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Interview with  
O. R. Sparkman  
May 6, 1971

Place of Interview: Irving, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Mr. O. R. Sparkman

Place of Interview: Irving, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Date: May 6, 1971

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. O. R. Sparkman for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 6, 1971, in Irving, Texas. Mr. Sparkman was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II, and the purpose of this interview is to record his reminiscences and experiences during that time when he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese. Mr. Sparkman, before we get into your actual experiences as a prisoner-of-war, would you please give us a brief biography of yourself. In other words, we'd like to know when you were born, where you born, what your education is, what your present occupation is, so on and so forth.

Mr. Sparkman: I was born on August 23, 1921, in Athens, Texas, and I lived there about two and a half years. My parents moved to Corsicana somewhere around there. I forget exactly. And then they moved to Dallas. I was raised in Dallas. As most kids did, you know, I went to school and worked a little until the time I went in the service.

Dr. Marcello: What do you do now for a living?

Mr. Sparkman: Oh, I drive a truck.

Marcello: I see. When did you join the service?

Sparkman: January 15, 1940. That was my anniversary date.

Marcello: I see. And you joined the Marine Corps. Is that correct?

Sparkman: Yes, uh-huh.

Marcello: Why did you join? Do you recall offhand?

Sparkman: No, I've often asked myself that. That's the only service nobody could tell you anything about.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: You know, I was eighteen then, and I guess I liked adventure.

Marcello: I see. Some people say that they couldn't find a job so they joined. And others, of course, say that they were about to be drafted and that's the reason they joined. But in your case you were simply interested in the adventure as much as anything.

Sparkman: Right. Something different.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot training?

Sparkman: San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything exceptional that happened while you were there that stands out in your mind?

Sparkman: Doesn't seem like. You know, it was a little rougher then than it is now. We couldn't write home to the mothers and get them down there to fight the battles for us.

Marcello: At the time you joined the Marines did you have any idea that the country might possibly get into war someday with the Japanese?

Sparkman: I was an eighteen-year-old. I wasn't thinking about that.

Marcello: You weren't thinking about it at all?

Sparkman: I wouldn't have cared anyway probably.

Marcello: Where did you go from San Diego?

Sparkman: Mare Island. From there we were to be shipped overseas, I believe.

Marcello: Mare Island. Whereabouts is Mare Island?

Sparkman: San Francisco.

Marcello: It's at San Francisco?

Sparkman: Navy yard, I think.

Marcello: I see. What sort of training did you get in the Marine Corps? By that I mean did you have a particular specialty or were you an infantryman?

Sparkman: No, in those days they taught you automatic weapons and whatever the Marines were supposed to know--how to roll your packs, and just be in good shape physically, you know, marksmanship.

Marcello: I see. Essentially then you were trained as a combat soldier. Is that correct?

Sparkman: Yes, uh-huh.

Marcello: As a combat Marine.

Sparkman: That's right. In '40 they didn't have too much specialization, I don't think.

Marcello: Where did you go from Mare Island?

Sparkman: Oh, we boarded the S. S. Henderson and just headed east. Marines usually spent two years overseas and we were being sent as replacements for some who were coming back. And they'd have a roster up on the bulletin board and you put your name down to

volunteer for, let's say, for, oh . . . the Flagship was Augusta then. You could, you know, volunteer for that. And some got off at Shanghai. I just kept on; I wouldn't volunteer for anything. I just wanted to see how long I could ride.

Marcello: I see. Where did you finally end up then?

Sparkman: Tientsin.

Marcello: Tientsin in China. What sort of duty does a Marine perform in Tientsin, China, or what sort of duties did a Marine perform at that time?

Sparkman: Well, you know, it was divided up into different sections of town. Italians, French, British, and Americans had sections of it after the Boxer Rebellion. And we had old German barracks, I believe. It looked like, you know, the old castles you see in Germany. They found that this is what it was designed after. They were old brownstone buildings, and each end had a staircase running up the corners to the towers. And about all we did is stand guard.

Marcello: What sort of guard duty was this? What were you guarding against and so on?

Sparkman: Nothing in particular. It goes with the training. That's what you had to do to earn your money, I guess.

Marcello: What all was located in the American compound in Tientsin?

Sparkman: There were just a few civilians scattered out through town, you know, in businesses. And we never did meet them in Tientsin, and I just don't know who was there.

Marcello: Were there any diplomats or anybody like that in the compound at Tientsin?

Sparkman: Not that I know of. No, they were in Peking.

Marcello: They were in Peking.

Sparkman: Yes. I guess the reason we were there was because everybody else was, and, you know, it just too . . . well, everybody else was there because, I guess it was what they imposed on the Chinese after the Boxer Rebellion. And they just fulfilled the commitment or let them know we were still there or something.

Marcello: About how many Marines were there at Tientsin? Could you possibly estimate the number?

Sparkman: I would say there was somewhere around seventy-five. I can tell you how many was in both . . . when we were captured how many were in both . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . Peking and Tientsin.

Marcello: I see. But you would estimate that at Tientsin there were maybe somewhere around seventy-five?

Sparkman: Well, at the time of capture?

Marcello: At the time . . . well, anytime. Let's say an average number.

Sparkman: Well, the average now . . . I'd have to look that up.

Marcello: Uh-huh.

Sparkman: I think there were six platoons . . . I don't know. I just don't know.

Marcello: I see. Was this considered pretty good duty?

Sparkman: Well, I guess it was. You didn't have to do anything. Oh, sometimes we'd go out in the country on extended marching orders. Sometimes in the winter there was a little rice; there was a bunch of ponds out there, and you'd have to wade across them, but it wasn't bad.

Marcello: What did a Marine do for entertainment in Tientsin?

Sparkman: Well, there wasn't too much to do. You'd either go out for sports or . . .

Marcello: Now surely there must have been some good times to be had in Tientsin other than sports. You can put it on the record. You don't have to get down to graphic details or anything like that.

Sparkman: Well, I'll tell you most of them drank all the time.

Marcello: Uh-huh.

Sparkman: A fifth of gin was \$.65, Canadian Club was \$.95--that was pretty cheap--didn't drink much of it. A dollar thirty-five for the best. So most of them had been there for awhile, and they got to drinking, and they did their part of it.

Marcello: What was the city of Tientsin like? It was a pretty big city, was it not?

Sparkman: It's a good-sized Chinese city and . . . well, by our standards not too clean. But then again it was surprising, and in some of the business districts the buildings were pretty modern. It kind of struck you as kind of like our cities--a little bit



like them because I guess foreign industry built some of these buildings that the businesses were held in. I've got pictures of them as they were, but I just didn't pay too much attention to them.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with the Chinese?

Sparkman: Well, in the tour of duty there, yes, we had liberty every other day.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: After we went on guard duty.

Marcello: I see. What was your opinion of the Chinese?

Sparkman: Well, I liked them. They're a pretty intelligent bunch of people. They're nice, polite, and they live like anybody else if they have the ways and means to do so. But life's pretty rough over there, and also if you've never seen China, well, it's just hard to explain.

Marcello: Did most Americans feel this way, or did a lot of them hold the Chinese in contempt? I'm referring now . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . to the people that you know.

Sparkman: Well, some did. I know one or two that seemed to. But I don't know whether they did or not. You know, most of them were young, and their opinions would run a lot differently as they grew older. It seemed like most of them held the Chinese in contempt, but . . .

Marcello: What sort of things would they possibly do to the Chinese? Is

there anything they would do to them overtly such as, you know, pushing them, kicking them, shoving them, things like that, cursing them out?

Sparkman: Oh, yeah, just not treating them with respect too much. One old boy, if they didn't toe the line when they came through his guard post, why, they'd get the bayonet sometimes. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. You mean he was just prodding them with a bayonet?

Sparkman: Yeah, well, it was pretty deep sometimes.

Marcello: I see. I see. This actually . . .

Sparkman: I know one . . .

Marcello: . . . happened on occasion?

Sparkman: . . . of them one day they had to take him up to the dispensary (chuckle) to get him sewed up.

Marcello: Is that right?

Sparkman: Yeah. 'Course, he didn't like them. I don't know why.

Marcello: Why did they have Marine guards around this foreign compound?

Sparkman: Well, this was our compound. I guess we inherited it from the Germans, or maybe nobody else wanted it. It was right down in the . . . I guess you would call it slums here. It might have been uptown to them.

Marcello: I see. Well, who was allowed to come into this compound, and who were you supposed to keep out?

Sparkman: Well, anyone without a pass.

Marcello: I see. You had to have a pass . . .

Sparkman: Yes.

Marcello: . . . to get back and forth from one compound to another.

Sparkman: You had to know the room boys, and they were supposed to show their pass, too. We didn't get in and out unless, you know, we were off duty.

Marcello: Did the compound employ a lot of Chinese?

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: You mentioned room boys.

Sparkman: Yeah. I don't know how many. Each platoon had a room boy. That would have been about three on topside, and they had one, probably, that was in charge of them. He did the ironing and bossed the others around. And we probably had about eight or ten in each barracks, and we had two full barracks--a company and . . . let's see, B Company and C Company, I guess. I got the pictures of everybody over there. I think that's what it was. And then we had . . .

Marcello: In other words . . .

Sparkman: And then we had cooks. The cooks were our own personnel, but we had boys waiting on the tables. I know we had four or five over there, and headquarters had some too. I don't know how many.

Marcello: In other words, the compound did employ quite a few Chinese.

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: And the Marine Corps itself employed quite a few Chinese.

Sparkman: Yeah, we had a barroom across the road from the barracks, and they even employed Chinese over there, too. Of course, we had our own men over there that watched them, but I imagine they

had half a dozen to a dozen over there. We had an ice plant, and the old barracks had steam heat, so the boiler was going all the time and made ice over there.

Marcello: Was this American compound more or less self contained? By that I mean could it exist by itself? I assume it had to buy its food from the outside.

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: And I assume, perhaps, its electricity and its water were supplied from the outside.

Sparkman: Yes, from the Chinese. I don't know whether our power plant generated electricity or not. I think it came from the Chinese. And they bought food every day from them. We did get large shipments of stuff from the states, oh, about once a year.

Marcello: What was a typical day like in the compound, that is, what was your typical day like?

Sparkman: Oh, you got up about--what time did we get up in the morning--six or seven o'clock? I think it was seven o'clock. Anyway, we'd get up. The bugler would blow reveille. And the Chinese would already be there. Of course, they were pretty quiet, and they would come into the barracks without bothering anybody.

Marcello: What would have happened if they made a lot of noise?

Sparkman: Oh, somebody would have gotten up and kicked them off the second story or something.

Marcello: I see. In other words, if the Chinese stepped out of line, they were . . .

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: . . . they were kicked around, shoved around pretty well.

Sparkman: Well, maybe, you know. They got to knowing them, and they treated them . . . some old guys would treat them pretty nice. I did, too, until my room boy was getting stuff out of the locker, you know, food and stuff.

Marcello: Your room boy was stealing food?

Sparkman: Oh, well, yeah. I told him I knew it, and I didn't like it, and he'd better stop it, and he did. And I said, "Well, I'll give it to you, but I don't want you stealing." And he never bothered me again. He was a pretty good room boy. He was young.

Marcello: Was stealing a problem with the Chinese?

Sparkman: No. Oh, they didn't ever bother your stuff. They were pretty honest.

Marcello: After reveille, what happened then?

Sparkman: Well, we'd get up, you know, and get ready and fall out for our roll call. We'd eat breakfast. Then we'd go back in the barracks and put on our uniforms--whatever it was that day. Usually it was khakis. The temperature over there was about . . . looked like West Texas out there, and the temperature was about the same. It might have got a little colder during the night. We didn't have a thermometer or I never did look at one or see one, but I just figured that when you could . . . you'd drop water or spit on the sidewalk, and it'd be frozen by the time you could step on it. It was pretty cold.

Marcello: It got pretty cold I suppose.

Sparkman: Uh-huh, I don't know how cold. Anyway, to get on with the story, then we'd fall out for just close-order drill. And we were just drilling all the time and doing calisthenics with the rifles. It was funny to watch. Now, I didn't drink, so I tried to play six games of handball or six games of tennis if I could find anybody that wasn't hitting the juice too hard, and I would get them to play with me. And I enjoyed doing that. We had one other sergeant, and he was in pretty good shape for a man his age. I guess he was in his thirties. I thought he was an old man. I guess he was in his thirties. He was a little heavy, but he was in good shape, and he'd get out there, and he'd do calisthenics until everybody would just quit. And, of course, I stayed with him one day, and he made me try it again. But then again I was a kid and wasn't drinking, so I was in pretty good shape.

And we'd just drill. And each one of us, we'd take the sergeant's place. We was all privates because we didn't get our Pfc's promotion over there for five years. Most of them went there as privates, and that's all they ended up as. But we'd take the sergeant's place, then the platoon sergeant's, then the lieutenant's and the captain's, or any of them, and go through whatever they was supposed to do in close-order drill or parades or, you know, just anything you could think of to do. It was all part of military procedures, so everyone

of us knew the book forward and backwards. That's all we did; we just did do that.

Oh, we'd have field day on Fridays. We'd clean the machine guns; we were a machine gun company. And we had the old canister type like they had in World War I. We didn't have any new weapons over there--the BAR, the Thompson, the .45, the 1903 rifle.

Marcello: The 03 Springfield?

Sparkman: Yeah. But what we would do for practice, why, we'd take everyone of those parts and throw them in a sea bag, and each one of us would blindfold a man; for each weapon we had in there, and we'd run through that once in a while. We got down to where we could put them together in, oh, seven minutes. That seems like a long while. It wasn't very long that all four or five of you, whatever weapons you had in there, could reach in there blindfolded and put them all together. You know, we did it so much, you got to where you could just feel it and know what you got. Of course, we had to do this if we were under battlefield conditions, and trying to put something together at night. And it would help.

Marcello: From what you've gathered so far, I would say that duty in Tientsin was pretty plush duty, is that correct?

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: Wasn't bad . . .

Sparkman: . . . Oh . . .

Marcello: . . . wasn't typical Marine Corps duty.

Sparkman: Well, any duty in the Marine Corps overseas before World War II was pretty good, I'll tell you.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: Man, you'd like to live over there. Everybody waited on you, and it didn't cost you much. I think the room boys probably cost us seven or eight dollars in their money which was, when I first went over there, twenty-five to one and then about thirty cents, wasn't it? Somewhere around there--thirty or forty cents. Well, it's, let's see. Cokes were three cents, hamburgers were a nickel, and you could get shoes soled for, oh, what, fifteen or twenty cents, something like that.

Marcello: Fifteen or twenty cents.

Sparkman: That was our money. And we got our uniforms made. We had tailor-made uniforms over there.

Marcello: I was just going to say that I bet you all had tailor-made uniforms.

Sparkman: Yes. Well, that was the uniform of the day. We didn't use, you know, the GI issue because it didn't look as good. What did we pay for them? About seventy-five cents for a suit, I think. One of the other boys are liable to straighten me out on it later on down the line . . .

Marcello: I see. Did you ever have very much contact with the other foreigners in the other compounds?

Sparkman: Well, I didn't but the Italians would come over and play



volleyball now and then, we got along pretty good with them. I think the French were over sometimes. But when we first got there in the Spring of '40, yeah, about May of '40, everyone of them had men at their legations, even in Tientsin. And the guys would go out, you know, and they'd drink a lot. And the English were there, and the English and Americans would usually end up in a fight. And either one of them would get in trouble. I mean, they'd end up in the brig because the officers were pretty strict about that. But the Italians would usually, tell our men, "Just go sit down." They'd take care of the English for them. (Chuckle) So you'd be out there, and there would be a fight with them, and the Italians picked the biggest men. They had some big ones, too, and they'd always do the fighting for them so the story I heard. I never did get in trouble. I didn't run into it, but I know they was doing it.

Marcello: Generally speaking, would you say the morale of the Marines at Tientsin was pretty high?

Sparkman: Oh, it was, yeah. I don't see how it could have been any higher. We were having a good time.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: Why not?

Marcello: Did the Japanese have a compound at Tientsin?

Sparkman: Yeah. But I don't know where it was or anything about it. They probably had a camp outside of town because they had

already gone through Tientsin and Peking and some to Shanghai.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: So they probably had their camp outside. Tientsin was a big city--about a million and a half I believe, at that time, wasn't it?

Marcello: I'm pretty sure it probably would have been that big.

Sparkman: I think it was. It was pretty good-sized.

Marcello: Also, I think for the record I might mention the Japanese now had been fighting in China ever since about 1931.

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah.

Marcello: Well, you remember they attacked Manchuria in '31; then later on in the thirties they moved down into North China.

Sparkman: Yeah, uh-huh.

Marcello: Now did you perchance ever witness any of the slurmishes or battles between the Japanese and the Chinese?

Sparkman: No. It was long gone by the time we got there.

Marcello: I see. Did you ever have any contact with the Japanese at all?

Sparkman: Well, no. I was on guard duty, and we went down to inspect some stuff that had come in from Chinwangtao, I suppose, in this supply ship, and that's the first Jap I ever met. He was with us for some reason--maybe customs or something. I don't know. That's the first one I ever saw. But they were there in the city and had men stationed in the city. I don't know where. It wasn't far from where we were because some of the guys were in a honky-tonk one night and got in a fight with some of these Japs, and the Japs locked them up. And we had a young

lieutenant there, I forget which platoon he was in. I even forget his name now. I'd remember if I saw him. But anyway, they wouldn't let the men loose, and he told them that he was going back and get a machine gun and put it in his pickup--I guess they had pickups then--and he said he was coming after them in about fifteen or twenty minutes. And he left and they turned the men loose; they didn't hold them. Well, he would have done it, I guess. He'd end up in hot water but (chuckle), you know, they believed what was said.

Marcello: You mentioned a while ago something about the foreign legations. Was there a legation in each one of the compounds?

Sparkman: Well, this was in Peking now.

Marcello: I see. In other words, you really didn't run into too many diplomats or too many members of the diplomatic corps in Tientsin.

Sparkman: No. I might have saw them, but I wouldn't know who they were because Tientsin was a port city.

Marcello: I see. It was a port city, right?

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: And Peking was just a little ways inland.

Sparkman: . . . legation city. Yeah.

Marcello: Right. It was the old imperial capitol of China. It wasn't too far from Tientsin, though, was it?

Sparkman: Well, it took all day.

Marcello: It did?

Sparkman: It was 150 miles.

Marcello: I see. Well, given the size of China it really wasn't too far, I suppose.

Sparkman: No, no, it wasn't. It was about a day's travel from Chinwangtao. We'd have to go down there too. We had a rifle range down there.

Marcello: I assume these places you're talking about are in the vicinity of Tientsin.

Sparkman: No, Chinwangtao is on the coast.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: That's where we come in on the way to Tientsin, and that's where we had the rifle range. And then from there we'd go on over to the Great Wall and you were able to see it from the rifle range there.

Marcello: Oh, you were able to see the Great Wall?

Sparkman: Yeah, uh-huh.

Marcello: What did you think about it?

Sparkman: It was a pretty good piece of engineering, you know, to be built so long ago. I've read a lot about Chinese history, and you stop to think how many lives went into it. There's a lot of history in that thing and a lot of suffering.

Marcello: Did you ever get to see much of China?

Sparkman: No. I sure didn't. Not as much as I would have liked to. I didn't see much cause to because I was just a nineteen year old kid. I wish now that I had toured everywhere.

Marcello: Was it pretty safe for a foreigner to travel anyplace in China at this time?

Sparkman: Well, I think so. I wouldn't a . . . swear to that. Of course, we were always in a bunch and in uniform. It might have been safe for us, but I don't know about anybody else. But there was a lot of people over there--Americans. There was one guy there in Tientsin who had retired there from the Army, and he had him a rug factory.

Marcello: Did you ever have any contact with any missionaries while you were over there?

Sparkman: No.

Marcello: None of them ever lived in the compound?

Sparkman: No. I might have known of them or somebody might have, but personally I just don't remember.

Marcello: But generally, then, you seem to feel that it must have been fairly safe to travel in the Chinese countryside.

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: You never heard any stories to the contrary?

Sparkman: No. As far as I know, the Chinese generally didn't bother you. Of course, I suppose if you got far enough out of the towns there were a lot of bandits--there's bound to have been--and the Japs might have bothered you, too, you know.

Marcello: Did the Japanese control the surrounding countryside?

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: It was all Japanese. This was a result of the invasion in North China.

Sparkman: Well, we didn't see them. We went out on extended marches and drills, you know. We'd go quite a ways into the country. We didn't see any, but once in a while you'd see some marching around. But . . . well, I guess we just weren't looking for them.

Marcello: But it was generally recognized that of all the foreign nationalities there, the Japanese ruled the countryside.

Sparkman: Oh yeah.

Marcello: Is that a safe assumption?

Sparkman: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Marcello: But they left things alone in the compound--in Tientsin itself?

Sparkman: Well, yeah . . .

Marcello: It was an international city? Is that what you would call it?

Sparkman: Yeah. Well, you know, until then they didn't bother anybody because they, I understand, were the first to want to ratify that agreement that, you know, they'd be recognized. And if it came to war, well, all their people would be repatriated because they were the weakest of all the powers that signed that agreement. But when it came time they renigged on it. They didn't honor it.

Marcello: Now what agreement are you referring to?

Sparkman: I'm talking about the Geneva Conference when they had it, you know, that you can't take prisoners-of-war.

Marcello: I see. I see.

Sparkman: As the case in the First World War.

Marcello: A while ago you mentioned bandits. Did you ever hear any stories about the Chinese bandits?

Sparkman: No. All I had done is just read about them. Of course, I imagine some of those older men could tell you a few, a few experiences I didn't hear anything about them.

Marcello: What do you think was the Chinese opinion of Americans?

Sparkman: Well, it . . . if you're a soldier, that's about as low as you can get. The Chinese don't like soldiers. According to Chinese ways, a soldier is . . . they're just sorry. They're as low as a human can get.

Marcello: Did they ever show their contempt for the military in any way?

Sparkman: Well, they might have if you could have understood them, but we didn't speak too much Chinese. Sometimes you couldn't hear what they were saying, but sometimes you could sense it. But all in all they're pretty . . . the ones you came in contact with knew you had the money, so they were going to be nice.

Marcello: I guess as much as anything you would say the relationships were rather civil and that was about it.

Sparkman: Yeah. Well, some of them were pretty friendly. There used to be one in Chinwangtao--this old man that we bought our groceries from--and he'd come out there on the beach early in the morning about sunup. When I was on guard duty, well, I'd go down there, and I knew he'd be down there, and I'd talk to him. And he had a real deep voice. And his accent, I don't remember,

oh, whether it was much different from anybody here or not. I just liked to talk to him. That was the first time I'd ever really talked serious to one of the Chinese. If you learn the people, you can go anyplace.

Marcello: Did you ever make an attempt to learn about the people and their customs and so on?

Sparkman: Well, yeah. I always did read quite a bit, and in fact, I'd read all of the time. And you got to where you could understand them and speak a little of it. Some of the boys got pretty good. One boy got to where they could read . . . I know he could read 300 characters, and he was pretty good.

Marcello: Did you ever learn to read any?

Sparkman: No. Well, I knew a few what they meant, but I didn't try.

Marcello: Could you get by communicating with the Chinese?

Sparkman: Yeah. I knew what they were saying better than I could speak it . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . a lot of times.

Marcello: Did you ever run into, or have any contact with, any Chinese soldiers. Well, you probably wouldn't have . . .

Sparkman: I didn't see any, no.

Marcello: . . . in Tientsin or the surrounding countryside because I guess, the Japanese . . .

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: . . . had chased all of them out.



Sparkman: They were up in the hills.

Marcello: You were saying a while ago about soldiers being sorry bunches. I guess those Chinese soldiers were a pretty sorry outfit, too, were they not?

Sparkman: Well, I guess they were. It's hard to . . . I think they . . . well, until recently they had trouble getting the soldiers because you know, the contempt they had for them. But, of course, that's all changed now.

Marcello: Apparently had a lot of trouble keeping them in the army. A lot of them would desert . . .

Sparkman: Yes, yes. Uh-huh.

Marcello: . . . and what have you--go over the hill, head for the countryside.

Sparkman: As long as they watched them they stayed there, but after that they wouldn't stay too long.

Marcello: About how long were you in Tientsin altogether?

Sparkman: Oh, around . . . it's hard to remember that. Say . . . from '40 to '41-42. I think we left there sometime in '42--the last part of '42, but I'm not sure about that. And I went to Peking then.

Marcello: Well, in 1942 the war had already started then. Right?

Sparkman: Was it '42? Well, if it was then we better back up.

Marcello: The war started on December 7, 1941.

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah. So we got there in . . . when did we get there? In '40? Seems to me that I got there in May of '40. I don't

know what date. So I stayed there about a year then, and I did about three months' duty at Chinwangtao at the old rifle range. That was a little extra pay down there.

Marcello: How come it was extra pay down there?

Sparkman: Well, you had to buy your own food right there. We bought from the merchants around in town. And they gave you so much for subsistence allowance. I paid for that. A man could really make the money then. Let's see, what were we making? They made \$21.80 a month.

Marcello: That \$21.80 went a long way though, did it not?

Sparkman: Well, yeah, unless you took it and went over to a club. (Chuckle) But anyway we was paid a little extra down there for our food and subsistence, and you could save money there. I think I sent home a couple hundred dollars while I was down there.

Marcello: Why did they send you from Tientsin to Chinwangtao?

Sparkman: Well, I volunteered for it. They needed somebody on guard duty down there. They had a bunch of . . . well, I'd call them huts. They were frames and half of it was thatched over with bamboo like they weave over there. And it had the bunks and mattresses, and the plumbing fixtures were still there. They had it fixed up pretty nice for a rifle range. And during the summer they'd even come from up Shanghai to use it and also from Peking, Tientsin. They used it quite a bit. They had rifles, automatic weapons, and hand grenades,

and so they had quite a bit of things down there. And there was an officer's club.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: So we had guards out. It just gave us something to do, and it kept the Chinese off of it, you know. I don't know how many acres were in it, but I imagine it was 100 acres or so. I'd see them down there--the Chinese--where they used to fire the rifles into the abutments. They'd be down there digging the lead out, and we'd chase them off sometimes--just keep them off of it, something to do. I don't know whether they were hurting anything, but they just told us to keep them off of it.

Marcello: I see. So you were down at Chingwangtao about three months. And then from there you were sent to . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . Peking?

Sparkman: Let's see. I think I stayed in Tientsin awhile. I believe it was in the last part of '41.

Marcello: 1941 is when the war started--in December of 1941.

Sparkman: Yeah. Well, it was in the fall of '40 then. So we came back, and I had to go over and draw my blues because I had never stood an honor guard. You know, we were supposed to have them, so I had to draw some of them. In fact, I had to polish them all up because I'd never worn them before. Well, anyway, we had a Japanese that was come in for . . . you know, just to

visit, and we had to turn out the guards for him--honor guard. And I didn't think much of him, you know. He was a typical Japanese.

Marcello: This was an officer?

Sparkman: Yes, uh-huh. We stood honor guard for him. They'd go down the line inspecting. And his name was Homma. He was the same Homma that was in the Philippines.

Marcello: Right. The guy who was convicted as a war criminal.

Sparkman: He was there. Of course, I didn't know him at the time--just another Jap. Of course, I soon learned who he was (chuckle), and it wasn't too long after that I must have volunteered for . . . I don't think I volunteered that much. They just sent me up there to Peking. They volunteered for me, but anyway, that's where I ended up.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: In Peking.

Marcello: What was Peking like?

Sparkman: It was pretty nice. There in the embassy where we were, there were nice barracks, tile floors. Our other one had been old wood over there--pretty run-down. It was pretty nice after being in Tientsin. There was kind of a garden between the barracks--in between the walls. Everything out there had walls on it. About six or seven foot high, and it had a small parade ground where they maneuvered. And the legation was on the other side of another wall on down through the garden

there. Well, that was our main legation where the diplomats stayed. I never did meet any of them--I'd see them--but they were over there. Then down the street was the Russians and the French and the Italians and all down the line. They just run down there. You know, I don't remember ever going down that legation street. I guess I have, but I just didn't pay any attention to it. But about three or four blocks on down the street there was a stable. There'd been the old horse Marines out there, and they still had eight horses down there. Headquarters had their trucks, I think, down there. It seems like they had something else, but I just forget. But we had to stand guard down there, too, as well as at Tientsin. That's where I was the day that somebody said the Japs had us surrounded.

Marcello: I see. Well just going back a little bit, it's true, is it not, that Peking was the old imperial capitol of China?

Sparkman: Yeah, it was. Of course, it had been several different places before. I forget my history, but it usually had been there. Yeah that was the manderin capitol.

Marcello: And at the particular time that you were there the foreign countries had all their embassies there. Is that correct?

Sparkman: Yes.

Marcello: Was the duty of the Marines there to guard the American Embassy?

Sparkman: Well, yeah, in case of riots by the natives. There wasn't any other thing but that. And our legation was . . . I think that

east of us was the inner wall--what's called a Tartar Wall. It was about fifty feet high, and about four horsemen could run abreast down the side of it in most places. And most of it was about fifty across at the top. It was still in good repair--a nice wall. It was to keep the invaders from invading the capitol about 500 years ago. But anyway we walked the post from the end of our legation down as far as the stables. We walked up on that. And we had a thing that looked like a sundial, and, of course, it was six foot up with arrows pointing to it, and if you went along the arrows, it told you who lived in that direction. And if you saw a red flare or blue one or what, well, we'd call the corporal-of-the-guard because they was needing assistance. And that's what we did up there. We did, of course, have to watch our flares.

Marcello: In what way would you have to watch out for them?

Sparkman: Well, I mean on this wall they had this diagram and an arrow pointing in the direction where they lived. And if a flare was fired in the air you could see it because you were up high. I suppose we would call out a platoon of men to check out what was wrong with them.

Marcello: Well, what I was getting at is what kind of trouble could those people possibly get into?

Sparkman: Well, the only thing would have been was a native.

Marcello: You're saying, that the Chinese . . .

Sparkman: Chinese.

Marcello: . . . the Chinese there didn't particularly get along with the Americans?

Sparkman: No, it wasn't that. It was that it was just a carry-over from the Boxer . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . Rebellion deal.

Marcello: This is correct. Of course, Peking was the center of the Boxer Rebellion. And you say there was quite a bit of resentment among the Chinese for foreigners?

Sparkman: Well, I believe there was. Of course, I never did study them (chuckle) and, you know, never did detect it.

Marcello: Well, how safe was it, let's say, to walk the streets of Peking as an American?

Sparkman: I never thought anything about it because I went all over the town.

Marcello: You did and nobody ever molested you at all?

Sparkman: No.

Marcello: Did you ever detect any hostility?

Sparkman: No, not toward myself. The only time I noticed it is when some of the boys wouldn't pay the vichsha boy. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. I see.

Sparkman: That's the only time they got mad at them.

Marcello: Did you like Peking better than Tientsin?

Sparkman: Oh, I liked both of them, about the same. They were all right.

Marcello: Was Peking a little cleaner?

Sparkman: It seemed to be. Our compound overlooked . . . our was the last one in the row before you came to the Imperial City, and we could see over the wall into the Imperial City and see the buildings. But it was kind of scenic. It was nice from where our barracks were.

Marcello: I assume then from what you have said that all of the foreign legations were located in one place. Is that correct?

Sparkman: Yes, Legation Avenue, it was called.

Marcello: Legation Avenue. And then there was the Imperial City beyond Legation Avenue. And I assume you were not allowed to enter the Imperial City. Is this correct?

Sparkman: Well, you know, I don't know. I've often wished I'd gone to visit it. I know about that time you could visit it. I think, there was still some buildings . . . but I just never did go out. I guess I had too many other things to do.

Marcello: Did you ever have much contact with the other foreign contingents at Peking?

Sparkman: No.

Marcello: How about the Japanese?

Sparkman: Well, you could see them everywhere.

Marcello: The Japanese were all over Peking?

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah.

Marcello: Was Peking at this time still out of bounds so far as the Japanese were concerned? Because around Peking they had also,



I suppose, taken most of that countryside, had they not?

Sparkman: Yeah, they had quite a few troops down there. I knew they had a camp site, and one of the men mentioned that they had 20,000 troops not far from where we were at. Because that morning I was on guard duty . . . it must have been about four o'clock, somewhere . . . one o'clock. It could have been around in there somewhere. The room boys started in pretty early, and they slapped one of them. And a corporal-of-the-guard said that one of them had called in and said the Japanese had slapped him. Well, we thought they just harassed him. Well, it wasn't too long there that a wireless had come through and said, you know, that the Japs hit Pearl Harbor and we was at war.

Marcello: What did you think about this when you heard this?

Sparkman: It was hard to believe. The corporal-of-the-guard told me that they was up the other end of the gate up there. Like I said, it was about four blocks up there to the main legation up to our compound. And he told me to keep off the walk. I told him I was going up to eat. And he said that they had the whole bunch up there. And I said, "I don't think it's anything to bother you." 'Course, they didn't bother me, but I mean they were up there. We knew that they would kind of get trigger happy, too, at times. You know, I'd heard of them. I'd had pictures of where they mistreated the Chinese. But they didn't bother us that morning.

But they did send word that at one o'clock they'd come in and take the compound--you know, they'd take over. So that gave us quite a few hours there to go over to the legation and burn all the papers, which we did there--a whole bunch of us. In fact, we hauled them out and burned everything we could.

Marcello: You burned all legation papers.

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: About how many Marines were there at Peking?

Sparkman: Well, I'd say there was about . . . like I said, at the last there was probably seventy-five to eighty. And between the two--Tientsin and Peking--I'd say there was 203. I saw the company clerk not too long ago, and he said there was 205, so there's a slight discrepancy.

Marcello: Well, around 200 then, somewhere around 200 in both Tientsin and Peking.

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: Well, I assume that it was a foregone conclusion that you were going to have to surrender. You had no chance at all against the Japanese.

Sparkman: No, we had 203 men, and we had three loose boxes of ammunition and everything that we had throwed in it. They made us bring that out. We shipped all the rest to Chinwangtao. And we were supposed to board that U. S. S. Harrison, I believe it was. The captain had an envelope--sealed orders--and he

wasn't supposed to open it until we got to sea. And we didn't know where we were going, so all of our stuff was down at Chinwangtao to be shipped out.

Marcello: But now you were at Peking.

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah. But all of us were leaving. Let's see, they walked in on a Monday morning there . . . well, a Sunday. It was a day later there. Wasn't it Monday there?

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: And on Wednesday we were supposed to leave for Chinwangtao, so we were that close to leaving.

Marcello: I see. Well, what did you think about the idea of giving up to the Japanese?

Sparkman: Well, that was pretty hard to take, you know. You've always been the "top-dog." It's a little hard to give up like that. I guess if they'd said fight we'd have fought. But, you know, there wasn't much use in it. And at one o'clock, you know, we was all standing out there at attention, and they pulled down the flag. It was pretty hard to take, but . . .

Marcello: In other words, this whole surrender was more or less conducted in a rather orderly process.

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah.

Marcello: It was ceremonial and so on?

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah. They, you know, gave us all the honors because we'd been doing duty with them, you know.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: So they just left us in the barracks, you know, just told us not to go out. The place ran pretty much as it did, and they put guards at each end of the barracks.

Marcello: I assume that they confiscated all the weapons.

Sparkman: Yeah, each one of us had a rifle, and I don't know what we had there at Peking because I hadn't been there very long, and I don't know whether they had machine guns or what. We didn't do too much up there. I hadn't been there that long.

Marcello: As Pearl Harbor approached, were you able to detect any hostility on the part of the Japanese toward the Americans?

Sparkman: No, not there in Peking. I didn't notice anything like that.

Marcello: Did you have much contact with . . . well, you said there were Japanese running all over the place.

Sparkman: Yes. Oh, yeah. Just on the other side of this railroad station they were just thick as fleas on a dog's back over there.

Marcello: These were mostly military personnel?

Sparkman: Yes, uh-huh. They didn't bother us as far as I know. They just didn't bother us.

Marcello: Well, how long did they keep you confined to the barracks in Peking?

Sparkman: Seems like we stayed there about three weeks.

Marcello: Did you do anything while you were there?

Sparkman: No. Oh, we was moving stuff in and out of the stable down there. I don't know what we were doing, but I remember riding

back and forth. And we'd make the Japanese ride on the fender. It was cold. (Chuckle) We'd make them ride on the fender. They were scared of us. You could holler at them or something and they'd run.

Marcello: The Japanese were scared of the Americans.

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah, with a rifle. They were scared of the Marines.

Marcello: Is that right?

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: For what reason?

Sparkman: Well, I don't know. I guess the stories they told them. One old boy was a corporal at the time . . . and they must not have had very much sugar. He come in wanting sugar and this old boy filled his cup with salt. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: So he come back with his bayonet at this boy, and the old boy just picked up a broomhandle and just chased him out of the barracks with it. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Now this is a story that I don't think I've heard before---that the Japanese were actually afraid of the Americans at this time.

Sparkman: Yeah, uh-huh.

Marcello: A little leary at least.

Sparkman: Well, yeah. Yeah, they were kind of, leary because, you know, Marines then, you know, did pretty much as you wanted them and nobody pushed you around, and you could get by with it.

Marcello: And even though they had the guns they were still scared?

Sparkman: Oh, yeah. They'd step out of your way, and you could push them like this, and he'd come back at that boy with a bayonet. But they were not too good on their bayonet practice. I've watched them. So he just took a broomstick and just outfought him with a broomstick and pushed him on out of the kitchen. (Chuckle) I don't think he ever bothered him again.

Oh, they couldn't get over the way those barracks looked. Those Jap officers would come up there, and they thought we were all diplomats, I guess. But they'd come around looking, you know, at the tile floors, and the head was pretty clean. The showers and everything were all nice for that part of the country. And I noticed one Jap . . . you know, they have a lot of gold teeth, and we had some PDQ there. That's what we use to clean. Instead of Babo and stuff we used that to clean up.

Marcello: P-D-Q?

Sparkman: Yeah. That's what we had in those days in the service, and I thought everybody had it. Well, it was just kind of a soapstone --pumice or something. You know, it was some kind of soap, and it was what the service used then to clean the rings out of the laboratories and just clean up in general. And, boy, he just shined his teeth (chuckle) with it.

Marcello: He shined his teeth with PDQ?

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: His gold teeth.

Sparkman: (Chuckle) It shined them too. He had the best looking . . . and I don't believe we stayed long--about three weeks. And then they took us to Tientsin. So we went back down there.

Marcello: What sort of supplies were you getting while you were in the barracks? Were you eating pretty well?

Sparkman: We had our own supplies.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: I Yeah, they lasted that long.

Marcello: But generally speaking, they more or less left you alone at Peking mainly because they were scared of you.

Sparkman: Well, that was the guards. You know, they didn't bother us. They didn't push us around. But they changed, I guess, when they started moving us.

Marcello: I see. Then you were there about three weeks, and then they moved . . .

Sparkman: I think.

Marcello: All right. Let's say approximately three weeks.

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: Then they moved you back down to Tientsin again. Is that correct?

Sparkman: Yeah, we moved . . .

Marcello: What did they allow you to take with you? Could you take your own equipment and supplies and so on, other than weapons?

Sparkman: Well, each one of us had a lot of baggage then and I. . . . We were fixing to leave, and I had a lot of things I had gone

in town and shopped for--carvings and laquer boxes and, oh, I don't know what all--quite a bit of stuff. And I had a good-sized suitcase about four foot long by two and a half wide and about the same thickness. And there was a storage firm in town called Brenner, a Swiss firm, so they let them take them and store them.

Marcello: The Japanese . . .

Sparkman: Yeah. That's right.

Marcello: . . . allowed Brenner to store . . .

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: . . . all of the . . .

Sparkman: Extra stuff.

Marcello: . . . gifts and the extra gear that you had accumulated?

Sparkman: Yeah. Of course, they went through it. They were supposed to search your bags to see if you had anything you weren't supposed to. They didn't search us too much then. You know, they were still letting us have our own way, and I had a hunting knife and everything else--binoculars and cameras. I had some pretty good stuff. But anyway, we picked out what we wanted, and then Brenner picked them all up, and we kept with us what we wanted to. I carried that big suitcase all the way through to about Shanghai. When they moved us from Tientsin to Shanghai, I still had it with me.

Marcello: You mean all this time you were allowed to keep this suitcase with these gifts and goods that you'd collected?



Sparkman: Well, this isn't the one that I had all of the stuff in. This is what I had my extra clothes and uniform . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . .and stuff in it I had in the barracks that we could keep with us.

Marcello: I see. In other words, you shipped all of your gifts and so on . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . to Brenner's, and you kept the clothing and the other necessities . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . that you figured you were going to need.

Sparkman: . . . that's right. And I had a pair of binoculars and my hunting knife hid in the clothes.

Marcello: Well, what did you think would have happened if they had found these things?

Sparkman: Oh, they'd just take them. Well, they did. I don't have that camera or the binoculars. I sure wished I had them; they were good. The binoculars were the best that the Germans made. I bought it from a German dealer in Tientsin when I was there. There was a German dealer there that sold cameras and binoculars. I've still got the receipts for all that stuff.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: And I think . . .

Marcello: I'd like to take a look at some of those things, if there're ...

Sparkman: I kept all that . . .

Marcello: . . . if there're available pretty close.

Sparkman: . . . all that, kept all that. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: But I've lost a lot. But anyway, as for the camera, of course, he wanted it for his own personal use and the binoculars, you know, that was wartime materials. But they confiscated that. But he did give me, oh, maybe the equivalent of five dollars for the camera. And so I had the hunting knife. I kept it all the way through.

Marcello: And they never did confiscate this hunting knife?

Sparkman: Well, they didn't find it . . .

Marcello: They never found it?

Sparkman: No, they found my pocketknife, but they never did find that. I'd move it around between pant legs and stuff. It was a good knife.

Marcello: Well, obviously, from everything that you've said so far, this is unusual because none of the other prisoners have ever said this. I get the impression that these North China Marines were more or less a rather elite outfit, is this correct?

Sparkman: It seems like they were supposed to have been. Maybe that's because we were there, and we thought (chuckle) we were, I guess. (Chuckle) Well, it was pretty good, I guess.

Marcello: Some of the other ex-prisoners that I have talked to, especially the Marines which were captured on Wake Island . . .

Sparkman: Yeah, well, I saw some of them, too . . .

Marcello: . . . the Japanese lined them up . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . stripped them of all of their clothes other than their underwear . . .

Sparkman: . . . well . . .

Marcello: . . . took all their watches and all of their other worldly possessions . . .

Sparkman: See, now those men had been fighting. We was in prison camp with them down at Shanghai. They brought them and put all of us together. They had been fighting, and they'd given them a hard fight for so long, and so they were mad at them, you know. They did treat them pretty rough, whereas they just captured us up there in the legation, and they didn't know exactly how to treat us because, you know, we was in the legation. And they was supposed to take us to Shanghai and, you know, let us go.

Marcello: In other words, you figured that . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . you were diplomatic personnel . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, yeah, that's right . . .

Marcello: . . .and they would send you back to the United States again.

Sparkman: . . . that was the agreement . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . and that's why we's going . . .

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: . . . to Shanghai. But in the meantime . . .

Marcello: You weren't too worried about things while you were in Peking . . .

Sparkman: No . . .

Marcello: . . . because you assumed that you were going back to Shanghai . . .

Sparkman: . . . that's what . . .

Marcello: . . . and from there you were going back to the United States.

Sparkman: . . . that's what our officers told us.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: L. A. Brown, you know, he was our Executive Officer and the man that wrote the manual for the Marine Corps up until then. Of course, that's what he kept telling us, and they sent us to Tientsin for awhile, and they was going to move us to Shanghai in the old Woosung barracks, the old Chinese barracks. Anyway, they moved us down there, but in the meantime about half a dozen of us . . . oh, I was nineteen then--young and in good health--and I made it up that I was going to escape. I knew about where but don't ask me now. I couldn't name the town. The Chinese town would have been about twenty-five miles from the line. And I had enough food; I bought it there, you know, in Tientsin from the Chinese. Before they shipped us, they let us buy stuff out of the town. Sometimes the Japs would go right with us.

Marcello: Now this is in Peking or in Tientsin?

Sparkman: Tientsin.

Marcello: Tientsin.

Sparkman: Before they shipped us out at Shanghai.

Marcello: Okay, let me see. You were captured in Peking, and you were there about three weeks . . .

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: . . . and then they shipped you down to Tientsin . . .

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: How long were you there?

Sparkman: It seems like we was there a month or six weeks, somewhere around there. But for a week or a few days, they kept us in an old warehouse there in town in a railroad yard somewhere-- the bunch from Peking. And it had, you know, just a brick floor to it and was just a big old tin building. And then they moved us over there with the rest of the guys from Tientsin. We stayed there about six weeks, and then they decided to ship us to Shanghai. Of course, we had to back . . . to go back to catch the ship. I think the U. S. S. Harrison was coming in after us. And, of course, our officers told us not to try to escape because it would be rougher on the older men if we did.

Marcello: Well, you thought anyhow you were going to be transferred back to the United States anyhow.

Sparkman: They said we were going to be repatriated anyway. That was an agreement and the Japs had agreed to it. They were the ones who got the United States to sign it. But they just herded.

us all in boxcars.

Marcello: Well, what did you do the whole time you were at Tientsin?  
You said you were there about a month.

Sparkman: Well, I guess we just cleaned up the barracks and just, you know, generally loafed around and talked. That's about all you had to do.

Marcello: Were you still eating fairly well?

Sparkman: Yeah, our food was still holding out.

Marcello: Were the Japanese still treating you with quite a bit of respect? And were you still treating them (chuckle) with a quite a bit of contempt?

Sparkman: I don't think they was even bothering us as far as I can remember. I don't know where they were. I guess they was down in our old guardhouse, and I never did go down there.

Marcello: And you said that on occasions they would allow you to go into Tientsin.

Sparkman: Well, no, not into it, but just across the street over there.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: One of them was standing guard where we used to go in the gate, and it was just about twelve or fifteen feet across there.

Marcello: And you'd go over and buy food and so on . . .

Sparkman: Yes, there were Chinese stores there.

Marcello: And the Japanese had no objections to this at all?

Sparkman: No, not then. We had our own money. And they was still treating us all right then.

Marcello: This is in the wintertime. Had you already been issued your winter gear and what have you?

Sparkman: Well, we had all of that stuff—overcoats--and our uniforms was wool. And we had fur hats that we wore up there in Tientsin and Peking.

Marcello: Was this a unique type of uniform? Were you . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . the only Marines that had this type of uniform?

Sparkman: . . . yeah. The fur hat was the only thing that the North China Marines had. It was made out of rabbit or something, I guess. You know, one of the Chinese made it. But all of us had it, and it had a special badge on it, and it was different from the rest of them, and it made you look a lot taller once you were wearing it. I know when we went into the camp there, some of the Wake Island Marines thought that was the biggest bunch of men they ever saw. Of course, they had on our own uniforms and those fur caps, too.

Marcello: Is that right?

Sparkman: Yeah, they thought we were the Russians at first. We all had on uniforms, and we still looked like a military outfit.

Marcello: But you were still keeping pretty warm and what have you. You had good winter gear.

Sparkman: Well, yeah until we hit there. There was no heat in those barracks.

Marcello: This was in Tientsin?

Sparkman: No, that was in Shanghai . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . in those old Chinese barracks.

Marcello: I see. But you did have heat and what have you in the barracks wherever you were . . .

Sparkman: Yeah, we had our own . . .

Marcello: . . . staying in Tientsin?

Sparkman: . . . we had our own source of heat in those two places. But down there, well, that was the end of the honeymoon.

Marcello: Was there ever any evidence that you noticed of the Japanese mistreating the Americans in Tientsin?

Sparkman: No, I don't think they did there. In fact, I can't even remember seeing any Japanese there--only the down on our gate that I was talking about. I asked if I could go across and buy something, and that's about the only time I remember one of them.

Marcello: Here again, just as in Peking they more or less left you . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . to yourselves.

Sparkman: . . . that's right.

Marcello: As long as you stayed in line, they didn't bother you . . .

Sparkman: No, they didn't bother us.

Marcello: . . .as long as you behaved yourself.

Sparkman: Of course, we could get by with stuff, and they still wouldn't bother us.



Marcello: You were still holding them in quite a bit . . .

Sparkman: Yes . . .

Marcello: . . . of contempt?

Sparkman: . . . yeah. They didn't bother us, didn't seem to. And, of course, when we got to Shanghai, well, they already had the barracks made up, different guards, and everything. And I guess they'd been schooled in how to treat American prisoners.

Marcello: Things changed . . .

Sparkman: Yes . . .

Marcello: . . . when you got to . . .

Sparkman: . . . changed quite a bit . . .

Marcello: . . . to Shanghai.

Sparkman: . . . yeah, I . . .

Marcello: What was the trip like from Tientsin to Shanghai?

Sparkman: Well, it was a rough one.

Marcello: It was? In what way?

Sparkman: I think it took about three days, and they shoved us into boxcars, and I know there was just enough room for everybody to sit down or lay down but one man.

Marcello: Well, how about your gear?

Sparkman: We stood on that or held it.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: It seems like we swung it from the side of the boxcars. We just had a blanket roll with us, and I had canned food and stuff of that sort in it. Like I told you, I was figuring on

making a break for it, because they were coming within twenty-five miles of the guerrillas down there. One was old what's his name, old Mao.

Marcello: Mao Tse-Tung?

Sparkman: Right . . .

Marcello: . . . did you ever have any . . .

Sparkman: . . . no . . .

Marcello: . . . contact with the Chinese Communist guerrillas?

Sparkman: . . . no, I didn't.

Marcello: But they were in the countryside, the Chinese Communist guerrillas?

Sparkman: Yes.

Marcello: Now Chiang Kai-shek's boys were nowhere around?

Sparkman: Now there might have been some of his men there, too.

Marcello: I doubt it, though, from what I know about history. In . . . I think the Japanese were chasing his troops.

Sparkman: See, they were fighting together then. They might have, yeah, because he was fighting the Japs, and we were supplying him.

Marcello: From what I gather, though, Chiang wasn't doing too much fighting. He was doing a lot of running . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . less fighting . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . I think a good portion of the fighting in China was

being done by Mao Tse-Tung . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, that's right . . .

Marcello: . . .and the Chinese Communists. Well, anyhow, so this is getting more interesting all the time.

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: So you're in this boxcar . . .

Sparkman: Anyway there was just enough room . . . I think they shoved all 200 of us in there. I guess they had two cars. But anyway, everybody sat down, layed down, or layed on top of each other. And one person had to stand up because I was that person. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. There just wasn't room for you.

Sparkman: I finally went to sleep, and I ended up with everybody's feet on me the next morning, and I never had such a pain right over my heart. I thought I was going to die. (Chuckle) I woke up and their feet was on me. (Chuckle) And about the middle of the day they'd make the engineer stop, and they let us out along on the tracks some and do what we had to do since this was in the countryside. But in some cars, they'd leave a door open when the guard was standing there, or there was holes in it, probably bullet holes, I guess. But I can remember meeting engines and trains when we would be in the railroad yards of these towns, and they'd be just full of holes. And the engineers on them looked like they was boys about twelve or thirteen years old. There wasn't any men on them.

Marcello: You figure that these trains had been shot up by the Chinese guerrillas?

Sparkman: Well, it was American planes . . .

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Sparkman: . . . what had been doing it.

Marcello: Well, now . . .

Sparkman: They had been strafing them.

Marcello: . . . this early in the war there were American planes?

Sparkman: Well, they were, yeah. The Tigers were . . .

Marcello: Oh, I see . . .

Sparkman: . . . down there . . .

Marcello: . . . the Flying Tigers, right . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, they were down there . . .

Marcello: . . . the Chennault's boys.

Sparkman: . . . they were coming in there.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: They went close enough by that they could hit them. That's right, really.

Marcello: That's right. I forgot about that.

Sparkman: Yeah, and they really peppered that rolling stock. There wasn't any old engineers; it was all boys. And several times during the night we could hear some shots, but I forgot the name of the town where we were. But that was where I was going to make the break, and they wouldn't have chased me because they was so close in. Somebody shot at someone during

the night, like I said. But we was just in old boxcars. I don't remember whether we had any water or not, but if you didn't have it with you, you didn't because the water wasn't fit to drink. You know over there you really had to be careful. And I think it took about three days. We thought it was rough, but in other places it was rougher.

Marcello: Apparently, the Japanese were not supplying you with any provisions. They were either hoping or . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . they figured that . . .

Sparkman: . . . we'd been going . . .

Marcello: . . . you had enough to keep you going.

Sparkman: . . . Right. We were still on our own . . .

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: . . . down to there. When we got to Shanghai, of course, everything was gone by then. They talked us out of trying to escape so we ended up there. We got in there, and it was cold down there. The temperature there is about like Mobile, Alabama.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: It and Shanghai are about the same, I've been told.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: Shanghai was about the same latitude as Mobile. And, of course, we was on Japanese rations then.

Marcello: Well, were you put in a regular prisoner-of-war compound in

Shanghai?

Sparkman: Well, at Shanghai we was in part of these old barracks that the Chinese had when they were there. It was old Fort Woosung, I guess . . .

Marcello: They must have really been something.

Sparkman: Well, it was just long clapboard buildings, tin roofs. Of course, they weren't double-lined or anything. The beds were just wide enough and long enough for a man to sleep on. Of course, we had a window on each side. And down through it was a hall, and on the other side of the building it was built the same way. I think there were ten or twelve of us on a side. That gave us seventeen inches of room to sleep in. Of course, the Japs could have made out all right, but seventeen inches was not enough for us. And, of course, we would stagger, and the next morning you would get up and the guy next to you would have his feet in your face.

Marcello: Well, by the time you got to Shanghai did you still have some of your rations left yet?

Sparkman: Oh, I can't remember. We must have had very little if any, because they hadn't fed us for three days. I don't remember them bringing anything in.

Marcello: Now is this where you met the Wake Island Marines?

Sparkman: Yes, uh-huh. Wake Island and there was some English there out of Burma and down through there. The captain from that steamship that was going to pick us up was there.

Marcello: The SS Harrison.

Sparkman: Yeah, his crew.

Marcello: Now when they had taken you prisoner in Peking, did they lump you together with the other nationalities there? I'm speaking now primarily, let's say, of the British with whom the Japanese were also at war.

Sparkman: No. We were left strictly to ourselves, and we weren't with any other bunch until we got to Shanghai.

Marcello: I see. And then it was at Shanghai where you got put in with this hodgepodge . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah.

Marcello: . . . of other groups . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . more or less. When you got to Shanghai, did they still keep the North China Marines to themselves, or were you mixed in with the rest of the prisoners?

Sparkman: No, we was in our own barracks, had our own officers . . .

Marcello: Was there any reason for this? Were they still regarding you as, perhaps, some of the elite troops or something?

Sparkman: I don't know. If they did, I didn't know it. We was a unit and they was keeping us more or less together. We still had our officers with us, and they were still demanding our rights. If you don't ask or demand them, you don't get them.

Marcello: I would assume that there was still discipline being maintained among the Marines. You were still obeying . . .

Sparkman: Oh, yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . your officers . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . .and so on. Now you hadn't found out yet that you were not going to be repatriated, did you?

Sparkman: When we walked in at the camp there in Peking we sure knew it. Well, let's see now . . .

Marcello: You, you mean in Shanghai . . .

Sparkman: . . . now, wait a minute. Shanghai, I take that back. No, we didn't then.

Marcello: That is when you first got to Shanghai . . .

Sparkman: Yes . . .

Marcello: . . . you were still under the impression that you . . .

Sparkman: . . . yes . . .

Marcello: . . . were going to be repatriated . . .

Sparkman: . . . yes . . .

Marcello: . . .and morale was still pretty high.

Sparkman: . . . yeah. Now I couldn't tell you when we found out we weren't . . .

Marcello: Can you remember your reaction when you found out you weren't?

Sparkman: It was the biggest disappointment that I'd ever had, and I've never been disappointed since.

Marcello: I assume that morale suffered quite a bit after that shock.

Sparkman: I imagine it did. It's been so long that I forgot. We had



too many other thoughts like trying to keep warm.

Marcello: You said that you had trouble keeping warm in Shanghai?

Sparkman: Well, yeah. We got there and it was pretty humid and the blankets, you could have rang water out of them, almost, because they had so much water in them. And there was no heat, and it was in winter. It was cold. And the men that was already there--the Wake Island bunch had beat us there--they didn't have as many clothes as we did. Lots of them didn't even have shoes. The Japanese gave them some of their old shoes, old leather and just hobnails on them, which weren't much for comfort. But you'd lay there at night, and all you could hear was continuous coughing. Everybody had something wrong with them, cold or something. But the second year, nobody had any colds. They didn't furnish us with warm water to take a bath; I never did miss a day unless they stopped me. Sometimes I'd have broken the ice--maybe an inch and a half or two inches of ice to take a bath--with a heavy bucket that I had, and you'd even get used to that, but I never did have a cold.

Marcello: What sort of relations did the North China Marines have with the Wake Island Marines and some of these other groups? The reason I bring that question up is that one of the Marines that I interviewed before, who had been on Wake Island, didn't have too much love for the North China Marines. For example, he said that the North China Marines wouldn't share

their food with the other prisoners--what food they had. Do you remember what sort of a relationship developed between your outfit and either the other Marines or the other foreign contingents?

Sparkman: Well, no. I didn't pay any attention to the others. I always tended to my own business. I just didn't pay much attention to them. I don't know whether they didn't like us because we didn't share our food or what we had. I don't think we had any food there. One of the men had about a half a plug of tobacco, and I remember he cut it up three or four ways, gave each one of us a bite of it. And I ate it. I was hungry enough that I could eat it, and it didn't bother me.

Marcello: You ate the plug of tobacco?

Sparkman: Yeah, I ate it. I didn't chew it. (Chuckle) And I don't think it made the other guys sick, either.

Marcello: It didn't? (Chuckle)

Sparkman: No. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Now when was this? Was this shortly after you . . .

Sparkman: That's when we first got there . . .

Marcello: . . . arrived at Shanghai?

Sparkman: . . . probably the first night.

Marcello: Things were pretty tough then.

Sparkman: I don't think we had any (chuckle) . . .

Marcello: In other words, you would say that this Wake Island Marine was exaggerating quite a bit because you didn't have any food yourself when . . .

Sparkman: I don't remember having any.

Marcello: . . . you got to Shanghai. Well, apparently not if you had had to eat a plug of tobacco.

Sparkman: We had probably a few cigarettes and some tobacco as well as I remember. I was smoking a pipe. And it got to where it tasted like food and, you know, smelled like food did.

Marcello: What was a typical day like in Shanghai? What was the typical day as a prisoner-of-war in Shanghai like? What did you do?

Sparkman: Well, let's see. You had to get up every morning and stand up and count off. They would check you to see if everybody was there. And it was cold when you got up. And then you went over to the cook's house and got the rice and they called it a soup. I think there were about six pounds of meat--seems like I remember somebody saying--for 1,500 men. That's a lot of meat; sometimes you'd see a chunk of it once a week. And then you'd get a cup of rice, a teacup full of rice. Of course, their rice was different from ours. Some days it was liable to be half cold if it had fallen out, and if they'd swept it up with the coal chips in it. Well, it was pretty gritty. And some days . . . I remember one morning they were serving rice, and he dipped in and he come up with a half of a rat in a cup of rice. The rat had been trying to eat at night, and it fell in and drowned. And this old boy says, "I don't want it!" And I says, "Heck." I said, "Give me that rat and the rest of it, too." And, of course, the next man, he didn't

care either.

Marcello: What did you eat? You just ate the rice. You didn't eat the rat, though, did you?

Sparkman: Oh, I don't know, the guy didn't trade with me.

Marcello: (Chuckle) Oh, he didn't trade.

Sparkman: Suppose I threw the rat out. But I did it. There was an old kitten in the camp there one day, and I was going to cook that, but one of these Chinese of the USS Harrison beat me to it because I saw the skin laying there to dry out. But, you know, I guess cat would be all right. When you get hungry, your stomach don't . . .

Marcello: Well, what did the Japanese . . .

Sparkman: . . . know what you eat.

Marcello: . . . what did the Japanese do to keep you busy here at Shanghai?

Sparkman: Well, let's see, what did we do at first? We worked around camp there for awhile, and I don't remember what period of time it was. It wasn't very long after we got there, and they was going to build a park. It was about three miles out there, so we'd march out every morning. And we would draw our picks and shovels out there. And we had a narrow gauge track laid like you use in an old mines here. And the box on the wheels would hold about a yard of dirt. So we was supposed to start out with four men and fill the box and push it around on this track. And it had some little old sluices on it

full of water so we was going to fill them up, and they was about five or six foot deep. We'd run the track on the side, and we'd dump it as we come along, you know, move on up to your position and dump it and gradually move the track across it. Well, I don't know how long that lasted. And then they finally got us down to three men, and then they got us down to two. That was about as far as they could go. Two men digging thirty-five yards of dirt a day, that's a lot of digging. And this Jap interpreter he had been in Honolulu, I think. I don't know definitely what he was doing. Some of the guys speculated that he might have been a taxi driver. But he didn't like Marines, I can tell you that.

Marcello: What did he do to show his dislike?

Sparkman: Oh, he'd catch you wrong, and he would hit at you with his loaded riding crop and try to slap you around or give you details that you didn't like.

Marcello: You said he had a loaded riding crop. You mean one that was leaded down or something?

Sparkman: Yeah, loaded with lead. He hit at me but he never did make contact, (chuckle). That bothered him, but anyway, he'd stand up there as we were getting little height to these windbreaks. I think they were about in our yardage about 400 yards long. We'd start at about six foot, and we'd build 'em up about thirty foot high. Guys would slope them up. And distance, when you got down to weighing around 110 pounds, it gets a little heavy. And, you know, you're hungry all the time.

Marcello: How long did a typical workday last?

Sparkman: Well, all day.

Marcello: Like from sunup to sundown?

Sparkman: Well, it was getting pretty dusky when they brought us in.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were removing dirt. Did you have to meet a certain quota?

Sparkman: Well, we were supposed to move thirty-five loads, I remember, at one time. Well, they was yards, you know, a yard of dirt.

Marcello: A cubic yard of dirt?

Sparkman: Yeah, yeah. And this old Jap was standing up there and he was saying, "Cart musta be full." A friend of mine and I said, "I'm not going to fill these things up. I don't care if he does catch me." Of course, he didn't go for it much. He knew I wasn't so he didn't either. So we pushed that thing, and that Jap looked over there and saw that I throwed just about a half a dozen shovels full in this flat. (Chuckle) Boy, that made him mad. (Chuckle)

Marcello: What did he do?

Sparkman: He probably hit at us with his crop, but he didn't hit me. I think he hit my friend because we loaded up, you know, so I didn't want him to get hit.

Marcello: You said that you were working from sunup to sundown. How many days a week?

Sparkman: Oh, they let us have Sunday off.

Marcello: So, you worked six days a week, in other words . . .

Sparkman: Yeah, I think it was . . .

Marcello: . . . had one day off.

Sparkman: . . . yeah, and we had Sunday off. They did respect that. And we had a chaplain in our camp, and I think he held church services. It seems to me like there at the last before we moved from there, it seems to me like somebody from in town, maybe--I think it was a Japanese--preached there, Protestant. I'm not sure about it. I'm pretty sure about it, but you might confirm it with other guys that you talk to. Well, we'd just do that--shovel dirt and building that thing, which we weren't supposed to be doing, because that was a wartime facility, a rifle range is.

Marcello: Oh, this was what you were building . . .

Sparkman: Yes . . .

Marcello: . . . a rifle range?

Sparkman: . . . well, they told us it was a recreation park. Of course, after we got it so far along you can't hide the fact of what it is. I suppose that thing is still there because that was a lot of dirt.

Marcello: (Chuckle) You hauled a lot of dirt while you were there.

Sparkman: Yeah, I'd like to go back over there and just see where it was.

Marcello: Well, at this time were they treating the North China Marines any different than the other prisoners?

Sparkman: Not that I could tell . . .

Marcello: They weren't treating you as any sort of an elite anymore?

Sparkman: No, we was all lumped together. And, of course, our clothes were wore out, and we didn't have any shoes. And, you know, we looked about as ragtag as the rest of them. They maybe gave us a few clothes because some of the guys didn't take care of theirs.

Marcello: What was the medical condition of the North China Marines?

Sparkman: Oh, well, we was all in good health. And we did have our own doctor. I don't know how much of the stuff that they were able to bring with them. I just don't know.

Marcello: How was, how was your personal health?

Sparkman: Oh, I was always healthy. I didn't get sick.

Marcello: You never did come down with any diseases . . .

Sparkman: No . . .

Marcello: . . . and so on in the prison camp?

Sparkman: . . . no, I never did. The only thing I ever had was chilblain.

Marcello: Chilblain?

Sparkman: You know, your hands stay chilled all the time, just before they freeze, you know?

Marcello: Uh-huh.

Sparkman: You get gangrene in them. I had it in my heels after awhile but . . .

Marcello: Is it kind of like frostbite or . . .

Sparkman: Yeah, that's what it is. Your hands swell up and you can't even close them no more than that. And it just itches when



you sleep at night, and you can just claw your hands and your feet. You know, just claw the skin off of them.

Marcello: I assume this came mainly from the cold weather . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . isn't that correct, working outside.

Sparkman: . . . prolonged cold and no protection. But I stayed in camp two days, and they slipped me some hot water and I soaked them. Hot water will take it out right away, but it comes back when you get out in it. And I remember one day we was walking out there at the rifle range that we was building, and we was coming back in. And one of these Japanese wanted a deal to heat hot water in for a bath. So there was a bunch of bricks laying there. When they came through there, they tore these houses up, shelling them, when the Japanese came through that part of the country six years or so before. And so he wanted each one of us to carry a brick in. Well, those old bricks was pretty heavy, and I guess they weighed five pounds apiece. We had been working all day, and you had to walk that three miles in. And they'd pass through you and see if everybody had a brick. So when he went on down to the end, I threw my brick down. Of course, when someone saw me do it about eight of them did it, too. (Chuckle) Well, when we got into the barracks, they lined us all up to see who had their bricks. (Chuckle) No, it was before we got there, just outside the compound. And they lined us up. And they had one guy we called "G-2." And I guess he was . . .

Marcello: He must have been a spy of some sort.

Sparkman: Yeah, he was a little tougher. He was mean for a Jap and a little larger than the rest of them. And we called him "G-2" because he checked on the guards, and I think he was the main guy that was running the guard detail. And he didn't see us with any bricks, and he lined us up there out from the rest of them. He had us standing up there, and he jabbered to us. He come down the line, and he'd slap us on one side, and then he went back up to the other side (chuckle) and slapped us alongside of the face. Well, I kind of rolled with mine, so he didn't bother me much. I was on the end. But some of the guys he knocked out. You know, you can hit a man very light behind his jawbone or right on it, and it don't take much to knock him out. Well, I don't know if the guys were mad at me or not, but, you know, I didn't do that. This one guy had caught me around a Jap. I called him "Cat Eyes." His eyes were slanted quite a bit.

Marcello: This was another Japanese soldier, Cat Eyes?

Sparkman: Yeah. And he was always after me. If we lined for inspection, for example, and if I didn't have my shoes fixed right, he'd point it out to whoever was in charge of it. And one day he wanted me to jump over the electric fence. He told me to jump over it. And I told him, "No, I don't want to do it."

Marcello: That's right. There was an electric fence around . . .

Sparkman: Yes . . .

Marcello: . . . this camp that was in Shanghai, were there not?

Sparkman: . . . yeah, this one was the one that was inside the compound. And the guardhouse was sitting about fifty yards over there. And they was all sitting out there talking and jabbering. Well, they'd thought it was funny to pull the juice on it when I jumped up on it. So I told him I wasn't going to do it. And he kept insisting and I said, "Okay." So I put my foot on one of the insulators, and I vaulted over, and that made him mad. He slapped me around a little.

Marcello: I assume that you had a name or that you had nicknames, rather, for just about all of the Japanese guards.

Sparkman: Well, I think we did.

Marcello: You mentioned "G-2" and you mentioned "Cat Eyes." Were there any other Japanese guards that stand out in your mind?

Sparkman: No, that's what everybody called those two. They were always looking for trouble. We had another little Jap, but he was just as friendly as he could be. He was nice. He gave the guys cigarettes all the time. And he'd talk to them. He was going to an English school in Shanghai to learn to speak English, and he liked to talk to us all the time, and he'd give them a little information. He was nice. You know, he'd treat you like a human being, and he'd never bother you. He'd treat you like a human being. He'd tell you to get back to work so he wouldn't get in trouble, but actually he wouldn't tell you to do anything. But the guys would do it to keep

from getting him in trouble.

And we ran across a few of them on work details that they'd send us on. We had another detail we was working on while we were there in Shanghai, too. It was at the old Shanghai racetrack. We were digging holes, but we didn't dig it too deep--about four foot. But we'd save the sod and cut it about six foot and a foot long, eight inches across, something like that. And we'd put that over the oil and the fuel and stuff that we was putting in these holes, which was in barrels. And it came from the Sun Oil Company and Humble and everything from the United States, stuff that they had confiscated out of Shanghai. And they was putting it out there so it wouldn't be bombed or set afire or something. And they brought in bamboo from somewhere, the biggest I'd ever seen. Some of it was, oh, I guess, up to, I believe, six inches in diameter. And we got some metal strips and put it in a bamboo frame. Of course, that was all they had to work with. And we'd start that, split the bamboo on a small end four ways. And we would start it through this \_\_\_\_\_ of metal, and it'd just split four ways through there. And then we'd weave that into big mats. I'd say those were thirty foot long and thirty foot square mats. They laid over that hole, and then we put this here sod over it. Well, we weren't supposed to be doing that but we were.

Marcello: Did you ever do anything to sabotage the work details and so

on, other than what you've mentioned?

Sparkman: Well, if a Jap wasn't watching you, you could get one of them leaking. You could turn it upside down so it would leak out. But one of these Japs who was on this detail had been a room boy over here in San Francisco. And he was in charge of us building roads around through there so they could come in there after that fuel. He'd take it out of there. We'd, you know, scrape it off with shovels--that's all we had, shovels--and just scrape the dirt off and mark it. We would dig down about three inches or slant three inches on the side. And he'd say, "Well, each one of you do that and ya'll sit down. If you see a Jap officer coming or a sergeant, get up and make like you're really working. I'm not going to bother you unless you bother me." "If you don't," he said, "I'm not going to bother you." And he'd tell us news that he'd heard, he didn't like it either. He went back over there with his parents, and he couldn't get back. He was just waiting for the war to end. So he was nice to us.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if there was much evidence of any compassion or feeling on the part of the Japanese soldiers toward the prisoners?

Sparkman: Well, he was alright. Of course . . .

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: . . . he was probably a United States citizen. He didn't want any marks on him when he came back. He was taller than I am.

He was about 6' 1" I'd say. And when he came out there, he was in charge of that whole detail. I think he was the sergeant. Well, our sergeants don't have to work because their sergeants didn't. You know, they have quite a bit of authority over there in the Japanese Army. They'd sit around in this here little building they had out there, and he'd laugh, and you'd hear him laughing all over that race course. And he couldn't speak English. Of course, he finally learned. And, you know, they knew a little, little Jap. And that was a pretty good guy. But now, he'd put us to work, and if any of those other Japanese lieutenants or something would come through and jump on us, boy, he'd get out there and chase them out. And he was just a sergeant, but he'd run them off. And one day I think it started raining or it was fixing too, and he went on and got some trucks from these other Japs and made them take us in.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any particular cruelties or atrocities on the part of the Japanese?

Sparkman: Well, no, none other than just slapping the guys around. The first night we got to Shanghai, some of them come through there, and they'd take them by the shirt collar and throw them over the back of something. We didn't like, but there wasn't much you could do about it. Other than that, you know, we were away from the war, so by the time they got back there, the grudges probably cooled off a little bit.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: Oh, we probably had some of them that would if some of the other Japs hadn't been around--like this one up there, that big sergeant. He was pretty nice. He'd take up for you. And we had another detail over at a garage not far from there where they worked on the trucks for the Shanghai area. I guess their motorpool. And the guys there would put shavings and anything else they could do in the motors.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: Leave the batteries out and everything, (chuckle) you know.

Marcello: These are some of the . . .

Sparkman: The guys . . .

Marcello: . . . methods of sabotage . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . that these guys . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . would pull on the Japanese trucks.

Sparkman: . . . they volunteered. And one of them was telling us one day that they had one little old Jap over there. He was about the size of a good-sized monkey. He was always skinny, and he had big glasses, you know, how the Japs are supposed to look. He was always there screeching and hollering at them down there. And they was talking about him one day. They didn't know what in the world he was doing. He didn't know even how to operate it. He lit up one of those torches, and he burnt right through one of those holes. And it blew the

tank out through the top of the garage, (chuckle) you know. I don't remember whether it killed him or what or where it hurt. I think it did kill one of them. And, you know, they was always talking about the silly things they'd pull.

Marcello: You were mentioning awhile ago that obviously the rations you were receiving were not very substantial. Just for our record, this was not a case where the Japanese were deliberately trying to starve you or anything?

Sparkman: I don't know. We weren't getting the same thing they were.

Marcello: You were not getting as much as they were?

Sparkman: No.

Marcello: You're positive about that?

Sparkman: Yeah, I am. And, you know, we were larger men, too.

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: You take a cup of rice. That's not very much rice.

Marcello: You were getting this three times a day?

Sparkman: Yeah, if you didn't do something they disapproved of, and then you didn't get any.

Marcello: Was this a rather commonplace occurrence . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . of crossing them and not getting your rations?

Sparkman: . . . well, I guess over the whole fifteen men it might have been. But they didn't do us that way too much. I remember one night of an instance concerning my shoes. They wanted fish oil on them, and I shined them, that's what it was. I



still had some GI shoes that was pretty decent, and I shined them because I had the polish. They didn't like it, so they took us up in front of the guardhouse and told us we were going to stay there all night unless something didn't . . . I don't remember. And it started raining or something, and one of 'em come in and went down the line and slapped all of us and sent us back to our barracks. But it was that old "Cat Eyes" that did it. I would have killed him if they'd caught him, but they shipped him out a day before. They brought in some new guards, and we didn't know what was going on, so I never did get to catch him.

Marcello: What was the thing most constantly on your mind the whole time you were in Shanghai? Food?

Sparkman: Yeah, if you let it bother you. I could be walking along and just smell anything cooking. Your sense of smell gets pretty acute when you do get hungry.

Marcello: I bet your imagination played tricks on your sometimes, also.

Sparkman: Well, I had a guy next to me who was a corporal. He let his imagination run away with him. But I'd dwell on that a little when I first got in, but as young as I was I knew that wasn't too good for you. And I did a lot of reading there. We had a library there in Shanghai. People from in town had sent them in to us. We had a pretty good library.

Marcello: When you say people in town sent the books, do you mean American civilians?

Sparkman: Yeah, they were interned, I think . . .

Marcello: I was going to say they were interned.

Sparkman: . . . actually they were probably more or less a house  
guest-type deal, I think . . .

Marcello: But the Japanese . . .

Sparkman: . . . for awhile.

Marcello: . . . did allow them to send books and . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . reading material in to you.

Sparkman: . . . yeah, yeah. And it seems like one Christmas they sent  
something in--cards, I guess.

Marcello: Were you receiving much news from the outside world?

Sparkman: Well, yeah. We had several radiomen, and we had a record  
recorder, and the guy made a short-wave radio out of it. I  
didn't have a piece of it, but I know some of them did. Each  
one of them would have a piece of the thing.

Marcello: You had to keep this secretly, of course.

Sparkman: Yes. And it was certain nights that they would put it together  
and hook in on short-wave frequencies and bands. I think the  
first time they put it together the Battle of Leyte was going  
on or just finished, and they got that news.

Marcello: Well, that was later in the war then.

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: The Battle of Leyte Gulf was near the end of the war . . .

Sparkman: Around in there or maybe it was the Coral Sea Battle but . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . the first one where we come out ahead, I think.

Marcello: In other words, you were receiving some news from the outside world then . . .

Sparkman: Yes, through the short-wave, yeah.

Marcello: . . . and you more or less knew what the course of the war was.

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: Well, let me put it to you this way . . .

Sparkman: . . . it sounded more like scuttlebutt.

Marcello: . . . when did you think that we were winning? When did you think that the Allies were winning?

Sparkman: Well, when we heard the radio reports there. It was our bunch that had the radio, so we knew it was pretty straight. We knew that one of us had it, and we knew who had it, so we knew it was pretty straight. But the Japs for a time had the radio up there, and as long as they were on that campaign in the Philippines, trying to take Manila, well, they had the radio over there in the barracks. But they knew we was doing something, so they took all the radios out. I think they had one of those short-waves, too. So they took all those out. We used to get Tokyo Rose all the time and stuff like that.

Marcello: Was there ever very much evidence of collaboration? Did anybody ever tell things to the Japanese in order to get special treatment . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . that you recall?

Sparkman: . . . not that I know personally. Some of them I know was doing it, but I forget the instances. It's been so long now. I didn't know about it at the time probably. In fact, our officers weren't on the up and up. That's why I didn't respect officers when I got out of the service.

Marcello: I had heard something from one of the other prisoners about one of the officers whom he suspected of collaborating in some way with the Japanese . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . he always seemed to get better food and . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . and better clothing, perhaps, what have you.

Sparkman: . . . well, they held an officer in pretty high esteem, too. Ours, I come to understand, they were giving orders to burn the money. I think it was about \$40,000 there because we had one month's paycheck . . .

Marcello: Payroll.

Sparkman: . . . and the payroll. And then we had a club that the servicemen had, and it was sold. And he was just keeping the money. And he kept it. It was supposed to have been divided up between the men. We got some of it . . .

Marcello: Now this was from back in Peking?

Sparkman: Yeah. We got some of it but we never did get all of it, just enough to keep us quiet . . .

Marcello: When was this club sold?

Sparkman: I didn't find about it until a few months ago.

Marcello: When was this club sold? Was this before the Japanese . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . took Peking?

Sparkman: . . . it must have been during the time we was locked up. I don't know . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . or just before. We was pulling out. I guess it was just before. You know, it kind of gets hazy after such a long time, and I wasn't paying too much attention to it. I was nineteen years old and, like I said, those officers had that money all the time. And I didn't know it until just a few months ago when we had the North China Marine reunion for the guys around here.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: And I didn't know it until some of the company clerks told me.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: You know, I should have figured it out, but I guess I was at the certain age when I believed everybody.

Marcello: Well, were there ever any escape attempts while you were there?

Sparkman: Yeah, in Shanghai there was. There was a guy by the name of Story, and he was married or living with a Chinese woman. He was more or less married to her, I think. He'd been living with her for a long time. And I think Bates was with him, and

I can't think of this other boy. I'd know him if I saw him. I can show you his picture there, but I don't think, I can't remember his name. Anyway, they all three tried to escape. Well, you had to go across the Woosung River and the Yangtze, I think, before you could get out of it in this peninsula where we were. And a few days after that they told us they had captured them, and they dug a . . . or told us they had captured them and executed them. That's what it was. And, of course, we didn't know.

Marcello: That they'd captured them where?

Sparkman: They said they captured them. Well, you know, it would be hard for a white man to escape because that country is just as flat as West Texas or flat as a table. And you can tell a Chinese from a foreigner--you know, the way they walk and dress and other things from a long ways off. But they had this woman, his wife, I'll call her, because I think she is married to him. And their inlaws, you know, they had the boat and the men they paid off to lead them through certain places. And I think this Story did get away, and he fought with the Chinese guerrillas and trained them all during the war. And he wrote a book, and I forgot it. I'll find out about it. I'd like to go and read it and see what he did do. These other two spent their time in the old Shanghai jail down there. Now I think it was pretty rough on them but they were alive. And I guess that's all they were counting on anyway.

Marcello: Well, I wonder how they ever made contact with the people on the outside to pull off this escape. Was this guy's wife allowed to visit him . . .

Sparkman: No . . .

Marcello: . . . or something?

Sparkman: . . . no, evidently they made it up before it all come to pass, and, well, I just don't know. You know, the Chinese, they're pretty good at that. And they was everywhere, and he knew the language, and he could talk to them. So evidently they'd planned it some way, and he did escape.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned some electrified fences around the camp. What were they like? Do you remember them?

Sparkman: Well, it was just an ordinary fence with three strands of wire around it, charged. When the grass grew up on it . . . you know, if it was damp you see it sparking, or if stray animals got through, you could see it. Once in a while it would get him.

Marcello: Would it kill a man if you got up against it?

Sparkman: Yeah, I think they told us it had 1,800 on the inside and 3,000 on the one on outside . . .

Marcello: But there were two . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . electrified fences.

Sparkman: . . . one was on top of that six foot fence.

Marcello: I see. Or six foot wall?

Sparkman: Yeah, a six foot wall, brick wall. And one night . . . in the back of these barracks, they had a wash bench with faucets on top and a tin bottom to it where you could wash your clothes or brush your teeth, wash your hair, you know, just like the Chinese had left it when they left there. And the camp electrician was standing on the barracks, and he was one of the civilians that was putting in the defense of Wake Island or Midway. Was it Wake Island? They had some of them there. And he was an electrician, so he put in the light bulbs and stuff in the camp. And there was one out on the back of one of the outhouses there for his barracks, and this Jap who was standing guard on the road outside the fence told him to put a light in it. He told him he couldn't do it. He said the fence was on and they'd take \_\_\_\_\_ his barracks. And the Jap motioned to him. I was brushing my teeth and listening at them, but I couldn't hear them, but the Jap pointed a gun at him like, you know, he was maybe going to shoot him if he didn't. And that guy pointed right here at his throat, you know, "Shoot me there if that's what you're going to do." The next thing that happened was that that Jap shot him right in the throat. I brushed my teeth, finished brushing them, and there wasn't much I could do for him.

Marcello: You actually had witnessed this, huh?

Sparkman: Yes. He shot the man in the throat with a rifle, he . . . he was dead before he hit the ground.



Marcello: About how far away from you was he?

Sparkman: Well, I guess I was roughly sixty feet probably.

Marcello: What did you think when you saw this?

Sparkman: Well, I thought as crazy as he is, he's liable to shoot me, and I finished brushing my teeth and went in. (Chuckle) And I told the guys in there that a Jap out there had shot that guy. Of course, they rushed out there but he . . . when he did shoot him, he raised his rifle up and lowered it, and I don't know. He didn't mean to but he did. I don't think he did. You know, he was just playing, but he was just a young soldier, too.

And the next day we didn't go out to the rifle range. Evidently we hadn't started it then. And we was making a baseball field. That's what they told us to do, and we did it. You had the energy to play one in . . . to play once in a while. We hadn't been there too long. So we was leveling off this field in front of the barracks, I think. And they had a guardtower. And they went over there and dug a hole underneath the guardtower and under the fence. And a bunch of Japs from out in town--you could tell because they had civilian clothes--they was taking pictures. So evidently they said the man was trying to escape, probably just a story they put out on that one.

Marcello: Did you ever have much contact with the Chinese? I'm speaking now of the civilians.

Sparkman: No. We marched through their villages. There was a couple of little villages between there. If there was a chicken that got out in front or a cat or something, well, somebody would grab it. Sometimes they have their wheat in little old baskets, you know, woven baskets out there to dry, and the guys would eat that before they got through. I got a little of it once. I kinda felt guilty. They probably didn't have any more than we did. But you'd chew on that wheat, and you'd chew on it awhile, and it was just like gum.

Marcello: Is that right?

Sparkman: And it was food.

Marcello: Did you ever get outside the prisoner-of-war compound very often?

Sparkman: Yeah, when we went to the rifle range.

Marcello: I see. And this is where you took the opportunity to . . .

Sparkman: Yeah, just get a handful of wheat. But the Chinese finally got wise, and they didn't put it in our reach.

Marcello: Did the Japanese have any objections to this?

Sparkman: I don't remember. It seems like they'd holler at them, but I don't think they cared too much.

Marcello: I guess they held the Chinese pretty much in contempt . . .

Sparkman: Oh, yeah. . .

Marcello: . . . did they not?

Sparkman: . . . they were just animals to them. Of course, you know, life over there is not too expensive anyway. As long as it's

not happening to an individual, well, they don't worry too much about the other man unless they're kin to them, and they worry about them a little.

Marcello: I see. Concerning your physical condition, had you lost much weight at this time or during your stay at . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . Shanghai?

Sparkman: . . . I think I was down to 110 pounds. I didn't weigh too much.

Marcello: What was your normal weight?

Sparkman: About 135 or 140. I was just nineteen. I turned nineteen in the prison camp, I think. And I grew about three-quarters of an inch and might have grown a little more if I had the food. But I was in good health, like I said. I never was sick.

Marcello: Apparently, there wasn't much of an attrition rate. Not too many of your people died.

Sparkman: Well, they were . . .

Marcello: I'm speaking now of the North China Marines.

Sparkman: . . . well, you mean while we was there?

Marcello: Right, while you were at Shanghai.

Sparkman: One or two of them, and some of them got killed . . . part of our bunch got killed in Tokyo up in that area in the last days of the war.

Marcello: Now while you were in Shanghai, did you ever see or experience any of the guerrilla activities that you talked about earlier?

Sparkman: Well, in a way. One day we was out on this detail on the

horsetrack there, which had been the racetrack. Well, we was supposed to be resting. It was a sunny day, I remember. Anyway it was pretty bright, but it was cool, and everybody was taking time to smoke, and they was sitting down there in this ditch to get out of the wind. And I was standing up on top of it. I think I'd quit smoking at that time there. Some people were stupid enough to trade food for cigarettes, so (chuckle) I was sacrificing. (Chuckle) I wasn't smoking. But I heard something that sounded familiar to me. And I was leaning on my shovel. I was always doing it if I could get by with it. And I turned around and it was an airplane. Boy, that was the prettiest airplane I ever saw. You know, a real sharp nose and, boy, that thing was streamlined. And he was coming in, and, you know, I never thought much about it. And there was a little old plane trying to get up from the airfield over there--a little old trainer that looked like a Piper Cub or something. And that old plane made a swipe at that plane, and it looked like it threw out a bushel basket of surplus. What it was, was a P-51. I'd never seen one before. He hit that little old trainer, and there was a big old bomber trying to get down, and he made a wide sweep, and he come and he knocked that thing down. But he didn't knock that little old Cub down the first time, and he hit him again when he come and made another sweep. And there was several other planes up in the air in the distance. And boy they were giving him a fit.

And they just disappeared in a few minutes. They was flying so far and they just had so many minutes--maybe five minutes over the target area--and they had to head back to Burma down in there. I think it was the Tigers. And that was the first time.

Marcello: Did that do wonders for your morale?

Sparkman: Sure did. Everybody felt a lot better after that. The Japs didn't say much. And this one that was the head of the detail then, you know, he didn't say anything or make a comment--the one that was from San Francisco. That was the first time they hit.

And the next time might have been the next day. Well, they had us over building some shelters for a Jap communications center there. I guess their main communications. It was a big European-type house, and there was serials everywhere. And they had this concrete pipe about six foot in diameter and four inches thick. And we was sodding over it and making shelters. We was out there working one day, and I heard this same thing, but it sounded a little different. This time it was, I think, a P-40, and they was mixed. They'd come in there, and it looked like there was about two dozen of them. And we was out there in that communications area, and those Japs come running out of there. They were jabbering and hollering and putting on their helmets and whatever, (chuckle) running for that shelter. (Chuckle) We'd just finished them, and here we are

just standing out in the open. (Chuckle) And over at this communications building those planes were . . . there was an airfield in front of us. In fact there was airfields everywhere, and some Jap planes were just going straight up. They would go just as high as they could, and one of them did get away. He just headed as far as he could. He knew they couldn't catch him too far. And they tore all those airfields up around there and everything. And those old Japs were hollering at us, "No look!" (Chuckle) But they run into the shelter (chuckle), so we had a field day.

Marcello: Now I assume this was late in the war, was it not?

Sparkman: Well, it wasn't too late, was it? When was the (chuckle) last year of it?

Marcello: The last year of the war would have been '45.

Sparkman: '45? Well, this must have been the summer of '44.

Marcello: About '44? Well, that's pretty . . .

Sparkman: The summer of '44 . . .

Marcello: . . . late in the war.

Sparkman: . . . because we still have a lot of story to go . . .

Marcello: Yeah, right . . .

Sparkman: . . . so I . . .

Marcello: . . . the tide had turned, had it not?

Sparkman: . . . yeah, that's about when they hit. Yeah, and it seems like that night this Harrison, they had it in the harbor down there in Shanghai. And we heard a lot of explosions. And you

see the stack if you got to a certain place there because the land is flat. And it was laying in the channel the next day. That was when the Japs told us we weren't going to go back. (Chuckle) "You sunk the ship."

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: And so that's when we found out. But it seems like we were out on the same detail the next day doing something else. We might have been starting another one. And I remember seeing six Jap Betty-type planes get up. I didn't know what they were then, but that was the only type bomber I'd ever saw, and I found out later they's Bettys. Well, they were going down around the coast of Burma. Anyway, I remember it was a battle because after I saw these planes leave, well, it was about nine o'clock in the morning. And late in the afternoon--it was about five or five-thirty--one of them come in. And he had one motor going, and when he hit he exploded. And that old Jap, he was up there hitting at us with his rifle, "No look, no look!" And that other one, I think when he hit, he crashed. And everyone of them, they went out and they got four of them. Two of them made it back, but they crashed. So that night they hooked the short-wave radio up, and they found out what had happened. They had had a battle down there, and they . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . got the reports. But six of them had attacked, and they

got four of them and two got away. Well, the other two didn't.  
They made it back to the field . . .

Marcello: And they crash-landed on the field.

Sparkman: . . . but that was a lot of fun.

Marcello: A lot of fun. (Chuckle)

Sparkman: Yeah. To the north of our barracks they had an airfield back there. See, it was half a mile, I think, back there--right in back of the barracks. Well, one of those planes one day . . . we was in the barracks and hadn't left yet. And they had us outside working, cutting grass or something. I remember I was in the back of it. And this plane, he come down on the field about three or four foot of it straight into those Jap hangers, and he strafed them, flew over them, and he come out. And that thing was coming right straight at me. And, you know, I was up against that wall, with that high tension wire on top of it. I was just standing there and he was coming right straight at me. That was one time that I was scared, but there wasn't anything I could do.

Marcello: Did you ever get the impression that perhaps these pilots knew that there was a prisoner-of-war compound . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . down there.

Sparkman: . . . yeah. Some of the guys that came in later was British or something, and they said that they knew . . . oh, it was a couple of pilots. That's how I knew. They'd been briefed on



it. They did have some American pilots, but I forget the boys' name; there were two of them. And they said they'd been briefed on it, and they knew we was there. And that is why that didn't really scare me too much. I sure hope he'd been briefed. As it was he was about fifty foot high and was flying straight at me. I know he saw me. I was the only one up there. The rest of them, well, they were down in the ditch down there. They was down there digging, and all they had to do was just lay down.

Marcello: What sort of medical facilities did the Japanese provide for the prisoners?

Sparkman: I don't know.

Marcello: You said you had your own doctors, but I assume that the medical supplies that they had were rather limited.

Sparkman: Yeah, I don't know that the Japs brought anything. Of course, some of the other guys might know.

Marcello: What do you think would have happened if somebody had come down with the appendicitus?

Sparkman: Oh, they'd cut him open, and I think one did. I think they operated on him. Well, the doctor had his own medical kit.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: And I think they had a little bit of anesthetics.

Marcello: I see. I was going to ask you . . .

Sparkman: I know they had some . . .

Marcello: . . . if they did.

Sparkman: . . . because I went over there. I had a tooth that was bad, and I told him just to pull it. I didn't know he had any novacaine.

Marcello: Novacaine.

Sparkman: I didn't know he had any. So I told him, "Just pull it out." I said, "It hurts so bad," I said, "I won't even feel it." In fact, it was hurting so bad that every hair on my head was hurting. (Chuckle) But he had some, so that's about the only time I ever went over there. Oh, I crushed a couple of these fingers. We was lifting that little old side track one day, and it had been raining, and I was in a hole. And when they moved it, well, I just slid, and the whole thing slid, and when I set it down . . . I can't remember now. But anyway, I could either hold it and crush my fingers, or if I let go of it, I figured it would have brokeed my leg because I was down in the hole. And that's why they were crushed.

Marcello: I assume they weren't sore enough that you could stop working, or that they allowed you . . .

Sparkman: . . . well . . .

Marcello: . . . to stay in the barracks?

Sparkman: . . . they didn't. They wasn't hurting them, so I didn't stay in the barracks . . .

Marcello: That's what I mean. You still had to continue to work?

Sparkman: Yeah. Well, you know, it mashed the nails off. The doctor just pulled them off. And they sure hurt. But if it rained

too much . . . they had the stables over in front of our compound they was keeping us in, and we polished shells for them.

Marcello: I see . . .

Sparkman: About three-inch shells . . .

Marcello: . . . polished shells?

Sparkman: . . . about three-inch shells. They didn't give you anything to polish them with. You just had to get sand off the floor if it was dry. And they had grass ropes, and they use a lot of grass rope over there. They tied it with wheat straw, rice straw. And you polished them with that. And I remember sticking my fingers in that cold water. Boy, they sure did hurt.

Marcello: Is there anything else that stands out from your stay at Shanghai that you think ought to be a part of the record?

Sparkman: Oh, not too much other than, you know, the planes circling, and it was a lot of fun to watch. Yeah, I almost forgot it. One night we awakened with some noise. I heard an explosion. I didn't know what in the world happened. I thought they was bombing the Harrison because they'd bombed it twice. The Japs did raise it, and they bombed it again about a week before, and I thought they was bombing it again. And, man, it was just explosions one after another. It was dark and these old barracks had brick walls around them. But it was five, I

think, to our right, and they was coming from the sea--the noise was. And you'd hear it hit, and you could see every board, glass, piece of tin in that barracks vibrate. And you could hear each one of those sound concussions as it hit. Boy, when it hits your ears, you shake. And it went on all night, and we got up the next morning and it was still going on--explosions. And we got up and there was cloth all over the barracks and as far as we went--three miles out to that rifle range--there was nothing but silk bags.

Marcello: Silk bags? What do you think this was from?

Sparkman: Well, there was a powder magazine out there, and I forget whether it was sabotaged or one of our ships came in close enough there and shelled it. I forget which.

Marcello: After awhile, did these air raids become a more or less daily occurrence . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . or were these harassing raids?

Sparkman: . . . well, yeah. They did knock out a lot of planes. And when you did hear one come in, you'd see every Jap airplane in the area take off in the opposite direction.

Marcello: They were no match for our latest fighter planes, I assume.

Sparkman: No, no. Their Zero was a far better plane, but I didn't notice any of them around there at that time.

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: But our planes could out-maneuver them. And I think they

could out-gun them, too, but they couldn't out-run them.

Marcello: I gather from what you have said that you were removed from Shanghai near the end of the war.

Sparkman: Yeah, the whole camp was moved. They started the first of June, I think.

Marcello: This was in 1945?

Sparkman: Yeah, this was when we started moving. Now they moved us back--all of us, the whole camp. Of course, we was all together.

Marcello: When you say the whole camp, you mean the North China Marines and the Wake Island Marines and the rest?

Sparkman: The Wakes and the civilians and everything. We was going to Japan. They moved us back to Tientsin for awhile, and we stayed three or four days in an old--what they call--"go-downs" out there.

Marcello: A go-down?

Sparkman: It was a warehouse. That's what they call them in China. And they kept us there three or four days, and then we caught the boxcar again. And you talk about first class! Boy, we was crammed in there, and we'd get water once a day, and we'd put iodine in it. Well, if the train lurched or something or somebody bumped the corpsman, (chuckle) that iodine would blister your mouth. But it got to where we would drink it, and it would taste so good that water was kind of flat.

Marcello: What did you put iodine in it for? Was that to purify it?

Sparkman: That was to purify it. That was the only thing we had to purify it with. We couldn't boil it.

Marcello: I assume you had to be careful how much iodine you put in there.

Sparkman: Yeah, it would blister your mouth and it would peel a little. But it wasn't bad at all.

Marcello: Do you know where they were taking you?

Sparkman: We were going to Japan.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: That's all we knew at the time. And I think it took . . . I forget the length of time now. One of the boys will remember somewhere along there how much time it took. We went from Shanghai . . .

Marcello: Up to Tientsin . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, back up on that trip. That's about 600 or 800 miles up there.

Marcello: Now this was by boxcar?

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: That was a pretty rough trip, I gather.

Sparkman: Yeah, you know, jammed in like you are and you couldn't rest.

Marcello: Would the train stop so often so that you could go . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . to the toilet and so on?

Sparkman: . . . once a day. You might be in the middle of a village, and that's . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: . . . where you went.

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: And everybody was standing there and looking at you. Of course, there that's common and . . .

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: . . . you get used to that over there. And they let us off in Tientsin for awhile, and we rested for about three days. And then we hit the boxcars again, same old deal. And there you go up through . . . I forget where the railroad goes but it goes up through Mongolia and up through there. And it goes up through Pusan, Korea. And that's where we were. And we went to Pusan there.

Marcello: Pusan, Korea.

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: Now is this in northern . . .

Sparkman: . . . south . . .

Marcello: . . . this is southern Korea.

Sparkman: Wait a minute, wait a minute. It's not Pusan. Well, what's the capitol?

Marcello: Seoul.

Sparkman: Seoul, that's where we were . . .

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: I was trying to think. That was one of the towns, I guess, we went through somewhere . . .

Marcello: That was quite a trip, then, wasn't it?

Sparkman: Yeah, it was pretty long. We got to see a lot of country. So we went through up through Mongolia and Manchuria, and I think we come through what's now part of North Korea, and then into Seoul. It was pretty rugged country, alright. It was pretty high hills and up and down. But anyway, they put us in some old barracks there, and it was raining. It was raining when we got there. It started raining. And the barracks had a leak in them, so we had to fix that. It was cold.

Marcello: Did the morale drop pretty low during this long trip? This must have been well over 1,000 miles, wasn't it?

Sparkman: Oh, yeah, I don't know how long the trip was.

Marcello: Were you on pretty short rations on this trip?

Sparkman: I don't even remember eating. I don't know what we had. The water was the main thing that I remember.

Marcello: And how long did the trip take altogether from the time you left Shanghai until the time you got to Seoul?

Sparkman: The whole trip took a month before we ended up. Those things don't travel as fast at night.

Marcello: Well, you obviously must have been getting some sleep along the way . . .

Sparkman: At night they didn't travel, I don't think. Yeah, but I can't remember what it was. Oh, we had some Red Cross packages that had come in, and they did distribute them then.

Marcello: Did you get very many Red Cross packages while you were at Shanghai?



Sparkman: Seems like we got three or four of them. Seems like we got about four of them. Of course, there was a lot more of them there . . .

Marcello: I was going to say . . .

Sparkman: . . . but the Japs was taking their part, too.

Marcello: . . . right. I was going to ask you if even the packages you'd received . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . had things removed from them?

Sparkman: . . . no, they'd give us a full package. It sure was good. (Chuckle) That's what we ate on, I think when we left there. And anyway, we stayed three days on that, so then they took us down to the wharves and had us load salt on our ship.

Marcello: Now where were these wharves?

Sparkman: Down in Seoul or wherever its called. Anyway, we was on the docks. And there was salt that they were mining there and shipping to Japan. I think it's eighty miles across there, or 100, across from there over to the southern tip of Japan. So they was going to get their work out of us . . .

Marcello: Well, if you were along the coast then, you must have been at Pusan rather than Seoul because Seoul is kind of up near the thirty-eighth parallel . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . Pusan is the city along the coast.

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: Right, okay.

Sparkman: . . . we'll get this straight (chuckle) in a minute.

Marcello: When you mentioned Seoul, I knew that that was farther north, and it was inland a little bit . . .

Sparkman: That's right . . .

Marcello: . . . okay, Pusan, right. I thought that was what you were talking about . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, I was trying to think of it . . .

Marcello: . . . awhile ago . . .

Sparkman: . . . I have it pictured in my mind . . .

Marcello: . . . right . . .

Sparkman: . . . but I . . .

Marcello: . . . that's okay. It happened a long time ago and we got it straight now, so . . .

Sparkman: Anyway, they had us loading this ship with salt, and some of us wasn't doing anything. So we were supposed to work there only three days, and I forget what the other guys were doing. Anyway, when we started to move camp, well, we had a working detail. Well, I got on that for some reason. I guess somebody had pointed a finger at me and said, "Go." But when we started to leave camp each one of us got our own . . . you know, from our experience we had bottles and whatever we could fill filled up with water--water we had boiled so we could have enough water to drink.

Marcello: I assume that after awhile you learned to live with what was available . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . make maximum use of what was available.

Sparkman: . . . yeah. And we was loading the ship. I was on that detail. And there was quite a bit of stuff to load whatever we was loading. And some of them werent doing anything except sitting around. So we worked and I remember I sat my water down and told somebody to watch it. And it was nine-thirty or ten--seems like it was pretty late--and I went back to get a drink of water, and somebody had drank it. And I was pretty unhappy about that. He wouldn't tell me who did it because I would have probably done something drastic to that person.

Marcello: I would assume that at that stage, when something like that did happen, tempers became a little short.

Sparkman: Yeah. If I had to kill a man then, it wouldn't matter. I would have done it easier then than I would stepping on a bug now.

Marcello: I'm sure you probably would have. Was there ever quite a few fights among the prisoners . . .

Sparkman: No . . .

Marcello: . . . and so on?

Sparkman: . . . surprisingly not. I never saw but about one, and you know, they wouldn't hold a grudge anyway. All of you are in the same boat, so to speak. You know, it just flares up and then probably they would forget it. I did. I never did hold a grudge against anybody anyway--never did and haven't yet.

But anyway, boy, I was thirsty, and there was no water either. The Japs didn't give us any water, and I wouldn't drink it if they did, but they wouldn't give us any. So we had to go on ship. That was way late at night, and we was going across from there over to the southern tip of Japan . . .

Marcello: You were on your way to Japan?

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: Now did you still have your suitcase with you or your . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . or your case?

Sparkman: . . . I don't know where it was at that time. They probably stored it somewhere. We just had what we could carry. That wasn't very much. And we started across there. And anyway, I'd worked most of that day, and then at night I didn't get any water. We was going to cross it in the daylight. It started to rain a little bit, and the water was draining off the ship. Well, they had us all below in holds. By that time a lot of guys had diarrhea, and the old toilet up there wasn't working. You know how they do on ships. It was overflowing, and it was everywhere. And the water was coming off the ship, and we'd stick our hand out of a porthole, it seems like, or just a hatch going up on the deck. Of course, there was Japs in there, and they wouldn't let us all come up through there. But this water was draining off where I could reach it. Those who hadn't had a drink held a cup under there and got a couple

of drinks. Then there was a leaky steampipe going through the head in there and that was where I was talking about--where it was so nasty. If you could stand it in there, you could get water. It was leaking steam, and you'd hold it there for long enough, you could get a little sip of water. So, you know, we holded it up there--the ones who hadn't had a drink of water. So that was all night and all day that they hadn't give us any water. And an old Jap was going across there . . . they was doing pretty good because they let us go up on deck for some air.

Marcello: That trip probably didn't take too long, did it? Like you say . . .

Sparkman: All day.

Marcello: . . . it wasn't too far across there . . .

Sparkman: . . . it took all day . . .

Marcello: . . . all day.

Sparkman: . . . it took part of the night until late in the afternoon, it seems like to me . . .

Marcello: Well, I guess it did seem like a long time to you . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . but I meant that it didn't take a week or that . . .

Sparkman: . . . no . . .

Marcello: . . . much time.

Sparkman: . . . no, a day. But the Japs sure did get pretty excited, and every one of them was throwing on their life jackets and

everything. One of the B-29s was floating around up there somewhere. They were sinking ships over there then, and they'd picked one up evidently. And, well, it didn't happen, because we was all friends. Of course, they knew where we were, and that we was on that ship. But they didn't bother with us. They sunk some around there, you know. We didn't see them, but they got some of them in the area. And they pulled into the southern tip; I forget the name of this here town in Japan.

Marcello: Was it a big city?

Sparkman: Well, I'd say it was a pretty good little city. It's the end of the railroad there, southern tip of Japan. It's pretty important little city. And as we pulled in, we would look out the portholes and see submarines. It was a submarine base, too. They weren't going anywhere because they was afraid to get out there, I found out later. But they kept us on there awhile, and they finally went over, somebody did, in a boat and rowed out a five gallon can of water. That was the best water I ever tasted. Well, they finally unloaded us off the ship and took us on a short march up into town, and it was the local school. And that's where we was going to spend the night.

Marcello: Did you manage to observe much . . . this was at nighttime so you weren't able to . . .

Sparkman: Well, this was at dusk.

Marcello: . . . see the civilian population.

Sparkman: No, it seems like we went to the school. We was going to spend the night. And, you know, I don't remember whether we spent the night there or not.

Marcello: About how many of you were there?

Sparkman: They'd split us up . . .

Marcello: Well, I . . .

Sparkman: . . . I just don't remember . . .

Marcello: . . . think they probably had split you up. The reason I . . .

Sparkman: . . . well . . .

Marcello: . . . that was one of the reasons I asked that question because I know the Wake Island Marine that I talked to . . .

Sparkman: . . . all of our bunch was together . . .

Marcello: . . . apparently was sent from China right . . .

Sparkman: . . . yes . . .

Marcello: . . . over to Japan . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, some of them, some of them . . .

Marcello: . . . and apparently he missed Korea and . . .

Sparkman: . . . some of them were . . .

Marcello: . . . that route.

Sparkman: But we still had a bunch of them. But I know all of our men were still there, and I don't know how many of the Wake Island bunch was with us. It seems like they brought a train down, and we loaded on that night. It might have been the next morning. We loaded on the train--still not enough room. I

don't remember, but I guess we had water before we left. I don't remember about the food. I don't remember eating that day. But it was somewhere around the first of July because we had traveled all that day, and those old cars were wet on the bottom. They had washed them down. It was just old wooden benches, and wasn't anywhere to sleep. Guys who had beat you to the aisle were the ones that was setting down. I ended up as one of those that wasn't. And a bunch of us were like that. So we'd get under the seats--make the guys move their feet--and slide down under the seats. There was just about this much room there, and you could sleep under there. Of course, the floor was black. It was like that because of the coal dust, dirt ground into them. Well, we didn't get to take a bath, and it didn't matter too much, I guess. So we traveled that way. We was out of a cattle car then, but the shades were down in the cars, and it could have been that night. It could have been about the third. I don't remember where we stayed at any time. We might have even traveled all night. I remember going to sleep because I was pretty tired. And I remember about the third of July we stopped somewhere in some town, and they brought in a little cardboard carton like they get with their lunches. They make them to go, I guess. They had real small white coffee-looking things in it, and it had some dried grasshoppers, a little bit of rice, a few other things. That was what we had to eat that day. I'm pretty



sure it was the third of July.

And that night, we was getting pretty close to Tokyo, and we were going to change trains there to another one. Well, I remember when we went through Yokohama--or I assume that it was it--one of the boys raised the curtain, and all you could see was a ship . . . ships sunk, laying on their sides, and burning. They just had a big raid, and this was on the outskirts of Tokyo, I think. They probably have a big harbor there, too. But anyway, all you could see was these things burning. And, of course, this guy got caught, and this Jap hit him with a rifle butt. I don't remember whether it hurt him or not--probably didn't. I was sitting in the aisle and I could look out, you know. I was letting him be the bait. You could see fire everywhere.

And they got us off the train and walked us down under a subway. And we had a box--I remember now--we had a box about this size that we was carrying our stuff in. Each one of us had what we could carry, and, you know, it was pretty heavy, and we took our time. And the Japs was hurrying us down through there trying to get us to run, but I wouldn't run. And I guess they all got ahead of me and down through that subway. I never did see anybody. And I went a long way; I don't know how far. I thought, "Well, with white people around, it will be easier to escape, but being the circumstances it would be hard to do." I got up to that train, and they was boarding

another train. And there was a guy standing with a bloody head and cuts all over him. And they said the women back there had been throwing rocks at 'em . . .

Marcello: Throwing rocks at them?

Sparkman: . . . yeah. And they got cut. I never saw a person. All the way back, I just walked.

Marcello: You mean, they probably threw rocks and so on at them because of the air raids and . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . what have you?

Sparkman: . . . yeah. There was bodies still laying in the streets where we'd crossed or where you could see, you know, across the intersection when we were running through this tunnel. There was bodies laying in the streets, and they hadn't cleaned up, and they probably had had it during the day. There were fires everywhere. It was burning; the whole town was burning.

Marcello: But just by lagging behind you had escaped being hit by any rocks.

Sparkman: I didn't see anybody, didn't even see a guard. I didn't see any people. And the corpsman was patching them up. Well, we continued, and we was going to the other end of Japan now. I guess it took another day. And it didn't take them long to put us on the train and then on another boat because we were going to cross over to Hakodate . . .

Marcello: On Hokkaido?

Sparkman: . . . yeah. The name of the town we went to was Hakodate, and Hokkaido was the island. It took about a day to get over there, and that trip wasn't too pleasant, I don't think. I think the water situation was rough there. And when we hit that, well, we hit the rails again on a freight train. But it seems to me like that they took us to another town, and, boy, these barracks were bad. They hadn't been lived in in years. We stayed there a few days, building them up, fixing them up. And they took us up again, carrying us to different places. Well, what they do is mining over there, and they were just carrying us into the mines. And as we went across that island, it was August, and you see snow up on those mountains.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: And places where people was living you could see little old snow blades, plows, setting around. It gave you the impression that it was a lot of snow up there, and I think there is, isn't it?

Marcello: I believe so, right . . .

Sparkman: On that northern island . . .

Marcello: . . . yeah, that was the northernmost . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . of the four main islands.

Sparkman: . . . that's right. And Russia has the other island next to them.

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: So it gets pretty cold up there. But anyway, they kept us

there awhile. And it took us about a day by train to go back in there where they took us on that island. And it was a pretty island. It looks like West Texas, reminds you of it--arid in parts, flat, and dry. I think the one they took us to was Hakodate or the town nearest to it. So we had this mine waiting for us and the barracks. They'd built the barracks, and those barracks was built about six or seven foot up. Up in the air they had another platform up there, and ten men would sleep on a side--I say ten, but I don't remember exactly--and ten on the bottom. And you know, you get on a straw mat, pulled your mattress cover up with the straw if you had it. There I don't think we had 'em. We just had blankets and fleas. Fleas were as thick as a carpet there, and there was no way to get rid of them. We didn't care. They come out at night, and, boy, they come out, and you would itch all night. But anyway, we was in this little old place. That was about in the last of July or the first of August. And that little old mine, you go down in it . . .

Marcello: What sort of mine was it?

Sparkman: . . . it was a coal mine. They hadn't worked it because it was too dangerous for the Koreans. And . . .

Marcello: So you know what they thought of you then.

Sparkman: . . . yeah. (Chuckle) And you could go down there in that mine, and there were small supports on it, and they was so rotten. Dry rot, I guess. But they hadn't been used in a

long while, so they opened it up so we could go through it. And they had a Jap inspector. He'd come down there and inspect it once in awhile, you know, for gas and stuff. But there was water in the bottom of it. You'd wear your overcoat down there all day, and it felt comfortable.

Marcello: Were you issued a new overcoat or did . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . you have your North China Marine overcoat?

Sparkman: . . . no, I wasn't messing it up. I was saving it when it got cold. The Red Cross had sent some coats in and we got those, and that's the one I was wearing there because it was a little shorter, and it wasn't quite as heavy. But there was water about ankle-deep in that mine all the time. And, of course, your shoes didn't last long because you were wading in it. And it wasn't too cold then, but your feet was just as black as they could be, you know, just into the hide. In fact, I was back a few months in the States before my feet ever turned white.

Marcello: Before you got all the coal dust and dirt and what have you out of them.

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: What was your job in the coal mine?

Sparkman: Shovel coal. They had some little air jacks in there, believe it or not.

Marcello: Somebody was drilling the coal with these air jacks?

Sparkman: Yeah, or you could pick it up and drill with it if you got tired. Of course, they watched you and they wanted so much coal out. Two or three boys and I was standing by one of those flats, one of those old coal carts one day, and a pebble fell in that cart we was leaning on. And I looked up all of a sudden, and here comes about a ton of the ceiling down, you know, a big old slab. I guess it weighed about a ton, and it hit right on where we were standing. And, heck, I was six foot away from that thing when it hit that cart.

Marcello: I'll bet.

Sparkman: It was on my side, and it would have missed them, but that's as close as I come to getting hurt down there.

Marcello: You had quotas again in this coal mine . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . in other words, you had to mine so much coal?

Sparkman: . . . we had so much to do . . .

Marcello: You were shoveling it into the carts, I assume?

Sparkman: Yeah, and they would push it out, push it someplace. I think they had a tow deal to pull it on out. And when they got out they did have hot water for us to take a bath. But the old Jap sentry sat out there in front of the barracks off the road where it was coming into the barracks. They'd sit there and they'd sit on a bench in front, and when we went from the barracks over to the bathhouse or bathhouse back to the barracks, if you didn't bow to them, you know, they'd come

over there and slap you around and maybe tell you to come over there and make you stand out there at attention for awhile. Now one of them, he liked to slap everybody around. And I'd catch him when he wasn't looking and run across. (Chuckle) I wasn't (chuckle) about to bow to them if I didn't have to.

Marcello: What sort of a work day did you put in the mine?

Sparkman: Well, we got up early and they had roll call. And we went down and got our lamps. Right back of us they had a little shed back there where they issued us head lamps. This shack was serviced by Korean women. I guess they was Koreans because that's what they looked like. Young girls and a couple men back up kept the lanterns serviced, I think, for the other miners, too. And we was working there, and I forget what time we'd come out. It wasn't too bad. They didn't work us as long as we did on that other deal. And the food wasn't so good either. You got rice and you got seaweed. By then we were getting seaweed. Well, it looks like cattails, but they eat it a lot. It wasn't bad after you got used to it. They did have some green stuff cooked. I know once I think we passed a place up in the village. They had some horsemeat up in there with big maggots running out of it. They'd give you a little meat. But that was for the whole village, I guess. It was a big pile, and it seems like about five foot high and, you know, just sloped down.

Marcello: Of maggoty horsemeat?

Sparkman: Yeah. Boy those were big maggots. They were, I guess, a

sixteenth of an inch through the body and . . .

Marcello: Did you people eat any of this meat?

Sparkman: Heck, yeah . . .

Marcello: You did? Maggots and all?

Sparkman: . . . nothing wrong with maggots. I'd been looking for snails or anything. I saw an old boy one day . . . a salamander ran across through there, and he dug him out with something, and he picked it up and swallowed it.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what did you do to supplement your diet, and apparently you're answering that question now.

Sparkman: Well, I never did eat any of that other stuff. I'd tasted a bunch of snails at Hakodate. On that island, evidently, you know, they have big ones. Those northern places like that do sometimes, and they'd run big. But I didn't get enough, so I give them to a guy who had, you know, a few more than I did. He said they was pretty good--just big old snails laying.

Marcello: While you were working in these coal mines were you under civilian supervision, or were you still under the military?

Sparkman: Well, both. They pass down there and stand in front of the entrance down there, but they did have some inspectors that come down through there, you know, miners that knew what they was doing. We didn't know what we was doing, really.

Marcello: Did the civilians treat you any differently than the military?

Sparkman: Well, yeah. I think they'd boss you around, and . . . I don't remember one of them ever saying anything to me.



Marcello: Was there ever very many air raids on Hokkaido? I don't think there was too many, were there?

Sparkman: No, I don't remember . . .

Marcello: Because most of the cities are located on the other island . . .

Sparkman: . . . we were remote . . .

Marcello: . . . right . . .

Sparkman: . . . and were in between those mountains. That valley was pretty deep.

Marcello: Well, what I was getting at is, they probably wouldn't have been as quite as hostile, let's say, as some of the people that you encountered at that railroad station . . .

Sparkman: . . . No . . .

Marcello: . . . because they weren't getting bombed . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, that's right. Well, that was the women that was doing that.

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: You can't blame them, I guess, at the time. There was another incident that I forget when we first pulled in. We were still wearing our fur hats, I believe even on Hokkaido. And we stopped at this little old village at night. I don't know whether we was transferring or if we was supposed to be staying there that night. This Jap, he comes up there with a lantern. I remember him holding it up so he could see us. And he was looking at us and he said, "No wonder they say what they do

about ya'll. Ya'll do look mean." Somebody asked him why, and he said, "Well, they told us that for ya'll to get in the Marine Corps you have to kill your parents and all your brothers and sisters." And he believed it. He said, "Man, ya'll look mean."

Marcello: That must have been some of the stories that they were circulating about the . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . about the Americans.

Sparkman: . . . yeah. Well, I guess he believed it. He was standing back.

Marcello: Well, apparently working conditions in this mine must have been pretty terrible. You said that there was always the danger of a cave-in, and you were working in water and so on and so forth. Did you lose very many men here?

Sparkman: No. We weren't there that long, we stayed from the last of July up until the end of the war. But that wasn't . . .

Marcello: Well, that would have been August . . .

Sparkman: . . . what was it, a month or six weeks or so . . .

Marcello: . . . right, it couldn't have been any more than that . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . I see. You really weren't there that long.

Sparkman: . . . that's right. And one old boy went through there one day . . . it didn't seem like we'd been there for a few weeks because we hadn't been out of our barracks then. We'd

been working. And it was just a few days before they made us bow to them when we crossed back and forth there. And this one old boy he was always agitating them, and he come back in and said, "The war must be over. I went across there, and that old Jap was looking right at me." And he said, "He didn't make me bow to him, or he didn't come up there and knock me around or anything. The war was . . . the war must be over." And he said, "Something's funny." And the next day they changed all those guards and brought in some new ones. And we found that they'd dropped the atomic bomb that day, I guess, or it had been a few days before. But they knew it and we didn't, and I guess they had put the word out. And we was laying there at night, you know, after they hadn't bothered us, and we kicked all the louvers off the front door. We was up on the second story there, and they had some windows there, but they put a solid louvered board up there. They kind of slanted it out so a breeze would come in. But we couldn't see anything, so we kicked them off that night to see what they'd do. And they didn't say a thing. And we was laying there, and I guess we shouldn't have because there was a little old power station like they have around here, you know, transformer there on the ground with a fence around it. And it looked like it powered all that valley or served as a booster, and they had a light up there. And, boy, it was shining right in our face. And somebody said, "I wish somebody would put that

light out." And I said, "Well, wait a minute, I'll shoot it out." And I just pointed my finger at it and said, "Bang!" And that thing exploded right about then. (Chuckle) It wasn't far from it. It wasn't 100 yards up there. (Chuckle)

Marcello: What do you think happened?

Sparkman: It just blew up. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Just, just a mere . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . coincidence.

Sparkman: . . . yeah, just blew out at the same time. Nobody has set a charge or anything. It just blew up. (Chuckle) But anyway, it was funny. And the next day and with the change of the guards there was onethere I wanted to get. I forget who he was then. But . . .

Marcello: Why did you want to get him?

Sparkman: Ah, he had been pushing me around, I guess. You know, just like old "Cat Eyes," I wanted to get him, but they changed guards. They got smart that way because when they left I run across one guy that had been up there in Mukden or somewhere in Manchuria where they had some of the men. And they killed a couple of those because they didn't move them out. Somewhere in there they caught him in that vicinity and did them just like they did them.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if you had any scores to settle with some of these guards. Apparently, most of the prisoners had . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . picked out somebody that they wanted . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah, there was several of them . . .

Marcello: . . . to nail after the war . . .

Sparkman: . . . but they wouldn't let you go back over there for a couple of years after you got back anyway. And let's see, we didn't go back to the mines. We just layed around. And they went to bringing in food. And, of course, they didn't have much to bring in. They brought us some beer from somewhere--their beer. They have pretty good beer. They don't drink much beer, and . . .

Marcello: The Japanese brought this beer in?

Sparkman: . . . yeah. It was a good beer by their standards. I think I tasted some of it. The guys that liked it said it was pretty good beer. And they brought in some candy and stuff like that. They didn't have too much. And they brought more blankets in, and it was getting a little cold up there even in August. And if we wanted to, we could go down there, and they'd bring a village policeman. Like if we wanted to go walking, you know, they would just bring us back and interpret for us. And he'd walk along with us. We liked to walk some of them to death. We hadn't been out, and with this new freedom we would go where we wanted to. And, man, it sure was nice--all that freedom. And we got a wireless from somewhere. They had a wireless in town. And one of the Japs I guess brought the message down there that they was going to drop food to us.

Marcello: These were the American B-29s . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . or something . . .

Sparkman: . . . they got contact with us somewhere. And they told us that it would be a week or so before we could get out because they was having to clear a harbor of mines where they was going to carry us out down there at Hakodate. And so they put the message out that we was to mark the end of our barracks. You know, on the grounds, the end of it. But they said on the end of the barracks, so they put them up on the end of our barracks. (Chuckle) Somebody marked it. But the little Navy planes, I guess the Grummans or something about that type, come off the ships, and they could see the mistake. They flew right over and, boy, when they'd open those little old hatches, they looked like pretty good-sized then. And they was dropping coffee and stuff like that in mattresses like they had on ship. Of course, we was taking a beating, and they was putting it right on target.

Marcello: They were dropping this food . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . inside of mattresses?

Sparkman: . . . yeah. Of course, they was just coming in and just . . .

Marcello: This is unusual . . .

Sparkman: . . . dive-bombing it.

Marcello: . . . because most of them said . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . that the food had been dropped in big fifty-five gallon oil drums.

Sparkman: Well, these first ones come off the Navy, and they dropped stuff like that--food and hot coffee, you know, what they had in the Navy.

Marcello: Right.

Sparkman: . . . and they dropped them in. And they come through it all right. It seems like that was enough, but the next day the B-29s was going to drop, but they couldn't come in low enough. They had to be up pretty high. And we were supposed to, you know . . . the target was supposed to be this same area. Well, the Navy came in and dropped a few more things. And those B-29s came in during the day, and they were flying pretty high, you know, and they didn't look like they was small planes, but they didn't look like they was large. I guess they was pretty large. We never had seen any.

Marcello: You'd never seen . . .

Sparkman: No . . .

Marcello: . . . any B-29s.

Sparkman: . . . we hadn't seen any, so they didn't look small but they didn't look large either at the height they were flying. And all of the other guys was outside watching them drop it, and I just stayed in. Usually I didn't get too enthused about stuff like that. But the other guys did, and I just looked at it as it happened or something. But I was on one end of that

barracks, and I was up on the second story of it. And I heard those B-29s come over, so I just leaned out. And I could see one coming outside of the barracks, and he was dropping some little old stuff on parachutes. And they looked like, you know, about six or eight inches through and ten inches long. And that plane kept getting closer and closer, and it kept getting bigger, too. When that thing got down there where I could see it, it was two fifty-five gallon drums welded together. And I jumped down off that--I was barefooted--I jumped off of that thing. I run outside, and, the fence that I tried to get up on before and couldn't, I went over that fence. That day by the time that the drum hit--and it hit on this high line that came out of the mine that pulls the cars out--and it was full of chocolate, that drum was. And, boy, it smelled like a bakery. And two of them hit this little old lamp shack at the back of us. Those two girls were in it, and it killed them. It cut one of them's head off and the arms and the legs and just cut them up. And the package dropped in there. It happened to be cigarettes. And one old boy run in there, and one of them's hand was laying there. He picked it up and said, "Glad to meet you, ma'am." (Chuckle) And the cigarettes he smoked out of that bunch was bloody. One boy didn't want to smoke them, so I traded with him. I said it didn't matter to me. And they dropped those things all over those mountains. You know, we took off and went to chase them



down. And I remember . . .

Marcello: The Japanese didn't stop you at all?

Sparkman: No, this was new guards. They was just there to see . . .

Marcello: I see . . .

Sparkman: . . . nobody bothered us then.

Marcello: I see.

Sparkman: It was reversed by then. We'd take off, and they'd have to follow us. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Did you ever think that the Japanese might possibly kill all of you after the surrender?

Sparkman: Never thought much about it. They seemed to be afraid to or something. I never thought much about it. Oh, I guess I did, but . . .

Marcello: What were your own feelings when you found out that the war was over?

Sparkman: Well, after you've been a prisoner that long, it was just hard to express--have all that freedom and do what you want to, when you want to, all the food you want. That was when you could get it. We didn't get it for about a month.

Marcello: From what I gather, they kind of fed you gradually, did they not?

Sparkman: Well, no, what I was getting to, when they was dropping this stuff from the planes we come on one way up there in the hills somewhere. And it had been hit and busted open, and there was a can of peaches laying there. And there was these old leaves up there--pretty good-sized. Oh, they were about four inches

across, four or five long. We scooped those peaches out of there, you know, off the ground on those leaves and eat them. Boy, they were good.

Marcello: I guess canned fruit was quite a delicacy, was it not?

Sparkman: Yeah, it was. But I don't remember what all was in it, now-- cigarettes and, well, everything. Lot of the boys got sick from that. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I'll bet.

Sparkman: (Chuckle) They just ate everything that come. (Chuckle) And a little old Jap the next day, they'd get magazines, too, and one of them come in there bringing a bunch of books in. And he'd found them up in the hills somewhere. I guess they dropped stuff everywhere there. He was running all over the hills. And they had cans of little old powder in there, and they wasn't worth a darn. It was foot powder. And the guys didn't know what it was, thought it was foot powder. It was DDT is what it was.

Marcello: Oh, boy.

Sparkman: But they didn't know it. We was using it as foot powder, and there was a bunch got it. And I remember a guy saying, "What's foot powder for? We don't have any shoes." And they dropped matches and this old boy on the platform in front of me, he stayed awake all night because the fleas were so bad. He burnt a whole box of matches, those little old kitchen matches like they use in the big box going after fleas. And finally somebody discovered that that foot powder was DDT. Oh, we didn't

know what DDT was, but it sure did get rid of the fleas. And they were just thick as the nap on that rug.

Marcello: As you look back on your stay in prison camp, what do you think kept you going more than anything else? What do you think was the key to your survival? Have you ever thought about that?

Sparkman: Hard head, just determined not to let it get me down. What you have to do to keep going. Don't feel sorry for yourself. A lot of the guys got to feeling sorry for themselves in the prison camp and they are dead, too, now.

Marcello: Did you ever look very far ahead? Some prisoners said they lived maybe about a month at a time at the very most.

Sparkman: I found out just to the next day. If you got through that day it was okay.

Marcello: I see, just from day to day.

Sparkman: Don't worry about the next one.

Marcello: Did you ever give up hope that you would be rescued or liberated?

Sparkman: I don't think I did. I just began to doubt how soon, but I don't think I ever gave up.

Marcello: As you look back on your stay in the prisoner-of-war camp, would you say that the lowest point was when you found out that you weren't going to be repatriated?

Sparkman: Yes . . .

Marcello: From a morale standpoint wouldn't you say that was perhaps the

lowest point?

Sparkman: . . . well, yeah, I imagine so.

Marcello: And what do you think was the worst thing physically that you endured in prison camp? I was going to say that perhaps it was the train ride from Shanghai eventually over through to Pusan in Korea.

Sparkman: Well, no, just being hungry all the time.

Marcello: Just being hungry . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . the constant hunger.

Sparkman: . . . you know, the first few months it don't hit you much, but if you go getting the same diet day in and day out, well, it finally gets to you--eating the same diet. When you eat one spoon of rice . . . well, you know how when you have heartburn? Well, you eat one spoon of rice, and it will just burn your stomach and, you know, your nose will water, and it stops your nose up.

Marcello: Incidentally, what is the official designation of your unit? What unit were you in? What were they known as? Do you remember offhand?

Sparkman: The North China Marines.

Marcello: Just the North China Marines?

Sparkman: Yeah.

Marcello: And you were in what, Company D, was it?

Sparkman: Well, yeah, in Tientsin. Don't ask me what it was in Peking. I forget.

Marcello: I see. Is there anything else that you think needs to be a part of the record that we haven't talked about . . .

Sparkman: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . I'm sure there are things that you . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . have ommitted.

Sparkman: . . . I'll probably think of them later, but you know, that's the highlights, I believe.

Marcello: Sure. Every prisoners I've talked to . . .

Sparkman: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . always does this . . .

Sparkman: . . . yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . remember things later on.

Sparkman: . . . some of the other guys will think, you know, of a lot of the stuff, I think . . .

Marcello: I'm sure.