INTERVIEWEE NAMES:  
Brigadier Frank McCallum and Mrs. Sybilla McCallum  
  4700.0601 Tape 881.1  (Tape 2 of 3)  
Audrey Spence  
  4700.0602 Tape 881.2  (Tape 1 of 2)  

IDENTIFICATION:  Britons in Pre-Independence India  

INTERVIEWERS:  Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan  

SERIES:  British Voices from South Asia  

INTERVIEW DATES:  
McCallums:  4/29/1978  

TOTAL PLAYING TIME:  1 hour, 34 minutes  

OTHER MATERIALS:  None  

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Tape 881, Side A  
McCallums (Part 2 of 3) (881.1)  
002 McCallum tells of how the guards would go through all the motions, even when they knew who it was  
014 McCallum was very keen on shooting; he would take his wife and child out along the town drain and the jail, where there was always a snipe  
019 McCallum received a nomination for the Staff College; they knew then that they would never have to be separated again  
025 McCallum was there during the earthquake  
027 the people would say, “The devil looks out for his own” when discussing the Staff College  
032 the Indian hospitals were terrible; fortunately, the army was there to set-up tents  
036 Mrs. McCallum tells of how she would have to steal tea for the patients  
041 McCallum tells of how Mrs. McCallum once poured tea into the mouth of a dead man; no one seemed to mind that she went around pouring it into the mouths of untouchables and high castes.
all of the wives and families were evacuated back to England; the men were not allowed to
sleep in their bungalows, but had to sleep in tents outside
this was because the “rumble-tumble” went on for a while
McCallum was put in charge of riding around, keeping an eye on the villagers and
reporting what they doing
the villages seemed to be withering away, especially because water was such a problem
there would be water lines that brought water into the villages from the bottom of the hills
someone would dig a hole and a long ditch; someone would then come along and dig
another; no water was flowing
it was terrible because the villagers were afraid to go into the hospital because they were
afraid they would die
McCallum talks of other stations that he served; he also talks of the abandoned women’s
camp
McCallum borrowed the Gate Commander’s staff car; McCallum knew the car had to stop
in the early morning
McCallum went banging on every car until he found the man’s room
they arrived in the morning and had breakfast; after which, McCallum took his family to
the Abandoned Wives Camp
twenty-four hours later, he was off to battle
they eventually got a bungalow in Fort Edwards; named after Edwards who had made a
name for himself in the early days
it was a comfortable, two story bungalow
for the first fifteen years of married life, they were only together for five years
when on the Frontier, one got very good leave; there was three months of leave if you could
afford it
McCallum talks of how wonderful Kashmir was; the McCallums had a wonderful
bungalow there when they went up the second time
McCallum talks of a fishing expedition that he enjoyed
the McCallums began married life during a terrorist attack and survived an earthquake
people were very kind; Mrs. McCallum talks of being taken in by some troops while on her
way out to meet McCallum
there was always someone willing to help
the first time in Kashmir, Mrs. McCallum rented an improper camp that was very cold;
there were no servants, no stoves, no heating or fireplaces
Mrs. McCallum’s servants ran off to another woman, who offered for Mrs. McCallum to
stay with her; they found proper accommodations the next day
there was never a real problem with putting people up because of the servants
having family history in India did make things easier because you knew what to expect
when you reached India
the sad part was always when the children had to go back home
it would take six weeks to get a letter back and forth
Mrs. McCallum was considered “lucky” because she was able to stay with her brother at
her aunt’s house; some children were pushed from one relation to another
the McCallum’s children left when they were very young because of the war; they came
home and never went out again
it was months later before one was able to get free passages to and from home; when they
first went out, there were no free passages at all
they were later given five free first class passages during their service

Mrs. McCallum talks of the way things are now in regards to the soldiers and families, such as the now available schooling and such

although they had servants, life in India was very hard; it was the kind that was difficult with great weather extremes

there were the “Kojak Winds” that would cut through everything; they would put oatmeal in the bath to avoid too much drying of the skin

people continued going to India because of the limited open positions for men in those days

there was always a chance at excitement

there was a bearer, a butler/waiter, a cook and apprentice, a sweeper, a stable keeper, a gardener and a water carrier

there was no running water in any of the bungalows, just a turn pipe

the dobee would do the washing; he would work for a number of families; the way they washed clothes was “marvelous” although one tended to lose a number of buttons

they ate the English food, for Indian food was very rich; they had fruit and breakfast, followed by lunch and then dinner; when you were entertaining guests or out to dinner, you would serve five courses

in old India, there were enormous dinners

Mrs. McCallum loved Indian food, but for everyday meals, one would eat English meals

people would take several things out to India to make it feel more like home; they would not take furniture but knick-knacks and such

the servants were extremely honest when you think of what their wages were

the cook usually knew a certain amount of English dishes, unless there was a family dish; they were very good with learning and doing

when you would go on leave, the cook may leave you and go to work for someone else; as soon as you would return, they would return to you

there were two or three popular dishes among the cooks; “Sin Pancakes” or “Fruit baskets”

at Christmas, the servants would make “jollies”

the British were not allowed to take any gifts from the Indians except for baskets of fruit

Mrs. McCallum remembers all the Indian gentlemen sending Christmas cakes when she was younger

there would be rows of Christmas cakes with delicate icing

all the Gorkha officers would come to be greeted by the C.O. at Christmas; they were all dressed in their very best with all their medals and such

on one occasion, they introduced Snapdragon; it is hot brandy poured over nuts and fire is set to it; it was a big hit at parties

the officers would drink either whiskey or rum

Christmas was a great time for shoots and get-togethers; the forest people, mostly the Indian Forest Service people, would invite people out to their Christmas camp

it was a jolly vacation; shooting was not the main thing, it was mostly a “get-together”

McCallum tells the story of a medical servant and one of his patients

there’s not much to say about mess life; he tells of the various messes

there were some beautiful messes; some were very strict

you had to be at the mess for a certain time to eat your meals; you generally had tea in your own bunker

on Mess Night, you were required to be there on time; he tells of the procedures that went on that particular night
at the entrance hall was an enormous red book; it contained everyone’s name and how many drinks you had consumed that evening; this book was inspected by the C.O. and at the annual inspection by the Brigade Commander

once a week, there would be Band Night; the band would come out and play; guests were invited

there were great games; there were two forms of fighting; McCallum describes various games

no one ever seemed to get hurt when playing; they never played any “stupid” games

there was one mess that was known for playing stupid games, playing a “William Tell” on one occasion

McCallum talks of trying to drink whiskey while standing on one’s head; one night while dining out, the Head Forester and two C.O.s tried to do it

one of the men was brought home on top the car, singing about his little blue home in Bloomsbury

the women also had a very happy, exciting life; they were all the same age and same amount of income; there were no great differences between the women

Mrs. McCallum did not enjoy club life very much, so she did not join or go to often; there were always picnics and dances, however

the club was the place for those that enjoyed playing games, like cards or golf

there was some riding

McCallum tells of the Saturday afternoon tennis games on the court behind the mess

Mrs. McCallum was able to be with her children up until World War II

sending the children off was terrible in the early days; it was common for the children to be sent to grandparents, aunts and uncles who did not really want them

there were schools in India, but most of the good schools were for the children of soldiers; before, the regimental children were raised in the barracks and sometimes orphaned

Mrs. McCallum talks of the Lawrence School and the Roman Catholic Schools

it was always believed that the children should go home and not stay; unlike the French, the British were never allowed to believe India was theirs

the British were not allowed to buy land in India

people now think differently about education

Tape 881, Side B
Spence (Part 2 of 2) (881.2)

on Sunday afternoons, everyone in the school was told to sit and write a letter to their parents under the supervision of a mistress

Spence remembers trying to find things to stay; her father had the same problem; when her grandfather was writing, he talked of catching the steamer

in one of her grandfather’s letters, he is on his way out to India; they had to wait a day and a half at one of the ports to allow the mail to catch up and transfer onto the steamer

airmail made the letter writing easier, which began in the 1940s

Spence’s mother landed in Bombay and was married to her father in the cathedral; they had met while he was on leave

men went down and got married at Bombay because they would meet their brides off the boat; this was probably because the girls rarely had relations

all of the people on the boat attended the wedding

Spence was born in Shimla at the nursing home
at that time in Shimla, only the viceroy and commander and chief were allowed to have a car; everyone else either walked or rode a horse; there were transportation alternatives, but they were expensive to have and maintain

there were bullock carts, which were very common form of transportation

Spence’s father never learned to drive; when cars came out, they hired a chauffeur

Spence’s mother never drove either; they did not own a car when they returned to England

Spence explains their house in Shimla; she remembers always finding a monkey in the swing on the veranda

the windows had to be wired to keep the monkeys out

they look at pictures; Spence explains who and what is in the pictures

Spence remembers the servants, especially the bearer

Spence always went to school on her pony; she began kindergarten in India

except for the very beginning, Spence’s father served in the central government

Spence’s family would always rent a house when they went home on leave

there was a giant anthill in their house in Delhi

Spence remembers India very well; she was seven when she left

one was allocated a house, based upon your position

it was hard to see because of the funny hats worn

Spence remembers being terrified of the nurse; the children had a nanny

Spence admits to being a naughty child, but also an amusing one

the would bring the nanny back to England with them when going on leave

when coming back to England, one would always rent a furnished house; it was always a different one, which meant you traveled around with a large amount of luggage

Spence would buy one film a week with her “pocket money”

you traveled around the country; always one taxi for the luggage and another for them

in one house, there was one room that was stuffed with trunks, suitcases, etc.

the government houses were furnished by the government; they did not have a house of their own until Spence was twenty

you often lost things you were fond of because things had to be thrown out; Spence suspects her mother did it in the dead of night when they were all asleep

you had to have a great deal of personal stability to survive the moving around

it was, to an extent, a shock for children going back to England after growing accustomed to life in India

Spence’s sister was sent home first and was alone the longest; her mother came home every six months after that initial eighteen months

Spence believes her sister felt rejected, hidden by her self-defense mechanism of teasing

it was unusual for a mother to come home every six months; her mother spent most of their money because of this; her father was good in that he agreed to this

her mother would stay for the summer holidays; Spence remembers eagerly anticipating her return to England

Spence recalls a conversation between herself and her sister concerning their play names

moving around so frequently meant there was never much continuity

people returning from India tended to go back to their parents if it was possible; people tended to go to the West Country

Spence talks of the boy that teased her throughout elementary

for her seventh birthday, Spence had a camel for the afternoon that would take them around the garden
there was a certain frock that was always worn in England during the summer
when her mother returned in May, there was snow on the ground and her sister in the dress
with chill bumps up to her elbows
the headmistress said she could not put on her winter clothes because it was the beginning
of summer and the children had to wear their summer clothes
once a year, there was a great party and everyone always had a marvelous time
when Spence’s father would return from work, he would read *Winnie the Pooh* to the
children; he would always be back at five because he went to work early in the morning
Spence’s second cousin married a general
when they were younger, all of the children went to the same school
Spence’s sister put roller skates on her home-made hammock
Spence’s brother was not well when he first came back
the houses were so expensive that it was impossible to live in unless you shared them with
other people
Spence believed New Delhi was a beautiful place
they put some of the servants on pension after leaving because the servants remained with
them for so long
there was a problem with wasps and hornets
on her mother’s side, there was a cousin that went into the Gorkhas and her uncle taught in
an Indian school and wrote a book
her mother’s side tended to be more in the church
there was a church that was buried in the sand; Spence’s grandfather was responsible for
having it dug out
there were various furnished houses at all of these places; all of the houses were different
they would always go to the sea in August and then to visit their grandfather in October
the books Spence had showed a different type of childhood when compared to her own; it
would have been a different sort of experience
her sister went back during the war in one of the women services; at the end, she went and
joined her parents; she would later marry there
going to India was a tradition for families; there were those families that did not adjust well
people from Ireland tended to go out to India; this is probably because of the economic
conditions in Ireland
because of the hot climate, nothing really grew well
Mrs. Roosevelt went to the same school as Spence’s aunt, which was run by a French
woman in England
Spence adored the nursery man the most when she was younger
the adults had a more paternalistic relationship
the servants loved children; they enjoyed playing with them; the servants still ask about her
nieces and nephews as well as her children
Spence talks of the people in the various photographs and sketches
her great, great uncle was supposed to go out to India at the age of seventeen
Spence reads her family history with India
Helen married Sir Bradley Leslie, who built a lot of the Indian railways
Spence continues talking about her family tree; an uncle was in the Indian Police
many of the girls went out to India to meet someone and get married
Spence made out a family tree; her grandfather went out in the British-Indian Army and
stayed for thirty years