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Interview with  
GROVER REICHLER  
January 22, 1979

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas  
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello  
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(Signature)  
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Oral History Collection

Grover Reichle

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Grover Reichle for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on January 22, 1979, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Reichle in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, of the 36th Division of the Texas National Guard. This unit is commonly referred to as the "Lost Battalion." The unit was captured intact in Java in March of 1942, and subsequently the personnel in the unit spent the rest of World War II in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

Mr. Reichle, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature.

Mr. Reichle: I was born on May 15, 1920, in Falls County and lived there all my life. A friend came to live with his uncle--named Jack Kenner--and joined me on the farm.

His uncle died in 1940, and he went to Lubbock and lived with an uncle out there who was a major--Major Walton--in the 1st Battalion, 131st Field Artillery. The thing came up to get the year over with. Everyone went to volunteering . . . I mean, being called for the draft. I was working at a cotton gin in a little ol' place called Perry at the time, and everybody wondered why I didn't go sign up for the draft. They kept asking my daddy, and he said, "Well, he's not old enough. He's just twenty years old." This friend of mine wrote me a letter and wanted me to come out there and join the National Guard, and we could get our year over with together. So I caught a ride on a grain truck one day and went to Lubbock.

Marcello: And where had you been working at this cotton gin?

Reichle: At Perry, Texas. It's a little ol' place just north of Marlin, Texas. Lubbock's where I joined the National Guard. I joined it on November 11, 1940. Then we mobilized on the 25th and remained in Lubbock until we went to Brownwood, I think, in January.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute here. From what I gather, the National Guard was an alternative to the draft for you.

Reichle: Yes, I joined that thing to get my year over with with my friend.

Marcello: Why did you decide to take your chances in the National Guard rather than being drafted into the regular Army?

Reichle: The reason I did . . . I was just going to be with my friend. I'd know someone, see, instead of being with a bunch of strangers. That's why I did.

Marcello: How seriously was the situation being taken at that time? In other words, when you joined the National Guard, did you realize the seriousness of the world situation and the possibility that you might eventually be federalized?

Reichle: No, I never even gave it a thought because I guess I was too young and full of "umph" and didn't care. Even when we were fixing to go overseas . . . what they did, they took picked men from two battalions. We were in the 1st Battalion, and they transferred us to the 2nd Battalion. I was a C Battery man and later became an F Battery man. We were supposed to go to the Philippine Islands, we found out later, to form a new triangular division. People asked us about it, but we never even thought about any war. We were just going to the Philippine Islands.

Marcello: You mentioned that you joined in November of 1940?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: The unit was federalized when?

Reichle: November 25th of 1940.

Marcello: So you were not actually in too long before the unit did mobilize.

Reichle: Yes, just a few days.

Marcello: After the unit mobilized, it did not go directly to Brownwood,

is that correct?

Reichle: Camp Bowie was not completed. Each unit stayed at its National Guard armory.

Marcello: Where was your armory?

Reichle: In Lubbock.

Marcello: What did you do during that period between the time of mobilization in November of 1940 and the time that you went to Camp Bowie in January of 1941?

Reichle: When I went out there, I went to live with this uncle of Jack's--Major Walton. Jack and I, we didn't have any money. There was a gin right close by, and we'd load cotton at night--just anything to pick up a little money. We lived there with him until we mobilized. Then we slept in the armory. It had just a big room and had a bunch of steel cots.

Marcello: What sort of training did you undergo while you were living there in the armory?

Reichle: Just what you'd normally call basic training--close order drill . . . we didn't use rifles. I never did know how to use a rifle. We had pistol action and that's all. It was just close order drill. I think maybe we went out a few times in them old trucks--they had old trucks--but later we got a new truck.

Marcello: So even after the unit mobilized, nobody was really taking the whole business too seriously.

Reichle: No, we never did, even when we got to Brownwood.

Marcello: What sort of liberty or leaves did you get while you were here at Lubbock and before the unit moved on to Brownwood?

Reichle: Well, at Lubbock we could just go to town anytime we wanted to. We were just nearly in town, anyway. We could go anytime after we got off drill. You didn't have to have a pass there. The boys that lived in Lubbock, most of them-- it was very few of us that stayed in the National Guard armory--could spend the night at home.

Marcello: But you yourself stayed right there in the armory.

Reichle: Well, I didn't have anyplace to go--Jack Kenner and I and several more. Some of them were from Brownfield, and one of them was from New Mexico that came in there and joined us. One ol' boy named Hoover from New Mexico, he came and joined because he had a brother-in-law who was a sergeant in that thing. It was just something like that that brought people together.

Marcello: So then in January of 1941, the unit moved on to Brownwood. Describe this move from Lubbock to Camp Bowie in Brownwood.

Reichle: Being a field artillery unit, we had our own trucks and transportation. We just drove our trucks down there--kitchen trucks and wire trucks--and towed our guns. Incidentally, I was a truck driver, and I drove a wire truck. It had a trailer with wire and telephone equipment and so forth on it.

Marcello: You mentioned that you towed your guns down there. Were you using the French 75-millimeters?

Reichle: Yes, the French. That's right.

Marcello: Had you had very much training with those guns there at Lubbock?

Reichle: Yes, we did some there. That's some of the training we had at Lubbock. Before I became a truck driver, they called me a tailgunner. I had to move the tail of that thing around.

Marcello: Did they actually fire those weapons right there around Lubbock?

Reichle: No, we did not.

Marcello: I guess it was probably a matter of learning how to set up those guns quickly and efficiently and that sort of thing.

Reichle: Yes, that's what it was. We just practiced hooking them up and setting them up and then rehooking them and starting over and over and over.

Marcello: When you got to Camp Bowie, I don't think it was still finished yet, was it?

Reichle: No, no, no. It was muddy. The streets was muddy and boggy.

Marcello: Were you having any regrets about having entered the service by that time?

Reichle: No. It was just all a big new world to me.

Marcello: Did you people have to go about the job of actually getting the camp into shape?



Reichle: No, we didn't do too much of that. All we did was try to keep our tents clean because it was so muddy. That didn't last long. I don't really remember how long it took, but it wasn't very long until everything was in shape. They had the truck parks in shape and the guns and so forth.

Marcello: What sort of additional training did you undergo after you got to Camp Bowie?

Reichle: We was through; we didn't do any. We just didn't do hardly anything. We had a little calisthenics every morning. But that's when they began . . . those boys that was being drafted in . . . see, we wasn't at wartime strength. They began to draft them in and put them into each battery. As they came into our battery, they ate with us and slept with us. But then during the day, they would go off somewhere else--to a different parade ground--and take their basic training, which we had had in Lubbock. We had it much easier than they did. They just really had to "hump" it.

Marcello: You were still in the 1st Battalion at this point.

Reichle: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Were there ever any difficulties in receiving these draftees into the unit? In other words, most of you were pretty close-knit and knew one another. Now you were suddenly getting some new people into the unit. Did that ever cause any problems?

Reichle: No, no, it really didn't. We hadn't been together long

enough that we was all that close. In fact, some of the boys that was drafted in became better friends than some of them that was there. I think we was probably at two-thirds strength, was all we was. There was a bunch of them drafted in.

Marcello: Now after you got to Camp Bowie and had been there for a while, in the summer of 1941, I think you were then sent off to the 3rd Army maneuvers in Louisiana, were you not?

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: And you were still in the 1st Battalion at this point?

Reichle: Yes, but now before that, we had a big maneuver around Brownwood. I don't remember what that thing was called, but a bunch of them came up from Fort Bliss. We maneuvered all around Brownwood--Rising Star, Cross Plains, Blanket, all in there--for, it seemed to me, like, maybe a month.

That was a big coincidence there. When they got ready to go back to Fort Sam Houston, the infantry had no way back. They put two drivers to a truck, and we hauled infantrymen back down there. That was the only time I ever saw us drive with the "hammer down." They had MP's in every town and stopped traffic. We never did stop. An ol' boy named Connally and I drove together; we drove my truck. But I drove most of the way down, and he drove back. We really enjoyed that ride.

I want to bring up a little thing here. They always

call me "Country" and "Red," and we was driving down that road, and a fellow was plowing with an ol' John Deere tractor. I said, "Look at that ol' John Deere tractor," and ol' Connally went to laughing and said, "God Almighty! You can't take the country out of ol' 'Rural Red' Reichle!" That's where I got my name. I even got mail addressed to me in Brownwood--"Rural Red" Reichle--and I'd get it.

Marcello: You mentioned that you did participate on these Louisiana maneuvers in the summer of 1941. What happened on those maneuvers? What took place over there in Louisiana?

Reichle: We just maneuvered all the time, day and night. Again, being a truck driver, we didn't do any KP duty or guard duty or anything else. The sergeant--he was a wire sergeant--rode in the cab with you, and he was your relief driver. But our motor officer didn't believe in that. He said a good driver slept when he could. So we didn't have to do any KP duty, any guard duty, or anything else. We just drove our trucks, and anytime we wasn't driving, we were in that truck trying to sleep, day or night.

Marcello: Now evidently the unit did get to fire its weapons and so on over in Louisiana.

Reichle: Oh, yes. We had those little ol' 37-millimeter things that would fasten up onto the barrel of those 75's. That's what we'd fire. They were 37-millimeter with actual live ammunition instead of 75's. We simulated the same thing.

Of course, we done a lot of blackout driving at night. There was one boy, "Red" Thomas, he was driving a truck for someone that night. I don't remember what truck he was driving, but he was following a gun--total blackout--and he didn't see us stop. He slammed right into the tube of that gun, and it went through his radiator and knocked that thing in full recoil. We liked to have never gotten that thing apart.

Several trucks turned over--not with us but, you know, different ones--and fell off of bridges and so forth. They decided it was too dangerous, you know, to just kill people like that, so we started driving at night with our lights on. We just simulated the blackout.

Marcello: Evidently, the unit made a pretty good record for itself there in Louisiana, did it not?

Reichle: From what I understood, yes. I understood that it did real good--real good. In fact, that's one reason, from what I understood, they picked that 2nd Battalion to go overseas. I'm guessing that they thought that was the most accurate battalion in the whole field artillery of the division.

Marcello: But there's never really been any official verification as to why the unit was selected to go overseas as a part of PLUM.

Reichle: As far as I know, no. We always guessed. We was told that was it, but you can hear anything you want to hear in the Army.

Marcello: So you finish the Louisiana maneuvers. Incidentally, how

long did they last?

Reichle: As well as I remember, they lasted nearly two months. But at one time in there, after we had been there about three weeks, we got a break of, I think, five days. Anybody that wanted to go . . . we could either go to Beaumont or Orange, Texas. They furnished trucks, and we all went down there in trucks. Now there's where we really had a ball. I was one of the smart few--there was four of us. When we first got there, we went and got a hotel and then went to doing everything we was going to do. That night, when we got to our hotel room, we barely could get in our beds. Our room was full. They all went to drinking and partying earlier, and the hotels was all filled up. They slept on the floor and everywhere else.

There was one big cafe that I don't remember the name of. Someone started going in the back and ordering a big steak and eating like a king and putting that ticket in their pocket. Then they'd go up to the front and get a cup of coffee and pay that coffee ticket, and they went out. After about two days, that place decided that something was going wrong (chuckle). They weren't taking in enough money to do so much business. So they started searching you for your ticket when you went out. (Chuckle) We had one ol' boy named Bob Richey; he ate his ticket. (Laughter) He couldn't do anything else with it.

Marcello: When you returned from Louisiana, was it not at that point that the 2nd Battalion was detached from the 36th Division? Wasn't it shortly after you returned from Louisiana that it took place?

Reichle: Real shortly after we'd left.

Marcello: I guess there are two things that we have to talk about at this point, Mr. Reichle. First of all, we have to talk about you being transferred from the 1st Battalion into the 2nd Battalion, and then we need to talk about the detachment of the 2nd Battalion from the 36th Division. When were you detached or transferred, I guess we should say, from the 1st Battalion into the 2nd Battalion? When did that take place? Was it after you returned from Louisiana?

Reichle: Oh, yes. It was shortly after we returned from Louisiana,

Marcello: What was the reason for that transfer?

Reichle: You mean, why was I transferred?

Marcello: Yes.

Reichle: Well, I'm going to backtrack a little bit because it's kind of an odd story. Coming back from the Louisiana maneuvers, we spent the night in Tawakoni, Texas. That wasn't far from Marlin, my home. There was another ol' boy there from a little ol' town close by. His brother came and picked him up, and I found out they was going back. Jack and I was going to go back with them and spend that night at home, and they was going to take us back the next morning. Well,

Colonel Bay caught Jack putting his tie on, running. He wanted to know where he was going. Jack said he was going home. The colonel said, "No, you're not going home." So he sent him back. I went on home with them, and my dad brought me back to Tawakoni.

Then Jack Kenner and "Red" Thomas and Glen Jones and I, we four went to Waco. My daddy went with us, and he stayed with an uncle of mine while we went honky-tonking. Glen Jones didn't want to go on back; he wanted to stay and party some more. Finally, we got him to go, and we picked up my daddy. When we got back to Tawakoni, they had already eaten breakfast. There was a line sergeant there having a formation, and we all got "eaten out" real good.

So when this thing came up to go to the 2nd Battalion, they sent Captain Wright, and he said, "Well, you four are going with me. They called me to go, and y'all are going with me." So that's why we went. Now the rest of them, (chuckle) I don't know. But that's why we four ended up in the 2nd Battalion.

Marcello: So you ended up in the 2nd Battalion mainly as a disciplinary move more than anything else.

Reichle: I imagine so, yes. We carried the first sergeant with us.

Marcello: How many of you were then transferred from the 1st Battalion into the 2nd Battalion?

Reichle: About half and half. There was some old ones they didn't

take and some young ones they didn't take. They had to be just about the right age--around twenty-one or twenty-two. There was several of them twenty-seven or twenty-eight that did not go.

Marcello: It was also at this point, then, that the older personnel and the married personnel had the chance to get out of the unit, is that correct, and not go on to PLUM?

Reichle: Anyone married, unless he was an officer. No one was married. Any married ones did not have to go unless they wanted to.

Marcello: Did this decision come after you found out that you were going overseas, or was it at the time of the transfer that this occurred?

Reichle: I think about the same time. We knew we was going somewhere, but we didn't know for sure where.

Marcello: Was your function or routine changed any when you moved from the 1st Battalion over into the 2nd Battalion?

Reichle: None whatsoever.

Marcello: You still remained as a truck driver.

Reichle: Yes. Anyone that transferred, whatever he did, he took that same slot in the 2nd Battalion. We carried, in fact, nearly all our officers. All our officers were C Battery men--all our officers were--from the battery commander on down.

Marcello: You mentioned C Battery, so let me go back a minute. When you transferred from the 1st Battalion into the 2nd Battalion, into which battery did you go?



Reichle: F Battery. If you was an A Battery man, you went to D Battery.

Marcello: In other words, if you were in A Battery in the 1st Battalion, you went to D Battery in the 2nd Battalion.

Reichle: That's right. B Battery went to E Battery, and C Battery went to F Battery. And then F Battery went over to C Battery. We just swapped bunks; that's all we did,

Marcello: And was F Battery a firing battery, or what was its purpose?

Reichle: Both of them was firing batteries. There was another battalion with guns just like ours, and then another one from around Corsicana had heavier guns--155's. But they all remained in Brownwood.

Marcello: About the time that you were transferred from the 1st Battalion into the 2nd Battalion, the 2nd Battalion was then detached from the 36th Division.

Reichle: We kind of was on our own to an extent, as well as I remember now. One thing they did . . . as soon as we got transferred, half of us got a week's furlough. When we got back, the other half got a week's furlough. I think I got one more weekend pass after that. Most all of us did. Incidentally, we mobilized . . . I joined on Armistice Day and a year from that day, November 11th, we left Brownwood.

Marcello: And your destination was PLUM.

Reichle: PLUM, yes.

Marcello: Why was it that the 2nd Battalion was detached from the

36th Division?

Reichle: Again, I don't know, but I'm guessing this. The 131st Field Artillery did the most outstanding job in the Louisiana maneuvers. That's to my knowledge. That's why they picked that. So then they took the picked men . . . not necessarily picked men. They were picked men to an extent, yes, and then they considered age and non-married men. You know, men who was young enough didn't care and would go do anything. That's really what it was.

Marcello: As you were to find out much later, and even as rumors had it at the time, PLUM was your destination in the Philippines.

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: And essentially you were being sent to the Philippines in order to create a new triangular division, isn't that correct?

Reichle: A new, fast-moving triangular division, that's right.

Marcello: Why was it that the Army decided to reorganize from the square divisions to the triangular divisions? Do you know?

Reichle: I don't know that. Yes, I do. A square division moved too slow. That's one big thing they learned in the Louisiana maneuvers. They moved too slow.

Marcello: In other words, there were too many personnel in that square division?

Reichle: Yes, and because of the way the thing operated. Of course, I wasn't up high enough in the bracket to really know, but we heard these things.

Marcello: Well, this goes along with what I have read. I've read that the Army by this time had been impressed with the victories being won by the small German divisions in Europe. Evidently, in an effort to copy these German divisions, they did decide to reorganize and make the units much more mobile.

Reichle: That's possibly very much so.

Marcello: They were impressed with the speed and the mobility of those German armies.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: So you're a part of Operation PLUM, I guess we can call it. What sort of rumors were going through the unit when you heard about PLUM?

Reichle: Really nothing. We all wanted to go to the Philippine Islands. We was going to a party. We carried golf clubs with us and street clothes--just everything. We was going to a ball.

Marcello: Even though you had not really officially been told that PLUM did mean the Philippine Islands?

Reichle: Yes, we had finally been officially told.

Marcello: Oh, you were?

Reichle: Yes. We was going to the Philippine Islands.

Marcello: So you board a train bound for San Francisco, and then I believe when you got to San Francisco, you spent about a week at Angel Island.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: What did you do while you were at Angel Island?

Reichle: We got to go to town about two or three times. Incidentally, we hadn't been paid and had very little money. In fact, Jack Kenner and I was broke. It was Thanksgiving Day--the first Thanksgiving--and we decided we'd send a Thanksgiving greeting home. So we sent our Thanksgiving greeting home collect and waited about two hours. Then we sent my dad another collect one to wire us some money. It didn't get there in time. It took my dad about a year to get his money back.

Marcello: In other words, by the time he sent the money, you had already left Angel Island.

Reichle: We'd left Angel Island, yes--got on the boat and was gone.

Marcello: At this time, how much thought were you giving to the possibility of the country getting into war?

Reichle: None whatsoever. It was very rarely mentioned.

Marcello: And probably even if you did think of the country getting into war, you probably thought more in terms of fighting Germany than Japan.

Reichle: Absolutely, yes. We never even thought about fighting Japan, I didn't. It wasn't ever mentioned until they bombed Pearl Harbor. We had just left Pearl Harbor about three days when they bombed it.

Marcello: At Angel Island, you boarded the USS Republic.

Reichle: The USS Republic, that's right.

Marcello: Describe what sort of a vessel the Republic was.

Reichle: (Chuckle) It was just a big, ol' ship that come to the States from Germany in World War I. The rumor got out that its sister ship sank in seven minutes. Of course, that made us all feel real good (facetious remark). Going into Honolulu . . .

Marcello: Let's just back up a minute before we get you into Honolulu. Let's get you out of San Francisco Bay.

Reichle: Oh, you want to know about seasickness?

Marcello: How about the ground swells? Did they affect you any?

Reichle: No, they never did. When we first got aboard, the first thing I can really remember was going through the Golden Gate Bridge, and I looked and thought, "Oh, this ship will never go under that thing. It's too tall, and that bridge is too low." When we got there, it was way up there. Anyway, after we got out and began to hit some waves, they began to get seasick.

Marcello: But you did not.

Reichle: I didn't. I was lucky. You were talking about "Slug" Wright awhile ago. Did he tell you about taking his seasick pills?

Marcello: I'm not sure, but tell me what you remember.

Reichle: (Chuckle) He bought him some seasick pills and took them like he was supposed to, and he tried to die for about four days. It liked to have killed him (chuckle). There were those big, long . . . about three-foot-long aluminum trays with about four water fountains in them. Instead of just a regular

water fountain, it was just a bunch of them in every place where you slept. You couldn't even get a drink of water. Them things were full of "urp"--everywhere! You'd go down in the hold . . . they was boiling cabbage day and night in that kitchen. All you could smell was "urp" and boiled cabbage. It took me three days before I found my bunk, but luckily I never did get seasick.

Marcello: I've never heard that term "urp" before to describe vomit. That must be an old Texas term or something,

Reichle: I don't know what it is (chuckle). That's all I ever heard, was "urp" (chuckle). There was one ol' boy . . . I don't know what outfit he was out of because there was some more of them going to PLUM. He had a nose like a parrot. I'll never forget him. He had a ten-gallon slop jar all his own (chuckle). He'd start trying to "urp," and it took him thirty minutes. He said if he ever got over this, he'd never eat another sardine (chuckle). He'd been eating sardines, and that's what he was "urping."

Marcello: Evidently, this should have given you some clue as to what your Army career was going to be like from here on out.

Reichle: (Chuckle) Well, I'd never really given it any thought. Again, I was just young and ignorant. I didn't care. It didn't make me any difference.

Marcello: But there were a large number of people that did get seasick.

Reichle: I'm going to say 70 percent of them, at least. They was in

bunks . . . they'd get in anybody's bunk, It didn't make any difference. I finally found my bunk, but somebody else was in it. I couldn't get him out; he was too sick to get out.

Then that's where they took our .45's away from us and issued us Springfield rifles--aboard ship. Then we finally began thinking, "Well, maybe we're going to do some fighting." It kind of entered our mind but not very heavy.

Marcello: You pulled into Honolulu, and I don't think you stayed there too long, did you?

Reichle: We got to go to town four hours in the afternoon.

Marcello: I think it was November 28th when you got into Honolulu.

Reichle: That's about right.

Marcello: What did you do with your four hours in Honolulu?

Reichle: Well, I'll backtrack a little bit again. On this ship all them other people had money except us. The canteen line was a hundred miles long. I borrowed enough money from somebody--from four or five to get enough together--and went and bought a box of candy and went to stand in that line. You could buy three bars for a dime, and by buying them by the box, I'd take it out and sell it to these folks that had money for a nickel a bar. I finally got enough money to buy my own box of candy. I just stayed in that line until I had enough money to buy me some cigarettes. I stayed in that line all the time and had enough money for Jack and I to go

to a show with when we got to Honolulu. That's the only way we had any money.

Marcello: So what did you do when you went ashore in Honolulu?

Reichle: I don't really remember. We just rode around and looked and walked. But then we began to realize something there because Honolulu was under martial law,

Marcello: What sort of things did you see in Honolulu? You mentioned it was under martial law. In other words, did you see any sandbag emplacements or barbed wire or armed guards and patrols or anything of that nature?

Reichle: Yes, armed guards, and they was running around in jeeps with machine guns all over town--just everywhere you looked. The MP's were all over town. They wasn't playing.

Marcello: So that area was close to a wartime footing.

Reichle: Yes, it was. We really didn't realize it at the time, and why they ever let them bomb Pearl Harbor . . . they just slipped in on them. That big aircraft carrier shouldn't ever have gotten that close.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, you're only there for a few hours, to say the least. Anyway, the next day, which would have been November 29th, the Republic leaves as part of a convoy.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: It was about a nine-ship convoy, I believe. It was a fairly large convoy, wasn't it?

Reichle: It was either seven or nine. I want to say seven, but it



might have been nine.

Marcello: Do you remember some of the other ships that were in this convoy?

Reichle: One of them distinctly--the Bloemfontein. It was a Dutch freighter that followed us. At one time, after we found out we was in war with Japan, they began to unwind a long cable on top of the deck of the USS Republic. Rumor got out that that ship behind us was about to go dead, and they was going to have to tow it on in. Well, that never happened. Of course, we went down to the Fiji Islands and took on fresh water--we never did get off down there--and fuel.

Marcello: Also, I think you were escorted by a heavy cruiser, the USS Pensacola, were you not?

Reichle: Yes, that's right. And two "tin cans," but I don't remember what they was.

Marcello: On December 7th, you're a short distance east of the Gilbert Islands when you receive the news of the Pearl Harbor attack. Describe how you received this news and what your reaction was when you heard about it.

Reichle: The way that thing came up . . . again, our first sergeant, Glen Jones, was a tremendous soldier. He fell the battery out on deck and got us at attention. Our battery commander came up to us and started crying like a baby! Our battery commander, who's supposed to be the leader, was saying we was in a state of war with Japan, and we didn't have anything

to worry about because we didn't have any family. He had a wife and two kids. He had upset us something awful--not that we was in a war with Japan but that we was going to fight with someone like that leading us. That's when the first sergeant took over the battery. He run the battery. He had to get the battery to attention so that "Hud" Wright could talk.

Marcello: I've heard this story before, so you're not the first person who has told it to me. But I'm glad you did mention it because it again verifies what other people have told me.

Reichle: Okay.

Marcello: So, again, how did the news of the Pearl Harbor attack affect the morale of the people in the unit?

Reichle: On my part and my closest friends, none whatsoever with the exception of what I just got through saying. Again, we was young. We didn't care. We was ready. If we was going to be in war, we'd be in war. If we hadn't have been there then, we'd have gone later, anyway. So it didn't make any difference.

Marcello: Were you pretty confident as to what would be the outcome of this war against Japan at that time?

Reichle: Oh, yes. Sure, sure. We never had any doubts. We never did have a doubt. Even while we was prisoners that long, we never had a doubt. The ones of us that had a doubt about coming home didn't come home.

Marcello: Did you think this war was going to be a short war? I'm referring now to that period when you're still on board the Republic.

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: When you thought of a Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Reichle: I didn't really think of it then. I didn't really think of what a Jap looked like. I knew about what they looked like.

Marcello: Did you know Frank Fujita at this time yet?

Reichle: No, I didn't know him then. In fact, I don't think I learned to know him until after we was liberated because he was an E Battery man. They stayed on the south end of the island, and we went up on the north end of the island.

Marcello: What precautionary steps were taken aboard the Republic and in the rest of the convoy now that a state of war existed between the two countries?

Reichle: Nothing changed to my knowledge. Nothing changed.

Marcello: Did you ever set up your guns on deck or anything of that nature?

Reichle: Not on the Republic, no.

Marcello: Did you ever take any sort of a zigzag course or anything of that nature that you recall?

Reichle: Not in the convoy. We didn't do that until we left Australia.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that on occasions the Pensacola would be there, then it would disappear, and then it would come back

again.

Reichle: Oh, yes. These two "tin cans" . . . never was one of them in sight. To my knowledge, one of them was always out of sight. I had forgotten about that until you mentioned it.

Marcello: You head toward the Fiji Islands, and you just stay there very, very briefly, do you not?

Reichle: Yes, just long enough to . . . we got in there sometime during the day, and we left that same day.

Marcello: And I think you just took on fresh water and fresh provisions and things like that there.

Reichle: That's all.

Marcello: By this time, your course has changed. You're not going to the Philippines. You're on your way to Brisbane, Australia.

Reichle: We didn't know where. I mean, someone did, but we didn't know. We didn't know where we was going until we got to Brisbane, Australia.

Marcello: Describe your entry into Brisbane.

Reichle: You mean, going to town?

Marcello: Well, I think you have to make sure you go up the river there at Brisbane in high tide, do you not?

Reichle: Yes, yes. I vaguely remember that. Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Okay, so what does happen when you get to Brisbane?

Reichle: Well, they took us to that Ascott Race Course, and we lived in tents. That's the first time I heard that word "bloody." The Australians, they use "bloody" with everything. So we

was all going to have "bloody" mutton. That's all we had, was boiled mutton and good bread--every meal.

Marcello: Did you ever get used to that mutton?

Reichle: No, I never did, but we ate it.

Marcello: I gather that most of those Texan boys didn't care too much for that mutton.

Reichle: No, but it was better than rice, as we learned later.

Marcello: What was it about the mutton that you didn't like?

Reichle: Boiled! It was boiled mutton. You know, barbecued mutton or maybe fried or some other way than just boiled mutton.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you seem to get from the Australian civilians there?

Reichle: Oh, the best in the world! Again, we didn't have any money. None of us did by this time. Some of them began to sell their overcoats. We didn't need them things there; we had left winter and sold our clothes and anything we could find. We started to town on trams. Didn't anybody have a car there; they didn't have enough gasoline. Them trams was so full that the conductor was on the front, and we'd get on the back and hang on until he got back there. Then we'd get off and catch the next one. Finally, they realized what was going on. They didn't even care; they didn't pay any attention to us. When we got to town, them Australians took to us like a duck to water. Them young men was all gone, and them young women was carrying us around. We'd come back drunk

and have money in our pockets. We didn't know anything about that money. After we got some money, we'd go buy something and say, "Here, take out what you need." We was treated like kings; I mean, literally kings.

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that evidently struck the men as being very unusual. You saw virtually no young men at all. They was already off fighting somewhere,

Reichle: Yes, that's right. Very few young men. The Australian people are good people. They're good people. We liked them, and they liked us,

Marcello: Were you ever one of the fortunate ones to get invited into the Australian homes for Christmas dinner?

Reichle: No, I never did.

Marcello: So you spent the Christmas of 1941 there at the Ascott Race Track or somewhere in that vicinity.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: What sort of training did you undergo when you got to the Ascott Race Track, or didn't you do any training at all?

Reichle: We didn't do anything. In fact, we went to get our trucks and guns and so forth, and they were gone! They was supposed to be aboard that ship with us. We didn't know what we was going to do. One day they came in and said, "All truck drivers, let's go to town. We've found some trucks and guns and so forth." No, they found our split-trail 75's. They were new; we'd never used them. They said, "We found

some trucks down here, and all you drivers go get you a truck like you had, and if you pulled a trailer, get a trailer like you had." So we went and stole somebody else's truck, and some extra ones, also. We had more jeeps than you could shake a stick at, Where that stuff come from, we never did know; and what happened to ours, we never did know. Had you been told that before?

Marcello: Something along those lines, yes. On December 28th, you embark once again. This time you're put aboard the Bloemfontein. When you board the Bloemfontein, do you know that you are on your way to Java? Have you been told?

Reichle: No, we hadn't been told anything. In fact, we stayed on it all day. We ate lunch on it. Again, by this time, we all had a little bit of money. So the Australian dockworkers . . . we gave them money, and they went and got us booze. Everybody got drunk but Colonel Tharp and me. About five o'clock, well, we're not leaving. We're going to get off here. We're going to stay in Australia; we're not going. Colonel Tharp said, "Well, everybody's drunk. We'll just spend the night here and get off in the morning." Naturally, we all had to sleep on deck because that was a freighter. The only ones that had a place to sleep was officers.

We're laying on deck, and the next morning I wake up, and the sun was moving. We pulled out by ourselves. That thing had a little ol' bitty--I forget what size gun it

was--thing. So we got four of our 75-millimeter howitzers out and nailed them on deck--two on each end.

We was laying there one night . . . we had someone that stood guard all night. And this fellow, Rayburn, punched me and said, "Hey, 'Red,' look at that periscope right over there." I looked and I never did see it, All of a sudden, that skipper pulled the throttle, and that thing reared up like a motor boat. I mean, it took off!

Marcello: It was a pretty fast vessel.

Reichle: It was fast! All of a sudden, he shut it down and made a short right. It coasted a little piece, and directly he "hooked it" again. He'd make a left and do the same thing. We found out later that he took us through a tremendous Jap submarine trap that night--by ourself! We finally caught that convoy in Port Darwin. Then, from there on, we was in convoy to Java.

Marcello: Was the Bloemfontein a smaller vessel than the Republic?

Reichle: Oh, much smaller!

Marcello: In other words, when you were on the Republic, you were there with other Army units, also.

Reichle: Oh, yes! I don't know how many thousands was aboard that thing. In other words, it was probably enough on that boat that if we had have gotten to the Philippine Islands, that was going to be the division right there. I'm guessing it was that many people on that thing. It was a big ol'



thing!

Marcello: Again, as fate would have it, rather than sending one of those other units aboard the Bloemfontein, it just so happened that it turned out to be the 2nd Battalion.

Reichle: We was the right size, see. There was just 500 of us. In Brisbane, Australia, we was made the U.S. task force in the Far East. You know what a task force is--you're anything. So we went to Java and acted as a ground crew for the Air Corps that had evacuated the Philippine Islands.

Marcello: You sail to Java, and you dock at Surabaya. I heard one of the former "Lost Battalion" boys say that now they knew what PLUM meant--"plumb to hell."

Reichle: (Laughter) That's right.

Marcello: Evidently, Surabaya wasn't exactly an ideal place, so far as you all were concerned.

Reichle: We didn't stay there at all. We went to a little ol' place called Malang. That was inland, right at the airport.

Marcello: Malang was the town, and Singosari was the airport. Is that correct, or was it the other way around?

Reichle: Malang was the town. Singosari must have been the airport. That's right. Malang was the town.

Marcello: How did you get from Surabaya to the airfield?

Reichle: In our trucks. As well as I remember, we went in our trucks. But then I don't remember why we kept going back. The truck drivers kept going back to Surabaya for two or three days

bringing stuff back. They could have hauled everything one time. I don't remember.

Marcello: Did you make some of these trips back and forth?

Reichle: Yes. But one thing we distinctly remembered (chuckle). Them little ol' Javanese--little, bitty people--could squat on their haunches. They could sit right down there and be that far from the ground (gesture) and sit there for days. They just sat there and stared at us--every move we made. We got amazed at how they could just sit there and do nothing.

Marcello: Had you ever seen so many people in such a small area?

Reichle: No. The only place I've ever seen that many people in an area was on the USS Republic. I forget how many people per square mile is in Java, but it was the most densely populated place in the world--even more so than Japan, from what I understood.

Marcello: Describe what your quarters were like there at the airport.

Reichle: It was an old barracks. It was an Army barracks. I don't know why they built them things like they did, but they had what they called cubicles. It had an aisle down through the middle and then a concrete wall up just about six feet high. There were two men in each one of them things. Instead of rooms, there'd be a wall.

Marcello: Did you have a bunk, or were you sleeping on the floor?

Reichle: Yes, we had a bunk and a footlocker. The latrines, they was

odd things. You would just get straddled over a trench-- concrete slab--and there was water running down through it all the time. Incidentally, in Java the Dutch don't use toilet paper. They use water. Everytime you go to the restroom, there's a little ol' water hole. I never could find any toilet paper.

Marcello: I'm sure that must have elicited all sorts of comments from the Texas boys when they saw that thing.

Reichle: Oh, yes. It was all new to us. It was all new to anybody, as far as that goes.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get from the Dutch there at the airport?

Reichle: Good. The Dutch was all right.

Marcello: Once you get to the airport and you're more or less settled in, what sort of routine did you undergo at that point?

Reichle: Everyone had a different routine of some kind. Personally, what I did . . . it was three of us that drove a bus--a right-hand-drive bus. We'd work eight-hour shifts. We'd park that bus at the airport, and any Air Force enlisted man, officer, or what . . . anywhere he wanted to go, all he done was come to that bus and tell us where he wanted to go, and we'd take him.

Marcello: So you were in essence working for the Air Force personnel.

Reichle: Yes, all of us did. Some of them worked at night fueling planes; some of them mechanicked. Actually, we was just a

ground crew for the Air Force, that's all.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. I think we're talking here about the 19th Bomb Group. Was the 19th Bomb Group already there when your unit arrived, or did it come shortly thereafter?

Reichle: No, it was there. That's why they took us there. Them boys would service those planes, fuel them up, overhaul them, and then fly them. They'd maybe fly one mission every three days. Well, when we got there and got started, they flew a mission everyday. They had three ol' Liberators--them ol' low-flying planes--that went out every night. Our boys would service them during the day, and then at night they'd service these B-17's that would go out the next morning. They'd park them on the muddy runway in the rainy season, and them things would just bury up. We'd have to take two or four six-wheel drive trucks with wench lines to help pull them out of the mud so they could get on the runway,

Marcello: So you were using all grass runways or dirt runways here at Singosari.

Reichle: Yes, dirt runways. That's all they had.

Marcello: Like you pointed out, the unit was basically serving as maintenance personnel for these airplanes.

Reichle: That's what we was doing, yes.

Marcello: Approximately how many airplanes were there here?

Reichle: I had three of those ol' night planes. I'm thinking they had six or seven, but they never could get over four or five

off at one night. They just couldn't keep them going. It was a little ol' short airport--short runway. On one end of it was a forest; on the other end was a deep ditch. They was flying new planes in. These rookie pilots were flying them in, and they'd tear up just about two-thirds of them. But the ol' sergeant that was in charge . . . they did have one sergeant that was a maintenance man. That's the only one they had. Well, it didn't make much difference because they needed parts as long as they could keep those other ones going that way.

One night they tried to land and couldn't. That's the first time we ever saw it, It was always blackout in Java. They lit that thing up like day, trying to land that plane, and he still crashed the damn thing up. But them pilots that was there, they knew how to fly planes.

Marcello: Occasionally, was it not true that somebody from the unit would volunteer to go out on these bombing missions?

Reichle: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Didn't you lose a couple of people that way?

Reichle: We lost two, I know of, for sure, that joined the Air Force. A bunch of us should have, if we'd have known any better. Incidentally, ol' Colonel Eubank, who was in charge of the Air Force, wanted to fly us out. He wanted us to go to Australia with him, but all 500 of us stayed.

Marcello: You mentioned that you get to Singosari, and your primary

function is to service these airplanes. What did you do with your artillery pieces?

Reichle: Oh, they set them up out there in different spots out there and used them as antiaircraft weapons. Incidentally, for another thing, when we left Australia, we picked up some ol' British fieldpieces that wouldn't even shoot. They was rusted up. We scattered them all around that airport in open sight, and after the first air raid, they bombed that thing until it was level. They took all them ol' guns to town somewhere and put them in storage in a building.

While we was in action, it come to us official that there were 40,000 Americans landed on the island of Java and 60,000 Australians. Later, we realized that all these ol' fieldpieces was a bluff to make them think it was a full division there. It was not. We'd been prisoners some month or longer, and they got Colonel Tharp and really raked him over the coals, wanting to know where the rest of the Americans was. There was supposed to be 40,000 Americans there. He said there was not--just 500. He finally convinced them that was right. He asked them, "Do you expect 500 to 'whup' the great Nippon Army?" He said, "I hope they have better luck next time." He was a pretty controlled little ol' cuss. He was as tough as a boot.

Marcello: How were these guns set up in order to use them as antiaircraft weapons? Did they have to dig pits for them or what?

Reichle: No, they was split-trails. I don't think they dug pits, but, of course, I wasn't around them guns enough to know. You could raise them things nearly straight up. They cut their shrapnel just as far as you could shoot. They did shoot down one plane. It came over the news about the Yanks having some kind of new antiaircraft weapon.

Marcello: Reality hits on February 5th because that's when the first air raid was staged. Do you remember that first air raid, and, if so, describe it.

Reichle: Oh, man, yes! (Chuckle) Well, with me it's kind of a peculiar thing. Again, I was a truck driver, and I was parked right by a bunch of fifty-gallon drums of gasoline. Here come two 2nd lieutenants who said, "Let's go to town." Okay, so they got in, and about that time the air raid alarm was sounding. We had had one practice alert before this, so we didn't pay any attention to it. I started going, and they said, "Oh, we better wait a minute and see what's going to happen." I said, "Okay." We set there a few minutes, and directly one lieutenant looked out the door and said, "I hear them coming." He said, "One, two, three . . . Goddamn! The sky's full of them!" And they took off with me right behind them. I thought, "Well, I'm going to follow these boys because they done been down this road in the Philippine Islands!"

Them planes was so low . . . they could come over strafing us after they got through bombing. One of them Japs circled

right over me, and I could see the slant in his eyes, he was so low. If he'd have seen me, he could just took his pistol and shot me. Everytime they quit strafing, I'd run again, trying to catch up with them two fellows. I finally caught them about a mile-and-a-half, I guess, in a trench.

The air raid was over by this time. We lay there, and I lit up a cigarette. One of them said . . . he called me "Artillery." He said, "'Artillery,' give me a puff off that cigarette." I did and he just took a drag plumb up to the fire. I just threw that thing away and lit me another one. He said, "Give me one of them cigarettes, 'Artillery.'" He was shaking like a leaf on a tree, so he was five times scareder than I was. He was a little ol' bitty red-faced fellow. I went to hand him one, and he said, "Light it for me, please." I lit it and handed it to him, and he swallowed it, and I smoked mine. We finally got settled down there, and I said, "Now you fellows have been through this before, haven't you? Y'all come from the Philippine Islands." They said, "Oh, man, we just got here from the States here yesterday!" (laughter) I decided from then on that I was going back to my own judgment, and I didn't listen to anyone else.

Marcello: During this first raid, then, the Japanese came over with high-level bombers first of all and then strafers?

Reichle: They come over with high-level bombers and then made a circle. When they made that circle, they strafed us. Then they come



back and made another pass. The bombers left, and they kept strafing us as long as they had enough fuel to get back to their base or ship.

Marcello: What sort of damage did they do to the base after that initial raid?

Reichle: They tore it up pretty good. In fact, our canteen . . . they had beer in quart-jug bottles, and we had to kick that ol' stuff off the floor because the roof was plumb gone off that thing. I forget what kind of roof you call that stuff. I've seen it here. It's some kind of crop stuff, just laying up there.

Them strafers . . . they had some kind of shrapnel bullets--little ol' bitty bullets--and they'd hit a piece of concrete wall or something on the ground and just scratch it all to pieces. If that had hit a man, it would just have blown him all to pieces,

Marcello: What sort of damage did they do to the planes and the runways?

Reichle: The planes weren't there. See, the planes were out flying. They didn't hurt the runway, as well as I remember.

Marcello: Of course, there's not too much damage they could do to the runway since they were only dirt and grass, anyway. They could always be filled in, I guess--any holes that were made.

Reichle: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Do you ever get used to these air raids? You had several more of them.

- Reichle: We had two or three more there. The worst air raid we had was while we was prisoners on the railroad, or after the railroad was finished.
- Marcello: We'll talk about that later on.
- Reichle: One truck was loaded with milk back in the building, and a bomb went right down through that thing and didn't explode. It hit the floor under it and just knocked a hole in that milk truck. But then when it exploded, it tore everything up. It knocked both back wheels out from under it. It tore it up pretty good.
- Marcello: I've heard that there was milk all over that base as a result.
- Reichle: Yes, yes. Oh, someone else told you about that truck of milk, huh?
- Marcello: Yes. Like you mentioned, the Japanese did come back several more times on air raids. Evidently, they did get a couple of those bombers, did they not, that is, the bombers on the ground? Pretty soon there were only about four of them, I believe, that were operational.
- Reichle: I believe that's right. I believe they did. I think that four was all that was left when we left there. Them ol' night bombers, it seemed to me like, left before the others did.
- Marcello: I gather than your artillery pieces weren't necessarily that effective against the high-level bombers. They simply couldn't

reach them on a great many occasions. Isn't that true?

Reichle: Yes, that's right. They couldn't reach them. Just luckily this one plane . . . I don't think it got shot down, but it got hit pretty good. The shrapnel just exploded at the right time.

Marcello: I guess after that, the Japanese learned their lesson and simply flew above the burst of the shells.

Reichle: Yes. One day during an air raid, a P-40 landed. Of course, after the first air raid, it didn't do any good to run so far. We just found a hole and got kind of accustomed to it. This P-40 landed, and the pilot jumped out. By that time the bombing was over. I was standing there at the hangar, and he run up and hollered at some of us, "Where am I?" They told him, and he said, "Well, I'm going! They shot my compass out, and I didn't know where I was." They said, "Man, there's an air raid going on." He said, "Hell, I'm better off up there than I am down here." He took off with that thing; he didn't roll but like a hundred feet, and that thing just went straight up.

Marcello: Could you expect these air raids to occur at a particular time, or did the Japanese vary their schedule?

Reichle: I can't really remember that. They was always in the daytime. As a rule, it was around noon as well as I remember.

Marcello: On February 27th, the Japanese evidently landed on the north side of the island. About that time, the B-17's and their

crews were ordered to Australia. What do you remember about the evacuation of the Air Force personnel?

Reichle: I really don't. They just left. They took what they could take in their planes and left.

Marcello: How did their leaving affect the morale of the people that had to stay behind?

Reichle: Really, it didn't. I mean, we wanted to go, but there was orders to stay, so we stayed. You know, that was it,

That's another thing I'm going to bring up now. Our Army today, they cater too much to the goodwill of the soldiers. That's no way for an army to be. An army has got to be disciplined. They've got to take "no" as "no." We didn't know any better. That's how we was disciplined. We was trained that way.

Marcello: At this point, did you and the rest of your buddies realize the hopelessness of your situation?

Reichle: No, we never did.

Marcello: In other words, even after the B-17's left, you were fully expecting to be evacuated yourself, probably by sea.

Reichle: No. We maybe hoped so, but we didn't think they was going to "whup" us. We didn't think they was going to "whup" us. One thing they did know . . . of course, I never did go down on the front lines, but they knew they was being shot at. Them Australians . . . what did they call them fellows? They was kind of like our Marines. They gave them some

Australian rum with every meal, and they'd fight a circle saw. They wouldn't back up for nothing.

We had a 1st lieutenant who come with us from somewhere. I don't know where he came from. We didn't have any maps or anything. We was down at a river, and he got a jeep and drove down to that river--Japs right across the river--and made some mileage to lay in the first round of ammunition. Once he got his bearing, they knew they was being shot at.

Marcello: Shortly after the air crews left, your unit was also moved out of this area.

Reichle: Yes, that's when we went up to Batavia.

Marcello: How far away was Batavia from the air base?

Reichle: It was on the other end of the island. We was close to there; we never did get to town. But that's where they landed. They started coming in, and we met them somewhere between there and Bandung. I think we stayed there and fought them either two or three days. The Dutch were all at the other end of the island. We got close to this town, Bandung, and we bivouacked in a rubber plantation that night.

Marcello: At this point, Battery E did not go along with you, isn't that correct?

Reichle: Battery E stayed down at Surabaja.

Marcello: But all the rest of the units headed toward Bandung.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: What happens when you get to Bandung?

Reichle: Well, see, we went on past Bandung, and that's where we met the Japs somewhere. I don't remember the name of that little ol' town. There was a river there; that's all I know.

Marcello: Describe this initial skirmish with the Japanese.

Reichle: I can't because, again, if you was a truck driver, the only way that you got to go was if your truck carried food to the men on the front lines. Glen never would let me go. I begged to go. I wanted to go down there and see what it looked like, but if it was your time to go, you went. One ol' boy didn't want to go, and he started crying. I said, "Let me go, Glen." He said, "No. When it's time to go, he's going!"

Marcello: I gather that, for the most part, your unit was constantly on the move.

Reichle: We stayed there for a few days. We left there at night, and they was setting fires right behind us. I'll never forget that. It was total blackout; it had to be. It was a little ol' narrow road, and my truck slipped off in a ditch, and it was buried. I finally got the front wheels in, and I just stayed in that ditch. Them boys in the back of my truck (chuckle) kept hollering at me. Ol' Glen Self, I'll never forget him. He kept hollering, "Get us out of here! They're burning things up! They're right behind us! Let's go! Let's go!" Finally, I got to a corner, and the truck crawled

up on the road, and I could see them little ol' lights ahead of me. We drove all night.

Marcello: Evidently, the Japanese had complete control of the air, and they were continually outflanking you.

Reichle: That's right. We had no antiaircraft guns or air protection whatsoever.

Marcello: Okay, you're retreating. Where are you retreating toward?

Reichle: We didn't know. We was going back south; that's all we knew. That's when we spent the day in this rubber plantation at Bandung. That day they bombed that thing until the world looked level. We was fortunate, though. We hid in that rubber plantation, and they never did see us. We could see a British convoy going down, and they bombed that thing all to pieces. That night . . . or as soon as the air raid was over . . . we left before night because they wasn't coming back that day. We had to drive through muddy fields and everywhere else. That road was just blown all to pieces for a long way. I don't remember where it was . . . it was around Bandung that we spent the night in another rubber plantation. That's when we found out we was surrendering.

Marcello: The word of the surrender comes down on March 11, 1942. Describe where you were, what you were doing, and what your reaction was when you heard that the unit had surrendered.

Reichle: I don't remember the name of this little ol' town, but we was close to this little ol' town. They said, "Well, the

island has surrendered." The first thing we did, we burned up our trucks. We cut the tires all to pieces. We burnt up our cars. We kept either one or two trucks--just enough to carry our supplies.

Marcello: When you say you burned up your trucks, I assume you're referring to draining all the oil and letting the engines run.

Reichle: Yes, that's right. We had two new Chevrolet cars, and we timed them. We drained the water out of them and the oil out of them and pulled the throttle wide open. One run for eleven minutes, and the other one run for twelve before they locked up. They run longer than we thought they would without any water or oil in them.

They told us that we was free. They gave us anything we wanted to get off the island, Some of them tried to go, but there was no place to go. We could go to town; we could walk downtown anywhere we wanted to. The Japs wouldn't pay any attention to us as long as we didn't have a gun. We stayed there a few days before we finally went up on a tea plantation.

Marcello: Let's back up here a minute and talk a little bit more about the actual surrender. At the time that you heard about the surrender, were you now worried about your fate? Did you wonder what was going to happen to you at this point?

Reichle: No, not yet. We wondered but we wasn't depressed about it.



Marcello: Had you ever heard the rumor that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Reichle: I don't know. I don't believe that was told. It might have been,

Marcello: Up until this time, you personally had really not even seen any Japanese, had you, except maybe that one pilot that you said had flown rather low to the ground?

Reichle: No, I hadn't seen a Jap. I don't think any of our boys did actually because, being field artillery, they'd be back farther. Them Australians at the front, they might have seen some.

Marcello: Shortly after the surrender, you mentioned that you are still free to roam around just so long as you had no arms. Did you go into town?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Did you see any Japanese in town?

Reichle: Oh, yes. They was everywhere.

Marcello: What were your first impressions of those Japanese?

Reichle: I don't know. Just Japs, I guess. I didn't really give it much thought. Amazingly, I wasn't scared of them for some reason.

Marcello: I've heard some people say that they weren't impressed by their scruffy uniforms and so on.

Reichle: Oh, they looked slouchy, yes. They always did look slouchy--ol' cheap clothes and them boots and the way they wore them,

them caps . . . they was sloppy-looking people.

Marcello: But they didn't seem to bother you at all when you were in town, then.

Reichle: No. In fact, they seemed more scared of us than we were of them.

Marcello: A matter of curiosity, perhaps.

Reichle: Or something. I don't know. There's another thing, incidentally, that I hadn't thought of that until now. All them Javanese rode bicycles, and every one of them had an American flag on their bicycle. Hell, the next morning they all had the "Rising Sun" on their bicycles. They were prepared either way. It didn't make any difference (chuckle).

Marcello: They changed sides pretty fast.

Reichle: Yes, sir. They changed sides overnight.

Marcello: I guess they were loyal to whomever held the guns,

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: That again would have made escape virtually impossible, too, since they had changed loyalties. They'd probably turn you in for some sort of a bounty or reward.

Reichle: Oh, yes. After we was on the railroad, there was a bounty of \$25 on any white man's head they brought in.

Marcello: You mentioned that the surrender occurs, and after a couple of days, you were sent to this tea plantation. How far away was it from where you had been located when the surrender took place? You'd probably have to estimate this, of course.

Reichle: I can't remember, It wasn't very far, not over four or five miles, I'm thinking.

Marcello: How did you get to the tea plantation?

Reichle: We had two or three trucks.

Marcello: That wasn't very many trucks to take all these personnel.

Reichle: I guess they made some extra trips. I don't really remember. It wasn't but three batteries then; Service Battery was with us. The Headquarters Battery must have been somewhere around, too. Wait a minute. I'm getting my senses about half-crossed up. I believe just F Battery was with us on that tea plantation, as well as I remember now.

Marcello: Which batteries would have gone to the tea plantation?

Reichle: I think it was just F Battery. It might have been . . . I can't remember. I just flat don't remember.

Marcello: But you still were separated from E Battery.

Reichle: Oh, yes. We never did get back to E Battery. The only thing I can remember . . . if I'm getting ahead of you, you stop me. We stayed up there some three or four days.

Marcello: What did you do while you were up there?

Reichle: Nothing.

Marcello: Just sat around?

Reichle: Yes, there wasn't anything to do.

Marcello: Did you play cards or did anybody have any liquor or anything of that nature?

Reichle: No, we didn't have any liquor--to our regrets, Maybe we

played some cards or something. We just laid and waited. We didn't stay there very long.

Then we went down to a railroad, aside a railroad, and stayed there some two or three days. I understood later that they was going to make us walk all the way back to Batavia. Colonel Tharp told them we was not. His soldiers was not foot soldiers--they rode! He was a pretty tough little ol' man. They finally gave in. We had one truck, as well as I remember. All the rest of us gathered there at that time--everyone except E Battery, to my knowledge. We carried our kitchen equipment and our food and left our truck there. That train stopped and took us into Batavia.

They put us in a camp with the British at first. That was our first meal that morning of that rice. We had had our own food up until then. For a day or two, we had it there, and then the British come and took it and divided it up between their officers. That first morning, we had that ol' Java red rice. It was dark. That stuff don't look so bad, but, oh, boy! You couldn't eat it.

Marcello: Why was that?

Reichle: It was Java red rice--full of worms, rat turds, weevils. We had no salt, no nothing--just boiled rice. Our cook at the time didn't know how to cook rice, steam rice, like it should be done. It'd be very edible if it had any seasoning to it at all. He learned later.

Marcello: When you got down to that railroad siding, did you meet Japanese troops there?

Reichle: Just very few. Just enough that they guarded us on the train we was on,

Marcello: Did they rough you up any or yell and shout and scream at this point?

Reichle: They yelled and shouted as much as they knew how, but, again, they seemed to be just about as scared of us as we were of them.

Marcello: I assume that you had most of your personal gear with you at this point.

Reichle: Yes, we did then.

Marcello: What things did you have with you personally? Can you think of some of the things you had?

Reichle: I had a watch and my underclothes and my clothes and my mess kit, About the only things personal I had was my billfold and watch. Of course, again, this stuff we carried, we'd done away with that already. I didn't carry anything. I carried one suit of clothes. Some of them carried golf clubs; some of them carried fishing equipment. But we didn't have any of it by this time.

Marcello: What were you carrying your gear in?

Reichle: My barracks bag. We left our footlockers.. I guess we left them--I know we did--when we left that airport down there.

Marcello: You mentioned that the surrender occurs. You eventually go

to the tea plantation, and then from there you go to the railroad siding, and you board this train, Where do they take you?

Reichle: Batavia, Java. It's at the north end of the island.

Marcello: What was the particular name of the camp where you were located? Do you know offhand?

Reichle: I can't remember the name of the camp.

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

Reichle: We was in Tanjong Priok at one time, and I'm thinking we stayed there some little while at that camp. That's where I took amoebic dysentery--my first case of it, I could go to the bathroom anytime anyone wanted me to go--just a little bit of blood. My stomach was cramping; I was sick. We left there and walked. I think we went to Tanjong Priok from there. That's where we met the Marines and sailors off the Houston. We were all Americans there.

On that march, if it hadn't been for this friend of mine--Rayburn--and a fellow whose name, I think, was Tidwell, I couldn't have carried my bag. I was so weak. I was at the back end, and whoever was at the back, the Japs were just beating on them all the time. They was about to beat me to death, and Rayburn grabbed my bag and shoved me right up in the middle. I had no choice. I couldn't fall because they had me too crowded up. All I could do was just go along with them. Had he not done that, I would not have made it.

Marcello: Where were you located before you got into Bicycle Camp?

It is in Bicycle Camp where you pick up most of the Houston survivors, isn't it?

Reichle: Tanjong Priok. That's right. Now you're getting me straight. When we left that railroad siding, we went to Tanjong Priok and then stayed there until we went to Bicycle Camp. That's where we walked.

Marcello: Fine. Describe what Tanjong Priok looked like from a physical standpoint.

Reichle: It was a nice-looking camp inside. Incidentally, I never did go on any work details because I was so sick. I wasn't able to go. At that time, if you were sick, you didn't have to work. Again, I keep repeating this fellow, Rayburn. He stole some sugar and a hot plate, and he nursed me back to life.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't receive any professional medical attention for your dysentery.

Reichle: No, I didn't have any. I just finally overcome it. I did go out on one or two working parties, but we didn't work hard then.

Marcello: What were your living quarters like there at Tanjong Priok?

Reichle: They were pretty nice--nice barracks.

Marcello: Had this been an old Dutch military camp?

Reichle: Yes, that's right. As well as I remember, we even had bunks. I believe we did in that camp. At that other camp, Bicycle

Camp, we slept on the floor. I think that's right. Has anybody else said that we slept on the floor?

Marcello: Oh, yes.

Reichle: Didn't we have bunks at this other one?

Marcello: At Tanjong Priok?

Reichle: Yes. We had bunks there, I think, and we had a stage there, also. We had what the Japs called a yasumi every eight days, and that night we'd have a stage show.

Marcello: This was at Tanjong Priok?

Reichle: Yes. Some of them dressed up like girls, and we just had a ball.

Marcello: How big a camp was it here at Tanjong Priok? Was it a very big camp?

Reichle: I really don't know. I think it was a big camp because there was some Australians there and also some English and some Dutch. But, again, the Americans were in . . . I believe two barracks held us and the sailors and the Marines off the Houston. We didn't eat with them; we was just strictly with ourselves.

Marcello: You do meet some of the sailors and Marines off the Houston here at Tanjong Priok?

Reichle: Yes, we met them all there. That's where we met them.

Marcello: I thought you met them in Bicycle Camp.

Reichle: No, I don't think so. That's the first ones I saw, to my knowledge--in Tanjong Priok.



Marcello: Describe what the food was like here at Tanjong Priok.

Reichle: Well, it was rice, but by this time, our cook . . . we did our own cooking, and he knew how. We had a little bit of vegetables. It wasn't so bad.

Marcello: Was it still full of weevils and rat dung and that sort of thing?

Reichle: It began to get a little bit better. It wasn't what they swept up off the floors by this time. That's the first time we ever heard . . . them sailors and Marines . . . I'll never forget the first one I saw. One of them was calling, "Meow, meow, meow." They caught a cat, and they ate that cat. That taught us then that anything was good to eat.

Marcello: In other words, even as early as your stay here at Tanjong Priok, before you moved into Bicycle Camp, people were already resorting to eating dogs, cats, and things of that nature.

Reichle: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Basically, however, did your food only consist of rice?

Reichle: Basically rice, yes.

Marcello: How many times a day did you get it?

Reichle: Three times.

Marcello: And about how much rice did you get per serving?

Reichle: I guess all you wanted.

Marcello: Oh, you could get all the rice you wanted?

Reichle: Then, yes, but didn't anybody want very much.

- Marcello: Did you get anything besides rice?
- Reichle: They had some soup. They called it soup. It was a pie melon thing that looked kind of like a watermelon on the outside, and all the inside was white. They was really supposed to make preserves out of it. They'd put them in water and boil them and maybe have a little bit of meat. If you got a piece of meat as big as your thumb, you was lucky.
- Marcello: Did the Japanese harass you very much at Tanjong Priok?
- Reichle: No, they didn't, not as long as you stayed inside. You better not step outside. At Bicycle Camp, though, they had big barbed wire all around. In this other one, well, it was a regular barracks. It was a nice place to live. We could have stayed there and lived good.
- Marcello: Like you mentioned, there evidently weren't too many work details here. Even those that did exist were all voluntary.
- Reichle: No, not necessarily. Some of it was. Some of them just wanted to get out of the building. They didn't work all that hard--rolled barrels of gasoline and loaded and unloaded ships and worked on the docks.
- Marcello: In other words, I guess they were cleaning up the war damage and then loading all the booty on ships to be sent back to Japan.
- Reichle: Yes, I imagine that's right.
- Marcello: I guess the work details probably gave you a chance to get

some extra rations, too, did they not, if you could steal something?

Reichle: Oh, that's the only way you could get extra rations, was to steal it. Again, this fellow, Rayburn, he was a pretty good artist. He knew how to get it and get by with it.

Marcello: Did you do very much trading with the natives here at Tanjong Priok?

Reichle: No.

Marcello: Evidently, this camp at Tanjong Priok had been established just long enough for the Japanese to organize a larger camp where they could consolidate all of the prisoners. Isn't that more or less your impression?

Reichle: I imagine that's right.

Marcello: How long did you stay there? My records seem to indicate about two months. Does that seem right to you?

Reichle: That sounds about right, yes.

Marcello: At this early stage, how long did you think you would be a prisoner?

Reichle: Oh, we didn't figure long. Maybe three, four, or five months, and we'd be out of there.

Marcello: How long did you stay down with the dysentery?

Reichle: I was down maybe about a week, and then I began to overcome it. With this fellow, Rayburn, feeding me, well, I got my strength back.

Marcello: What's this dysentery like? We hear that term being used

quite a bit, and I hear the prisoners using this term quite a bit. Maybe we take it for granted that everybody knows what dysentery is all about. How does it affect one when you get dysentery?

Reichle: You can't eat, and your stomach cramps something awful. Your bowels . . . as I said, anytime you want to go to the restroom, you can go. Anytime you want to go to the restroom, it would be just a little bit of blood, and that's all--just blood; nothing but blood. In other words, it's an intestinal parasite. It just eats your insides out.

Marcello: Evidently, even when you are able to eat, your body doesn't have a chance to use that food because it just passes through you so quickly.

Reichle: That's right. And another thing, once you get down like that, unless you have something besides rice . . . you have got to have some kind of vitamins to bring you back. Once you come down with it and lost that weight, you're not going to gain it back until you've got something else to eat.

Marcello: Despite the fact that you were down with dysentery, I assume that you were still not discouraged. You knew that you were eventually going to be liberated.

Reichle: I had a couple of girlfriends that I'd told I'd be back, so I had to come back.

Marcello: You were probably about twenty-one or twenty-two by this time?

Reichle: On May 15th, I was twenty-two--1942.

- Marcello: Would you say that this was about the average age of most of your buddies?
- Reichle: Yes. Most all of us were about the same age--maybe a year or so younger than me. You see, in the National Guard, they could get in at eighteen. Very few of them was older than me, unless they were commissioned officers. And they weren't much older, if any older.
- Marcello: By this time, that is, during that approximate two-month stay here at Tanjong Priok, are you learning how to be a prisoner-of-war? I think there is an art of learning how to be a prisoner-of-war.
- Reichle: I guess that's right. I hadn't thought of it, but I guess it is--how to take advantage of whatever you had, that you could find to eat and wear.
- Marcello: You're under a stress situation, and you have to learn how to cope.
- Reichle: That's right.
- Marcello: For example, what sort of a relationship do you develop with the Japanese?
- Reichle: Inwardly, you hate them, but you have to bow and scrape. Incidentally, you had to salute a Jap anytime you met him if you had headware on. Otherwise, you had to bow. Well, I always had something on my head because I didn't want to bow to them little yellow bastards.
- Marcello: Is it also true that you learn pretty quickly to stay away

from them if you possibly could?

Reichle: Oh, yes, absolutely! Absolutely!

Marcello: There was no such thing as ever trying to establish some sort of a friendship with the Japanese.

Reichle: I never did try. I don't think any of us did. I heard that some in Corregidor . . . I've heard it said that one at home did.

Marcello: I heard it could be rather risky if you got too close to these Japanese.

Reichle: I wouldn't take that chance. No, it could be too risky.

Marcello: In other words, he could turn on you anytime over just a small provocation.

Reichle: He would. He would do it. I never did know of them doing it, but I didn't take that chance.

Marcello: In other words, I guess it's safe to say that there were not very many "Uncle Toms" or "Sambos" among the prisoners.

Reichle: No. Later--I may be getting ahead of you--you would . . . I keep mentioning this fellow, Rayburn, and "Buck" Lawley. We three were just like brothers. You had to be that way. Everyone of the rest of them was the same way.

Marcello: This is another one of the things that you had to do in order to cope with your situation, that is, little cliques formed. When I use the term "clique," I'm not using that in a derogatory sense.

Reichle: I know what you're saying. The way I'd put it, either two

or three or four became a family. That's what I'd call it.

Marcello: You mentioned that two or three or four of you became a family, and I'm sure that very shortly you knew everything about everybody in that little clique.

Reichle: Oh, yes. You knew their parents and never had seen them-- their sisters, their brothers, their cousins, aunts, uncles.

Marcello: Like you say, having formed these cliques was going to be one of the keys to your survival later on down the line.

Reichle: That was it. We didn't realize it at that time, but that was it.

Marcello: In other words, if one happened to run across some food, he would share it with the other members of the clique. If he ran across some other material, whatever it might be, it would be shared commonly.

Reichle: That's right. It would be shared just like a family would share. That's why I say you became a family.

Marcello: By this time, are you also learning that it's going to be necessary to have at least a minimal knowledge of the Japanese language? Do you learn that at this point?

Reichle: Oh, yes. You begin to learn it.

Marcello: Correct me if I'm wrong, but would it be safe to say that on many occasions the bashings and the hitting and shouting would occur because these uneducated Japanese peasants couldn't make you understand what they wanted you to do? In other words, there was a language difficulty there, and one way

they could get the message across to you would be to give you a good belt, so to speak.

Reichle: That's right. That was a big item there.

Marcello: By this time, are you observing that corporal punishment-- physical punishment--is a way of life in the Japanese Army?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Did you ever see any examples of Japanese punishing other Japanese?

Reichle: Oh, sure.

Marcello: How would it usually take place?

Reichle: One incident . . . well, I'll get back to the railroad again. We were on a work detail and digging a hole for some reason, a big hole about as big as this table. There was a Jap sergeant--one of the top-ranking sergeants, next to a commissioned officer--probably had a warrant or something-- who was evidently an engineer. He was a pretty intelligent fellow. He tried to speak English; he tried to get along with you . . . you know, getting back to this speech barrier.

A Jap officer rode up on horseback. Well, when a Jap officer rode up--or a high-ranking man--drove up, even walked up, the top-ranking man there was supposed to holler, "Ki o tsukete!" That's "attention." This Jap officer rode up on horseback, and that man was down in the hole working, trying to show the boys how to do what he wanted them to do. He didn't see him. That Jap officer rode up and just hollered.



Man, he jumped out of that hole and got up there and stood at rigid attention. That damn officer took his saber off-- a bayonet--and knocked him back in that hole because he didn't get out and holler "Attention!" That shows how ignorant they are. That man was an officer, and this fellow had more sense than the officer did.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that if some higher-ranking officer caught hell, it would filter all the way down the ranks until the prisoners caught hell.

Reichle: Oh, yes. That's right. Absolutely!

Marcello: Everybody had to save face, I guess.

Reichle: Yes. See, we was guarded by Koreans.

Marcello: When did you pick up the Korean guards? Was that in Bicycle Camp, or was it on the railroad?

Reichle: There wasn't any Koreans in Java. That was front-line troops there.

Marcello: Generally speaking, I gather you weren't harassed a whole lot here at Tanjong Priok.

Reichle: No, no. It wasn't so bad. It was on one work detail that I heard them coming in one day. A Dutch woman . . . they was on a truck, and I forget what she had done--giving the "V" for victory or something, kind of hid behind the building--and the Japs saw her. They stopped that truck and got off and whipped that woman until she was nearly dead--just for doing that.

- Marcello: I guess, then, that if you did observe some Japanese officer or sergeant catching hell, you would try to especially avoid those Japanese soldiers because you knew that sooner or later it would filter down to you.
- Reichle: Sure, sure. Absolutely. If you saw it . . . you tried not to see it. You didn't even want to know about it.
- Marcello: In May of 1942, the Japanese transferred all the prisoners to Bicycle Camp. Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint. I'm referring now to your quarters and the buildings and the fence around it and that sort of thing.
- Reichle: It was a nice camp inside. Now the outside, I don't really remember what it looked like.
- Marcello: What were your barracks like?
- Reichle: Just regular barracks like anyone else would have. They were nice barracks. They had a shower. They were just as good a barracks as we had--in fact, better than we had in Brownwood because we lived in pup tents.
- Marcello: So you actually did have shower facilities right in the barracks there at Bicycle Camp.
- Reichle: That's right. That's the only place we did have them, I guess.
- Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned that you did sleep on the floor, however, here.
- Reichle: I thought we had cots there. Again, I'm not sure, but I believe we did.

- Marcello: What sort of a fence did Bicycle Camp have around it?
- Reichle: I don't remember a fence around it.
- Marcello: It was a pretty big camp, wasn't it?
- Reichle: As far as I know, yes. Again, it was just us and the sailors and Marines, is all we actually saw. There were some more barrack buildings all around, but it seemed that there was a little space between them or something--a fence--where you had to go through a gate to get out.
- Marcello: Were these two-story barracks, or were they just long, one-story barracks?
- Reichle: Long, one-story buildings, as well as I remember. Yes, I know they was.
- Marcello: You mentioned the shower facilities awhile ago. Was there plenty of water and were there ample opportunities to bathe and things of that nature?
- Reichle: As well as I remember, yes. I don't remember having any difficulty bathing here.
- Marcello: When you enter Bicycle Camp, the people off the Houston are already there. We kind of clarified that a little during that period when we took our break. We decided that the Houston people met the 2nd Battalion people there at Bicycle Camp. They were a pretty pitiful-looking outfit, were they not?
- Reichle: They sure was.
- Marcello: Describe what they looked like--their condition.

Reichle: It's hard to do. They were in sad condition--no clothes . . . see, after they sank, they didn't have any except what they had on. They had cups and tin cans and anything they could find to eat out of. They didn't have any soap with them, no towels. I just remember that they didn't have anything. They was exceptionally glad to see us because we were Americans. We shared what we could with them.

Marcello: I assume that this sharing was done rather spontaneously. Nobody had to tell people in the 2nd Battalion to do it.

Reichle: Oh, no. Everybody graciously . . . each one picked out somebody, and whatever you had that they needed and that you could spare, they got it.

Marcello: I gather that those people more or less easily integrated with the other members of the unit.

Reichle: Oh, yes. Let me put it this way: it was kind of like going back home. You saw some different Americans other than the ones we'd seen with us.

Marcello: Did you seem to have plenty of room in these barracks?

Reichle: As well as I remember, yes. Each one of them had a big porch on the front of it. I remember that now.

Marcello: So they were kind of airy, then.

Reichle: Yes. They faced each other. Out in the middle from the porch was a parade ground. The barracks had an aisle down it, and we slept on each side.

Marcello: Describe what the food was like here at Bicycle Camp.

- Reichle: I can't really remember. I know it was pretty good food. We didn't go hungry there.
- Marcello: Was it mainly rice once again?
- Reichle: Oh, yes. Rice was the main meal no matter where you were. I think there we had real coffee for breakfast. We had tea. I believe we maybe even had a little ice in the tea at noon.
- Marcello: Is it not true that, at least in the beginning and as long as it held out, company funds were being used to purchase food on the outside? Did you know about that?
- Reichle: I thought as much. This is backtracking, but when we was in that rubber plantation, that colonel would come up there in a car and have the whole back seat full of money. They was supposed to pay us but didn't. Then we was taken prisoners, and we never got any of that money--the enlisted men didn't. We never knew what happened to it. They probably did buy some extra food if the Japs would let them. The Japs might have taken some of that money away from them. I don't know if they had very much. I don't know.
- Marcello: You mentioned that you did seem to get plenty to eat here at Bicycle Camp.
- Reichle: Yes. I don't remember going hungry there. I just do not remember it.
- Marcello: What were the toilet facilities like here at Bicycle Camp?
- Reichle: As well as I remember, just about like them at that airport.

Marcello: Did everything seem to be more or less clean here, including your toilet facilities?

Reichle: Yes, in that camp. It was a clean camp. You could have survived in a camp like that,

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying, or leading up to, in effect, is that there wasn't a whole lot of disease that became prevalent here because of the sanitary conditions.

Reichle: No. I don't remember any, in fact,

Marcello: Had you fully recovered from your dysentery by this time?

Reichle: As much as I could, yes. In fact, I recovered as much as until after we was liberated.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the Japanese guards here. Describe what their conduct was like toward the prisoners.

Reichle: Well, again, they were Japs. I don't remember any torture. One of them whipped me for something on a work party, and I don't remember why, but he whipped me good. There was a sergeant named "Brodie" Miller. Oh, he laughed at me about that, and why didn't I fight back! He really give me a hard time. He was a boxer. He had been in the Marine Corps prior to this for a short time.

He got a whipping one day. That's one distinct thing I remember about him and this porch. I wasn't on the work detail, but I heard about it. They told me, "Ol' 'Brodie' got one, so you can get on him." I sat down and got to talking to him, and I went to laughing at him about why he

didn't fight back. (Chuckle) He got kind of hot, and he done like that (gesture) and thumped me like that and knocked one of my teeth loose. He didn't hit me all that hard, and my tooth tightened up. That's the two whippings I remember--two whippings that I know of. There weren't very many of them going on.

I know what I did. We couldn't smoke cigarettes except when they hollered "smoko." We was carrying something on the dock, and, hell, without thinking, I lit up a cigarette. When I did, it wasn't worth it.

Marcello: What form did this physical punishment take?

Reichle: They just beat you with a rifle butt or a stick of firewood or just anything. It didn't make any difference.

Marcello: What did this Japanese guard use on you?

Reichle: I think his fist first and then his rifle butt that time,

Marcello: Was it kind of humiliating to have to take this from these individuals who were physically smaller than you?

Reichle: At first, yes. But after you seen it going on everyday, you got accustomed to it. Now them damn limeys , , . we saw more of them on the railroad than anywhere else. They started whipping on them, and they'd get right down at their feet, just crying like a mongrel dog would cry. I would never have let one of them little yellow bastards get me down. I never did let one of them knock me down for nothing, no matter what he did!

Marcello: I heard that it was bad news to get knocked down because they'd really just stomp you then.

Reichle: That's right! But them bastards would do it, though--them limeys would. They was scared of them. They was cowards and dirty, filthy people.

Marcello: We'll talk more about the British later on because I think they do play a pretty important part in this particular story. Would the Japanese guards ever pull sneak inspections of the barracks or come through the barracks and things of this nature?

Reichle: Oh, yes,

Marcello: What would they be looking for when they would come through?

Reichle: Just anything they could find--thinking you might have a radio or some type of communication equipment. Maybe they thought you'd have a rifle hid or a pistol hid,

Marcello: What sort of items were you expressly forbidden to have? Obviously, you couldn't have any weapons. What other items were you not allowed to have?

Reichle: Just damn near nothing! I kept my watch until I finally sold it.

Marcello: How about writing paper and things of that nature?

Reichle: We didn't have any.

Marcello: Could you keep it if you had it?

Reichle: I don't know. I truly don't know because I never did have any. I don't believe I did have much. Oh, maybe at first,



yes. I don't think they bothered us very much because we couldn't get it out, anyway.

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that I guess I need to pursue farther. You were talking about radios awhile ago. Were there any radios in camp, whereby you could get news from the outside?

Reichle: Yes, but we never did know where,

Marcello: And you probably didn't want to know where, actually.

Reichle: No. No one did. After it was over, after the whole thing was said and done, we found out where it was and how we kept it.

Marcello: How was it kept, and where was it?

Reichle: I keep going back to the railroad. I'm getting ahead of you, but when I found out about it, they would grind up this rice and make rice flour and make bread. As a rule, we knew a day in advance when we was going to go from one camp to another. Each one of them would take a piece of this radio and bake it in a loaf of bread. Then, when we got to the next camp, they'd take it apart and put it back together. It was a sergeant--I forget his name--that communications was his business. He knew how to make that radio--had enough stuff--and he kept that thing going. I don't know where he got the batteries, how he got them, or what. But we'd get this stuff, and as we was going along, well, we found out and knew pretty much how the war was

going on all the time.

Marcello: I guess back there in Bicycle Camp, most of the news you were getting was bad news at that early stage of the war.

Reichle: I don't really remember much news back then. We had not been prisoners long to realize we was going to be there that long. You know, just about any day they was going to come over here after us.

Marcello: Incidentally, up until this point, had the Japanese processed you in any way? In other words, did they record any information about you in terms of your birth and all this sort of thing?

Reichle: Yes. I'm guessing this--I don't know it--but they determined from this information where each individual was going to go--about your birth, childhood, what you did as a trade before you got in the Army, what you did in the Army, physical work, what have you. I'm guessing that that's why they did this, was to decide where they was going to send each individual. As I look back now, most of them who went to Japan hadn't done very much physical work in their childhood. They were raised in town or had finished high school or gone to college and then got in the National Guard. I'm just guessing that, now. Has anybody else commented on that?

Marcello: Not too much, and that's why I asked the question. Did they ever give you any sort of identification? Did you have a dog tag or a card or anything of that nature?

Reichle: No. The best I remember, no.

Marcello: Very shortly after you arrived in Bicycle Camp, the Japanese attempted to get all of these prisoners to sign a non-escape pledge or a type of loyalty oath, Do you remember that incident?

Reichle: I vaguely do, yes.

Marcello: Describe what you remember about it.

Reichle: I can't describe nothing. I just flat can't do it. I wish I could.

Marcello: Do you remember whether or not you eventually signed that?

Reichle: I don't really remember. As well as I remember, we just made up our minds we wasn't going to do it, but finally we did. We nearly had to, anyway.

Marcello: Evidently, the officers said that, since all this was having to be done under duress, that there would be no future punishment or recriminations or anything of that sort.

Reichle: As well as I remember now, we had to do that to protect Colonel Tharp because he protected us. I believe that's right. Some of the other officers asked us to do it. Incidentally, if you look back, it didn't make any difference whether you signed it or not because you're going to do it, anyway. Whether you said you would or wouldn't, you were going to do it or die.

Marcello: This kind of leads into my next question. Were there ever serious thoughts about escaping while you were here in Bicycle Camp?

Reichle: No. To my knowledge, no.

Marcello: Why?

Reichle: Again, where would you go? If you got out of Bicycle Camp and got to the beach, where was you going to go? You couldn't swim to Australia. As I said, some of them tried way back there. They went to the beach, and they come back. They had no place to go.

Marcello: When you say some of them tried, I'm sure that you're referring to that period immediately after the surrender.

Reichle: Yes, that's right. See, we could take a truck or car or anything you had and go wherever you wanted to go. The Japs didn't bother you because they knew you wasn't going anywhere. As long as you wasn't armed, they didn't bother you at all.

Marcello: What threats did they make if one did try to escape and were caught? What did they say they would do?

Reichle: Death. There wasn't no threat to it. It was death.

Marcello: You knew they weren't bluffing.

Reichle: No, they weren't bluffing. I'll tell you about something later when we get to it.

Marcello: You mentioned work details awhile ago. Describe how the work details took place here at Bicycle Camp.

Reichle: Again, I can't remember too much about it. We worked on the docks all the time doing something. At this particular time, I think we was carrying sacks of rice.

Marcello: Was this voluntary work?

Reichle: Not necessarily, no. So many people had to work everyday, and usually you took your turn.

Marcello: Was it very strenuous work?

Reichle: Oh, hell, yes! Would you consider carrying about a hundred-and-something-pound sack of rice on your back very strenuous? And I don't mean two; I mean one.

Marcello: How long would a workday usually last here?

Reichle: About daylight hours in Java.

Marcello: Here again, did you have an opportunity to steal anything or to do any trading while you were on these work details?

Reichle: I don't remember any trading there, no. There was some stealing going on. Anytime you could, you'd steal some sugar or eggs or anything you could find to steal,

Marcello: I gather that by this time all the prisoners were becoming scavengers.

Reichle: To a certain extent, yes.

Marcello: In other words, any item, no matter how inconsequential it might appear at the time, was picked up and kept because it might be of use somewhere later on.

Reichle: That's right. You're absolutely right.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the sailors and Marines off the Houston were especially good at taking inconsequential items and making them into something useful, whether it be a mess gear or eating utensils or something of that nature.

Reichle: Again, they had to because they didn't have anything. We was fortunate; we had our mess kits and our spoons and knives and forks and canteen cup and water canteen. They didn't have any of this. The Japs didn't bend over backwards for us, either.

Marcello: I gather, for example, that some people were using automobile hubcaps for plates and bowls and so on.

Reichle: Oh, yes. I saw that. I met someone out there that had that same thing.

Marcello: I've heard it said that there evidently was an old car parked in Bicycle Camp, and within a short amount of time that car had been virtually stripped.

Reichle: That's right! I forgot about that thing. I sure did. As well as I remember, there was nothing left but the frame. I believe that's right. How they took that damn car apart without any tools, I don't know.

Marcello: I guess that on a ship as big as the Houston, though, you probably had all sorts of specialists--everything from carpenters to machinists,

Reichle: I'm sure you did, but, again, they didn't come off with nothing but their clothes they had on their backs.

Marcello: The point is, they had the skills that they could use to fashion whatever they found into something useful.

Reichle: Sure, sure. There was enough of them there that some of them knew something. It had to be. I imagine it would have been

the same way with us.

Marcello: What did you do in your spare time there at Bicycle Camp?

Reichle: Nothing. Played a little poker or cards.

Marcello: What did you talk about in your bull sessions?

Reichle: Women and watermelons.

Marcello: I can understand women, but why watermelons?

Reichle: Well, that's just an ol' Texas saying.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say, however, that the chief topic of conversation was usually food?

Reichle: But not so much as later. Then, we was still talking about the good things we was going to do as soon as we got out-- what we was going to do.

Marcello: At this stage, that is, while you're here in Bicycle Camp, did you have very much contact with the other nationalities?

Reichle: Not much, as I remember. A little bit on working details, maybe.

Marcello: Did you have anything else that you could do for recreation, that is, was there any volleyball or athletic activities of any sort?

Reichle: I believe there was a volleyball net in between those two buildings, as well as I remember now. Then, as I told you awhile ago, this big stage, we used that once every eight days at night.

Marcello: Were those stage performances well-attended?

Reichle: Oh, yes, everybody went. And I don't mean just the Americans.

As well as I remember, it was the whole camp.

Marcello: Including Japanese?

Reichle: No. The Japs was probably guarding us. I don't really remember that now.

Marcello: By this time, has your little clique formed yet?

Reichle: No. We were friends, but it didn't start until later.

Marcello: What were the hospital facilities like there at Bicycle Camp?

Reichle: I don't remember. They must have had one, but, again, it was clean. There wasn't much sickness. I don't know of anyone that went to the hospital.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that, had you been able to stay in Bicycle Camp for your entire period as a prisoner, life would not have been too bad? Being a prisoner-of-war is bad under any circumstances, but Bicycle Camp wasn't all that bad, was it?

Reichle: Really and truly, I think, as well as I remember right now, it might have ended up being boring. It probably would have. We didn't work that hard and that much. We had too much leisure time on our hands, and seeing the same people every-day, you'd normally get bored. We probably would have gotten mad at each other.

Marcello: In October of 1942, the Americans were moved out of Bicycle Camp. Were you given any prior warning before you were moved? Do you recall if you were told in advance that



you would be leaving Bicycle Camp?

Reichle: Yes, I think we were told one or two days before, As well as I remember, it was 165 of us, We didn't know where we was going, but we knew we was going to leave.

Marcello: Do you remember the precise date you left Bicycle Camp?

Reichle: No, I can't remember,

Marcello: But you say there were 165 of you,

Reichle: I believe there were 165, and we were the first to leave, Let me ask you this. Has anybody said anything about the Fitzsimmons group on the railroad?

Marcello: Yes, I've talked to some people that have mentioned that.

Reichle: That's it right there.

Marcello: Okay, you were part of the Fitzsimmons group, How did they get the name of the Fitzsimmons group?

Reichle: He was a captain, and he was in charge of that group,

Marcello: Was he an American?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Was it rather upsetting to have to leave Bicycle Camp? In other words, I would assume that, by October of 1942, you had more or less settled into some sort of routine.

Reichle: Yes. But it didn't make me any difference, The only thing I didn't like was that I left Jack. He didn't go with me, There, again, that was my idea of getting into the Army.

Marcello: Up until that time, had you and Jack Kenner been very, very close?

Reichle: Oh, yes, yes. If I was broke, Jack would loan me money and vice versa,

Marcello: How was it that you were picked to go in this first group?

Reichle: I don't know that. Again, I'm guessing, but these questions they asked us . . . , all my life, all I've known was work. They wanted somebody to work there. That would be my guess,

Marcello: So I assume you went from Bicycle Camp down to the docks. How did you get to the docks?

Reichle: I guess we walked; we were bound to have. I don't really remember. We walked everywhere we went.

Marcello: Describe the ship that you boarded when you got to the dock at Batavia,

Reichle: It was a Jap freighter, is all I can remember about it. They put us . . . no, it wasn't that ship. I can't really remember that ship from there to Singapore. I can't remember it to save my life.

Marcello: Do you remember what conditions were like aboard that ship?

Reichle: Not that one, no. The next one, I do..

Marcello: How long were you on that ship over to Singapore?

Reichle: Maybe a week.

Marcello: Were you put down in a hold?

Reichle: Not in that ship, I don't think. I don't believe it was that ship. We was in a hold on one, but I think it was the following one,

Marcello: How was the food aboard ship on that trip over to Singapore?

Reichle: As well as I remember, we got rice twice a day and no water. You got a half a canteen cup of tea, and that was your water for the day.

Marcello: But you can't recall whether or not you were down in a hold for that trip over to Singapore.

Reichle: I'm not sure, to Singapore. I'm just blank on that one.

Marcello: Generally speaking, did the Japanese more or less let you alone while you were on this ship and on your way over to Singapore?

Reichle: Oh, yes, They didn't bother us.

Marcello: What happens when you get to Singapore?

Reichle: We went down somewhere in an ol' British fort. I don't remember the name of it at all.

Marcello: Was it Changi?

Reichle: I'm blank, I don't know. All I can remember about it is that it had coconut trees. In the barracks . . . we cut all the door frames and window frames out for firewood and climbed these coconut trees and stole coconuts. Them limeys would get on us about stealing the king's coconuts. Those Japs were going to take them, anyway. We destroyed those things pretty good.

Marcello: You brought up the subject of the king's coconuts, so let's pursue it a little bit further. You mentioned that you climbed the coconut trees in order to get the coconuts for additional

food.

Reichle: Let me retract that. We didn't climb them. We tried to get them the best way we could. Them little ol' natives, as well as I remember, would come through that camp. They'd climb them trees, boy, and they could "skin" them trees. We'd give them a nickel, and they'd get up there and get coconuts. I believe that's right.

Marcello: And did you mention that the British tried to stop you from getting those coconuts?

Reichle: Oh, yes.

Marcello: I wonder what their purpose was in doing that?

Reichle: I guess it was that ol' instinct that it's born in them. You know, you're born in a class, and the king is the upper crust. Everything is the king's. I guess that's it. I don't know why,

Marcello: In what way did they try to stop you from getting at those coconuts?

Reichle: They was going to forcibly stop us, and they seen they couldn't. All they would do is threaten. They would not fight. All they would do is threaten.

Marcello: There were thousands of British in this camp, weren't there?

Reichle: I presume so. I don't know how many was there. That was all that was on Singapore, and they all had to be in that camp.

Marcello: Is it not true that they ran the camp?

Reichle: Oh, yes.

Marcello: What were your quarters like here at Singapore?

Reichle: They was just ol' barracks. As well as I remember, we slept on the floor with our blankets, and that was all. How we cooked, I don't remember now. I don't remember how we cooked.

Marcello: Did you have trouble with lice and bedbugs and vermin here at Singapore--in Changi? Do you recall?

Reichle: Yes, I remember that.

Marcello: How did you get rid of them?

Reichle: I don't remember now. Has anyone else told you how?

Marcello: Well, they tried everything from boiling the wood to scorching it and so on and so forth.

Reichle: Oh, yes. As I say, we burned all the wood and scorched everything we could. I don't remember how we finally got them out of our beds. With our blankets, we'd just shake them out and hope we killed them all.

Marcello: Were the British issuing the food or rations here in Changi?

Reichle: Again, I don't remember. We didn't stay there long enough to even get our feet on the ground very good.

Marcello: About how long did you stay there?

Reichle: I'm thinking a week or ten days. A very short time.

Marcello: Did you go on any work details while you were here at Singapore?

Reichle: If we did, I don't remember. I don't think we worked at all there.

Marcello: Again, at this point, is everybody's health fairly good?

Reichle: Oh, yes.

Marcello: You mentioned that you only stayed in Changi for a short period of time, perhaps no longer than ten days. What happens at this point?

Reichle: I don't remember how we were told to move, but the same 165 of us went back and got on a boat. That's the boat we went to Burma on. That's the one where we were in the hold.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of it?

Reichle: No, I don't.

Marcello: Does the Dai Moji Maru or the Dai Nichi Maru ring a bell here?

Reichle: Oh, yes, that was probably it.

Marcello: Where did you board that ship? Did you board it right there at Singapore, or did you take a train and board it some other place?

Reichle: As well as I remember, right there.

Marcello: Describe your trip on this ship. You mentioned that it was a real hold.

Reichle: It was a hole--right down at the bottom of the ship, right over the rudder--and it hauled horses in it. It had horse manure about that deep (gesture) on the floor. In that ship, about three feet high, they built some decks out for bunks. We slept on the floor and up on them things. I believe it was just two high because you couldn't get up any higher. Then there was beams across that the boards would be on.

But they didn't put the boards on there. Some of them even slept on them beams. The only way you could go out . . . they had latrines--just a board--built over the side of the ship. The only way you could get out of the hold was to go get in that latrine line. Hell, lots of nights, half of us would just stay all night in that damn latrine line just to get us some fresh air. We never had a bath, washed our faces, shaved, nothing, for over a week.

We got rice twice a day and a half-canteen cup of tea. That's all the food and water we got.

Marcello: Was this rice lowered down into that hold?

Reichle: Yes, they brought down in there and served us.

Marcello: Was discipline maintained in the serving of the rice and so on? Like you mentioned, you were down in that hold for days on very, very short rations. Was discipline maintained down there?

Reichle: As well as I remember, yes. In other words--I'm guessing--we were a bunch of country boys and beginning to realize what we was going through and knew we had to live with each other. I guess that's the way it was.

Marcello: How crowded were conditions down in the hold?

Reichle: Everybody couldn't lay down at one time. You could just maybe get a little ol' spot to hang on. Like I say, they was sitting up on them piers, and then some of them were standing up in the latrine line all the time. Well, that

kind of lightened the load down there,

Marcello: Could you go to the latrine whenever you wished?

Reichle: Yes, but you had to go. I mean, you had to get in there and sit down whether you did anything or not. You better not get in that line and go back because them Japs was watching every move you made.

Marcello: Like you say, one of the main purposes in getting in that latrine line was to get some fresh air.

Reichle: To get some fresh air, yes.

Marcello: How hot was it down in the hold?

Reichle: Oh, God! Don't ask! There was no way of knowing. It was hot because it was hot above ship. Out in the air, it was hot.

Marcello: Did you ever see anybody lose control and just go berserk down there in that hold?

Reichle: I believe so, but I don't remember who it was. I know I did see somebody, but I don't know who it was.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were on that ship for about five days.

Reichle: I believe it was longer than that. I think it was a week.

Marcello: Where did the ship eventually land? Was it at Moulmein, Burma?

Reichle: At Moulmein, Burma . . . no, wait just a minute. We landed somewhere else. I don't remember where. We got off, and they put us on a little ol' bitty freighter, and the only place to sit was up on deck, and that tickled us to death. We stayed on that thing about a day, and it took us to



Moulmein, Burma.

Marcello: Your ship was not the one that came under the air raid, is that correct?

Reichle: No, we was ahead of that one.

Marcello: So what happens when you get to Moulmein?

Reichle: We go to an old jail--a prison. That's where I realized what shape I was in.

Marcello: Why was that?

Reichle: I didn't have any skin on me anywhere all around down here in my crotch--around anywhere. From that heat and no baths, I peeled off. Man, I was a sad sight. Most of the rest of us was. We didn't have anything for it. The only thing we could do was to keep taking baths. I think maybe we finally got some kind of grease to put on us that kind of solved the dryness and the pain. It didn't last long.

We didn't stay there but maybe a day, two days. One thing I remember about Moulmein was that great, gold dome.

Marcello: The Moulmein Pagoda?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Did it remind you of Kipling?

Reichle: (Chuckle) I don't know what I thought of.

Marcello: Again, this was more or less just a transit station.

Reichle: Yes, a transit station was all it was.

Marcello: As you mentioned, the skin had peeled away from your crotch, penis, testicles--things of that sort.

Reichle: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Did this cause you a great deal of pain and discomfort?

Reichle: Oh, man, yes! This was another reason we'd get up in that line and try to get some fresh air and cool off a little bit--after about three days of it. The first two or three days wasn't so bad.

Marcello: Where do you go, then, from Moulmein since you only remain there a day or so?

Reichle: We went to the railroad.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that they sent you to Thanbyuzayat, first of all?

Reichle: Thanbyuzayat, that's right.

Marcello: What happened when you got there?

Reichle: That's when we started "hooking it." I believe we went there on a train. I believe that's right. When we left there, we went to what they called the 25 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: At Thanbyuzayat, do you remember Colonel Nagatomo?

Reichle: Vaguely, yes.

Marcello: Do you remember the pep talk that he gave you?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Describe it.

Reichle: I can't do it, I wish I had that book with me. He let us know how generous he was to let us live and build that railroad. He let us know we was slave laborers.

Marcello: I gather than there were copies of this speech distributed

up and down the line.

Reichle: Yes. I don't know whatever happened to them. I have one at home, and I also have a book that Teel wrote. I believe it's in that book.

Marcello: You're, of course, referring to Horace Teel, who wrote a book on his experiences as a POW.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: Did you have any idea at this point just exactly what you were in for?

Reichle: No, I still didn't know. We didn't know until we got to the 25 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: You got to the 25 Kilo Camp. How did you get there?

Reichle: We walked.

Marcello: This was during the dry season, wasn't it?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what the road was like on this walk to 25 Kilo Camp.

Reichle: The right-of-way was cleared, and that's all, I believe they might have been started a little on the railroad, but where we went, we started from scratch.

Marcello: But I gather that the road and the dust were just a real fine powder.

Reichle: Oh, yes, yes! Sure. Dust and powder.

Marcello: I guess it just formed little puffs when you walked on it, so to speak.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: Everybody was dusty by the time they got to the 25 Kilo.

Reichle: Yes, Dusty, tired, hungry.

Marcello: Describe what the 25 Kilo Camp looked like from a physical standpoint. I would assume that every one of these camps that we're going to talk about looked basically the same.

Reichle: That picture you have of an atap hut . . . that's it. That's as near as I can describe it.

Marcello: About how big were these atap huts? You'd probably have to estimate this, of course.

Reichle: I'm going to guess about fifty feet long and probably ten feet wide. In other words, it was an atap hut that had a bamboo deck and an aisle down through there. Your bamboo deck was just about chair-high, and that was your chair. You sat on it and put your feet on the ground, and when you laid back, that was your bed. That's your spot.

Marcello: About how much room did you have per man?

Reichle: Just about three feet.

Marcello: Within that three-foot area, you slept, you ate, you stored all your belongings, and everything of that sort.

Reichle: Yes, under that bunk on the ground. Some of us made some kind of thing to hang something up behind us. Later, we got to where . . . in the corner or anywhere we could, two of us . . . one of us would sleep on the floor and then build us another bunk up above out of bamboo and conserve a little more space.

Marcello: Approximately how large were these camps in terms of the number of people you could house there?

Reichle: Again, at that time there were still 165 of us in that camp.

Marcello: I assume that that camp had been built for you when you got there. Native labor had probably done that.

Reichle: Yes, it was built. We never did build a camp.

Marcello: Would there have been a special or a separate building, then, for the cook's shack and things of that nature?

Reichle: Yes, and a separate one for the latrine, as well as I remember.

Marcello: What were the latrines like in these kilo camps?

Reichle: The same thing. Just a little ol' atap hut.

Marcello: But these weren't nearly so sanitary as they'd been in Bicycle Camp and that sort of thing.

Reichle: No, no. They were just on-the-ground privies. We just dug a hole, and that was it.

Marcello: And I guess the flies and maggots just overran those latrines.

Reichle: Yes, absolutely.

Marcello: This, I assume, was where you began to work on the railroad.

Reichle: That's where we started building the railroad.

Marcello: How many guards would you have to guard 165 men?

Reichle: I don't really remember. There was probably thirty, thirty-five.

Marcello: Were most of these guards Koreans?

Reichle: All of them were Koreans.

Marcello: In other words, you would have Japanese officers and Japanese technicians and probably Korean guards.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: How did the Korean guards differ from the Japanese guards you had in Bicycle Camp?

Reichle: They couldn't beat on anyone but us. They was scared of the Japs, and, therefore, you didn't take a chance on doing anything they didn't like.

Marcello: In other words, are you saying, in effect, that the Korean guards were much more vicious than the Japanese guards?

Reichle: Yes. They're crazy.

Marcello: What were some of the things that the Koreans would do in terms of punishment and physical beatings and things of that nature?

Reichle: Oh, man, they knew how! They flat knew how!

Marcello: What would they do?

Reichle: If I get ahead of myself, now, you tell me. For instance, one night we had gone up and come back to a different camp. My bunk was right here and right here was a Jap kitchen (gestures). There was about five feet between my bunk and the Jap kitchen. I had dysentery again, and it was during the rainy season. Our latrine was up on the hillside, and it was black--pitch-dark that night. I didn't have on any clothes, and I had to go to the latrine. Right at the end of our hut was a two-holer and a little nicer built. I thought, "Well, I'm not going to walk up on that slick hill in the dark," so I went in that Jap latrine. When I sat down, I cut loose.

A Korean hollered at me in the next stall. I didn't say a thing; I just sat there until he left. I finally heard him leave, and to my sad mistake, instead of coming around to the end of the hut and coming to my bunk this way, I just come right down and crawled on my bunk this way (gestures). There was that Korean cook fixing to start breakfast,

You talk about giving a man a whipping! He got a stick of firewood that was about that big around (gesture) and had been cut in fours. He whipped me from here up to here (gesture)--all the skin off.

Marcello: So he took a stick of firewood, maybe about a two-by-two or something like that?

Reichle: About two-and-a-half feet long.

Marcello: And he hit you in the upper part of your arm and shoulder and elbow.

Reichle: All the way up here. In fact, I thought I'd lost my elbow. A big knot came up in my elbow. Well, he whipped me for I don't know how long. Finally, a guard come by, and he whipped me with his rifle butt. They always walk guard with fixed bayonets, and that Jap screamed and jabbed that bayonet to just about there (gesture) and stopped. In my own mind, I knew he wasn't going to bayonet me, but I thought he might slip. Well, he worked me over until about the time he could be relieved. Then the next one worked me over.

God took care of me because they should have killed me. Somebody finally went and got the Dutch interpreter that could speak Japanese. In the meantime, I told them I was sick. Anyway, the interpreter finally came. Somebody got me a pair of shorts, and I put some shorts on.

They wouldn't let me alone. They took me to the guardhouse and made me stand at attention in front of the guardhouse. I mean, at rigid attention. If I sagged, they'd come and slap me. Finally, it was time for everyone to get up and go to chow. I thought maybe they'd let me go so I could eat. They kept on, and then everyone cut out to go to work. Everybody fell out to go to work. I stood there until about ten o'clock that morning, and they finally released me. I was no exception. That was the kind of brutality they used.

Marcello: Did you have any broken bones as a result of that beating?

Reichle: I did not. If I did, I never did know it.

Marcello: I understand the Koreans just did it out of sheer delight.

Reichle: Yes, sure, they did. That's absolutely right. You wouldn't beat a dog that way,

Marcello: How do you explain their conduct towards the prisoners?

Reichle: I can't do it. There's only one way I can explain it . . . I think I'd recognize a few if they walked in that door. I'd cut their throat and not even grin or bat an eye one bit. It wouldn't bother me one ounce. That may sound brutal,



but that's the way it is.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the work details on this railroad. Describe what a work detail was like, that is, from the time you started in the morning until you got home in the evening. We're back to 25 Kilo Camp, now,

Reichle: Well, we'd start out . . . they called us kumis. I think there were eighteen men to a kumi. One man would be in charge; he didn't work.

Marcello: Would that usually be an officer?

Reichle: Yes, if there were enough officers. They'd measure off a cubic meter of dirt per person. That doesn't mean you had to dig a cubic meter. You had to dig and carry it in "bambo" baskets. You had to dig out high places and fill in the low places.

Marcello: So you were making cuts and fills.

Reichle: Yes, that's right. When we first started, we'd get off at lunch, rest about an hour, and go back. We'd come in just about dark--dog-tired. We began to learn how to shovel that stuff. We could take that ol' basket and trot off down there, and that pole never hit our shoulder once we got it going. We started getting through around 3:30 or four o'clock. We thought, "Uh-oh, we better slow down here." The next thing we knew, we was getting through about 2:30. We started slowing down, sure enough, and the Koreans didn't want to stay down there, either. They said, "Go ahead and finish."

We can see you slowing down." We could understand some of their language by then. They said, "When you get that done, you're through." Hell, we got to where at one o'clock we was through.

Marcello: You all were in pretty good physical shape, too, at that point,

Reichle: Oh, yes. We done got hardened up then. We got used to that kind of stuff. The bastards lied, like always. They started putting a cubic meter-and-a-half on us, and then later it was two cubic meters a day. But, by this time, I wasn't working on the railroad anymore. I was exceptionally lucky. James Gee and a fellow named P.E. Stone , , . they called it "boof-and-carry." That was kitchen help--cooks and people that carried water. They was cutting wood.

Marcello: And what was this called?

Reichle: "Boof-and-carry." That was kitchen help. They was cutting wood for the kitchen. Someone left or something, and they promoted Jimmy Gee and made him in charge of one of these kumis. We called him "head honcho." Well, Jimmy liked me well enough, and he saw that I got his job. So I never did work on the railroad anymore after that. I cut wood.

P.E. Stone and I would go out in the jungle, and there were great, big, ol' trees. We had a six-foot cross-cut saw. When we got down to the middle of a tree, we couldn't pull it but about a foot-and-a-half. It would take us all morning

to saw through one of them big, ol', hard logs. They were pretty redwood--hard as nails.

Marcello: Is this teakwood we're talking about?

Reichle: Some kind of wood. I guess it was teakwood. It was sure pretty wood. Then that afternoon, we'd take our saw back to camp and leave it. We'd take our axes and split it up, and then put it in a sack on these "bambo" poles and tote it into camp. When we got enough of a supply of firewood for the next day, then we were through. No Japs guarded us, and we worked at our leisure.

Marcello: About how long would it take you to cut enough wood for a day's supply?

Reichle: We'd leave around 3:30 or four o'clock in the afternoon.

Marcello: And you would have started at what time?

Reichle: About eight o'clock. When the rest of them went to work, we'd go to work. We fell out by the kitchen, and the work detail fell out somewhere else. We'd get our morning lecture, and then each one would go their own way.

Marcello: When did you begin to cut firewood? In other words, at what camp?

Reichle: At that same camp.

Marcello: Twenty-five Kilo?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: I gather that nobody really resented people who got a soft job. In other words, as many people as possible that could

get off that railroad was a good thing.

Reichle: No resentment whatsoever. That's the amazing thing about it--no resentment whatsoever. Occasionally, yes.

Marcello: But officers would do everything they could do to find something in camp for a prisoner to do, so they could get another man off the road. Is that true?

Reichle: If it was possible, yes. That's right.

Marcello: For example, I think a lot of the officers were even allowed to have manservants, which obviously was something that didn't occur in the American Army, but it was still a way of getting people off that railroad.

Reichle: Yes. Them limeys, they really pursued that thing. This ol' Colonel Black--I guess you've heard of him.

Now, then, if you're ready for a little ol' tale about me personally . . . that's when I started trading with the natives.

Marcello: When you were on the woodcutting detail.

Reichle: Yes. I found a native--a little ol' bitty yellow native--a neat, clean-cut native--and I got enough over to him and told him I wanted to buy some sugar and eggs and tobacco, He let me know he wanted to buy watches and rings and clothes and anything he could. At night I would buy anything anybody wanted to sell, whether it be a watch or ring or pair of shorts or shirt. It didn't make any difference; I'd buy it. Going to work the next morning, I'd take it with me. He'd

come. He knew where we was going to be.

Marcello: Like you say, you were not being guarded by the Japanese.

Reichle: No, they didn't bother us. We couldn't go anywhere, so it made it real easy. So I would sell it as a profit. Then, I'd buy sugar and eggs and tobacco, bananas--anything he had to sell. I'd take that back into camp and sell it at a profit.

Well, here's where Eldridge Rayburn and "Buck" Lawley and I began to buddy up. That's where it started. Rayburn, again, is a good fellow. He's a gambler and has got a heart of gold. "Buck" is a bashful-type fellow, had not much to say, but had an art of sewing. So he'd cut up every inch of mosquito net he could find and make us shorts. We were pretty fortunate having "Buck" around because we usually had shorts most of the time. Rayburn would do the promoting, and he'd help sell that stuff. He'd make sure he got enough money for it--not give it away. We just had money all the time.

Marcello: So you'd buy watches, clothing, jewelry, and so on from the prisoners. You would take this material and trade it to the natives for sugar, eggs . . .

Reichle: Anything you could eat.

Marcello: . . . and anything else you could eat.

Reichle: Tobacco.

Marcello: Then you would take this material back to the prisoners and

sell it to them at a profit. In other words, you were actually getting back your own money, plus some.

Reichle: Yes, that's right,

Marcello: And then this cycle continued,

Reichle: Yes, it kept on,

Marcello: I assume that the Japanese had issued orders against trading with the natives.

Reichle: Oh, had they known that . . . had they ever caught me . . . I tried to give some stuff to some of them once or twice that I felt like was friends of mine and who needed it, and Rayburn wouldn't let me. He said, "If they catch you, they're going to kill you, not them folks." He was right, but I was a little bit chicken-hearted. He'd been around the world a little more than I had.

You were talking about this Colonel Black. One morning they fell us out . . . I'm going to backtrack. One day his . . . they called them "batmen." His batman come down. There was a native there waiting for me, and his batman was there. He was trying to buy that stuff from him. That native wouldn't sell it to him, but he was scared and thought he was fixing to get a "whupping." I got there just in time and asked him what he wanted. He said he wanted some of that sugar for Colonel Black. I said, "Well, if some colonel wants some of that sugar, you tell him to bring some money this afternoon over to my hut, and he can have it." The

batman said, "He wants me to buy it for him now." I said, "No, you're not going to get it now." One thing led to another, and I said, "Now, fellow, if you want to get a 'whupping' right now, you just stand right there because you're fixing to get one. Or you can go back and talk to Colonel Black. Whichever one do you want to do, you just take your damn choice." He thought I meant what I said, and he left. I didn't hear anymore about it,

The next morning, they fell us out to go to work by the kitchen, and here comes Colonel Black. He walked up, and I happened to be standing right in the middle of the front line. He walked up to me, and I was winding my watch. We wasn't at attention; I was just winding my watch. He says, "Which one of these fellows is Reichle?" I said, "That's me." I forget how it come up, but he said something about his batman. I kept winding my watch. He said, "Quit winding your watch." I said, "Say, I'm not no limey. You talk to me like I'm a person. You don't talk to me like that. I'm no damn limey. You've got nothing to do with me." He said, "I'm the colonel of this camp." I said, "I don't give a goddamn what you are! This is a Japanese camp."

He started in about his batman. I said, "Now, colonel,"-- I finally called him colonel--"I done told you once. I told your batman. I'm going to tell you, and I'm going to tell him again. Don't fool with my native, or somebody's

going to get a 'whupping.'" Oh, he got mad! He got madder than hell! But he finally quit because he seen I wasn't going to pay no damn attention to him. I'd have slapped the hell out of him right there.

So we went on to work. We come in at noon, and this Stensland that I was telling you about . . . Fitzsimmons was gone by this time, and Stensland was in charge. Stensland didn't leave camp; he didn't go to work. The one in charge of that group stayed in camp with the sick. So Colonel Black comes by telling him what to do with me, and he was going to fine me so many days of my pay. Stensland says, "Now, Colonel Black, you're not going to fine him any of his pay. I'm in charge of this group. You don't have a damn thing to do with them!" Colonel Black said, "Well, somebody ought to tell him." Stensland said, "Well, I'll tell you one thing, Colonel Black. I'm not going to tell him anything. Maybe you ought to tell your batman to leave him alone because he's a pretty big man, and he might just do it!" That settled it, and I never heard another word about it. That's just all there was to it.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned pay. You got paid to work as a prisoner?

Reichle: Yes, ten cents a day when you worked.

Marcello: Would you get paid in Japanese currency or occupation currency?

Reichle: Invasion money--occupation money. At first, I think we



had a little currency,

Marcello: Where could you spend this money?

Reichle: As a rule, they had a little canteen in the camp somewhere.

Marcello: Did the Japanese run the canteen?

Reichle: No, they let some POW's run it,

Marcello: What sort of items would you get in the canteen?

Reichle: If they had it, sugar and eggs and tobacco, But they didn't have very much there. Where we got to spend it was when I'd bring that stuff in,

Marcello: When you went out on the work details--cutting wood and so on-- did you ever run across any wild "critters" out there, such as snakes or tigers or anything of that nature?

Reichle: I never did see any tigers. I saw snakes, yes. There were tigers. Not there, but farther up the line was tigers.

Marcello: Were snakes and things like that a problem?

Reichle: Oh, you had to watch for them, yes. But we never did really have a problem with them. The worst thing that we ever saw-- and you could see them--was a great, big, ol' black . . . looked just like a little ol' scorpion, but it was a black one and as big as a lizard. I can believe, and everyone else did, that if them things would sting you, they'd kill you. They looked that tough. I don't know of anyone ever stepping on one or anything else because we watched for them.

Marcello: How long did you stay at the 25 Kilo Camp?

Reichle: I don't remember that now. I can't pin that down to any

days at all. We left there and went to the 33 Kilo Camp, I believe it was, and then we went somewhere else. At about that time, we began to get the right-of-way cleared. I helped build some bridges, too, before I went to cutting wood. The way we drove those pilings by hand . . .

Marcello: How long did you actually work on the railroad before you began to cut the wood?

Reichle: I don't really remember. It was about three or four months. I'm kind of getting mixed up and backtracking, but that's how I got what I did. They transferred Fitzsimmons somewhere-- I don't remember where now--and that's when Stensland took over the camp. When Jimmy Gee got that opening, that's how I got it. It seems to me maybe about four or five or six months. I don't know.

Marcello: You mentioned that while you were working on this railroad, you did get into some bridge-building details. Describe the bridge-building on this railroad. I've seen some of the pictures, and those bridges don't look too safe,

Reichle: (Chuckle) They're not. They had some kind of ol' rig. I don't know what they're called now, but it had a great, big, ol' piece of iron and some pulleys and about six or eight ropes. I think two would get two to a rope, and we'd pull that thing and holler and turn it loose and let it drive that piling. That was green wood--just green, cut wood--and they'd taper it four ways and put an iron wedge on it so it wouldn't

split, and they'd drive it into the ground. We'd start out driving three feet. If they drove easy, we stopped at three feet. If it drove too hard, we'd just stop and saw them off. Then, later, when they got to a bigger crease, they'd stack another stack like that (gesture). Then, later, I saw some--we didn't build any of those--that was three stacks high. Every rainy season, they'd wash out. If it happened to be a curve, they'd just build a bridge on a curve on the side of a mountain.

Marcello: Was there anything you could do to sabotage the work on the railroad?

Reichle: No, I don't know what it would be. We didn't have to; the rainy season would do that. That monsoon season would do enough sabotaging without any other thing. We didn't want to sabotage because we wanted to get through that thing.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you were discussing the incident involving Colonel Black of the British Army and his batman. Am I to assume that, by this time, you and your buddies had come to very much dislike the British?

Reichle: Oh, yes. We never did like them, but all the time everything got just a little bit worse.

Marcello: What was the source of this dislike for the British?

Reichle: The only thing I can say is that they were very dirty, ignorant, no morals whatsoever--the lowest morals possible, even lower than our lowest class right here. Their morals

are extra low. In fact, they're lower than, I think, anyone I've ever seen or anyone I've ever met. Maybe even as low as the damn Japs.

Marcello: How would you contrast the British with the Australians?

Reichle: Oh, there's no way. You can't compare them. You compare the Australians with us.

Marcello: Why was it that such warm bonds of friendship existed between the Americans and the Australians?

Reichle: The Australians were people that would stand up for their rights. They were clean; they were intelligent. They were just different people. In other words, Australia was-- I'm guessing--occupied with people just like we are here. The "slum" that they sent out of England, they sent here.

Marcello: What was the food like here around 25 Kilo Camp?

Reichle: It was fair. It was still rice and soup; that's all it was.

Marcello: You mentioned this native awhile ago. Were there native villages all along the road, or were there simply certain individuals who would follow the progress of the road?

Reichle: There were some natives all along, up until we got way up there. Later, there wasn't any more.

I'm getting ahead of myself, but it'll fit right now. We was way up--not at Three Pagodas Pass--around 80--something Kilo Camp. I was still cutting wood. A little native come up to me one day and let me know that he wanted to buy some shorts. I let him know I wanted some sugar, so he went and

got some. They called it shintagar. It was a brown slab about that wide and about that long and about that thick (gestures). There'd be five slices--slabs--of it wrapped up in some big, ol' tree leaves.

Well, he went and got it and come back. I tried to pay him with money, and he didn't want no money. He wanted some shorts. I tried to get him to let me see the sugar, and he said, no, I couldn't see it. Finally, he let me tear a hole in it--just a little, bitty hole--and look in there. I could see it was brown.

Now "Buck" had one pair of shorts, and I went back to camp and told "Buck," "I've got to have them shorts you got!" He said, "No, that's the only pair I've got, and you know I can't go without shorts. I can't wear them G-strings," I said, "'Buck,' you can find something to make you another pair. We've got to have that sugar. I've done found us a bag of sugar!" So, finally, with enough argument, he let me have it.

I took it out there and gave it to that native, and he took those shorts and run. I never thought too much about it. I went on cutting wood, and when I got through and went into camp that night, I took that sugar with me. I said, "Boy, we're going to eat some rice tonight! We've got this sugar." I opened it up, and it was a damn chunk of dirt! He'd cut out a chunk of dirt--just the right size, the right

color--and wrapped it in those damn leaves! Everyone still says I've got some Burma real estate, That was my end of trading with the natives.

Marcello: Why did you take these chances in trading with the natives?

Reichle: Survival, I guess. I didn't know any better or something.

Marcello: I'm sure that survival did play a very important part, but could we also say that it represented one little triumph over the Japanese?

Reichle: Maybe so. I don't know. Maybe we were greedy.

Marcello: You had gotten away with something that you were forbidden to do.

Reichle: I hadn't even thought of it that way. We had one boy that done something, I can't remember his name, He was a Marine, I believe--a sailor or Marine, one. He done something like that, and they took him off, and we never did hear of him anymore. We heard they took him back to Singapore and killed him. But we never did know what happened to him, No one's ever heard of him again.

Marcello: I assume that, through all this trading and so on, you really didn't accumulate any money. Everything was going into goods, so to speak,

Reichle: On, no, we always had money. This thing can go on and on, if you want to ask me some questions. But let me tell you some things that I remember when we get through with that railroad. I'm not rushing things, either. When we got on

up to Three Pagodas Pass--the worst camp--that's when the bridges started washing out. The rainy season hit. Well, there is where we like to have starved to death! I mean, literally starved to death!

Marcello: Let's just stop there for a minute, because that's getting into my next series of questions. In May of 1943, work had progressed up to the 80 Kilo Camp. Here was where the Japanese began the so-called "Speedo" campaign because they were behind on the railroad. It just so happened that the "Speedo" campaign also coincided with the coming of the monsoon season. What was it like during the monsoon season?

Reichle: Well, it would start raining in the afternoon around four or five o'clock, as well as I remember, just like we have winter here. It just progressed gradually daily, and before long it rained day and night. It didn't quit! It rained day and night, just all the time, until it finally tapered off the same way and quit. Three months of it! It would start, and it never would get dry. It was just wet and muddy all the time. Just like we have three months of winter here; it's three months of monsoon season there. When it quits raining, it ain't going to rain. You don't worry about the rain. It's not going to rain.

Marcello: I gather that nothing--nothing--stays dry during the rainy season.

Reichle: No, nothing. It's just rain; that's all.

Marcello: How does it affect you physically to be living in that sort of situation for months?

Reichle: After so long, living under those conditions, you just kind of accept everything for what it is. You don't pay much attention to it. You try to keep your feet dry enough so that you don't start rotting. Your feet are muddy all the time. You could barely get on a dry spot in them ol' atap huts because the water runs down through them some way. The only way you could stay dry was up on your bunk.

Marcello: And, even then, I guess, the rain would be so constant and rain so much that it would come through the roof, would it not?

Reichle: No, I don't remember that it did very much because the wind didn't blow. That ol' atap, it wouldn't leak. If the wind blows that stuff, it would just blow it off.

Marcello: These barracks were open at both ends, were they not?

Reichle: Yes, on both ends and also across the middle.

Marcello: What effect did the "Speedo" campaign have upon the prisoners?

Reichle: If I'm not mistaken, about the time the "Speedo" campaign come on, we was still, again, the right size. We went back and started laying rails. We didn't work on the railroad anymore. When we finished the railroad, we met the British around Three Pagodas Pass--I think it was the 109 or 111 Kilo Camp.



Marcello: In the meantime, has the rest of the unit caught up with you, that is, with the Fitzsimmons bunch?

Reichle: We are the Fitzsimmons bunch.

Marcello: Yes, I know you're the Fitzsimmons bunch, but how about all the rest of those that were coming after you?

Reichle: Oh, yes and no. Sometimes we'd be in the same camp, and then sometimes we wouldn't. We'd just come and go.

Marcello: By this time, you all were working on the railroad.

Reichle: All that went to Java?

Marcello: Yes.

Reichle: Yes, all that came from Java were there. Of course, a bunch of them went to Japan and Formosa and Singapore and several different places.

Marcello: How did the Japanese attitude change when the "Speedo" campaign was initiated?

Reichle: Again, me not working directly on the railroad, I can't answer that. After I started cutting wood, I never did work on the railroad anymore. Like, some of these boys who worked in that solid rock, they raised it two cubic meters a day, and they'd sit right there and chip that rock with a hammer and chisel and move that much dirt.

Marcello: By the time the "Speedo" campaign and the monsoons begin, the health of the prisoners is also beginning to break down, isn't it?

Reichle: Oh, yes, yes. Absolutely. We were getting farther into the

jungle. You couldn't drink water without boiling it.

Due to the monsoon season and the railroad bridges washing out, they couldn't get supplies to us, so we were on starvation rations. The bunch we was with had this Dutch doctor-- "Doc" Hekking. If you got sick, he'd tell you to get you some grass and some leaves off of that tree and a limb off of this one and cook it up. It tasted like hell, but it would help you. He'd tell you what kind of grass to cook and eat.

Marcello: In other words, are you saying that Doctor Hekking knew the various folk medicines and remedies that could help you?

Reichle: Oh, yes. He'd practiced in the tropics for twenty years, see. It wasn't new to him. We was real fortunate to have him.

This one camp was the worst camp we was in. If we had less than five deaths--every afternoon we'd have a funeral "parade," they called it--we just didn't have one that day. It wasn't very many of our boys, but them limeys was dying. He told us, "I'll tell you one thing, you Yanks"--he'd begun to try and help the limey doctors--"I can tell y'all had the proper food and milk and so forth when y'all were boys growing up. You just have a little more stamina than these British have." Their hips would just fall off from malnutrition--just fell off.

Marcello: But I've also heard it said that the British in many cases

seemed to have given up all hope, that is, the common, ordinary, British soldier.

Reichle: Sure, sure! That's absolutely right. We had one man in our bunch that took pellagra of the heart. When I talk about pellagra . . . you couldn't drink water. You get enough liquid in your rice and soup not to dehydrate, but the more water you drink, the worse that it's going to be. We finally dug up a can of Carnation milk--you put it in boiling water and make caramel out of it--and gave it to him. He got over it; he was all right.

We had to boil water again, and we'd all get our canteens full of hot water after we ate the meal at night, so the next day we could have cool water. They took this ol' boy's canteen away from him. We began to hear him get up in the middle of the night stealing water out of our canteens.

It wasn't long before he was down again. He laid right there on his back just unconscious--in a coma--for about three or four days. Flies were crawling in and out of his mouth, so I put a sheet over his head. Flies were still getting in there, so we said, "Hell, let him die. He's been trying to." It was that hard. That's just the way it was. When it got ready to bury him, they had to draft people to bury him because no one wanted to dig his grave. They said, "Throw him in the creek bed!"

We had one boy named Ecklund--they called him "Big

Swede"--who took sick, Most everything was gone by then because of this other fellow, but they give him everything they could. We tried to feed him, and he'd do his best to eat that ol' rotten soup and rice. He did his best to live, and he didn't make it. That day we had to draw straws to see who would get to dig his grave. He wasn't no half-way; he was all right. He was a pretty good fellow.

Marcello: You actually did see cases where a person would literally give up and die.

Reichle: If you wanted to die, that's all you had to do. All you had to do was lay down. You didn't have to try--just lay down--and you were going to die.

To go back to "Buck" . . . when I say, "Buck," I'm talking about George Lawley. He may have told you this. We were in this same worst camp, and "Buck" got sick. He was sick, boy! He wouldn't eat. I done all I could to get him to eat. One day, Rayburn walked up to him and started cussing him--everything he could think of. He cussed him . . . it's a dirty shame. When he got through, I came around . . . he was laying right at the atap hut, where the partition was--there's a wall up there. I got Rayburn right around behind that and took him outside, and I said, "Rayburn, I never have threatened to 'whup' you, but you do that one more time, and you're going to get a 'whupping' from me or get caught trying!" He said, "Hell, 'Red,' we got to get him mad and get him up! If we

don't get him up, he's going to lay there and die!" And it worked! He got mad and got up and was all right. Did "Buck" tell you that?

Marcello: I can't recall if he did or not. What was the biggest killer in the camps? Obviously, it all starts with malnutrition, but in terms of actual ailments, what is the big killer?

Reichle: That's it right there--malnutrition or that pellagra of the heart. Doctor Hekking told us that doctors here wouldn't believe the records he kept. Ninety-nine percent of the deaths were a direct cause of malnutrition.

Marcello: And was even the dysentery related to malnutrition?

Reichle: No, I don't guess so.

Marcello: But quite a few died from dysentery, too.

Reichle: To my knowledge, I don't know. Maybe so. I don't guess too many of them did because, if they did, I should have. I had it about as bad as anybody ever had it. They had two kinds. One was that kind I had the first time--that bleeding kind--and then the other one was the kind where your bowels would just run off, I mean, just run off! But it wouldn't last over two or three days, and it was gone. Either it was gone, or you were gone, one. It didn't last long.

Marcello: I've heard it said that in some cases the dysentery was so bad that the inner lining of the anal passages would actually come out.

Reichle: Yes, that's right. It was pretty bad.

Marcello: What could you do for dysentery? Was there any cure?

Reichle: I don't remember now. I don't know of anything we had.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of them eating charcoal?

Reichle: I believe so. Another thing, they used charcoal for their teeth.

Marcello: They would use charcoal for their teeth?

Reichle: Yes, to clean their teeth. Getting back to me, both of my ears--we were in 25 Kilo Camp--right back here (gesture) just cracked open. I was embarrassed. We'd bathe in the creek. I don't remember where, but somewhere we got a little bit of soap. We took a bath everyday if we possibly could--and I could. I was talking to myself: "Goddamn! I ain't clean behind my ears;" I got to see some soap, boy, and I double-scrubbed for about three days. The more I scrubbed, the sorer them things got. I didn't know what to do. I was embarrassed to go to a doctor, because I knew I was filthy. Finally, I had to.

I went to him, and I said, "Doctor, look at my ears. I'm ashamed that I'm not bathing enough. Look how my ears are cracking." (Chuckle) He said, "Oh, 'Red,' you're clean. That's just a vitamin deficiency. Can't you get you a lemon or lime?" I said, "Oh, yes! I can get me a lemon or lime." He said, "You get you a lemon or lime and suck the juice out of it and squeeze just a little bit of it on each one of them places. It's going to burn, but it'll go away." It wasn't a week, and

it was gone. Had he not known that, my ears might have fallen off!

Marcello: You mentioned soap awhile ago. Where did you get soap?

Reichle: I don't know. I think, as well as I remember now, they cut up some kind of ol' lye soap in camp for us.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese issued it?

Reichle: No, no. They'd give us some stuff, and our cooks would cook it up. You've heard of lye soap when we were kids? Well, that's the same kind of stuff.

Marcello: While you were working around in the kitchen, did you have an opportunity to get a little bit of extra food at all?

Reichle: No, there wasn't no such thing. I mean, I'm not bragging on me. I didn't ask for it. No one asked for anything. No one wanted anything extra. You won't take anything that your buddy might need.

Marcello: But I gather that when the food was parceled out, everybody watched the parceling of the food like a hawk.

Reichle: No, no, I wouldn't say that.

Marcello: No?

Reichle: No, I wouldn't say that. Maybe when it got real short, there might have been a few that we called "gluttons" that would watch it. But the average man, as a rule, couldn't eat all the rice we got, anyway.

Marcello: How come? Was it just so bad?

Reichle: So bad? As a rule, you could get plenty of rice. You could get

a mess kit heaped up of rice, but you couldn't eat so much of it. We had one ol' boy who would eat all he could get his hands on. He had a belly on him! I swear to goodness! He was all shoulders and chest, and his belly would come down like this (gesture). I mean, way out there! He looked like a pregnant woman.

Marcello: Really, a sign of malnutrition.

Reichle: Yes, it is a sign of malnutrition, but all that rice just made it that much worse. Another thing about the Japs and Koreans . . . rice makes your stomach cold. I don't know whether you know that or not. They all had a kind of sarong about that wide (gesture)--a pretty thick towel--that they'd wrap around their waist right tight to keep that stomach warm.

Marcello: Did you ever have any tropical ulcers?

Reichle: Very few. I've got a few scars on my leg now.

Marcello: How would you get rid of them?

Reichle: They just finally left. I didn't have them bad enough. Some of them boys that worked on the railroad--chipping that rock--had them. We had one ol' boy, Glen Self . . . on his left leg, right here on his shin . . . now there's a little scar right there (gesture). His was in about the same spot. It got so bad, and "Doc" Hekking couldn't do anything else. The only thing he could do about it, he made what he called an "ulcer spoon." He had Glen lay down on his back on a table, and three or four or five of us would hold him. He didn't



want us to hold him, but we had to. "Doc" Hekking scraped that thing until it bled all over, and he bandaged it up. In about three or four days, he'd do it again. That thing finally half-healed up, and the bone was sticking out--dead bone.

We got back into Siam where they had better facilities and had another Dutch doctor there who was a surgeon. They put him to sleep--they had something--and chiseled that dead bone away and sewed that meat back. He's got a hole in it right now. You can stick your finger in it , but it doesn't bother him.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that they used maggots to eat out the dead flesh. Had you ever seen that?

Reichle: I've heard of that. No, I've never seen that. I've seen people with maggots--some of them limeys--and didn't even know it!

Marcello: How did you substitute for toothpaste, toothbrushes, shaving utensils, and things of that nature?

Reichle: How we managed to shave without utensils, I don't know. We always had some kind of ol' razor blades around. We learned that you could break a soda water bottle and take a razor blade in there and get them sharp again. Soap--I've told you that. Brushing your teeth . . . well, the last thing I can remember is we used charcoal.

Marcello: What did you use for a toothbrush?

Reichle: We didn't use them, so we'd take that charcoal and put it in a rag or something.

Marcello: It made your teeth black, but it cleaned them, huh? -

Reichle: No, it didn't make them black. It would make them white, Amazing! You'd rinse it off with water, and the black would disappear. It did clean your teeth pretty good.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you were mentioning the burial details. When you got up into the monsoon season, men are beginning to die in bunches. Describe what one of these burial details was like. Were you ever on one of them?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Okay. Describe how the burying of the dead would take place.

Reichle: Well, each group would bury their own, and we'd go at the same time. I only made one when we buried this fellow, Ecklund. We had four pallbearers. They dug the grave, and then they carried the body. I can't remember now who said the words, but just one would go and say the words for all of them-- Australians, British, Dutch, Americans, whatever. When it was over, the Japs . . . I don't believe the Japs even went with us because we just walked across the railroad. They'd sit there and watch us. When that was over, then we covered him up.

I'll never forget that to this day. We let "Swede" down. We had his head and so forth wrapped in a little ol' blanket, and his feet were up as far as they would go in a croke sack. He was laying there. We all had shovels, and nobody could

shovel that first shovel of dirt. We just stood there. It was pretty hard. It was our first good friend to die. There was one ol' boy named "Snuffy" Jordan, who was goofing off all the time. He shoveled a shovel of dirt on him and said, "Well, 'Big Swede,' I hate to do it, but here it goes." He threw a shovel of dirt right in his face. That was it, and it was over.

Marcello: Were there careful records kept of the burial sites and things of that nature?

Reichle: As far as I know, they tried to. But from what I know now, there's no way they could find them. I understand that jungle has grown back up something awful.

Marcello: Did they try and put some sort of a headstone at each grave?

Reichle: Oh, yes. We made a wooden marker, but, again, the monsoon season hit and washed them away.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that the dead had to be buried without any clothing on because the natives would come along and dig them up and get the clothing off of them. Had you ever heard that?

Reichle: We didn't bury them with any clothes. As I say, the Japs finally issued us little, ol', bitty blankets--about a half a blanket--and we put that on him. That was all . . . and his feet in a croke sack. The rest of his clothes, somebody kept them.

Marcello: Of course, somebody could always use whatever clothing that

dead person had,

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: Under these circumstances, do you see men becoming more religious, or do you think more about a higher being or anything of that nature?

Reichle: Yes, some people do. Most people do. One friend of mine, he's a big worker in the Baptist church today. He told me one day, "'Red,' you know, I don't believe there's a God in heaven. If there was, he wouldn't let anything go on like this." You got that kind of feeling. We had some who started preaching. As soon as the bombs quit falling, they went back to drinking. You can go either way on that.

Marcello: Were there religious services held in the camps and so on?

Reichle: Just whenever we could slip off. We weren't allowed to have them. When we had these yasumi days and catching the Japs not around, this fellow, Teel, would hold a service. That's all we had.

Marcello: I guess when those guys came off the railroad during the monsoon season and the "Speedo" campaign, they were just dead-tired.

Reichle: Well, you're talking about this "Speedo" campaign. When we was laying rails--again, I was fortunate in cutting wood--our boys would sometimes stay out there thirty-six hours. We'd take their food to them. Thirty-six hours in a row--one day and night, and all day the next day. You'd sleep that

night and then do the same thing again,

Marcello: During the "Speedo" campaign, I gather there were no days off, though, were there?

Reichle: Oh, no. That thing quit pretty quick--them days off, That didn't last long at all. I don't think that lasted three months.

Marcello: Who determined when a man was too sick to go out on the road and work?

Reichle: The Japs. They didn't with us, but in some of them camps they even carried the sick on a kind of hammock-thing with two poles in it--like a stretcher. They'd carry them and line them up out there, passing rocks from one to the other.

At first, the doctor decided, but later on . . . in one of these camps, we had a doctor with us, but he stayed with the other bunch. He finally died from trying to take care of them. He had so many sick ones that the Jap officer come to him one day and said, "Why don't you just let me go kill them? They're going to die, anyway, and you won't have to work so hard." That's the way they felt.

Marcello: What you're saying, in effect, then, is that if a person became sick, he would go to the doctor first. The doctor would determine whether or not he was sick enough to remain in whatever . . .

Reichle: Whether he was sicker than the next man.

Marcello: Right. Okay, a doctor would determine whether or not he was

sick enough to stay off the job.

Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: At that point the Japanese guard or somebody would come through, and he had to have so many men on that work detail. He would come through the camp or the hospital building or whatever you want to call it, and then he would pick out people the doctor had felt were too sick to work. These people would then be sent out on the road.

Reichle: That's right. "Doc" Hekking tried to stop them, but they couldn't do it.

Marcello: In other words, probably there was no way that a man with malaria could stay off the road. Physically, outwardly, he looked okay to the Japanese guards,

Reichle: I guess so.

Marcello: So what you're doing is taking an ignorant peasant once again, who obviously has no knowledge of medicine, and he is ultimately determining who works and who doesn't,

Reichle: That's right. That's the way they believed.

Marcello: Did you know anything about the so-called hospital camp that ultimately or eventually was established back at the 80 Kilo Camp?

Reichle: No, I didn't know anything about that one. I remember the one back at Thanbyuzayat. They had one there, but I didn't know anything about that other one. Again, there was when the rainy season hit, and we had passed that and couldn't

go backwards. Later, some of our boys went back and started building the bridges again. Then that's when we went on into Siam.

Marcello: Throughout this entire period of your working on the railroad, and during this period when you're cutting wood, do you still continue to have your dysentery? Or does it come again and go again? How does it work?

Reichle: I may be getting ahead of myself now, but if I do you just stop me. After we was liberated and got to Calcutta, India, they found me and several others still having it. They lined us up down a wall. I think there were fourteen of us that got a shot every morning for that for, I believe, fourteen days. That was supposed to be it. It'd show up in your bloodstream.

Marcello: You mentioned that you continue to work on the road, and ultimately you met the British, who were building from the other end, at Three Pagodas Pass.

Reichle: That's where we met, but we didn't actually meet them there. See, they was here and we was here (gestures), but the railroad was completed in between us. Again, I wasn't laying any rails, so I wouldn't know. I don't remember whether those other boys said they met some British or not.

Marcello: Did you perchance take part in the ceremony that commemorated the completion of the railroad?

Reichle: No, I did not.

Marcello: I knew there was a ceremony held at Three Pagodas Pass, and I haven't run across too many prisoners who actually were witnesses to that ceremony.

Reichle: I don't remember that.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you have names for the Japanese guards--any nicknames for them?

Reichle: Yes, some of them.

Marcello: Can you recall any of those nicknames?

Reichle: Not right now. I really can't. The only one I can remember is "Joe." He was a little Korean that everybody liked.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of one called "Liver Lips?"

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: "Donald Duck?"

Reichle: Yes, but I can't really remember them. There was another one that was a mean one. I can't remember his name.

Marcello: The railroad was finished in October of 1944. Did you ever have to make a trip on that railroad that you had just built?

Reichle: Yes, that's how we got from . . . in fact, we rode it most of the way after we started laying rails. Then when we moved up to the next camp, we'd ride the train. They were in too big a hurry for us to walk.

Marcello: Did you have any fear of taking that railroad from wherever you were into Siam?

Reichle: I remember one remark I made--I'll never forget it--on one of these three-deck bridges on a curve. That ol' train was



just sailing around that thing (chuckle), and everyone was screaming and hollering, "He better slow down! This damn bridge is going to fall over!" I laughed and said, "Man, when I was a kid, I paid a dollar to ride a roller coaster that wasn't this much fun!" (chuckle) That's the way we felt about it.

Marcello: Where did you go after you got into Thailand?

Reichle: There were two camps, and I probably have them mixed up. One of them was Kanchanaburi, and the other one was Tamuang or Tamarkan. It was one of those two.

Marcello: Was the camp that you went to a large camp?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: It was probably Kanchanaburi then. Thousands and thousands of people were there.

Reichle: Lots of them--British and Australians and everything. Anyway, we didn't stay there for too long.

Marcello: About how long did you stay there?

Reichle: I can't remember that. There was a bunch of mango trees there. I can remember that.

Marcello: I guess anything would have been better than that railroad.

Reichle: Oh, yes. We was doing pretty good again by this time.

Marcello: Did you stay there at Kanchanaburi for a period of weeks or months?

Reichle: Yes, a pretty good while. I still cut wood. There was where I was unlucky cutting wood because they didn't work too much,

but I had to work everyday.

The food was pretty good. They had a good canteen there, They even had a little, ol' native--Javanese--cook that took a liking to me, and he served me some extra food. He found out my dad and I had a birthday the same day. He found out when my birthday was, and he made that rice for me and made me a birthday cake and put "Happy Birthday, Son" on it. So we did pretty good there. The food was a little better, and there was more of it.

Marcello: I guess they had worked the prisoners just about as hard as they possibly could, so they had to back off a little bit by the time they got to Kanchanaburi.

Reichle: It couldn't get any worse. We had it pretty good there. Here's a story you're going to hear that, if you hear it, you'll hear it two more times and that's all. They took a bunch of us and were going somewhere; I never did know where. Later, I heard they went down to French Indochina. They decided they had too many Americans, and they cut two brothers and me back. Onis and Clifford Brimhall and me--three Americans. For a long time--nearly until the war was over--we were the only three Americans together. We ended up in camp with a bunch of limeys. We went back to that same camp and stayed there quite some time, being the only three Americans.

They finally had one limey with a little bit of sense. They began to realize that the blankets and everything were

getting lousy. Hell, they was lousy! He helped us, showed us how he wanted it done. We built a thing with a fire in it and plenty of water and steamed those blankets. He was the health camp officer. He was a doctor. Every morning, he would designate a hut to bring their blankets up there to us, and we would steam their blankets. That's all we did. We built a fire and kept it going.

Marcello: Where did this take place?

Reichle: In that camp, whichever one it was.

Marcello: Kanchanaburi?

Reichle: I think that's the one.

Marcello: In other words, you were left behind when this original group was selected to go down to Saigon.

Reichle: That's where I left "Buck" and Rayburn. I remember telling Jimmy Gee, "Now you be sure and take care of 'Buck' because he can't take care of himself."

Marcello: So Lawley and Rayburn did go with this group, and the clique was broken up then.

Reichle: Yes, that's when Onis and Clifford and I got together. We had to; we was the only three Americans there. We three was the only three out of that bunch that stayed together the whole time, to my knowledge.

Marcello: During your stay here at Kanchanaburi, was the camp ever subjected to any air raids?

Reichle: No, not at that one when I was there. Later, it was. We

was in another camp.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were still basically cutting wood here at Kanchanaburi.

Reichle: No, that's when I was steaming blankets.

Marcello: When you first went to Kanchanaburi, you had been cutting wood yet.

Reichle: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you were working as hard in Kanchanaburi as you had out on the railroad,

Reichle: That's right. In other words, I cut wood up until we left to go on this detail.

Marcello: Did your health seem to improve while you were here at Kanchanaburi?

Reichle: Some better, yes.

Marcello: I guess you were closer to civilization, and, hence, more food was available.

Reichle: We had a little more food . . . we was civilized. There were no damn jungles and insects,

Marcello: Did the variety of the food change?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: In what way?

Reichle: Just better. A little more seasoning and a little more salt. You could put a little bit of anything on rice, and it was edible.

Marcello: Did you get any vegetables or fruit or anything of that nature?

Reichle: A little bit of vegetables. The only fruit we ever got was the mangos from the mango trees.

Marcello: I assume that by this time you had stopped trading with the natives again.

Reichle: Oh, yes. There wasn't any natives around.

Marcello: There were no natives around Kanchanaburi?

Reichle: Yes, but we was in barbed wire.

Marcello: I see.

Reichle: In other words, if you went out you was guarded,

Marcello: Where did you go from Kanchanaburi?

Reichle: That's what I'm trying to remember. There was another camp back where Onis and Clifford and I were, and I don't remember the name of that camp. It was a triangle like that (gesture). Here was three railroad sidings, and here an antiaircraft battery (gestures). Onis and Clifford and I were with a bunch of limeys--just we three. All the rest of them was limeys. A Jap walked guard all night, and outside these huts they had a trench dug all the way around. That was for you to get into in case of an air raid.

One night the planes flew over, and when they did, this antiaircraft battery opened up. Them limeys began to jump out of them huts, and them Japs just beat the hell out of them. About two nights later, the same thing happened. It was truly an air raid. They dropped the first stick of bombs, and I began to hear them whistle. Well, I thought maybe I

did. Onis and Clifford and I were the only three in the hut, so I got up and walked . . . we was pretty close to that middle aisle, so I got up and walked out to that middle trench. About that time, you could see them B-29's--them big ones. I said, "My God, Onis! It is them! I hear them falling now!" (Chuckle) He and Clifford both just flew out the back of that ol' atap hut and hit that ditch with me.

The first plane dropped a flare, and they bombed us I don't know how many times that night. The first one that dropped without a flare dropped three bombs in a Dutch hut and killed ninety-something outright. Them limeys started crying: "Why don't you Yanks go back home and leave us alone?" Then we started another war. We said, "Well, you sons-of-bitches, you've been wanting us to do something! Now that they're trying to do something, you don't want that done!" We didn't stay there too long.

Marcello: Would this camp possibly have been Tamuang?

Reichle: Yes.

Marcello: Was there a bridge or anything there? Or Tamarkan? Could it have been Tamarkan?

Reichle: No, I don't believe it was either one. There wasn't a bridge there. It was just a railroad siding. Now where you're talking about, they got bombed there, also. I remember some of them come up to us later--come back and joined us again--who had been bombed there about the same time we was bombed here.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing here at this camp?

Reichle: At that camp, we just didn't do much of anything--us three Americans. They just didn't bother us. They would let us eat, and that was about it.

Marcello: When these air raids took place, what did that do for your morale?

Reichle: Personally, we three Americans was proud of it. We knew they was coming on then.

Marcello: That was an indication, I guess, that the war had turned in favor of the Allies.

Reichle: They was the first Allied planes we'd seen, other than them ones we saw in Java.

Marcello: I guess you couldn't show your happiness too much around the Japanese, could you?

Reichle: No, we didn't do that.

Marcello: How did the attitude of the Japanese change as a result of these raids?

Reichle: Well, I don't know that I could see much difference in them. They seemed to later get a little more meeker, also.

Marcello: Where do you move from this camp?

Reichle: I don't know the name of it, but it was up somewhere north of Bangkok. The railroad went east and west, so we was north about 140 kilometers.

Marcello: Was this a very big camp?

Reichle: It was a big camp with lots of limeys there. Some Jap front-

line troops were there. We joined a few more Americans there. Up on this mountain--I'd say a plateau--was a shrine built with a long stairway, probably a hundred yards high. The Chinese would come there and pull their shoes off and walk up barefooted, I never did go up in that thing because I didn't want to. The stairs was so steep and had no bannisters, so I always had a fear of maybe falling down that thing. I'd been there too long to take that chance. Up on top was a big plateau--a mesa--and their Buddha was supposed to lay there. Did you ever see a car run on charcoal?

Marcello: No.

Reichle: They had them. They didn't have any gasoline, They had a little charcoal burner on the back of them, and the rich Chinese had a little electric blower on theirs, and the poor ones had a hand blower. The way they'd do it, they'd get that charcoal to burning, just smoldering, and then take that blower and blow that smoke up into the engine and try to crank it. Once they got it cranked, the way the thing was built, there would be enough vacuum to pull that fume up there and then burn it like gasoline. Like I said, the ones that had plenty of money had a little electrical deal on theirs,

Marcello: What sort of work did you do at this camp?

Reichle: At this camp, again, I was lucky. We carried water for the kitchen. Right down at the bottom of that plateau was a great, big, round, concrete tank, and water run in it all the



time--clear water. We carried water for the kitchen, and that's all we did, was just carry water for the kitchen in the morning. We'd have enough for lunch, so we would rest. Then in the afternoon we'd carry it again until . . . I think it was we three and one or two more. That was all we did.

Marcello: How was the food here at this camp?

Reichle: It was always getting better all the time. It was getting pretty good.

Marcello: It was getting better?

Reichle: Yes, it was still getting a little better. The rest of the boys would work on ammunition dumps. They just put them in trucks. They didn't walk anymore. They kind of stopped that walking. They'd stay the night in camp, and the next day they'd take them to the ammunition dump.

Marcello: Did you still have your Korean guards with you?

Reichle: Yes. Not the same ones, but we always had Korean guards.

Marcello: Did they seem to be easing up a little bit in terms of the punishment?

Reichle: To a certain extent, yes. They seemed to get some fear. That's where we were when the war was over.

Marcello: By this time, do you have some grudges against these Korean guards? Do you plan to get even if the war is over?

Reichle: Yes, just for a while. But I didn't ever do anything to them. Some of them gave them a 'whupping.' I guess we're just about

over now.

Marcello: About how long were you at that camp altogether?

Reichle: Again, three or four or five, maybe six months.

Marcello: You said the food was getting better. In what way?

Reichle: There was just more of it--more vegetables. Everything was just a little bit better.

Marcello: Were you picking up some weight?

Reichle: Yes. I'd probably gotten up to about 140 or 145 pounds.

Marcello: How much did you weigh when you got into the service?

Reichle: One hundred and ninety-six pounds when I got with the Jap army.

Marcello: What would you say your lowest weight was?

Reichle: About 125, I guess.

Marcello: So you went from 195 pounds down to 125, approximately.

Reichle: Yes, but I'm no exception. Everybody else done the same thing. The only way they lost less weight is if they weighed less than I did to start with. If they weighed more than I did, they lost more. It didn't make any difference.

Marcello: Describe the events leading up to your liberation. I'm sure that's a time that you have fond memories of.

Reichle: Just a few days before that, Onis Brimhall and I got to talking about it. I said, "Hell, this damn war ain't never going to end. I've done decided it ain't going to end."

Marcello: Incidentally, all this time, how long was the war going to last? When was it going to be over? In other words, how many days or weeks or months ahead were you living?

Reichle: Me?

Marcello: Yes.

Reichle: Just forever. Forever! I didn't think I was ever going to come home by this time, but I wasn't going to die. Some of the boys lived it a day at a time.

Again, these boys went out one morning to work on the trucks. They got to this ammunition dump, and they never did get off. They heard the Japs there talking to these Korean guards and the drivers. They never did unload them; they came on back. We wondered why they came back early. Of course, we was still carrying water. When we got through carrying water, we went in our hut.

Like I said, there was some more Americans there then, and they said, "Boys, the war is over." "How do you know?" "Well, we heard them talking, and we understood enough that the war is over. It's over!" I asked, "Onis, what do you think?" He said, "'Red,' I believe it is this time. What do you think?" I said, "Well, I want to, but I'm scared to. It may not be."

We kind of dropped it at that. That afternoon, we carried our water again and got through and came back. Everyone was laying around, not a thing being done. No one was working but us and the cook. The guards wasn't even very thick. All of a sudden, they began to put a great, big stand where we usually stood at parade every afternoon when they counted us. I

wondered, "What the hell they're going to put that big stand up there for?"

They fell us out, and this Jap officer, I mean, he come out in full dress--them polished boots and that saber hanging down. He got up on that stand, and he made a big speech. It seemed like it lasted about twenty minutes. The interpreter got up and said, "Well, boys, the war is over!" And where that American flag come from, I never did know. That night the Japs just left us alone, and that was it.

Marcello: Was it a homemade job, that flag?

Reichle: No, they had little, ol' bitty flags! Some of them had regular flags! How they kept them that long, I don't know. No, they were regular American flags. So the Japs just let us alone, and that was it.

Marcello: But the Japanese still had the guns and were still guarding the camp.

Reichle: No, they left us. They didn't bother us; they was through with us.

Marcello: But the Japanese then just disappeared?

Reichle: Them front-line troops, I don't know where they went. The Japs that was in charge of the camp, they stayed--them Jap officers. The Koreans, they gave them a bag of rice, one pair of shoes, one shirt, and one pair of pants, and told them to get back to Korea the best they could. They were no more subjects of Japan, and they had to get back on their own. They come to us that night begging. It was lucky that none of them came to me.

Every one of them that came to them, they just 'whupped' the dog out of them, and they just disappeared. That's all there was to it. We'd stayed there maybe a week.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying is, did the Japanese still keep you in the camp?

Reichle: No. We stayed but we didn't have to. Somehow, somebody got a truck, and then we went to town to buy our own supplies, I don't know who was in charge. There was a little, ol' town close by. I don't know who paid for them,

Marcello: Was there any celebration that night when the surrender was announced?

Reichle: Oh, as best we could! Yes, sir! I don't know how late we stayed up.

Marcello: Describe what the celebration was like,

Reichle: Just happy and laughing. We didn't have anything to celebrate with--just smoke one or two more cigarettes. If we could have got a drink of whiskey, we sure would have taken that. We was just happy, that's all--just happy.

Marcello: What sort of emotions could you detect on the part of the Japanese?

Reichle: That's what I say. It seemed like you could tell something but not much of anything. Then when they told us the war was over, we didn't see them anymore except if we walked by the guardhouse. Before, if we walked by the guardhouse, we had to salute them. Hell, now we just walked by, and they

didn't pay any attention to us. The reason I think they stayed . . . again, we stayed there maybe a week, and finally they got some trucks and took us down to Bangkok and put us on the docks down there.

Marcello: In the meantime, had you ever left the camp?

Reichle: No, there wasn't anyplace to go. I didn't even go to town. I just went down there to get water.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were there for about a week before you were shipped out by truck. During that week, were you kind of getting a little restless, so to speak?

Reichle: Oh, man, you know that!

Marcello: You know, "When the hell are they going to come and get us?"

Reichle: You know that! We didn't know where to go, so we was better off right where we was. We was taken care of. We had a truck that we'd go get food with, and our cook would cook. We didn't pay no attention to the Japs, and they didn't pay no attention to us.

Marcello: The Japanese did not have any instructions for you. In other words, they had not been told to tell you to stay there.

Reichle: I presume not. I'm presuming that's why them Japs stayed--until they got instructions to take us to Bangkok. I'm guessing that.

Marcello: And the Japanese did take you to Bangkok.

Reichle: They got the trucks, yes. They drove the trucks and took us to Bangkok.

Marcello: So what happens when you get to Bangkok?

Reichle: We didn't see any Japs or anything. We just stayed there at the docks. I don't know who went to town and bought our groceries.

Marcello: You were driven to Bangkok by the Japanese?

Reichle: Yes, in their trucks.

Marcello: And then they disappeared again.

Reichle: Yes. They set up an Allied headquarters downtown, and we could go downtown if we wanted to, but we didn't have any business downtown.

Incidentally, back there sometime they dropped some Red Cross supplies. I was lucky enough to get a new pair of pants, a shirt, and a pair of shoes. I wore them once or twice, but I was going to save them in case we ever was liberated. I saved mine and I washed them several times; I couldn't iron them or anything.

Marcello: Where did you get that Red Cross package? Do you recall?

Reichle: It dropped in there somewhere, but so much of that stuff was dropped that the Japs took it. One time we got a pack of cigarettes apiece and one time a little bit of medicine. But the Japs kept it all.

Marcello: In other words, you never got a full Red Cross package.

Reichle: No, they kept it all.

Marcello: And even when they did distribute any Red Cross material, you might have got a quarter of a package or something like that?

Reichle: Maybe a pack . . . you usually got a pack if you got anything,

as well as I remember.

Marcello: Was it at Bangkok where you met your first Americans?

Reichle: We finally got a little mail . . . oh, at Bangkok? Well, that's the big deal. Again, we stayed there seven or eight or ten days. You know, time got to where it didn't mean so much. We was just fixing to eat lunch one day and here comes-- I may cry when I tell you this--a man with the cleanest, pressed clothes you ever saw. Boy, this is it! We knew it (weeping).

Marcello: Was this an American?

Reichle: Yes, a captain. He walked up to Colonel Tharp and said, "How long before we can have these men ready to go?" Colonel Tharp said, "I can have my men ready in about an hour."

Marcello: What colonel was this?

Reichle: Colonel Tharp. This captain said, "Our men, please." Somebody hollered, "Hell, let's go now." The captain said, "Well, y'all have to eat and pack your clothes." We said, "Eat, hell! We don't want this stuff, and we've got on what we've got, Let's go!" But it took approximately two hours--it seemed like to me three weeks--to find enough trucks. They landed at an ol' abandoned air strip, and this fellow was in Rangoon, Burma, with a combat-cargo plane. He heard there was some Americans in Bangkok, Siam. He detached six planes and took it on his own and landed on that little ol' abandoned airstrip.

Marcello: These were just Americans that were taken out.



Reichle: That's right.

Marcello: Was this where the British tried to pull some rank?

Reichle: Yes, that's right. He'd found this Allied headquarters and went there, and there was some limeys there. There weren't any Americans there. He wanted to know where the Americans was, and the British told them. He told them he'd come after the Americans. The limeys said, "Well, we've got some sick Englishmen here that need to go home." He said, "I've come after Americans. That's all I came after." (chuckle)

We got on the trucks, got off, and they said, "Eighteen men to a plane." That's the first time I ever saw no formation. There were eighteen men to a plane just like that. We started to get on, and that pilot said, "Get back off of here. Get out and line up." We thought, "Oh, hell, here it starts again." He got his buddy and went in the plane and come back, and there was about a couple of packs of cigarettes. (Chuckle) "Come on, y'all, let's go!"

Marcello: By this time, I bet you were to the point where you didn't want to take too many orders from people, did you? You had taken orders, I guess, as long as you'd wanted to,

Reichle: We wasn't going to,

Marcello: So from there you went to Bangkok and then to Calcutta.

Reichle: And they fed us sandwiches. We got to Calcutta just a little bit before daylight.

Marcello: Is this where you got your first real going-over in terms of

medical attention?

Reichle: Yes, that's where we got it. When I was telling you about that dysentery awhile ago . . . well, that's where they gave us those shots for that and treated us for malaria and different things, whatever we had. Depending on what was wrong with you, that's how long you stayed. As soon as they thought you was physically able to come back to the States and not carry a bunch of that jungle disease back, you came home.

Marcello: Did they feed you pretty well there in Calcutta?

Reichle: Oh, boy! There was a kitchen right there by us, and we could go anytime of the night we wanted to and get coffee. It didn't make any difference. We was kings.

Marcello: Could you handle all that food at one time?

Reichle: Sure. I didn't think we could, but we did. Of course, we didn't eat as much as we thought we would because our stomachs just shrunk up.

Marcello: Speaking of food, while you were back there on the railroad, was there one particular food that you thought about more than any other, that you just craved?

Reichle: I guess all we talked about was steak more than anything else. As far as craving, you just craved food, period. It didn't make any difference--just anything from stateside.

Marcello: I gather you all sat around back in the jungle and made up recipes and talked about things like that all the time.

Reichle: Oh, yes--what all we was going to do when we got home.

- Marcello: Did the medical authorities ever make any efforts to ease you back into civilian life again?
- Reichle: No, not to my knowledge. If they did, they did it in Calcutta.
- Marcello: Do you think that most of you were prepared psychologically to meet the "real world" so suddenly?
- Reichle: I don't believe we were, I really don't. When we walked in that hospital, there was the first woman's voice we'd heard in three-and-a-half years . . . , four years, actually, They sounded so squeaky and looked so pale white, They looked like they was sick! We thought they was about to die! Hell, they thought we was sick, but they was worse off than we was.
- Marcello: Did you have to clean up your language quite a bit? I gather that when one becomes a prisoner-of-war and is a prisoner-of-war so long and around men so much, the language kind of gets a little salty.
- Reichle: No. Amazingly, it didn't get that bad. There was a rare few that pulled some stunts I didn't approve of. I had one friend who had gotten back with us, and he came to me one afternoon late and began to talk some of that ol' junk, and I said, "I think a lot of you, and I like your company, but if you're going to talk like that, you just go right on by. I don't want any part of that. I'm a civilized man."
- Marcello: Did you personally have much trouble adjusting to civilian life once again?
- Reichle: If I did, I don't know it. I guess I was too ignorant to know.

Marcello: I heard some of the men say that they had trouble staying in one place very long after they got back.

Reichle: Oh, yes. I still have that problem. Of course, I guess I've been that way all my life. After I got back, the biggest thing, as far as that goes, with me personally . . . if an airplane flew over--I was mechanicking in a shop after I came back--and I was in that building, I couldn't stay. I could not stay. I had to get out and see it. You couldn't tie me in there. It took me I don't know how long to get over that.

You remember voices. There was an ol' boy back there one day, and I was in a car and had my back to him. He walked in and said, "Can I borrow a pair of pliers from somebody?" I said, "Hell, 'Smiley' Long!" I recognized his voice and didn't even see him. He was a recruiter then. Things like that, you just kind of remember.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that some of the men couldn't take all the attention that was lavished upon them when they came back.

Reichle: There was too much personal attention in places, that's right. As Jackie Kenner said, "The federal government really didn't pay any attention to prisoners during World War II until they began to come back from the Korean and Vietnam wars. Then they began to think about the ones from Bataan and Corregidor and Java and Germany."

Marcello: As you look back upon your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as being the key to your survival? What

pulled you through?

Reichle: Determination, to me. That, and "Doc" Hekking and the help of God,

Marcello: Could we possibly add that there was a little bit of luck involved in that you got a job cutting wood rather than working on the railroad?

Reichle: Sure. Anything was lucky, yes. That's right. Anything was lucky. Really, to put it down to one thing, it had to be God's will. That's the only way it could be.

Marcello: Mr. Reichle, I have no further questions. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk to me,

Reichle: I thank you for your time very much.

Marcello: You've said a lot of very important and interesting things, and I'm glad that you decided to come up here and talk with me,

Reichle: Jackie Kenner's the one that got this thing going.

Marcello: Like I said, sometime in the near future, we'll hopefully get him.

Reichle: I'm going to call them. I'm going to call them probably tonight.