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Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: C. A. Cates

(Signature)

Date: 14 March 1974

Oral History Collection

C. A. Cates

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas Date: March 14, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing C. A. Cates for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 14, 1974, in Decatur, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Cates 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. Cates was an officer who served with the "Lost Battalion," a Texas National Guard outfit that was captured virtually intact on the island of Java in March of 1942. This particular unit spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps throughout Japan and Asia.

Mr. Cates, to begin this interview, would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, would you tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education, your present occupation--things of that nature. Just be very brief.

Mr. Cates: I was born in Decatur on August 29, 1908. I've lived no place else except, of course, for the war experience. I attended school here, one year at Decatur Baptist College, after high school. I went to Texas A & M, where I got a B.S. degree in chemical engineering followed by a master of science degree in chemical engineering. Then, on graduation I bumped heads with the depression, and rather than following chemical engineering, I went into teaching. I taught seven years in the local high school in the mathematics department, and then the war took me out of that. I came back to go into the abstract firm with my father. I'm the fourth generation in that firm, Cates Abstract Company.

Dr. Marcello: When did you enter the National Guard, and why did you enter?

Mr. Cates: I got out of A & M with a reserve officer's degree. I had known when I finished that there was a possibility I might come into the local unit of the Guard as an officer to continue whatever the carry-over value might be. I got into the Guard before graduation as a private and corporal and so on and then on graduation became an officer in the local unit.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the National Guard unit here in Decatur, did you have any notion at that time that the country might possibly be going into war?

Cates: None at all. None.

Marcello: What sort of a unit was this here at Decatur? What was its function?

Cates: Its function was to furnish the headquarters detail for one battalion of field artillery, light artillery. We did communication; we laid telephones; we had radio communication. We functioned as observation and liaison with infantry.

Marcello: This was the headquarters that . . . would you call it the headquarters company?

Cates: Yes, an artillery battery rather than company but basically the same.

Marcello: And then within the "Lost Battalion," or what was to eventually become the "Lost Battalion," there was D, E, and F Battery. Isn't that correct?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: All of which were artillery batteries. Then I think you had a transportation unit, did you not?

Cates: Service battery, yes.

Marcello: And was there a medical detachment, also?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: But this particular unit here in Decatur was a headquarters unit.

Cates: A headquarters for the battalion.

Marcello: Well, the unit was finally mobilized in November of 1940. I think it was November 11.

Cates: Right, yes.

Marcello: Now when did you go on the maneuvers in Louisiana? Was it before or after this date?

Cates: Before mobilization. We stayed in our local unit in a mobilized status until we were taken over to Camp Bowie at Brownwood. We waited locally because of the fact that there was no Camp Bowie for us to go to. When they set up a crude camp, we went into it immediately.

Marcello: What sort of activity took place at Camp Bowie in Brownwood after you were mobilized?

Cates: Normal training, maneuvers. We had problems locally. We would go into the field with our batteries of artillery. Our headquarters unit functioned just as well as we could under the circumstances.

Marcello: You say you functioned as well as you could under the circumstances. Were they trying?

Cates: No, not really, except that it was new to us. We hadn't had such a thing which might ultimately lead to activity. We could see that. We had previously had a picnic out of it. Then at Camp Bowie in the mud and the temporary shelters at that time, we fussed and cussed and fumed because we knew it was more serious than it had been.

Marcello: What was the average age of the men in the Decatur unit? You would have to estimate this, of course. What do you think would be the average age?

Cates: I would think they would certainly be no more than mid-twenties. They were youngish. We had many school kids when we left home. They were replaced by draftees who in turn were young. We wound up with, I would say, mid-twenties as an average.

Marcello: Approximately how many men were in this unit in Decatur altogether?

Cates: We, as I recall, attempted to keep a level of approximately a hundred. I don't know the exact number.

Marcello: I would assume that during this particular period, or at least before mobilization anyhow, a lot of young men kind of considered the National Guard a type of

social organization. Is that a good word to use, perhaps?

Cates: That's not a bad word to use (chuckle). It was difficult to make them see anything too serious out of it before mobilization. It was radically different when they knew there was a possibility we would have other things to do. We had outings. We had a summer camp which was a picnic for most of us--very enjoyable. I don't mean by that that we jumped off entirely, or goofed off, because we did have things to do and we knew it. We were inspected and scored and graded and raked over the coals if we didn't make a certain mark. But still, it was taken lightly, I think.

Marcello: Was it in Louisiana that the unit had achieved relatively high scores so far as performance was concerned in maneuvers?

Cates: Yes. We were rather high up the scale, I think, as far as our records were concerned.

Marcello: I've heard that this was perhaps one of the reasons why the 131st Field Artillery was eventually selected to be a part of Operation PLUM. Is there any truth to this?

Cates: That I have heard, also. I didn't attempt to run the rumor down.

Marcello: Did you know of any other reason why the 131st Field Artillery was ultimately destined for the Philippines?

Cates: No, none, except that as you suggested, the possibility it would serve as a nucleus or a cater for an organization or whatever was to take place.

Marcello: Now sometime during this period, is it not true that the Army underwent a reorganization from the square division to the triangular division? How exactly did that take place, and why did it take place? I think the 131st Field Artillery was caught up in that reorganization, was it not?

Cates: Yes. We left home a square division and landed a triangular division without really ever having attained the status of a triangular division. I think it was due largely to a change in mobility. We went from a horse-drawn outfit to the most mobile possible. Even as we mobilized in Camp Bowie, we had obsolete equipment. It's just simply progress, and I think mobility would probably be the password.

Marcello: Is this when you received the French 75's, or had you had these before?

Cates: We had the 75's before we were on the way to junking them in favor of the 105 howitzers. We left home with 75's.

Marcello: This is what I thought. Now ultimately, of course, like we pointed out, the 131st Field Artillery was destined for overseas duty in the Philippines. Didn't they have an age cutoff? In other words, didn't men who were over a certain age have a chance to opt out of going to the Far East?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: How did that work?

Cates: I don't know, frankly. But there were a great number who took advantage of the option and didn't go overseas with us.

Marcello: Now did this apply to both officers and enlisted men?

Cates: With officers, I don't know. I really don't know because those with whom I was in contact didn't have the option, didn't exercise it to say the least.

Marcello: What was done to replace those who opted out. Were draftees simply brought in to fill out the ranks?

Cates: Yes. There were a number of transfers within our artillery brigade.

Marcello: But for the most part, this outfit was made up of almost entirely Texans, isn't that correct?

Cates: Right, yes.

Marcello: Well, you eventually left Brownwood and traveled by

train to San Francisco. At the time that you were traveling westward, I assume that you had no idea what your ultimate destination was.

Cates: None whatever.

Marcello: You did know that you were a part of PLUM?

Cates: Right.

Marcello: And that's it?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: You got to San Francisco, and, of course, you boarded the USS Republic for your trip across the Pacific, and your first stop was Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands. As an old Texas boy from Decatur, how did you stand up on this ocean voyage? Did you get seasick?

Cates: Only on landing. We went through Molokai Channel, and it's very turbulent. That, I think, was the only moment that I was not easy. However, I'll admit that when I got ashore, the sidewalks were rotating more than a little bit (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you have very much time to spend ashore here in Honolulu?

Cates: No, just a very short shore leave.

Marcello: During the time that you did get to go ashore, did you notice any extraordinary precautions being taken for war on the part of the military?

Cates: There were definitely signs of unease there. There were barbed wire entanglements on the streets. There were MP's, mounted machine guns, and such signs at the busy intersections.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of any of the civilians and so on talk about the possibility of war?

Cates: No. We had no contact . . . that is, I had no contact with civilians there. I don't know if that was a matter of conversation with them or not.

Marcello: So you didn't have a very long shore leave in Honolulu, and again you got back on the USS Republic and took off again. I think it was somewhere off the Fiji Islands, was it not . . . you had stopped at the Fiji Islands briefly to take on fresh water and additional provisions and this sort of thing, but anyway, it was somewhere off the Fiji Islands that you received the word that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Cates: We pulled into Fiji after we were very definitely certain of the attack. We passed the Japanese task force just beyond Pearl Harbor on the day we left or the day after we left. We were there the seventh, and they hit the eighth.

Marcello: Well, did you pass the Japanese task force that was on its way to Pearl Harbor, do you feel?

Cates: Yes, I feel that we did.

Marcello: Can you describe this particular incident?

Cates: There were vessels not discernable to me, but the watch reported and signaled them and received no answer. We could see masts. We could see a group of vessels at a great distance. Other than our feeling the discomfort that was instilled in us because of the rumors that there was something big out there that wasn't answering, we didn't know much until the next day.

Marcello: Did this cause very much excitement and so on on board the ship?

Cates: It did. It surely did!

Marcello: Did the officers more or less . . . were the officers more or less aware of the danger of war in the Pacific than, let's say, the enlisted men were?

Cates: I don't think any of us had occasion to be aware of anything really, until Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: What were your reactions when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Cates: Very lost feeling, I will be frank to admit. We were mighty far from home and no place to go. With the Japanese between us and home--obviously they were

between us and wherever we were going--so that made us a very small point in a very big ocean, and that situation continued for quite awhile.

Marcello: Now, of course, when you left Honolulu, you were accompanied by a couple of other ships, were you not?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: I think there was a little gunboat and a cruiser, the Pensacola.

Cates: Yes, Niagara, I believe, was the name of the converted yacht and the Pensacola.

Marcello: Did you think that it would be a relatively short war?

Cates: I had no earthly idea what to think of things.

Marcello: What sort of discussion was taking place among your fellow officers after they had received the news?

Cates: Nothing. It was difficult for us to conceive with our being in such a position without having been told that there was something afoot. You never know everything, I guess, and we certainly didn't know anything in that . . .

Marcello: Perplexity?

Cates: Perplexity, yes.

Marcello: Perplexity would probably be a good word to describe it.

What picture did you have in mind of a typical Japanese? When you thought of the Japanese, what did you think of?

Cates: I don't know that I have an answer to that, either. A small, very obsequious individual, not very outgoing, certainly not a bully. It was hard to conceive of their having done what they had done at Pearl Harbor with the picture I had of the Japanese.

Marcello: Did you think that it would be a relatively short war with obviously the United States winning?

Cates: Quick. Yes, I did. I felt that they surely could not have done what they did with any intention of continuing it, and if they did try to continue, they couldn't conceivably last long. Yes, I thought it would be over in a hurry.

Marcello: Quite obviously, you didn't know the extent of the damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor.

Cates: No.

Marcello: Okay, so your course was diverted from the Philippines to Brisbane, Australia. You arrived at Brisbane, I think, sometime around December 21, 1941. Could you describe what sort of reception you received from the Australians when you landed at Brisbane?

Cates: We could have landed on a desert basically. We didn't see anybody except, of course, the ladies or very young people and very old people. All of their fighting men were gone. And, of course, they had no reception committees out for people like us. We were an accident of the war. We were treated nice enough--I don't mean that officially--and given every consideration possible. But it was an Australia that obviously was not an everyday Australia.

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

Cates: We were billeted in a racetrack, the name of which I have forgotten.

Marcello: The Ascot Racetrack.

Cates: Ascot Racetrack, yes.

Marcello: What sort of quarters did you have here at the racetrack?

Cates: We were in the grandstand part of the time, and the men were scattered around the infield, and I shall not forget mutton for Christmas dinner when we might have had turkey if we had asked for it (chuckle).

Marcello: I gather that the Texas boys didn't take too well to that mutton?

Cates: It was hopeless (chuckle).

Marcello: I do remember several of the people telling me, however, that the Australians did invite the troops into their homes for Christmas dinner.

Cates: They did. They did, yes.

Marcello: And I assume there wasn't too much that was done during this short period that you were in Brisbane. In other words, there was no training or anything of that nature.

Cates: No.

Marcello: You were simply waiting there for further orders, I suspect.

Cates: Maintenance. We did minor maintenance and basically nothing else.

Marcello: Well, very shortly thereafter, maybe about a week and a half after you landed in Brisbane, or maybe as much as two or three weeks after you had landed in Brisbane, you left again. Of course, your ultimate destination this time was Java in the East Indies. At the time you left Brisbane, did you know that you were on your way to Java?

Cates: Yes, we were told then that we were going to provide ground forces for the Clark Field planes that had to leave the Philippines without sufficient personnel to do the groundwork.

Marcello: Now you no longer had the USS Republic. You were on board a Dutch freighter at that time, were you not?

Cates: Yes, the Bloemfontein, a Dutch freighter.

Marcello: And, as I recall, the first leg of this journey took you to Port Darwin in the northern reaches of Australia. Was there anything of importance or out of the ordinary that happened on the trip from Brisbane to Fort Darwin?

Cates: We were fired on by submarines. I had a watch. We signed the log before and after our watch, reporting anything that might have happened. Basically nothing did. It was routine. But one time I followed the preceding officer, relieved him, and in the log, I noticed an entry, "Torpedo wake crossed the bow." That's so-and-so, certain hour.

Marcello: I gather that it didn't cause too much alarm because a lot of people didn't know about it.

Cates: Not really, not really. But the personnel on the ship knew that we were in waters that weren't too healthy.

Marcello: I gather, however, this Bloemfontein was a much better ship than that old USS Republic, and it would speed along at a pretty clip.

Cates: Yes, it was. It was a rather nice ship.

Marcello: What did the officers talk about during this voyage? In other words, were you busy making some sort of preparations for what you would do when you got to Java or anything of this nature?

Cates: Not in my level, no. I don't know of anything we could have planned or thought or altered by way of analysis of our position because we still didn't know a lot.

Marcello: At this time, were you getting the idea that perhaps you were sacrificial lambs, in other words, that you were being sent to Java as a type of holding action in order to divert the Japanese away from Australia?

Cates: Well, at this time, I think we all thought we would be victorious. I don't think we had a ghost of an idea that we would be on the embarrassing side of things. No, I think, without exception we were optimistic.

Marcello: Okay, so you landed in Java on January 11, 1942, at the port of Surabaja, and I assume that you went immediately, or very shortly, to this airfield outside Surabaja at Malang. What was the airfield like?

Cates: It was a clearing in a jungle. It had a runway long enough to handle our large planes, which at

that time were the B-17's. There were concealed areas for disposition of planes on the ground, camouflaged and under the overhang of the trees. It was just a normal military installation, I should think. The quarters were extremely nice barracks with individual quarters for the officers.

Marcello: Can you describe the quarters in a little better detail so far as the bedding and toilet facilities and what have you?

Cates: The buildings were brick without exception. They were air conditioned by a slit at the top of each wall. There was always a breeze blowing, an ocean breeze, of course. They were quite comfortable. The walls were thick, and the roofs were of tile. The bedding was military cots. The toilet facilities were an open ditch or straddle slit of flowing water.

Marcello: Now did you have very much contact with the Dutch here at Malang?

Cates: Yes, we did.

Marcello: In what way were you cooperating or acting with the Dutch?

Cates: That I couldn't tell you. Anything of that nature would have happened at the staff level. We did the

groundwork on the planes. We had our guns disposed for antiaircraft use, if you can do that with a French 75. Cooperation with the Dutch, of course, was of the staff nature, naturally. It would be supplies, logistics, rather than service.

Marcello: I gather that generally speaking the Dutch weren't exactly too anxious to put up a real fierce resistance on Java.

Cates: I don't think so.

Marcello: From what I have heard, they were of the belief that if they didn't put up much resistance, the Japanese occupation would simply be that much easier, their property would still be intact, so on and so forth.

Cates: That's a very nice thought. I share that, really.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, the major function of the American troops here at Malang was to service those airplanes that had gotten down from Clark Field in the Philippines. I think it was the 6th, 7th, and the 19th Bomb Groups, remnants of those bomb groups, what was left of them. I suppose you did such things as refuel them and load the bombs and this sort of thing. Again, you really weren't functioning so much as an artillery outfit at this time.

Cates: No.

Marcello: I think it was on February 5, 1942, that this airfield at Malang came under its first air raid or air attack. Had you more or less been expecting an air attack somewhere along the line?

Cates: I don't recall any anticipation, no.

Marcello: Can you remember the details of this first air attack? When I say details, what were you doing at the time, and what did you do when the attack occurred?

Cates: I don't know what I was involved with at the time it occurred. I remember that very shortly after it occurred I was in as deep a ditch as I could find. After that, of course, we learned to be a little bit quicker getting in those ditches. We had slit trenches and places prepared closer to our barracks routinely after the first attack.

Marcello: Did they do quite a bit of damage on the field as a result of that first attack?

Cates: Yes. Frankly I don't remember the actual extent of it. They made strafing runs. Anything that was there, they got.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you came under this air attack? Was it fright, apprehension?

Cates: Absolute terror! Anybody who was not scared just hasn't been there.

Marcello: Were these bombers, or was it a combination of bombers and fighters?

Cates: I think fighters only, the first time. I'm not sure if there were high-level bombers, but I remember the fighters coming in low. They tell me you couldn't see--not even after they started firing--you couldn't see them. Then they were gone behind you.

Marcello: I've heard several of the people mention that they hated the fighters more than the bombers, actually. Somehow, it was very, very frightening to be strafed.

Cates: Yes, and you can watch a bomber. You can catch him at the point of release and anticipate whether you're supposed to duck or not. But a strafer coming from nowhere and not knowing his line of flight, you don't know what's happening.

Marcello: I assume that your unit was in no position to put up very much resistance against these air attacks.

Cates: Not a lot, no. We did displace our 75's. We had saluting ammunition. We had shrapnel and we fired at them, and there was a report that the Japanese had given publicity to the fact that there was some strange new antiaircraft weapon being used against them. This was a hilarious thing to us because, well,

you could throw your hat as high as we could throw those 75's.

Marcello: In other words, is it true that those 75's really couldn't reach those bombers?

Cates: I don't think they could conceivably have reached them.

Marcello: You mentioned saluting ammunition awhile ago. Pardon my ignorance, but what is saluting ammunition?

Cates: They're dummies, blanks.

Marcello: I understand that some of the machine guns out of the damage or destroyed planes were also mounted on jeeps and at other places.

Cates: Yes, that's true.

Marcello: How many of these air attacks did you come under? Could you estimate the number?

Cates: No, I don't think I could.

Marcello: Was it less than a dozen?

Cates: Gosh, it seems like a million! No, I really couldn't.

Marcello: Was this an everyday occurrence that planes came?

Cates: It seemed so to me, yes. It seemed very routine.

Marcello: And I assume the raids really didn't last that long, but to you it seemed like they lasted a long time.

Cates: That is true.

Marcello: It was on February 27, 1942, that the bomb group left Java, and I assume they were heading for Australia. Do you remember when they left?

Cates: Yes, I do.

Marcello: I'm sure that must have been terrible for the morale of the troops there.

Cates: It was a low point. I had a driver who was given the opportunity of going out with them.

Marcello: Was his name Glenn Pace?

Cates: No, his name was Lyon. I remember the feeling that which of us was going where, you know. He could have been volunteering into something far more uncertain than we were heading for, and our lot was by no means a choice one. Yes, I do remember how very low it felt to be abandoned by that group. That's what it felt like. It felt like abandonment.

Marcello: I assume it was at this point that you knew that you were going to be sacrificial lambs, and that your purpose was to divert the Japanese troops on the island of Java.

Cates: Yes, it was obvious that we had noplace to go then.

Marcello: Well, apparently this little particular ruse did work because very shortly thereafter the Japanese did

invade the island of Java, and they came in overwhelming force. I assume they must have felt that there were a lot more Americans and Australians on that island than there actually were.

Cates: Yes, undoubtedly.

Marcello: I've seen some estimates that they landed with about 200,000 troops. Can you tell me what happened after the Japanese troops landed? What actually did your unit do?

Cates: Our unit went into position at Leuwiliang with antiaircraft guns. My particular assignment was a defense of the bridge over a river near that place. I reported my unit to the sapper regiment--that's a fighting engineer regiment--and told him what I had, and, of course, there was noplace for him to crawl under because I had no ammunition to give him for fire support, but as a matter of textbook courtesy, that's what we did. My artillery unit actually did fire at the bridge. How much damage it did, I don't know. We probably held up the advance of the Japanese a little while, and then, of course, they came on over anyway because they were there in such numbers that our's was a pretty hopeless position.

Marcello: Is it not true that when the Japanese did land that the people in the "Lost Battalion" were more or less scattered and spread out to give the impression that there were many, many more there than there actually was?

Cates: Yes. And the same thing occurred just before the landing. We were at the east end of Java at Malang, and there were Australian regiments at the west end at Batavia. We went west and they came east to give the appearance of much military traffic on the island. The same thing I think is true in the defense of the Leuwiliang area--one gun here, one there. It likely did accomplish the purpose of making it look like a larger defense force.

Marcello: Well, it goes without saying, of course, that the troops on the island of Java were in no position to put up with very much resistance to the Japanese, and actually, very quickly, the island did capitulate. I think it was on March 9, 1942, that the Allied forces on Java did surrender. Were you in any way closely connected with the decision to surrender as an officer?

Cates: No.

Marcello: In other words, the word was passed down to you and from you to the enlisted men.

Cates: That's right.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you received the order that all the resistance was to cease and that you were going to give up?

Cates: I don't think any new level of feelings developed because we were already basically at the bottom of the barrel, and the knowledge that we were then prisoners was just a confirmation of what we had known for several days anyway. We were lucky to be prisoners, and we realized it.

Marcello: Did you ever think of possibly heading for the hills?

Cates: Not really, no.

Marcello: Why not?

Cates: There was no place to go, literally no place to go.

Marcello: I understand the natives were not loyal to anybody.

Cates: We had been made to realize that. I think that was a gift from the Dutch--that if we did head for the hills we would be hunted down by the natives in all probability.

Marcello: I think, in fact, the Japanese had put a bounty on the American troops or any escaped prisoners. And, of course, you would have stood out like a sore thumb racially, and you didn't know the language, nor did you know the terrain.

Cates: We could not have survived at all, I'm sure.

Marcello: Some of the American troops have mentioned that they felt a certain amount of shame at having to surrender. Did this particular feeling ever cross your mind?

Cates: No, not a feeling of shame.

Marcello: Did you ever hear rumors to the effect that the Japanese didn't take any prisoners?

Cates: Yes. Yes, we felt that there was not too much assurance that we'd survive it.

Marcello: Well, how long was it after the surrender that you finally had your first contact with the Japanese?

Cates: I don't know in point of hours or days. Shortly after the capitulation, however, we were told to marshal our forces at a certain point. We did so, sat at the side of the road, and watched these big bruisers march by. The first Japanese we saw were huge men. Where they got them, I don't know.

Marcello: Now were these the . . . the American troops usually referred to them as the Imperial Marines, but I think the Japanese name for them were Special Landing Forces or something of that nature.

Cates: Yes, and magnificent people, huge. The average

Jap is not a big man, but these people were. Where they got them, I don't know.

Marcello: In other words, you originally were losing your initial impression of the Japanese.

Cates: Fast, yes.

Marcello: These were obviously frontline troops.

Cates: They were definitely frontline troops.

Marcello: Can you remember what happened during this initial contact?

Cates: No. Timidity on both parts, I think. They left us alone. They made no effort to mingle or put us down. They just marched us right on down the road, and we basically had no contact other than visual.

Marcello: Where did you go from this point? Obviously, you must have been instructed to go to a certain point?

Cates: Yes, another racetrack. We went into a thing with a small grandstand, and there we turned over all our materiel. We had mutilated part of it, the 75's. If they'd found a round of ammunition anyplace by then, I think they could not have fired them, I don't think, because we did things to the lanyards and firing pins and what have you. But we turned over all of our materiel there and then were, of course,

taken to holding areas as far as personnel was concerned.

Marcello: Now where was this racetrack?

Cates: I don't know.

Marcello: It wasn't in Batavia, was it?

Cates: No, it was out of Batavia. Buitenzorg, I think. I'm not sure of that. It was a smallish town outside of Batavia.

Marcello: And I assume you were not there too long?

Cates: No.

Marcello: During your stay here at this racetrack, did you have any additional contact with the Japanese?

Cates: No, I had none.

Marcello: Were there any Japanese around the racetrack or near there?

Cates: I don't remember seeing anyone there, no.

Marcello: So what happened from that point?

Cates: We were taken to a tea plantation high in the hills, Ondernehming Waspada. "Ondernehming," that's a Dutch word meaning corporation, I think, and Waspada was the name of the plantation. It was very high. We were above the clouds and quite comfortable just for a short stay. We didn't stay there very long. There

was water. We could bathe. We could louse around, but we didn't stay long.

Marcello: Did you do anything while you were there?

Cates: No, nothing. Chess and bridge and bull sessions.

Marcello: And again, you had virtually no contact at all with the Japanese?

Cates: None.

Marcello: How long were you there, a week or so?

Cates: Yes, no more, ten days.

Marcello: Where did you go from that point?

Cates: From that point, we went into Batavia to the Bicycle Regiment.

Marcello: You went right from the tea plantation to the Bicycle Camp?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: How were you receiving your instructions from the Japanese? Were these orders being directed to Colonel Tharp?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: And, from him, of course, they filtered down to the rest of the men?

Cates: Yes, a normal chain of command was in effect even then.

Marcello: Well, you mentioned awhile ago that the Decatur unit was part of the headquarters company, is that correct?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: How close were you to Tharp and this group?

Cates: I myself was not in the Decatur company. All of my experience was with the staff, with the headquarters battery, but when we were shipped overseas from Camp Bowie, I was transferred to command of D Battery. So I was not in touch with the headquarters unit or with the staff function as I might have been had I stayed in the headquarters battery.

Marcello: I see. In other words you were now in one of the artillery units.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: I think you had mentioned that earlier, and I'd forgotten about that. Describe what Bicycle Camp was like. Here, of course, is where you had your first real contact with the Japanese.

Cates: We had contacts with the Japanese at the Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint.

Cates: It's difficult to pinpoint anything that would mark it as different from the Malang-type thing. It was less roomy, certainly. There were more barracks, less open space. But again, there were brick buildings and tile roofs and a lot of shade.

Marcello: This had been a Dutch Army camp, had it not?

Cates: Yes. The 10th . . . something . . . Bicycle Regiment. I did know the name, but I've forgotten.

Marcello: Now I gather that very, very shortly after you arrived at this camp, you were given a pep talk by the Japanese commandant. Do you remember that pep talk?

Cates: Yes, I do.

Marcello: Can you describe it?

Cates: We were in parade ground assembly, and he came out with his interpreter and told us we must be loyal and this, that, and the other. The situation was really a little bit like a musical comedy, maybe a Gilbert and Sullivan slapstick, really. It couldn't be real. We couldn't feel that it was real.

Marcello: What makes you say that it was like a comedy?

Cates: Because they were so serious and expected us to take it in the fashion. They're a peculiar people. Orders are never to be taken as anything except literal. We couldn't conceive of anybody in their position expecting anybody in our position to act as they would do. Yet, from his demeanor, it was obvious to us that he was perfectly straight-faced and serious and wasn't kidding us. He was telling us the way they saw it.

Marcello: Now was it at this time that you were told to sign the document pledging that you would not escape?

Cates: That was basically the beginning of that, yes.

Marcello: What was the reaction to that document?

Cates: Again, disbelief. We simply wouldn't sign anything that ridiculous. Nothing except stupidity made us feel that way because, what the heck, if you intend to escape, you'd escape whether you signed a document or not. It was ridiculous to make a point out of holding your signature over something that couldn't bind you. And yet, we did. We simply weren't going to sign a pledge for the stupid yellow so-and-so's!

Marcello: Well, what was the Japanese reaction to your refusal to sign?

Cates: They didn't waste any time making us see that we better sign. We had several different exhibitions of their type of punishment, such as kneeling on gravel with your bare knees and things of that nature. They marched us off to the floor of a garage and made us sit there while the guards walked by with machetes and bayonets and looked fiercely at us as if they were just waiting for the charge signal to come in and mow us down. It was strictly a psychological

thing. We were told we mustn't talk. We sat in there on the cement floor of this garage and did just that. It was rather eerie. I'll admit the musical comedy had gone out of it largely by then.

Marcello: I guess that when you entered Bicycle Camp, you really knew that you were prisoners-of-war?

Cates: Yes. We were behind barbed wire and we knew it.

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

Cates: Everything we had, basically. I had three contax cameras and several lenses that I took over with me because at the time we left the States, it was peace, if you'll remember. I still had those at the . . . right into the Bicycle Camp. I had watches, my rings. Nothing had been taken until then, but it was there that the articles started being confiscated.

Marcello: What articles in particular were being confiscated, and what did you have taken?

Cates: I had all of my cameras taken, and that again was an interesting thing. I was called into the commandant's office, and he sat at the end of the conference table that must have . . . I suppose it would have seated thirty people at a banquet. He was at the far end.

I was at my end, and nobody was between us except an interpreter. We bargained over my cameras just as if I had any option. Finally, we arrived at a price that suited him, and I told him I would have it. He signed a receipt for those cameras, and that's it. I didn't get the amount that I bargained for, but he got the cameras through the process of haggling rather than the forced taking of them.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what type of Japanese officer are we talking about in Bicycle Camp?

Cates: The officer that I'm talking about was very advanced in age. He was . . . I don't know, but he was an old man by my standards at the time.

Marcello: Were these rear echelon troops that we're dealing with here in Bicycle Camp?

Cates: Yes, I rather think so, not the fighting, frontline soldiers. They were rear echelon personnel.

Marcello: I would assume that they weren't going to assign any elite troops to the guarding of prisoners-of-war. The good soldiers were on the front lines someplace fighting.

Cates: That is true.

Marcello: Also, now when you entered . . . well, let me get back to your possessions again. You talked about

some of the more valuable items that you had. What necessities did you personally have at the time that you went into camp--such as blankets and clothing and things of that nature?

Cates: Well, I had a rubber air mattress. I had a blanket. I hadn't lost anything, I don't think. I had left a trunk of gear back at Malang which we had no way to transport. In it were books and things of that nature. Uniform equipment, I had with me, bedroll.

Marcello: Did you have perhaps a couple of pairs of shoes and your toilet articles and things of that nature?

Cates: Yes, everything. I had a full complement of field equipment.

Marcello: What were the officers' quarters like here at Bicycle Camp?

Cates: I don't know the nature of the building, but we were in a dormitory . . . we made a dormitory-type existance out of something that obviously was not that. What that building previously had been, I don't know. But we had cots placed two or three feet apart, perhaps, and in connection with that officer's barracks, we had two or three of the Chinese boys off the Houston, stewards if you will, to continue that same function. We had rather a nice thing personally.

Marcello: Now the officers and the enlisted men were separated?

Cates: Yes, yes, they were.

Marcello: You mentioned the survivors off of the USS Houston awhile ago. They were in camp when you got there, were they not?

Cates: Yes, they were already there.

Marcello: Can you describe their particular condition?

Cates: Except for the fact that they came ashore with no possessions except for what they had on their back, they were still sound physically, most of them. They were pretty rugged individually. That was early. Nobody had been abused or damaged physically.

Marcello: I gather that the people in the "Lost Battalion" did share some of their possessions with these survivors.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Now up until this time, you were probably living off the company rations, were you not, that is, up until the time you got into Bicycle Camp? The Japanese had not been making any provisions for your food and so on.

Cates: No, not as such. Now there again is a function that I had nothing to do with, and frankly I don't know.

Marcello: But now when you got into Bicycle Camp, at least in part, you were receiving your first Japanese rations, isn't that true?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Can you describe what these rations were like?

Cates: Only vaguely. We had a thing that looked like a green watermelon that was rather basic to the diet. We had rice. Fortunately, I liked rice. That green thing, they called that chunkel or something. I don't know what it was, but we had vegetable soups. We had a minimum of meat. We always had rice. We'd occasionally have fish to supplement the rice. It was an oriental diet rather than an American diet. No steak at all.

Marcello: So far as the Japanese food was concerned, were the officers given the same rations as the enlisted men?

Cates: Yes, basically. We were lucky in that these China boys knew a lot of things to do with the food. It was their kind of cooking.

Marcello: I gather that among the enlisted men, it took them awhile to get the hang of cooking that rice in such a manner that it would be edible.

Cates: Right.

Marcello: Was there a sufficient quantity of this food?

Cates: There was as far as I know, yes.

Marcello: Also, I know at this time that company funds were used to procure food from the outside.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Did you have any particular part in this operation?

Cates: No.

Marcello: Do you know anything at all about this operation?

Cates: No, I don't. I had no contact with it.

Marcello: Where would these funds have come from?

Cates: We received payroll funds and company funds by air just before the capitulation of the island. How far that went, I don't really know. That obviously was the source of those purchase funds.

Marcello: Now there's a subject that comes up here that has been somewhat controversial. I heard it said by several of the prisoners that in the spending of these company funds the officers seemed to take care of themselves a little better than the enlisted men.

Cates: It's entirely conceivable. I don't know that it was deliberate. It could have been that the numbers made it seem so, but it is entirely conceivable. I don't remember feeling deprived, but, as I said a moment ago, I like rice. I bunked next to a guy that went blind because he didn't like rice and he couldn't eat rice. My appetite would accept almost anything, so my memory of food is really not a

criteria, but I shouldn't be surprised if that's true if it was apparent to the men. As I say, we were lucky enough to have these China boys who were stewards. I remember one time we got a ration of white beans of some sort. I don't know whether we bought them. They had weevils in them. I remember seeing the beans to start with, and I saw a big brute of a Chinaman in there who said, "They're not fit to eat like this, so sprout them." So he took about two days to sprout those beans and we ate bean sprouts. The men ate weevily white beans. You see, they didn't know these things. They hadn't the facilities to do the cooking. Now I'm not saying that this is what made the officers' mess look better than the other because there were a few of us and chances are we had private funds. I had a pocketful of money. I had two payrolls that I hadn't been able to spend, still in my pocket.

Marcello: Did you have a chance to spend these personal funds while you were in Bicycle Camp?

Cates: For something like that. If someone were going out, they'd bring me a thing or two.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever try to force the officers to

work here at Bicycle Camp? I know most of the work details were voluntary.

Cates: Yes, they were.

Marcello: Usually, when a work detail went out, did they put an officer in charge of one of these work details?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Did you, yourself, personally go on any of them?

Cates: Not from the Bicycle Camp, no.

Marcello: Is there any special reason why you didn't go on any of the work details?

Cates: No, no reason.

Marcello: How did you spend most of your time?

Cates: Bridge and volleyball. We organized volleyball at that camp. We had a number of books. I'm trying to think of another camp from which I did go into Batavia to the warehouse of some rubber company.

Marcello: It wasn't Tanjong Priok, was it?

Cates: Tanjong Priok, yes.

Marcello: Did you go there out from Bicycle Camp?

Cates: Yes, and then back.

Marcello: What did you do on those details into Tanjong Priok?

Cates: Stripped everything in sight basically. Anything metallic was picked up and loaded on ships back for Japan. When they got through, it was an empty warehouse.

Marcello: Was this one of the few times that you went out on a work detail?

Cates: Yes. I went down there two or three times, no more.

Marcello: Were the Japanese ever insistent about officers going on work details or anything of this nature?

Cates: I never did know if that was our own decision to follow our usual procedure. You know, it's a normal thing that the party would go out with someone in command, or whether that was a directive of the Japanese, I don't know.

Marcello: How much did the Japanese harass the prisoners at Bicycle Camp physically?

Cates: I don't know of any instances directly. We would hear things, but I did not see one incident myself of any punishment, any harassment, other than this psychological bit about sign the order, do this, do that.

Marcello: Were there any particular procedures or orders that the Japanese laid down for the prisoners so far as their relation with the captors were concerned? In other words, did you as an officer, for example, have to bow to Japanese soldiers and this sort of thing?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Even to the enlisted men?

Cates: Everybody.

Marcello: What would happen if you forgot to bow or what have you?

Cates: There were beatings, I think. However, you make games of things that you have to make games of. I think a sense of humor probably will pull you through a lot of situations that you would not survive without, if you know what I mean. So if we have to holler attention and jump up and salute when a Jap comes . . . we know a block away that he's on the way by the orders that are being screamed out up the street, and we know if he's coming our way or going the other way. So very few times did we get surprised. I don't know what would have happened, but I do know that they can stand in front of you and look up at you and throw the biggest voice you ever heard in your life. I was never struck by one in that situation. I was later in other positions, but not there. I was fussed at a time or two.

Marcello: Generally speaking, would it be accurate to say that here at Bicycle Camp that beatings were the exception rather than the rule?

Cates: I think it would be that, truly.

Marcello: How much contact did the officers have with the Japanese? I'm speaking now of the command structure in the camp, let's say the Japanese commandant and the people directly under him.

Cates: I don't know that I could appraise that. We had an officer, Captain Fowler, who was liaison, and, of course, he was in and out to receive instructions or report our situation. I don't mean by that that he moved in with them or was with them routinely, but he was in the capacity of liaison between us and them. Our other officers were called in . . . staff, I mean. But contact as such, I don't see how you could say that it existed. They had their duties, and we had ours. We were careful not to encroach too much.

Marcello: What was the chain of command? Did orders come from the Japanese commandant through Fowler, down to the rest of the officers, then to the enlisted men?

Cates: Right.

Marcello: What sort of military discipline was maintained in this camp among the American prisoners?

Cates: No active discipline. Whatever discipline was there was inherent or self-discipline or done for morale

purposes, and I think it was rather voluntary. I don't remember an instance of any of the enlisted men giving me the feeling that they hated my guts: "Now it's different. Stay the heck out of my way. You're no longer my captain, see." I don't know of any breakdown in our self-discipline to that extent.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what was the state of the prisoners' health during this stay at Bicycle Camp?

Cates: Basically good.

Marcello: You didn't lose anybody here, did you?

Cates: Not to my knowledge.

Marcello: What sort of relations existed between the American prisoners and prisoners of other nationalities? I know there were some Australians and some Dutch at this camp, were there not?

Cates: There were both. That was our first contact with either, frankly. We discovered that we were very much the same as an Australian, and that we could get along with the Dutchmen. It was rather affable on the whole.

Marcello: Was there much co-mingling among the various nationalities?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, you were just segregated in the barracks, but there was a common parade ground or something of this nature where you could intermingle.

Cates: Yes, right.

Marcello: Well, finally, in late September or early October of 1942, orders came down that you were to pack and get ready to leave. What sort of a psychological effect did these orders have? In other words, you had been at Bicycle Camp for somewhere around six months, perhaps. It wasn't really that bad a place. If you had been able to stay there for the duration of the war, things wouldn't have been too bad.

Cates: No.

Marcello: So now you had received orders to leave. You didn't know where you were going. What sort of a psychological effect did the unknown have at this time?

Cates: It was demoralizing, I think, on all of us without exception. I don't know. If you stood on a precipice and had only one certain knowledge, and that was that you were going to jump off, you would have been in much the same position we were in there. We were leaving a good thing and going into something that we couldn't anticipate, couldn't predict, and out there tomorrow had no future anymore.

Marcello: Now where was the "Lost Battalion" split up? Was it here or did this occur after you got to Changi Prison Camp?

Cates: We left one battery in East Java, Malang. E Battery stayed in East Java. At Bicycle Camp, the rest of us started splitting up. One party went directly from there to Japan. The rest of us were over in Singapore, Changi.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that E Battery was at Batavia?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: They had never even gone to Bicycle Camp with you?

Cates: No.

Marcello: I see. In other words, it was D and F Battery that was at Bicycle Camp.

Cates: And the headquarters battery and the service battery.

Marcello: Headquarters battery and the service battery. Then which one went to Japan?

Cates: E Battery went straight to Japan from Batavia. Then a group that they called the engineers . . . they had a make on everybody's professional qualifications, and anybody that gave any promise of being anything related to an engineer went to Japan with the first group that were taken from the Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: So consequently then, what groups went from Bicycle Camp to Changi?

Cates: Those non-engineers, let's put it that way.

Marcello: And more specifically, what particular batteries would these have been now?

Cates: It would have been the . . . all four of the batteries--service battery, headquarters battery, D Battery, and F Battery, less those persons from the various batteries which had been sent to Japan direct.

Marcello: What was this trip like from Bicycle Camp to Changi?

Cates: Now Changi is Singapore, am I right?

Marcello: Yes.

Cates: I didn't want to get the names wrong. We had a very uneventful trip over to the staging area. We loaded out and, of course, were extremely crowded in a junk ship from way back. There was just total disorganization. It was a madhouse as far as my memory is concerned. Nothing stands out especially, except that it was confusion.

Marcello: What were the quarters like aboard this ship for the prisoners?

Cates: Well, there were none, basically. We were just crowded in the hull.

Marcello: What sort of provisions did the Japanese make so far as food and water and this sort of thing?

Cates: There were foods prepared on the weather deck, and we lined up and went up and ate out of a huge container of sorts. I don't remember anything that stands out there.

Marcello: You were allowed to go above deck?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Could you go above deck whenever you wanted to, or were you only permitted above deck at certain times?

Cates: No. It was on a rather select basis: "You, this group, this group. You've been up long enough, go back."

Marcello: Did the troops seem to suffer too much on this trip from Bicycle Camp to Changi?

Cates: It wasn't that long, really.

Marcello: Was it just a matter of a couple of days?

Cates: Yes, oh, yes. It's short.

Marcello: So you land in Singapore, and you're immediately sent to Changi Prison Camp. What was Changi like? Describe it from a physical standpoint first of all.

Cates: Changi is rather a nice station, too, in peacetime, that is, the evidence of it having been rather nice was still there. We moved into very comfortable

quarters, again segregated. The officers and the men were segregated. We picked up where we left off in the 10th Battalion Camp, really, the Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Now at this camp, there were many, many more British troops, were there not?

Cates: Yes, the British were in control of this camp.

Marcello: What was the state of these British prisoners at the time you arrived at Changi?

Cates: They were pretty eratic, really. It's difficult to say. I hesitate to express an opinion. They had a little bit more contact with the bit rougher going than we had had, coming down through Malaya and in Singapore itself. I think perhaps they had by this time adopted a little bit of the feeling that it's every man for himself.

Marcello: I gather that all discipline had more or less broken down among the British, and by this time they had been blaming their officers for their fate.

Cates: I think it's true.

Marcello: Now are we talking about British troops that had been kicked out of Dunkirk, and had been kicked out of Crete and now had been defeated in Singapore?

Cates: Yes, they knew nothing but run.

Marcello: I'm sure this must have had some sort of a demoralizing effort among the American troops, also, who entered Changi.

Cates: Yes, yes, it did to a certain extent.

Marcello: I can think of one particular incident where the American prisoners were apparently obtaining coconuts, and evidently there was some sort of controversy about this because British officers said that these were the king's coconuts and that they weren't to be eaten.

Cates: Yes, they weren't to be touched.

Marcello: Do you remember this particular incident and what sort of a fuss it caused?

Cates: No, that came to me by remote control. I was no part of it, but I do remember the incident.

Marcello: What did you do while you were here at Changi?

Cates: We did basically what we had been doing, that is, with my group, the ones with whom I was in contact, we just continued to mark time day by day.

Marcello: Were there any work details here?

Cates: Yes, there were but in Changi I don't think I personally went out a time.

Marcello: How did the Japanese treatment of the prisoners compare

with what it had been at Bicycle Camp so far as physical harassment was concerned?

Cates: There was less of it, I would say.

Marcello: There was even less at Changi than there had been at Bicycle Camp?

Cates: Less at Changi than there had been at Bicycle Camp, yes.

Marcello: Which means that there virtually must not have been any physical harassment at all.

Cates: No, we frankly had little contact with anything. We couldn't understand the fact that it held off to that extent.

Marcello: What was the food like here at Changi?

Cates: It was probably thinner than it had been at Batavia--basically the same type thing, but not as much.

Marcello: I do know that prisoners here were required, or else volunteered, to work in the vegetable gardens that had been planted here. Do you know anything about these?

Cates: No. I went out with the work party, and I've forgotten . . . we moved some oil barrels, and where or why, I don't remember. We were picked up by a Japanese truck with a Japanese driver, and he turned out to be from Salt Lake City, the Jap driver.

Marcello: Did this make for some interesting conversation?

Cates: It made for one of the cutest cracks I ever saw. I was in the cab with the driver. Again, officers and men were separated. One of the men in the back said, "Hey, captain, tell that little yellow bastard to stop and let us off at this next corner." And that little yellow bastard stuck his head out of the car and said (laughter), "The little yellow bastard heard you, and he's going to stop anyway, and get your so-in-so off of this truck!" And then when he stopped up there, he told us he had been a taxi driver in Salt Lake City, had gone home for a visit, and had been conscripted. He was as homesick as we were, believe me.

Marcello: Did you ever have very much contact with this person afterwards?

Cates: Never saw him again, but we heard of him because our work parties would periodically draw him as the driver.

Marcello: Incidentally, how close did you think your rescue was?

Cates: I don't think we hoped. Right up until the date we were delivered, I had never a feeling that we would be rescued, not using that word technically.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't think that rescue was going to come a week from now or a month from now or anything of this nature?

Cates: No, I never had that feeling. As a matter of fact, early I didn't expect to survive. Later on, I found myself able to survive for this day only and worry about nothing--not hope for tomorrow, not worry about tomorrow, just live for today.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how would you compare Changi with Bicycle Camp? Better? Worse?

Cates: I would say that it had the potential for a better thing, but at the time we entered it, it was pretty grim.

Marcello: I understand the British . . . well, all sanitation and hygiene had broken down among the British troops, also. And I gather this was a sore point so far as relations between the British and the Americans were concerned.

Cates: It was, yes. And we were so <u>badly</u> outnumbered that if we had any voice in anything . . . we didn't have a voice really, so we felt like a poor stepchild for sure in a place like that.

Marcello: From what most of the other prisoners have told me,

they were kind of glad to leave Changi. It was a very unhappy place.

Cates: Yes, to go anyplace.

Marcello: Had any disease or anything of that nature broken out here in Changi?

Cates: I remember dengue fever. My buddy had to go over to the hospital, and an interesting thing happened there. I met a Britisher who knew what Decatur was like. He was a traveler for the British-American Tobacco Company and pinned me down as to where I was from, and before I got the word Decatur out, he said, "Oh, the place with the lovely courthouse." I felt awfully homesick.

Marcello: You mentioned hospital facilities, and this brings another question to mind. How did the hospital facilities on Changi compare with those in Bicycle Camp? We haven't discussed that point yet.

Cates: The Changi hospital was a hospital. How they continued, I don't know. They had surgical equipment. They had operating rooms. They had the ability to do things that could not have been done at Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Now at the time you left Changi, was the health of the prisoners still fairly good?

Cates: Still basically sound, yes. We had, I would say, sicknesses rather than anything else, which would have happened if we had been at home. We would have had dengue if it had broken out. We would have had the things . . . yes, we were still in good condition.

Marcello: I guess it was in early January of 1943 or possibly late December of 1942 that you left Changi Prison Camp, and your ultimate destination was Moulmein in Burma. At the time you left Changi, did you know where you were going?

Cates: I don't think so.

Marcello: I was thinking in terms of other work parties having been sent out before you, let's say, to work on the railroad.

Cates: No, we didn't know that there was a railroad.

Marcello: Is it not true that you went from Changi and up the coast of Malaya a little way by train before you boarded the ship?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: What was this train trip like? Do you recall?

Cates: You would expect to see that train in a National Geographic film, I think. Jungle ride on a narrow gauge train. You see natives hop on those things, and they'll pack a

hundred bodies into one car, all waving madly and talking and screaming. That's the type thing we went up country on. We went in through Kuala Lumpur. Kuala Lumpur had the most fabulous depot I've ever seen to receive a train like we brought in there. It was all white marble and tile and huge vaulted ceilings like a cathedral . . . fantastic building. On to George Town or Prae or whatever, I don't remember . . . we boarded ship at George Town, I believe.

Marcello: What sort of a train trip was this? Was it a harrowing experience? Were you crowded in the boxcars or anything of this nature?

Cates: Yes, but not uncomfortably. It was not such as to endanger our health or well being.

Marcello: Were these cars open in any way? Were you enclosed in them?

Cates: No, we were not enclosed. But, again, no place to go. We could possibly have hopped off, but we couldn't have disappeared in the jungle under any circumstances and survived. No, we were not locked up in an airtight Black Hole of Calcutta-type thing.

Marcello: Okay, so you boarded another tramp steamer, I guess we could say, here at George Town. I think it was

George Town where you did board that steamer, and your ultimate destination was Moulmein. Now this was a pretty tough trip, also, was it not?

Cates: It was indeed!

Marcello: Can you describe it?

Cates: We didn't know it was going to be tough. We were again crowded in the hold. We were fed on the weather deck. We had little latrines on the weather deck and barely room to stretch out.

Marcello: Now were you down in the hold with the enlisted men here, or were you still segregated from the enlisted men?

Cates: I was still with a group of officers, yes. How that was obtained, I don't know.

Marcello: Were you still in the same place with the enlisted men?

Cates: Yes, still in the hold, a double-deck hold. A temporary structure had been built so that we got under the deck above us, which was perhaps waist high, and on top of this deck was another group of men. We had probably enough room to stretch out if we'd tuck our feet in, but certainly we couldn't stretch out the full length at any time. That in itself was rather a shock to be cooped up like that,

and that's the first time I remember discomfort on any of these legs of our trip--physical discomfort.

Then, of course, we got to the mouth of the river, and some of our Air Force people found us and bombed us and sunk the companion ship, and we took two or three hits, none below the water line, and stood in the water dead, picking up survivors. All the while, we were waiting for those planes to come back.

Marcello: Did you actually witness this air raid?

Cates: No, I had a play-by-play description by a man by the name of Charles Donovan Smith, III. His home was Memphis. He was a Houston survivor and absolutely without nerve undoubtedly because he stood on the deck, and he says, "Well, boys, here they come again. They're about dropping high. Pull in your necks. Here they come!" He was literally sitting on the deck and calling the things as they made their runs. They made several runs until they exhausted their bomb loads and fortunately never got a hit on us that was a fatal hit.

Marcello: What sort of damage was done to your particular ship?

Cates: There were deaths on the ship. We took . . . I don't know how many bombs that were near misses just

off the ship. Of course, they hit at the water line because the explosion would come there, and some of the men forward were killed in one of these. We didn't do anything except kick each other a little bit when the things would go off. Our end of it was not really rocked by the explosion.

Marcello: I gather a small fire did break out of the ship, and I gather the Japanese blew off part of their own bridge, did they not, in trying to fire at the planes?

Cates: Yes, in trying to fire at the planes. From a distance, it must have been comical (chuckle).

Marcello: What were your emotions or feelings when you were subjected to this air attack?

Cates: A feeling of utter helplessness. This time, so help me, I was not scared, and I think Charles Donovan Smith, III, made the pep talk that kept me from being terrified. But I wasn't scared. I realized how very helpless and how very hopeless our position had become, but it was beyond fright this time. I can't explain that. Later, I contacted one of the pilots of these ships in the hospital in Calcutta, and he told us that we were the fourth target of opportunity, that they were fogged out the first target they had

been assigned, and the second they couldn't find either and the third they couldn't find, and we just happened to be out there, and they had the order to hit anything they saw.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese after this attack had taken place?

Cates: They were far more eratic than we, really. They were beyond control, just like a bunch of chickens with their heads cut off.

Marcello: In what way?

Cates: There was no organization anymore. They had dropped their guns. They had . . . oh, everything. It was . . . I don't know, it . . .

Marcello: Did the treatment of the prisoners become more harsh?

Cates: No, it became louder but no more harsh. They'd scream and stomp and give the appearance of being busy, but I think it was basically to bolster their own courage.

Marcello: I assume that your ship was <u>really</u> crowded now as a result of having taken on those survivors.

Cates: It was.

Marcello: How much longer did the trip take to get to Moulmein?

Cates: I don't know, but so help me, I could have got out on

the bank and walked and got there quicker. I would have done it if they'd let me (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, anyhow, I think it was on January 9, 1943, that you finally pulled into Moulmein. When you got off ship at Moulmein, where did they send you or where did you go? I think you stayed in Moulmein for a night or two, did you not?

Cates: Yes, we did and went to a multi-layered native prison, and this is the first time that we were literally imprisoned.

Marcello: Can you describe what this place was like?

Cates: It was open to a certain extent. I mean, it was not air proof by any means. It had a feeling of space, but there was screen . . . hog wire-type wire so that we could not get out of our immediate room once we were in there. It was old, beat up, perhaps something they had kept natives in. I don't know really what its history might have been. I just remember the feeling that you were locked up.

Marcello: Fortunately, you weren't there very long.

Cates: Just a very short time.

Marcello: Now I gather that all of you were not in this native prison. I've heard tales that some were in a mortuary, some were in a leper asylum.

Cates: Just wherever they could find room for a group of us.

Marcello: So where did they send you from Moulmein? You mentioned that you were just there a very, very short while.

Cates: Yes, and then we started these trips up to the 15 Kilo Camp and so-and-so.

Marcello: Well, did you go to Thanbyuzayat first?

Cates: We didn't go that far at first, no. My unit was a small unit. I don't remember how large it was, but we didn't go far out of Moulmein on the first leg, and then the staging camp seems to have been Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: You mentioned that from Moulmein you went to this one . . . was it the 15 Kilo Camp?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: What was it like and what did you do there?

Cates: We were in the jungle, and we apparently underwent a change of orders. Why we were stopped there, I don't know because we didn't do anything there. Then we went farther on upcountry.

Marcello: How long did you stay at this 15 Kilo Camp?

Cates: Just a matter of days. Just about like the stop at Moulmein. Just until they could decide what.

Marcello: And then from this 15 Kilo Camp you were sent to Thanbyuzayat, which was the staging area more or less.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: I think there was a supply depot there, and there was even a hospital and a few other things. Now was it at Thanbyuzayat where you first came in contact with Colonel Nagatomo?

Cates: I believe it was, yes.

Marcello: Now, he gave you a little pep talk, too, did he not?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Can you recall it?

Cates: No, the name is there. His demeanor is there, but no details.

Marcello: How long did you stay there?

Cates: I really don't know. I was in and out of Thanbyuzayat two or three times.

Marcello: For what reason did you go back to Thanbyuzayat later on?

Cates: I couldn't tell you that. We shuttled when and if . . . and if we were unhappy with our lot, we tried to get shifted. I don't think I, myself, ever volunteered for a dadgummed thing--not ever. But I

did make the shuttle more than once to Thanbyuzayat. How long the stays were, frankly I don't know. Those days were pretty hazy.

Marcello: Okay, from Thanbyuzayat then, very quickly you were sent up to the 18 Kilo Camp, I believe, were you not?

Cates: Well . . .

Marcello: I know most of the "Lost Battalion" people were sent first to the 18 Kilo Camp.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: If we describe one of these camps, are we kind of describing all of them?

Cates: Basically, we are, yes.

Marcello: Basically, what were these camps like from a physical standpoint?

Cates: This would really be a stay in the jungle, any of these camps. The huts were barely off the ground, enough to get out the mud and slush and off of the ground. We would have nothing that we didn't create with our own hands. We'd build the walls, the roof, roof it with atap roofing or palm fronds or whatever. The beds would be bamboo slats lashed together, created by native labor, I mean, we being the natives by this time.

Marcello: You were actually building some of these camps?

Cates: We'd build these things, yes. And we rebuilt them when they'd become unserviceable because a number of them did. We'd be repairing roofs from time to time, building new ones.

Marcello: Now when you got into the jungles and when you were working on this railroad, this is when you had your first contact with the Korean guards, was it not?

Cates: Yes, we had three types of personnel there. We had the original Japs who had been with us. We had the engineers who were building the roads and had nothing to do with our administration. And then we had the Korean guards.

Marcello: What were those Korean guards like?

Cates: They were pretty rugged and a little bit of individuals. No two of them were really alike, and whether you'd say they were mad men or not, I don't know, but they were rugged.

Marcello: Is this where the beating and the physical punishment really began?

Cates: Yes, it was very routine from there on.

Marcello: What forms did this punishment take?

Cates: Well, it would be anything. It would be beatings with the hand. It would be with bamboo rods. I got hit

over the head with a stick of stove wood once, to show you that just anything at hand could be used. I took a couple of kickings.

Marcello: Generally speaking, why were you beaten or kicked?

Cates: I had a knife from the kitchen and was building a bunk, and knives were contraband, and the Korean guard came through the barracks and caught me with the knife, and I thought he was going to kill me. One of the China boys again came down. A Chinaman can write to a Japanese, but they can't speak. They have a common calligraphy or written language. The China boy got down and with his fingernail wrote in the dust of the barracks what I was doing with that knife and that I had borrowed it and that the guardhouse knew I had it. This Jap gradually cooled off, and when he left he picked up a stick of stove wood and backhanded me with it. By then, I was happy to see a stick of stove wood.

The kicking, I got at the top of a watchtower. I took a group of men over to the graveyard to see the last resting places of a few of their friends. I again reported to the guardhouse, and I went from there straight to the cemetery. The guard in one of

these towers called me over and cussed me out and motioned me to climb up the ladder, and when I got to the top of the ladder, he kicked me in the chest and knocked me off the ladder about fifteen feet to the ground. That is typical, I mean, just whatever inspiration they got, that's what they hit you with.

Marcello: How did you account for the harsh treatment given out by the Korean guards?

Cates: I think perhaps it reflects the same philosophy that we had come to by then: "It's a hopeless situation. We're this far from home. We'll never get back, and to heck with anything human." I think that showed up in some of our own make-up. I don't think they were crazy. If they were, we had a few crazy ones, too. They were not professional soldiers. They were far from home, and they were homesick, and there was their wife and children back in Tokyo or Yokohama or wherever, or Korea.

Too, it reflects the chain of command that they must observe that was a little bit hard for us to see, that is, if no order is ever violated because anybody above you has life and death control over you. If an order is given to you as a Japanese soldier,

you obey that order. There's no question. In such a situation, they may have been at the lower end of the scale. They've been ordered by everybody above them, and here is this bunch of fresh meat in the form of these helpless prisoners-of-war who are lean and emaciated and docile. It could have been that it was the crack of the whip at the end of the line. I don't know. It's difficult to put your finger on the reason for their mistreatment, but we did feel punishment.

Marcello: What were some of the harsher forms of punishment that you witnessed?

Cates: I think the most cruel thing I saw was a man forced to stand at attention, basically, with very few breaks for twenty-four hours. He was not entirely rational after the punishment. He wasn't strong enough to sustain it to start with. To me that was more cruel than beating. I didn't see any truly unmerciful beatings because when you get right down to it, if it is a question of venting your temper, one blow and its over with. You don't need to kill a man to let off steam.

Marcello: Let's talk about the railroad building. What were the

Japanese objectives in building this railroad? Why did they need to build this railroad?

Cates: I don't know, frankly. I don't believe they had that much to move from one end of the line to the other. I somehow feel that it was a challenge. The route of that railroad, as I understand it, had been surveyed for years and abandoned as impractical by the British. They would go across the Kra Isthmus with the canal and move freight by ship. It took less expenditure and time and effort than it would to move it across that jungle railroad. The Japs came along and discovered such a blueprint, and they said, "Well, here. We can do it. Now is the time."

Marcello: And they had plenty of labor with which to do it.

Cates: Yes, free labor. I think the challenge of doing that, coupled, of course, with the fact that they had a bunch of slave labor that they had to administer.

Marcello: What specific tasks were the prisoners assigned to do in the building of this railroad? What were some of the tasks?

Cates: We broke stone for ballast on the railroad fills. We carried earth to create fills and build bridges, of course. We had elephant help a little bit, but most

of it was manpower that moved those _____trees and butted them together and pinned them and put the rails on top. Everything that would be done by machinery on anybody else's railroad was done strictly by hand. Mud and earth was carried in a bamboo litter.

Marcello: In other words, you were making cuts and fills and making ballast and laying track and ties for the railroads.

Cates: Right.

Marcello: How tough was this work?

Cates: Well, that's difficult to answer. The people who had to break the rocks had really a dangerous job because the flying chips from those rocks would cut shins and cut flesh and cause ulcers, bleeding sores. Open sores were started which had just had one end. There was no medicine for them. They went ultimately into blood poisoning and death. Now that is, in my memory, the truly trying part of the railroad.

The rest of it was punishing. They'd make up a crew of workers to fill a quota whether there were that many sound men or not. They had to have a hundred, they'd take ten off the sick bed, if they had to. They'd go out and they'd work, and to that extent those men were punished.

I don't remember the actual time on the road as being hardly punishing because we could move at a snail's pace. We had to go from point A to point B to pick up mud to bring back to point A to dump up on the top of that thing and watch it slide down to the bottom. But we could do it basically at our own pace, just so we were moving.

We were not given a lot of static by the engineers who were really quite nice personnel to contact in that particular instance. As a matter of fact, I spent an afternoon listening to one of them quote Shakespeare. I found him highly entertaining. But now here again, I reflect an officer's job. I had to go out with the men, but I didn't have to do anything, you see.

Marcello: Yes. What was your job as an officer on these work details?

Cates: Literally nothing. Just go out with them and be the officer in case anything happened, which, nothing ever happened.

Marcello: Did you ever have to serve as a go-between between the guards and the prisoners?

Cates: No, not actually. It was rather a concession to, well, convention, if anything. They permitted us to

send an officer out with the group, not so much as an option on our part but demand on their part. But they made it very obvious that they were treating the officers nice and like officers. They were not making them work. They made a point of it.

Marcello: Was there very much resentment among the enlisted men over the fact that officers were not working?

Cates: I don't think so. There was none spoken because psychologically, I think, perhaps it sought its own solution. For instance, I had an A & M ring that I sold out on a work party one time for $120. My first use of the money was to buy a pair of shoes for one of my men. Now I don't say that that's a noble gesture, but the men didn't feel like the officers were abandoning them and living in the lap of luxury.

Marcello: You mentioned that you bought a pair of shoes for this man. From whom did you purchase the shoes?

Cates: From an Englishman who was back-packing a spare pair of shoes.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with native merchants or traders along this road?

Cates: We were never out of sight of a Chinese trader. No

matter where we went, one would pop up selling flashlight batteries and candles.

Marcello: Did the Japanese allow a free trade to develop here?

Cates: Very much so, yes.

Marcello: What items did you possibly have that the Chinese could use?

Cates: I was in a position of almost having to fight to retain my shoes one time. This native was so insistent that, in my position, I just had to sell, you know. I was dying of want, and those shoes should buy my salvation. He couldn't understand my not wanting to part with those shoes. Well, to me, that would have been utterly ridiculous because we were marching from camp to camp basically. So that is not truly indictive because we frequently had money and could buy tobacco or brown sugar or duck eggs or something from these traders, these Chinese traders. Of course, it was limited. We didn't have funds to do a wholesale thing.

Marcello: What was the food like when you were working on this railroad?

Cates: It was basically scanty. We had rice. Occasionally, we'd supplement it with dried fish or horse meat or something, but not too often. Basically, it would be

rice unless we had the melon that I mentioned a minute ago, done in a soupy fashion, never tasty.

Marcello: How was the food both quantity wise and quality wise?

Cates: I don't remember suffering hunger because of quantity, but I do remember that it was the quality of it that was not good.

Marcello: Were you getting polished rice, or was it just a poor grade of rice period?

Cates: No, we were getting a poor grade of rice from just almost any source.

Marcello: Generally speaking, while you were working on this railroad, what was the thought that was most constantly on your mind?

Cates: I think by that time I had basically quit thinking about anything constructive. I tried to read when I could. I had picked up a mahjong set in Singapore, and we had a mahjong game going. By then the playing cards had all worn out. There was no bridge possible. Some of the men attempted to replace bridge cards by shaving bamboo slivers down and making their own decks of cards, but that was a little bit of a farce. But somehow there was always something to read, and I think my own feeling was just to pass another hour, pass another day.

Marcello: I know a lot of the prisoners have mentioned that by the time they got to the jungle the thought that was most constantly on their mind was food.

Cates: I believe so, too. If there was a constructive thought, it was that. I remember one instance when there was a lizard way up at the top of a tree. One of the Japanese guards had one of these .22, .24, .25, whatever their carbine is. It's a very small caliber thing. The commandant of the camp came by. I can't think of his name, but he was one of the less desirable people we knew. He was going to shoot that lizard up there, and we were just wondering if we could beat him to the lizard if it fell. We did find a few wild fowl. We trapped a few banty roosters or chickens of that nature. There wasn't a dog for miles from where we were. Yes, food was very prominent thought.

Marcello: What were some of the more exotic foods that you sampled while you were working on the railroad?

Cates: I ate some cobra. I ate a rock python once. Not myself, mind you. I wasn't that privileged, but I would have, I think, in time. But I did feel myself very privileged to share in it. I ate dog. I ate horse. I think that's just about the gamut of availability.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the commandant was a nasty character. In what way?

Cates: Oh, just being prominent and loud and nasty. He withheld medicine that we knew he had. He sent people out on work parties, and he called out the sick, made them stand at attention. He'd go up and down and point his finger and select the ones who'd go. We hated him thoroughly!

Marcello: Was this commandant with you all the way along the railroad?

Cates: He was not too far away. We might leave his camp for a while and then he'd come back . . . we'd come back to him. Oddly enough, he spoke good English. You undoubtedly have had his name brought up, and I'm sorry I can't remember it. He was not a captain. He was under an officer.

Marcello: What was the condition of your clothing by this time?

Cates: Very tattered. I had picked up a native sarong, and I used it just lousing around, and I folded my shorts very carefully and left them under my pillow to take care of them against an emergency. Of course, if I'd go out on a work party, that would be one of the emergencies. I'd put those shorts on because you get no place in a sarong in the jungle.

Marcello: Did you have to go out on work parties everyday in the building of this railroad?

Cates: No, we rotated two or three times a week, perhaps. But, really, it was good to go out if you were able to get out. There's one place where we would be glad of the opportunity.

Marcello: Incidentally, did they know that you were an engineer?

Cates: No, they didn't. I signed up as a schoolteacher (chuckle).

Marcello: I was wondering if they had ever made any use of your technical skills.

Cates: I never did know why the point didn't come up because they made such a point of sending anybody with any mechanical training upcountry. I didn't mention my education. I did on my brief put down schoolteacher.

Marcello: As an engineer, what was your opinion of the Japanese construction on this railroad, even though you were not a civil engineer?

Cates: Well, it was like a bad dream that dissolves. Technically, it starts out with a beautiful plan, and then all of a sudden things started developing an extra arm here and an extra joint there that works backwards. That seemed to be the direction their road was going. On the blueprint it looked beautiful, and then when you would

see them bucktooth thirty-foot long logs together and toenail them in to support a moving vehicle up at the top sixty feet in the air, it became the dream that I'm talking about.

Marcello: What did you think of their pile driving method?

Cates: They did a little bit of everything.

Marcello: Did you witness any of the bridge building that went on in that road?

Cates: No, I was never on a bridge building party. My contact with the bridges seem to be an after-glance. I remember that we drove over one of them, and it was so rickety that they wouldn't let anybody go over. We had to walk. They moved the vehicle over, and if it made it, then the personnel came behind (chuckle). Nobody but the engineer rode.

Marcello: I know that in May of 1943, or by May of 1943, the railroad was behind schedule so far as the building was concerned, so far as its progress was concerned. At that point the Japanese initiated the so-called "Speedo" campaign, and it just so happened that the "Speedo" campaign coincided with the monsoon season. Now what were conditions like when you had this combination of the monsoons and the "Speedo" campaign?

Now by this time, I think, you were up at either the 80 Kilo or the 100 Kilo during this period.

Cates: Yes, I was at both, at 80 Kilo and at 100. This was the very bottom. Everyone was down with malaria. We had not enough treatment for it. We had to go work. We had the quotas to comply with, the orders, and it was horrible, really. At 80 Kilo I lost my second in command to malaria, and I was at 100 Kilo when the death of most of my buddies occurred. This was pretty horrible. We were never dry the duration of the monsoons. We were on a hillside at 100 Kilo, and standing water was on that hill. It rained so intensely.

Marcello: I gather that the location of the 100 Kilo Camp was at the worst possible place.

Cates: It must have been. We had fish under our bunks. I don't know how they could have selected a worse place. It was a bog. It was absolutely the worst possible place they could have put us.

Marcello: Now when the "Speedo" campaign started, did the officers have to work at this time, or were you still exempt from work?

Cates: I never did work.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that one of the particular

maladies that affected the prisoners while working on this railroad were the tropical ulcers. Now did you yourself ever have any of these?

Cates: No.

Marcello: They were apparently pretty nasty things.

Cates: They were awful!

Marcello: I think it was also around this time that Dr. Lumpkin died. I'm sure that was a real blow to the morale of the troops, was it not?

Cates: It was, yes. Dr. Lumpkin, Captain Taylor, Clyde Fillmore, J. B. Nelson, myself, and Ike Parker--six of us in one cubicle. Hampton and Dr. Lumpkin died within a matter of days of each other. Of course, Hugh being our doctor, that was the last hope anybody had. This, I think, points up another thing--our hunger. Our need for food was such that we would eat anything, things that we knew not to eat. All six of us in this cubicle came down with cholera as a result of eating food that was open to the air. It was a thing called a rhanboetan, a hairy fruit of the jungle. It looks a bit like a strawberry, a purple strawberry, larger. I'm convinced that that is the source of the thing that took Hampton and Lumpkin.

Marcello: How did you get rid of this cholera?

Cates: Some native told us that if we'd eat charcoal, it would absorb the contents of our stomachs that were at fault. Otherwise, you just simply void the contents of your stomach, and then the stomach itself would go . . . all the liquids go. This fellow told us that if we would eat charcoal, it would absorb those poisons.

Marcello: I knew that they used the charcoal for dysentery, but I hadn't realized that they used it for cholera.

Cates: It was effective with us, and J. B. Nelson and I--J. B. was off the Houston, a kid from Port Arthur or the Beaumont-Orange area--he and I literally forced charcoal, burnt rice, down each other's throat. I don't think it's any doubt but that it pulled us through. But it was a bad thing there at 100 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Now this is where, I gather, you lost a great many men. Sometimes the death rate would be as high as five a day at least.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: What are these burial details like here? Did you ever have to supervise any of these or go on any of those?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: What sort of provisions were made for these people?

Cates: We had an area set aside over across the draw and we, of course, had to supply the details to open the graves. We had to say the sermons. I held two or three services myself. Just whoever was available in camp had to participate, and the personnel remaining in the camp mobile enough to do such a thing was extremely limited. So it meant that the burial detail was rather, you know, constantly in need because the work crews had to go out. The people who were left were working at home, you know. It was pretty immediate, pretty . . . oh, I don't know. It cringed you a little bit, let's put it that way.

Marcello: Was there ever any attempt made to keep records of the deaths and things of this nature?

Cates: I don't know that there was a concerted effort, no. Frankly, I don't know.

Marcello: I assume that by this time you had virtually no medical supplies at all.

Cates: None.

Marcello: In fact, the roads had been washed out, and it was extremely difficult to get any supplies of any sort

up to the 100 Kilo Camp. Even the native traders couldn't reach you here.

Cates: No.

Marcello: Things got so bad during this particular stretch that they even moved a group of the very sickest prisoners back to the 80 Kilo Camp, isn't that correct? Didn't they establish some sort of a hospital back there?

Cates: Well, that's a polite way to word it, yes.

Marcello: Actually, from what I gather, they sent those people back there, thinking that there was no hope for them, that they were going to die, and I don't think there . . . like you mentioned, there were no provisions whatsoever back there.

Cates: No.

Marcello: They just lay there. If they made it, fine, and if they didn't, well, that was tough.

Cates: Sure enough.

Marcello: Well, finally the railroad was completed in either late October or November of 1943. They held a ceremony at Three Pagodas Pass, which I guess is approximately where the two links of the train were joined. Did you perchance attend that ceremony?

Cates: No, I wasn't in that.

Marcello: I'm still looking for somebody who attended that ceremony. I haven't found anybody yet.

Cates: I don't know who might have been there.

Marcello: Incidentally, in the building of this railroad, did you ever see any evidence of any collaboration with the enemy, that is, prisoners who perhaps would curry favors with the Japanese in return for food and things of this nature?

Cates: No, never. Not a single incident. Not even a suspicion of it.

Marcello: Now, when things got so desperate on the railroad, especially during the "Speedo" campaign, did anybody ever give any thoughts to escape?

Cates: Not to my knowledge, no.

Marcello: Okay, so the railroad was completed. Where did they send you from this point?

Cates: We started sort of an unprogrammed move towards Thailand, I think. I don't know if there was any plan. I don't know if there was any need for a plan. Now forward and down the line was the hospital area. I think perhaps the first moves were by people into that hospital.

Marcello: I think the sickest of the prisoners were sent to Kanchanaburi, were they not?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: This was a huge camp.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Were you there?

Cates: No. I was at Kanburi but not Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: There's a difference between the two?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: I didn't realize that. I thought that perhaps they were the same, just different names.

Cates: No.

Marcello: How come you were sent to Kanburi?

Cates: I don't know that either. It was rather a nice little camp down there, and that was one of the few really sanitary feelings that I had at that stage.

Marcello: Did you go there by train?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: What was the camp like? Can you describe it?

Cates: Well, no. It was barracks, but wooden floors this time. They were open, native-type. They were not pretentious. There were mango trees in there. A mango tree is like <u>nothing</u> else if you've had nothing.

If one of those things would drop . . . we weren't allowed to pick them, but if one would drop during the night, there'd be a mad rush. Everybody would hear it plop, and here would go the scramble. My mahjong set came in handy there. The camp commander was a sergeant who was, of course, socially unable to fratinize with his own people because there were no other sergeants about. There was only a corporal, and a sergeant doesn't speak to a corporal except to give orders. He came through camp and caught us playing mahjong one time, and he asked me and two of the China boys to come over to his quarters with the mahjong set. I had cane sugar for the first time since I'd left home. I had ice tea for the first time since I'd left home. None of us could speak to each other except in Pidgin English. We had an hilarious time. Anyway, Kanburi in my memory is rather a nice thought.

Marcello: Did you do any work at all here at this camp?

Cates: None. Some of the men did go down to the river landings, but I think that was just to pick up supplies.

Marcello: How long were you here altogether? Was it a matter of months or a week?

Cates: Two or three months at least.

Marcello: Were you harassed in any way here?

Cates: Not in the least.

Marcello: They more or less let you alone?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: Is there anything else that's outstanding from your stay here at Kanburi that you think we need to have a part of the record? For the most part, like you said, this was more or less a rest and recuperation sort of operation here.

Cates: Yes, it definitely was that.

Marcello: Up to this time, had you been able to send any mail home?

Cates: No.

Marcello: How about news from the outside world? Were you getting any news from the outside world, or did you have some sort of an idea about what was happening in the outside world?

Cates: The British had concealed a radio. We periodically would get rather authentic reports from that. They would dismantle it when they'd move from camp to camp.

Somebody would take the coil, and somebody else would take a vacuum tube, and then we'd assemble it at the other end. Again, a Chinese trader would bring us a flashlight battery. They were awfully cautious about using that, but periodically they would go on and get . . . I believe they monitored Delhi for newscasts. If we were not in the camp where the radio was at that time concealed, we would be brought news by work parties from time to time, a shuttle back and forth. So we were not entirely in the dark as to the progress of things.

Marcello: By this time, did you get the feeling that the course of the war was changing?

Cates: Yes, we did.

Marcello: Did you ever see any physical evidence of this? In other words, any bombers or anything of this nature?

Cates: Oh, yes, there were . . . we called them "Reccy Joe." They were reconnaissance planes to say the least. We had periodic bombings.

Marcello: Now was this while you were working on the railroad or while you were at Kanburi?

Cates: It was at Kanburi.

Marcello: Can you describe these bombings?

Cates: No, because it was always far away. We were not sitting on top of the target there. Up at the bridge, the camp was right at the end of the bridge, and if they bombed the bridge, they bombed the camp. It's a different situation. We were never hit. I don't know how close any bombing might have come. Perhaps several miles away, at the very closest.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese now that this sort of thing occurred?

Cates: Well, by this time, we're seeing little things on the bulletin board like, "Prisoners will not laugh at the Japanese during the course of an air raid." We had slit trenches all over at every camp. We are in the position now of feeling that we are again a superior race. There's optimism. It's almost a feeling of happiness when those planes do come over. I don't remember where it was, but at one camp there was a pigpen with a moat rather than a fence to retain the pigs. I spent a bombing raid down in that thing. I remember the prisoners walking around the parapets of that thing. It was rectangular and we could go from one . . . if the planes were coming from that side, we knew where to go. All the while, there was

one of the less strong Japanese characters on his knees and his hands with his nose buried right in the bottom of that mud. We all had a feeling of superiority. It was very infectious. Now this is a question of morale, see. Ours is going up, and his is going down. He hadn't been too darn happy to this stage, but now he's even less so. So it's a seesaw, and, yes, we feel that it's switching.

Marcello: Since obviously you were getting a morale boost, did you feel any increased sense of boldness? In other words, did you become more bold? Did you do things that you normally would not have done otherwise?

Cates: Shortly after this bit about the bulletin boards, we had a night raid. Then a notice went on the bulletin board "Prisoners will not smoke outside after dark." Somebody in the camp . . . not I. I wasn't that bold, but I felt it, I'll admit. But this particular individual says, "They'll never give me another order." He went across the parade grounds striking matches and firing up a cigarette that was already lit. We were all on short rations for three weeks because of

this. Too bold, yes, it was there. But it was still not time for anybody to do anything stupid, and most of us knew it.

Marcello: What sort of food were you getting here at Kanburi?

Cates: We had access to probably more here because we were at a point on the river where supplies were to be had. I remember we went down on a bath party one time strictly to bathe in the river. There was a native family in a canoe down there that had a charcoal brazier, and I had a banquet with them. I'd swim up to the side of the boat, and they'd give me a piece of meat out of their hash that was going on this brazier or whatever they call hash. Now the availability or accessability is different from then on. We're not entirely confined to polished rice and chunkel soup. More and more things come in. The canteen, we had duck eggs. If you had a quarter, you could get a duck egg.

Marcello: This canteen was operated by the Japanese?

Cates: No, it was operated by the PW's.

Marcello: Where would the POW's obtain the goods to stock the canteen?

Cates: I don't, except through the sale of them. The Japs paid us script money, and obviously somebody had money to operate on consignment, perhaps. Somebody would advance the funds and then sold it back to the prisoners to re-finance the purchase. It was never a wide open thing, but you could get a block of sugar. You could get . . . oh, it looked like tobacco, but it tasted like brown sugar. It was unrefined sugar in other words. You could get tobacco, duck eggs, sugar, almost without exception.

Marcello: Food was still a constant thought on everybody's minds, I gather.

Cates: Yes, you bet.

Marcello: Things weren't that good.

Cates: No, no. And your last dime would go for something to eat.

Marcello: Okay, so you were at this camp for a few months. Where did you go from Kanburi?

Cates: I think it was from there that I departed for Bangkok.

Marcello: Were you kind of sorry or apprehensive to leave Kanburi?

Cates: No, because we had rumors just before we left that the end of the war was just around the corner. We would

get victory signs from the natives and smiles where we hadn't got any before. We sensed that something was afoot. Then on that trip, we were told that it was over before we got there.

Marcello: You must have been at Kanburi for quite awhile then because you got out of the jungle in October or November of 1943, and the war wasn't over until August of 1945. So you must have been there for close to a year then, perhaps.

Cates: Yes, I was. Now I went from there back to the camp at the end of the bridge.

Marcello: Kanchanaburi?

Cates: Kanchanaburi, and then back to Kanburi. I made two moves there. For a year or more, I was there. I was in Kanchanaburi when they bombed their hospital shack and killed a great number of our men.

Marcello: Now let's get this straight. You went from the railroad to Kanburi, and you were there for a couple of months?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: And then from there you went up to Kanchanaburi. You stayed there for the bulk of the time.

Cates: Yes, several more months, yes.

Marcello: What was your stay like in Kanchanaburi then?

Cates: It was optimistic, let's put it that way. I worked less. We had theaters; we had entertainment. There were many interesting people. We organized lectures, the Australians see fit to call them: "Anybody that knows anything, come over and talk to us tonight." There's always somebody who knows a little something that the other guy doesn't. So there was a regular Chautauqua circuits going on within our own personnel. They had stage units that were basically professional, very good.

Marcello: Well, this was a very big camp, so I assume you found all sorts of talent in this camp.

Cates: Yes, much talent. And all forces were there--Australian, English, Dutch, native, European-Dutch. It was huge.

Marcello: What did you do during your stay here at this camp? Was it a matter of rest and recuperation again?

Cates: Yes, yes, there was no basic work being done. We'd go patch up the bridge when they'd knock it out.

Marcello: How were the living quarters at this particular camp?

Cates: They were adequate, I'd say. They were native-style, bamboo, but clean and airy.

Marcello: These didn't have the floorboards like the ones at Kanburi?

Cates: No, we were off the ground, but on bamboo. It was on the high bank of the river and not marshy or boggy, not wet.

Marcello: And did the Japanese more or less leave you alone here at Kanburi?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: You were mentioning awhile ago the bombing raids that took place here. Let's get some background into the story at this point. At Kanchanaburi, there was a very important bridge, was there not, that spanned the river. Now what river is this?

Cates: Isn't it the Kwai?

Marcello: I think it is the Kwai.

Cates: Yes, this is the bridge on the River Kwai.

Marcello: Well, describe these bombing raids.

Cates: The B-24's would come over to bomb this bridge. The first flight they made, a bent fin brought a huge bomb over and made a crater about thirty feet deep right in the middle of our hospital shack.

Marcello: A bent fin on the bomb?

Cates: Yes, it was a malfunctioning bomb because nothing else in that stick of bombs even came close to that particular spot. And oddly enough, we could see it

coming. We could see it leave the cluster and coming at us. And that's when we left the parade ground and scattered. We were at tenko that evening counting in everybody, you know, parade. On a number of other runs, they'd come . . . well, normally, they'd fly the piers. They'd fly so as to hit the piers of the bridge. They didn't often frighten us into thinking they were coming after us. It was obvious they were not deliberately attacking us, but it scared the living daylights out of us everytime we'd hear a plane.

Marcello: Were the Japanese able to put up any resistance at all to these air attacks?

Cates: Yes, they had ack-ack guns mounted on the perimeter of the camp. They were within sight. They were obvious.

Marcello: Did you ever feel bold enough to cheer when the bombers came?

Cates: Oh, yes, definitely, yes.

Marcello: What would the Japanese do?

Cates: They didn't care for it. We were never punished because of it, but we were awfully unpopular.

Marcello: About how often did you experience these raids here at Kanchanaburi?

Cates: I couldn't tell you. Several, a number of them. It seemed extremely frequent, but I guess not a great number.

Marcello: How were you being fed here at Kanchanaburi? When I say "how," what was the quantity and quality of the food once again?

Cates: A little bit better, certainly by the standards we had been accustomed to further up the country. We had adequate cooking facilities, and rations were not bad. The supply was . . . quantity was up. I don't know why, except that we'd come to the river, and that's the artery of supply in that country.

Marcello: Here again, were you more or less let alone here by the Japanese?

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: There was very little harassment?

Cates: Yes, very little.

Marcello: You mentioned from that point, then, you were sent back down to Kanburi again, and ultimately after another short stay in that camp, you were on your way to Bangkok. Do you think it was their intention to send you to Japan?

Cates: No, we were told that there was a staging area upcountry from Bangkok, a nebulous number of miles, and that we were being sent there just as a holding area. No particular end was promised us, no guarantee of an ideal situation, but we were told that that was to be it. They were going to take us up there, the road was finished, we were through working, and they didn't have any other need for us. That's where we were going.

Marcello: Did you ever have a fear of going back to Japan?

Cates: You say back . . .

Marcello: Did you ever have a fear of them sending you to Japan? Did you dread that thought of having to go to Japan?

Cates: No, no. As a matter of fact, I never felt that I would wind up in Japan. It never once crossed my mind, and yet I knew that these other groups had gone.

Marcello: Okay, so you were on your way to Bangkok when you finally got word of the surrender. What sort of a feeling . . . . Well, first of all, describe how you heard about the surrender.

Cates: We were stopped at a station along the route--I don't know the name of the place--and were off-boarded.

Everybody was told to get off the train. We were lined up on one side of the tracks, the Japs on another, and the commanding officer of the Jap unit then, through an interpreter, he told his troops that the war was over, and we saw them sag and start crying, and then the interpreter told us the war was over and we started crying and sagging. A crazier situation never existed, I know. I mean, theoretically, you'd say, "Well, I will personally tear his head off his shoulders if I ever have the opportunity and no desire to take it any further. That's it. That's all. That's period."

Marcello: These were Japanese guards. There were not Korean guards.

Cates: No, these were Japanese. They marched off. We got back on the train and went on into Bangkok, went to a warehouse, and didn't see them anymore, except that mad sergeant from upcountry who took delight in sending the men out on a work party when they were sick at 100 Kilo Camp, and the one who deprived us of our medicine when we knew he had medicine. We were in this warehouse on the riverfront in Bangkok, and this character walks in one door and walks diagonally

across the warehouse . . . it's at least a hundred feet across . . . and every man in that warehouse knows him. Every man has sworn that he'd personally chop him to pieces if he ever had the chance, and not a man got up. I don't know what that indicates, but it's a new beginning somehow, to think that that idiot survived that walk across that floor. Why, I don't know, but it just wasn't in us to pursue the conflict anymore. It was all over, and the quicker we could get out of there, the happier we would be.

Marcello: How long was it before the Americans came, before you were actually liberated?

Cates: I don't know. On the 29th of August, my birthday . . . and I hesitate to use any names. We were not in Bangkok. We had already gone out to another place, and I don't know why I can't think of the name, but Hud Wright and I . . . Hud Wright was captain of F Battery, and he lived in Plainview. He and I went into town on a contact mission to see if we could pick up anything by way of supplies. We already had a . . . who were the secret service people in there? We had had contact with our own people who had parachuted in and established guerrilla units and contacts.

Marcello: This is part of the OSS.

Cates: OSS, right. I couldn't think of the classification. Well, anyway, Hud and I were on this thing, and he managed by sign language to tell them it was my birthday. Okay, we have a rice wine party going in, and we have dinner with the mayor, and we make our contacts in coming back. So on the 29th, we were technically on the way home because it was the next day, I think, or the day after that the first of our parties started flying back to Calcutta. We were not in Bangkok very long before we went out to this place of . . . no name.

Marcello: Like you say, you flew from an airfield close to Bangkok over to Calcutta.

Cates: Yes.

Marcello: How long did you remain in the hospital at Calcutta?

Cates: I was there three weeks, I think, nearly a month, because of a mix-up in urine samples. They let the wrong man go and kept me there, and I had to check up clear before they turned me loose, and I was behind all the rest of the party. It's during this three-week interlude that I met this idiot that flew that B-24 that sunk our ship back at the mouth of the Moulmein Harbor.

Marcello: What were your remarks to him when you found out that he was the one?

Cates: I used all of the words (laughter).

Marcello: When did you get your first square meal?

Cates: In Calcutta.

Marcello: Did you have any trouble eating it?

Cates: They wouldn't give us enough. They fed us about five times a day, and as I recall, it was a peach half and one cracker, and they were extremely cautious to turn us loose on food. They were more pessimistic than we. I would have tackled anything. Gradually, they realized that it would not kill us to eat.

Marcello: When you got back to the States, did you have much trouble re-adjusting to civilian life after this experience in the jungle?

Cates: Yes, I had quite a bit of adjustment, and it's difficult to tell why. I think perhaps the greeting accorded these recent PW's is typical, however. There's an over-anxious feeling on the part of the public to assimilate the PW, and he needs more privacy to meet himself again. I was terrified in Washington, D.C. I flew from Calcutta to the Azores to Newfoundland to Walter Reed Hospital. There I met

the first person from home who came out a little bit too quick for me, and it unhinged me. I came on into San Antonio, Fort Sam Houston, and was released in time, and I think I had rather an uneasy stage there, and then I came home and attempted to pick up too quickly. My wife and I made a trip through the South, and we went to New Orleans, and I was literally sick at the contact and the hustle and bustle that New Orleans represented.

Marcello: Incidentally, I gather that you were married while you were a prisoner-of-war?

Cates: Yes. It takes a little bit of time to pick up the words you need to read the newspapers, you know. Your vocabulary has avoided you these many years. I think to readjust you need perhaps more freedom than entertainment, freedom to work it out your own way.

Marcello: How much did you weigh when you entered the service, and how much did you weigh at your lowest peak?

Cates: I weighed 145 when I entered the service, and I got down to ninety-one, which is not too bad a level. As I said, I didn't have the tropic ulcers. I wasn't nearly as emaciated as some of them. I've always been awfully compatible with food, and I'd eat anything,

literally--snakes and puppy dogs and burnt rice and just rice. Wormy cheese. I remember we got into a head of limburger cheese that was fly-blown, and we'd just shake the larva out and eat it.

Marcello: Where did you get hold of this cheese?

Cates: This was in the warehouse at Batavia.

Marcello: I think I've heard some stories about that, yes.

Cates: Incidentally, somebody found and buried a case of liquor. They dropped it down into one of the quays and submerged it, weighing it down, and then we'd come back and retrieve one bottle at a time and sneak it into camp. There's always a way. But, you know, to survive at all, I think you've got to eat. You can't just turn up your nose because you don't like it. That wasn't a problem with me. I could eat and therefore I didn't just go down to nothing. Ninety-one pounds is near nothing, but I didn't quite hit the bottom like some of the others did.

Marcello: As you look back on your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as having been the major factor in pulling you through?

Cates: Two or three things. Sense of humor, I think, is perhaps essential to survival. I think the feeling

that there's something back that you ought to be part of again is necessary. I don't know. Certainly, faith is vital. Christian background is helpful. You can't put two men up there and say, "Well, they've all got these qualifications, so they're both going to get back." There's a point at which one of them decides he can't make it or isn't going to.

Marcello: Did you actually witness people giving up and literally lying down or sitting down and dying?

Cates: One of our best men was a fellow named Jack Shaw from Decatur. He was one of the oldtimers in the Guard unit and one of the best men. He volunteered for kitchen duty and cut his shin on a huge cooking pot with a sharp edge. He had no medicine and developed an ulcer, and he couldn't . . . the cut was on his shin. Towards the end of his life, he could nick himself on the shoulder and puss would flow. He lived at least five months on sheer determination after he was a dead man. Then one day I went over to see him, and he said, "Captain, I can't go any further." He died that day. Something gave up. His body had already given up, but it was something more than that. Something carries you that is not literally life itself.

Marcello: Has time healed the wounds? In other words, at the time that you got out of the service, at the time you got out of prison camp, did you feel any animosity towards the Japanese?

Cates: No, I don't believe that I did. Not as a group.

Marcello: Then, obviously, you have no feelings of animosity towards them now?

Cates: No. As a matter of fact, there were a great number of occasions back during those years when I felt some bond of sympathy with them. I mentioned reading books. One book that I read was a book on palmistry. I was sitting on one of these slit trenches one day reading the palm of a guy I was talking to. One of the Japs came up and stuck his palm out. He spoke a smattering of English, and I told him this, that, and the other. I read the lines the way the book said it was. I told him he was not a mercenary, a professional soldier, and he shook his head. I said, "You're a businessman." He shook his head yes. I said, "You've got two wives and three children." He shook his head. I said, "You want to go home," and he cried. He pulled out his wallet, and he had a picture of two wives and three children, and it turned out that he

manufactured bicycles in Tokyo. Not a big establishment, but he assembled and put together bicycles by hand. Well, he was in a hole he didn't care for either. And so were my buddy and I sitting there, and really you can't feel animosity towards somebody who's in the same situation. He's got orders. He's not doing this by choice. If you can feel that way towards an individual, then you certainly must feel that way towards the nation from which he came. If you feel that this character that withheld the medicine back there at 100 Kilo Camp was a madman, then all you've got to do is look down the ranks and look at this big tall guy you've got in your own outfit that does some weird things, too, or have him look at you and say, "Captain, you ain't so sane every day." See?

Marcello: Yes.

Cates: No, I could feel no animosity towards this international situation. I couldn't question my luck either because some of the fellows that we left back at Camp Bowie hit Salerno and didn't get out. Okay, who had the good luck, and who had the bad luck?