



## **Interview with Mr Don L. Christison VX4961 2/8** **Australian Infantry Battalion AIF of Yarram, Victoria.**

Born:	5 May 1919.
Place of Birth:	Kasauli, India.
Date Of Enlistment:	15 November 1939.
Locality Of Enlistment:	Glen Iris, Victoria, Australia.
Place of Enlistment:	Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.
Next Of Kin:	F. Christison.
Date of Discharge:	18 December 1945.

Q. When did you join the Army?

A. I joined the AIF<sup>1</sup> the first week of November 1939.

Q. Why did you join the Army?

A. I was brought up with a bit of a military background and it was the thing to do.

Q. What did your parents do? Were they in WW1?

A. My father had been a soldier since he was 16 (or a bit younger), he did his seven years with Royal Light Horse Artillery and came out to Australia as a policeman, he was based at Wangaratta when the war started and he joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Horse. He was a Signaller.

Q. Was he in Beersheba<sup>2</sup>?

A. No, they were doing an exercise in Egypt, and Signallers had been fairly scarce, but he was a trained Army Signaller and he was on top of one of the pyramids getting messages from the exercise further up the Nile and the GOC<sup>3</sup> was sick in the bed and it had been going back to a signaller outside the tent and I think that got him his commission. And he transferred to British Army and was on Gallipoli and he finished up in India, he married a Scotch Nurse and I was born in India and she died when I was two months old and I was sent home to England and I came out here when I was six. He came back here after mucking about a bit and it all went from there.

Q. Did you come back to the Wangaratta area?

A. No, he came back to Melbourne, when I got back here he was a Major then I think in the Militia and he had a Commonwealth job getting the people from Melbourne to the new capital at Canberra. So that's what he was doing.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Imperial Force.

<sup>2</sup> Beersheba: The last great Calvary charge on Turkish trenches in WW1 on 31 Oct 1917 by the 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Australian Light Horse to capture vital wells to drive the Turk from Palestine.

<sup>3</sup> General Officer Commanding.

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Q. So how did you guys end up out this way at Yarram.

A. Ahhh, look I could keep you here the whole afternoon.

Q. Where did you serve in Europe?

A. Greece.

Q. And Greece fell and is that how you became a POW?

A. Yes, I was 2<sup>nd</sup>/8 Battalion and we were fairly early into Greece, the Germans were coming through Bulgaria and they snuck round and went through Yugoslavia and they were racing down to this pass we had to hold for two days and we held it for two days, it was a Panzer Division of the Luckstated SS. It was a bit of a shambles when we went to withdraw they were right on our tails - ahhh I was a bit slow getting away.

Q. Did a lot of other blokes get away?

A. I think the Battalion lost nearly 300 men; we were up in the hills, no roads, there was an English Regiment down in the valley on the road and he was part of the British Armour Brigade that was there. A Battalion of tanks - 40 of them (light tanks) light armoured cars and an infantry regiment and the armour was further back and they got orders to withdraw and the CO of this battalion got orders to withdraw before the Australian order came through and he shot through - and of course the Germans came straight through.

Q. How many Aussies were captured with you?

A. Only one was eventually captured and that was me. There was a whole party of us; there was a fella and we were carrying him out (he had been shot in both thighs) and we got him down to the village and he had to have attention (a lot of the troops had absolutely had it) they had been lying in snow, hadn't had much sleep for the previous week and four of us decided to go on. And after a couple of more days, two of them said they had had enough. Some Greeks found us and they said that the Germans had told them that if they saw any British tell them to come in and they'll be treated well. So off they went and we went on. They were picked up by two SS NCO's next morning, they were walking down the road and the SS pulled out their Lugers and shot them. One was killed and one was shot through the mouth and they just left him there and I got his story after the war in England. The following day some kids found us and went back and told their parents and they came out and told us the same thing; so the fella and I we kept on going. Fortunately there was an old Greek rowing up the shores of the lake; and this old fellow rowing up and I pulled the pistol out and he rowed us across the lake. About halfway across I suppose (it was about a mile wide); there was a railway along the edge of the lake where you walk down, you could see a file of five Germans coming down and we missed them and they missed us. I was caught later - they gave us away.

Q. Who gave you away?

A. Greeks.

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Q. Were there bounties on your head?

A. There were a lot of us around the country - some of us were lucky to get away.

Q. Were you required to do any forced labour?

A. No. As an officer I wasn't; the troops were in Stalags, they were sent out to labour, NCOs weren't - above the rank of Corporal. Those that had some farming background did it easily, of course there were no men on the farms and in lots of cases they became part of the family. One of our blokes went back and married the daughter. Those that were working in mines, they had it fairly hard, but nothing like the Japanese side.

Q. Did you have to sign 'No Escape Documents'?

A. No. When we got to our first camp, fellas/Brits that were caught in 1940 - they were known as the old lags; and they had some senior officers there and the senior officer who was there was a Major General who was commanding the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division, got us all new fellas into this room, got up on a stool and said, 'When the Germans catch you they say, 'Now your war is over', he got up and said, 'Your war is not over'. 'It is your duty while you are here to hold down as many Germans as you can.' He said, 'I can't tell you about it now, but you'll find out about it in due course.'

Which we did. I know one escape at the next camp, no the last camp we were at, 30 got away and that stopped the whole of southern Germany. The Gestapo took over when the 60 got away from Stalag Luft 3<sup>4</sup>, the only way to stop it was to shoot them and that's what happened. I can't tell you how but there were methods we heard from (or the Brits heard from London) we were told not to do any more escaping as the war wouldn't be that long before it was over and it wasn't worth it. Our own intelligence told us that if any more than 10 escaped the news went straight to Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin. Under 10 it was kept in the local Army area. And 6 got out and they were all caught.

Q. A typical day in the camp? Was there a lot of standing around time?

A. There wasn't really. I used to get up fairly early and try and run round the oval four times which made a mile; then I'd go and have (in the summer) a cold shower - you'd get a hot shower once a week. In the winter there would be three feet of ice out from the floor from the people previously showering and you didn't shower too often but you did occasionally. There was what was called an 'Arpell' a counting parade, that was straight after breakfast and the whole camp paraded and the German Duty Officer came on with sentries all around and they were given a count and normally it was all right.

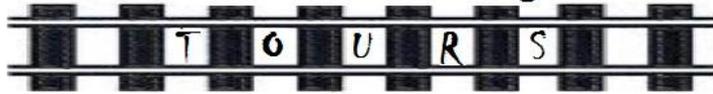
Q. Did they count many times a day?

A. Once a day generally. When we got to this camp, the Canadians that were caught, at ahhh here we go again, they were new prisoners, brand spanking, and they were in a company of their own and the camp commandant was an arrogant bloke (little sod)

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<sup>4</sup> Stalag Luft 3 (The Great Escape Camp).

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called 'Blatabouer' and he used to get up with the whole parade was in front of him in the morning, he'd have his gloves in one hand and his pistol belt, anyhow a mate of mine (you'd heard me talk of him there) he used to do a morning walk with one smoke of his pipe (you didn't waste tobacco).

This morning, a still morning, exhaled you see, and this spiral of smoke went up and there was a scream from the top of the ramp 'Aung Marong Dut Company' - 'There is a man smoking in that company', and they were all running around and the pipe was passed down and nothing happened and anyhow the next morning he was standing there and one of the Canadians went, 'Ohhhhh' (you didn't do that to half Colonels in the German Army), I've never seen a man as mad, his eyes were open, with froth coming down here (points to his chin), the guards had to put one up the spout, and fix their bayonets and then he turns around and said 'Hein Officierlager nichte nein Kindergarten' we never saw him again, if that was Japanese there would have been a head falling.

Q. What was that German phrase that you said regarding a Kindergarten or something?

A. Hein Officierlager (this is an Officers Camp) nichte nein Kindergarten (not a Kindergarten).

Q. A typical day's food - what were you given to eat?

A. An official meal was generally a soup or something like it at midday. (These one per head per week (Don points to a Canadian Red Cross cardboard box - about 1.5 times the size of a shoe box). We weren't over fed by any manner of means. But we had issued bread, German issued bread and there would be toast and perhaps some sort of porridge or something, generally porridge.

Q. What did these consist of - the Canadian Red Cross Parcels?

A. 15 packs and a piece of soap, now in one corner there was a tin of milk powder, couple of tins of meat, a jam or honey, some sugar. No smokes, that was issued separately.

Q. Chocolate and cheese, that sort of thing?

A. Chocolate and cheese yes good on you.

Q. Coffee?

A. Yes coffee, we had a Canadian in our room and he taught us how to make coffee.

Q. What were the guards like? Were they approachable, could you talk to them?

A. They varied, most of them were fairly approachable. There was one equivalent of a Corporal and four blokes, I don't know what they were doing down at, what was called 'The Garden Setting', it was the old barracks, up on top of the ridge and there was the parade ground some shedding over there, parcels were kept in, down this end there were five huts, wooden and tarped cloth and they were quite good - I did a year in them. Anyhow they were digging down there and they used to come in the morning and of course the troops used to get in amongst them, oh talk to them and

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there would be a few cigarettes, that was smoked - they got along very well with them. Much went on, I remember we had one big straff though when they brought an SS barracks over the other side of the valley, they brought them in to look after us. They pulled us down on the Parade Ground and went through the whole issue of contraband.

Q. Did they find any?

A. Not much. It was winter and we had the Canadians there. We had a five a side Hockey area, there was a bank up about so high (Don levels his hand about table high) all built all round it, and when it froze it be a big (oh what do they call it) - line of about 2 or 300 prisoners a day, with buckets of water down there, tossing it in until they got a nice covering of it. Then the Ice Hockey would start. The Canadians could play before they could walk - they used to be fantastic. Anyhow this big straff day, all the Germans pretty well it was suppose to be seen we didn't move away from the parade ground, we were all around here watching the American teams play Ice Hockey.

Q. Were there cases of bastardisation by the guards?

A. The only one we had, the American Air Force was bombing Regensburg (a big Messerschmitt factory out there) and air raids we had to go inside and these big streams of planes going over and one or two sort of came out and there was one German, it was said that he belonged to the Gestapo he was sent there because all the other German Guards were scared of him and he told one guard to 'shoot that man there and get them in', which he did, that was the only incident that I can remember.

*Mrs Christison reminded Don about the German Guard Story*

Don: Oh heavens yes that was when we were in Greece, there was a mixture of Australians, New Zealanders, there had been a couple of English Naval fellas they had been running an embarkation bench, but when it became their turn there was no boats left so they were caught. One was what they called a 'Skipper' he was a one striper, he'd been captain of a Norfolk boat (with an accent you could cut with a knife), he had all the cheek, he used to start and tell dirty stories for about 20 minutes after lights out and for about a month he didn't repeat himself, anyhow this night they were singing a rather dubious song, a common tune, about the sex life of the German hierarchy. There was a 'clump clump' down the passage and the German Guard Commander screamed, 'Ruig, Distaste' (Quiet Lights Out) screaming all the way down and back. In the next bed next to me was New South Welshman called Harry Lovett, and Harry of all things in those days, foot disease no, I thought I had it at one stage, Gout. Gout was something you only got on high living and to get high living at that prison he must have had the high life before he was caught. Anyway he was bad tempered - and just before the guard walked out the door, Harry said, 'Ah quiet you loud mouth bastard' and unfortunately the empathant was the same in German and Unterfeldweibel<sup>5</sup> were never called that. And he jumped around and I doubt he hit the ground till he landed between our two beds and he thought it was me. And he had a

<sup>5</sup> Unterfeldweibel is a Warrant Officer/Staff Sergeant.

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Schmeisser<sup>6</sup> and a torch and all I could see was the muzzle of the Schmeisser going up and down like this at about that range and he was screaming at the top of his voice and it seemed a long time but it couldn't have been very long and suddenly he stopped and marched out - Clump, Clump Clump... and over in the far corner (Don put on a Scottish voice) 'He Chris lad, I gotta a clean pair of pants if you'd like them'.

Q. How old would you have been at the time?

A. I had my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday there. (19 when captured).

Q. Was there ever anything said like back chatting a guard that got you into trouble?

A. No. You had as you found out - service discipline and when the Battalion was formed it was a damned good Battalion and I always reckoned I was too young to get a commission....I had a fair amount of discipline in my life.

Q. Did you attempt to escape at all?

A. I had two tries, neither of them got out of the camp.

Q. The camp set up itself - was it double wired?

A. Yes. There was a trip wire, about three metres out from the main fence and if you went over that you were shot at and if you kicked a football out of it, you would be in sight of a tower, and you'd shout out to the guard, 'Football' and the guard would have his rifle up, 'Go on'.

Q. So you tried to escape twice but you didn't get out of the wire?

A. Didn't get out of the camp no. Didn't get caught, it was a job (like you'll read about there) it was over the wire, we'd made ladders and we trained - the ladders were shifted down to a hut on the bottom part of the camp, closest to the wire and put under the floor. But there must have been some crack or something form in the floor - the Orderly who normally looked after it, just swept the dirt in there and getting inspected by the Germans this day and they said 'What is dust there', pulled up the boards and here is these ladders and there was hell to pay and that was that. Another one was a tunnel, but they had two parties get out over two nights. They were going to put dummies in the count the following morning, but when that went, I was on the second party on the second night (it would have been far more dangerous then), the Stalag Luft 3 thing went on and we got the word that no more than 10 could get out or there'd be Gestapo....they put six out.

Q. How long was the tunnel?

A. Quite a good one - the Chief Tunneller was an Australian (he was in the British Army, first war soldier) and he was a mining engineer by trade and they thought that we'd probably tunnel out mainly from the 'Garden City' to the area where the river ran along there and double wire fence ran along there and we'd get out there. They built another fence inside - so we couldn't get there - and that was known as the

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<sup>6</sup> The Schmeisser was an MP38/40 Sub Machine Gun, with characteristic pistol grip and long vertical magazine.

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‘Blatabouer Line.’ He had an Oberleutnant<sup>7</sup> on his staff who had been badly wounded in France and he had a limp, the Oberleutnant was a good bloke he didn’t say much at all, but he did say when they got that 30 out - the Blatabouer line was like any other line in this war, that it was either incomplete or facing the wrong way!

Q. How did the logistics of the tunnel work?

A. You would see blokes with overcoats on/greycoats on; and they’d have a pair of long legged underpants, over their shoulders under their coat and the legs of the underpants would be filled up with soil and their was a constant (oh there would be 5,000 I suppose or 4 or 5 thousand in the camp) and they would be walking round the outside of the camp all the time. And as they went along they would pull the string of one of the legs and gradually let the earth out you see and within an hour or two it had been trod in. The Germans woke up after a while, you would see them going around scratching with a magnifying glass looking - that was the one way.

Q. That was a lot of dirt to remove?

A. Oh yes, this went from the bottom of the main barrack building, underneath a road and up the hill on the other side - and on the hill on the other side were garden plots and all the towers were facing inwards and the lights on the edge of the camp were all inward, along back there.

Q. So actually six guys got out via the tunnel?

A. Yes, the earliest out had the best go, because he was going longer before daylight.

Q. Did they get back to friendly lines?

A. Not in that stage, in that one there, three got back, out of damn near 40. Two New Zealanders were together and they got on a train (an hourly six lot), there was a load on the trucks, they were tanks, big round tanks with two sections in them, they were what was called, ‘Schies panzers’, (Shit Panzers in other words!) They used to use them to pump the latrines and things out and that would be let go (in our case) in the vegetable gardens in winter, by morning it would be frozen and wouldn’t smell, but they used to use that in the paddocks. Anyhow these two fellas got into that and one got a bad dose of cramp and he just had to get out and stretch his legs and he lift up the lid as he went through a station evidently, and the train was stopped at the next station - done over and that was that. If you were fluent with German, you had experts in any trade there, you could get dressed up as any sort of person.

Q. What about documentation?

A. Documentation (the forger) could forge anything they used to get copies of certificates of who they were - identity cards, you’d get your photo taken, there would be a Germanic stamp on it and a Germanic name or a French name or a Polish name, you’d be a worker.

Q. Having a Polish name you wouldn’t want to end up getting caught and being put in a

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<sup>7</sup> First Lieutenant

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Concentration Camp?

A. There were Polish military there and they were in prison camps too.

*Mrs Christison reminded Don about the time the German General paid a visit to camp:*

Don: Oh hell yes that was a beauty. The Area Commandant - Vermacht...he was Army Area Seven - his base was in Munich. And he used to inspect the camps once a year. And they heard the General's going to inspect on such and such a date, on a certain morning. So they got one of the elderly officers who was a Colonel and dressed him up as a General (he just had to be himself - look grumpy and give a sort of German salute and that was that you see). He had with him a fella who had ran a business in Germany during the war - this was his Adjutant and he was absolutely fluent. ....in civilian clothes, just about the time the German General was supposed to be there, this General party walks up the 'Largerstrasser' you see. The main entrance was at that end, that back entrance at that end, the main guard house was at that end, and there was a guard at that end gate there and a smaller guard house. And the German's wives and people lived there and there was a road and away they went....

Anyhow they get up here and just as they are getting near the garage with the gate, a British soldier came out with an arm load of uniforms from the Q Store. And this fellow (it was all put together), called him to a halt and screamed, 'Didn't the British have any discipline you should salute a general', 'Now stand to attention and salute', he had to drop his clothes and do a salute you see, and of course the guard was watching, and by the time that was over, the guard was holding the gate open with his arms over sleeve. The German troops in the guard house were all out. The Unterfeldwebel in charge of the guard in front of them and they presented arms and gave them a salute and off they went you see. And the damned Unterfeldwebel went straight back into the hut, called up the Commandant at the other end of the camp and said the 'General has just left', and the Officer in charge at the other end of the camp said, 'The General's not arrived yet - he's running an hour late!' So one of them got on a bike and shot up the road and got them.

Q. Did he get far?

A. No. (laughing). But that couldn't have happened in Japan.

Q. At the end of the war when Germany fell, how was the camp given over to you guys?

A. Well about three weeks before the end (might have been a bit longer), we were told we were marching out (and the Yanks were within about 50 miles), and Brits being Brits, thought that the longer we can get out, they might catch up with us. Instead of leaving at six it was about nine before everybody got out. About half past nine we were in second company up the road and they halted us, to close up the whole five thousand (whatever it was). While we were there a Mustang came over and gave a 'wing up' starboard and a 'wing up' port, and I said to my mate, 'Ohh they know where we are now', and oh they sure did. About eight to ten minutes later, about six or eight (I forget the number) P-47's (the Ground Attack Aircraft), came in on the

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others side, down the valley on the other side was an SS Transport going along - they started bombing then, dropped their bombs on them and came around and started striking us - there was 16 killed and about 30 wounded. There would have been a lot more but one of the Brits had a Union Jack and he and his mates stood in the middle of the road and held it up and we were marched back into camp - and from then on we were marched at nights. And we were about 12 k's getting to Mooseberg (and it was all about Mooseberg there) and you'll read about that in time....Eichstatt to Mooseberg<sup>8</sup>.

Q. Did the huts you lived in the camps did they have PW on their roofs?

A. No, we had an Englishman who was a gardener - he dug up an acre or so of garden and by the end of the day we got strafed (we all got back to camp) he dug a big POW across the football field. Not that it did any good because we weren't there after that.

Q. How did you know it was the end of the war?

A. Well we always had a radio and there was a medicine ball that came on the march with us and the radio was in the medicine ball, they knew we had one (they didn't worry about it then), but when we were in the barracks they always used to be looking for radios. They never found it.

Q. How could you turn it on?

A. I don't know - I don't know anything about it. They used to have a team of fellas that used to listen to it and could go around the various barrack and they could go to the various rooms and verbatim give the current news bulletin.

Mrs Christison asks about the concerts in the camps:

Don: There were experts in every science every type of education (I was interested in Agriculture) they had a terrific library there, we could send to England for books (which they'd arrive) there were lectures and there were concerts - they had some very good musicians there and one fella used to get up in the local - Volkisher Beobachter - that was the local Nazi Newspaper and give a parody on what was going on round the world and there would be always some rather filthy cracks at either Hitler or Goebbels or the rest of them. And generally there would be a couple of German Officers who would come to the concerts (and they'd have to slack off that) but when there were no Germans there we used to get things like that - you'd never be short of a laugh.

Mrs Christison mentions Don's binoculars which prompts:

Don: I wasn't searched until I got to the first camp (binoculars were hard to get before we went to Libya) and everybody had Italians then, but I bought myself a pair of binoculars in Jerusalem (they were private) and they found those and an Army Jack Knife (Army issued Jack Knife), had a blade (an old fashioned one) with a spike on the end to get the stones from the horses hooves. It was a handy old knife. They

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<sup>8</sup> Mooseberg is less than 50 kms north of Munich.

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gave me a receipt for it (the receipt's there somewhere). Anyway just a few days before we were leaving the camp (this is Eichstatt) an order came out - go to the Science Room and the confiscated items will be there. I didn't bother to go and I think Johnny came in and said, 'Hey Chris, there's some stuff of yours there'. So I went along and here are my binoculars...and they are still out on the farm. But that wouldn't have happened in the Australian Army. We had a fantastic library as I told you and anybody who wanted any of it - take it, and then we were told we would have to march and the German Camp Quartermaster was on the local council, and he told the Senior British Officer, that if they pack their books up into parcels, you could get them put in there, in the Council Officers and they'd be safe there until things clear down. About six months later after I was home after the war had finished, that arrived full of books.

Q. He (the Quartermaster) had sent them?

A. The Red Cross had looked after them.

Q. You were told by the radio the war was over - how did they the Germans tell you - was there anything official?

A. There was a lot of troop movement on the road outside, Mooseberg there was 75,000 prisoners another 100,000 in what they called 'Arbeit Commandoes' or work areas, and they'd concentrate all the prisoners there - Russians, Poles, you name it and they were there - Italians even. There was a lot more German troop movement and a lot more air activity and then this day, there was a bit of gunfire/artillery fire/small arms fire and everybody was told to keep their heads down and some clot of a Yank came and did a barrel roll across the edge of the camp about 10 feet high and roared off again and scared hell out of everybody and bit after that there was a lot of cheering and one of Patton's Tanks came in the gateway. And then we were there for another week I suppose and we were trucked to a place called Mooseberg to a training airstrip. First day they brought in 60 Dakota's and I was reading Johnny's account of it and of course they were American aircraft and we were a bit sour as the Americans went first - they'd been caught about three months I suppose. We went the next day.

Q. And how did you go the next day?

A. We stayed the night, we were out of the town, (Landshut<sup>9</sup>), we were marched into Landshut and there were all these two storey flats - the Yanks went in and pushed all the Germans out - they slept there for the night - a few were buggers like that behaving like the Germans themselves....So we went along and knocked on the door further up the street, 'Yes Come in', they supplied a bed (and we supplied a bit of Red Cross chocolate and Red Cross rations) had a good meal.

Q. Was that your first meal?

A. I can't remember what it was...I can't tell you about the first meal - well you had just meals....but when we got to England....

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<sup>9</sup> Landshut is about 15 kms NE of Mooseberg.

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*Mrs Christison: The Place where they stayed, the German household, Don's friend who was with him (Johnny Crooks) went back several times since the war and remained good friends.*

Don: He could speak fluent German...Anyhow the Red Cross had put or sent from Australia, a very good issue of food to fatten the prisoners up with and the troops feared better than the Officers Mess did. (That was when we were at Eastbourne<sup>10</sup>). And this day I was Orderly Officer and the Orderly Officer had to check the Mess and low and behold one of our Battalion Cooks - Corporal Cook - He said, 'What are you doing here,' and I told him and he said sit down over there and I'll show you what we are eating. And he came in with this plate of roast and a plate of duff after that (plum pudding) - it was out of this world and then I went along to the Officers Mess and ate my tea - I could hardly take it.

Q. When I think of Germany now I think of German beer, was there any of that around at the time?

A. There was an occasion in Germany when you could get it - Im not a beer person and I still am not...but they got short of it I suppose and the Officer prisoners who paid for it didn't get it...but the Officers Mess was OK at Eastbourne that was for sure.

Q. When it was all over you went from Landshut?

A. Landshut - I left on the second day, late in the afternoon, then I went to Reims and Reims was Army Headquarters and we were camped just outside Reims that night and trucked another 30 kms to an aerodrome the next morning. We were still in our 'Bibarach' organisations each barrack was a battalion and three staircases or portions of it was a company and our Company Commander was a Royal Marine who had been caught at (ah doesn't matter where) but had his blue suit, he was really smart with his brass buttons shining. We were all sitting around under some trees and this RAF car pulled up and out got a very senior looking Officer, with a very tall lady, it was his wife - she happened to be an Officer too and I forgotten his name, ahh Tedder<sup>11</sup>, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Tedder - he wanted to know all about us, and our Marine Major...

*Change of Voice Recording Tape.....*

...and him being a Marine Major said 'Yes I have it with me', and Tedder said to

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<sup>10</sup> Eastbourne is about 90 kms south of London.

<sup>11</sup> Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder: AOC Mediterranean, Deputy Commander SHAEF - see photo:



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him, well go over to that tin hut over there and you'll find a Squadron Leader and give it to him and we'll have aircraft in for you tomorrow morning. Oh where did we sleep that evening must have been somewhere there, oh yes, ahh in tents. Next morning about 10oclock there was a rumble and roar and the Lancaster's started to come in, continuous and picked us up and flew us to Westcott in Buckinghamshire about an hour and a half and that was it.

Q. Did you see much of Germany as in the bomb damage?

A. Going across, yes, we had enough light to see quite a number of towns and they were wrecks. In Japan there was a much higher rate of wooden buildings/houses - the fire rate there it just looked like the aftermath of a bushfire with the odd black concrete building standing up....but they were far more completely obliterated than the Germans were.

*Mrs Christison: You wouldn't have seen Dresden though...?*

Don: No, didn't see any of the towns. Some of the orderlies, by the Geneva Convention, five officers had an orderly, that was never the number, we used to have one for three rooms I suppose, then they got shorter and shorter and the Germans took them out for work. And after one of the big raids in Munich, they were sent down there to help pile up barricades across roads where the houses were unfit to live in. Prior to that we had a camp Officer - a German Camp Officer who was very good and I can't think of his bloody name and his son used to come out on the weekends - he was only a teenager he came out a couple of times in a blue Luftwaffe type uniform and he was what they called a 'Flakhelfer' - an Orderly on the Ack Ack Batteries in Munich. And he was killed in one of the big raids and we didn't see his father for a while; and after one of the raids just afterwards, all our Orderly's went they were down as I said, blocking off the roads; and in charge of this batch of Orderly's was a fella from the Black Watch 'Scott'. And he saw, this German Officer and his wife - she was crying and he marched over and snapped him a salute, he could speak German (you could hardly understand his English his Scotch was so broad, fairly guttural) the Guard he was talking to was saying, Ya Ya Ya Ya, and he must have got through to the German Officer and could they help and his wife was saying: 'Nor dein photograph', 'Only a Photograph'.

So he was given the approximate place the house was so he went back and said to his mates 'C'mon give me a hand', and he was screamed at by the SA<sup>12</sup>, and the SA was told what to do in Scotch and he didn't understand and they went and found the photograph - they went back and saluted....and he was always very good to us after that.

Q. Did you ever get back to Germany or that was it?

A. That was it - I would have loved to have gone back.

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<sup>12</sup> Sturmabteilungen (Storm troops founded in 1921).

# Death Railway



Q. One of these days still?

A. No.

Q. Did you have a big party when you got back to Australia or big celebration?

A. Came through the Sydney heads about one in the afternoon, on a Wednesday afternoon, (Mrs Christison says the first bomb was dropped whilst Don was sailing between NZ and Australia) and we had a half Colonel who had been sent over from England to look after us and when he left they were having trouble on the waterfront - stuff getting pinched by the Wharfies.

So he said right we want all the Officers luggage and get a party and an Officer to look after it. So, my family situation wasn't such that I wasn't mad to see them. I said I'll take the job and had about six blokes with me and when they put us in the train to go from Sydney to Melbourne they kept the baggage back and a Major came along told me that General Blamey ran things in the Army now and that was going back to barracks and that would be sent along in due course. So I said dammit, I'll see it back to barracks and I sent the troops on they got on the train and I came on the next day.

I was met my father and step-mother at Orrong Park and that was that. And about a day later (Ohh when did I ring you up (talking to Mrs Christison), that night - yeah. But we didn't have any parties.

# Death Railway

## T O U R S



LT D.L. Christison, kneeling on the LHS. (Compliments LT Don Christison).