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Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Lawrence M. Brown
(Signature)

Date: 13 Mar 74

Oral History Collection

Lawrence Brown

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas Date: March 13, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Lawrence Brown for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 13, 1974, in Decatur, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Brown in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Brown was a member of the "Lost Battalion," which was a Texas National Guard outfit formerly attached to the 36th Division. This "Lost Battalion" was captured virtually intact by the Japanese on the island of Java in March of 1942.

Mr. Brown, to begin this interview, very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me where you were born, when you were born, your education, your present occupation. Be brief.

Mr. Brown: Well, I was born here in Decatur, Texas, 1914. I stayed around in Decatur until I was about twenty years old. Of course, that was back in the depression.

Then I went into the CCC's. I stayed in the Civilian Conservation Corps for two and a half years, maybe three years. Then after I got out of that I went to work for the agriculture people. Then I moved back to Decatur and joined the National Guard. I was working around odd jobs here in Decatur.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the National Guard?

Brown: Well, back in those days, you didn't have much money, and anything you could do extra to make a little money, well, you know, being an old single boy, it kind of helped out a little bit (chuckle). We met, I believe, four times a month, and we got paid a dollar a drill. Of course, that wasn't very much. They paid us every three months.

Marcello: Is it not true that the National Guard was kind of considered a kind of social club, also, for the young men?

Brown: At that time it was, yes.

Marcello: Was there a National Guard unit here in Decatur?

Brown: Yes. It was the 2nd Battalion of the 131st Field Artillery. We was the headquarters outfit for it. We supplied the communication and liaison with the batteries.

Marcello: There were three firing batteries, were there not, and the headquarters company?

Brown: Yes, and then it had a service battery which made us a complete, self-contained unit. In actual combat, if we had gone into combat at that time, we would have been supporting the 142nd Infantry, I believe it was.

Marcello: Now at the time that you entered the National Guard, did you have any idea at all that the country might eventually be going to war? Did you keep up with world events?

Brown: No. I was young and single and didn't worry about it. That was the least of my worries, was what was going to happen or anything like that.

Marcello: I'm sure if you did think about it--world events--your eyes would probably turn toward Europe rather than toward Asia.

Brown: They would have. They would have. Well, I guess so because . . . I didn't read much newspapers or keep up with world events. I wasn't interested in it.

Marcello: Now in November, 1940, the Texas National Guard was federalized.

Brown: I think we mobilized in September, 1940, and we stayed here in Decatur . . . oh, I believe we was here about a month before we moved out to Brownwood.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being mobilized?

Was this a serious matter, or still weren't you too worried about it?

Brown: Oh, none of us worried about it. We were all young boys, and we just figured there was not much to think about.

Marcello: What was the average age, would you say, of the boys in this Decatur unit?

Brown: I guess the average age of them would be about twenty.

Marcello: You were that young?

Brown: Yes, we were.

Marcello: So after you were mobilized, you went to Camp Bowie, I think it was, at Brownwood. Is that correct?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: What sort of training did your particular unit undergo at Brownwood?

Brown: Well, we went into more extensive training and maneuvers, and, of course, that country down there is hill country. We was on maneuvers every weekend, and after we were down there about six months, we figured we would be shipping out somewhere, but we didn't think about the Far East. We thought it might be in Europe due to the fact of the terrain that they had us on all the time.

Marcello: What sort of training did you receive here at Brownwood?

Do you know if it was thorough training or anything of that nature?

Brown: Well, at that time, I believe it was. Of course, we didn't know anything about the new, modern warfare, you know. Our weapons and everything was all vintage of 1914.

Marcello: You were using the French 75's as your artillery pieces, were you not?

Brown: Yes. Now they were modified from the old ones. I think the only difference was that instead of having wagon wheels to pull them, they were mounted on truck wheels.

Marcello: I think you had to split trail, too, did you not?

Brown: Yes, split trail. All of our equipment was 1914. Of course, when we was in Louisiana . . .

Marcello: Now this was before the mobilization, was it not? When did you go to Louisiana? Was that before or after you were mobilized?

Brown: Let's see. That was after we were mobilized. Up until we mobilized, we always went down the coast for maneuvers, but after we mobilized, we went to Louisiana.

Marcello: And from there to Camp Bowie?

Brown: Yes, that's right. We was in Louisiana about three months and then came back to Camp Bowie. After we had

gotten back from Camp Bowie, they gave us furloughs, and some of the boys got called back--I happened to be one of them--that got a telegram and was called back to Camp Bowie because they had the alert to move. When I got back to camp, all the old men--oh, I'll say in the ages of forty that we had with us, the old National Guard boys--they were given a chance to get out or transfer to another unit. I think the biggest part of them got out. After I got back to the states, I found out they had to turn around and then call them back to duty. Then we left in 1941, I believe it was, when we left Brownwood.

Marcello: For San Francisco?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Now, what was your particular function in this outfit?

Brown: Well, I started out in communications, communications sergeant, and they sent me to Fort Sill to communications school. I stayed up there three months, and when I got back to Brownwood, reported back in there from communications school, well, they made me mess sergeant, and I'll tell you that like to have floored me. I couldn't even boil water without scorching it (chuckle).

Marcello: That was apparently typical of the old Army.

Brown: It was, yes.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the National Guard, it was all a part of the 36th Division. Some time during this period, the 36th Division--and I suppose all other Army divisions--was transformed from the square division into the triangular division, and that's eventually how your unit was detached and ultimately found its way to the Far East, isn't that correct?

Brown: Well, I don't know if that was the cause of our unit being sent to the Far East or not. I know after we came back from Louisiana that then we were going to go into triangular divisions. We got the notice that because our outfit was such a good showing in Louisiana on maneuvers, that they pulled us out, and they were going to send us to California, and we understood it . . . well, we heard all kinds of rumors.

Marcello: I'm sure that the camp was one rumor mill.

Brown: Oh, it was. We thought we was going to get to stay on as Coast Guard in California, and then we thought that PLUM . . . we didn't know where that was, but everybody told us to be sure and take all of our fishing gear and everything. They said we were going to a nice climate and all that stuff.

Marcello: When you talk about PLUM, this was the code name given for your ultimate mission or destination.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Let's just go back here a minute. Before we go any further, I want you to identify your unit in full. Start with division and work right on down to the lowest unit. It was the 36th Division, and you take it from there. Let me put it to you this way. What particular batteries?

Brown: You mean in the 36th Division or just in our unit?

Marcello: In your unit.

Brown: Well, our unit consisted of 131st Field Artillery, which had a headquarters unit, Batteries D, E, and F, and then a service battery, and then we had a medical unit attached to us. I think the medical unit was out of Wichita Falls.

Marcello: All of these units are what ultimately became known as the "Lost Battalion," isn't that correct?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: This is what I wanted to get into the record.

Brown: Yes, well, there were a little over 500 of us in that unit.

Marcello: And most of these boys were from West Texas, isn't that correct?

Brown: Yes, West Texas. They was from Decatur, Wichita Falls, Jacksboro, Abilene. There were some from Amarillo. Yes, from those towns. After we got back off the maneuvers from Louisiana, that's when they busted the outfit up. They tore our unit completely up, and they brought in new men that we never had worked with or never had seen before, draftees that they had brought in there. Then it was made up of men all over the whole United States, but originally it was just strictly West Texas boys.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were sent from Camp Bowie in Brownwood to San Francisco, so you did know that your ultimate destination was somewhere in the Pacific. What were your feelings about going to the Pacific?

Brown: Well, really, I still didn't . . . it never did dawn on me. I didn't care until I got to . . . I believe it was Angel Island.

Marcello: Was that in San Francisco Bay?

Brown: San Francisco Bay, yes. We stayed there a week, I believe it was, before we left there. We were coming back from Angel Island one evening after a bunch of

us boys had gone to San Francisco, and we passed an old corporal. He had hash marks from his wrist to his elbow, and we hollered at him. He said, "Boys, you can go home and tell your mamas you've seen a soldier now." He said, "I'll tell you what, where you guys are going, I'm glad I'm not there anymore." We still did not think anything about it.

Marcello: Did he ever tell you where you were going to go?

Brown: No, he never did, never did.

Marcello: Well, you left San Francisco aboard the USS Republic, and your first destination, of course, was going to be Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands. As an old Texas boy, how did you fare on that trip on that boat?

Brown: I'll tell you what. That boat trip, they can have it! We got on that thing and got about three or four days out of Frisco--maybe not that far out--and ran into a storm. Well, everybody got seasick. I was standing up against what they call the bulkhead or the wall on the ship, and I was watching these old boys bending over the rail feeding the fish. I was laughing at them. I thought, "Boy, I'm not going to be one of them guys." In less than twenty minutes, boy, I was pushing them aside getting to that. I'll tell you

what, that liked to kill me before I got over that. But you know, I never did get seasick anymore.

Marcello: I guess you got your sea legs by the time you had reached the Hawaiian Islands.

Brown: I met an old boatswain's mate on that thing. Of course, I was staff sergeant by that time. We had a little better quarters than the rest of the guys did. He said, "Sarg, if you get right in the middle of that ship, that won't bother you at all." I never did find the middle of that darn ship (chuckle)!

Marcello: So you got into Honolulu, and you really didn't stay there too long. I think you may have had a very, very short leave, did you not?

Brown: Yes, I got to go ashore for three hours, I believe it was, something like that.

Marcello: During this very short stay on Honolulu, did you notice any military preparations taking place for the eventuality of war?

Brown: No, I didn't at that time. I forgot who went with me, but we went to downtown Honolulu, and it was just like walking down Main Street of Fort Worth, the way it was then, you know, and that's been some-odd years ago. We couldn't see any activities or any preparations being

made. Now there could have been over on the airfield, but in that particular area where we were, there wasn't any.

Marcello: Did you hear any talk among the civilians that you may have run into?

Brown: No, not a bit.

Marcello: You mentioned that you only had this shore leave for about three hours, and then it was back on the boat again, and you were ready to take off, I guess. Now when you left Honolulu, you were part of a convoy, were you not?

Brown: Yes, we had the Pensacola with us, USS Pensacola.

Marcello: This was a cruiser?

Brown: Cruiser, yes. Then another little old gunboat. It stayed out way in the distance, I don't know. The biggest part of the time, all you could see was just a mast on it, you know. As well as I can remember, those three ships, the Republic and the Pensacola and that little gunboat, were the only ones in that convoy. There could have been more, but that's all that I can remember.

Marcello: How did you spend your time aboard this ship after you left Pearl Harbor? Were you fighting seasickness again,

or was there any sort of training or classes or drills that you may have been practicing?

Brown: No. I was fortunate. After I got over that seasickness out of Frisco, I never did have seasickness anymore. We had a pretty easy life on the Republic. About all the formations we had to stand was evacuation drills every morning and night, and the rest of the time, you could do pretty much as you wanted.

Marcello: Somewhere off the Fiji Islands then . . . and incidentally, you had stopped at the Fiji Islands to take on fresh water and some other supplies. But nevertheless, it was somewhere off the Fiji Islands when you received the word about Pearl Harbor.

Brown: We were about three or four days out of Pearl Harbor, if we were that far, or that many days. We couldn't have been over a hundred miles because that old Republic only had one boiler, and you could drop a banana peeling over the side and stand there and look at it, and directly you would start going by it. That's how slow we were moving. Then they called quarters and told us then that United States was at war with . . . a state of war exists between the United States and Japan.

Marcello: What were your reactions or your feelings when you heard this?

Brown: Well, everybody was pretty low along about that time because we wasn't expecting that, but it didn't last very long. It kind of hit us a blow all of a sudden.

Marcello: I'm sure that you really didn't know the extent of the damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor.

Brown: No, we didn't then because they didn't tell us.

Marcello: One of the members of this "Lost Battalion" was Frank Fujita, who, of course, was Japanese-American. What was the reaction toward Fujita as a result of this Japanese attack? Was there any hostility or kidding or anything of this nature?

Brown: No, I don't believe there was any hostility toward him, and I don't believe there was very much kidding going on toward him. We just treated him like he was one of us.

Marcello: I think he was a sergeant, too, was he not?

Brown: Yes, he sure was. I'll tell you what our biggest scare was, though. We was getting pretty close to the Fiji Islands, and one evening--I guess it could have been one morning--off over the horizon we'd see some smoke coming up, you know. The old Pensacola, she took off and left us. She turned broad-sided and turned all her guns toward that smoke, and I thought, well, we

better start turning here, but we kept on steaming right toward them. Those ships kept getting closer, and we was getting closer to them, and that Pensacola wasn't even moving. We finally got up there close enough where they told us they was Australian ships, not to worry. They sure scared the heck out of us while they was coming up there (chuckle).

Marcello: After the word had been received that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, then, of course, your ultimate destination was changed. Originally you were on your way to the Philippines, of course, as a part of Operation PLUM, and now you were being diverted to Brisbane, Australia. Describe the reception you got when you got into Brisbane.

Brown: (chuckle) We got a good one at Brisbane. I think all the Aussies turned out to meet us down there. They went all out for us.

Marcello: These are the first Americans that have ever landed on Australian soil, I guess.

Brown: Yes, I believe that we was the first American troops on Australian soil, and we was the first American troops out there during the beginning of World War II. In fact, there was just a whole bunch of things we was first in along about that time (chuckle).

Marcello: Where were you billeted after you got to Brisbane?

Brown: We stayed at a racetrack out there. I forgot the name of it.

Marcello: The Ascot Racetrack.

Brown: The Ascot. Yes, that's what it was--the Ascot.

Marcello: What sort of quarters did you have there?

Brown: We had tents. Of course, that wasn't nothing new to us because we had lived in tents in Brownwood. The climate was wonderful, and we just had a big time. The Aussies took us in hand and showed us the town. Fortunately, I got to visit a bunch of the Australians' Army out in the, what they call, the boondocks. I went out there and spent a weekend with them. I think they're a fine bunch of people.

Marcello: How did you manage to get to spend this time with the Australian Army?

Brown: I met an Australian sergeant down on the docks and got acquainted with him. Then he invited me and another sergeant out there for the weekend. I'll tell you what, we had a big time!

Marcello: Now is this where you spent Christmas? The reason I ask you this is because I know you got to Brisbane on December 21, 1941, so this would have been just a few days before Christmas.

Brown: Yes, that's where we spent Christmas.

Marcello: Did you have a pretty good Christmas celebration?

Brown: Yes, we did. We sure did (chuckle).

Marcello: I've heard several of the "Lost Battalion" people say that this was one of their first experiences with mutton, and they really didn't care for it much. What were your reactions?

Brown: Oh, my Lord! When we got off that ship, they told us they had hot chow for us, good chow. We had our mess kits when we were passing through this line, and we got around there, and they began dishing up this here, and I looked at it and smelled it, and I thought, "Oh, boy, what is that stuff." It was mutton of stew of which they thought was the best in the world. I don't think a doggone one of them soldiers took any of that stuff. They had some bread and butter and jam that was out of this world. I felt ashamed of it later on for not eating none of that Australian food. That mutton, we couldn't go (chuckle).

Marcello: You apparently didn't spend a whole lot of time here in Brisbane. Did you do anything in a military sense while you were here? In other words, did you undergo any sort of training or anything of this nature?

Brown: None whatsoever.

Marcello: I gather from what you said that you were mostly on your own free time here.

Brown: Yes, we were. They were still trying to get us to the Philippines, and we started loading on one ship, on the Bloemfontein, down there one time, and then we got orders to get off of it. They started unloading again. The reason I know, I was on guard duty on the docks. Then orders came back that we were sailing again, and they put us back on the Bloemfontein, going to the Philippines due to the fact that this Dutch commander said he could get us through to there. I was a little worried about that. The second time we got all loaded back on and everything ready, well, they had orders to hold us. Then all of a sudden everything just went crazy, and we set sail for the Philippines. But we never did get there.

Marcello: Can you describe what happened? You mentioned that you were on your way to the Philippines, and I know that ultimately you were diverted to Port Darwin.

Brown: Really, I don't think that this Dutch commander had any idea of going to the Philippines to begin with. I think that what he had . . . he got enough fuel to

get him to Java, and that's where he was going, and that's where he took us. And, too, we might have had orders--I don't know--to go to Java. Personally, I think that the "Lost Battalion," when we got to Australia and then started going on up to Java, that we were "wrote off the map" then. Now what we had done, we had served our purpose. Little did I know at that time, but since I got back home and began to think about it and reading about it--all the things that have taken place--I believe that we were sacrificed to make the Japanese land in Java instead of Australia.

Marcello: This seems to be the general feeling of most of the people I interviewed, and I think that most of the records also indicate that this is a fact.

Brown: Well, at that time . . . now they didn't have a cotton-picking thing in Australia. All their troops was real old men. They didn't have any equipment. They had less equipment than what we did. For that reason, I believe that's why we were sacrified. Of course, for the United States, it was a good sacrifice. A lot of guys may not agree with me on that, but 500 men against a continent is what I believe they let us go for, which was a good deal.

Marcello: So you eventually ended up first of all in Port Darwin. Did you stay there very long?

Brown: No. I don't remember too much about that trip from Australia to Java. I was in the hospital all that time.

Marcello: What was wrong with you?

Brown: I had what you call a quince in my throat, and I couldn't swallow. I was in that thing about almost a week before that quince burst in my throat. I didn't get out much on that. The boys later told me, "Well, you didn't miss anything. You missed a few torpedos and whatnot, but outside of that it was a pretty good trip."

Marcello: You didn't know anything about the submarine scare that they had?

Brown: No. I do know that they mounted one of those French 75's on the bow of the ship. That was going to be our protection. They were trying to learn to fire it. They couldn't fire it when the ship would come up because it would drop back down too soon. They'd shoot about ten feet above the ship all the time, so whoever they had out there wasn't very good (chuckle).

Marcello: What sort of a ship was this Bloemfontein?

Brown: It was a merchant ship. They had some quarters in the bow and some in about the middle of it, but it was a merchant ship. That's all it was.

Marcello: Was it better or worse than the Republic?

Brown: Well, I believe it was better. It wasn't near as crowded, and it was a lot faster. That thing sure could get up and run. I believe it was a lot better.

Marcello: Now ultimately, of course, you ended up at Surabaja, in Java. What were your reactions when you found out that you were landing in Java?

Brown: Well, when we got off that ship, I thought, "Oh, my Lord! What have we run into here?" Couldn't talk their language, couldn't understand them. Sometimes you could make them understand by sign language. Very few Dutch were down there to greet us. Really, I don't think they wanted us on that island in the first place.

Marcello: What makes you think that?

Brown: Well, I don't know. Just the way they acted and what they did to us. I really don't think they wanted us on that island.

Marcello: What were some of the things they did?

Brown: They just wouldn't have a cotton picking thing to do with us. The natives . . . you could get along with the natives a lot easier than you could some of those Dutchmen.

Marcello: I've heard it said that Dutch really didn't want to put up too much resistance because they figured if they didn't put up any resistance, there would be very little damage done on the island, and the Japanese might treat them better when the Japanese ultimately conquered the island. Apparently the Dutch had already given up, virtually.

Brown: Well, yes. You see, when we landed there and got off the ship and we got up to Singosari, well, the Dutch kept telling us about they had a brigade of men over here and a regiment over here and that we would be maybe the third or fourth line of defense. But we found out what their brigade was. Their brigade was a company of about fifteen men and their regiment was about five. Well, that put us right up on the front lines all the time. Those natives, well, when they got into action, well, they pulled off all their uniforms and went native.

Marcello: The natives were really loyal to nobody.

Brown: No. From what accounts I've seen and had with those natives over there, I don't believe they cared who their ruler was. It was immaterial to them. As long as they got enough food to eat that day, well, they was contented.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you went up to a Singosari.

Brown: Yes. That was an air base that we stayed at.

Marcello: Well, wasn't the air base at Malang, or was the air base close to Malang?

Brown: It was close to Malang. Singosari was the air base for the Dutch army.

Marcello: And this was your ultimate destination after you landed at Surabaja. You didn't stay at Surabaja too long, did you?

Brown: No. We unloaded and went right on up there.

Marcello: You went there by truck?

Brown: By truck, yes.

Marcello: Was this an uneventful trip?

Brown: As best I can remember, it was.

Marcello: What were your impressions of the terrain.

Brown: You know, it reminded me a whole lot of Texas, right around in here--that part of the country did--outside of being hot and rainy. I thought it was a beautiful country right around in there, I sure did. Malang was a beautiful town. The Dutch kept it clean, and it was just as clean as it could be--no trash, no filth, no dirt, no nothing scattered around over the streets or anything. It was clean.

Marcello: Now was this up in the highlands?

Brown: Yes, it was.

Marcello: It was back off the coast?

Brown: Back off the coast, yes. I don't remember how many kilometers it was, but it was way back off the coast.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to this airport? In other words, what was your mission?

Brown: Well, when we got there and got set up . . . of course, part of the air force . . . I believe it was the 19th Bomb Wing out of the Philippines . . .

Marcello: That was the 6th, 7th, and 19th Bomb Groups out of the Philippines.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: What was left of those Bomb Groups.

Brown: Well, they were using that for a base to take off from and land. We acted as ground troops for those guys. Then some of the boys later went on up to the fighter squadron up in the mountains and stayed with them.

Marcello: Now when you say you acted as support troops, you were in effect servicing these planes, isn't that correct?

Brown: Yes, helping those Air Corps guys. Of course, all they had was just a crew per plane. We went over there and helped them all we could.

Marcello: In other words, you were loading bombs, loading ammunition, refueling the planes, things of this nature.

Brown: Yes, that's right, and dodging air raids.

Marcello: Well, the first air raid took place on February 5, 1942. Describe that experience the best you can.

Brown: Well, they had an air raid alarm over there on that island, the natives had it, and it was uncanny. I don't know what drums they was beating on, but--we didn't know it at the time--we heard the drums and didn't pay it any attention. About twenty minutes later the sirens went off. We kind of strolled out of camp, false alarm, such stuff as that, but it wasn't. I don't believe that they dropped too many on us that time. I don't remember much about that. After that first raid . . .

Marcello: Now was this first raid made by bombers, or was it strafing, or was it a combination of both?

Brown: I'm just trying to think. It seems to me like it was bombers. I know we got strafed later on.

Marcello: What did you do when the air raid started and when you found out it was the real thing?

Brown: Well, after that first raid, when we heard them drums, the native's drums, we took off because we didn't wait

for the siren because we had more confidence in the natives than we do in that siren. I never will forget the day that they strafed. They came in with the fighter planes and strafed us. My post was with the Colonel Tharp. Due to the fact that I was communications sergeant, well, I had to go with him all the time. I had missed the Colonel, and I had taken off running. I got about half-way up the middle of this airfield, and them fighter planes hit. I got down on the ground, and they were strafing the airplanes that we had lined up over there. They would come right up and they'd bank it right up there where I was laying. They'd come down, and they'd just cut the grass on both sides of me. Then I got under a little twig of grass. I hid under that! I'll tell you what, I sure did get in a small bunch! I stayed out there during that whole raid. I was afraid to get up and run. I was afraid that I'd get hit.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were fairly close to Colonel Tharp. What kind of man was he? Colonel Tharp, of course, was the commander of your outfit.

Brown: Yes. He was a pretty good old man. I liked him. He done everything that he could possibly do for us while

we was over there. Of course, his hand was tied. We were under the orders of the Dutch, and he had to fight them to get what he wanted. They began declaring all their towns open. According to the Geneva Treaty, we wasn't allowed in them, and we had to get out of them. We couldn't get any supplies out of them. But Colonel Tharp was a pretty good old gentleman. I liked him.

Marcello: What sort of resistance did the outfit put up against these air attacks?

Brown: There wasn't much that we could do. They did dig in them old French 75's. That's the first time I'd ever seen them things standing right on their tail. They dug them things down where they were shooting almost straight up in the air. Everytime they'd shoot them, well, they couldn't shoot them but one time because the ground was so soft that the trail would go so deep. Then they'd have to turn around and dig them out. After we did that, it came out on the radio--the Japanese put it out--that the Americans had some type of antiaircraft guns that they were shooting at them (chuckle).

Marcello: Were these guns very effective? Did you manage to hit any Japanese planes?

Brown: Not that I know of, no. Of course, we couldn't shoot but one way, and that was right straight up.

Marcello: I think they also mounted some of the machine guns off the damaged airplanes on jeeps and things of this nature, too, did they not?

Brown: Yes, we had .50-caliber machine guns. I think we had three machine gun nests set up around the area, what guns we could get hold of. I was in one of them one time in a raid. I don't know what I was doing in there. I think the Colonel sent me out there to talk to them boys about something because our command post wasn't too far from it. He didn't want them firing on them until they got by. I got caught in one of them, and they shot it all up. Me and that other boy didn't get any hits though (chuckle).

Marcello: Since you were pretty close to Colonel Tharp, were you more or less privy to most of the major decisions that were being made?

Brown: No, he didn't confide at all. When we'd go to these big conferences he'd have, well, he wouldn't say too much about it. I didn't ask him because I figured if he wanted to tell me, he'd tell me. If there was something he wanted me to know, he'd tell me. But

he didn't talk too much about them. Really, I think that he was beat down by the Dutch high command.

Marcello: During this period, did you ever have very much contact with the Dutch troops?

Brown: No.

Marcello: Were any Dutch troops here at the air base?

Brown: No, there wasn't, not any. There was one antiaircraft English outfit that moved in there, and they stayed about a week, and then they moved out.

Marcello: In early March of 1942, the Japanese forces invaded the island, and there wasn't very much resistance put up, as I recall.

Brown: No.

Marcello: Do you remember what occurred after the Japanese invaded the island?

Brown: When they made their invasion, we was in Singosari, and we had orders to pull out and advance to the north. Of course, we left everything we owned out there except our military equipment, which we took with us. Then E Battery went to Surabaja. The other two batteries and headquarters battery and the service battery and the medical detachment all went with us. All the way up through the island, we didn't do any fighting because

they hadn't made any contact with the enemy. We traveled by day, and at night we'd stop. I was trying to think of the name of that little town where we first encountered them. I don't remember the name of it.

Anyway, we went into action one evening with . . . let's see, Major Rogers was in charge of the guns that day, and I think we had one or two guns set up. We were the supporting fire for the Australian infantry. We fired that evening. Of course, we didn't have much ammunition other than what we had brought with us. Then the Aussies pulled out, and then we had to evacuate it.

From then on, every time we were retreating, we were actually advancing because they was closing in on all sides on us. That's how bad it was. I think that they said that they hit that island with 200,000 troops, and there was five hundred Yanks, and I don't know how many Aussies was there. There couldn't have been too many of them there. And then there was that one antiaircraft outfit of the English army. That was all the foreign troops that was on that island that I know of.

Marcello: Incidentally, what was your impression of the typical Japanese before you had even really seen one?

Brown: Well, I've tried to ask myself that. I don't know. I don't believe I had any. I never had seen one other than when we got to Java. I'd seen Chinese there and those Javanese, and really I didn't have any because I didn't know what kind of people they were.

Marcello: Did you think there was going to be a relatively short war?

Brown: I did at the time. After we went into action, yes, I sure did. I thought, "Well, this will be ended pretty quick."

Marcello: Anyhow, finally on March 9, 1942, the order came down to surrender. What were your thoughts when you heard that the outfit was to surrender?

Brown: Well, by that time we had made pretty good connection with the Aussies and some of the Limeys. Through them we had heard what the Japanese had done with their prisoners.

Marcello: Which was?

Brown: Kill them! That kind of shook us up. We thought they would probably get us all together and shoot us down. That was the opinion of everybody, that that was it.

Marcello: In other words, you believed that the Japanese did not take any prisoners?

Brown: Yes, we did. What we had heard from the Aussies and the other troops of the encounters that they had heard from the other men, they didn't take any prisoners. We didn't know what to expect then. After we got our orders where to go to and to surrender, I think we was there about two or three days before any of the Japanese came.

Marcello: What were you told to do until they came?

Brown: We were told to stack all the equipment and leave it intact, and cars and trucks and anything else had to be left intact for their use. We didn't do this. We destroyed all the mechanisms of the rifles, the guns, and the cars, and, of course, we didn't destroy the trucks because we had to have that for transportation.

Marcello: Did you feel disgraced or ashamed because you had surrendered?

Brown: Well, in a way we did because we didn't think that we had done what we were supposed to do. I've often wondered if we had all of our outfit that we had trained with in Camp Bowie and all the old officers that we had with us, if we had had all of those old men over there, I believe things would have been different. Of course, I don't know. That's just my

personal opinion. We had new officers that we didn't know, and I believe that the difference would have been there.

Marcello: Now you said that you had officers that you didn't know. Is this because a lot of your original officers were older fellows, and they were some that didn't have to go along?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Consequently, they replaced those older officers with younger ones.

Brown: Younger officers, yes.

Marcello: In fact, this is how Julius Heinen got in the "Lost Battalion," I believe, didn't he?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Heinen was one that I've interviewed from Dallas. I forgot to mention him to you awhile ago.

Brown: Yes. In all the outfits, I believe they took all the commanding officers out of the headquarters battery, out of our outfit, out of F Battery and maybe D Battery, then some more officers that they transferred out and brought in young officers.

Marcello: You mentioned that it was a couple days after the actual surrender that you first had your contact with the Japanese troops. Can you describe what took place?

Brown: It was kind of funny. That Japanese officer, he was a little bitty guy. We thought, "My Lord of mercy! We surrendered to that guy?" But later on, we found out what they could do and what they couldn't do.

Marcello: What else happened during this initial contact?

Brown: Well, after he told us all everything we had to do, he moved us up into the mountains at a tea plantation. It seemed to me like we stayed up there about a week.

Marcello: Was this the entire unit?

Brown: The entire unit.

Marcello: What did you do while you were up at this tea plantation for a week?

Brown: We didn't do anything. We just stayed there because that's where he told us to go.

Marcello: Were you being closely guarded by the Japanese?

Brown: Not at that time, no.

Marcello: Were there very many Japanese with you?

Brown: No.

Marcello: In other words, you were more or less on your own.

Brown: Yes. It seemed to me like there was an officer that contacted our officers every day.

Marcello: How much thought did you ever give to heading for the hills?

Brown: Well, really, I didn't give it any thought because I didn't know the language, I didn't know the country, and later I found out that it was a good thing because they had a bounty on our heads. We didn't know who was pro-Japanese and who wasn't. In that part of the country, the biggest part of them was pro-Japanese. You couldn't have done very good. Now a bunch of the boys did leave the first area where we were first contacted about a Jap. They left and they went to the coast. They tried to get a ship out of there, but they couldn't. When the 19th Bomb Group . . . before they left . . . I forgot that old colonel's name that was in charge of that Air Corps group, but I think he hung around about two or three days waiting on orders to fly us out of there because at that time he had enough planes that he could dump everything he had and fly us out of there.

Marcello: Was there very much resentment or grumbling because you were not flown out of there?

Brown: Well, yes, there was. We had a chance to get out, and they wouldn't take us out. They wouldn't let us go. I never did understand who countermanded that order. We had already served our purpose to do whatever we was going to do.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were at this tea plantation for about a week. Where did you go or where did they move you after that first week?

Brown: From there we moved to some little old town . . .

Marcello: Tanjong Priok?

Brown: I believe that's where it was. Now that's where we lost all of our trucks and everything.

Marcello: When you say you lost them, you meant they were taken over by the Japanese?

Brown: Yes. Then I can't remember how long we stayed there. It wasn't very long though.

Marcello: What did you do while you were at Tanjong Priok?

Brown: We didn't do much of anything, not anything at all.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with the Japanese here?

Brown: We had more there than we did up on the tea plantation because that was in the town, and they was keeping pretty close watch over us.

Marcello: Was Tanjong Priok along the coast?

Brown: No, I don't believe it was. We went from there to . . . we had to march that distance . . . no, wait a minute. I believe we was loaded on a train and went to . . .

Marcello: Now you were in a racetrack again somewhere along here, were you not?

Brown: That's what I'm trying to think. I can't remember whether it was . . .

Marcello: Was this racetrack back in Batavia, perhaps?

Brown: I'm just trying to think. They called that Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Your longest stay in Java was in Bicycle Camp. Is this where you went from Tanjong Priok?

Brown: Now that I can't remember. It seems to me like we went to the docks first.

Marcello: Now I know that sometime in that stretch before you went to Bicycle Camp, you did work at the docks. I was under the impression this was at Tanjong Priok, but maybe it wasn't.

Brown: Well, it could have been. I don't remember exactly.

Marcello: It might have been at the racetrack when you were at Batavia.

Brown: Batavia is where it was. At the racetrack is where we worked on the docks because we wasn't too far from the coast right there.

Marcello: Well, how long did you remain in Batavia?

Brown: We were in there about a month, if we was there that long.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do on the docks?

Brown: Unload ships. I didn't get in on any of that. I think that was strictly volunteers. Whoever wanted to go out and work could go out and work. I was trying to think . . . I can't remember when we went from there to Bicycle Camp. Now Bicycle Camp was where we stayed the longest.

Marcello: Well, nevertheless, before we get you up into Bicycle Camp, let me ask you this question. At this particular stage, had the physical harassment by the Japanese started yet?

Brown: No, it hadn't.

Marcello: In other words, you were probably for the most part dealing with front line troops.

Brown: We were, yes.

Marcello: And they more or less left you alone?

Brown: Now the regular Japanese soldier, he was pretty good. He was pretty good to us.

Marcello: How about your own physical shape at this time? Was most of the unit in pretty good shape?

Brown: Yes, they sure were.

Marcello: In other words, you hadn't lost any weight or anything?

Brown: They hadn't lost any weight, and we were still eating good, and they had good medical facilities, and we were still in number one shape.

Brown: Were you still living off your company supplies at this stage?

Brown: At that time we were.

Marcello: So ultimately you ended up in Bicycle Camp. This was in May of 1942. You surrendered in March of 1942. Then you mentioned you spent some time at the tea plantation. Then you spent some time at the docks at Batavia. In fact, I think you got to those docks sometime around the 30th of March, I believe it was, of 1942. So you couldn't have been there much more than a month like you mentioned awhile ago because you went into Bicycle Camp in May, 1942. Describe Bicycle Camp. What did it look like?

Brown: Oh, that Bicycle Camp was a real nice place. Evidently, that was the troop quarters for the Dutch Army. The way it was fixed up, they was built all out of stone, and they were very nice. We got good treatment there.

Marcello: What sort of bedding did you have in the barracks there?

Brown: They had a little platform raised up that you slept on all the time. If you had any blankets, you used them.

Marcello: Was there barbed wire or anything of this nature around the camp?

Brown: I believe the outside fence was made of stone, and then the top of it had barbed wire in it. We didn't see

too many Japanese there either.

Marcello: What were the toilet facilities like in this camp?

Brown: Well, I'll tell you that Far East . . . I don't know really how to describe that. All of them was just slit trenches, the biggest part of them, a toilet with water running through them. They didn't have any toilet facilities like we've got here in the United States.

Marcello: How about bathing facilities? What were they like? I'm speaking strictly of Bicycle Camp.

Brown: If I remember right, if you was fortunate enough to be in some of those rooms, they had a hydrant and then it had a basin of water, and you'd dip that water out of that basin, and you'd pour it on you. That was the way you took your bath, same as a shower bath. But you had to pour the water on yourself, and some places had regular showers in them where you could go in and take a shower.

Marcello: Did you have an ample supply of soap and other toilet articles and things of this nature?

Brown: Yes, we still had that left when we was captured.

Marcello: What sort of personal possessions did you have by the time you entered Bicycle Camp?

Brown: I didn't have a cotton picking thing. They told us that all of our stuff would catch up with us, and I didn't have but . . . let's see, I think I had two changes of underwear and an extra pair of shoes and an extra uniform. I believe I had two extra uniforms. That was about all I could pack in that ditty bag, plus my toilet articles.

Marcello: Did you have any blankets or anything of this nature?

Brown: Yes, I had my blankets, had two blankets. I forgot about that. That was all I could get in that darn thing.

Marcello: Now as I recall, as soon as you entered camp or very shortly after you entered the camp, you were given some sort of a pep talk by the Japanese commander. Do you recall that?

Brown: Oh, boy! I'll tell you, I do. We had a work party that morning, and there was guys that wanted to go out and work. It was still voluntary at that time. If you wanted to go to work, that was okay. If you didn't, that was okay, too. That's when we joined up with the . . .

Marcello: The Houston boys.

Brown: Survivors off the Houston, yes. Anyway, the Japanese came through there, and they had an oath that we were

supposed to sign. We were to swear allegiance to the Japanese -- not to harass them or do anything to them, you know, in the way of sabotage or whatnot.

Marcello: Also, didn't it include a promise not to escape?

Brown: Yes, I believe it had that in it. Well, heck, we all just blew up. Not going to sign it. So the Japanese come back through a little later and wanted to know which had signed it. We told them no. He said, "You'd better sign it." We told him no. So the third time he come back, well, he marched us all out in this open parade area they had out there and made us sit down. We had to cross our legs first and then sit down with our legs crossed. You had to cross your arms in front of you and not move. We sat there for about six hours before we got us a break. But anyway, during that time, a bunch of us put our heads together and said, "Well, why not sign it. We ain't going to do it anyway. We signed that oath with the United States, and we're going to support them, come heck or high water. This one here won't do them any good, and it might help us out a little bit." So we signed the darn thing. And when we signed it, the Japanese just turned the other way, just as friendly as they could be.

Marcello: What other type of rules and regulations did the Japanese establish for the prisoners?

Brown: I'll tell you . . .

Marcello: In other words, what sort of respect did you have to show toward Japanese soldiers? What sort of procedure did you have to follow?

Brown: Well, the Japanese soldier, you had to salute him, either that or an officer, you had to bow to him, which we didn't like one little bit. Then you always had to answer "sir" to them. They came first above anything else, as we later found out the hard way.

Marcello: What do you mean when you say they came first above everything else?

Brown: Well, after you took several beatings from them, you realized that they was the number one, and you had to do what they told you.

Marcello: How frequent were the beatings and punishments in this camp?

Brown: In the Bicycle Camp they didn't have very many of them, very few of them. After we signed that oath of alligiance to them, there were very few.

Marcello: What form did the punishment usually take that was dealt out here in Bicycle Camp?

Brown: Well, I've been trying to think about that all the time, and I don't remember anybody getting a beating or a bashing in there. There just wasn't that many Japanese around.

Marcello: Now there were other nationalities in this camp also, were there not?

Brown: Oh, yes. There was Australians, English, and Americans.

Marcello: Were you all segregated into your own compounds?

Brown: Yes, the Americans were together, and the Limeys and the Aussies were together.

Marcello: How were relations between the nationalities?

Brown: Well, the Americans and the Aussies got along just fine, but the English--I don't know--we couldn't get along with the English for some reason or another. I don't know why.

Marcello: You don't know why you couldn't get along with the English?

Brown: I never have figured that out. Australians remind me <u>then</u> like my grandad was a long time ago. They're a hardy people, and anybody in the world can get along with them if you treat them half-way right. They took to the Americans. They felt the Americans was alright.

Marcello: How much intermingling was there among the nationalities?

Brown: Well, with the Australians and Americans, there was a whole lot, but not too much with the Limeys, at least not until a couple of years later when they really did put us together. Then we got to know the Limeys better.

Marcello: What was the food like here in Bicycle Camp?

Brown: In Bicycle Camp it was pretty good. We still had a little money. I say we--the supply officer did. We got to buy some extra grub while we was there in that Bicycle Camp. Of course, with what money he had saved up . . .

Marcello: Now these were company funds that you're referring to?

Brown: Yes. CS supply, our supply outfit. Then we took the boys off the Houston in with it, too, and kind of split it all up between them and us. But we had good food in there.

Marcello: What sort of food was provided of the Japanese?

Brown: Rice. Rice and then . . . I think they gave us some beef, but I don't remember how much.

Marcello: Was this rice given to you three times a day?

Brown: Yes, it was then.

Marcello: How was it quantity-wise?

Brown: Well, I don't remember being hungry during that part of it because it seemed to me like we had plenty at

all times. Because of the money that the supply officer put with buying food and with what the Japanese gave us, we had a pretty good diet along about that time.

Marcello: How was the rice so far as quality was concerned? In other words, were you eating as good a rice as the Japanese soldiers were eating?

Brown: No, I don't believe we were, never, never.

Marcello: Who was preparing the rice?

Brown: We had our own cooks at the time.

Marcello: Did it take them awhile to get used to cooking rice?

Brown: Yes, it did. I believe the Aussies showed our cooks how to cook that darn rice because we never had cooked it like they cook it. They just steam it as to where each grain just stands out by itself. After they learn how though, he was pretty good.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that while you were in Bicycle Camp, you were able to purchase food through the company funds that the supply officer had. How about the company payroll? Who had it?

Brown: Let's see, I believe that was Captain . . .

Marcello: In other words, there was money that the supply officer had and there was additional company funds also, isn't that correct?

Brown: As best as I know, yes. Of course, we didn't get no pay after we left Singosari. The colonel, I think he had a draft that he drew money on and he paid us in guilders, but we didn't draw all of our pay when we was there in Java.

Marcello: I'm going to ask you a loaded question, and if you don't wish to answer, that's perfectly fine, and I understand. From some of the other prisoners that I've interviewed, there were rumors going around that officers seemed to be living a little better than the enlisted men did, and the assumption was that the officers were spending company funds for their own betterment.

Brown: I kind of believe that that was going on. From what accounts that I've seen and I've heard of after I got back, it was going on. They had better living conditions than we had in the Bicycle Camp. After the Bicycle Camp, they didn't.

Marcello: What was discipline like among the Americans here at Bicycle Camp?

Brown: Well, it was good. We still had our officers with us and every man . . . I don't know, the men back in those days, whoever was in charge of them, well, they respected the authority all the way through, and they

done what ever they told them to. Oh, they might gripe and groan about it later on, but they'd do it and then gripe. We still saluted our officers and everything while we was in the prison camp and while they was with us.

Marcello: How was morale at this time?

Brown: Surprisingly, it was good. It sure was.

Marcello: Was this because you were expecting the rescue to come in a month or so?

Brown: Well, yes, I believe it was because when they had taken us prisoner, we didn't figure we would be prisoners, oh, not longer than six months. We didn't think we'd be prisoners but about that long.

Marcello: Were there all sorts of rumors about the pending liberation floating around the camp?

Brown: We got some dope in Bicycle Camp that MacArthur was on his way to get us, and that kind of pepped everybody up, you know. We thought, "Well, in six months he'll be here, and we'll be out of it, be back home." But it didn't turn out that way.

Marcello: We were mentioning the survivors of the USS Houston awhile ago. What sort of shape were they in when you arrived at Bicycle Camp? They were there before you.

Brown: Them old boys was in rough shape. They didn't have much to eat before we got there, and they didn't have any clothes at all. They were just in terrible shape. Some of them had already taken beriberi by the time we got there. Their physical condition was . . . they had it a lot rougher than what we did. The Japanese marched them, I believe, all the way from where they captured them back to the Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Well, to begin with, that ship had been blown virtually out of the water.

Brown: Yes, it was blown to smithereens, I'll tell you.

Marcello: Those guys were in the water for a long time.

Brown: Some of them, I believe, was in the water for thirty-six hours before they got out of there.

Marcello: I gather that members of the "Lost Battalion" did share their belongings and so on with the men from the USS Houston, and those guys have been kind of eternally grateful ever since.

Brown: Yes, we gave them everything we had. We shared with them on everything: clothes, blankets, and anything we had. If we had two of something and they needed it, well, we gave it to them, helped them in any way we could.

Marcello: What sort of a routine did you personally follow here in this camp? You mentioned awhile ago, for example, that work details were a voluntary thing.

Brown: Yes, at that time they were. I just kind of let everything take care of itself. I was married at the time.

Marcello: Oh, you were married at the time. You were one of the few then.

Brown: Yes, I had gotten married in March of 1941, and I didn't worry about her because I knew she'd be well taken care of. I just kind of went with the bunch. I didn't let anything upset me or worry me.

Marcello: How did you spend your time?

Brown: At the Bicycle Camp?

Marcello: Yes.

Brown: We played cards and dominoes and anything else we could get to do to pass the time.

Marcello: Were you receiving any news at all from the outside?

Brown: I've been thinking about that. It seemed to me like somebody in our outfit had a radio in there somewhere, but they wouldn't put out the news currently as it happened. They'd wait a couple of days, three days, then pass it out.

Marcello: Now this had to be done secretly, did it not?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: We mentioned awhile ago some of the rules that the Japanese laid down, and you mentioned, of course, that you had to salute or bow to the Japanese officers and enlisted men. What other rules and regulations did the Japanese lay down? In other words, what sort of articles could you not have in your possession?

Brown: Well, now that's debatable. They'd come through one time on a shakedown, and maybe they'd be looking for pencils. You could have knives of all descriptions, and I believe you could lay a gun down there, but they weren't looking for that. They were looking for pencils. Any kind of a thing that you could mark with, they got it. Maybe next time they come through on a shakedown, they'd be looking for knives. You couldn't tell. That oriental mind, you could not outguess them or out think them.

Marcello: Did you ever see any Japanese soldiers here at Bicycle Camp show any compassion for the prisoners?

Brown: No, I wasn't around any of them. Some of the boys did. I understand that they thought that the Japanese would eventually lose the war, but I never did come in contact with them. Later on I did, though.

Marcello: Well, finally, in October of 1942, you were moved out of Bicycle Camp. If you could have stayed the whole war in Bicycle Camp, things wouldn't have been too bad, would have they?

Brown: No, I don't believe they would have if we could have gotten to stay there. I believe that we wouldn't have been treated near as bad or had very much work to do. In comparison to that, where I work now, there is this boy down there now that was a German prisoner-of-war, and we get to reminiscing a lot of times about that, and he tells me that in the prison camp that he was in that they didn't get very much to eat, but they got well taken care of, and they fought to go out on working parties and to get out of camp. It might have been that way if we got to stay in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Now was your weight pretty much the same as it had been when you entered the service at the time you left Bicycle Camp?

Brown: Yes, it was. We were still on pretty big chow, and our physical condition hadn't deteriorated any at all.

Marcello: What sort of a psychological shock was it when suddenly you found that you were going to leave? I'm sure you didn't know where you were going.

Brown: No, we didn't. When we got word that we were going to leave there, we figured that we were going to Japan proper.

Marcello: What sort of dread or fear did you have about going to Japan?

Brown: Well, from what we'd heard the Americans was bombing every ship that moved out of there, and we figured maybe if we did get out of there that we'd get bombed while we was at sea, and that would be it.

Marcello: Now was this when the "Lost Battalion" got separated? Were you all together up to this time?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: How did they determine who went to Japan and who ultimately went to Changi Prison Camp?

Brown: Well, none of us went to Japan from there. They split us up by groups. I don't remember now from the Bicycle Camp to . . . no, from the Bicycle Camp we went intact to Singapore, to Changi Village, and there's where they split us up, right there. Of course, we never did know about E Battery or whatever happened to them. We couldn't get no word at all of them. The Japanese wouldn't tell us anything about them.

Marcello: When you left Bicycle Camp, did you know where you were ultimately going?

Brown: No.

Marcello: Describe the trip from Bicycle Camp to Changi. I assume you probably boarded a ship at Batavia?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Describe the trip from the time you left Bicycle Camp until you got to Changi.

Brown: I can't remember how we got to Batavia. I don't remember whether we went by railroad. We might have went by railroad, boxcars, to the docks at Batavia, but they loaded, oh, I guess it must have been about a thousand of us on that ship, and it was an old Japanese transport, not a transport but a merchant ship. They had gone in there below the decks . . . the decks was . . . from one deck to the next was about nine feet apart, something like that. Then they'd build tiers that were about three foot high. They made us all get in that and lay down in there. You didn't get no circulation or nothing and it was hot. It was right on the equator. We was on that thing about . . . it seemed to me like it was about a week. From the time we got on that ship until the time we got to Changi, well, that's when the morale went down and the physical condition started going

down because we got in contact with somebody in there that had dysentery. We didn't have no way of cleaning cooking utensils, washing them or anything. The food we got was just half-prepared, and you got fed twice a day.

Marcello: Was the food lowered down through the decks?

Brown: Yes, and passed out down there. Of course, they wouldn't let anybody . . . they'd let you topside, but it was just a little bit till you had to come back down. A lot of boys never did get to topside during all that five days.

Marcello: Where were the toilet facilities located on this ship?

Brown: Well, they was just little outhouses built over on the side of the ship.

Marcello: Could you go up there any time you wanted to? Or was there a certain time?

Brown: No, certain times. Certain times you could go. Otherwise, you couldn't.

Marcello: How crowded were you on this ship?

Brown: Oh, we were packed in there like sardines. It was then that we really knew that we was prisoners-of-war because that's when they treated us like dogs from then on. As well as I can remember, they had Korean guards over us.

Marcello: Even when you got on the ship?

Brown: On that ship, they had Koreans on there.

Marcello: What sort of possessions were you allowed to take with you from Bicycle Camp?

Brown: You was allowed to take anything that you wanted to. Of course, we didn't have very much to start off with, just that little old ditty bag, and that was it.

Marcello: Was there room to stand up?

Brown: No, you could sit up, but you couldn't stand up.

Marcello: How about when you had to sleep? Did you have to sleep sitting up?

Brown: (chuckle) Some of us did. When you'd get ready . . . you didn't turn over. You'd have to wait until somebody else turned over before you could turn over. That's how close we was packed in there. It wasn't a very big ship either. All holds were the same way.

Marcello: How did you personally fare on this trip?

Brown: Well, not too good. It was awfully hot, and the climate, I wasn't use to that. That was one time that I got a little shakey. I didn't know what was going to happen to us. That old ship . . . they told me later that you could trail it by the rust that was falling off of it on the way to Singapore.

Marcello: So you finally landed then in Singapore, and you were sent to Changi Village. I've never heard it called that before. Describe what Changi was like, and then compare it with what Bicycle Camp had been like.

Brown: Well, from the time we got off the ship, the Japanese put us on trucks to take us out to there. On this boulevard going down through Changi Village, all along the sides of that boulevard, they had heads on sticks sticking in the ground--people that they had killed. We realized then that we were lucky to be alive from seeing all of that. When we got to Changi, well, the Limeys was already there because that was where they captured the biggest part of the Limey army. There were old English barracks that they had there, and we stayed in them. That's when we went on Japanese rations.

Marcello: What were these barracks like?

Brown: They were two-story and three-story barracks. They was pretty nice barracks.

Marcello: What were the bedding facilities like?

Brown: Well, the bedding facilities, you didn't have any more than what you had with you. You slept on the floor, or if you could find enough lumber or whatnot to make you some kind of bunk, well, that's what you had. If you didn't, you slept on the floor.

Marcello: In other words, there were no platforms in this particular place?

Brown: No, there wasn't because the men in the English Army, we found out, that stayed there, they're the ones that manned those big guns that the Limeys had that said the Island of Singapore was impregnable. Of course, it was by sea, but the Japanese come up the back door on them, across the Strait of Johore, and invaded the island.

Marcello: How did Changi compare with Bicycle Camp? Better? Worse?

Brown: I believe it was worse.

Marcello: In what way?

Brown: There was too many there. Of course, we were more crowded there than we were at the Bicycle Camp. We wasn't segregated there like we was at the Bicycle Camp. We was mixed in with the Limeys and Gurkhas and the Sikhs. They had some of the Sikhs with us, and the Gurkhas was off in another compound. The Japanese separated them. But they put all the Americans and the Limeys and Australians together.

Marcello: In fact, they even used the Sikhs sometimes for guard duty, did they not?

Brown: Yes, they did.

Marcello: These apparently were Sikhs that they had convinced . . .

Brown: They converted them to the Japanese Army.

Marcello: They apparently had convinced these people that they were eventually going to liberate India from British rule?

Brown: Yes, they sure did.

Marcello: Well, now, you mentioned here that the nationalities were much more mixed than they had been at Bicycle Camp, and you also mentioned that Changi was not nearly so pleasant as Bicycle Camp. I gather that the British morale here at Changi was relatively low.

Brown: No, it wasn't. It was high. I thought it was high because the Limeys were under the same impression that we were, that they wouldn't be prisoners very long. The Limey officers outranked our officers, and we got the tail-end of everything. We was the last ones there, so we got what was left after the Limeys got through with it.

Marcello: What were the toilet and bathing facilities like here at Changi?

Brown: As best as I can remember, they were pretty good. We had running water where we could bathe and clean up.

Marcello: What sort of work details did you have to perform here at Changi?

Brown: Well, Changi was a lot like Bicycle Camp. We didn't have very much to do there. The Japanese took us out on garden projects that they had got started. We worked in some of those. That was about the extent of it there.

Marcello: You mentioned that there were garden projects here. Did you have a chance to share in any of the produce from the garden?

Brown: No. We planted, but we left there before they ever got finished.

Marcello: You also mentioned awhile ago that you started receiving Japanese rations here. Would you describe what they were like?

Brown: Well, it was rice. I don't know what kind of rice it was. It was brown-looking rice that we had to start cooking. Then we had the vegetables that they gave us, which was something like cabbage, and watermelons and some beef that we made into stew.

Marcello: Was the rice wormy?

Brown: Yes, it was. We didn't pick none of them out, though. We ate them (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you in the beginning pick out the worms, and then later on did it make any difference?

Brown: At the beginning we did. We were pretty choicy, you know, and we thought, "Well, we got to take care of ourselves. We're not going to eat that darn stuff because it's not any good."

Marcello: I gather you were also getting a lot of polished rice

here. It wasn't nearly so nutritious as the other kind of rice.

Brown: Yes, we did.

Marcello: How often did you get fed here?

Brown: We got fed there three times a day, if I remember right.

Marcello: Did you receive a sufficient quantity of rice?

Brown: No, our rations were cut down considerably.

Marcello: Did you ever have any way of supplementing your diet here at Changi?

Brown: Well, at that place we did have. We got coconuts. Of course, the only way we had to get them coconuts was to chop the trees down, and the Limeys jumped on us because they told us that was the king's property. We told him pretty quick that it belonged to the Japanese, and as long as they didn't care, we was going to chop them down (chuckle).

Marcello: Where did you get the axes and so on to chop down these trees? Did the Japanese allow you to have tools of this nature?

Brown: The Limeys had them, and we got them from them to go on wood parties to get wood to burn to cook our chow with.

Marcello: Now at this time, how was your weight holding up?

Brown: It was still holding up pretty good. I lost a little,

but I was still holding my own. The rest of the boys were, too.

Marcello: How about other diseases? Had they started yet in these camps?

Brown: Other than dysentery, no. Of course, the reason for that was we didn't have the right kind of facilities to take care of our eating utensils.

Marcello: At this particular time, how were the medical facilities and supplies holding out?

Brown: It was pretty good. The Limeys was well-equipped there. I believe while I was there the Limey doctors took out my tonsils while I was there.

Marcello: Did they have anesthetics and things of this nature?

Brown: Yes. The Japanese hadn't taken their medical supplies away from them. It seems to be that that unit was intact when the island fell, and the Japanese left them there.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that from time to time there were ill-feelings between the British troops and the Americans. Did these ill-feelings ever break out into open hostilities or fights?

Brown: (chuckle) They did while we was there at Changi Village. We had a lot of fights with the Limeys. Those

Limeys, I don't know. I just couldn't understand them. They didn't clean up or try to stay clean or nothing. You could smell one of them for a mile away.

Marcello: Well, this is why I asked you about the morale factor awhile ago. My feeling was that these were the same British troops that had been kicked out of Dunkirk, they had been kicked out of Malta, and they had been defeated in Singapore.

Brown: Some of them had been, yes.

Marcello: These guys were real losers.

Brown: Yes, they were. Then, on top of that, the Australians . . . we met some Australians there that had landed on Java the night before it fell the next day. They just came from Australia there, then they was prisoners-of-war. They never did even fire a round.

Marcello: Was their morale fairly low, also?

Brown: Their's was, yes, because they couldn't understand why in the world that they was moved in there and then taken prisoners the next day.

Marcello: I understand that the British discipline was also relatively lax at this time. Many of the enlisted men apparently had blamed their officers for all the disasters that had befallen them.

Brown: Well, they did, but those English sergeant majors, they were the rule of the roost. I mean, their word was law. Those Limeys, at that time they still done what them English sergeant majors told them, even to the officers. Now I don't know how much authority they had, but evidently they had a heck of a lot.

Marcello: What was the Japanese harassment like here at Changi? Did it get worse as compared to Bicycle Camp?

Brown: No, it was still about the same. We still hadn't no taste of the punishment that they was going to hand out to us later on. I never realized that until we got into Burma, but we was watching them drill a bunch of Japanese recruits down here on this parade field. They had these Japanese soldiers marching around this sergeant in a circle. He was learning them the goose-step. He'd pull one of them out of rank and take a bamboo pole and just beat him real good and put him back in the ranks and start him marching again. Then if he didn't do it right, then he done it all over again. Of course, in our army we didn't do that--or no other civilized army that we knew of--and we couldn't understand that. Later on, we found out why. That was their way of telling you

that you wasn't doing it right. They used brutal punishment even on their own people the same way as they did us.

Marcello: Now at this time, had the Americans formed little cliques?

Brown: Some of them had, but not near as much as we did later on.

Marcello: Again, when I use that term clique, I'm not using it in a derogatory sense, but I heard that later on there was a tendency for two or three or four individuals to get together and kind of look out for one another.

Brown: I understand what you mean by that, yes. We hadn't got . . . well, we just hadn't got the feeling that we got later on down the line. Of course, everybody was well, and nobody was sick, and they wasn't having any trouble of any kind except a few fist fights with the Limeys. Of course, that was all in fun to us. What's a fist fight as long as we won!

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever intervene in these fights or anything of this nature?

Brown: No, they never did. That I know of, they never did.

Marcello: Did you yourself ever go with any of the work details here at Changi?

Brown: Yes, on the garden details.

Marcello: Now was this voluntary, or did you have to go?

Brown: No, it was voluntary. At that time, we'd volunteer to get out of that camp to look around over the island.

Marcello: What ways could you possibly supplement your diet here at Changi other than by eating the king's coconuts?

Brown: We didn't have no other way.

Marcello: In other words, you couldn't use company funds to trade with local merchants or anything of that nature here.

Brown: No, we sure couldn't because the food supply on that island was real short.

Marcello: Had you resorted to eating dogs, cats, or anything of that nature yet?

Brown: No, not then.

Marcello: Well, finally then, in early January of 1943--you had been at Changi for somewhere around two months--you were scheduled to move on again. How did you feel about leaving Changi?

Brown: Well, you know, in a way I was kind of glad of it, to get out of that darn place. I didn't know what was going to happen to me later on. Of course, they took out a bunch of Americans and English in August before us, and they went to Ragoon, I believe it was.

They left, I guess, a couple of weeks earlier than what we did. They took the rest of the Americans and some Australians and some Limeys. I don't remember the exact number that was in that party. We went by rail up into the Malay states. Somewhere in Malaya we got on a boat.

Marcello: What was the trip by train like up to the coast?

Brown: All of that was still pretty good. They still hadn't started any of their harassment or anything.

Marcello: Were you packed in those cars pretty tightly?

Brown: If I remember right, I don't believe we were at that time.

Marcello: Now was it at Changi that one of the batteries was separated from the rest of the outfit and sent over to Japan?

Brown: Well, see, that was E Battery. I can't remember whether they came to Changi, to Singapore, or not. I don't remember whether they did or not. Don't believe they did. I believe when they left Surabaja they went on to Japan from there, if I remember right. Now I could be mistaken.

Marcello: So you boarded a ship and your ultimate destination was Moulmein in Burma. Once again, I'm sure you did not know that that was your destination.

Brown: No, we didn't know where we was going. We knew that the other bunch went to Rangoon, and we thought that's where we was going. Anyway, after we got on these ships . . . there were three ships on this convoy, and we were out in the Indian Ocean. I guess we had been about a week, and the conditions was good. They didn't have us crowded in them ships. One of the ships was loaded with Japanese troops, and this ship that the prisoners was on, we had lots of space. You wasn't crowded and the Japanese treated you good. They let us on the topside and take a bath anytime we wanted to. We could do anything we wanted to. They were real good to us for about a week.

Then one day just about noon these three ships was in convoy, one right after the other, and we happened to look at that first ship ahead and a stick of bombs had went right down the smokestack of it and blew it up. On the one that we was on, one bomb missed the bow, and another bomb missed the back end of the boat. Then they sank the boat behind us. We was scared! The Japanese, they went berserk. We wanted to go topside, and they wouldn't let us. They loaded them guns, and I thought they was gonna start killing us down there

then. We didn't move because we seen that they meant business!

Marcello: Were you able to see the bombs or anything of this nature?

Brown: Well, we was all topside, see, when they first done all the damage, and then they made us get below. On the first pass, well, they sank the first ship and the third ship. On the one that we was on they got those two near misses, and they set it on fire. Then the hatch was open where you could see, and we watched that guy come back across. He come back right across the middle of it. He straddled us again with two sticks of bombs. Then he left. Evidently, that was all the bombs they had, but I'll tell you what, that convinced me that I didn't want no part of the Navy! There was no place to walk (chuckle)!

Marcello: I gather that your ship tried to resist. They had set up some sort of artillery pieces on that ship, and apparently in resisting they blew off part of the bridge or something?

Brown: Yes, they shot off the bridge.

Marcello: Did you manage to see that?

Brown: No, I didn't get to see that. Where I was . . . they had me back . . . I was back down in that hold. They

made me get way back over next to the wall. I didn't get to see any of that. Then when they started picking up survivors, they let us come topside and help them rescue those Japanese soldiers that was in the water.

Marcello: I would assume that your ship got pretty crowded after you started picking up survivors.

Brown: It did. From then on, it was heck. Boy, they was rough on us!

Marcello: In what way?

Brown: Of course, we intermingled with the Japanese soldiers, and we got by with a lot of stuff.

Marcello: How was this?

Brown: We got more to eat than what we had been getting. Those were the regular Japanese soldiers. They didn't treat us as prisoners. Some of them could talk good English, but they didn't tell us anything, but they'd sit there and talk to us. Then as we was going up the river into Moulmein on this same ship, a Japanese fighter came over and everybody evacuated the ship. They jumped out of that thing like a covey of quails--prisoners and Japanese soldiers and everybody (chuckle).

Marcello: They just jumped off the ship?

Brown: Yes, they jumped off the ship and swam to shore (laughter).

Marcello: Were you one of those, or did you stay on the ship?

Brown: No, I stayed on the ship, but that sure was funny. They had to stop the ship to gather them guys back up. Then, when we got on into Moulmein, well, I've often thought and remembered Kipling, who wrote that poem, The Old Moulmein Pagoda. Well, I got to see it. In fact, I think we stayed there. We got in there late that night, and the next morning somebody told us that we stayed in a leper colony that night (chuckle). We figured everybody would come down with that leprosy, but nobody took it.

Marcello: I gather they must have scattered you out in a number of places when you reached Moulmein. I heard some people say that they were staying in a mortuary, some were staying in a jail with common criminals, and there were some others that were in this leper colony.

Brown: Yes, they did, and that's the way they moved us out of there down to the railroad. They moved us out in different groups.

Marcello: How long did you stay there at Moulmein before they moved you out?

Brown: I guess we was there about a week, and then we moved

out to . . . I believe that first camp was what they called the 10 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Was this at Thanbyuzayat?

Brown: Yes, I believe that was it.

Marcello: This was a base camp, was it not?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: I think most of you went there around January 27, 1943.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: I think this was kind of a railhead, was it not?

Brown: At that time it was, yes.

Marcello: Did you move right on through Thanbyuzayat up to the first kilo camp?

Brown: Yes, we did. I can't remember the first kilo camp that we was in.

Marcello: I think it was the 18 Kilo Camp.

Brown: I know that we had to march from the 10 Kilo Camp. We marched up through that one. They made us walk all the way.

Marcello: When you got to Thanbyuzayat, did you have a pep talk here by the Japanese officer in charge? I'm referring to Colonel Nagatomo.

Brown: I don't remember that. I do remember the Japanese sergeant that we had at the 18 Kilo Camp. That

morning we got ready to go to work on the railroad, and we come out there, and he told us, "I hold your life in my hands. How do you want to live it?"

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard this statement from the Japanese sergeant?

Brown: I never thought much about it. I thought, "Oh, he doesn't know what he's talking about." Of course, I didn't know what kind of work we was going to be doing on that railroad, but I could see when he said railroad work, well I thought, "Well, lots of equipment and whatnot." The equipment turned out to be picks and shovels.

Marcello: What was this 18 Kilo Camp like? Describe it from the physical standpoint.

Brown: Well, it was just a bunch of thatched huts built out of bamboo. Your bed was a platform bed. It was built about maybe three or four foot off the ground. The roof was thatched, made out of bamboo leaves that the natives had taken and woven together and made a roof out of it.

Marcello: These camps had already been established before you had gotten there?

Brown: Yes. Every camp that we was in from now on was already built by the time we got there.

Marcello: If we are describing the 18 Kilo Camp, are we more or less describing what all the other camps look like, also?

Brown: Yes, when you've seen one of them, you've seen them all because they all looked exactly alike.

Marcello: What were the toilet facilities like?

Brown: Well, you had slit trenches. That was all you had.

Marcello: I'm sure that maggots were rampant in these camps.

Brown: Oh, they were, they were! During rainy season . . . of course, the annual rainfall over there was over 600 inches a year, and that was six months out of the year that it rained there. Then, when it turned dry, it was just as dry as it was wet. In the dry season, well, it never did rain.

Marcello: What sort of a routine did you follow here at the 18 Kilo Camp? This is where you started working on the railroad. Now describe your routine.

Brown: When we first got there, they broke us up into what they called kumis. Of course, at that time all the men was in good physical condition. Each man had to move a cubic meter of dirt a day. Well, if you had thirty men in your group and you went out to work, that meant that you had to move thirty cubic meters

of dirt regardless of whether it was a rock or whatnot. The only way you had to move it was a "yoho pole" and a towsack. It had wire on each end, and it went over a pole. They put the dirt in this towsack, and you carried it up and made the fills, or you made the cuts the same way.

Marcello: How did those things get called "yoho poles?" I've never found out.

Brown: I guess that started in Java. We saw those natives over there carrying those sacks of rice on those things. They'd have a 200-pound kilo on each end of that stick, and they'd balance it on their shoulders, and then if you get to kind of jump it up and down. Then as that pole would jump up, raise the weight up, well, they'd take a step. I guess that's where we got the idea of the "yoyo," the "yoho pole."

Marcello: But they were called "yoho poles."

Brown: Yes, "yoho poles."

Marcello: Now you were making primarily cuts and fills on this railroad. When you started at the 18 Kilo Camp, the work was relatively easy, was it not?

Brown: Oh, yes, it was, yes. As I was saying, the men were still in pretty good physical condition. They hadn't

started deteriorating. We hadn't been there too long till they began going downhill, getting sick. Dysentery started hitting us. Maybe the group you'd be in would get down to where it would be working maybe twenty men. You still had to move thirty cubic meters of dirt, and you stayed out there until you did.

Marcello: Now isn't it true that it was pretty easy to meet that one cubic meter per man, and the Americans at first finished up relatively early in the day?

Brown: Oh, yes, it was.

Marcello: Then what did the Japanese do?

Brown: Well, after we started doing that awhile, they began adding more on to us, cubic and a half meters a day. The Japanese didn't like the Americans anyway. We always got the rough end of the stick wherever it was. Wherever the digging was the hardest, that's where they put us.

But Lieutenant Hampton was in charge of one kumi. He had a lot of engineering experience. He'd draw this design out on the ground, an angle this way and an angle that way, where the Japanese couldn't figure it. He got by with it a long time. We didn't have to move very much dirt until they caught up with him.

Marcello: How would they determine what constituted a meter of dirt? Did they drive stakes in the ground at various intervals, and you had to move that much dirt?

Brown: They stepped it off for you. They had it plotted out. "This is your work. You work here today."

Marcello: What sort of work did American officers have to do on this railroad?

Brown: They were supervisors mostly. They didn't have to do any physical work. They never did ask the officers to work any.

Marcello: Did this cause any particular resentment among the enlisted men?

Brown: Well, at first it didn't, but later on when we all began getting sick, it did. We couldn't understand why that they didn't have to do it, too, but the Japanese never did make them work any.

Marcello: What function did the officer serve in the camps on the railroad? I'm referring now to the American officers. Were they kind of a go-between or the liaison between the enlisted men and the Japanese?

Brown: Yes. At the camp we was in we had a Dutch--I believe he was a Dutchman--interpreter. Through him the officers supposedly tried to get better deals for us.

If the Japanese were so minded to, they would, and if they didn't, you didn't get it.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that this is where dysentery started to hit you. What caused this dysentery?

Brown: Well, dysentery is caused by being unclean with your eating utensils and the cooking. We didn't boil all of our water when we drank it. Of course, over there all your drinking water had to be boiled. We'd be careless at times and wouldn't boil the drinking water. That would cause it.

Marcello: Had malaria hit you at this time yet?

Brown: No, not then, not then. As we got deeper into the jungles, it did.

Marcello: You were working in relatively flat country here at the 18 Kilo Camp, were you not?

Brown: Yes, but as we got deeper into it, we began to get into the mountains and the hills and valleys, and then that's where the malaria and dysentery and beriberi and everything else hit us right in the face.

Marcello: What was the food like here at the 18 Kilo Camp?

Brown: It was strictly rice and stew. You'd get a little old half-pint milk can of stew, and then you'd get your mess kit full of rice. You got that three times

a day. The beef . . . they'd bring out a quarter of beef for around 2,000 men.

Marcello: Which meant that the stew just got a little bit of a flavoring.

Brown: It just got a little bit of flavoring. They had some kind of watermelon over there. I never did understand what kind it was. It looked like our regular watermelon, but the inside of it was hollow. They'd cook it and put it in there. Then, bamboo shoots, we ate those. We didn't then, but we did later on down the line. At first, we didn't know what they was for.

Marcello: Did you have a chance to supplement your diet here at the 18 Kilo Camp?

Brown: We didn't, no.

Marcello: I was wondering if you had any contact with any local merchants or traders.

Brown: No, we sure didn't.

Marcello: Now that would come later on. However, on this railroad from time to time, you did have the opportunity to purchase things from the local traders, did you not?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: But not here at the 18 Kilo Camp.

Brown: Not the 18 Kilo, no.

Marcello: What sort of harassment did you have to endure at the hands of the guards here at the 18 Kilo Camp?

Brown: Well, that's where we got shook up. All during the whole time that we was in Burma, we had Japanese officers and Korean guards. Now a Korean guard to a regular Japanese, he was just as low as he could be. I never did see a Korean with any rank at all. They was always a buck private. The Japanese had been beating the men for many years, you know. When they put them guards over us . . . we couldn't understand them. Something we should have learned was their language, but we didn't until later on. We didn't know what they was talking about. Then they'd beat us until we was doing what they wanted us to do. Oh, boy, there was no way in the world that you could figure out that oriental mind.

Marcello: What form did these beatings take from the Korean guards?

Brown: Well, normally every one of them carried their gun and a bamboo pole. They used that bamboo pole, and if it wasn't handy, they used their fists. You'd say something to the guard today that he'd laugh about, and then you'd come back the next day and say the same

thing, and he'd give you a beating about it. You just never knew what kind of mood they was ever going to be in.

Marcello: Did they seem to like to go out of their way to beat the American prisoners?

Brown: Yes, they did. Evidently, that had been handed down. See, they didn't like Roosevelt. They hated him with a purple passion. Every one of them told us that. Roosevelt was no good. Because Roosevelt was our President and we was fighting for him, well, he was no good, and so therefore that put us in the same bracket. Oh, they gave the Americans the devil all the way through! If there was any rough digging or any rough work to do, the Americans got to do it.

Marcello: Why do you think this occurred? Do you think perhaps it was an inferiority complex on the part of the Japanese and the Koreans?

Brown: Well, of course, evidently it was because they had been brainwashed. We had been shipping a lot of raw materials to them, and we stopped that all at once. They just didn't like what Roosevelt was doing to them. That's what it boiled down to. I don't think it was because they thought we was superior to them

because their impression was the other way around--that they were superior to us, regardless.

Marcello: Did they seem to like to pick on the bigger American prisoners?

Brown: No. If you was American, that's all it took. It didn't make them any difference. You'd think that they would, but you just had to be an American, and that was it.

Marcello: Did you ever see them provoke any of the prisoners to the extent where the prisoner would actually take countermeasures, that is, strike back without thinking?

Brown: I've heard other boys tell me they did, but I never did see any of it. I never was around when any of it happened.

Marcello: What sort of punishment did you personally receive at the hands of any of the Japanese or Koreans?

Brown: Outside of a few beatings, I guess that was about it.

Marcello: Most of these prisoners talked about beatings in a rather nonchalant manner, and I'm not sure what really constitutes a beating.

Brown: Well, I guess what we mean is that they always carry this bamboo pole. That's usually what they worked you over with. It could deal with some little minor thing, or it could be major. If you had a hat on, the first

thing they done was knock that off with that bamboo pole, and then if you went to pick it up, they'd hit you again and again and again. What made them stop, I don't know. They'd do it so long, and then they'd quit.

Marcello: What sort of harm did this do to your body?

Brown: Well, usually it was about the head and the shoulders where they hit you all the time. I've seen guys with knots all over their head where they'd got beaten by them.

Marcello: Is this something you ever get used to? In other words, do you learn to roll with the punch, so to speak?

Brown: No, you don't. Not with that. There's no way you can.

Marcello: What do you simply try to do? Stay out of their way?

Brown: Yes, you do. Really, we did. Some of those Korean guards was pretty good. Everybody tried to get in on the same group that he'd be in charge of. But we had one we called "Liver Lips." Boy, he was a stinker from the word go! He'd pick up a group of men, and another guard would take out a group of men, and another . . . they'd get together out on the job, you know. Then when the Japanese engineer would come by and catch them sitting down, well, they'd thrash them. Then

they'd get up and they'd thrash us, just whop us real good.

Marcello: You mentioned this particular nickname for this guard. I'm sure that just about all the guards had a nickname of one kind or another.

Brown: Yes, they did.

Marcello: Do you remember any of the others?

Brown: Let's see. We had another one called "Baby Face." Now he was the stinker! Oh, boy!

Marcello: In what way?

Brown: He could think up more ways to punish you than you can think of.

Marcello: Can you think of any specific examples?

Brown: No, not right offhand I can't. But I know we all stayed clear from him. He stayed in camp the biggest part of the time. When we'd see him coming, boy, we'd get out of his way because you never knew what to expect from him.

Marcello: You were going to mention the name of another guard before I interrupted you.

Brown: Well, we had one there. He was a Japanese sergeant. We called him "Sojo." Now he was pretty good to us.

Marcello: In what way was he good to you?

Brown: Well, he tried to explain things to you. He could talk some English, and he'd try to explain some things to you--what was happening and what he wanted us to do and whatnot. But then the Korean guards would think that we was buttering up this Japanese soldier, noncom, and then we'd catch it again from them.

Marcello: You mentioned that most of the work on this job was done with a pick and a shovel. Was there any blasting that had to be done?

Brown: Now I don't remember any. After I left the 18 Kilo Camp, I got lucky some way or another, and I got off the railroad work. My job then was to cut wood for the kitchen. There was seven men in our party, and we kept wood for the kitchen all the time to cook with. The Japanese gave us saws and axes, and we'd go out in the woods and cut wood and carry it in on our backs to the kitchen to use to cook with. From what I can remember and from what the boys was telling me, I don't believe they had any dynamite in there. They could have on some of those, but I don't remember any.

Marcello: Where did you move from the 18 Kilo Camp?

Brown: Well, let's see. It seems to me like I went from 18 to 80 Kilo.

Marcello: Now this is where things <u>really</u> started to get bad, did they not?

Brown: Yes, they did.

Marcello: How did you travel from the 18 Kilo Camp to the 80 Kilo Camp?

Brown: We went by rail on that part of it.

Marcello: In other words, this was the rail that had been constructed?

Brown: Yes. Between 18 and 80, there was a bunch more camps in there. By that time, we had been over there, oh, maybe almost a year. Our doctor had died, and we had a doctor out of the Navy, and he was an old man to begin with. He hadn't been practicing medicine too long. He didn't know anything about the jungle diseases that we had. It kind of left our camp in a heck of a shape. Our morale got low after this doctor died, Captain Lumpkin, because we thought the world and all of him. He told us, "Now when we get back to the States, I'm going to take you guys over, and you're going to eat what I tell you to and you're going to do what I tell you until you get your health back." Well,

we depended on him. Of course, he knew when somebody was playing off sick and when they wasn't, you know. After he died, the morale in camp, it just went to pieces. There wasn't any. We were without a doctor, and you didn't have nothing. They brought in this Navy doctor that was on the Houston. I felt sorry for the old man. He done the best he could, but he didn't have no equipment. He didn't have no medical supplies, no nothing. Everybody had those tropical ulcers, which was some kind of cancer disease. That killed a good many men over there. I know on this wood detail I was on, we was the burial party, too. We had to bury all the men. There one month, we averaged better than five a day that had died with those tropical ulcers and beriberi and other diseases that you get. All those diseases were dormant. There wasn't no cold weather to kill them out. If you got a little scratch on your hand, well, you could bet your bottom dollar that that night there would be a tropical ulcer start there.

Marcello: Did you ever get one of those tropical ulcers?

Brown: I've had them all over my legs.

Marcello: How did you get rid of them?

Brown: Well, at first this doctor didn't know how to treat us, and in some way or another he got permission to go down

to see this Dutch doctor in this other camp. When he come back, he began doctoring us the way this doctor told him to. He would take just a regular teaspoon, and he sharpened it down to where there was a razor's edge right on the point. He would go in that wound and dig all that old dead flesh out of there, get down to the good meat of your body. He done that every day. When he first started, you couldn't feel it because that place didn't have any feeling in it at all until he got down to the good flesh. If you had two or three on your leg, by the time he got down to the last one, the feeling was beginning to come back in them, and, oh, they'd just kill you! The only way we treated them was with . . . if we could get some salt, we'd make salt water and pour on them and keep them wrapped up to keep the flies out of them.

Marcello: A lot of people also bathed them with rags soaked in hot water, did they not?

Brown: Yes, that's all we had.

Marcello: I've even heard some report that maggots were tried. They would put maggots on this dead flesh.

Brown: Yes, and you'd be surprised. The maggots wouldn't stay in them. Some of them they would, and some of

them they wouldn't. We used them maggots for the same purpose that he was using the spoon for--to eat up all that dead flesh in there.

Marcello: If the maggots would stay in the wound, did they do the job usually?

Brown: Sometimes they would, yes. They'd clean it out, eat all of that old dead flesh out of it. Then you'd scrape the maggots out . . . well, you know a long time ago--we didn't know it--but a long time they used to doctor that way a long time ago on those kind of sores back in the early days of American history.

Marcello: They used to use leeches a lot of times.

Brown: Yes. I've seen that done while I was in Java. Those leeches are horrible! I got into them after we got into Saigon.

Marcello: Like you say, at the 80 Kilo Camp is where things really got bad. You mentioned the burial details awhile ago. Would you mind describing what they were like?

Brown: No. The burial detail, we had one officer, a chaplain, and we had a . . . there was a Navy man in there that was a Catholic, and whatever religious faith he was, well, that's the way we tried to bury him. We didn't have nothing to make any caskets out of, so we wrapped them up in blankets and buried in the grave.

Marcello: Is it not true that usually the clothing and things like that were stripped from them because that could be used by some other prisoner?

Brown: Yes, but normally we didn't take no clothes off of them. If they had any extra clothes, we'd take that and divide it up. The medical corpsmen would take that and divide it up among the rest of the guys that didn't have any.

Marcello: Now was it at the 80 Kilo Camp where the "Speedo" campaign started?

Brown: Yes, it was.

Marcello: Everything hit there at one time. First of all, I think that 80 Kilo Camp and the 100 Kilo Camp are located in terrible, low, swampy places. At the same time this "Speedo" campaign started, the monsoons had also begun.

Brown: Well see, the Japanese was under . . . that railroad had to be built by a specified time. Making all those cuts and things they had coming through there, well, they got behind on their schedule. Then they upped the quota on us. They made the men dig more. I know while we was on that wood detail they took us off that wood detail three days a week and put us on the railroad

building bridges. That's where we used the elephants to haul them timbers for us and drove piling.

Marcello: Describe what this bridge building was like. I think it's kind of interesting.

Brown: I'll tell you, that bridge building beat all I ever saw. They had these big logs or these trees cut down in the jungles, and they'd take these big old elephants out there, and they picked up these logs. Some of them was at least thirty foot long. That elephant would get those tusks under that thing. . . he had a native that was making him do all of this. He'd carry them logs down to where they was going to build this bridge. Then we built this scaffold, and it looked like an old-time oil derrick. They had two pulleys in the top of it. They had ropes over these pulleys. There was a rope that went out one direction from it, and the other rope went out on the other side of it. You had a thousand pounds of weights, and they had thirty men on each side of this tower holding onto these ropes. We'd walk out there and pull that thousand pound weight up after we got that piling set in there, and we'd drive it in the ground. Now that way we drove the piling.

Marcello: Did you ever hear the particular story . . . I've got to put this in the record, I suppose. Pete Smallwood was describing the pile driving operation to me, and apparently as you would pull these ropes, there was a little tune or a little song that you would sing as you worked.

Brown: Yes. I've forgotten how that went.

Marcello: It goes something like "Japanese, piss on you!" Or something of this nature.

Brown: I've forgotten how that went (laughter).

Marcello: And I gather that one of the Japanese guards could apparently speak English, could he not, or understand English, and understood what you were saying.

Brown: (chuckle) I'd forgotten all about that. These bridges then was braced with bamboo. Not a nail in them mind you. They'd take this bamboo, which was about two or three inches in diameter, and then they'd tie this bamboo onto these pilings we had drove in there. The way they tied it to it, they stripped this green bamboo in strips, and they'd tie it around there. You know those bridges was just as solid as everything in the world. If the pilings wasn't long enough, well, we'd set another piling on top of that one and then had these

big spikes that we drove in around it and then brace it up with that bamboo. I rode across some of them babies I built, too (chuckle).

Marcello: Did they shake and shiver?

Brown: No, sir. They didn't. It surprised me! But that 80 Kilo, it was terrible.

Marcello: How long were you at that 80 Kilo Camp altogether?

Brown: We was there a long time at that particular spot.

Marcello: Now also, it was tough for supplies to reach you there.

Brown: Yes, it was. A lot of times we wouldn't even get . . . we didn't have but just rice to eat. At one time they didn't get the beef to us, and all we had was fish and fish made into a stew. We'd have the heads for breakfast, the bodies for dinner, and the tails for supper. Of course, you don't get much to eat really out of those heads and tails. Then you'd get that little old cup of soup, stew, and that was it. It got pretty rough there for a while till we killed a . . . one of the natives out there had these buffalo, and we rounded one of them up one night and killed him. We buried the hide there in camp and all entrails and everything out of this buffalo and cooked him all up that night. Those natives sure was looking

for those buffalo the next morning, but they never did find them.

Marcello: Did the Japanese know what was going on?

Brown: No. That's where I ate my first dog, I believe it was, there at 80 Kilo. We had a Dutchman there that was a veterinarian. We got some dogs . . . the dogs began coming in there, and that Dutchman would look at them and he wanted to know if we ever ate any. We told him, "No, we hadn't." He said, "Well, they're good eating." So he said, "You bring the men dogs." So all the dogs we could find, we'd bring them into camp. He'd check them out, and if he didn't think they was sick or anything was wrong with them, he'd kill them, then skin them, and cook them. You know, that's pretty good eating if you've got the seasoning to put in it. Of course, we had a lot of . . . when we were on the wood detail, we run into a lot of those pepper plants and whatnot.

Marcello: I understand they were wicked.

Brown: Boy, I'll tell you they are! You can season that dog up with it, and it's pretty good eating. In fact you don't know you're eating dog even after you skin him and hang him up.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had been eating dog. What other exotic foods did you eat during this rather desperate period?

Brown: Well, I'll tell you. A lot of those guys told me about eating cats and snails. I kind of drew a line on that. I couldn't . . . a cat, no, and the snail, I'd seen them. I don't believe I could eat any of them. Of course, we was down pretty low in weight by that time. I didn't think I was quite that hungry to eat snails and cats. Some of the boys did but I didn't. We did get hold of a snake, a python. Now he was pretty good eating. They took and they skinned it and got the meat off the backbone. That was pretty good eating. That's the first time I'd ever seen that. The Japanese told us how to fix that. It was good eating.

Marcello: Did you ever have opportunity here at either of these camps, either the 80 Kilo Camp or the 100 Kilo Camp, to trade with local natives?

Brown: You said something about that awhile ago.

Marcello: For example, weren't you able to get duck eggs somewhere along the line here?

Brown: Some of the guys did, but we on that wood detail never did run into those natives that had any of that. Some

of them got hold of some sugar, brown sugar, wrapped up in bamboo leaves. I don't remember me getting out and getting hold of any of them. I know some of the boys got eggs, but they was about two dollars apiece that the natives charged for them.

As well as I can remember, there wasn't too much trading going on. We didn't get paid while we was working on that railroad, if I remember right. I don't think they paid us on that deal. We didn't get paid on that until we got into Saigon, after they moved out from the railroad.

That 80 Kilo . . . well, all through there . . . I know one time we was out there, and the Japanese brought through a company of infantry going to the front in India. They had one man that was sick. He was trailing along behind. This Japanese sergeant came back there, and the old boy had fallen down. He was just so sick he couldn't go. He took that bamboo pole and beat that old boy until he got him on his feet and started him walking again. I couldn't see that, but he sure did that to his own troops.

Marcello: What was the thing that was most constantly on your mind here in the 80 and 100 Kilo Camp?

Brown: Well, I guess it was food.

Marcello: There's no guessing about it. I know it was food, but I wanted to hear you say it (chuckle).

Brown: You can't imagine . . . I don't care what you're doing, you're thinking about something to eat. You'd think, "Boy, if I just had a piece of that cake or a pie or a steak or a good biscuit." Then when you got that little old . . . what we had to eat at dinner, well, you forgot about good food until you started getting hungry again. Then you'd start dreaming. You'd go to sleep at night, and you'd dream about good chow.

Marcello: What particular food was most constantly on your mind?

Brown: I was always a guy that liked lots of sweets, pies and cakes. That's about all I could think about, chocolate pie and coconut pie. I bet you I ate a "jillion" of them in a dream.

Marcello: I've heard some of the prisoners tell me that their imaginations would run away with them so much that they could actually imagine smelling a particular type of food being cooked in the camp, bacon and eggs, for example.

Brown: Sometimes some of the aroma that was coming out of the kitchens there, you could think that that was what they was cooking.

Marcello: Up until this time, had you received any Red Cross packages at all?

Brown: No, we didn't. We didn't receive any Red Cross packages that I know of all the time we was in Burma working on that railroad. Not at all.

Marcello: How about mail? Were you able to send out any mail?

Brown: I thought it was at 80 Kilo--right along about in there somewhere--that we got to send a little old card out, and it was already printed on there, and you scratched out what you wanted to say. You could sign your name to it, and you could say you was with so and so. My wife got one of those . . . and a real good friend whose nickname was Harpo . . . we called him Harpo Lewis all the time. I told her that I was with Harpo Lewis, so when she received it some two years later, which at that time the federal government didn't know whether we was alive or dead, you know, well, she wrote to them and asked them how to get in contact with me, and they answered her back and said if she had any information at all, well, let them know about it. She sent this card to them, and then in turn they sent her a telegram back stating that I was a prisoner-of-war. That was the first they had heard of her. They wouldn't

accept the name Harpo Lewis as being one of the members of the battalion.

Marcello: When you say they, the government or us?

Brown: The government, because I didn't designate by name, and I called him by a nickname, and so they wouldn't accept that.

Marcello: How about radios? Did anybody have any secret radios in any of these camps?

Brown: Not up and down on the line on the railroad. I don't believe we had any down through there.

Marcello: What was the condition of your clothing by this time? Now you had been a prisoner-of-war for well over a year. About a year and a half by this time.

Brown: We got pretty sharp. We'd take . . . if we had any long trousers, we'd cut them off and make shorts out of them and then take the legs and make a pair of shorts out of them. We was down to shorts, and some of us had shoes, and some of us didn't. We was down to that. Hats, we made hats of whatever we could come across.

Marcello: What were conditions like in the barracks during the rainy season?

Brown: Well, you know, by gosh, I'll tell you. Those doggone

thatched roofs did not leak, and it was dry inside them barracks.

Marcello: Even during the rainy season?

Brown: Even during the rainy season. I've seen it rain so hard that you couldn't see outside that thing, and there wouldn't be a drop of water coming through that thatched roof. How they got that fixed where it would do that, I don't know. It was dry on the inside.

Marcello: How did these monsoons affect the work on the railroad?

Brown: Well, you worked just like it was a pretty day. You still went out and worked every day regardless. Usually they'd work us ten days or fifteen days, and then they'd give us a day of rest.

Marcello: Now was this during the "Speedo" campaign that they did this?

Brown: No, that's before the "Speedo" campaign. During the "Speedo" campaign, none of us never did stop. They carried men out that couldn't walk. They'd have the other prisoners carry them out on stretchers, and they took them to a rockpile to make ballast for that railroad. Every man that was able to sit up, he did something for that railroad.

Marcello: How sick did you have to be before they would permit

you to stay in camp and not go out and work on the railroad?

Brown: You almost had to be on your death bed. Now they had one camp that was strictly a hospital camp. They took some out of that, but they didn't take very many. All the rest of the camps, darn near everybody went out, unless our doctor just stood up and demanded that that particular guy was too sick that he couldn't go.

Marcello: Did you ever witness men actually giving up and sitting down or lying down and dying?

Brown: Yes, I have.

Marcello: Can you describe what this was like?

Brown: Well, I'll tell you. It's an awful sight. Usually it affected the big men first. They were the first ones to give up. I guess it's because of their physical condition. They'd always been top, you know, big men, and could do anything they wanted to. They got down to the point where they couldn't do anything, and the little man was still going. Now men about my size, it didn't hurt us near as bad as it did the big men. They looked like they just fell apart. They didn't care about living or dying. A lot of men, after we got to 80 Kilo, they quit eating that rice. Of course, we buried them in a short time.

Marcello: I gather this was one of the first signs that somebody had given up, that is, when they stop eating?

Brown: Yes, it is.

Marcello: I understand from time to time their minds would also wander, and they would talk about home.

Brown: They would. When they quit eating that rice . . . well, that was your meal ticket home. If you didn't eat the rice, you didn't get home. Oh, it was terrible. They just deteriorated just plumb down to nothing. I've seen men that maybe one week he would be in what we considered good physical condition at that time, and a week later you wouldn't know them. They quit eating rice and quit eating. They wanted to die. They just took all of it they could take.

That was the beginning of the cliques that we referred to awhile ago. Each group of men, maybe there would be four in a group or five or maybe ten, but they all buddied together. They took care of one another. One guy got sick, well, even out while he was working, well, the others would jump in and let him stand off and rest while the guard wasn't looking. They took care of them that way. If they had any kind of quinine or anything like that, well, he's the one that got it. Usually your

group was considered from three on up, men that kind of bound together. Even now, as long ago as that's been, when we have our convention, you'll notice that those men will get back in a group again.

Marcello: If I ever get to attend one of these conventions, I'm going to try to observe that.

Brown: You'll be surprised. They'll darn sure do it.

Marcello: Who were the particular ones in your clique?

Brown: It was me and Slate and Morrow. They was at the convention last year, and we got together, and that's where we stayed. Now we liked the other guys well and good. There was nothing wrong with them, but that's just the way we were. Old Slate and Morrow, we stole for one another, took care of one another, shared everything we had with one another.

Marcello: You mentioned stealing. I assume that stealing from the Japanese was fair game?

Brown: Oh, yes. Yes, it was. Of course, at that time when we was in the jungles, you couldn't do very much. When they moved us into Saigon was when we done the biggest part of our stealing.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any evidence of collaboration between prisoners and Japanese?

Brown: No, I can't say that I have. Maybe there was one guy that we thought was collaborating until the Japanese beat him up all one day, and we come to the conclusion that we didn't think that he was collaborating with them. What he was doing, he was taking care of them--cleaning their clothes and keeping up their hut and cooking for them and whatnot. After he got that beating, we decided that he wasn't collaborating with them.

Marcello: I know this particular individual's name, and if you don't want it as part of the record, we won't put it in.

Brown: Well, I'd rather not.

Marcello: Can you describe the incident the day that he came back into the barracks? One of the prisoners hollered out, "Ki o tsukete!" Describe what happened there.

Brown: (chuckle). Yes. Well, we just ignored him when they sent him back to us. Well, I forgot now who did that, but somebody hollered "Ki o tsukete" and wouldn't nobody have anything to do with him for a long time. He was kind of an outsider to everybody else.

Marcello: What happened to that guy when he hollered "Ki o tsukete?"

Brown: You know, I don't remember that.

Marcello: As I recall, this individual just turned around and belted him and broke his nose.

Brown: Yes, I remember now. Pretty good fight over that one.

Marcello: Wasn't much of a fight, I don't think. I think there was just one punch, wasn't it?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: But anyhow, the point is--and I think we need to get this into the record--this individual about whom we're referring, I don't believe really was a collaborator.

Brown: No, I don't think he was either. Of course, all we could see was we was down here down below him, and the Japanese was on that hill up here.

Marcello: Probably whatever he was doing, anybody else who had been in his place would have been doing the same thing.

Brown: Yes, they would have. He was getting plenty to eat, and they was taking care of him and doctoring him up and whatnot. We figured that he was collaborating with them. But after he got that beating, we decided that he wasn't. Well, what he was doing, he was stealing from them and keeping up a bunch of boys down in with the prisoners. This was unknown to us because these guys wouldn't have snitched on him because they'd get him behind the eight ball, you know. But that's what he was doing, and he got caught at it. He turned out to be a real nice fellow, too.

Marcello: In fact, he was eventually elected an officer in your organization, was he not?

Brown: He sure was.

Marcello: Future scholars are going to wonder who this mysterious person is that we're talking about. I'll just say that his name is mentioned in another one of our interviews, and they can refer to that one if they wish (chuckle).

Brown: We're sitting down here . . . I don't know how to describe it, actually like a bunch of little kids. One kid gets all the candy, and nobody else gets anything. And he's getting all the good parts, and we're getting all the bad parts. Well, of course, at that time, we wasn't getting no food supplies or no nothing and working our tails off, you know, and he was taking it easy up there. It didn't leave much thinking other than that's what he was doing. But we come to find out that it wasn't.

Marcello: How great a factor was religion while you were working on the railroad? In other words, did you see men become very religious during this period of adversity?

Brown: Well, yes, you did. It was more distinct in the Catholics than it was in the Protestants. Now on our days off, the Catholics would have their services, and

the Protestants would, too. It was more predominant in the Catholics. Each individual man had his own way. I think every one of us did. We just didn't go entirely, let ourselves go plumb down to nothing at all. Each man, we had that little Bible that we was given, and I believe each man had one of those, and you could see them reading them throughout the barracks on the days we was off.

Marcello: I think we also need to get into the record the story concerning the diary or the day-to-day routine that you were writing down.

Brown: Yes, I started that right after we left Hawaii on this old USS Republic. I started a letter to my wife, and I never did get to mail it. I thought, "Well, I'll mail it when I get to Java or wherever we are going." So I kept adding to it each day. I'd write about a page and a half or two pages. Then I'd state everything that happened to us that day and what we had done, and then I'd make a few forecasts of what would happen in the near future. I didn't mail it when I got to Java, which I should have done, but I didn't. I just kept adding to it. I thought, "Well, I'll keep it, and when I get back home, well, I'll say

now here's the letter. This letter will tell you everything I've done, and I won't have to tell you nothing." I kept that doggone thing, and I kept it fully current up till I got in the jungle in Burma on that railroad. The Japanese was shaking us down pretty close for what kind of tools we had or if we had anything that we could harm them with. One old boy had a map of the United States, I believe it was, or a map of the world, and they found that on him, and they really worked him over for that. That kind of scared me up, and I took my diary then, and I rolled it up in some oil cloth, and I buried it there at that camp. I intended to get it when I left, and I forgot all about it. I just wonder if that diary is still there. I sure wish I still had it now because it would really have been good.

Marcello: Where did you get the paper to write this diary?

Brown: When we left Singosari, I accidentally poked some extra paper in my ditty bag. When I got to Bicycle Camp, I got hold of some more. I don't remember where I got it at, but it was blank paper. It looked like typing paper. I got me a quite a bit of it. Then I didn't get any more until I got into the jungle.

Somewhere or another in the jungle I got hold of some wrapping paper. I can't remember how I got it, but I got hold of some. I kept it going that way. I had a good diary if I could just have kept it, hadn't chickened out and got scared. I could probably have hid it all the way through and come out with it.

Marcello: What was the punishment normally if they should find somebody with writing material or having written material?

Brown: They tried to tie it into sabotage on you, and, oh, they would beat you awhile and then question you. They'd beat you awhile and then question you. They'd try to tie it into sabotage or if you was going to escape, more especially if you had a map. You was going to use that for the method of escape.

Marcello: What were some of the more atrocious forms of punishment that you witnessed here on the railroad? Or the more unusual forms of punishment?

Brown: Well, they had one guy that they drawed a circle in the ground just the size of his foot and made him stand in that circle for forty-eight hours and wouldn't let him get out of there for nothing, not even to go to the bathroom. Then they stood him right there

and made him . . . for forty-eight hours, they didn't let him sleep or nothing, and that's pretty hard to do, more especially if you're weak and have nothing to eat. They didn't give him any food during all that time. They gave him a little water, but no food. I think they'd caught him stealing from them. He stole some food out of their kitchen, and they caught him.

Marcello: Now I do know that at the 100 Kilo Camp things got so bad there that they took a large group of the sickest prisoners, and they moved them back down to the 80 Kilo Camp, where they had established some sort of a makeshift hospital.

Brown: Yes, they did. They had a little more medical supplies down there than what we had. Of course, we didn't have any, and they had a little bit more than what they had, and they had some doctors down there. The Japanese would come through and inspect them, and the ones they thought that should go down there, that's the ones they sent down to this hospital camp.

Marcello: I assume that if you were not sick enough that you were not sent down there?

Brown: No, I didn't get down there. I was off for about three days, and that was the only time that I lost on that railroad on account of sickness.

Marcello: While you were on the railroad, did you ever have to lay ties or track?

Brown: No, I didn't get into any of that.

Marcello: I understand this was a pretty tough detail.

Brown: It was. It was. I was on the wood detail all the time except when they got into the rush, that hurry-up deal. Then I got on the bridge detail. I built bridges all during that time.

Marcello: Well, finally, the railroad was completed sometime in October or November of 1943. Now I do know that there was a ceremony held commemorating the completion of that railroad, and this ceremony was held at Three Pagodas Pass. There was some sort of memorial ceremony there. Did you perchance attend that ceremony?

Brown: No, sir. I didn't. I didn't get into that.

Marcello: You know, I cannot find a single prisoner who attended that ceremony.

Brown: When we left out of there, they moved us . . . we went from there into Siam, I believe it was.

Marcello: You probably went to Kanchanaburi, didn't you?

Brown: No.

Marcello: Oh, you didn't go to Kanchanaburi. Most of the people did go there, did they not?

Brown: Yes. That was the one on the river. Well, they moved us up into another little old camp about thirty miles from there.

Marcello: Now a couple other names that I have are either Tamarkan or Tamuang. Was it either one of those two?

Brown: I believe it was Tamuang.

Marcello: Okay.

Brown: There was very few Americans in that. There were maybe a hundred Americans, and the rest of them were Dutch.

Marcello: In other words, the "Lost Battalion" was split up again at this point?

Brown: Yes. There were about a hundred Americans in there.

Marcello: How did they move you from the . . . did you go by railroad to Tamuang?

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: Which one did you . . . which one were you at, Tamuang or Tamarkan?

Brown: I think it was Tamarkan.

Marcello: Tamarkan.

Brown: Woodrow Starnes was with me. I can't remember who else. Anyway, there at this particular camp . . . it wasn't a very big camp. There was about a hundred Americans if there was that many and some Dutch and

some Indians, and I believe there was a few Australians. I know we didn't have any water in camp, and Woodrow and myself and a Dutchman, we dug a well. The darn thing caved in on me down there, and they had to dig me out.

Marcello: About how deep were you?

Brown: Oh, we was down about twenty feet. Oh, yes, I had a darn two-dollar bill that I had got somewhere, and I hadn't had nothing but bad luck the whole time I was carrying that two-dollar bill, and we got a chance there at that camp to buy some stuff with it. I took that two-dollar American bill, and I got rid of it right there, and when I did my hard luck left me. I had pretty good luck from then on (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe what this camp was like from a physical standpoint.

Brown: Oh, it was a good camp. The Japanese was good to us, even the guards. We had a different set of guards, and we didn't have to make any work details, go out on no work details. We stayed there in camp all the time.

Marcello: In other words, was this kind of a rest and recuperation for you?

Brown: Evidently, it was to them. That's what it was for. Of course, every man in that camp was in good physical condition.

Marcello: When you say good physical condition, you mean compared to some of the other people.

Brown: Yes. In the Japs' opinion we were in better physical condition than the rest of the men were. They told us that they was going to move us to Japan. We knew what they was doing it for. It was to build up the morale of the Japanese people because we had heard all during this time how the Japanese were losing out on all fronts.

Marcello: Once more I'll ask you how you felt about going to Japan.

Brown: Well, that trip I was worried about. That was one time that I was worried about. I worried about that plumb on from the time we left Tamarkan until we got into Saigon.

Marcello: What made you worry so much about going to Japan?

Brown: Well, I knew that we knew that the Japanese was losing out, and we knew that the transportation from French Indo-China into Japan would be . . . if we got there, we'd be lucky because they'd sank so many ships. Really, I hadn't thought too much about the sinking of the ships until we got into Saigon. We came up that way by boat,

and there was ships there in the harbor that the Americans had sunk. They said that the river channel from now on out to the coast was the same way. That was one trip that I was really sweating out. I didn't want to make that one. I was worried.

Marcello: When did you perceive that the tide of the war had changed and that the Allies were winning?

Brown: Not until we got through with that doggone railroad. We had some natives that come into camp there that we traded with, and they'd tell us little bits of information. They'd tell one something, and another guy would come, and they'd tell him something else. We'd get together and put it all together. By that, we knew that the Japanese were losing out on all fronts.

Marcello: Had you experienced any air raids up until this time either on the railroad or in Tamarkan?

Brown: No, I hadn't.

Marcello: Something we never talked about up till now is the black market activities. I understand there was a flourishing black market both on the railroad and perhaps on some of these other camps. Do you know anything about it?

Brown: No, I don't, but other guys told me that they had lots

of it going on. I never was at the right place at the right time to get into any of that.

Marcello: How long were you at Tamarkan altogether?

Brown: We was there about two months if I can remember right.

Marcello: As you mentioned, you really didn't do too much of anything there.

Brown: No, we didn't. They didn't put you out on no details or anything. We just stayed right there in camp. They fed us pretty good. We got better food after we got off that railroad.

Marcello: What sort of food did you get here?

Brown: Well, of course, it was still rice and stew, but the stew had a lot more ingredients in it and more of it. We could eat all we wanted, and we wasn't limited to just one cup of stew. We could get all we wanted to eat. Then when they told us they was going to move us to Japan, well, then we realized what they was doing. They was fattening us up for the . . .

Marcello: There's something that comes to mind here. I gathered that the sickest prisoners were sent to Kanchanaburi.

Brown: Kanchanaburi, yes.

Marcello: And as you point out, the healthier ones were sent to Tamarkan.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: You were at Tamarkan for about two months, and then what happened?

Brown: Then they moved us to Saigon. We moved by rail and by boat. As we was going through Siam, well, there was a lot of . . . we seen where there had been a lot of air activities where the Americans had bombed a lot of installations. They was pretty good to us on that. They didn't crowd us too deep into the boxcars. We could open the doors and get plenty of fresh air. And then it was the same way when we got on the riverboat going to Saigon. They was pretty good to us.

Marcello: As the tide of the war changed, did you notice any change in the attitude of the Japanese?

Brown: No, not until we got to Saigon. We'd get out on those work parties, and a lot of times they'd bring the regular Japanese soldier back for a rest, and they'd put him in these prison camps to guard prisoners. Sometimes he'd tell us that the war wasn't going very good. Normally, he'd just say, "Go away and leave me alone. I'm tired, I'm sleepy." As long as we had a regular Japanese guard over us, we done good. When they'd come back to their Korean guards, it would just change like that.

Marcello: By this time, had you been getting accustomed to moving? Was it nearly so much a traumatic experience now?

Brown: Yes, I got used to the moving. It didn't make any . . . I just got to the point where I didn't care. If I stay here tonight, okay. If I stayed over there tomorrow night, well, that didn't make any difference.

Marcello: How were you living at this time? From day to day? From week to week? From month to month?

Brown: I was living from day to day. Just day to day. I let each day take care for itself because I knew that I couldn't control the next day, so I just lived for that day. Of course, after we got into Saigon, well, we worked on the docks there unloading ships that they'd brought in--rice and supplies and ammunition. And we also dug gun emplacements. That's where I got my first leeches on me.

Marcello: You might describe this particular incident.

Brown: They had us on the river. Where they was putting this gun emplacement in, well, we had to go down in the river and dig it out. There was old mud and water, you know, nasty. You'd come out of there, and you couldn't feel them leeches biting you. If some old boy didn't see them on you, and if they got up under

your shorts, you'd never know you had them till you got back to camp and took a bath. Then you'd have to get somebody to help you pull them off of you because they'd stick on both ends. They'd cut a little V--it was an inverted V--with their mouth and then the tail part would latch on to you, and they got that blood to circulating. After you got him off, well, that place where his mouth was, well, the blood would continue to run out of there. It wouldn't congeal. You had to put something on it to make it congeal.

Marcello: How'd you get them off? Did you just pull them off?

Brown: Well, lots of times we'd use a cigarette, burn them, and make them turn loose. You couldn't . . . it was hard to pull them off of you.

Marcello: You must have been working on these gun emplacements with Pete Smallwood. I think he worked on those here, too. In fact, I think he described the leeches, also.

Brown: Yes, we did. On the river down there I believe we got into that. Of course, the Americans were the only ones that had to dig them gun emplacements. They'd pull all other people up and put the Americans in the mud and slime.

Marcello: While you were working on the docks, did you have an opportunity to steal food and supplement your diet once again?

Brown: Yes, we did (chuckle). We stole a lot of canned goods down there. I never will forget one time--the first time I'd ever carried any rice. We was unloading boxcars and carrying it to the dock and putting it in this net. Then they'd pull this net and let it down in a hold in the ship, and then they'd unload it. It took four men to put a sack of that rice on you, and that weighed 100 kilos, which is about 220 pounds, American pounds. They put this first sack of rice on me. They got it on my shoulders, and I took one step, and I just went down to the ground. I couldn't carry it. That Japanese run up in front of me, stuck that bayonet down there, and got the edge of it right on my stomach. I looked up at him, and I said, "Just go ahead and push it because I couldn't carry it anyway." He _____ a time or two, and they got down out of their car and lifted that sack of rice off for me, and they said, "Brown, maybe if you'll put it a little higher on your shoulders, well, then you can carry it." That time they set it up real high

on my shoulders, and I got balanced, and I'm telling you, that's the hardest doggone day's work I ever put in in my life. That was all day long, until we loaded that ship that night, when we got to come out of there. That sure was heavy work.

Marcello: You were chuckling awhile ago when I had mentioned the opportunity to steal food.

Brown: Oh, yes! We was unloading canned sweet and condensed cream. Oh, boy! Everybody had a batch of that, and they caught us. So they lined us up in parade ground formation, you know, and made us open ranks, take two steps apart. Then they'd come by and shake us down. We had it hid out all around the building where we could get it when they left out. They couldn't find any. Oh, those officers was mad! I mean to tell you they was mad! There was a little old Japanese sergeant standing out in front of us. Finally we heard somebody say, "Alright, you guys, you better wise up and give us back that milk because these officers are going to stay out here till they get it." Well, everybody began looking around, you know, to see who was doing all that talking. He was up there just dying laughing, that Japanese sergeant was, and he said, "You

needn't to look around. I'm doing the talking to you." (Laughter) He was educated here in the United States. He had come back to Japan on a visit, and they wouldn't let him come back, and that's the reason he was in the Japanese army.

Marcello: What sort of treatment in general did you receive from the Japanese guards here in Saigon? I use the term Japanese guards because I assume these were Japanese guards.

Brown: No, they was Korean. They was Korean guards. We still had the Japanese officer and the Japanese sergeant, but the guards was still Korean. We had Korean guards all the way through with the exceptions of the times that they'd bring the regular Japanese soldiers back for a rest, and then I guess they gave these Korean guards their liberty.

Marcello: What sort of treatment did you receive from these guards here at Saigon?

Brown: From the Japanese guards?

Marcello: Either one.

Brown: The Korean guards was rough.

Marcello: They were still rough here?

Brown: They were still rough. Some of those guards were

the ones that we had on the railroad. They were still rough on us.

Marcello: You would think that perhaps their dispositions would have changed after getting out of the jungle, too, because I'm sure that was no pleasant experience for them.

Brown: You know, those regular Japanese soldiers, they beat the devil out of them Korean guards. They'd bash them good for not obeying what they . . . of course, the Korean guard had to say "Yes, sir," salute and bow down to the lowest rank in regular Japanese soldier. They was just low men on the totem pole, and that's all there was to it.

Marcello: What sort of quarters did you have here in Saigon?

Brown: We had pretty good quarters. They were houses and looked like concrete block buildings that we were in.

Marcello: Were you staying in some sort of an army compound, or was it a warehouse or what?

Brown: It was some kind of an army compound that they'd used for the regular . . . I guess the French had it. They used the natives as soldiers, and that's where they stayed because they had their main cook house out in the middle of it, and we had a big tank out in the

middle of it where we could bathe by, and water and the food supply was pretty good. That's where we got our first American Red Cross package.

Marcello: Can you describe what it was like to receive one of these Red Cross packages?

Brown: Say, I'll tell you what! That was just a little bit of heaven! In that we had a can of hardtack, which when we was back home in the States, we wouldn't have eaten it, you know. We had chewing gum and cigarettes and cheese.

Marcello: Klim?

Brown: Everybody had a can of Spam in there.

Marcello: But did you have the Klim, the powdered milk, milk spelled backwards?

Brown: Yes, we had that. Everybody in camp got one of them. Boy, we . . . of course these little groups got together, you know. We'd put it together and then we'd prepare it our own selves. We stretched it out to make it last a long time that way. I know the one that I got had Old Gold cigarettes in it. Everybody else had Old Golds and Chesterfields, I guess. I said, "By gosh! If that Old Golds is the only tobacco company that's putting out cigarettes in Red Cross packages,

that's the only thing I'm going to smoke when I get back home (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you ever see any of the prisoners trade their food for cigarettes?

Brown: No, I never did. When we got to Saigon, we had a canteen there and they paid us. I believe we got ten cents a day for working for every day we worked. The Japanese run the canteen, and we could buy sugar, which is that brown sugar, and tobacco, that wog tobacco which looks like moss growing on the trees down in East Texas, is what it looks like. I believe it had a little cocaine in it, too, because I know I chewed it. I didn't smoke it. I chewed the darn stuff, and my whole side of my jaw just paralyzed. I didn't have a bit more feeling than nothing in the world in it. I forgot what all else you could buy in that thing.

One time there we had a Red Cross representative come in there. Boy, they issued out the clothing and everything to us, you know! They supplied this canteen, and they had it loaded for the benefit of this Red Cross inspector. They kept us off work that day. They brought them all through camp and showed us all this stuff, you know. But we couldn't buy anything. They

wouldn't sell anything during that time. Just as quick as they left, they took every bit of that out and put it back over in their quarters.

Marcello: What about their clothing? Did they allow you to keep the clothing?

Brown: No, sir. They got them, too. They took everything back.

Marcello: How hard was the work here in Saigon? Or did it vary from detail to detail?

Brown: Well, the work was pretty easy there, except digging those gun emplacements. Then, of course, we worked out at the airfield a whole lot, digging emplacements to put those airplanes in. That was pretty easy work compared to what we had on the railroad.

Marcello: I understand that they were training some of the kamikaze pilots out of this airfield.

Brown: And I'll tell you what! For their methods of training them, they would take these pilots, and there'd be an instructor on the ground. This happened when I was out there. I saw this. By that time I'd learned to speak Japanese pretty good. I could understand enough of it to understand what type of aerial maneuver that he was supposed to do up in the air. So he sent him up. He got up there, done this maneuver, and he come

back down. When he got out of that airplane that Japanese officer had the bamboo pole and literally worked that guy over and put him back in the plane and sent him back up there to do the same thing again. ThenI got to thinking. I thought, "Well, gee whiz! They beat their own people with bamboo poles. That's the reason they was beating us, because they didn't know any better." That's the way they had to tell you what to do.

Marcello: Did you ever see any female pilots here?

Brown: No, I didn't. I never did. I never did see any. I never did see any kind of Japanese female other than at the hospital that we went to. We worked around it for a while while we was there in Saigon.

Marcello: Did you ever leave Saigon during this period?

Brown: Yes. We went to the . . . old "Sojo," that sergeant that I referred to awhile ago, he took twenty of us, and we went up to a town in French Indo-China called Da Lat.

Marcello: You must have been with Smallwood again.

Brown: Evidently I was if he was up there. He took fifteen of us up there, and we got the camp ready to move the rest of the men up. That fifteen, we lived pretty

good up there. We got to eat the regular Japanese food, the same that the soldiers had and all. He treated us real good up there till he got the rest of the men up. Then we didn't have to make any work details. The rest of the guys went down there and they was undermining that hill, digging caves back in there for them to store stuff in. Then they took 120 of us up to a little old town called Tai Hoi.

Then they made me . . . well, let me see now. When we left the jungles, Burma, they took the officers away from us. I never did know what happened to them at all. I don't know where they went to or what happened to them. They'd take the ranking noncom and they'd put him in charge of the camp. When we got . . . they took us up to a little place called Tai Hoi. It was about 500 miles kind of due north of Saigon. We worked on the bombed out railroad bridges and unloaded trains from these bridges. They'd unload them on one side and carry them across to the other side and put them on another train. We went up there by train, and they made me sergeant major of the camp, and I didn't have to go out on any work details on that.

I literally got whale beat out of me up there! We worked at night all the time on account of the bombing raids. They wouldn't work us in the daytime. There was one B-29 that flew that railroad from Saigon all up through there. Anything that moved, well, he bombed it or strafed it. Our camp, he never did touch. Evidently he knew that we were there. I know we would always pray for . . . we had one Japanese guard, and he'd invariably shoot at him every time he'd come by, and when he did, he'd go up there and circle and then come back by and just shoot at everything in the world. He never did get inside that camp.

But anyway, these men was out working one night. They was unloading pontoons. They came and had breakfast and went to bed. They'd been in bed about an hour till old "Sojo" come around and got me and made me get everybody up and get them out on the parade ground. He got me out in front of them. If they'd talk slow, I could understand them. But he was talking real fast, and I couldn't understand a word he was saying. Old Wayne Rhine . . . he'd say something to me, and I wouldn't answer him and he'd hit me with

his fist. Finally, old Wayne said, "Brown, he's talking about them pontoons we unloaded." I said, "Well, what in the hell did you do to them?" He said, "We busted a hole in every one of them. That's what he's raising hell about." (Laughter) I told him, "Well, you could have said something earlier than that and saved me all this beating I'm getting down here!" So I said, "Now next time, you guys, don't do that. Just do it to one or two of them." It satisfied old "Sojo." He let them all go back to bed. Then that night I had dinner with him. I had lobster, all kinds of sea food fixed up. Oh, it was out of this world. I couldn't eat very much of it. It made me so cotton picking mad I could have died (chuckle)! The one time I had a good meal, and I couldn't eat any of it (chuckle)!

Marcello: How long were you up here at Tai Hoi altogether?

Brown: We was up there until the end of the war.

Marcello: I gather that was pretty tough work, was it not, for those that were working on this?

Brown: No, it wasn't, it wasn't. We had it pretty easy. We worked nights all the time. At night you can . . . you don't have to work very hard at night because they can't see you. Then we got to where we'd be moving

stuff, this freight, from one train to the other, and we stole everything that they hadn't nailed down.

I know one night I went out with them. Me and Wayne, he was ahead of me, and I was right behind him. We had a big towsack. I thought it was bran that we was carrying in there. Old Wayne had worked a hole in this towsack. I noticed every now and then that he'd get a big finger full and he'd eat it. I said, "Wayne, what in the hell are you eating?" He said, "Boy, you and me are carrying dried shrimp." So we set them down over here (laughter).

Marcello: In other words, you were getting a little fatter after you moved into Indo-China.

Brown: Yes, we were. That bunch up in there, we had it pretty good up in there. Of course, that dried fish, we got to where we could eat it pretty good. It tasted real good to us. I get hungry for some of that stuff nowadays.

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that I hadn't asked you earlier and I mean to. What opportunities did you have to commit sabotage, either on the railroad or inside Saigon or up here at Tai Hoi or in Da Lat?

Brown: On the railroad, I didn't have any but . . .

Marcello: About the only thing you could do on the railroad, I guess, was conveniently leave a couple of shovels or picks or things of that nature.

Brown: Yes, but they kept check pretty close on them. After we got into Saigon, well, we got to loading them barges with gasoline, and I know the ones we loaded, they didn't get to their destination with barrels of gasoline because . . . somewhere in the deal we found a wrench that would fit that cap on that barrel. On every one we loaded we made sure that that big hole was down and the cap was loose, and it was leaking when it left there. I know good and well that none of those barrels got to where they was going.

Then we was working in the automobile shop there in Saigon where we was wrapping coils. The Japanese couldn't get any parts along at the end of the war, so they had to make their own coils, spark plugs, and valve cores. These coils that we was wrapping, well, they'd watch us and we'd have to put so many turns of wire on there. Then we would invariably leave off enough turns where that coil wouldn't work for but about a couple of hours and it would poop out. And valve stems, we'd take them valve stems and put that

little rubber back on those things. Now I'll tell you, those Japanese, they could do more with nothing than any bunch of people I ever saw. On that railroad they had trucks that you'd swear they was Dodges, but they was Dodges, Chevrolets, and Fords--all those parts was intermingled on that truck. They overhauled them with a ball peen hammer and a cold chisel. That's the way they overhauled them things. That beat me!

Marcello: I gather that at Saigon and in Indo-China you were doing a variety of jobs.

Brown: Yes, we were. Of course, that's where they made thieves out of us. We'd go out on these jobs in parts of the town we'd go out on, well, we'd have a chance to steal this stuff, but we couldn't sell it. So we'd risk carrying it back into camp, hiding it, and then getting on a different detail the next day and carrying it out. Wrenches and cloth and such stuff as that, that's what we stole the most of.

Marcello: I remember you stole a lot of cloth because Smallwood also mentions the cloth. Didn't you have a method of wrapping it around your legs or around your body or something?

Brown: (Laughter) Yes, of course, you had those shorts on, you know, and you wrapped it around your waist and pulled your shorts up over them.

Marcello: He was saying that you could wrap as much as twenty yards around you or something like that.

Brown: You could.

Marcello: Was this silk or what sort of cloth was it?

Brown: It was cotton cloth, black cotton cloth. It was what they used . . .

Marcello: They make clothing out of it, don't they?

Brown: Yes, the natives make clothes out of it. We would steal it from where we . . . what we used it for is they had tires stored in these warehouses. They had this cloth hanging down from the top of the ceiling over these tires to keep them dark so they wouldn't ruin. That's where we stole our cloth at. I never will forget one time I got hold of a crescent wrench, and I thought, "Boy, that'll be just the thing. I'll get old Slate to sell it out on that other detail."

Marcello: In other words, you would sell and barter all of these things with the natives.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: For food usually, I suppose?

Brown: Yes, food or money because we could buy stuff there in that little old canteen there in camp. I got this crescent wrench, and it was about a ten-inch crescent

wrench, and I had my canteen on, so I put it down next to my skin and put that canteen over it, you know. They did an inspection out there, and he didn't find it. Of course, you marched into camp after you got . . . they hauled us to and from camp in trucks. You'd begin unloading them trucks, and you'd line up into formation again, and he'd count you to see if you was all there. Then when you marched past the guard gate, well, you had to do a eyes right or left, whichever way you was going. I marched through the gate, I didn't look to the right or to the left. I just didn't look. I hadn't got much more than two steps by that guardhouse till that guard hit me. First thing I thought of, "The wrench is gone." I wasn't worrying about him hitting me. I'd gotten used to that. I thought, "Oh, boy! If he shakes me down and finds that wrench, I'm a dead duck." Because they had a little doghouse out there. It was about two foot high and about three foot long. If they caught you stealing, well that's . . . you stayed in that for about two days. You couldn't sit up, and you couldn't lay down. I thought, "That's where I'm going to be." There was no doubt in my mind. I'd done give up on

that deal. He stood me at attention and hit me a time or two and then marched me back out in the street. I come back through there and he said, "Ka tsu ra hidari," and that means cast your eyes to the right. Boy, I hung one on him, I'm telling you. He said, "Ush." You talk about somebody feeling good! After I got by that, I just knew I was going to be in that darn little doghouse.

Marcello: But I can remember Smallwood telling me that that cloth was prime item for bartering.

Brown: Oh, you could get a lot of money for that, you sure could. That's where we . . . we had a radio there in that camp at Saigon. We had an old boy in there that was a radio bug. I mean he could build one up for nothing. One of these jobs that we was on, well, they found the radio. They dismantled it at the job. They'd bring it in a piece at a time and give it to this old boy. They brought the chasis and the whole thing in! How they brought the chasis in, I don't know, because it was about that square [gesture] and about that thick [gesture], but they got it by that darn guard. He put that thing together. This cook house had a big brick chimney. They hollowed out a space in this brick chimney and set that radio in there.

This Japanese lieutenant, he called us out there one day and said, "I want to tell you all something. There's only two people that's got radios that can catch worldwide broadcast, BBC. I've got one, and you guys have got one. If I ever find it, I'm going to kill you!"

Marcello: By this time, did the Japanese more or less realize that the war was soon going to be over?

Brown: Yes, I believe they did. I believe they did realize that it was going to be over.

Marcello: As a result, did the harassment ease up a little bit?

Brown: Yes. Even up there when we was in Tai Hoi, we got good treatment up there.

Marcello: By this time, I gather that you perhaps were getting a little closer to some of these Japanese guards.

Brown: Yes, we were. This old "Sojo," oh, we got real close to him. They moved him out one time, and they brought another one into us. I forgot what we called him. But, boy, he was a son-of-a-gun! I'm telling you what, he was rough on us! But he didn't stay but just a short time, and they brought this old sergeant back to us. Unless we was just deliberately done something, you know, like knocking holes in all of them pontoons, he wouldn't do anything to us.

Marcello: As the end of the war approached, was there ever any fear on your part that the Japanese would kill all of you?

Brown: Yes, we got that impression twice. When we was down in Saigon before they started moving us out of there . . . well, let's see, I'm getting a little ahead of my story. While we was in Saigon, they made three efforts, I believe, to get us to Japan. In fact, they went as far one time to go ahead and issue us supplies and extra clothing to make that trip, but they couldn't get no ships moving. We knew then that the war was going against them pretty bad. When we was in Tai Hoi, the natives would tell us that . . . up there, we got friendly with the natives. The natives would tell us that the war was going against the Japanese, that they were losing. That's when we heard that the United States dropped the atomic bomb over there. We heard that they dropped it, and we also heard that they couldn't control it, that it was a chain reaction, and it was coming right on down, just mowing everything down in sight.

Marcello: Did you hear this over the radio?

Brown: I've forgot now how we heard that, but we heard it while we was up at Tai Hoi.

Marcello: Well, I guess you wouldn't have had your radio up there at Tai Hoi.

Brown: No, we didn't have it, but I forgot now how we found that out, unless some of the natives up in there told us. The natives up in that part of the world were pretty friendly to us. They'd help us whenever they could. If the Japanese would let them, well, they'd help us. They'd give us . . . seems to me like we run onto a Catholic nun up in there that helped us some. It was either there or in Saigon that we run into these Catholic nuns that helped us. The closer it got to the end of the war, the better they got. Of course, up there we didn't get worried until along the last part of August of . . . when was that?

Marcello: 1945.

Brown: 1945, that the war was over.

Marcello: Can you describe this particular incident?

Brown: Well, we went out to work that morning. They put us back on days. We kept watching the natives. They kept getting closer to us when we was marching out. They were a whole lot closer than what they'd normally get. They'd tell us that Japan was finished. We couldn't figure that out. The whole time we was out on that job that day, well, we kept noticing the guards,

that they wasn't paying us any mind. They was off in little groups talking to themselves. Coming back from work that evening, the natives got hold of us again, and they'd intermingle with us then. The Japanese wouldn't run them off. They'd say, "Shoot him! Shoot him! War is finished!" When they got back to camp that night, well, old "Sojo" told us. He said the war was over. They immediately transferred all the guards that we had, that had been with us, they transferred them all out, brought in a different set of guards to put on us. Then old "Sojo" . . . I went and complained to him about the food.

Marcello: You were really getting brave by this time.

Brown: Yes, I told him, "Now, 'Sojo,' we want some better food to eat, better than this crud you've been feeding us. Now you've got to do that right now."

Marcello: Were you still saluting and bowing and all that?

Brown: No, I shut it off right there. He said, "Ush." He'd do what he could. Of course, up in there in that little old town, he couldn't get very much. But he did. He got us a little better food than what we had been getting. Then he told us that he was going to take us back to Saigon and turn us over to the

Americans in Saigon. He loaded us on boxcars and, oh Lord, I think there was only about ten or fifteen men to the boxcar. He got us fixed in those the best way he could, make it comfortable for us. On our way back to Saigon, we run into a revolution.

Marcello: In other words, these were the natives who assumed that now that the war was over, they were going to receive their independence from France. This was actually the beginning of the communist revolution, you might say, in that area.

Brown: We got about a hundred miles south of Tai Hoi, and we ran into this ambush. I thought, "God almighty! Going through all of this, and then we're going to get killed on the way to freedom!" But we was lucky. We didn't get a man shot or nothing. They did shoot them boxcars plumb full of holes. I believe they killed the engineer on that trip.

Marcello: Were they just shooting at this train as it went by or what?

Brown: Yes, they was shooting at the train as it went by. We spent the night . . . it's where they got that big airbase over there now in Saigon. It's right on the coast. Almost caught it, but I can't recall the name

of the town. Anyway, they got a big military base there. We spent the night there in that town. They had a carnival going. I never will forget it. We didn't have a dime or no clothes to wear, but we went . . . the biggest part of the men went to the carnival.

Marcello: By this time, what happened to the Japanese guards?

Brown: They was still with us.

Marcello: Did they still have their guns and everything of this nature?

Brown: Yes, but they didn't bother us. They didn't do anything to us. He wanted us to stay on the train, but, Lord, them Americans had by then gone hog wild. They went to that . . . a bunch of them went to that carnival. They come back, and, boy, they was loused up drunk! I don't know where they got the money for what they were drinking.

We got back on that train again that morning and went on into Saigon. They carried us to a different camp. This one had been a military barracks for the Japanese. They had cleaned all of the Japanese out of it, and they put us in there. This thing also had a concrete fence, brick fence, around it with barbed

wire around it. We didn't have no officers with us. We had the Japanese guards, a new set of guards. They was regular Japanese. They wasn't Koreans. This Japanese officer come around and told us, "Please stay in this compound. We've got to turn you over intact to the American authorities. They'll be in here in a day or two." But we didn't.

We went over the fence. We went down into Saigon. We didn't have no money or nothing, didn't buy anything. So the French down there, I guess they felt sorry for us, and they invited us down to the house for something to eat, and me and Wayne Rhine and two or three more went with this French family down at their house and had a supper, I believe it was, or a dinner. While we was sitting down at this table eating, gunfire broke out. We couldn't understand what the French was saying, but they was telling us that there was a revolution going on. Boy, we decided that we better get the heck out of there and get back to camp.

Marcello: They were really gunning for those Frenchmen.

Brown: Yes, they were. They sure were. We got out in the middle of the street, and we wasn't dressed like no Frenchman because we still had on our khaki shorts

of prison life, and we walked right in the middle of the street. Them bullets goes "Zoooom." They was shooting over our heads. Finally, we got up to a corner there, and there was just a whole gang of natives up there. They just came out of the house right on the corner, and they had just killed all of the French family in that house. All they had was bamboo, and they had sharpened it down to a spear, and, of course, they just encircled us and run up there and was sticking them spears at us.

And, accidentally, one of them natives could speak English and asked us, "Who are you?" We told him, "We're Americans. We're going back to this camp." He said, "Well, I'll tell you guys something. You get out there to that camp, and you stay there because it's fixing to break loose here in this town." We took him at his word. He sent a guard along with us to get us back to camp. I didn't leave camp anymore until the Americans got there. That's how close we come to getting killed after going through all that.

Marcello: Incidentally, what were your immediate feelings when you got the official word from "Sojo" that the war was over?

Brown: Well, I thought of one guard right off, "Liver Lips," that I told you about awhile ago. If I could have gotten hold of that guy, I would have killed him right there.

Marcello: I was going to ask if you ever had any feelings for revenge for these guards?

Brown: That particular one, I could have. It wouldn't have bothered me a bit, not one little bit. I could have killed him with the greatest of ease, and it would have been just like taking a drink of water because he dealt us misery, all uncalled for. It wouldn't have bothered me a bit on him. But now, that was the only one.

After I had witnessed the way the Japanese treated their own people . . . well, to me war is war, and you go in it to win. There's no set rules to fighting a war because if when you go into a war, you go in to win. You've got to use every method in the world you can to win. That's what the Japanese was doing, but, of course, they signed the Geneva Peace Treaty, and, of course, the United States didn't. I hold them responsible for the way they treated the prisoners. I don't believe they should have treated them that way.

It was all uncalled for. Again, when you stop to think about it, their food supply situation . . . the food they fed us was probably what their own people was getting. No, I don't feel bad toward the Japanese, but that one particular one at that time, if I would have gotten hold of him, I would have killed him.

Marcello: I would assume that after awhile, most of these guards kind of became rather faceless unless one of them like "Liver Lips" actually stood out.

Brown: Yes, they did. That "Baby Face" was another one that I don't believe if they could have gotten to him that he would have lived. They would have killed him and wouldn't have thought anything about it. Now on that train that we was going up to Da Lat on, or coming down from Da Lat, well, in this coach we was in, they had a regular Japanese soldier guarding us. That old boy had been on the front line, I guess, all of his life because he was worn completely out. We stole everything that old boy had--his gun, his shoes, we even took his clothes off of him. We got to feeling sorry for him, and we give it all back to him (chuckle). But now he was that good to us. He didn't care what we done just as long as he got to where he was going with the set number of men he had when he started out

with. That was all he was worried about. The rest of the time, just leave him alone. But we stole everything that guy had. I mean we stole his gun, his ammunition, his shoes, his pack. We stole it all. Then we felt sorry for him and give it all back to him.

Marcello: Describe your first contact with the Americans now that the war was over.

Brown: Well, let's see. My first contact was after the . . . there was a major that came out to camp. He made up a roster of all . . . now he was an American. He made a roster of all American men, American prisoners, in that camp. He divided us up into how many men that could fly out on each airplane. He said, "Now you get ready because there will be a flight in on . . ." this was like on Monday, and he said, "Now on Tuesday morning there will be an airplane in here to pick up a set number of men." He had us all broke down into what flight we was going to be on and all. Boy, I sure was glad to see that old boy! The next morning a Japanese brought a truck around there, and we loaded up these number of men and I went . . . me and another boy went out there with them to see them off. They all

loaded on the airplane, on this old C-47, and, of course, me and this other boy didn't get on because we wasn't supposed to go out on that flight. This pilot, he stuck his head out the window after he got his engine reved up and hollered, "Hey, ain't you guys going?" We told him no. I said, "You've got what you're supposed to haul." He says, "Always room for some more. Come on." So on it we went. When we got on it, this crew chief, he shut the door of the darn old C-47, and he took some bailing wire and wired it together, you know. I thought, "I ain't too sure about this flight. I believe I'd rather of stayed and caught the next one." But we flew out of there without a doggone bit of trouble.

Marcello: Where did you fly to?

Brown: We went to Rangoon, and that's where I met my first Red Cross. That's where I got it in for the Red Cross. I wouldn't help them over nothing! This pilot landed on the field, and he said, "Come on by. Let's go over there and get you a good old cup of American coffee." And we said, "That's just fine. That's what we want." Donuts, and we got some donuts, too. Well, gee whiz! It had been years since we had had a good cup of coffee.

All we had was rice coffee. We went over there to this Red Cross canteen. He said, "Give these guys a cup of coffee." She said, "Have they got the money?" There we stood in shorts, barefooted, and not one place to even carry a little bitty nickel. She said, "If they've got the money, they can buy this coffee." He said, "Lady, these guys have been where there ain't no money." She said, "I can't help it. If you ain't got the money, you can't buy no coffee." He said, "Well, we gave you the coffee." She said, "Well, still, you've got to buy it." That cooked me with the Red Cross right there. So he took us on up here to a great old big pyramidal tent. When we walked in that thing, they had a table . . . it looked like acres and acres of tables, boy! And food, you name it, it was stacked on that table! I don't care what it was. We had generals, colonels, majors, all ranks was waiting on us. I couldn't eat a darn thing. I ate about five or six bites, and I couldn't eat anymore of that food. Boy, and they just had everything out there! They treated us like kings, the Air Corps did to us. From then on, from that day that we got back into American custody, they treated us like kings.

Marcello: When did you first enter a hospital? I'm sure that one of the first stops was a hospital.

Brown: We went from Rangoon to Calcutta. We went in the hospital there. We stayed in Calcutta . . . oh, the old boy that flew me from Rangoon, Rangoon to Calcutta--he was a pilot of this here ship--and after he got in the air and got airborne, well, he come back there, and he said, "Any of you guys from Texas?" And we said, "Yes, all of us are." He said, "How about Decatur?" I said, "Come on back here, boy. We'll talk to you." This darn kid was going to high school when I left Decatur. He was just in high school. To think that I'd run onto that guy in Calcutta, a major in the Air Force, and he was flying me home. That's where I got my first good chew of tobacco. Calcutta was where I met my first WAC. That's something we didn't know about, you know. We got off of this plane in Calcutta, Dum Dum Airfield. They had a carry-all there waiting on us. It was new to us. We didn't know what that thing was. Somebody ripped that off and told us to get our "you-know-whats" on this truck. So we all kind of looked around wondering who was talking, you know. This soldier got out of there, and we looked at her and

decided that wasn't a soldier. It was a woman. We couldn't understand what the women were doing in the United States Army. She told us in so many words, she said, "Didn't you guys ever see a WAC before?" We said, "Lady, we don't even know what that is." That was the first time I ever seen them boys dumbfounded. I mean, we was just like little bitty kids. We done exactly what she said, too.

Marcello: I want to go back here a minute and ask a question. Did the Japanese guards seem kind of relieved when the war was over?

Brown: Well, old "Sojo" did. He was kind of down in the dumps. But now the rest of those guards that we had didn't. When we got back to Saigon, well, it looked like that all of those guards there were real young Japanese soldiers, real, real young. They was scared of us. We could go out there and take their gun away from them and take their swords and anything at all, and they wouldn't object to nothing. They were scared of us.

Marcello: You mentioned that they laid out this massive amount of food for you there in Rangoon and they put you in the hospital there in Calcutta, where I'm sure you

underwent a rather thorough examination. If you were sick enough, they would keep you there for a while. What other preparations had they made for you, or what other treatment did you receive? In other words, did you have to take any sort of psychological tests or anything of this nature?

Brown: No, I didn't see a psychiatrist the whole time I was there.

Marcello: How long were you in Calcutta altogether?

Brown: We was there about two weeks. No, now let's see, August . . . no, we wasn't there that long because I got back to the States sometime in September. I imagine about two weeks that we stayed there. They just turned it over to us. Those doctors were dumbfounded that a man could go through what we had gone through and come out in that kind of shape. I had many of those doctors tell me, "Boy, by all medical rights, you are supposed to be dead. You're not even supposed to be alive. We don't see how you done it." The little men made it fine. The big man couldn't make it.

Marcello: At the time you entered the service, how much did you weigh?

Brown: When I left Brownwood, I weighed about 145 pounds.

Marcello: How much did you weigh at your lowest?

Brown: I got down to about eighty pounds, I imagine. I'll tell you, those men over there, you could stand off and see them. One of their jaws would be shrunk in. You could see the outline of their teeth. You could even count the teeth that they had in their mouth. They had lost that much weight. A lot of those men, the arms was just the skin over the bone.

Marcello: What ailments did you have or did you contract while you were in the jungle or while you were a prisoner-of-war? You had tropical ulcers. I'm sure you had malaria.

Brown: Yes, dysentery, beriberi. I had the jungle fever, not much of it, and malnutrition. I guess what hurt me most was that beriberi.

Marcello: Now this is a vitamin deficiency, is it not?

Brown: Yes. Your legs swell up. It looked like you was just as fat as everything. You could take your finger and poke it in your leg, and then when you'd bring your finger out, it leaves a hole there in your leg.

Marcello: Now this was wet beriberi, I gather.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: There was a wet beriberi, and there was a dry beriberi. In dry beriberi I suppose your skin just cracks, does it not?

Brown: It does.

Marcello: But in the jungles, most of the prisoners experienced the wet beriberi.

Brown: Yes. Where we were, yes.

Marcello: Did you have to undergo any additional treatment after you got back to the United States? I'm referring to the time when you first got back to the United States.

Brown: No. Well, when I was in Calcutta I had stomach trouble all the time. I kept telling them then that I did have. But they'd X-ray me, and they couldn't find anything. They figured it was nerves that caused all that. When I left the hospital there in Calcutta and they flew me back to the States, I went into Halloran General Hospital in New York. I stayed in Halloran General Hospital for one week. No, I was there two weeks. When I left there, they marked me for general duty. I reported back to Fort Sam Houston. That made me a complete trip around the world.

Marcello: That's right. You started out at Camp Bowie, and you ended up at Fort Sam Houston.

Brown: Yes.

Marcello: As you look back on your experience as a prisoner-of-war, what do you think pulled you through more than anything else?

Brown: Well, you know, I've thought about that. I guess that I didn't let anything bother me. My folks at home, I didn't let that enter my mind. I knew they was being taken care of. I was worried about number one, about myself. I just let each day take care of itself. I just lived from day to day. When we had that bombing raid and the strafing raid in Saigon, I didn't . . . I worried a whole lot then. Our camp there in Saigon was right there on the river docks. Just a street separated us from the river, and that's where the docks were. They came in there and bombed all up and down those river docks, but they never did get over there in our area at all. Then when the Navy came in there and strafed all day long, well, they never did get any strafing in that camp we was in. We got a lot of hulls from those airplanes that fell in the camp, but they never did get a shot over in there.

Marcello: You got a lot of hulls?

Brown: Yes, the hulls out of the machine guns falling out of them airplanes, they'd fall on us. We later found out that they knew where we were, and for that reason we didn't get hit. I'll tell you what. That is an

awful sight. I could stand the bombing raids, but I can't stand them strafing raids because you don't know what they're going to hit. They're just . . . they'll shoot at anything that moves, you know. In a bombing raid, you've got a pretty good idea that they've got a military target in sight somewhere. When you see them coming in, and they've got that bomb bay door open . . . if they're right above you and the bombs are not falling, you're a safe boy. You've got it made. You can sure hear them things whistling through the air.