

GORDON

18th October, 2015

If you could start with your name and a bit of your background?

Yes. Gordon Jamieson. I was born in Stanthorpe, lived at Amiens on an orchard with my father. He fought in the first World War in the same battalion that I got into in the second World War. So from there on I grew up living at Stanthorpe around about the scholarship period and came down to Brisbane and went to High School around here. I got myself a job at the War Services Home Commission and while I was in that job, the time came when I was 19 and I joined the army. I had to put my age up, I cheated you know, I was born in 1921. I put my age up, my Father helped me, my Mother was opposed to it. But I joined up with another young fellow. He got thrown out, but I managed to stay in by telling them I was twenty and a half and then Mum and Dad had to sign the permission to give the other half / six months. Then I did twelve months in Australia. In Brisbane and in Bathurst, in our training and then we went over to Malaya in 1941 and we were there for about 6 months training when the Japanese invaded and we became involved in the Japanese war. After a while taken prisoner of war of course, and there three and a half years to the day, 15th of February to 15th of August. I did time up on the

Thai-Burma railway line and then back to Singapore, where we worked on the wharves and we also built the ground-work for the Changi Airport.

However, since that time, I've become involved in the peace movement.

Back in Brisbane?

Back in Brisbane, yes.

And you've lived in Brisbane since?

Slacks Creek mostly, since I married Shirl. A Pacifist from Slacks Creek. It's been a good life since.

Ok. So can I ask you to describe what peace means to you?

Ah - it's not as exciting as war! [Laughs]

Well, it is! It's not as exciting. Being a young fellow, I stumbled my way through the Burma-Thai Railway. It wasn't, well even though it was as hectic to me as it was to the married men you know, thirties and forties and that. It must have been pretty tough on them when they got ill and that, knowing they had families back home and things like that. I sort of came through quite well. I wasn't anti-Japanese. I was against some. It was

mostly the Officer rank that were the cruel people not the regulars, they'd sit with you and have a smoke. Then, if an Officer came, they'd jump up and start yelling at you. Yes, I never became anti-Jap. Though those Officers were ferocious fellows.

So you have never been a person of hate then? You didn't link those experiences?

No. And later I became Secretary of what was called The Reparations Committee. We were seeking compensation from Japan

So that reparations process you went through, that was a very important part of peacemaking for you?

It was. But what got me into strife with some of my co-vets was the fact that I became too friendly with them. They sort of expected that we would still play up and be a bit aggressive towards them.

Daughter: The reparation was actually not a financial, individual financial scheme. It was to build a health what do you call it? James Cook University in Townsville donated the land and it was a big project for a Tropical Disease Centre that would help the whole South Asia Pacific area.

*And they wanted the Japanese to fund it.
As I said, not giving money to individual
people but to help the Japanese and the
Thai's.*

It was well on the way, so much work done,
until there was a change of government.
See, here was thirty thousand dollars and
see, I'm being political now.

*Daughter : Well, you are, but that's what
happened.*

Because we got all the support in the
world from the Labor government in the
nineties and we got thirty thousand
dollars for travelling expenses and what
have you, and there was a change of
government and that chopped it right off.
The Australian tax payer paid the Japanese
debt - twenty-five thousand dollars to each
of us.

*So it ended up being the Australian
Government?*

Yep, Johnny Howard. So, that was the
biggest disappointment.

So the Tropical Disease Centre project failed?

Yes, it was a massive thing.

Daughter : You know, I think the Australian government should have compensated them but Dad doesn't because he said he worked for the enemy. That's his favourite saying. It's the same with DVA. Whenever they do anything for him he always says, "I don't want to be paid, I worked for the enemy".

Oh, we did a heckavulot of work on it. Got the Japanese involved and I believe they would have eventually come across with it.

Daughter : There's the book with all the plans and everything, virtually all that work was donated, the architects and everybody. A lot of work. It didn't turn out as we wanted it.

My next question was, when you were saying how important peace is to you and it sounds like it was very important, because you did all of that work. And so, is it linked to other values and conditions? I guess from what you've just said it would be linked to cooperation - it would be a very active thing - Peace?

Daughter : Another example is when the Vietnam War happened, my brother was of age and Mum and Dad were in the peace movement, 'Save Ours Sons', because they obviously didn't want him to go to war. Because my Father had been there, done that.

There was a real anti-war movement, you see. Because they were Quakers, the family I married into, they were opposed to war of any kind. But I couldn't agree entirely with them because they would have definitely been suffering a heckavulot under the Japanese because they had a massive army.

So you believe in a good war, a just war?

I think there is such thing as a just war, but it was not the way they were formed, particularly the person-to-person atrocities. Once we were Prisoners of War, you know there are international

agreements on how you treat prisoners of war, they just didn't abide by any of them. But it wasn't the average Japanese, it was the higher-ranking Japanese that were in control and gave the bad treatment that we received. Yes, we used to have them sitting around with us having morning tea, this was in Singapore, and then as soon as they saw an Officer, they'd jump up and they'd start yelling at you, "Get back to work!"

Has the significance of peace changed for you over time?

I couldn't become a Pacifist as the Quakers had in this hostile environment. I wasn't a war-like person or anything. But I do think there's got to be some form of, not necessarily a big threatening army that sort of thing, but you have to have some form of opposition to violence. So I wasn't a Pacifist to that degree. You see a Pacifist, they'd die for their cause. I wouldn't be that foolish.

Daughter : But Dad brings no hate. You know most POWs from Vietnam or wherever, there's hatred there. What they think etc, but Dad has never. Or never that I've seen.

Do you think you're more tolerant than of other views?

I don't know. I just didn't get as hostile as our boys did against the Japanese. Well even in the committee that I was secretary of, this Reparations committee that was Australia wide, and we had people come up from Melbourne, and people as members. I found them quite peaceful too, but they were from our ex-POW organization. So I got away with it because I had a lot of support from quite a number of people when I went over to Japan, and I had some people over there that I met, particularly this Nagasi Takashi.

This story here is one of the most beautiful stories I've heard of any soldier, particularly a Japanese soldier. He was the fellow who was at Lomax's¹ beltings. He was the interpreter. Of course, for Lomax, he was the culprit, you know. So this fellow was very aggressive outwardly, but inwardly totally different because he knew that if he didn't do it he'd be shot because he had the riflemen

1 Eric Lomax was a British officer captured by the Japanese in Singapore during World War II. His well-known autobiography that was published in 1995, *The Railway Man*, details his experiences as a prisoner-of-war. The film adaptation was released 2013.

around him. These are the stories he tells. You see, when he went home after the war he really showed himself up as a Pacifist sort of a man and he was well known over there by numerous Japanese who supported him too. I was quite surprised to hear his story, just how close he was to being shot himself. But that is a real Pacifist because he didn't hide it. He had to hide it while he was questioning Prisoners of War, but then he came out and showed his true colours.

And did he get a lot of criticism from his own Japanese people for that?

Oh, he would have had a lot of trouble over there I'd say, yes. He was sort of a loner over there. Well, he had a lot of following but a loner in himself as a person, well known around Japan. And of course, he got hell out here because of what he did with Lomax, when Lomax told his story.

And do you think you've been isolated too?

Oh, not isolated. I was secretary of the committee. I reckon it was the right thing. I got away with it. There was a lot said to me about it, but fortunately, I must have had a good personality. Peter Collas, he was a Prisoner of War in Europe

but he was also a solicitor on the Gold Coast here. I became a great mate of his because I used to go to school with him and I think that meant a lot too, having him on side with his support and his popularity too. He's passed away but his name is still part of Collas and Moro Solicitors. And of course at the meetings of the group, with other Prisoners of War, I had this little lady here that was the real Pacifist and she was very popular amongst the wives.

Was there a big Quaker community?

There was a big Quaker community I remember, when I first met her. They were along the river, you know, just over the Story Bridge. Just down on that street there, there was the Society's place - I've forgotten what they call their place now. Yes, a Meeting House.

Are you a Quaker? Do you consider yourself
a Quaker?

*Daughter : No. But I'd never known them to
preach or do anything like that. I mean I
knew that Mum and Pop and my Aunties and
Uncles were all Quakers, but it was never
pushed onto anybody, no, not at all.*

But they did support the conscientious
objectors during the war. There were a lot
of those. A lot of those were malingerers
really, they weren't really Quakers, and
they weren't Pacifists.

Did your son get drafted?

Daughter: No, but that was through sheer luck.

But even when her ladyship's parents passed on in the 70s, she encouraged me to get back involved with the vet fellows. And I had a very good job as secretary of the Reparations committee and that's when I got sick.

Daughter : Yes, Dad got very sick. When did you get very, very sick? It was a war-related thing. He ended up ten weeks in intensive care and they based it on a dysentery test they used to do in the camp with bamboo rods.

Oh yeah, I copped the lot!

Daughter : And all these years later it was all through his system. He was 10 weeks in intensive care.

After the war?

Well, after the war. This was in the 80s, early 80s.

Do you think there's a difference between inner peace, the peace that you come to in yourself and social peace - these other social efforts that you've made? Or are they one and the same thing for you?

I don't know. I never saw the extremities that Pacifists might go to. I think if they're threatened with death in any country, they would still be a Pacifist. I was not a Pacifist to that degree. I could see that there had to be a bit of violence that had to be injected, to resist, but not to kill on a mass scale like we did in the army and things like that. I'm not such a great killer, but you see a Pacifist they won't even budge.

Have you ever done anything for your own peace of mind, any exercises or practices - do you meditate, do you pray, are you religious?

No. Oh god I might yell like that or something but it's not praying, it's spur of the moment. As children we always had to recite our prayers beside the bed and everything but no, not in adult life.

Daughter : Dad's release was to read stories, as a researcher, and now he looks back and sees he was very involved. I think that was his therapy.

But the POW business up in Thailand was a real test you know.

Well, I can't imagine.

Daughter : No, I can't either. I hear the stories and I can't.

But I didn't [come home a different man]. I think with young fellows that I companioned over there, we were in our early twenties and I think that they didn't take it so seriously, the hatred, as the older fellows. They were making real sacrifices because they had children at home. To me it was different. I had a beautiful experience of dying!

Tell me about that.

Oh, it was a lovely one. I had a Chinese mate with me in a pit. We were digging a machine gun pit. We had a machine gun on a what's-its-name and of course we decided to have a smoke in the pit while we were doing it. We heard this aircraft come in and he was just over the trees. We were in a rubber tree plantation. This Japanese aircraft came over, just over the treetops, and then went away and you could hear him turn around. We then knew he was carrying four bombs and we heard the bombs drop. One, two, three and the fourth one straight through our tree. The concussion was immediate you know, but the body itself, you lost consciousness, but it was slowly. All the time you were sinking and gee, it was a lovely feeling. It went through the whole body and you were sinking down into the ground.

It was actually a pleasant release? So you're not afraid to die?

Oh no, it wasn't fear or anything. There was no chance to be afraid because it was too quick. Bang. Going out to it was slow, but you were going down into the earth. I don't know how many hours later I heard

my mate move. 'You alright son?'' he said. Then you could hear the voices in the distance. But I've still got the tinnitus that was set off from it.

Do you think that peace is best found with others, or by yourself, within yourself?

What sort of peace are you talking about?

Well, you tell me. I mean are there different kinds of peace? Well, do you think Australia is a peaceful country?

A peaceful country? Oh yes, because it does not have big armies or anything like that. Government armies and all the rest of it.

There's not a strong military presence in our streets?

Yeah. But during the war we provided troops of course. And it depends even on the individuals within that army. I don't think I would ever have allowed myself to be turned into a brutal force. I don't think so. Australia has a much more lenient way of training its army than what a lot of countries do. See Officers would go and slap a man. I don't know what they do in Britain.

Well it is often depicted that the brutalisation process is simply par for the course. It's often depicted that way.

No, I don't recall any brutal thing. We had certain points on a bag that was like a human, tender points that you could bayonet anyone without going too far in. That sort of thing, but you did it to a bag not a human. And you did that as an exercise.

Daughter : But if you were in that position, could you have done it?

Well if it was yourself, I don't know where the action is you see, and we were against a very brutal enemy.

So, you believe in ethics. In the rules and conventions of war.

You would still do your best to defend yourself. But you don't go out deliberately. Well, I don't think, I don't know what I'd be confronted with had someone come up to me with a bayonet. I think the hair would have raised on the back of your neck and you'd get right into it to save yourself. But not as a practice, but as a momentary thing.

Your daughter was saying before that you often joked that you worked for the enemy.

Yeah, well we did. We worked for the Japanese.

Well can you describe what you mean, was that a serious compromise for you? Obviously you had no choice.

Well, it depends. As you say, there was a whole army of us that had to do it. I can't imagine the Japanese; well a lot of the Japanese would have committed suicide.

Yes, that's why they didn't have any respect for prisoners of war.

Yes, where we had a lot of married men with children at home and they wanted to continue to live.

Yes, well that's a huge cultural difference isn't it?

Yes, well, when we had refused to do something you'd soon get a few claps around the ear by the Japs and things like that.

And do you have any other stories of moments of intense peacefulness that you've experienced? I love the dying story - it's great. Have there been others?

Of dying?

No of peacefulness. I mean did you share that story because it was about peacefulness?

Well, I don't know. It just happened you see, but I didn't die but I can imagine had it not been as far down. We were only about that far below the surface, so you felt all the hot air, all the soil and everything coming over you. It was all so sudden. But the other was slow, moving down to unconsciousness. But I don't know how long I was unconscious for. My mate would have been the same. Ma Chee Son, but we called him Matchison. I've never forgotten him. And he, the poor blighter,

was drowned on a ship that was sunk by an American submarine. He got off the ship all right but they couldn't pick him up, they could only pick up so many.

Daughter : And the lifelong friendships that he has made. There's not many left now. But they've been in touch the whole time since they come out of the war. Haven't they dad? You and your mates? Great friendships were made.

Well, we had a society, an order. The ex-POWs.

Daughter : So you can see that Dad's rehabilitation has really been through all of this, and this is just a portion of it. It's so involved. Because when he got so sick he had to stop work. Dad and my Grandfather had a welding, an automatic engineering business at Burleigh. But when Dad got sick he had to stop working, Mum's Dad and he always worked together. And Dad was pretty depressed and so Mum made him get involved in something and that's how all of that came about. It hasn't been all that long since he's stopped.

Having survived it, I'm not sorry that I experienced it at all. War time.

Why is that?

I don't know. It was a fantastic experience.

Because you learnt so much?

Oh yes. You can pick the good from the bad, you know. In your friends and your enemies. It was a mixed dish but I seemed to come through it quite well.