

## T. Harry Williams Center of Oral History

### Tape 893 Finding Aid

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Roy Metcalf

**COLLECTION:** 4700.0611 Tape 893 (Tape 1 of 2)

**IDENTIFICATION:** Briton in Pre-Independence India

**INTERVIEWERS:** Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

**SERIES:** British Voices from South Asia

**INTERVIEW DATE:** 7/2/80

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 33 minutes

**OTHER MATERIALS:** None

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### INDEX

#### Tape 893, Side A

#### Metcalf (Part 1 of 3)

- 004 basic reason for going to India was family connections; grandfather was in the Bengal Civil Service (which would later become the Indian Civil Service); his father was born there
- 011 after the incentive of being a soldier was the incentive of money; received more money in the Indian army than in the British army, along with faster promotions
- 020 went to a British regiment your first year in India to give you a chance to change your mind
- 024 he had an idea of India through his family, but he had never been there before; it seemed to be familiar once he got into India; nothing ever seemed to be unfamiliar
- 032 father was a sailor
- 037 one the first trip out, they ran into a huge storm; troops were in the lower decks and became terribly seasick
- 050 troopers [ships] had funny rules: even if you were married, you could not share a room with your wife aboard one; women were on one side, men were on the other
- 057 you were on the trooper when you were being sent or being transferred with your regiment; you could ask to get a trooper passage when you were going on leave because it was cheaper

064 on the troopers, there was military organization  
069 you asked to join a regiment, and usually you went there  
087 had to make your own arrangements when you got off the train; a man in a tweed suit  
walking around the station in the hottest area of India at four or five in the afternoon  
105 British regiments would usually move every three to five years; after about twenty years,  
they would change regiments and go back to England  
118 in the British regiment, you controlled a platoon immediately and took over the duties that  
they were doing; you could have been sent out on a local campaign  
126 when you got to an Indian regiment, you were second-in-command of a company for a  
short while, and then you would be placed in charge of a company  
128 there were roughly four platoons to a company  
130 after being there for a year, he chose an Indian regiment that was in Hong Kong; was in  
Hong Kong for a little less than a year  
135 the garrison in Hong Kong was comprised of three British regiments  
137 at that time, the Hong Kong police were all Indian; it hasn't altered since he has left; the  
actual area of Hong Kong could not be altered to any great extent because it was already  
built up  
148 would provide piracy guards from Hong Kong to Singapore and from Hong Kong to  
Shanghai because there were many Chinese pirates; any boat of any consequence would  
have a section of British or Indian troops, sometimes more if the boat was larger  
157 there were a number of instances with the pirates; ship officers would all carry guns in their  
pockets; there was a large grill that separated the first and second class passengers from the  
Chinese, because most of them were pirates just waiting on their boats  
162 piracy trips were fun; the pre-war life of a British soldier was very nice life, but it's not the  
same now  
168 went to Bombay for a few months; left the regiment in Bombay and went out on his own;  
regiment came back to central India; went to frontier post  
185 Indian regiment went for two years in the frontier stations and four years of the frontier  
supposedly  
190 he enjoyed the change; in the old days, an Indian regiment would always stay in the same  
place  
199 everyone would go to the military tailor and have one set of drill uniforms made properly;  
when they reached India, they would let the Indian tailors copy it because it was cheaper  
and they would do it properly  
207 didn't buy a topi until he got out there because they were not normally sold in England;  
there were topees that were part of the military uniform that were sold in England  
216 "old hands" would have some type of protection from the sun; those soldiers just coming  
out would be out there without any protection and it didn't bother them; never realized how  
hot it could be until you got out there  
227 remembers thinking of the Mediterranean as cool and lovely, and everyone else was  
gasping at the heat  
239 there was a notice that officers going ashore could not carry revolvers; it was a silly notice  
because if you strayed off the main streets in Malta, you had a good chance of being killed;  
never stopped at Aden, unlike most  
257 weather wasn't so bad because it was March; there is a nice breeze in Bombay in March  
266 had a strong impression about Bombay: it didn't seem like a strange town at all; it never  
seemed strange to him, but maybe to others it did; it had its drawbacks; they worked hard,

but also had a good time  
 275 depending on where you were, you did many different things while on leave; went big  
 game shooting a lot when in the middle of the central Indian jungles  
 278 jungles were thick with noticeable tracks through them, not like the ones of the Amazon;  
 trees were mostly tea trees; very little undergrowth; might stretch 800 miles back  
 288 once was a political officer in central India; tribe called [Bhil?] that still used bows and  
 arrows; [Gonds?] were known for their fast movement through the jungles; one state in  
 central India still had square wheels  
 301 can remember giving cigarettes and matches to the natives that were helping them on their  
 shoot; they knew what to do with it, but they had never really seen one before  
 305 that part of India had very nice climate; on a plateau about 3000 feet; never really gets hot  
 310 the eastern Bengal side was compatibly backward back then; think it may be because they  
 were left behind by the army, who had swept through it and continued onto the northwest  
 frontier  
 319 military expansion in India created the advancement as it went along because of its  
 demands  
 321 most bungalows were pre-mutiny in Sagar; just outside his mess, there was an elephant  
 mounting stone; had a large archway to allow the elephants to come in  
 328 didn't have elephants then, but they used to; the elephants would carry the artillery  
 331 [bivekhana?] was where the old Europeans would have their Indian ladies  
 338 up to the mutiny, the Europeans and Indians mixed very freely; the mutiny ended the  
 mingling, which was the biggest angle of the Anglo-Indian community; this made the  
 mutiny a great tragedy  
 350 talks about novel *Tom Brown's School Days*; he believes it is very accurate  
 369 talks about the different musical instruments that were used by the different regiments; his  
 regiment had a proper pipe band;  
 388 favorite time to go shooting was during Christmas and New Years in things called  
 Christmas camps; had a party of about twelve to fifteen; would frequently go out for  
 Saturday and Sunday, sometimes for a week; he would go out with the assistant police  
 officer and the assistant district officer  
 403 many would come to Sagar from northern India and go shooting for three weeks  
 406 plenty of tigers; a few of them were man eaters  
 410 assistant police officer was out in his district around the month of May; was sleeping on the  
 ground outside his tent; awoke to see tiger standing right over him, but didn't move  
 because he was scared stiff; turned his hair white  
 420 he was sitting on the ground, underneath a tree on a tiger hunting trip when he saw a tiger  
 staring straight at him; finally, the tiger turned his head and he shot him in the neck  
 435 when he was younger, he did a lot of crazy things; talks about the tiger shoot and the  
 panther hunts; he wouldn't do those things now  
 461 would go out about three miles from their mess in the evenings and shot a couple of things  
 for dinner  
 469 Sagar was not a large station: it was just them and an old cavalry school; the school may  
 have had up to fifty students each year; had many people coming through  
 482 there would be a week in March that you had to entertain people passing through for a  
 week; there was a polo tournament; people would come from all over; would have racing  
 and dances  
 492 Bina Junction was halfway between Bombay and Delhi

508 Gorkhas were used all over India to keep law and order around the time of Partition  
 522 station life was a bit confined, but he was lucky to go off into different areas of instruction,  
 so he was able to have a change  
 529 tells the story about him and John Cotton: he met John on the way to Delhi to pick up his  
 new orders, and John told him that he was going to Aden. Once in Delhi, Metcalf learns he  
 was supposed to go to Aden and John was supposed to be going to the Persian Gulf.  
 Metcalf ends up going to the Persian Gulf  
 554 Metcalf did his own astrological chart, which told him he would be spending a large  
 amount of your life connected with sea and oil  
 587 when "T" got to Aden, he was a member of the Eighth Cavalry, which were the governor's  
 guards  
 591 was in the army five years before going into politics; colonel suggested getting a job  
 outside the regiment  
 607 staff captains performed civil administration tasks  
 616 Colonel suggested going into politics and offered to call a friend of his in Delhi for  
 Metcalf; that's how he got into politics

### **Tape 893, Side B**

#### **Metcalf (Part 3 of 3)**

016 there were many eccentric English; India was marvelous country for eccentric people  
 because it was so "do as you like" for the English, the ruling class  
 018 one resident Metcalf had would go riding around in the morning and when he saw someone  
 sleeping in their gardens, he would ride his horse over their fence, through their beds and  
 back out again  
 021 first time he met him officially, Metcalf was his under-secretary; the secretary would go in,  
 in the morning, and discuss the issues that needed to be discussed and then it would be  
 Metcalf's turn  
 025 one day, Metcalf went in, and he was sitting underneath his desk, carving a wooden boat  
 032 one or two senior officers would do yoga every afternoon, but not many  
 035 provided you stayed within the law, no one would say anything about you  
 038 even the large British communities in India were small compared to places like London  
 and New York; looked at the Punjab as a province of England with its own government;  
 when looking at the annual budget, it was a large country, larger than some of those in  
 Europe; didn't think much about it then  
 065 there was a great difference between India and the Persian Gulf; there was less government  
 and more commercial  
 072 Persian Gulf Arabs were more of a Bedouin stock; very nice to deal with  
 076 first went to south Persia, where there was a council general for some Muslim country in  
 the Persian Gulf, as a personal assistant to learn about the work he would be doing; then  
 sent to [Bharat?] as an assistant political agent; was about 1935  
 087 at the time, there was an American oil company in Saudi Arabia that wanted to either put  
 up a refinery or set up a piping system to [Bharat?]; Metcalf sent a letter highly advising the  
 establishing of a pipeline; during the rest of the war, the English had control over the Saudi  
 Arabian oil  
 106 there are 20,000 Englishmen working in Saudi Arabia; English always seem to drift east,  
 possibly for the money; French are mainly in the Mediterranean  
 118 one reason for not staying in the gulf long was because members of the Indian service were

always being transferred; at the time, he also had to think about his personal career  
 124 went back to eastern India during the Burma War  
 127 they tried to get him back into the army when the war broke out, but there were several of  
 them that were not allowed to go  
 132 political agent's job was just about anything in the Indian states.  
 133 there were two types of Indian states: very large ones that were wealthy and powerful  
 outright, with their own armies and proper civil services; relations there were more  
 diplomatic  
 137 the other type of states were the smaller states; some were under direct management  
 because the maharajah's had "misbehaved themselves"; if not under direct management,  
 they were still closely supervised  
 143 in most of the areas, there was a large station inside the state; it was like a British district so  
 the agents, along with the other duties, were responsible for it too  
 150 they all had district training in a province; there were a lot of mixed duties; did his training  
 in [Rahl Penda?] in 1937, after getting back from the Gulf  
 154 have to pass the Indian Service Exam in law, administration, etc.  
 158 once sentenced an Englishman to death, although he didn't like it; didn't hang English back  
 then, so he had to spend around twenty to thirty years in a jail in Bombay  
 163 even for jobs like that, there was a consulate court  
 167 one of his first jobs in India was being in charge of opium; once a week, would give out  
 servings to the addicts  
 184 went to [Pandar?] after district training; maharajah wasn't allowed to rule, but he was  
 allowed to stay there  
 193 life in a large Indian state was very nice; mixed more freely with the Indians in Indian  
 states than in British India  
 199 in Indore, there weren't very many Europeans; there was a little club with three tennis  
 courts; had a school for the maharajah's sons; nice bungalows and gardens; climate was  
 moderate all year long  
 218 had interesting visitors  
 225 in those days, after you had been in India for a while, you seemed to know someone  
 anywhere you went; if you were going somewhere, you would map out who you would  
 stay with at night  
 230 had nice, large bungalows; there were hardly any hotels, except for in the larger areas like  
 Bombay; that's why you were always being put up by someone  
 234 had [*dak*?] bungalows; they were two or three room wooden bungalows around the main  
 roads; they had a regular Indian cook in charge; would frequently find someone else there;  
 were used often when touring; it would become your temporary headquarters  
 245 they were expected to be out touring at least one-third of the year, if not more  
 252 you had local administrators that addressed the problems  
 257 Indians didn't mind how inefficient you were, as long as they could see you, know you, and  
 you had been there for some time because they didn't like you moving around  
 268 by moving around, people would see you out; they didn't know you personally, but they  
 knew who you were; have always moved around; being seen is being normal; when going  
 around, would spend money at the local bazaar, which was always liked by the local people  
 301 ordinary peasants would always go into someone's garden or office and would make a  
 request for work  
 308 they got to know the lower country far better than someone from the ICS, who came out to

India when they were twenty-five or so, because they were mixing so young.  
320 people going into politics from the military seemed to do just as well, if not better than,  
those that came from the ICS; because of early training, they had more practical approach;  
didn't trust the Indians as much either  
325 all lower classes of the world cannot help but live by natural cunning because, if they don't,  
they will be swept away  
334 type of person that thinks too much did not adapt well at all to India; as a whole, India was  
a young man's place; fifty was normal retiring age  
361 the problem with where he is now is that people think too much; in India, you just did it;  
problems in England stem from inability to make up one's mind, thinking too much  
368 sometimes India could be unpleasant physically; for married people with children, there is  
the difficulty of education and the separation of families; one had to remember to take more  
precautions than normal, like disinfecting the water and remembering mosquito nets;  
383 life was hazardous, but it was not difficult financially; everyone was adequately paid; there  
were certain guarantees of being promoted, provided you avoided getting into trouble  
392 many of the difficulties in England did not happen in India  
394 English businessmen that went to India on their own seemed to have more trouble  
financially  
399 there was always malaria and dysentery around; people, especially in Northern India, were  
perhaps the healthiest people in the world; there was not much disease around  
410 from the European point of view, it was a young man's country, so you did not come across  
many people over fifty-five or sixty with many ailments because they were all back in  
England  
418 India was nothing like West Africa; English had controlled malaria and dysentery a good  
bit; there were no cholera epidemics after they got it under control; went to great lengths to  
control TB, which was spread easily by the dust in the dry season  
448 liked a lot of India, but there were parts he disliked; sometimes disliked the lack of social  
contact; disliked the extreme heat; disliked the general attitude of the government never  
being wrong, which was even said to him by a senior district officer  
465 one of the differences between the military political and the civil service political was that  
the military political was automatically anti-government and hardly ever agreed with the  
government  
473 as you got to know the countryside better, you realized the Hindu-Brahman people were  
very intelligent and cultured, but also very devious underneath  
479 the way of life was similar to the British Edwardian lifestyle; has been told there's no  
difference now from back then  
486 would like to go back in a way; would like to go for about six months, but he can't seem to  
find the time  
498 was married while in India; believes his wife liked it as well; she was a friend of his aunt  
and uncle; her family was also connected with India, but she had never been there before  
508 India may have been dull for the ladies sometimes because there weren't a great number of  
activities to do  
515 one seemed to work more and sleep less in India; seemed to have more energy, despite the  
heat  
520 had a lot of contact with Eurasians; some are very nice, but as a whole they seem to  
inherent the worst qualities of each side  
528 while in central India, he had a descendent of Napoleon Bonaparte that still received a

pension from the French government; part of Metcalf's duties was to pay him this pension every month

547 maharajah of the area of the square wheel was thought to allow thirteen murders in last few years; somehow they got rid of him; tells about the wedding ceremony he attended, when the groom had his mistress at his feet; used to play bicycle polo in the courtyard of the palace every afternoon

584 old custom of shooting guns the first night of a honeymoon to symbolize penetration

591 left maharajah in his state because he was not a nuisance politically; would cook marvelously

603 although they are eccentric, there is still a part of them that is uncivilized deep within; very few have any real depth of civilization; given the chance, they would be very despotic

612 one of Metcalf's chief jobs was to keep them from getting a chance; tried to keep certain amount of normalcy

622 there was always some amount of bribing going on; they tried to stop a lot of it; would be sent baskets of fruits with rings at the bottom; he would send the ring back, but they were allowed to keep the fruit

637 end of tape