This is Kathleen Gallagher interviewing Jack Rogers on a TCM 5000 CV at his home in Kennedys Bush Road in Halswell Christchurch.

Where were you born?

In Wanganui, North Island

And where did your parents come from?

My Dad was born in Masterton .At the age of three his mother took him back to England. And at the age of seventeen he came back to New Zealand on his own. And my mother was born in Masterton where her grandparent's family was a pioneer Methodist family in 1842. She was a Jones. My mum and Dad came to live in Gonville Wanganui, soon after they were married in Masterton.

Your dad's parents they continued to live in England? So you had grandparents there?

His mother. His father had died.

What were the early influences on you becoming a peace person?

Well I'm no child psychologist but I might have said this before that I overheard someone saying and I adopted what they said, that I was always a pacifist. All children, all babies come to understand a life of complete dependence on others this is the infant's impression, which must grow. In other words he absorbs pacifism with his mother's milk and sadly gradually our traditions and the way we are tends to knock a lot of it out of us. Thinking of the way you grow up I suppose family and parents. Much less than the little we know about child psychology they're overwrought and those are all influences that detract from this ideal which I hope this is what we all strive for.

Any early influences like parents or grandparents or friends?

We were a reasonably devout Methodist family and from an early memory I remember sitting next to my Mum and I used to listen to these sermons and take an interest in them. I used to hear the Sermon on the Mount read two or three times a year and I used to get the feeling that this is revolutionary. Why don't we all get up and cheer or do something? So my influences came in my very earliest day from the church and my home environment. I had three older sisters and one younger brother. I jump now to the school and say that the things that stand out most possibly is I was five years old and I felt humiliated by a response of a teacher to something I'd done and I had no idea doing that was not acceptable and there was a rule against it. And I think if I can feel that now it's very important significant, and yes we understand the strain that teachers are in they still are I'm sure, but it's the climate of control and discipline and maybe there are better ways. So early school bullying how do you cope with bullying - not that I remember being bullied much as it was always there.

The next influence standing out for me was when I moved into the technical college and I remember I was twelve at the time and they had cadet training. I think nearly all

secondary schools had cadet training. It was only twelve years after the war (WWI), 1918. I was born just before Armistice Day and I like to think I should be given some credit for that. Cadet training - I was uneasy about it and I had a feeling that possibly I should object to it, but I didn't and I couldn't summon the courage. But then I heard that the next drill day was of course a Wednesday - we'll all be going to a ceremony of an oath of allegiance and you picture this as a very serious thing. I did. And I was trying to summon up courage, what would I do? Is there anybody else in this school of three hundred boys who thinks the same way? Well when the occasion came, it was at the end of the cadet's session for the day and our platoon straggled into a classroom. Some of them had their great war uniforms on. There was no teacher there at all. And they had one of the older boys who were no doubt promoted to be a sergeant or something like that. They had him talking to the class and we all shuffled in and I finished at the back of the room. I suppose that was partly my shyness and he must have read something out or repeated it offhand, he was very very offhand and then at the finish he must have said do you all agree? We didn't go forward personally. So it meant I got 'let off the hook'.

You didn't say anything?

I liked the marching because we did great long walks, but I used to think the drill was the utmost stupidity what's it teaching me? I suspect you give authority to people who are only a year or two older than you, give them an authority over their fellows in the cadets. It reminds me of something some great politician said "Argument weak, raise the voice!" and I felt that they do everything by shouting orders and you often can't hear the words. If you know the famous marching, it's left right left, but it's 'if ef if,' and it's grunting and snarls.

And how old were you at that time?

I'd just turned twelve. I left Primary school when I was eleven. I quite enjoyed one or two aspects of it and then the next crisis came when we were going to the rifle range and I remember we had to use rifles - they were twenty-twos and they were lethal weapons. At the time they were becoming aware of the menace of the deer. I sort of talked myself out of it a little bit and of course I remember very well. In groups of five they had us on a lawn along at the pits and you shoot into a wall of sand and you have to go through a target first and I remember my very first shot I knocked the drawing pin out of the sheet that had two targets on it. The target was held up by 2 drawing pins, one in each corner. I knocked one out. It must have been 6-8" from the bull's eye! So it's a pity they didn't write me off immediately. I had to wait while they went through all the processes and it's all very rigid. It has to be or somebody would get hurt. Then I had to take my five shots while everybody looked on. So I felt very uncomfortable about that. Now near the end I was actually five years in technical college I went back for a sixth year - seventh form as it was in those days because jobs were very, very scarce I was too young to go to a university. You had to be eighteen I think. So I went back to tech briefly and they still had cadet training, and then they said next time we have this we're going to have bayonet practice and I thought if there's anything abhorrent it would be bayonet practice. It was only a bag of wheat or something. Stabbing it. I'd say that goes right back to how wrong it is. It does remind me – before we engage in warfare the government has to introduce ministers of education like the Nazis had theirs – and they have to bring about a whole

brainwashing and it might take at least two years to convince that once they've identified the enemy, and at times they change who your enemies are. And this I feel happened exactly the same way. The Labour Government had to demonise the Germans. They had to convince people with a delicate conscience, that it was alright to kill these people because they were less than human and so they published all the atrocities -some were real or there was something real behind it. But the portrayal was far over done and it happened on all sides.

And what about the Methodist Bible Class did you join that?

Oh yes, well automatically I suppose

How old were you?

I'd have been twelve then. I remember being secretary and you learn a lot about meetings- it was not too formal. But of course it was great reinforcement, a great encourager. I think its strength is that it was based on the groups of Bible Classes. I imagine every Church had their Bible Class for young people. In our Bible Classes we used to have a syllabus. It was written and published from Melbourne- a combined NZ and Australian syllabus, and it would have readings for every Sunday and it would have a lot of things to fill in. But it would lead as to the discussions which were quite often about public issues and there were no taboos on subjects at all. There were some subjects like sex that we were all too scared to ask about it. But you must realise we'd come out of the great slump as they called it, the great depression and when I was twelve, we had the rise of Hitler and Mussolini and the Spanish Civil War which was sadly tragic as you know for Catholics as every war is.

So these are in the thirties. These are early influences. And you said about the cadet school and Methodist Bible Class- were there any later influences on you becoming a peace person?

I think it was an evolution of the Bible Class as it grew. I was leading a junior Bible Class and still going to the senior one, and in 1936, these people founded the NZ Christian Pacifist Society. It was associated with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation whose founding goes back to 1914, and the War Resisters International another English body which also goes back to that time. The Bible Class movement was incredibly strong, that they could afford to have travelling organisers or travelling secretaries. So at least once a year they'd pick their youngest and brightest. They were all university students aged 20-21. They paid them a salary and they'd go right round New Zealand and they were almost invariably Christian Pacifists. I took an interest in their summer and winter schools and annual conventions and they started remits and things. They discussed war and declared by a great majority in Wellington at the convention that we believe that our Christian faith insists on pacifism and that we can take no part on warfare nor can we take any part in the medical under military control, that being a key thing. And so we had a covenant. I knew of it, but I didn't join until I was eighteen.

You didn't join the Christian Pacifist society until you were eighteen?

Yes. And the Christian Pacifist Society membership got up to four hundred or so 'covenanters' at the declaration of the war and I was in Wanganui and these things were in Wellington or Auckland, and I went down to a 1940 Convention then, I biked down. We were brought up in hard times. Even though my Dad was mayor in the city, he wasn't well paid and according to Mum he gave too much away. We were never well off.

Were you discriminated against early on because of your involvement in campaigns for peace or for joining the Christian Pacifist Society or for other things like that?

No. I was discriminated against a bit after I came out from being in the camps and various prisons for about five years. People would not accept me. I remember getting a job. They'd sent me a letter saying 'yes come as soon as you can' - electrical it was and I had full qualifications and when I rang them back they said no in that case we can forget all about it - and of course they must have had some directive. Our Pacifist teachers weren't allowed to teach in government schools. A lot finished up at the Friends School because that was Pacifist, in Wanganui. The Civil Service was unavailable to military defaulters for many years after the war.

Between 1930 and 1940 you became involved with the Christian Pacifist Society and what did that involve doing? You went down to Wellington?

Yes it involved very little I suppose. I was studying very hard from getting my electrical exams - busy doing correspondence school to the AMIE (which is an associate member of the institute of electrical engineers). Then conscription came along and I had six weeks and I hadn't completed my syllabus and I was determined to complete this because once conscription is there I knew what was going to happen to me. If you're in prison you could get encouragement to study, but not in the detention camps.

So you didn't get encouragement to study in the camps?

No discouragement. I was held for three months in military barracks (prison) at Trentham, because the government was making up its mind what to do, and I was one of the very earliest.

So you were called up and what did you do then?

Well you were called up and you go before an appeal board. The appeal board is fairly intimidating in a way. The whole atmosphere of a court is designed to intimidate. You're a person not used to public speaking -you have to go along and make a statement, hear what everybody else thinks and we got a newsletter coming through all the time what other people are thinking of doing. I was up in the front ranks of this anyhow I went along to the appeal board. Everybody sits above you. Your judges as it were, and you have a magistrate, a crown prosecutor, a representative of the workers and a representative of the employers and that's the appeal board. They are interested in working out whether they should be keeping you in the job you should be doing or whether you should be in the army. Now as an illustration I was asked only one question by the Crown Prosecutor, and that was what

would you do if the Japs (this was before the Japanese came into the war but they were calling them Japs this is part of the demonising process) came and landed on the beaches at Castle cliff which is our beach at Wanganui and raped your mother (and rape was hardly ever mentioned in those days) and I said I really don't know but I do know that I wouldn't kill this soldier because I wouldn't have a rifle. I can only say I'd do my utmost to interpose myself to protect my mother'. And that'll be all thank you said the Board - that was it and five years imprisonment for that. Well I think it was fairly typical, but Christchurch can take credit that they had twice the appeals allowed rate to the average for New Zealand.

I think it's a progressive city

Yes I think it is and it's something that should hopefully grow all the time rather than stagnate and the next thing it's going backwards.

And your brother - what happened to you brother?

I didn't expect to see him for I assumed that he would not be called up for another five years. He was about five years younger unfortunately I think back on those times and I wish I was closer to my brother but I remembered trying hard and somehow he was so much younger. I was never proud of my relationship with Don but we didn't have much conversation and discussion. He'd often come along with what we were doing and sometimes an older brother or sister will resent that. I didn't expect that it would worry Don but in those days when they turned eighteen (I was twenty-one) they were called up immediately for Territorials and it was conscription. So Don appealed and I was very proud of him and of course he went through the same system as I did and by the time he came in I'd gone through and I was in the first base camp which was being built at the time.

So what happened to Don when he appealed?

My appeal was dismissed. And then a few weeks later they sent me a letter and said there's been an alteration to the law of conscription by which certain people may now have automatic exemption because the Quakers and the Christadelphians were exempt, but they were pretty rare in Wanganui as far as I knew. For that reason they said they'd have to go through the whole process again. I thought about it and decided what I wanted to do. I don't want any 'let out' and I knew how they are treated me so I wrote this courteous letter saying I had thought long and hard about this and I've decided not to come to that appeal so I was automatically dismissed. The next thing I get is a notice to go to the drill hall and have my medical exam. I said seeing that I'm not going to be in the army it wouldn't make sense for me to come to the examination. So the next thing was a policeman knocked on the front door. I was studying away there and he said he wanted my mother. I was twenty-one, but he wanted my mother and he had to present her with this 'bluey' which is a summons to a court at a given time so that was all the process and then it was a normal magistrate's court and there were a few people there to support me.

At this hearing I read out my statement and to my surprise there were two incidents. One that my Dad who was loyal to me the whole time - always has been - although we could never cross the neutral barrier we had set up 'let's talk about this son' or

‘Dad can we talk about this’. I think many would be in the same boat. But anyhow he was also mayor of the city of twenty odd thousand and suddenly I heard Dad speaking behind me and his voice was very compassionate, and he asked ‘Is there any way in which this father could take this punishment for his son?’ and everybody felt with him and you might say what a stupid thing to say but it came from the heart and I always admired him for doing that even though the magistrate quietly sat Dad down and that was that. And also our minister at Gonville Methodist church was a young man and he was rather shy and to my surprise he turned up to testify for me. He hadn’t asked the court and he wore his collar. At a certain stage he stood up and said he would like to speak on my behalf. He was told ‘no you haven’t the right from the court registrar’ and he said ‘I’m sorry, but I’m bound to say what I want to say’ and he said briefly what I’d been involved in in the church and its activities and how he was utterly convinced of my sincerity and the magistrate took it. We sat down again but I had a feeling. I knew one person with a lawyer and he was in the Churches and Bibles Classes and he was quite a bit older than me and he had his appeal allowed and he had offered to come and help me and I turned it down. I don’t know if you can understand the thought processes that go on but I felt if I can’t convince them of my sincerity why should I get someone else to persuade them? Now I know they deal with if the people reel off all the things you’ve done, but I don’t want that done. So I was then sentenced immediately to prison for one month in Wanganui. It was interesting because the men I’d worked for several of them had been in the first war. One of them was a Works manager and he asked if I’d come to his office one day while I was at work and he said ‘now look about this thing - do you know what’s going to happen probably to you’ and he said ‘look I went through the war (he was a Major) and I can understand how you feel, but do you realise that we could easily get you into a non-combatant service like doing a job like there are lots of them helping padres or working in the Salvation Army there at Trentham?’

This guy told you there was a way out?

Yes, as other people did. When I came out of prison I had three months in Trentham military camp - there are a lot of stories - it was a fascinating experience. We had to be sentenced again for the duration of the war. A sentence didn’t exist. Because we mostly had refused a medical exam we had to have an exam and it had to be by civilian doctors and I’m sure the army doctors just went out and put their civies on and I didn’t know til after the war I went through it no trouble at all. I had a very severe asthma. They never told you how severe but I used to want to die as a child when I had the attacks and I got right through. In the end he (the Judge) asked about my history of health and I said well that is something from the past. My sisters told me that my Dad as a good father couldn’t help and he knew. He was also a member of the legislative council and when he asked the Judge how I had got on he said ‘ why didn’t you tell me he was your son’ - that’s the way the system worked.

What was it like in Trentham?

Well I could write quite a long story about fascinating things - humorous things that happened but the really poignant one was one night we used to have an Easter camp and we used to combine with Wanganui and Manawatu and it would be held at Marton or somewhere like that. Usually on grandstands - it didn’t cost anything to use them and it’s about three days of concentrated being together and you get to know

people a little bit. Anyhow every day the guard changes - the guard incidentally consists of a sergeant and six guards - and there were two or three guards around the complex and this was the main guard house. The procedure was at three o'clock the incoming sergeant after due protocols or behaviour - all the nonsense that goes on- would come in with the passing out sergeant into the common room. In the daytime we were unlocked and we were free to keep warm in the common room which was very cold. We sat around a little pot belly stove which was red hot and that kept us alive. Anyhow it was very small and we'd hear 'oh yes the incoming sergeant had to sign a receipt for six bodies' - not six men but six bodies - and it's a tradition. I read on Maurice Gee's book about the Somes Island and how they had prisoners because they were German and some were Nazis and some were there who'd been socialist in Austria and they'd fled and they got lumped in together and they used the same style 'live bodies'. And then he read out the names. We didn't have to do anything and the new Sergeant of the Guard looked away straight away and it wasn't until half past eight at night he came to me. He was obviously in distress and he sat on the end of my bed. It was the smallest cell I've ever been in and there was hardly any room to change your clothes he said 'Jack you've got money on you 'and I said 'yes'. I was in civies and he said 'right, okay, I want you to walk out that door. A chain away from the front gate was the Trentham Railway station and away from there and catch the train and no one will stop you. I'm the sergeant of the guard'. I thought how will I respond to this and I just talked quietly. After about twenty minutes I think he went out and I said 'no I'm sorry I can't do that'. But think of it from his point of view that's what they'd shoot them for 'where's he gone? You allowed him to go?'

He was from the Easter Camp?

Yes. I didn't know him well but he knew me. I worried for years about perhaps he'd have a problem when it comes to lifting that rifle and saying 'this is a man'. Of course war avoids all that sort of thing. They did a certain census or study of soldiers in the Vietnam War and a very large percent of them -sixty or seventy percent - never fired, never aimed at a person - they just aimed up in the air and who was to know?

What about after Trentham. You were in Trentham for three months where did you go after that?

After Trentham we went for this medical exam. We went to a magistrate to be sentenced for the duration of the war and then we were taken by Black Maria, which was the traditional way, in tens. There were twenty-two of us. Then we were taken to the station. The Japanese were three thousand miles away. The train was blacked out and we sat in one carriage. I don't know how many guards we had, it couldn't have been more than two anyhow and they were very nervous. They asked one or two 'are you people prepared to give your word that you won't escape?' I think somebody said 'I don't think you need to worry about us' and we were taken to Rotorua and then we were taken on to the base camp which was about thirty miles up north. That was December of 1941. I was there for about seven or eight weeks. Incidentally we were all our group - the Methodists were discussing the ethics of cooperating with the camps. On the positive side we'd said this is pretty basically wrong from the ethical point of view because it hasn't got the checks and balances of the prison system at all and it's and amateur and the government is trying to persuade the civilian populace that we will be doing helpful things for the men when they return - we'd be doing

something creative. But unfortunately that gave us an uneasy feeling and if you deal with it as an issue you think no I'm not sure that is the way to go and there were six of us Methodist and we talked and talked about it. We said 'we think that is the right thing to do' and we're all together mates. It was always in the last resort that you act on your own and then you'll never have any regrets. There were six of us. We filled up the punishment compound and we were in solitary confinement and reduced rations and we didn't know how long it would have gone on for. We'd gone on for three weeks and we'd get half an hour's exercise a day except when it rained but they did take us for one walk down the road which was just like heaven which was for about an hour and back.

Now one Wanganui friend of mine Noel Ginn - Noel had asked the warder if we could have a meeting. We used to use notes that were going through the toilet loo mail - we didn't use the word 'loo' in those days we only had toilet paper to write on. He asked for is to have another discussion among ourselves. Noel just put his case he never tried to be persuasive. We were all influenced by Rev Ormond Burton and Ormy was in prison himself during most of the war. And Ormond's dictum was we should not object to the way we're treated but we definitely should make an issue about situations we saw were done even if the situations had nothing to do with us. When he was in Mount Eden the men would say 'did you hear the noise' and it's a big prison and you hear a noise and you don't know where it's coming from and he said 'well one of our chaps was in the next cell next door and he's sure that the noise equated with beating someone up in the cell and in that case you felt it incumbent on you to do something about -it if you don't say anything are you agreeing to it all?

After three months you'd been in solitary confinement?

Yes, and we decided to pull out. I know later on one of the people who was very much against it -he wasn't in the CPS - I don't think he told Walter Lawry who later told me, he felt up to that point we had the capacity to change the Labour Government's mind because they'd got to the point where they'd had so many people in prison. Some of them had been very much attached like Ormond Burton. He was in the Labour Party. We were interested in principles and part of politics was about strategies.

So when you came out of solitary what happened then?

Well, we came out and we were good boys. Then they were starting a new camp up at Hautu and I heard that two of the Wanganui boys were going up there and you know we have a non-cooperation policy. I said I'd like to go there and it was all nearer home to most of them were from Auckland way and so I landed up there a few days later and Hautu was just a sports man's paradise as they told us. They didn't even have fences around and they were in the process of building the fences and there were three men came everyday from Taupo in the Public Works and they came to work around us. And I was quite amused because there was one Englishman and there was a Maori chap. I thought here we are we've got a Maori building a barbed wire fence - and you know the barbed wire - a few years before they were encouraging all the farmers to give their old implements and things to the foundries to melt them down and you know they sent it to Japan before they declared war on them. 'Here he is imprisoning the whites' I felt as though I deserved it but the Maori and I might have

pointed it out to him and he had a great old laugh and I was at Hautu then for the next four years except for two weeks in Mount Eden.

And did Hautu change over the time from when you first arrived?

O yes dramatically. I don't know if it was by intent on the part of the authorities or just the evolution of the thing but it came gradually to be looked upon as that's the place they send you to if you're an embarrassment - somewhere or other for cooling down because it's very cold in the winter it's nearly two thousand feet above sea level and Taupo gets cold.

I'd been quite cooperative with them in the sense that as an electrician they said 'would you like to help in installing the motor generators and setting up a power system?' and they gave me complete control and someone in to oversee me once a week from Rotorua. He said 'how are you going? What do you need?' and away he'd go. The chap from the dept was given two motors from the *Maui Pomare* which was the government banana boat and they'd had nothing but trouble with them so they'd sent them up to the camps. And I know Arthur was a Methodist but I'm not biased but he completely took it to bits with a minimum of tools and reconditioned it and put it together and it never missed a beat the rest of the time. I was more or less in their good books. It wasn't til about eighteen months later early '44 that I was summoned down to the office for a meeting with the head manager Leonard Greenberg and the supervisor. I remember him he was sitting there and he had all these tallest guards all behind him and I had to sit down at front. It was magistrate's court all over again but this was supposed to start off very pleasantly. I had no inkling of what it was about but Mr Greenberg was an unusual chap. Instead of asking me straight out would I do something he had to go through the whole thing and the development and evolution and of course he said there's been a change in Wellington with regard to Hautu.

He didn't say we're going to make it a punishment camp. He did say we're going to rearrange the compounds. He said we will need floodlights in different places. Of course I'd set up about four or five outside street lights where I thought was the best place to put the lights socially like the toilet, the ablution block, the hall. We had a social hall and any other place where you went in there we might have had one or two, but none of them on the perimeter. Of course there was one put on a double barbed wire fence. We had a single one until then and the track that the warders could go around to keep us in. When you see those fences you know who are the baddies and they're on the inside. It's very hard to climb over that but it can be done. Anyhow after about half an hour of talking he finally put it. It was obvious it was a punishment. It was time for me to talk and I said as nicely as I could 'I really can't imagine why you felt I might agree to do this'. There was a basic unwritten rule that you don't help the authorities in prison. You don't build patrol tracks. You don't polish guns or anything. And not only did they have all that arrangement I had about a hundred watt lamps and that was the biggest you could buy. They put 500 watt lamps and about three times as many all around the perimeter and they little knew it but it was marvellous before then often the warders would be skulking in the shadows and you couldn't see them and they had black uniforms but now you could see them you could hide in the shadow of the hut right next door and you could have two minutes and then you could get under the wire and then you had to run because for a chain out it was lit all around the compound and that was all clear until just grass.

You used to get out of the camp?

Well by sheer good luck and a certain Rangipo Prison had eight or ten Methodists in it and it was about five miles away.

It was the most isolated of all the prisons?

Yes. Now one of our Methodist friends was Jack Hamerton now Ham was a butcher and they depended on him. The meat would come up from the prison. Ham would dress it up and he got told off because he gave us what was for soup - it's something to do with the bull (balls) anyhow these were delicacies. He got told off because he allowed one to go to the men's mess. There were about hundred and fifty of us and about twenty-five of them. I don't know how Jack dealt with that he had a place where he worked just outside the compound and they had to say nothing about Jack. Now you've got to go out there and they don't come out and watch you all the time and Jack thought he'd take a risk and he knew and they were all mates of ours they were all Methodists - they were there because in the Strathmore Camp the authorities were very, very concerned because the Methodists decided to have a weekly discussion group and the basis was the Christian Pacifist Society biblical but I guess they strayed a bit from that at times but the authorities were worried because we had a lot of the Hoons – Humanitarians used to come along.

So the early influences were your Dad's books -they were on the top shelf?

Well, of course Dad was uneducated or educated to the fifth standard but he had lots of books - classics - and he was well read though he didn't seem to have time to read books, so books were very important.

And you read 'All Quiet on the Western Front'?

I read one book that was very positive about pacifism it was called *The Power of non-Violence* it was by an American Quaker or an American pacifist called Richard Gregg. It was a psychological study and it gave lots and lots of instances of non-violent responses to military situations and things we never hear about. Norway had a chap who was considered a traitor because he worked for Hitler - he said well if you'll be controlled by us will you run your government show over there? And he did this. That happened in several countries. They brought in some sort of rule about schools and all the schoolteachers pretty well all went on strike they were not going to teach the new Nazi 'bible' and he acting as the prime minister carted a thousand of these teachers up to a camp away up in Northern Norway and the parents said well we'll take the schools because in those days the women wouldn't be working like they are today. It's a wonderful story. And we never heard about that because it wasn't in anyone's interests in the news media to know about it.

At the camp – did they ask you to fix up the wiring of many large flood lights around the compound, and you refused to do this?

Yes and so I was dismissed and I think there was usually a punishment when you're on the mat like that so all the letters were stopped. They never ever told Mum that

your son's alright - he's not missing or lost or anything like that. They told me they're withdrawing my privileges so I couldn't write at all. I could write on the underground - we had systems there but we used it pretty carefully.

And this guy Ham the butcher -he went down to Rangipo?
Ham was in Hautu -he later non-cooperated as many of them did at different stages. There is a book written about them. One of my boyhood friends in Wanganui and another whose been in Riverside community since it was inaugurated Chris Palmer there's a book written - Bread and Water - and they were the only people I'd say who escaped to protest the continuance of the war and called for a negotiated peace. I don't know the motivations of all the people who escaped and who attempted to. There were quite a lot but they escaped for the right purpose – to stand up to distribute their views about the war and that it ought to be negotiated. This was about at least a year before it was all over. They did that - they had about a fortnight - and they were so worried about the people who were shielding them because every night they'd have a different bed to sleep in. They said right now we've got to go and give ourselves up.

This was Chris Palmer and?

Merv Browne. So Chris Palmer went to see the Minister of Justice and he wanted to say something against the war. They was told he wasn't there but his secretaries tried to shepherd him out. It's interesting isn't it? Basically they were sympathetic and then finally somebody came along and said 'O look we've arranged for an interview for you at three o'clock tomorrow' and Chris turned up at three o'clock and the door was opened by Detective Brown and he was sentenced to three months. Then he came back to Hautu. Merv said he'd wanted to do what he was too young to do when every Friday night in Wellington at 8 o'clock the Christian Pacifists would have one person stood on a soap box and say how wrong the war was. They invariably got various sentences and usually for obstructing the traffic and that was very interesting because they were imprisoned before conscription started.

And Merv Browne did he go down and do that?

Well he'd missed out on that he was too young and fair enough he was probably still working and so this time he went and stood up and he said he wasn't much of an orator and everybody else for instance Ormond Burton had stood up as was his custom and he'd been in prison twice at least for the same offence. Burton stood up on his soap box and he had his collar on and he had his Bible and he said 'In the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ'… and the hand came around on his shoulder which is the way they do it and said "Identify yourself" and he said "I'm Ormond Edward Burton". And he said "I arrest you in the name of the law" and off he goes two and a half years imprisonment for quoting from the Bible. And Connie Summers got three months -the only woman in NZ to be imprisoned for sedition. Merv Browne stood on a soap box in Manners Street to appeal for a negotiated peace immediately and he read Corinthians 13. The detective was there and he waited til he'd finished it and then arrested him.

Jack Rogers and Connie Summers receiving Christian Pacifist Society Peace City Award from Mayor Garry Moore.

And why did you get sent to Mt Eden?

Well I got sent to Mt Eden because toward the end the war was over and the government had made some promise to the RSA. The RSA was the chief promoter of leaving us to rot in the camps and it was so false this idea that we were doing creative things. We were grubbing scrub from the pumice eruption which had happened way back 2000 years ago. It takes thousands of years for it to have normal growth on it which it does relatively quickly by dropping humus from the leaves of the most primitive mosses and lichens. It had got to Manuka scrub and it would be about six or seven feet high and we had to go and grub this out. There was a thousand acre paddock. I was talking many years later to the head of the Hautu prison. I'd come to know him because I'd asked his permission forty years later to go and have a look as I was in that area just for old times' sake. He said 'certainly I don't see why not, but could I come to?' I said of course and asked me to guide. I said I was there for four years so he met Jean and I there at ten o'clock. Everything had changed - the crude farming methods, the old posts all over the place, and the ground they'd put superphosphate - everything was tidy - a good rural farming scene but when I got near where the camp was there was a vast plantation of mature pine trees.

And did you put those in?

No we didn't, we did put a row about a mile long, about five trees wide, as a shelter belt and we realised then that we could have been putting in pine trees for four years at least and a big lot of men we could have planted that thousand acres in a couple of years at that time!

Why did you get sent to Mt Eden?

Because of this futility and the misrepresentations going on, and also I suppose you've got to do something. What are you going to do when some had gone hunger striking? Merv went thirty-six days on hunger strike. You didn't do something to the death or anything like that. There were only twenty-two of us left in the Hautu Camp and a lot had been let out because they had their rehearing. Some of us said we're not going up for a rehearing. They'd been let out so we agreed one morning when the warders came around. Two of them passed your hut, identified you in your hut and then went on their way. We said well we're not going to work today just for twenty-four hours. We were all told immediately after breakfast 'you have to report to the supervisor' or they'd come up and tell you because they didn't want you all there at once. There were nine of us out of twenty-two. We were sent to Rotorua where we went through the same old legal processes. One of us - Jimmy Warburton, made quite a statement for our reasons which was very adequate and so they gave us two weeks which was just like a holiday really - you know, going in the train and looking out the children. We hadn't seen children for years and women even though you're looking in backyards along the railway line they never faced you. It was also worrying because you're thinking I'll be out in that world I've got to make decisions for myself and I haven't had to do that for over four years and that's true of the soldiers too they've got to start from scratch again.

Was it reasonably harsh in Mt Eden itself or was it not too bad?

No but it was strict and it was very predictable. They kept to the rules pretty well although one night someone thought there'd been somebody beaten up and I asked to see the supervisor which is every prisoner's right. Eventually I got to see him and one of the things about the camps - we had the Jehovah's witnesses which must have been one of the biggest religious groups, and they dug their toes in. They'd take a stand on certain things and not on others with us. They took a stand in putting their hand on the Bible because they said it says in the Bible 'let your aye be aye and your nay be nay' and they would automatically get three days bread and water and be brought back through the process. Again that's called the cat and mouse legislation

Every time?

It does happen and when it came to the chief warder - he holds the Bible and the superintendent is sitting at the desk and there are only three of you. There might be a warder and I said to him very gentlemanly "Well I'd rather not - just remember the war was over'. They were starting to mellow a bit and I had my say. This was along with our philosophy that you would cooperate but only as long as you weren't helping the war by your action so you wouldn't put fences up or you wouldn't dig a patrol track for them or anything like that.

And Jack you know the mail run… ?

Well when I started there were these eight or ten Methodists in Rangipo Prison five or six miles away. The countryside had no tracks or anything except deer tracks because deer reached a peak in 1951 which wasn't long after. Jack Hamerton had started this mail run. He could do it in the daytime and he had several of our mates - that was

pretty well all Christian Pacifist Society Methodists. Various ones would go with him. Two of them would run over, but they all had to have that sort of job to do it in the daytime and they must have started doing it in the night time because it had to be when it was moonlight. You'd have to write your stuff flat out after lights out and then you'd take your pile - you'd have one or two things from others. Because so many people were passing through we were hearing things about which they never heard because they were very small. There were about 25-30 thirty people there and ours was a hundred and fifty inmates and so Jack determined one day he'd take the risk and he'd run over there and he found the way. It was pretty straight forward really. Most of it is you're out of sight and you'd have to cross a stream which could be difficult if it had been raining heavily. There was a swing bridge there but most of the planks were missing on it. You only used that when you were desperate. I did a few times and then you finally got to a point just above the swing bridge which was only half a mile from the prison and even your presence there often set the dogs barking at the prison which wasn't much help. About a year after it was started Jack came to me and said I'm going to non-cooperate next week so I'll be in the red compound punishment compound. He asked if I would like to carry on with the mail run. I said yes certainly and we'll go out next full moon whatever's a suitable time.

D**id you have to go through two barbed wire fences then?**

You had to go through three at least. The internal ones weren't so bad - they weren't so tight, but the external ones were tight they were six inches apart and when Jack and I first went through I held the wire over Jack to get through and then he held it for me. You've got two lots of wires and if you try to do that on your own then you're in real trouble because you can't reach around. You're not double jointed enough to reach around the back and so whether somebody else told me or not but the way I did it from then on was to lie on my back on the ground. When you're in that position you've got a huge leverage. You've often got your face and your head down and you go through lying on your back, head first and you feel yourself pass the wire over your legs and out and that might take twenty seconds I don't know because you're in full glare of the lights and hoping that the patrolmen aren't coming around. So I took this on and I think I did it for about eighteen months. When a note came from Allan Handyside, who was the chief scribe on the other side, that they had their suspicions where it was coming from. They knew that something was coming in and they didn't know and questions were being asked in Parliament. They were sending them down to people like Martyn Finlay a Labour Minister of Justice and he was asking them. And I suppose they had a directive to find out where this is coming from. I realised these were the things that I was handling. I never had time to read them. So I passed them on and then I brought all their stuff back.

Was this information about what was happening in Rangipo, and that was being asked in parliament?

O yes, we'd hear everything and they'd hear a certain amount of stuff from the prisons because somebody would be shifted there now and again from the prisons and you're hungry for news because we rarely saw a newspaper.

So it was really important to get stuff out in case things were happening which were really unorthodox?

Those were the main things. It was very important to get a letter out but they were used to send letters, perhaps to wives or fiancés or loyal friends and members of parliament through us and we would pass on everything to them. They started up a magazine in Hautu and it was never found out that we used to circulate it. Unfortunately it wasn't free and available to everybody there and they'd write a few articles for their 'Porangi newssheet'. It wouldn't be very hard to work that out would it?

How long were you in camp after the war?

Well the war finished early September. I got out in the end of February 1946 and so I don't suppose it's so terribly long after. I've seen no statistics that the last person was released about the end of March or April. There are various stories and even people have written their own books and reckoned they were there a lot longer but they didn't give a time.

And after the war did you remain involved with the Christian Pacifist Society?

O yes and the Bible Class Movement although I was very unsettled. I was trying to get work and I had a couple of jobs and also I'd formed a close emotional relationship with a certain dental nurse (Jean) and I was in Wanganui for a while and then I was working out of Wanganui and the next thing I had a job in Wellington. Finally I came back to be nearer Jean and worked at the Public Works and so I had very little connection with the Bible Class Movement but you know we've kept in touch ever since.

Even until now?

O yes, but it's getting less and less as we drop off the edge of the world.

What sort of action were you taking through the fifties with the Christian Pacifist Society? Were you involved in any demonstrations in the fifties?

Yes, but always as individuals. One of the very significant things which was important. I remember even before the war we were discussing about living in common -you've got plenty of biblical justification for that. And we felt well this has got lots going for it and they'd set up a community Riverside was the community of Christian Pacifist Society of people and they were able to take in people who got the sack and they were waiting to be sentenced because the head Hubert Holdaway had been in the Great War and he was very much of a Christian Pacifist and Arch Barrington joined it later. He was one of the two. He and Ormond Burton would probably be the main gurus for the movement. I wasn't so much involved. I was involved with a magazine they wanted me to put out a monthly paper and a monthly meditation or something like that and perhaps it was about a year. I got a job back in Wanganui on the reconstruction of the four year old Turakina tunnel- I was the electrician there. After about eighteen months there the job was finishing. Well they said they didn't have a job for a married man. But they wanted me to go on to the Rimutaka tunnel and they didn't have housing accommodation, but they said if you'd like to go to Lake Tekapo, which we'd never been to a way down the South Island,

we could have a Works house there very soon for you. And we went there and there was only one bed and the house hadn't been finished. We didn't even have our furniture by then. Of course there's nothing wrong with one bed especially if you put the mattresses on the floor you don't fall so hard. So then I was right out of contact in a way. I had an annual holiday but we were so busy with young families growing up and certainly connected with bible class there and I started up a gymnasium because I went to YMCA gymnasium. I loved the gymnasium. There was nothing going for the kids in those camps you know. There were a hundred houses in Camp number three which we were and just nothing and then we used to go to the services at the Anglican or Presbyterian at the Tekapo church the lovely Church of Good Shepherd. I got involved with it and as electricians we gave them a Saturday or so and we wired it up for lights. It never had any lights or heaters then.

You were in Tekapo for quite a long time?

Only another eighteen months. And then it was winding up and it was too much. It wasn't for us and we had a house and we had coppiced fence and nobody had fences. Very few had fences at all. We had a stone path. Jean had a lawn and children would come along and say 'please Mrs Rogers could we play on your lawn?' It was only about two metres by two metres but it was a lawn. There was only one other in this camp of a hundred houses.

And Jack what has sustained you throughout all your struggle for peace right through your life?

It's a bit like convictions people say you must have been pretty courageous to do that that. At no time did I feel I had to summon up courage, except when I was a boy, to do those those individual things.

And through the eighties and nineties were you involved with any of the Peace Foundation Movement?

Yes I was on the executive of CPS from 1979 but I didn't have any office as such. We went to all the Vietnam meetings we went to the one about the listening station they wanted to set up at Grasmere. That was of particular significance to me because our Power Board would have set the electrical thing up and just while this thing was a hot potato. All those who'd done more than twenty-five years service with the power board were invited to a dinner with the chairman. For some reason they had me sitting next to the chairman and he said 'well what do you think about this Omega Station?' and I said "I'm sorry I do not agree with it at all' and there wasn't much debate. I'm sure he never held it against me.

And you were involved with the Vietnam War demonstrations?

O yes lots of other things - it kept changing all the time

What about the anti-nuclear?

Oh yes. We had conferences still but they'd tapered off in the last ten years until we have got only three of us left. We've had reunions here on the lawn. When David

Grant's book came out we had a picture. There were about twenty or thirty people there. We're getting to that stage we had to go and pick people up or get someone else to do it and we have people like Morva Efford. She was a very well known assistant to all sorts of people going to the camps who told them how to write an appeal. Morva's still alive.

"Reunion" Old Conchies – WWII and hostess Jean. From left to right: Jean Rogers, Rose Plumridge, Morva Efford, Connie Summers, and June Gordon.

Did the Pacifist society commission David Grant to write a book?

He's writing the history of the Christian Pacifist Society. In some ways we're not terrifically happy about our decision but because it's saying goodbye. I don't think we've failed, but there's no one taking it on and of course it's been a single issue. We've expanded to support all other groups in all sorts of things even in the Iraq thing. I've tried to go along to every march they have there.

At the launching of "History of the New Zealand Christian Pacifist Society", 11/8/04. Back Row, left to right: Barry Harkness, Jack Rogers, Colin Ayers, Georgina Oxley, Lionel Oxley, Will Foote, and Richard Thompson. Front Row, left to right: Connie Summers, John Miller, John Flygenring, Jean Rogers, Morva Efford, and Myrtle Woodley.

And is there anything you'd like to say to young people involved in the peace movement today

Well I'd say read widely, and don't feel that if you question things, don't feel it's wrong to do that. Be prepared to be called a sceptic but explore your ideas, share them, test them out on other people, and refine them. That's the only way you grow. This is what worries me about our churches. We don't have a place to sit down and debate and discuss and talk about for instance on theology.

And are there any highlights from your peace work over the last twenty or thirty years?

I don't know. It's hard to think about. I think it was some of Katie's doing but they asked me to accept an award for the NZ Christian Pacifist Society Peace Award and a pendant designed by Riki Manuel of which there are only about ten. I felt in some ways perhaps we should have said well not really this is a Christchurch thing but who should have been top of the list but Katie. I think she organises but she wouldn't put her own name forward naturally. The award was titled 'Peace City Award' to recognise the Christchurch City Council declaration to become the First Peace City to join with the peace people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki cities.

And any other highlights?

I think if I was to discuss with you the philosophy, well it's particularly appropriate at this time which is Easter time. It seemed to me to be the conventional tradition celebration and you know the events of the Easter weekend and I think the strength I think there's too much attention given to the magic of Easter. I believe in mysticism

but I believe religion is still relying on things which to me don't ring a bell. Now Jesus facing an inevitable crucifixion and I put it this way: the resurrection I think it's all symbolic and it's trying to explain the inexplicable. It's a bit like Noel Ginn trying to explain hereafter which he's doing in that and doing it in little flashes like that and so the crucifixion was the high spot, not the resurrection. The resurrection happened and it was an amazing thing but it's as though the churches need to have something like that to prove it. But I think here was a special man. I believe we're all sons of god. Anyhow here was a man and his mission what was the climax of his a career if you seek the truth all through your life in your behaviour and man's behaviour the time will come if you're open and honest and loving, when you'll meet with opposition and when that time comes it might come to a point of your life and at that point it applies things that Jesus had said. It doesn't matter how you die. It doesn't matter if they kill you, but it does matter if you compromise your spirit and your message. He would not compromise and he nearly did and it's a huge story what he went through the desertion of everybody and his own doubt and to me that's the triumph that as I say you don't get discussions on it and you can briefly say this at some sort of meeting but there's awful silence -that nice silence and you don't get any further.

It's about his commitment to the truth and not to be deterred from that?

Well yes it's something in the growth of man in some ways. We try to claim the only person who's done it but this suffering goes on there's been tyranny and things as awful as the crucifixion right through America and unfortunately the School of the Americas appear to be responsible for training these people to do it and they're still there. Other people in history might not have been professed Christian but I think they've followed the same track like Gandhi and there are lots of others.

Thank you Jack