CAPTAIN MAVIS HANNAH
INTERVIEWED BY DR AMY McGRATH
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Dr Amy McGrath interviewing Mrs Allgrove, formerly Captain Ellen Mavis Hannah, the surviving sister of the 2nd/4th Casualty Clearing Station, 2nd AIF No. SXF10595, during World War II. I'm interviewing her at Grove Hill House Dedham, Colchester on July l3th, 1981 for the Oral History Programme of the National Library of Australia.

AM: Mrs Allgrove, or may I call you Captain Hannah, as we're going to talk about your wartime experiences. You had a remarkable experience in that you survived the camps, prisoner of war camps of the Japanese and you were one of the few people to do so. I think perhaps before we go into that we can talk about how you came to be a member of the nursing profession and to enlist in the first place.

MH: I always wanted to be a nurse from the time I was a very small child. I went to Goodwood School in Adelaide and then on to Unley High School. After high school I wasn't able to go into nursing because I hadn't been very well and they didn't seem to think I would be fit enough to stand up to nursing.

I went into the Friendly Society's chemist shop in Goodwood and then in Unley, and in Norwood, for a few years and I learned dispensing. After that I decided that I still wanted to go nursing so I went to the Adelaide Hospital in 1934. Miss Daw (Lucy) was matron at the time and I remember those days extremely well, I loved my training. I finished in 1939 really, after having been a year as a staff nurse and I was in charge of the blood transfusion bank, of whom Dr Game was head. He was a young doctor at the time and I have just recently seen him in Melbourne, and he remembers those days extremely well. Strangely enough he happened to be on the tarmac in Singapore when our plane arrived back from Sumatra when we were being rescued. He said he was terribly shocked to see the difference in what we had been, as young people, and what we were now, particularly me as he knew me.

Anyway I finished and I decided as soon as war broke out that I would join the army. So I enlisted straight away but I wasn't called into camp until January 1940. I went to Woodside. We had to mark time there, more or less,

for a year because there was a stalemate in the Middle East. Those who were being sent to the Middle East had already gone, some had gone to England. We stayed there until I left Adelaide on, I think, the lst February 1941. I went to Sydney by train with a number of other girls and I did not know any of my own unit excepting Drummond, Balfour-Ogilvey and Dorsch who were South Australians; we had all been in camp together. We went to Sydney and sailed from Sydney. I think it was something like the 4th February 1941 and we arrived in Singapore in mid-February.

I went on the *'Queen Mary'* which was an absolute wonderful trip. Just recently I've been to Los Angeles and my godson who lives there, took me to Palm Beach where I went over the *'Mary'* with him, but it was a great disappointment because it wasn't spick-and-span as it was, and the beautiful ship that I was on. We carried, I think, something like 7,000 people, but when she was converted into a troop ship she carried 16,000 or 17,000 people. But I had had a beautiful cabin up on the sun deck and the paneling, the lifts, the salons, were exactly as they were before excepting it wasn't well kept. The centre of the ship, of course, has been demolished, the stacks have gone, and there are curio shops and all that sort of thing where there hadn't been before and it's really very commercialised. But walking around the deck I could imagine what it was like all those years ago. It was moonlight the night I was there and one of my most distinctive memories of the trip to Malaya was sailing in convoy during the moonlight. You looked out when you went to bed and there was the *'Aquitania'*, the *'Mauretania*', the *'New Amsterdam'* and the *'Mary'* all in line. The *'Aquitania'* was our flag ship and she, of course, was ahead. You woke up in the morning and the ships were in exactly the same position, which I always thought was rather remarkable.

When we left Sydney it was a beautiful, beautiful blue day, and when I was there I had an old friend who was in a new very tall building in Sydney and he took me up to his office. We looked across I think you call it Pinch Gut Islands which was the old prison fort right in the centre of the Harbour, and it was near there that the *'Mary'* was anchored. When we left we had hundreds of small boats with their flags flying, fire boats with their hoses going, there were bands, there were hundreds and hundreds of small yachts: all dipping around the ship saying goodbye to us. Lord and Lady Gowrie came on board. I knew the Gowries when I was a young girl because he was then Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven and he was Governor of South Australia, so I grew up knowing them. Then, of course, he became Governor-General he was by then Earl Gowrie. Well they came to say goodbye to us and after the war Lord & Lady Gowrie were in England and he was Constable of Windsor Castle. She used to write to me when I was in Malaya and when I came to England to live she used to invite me to Windsor Castle. I went on several occasions there. She was President of the Anzac Fellowship of Women, which I joined as soon as I came to England. So I had quite a lot to do with her over the years, until she became too old and feeble and she gave it up, and Lady Freyberg took over the presidency.

However, Lady Gowrie said to me "My word, what a lot of water has run under the bridge since we said goodbye on the *'Queen Mar*y'. She was a charming person and so was he. I always look back with much love and gratitude to the Gowries for the interest they always took in us.

However, we left Sydney Harbour in convoy. There had been mines laid in Bass Strait, so instead of us going through there we went way down south of Tasmania a long, long way down. It was very cold and misty and foggy and we didn't go across the Bight at all, we came directly up at an angle to Fremantle. We could not anchor in Fremantle, our ship was too big, so we had to anchor out in the roads somewhere. The two western Australian sisters to join my unit came out, and that was Wilmott and Farmaner. They did not return.

I went on then to Singapore. We left the convoy on a Sunday, I can't remember the exact date[1], but it was somewhere off Cocos Island and we had a rendezvous with a little destroyer the *'Durbin'*. I was reading the other day, a book on Dunkirk, and the *'Durbin'* formed one of the obstructions that they had put across the harbour, for the D-Day landings and that was the end of the *'Durbin'*, she was for demolition, and they used her there. But she had been our escort from Cocos to Singapore and I was absolutely amazed that on that Sunday, about 12 o'clock we saw a little smudge of smoke on the horizon - there was nothing else to be seen - and gradually this little destroyer came up. Then the other ships sailed around the *'Mary'* with flags flying and bands playing and they said goodbye to us. The *'New Amsterdam'* band played 'Now is the hour'. We steamed off with the *'Durbin'* and the others went on to Bombay. Some of those girls I was in camp with went to Greece and Crete - all of those came back - but my unit did not. I was on board with some of the l0th AGH sisters - they were the only two units, the l0th AGH and the 2nd/4th CCS. There may have been transport units and others, signals, and people like that, but they had no nurses attached to them, there was only the 10th AGH and 2nd/4th Casualty Clearing Station.

We were eight sisters actually, on the strength, but nine were associated with it altogether because Irene Drummond and I were the two senior sisters of the Casualty Clearing Station. In '41, in the early days of being in Malaya, we formed another hospital and that became the l3th Australian General Hospital, and Drummond was made matron. A girl called Kathleen Kinsella from South Australia took her place. Kinsella was drowned, so that made the ninth member in association with the Casualty Clearing Station. But as it happened, when we left Singapore, of course, we were bombed and the ship was sunk. Of the 65 sisters who left Singapore there were only 32 interned because the others had been shot on the beach or drowned. I believe 12 were drowned, 21 were shot dead - there were 22 shot, but Vivian Bullwinkel survived the shooting, and she came into camp

[1] Sunday 16th February.

with us and that made 32. Of that 32, 8 died in 1945, and of my own unit there was Dorsch and Kinsella who were drowned; Drummond, Balfour-Oglivey, Wilmot and Farmaner were shot; and Raymont, who was really a South Australian girl, but had enlisted in Tasmania, and a girl called Shirley Gardam - she was a Tasmanian - they both died in camp in '45 so that left me as the sole survivor of the unit.

We had a rather marvellous time in Malaya in 1941, because, of course, we were not at war there. We went to a place called Port Dickson which was the Malay Regiment Headquarters and we looked after the soldiers. We ran a dressing station, we didn't have a hospital there, the main hospital, the l0th went to Malacca and all the l0th sisters went there. But many girls came over as reinforcements and also the 13th AGH came over in '41. They had not been with us on the *'Mary'*. Vivian Bullwinkel was one and I think Iole Harper from Western Australia was another girl, she was l3th AGH. Iole survived and lives in Western Australia. Vivian Bullwinkel lives now in Western Australia. Betty Jeffrey is in Melbourne - she is the one who wrote 'White Coolies' - Elisabeth Simons, who was a particular friend of mine in camp, she lives in Tasmania and she wrote 'While History Passed'. She is the only Tasmanian sister. There are two sisters living in New Zealand; one from the l0th and her name was Jess Doyle: she's Jess McCauley. Another sister, who wasn't with us at all, but she was in Rabaul - there were six sisters taken prisoner from Rabaul and 24 of us, who survived. There are only four girls from Rabaul left; two have died since the war – one I think in '79 or '80 and the other one died about a year after the war: she was a South Australian girl named Calaghan. She had TB, she contracted that in Japan. So that only makes 26 surviving sisters of the AANS who are living because we had lost two; Vi McElnae, who was 2nd/l3th - she came over later in '41, and a girl called Short - she was also 2nd/l3th AGH, she came over in '41. So that left 22 of us and 4 Rabaul girls, making 26 in all. They are the ones that I have tried to get the authorities to give a full T & PI to.

AM: Can you tell me about the involvement with the actual campaign before you were taken prisoner?

MH: Then you see the Japanese came into the war on 7th December 1941[2]. Until then we had been working in various places, but we knew that we had, what they called a war station, and that would be at a place called Kluang which was north Johore. I spent quite a lot of time in Negri Sembilan and in Johore because as a casualty clearing station we didn't have an awful lot to do: so we formed the small dressing stations in each of the camps. Four of the sisters went to Muar and four stayed in Segamat at one stage. We were all together in south Johore, in Tampoi, where the l3th AGH was formed. While we were getting that organised, the 8 of us were there together.

[2] It was actually Monday 8th December 1941

AM: You were sort of making dispersal points?

MH: Yes, we were dispersed because there wasn't enough work to do. We weren't a hospital and we had camps in various parts of Malaya. Malacca was where the main hospital was and then the other main hospital was formed in south Johore near Johore Bahru. We were 8 of us and 4 were sent to one place and 4 to others when we were not altogether. But we were altogether at a place called Kajang which was in Negri Sembilan just south of Seremban. I think we only were in Kajang, Segamat, Tampoi - or I was only in those - and Port Dickson. We were there for a few months in Port Dickson. There we formed a dressing station because the 10th AGH went straightaway to Malacca and we went to Port Dickson. Port Dickson is about 40-50 miles from Malacca.

AM: Where were you when the actual invasion came?

MH: I was actually in Segamat at the time, when the Japanese came into the war. We were right on the main road. There was only one main road and one railway line and they both run, more or less, alongside each other. They still do because Malaya has a range of mountains on that side and the railway and the main road was made along that coast line which is the west coast of Malaya. But a lot of the Australians who came up after we were there, were sent to the other side, to Muar side, to the east and Kelantan side of Malaya in Johore because they all had the idea that the Japanese would come down and attack Malaya if they did so, in the southern part of Malaya. Instead of that they didn't: they came down the Gulf of Siam and they struck at Kota Bahru which is just south of the Siamese border. They went straight across Malaya to Penang, and of course, as soon as Singapore was bombed on the 7th December we were moved.

But on the Friday night prior to that we knew the Japanese were coming down to the Gulf of Siam and I will never understand, and neither will a lot of other people, why the lights were all on in Singapore when the Japanese attacked. They knew that they were coming because we had already been moved. I didn't personally know, excepting the Army Intelligence knew, because we were to have a party at our station on the 6th December Saturday night. We didn't have the party we were moved out on that Saturday night and the early hours of Sunday morning. We had to pack and be gone to our war station at Kluang and everybody was dispersed to whatever place they were going. For days before that, there was a lot of activity going up and down the main roads. There wire rolls of barbed wire, there were guns, all sorts of equipment going up north. So intelligence did know that the Japanese were approaching Singapore, or at least approaching Malaya, but they didn't know where they would strike. But they did, you see, come into Kota Bahru and then bombed Singapore at the same time. Well, why Singapore was lit on the Sunday morning, when we knew on Friday night, I haven't

any idea - neither do a lot of other people understand that.

However, the bombing took place and of course we were moved immediately, the Saturday night and early Sunday morning. All the food had been prepared for this party and we couldn't have it, it was just wasted really. We just went off to our war stations which was Kluang. It was a rubber estates Mengkibol, just on the edge of the air field at Kluang. We had tents for wards and our operating theatre - of course it was all pretty primitive. In those days you didn't have pre-packed sterile dressings or anything like that. We had sterile dressings but they were all in drums and that sort of things it wasn't like it is now, in packets. There were no disposable syringes: as they have now, all that had to be boiled. We used half kerosene tins, we cut them longways and we used to use those as sterilisers. We had primus stoves, pressure lamps, just camp beds, it was a forward dressing station, obviously. But we began later on to get casualties, and we had a great number of them because the air field was nearby and the Japanese were bombing everywhere they thought was of importance. The fighting began and as people began to retreat, so of course, they came into us.

It wasn't many weeks before we had to retreat ourselves and we went down to the l3th AGH at Tampoi, then we went across the causeway into Singapore and I was sent down to a school - it was called Swiss Cottage at Pasir Panjang down towards the causeway. We set up there, but it was near oil wells and I can remember distinctly being outside trying to bail out one of the slit trenches that we had, because we had no other protection. We were in the school master's house, living, and we used the school as a hospital and an operating theatre. I can remember this plane going over, very, very low, and I could even see the Japanese pilot, glasses and all, sitting in his seat. He didn't take any notice of me, he was going to bomb the oil tank which was just nearby. So once, of course, those were bombed, we then had to go back again towards the centre of Singapore. We ended up in St Patrick's school with the 2nd/10th AGH, and there we stayed. We also had tents for wards and a lot of the outlying houses were turned into wards because there was no hospital there, it was just a big school. We used the school rooms as some of the wards and an operating theatre. Then there were gun emplacements just below us - we were on a bit of a hill - and I, of course, had no idea of guns or what would happen or anything. When the Japanese were shelling us and then our people set up guns, we thought this was fine because they could shell back. But we didn't realise that the Japanese would find the range of the guns and so the shells would burst over our heads. They used to hit the trees at the top of the hill and burst over our tents. In fact we lost a few patients that way. One of the l0th AGH sisters, Freeman, who died in 1945 had a close shave one day. She was covered in dust mud scratches and a few other things, but she was alright, she was pretty shocked. As I was coming downstairs one morning to go on duty and just as I got to the front door - you see we were in the headmaster house, as our mess - a shell burst and a huge piece of shrapnel just went a couple of feet away from me. Then I hurried across - we used to have to go across the open playing field to get to the class-rooms which were our

wards, and of course I was in the operating theatre. I remember running the last few yards because a 'plane was machine gunning us and I just flattened myself against the doorway. I don't know, I must have born a charmed life I think because nothing happened to me at all. Then this went on until the l2th - matron called all of us together and those were the sisters who were actually present near the operating theatre, but there were a lot of sisters distributed around in the houses nursing the wounded. But she could only call together those who were actually there, and it was Matron Paschke of the l0th AGH, she was the senior matron in Malaya because Drummond's appointment was later. Drummond and the others were, I think, over near Katong that's where their hospital eventually landed up. However, she called us together and she asked for volunteers to stay and everybody volunteered to. I remember her saying "You, you and you can't", because I think two of the girls had had dengue fever, and one had a bad tooth. That girl, her name was Crick - I can't remember just off hand what her married name is, she's been married twice - but saw her in Western Australia Just recently and I asked her to confirm my memory that this was true that it was she who had the bad tooth. She said "Yes, I did, I had an abscess on my tooth". She said "That really saved my life", or as far as she knew it did, because she was one who was sent out on the l2th, she was on the 'Empire Star'. So what matron did was, she said that those girls had to go, but she said "I haven't got time to call everybody else together". So she sent a rider, a messenger, around to these houses and told these other girls that they must go. We didn't see any of those again, we all had had to have a 22 inch case packed and what we called a dilly bag, it wasn't a big sausage bag like the men had because they were too heavy. We had linen bags that were like a linen wash bag. It held quite a lot of stuff. So we kept those two things packed. We had our tin helmets always with us and we had a cape and a gas mask. They were always left handy wherever we went on duty we had them nearby so that we could pick them up at a moment's notice. So these other girls, of coursed would have had their equipment with them. They were just loaded on ambulances and taken away and we never saw them again until after the war.

This is why I argue that the army really washed their hands of us. Of course, at the time, I suppose it was a very difficult decision to make, but having asked for volunteers on the l2th, think we should have been allowed to stay and nurse the men. After all we took an oath exactly the same as the men did and I feel that the high command decided that they wouldn't be bothered with women because we may be raped, there might be all sorts of things happen to us and they would have to look on, and they were probably feeling duty bound, that they would have to stick up for us and that they couldn't see this sort of thing happen. I mean that may have been in minds, their I don't know. But I do know that we did not have a hope 24 hours later to get through.

AM: Where were the Japanese at this point?

MH: They were all in Singapore, just down the road from us. I suppose this is all a bit disjointed.

AM: No it's just exactly where they were, they were just down the road from the hospital?

MH: They were down the road from the hospital because you see...

AM: Was there rear guard fighting by the troops at this stage?

MH: Yes. We had come across the causeway some time before, I told you, but Malaya itself was evacuated by our troops. I think I'm right in saying the 6th of January 1942, was the day on which they bombed the causeway - our people sabotaged the causeway, blew holes in it, so that the Japanese, they thought, would not be able to have easy access to Singapore itself. All our troops were officially brought across. But when I was in that dressing stations down at Pasir Panjang which wasn't very far from the causeways we got dozens and dozens of stragglers. Some of those boys had been fighting up on Slim River and had walked for a fortnight down through Malaya living on bananas and that sort of thing. They had the most dreadfully blistered feet.

AM: How did they get across?

MH: They swam, or they got little boats, or they did something or other, or the fishermen helped them. You see the Straits of Johore are not very big, not very wide, and they would come across at night. There were various ways that they got across, I can't remember all the stories that they told us, but they certainly walked and eventually got across.

AM: Got through the Japanese lines somehow?

MH: Got through the Japanese lines, through and across to us. We were the first dressing station that there was available so they came to us. Then we would send them back to the other hospitals. When we first started to get casualties, on the mainland in Kluang, we used to - well one night we had 2,000 casualties through our station which was a tremendous number. What we used to do, they would be brought in and if they were seriously wounded and had to be operated on or needed a transfusion, we dealt with those on the spot. If not, we tried to make them as comfortable as we could, we tried to put them into a suit of pyjamas, we put their name tags on them, pinned on a sort of tag, and on their forehead, if they had morphia or anything like that, with a pencil we drew a quarter or a half and we put an 'm' beside it which meant morphia, half or a quarter grain. We had these abbreviations which were known by the medical people so they knew exactly what they had. We then loaded them in ambulances and sent them on the train, or by ambulances back to the base hospitals. This is what we

did when we were at Kluang and other outlying places anyone who came into us didn't stay with us at ally we were merely there for emergencies. Once the emergencies were treated then they were sent off by ambulance back to the base hospital.

AM: Now at the point where you're ordered out of Singapore...

MH: Then when I'm ordered out of Singapore, I'm by this time back with the main hospital because we had no forward place to be, Japanese were fighting all around us. The day that matron had called everybody together, I can remember standing and cutting up - much to my horror - a Union Jack to get the red pieces out of the Union Jack and the Australian flag, to make red crosses for the boys' arms. I Just roughly sewed a red cross on their arms. Don't forget we were a non-combatant unit and the hospitals and the CCS, we didn't have any gun practice, we had nothing at all. The girls later on had revolver practice, but we never did, we never knew one end of the gun from the other and we never touched a gun, we never had anything, and neither did our orderlies. Our orderlies were completely unarmed, and we felt that if they had a red cross on their arm, very naively, we thought the Japanese would recognise the red cross and that they would abide by its rules, but they did not.

AM: Who were the boys? Were they Chinese?

MH: Our orderlies - we always called them our boys - they were our own Australian Army AIF boys. We never had any other people excepting our servants in the messes and that sort of thing. They were in our mess at times but by this time we had no foreigners at all.

AM: When matron told you to pack up, what were you going to do with the wounded, leave them?

MH: We had to leave them in the care of orderlies, who were only trained roughly as orderlies and this is what upset the nurses terribly, because we felt that we were there to do a job and we weren't allowed to do it, we were being sent out. When the first lot of girls went, well fair enough there were half of us left behinds half from the l3th and half from the l0th, and all of the CCS girls.

AM: How were they being got out?

MR: When matron called those girls together and said so-and-so must go, they were sent by ambulance down to the docks and they were put on the *'Empire Star'*. The *'Empire Star'* was in the last convoy to get through. They went via Java, and I think they were in Java for a few days and then from Java they got down to Australia, but

they were bombed on the way to Java. The ship was badly damaged and one or two of the nurses disobeyed orders and did go to protect the wounded, and they received decorations for it. But most of the sisters had to be downstairs, below decks, as we did eventually. But they got through. That was the last convoy and that was the l2th February 1942. Now within 24 hours, on the 13th we were just told that we had to go, we were not given any option of staying at all, we had to pick up our emergency kit, were loaded an ambulances and sent off. I remember a Dr Juttner, who was from South Australia, coming to me and saying "If you get home will you ring up my wife and tell her and know I'm here, I'm OK". One or two people did the same thing, thinking of course that we would get through. Now we all went to St Andrew's Cathedral where we met up with the girls from the 13th AGH, who came into us. Now that made 65 nursing sisters.

AM: What did they think they were going to do with you?

MH: We had to shelter in St Andrew's Cathedral, meet up with the others because there were air raids on. There was an air raid while we were there; the Cathedral wasn't damaged at all so we were quite safe there. But the other girls who were from the l3th Joined us and so we were 65 sisters. The day before the Matron sent out the sisters, she also sent the masseurs and any odd people working. The only people who were left behind, all in Malaya, as far as the Australians were concerned, were 65 Australian Army nursing sisters, the rest of them had all been sent out the day before. Well we 65, that included the CCS, the l3th AGH girls. When we met up in the Cathedral we were then taken down to the docks, and when we got to the docks - we were in uniform of course - Dr Glen White, who is the ADMS (Assistant Director of Medical Services), he came along. He knew me quite well because we used to meet them socially throughout the time we were in Malaya, and he grabbed me by the arm and he said "Mavis, where are you going?" and I said "We're being put on that ship". He said "Oh no you're not, you haven't got a hope in hell of getting through". He said "Stay here and I will go and see what I can do". He went off to the high command, which was British command, they were the overall command, and he came back to me and he was almost in tears. He said "I'm sorry, I can do nothings you've got to go". So they put us on a launch and there were civilians on the launch as well. I remember singing "Wish Me Luck..." - I can't really say it because I always feel so emotional over that – "Wish Me Luck as You Wave Me Goodbye". We were put on the *'Vyner Brooke'* with hundreds and hundreds of civilian people and the boat was absolutely chocker-block. I saw Glen White in Melbourne recently and he remembers distinctly what he said. In fact he has written a letter for me to the Veterans Association and to the Minister to say that this was true, we did not have a hope, because we had to go down to Jave, through what they called 'bomb alley', which was the island of Banka lying off the coast of Sumatra. He said "You haven't got a hope of getting through, you can't possibly go", but the high command said we must so we were put on the launch and on to this ship. There wasn't room to move on that ship, we could not walk about very much, we had to sit on the deck. It was a small cargo vessel

which carried, I think, 12 passengers altogether. She was known as the *'Vyner Brooke'* because the white Rajah of Sarawak was called Vyner Brooke. I think she was about 4,000 tons, a very small ship. It was crowded because the powers that be, so we were told, couldn't only send European women and children out of Singapore, they had to send Eurasian, Chinese or Malays if they wanted Malays to go because it would have been said – "Oh yes you evacuated the Europeans but you didn't evacuate the others". Well, of course, obviously all of the population of Singapore did not want to go, but there was a motley collection of people from up country, Europeans, Eurasians, Indians, all sorts of people. Mostly they would have been born in Malaya but they were wanting to get away, unless they had some reason for staying behind. Of course millions of people were around in Singapore and Malaya itself, but they had their homes there and shops and all the rest of it, so they stayed. But there were many many people who wanted to be evacuated and those who wanted to be were, if possible. It was absolute shambles because as we were getting on our ship so were the Japanese bombing the harbour. Many ships carrying troops just coming into Singapore were bombed at that time. Some people were even drowned in the harbour of Singapore with all their kit and everything else. Ships were sunk and they were still landing as we were being sent out. This was only about 48 hours before the surrender. However, it was a dreadful shambles and I remember when we left St Andrews Cathedral and were taken in ambulances down to the wharf, again we had a big air raid and we sheltered in what they called 'go-downs', they are warehouses. It was very funny, but my husband's first wife, I knew her and she and I just met quite by chance on the Wharf. She asked what was happening. I told her we were being sent out and she said 'I hope that we go together, but we didn't. She should have left Singapore before, but she didn't, she was staying helping with the Red Cross. She got on a ship called the *'Gian Bee'*, and I was on the *'Vyner Brooke'*. I saw her on the ship and we waved goodbye to each other. She was a strong swimmer, but she was injured and she went down with her ship, and I, who cannot swim - I can't swim to this day - I spent nearly three days in the water with just a life belt eventually. I came ashore without anything wrong with me at all, excepting all the skin rubbed off my chin from the friction of the life belt. But the captain of the 'Vyner Brooke' I suppose saved our lives by insisting that every passenger on that ship, although we were some hundreds, had a life belt, otherwise he wouldn't take us. So we all had a life belt. But these cabins that were used for passengers and some of the senior crew, they were given up to people on the ship. In fact, one of the officers offered us a cabin, four of us sisters, and we said "Oh no, we won't take it, give it to some of the elderly people on the ship", because we were all women and children and a few elderly men, all sick men. There was no able-bodied man who was really fighting, no troops or anything like that. The only military people who were on board would be the actual crew on the ship, who were a motley crew because many of them were from the 'Repulse' and the 'Prince of Wales', the few survivors. We had six life boats, three on either side of the ship, and we had stacks of rafts about a yard square, made of slats of wood about 2 to 3 inches wide. There were two layers of them and they were bound around the edge with more wood so that you kept two layers of wood with spaces in between where the water would come up and it

would float. Around the edge of this would be looped a rope: and it was just caught every here and there so that you could hang on to it. But it was meant only for two people and they had paddles strapped to them and a canvas water bottle. But these were in heaps on the ship. I remember we crawled out over the mine fields because they were sounding all the way as we were moving out during the night, the early hours of 13th. I didn't realise the danger, we were just so exhausted from the work we had had to do and the dreadful shelling in Singapore. I think the shelling was worse than anything else because bombing from aeroplanes you knew where the bombs were coming from, or more or less what was going to happens but shelling you didn't know. The shelling was incessant and it was all around us, and you couldn't sleep. You had to work and look after the patients and all the rest of it, so we were exhausted. We tried to rest as much as we could but we couldn't lie down because there were so many people on the ship we had to sit on the deck. The cabin that had been offered to us was occupied by a couple of elderly couples and it was that cabin eventually that was bombed, so we were very fortunate. That's another time my life was saved, because had we accepted the cabin I don't know what would have happened. But Matron Paschke called us together again on the ships on the Fridays the l3th and she said who could swim? Those who could swim were meant to go with the rafts this was in case of an emergency. But, of course, man proposes and God disposes, really, so that when things actually happen they never are quite like one plans. The Japanese didn't only bomb us, they machine gunned us as well. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I don't know which, three of the lifeboats were holed with machine gun bullets. When the ship was listing she listed over to the other side so that the holed boats were the ones that could be launched. But they sank immediately I can see now one of the sailors standing in the boat to see if it was any good and he had two oars and it was gradually sinking beneath him because there were so many holes in it. The other side was being sucked down because the ship completely turned over when we were bombed. We were bombed for about an hour. But matron, the previous day, had called us together and said who can swim and so forth. So she arranged that those who could not swim were to go in all these boats. We had enough boats and rafts for practically everybody on the ship. But, when we were actually bombed, the ship was badly damaged and a bomb went down the funnel and blew the side out and blew the engine room to smithereens. An awful lot of the sailors were scalded very badly from the engine room. They, of course, were in the water and needed treatment. Some of the sisters who were with them - I wasn't with any of the seamen at all - they had put uniforms - taken their uniforms off and put them over the seamen. Of course, during the night they died and slipped off rafts or whatever they were on, or clinging to, and were downed, and the girls lost their uniforms. Three or four sisters came ashore eventually without any uniforms at all. But when the ship was attacked the siren went - the drill we had was at all that we had to go down below deck. So we all went down and I was sitting in a passage-way, next door to the other cabin that was bombed, or that we were to have occupied, and the cabin we were sitting near the entrance to, felt the blast. I remember one of the people with whom we became friendly with afterwards - she was a civilian, a Mrs Gillmore, was sitting underneath a wash basin - she had a tin hat on - and the wash

basin, although the bomb fell next door, it was split in two and Gilly had her tin hat knocked off. Another girl, called Olga Neubronner, she was a Straights Settlement Civilian nurse - they used to call them FMS in those days - Federation Malaya States - she was a civilian nurse and worked in one of the civilian hospitals in Singapore, and she was pregnant. She was married to a Singaporean and she was sitting on the bunk holding a pillow over her tummy and there were lots and lots of people in the cabins and passageways - this is where I was when the ship vas being bombed. Well when the all-clear went, we went upstairs and of course it was chaos everywhere and I was supposed to get into a boat, so I collected kettles of water, which we'd left ready, some blankets and some pillows and was going to put them into a boat, but there were no boats to get into because the planes came back and machine gunned us and we all fell flat on the deck and waited until they had gone. Then when the boats were launched of course they couldn't be used because they had holes in them, so that was that. But as the ship listed to the other side, the three boats on that side could be launched, and they were filled with people, but the boat was going down so fast that they couldn't get them all away from the side of the ship, and only two boats were able to be launched with people in them. The other one was sucked down and those people in it had to jump out. I don t know how many were drowned or what happened but I do know that a woman called Helen Bull who was an American married to an Englishman, who was a Judge of the Supreme Court in Singapore, he was left behind. She got on the ship with three small children - Hazel was about 2 and I think Molly was 5 and Robyn was about 7. She had these three children, they were all in the boat together and she told me that she told the two elder children to jump out and swim away because the ship was going down and her boat was being sucked under and she knew that they wouldn't have a hope. The kiddies could swim very well so she told them to swim away, which they did do. She was sucked down, but she had hold of Hazel's hand and she said she felt her foot caught in something and she struggled as hard as she could and she kicked her shoe off and so shot to the surface and she swam with Hazel. She said the last thing she saw was Molly's hair ribbon bobbing on the water. And, course, if you could imagine there were thousands of dead fish, there were dead bodies, oil drums bits of wood, there were people in the water, there were oil drums, bits of wood, tere were oars, there were boats that were sinking, there were all kinds of things floating in the water, so to pick up two small children who were gradually getting further and further away from you, would have been an impossibility. Helen lost sight of these children. Well I couldn't get into a boat, so as I said it was listing very badly to the other side, so I wasn't game to go down some of the ropes that were hanging. Some of the girls went straight down the ropes and of course took all the skin off their hands, I didn't do that, I went down a rope ladder. There was a girl called Sheila Brown, whose mother was with us on the ships we'd been on the launch together. I always remember Mrs Brown had very big feet and she used to have to have her shoes specially made. She told me about this on the launch, and she had very nice brown shoes. But of course we had all been told when we were briefed on the ship that we must kick our shoes off and our tin hats we must not have on because if we jumped into the water our necks would be broken with our tin hats on, so most people left their

tin hats behind and kicked their shoes off. One sister didn't, that was Mittelheuser - she died in camp eventually, but she kept her shoes all the way through the water and all the way through camp. Mrs Brown had these specially made shoes and of course she'd kicked her shoes off too, but she was a very fussy old lady and she had a big handbag, and her daughter was Sheila. Sheila was in the water already and Mrs Brown was coming down this ladder and she was in front of me, and of course we had no time, we had a very very short time to get off that ship and get away before it sank, it was just simply going over. Sheila was singing out "Where's my darling mother" and mother was saying "Sheila, Sheila, where's my Sheila?" going on like this. I saw Sheila in the bottom and I remember giving Mrs Brown a shove and saying to Sheila "Here comes your darling mother", and she went into the water. We've laughed and laughed since that, we used to laugh in camp about that.

When we made 'This Is Your Life' for Margot Turner, a couple of years ago, Sheila was there and we laughed about the story, but it was quite true. Mrs Brown was, as I said, a fussy lady, and she had this handbag. I wasn't with her at the time but Sheila told me that her mother and she clung to a raft and for some unknown reason the Japanese, although they were landing troops when people were landing all along this beach eventually, they came back with an empty boat and picked up Mrs Brown and Sheila and a few other people who were clinging to a raft, and Mrs Brown had left her handbag on the raft and she got to the shore and she said to the Japanese Soldier Boy, "I've left my handbag out there, will you go back and get it". Anyway he got her handbag but she never saw it any more. Of' course her glasses and money and anything she had were all in this handbag. She was terribly funny. The next time I saw Mrs Brown she had an old sarong on and a pair of plimsoles which were big, men's plimsoles, because she had such big feet and she walked like 'a quarter to three' sort of thing and she was terribly funny. She was a dear old thing, but she died in camp, she just couldn't take it. That was my experience of getting off the ship. I then jumped – I can't tell you how high, but quite a height into the water - holding on to my life belt, keeping it as I'd been told to, and I jumped into the water. I wasn't frightened, I can remember thinking, I don't know it never entered my head really, I just didn't think about it, you just had to do it and that was it. I remember wondering what I could get hold of and there was an oar floating in the water and I know I got hold of that. Chris Oxley, one of our sisters from the l0th, she was in the water near me and she was a Roman Catholic. Of course the oil had come up from the engine room and covered everybody in oil, and there was Chrissy looking the most dreadful forlorn poor little thing and she was saying "Holy Mary Mother of God pray for us..." and I said to her "Shut up Chris, stop saying your prayers, grab this oar with me and get away from the ship then you can say your prayers". I mean she was just petrified. We've laughed about that too. I had lunch with her a little while ago and I said "Holy Mary Mother of God" and she looked at me and laughed.

AM: Was land in sight?

MH: Yes. What happened was we were between Banka Island and the Sumatra proper and that was called

Banka Straits. The Japanese planes came over on the Friday and I suppose they were reconnaissance planes, they saw us, and we got through Friday the l3th and said "Well Friday the l3th is gone, we're okay now". But they came over on St Valentine's Day which was the l4th February. It was about 1 o'clock when they started to bomb us. We were, I would have thought, about 30 miles off the coast because Banka Island is quite a big island, it's a peculiar shape with sort of two ends like that and two at the top. But there were two lighthouses and we could see these lighthouses very well. It was about a quarter past 2 when my watch stopped in the water so we were about an hour from the time we began to be bombed until we got in the water, that was all.

AM: How many miles to land?

MH: About 30 miles I should think to land, about that I've been told, but 1 haven't much idea of distance. We could see the land, but it was a hell of a long way away, and of course with all the fish - I suppose the bombing of the area had caused so many fish to be killed. I can remember seeing the bombs falling near our ship and the captain was zig-zagging as much as he could and the bombs would fall and a spout of water would go yards up into the air when the bomb exploded, but didn't do us any damage until we got the direct hits.

AM: Any problem with sharks in the water?

MH: No. To my knowledge there were no problems at all, we certainly didn't have any and I was in the water a long time. But I think possibly, the bombing, I don't know, the bombing may have either scared them off or killed them or done something because there literally were hundreds and hundreds of fish floating on the water. Maybe anyway they had so much to eat perhaps, the sharks, that they didn't bother us, we didn't see any sharks at all. And I must confess I never even thought about sharks. But when Chris and I grabbed this oar Elaine Balfour-Ogilvey, one of my sisters, who was shot on the beach, she was near the lifeboat. I wasn't far away and she called to me - well I couldn't swim you see, I couldn't make it, I couldn't get to her, and that saved my life, because had I done so I would have been shot on the beach. Drummond was in the boat and Farmaner and Wilmot were either in the boat or clinging to it, I don't know for sure about that, but I do know that Lainie called me, but I couldn't get there, so I know that she clung to the rope and was dragged in eventually to the shore. Those were the sisters, with wounded people who were shot on the beach. But I found a raft - as the boat tippled over, so everything fell off the decks, luggage, all kinds of stuff that was on top of the decks, plus the rafts. Most of the rafts were broken - they were only meant for two people - you couldn't get on them, you could only cling to the ropes, but it did keep you together. I think there were about 16 people eventually clinging to the raft that I was clinging to. During the night we could see the light from the lighthouse very well and we tried to push to make for that lighthouse but the tide kept on carrying us out. I remember at one stage

we even touched the blocks of stone on which the lighthouse was built up, but there was nothing to cling to and before we could do anything we were swept out again. This went on each time the tide went in, we'd be carried out again. It must have been the Monday morning - we had decided during the night that we would leave the raft with the next tide going in, in the morning, as we were going in we would leave the raft. Then I was frightened because I couldn't swim and I didn't like leaving that raft because it way the only thing that was keeping me afloat apart from my life belt. I remember McElnea was with me and I think Val Smith and quite a lot of civilians, whom I don't remember. They said those who can't swim must stay near those who can swim. We had been a long time in the water and we were pretty exhausted by this time, we'd had no food, nothing to drink, nothing at all and you couldn't expect people who were just as exhausted as you were to hang around with you. I mean if they were swimming, they were swimming for their lives, to get ashore. I remember a lot of them had got onto the shore. It was a beautiful morning - if you've ever seen the sun rise in the East, the skies are almost like rainbows, beautiful colours like violets and pinks in the sky and the sea was just like glass and there were a few flying fish around. I remember being really frightened and leaving the raft. The others got ashore and they were calling me, trying to encourage me to come on. Eventually a Malay fisherman, with a tiny little canoe, which was only meant for one person, he had a paddle and he paddled out to me, about a quarter of a mile, and he told me to cling on to the side of the canoe. He dragged me then in the rest of the way. All the others were ashore. I can remember thinking, when I was struggling in the watery that my mother was near me and saying "Come on, don't give up, keep on going".

AM: How long were you in the water?

MH: Two nights and nearly three days. We got ashore then and I - I don't know why I did it - but I had enough sense to pin my pay book - I only had 2 dollars and they were only worth 2/4d in those days, 2 Malayan dollars; a compact, a lipstick, scissors and some morphia in little files - they were only for emergency, what we used normally were tablets and they were dissolved in emergency, what we used normally were tablets and they were dissolved in distilled water over a Bunsen burner and you injected that, but for emergency sake we were given these files of morphia and a syringe. They were pinned into my pocket. I saved those and I was able to use them. As I say I don't know why I pinned my pockets but I had enough sense to do that, but other people who hadn't and had things in their pockets, floated out in the water, and they lost glasses and all sorts of things. With the oil coming up, people who wore glasses - I didn't in those days - but they got smeared with oil, they couldn't see, took them off and put them in their pockets, and that was the last they saw of them. I gave this Malay fisherman the 2 dollars I had, then I was destitute, I had no money at all. I had no shoes, and I had taken off my petticoat - no pants I took them off at one stage, to wave, because we saw a lot of ships. Of course you've always got the optimist who would say "Here comes the navy", but they weren't at all, I knew they couldn't

possibly be our ships, but they were Japanese and they were full of troops, and they took no notice of us at all. They were landing their troops as we were landing, mostly during the nights. It was moonlight and I remember seeing a Jap, very plainly, on guard standing at the bow of the ship. It was making peculiar noises, it was the chains rattling, the ship's opening and allowing their small boats to slide out, they were landing craft of some sort. They are the people who picked Mrs Brown up and Sheila and some of the other people and took them ashore – why I don't know, they are just unpredictable people.

AM: Why did they machine gun them?

MH: Well when these girls got ashore, and took them ashore, and the civilian people, they lit a fire on the beach and that is really what we tried to make for, fire because we knew that'd there the people were. We struggled that to get there, but we couldn't - I've told you that we were being pushed in and pushed with the tide. Eventually I landed some miles further along the beach, 5 or 6 miles possibly from the main town of Muntok. These people had a lot of civilians because there was more than one ship sunk. In our camp eventually we had people from 63 different ships which had been sunk at that time. So there was an awful lot of people in the water, a lot of people dead, all sorts of things, and they made for the fire too. So there were a lot of civilian people collected there as well as the army sisters. I think it was on - we always say it was the 16th February that the sisters were shot, we keep that as the day of memorial for them, and that would have been on the Monday. Well it appears that the civilian people started to walk towards Muntok because they thought they would go and get help were looking after the wounded. The nurses had in their boat a few wounded whom they had put in some of the fisherman's huts and the fisherman who came down to collect me was one of the people who lived on the beach. I don't know if you know Malaya at all or that part of the world, but they have little fishing colonies on the coast, amongst the coconut palms. Those fishermen would have their nets hanging up and they'd go out fishing at night. Well this was a fisherman's village that the girls landed at. The civilian women and children and some of the men with them decided they would walk along to find the Japanese authority thinking that they would tell them that the sisters were on the beach, there were wounded people and that they wanted them to come along and bring them in. So they started off and they met a party of Japanese and the Japanese told them to wait, so they did wait. They waited and waited and waited and nothing happened so they decided to walk on. They came into the camp where I was. Eventually the sisters were still on the beach and this party of Japs went along, and the girls tell me, Viv tells me - she's the only survivor - that they took the men who were there behind some rocks and bayoneted them. Now of those number there were three survivors; one had come into our camp and he was bayoneted through the arm, he had a wound in his arm, his arm was in a sling we'd put it in, but we didn't know at the time, he wouldn't tell us, he was an American. But the other one was an Australian boy who was bayoneted through the buttocks, through the back here somewhere. Vivien says that

they went into the hut and they shot the wounded who were lying in the huts, they drove the sisters into the sea and Viv said she was very frightened of going back into the water and she hesitated at the water's edge. She was shot, in this fleshy part here, it didn't touch her ribs, it went straight through, she had two holes in her uniform, back and front. She put a water bottle over it afterwards when she came into the camp so that nobody would see it. She said it spun her round and she fell at the water's edge. She doesn't know whether she was unconscious with fright or what happened, but anyway she just lay there. And she said she saw Drummond - the sister I told you about before - who was very short-sighted and had quite thick glasses, she was hit by the Japs apparently and she fell and lost her glasses and she scrambled to look for them because she couldn't see without her her glasses and the Jap shot her again. Viv said that she just lay still and when things were quiet she looked around and found they'd all gone so she went back to where the huts were and she found this one boy Australian (Army) boy, who was bayoneted in the buttocks somewhere. She and he stayed together for a few days and they realised that they couldn't go on like that, that they had better try to get help. They walked along the road and as they were walking along a car came by and it was a Japanese naval officer. Now the naval people were much better than the military people, they had been trained by British and they had more of the tradition sort of thing. They picked them up and they gave Viv a drink of milk, tin milk, and they eventually brought her into our camp and that's how she was reunited with us. But in the meantime I was in this new camp we'd gone to. When I first got ashore we hid the first day. We dried our clothes out and one thing and the other. I was very adamant, argued the point that we must give ourselves up to authority. I couldn't see any point in staying out. Most people didn't speak the language, our skins were a different colours we couldn't expect the native population to take responsibility for us, it wasn't fair, and they wouldn't have anyway. I said we had no options we could not escape, how could we, we had no ships, we'd just come out of the blasted water, I didn't want to go back into it. So I argued all that day and eventually, towards evening we walked towards what we thought was a town. The first Japanese I came across was a Jap standing on a bridge. I thought "Oh my God what have I done, what have I made them do?", because he had a pith helmet on and he had those funny shoes with just the toes sticking out, sort of soft things with putties around his legs and this hat pulled tight and a great big bayonet and a gun, and thick glasses. I thought "Oh you little monkey, what have I done?" Anyway he shoved us off onto some other Jap and he took us into what was their headquarters. It was about dusk at this time and they made us sit in the dirt and wait. So we waited and waited and waited and eventually another Jap came out and took us down to a place where other prisoners were. It was supposed to be a customs house. I suppose the centre of it wasn't very much bigger than this room, it had no roof on it, the rooms opened off a courtyard. There was a dirty toilet at the end and a dirty old crock of water with all green slime in it. We were all herded into that place, we weren't allowed to go into the rooms. You could not lie down, we were packed like sardines in that place. We just sat there and of course we all had temperatures, we felt simply awful, we had nothing to eat, not a drink of water, we'd had nothing since we left the ships and we had precious little on the ship because

the only food that was on board was the box of tinned goods that had been put on with us. We all agreed that we would share that food amongst all the people on the ship and we'd ration it and make it last as long as we could. Of course we'd only been 24 hours at sea when we were sunk, so the rest it went to the bottom, we didn't have a good feed at all. Here we were landed on the beach with nothing, we were hungry, pretty well delirious, we all had temperatures, we had swollen faces. Some of them had no skin on their fingers. Well that woman, Olga Nubronner, who'd been in a cabin with me, she'd got ashore, I don't know how, and she was in this place. She had a miscarriage. I took my petticoat off, which was only a petticoat to the waist - we made petticoats like that because it was too hot to wear too much - but you could see through our dresses if you weren't careful, so we didn't think that was fair on the boys. When you stood in the doorway you could see all your legs, so we wore these petticoats. So I took my petticoat off and I used this for Olga, and that was the last I saw of my petticoat. All I had on was a corselette and a pair of stockings and my uniform. The collar was missing and I was just having a wash when the bombing started so 1 didn't have a complete uniform. Well we were herded into this place, we were there for two days, we had no foods we had nothing in that place at all. Then they moved us to a cinema - when I say cinema I don't mean a palatial sort of place at all, it was just made of corrugated iron with a dirt floor with some seats in the auditorium and a concrete stage. Now on that stage, we used that as an operating theatre. We had a lot of wounded people, we had hundreds of people coming into that place who had come out of the sea one way or another. There were a few RAF launches that people had been trying to get away in and the Japs had shelled them or brought them in. There were one or two amputations. I used my morphia and syringe, that was the end of that lot, I happened to have it in my pocket. We did the best we could with whatever we had. Then we were there a couple of days and while we were there the Japanese brought in huge - what we call Kwalis - you call them woks here I think, an oval pan, but they were very big ones that were used for community cooking. They brought in a couple of these and we cooked rice. We just had rice, we had nothing else but and that was the first food we'd had for about 5 days I suppose. Then we were moved from there up to PWD lines, that stands for Public Works Department, they are always called PWDs. Throughout countries where Britain has settled they had the same type of building. This was a very nice tiled floor with four taps and four little tanks - tongs they called them - and they had running water. Over the top was a corrugated iron roof and then opening off and they had cement platforms on either side on which the coolies would sleep. These were people who worked for the Public Works Department, but there was no one there of course. We occupied it and there were some hundreds in these places. While I was there we were running a dressing station as best we could. A sailor and survivor on beach, 3rd man to survive came up to me and he pulled my uniform and said "Good God, what have you got on". I told him. He said "I have just buried some bodies on the beach dressed in that uniform and they'd been shot". He said there's a man in this camp that was bayoneted at the same time, there he is". He pointed him out and he was the man with his arm in a sling. Well he wouldn't tell us anything about it, he was scared to, but the sailor told me that these sisters had been shot.

Now I didn't know whether to believe him or not, I thought perhaps there were a lot of stories, I didn't know. I went to a couple of the men in the camp. There was a head of Police Department, there was somebody else, one or two people, Europeans in government positions that had got away from Singapore but had congregated with us, they'd been taken prisoner and I told them. They said "We'd better keep quiet about this, we had better not say anything in case the Japanese get to know about it because they may do something to you". So we kept quiet. Well about a week later Viviea Bullwinkel strolled into our camp with this boy that had been bayonetted, and of course she confirmed our story. Now all the time through camp we protected Viv and as far as the Australian people are concerned, there's only one ex-POW sister and that is Vivian Bullwinkel. Now at isn't true because there are 26 of us now living, there were 30 in those days. But Vivian survived, but because she was the only survivor of the massacre on the beach - even in Jakarta where my stepson is the Trade Commissioner I saw 'Who's Who Australian'. I took it off the wall and I looked up Bullwinkel. Now it says on that "Vivian Bullwinkel, ... the only survivor of 22 sisters who left Singapore". Now that is not true, there were 65 of us left Singapore. She is the only survivor of 22 sisters shot on the beach in Banka, but she is not the only survivor. We were all together, we were all on the same ship, we all left together, we went through the same experiences, the only thing was that she landed with the other sisters, either in the boat or clinging to the boat, I don't know which - I think in the boat she told me - and she was shot, but survived. The rest of us of course were with her but we were at a different place and she eventually came into us and she was with us all the time. Now she will tell you, and I spoke to her about this the other day when I saw her. She said "Yes, that's quite true, they make a great fuss about it, but I know I'm one of you". Now two of our sisters got very upset because they'd been to various things and they said that people said "We're waiting for Sister Bullwinkel to come, the POW sister". The girls said "What do you think we are?" and they had no idea you see. It doesn't matter. but it's just the attitude that people have got fixed in their minds that's Viv's the only survivor. We protected her, she will tell you that herself, we never let her go into the limelight in any way at all, we've looked after her, we did all the prominent jobs that we possibly could so that Viv would not feature in any of these things at things at all. However, she survived and so did I. After that camp, that was in the PWD lines and that was on Banka. We were then eventually put on a ship, and every time we were moved - and I think we moved 10 times, the whole of the time we were captured - they said "We're taking you to a better camp". Now the men will tell you same thing, they were told exactly the same thing, "You're going to a better camp, you will have more food, there will be better medical treatment, there will be everything better for you" and everywhere we went was worse than the last. My husband Joe was a POW up on the railroad in Siam, he'll tell you exactly the same. So they put us on a boat, took us out on some landing craft first of all and then out to a ship and we were 6 days on that journey. We were down in the hold of the ship, we had only the bit of food we could take with us, we were stuck on bags of rice. we had no toilet facilities, we all had diarrhoea. We had little tins and we used to pass it up top and they'd wash the tins overboard and give them back to us. We were desperately ill, we lost - on each of the

journeys that we made we would lose 40 or 50 people. They'd either be thrown overboard if we were at sea, or if we were on a railroad they would be left at the wayside station, somewhere or the other, just left, we don't know what happened to them. None of our sisters died that way, they didn't die until we were in the last camps in Banka and Sumatra in '45, and so we buried them. They have now all been exhumed and are buried in Jakarta, but only the army sisters. That Mrs Brown I told you about, Sheila has been at the authorities for years and years and years to know where her mother is, or would they look, or would they find out. Nobody knows where the civilian people were, although every person who died we read a burial service and we had a cross made of wood and their name was burnt into it with a hot wire and the date. But our sisters are buried in Jakarta, there are 8 of them there. I saw the graves myself so I know that they are there in Jakarta. A couple of others went from Australia last year on a journey back to Sumatra and they went to see it in Jakarta.

Well we eventually, from that journey, we were taken into Palembang first of all, that was the town where the oil wells are, and that's the sort of main town of that part of Sumatra. It's at the head of the River Musi to Palembang. We had a long journey up this river. We were put then into some houses. Now I suppose looking back, of course, those first - well say the first year after we'd been moved from Banka to the mainland, was the best accommodation and the best time we ever had because although we were put into houses with nothing in them, nothing at all, just stone floors. In the East most of the Artisan type house would just have one long room through. Part of it would be dining room, part would be sitting room. It was all cement or tile floor and a little verandah and opening off it would be two bedrooms and then you'd go out the back and there was kitchen. A kitchen not like our kitchens but with a raised cement platform with holes in it which were used as braisiers. You'd put a pan on the top of that, which sat in a hole and you had a charcoal fire. We didn't have any charcoal of course. we had to use wood that we could get. There was a bathroom with just one of these tanks in it and a tap and a servant's room at the back. That was a typical house. But in that house we were 50 to 60 people and we slept on the floor, we didn't have a mattress, a mosquito net, we had nothing. The only thing, eventually, that I had - that was in the early days before the Dutch were taken prisoner - they were free and occasionally they were able to bring us some food, stew or soup or something because they were still free. But once Java felly which I think was about April or May of 1942, that was the end of it, the Dutch then were interned as well, the European Dutch. They were shoved into the camp with us you see. Well we were moved from those first lot of houses to another lot, but in that first lot of houses, when the Dutch were still free, was when the Japs tried to make geisha girls of us. Now I got very cross just recently to Jimmy Greenwood, who's the Deputy of Veteran Affairs in Sydney, he was our paymaster in Malaya and he knew me quite well and he knows all of us girls. I went to see him and I complained about pension and one thing and another and that was really how eventually I got a full pension. I had all the examinations and everything done, but it was only because I made a fuss about it. And James, Sister James, had been very sick and I didn't see why she shouldn't

have a pension either. She has had cancer, she looks terrible, but she's better than she was. However, James was the 2IC of the l0th Australian General Hospital and she said she was the senior sister in camp. Well I really was the senior sister because I was gazetted before any of them were but that didn't matter, I said "All right you're the senior, you take all the responsibility". Now James never wanted to take any responsibility, she always said - the girls will tell you - we always laughed about it because she said she was too exhausted to do anything. Well we were forced to go to a club. Next door to the houses - we lived in two houses, the sisters. We were divided up with some civilians and there was a house next door that the Japs made into a club. I'm not really a religious person but I had tremendous faith, I just felt - how can I explain it - there was something that held you up and the whole timed supported you and I just felt that we would be alright. I had a great determination that I wasn't going to die in that place, I was going home. If you lost that will to live you couldn't possibly have gone on. You had to have a sense of humour and you had to be able to laugh at lot of the things, be they tragic or not, you had to laugh otherwise you would have lust perished. This time 1 really and truly thought "My God we've reached rock bottom, we've got to go and do this". There was a woman in our camp - have you ever read the story of Gladys Aylwood? The film was made the 'Inn of the Seventh Happiness' or something. Well her story was very similar. She was a mill girl in Lancashire and she had the call for the missionary service, she always told us that whenever she needed something she prayed and it always somehow or other turned up. So this day, we knew we had to go to the club that night and we thought that if a whole lot of we women in the camp - we weren't only of course Australian nurses, we were all kinds - not the Dutch, they weren't with us then – if we all went to this club the Japanese couldn't do anything to us. How wrong were we. However, we went round and none of the women wanted to come, not one. So we went back to the house and Florie said "Let's pray about it". So we knelt down on the stone floor and Florie prayed in a simple ordinary everyday way that we would be safe. Well that night 27 of us went. Now James did not go, James stayed at home, she was too exhausted, she couldn't cope with it, so 27 of us went. We reckoned we left the best looking at home - we left Viv home, we left Wilma Oram and a few of the very good looking. I was supposed to be in those days but anyway I went. We pulled our hair back, because it was all cut fairly short by this time. We had no soap, we had nothing to clean ourselves with properly, we borrowed all the bits of uniform we could and what was remaining of our own. We had no shoes on our feet, we had no lipstick - well we wouldn't have put it on anyway - we made ourselves look as most unattractive as we possibly could. We went to this club. Now the people in that camp were pretty lousy because they left a 17 year old boy in the bar instead of the usual man who'd been made to go by the Japs, they didn't let him go that night, they had a boy there. I suppose because they thought, again, they'd have to stick up for us if something went wrong. So we went in – I don't know whether the Japs got I shock or not, but there were four officers sitting there plus Miarchi, who was in charge of us. Miarchi spoke English perfectly well but he would not speak English to us. He used to run a curio shop, a Japanese curio shop in Singapore - now this wasn't anything unusual and this is what's happening again today, the Japanese throughout the world are snapping their

little cameras everywhere, running this that and the other and knowing everything that goes on and this is what happened in Malaya. Every corner shop in all the villages throughout Malaya - my husband Joe will tell you this - were Japanese photographers. They knew everything, and he used to serve some of the women, even in our camp, in Singapore, and he wouldn't speak English to us, but he was in charge of us. Now we had a terrible boring evening, four awful little Jap officers with green caps down over their foreheads, thick glasses,. bandy legs, they only came up to about our shoulders, long swords, very nice green uniforms. Some of them had a little tiny moustache if they could grow one - they can't grow much hair. There they were, they didn't speak English, we didn't speak Japanese, so we were drawing pictures on bits of paper and trying to make some sort of conversation. Prior to this Miarchi had made we girls go up to a cross street nearby - we weren't within barbed wire at this time and they made us scrub these houses, put mats down and so on. They were to be the brothels. Now the street in Singapore of the brothels is called Lavender Street, so we nicknamed this Lavender Street because we had to laugh about it - it wasn't funny but we had to laugh about it, so we called it Lavender street. So this night, about 10 o'clock, I said to Miarchi "We're going home now". So we all got up and apparently - Val Smith reminded me of this the other day. There were two or three very tough girls, I mean they were really tough. They were nurses but they could drink anybody under the table and they were a bit mannish, they really were toughies, they wouldn't be intimidated by anybody. So Val tells me that she and Shortie were out pinching sugar out the back – I didn't know this at the time – but I got up and said "Let's go home" and Miarchi said "No you cannot". I said "Why can't we?". He said "Four of you have to stay and entertain these officers". I said "But we don't want to". He said "You've got too". I said "Well we're not going too". So he said "If you don't I will take every child out of the camp and I will starve them until you do". Well what could we do, we had to comply with them. So I thought "Blast this. it's not going to hurt the real me, I'm not going to fight them, if they rape me, I'll do it willingly, I'm not going to fight them". We were then about three months prisoners. we had had the most dreadful privations, we had no food, we had no medicine, we had nothing, absolutely nothing, only ourselves to depend on. Now had we fought them and had they hurt us, we would have died or suffered something or the other. I thought "Alright I'll do it". So Shortie and Val came in and Hempsted was there - Hempsted is dead, she died in camp. Val is still living, but Shortie has died since then, these were the three really tough ones. When they came in I said "You'll stay with me won't you?". That's why I always admire Jess Doyle, who's Mrs McCauley and lives in Wellington, she's a widow now - Jess was 2nd/l0th. She said "Well if you have to stay tonight, I'll stay tomorrow night". She went off home with the rest of the girls and four of us stayed behind. That was Val, Hempsted, Shortie and myself. I was the only one the Japs took out. Miarchi gave this officer a torch - although I don't speak Japanese knew perfectly well what he was saying, he was saying the houses are up there, this is the torch and this is where you go and so on and so on. So we walked out and I was terribly frightened, but we walked past the street and as we got to the street this Jap officer was saying "Come up here". I said "No I'm going up there". So I walked on up the hill and I was getting further and further away

from the lights. I was in the middle of the road and he came up to me and put his arms around me and kissed me on the side of the cheek and he said "I lub oo, I lub oo", and he came up to about my shoulder. My God I was frightened. I just put my hands like that and I pushed him and he sat in the middle of the road. I thought "Oh my God he'll kill me'. He lost his glasses, he lost his hat, his old sword went clanking on the ground. I thought "What am I going to do?". I turned on my heel and I walked back towards the house that we'd left. Bother me, if he didn't get up, he grabbed his glasses and his hat and everything and he walked back with me. Now he walked in that house, nothing had happened to me, not a thing. Miarchi, I'm quite sure didn't care whether it did or whether it didn't, but I had done what he insisted that I did, so he didn't lose face. I went in and the other girls told me afterwards that they'd breathed a sigh of relief because the rest of them had gone home and were shivering in their beds - well they didn't have beds, but on the floor - wondering what had happened to us. About a quarter of an hour later I got up and said "I'm going home". Miarchi said "All right", and he let us go. We went in and the girls said "What happened, we've been so frightened". We said "Nothing", and explained. Anyway the next day there was hell to pay. When we'd been round - Florrie and I - that day, evidently the Dutch knew about it, what was going to happen. There was Dr Holveg, who was later beheaded I believe, by the Japs, but he was the Red Cross representative in Palembang and he went to the high command and he told the high command what was going that we were Australian Army nursing sisters, we shouldn't be treated like this and he demanded they stop it. So. they did. They came out this club, they slammed the door shut, they smacked faces, they screamed and they yelled and they carried on, and we never had any more trouble, never, any more. I always say that it was Florrie's prayers that really saved us that night because before that the Japanese said to me, when I pointed to the brassard on my arm - the girls who had been shot on the beach all had red cross brassards on their arms - and I pointed to this and he slapped my face and tore my brassard off and he said "We don't recognise the Red Cross", and they never did. They did not give us any Red Cross parcels, they gave us nothing, to medicines, nothing. We used to see through the cracks in the guardhouse when we moved to a place where the guards were at one end of our hut Red Cross parcels, they took the cigarettes and the chocolate out and they threw the rest away. Here were our people dying from malaria, from malnutrition and we never had anything, never had a Red Cross parcel until the war was over, and then they gave us some Red Cross parcels, which Lord only knows how long they'd had, but we never had any of those things at all. So that was the end of that. The only other thing was that we were later moved from those houses to another lot of houses when the Dutch were interned with us. They had a big barbed wire enclosure but there were a number of houses. Now that was '43. I've got the card – I'll show you in a moment - which was the only letter we were able to write, and that was in March 1943. My mother received it just about '44, it took over 18 months to get home. The girls all laughed because they said it would never get through - well it did. You were only supposed to write 4 or 5 words on so most of them just put hello mum, or cheerio, or I'm okay or something like that. But I didn't, I drew very fine lines on it and I filled the card up. I gave the

addresses of the South Australian sisters who were with me, trying to make them understand that they were the only South Australians there, that the others were gone. So I gave Raymont's, Ashton and Clancy and Bullwinkel and mine.

AM: Did they understand that?

MH: Yes, they did at home, yes. I didn't say that we'd been shipwrecked but I said that breaststroke was the only limited sort of thing that I could do, that I'd lost everything and that we wanted seeds, we wanted vitamins, we wanted books, we wanted clothing, we wanted shoes. we wanted glasses, we wanted everything. I mentioned all these things. I asked if they could send us Red Cross parcels and so on and so on. Well my mother received this and she took it to the military and Sister Kestral was the military commandant then - she had trained at the Adelaide where I did. They were all very interested in this but of course we got no help at all, none whatsoever, but at least they knew we were alive then. Well of course Drummond was dead, so her name wasn't on the list, there was only Rayment's, Ashton - who was from the l3th AGH and lived in South Australia, myself, Clancey - who was another South Australian from the l3th AGH - and Bullwinkel. This was written in March '43 and that was the only communication we were ever allowed to make and we never received a letter. Yet when the war was over, although we didn't know it, but the liberators came over and dropped parcels and all sorts of things. Now the Japanese rushed in - this was after Hiroshima or Nakasaki - whichever it was first they rushed in sacks and sacks of letters which they'd had for over 3 years. Those letters were all water stained and it told me about a niece who was born in December '42, so she was well over 3 years old by the time that I received this letter. They had all these things but they never gave them to us at all never. I mean they treated us most disgracefully, we were not treated as officers, we had no officer status, gave us no money. If it hadn't been for the Dutch we wouldn't have had anything. I am very fond of the Dutch people. Like us, nobody was perfect, and naturally you would look after your own people first, but a lot of the Dutch women had a lot of money because their husbands were managers of banks or big companies or something and they gave their wives thousands and thousands of guilders. We ran a black market. A Jewish woman was the one who collected all the money around the camp, who ran the black market, she and her sister. She was able to borrow money – I never had any of it. We ran a Red Cross fund and I carried letters and money. I carried letters into a hospital that we were allowed to go to. We had one good decent Japanese doctor who tried to help us in '43 when we were in those houses, but he wasn't able to do very much at all. But I'd been very sick and I'd had a lot of tension because I never knew what was going to happen again. I'd been through that business with the officers and I'll tell you I was pretty frightened over that. That always hung over our heads. I had an extra systole in my pulse, you have an extra beat and your heart feels as though it goes clonk and turns over and then goes again. It was the most uncomfortable horrible feeling. I was only 4 stone 6 lbs when I come out of camp, so I'd lost an

awful lot of weight, by '43 even. I was going into this hospital and the Dutch women used to go in too, and they made themselves belts out of bits of sacking and they used to put fancy work on it. ut of course they were around their waists and they used to stuff these with letters because the Dutch men - I think it was in April in '42, they took us all down to a Padang, which is a big playing field and they brought a lot of Dutch in there too. They just simply put the men on one side and the women on the other. They didn't tell them they were going to separate them, they marched all the men off to one camp and the women stayed in another place, and from then on we never saw the men. Many of those husbands and wives never saw each other again, many of them died. The Japs never let them know - they were only half a mile away and they never told them. Anyway the Dutch women used to write letters because in this hospital you could get in touch - men were there as well - so you could give letters to them to give to other men and they in turn would bring letters to give to whoever was there to take back to the women's camp. But of course, the Dutch women, putting them in these belts around their waists, they could see it. The Japs used to slap their faces like mad and confiscate all the letters. They were always frightened of something written, I don't know why. Anyway the first lot of houses we went into we had a piano, a safe at the end of the room which had about a third of a bottle of mango chutney, and that went an awfully long way. We had about half a spoonful each I think on our rice. That was all that was in the safe, and a big camphor wood chest which was too heavy for whoever looted the place, because they'd taken everything out of it, it was stripped bare. In it there were a few old sanitary towels. You probably don't remember, but I do, as a girl we never had sanitary towels made of all this highfalutin stuff like they have now, they were made of towelling or calico with an end on it and you pinned it on and that was it, and you washed these things out. Well this is what we had, but of course we never menstruated because we'd lost so much weight. I suppose it was nature's way of preserving us and we did not menstruate. That's was nature's what Dr McDowell had said to me when I was going out with this Jap. She said "If anything happens to you and become pregnant, I'll see what I can do". I don't suppose we would have become pregnant anyway, we weren't menstruating. Anyway I stuffed the sanitary towel with the letters and I took them in time and time again, to the hospital. Men would be standing one side of a board, which was a divided trough, it was a school really, the nuns had used it as a school and now the Japs used it as their hospital. The nuns had been shoved across the road from their beautiful new hospital into this school and they had to use this as a hospital. It was a sort of staging place because the Japs brought men from Java, Sumatra, all over the place, via this hospital place in Palembang and took them off to Singapore or Japan or wherever they wanted to take them. The men used to be washing the other side and we'd be washing here. I mean you had no inhibitions at all, it didn't matter, you were all in the same boat, you just washed and that was it, and you'd talk. You'd watch the guard at the back you see and he'd be going past and you'd be able to have a talk or you'd pass over whatever you had and they'd pass back to you. My sanitary towel got filled up with letters and money, going back to the camp, because the men were paid, we never were. They used to want to send money back to us. So we formed a Red Cross fund through Dr McDowell, she ran this.

Now James borrowed quite a lot of money and some of we sisters decided that it wasn't moral that we should participate in this fund, that James got, we felt the whole come should have it as a fund for the sick people because really and truly nobody was any worse off than the other person. If you had money and you could buy through this Jewish woman, either black market or the Japs allowed for the first year or two, a man with a bullock cart to come in once a week to bring extra eggs, bananas, pineapples, anything - needles, a bit of cotton, a few notebooks, he would be able to bring in the early days. As egg would cost you, in those days, about 10 cents, a banana about 2 and a pineapple about 10. But later on you couldn't buy any of those things for 20 times as much, inflation went up so much. You had to have an awful lot of money to be able to cope with it. Well the men did receive money. We, by working for the Dutch women, doing their hard work, like digging gardens, carrying water, digging latrines, burying thing, if we did that they paid us so much for doing it, so they didn't have to do it. It suited us because we then had some money to be able to trade. I told you I gave my one 2 dollars to the Malay fisherman, so I didn't have any money, neither did the other girls, so that was very helpful. That was how we lived, dog ate dog in a sense. Hilda Holderness - I can't think of her other name - she was the Jewish girl from Singapore and she ran this black market, but of course if the Japs caught you black marketing there would be a terrible, terrible to do. A lot of the guards were Javanese and they had been the servants of some of the Dutch people who were in the camp, so if they could they would help the Dutch women, they would do things for them if they could, unbeknowns to the Japs. That's how we lived, by taking back money and being able, whenever anybody was sick, to give them a bit of extra food through this so-called shop. Well the Japs - somebody told on me, I don't know who, but this was another thing that was held over my head for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks. I was going to be interrogated by the Kempitai. The Kempitai was the corresponding organisation to the gestapo, that sort of military police business. Eventually they took me out to a house nearby and Dr McDowell came with me but she had to sit in another room. There was a guard standing beside me with a rifle and three Japs sitting at a table, who spoke English. I had to stand in front of them - you've seen similar sort of pictures to this - and they asked me who else was implicated with me. Well there wasn't anybody else, there was only me. They didn't think I was telling the truth. The guard would be told and he'd give me a hit across the back of the neck with his rifle. This went on a lot of times, they took me out and sent me back to the camp and then took me back again several times. Well this hung over my head for a very long time until eventually they gave in. But many of the officers at that time, who were out in the town, like Dr Holweg and one or two other doctors - I think this must have been when Italy collapsed, I think that was '43 the Japs got a bit windy about this and they were very suspicious and they beheaded a number of people. They put people into solitary confinement, they did all sorts of terrible things like this. They didn't put me into solitary confinement but they gave me lots of lashings. That was that, just fizzled out a I didn't hear any more, but I've still got the sanitary towel. So life went on like this and we lost an awful lot of people in the camp. I was born in 1910, so in '41 I was in my 31st year. Well people of my age group, be they civilians or army sisters, were

much better off than the older ones or the younger ones, because once they were 60-ish or so, they began to deteriorate, and if you haven't got medicines and things of course, it's worse. And if you'd been on a starvation diet and had beri-beri you were worse off still. Then we began to get malaria - that was terrible, malaria. And the latrines I suppose were the worse things. Unless you've been a prisoner you haven't any conception of what it was like, none whatsoever because in the tropics the rain rains, and it rains every day as a rule and you get a very heavy downpour, then the sun shines again and it's all bright and steamy and warm. But when it rains it fills up all these latrines. We didn't have the utensils to work with, we didn't have the strength to do the things. The men will tell you, you read any of their stories. They used to dig a trench and they'd fill that trench up as a latrine and that would be filled in you see. Well we couldn't do that and we all got worms, the most terrible worms and when these latrines would fill up with water all the contents would overflow and go down the muddy paths. You only had trompers to wear and you'd lose half of those in the mud and the straps would come off, or you'd have to walk in your bare feet. I mean we had no water, we only had well water to wash with, no toilet paper, nothing like that at all. It was nothing to go 20 times a night to the latrine. In fact, haven't really said much about this, but think - I know we killed a Jap guard one night in the latrines. He's probably still sitting down there somewhere. but he tried to interfere with one of the women and we heard screams and three of us went out. We fished her out, she slipped into the latrine. he was trying to interfere with her, obviously to rape her. At night you had no lights or anything, and we had a scuffle with him and he slipped and he fell in. So we pushed his hat down and his gun down and forgot all about him. We took the woman back to the hut and we cleaned her up and pacified her as best we could and we never heard any more about it. I don't know what happened about the guard, whether they ever looked for him or what they did. I think he's still down that terrible latrine. I suppose they were only doing what they were told to do, this is what the Germans say, "We were only carrying out orders".

AM: You didn't find the guards friendly

MH: No, they were indifferent, they were neither one thing or the other. They didn't like animals. especially the Javanese. One of the children in the camp found a puppy and made a pet of it. The kids had nothing in the camp, and what did these people do, they got hold of the dog and they put a wire around its neck and in front of the kids they strangled the dog. They did this for hours and hours and the dog howled - how would you feel like that. We had to do everything, in drought times - and you can have droughts - it sounds funny but you do have a dry season and very often there wasn't so much water. In our camp there was a well in the centre and the well would be dry. We'd have to go right down to a hydrant, down the road, and carry water and we used to have to fill up the Japanese tanks in the house next door, where they lived, the officers, before we could get any for our camp. So many times we used to spit in the water and we even wee-ed in it. It was just something to let off

steam. You might think it's not very funny, but it was to us, it relieved our feelings tremendously. You'd see a guard walking past and you'd see this blasted bowing all the time, you always had to bow. Many many was the time when a guard was going past and you'd bow and you'd say "You bloody little bastards, we hate the sight of you, we just wish you'd fall and bleak you bloody necks", we'd say. We smiled and they'd smile back and bow at what we were saying. We were blaspheming most dreadfully.

AM: You were never caught with one who could speak English?

MH: Well apparently Pemberton was and he said "Oh sister you wouldn't say that to us would you?" and she said they nearly had a fit, but it didn't happen to me, I didn't hear it. These are the ordinary guards, some of the officers, yes, spoke English, but a lot of the ordinary guards didn't. We used to blaspheme – I never swore in my life before. And Betty Jeffery taught us to sing "One day I killed a Jap, killed a Jap" - we'd be sitting on the floor and the Japs would be going past and we would be singing this and low chanting – "One day I killed a Jap, hit him on the head with a bloody lump of lead" and we'd be laughing our faces off, bowing our heads, and they hadn't a clue. It was a kind of letting off steam without doing too much damage to yourself because it was superficial, it didn't hurt us and it didn't hurt them because they didn't know, but we were complying more or less with what they said but we weren't giving in. We used to have concerts and the Japs could never see how funny this was but we laughed and laughed and laughed. We had a woman who used to sing 'Land of Hope and Glory'. She was a Dutch woman, she had a beautiful voice and she used to stand up there and sing and she used to say "Vider still and vider" - she couldn't say "Wider still and wider". The Japs would order some cane chairs to be sent in and the officers would sit down the front and we would sit on the dirt at the back. I made, out of some ticking and stuff that I had collected from the Dutch women, little cushions and I used to string them round our waist. It was only a tiny cushion, but it was to put under our bottoms because our bones stuck through, it was so painful to sit on the floor. At these concerts we'd sit down there and Mrs Van den Hout who would sing 'Land of Hope and Glory', and we'd clap and carry on. The Japs would clap and they thought this was beautiful. And she'd come back again and again and sing 'Land of Hope and Glory'. They couldn't. see how funny this was, but we thought it was a great joke because you couldn't have anything more patriotic than that. We used to sing 'Here's health unto their Majesties'. We used to sing - I never knew the words of it before, but I can never hear it at the women's institute without it bringing a lump to my throat and that is 'Jerusalem'. We used to sing a lot of things, to take the micky out of the Japs and if you could take the micky out of them you were doing fine, believe me, because it just gave you that little bit of help that you needed, moral help. Also we knew we would win, but however long it took we didn't know, we didn't know whether weld be there at the end, but we jolly well tried to be. But towards the end in '45 things got very, very bad and without the atom bomb none of us would have survived, not one of us. The thing that makes me most angry is the fact that every

anniversary, the 25th or whatever it is, of the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, you have all the sympathy in the world for the little Japanese but not one word is ever said about the prisoners of war and the treatment that they had. What about the men up on the railroad, every sleeper, four lives they say it cost. I mean what about us. I think, as I said in that, 41 sisters out of 65 was a very big percentage to have lost; 21 shot, 12 drowned, 8 died in camp. We may have lost the 8 in camp but lost all those others had we been able to stay in Singapore. I had friends who were in Sime Road Singapore, and they weren't treated anything like us, and we would have had all our own clothes, we would have had everything - what did we have, nothing. I lived out of the bottom of a Dutchman's white trousers. A Dutch woman cut them off and used the top bit as shorts and gave me the bottoms and I used to borrow a machine from a Dutch woman who was brought into camp, she brought her machine with her, and I used to pay her, in the early days, 10 cents an hour to lend me her machine and I used to sew on it, not that I'm much of a sewer. I used to make hats out of those rattan plaited bags that they used to send rations in and the Dutch used to give me bits of material to bind it with and cotton, and what was left they'd let me keep. All the girls had hats. We were moved so many times that we'd take everything that we could possibly take with us, bits of wire, a stone, a bit of tin, anything was very very important. Those pilchard tins - you know how the top folds back and you can never get the lid right off, well that formed a handle and that was a frying pan. We used to go through all the rubbish heaps everywhere to collect anything we could, they were our cooking utensils. We used to have cigarette tins - a 50 cigarette tin would just hold an egg, if you ever got an egg to boil. And occasionally in the rations they'd bring in duck eggs. We worked it out that each hut had about 56 people in it and to have some law and order - you can't live without law and order, there's no doubt about it, it doesn't matter what it is, you have to have some sort of order to live by. We worked it out that to have one head of each hut or of each compartment of the hut was best and she was responsible to collect rations, to see that they were given out properly, to do all sorts of things, and they in turn were responsible to one woman who was in charge of the British and one in charge of the Dutch. So that those two could go to the Japanese if ever they were wanted for anything and we made the Japanese understand that they were the two people who were responsible and if they wanted to give us any orders it had to come through them. Not that we got very far with them, they more often than not were made to stand in the sun and get their faces slapped. We had a roster and if any eggs came in, we realised in the early days that one egg between six people was of no use at all, so we would give, say if we got 5 or 6 eggs, we'd give 5 or 6 people an egg each. Then next time they came in, even if it was weeks apart, the next lot would get an egg; that was the only way we could work it. We used to count out sticks of kangkong – it's a sort of spinach but it's very rich in iron, and beans, long beans; we'd have one bean per person. And rations of rice were very very poor, we had about 2 ounces of rice per person per day and white rice at that, so wasn't any wonder that we got beri-beri. Our ankles got very weak, our wrists got weak, our bellies got big. You'd go up to these latrines and they'd be slippery and wet. You'd slip on them, you couldn't walk properly and all these maggots would fall over the top, it was revolting. Everyone had worms, it

really was revolting. I can't explain it. There was no soap, nothing to wash yourself with. We used to make a sort of lye, the Dutch nuns taught us how to do that. We used the ash from the fires and stick that in water. You poured the water off and used that water for washing clothes in. Unfortunately, all the clothes that we had were white so you couldn't do very much to try and keep them white because they were these white drill suits. We had no buttons or fasteners or anything, so we used to make a bra sort of top with two long ends that tied and just a strap over your shoulder and then these trousers and a bamboo hat. That was it, that was what you lived in. But, when the Dutch women came into camp, they'd bring with them a big mattress because perhaps they'd have 3 or 4 children. We had 28 inches per person bed space in the early days, when we went into huts to live, and that was just wide enough for a single mattress, if you had a mattress. But the Dutch people would come in with their 2 or 3 children, so they would take a bed space of 3 or 4 times that 28 inches, so they'd be able to have a double mattress and they all slept on that. They had mosquito nets, which we didn't have. But. then we had to move, so the question was how were the women going to cart these mattresses because they couldn't, they had to carry everything, there was no help for you, you didn't get anything carried for you. So I, because I was sewing hats and I used to get 1 gilder 50 for these hats, that enabled me to buy food for the girls. We lived in what we called konges. Konge is a word the Chinese use for a family. You shared everything. Those people meant a tremendous amount to you, because yesterday it happened and tomorrow might never come, so you lived for each day as it went along, you did the best you could. And without those people and without the love of those people, I don't know what we would have done because our families were so remote, we might never see them any more. It was those immediate people there who were most important to you, you helped each other, and that's how we lived through the days. We used to share all that we did. So these Dutch women came over to me and said "Can you make my mattress smaller". So I said "Yes, all right". I didn't know we'd do it, but anyway. We took all the kapok out of the ticking, we washed the ticking and split it up into smaller sections and then stitched the sections across and then stuffed those sections with kapok, sewed up the edges, and then rolled the whole thing up with two long strings and they could carry them on their backs, even the children could carry their own. So what was left, I said "What do you want be to do with it?". They said "You can have that", so we had enough then, of ticking and kapok, to make a small mattress for every one of the sisters, and also the same with the mosquito net. But, then we began to get trouble because you were either eaten alive by mosquitoes and got malaria, or you were eaten by bugs. As soon as you got bedding and that sort of thing, you got bugs. We got these nets; well we either stifled under them because it wasn't all made of netting, there'd be bits of ticking and bits of netting until we could replace the ticking with bits of net when we got more from the Dutch. And then the strings that you tied it up with, every morning when you woke up, about that far up, was thick with bugs. We used to have a debugging session every morning and they stink to high heaven, they are terrible, terrible things. You try and regiment a lot of women, and you can't. Never, never again do I want to live with a lot of women, I'll live with the men but not with the women because women are the very devil. They

are very nice, they are very courageous, they are very clever, they are very good, they'll do all sorts of things, but you can't make women do the same thing as you can make men, they just won't do it. Joe tells me that in their camp, many times, to get rid of the bugs, they went around with a g-string on, that's what they wore, just a g-string through their legs. Well we couldn't very well do that, but at least we could wear the minimum amount of clothes, which we did wear, and every bit of bed space was taken to pieces and was fumigated over smoke, everything was boiled up, all their clothing. But, you see, if women had a case, as a lot of them did who came into camp off a ship that wasn't bombed, they wouldn't give up those things for anything. I mean many of them died and left them behind and then they were distributed. They'd turn in their gravel if they knew what happened. While they were alive many of them wouldn't give you a thing. Some of them would give the last shirt off their backs if they had it, but not everybody was like that. To regiment a lot of women is very very very difficult. I mean they can be awfully bitchy - they can be very nice, but they can be terrible too. It was a case of you giving out rations – "Oh you're giving her more than you're giving me". "Well then you do it". "Oh no, I don't want to do it, you do it". One woman said to me "Oh dear, you girls are so clever, but then again you're used to roughing it", meaning that that was the way we lived, we grew up, we were used to roughing it all the time, whereas many of these girls' fathers owned big stations or had plenty of money or could have bought and sold some of these people. That was their attitude which could be very hurtful and very annoying when you lived with a lot of people like that. You imagine living with even, say 50 people. One or two of them would be your friends, you'd soon find out, you'd find your level with them. and the rest of them you wouldn't like at all. We made cards, we made Mah-Jong sets, we had talks about all kinds of things, we learned to play contract bridge, anything to keep your mind occupied, you had to keep your mind occupied otherwise you'd just be a cabbage. We had a choir; when we didn't have any instruments - we had the piano for a while but after that, when we moved, we couldn't take the piano. There was a missionary. She had been in China for a number of years and had had to get out of China. Then she went Malaya and of course, she was then in her middle 60s and she wasn't at all well. She developed what we call myxoedema which is lack of thyroid. She was really quite sick and she died in '45, but she was a tremendous inspiration to us, she used to hold a church service every week and whenever anybody was buried, there was always a burial service. She wrote plays, she was very clever musically and if anybody could hum a tune to her, she'd write down the so-fah and then she'd transpose it and she'd put in parts and all this sort of thing. She wrote what we called 'The Captives Hymn' and we used to sing it every Sunday, and at any other time. We used to have concerts for St George's Day, St Patrick's Day, St Andrew's Day, anything. Anzac Day we always held a service. We did all kinds of things like that. We used to make Xmas presents out of nothing, out of bits of lamp shade that we found in some of the houses we were in, anything to keep our minds occupied. And of course we had a lot of heavy work to do, it was awfully hard, even trying to keep body and soul together by eating. It was laborious work, you had to chop the trees down, most of it was rubber, green rubber and it smoked like mad. We had to collect all our own fire wood, we had to make our own

fires, we had to carry all the water, we had to chop wood for other people for the laps, we used to have to carry all their bath water and make gardens. As soon as we made a garden it was coming into harvesting, we'd leave the place, so we didn't have the benefit of it. Burying the dead was one of the most dreadful things because the Japanese were very frightened of illness - not that they gave us anything for it, but we used to carry make-shift coffins that we made out of old boxes about a mile from the camp on two bamboo poles. We only had those chunkels, a chunkel is like, it's like a heavy hoe, it has a blade about 6 inches square. They are awfully hard to use and that'd all we had to dig with. Sometimes, towards the end, it was nothing to have 12 or 13 deaths a day, and of course people had to be buried immediately. It meant that we were out on these parties for ages and ages, you'd be absolutely exhausted. You couldn't dig the holes very big, so the coffins were more or less just stuck underneath that was all. I made up my mind that I was not going to die under those circumstances, they were revolting, absolutely revolting. I know your body doesn't mean anything but at the same time it just revolted me, I didn't want to die under those conditions. But we did the best we could. I begged - I've never begged so much in all my life - I begged the Japanese, I would have done anything they asked me to do for medicine for Raymont. She had cerebral malaria and they wouldn't give me a thing. She was raving mad. Anyway she died. Gardam I think she died from lack of salt in her blood, she had diarrhoea and dysentery very badly, rather a bit like cholera when you get that, you just die because you haven't enough fluid as when you give an intravenous injection - she ought to have had that. I went to see her and I was feeding her and she just died. But we had no medicine so all you could do was give them rest and hot water, nothing more at all. Wilma Oram reminded me, I'd forgotten about it, but I used to wake up in the night - not in the hospital, I was never in the hospital - but in my bed space. We used to have people on night duty, we'd call it, so that if the Japs came wandering around you'd be alerted, and if anybody wanted any help in the night then there was always somebody there you could call on. Wilma said "Do you remember when you used to call me", because I'd wake up with a fright, I don't know why, but I'd feel my pulse going up and up and up and up until I felt I was suffocating. Wilma used to come and hold my hand until I calmed down and then perhaps I'd go off to sleep again, or as soon as the daylight came it was alright. Bubut this sort of thing that would happen, I suppose it was tension building up because we never knew what was going to happen. Even when the war was over, we didn't know what they'd do to us. In fact the records say that we were all to have been shot in August 1945, but again the atom bombs having being dropped, they didn't do it.

AM: When was it dropped?

MH: July I think. I think they were both in July[3], the beginning of July or the end of June, something like that.

[3] The two atom bombs were actually dropped on 6th and 9th August 1945 on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively.

Soon after that the Japs folded up. We knew something terrible had happened, but we had no idea, I had never heard of an atom bomb, I didn't have any clue what it was. But the Japs were very very upset about it. They were having a party or something when they got the news of it. You always had some women in the camp who would go and sleep with the Japs, do anything to get a bit of extra. That let us out I suppose, but those women came back and told us that something terrible had happened, but they had no idea what it was. Well then this went on until – I had malaria very badly and we were all told to congregate at a certain place, that the man in charge of our camp was going to make an announcement. He stood up on a table and through our Dutch interpreter - she was a woman who spoke a bit of Japanese - he stood up and he said the war was over, and if they'd done anything to us in the last 3½ years he hoped that we'd forgive them and be friends. We didn't say a word, but the Dutch people got a bit excited, shouted and yelled and laughed and joked and carried on, but I really felt too ill. We had to stay in this camp for a while longer because the Japs said the seas were mined and the airfields were mined and we'd have to stay in the camp, but we could trade with the natives. I suppose for about 3 weeds before we were released we were able to trade with them, and we could give them anything - I mean they were in a terrible condition, the native people, not so much from food I suppose but from other things. They would bring eggs in and a few scrawny chickens and we began to get a bit more food. We could trade anything that we had, any old patched pillows or anything, they were pleased to get hold of because they were in a very poor condition. So we traded with them and then one night about midnight or just after, there was a telephone call apparently and Mrs Hinch, our British commandant - she was an American really - but she was called into the guard- house - and Mrs Mueller too, and they were told that we, the Australians were to be moved out. But they thought we were 65, and they were sending two planes for us, so we could take 65 people, but we were only 24 so we took all the sick ones in the camp. This is when Elizabeth and 1 were carrying Mrs Bull - you remember me telling you that the last Helen saw of those two children was in the water and Molly's hair bobbing, and she had Hazel. Well she got ashore with Hazel and I remember Helen being in that guardhouse in this open courtyard where we first went in. When I went in she said "Have you seen my children?" I didn't know her at all. I said "No I hadn't seen any children". Anyway when I went to that hospital a year or so later, and I saw the men, one man said to me "Have you got a Mrs Bull in your camp?". I said "Yes". He said "Well you tell her that her children are safe in Java". Well I didn't really believe him but I told her and she said "I know they are quite safe".

AM: How did she know?

MH: Well she just felt it in herself, she didn't believe they were dead. Anyway we got back to Singapore and there was a New Zealand woman who was the head of the Y.W.C.A. in Singapore, and she'd been flown in from Java. She said to me "Did you have a Mrs Bull in your camp?" and I said "Yes we've brought her in with us

because she'd had typhoid and she was one of the sick people". She said "I must get in touch with her because I've been looking after her two children in Java for the last year". Apparently when that woman had persuaded the Chinese woman who'd been looking after the children to let her have them in the camp for about 18 months, these children were swimming in the water and an Australian soldier so the story goes was in a sampan and he picked a Chinese woman up and these two children. He got as far as Java, I don't know what happened to him afterward, whether he was imprisoned or not, but anyway a lot of people got to Java and then things happened to them after that. Anyway this Chinese woman swore that these two children were hers and she looked after them for a long time. Then the women in the camp, I don't know how they came in contact with her, but they persuaded the Chinese lady to let them have the children because they felt that they were not being educated and 2 or 3 years in a child's life of 5 and 7, is quite a lot. Now Lady Louis Mountbatten, she came to see us, she was in Singapore. She had a lot to do with us and we told her about this, so she made it her business, when she went to Java, to bring these children back, and she did. She brought them back to Singapore and Helen was reunited with those two - she already had Hazel with her, Hazel survived the camp, and her husband had been interned, and they were all united together. It was incredible wasn't it, you really wouldn't believe, but it was true. She never never gave up hope that those children were alright, it's an incredible story. They went back to America eventually because he must have been about retiring age by that time.

AM: So you were flown away?

MH: This was about 1 o'clock in the morning I suppose when we were told that we were moving out. We collected all our things, as best we could, and we were then taken, in the very early hours of the morning, by truck from the camp. We said goodbye to our friends there, we gave everything that we had more or less and we just took the sick people with us and went in these trucks to a train, which was only cattle trucks, but we were treated a bit better by this time. We were taken so many miles to a station and then we were put in trucks again and taken to an airfield near a place called Lahat. Lahat was a big military area and that was there some Afrikkans, some paratroopers had dropped by parachute. I've got a book written by one of them actually he sent it to me the other day. He came in and he told us the war was over, but he said we just had to wait, he couldn't do anything about it. But then the Australian government got onto it and they flew the Australians and New Zealanders out. They sent a plane to Palembang - as a matter of fact, in Sydney, where I was just recently, a man called Ken Brown was the pilot, he runs a garage now in Killara, and he and a navigator and a reporter, they all came on the plane and they contacted the men in the men's camp in Palembang. They told them that we were down near Lahat somewhere but they didn't know where, well we were a hundred miles or so from there, we were down at a place called Loebbok Linggau. So the reporter and the navigator commandeered a car - it was pretty brave of them because the Japs really didn't accept the war was over - and they drove a car all the way

from Palembang down to Lahat and that is when they contacted the Jap headquarters and the Afrikaans, and the Afrikaans knew where we were, and that's how we got the message through. They made arrangements, this 'plane went back to Singapore and the next day they were coming at half past four on this aerodrome near Lahat, and that is where we had to meet. That's how we got out. We got there and sure enough the plane turned up and instead of being, of course, 65 we were only 24, but we had taken quite a few with us. It was an old Douglas plane with canvas seats along the sides. We sat on those seats, no belts or anything, and the stretchers were down the centre of the plane. When we were landing on Singapore aerodrome, I looked out and there were hundreds of people running around and there were fire engines and ambulances and all sorts of things, we couldn't make out what the activity was. You know what it was, they couldn't get the under carriage down from under our plane and Ken Brown landed the plane on its belly, without any wheels. We came down safely and we didn't know of course until it was all over. Wouldn't it have been awful if we'd been wrecked there on the airport, at the end of all that. And John Game was there to meet us. I've got some pictures, but unfortunately I've left them with my daughter. I was about 4 stone 6 lbs and the other girls were about that. You know what they looked like coming out of Belsen, that's about what we looked like, our eyes were all sunken in our heads. But we'd had about three weeks food, better food, by this time, because we'd been able to trade with the natives, since the time the Japs told us the war was over. I think this was about the 27th September, something like that, when we were flown out.

AM: You were still capable of walking?

MH: Oh yes: we could walk, but we were pretty terrible. We all either had swollen ankles or swollen bellies and we couldn't eat. Did I long for meat and bread and butter.

AM: Had you lost any teeth?

MH: No 1 hadn't, but I'd lost a couple of fillings.

AM: Was eyesight affected?

MH: Yes our eyesight became affected, those especially who wore glasses found great difficulty in reading, but it got alright again. The back of my eyes had some damage but it repaired itself after I'd had some vitamin treatment.

AM : It's really remarkable when you see a person like yourself, to reflect just what restorative powers the

human body has.

MH: Yes that's right, and when you come to think of it 1 was then 35, I was 4 stone 6, I lost one tooth because I had a bad abscess on it by this time. The only time I ever had toothache in my life, was in camp; the only time I ever fainted in my life was in camp once, after having a terrible bout of diarrhoea and being up about 24 times or something in the night and I just caved over in the morning. The Japs had thrown some hot oil over my foot in 1945, 2 or 3 months before we were released.

AM: By mistake?

MH: No, well partly an accident, it was on purpose they threw it, but I happened to be there and they had got me on the foot. The only way that people could eat their ration of rice was to have it made very hot. You could see about 6 months before people died, that they were dying. I don't know how I can explain to you, but it was like a skeleton with just skin stretched over their faces and their eyes all sunken in their heads. They looked as though they were dying. This went on for months and unless we could make the rice very hot, they couldn't eat it. So Elisabeth Simons, Vi McElnea and I, we used to heat the rice up in these little oval pilchard tins and they'd have to give us any oil that they had because we didn't have anything extra to give to anybody. Whatever they wanted, we would heat it up and Vi would cover it and run it back to the so-called hospital. Well for some reason or other the Japs objected, I don't know why, and there was hot oil in this pan one day and the Jap just came along and threw it and it went all over my foot. I got a big ulcer on it, all festered up and I couldn't eat my rice. I'd try to take a mouth full and heave, heave like anything. Anyway I forced myself eventually to eat it and I got over but I could have died too, if I hadn't been able to do that. I craved for bread and butter and meat, they were the two things. We used to write recipes, think recipes, talk food, food, food, food, the whole time, the one mania we had was food. When I came out, blow me down, the bakery wasn't working so we didn't have any bread and we had male cooks who were dreadful. My first meal was a hard ship's biscuit, like a dog biscuit, and a poached egg that was all watery. I can't look poached eggs in the face now, really. Even if you'd given me a beautifully cooked meal I doubt that I could have eaten it, I couldn't for about year. But I was then 35, Joe - well you see how tall he is - he weighed just over 6 stone. In fact when we were married he was still very thin. But I recuperated pretty well. Of course we had hundreds of pills, we had sulphur drugs, all sorts of things. Then they sent us on the hospital ship home, which was a good thing, because once we got to Perth we were snowed under with welcome messages and flowers and Lord knows what. Then I had to go to Melbourne on the ship because you didn't touch at Adelaide. Then Ashton and I went home to Adelaide by ourselves and we had a marvelous welcome, the bands played and the traffic was all stopped and we had a Royal procession through the streets. We were taken to tie Town Hall and we received a cheque – I think it was 100 each we got – they made

a tremendous fuss, really terribly exciting, so what it would have been a month before I don't know. Then matron said we could do what we liked. Well my sister was in Western Australia and I hadn't seen much of her and she had a baby in that December, and she had, a little boy. I went over early in '46, to work at Hollywood Hospital, 110th at Hollywood, which is now Charles Gairdner Hospital, although part of it is military. I went over and stayed there and Joe was held up in Perth on his way back to Malaya and he and I met up again, and we decided to get married.

AM: And presumably you had your family after this?

MH: Oh yes. You see I didn't menstruate all that time and it was only after I got back to the hospital in Singapore and was given better food, that I suddenly got funny hot flushes. Then all of a sudden I started to menstruate and it was as regular as clockwork. I got married in December '46, and went back to Malaya to get married. I didn't know when I could get a boat, that's what I had to wait for, they wouldn't let me back. I knew I was sailing on the 4th December '46 and I got out of the army on the 2nd and I got up there on the l3th. I had to be 3 days in Singapore so I stayed with Sorby and Eunice Adams at St Andrews school. Joe was there and we got married on the 16h December 1946, I was then 36. I lost a baby mid '47 and I thought I wouldn't have any more. Anyway I was about 2 months pregnant, I suppose, and I was doing some welfare work. The people were in a shocking condition, I was in an ambulance and we were going through was some tall grass and there was a tree and we hit the tree in the ambulance and I flew up to the roof. I didn't take much notice, but I began to lose this baby and I lost it eventually. Then my elder son was born when I was 38, I was 38 on the l2th October and be was born on the 28th. Jessica was born when I was 40 and then Jeffery was born when I was 42, so I had three of them in 4 years and 3 months. So I didn't do too badly did I? And I was out in the jungle without any help, and my first baby was 10½ lbs. Jessica was 10 lb and then Jeffrey was a Caesarean because I had to have a big repair operation done after Jessica was born.

AM: So were you there during all the communist trouble?

MH: Yes, my children were born with all that. I went back in '46 and the day I quickened with Jeremy - I remember that very distinctly, it was June '48, the first lot of planters - the big trouble started. There were the odd ones that had been ambushed and so forth. A party of Chinese went to bungalow one Sunday morning. That Sunday morning - we were in the club in the evening and we were told about this and everybody was very upset. They moved all the women out of the estates and into the towns. I hated it, I said I wasn't going to live here with this lot of women, I'd had it, said I was going back to the estates so I went back. But we'd got wire around the perimeters by that time, we used to never lock a door. They all had guns - I was 7 months pregnant

and I was lying out in the rubber learning to fire a .303, and it nearly killed me, it nearly knocked me over. Joe bought me a .22, so I had to learn to do that. I had a revolver and I carried a revolver and a .22 everywhere I went. Under our beds we had a gun, under our pillows we had revolvers, it was awful, terrible. We never went anywhere without an armoured car, there was a curfew, and life was pretty hectic for about 5 years. Then we came home. The emergency was nearly over by that time. But I had two wars really.

AM: They didn't actually capture your estate?

MH: It wasn't a case of capturing it. We had a lot of trouble on the estate, we had people ambushed. We lived on the edge of a jungles our estates were on the edge of a jungle and the guerillas used to be in the jungle. They would come out and anybody who was living on the edges of the jungles like some of the coolies, the Chinese particularly, used to be squatters. They used to pay Joe $2 a year to squat on that land. They had a little plot, and their and pardi, chickens and pigs and a hut. The kiddies used to go to school every day and they used to work on the estate. But until the planters insisted that - through Templar - that all the people off the road were taken from one end back to the village that way, and from the other end back to the village that way, and put within a big compound with barbed wire and guards. Then they took all the shops and dwellings off the main roads and out of the jungle, nobody was allowed to live out there. But they got on top of it you see because then there was nowhere for the guerillas to get their foodstuffs' they only could get what was in the jungle, they couldn't come and demand any supplies, whereas before that they could. But, of course, you couldn't trust anybody, because your servants might be good servants in the day and by night they could be guerillas for all you knew, you had no idea. I don't say of course they were all like that but there were people who played a double game.

AM: It's funny that communism is a dead issue in Malaysia now

MH: Well not quite, up on the borders, up where I've been recently, they still have trouble. The Europeans don't have any trouble because Malaysia has got independence so they don't worry about the Europeans, they try to terrorise the local population. But Malaya is too well off, the people have always been well off in Malaya, you never saw beggars when the British were there, they were always very well off. The estates were very well run, we had our own hospitals, our own schools, a European doctor once a month who did a spleen test, there were all sorts of things done. It's not what you would say probably is good, but in their estimation it was, because it was the way they liked to live. They had electricity, they had televisions and Joe used to run a shop - well he didn't run it but he allowed the shop to be run by an Indian say, where they could buy their rice at a reasonable price, so they were very well looked after. They still have gone on doing that but nowadays, instead of you seeing a coolie carrying a pole over his shoulder with two buckets, they've got motorbikes now. They are

pretty well off, but whether the communists will eventually get in there I don't know. This is one of the things we were all a bit upset about Vietnam because once the communists got that part, Cambodia, all those places were really falling like nine pins, and that's what they think will happen right through there. That's why Australia is so vulnerable, I think. People don't understand this unless you've lived amongst the people, the dangers of these-things, we haven't got any conception.

AM: What you mean is that Australia is really a frontier.

MH: It's just sitting there, yes. I think this is where Australia doesn't think enough. I got into trouble with my stepson, who is the trade commissioner, and when I said I hated the Japanese, and I do, I'm sorry, but if a Japanese came in here I'd walk out, I just cannot bear a Japanese. I can see them as they treated me, with their bayonets, they were horrid, they really were. I just don't like them. It worries me to think people have become complacent about Japan - why did she fight the war? because she wanted to extend her territory didn't she? Now that she's economically sound, she's going to expand more and more, and you can't tell me because she's buying up properties in Australia she's not going to settle in it some time. It may not happen now, but it will happen and Australia has such few people in a smallish area really, the outback is not being used a great deal by Europeans.

AM: Can I just backtrack and ask you a question. On the Thailand railways think that they actually had Korean guards, did you?

MH: Yes: we had Koreans too, although we hated the Korean guards.

AM: Were they worse than the Japanese.

MH: Well everybody says they were.

AM: Did you find that?

MH: Well we had Javanese and we had Koreans and we didn't like them.

AM: Also somebody said to me that the people who survived better were the thin people rather than the fat people, did you find that?

MH: Yes, that was right, the people who were, as I told you, my age, and were thinner - very fat people didn't survive. People who had extreme habits, the smokers suffered a lot, not from their smoking but from lack of it, they craved cigarettes. When they couldn't get cigarettes they wanted sugar, well we didn't have much sugar. How many of those people, we got a little sugar, and we used to save it up and when we got a tin full, we could sell it through the black market, and we got enough money to buy a lot of green beans, bean sprouts. They were green beans but we used to make sprouts out of them by putting on a tray or in a banana leaf and leaving them for a day or two and wetting. They would sprout and you'd get lovely big sprouts. Well we could trade a tin of sugar for a lot of those bean sprouts, which did us much more good because we didn't crave sugar, we didn't smoke, so therefore it didn't affect us. But the people who did smoke would hang on to their sugar or they would trade their beans for sugar, which didn't do them any good.

AM: Talking about extremes, that sort of community is a reflection of the normal community, did you also have madness, people becoming deranged.

MH: Well I suppose, in a sense, we were all a bit dopey by the time we finished. Some people had obsessions about various things. We did suffer from what they called anxiety state.

AM: You didn't have anybody becoming down right deranged?

MH: No, only those who had cerebral malaria, and that was a different thing. I think on the whole people are pretty tough. It was your will, your mind that mattered a great deal more than your physical state in many ways.

AM: Also I ask you this question because in Hong Kong there were people who had lived at Repulse Bay in rich homes, who couldn't cope at all when they had to go into a prisoner of war camp there.

MH: I think that was probably a bit extreme. We had one woman who was what we called – instead of a remittance man, it was a remittance woman, she was paid so much to keep out of England. I don't know what was wrong, her marriage had broken up, all sorts of things. But anyway she used to frequent, or live in one of the rest houses and always be in the clubs. She didn't make the grade but she taught us how to play contract bridge which was a tremendous help to us, so she served her purpose in that way. But she didn't have what it took to take it I don't suppose. I think that most people have quite the wrong idea. You've got the idea of Somerset Maughan in many ways. He blew up a lot of these stories. That story 'The Letter' that Bette Davis played in many years ago, that was about a woman who murdered somebody but she got off because she was inscrutable and she never gave away a thing, that we the story and that was set in Malaya. But Somerset

Maughan went out and ferreted out a whole lot of stories and he wasn't very well liked over this because he broke confidence. They told him things in confidence and then he'd make a story out of it. Well Malaya, yes, it was a lovely place to live in, pre-war. When I first went to Malaya there were a lot of servants, but they were not ill-treated by any manner of means. They had good wages, they had good food. You could engage who you wanted and as many as you wanted. Yes, you had things done for you ....

AM: I mean these people, once they got into a prisoner of war camp and had those ....

MH: Yes, I understand what you meant but what I'm saying is that I think the whole idea of having everything done for you beforehand was exaggerated. There were probably some people who were affected like that because they didn't have any resources in themselves but then they would have done, wherever they would have been. The fact that they lived in Malaya and had servants, I don't think made any difference at all. But I will say that the Australian sisters, in fact all of the nursing staff, be whatever they were - we had Margot Turner with us who was a WA, we had a few other trained nurses, be had some nuns, a teaching order and a nursing order. Now the people with discipline, who had grown up with discipline, were much much better. I said to you a while ago that the women were the very devil to regiment. Now those women had never had any training, they hadn't had to tow the line in any way at all, whatever nationality they were. Whereas we had been disciplined, both in the army and in nursing. I mean I wasn't allowed to be home after ten o'clock at night in nursing. We had to do as we were told to a certain extent. So I suppose that did help because we could see - as I said before you can't live without law and order and discipline, you've got to be disciplined, you've got to live an ordered way or things become so chaotic that you just can't cope. But I think, looking back, there were one or two, Ruth Russell-Roberts for instance, she shouldn't have died. A lot of people shouldn't have died, they weren't any worse off than I was, in fact, they weren't as bad as we were because we often did their very heavy work in the camp, whereas they got out of it somebody but they died just the same, possibly because they didn't do these things.

AM: They didn't keep so fit.

MH: No, probably not. We had to work on practically no food, was a kind of mental attitude, and you friends, there was no doubt about that, you kept each other going. The POWs here have a saying, the spirit that kept the spirit going. That was true, you had to have that will to live, you had to have companionship, you had to have the will to do things, you had to be able to cope.

AM: Have the Japanese ever made any comment on the fact that they broke the Geneva Convention?

MH: Never, to my knowledge they have never done anything at all. They paid, in compensation, many many years ago, I received something like ten pounds, they gave us nothing else at all. You see the men received pay, the soldiers received something like 10 cents a day and the officers received more. Well in a lot of places the officers pooled all the money so the men got a bit more. It wasn't actually given to them but it was used as central food funds. But we didn't have anything, only that money that I brought into the camp, the money that we got through black market and money we earned from the Dutch, we had nothing else at all.

AM: The Australian Government has recompensed at all?

MH: The Australian Government has given us nothing, not that I can remember. The Japs gave us a bit. When we came back we had uniforms given to us and that sort of thing but originally we paddy we got so much allowance for our uniforms, I think it was thirty pounds if I remember rightly, and of course things were much cheaper in those days. Afterwards we weren't expected to pay any more.

AM: Don't prisoners of war get paid for the time they are in camp?

MH: Yes, we still received our pay, we got 1/6d a day, no different from anybody else, we got deferred pay. In '45 they suggested that if we wanted that money as a lump sum to rehabilitant ourselves, a house, a business, then we could have it, but if not would we leave it in for years for which we would receive compound interest. Well I did that and in '51 we came to England on leave and I bought silver with mine. I got about six hundred pounds and spent it on silver which is now worth about eleven thousand pounds; inflation that's all…. car horns, they didn't have the siren like we do… of course the people didn't know where we were, we could have been bombed. The Japs used to hop around and get excited but nothing of any interest really.

AM: What were the air raids for?

MH: The Americans were bombing - I suppose trying to bomb the oil supplies think in Pelambang, that's when we used to hear them. That must have been '43 I should think. I don't know what damage they did, I have no idea, but they bombed ...

AM: But you knew it was bombing?

MH: Oh yes we heard the bombing and we heard the horns of the cars going. But they bombed up in Siam too,

they bombed the railroad, but they didn't know that our men were working on the railroad then. They bombed the centre of the bridge. I've got some very nice pictures actually that are with my daughter at the moment, that Joe had. They show the places where they were, the terrific amount of work that was done by the men, just been driven by the Japs. But they had no respect for women whatsoever, none at all, and they still haven't, a woman is of no whatsoever in Japan - well she wasn't and she still isn't I'm sure.

AM: In some other places they actually forced people to go on death marches didn't they?

MH: Not women they didn't, not that I know of, but the men had to go, in Borneo, miles and miles, from one place to the other. We had to walk, when we were moved, we had a lot of walking to do and we had to carry everything with us. Then we were either put in cattle trucks and left in sidings, no food, only what you could take with you, or on ships, or both. We were taken once, right from Banka Island - we moved back there twice - and then we had to go from Banka Island to Palembang and then on train all the way down to Loebokk Linggau, a long long way, 200 or 300 miles I suppose. We didn't have any toilet facilities, nothing like that at all. On the ships it was exactly the same, really primitive and dreadful.

AM: It must have had a tremendous amount to do with your sense of humour?

MH: It did.

AM: Obviously, having met you, you were able to turn a great deal, even the worst, into jokes

MH: Oh yes. I mean it was really funny when you come to think of it. I've seen the Japanese say, "It's very serious, you mustn't laugh, all the bamboo houses in London have been burnt down and all the rice crops in Australia have failed". Well of course we got the giggles over that. I've seen them take their hats off and throw them on the ground and stamp on them with frustration because we laughed. They had no sense of humour, and they didn't know what ours was ...