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Interview with
Mr. Charley L. Pryor
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Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: *Charley L. Pryor*
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

C. L. Pryor

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: November 4, 1972

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. C. L. Pryor for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 4, 1972, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Pryor in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Pryor was in the Marine Corps and was on the USS Houston when it was sunk by the Japanese, and he then was captured and subsequently spent the rest of the war in various prisoner-of-war camps. Mr. Pryor, to begin this interview would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself? In other words would you tell me where you were born, when you were born, your occupation, your education, things of that nature?

Mr. Pryor: I was born February 9, 1920, in Gavin County, Oklahoma. At the age of nine we moved to West Texas in around, I'd guess, Dickens County in West Texas

and lived in and around the vicinity of Lubbock until I reached age eighteen. At age eighteen I dropped out of school and joined the United States Marine Corps in January, 1939. I took my training in San Diego and was stationed there in San Diego for some period of about a year and a half. Well, it was not quite a year and a half. In February, 1940, I was transferred to the Far East and went aboard the USS Augusta in Shanghai, China, in March of 1940. We stayed in China throughout most of that year operating in and out of Shanghai for brief periods of time. We spent most of the summer in around the northern Chinese ports. We were in and out of Weihaiwei and Chinwangtao and primarily operated out of the port of Tsingtao. While we were in and around Tsingtao, we observed the Japanese preparing for war. This was a Japanese-occupied city. We came in contact with them, and you might say that as we played, they were working for war. They, of course, were on a war footing. We watched them train during this period of time. Two or three incidents came up that, I guess, required the attention of the admiral that involved certain of our American personnel--fleet personnel--not just Augusta sailors or marines, but the Augusta was the

flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, and we did carry the admiral's flag. He was responsible, I guess, more or less to look after most diplomatic affairs. His post was one that was involved in the conduct of diplomacy just as it was one, you know, of the military.

Marcello: Let's just go back a minute here. Why did you decide to enter the Marine Corps?

Pryor: Well, of course, this was, oh, I guess, the tail end of the depression and my family was quite poor. We were not a member of the affluent society, and I found it necessary to stay out of school and work. It was difficult to go ahead and complete an education. I felt that my work was required to help subsist the family, and I felt that the Marine Corps would be a way whereby I could go ahead and maybe further some career. I hoped to finish much of my schooling through correspondence or other means or being able to go to a night school in a large city such as San Diego for this.

Marcello: You know, your answer is one of the stock answers that's usually given by the ex-prisoners when I ask them why they entered the service. They'll say that they joined because they couldn't find a job, because they liked the uniform, or because they liked to travel. These were probably the three primary reasons that most of

the people that I've talked to have given for entering the service.

Pryor: I suspect that I was influenced more by the fact that job opportunities were poor, were not promising at all. I'll not say that it was altogether the uniform that influenced me. I probably would not have recognized a Marine if one had walked in the house. I had never seen one. Of course, I had been a very good student of history in high school, and I guess I was more or less addicted to reading war history. Of course, the Marine Corps has made considerable history as a military force, and I was impressed with the Marine Corps, and I thought that they were an outstanding military group. That more than anything influenced me. Of course, I had never considered the travel altogether, although certainly the opportunity had been there. I've traveled completely around the world. Through travel either in that period of time and subsequently, I've been in every country in the Far East with exception of Afghanistan, I suppose. So travel is there. It's part of such a career.

Marcello: How did you become a sea-going marine? Or why did you decide to become a sea-going marine?

Pryor: Well, sea-going duty was not the most favored duty in the Marine Corps . . .

Marcello: Why was that?

Pryor: . . . in this time. Well, it was considered too much spit-and-polish to it. You did act, of course, as a security force for the ship. Moreover, you were on the capital ships. That would be the aircraft carriers, battleships, and heavy cruisers. You were there as the nucleus for a ship's landing force whereby the complement of the ship and its forces might be projected, you know, for some immediate reason on the beach. Your Marine detachment would be the base unit. Then much of the rest of the duty would be ceremonial. That involved a great deal of what we referred to in the Marine Corps as the spit-and-polish--seeing that the brass was shined, your shoes were shined, acting as your orderlies for your captain of the ship and your flag officers when the ship carried an admiral's flag. It was not the most popular duty with Marines in that time, but as I was ordered to the Far East, I thought, I had just as well go aboard the USS Augusta if I could be accepted. Marines that were chosen for sea duty most generally were, well, you might say "selected individuals." They were usually taller, and I felt that at 6 feet 1 inch that I would be tall enough. I had considered myself a pretty sharp Marine back in San Diego when I'd served

with the 6th Marines there in an infantry unit. I thought if I could be chosen for a billet on the USS Augusta, well, then I'd be entitled to have an opportunity to see more of the country. That prompted me to ask for it. I did volunteer for sea duty.

Marcello: How did an old country boy from Oklahoma and West Texas take to sea duty? Did you adapt rather easily?

Pryor: Well, fairly well. Your Marine Corps training is, I believe, the best that any military force offers. One thing that I believe that they do above all things that is a positive good is that it equips you to handle unusual eventualities so that you're completely confident--that your training will equip you to handle any situation that might arise suddenly and unforeseen. This idea of a country boy going aboard a ship and representing a complement of Marines offered no fears.

Marcello: How about seasickness?

Pryor: No, I had never been seasick. I know as I was transferred to the Far East . . . I left San Diego and we went to Mare Island and went aboard a transport in the Mare Island Navy Yard, and just immediately adjacent to the West Coast there's an area of very rough water. It's induced by ground swells, and in the old Navy of that day you used to refer to it as the "Potato Patch."

Our ship hugged this coast all the way up. Well, that was a real test. That was my first trip, of course, aboard ship other than for a brief period of time when we were on operations in around San Clemente Island and off the southern coast of California. But I had not experienced any seasickness except one time in Tsingtao. In Tsingtao we had a typhoon. A typhoon came up through there, and the water got a little bit rough. A number of us were caught ashore on liberty, and we had to stay over all night. Next morning they sent fifty-foot motor launches in for us and brought them in behind Junk Harbor. Tsingtao Harbor is a beautiful anchorage, but within the harbor itself there is another sheltered anchorage that the Chinese had established by putting big rocks in there. This afforded a sheltered anchorage for many of these Chinese junks--the small ship--that really was a place of residence and a means of subsistence of many of these Chinese people. So we brought the motor launches in behind this breakwater, and we all came aboard. When we cleared this breakwater, well, that was it. I experienced that first sensation of seasickness. Of course, I was not by myself; I was in select company. I know that our engineering officer then was a

lieutenant commander by the name of Gingrich. Gingrich retired as a vice admiral from the Navy, and he was just as sick as I was because (chuckle) he beat me to the railing. But we never experienced any of this. I'd guess one might be addicted or susceptible to seasickness. You pretty soon get used to it, and it would be an unusual weather situation that would bring it on--stormy weather or operating in some of the seas as we did later on in around the southern Philippines and then later on the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean is much like the "Potato Patch" off of San Francisco--large ground swells--no extremely rough water that would, you might say, produce white caps, but just this gradual ground swell. You'd feel it on the bottom of your feet as the ship would be swept up, you know. You'd feel the pressure on your feet and then the lessening of pressure as it responded to the swell itself.

Marcello: Did you board the USS Augusta at San Diego?

Pryor: No, I boarded the USS Augusta in Shanghai, China, about three o'clock one morning. The Augusta used to anchor in the middle of the Hwang Po River, and we had an established anchorage there. In fact, we were just about restricted to getting into that anchorage, and

that's as far as we could go. Usually, during the day, and certainly when the tide went out, we rested there in the mud. We couldn't have moved if we had wanted to. But the Augusta used to spend the winters in the Philippines where it was nice and warm. Then in the early spring she would go to Shanghai, and it gets exceptionally hot in Shanghai in the summertime, usually about the middle of June. I know it was about the middle of June when we went to North China where the climate was very favorable--cool, very nice. Then in the early fall, probably in September, we could come back to Shanghai and stay in Shanghai until sometime in early November. Then in early November we'd come back to the Philippines.

Marcello: Well, you mentioned that you didn't board the Augusta until you got to Shanghai. Were you on several other ships before you were on the Augusta?

Pryor: No. Just the transport, just the USS Henderson.

Marcello: You went aboard the Henderson, and it took you over to Shanghai, and that's where you boarded the Augusta.

Pryor: Right.

Marcello: What was the purpose of the Augusta over in China?

Pryor: The Augusta served as a flagship for the Asiatic Fleet. Actually, I'd guess that as you would look to the conduct

of diplomacy, it was nothing more than just the representative, well, symbolic token of showing the flag. Of course, that is one of the recognized ways in the conduct of diplomacy--to show the flag. We had certainly an ineffective fighting force if you would compare it with the Japanese fleet. We used to see many of their ships in and around our area of operations. But it was just symbolic of the United States presence in the Far East, and as I said a moment ago, our admiral had as much a diplomatic responsibility as he had a military responsibility. I know that as we traveled from one place to another the diplomatic officials were just as quick to come aboard and pay their respects to our admiral as the military officials would be. He was a ranking military man as well as being a ranking diplomat, and so such people as consul-generals and diplomatic officials of lesser rank would come aboard and pay their respects to our admiral.

Marcello: How old were you by this time?

Pryor: Well, I was twenty by this time.

Marcello: What were your impressions of China at that time, if you can place yourself back in perspective as a twenty year old Marine?

Pryor: Well, certainly China was an amazing world at this time. I would suppose the thing that impressed me most was just the teeming mass of people everywhere you went. This would be certainly so in the cities which we visited, and as you got out away from the cities and traveled around the countryside, this would be notable, too, in the small villages. The Chinese lived in the villages and farmed the surrounding area, and even the village life was just a teeming mass of humanity with villages very close to one another. Of course, being a boy raised on the farm, we were interested in how these people lived in that place. It was not an uncommon sight--and we marveled at it often--to see a Chinaman in the field with his wooden plow. He would have a cow or possibly a donkey and his wife hooked up to the plow. The wife was usually out in front (chuckle) of the cow. I don't know whether you'd call that altogether equal rights or not. But in the cities the thing that strikes you immediately, except for the teeming mass of people, was the utter poverty in which these people lived. It was not an uncommon sight to see them, I guess, subsist only on maybe one

small rice ball a day and maybe a couple of fishheads. I know that as we used to sit there at anchorage in the Hwang Po River . . . of course, in Shanghai there's no such thing as a sewage system. The raw garbage was disposed of in the nearest stream, and, of course, all those streams emptied into the Hwang Po. At nighttime all human waste would be gathered up in carts that we used to refer to as the "honey cart," and then it would be taken and dumped into the closest stream. So along about two or three o'clock in the morning there was kind of a ripe smell around the place. We used to dump our garbage over the side, and the Chinese would scramble in these little boats, sampans, and what we used to call "bum boats" to pick up this garbage. They would scramble for this refuse and garbage that we would dump over the side. I know that then it was not an uncommon sight to see dead people on the street as these derelects would huddle up into the vestibules of the businesses gathered along the street. You could pass along there in the early morning hours, sometimes even approaching midday, and these bodies would have not yet been removed. They'd just be huddled up there, and the passing crowds just ignored him all

that time. You quickly get the impression in that part that human life is probably the cheapest commodity that there would be.

China was an amazing place, and particularly Shanghai. We like to say that San Francisco is a melting pot of peoples, but certainly in Shanghai you'd never see anything that would compare to it. The French concession was just a little bit of French. Of course, the International Settlement was more or less . . . well, you might say a mixture of the English and Chinese influence. But you saw all manner of peoples--French and Greek and Italian--and, of course, many of these countries had troops there. We saw French troops, we saw Italian Marines. Then, of course, there was a great colony of Russians--the White Russian, you know, politically speaking, the Whites as opposed to the Reds. There was a tremendous colony of these people there. In fact, the Shanghai Volunteer Corps was a volunteer regiment staffed altogether by these Russians.

Marcello: What was the Shanghai Volunteer Corps? This is something I've never heard of?

Pryor: It was a military unit, but apparently from my understanding it was more like one of our reserve units

would be. But they were, I guess, subject to being called to immediate active duty with the military. I would believe that they were probably organized at the regimental level, and the personnel would be Russian, these White Russians. They organized pretty much to provide a defense for the International Settlement just as the 4th Marines and the San Marino . . . I know the Italian Marine unit there was the San Marino Battalion. And then we had English forces.

Marcello: Who supported this White Russian force?

Pryor: As far as the military support, I have no idea. I don't know where they would find their military support. I would think that probably as to pay and so forth probably it was a volunteer service. But as to how they were equipped and along that order, I don't know. I don't know where it came from. Now the International Settlement was governed by a composite council. I know there were so many English on that. In fact, the majority of them were English. I believe the French had some representation, and then there might have been three Americans on there. It might have been that they could have been equipped through that--might have been paid by this governing body or the International Settlement itself. I don't know.

Marcello: After observing the agricultural life, poverty, and the filth in China, what was your attitude towards the Chinese as a young twenty-year-old Marine?

Pryor: Well, certainly you had to sympathize with the Chinese. I suppose even then we were like the young American soldiers that were to follow along behind us. I think that altogether the young American serviceman is a pretty effective ambassador. I sometimes am angered at all this I read and I hear in the newspapers and from those who speak by way of the mass media of all, I guess, the horrors that we've inflicted on the North Vietnamese. Very little is ever said about the South, and so very little is ever said about the positive good that our people have accomplished. I know that wherever we've gone . . . in Korea we've noted the same thing, and I know that in South Vietnam that we've built schools, we have built and supported orphanages, and I would presume that our military people still do it. But you don't read of such things as that. The American military personnel altogether--you take them individually and you take them collectively as a group--they have very warm feeling for people who are in need. It was just as it was, I know, in the China of that day. I probably

gave away more money just to those people that . . . there were beggars all over the place, and if you had something, you just couldn't resist giving whenever you were asked. Well, after a time, you became . . . I guess you became more or less accustomed to seeing such things, but even then you still help them when you can. But to see these people as we understood China of that day and to know some of the things in the background . . . I know that we saw many wealthy people, evidence of so much wealth on the one hand and such abject poverty on the other. I did read somewhat of the history of China of that time and the conditions of China at that time, and as I've gone ahead and done some other study in this area, I do not for a moment fail to understand how China fell so easily to the Communists. You may have read this book, Red Star Over China by Edgar Snow.

Marcello: Yes.

Pryor: Well, he's a journalist but I like to think Edgar Snow is more than what we consider just an ordinary journalist. I think he's pretty much a scholarly journalist, but, of course, his writings are not as carefully researched and documented as one of our scholarly publications would be. But from my actual

observation in China of this time before we entered World War II that Edgar Snow's observations are just as valid as anything and just as real as anything that I've ever read. I know that he's been accused by Joe McCarthy and some of his followers as being a communist. It might be that he is. He lived with these people, and I suppose he was sympathetic to them. Well, I, too, was sympathetic to their position. I just couldn't see . . . it's hard for the human mind to understand the misery and poverty and filth in which people live-- that humans live--until you see it with your own eyes. I can sit here and tell about it, and it's hard for anybody to grasp it. You just have to see it.

Marcello: I guess as close as I've ever come to that myself would be in going to Mexico, and perhaps in many ways what you see in Mexico and some of the border towns in no way compares with what you possibly saw in China.

Pryor: I've been in all the border towns from California clear on around to Brownsville and Matamoros, and there's no place on the United States-Mexican border in which you see conditions that might be even remotely comparable to what you would have seen in China in 1940. There's only one other place that I've seen comparable conditions, and that would have been in

India among the non-castes, particularly this group that was referred to as the "Untouchables." Now these people may have had as bad a lot. It would be comparable. But in no other place have I seen such abject miseries comparable with what I had seen in China.

Marcello: What did you do on your liberty hours?

Pryor: That'd be a misleading question. Of course, China had much to offer. It was a little bit of Greece. It was a little bit of Italy. It was a little bit of France. It was a little bit of England. You might see some American influence there. We had an American school in China. I know that we had almost anything you'd want. We had an outstanding club where we could find most of what we wanted in the way of recreation. Then, of course, the night life of Shanghai in those days, and so too in most of the other port cities in which we ever went, particularly Tsingtao, was, well, just the normal night life, you know, dancing and dining and good food and always good company. This would be the order of things. And, of course, an American military man then was . . . you might consider him as being oft referred to as the affluent class. He would be wealthy.

Marcello: I gather that that pay, even though it wasn't very great by American standards, went a long way in China and the Far East in general.

Pryor: It did. I know when I enlisted in the Marine Corps, our pay scale then was \$21.00 a month. Of course, the Navy held out twenty cents of that for hospitalization, so it was \$20.80. We used to save \$3.70 a day--three meals and seventy cents. But about the middle of January--I believe on January 15th, 1940--I was promoted to Pfc by the best Marine that ever wore the uniform, "Chesty" Puller. He recently died. Along about the same time the military services received the first raise in pay. Congress raised our pay. I suppose we could see that . . . of course, Europe is at war, and we can see the necessity of preparing for war. Of course, along with the preparations usually go some financial inducement to kind of make the military service a little more palatable to those not as eager to volunteer as some of the rest of us had been. So we received a pay raise. My pay then after being promoted to Pfc went up to \$36.00 a month. The rate of exchange in China along about that time varied anywhere from about twenty to twenty-four mex. We referred to Chinese money as mex.

Marcello: Was this a Marine term or was this . . .

Pryor: No, this was a fairly common term, at least among the Americans, and I know, too, the Scottish referred to it as mex. The term originated from the fact that I believe the coinage there was the yuan. That would have been a . . . well, they were on the decimal system, and there was 100 cents to one yuan. The yuan would correspond to a dollar. But the term mex probably originated from the fact that it seems like most of the printed money--the paper money that we saw--was printed by the Mexico Banknote Company. Evidently they had their money printed in Mexico, and so we called it mex. And the exchange would range from about twenty to twenty-four yuan to one American dollar. Oh, somebody'd come in from the beach and say, "Well, the moneychangers are paying twenty-four to one this morning." And immediately you'd make arrangements to send one of them over there, you know, with what you could gather and exchange your U.S. currency for this yuan. If you hit it just right, of course, you could see that this would be a considerable windfall. You'd have a little extra money. But to give you a representative idea of how well off you would be in financial or economic terms, a big meal, I mean an outstanding like evening or dinner meal . . . you might begin with a soup and

salad and maybe sometimes with something extra with that. They were kind of fond of things like sardines. Well, you'd have an appetizer--soup and salad--and then you'd have the biggest steak that . . . we always bought the biggest steak that the place afforded, and it would come with a baked potato, and they'd put the little fried soybeans or bamboo shoots on everything. You would have this, and you'd have dessert and drinks with your meal. Such a meal would run you in the neighborhood of fifteen cents in United States terms. When we were on the shore and on the beach, we usually wore civilian clothing. Quite often we wore this. You could buy a tailor-made suit made out of the finest English tweed or Irish tweed or Scotch tweed or Italian gabardine, English gabardine, or the finest imported cloth from Italy and England or Ireland. Such a suit made by a Chinese tailor . . . and you could pick the pattern out of the most recent copy of Esquire magazine. These tailors could make it. Such a suit would cost you anywhere from, let's say, from ten to twelve dollars, maybe \$12.50 per suit. A topcoat made out of India cashmere material would run you about ten dollars. We wore tailor-made shoes made by Italian cobblers. These shoes would run us about two dollars

a pair. Shirts made out of Egyptian broadcloth--the long staple cotton that felt almost like silk--with pearl buttons . . . such a shirt with monogram, of course, would cost us about fifty cents.

Marcello: I gather most of you had tailor-made uniforms, also.

Pryor: All our uniforms of the Marine detachment aboard ship were required to be tailored. This was the outstanding bunch of Marines, I think, in all the Marine Corps. I have been around the World's Fair detachment of Marines. I have seen the drill teams that operate in and around Quantico, Virginia. I have never seen a comparable bunch of Marines to what we had on the Augusta.

Marcello: In what way?

Pryor: Well, just the physical . . . one thing their physical appearance. To the best of my recollection, we only had about four Marines out of the complement of about sixty that were under six feet. All our uniforms . . . of course, we took the regular GI issue of Marine uniforms and then had it tailored. All our buttons were gold-plated. We had seven big buttons on the front of our blouse, we had two small ones on the collar, and then there were three on each sleeve. To get those on the collar gold-plated would cost us about \$2.50. All you had to do was blow your breath

on them and rub them with an undershirt, you know, and they'd just glitter. We wore tailor-made belts. All our khaki clothing--our khaki shirts, and trousers--were all tailor-made all the way out of the English material. We had to wear tailor-made caps, and the only concession we made to this was that we did have patent leather visors on the caps. But it was just an outstanding bunch of Marines in size and then in the way we were equipped and dressed. We were just the most outstanding group I've ever seen.

Marcello: What effort did you make, again as a young Marine, to try and understand more fully what China was like-- Chinese life and things of that nature? In other words, did you visit all of the historical places? Did you examine the art treasures of China in the museums and things of this nature? Did you ever get out into the countryside, out of the port cities?

Pryor: Not far into the countryside. Usually time would not permit it. But we did travel far enough into the countryside to see what the country was like. In China at that time you could leave the immediate environment of the city, and it was just as rural as it would have been, I guess, if you had been a hundred miles inland. It just seemed that here's the city

that sat right in the middle of a rural area, and you cross an imaginary line drawn right here, and you're out in the villages. Then here's the great city on the one side. Of course, we did go to most all the interesting places. I heard the other day Senator Yarborough speak at the chapel at Dallas Baptist College, and he talked about Mr. Nixon, oh, more or less and his trip to China and thinking it was a big feat to go up there and climb up on the big wall. Well, we went up to the big wall. We've been on the big wall, too. Then in and around those cities we did this. We went to most of the places that are considered tourist attractions or would be considered tourist attractions. Tsingtao was an outstanding place in that respect. It was a German treaty port, you understand. There was German forts up in the hills overlooking the harbor, and it was more representative of Germany than it would have been of China in many of the business sections of the city. It was altogether a German influence. But we visited and we took many, many pictures, and this is the thing that I regret more than all else, I guess, of the many things that I might have lost when the Houston was sunk. I lost my picture albums, and so I have very little now in the way of

pictorial records that would permit me to reminisce about many of these things.

Marcello: Did you necessarily look down upon the Chinese with disgust? Or did you look upon them with a great deal of pity and understanding?

Pryor: No, I don't think that . . . I know that in my own mind and in my own heart that I never looked down on the Chinese with disgust. In any place I have ever gone in my life, in all the travels clear around the world and in all the many countries I've been, I have always considered that I'm the guest. This is their country, and I'm a visitor. I'm a guest. I would want them to treat me as I would want to be treated were they a guest in my country and the other way around, too. But I'd suppose that, as I say, the young American military man--I've lived with a lot of them, seen them in places all around the world--sometimes they are prone to say, "Well, now these people are natives. They're not, maybe, as good as I am and so forth." He'll share what he has, and this will be particularly true with young people, with kids. But oftentimes I think we may tend to be a little bit overbearing in many other ways, but I still have a big heart when they do need help and we'll give

it. But I never looked upon the Chinese that way. I know that I wouldn't want to trade places with any of them. They were a hardy people, but the life that they had to live was just not what you think the good Lord intended for any of his people.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with the other foreign contingents in China? I assume that you spent a good deal of your time around Shanghai, perhaps the bulk of your time.

Pryor: We had quite a lot of contact with the other military contingents. Of course, the whole purpose for all of them being there was to give protection to the International Settlement and French concession from encroachment by either side, either by the Chinese, the forces of Chiang Kai shek, or the Japanese forces.

Marcello: By this time, of course, the Japanese had already invaded North China, and I guess most of the countryside at that time was controlled by the Japanese.

Pryor: Yes, and they controlled the environs of Shanghai-- Haongkew and Chapei area. Those two areas particularly. Of course, the Soochow Creek formed the immediate boundary between Shanghai and the International Settlement proper, and these two areas. And, of course, this was why we had all these troops in there, and we

had frequent contact with the Italians, not altogether friendly, and they were assumed to be our chief rivals around the night spots and so forth.

Marcello: I've received this same information from other Marines, also.

Pryor: Our relations with the Italians were not too favorable. We got along fairly well with the English troops that were there, and we got along famously with the Scottish. The Seaforth Highlanders were in China, and so were the U. S. Marines, and, of course, our sailors, too. The Highlanders got along just first rate, very well, just outstanding. I've been around the Scottish a number of times since, and I think that they're just some of the finest people and one of the worlds outstanding military forces. Anytime you want to go with, I guess, a first class military man, well, just pick on one of these Scotties, and you've found him.

Marcello: I was kind of amused at what you had to say about the Italians because I have heard that from several other people. I think this was especially true with regard to the White Russian women, among others. I think apparently the Marines would wine and dine the White Russian women until closing time and then the Italians

would, apparently, move in and . . . it created some hard feelings.

Pryor: Well, we had one advantage. We had more money, and these White Russians used to say, "Marineski, I like you very much, but for forty dollar I could like you much more."

Marcello: How about the Japanese? Did you have very much contact at all with the Japanese?

Pryor: Not in the Shanghai area. Of course, occasionally we'd see them in the Hoangkew area. We could go into the countryside through Hoangkew, and we saw Japanese forces in and around Hoangkew. We mingled with the Japanese, well, considerably in Tsingtao, China. Of course, all Tsingtao was a Japanese-occupied city. Well, it was just prudent not to go to the same places that they frequented in any appreciable numbers. And, of course, they never pressed the issue, too. They restricted their troops, evidently, to places where we would not choose to go. I guess it was something that was just worked out more by just common sense than through any negotiated purpose. Although we'd met them on the street in the central part of the city and oftentimes we'd see some of them in restaurants or cafes in which we would go to eat, most generally in the

evening hours, we'd seldom see these Japanese. They would be only in the streets and thoroughfares around the city, and in the places we'd frequent on liberty, we'd very seldom run into a Japanese. And if so, it would usually be that they would be in civilian clothes. In North China, in Tsingtao, we were always in uniform. We had no access to any civilian clothes, and so we would always be in uniform. I know that a couple of our Marines got in trouble one time up there, and it required the Admiral's very diligent attention to get us out of that scrape.

Marcello: You mentioned us. Were you included in that scrape?

Pryor: No, no. There was three young Marines walking down the street. I remember their names. One of them was named Choate, one was named D. K. Manning, and one of them was named Ames, and I can't remember Ames' first name. But they were walking down the street, and a Japanese who apparently looked like a civilian staggered out of a bar and pushed one of them aside. I believe it was Ames.

Marcello: That was the wrong thing to do to a Marine.

Pryor: That was their story. So he immediately clobbered him. There was a couple of other Japanese came along about that same time, so they had a pretty good scrape.

It turned out that this individual that they had tangled with first was a Japanese Naval officer, and so that created some little bit of an incident. I know that we were scheduled to go to sea the next day, and the Admiral had to stay ashore and straighten this affair out. These guys were restricted then; there was no more liberty in Tsingtao for them.

Marcello: Were you ever able to observe how the Japanese treated the Chinese in the Japanese occupied areas?

Pryor: Well, superficially, yes. In and around that area, and, of course, later on we had seen it, as the Japanese treat all people wherever they go. The Japanese soldier, wherever he goes, is a very, very poor ambassador. He's not an ambassador at all of good will, but ill will. He'll create it. I have a great deal of admiration for the Japanese people. I've been in Japan since World War II has ended, and I hold no animosity toward them whatsoever; in fact, I have a great deal of admiration for them. I think they're a highly industrious people and an inventive people, and they are . . . certainly you can see the Japan of today, and if you understand the Japanese people, it's no great wonder. You do not stop, even for an instant, to marvel at how could they do it;

you understand how they have brought Japan to what she is today. But the Japanese of that day is pretty much like the Japanese of our own POW days. He was abusive, extremely abusive of any authority that he had, and, of course, most of this authority would have been directed toward the Chinese people with whom they would come in contact. Now we saw this. It would be in and around Tsingtao proper, and for the most part it would be the people that performed the menial duties and tasks of a city such as Tsingtao would be--the rickshaw pullers and many of those that used the streets in one way or two. But the Japanese soldier is abusive of almost any person or group of people over whom he has any sort of authority.

Marcello: Can you cite any specific examples from your experiences in China of these Japanese abuses?

Pryor: Well, it was not an uncommon thing to see them in and around . . . well, directing much of the traffic. Most of the traffic there that the Chinese were involved in was either pulling a rickshaw or a cart. There were very few trucks and so forth that belonged to any Chinese. If they moved rice or coal or any other commodity, it was usually on a hand-drawn cart with a number of Chinese in and around it with tow ropes

and so forth and so on. I know it was not an uncommon sight to see those people enter an intersection, and maybe a Japanese truck was held up by this, and so there would be usually first the screams of abuse and so forth. I didn't understand what they had to say; I didn't even then know whether it would be in Japanese or Chinese. Quite often then, if there would be one directing traffic, he would get around there with a . . . and most of them even then carried kind of a wooden sword, like the Samurai sword, but it would be made of wood, and they'd whop these Chinese with this. It was not an uncommon thing to see them kick them to get them moving along. Well, just things of that. Not any one specific instance, but many, many instances that would be represented by something like that. Of course, as abuse to the point of taking of life, I never saw any of that. I am satisfied that there would be instances in which it would go on because I know that it was a common thing in and around Shanghai of that time that you could buy these pictures. Now the source of them, I don't know, but it would show Japanese beheading Chinese and this sort of thing, so I'm satisfied that it must have gone on. But any Japanese abuse of a Chinaman that would necessitate

him requiring medical attention or no, we didn't see that. But just that that would tend to degrade an individual and suffer, let's say, maybe minor pain and so forth, this was a common thing. But not so far as to the taking of life or say breaking of a limb or something that would require hospital attention.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that the Japanese were perhaps more guilty of this sort of thing than, let's say, any of the other foreign contingents, whether it be the English or the Italians or the Scots or whoever it might be?

Pryor: Yes. Yes, this would be decidedly so. You would not see anything more than a minor argument between the Italians or the English or the French and Chinese. It would usually involve some business that maybe you think he was overcharging you for pulling you some distance in a rickshaw, or you were hassling over some object that he had for sale and so forth. Of course, this was pretty much like the way we . . . well, the situation along the Mexican border. You go into these souvenir and curio places, and they start out with a price and eventually you can probably buy the thing for half or less than half of what he is asking. Now

much of that goes on and did go on in the China of that day. You might expect they'd want the maximized profits, and you're not too prone to let them maximize profits. You might be willing to give him what he wants, but you've got to argue and fuss and threaten him and so forth to get him down there to let him know there is a real price for that, and then anything over and above that, you wanted him to understand that it was "kumshaw." That "kumshaw" term, I guess you can spell "kumshaw" anyway you want to. I guess your spelling would be as good as mine. But "kumshaw," you understand that that's a gift; I give that to you. I'm not buying this thing for, say, fourteen dollars mex; I'm buying it for seven dollars mex, and then I'll give you seven dollars "kumshaw" which was what he wanted in the first place, you know, the fourteen dollars. This was one thing that we were usually always particular about, is to get to that price and make it understood that you knew what that price ought to be, but then you'd go ahead and give him some "kumshaw."

Marcello: Just to show him that you were a generous person.

Pryor: Yes.

Marcello: As a young Marine, how closely were you following world events at the time?

Pryor: Well, actually, probably not as much as . . . well, I suppose not many of us followed world events too closely. For one thing, you traveled around a great deal. We were in and out of port on maneuvers and exercises, and, of course, a daily newspaper would not be available. The news that we would have would be picked up in normal radio transmission in our communications and radio room, and then the ship would publish a brief outline or summarization of the news of the day when we'd be out at sea. And so we were aware of what was going on in the world to some extent but not to any detailed extent that you might have been were you afforded access to regular newspapers and so forth. Even when we were in port, there was little in the way of newspapers that would be available, such as there would be, let's say, in a city such as the United States.

Marcello: Did you think there was a likelihood of war developing between the United States and Japan in rather short order at the time you were there?

Pryor: Yes, I think most of us realized that. For myself, we probably figured war would be a matter of time, even beginning in the summer of 1939. I know, as Europe went to war in 1939, we began to observe changes.

Our training was altogether changed. We began to acquire more in the way of materiel and equipment to train with. We began to accelerate the training of our reserve units, and their training was much more meaningful than it had been in previous times. So gradually over this period of time, from the time Europe went to war in '39 on down 'til this time in 1940, we knew the Japanese were continually training for war. We observed it. We could see them in the hills and even coming down at times and conducting exercises on the beaches in and around Tsingtao. They were in a continual preparation for war. Of course, they were involved in war. They had invaded north China in 1937, and so war had been a real thing to these people for some three years now. We believed that it would be just a matter of time until we would be at war. We had no idea as to how much of a period of grace we would have, but it was to come.

Marcello: If war did come, did you and the other Marines think you could handle the Japanese in pretty short order? Was there a feeling of overconfidence?

Pryor: I would suppose so. We felt that we could handle maybe ten or a dozen of them at least, anyway they

wanted to go. And surprisingly enough, we saw them; we knew what they were. We saw them in everyday training exercises and activities. We were probably the only Marines . . . I'd say that we might have been the only Marines that were permitted to see them right there as they were training for war. I would not suppose that the Marines in around . . . certainly not around Shanghai. They could only see them across in the Hoangkew and Chapei areas, but there you could not observe what they were actually doing in preparing for war, nor would you be able to in Tientsin or Peking. But in Tsingtao, we could see it; we could see what they did, man on man and in small units and even company sized units. We thought, "Well, gosh, we'd take anyhow a dozen of them." So I would suppose that we were possessed of a little bit of overconfidence.

Marcello: What sort of an image did you have of the typical Japanese? Was it the old cartoon caricature of the individual with buck teeth and horn-rimmed glasses and the big grin on his face?

Pryor: Of course, that's not altogether a misleading presentation. This is such a description and understanding of their nature as based pretty much on real observation. This would have been a common . . . well, let's say it would

not have been an uncommon appearance for the Japanese soldier of that day--glasses, small stature, most generally stocky, and, of course, very, very ill-kempt, I suppose. Their web gear--that would be their personal equipment, cartridge belts, and so forth and so on--would not be well kept. Their rifles, the stock would not be shined with linseed oil as we kept ours; the bluing job on them, even when new, was not a good job. Of course, we thought that their uniform was about the most ridiculous thing that anyone ever designed. I never did think, even on down until World War II days, that any part of it was ever practical let alone being presentable. This is all that we would ever see them in. Even their dress uniform looks like a couple of sacks hanging on them. So there was not a great deal about the individual Japanese soldier or their unit that commanded respect or attention at that time.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you ever see any Japanese Marines at the time?

Pryor: Well, when you refer to Japanese Marines as such, there is really no comparable group to the Marine Corps, as such. They do have forces that serve somewhat the same purpose as our Marines, but they call them Special Sea Forces. They are Special Sea Forces,

and they are not known as Marines as such. I know that after we were captured, they would ask you your service. Well, kaigun and rikagun are the terms for army and navy they understand. And so you tell them "Marine," and so the first thing you get is "Nani?" That's "What?" Then you have to explain to them, well, you're "sukoshi," as little. Well, it means in terms of "little bit." Now little in size, such as you say "small person" or "small cat or dog" like these around here would be chisai. But sukoshi means little as to amount, and we used to have to explain this business of Marine to them. Well, we are part-Navy, "sukoshi-kaigun," and were part-Army, we were "sukoshi-rikagun." So we're a little bit of both. So we would have to make this explanation to them, so that they could kind of understand that we were not altogether soldiers nor were we sailors. So from that we gathered that they had no groups, and then later on some of them told us they did have forces that were to carry out pretty much the same functions that Marines did, but they were referred to as Special Sea Forces. But we never knew them. We could not distinguish them in Tsingtao or in any other place in which we ever traveled.

Marcello: This is what I was leading up to because I've heard several other of the ex-prisoners talk about Japanese Marines and observe that they were usually quite large fellows. In fact, they said that they were perhaps as big as an American soldier, maybe in some cases bigger than the average American soldier.

Pryor: I think that sometimes they're referring to, oh, I don't know. I think we kind of got the idea somewhere along the line that the Japanese Imperial Guards were Marines, but there was an elite corps of Japanese Imperial Guards. Their job was to guard the Emperor. Well, I've got a book around here . . . you may have read it. It's good history. Oh, there it is behind you--Behind Japan's Surrender by Lester Brooks. You might read that. I think that's one of the best books that I've run onto concerning the behind-the-scenes, more or less, events that led up to Japan's acceptance of surrender. The Imperial Guards, many of them mutinied. We knew of these people, and I think that some of our people probably got the wrong idea--that these people were a select body of Marines such as we understood Marines to be. But other than this, these Sea Forces were . . . on, I met some of them. We saw some of them in and around Java after we were captured, and they were

more like the soldiers, the land forces, except they used to wear the anchors on their caps; instead of the star, they wore the anchors. They were not any different from the run-of-the-mill Japanese military man. I believe that there's probably some error of conception as to who these people were. I rather think that rather than being Marine forces as we would identify them, I think they must be referring to the Japanese Imperial Guards.

Marcello: Or at least some other type of elite outfit, perhaps.

Pryor: Now there are some of these units that were recruited particularly, let's say from northern Japan, particularly from Hokkaido, and these people are large. There are some of them that will be well over six feet tall and weigh 210-220 pounds. It's not an uncommon thing to see Japanese up here in northern Japan, particularly on the island of Hokkaido and even the northern tip of Honshu . . . that's the main island where Tokyo is situated. But Japan . . . evidently, many of their forces were recruited like back in the Revolutionary and Civil War period. An individual would go out here and recruit his own military unit, and many of the Japanese military forces were identified not by any particular designation, for example, as the 27th Regiment

of Infantry or the 14th Battalion or any such thing, but as the Japanese commander's name. And as oftentimes, he recruited that group. They might all come from one area, kind of like . . . well, you take these National Guard people that you're interviewing. They all come from certain areas. Well, you'd find some of these forces. I know that these Special Sea Forces would usually come from a port city and be identified with a port city. Their jobs, though, and responsibilities were more like those of our United States Marine Corps, rather than sea forces or naval forces or land forces.

Marcello: When did you leave China, and under what circumstances did you leave?

Pryor: Well, our departure from China was just no more than routine. We left Shanghai in, oh, I suppose it must have been about the middle of November in 1940, and this was the general custom that we would leave about this time. It was beginning to get cold, and in the mornings it was not uncommon to see heavy frost in and around and ice, and so this was just the common thing. We'd leave about this time and go back to the Philippines and operate in and around the Philippine waters out of Manila, of course. This would be our . . . more or less we'd be home ported in Manila for

this period of time and then operate in and around the islands of the Philippines through the winter months. So we left in about the middle of November, went back to the Philippines, and we took our normal training, peacetime training, maneuvering, conducting our exercises at sea.

Marcello: When you got to the Philippines in November of 1940, did you see a lot of extraordinary activity?

Pryor: No, not at this particular time, not in '40. But then I would say we began to observe unusual preparations for war beginning in '41, probably in the summer of '41. I know that our exercises, as we conducted maneuvers with our other vessels of the fleet and so forth, were more warlike and usually longer in duration, and, well, just speeded up, just more designed to whip you into combat shape, combat readiness. Then in the summer we began to see, I guess, new ships coming in. We saw more war materials coming in by freighter, transport, being unloaded. I'd guess, too, in the summer of 1941, General MacArthur was ordered back to active duty with the United States military forces. Before that time, I was transferred, incidentally, to the USS Houston from the Augusta when the Houston came to the Philippines in November, 1940, to relieve the

USS Augusta as the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. I had thought that I would come back to the states with the "Augie," as we called her.

Marcello: Were you ready to come back to the States?

Pryor: Well, I guess so. You'd kind of like to stay with the people you've been with, and I had been with these people for a good long while. The "Augie" seemed to be home, and I did work for Admiral Hart and Admiral Purnell. I was part of the flag complement, you know. Purnell was one of the finest men I guess you could ever work for. He was Admiral Hart's Chief of Staff. Admiral Hart directed that all personnel working with his flag would be transferred to the USS Houston. So up until the day before I was actually transferred, I thought that I'd be coming back to the States with the Augusta, but then I was transferred to the Houston. On the Houston, we continued pretty much the same routine. Certainly the complement we'd had on there was not the select complement . . .

Marcello: I can tell from what little you've said about the Houston so far that you kind of look much more fondly back upon the Augusta than you do the Houston, not necessarily because you were captured after the Houston was sunk or anything of that nature.

Pryor: Well, I guess we had many fonder memories of our times while I was a member of the complement on the Augusta than I would have had on the Houston. It was more work and not so much play when the Houston came out because we were getting ready. We were speeding up our preparations for the war, I guess, that was to come. But she was a very good ship. We had a good Marine detachment on there. The ship's captain was one of the finest men the Navy ever had. You read about him in the history of naval warfare. He retired as an admiral, Jesse B. Oldendorf. He was the one who crossed the T on the Japanese down in Surigao Strait and destroyed the Japanese that came in up through the southern Philippine Islands. That's Admiral Oldendorf. He was our captain on the Houston, our first captain. But we enjoyed it in and around the Philippines, and in that time of 1941, we traveled all over the Philippines. We went to all the major ports, all the primary islands, Samar, all around the islands of the Philippines. I know that one time we made a landing exercise at one of the places that the Japanese hit first, Aparri, so we landed there back in the very dark hours of morning, pre-dawn landing. It was just as dark as a dungeon. You wander through

here, and as soon as it began to get light, and these natives, Filipinos, heard us firing all these blanks and all us charging through there, and they thought the Japanese had already invaded. They had an awareness that Japan was an enemy, that Japan would probably bring war to them. This would have been, I suppose, in the summer of '41, sometime before war ever began, and they thought it was already there.

But we noticed all these differences, and, of course, this would seem to be an insignificant thing, MacArthur being recalled to active duty with the United States Army. When we first saw him, he was Field-Marshal of the Philippine forces. I thought he was the vainest man I'd ever seen. "Mac" never came aboard ship. He never came unless it was an official visit. That meant that he had to have all the honors. Us Marines, we didn't go for that because you had to get up there in that broiling sun, that Manila heat, and await the arrival of Field-Marshal MacArthur, then later Lieutenant-General MacArthur. He could have come aboard unofficially and not required all that and conducted his business and gone. But he had to have all the honors, the full ceremony. But we were not too favored . . . well, he was not our favorite military

man, but we came to have a lot of respect for him. I think now after going on particularly through Korea and now knowing something about the man's history, and then as I've studied Japanese government and politics--and, of course, my field is government--and as I've studied Japanese government and politics later on, I've come to admire MacArthur as I do few other people. If this nation has produced a genius in modern times, I believe MacArthur is as qualified as any we've ever produced to be called genius. But then in the fall of 1941, we speeded up this process of preparation.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you ever get into many of the Filipino port cities? Did you ever get into Manila very much, or places of that nature?

Pryor: Well, we operated out of Manila all the time. This would be our home port, in and around Manila, and, of course, we went to all the islands. Pretty much the summer of 1941 we spent a great deal in the southern islands.

Marcello: I would assume your base around Manila was Cavite, perhaps?

Pryor: Oh, we didn't operate out of Cavite. Well, see, Cavite is on one side of Manila Bay, and Manila proper is on the other side of Manila Bay, and we seldom went

the Cavite way. We had a dredged anchorage. Manila Bay is not a deep water anchorage, so usually we had a particular anchorage that was dredged out so that we could get in and out, and it was adjacent to the Manila side of the bay. Most of our liberty and so forth was in and around Manila.

Marcello: What I was leading up to was, did you ever have very much contact with Japanese civilians in Manila? Did you ever notice an extraordinary number of them around in Manila?

Pryor: No, not around Manila. You would see quite a bit of Japanese activity. See, Manila is one of the great ports of the world, and most of what we would see in the way of Japanese around Manila would be sailors, those off of the commercial vessels, merchantmen that would come in and out of the port city. There was a great deal of that. Manila sits right in the middle of the highway, so to speak, of many ways. If you look eastward across the Pacific or then along the north-south axis, there is Indonesia and India--that would be South Asia--and then the Japanese did quite a bit of trade with the Australians and New Zealanders in wool and meat and hides, and so Manila again sat right in the middle of the highway, the seaways, you might say.

We didn't see many of those. But now in and around on the island of Mindanao, there's a city called Davao. Now there was a considerable Japanese colony around Davao, and somehow we usually stayed clear of Davao. We didn't go there.

Marcello: The reason I asked you this question was I had an interview yesterday with a gentleman who remembers one little old Japanese who ran a bicycle shop in Manila, and after he got into prison camp at Cabanatuan, he discovered the man who ran the bicycle shop was actually a lieutenant-colonel in the Japanese Imperial Army and showed up at Cabanatuan. I was wondering if you yourself had noticed any extraordinary activity on the part of Japanese?

Pryor: No, no. We had not observed this. The only ones we would see would be those that would come in on merchantmen, and we had been given the information before by way of intelligence that most of these people, particularly the officers, the ship's officers, most of them were either naval officers or naval reserve officers. So they were, let's say, para-military. But other than that we didn't observe much of it. But we did visit all the other port cities, and Davao would be the only place where you'd see Japanese. It

was not like it would have been, say, in and around Honolulu, where you would have so many of them, and then along some of our California coastal ports. There were not too many of them. Of course, the great influence there would be Chinese, though. Most of your merchant class throughout all of the Far East is Chinese. But we were in all the islands and spent most of the summer of '41 in the southern islands, particularly around the islands of Tawitawi and Jolo, which is down around the Sulu Archipelago. Well, in all these exercises we visited all the islands, many of them, I guess, for the first time. The Augusta had not gone into most of them. It was our first time there--Cebu, Zamboanga.

Marcello: I think this more or less brings us up then to December the 7th or actually December the 8th, 1941. Can you remember what you were doing and what your reactions were at the time you heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Pryor: Oh, very clearly. Let me go back, let me digress just a little bit, though, and pick up one thing that I would like to get into any record that I might be ever afforded an opportunity to work with. Almost a week before the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor, we knew that

something was in the wind. The Marines on the USS Houston had one of the finest softball teams there was in the Far East. We had a complement of about sixty-three . . . it varied from time to time but generally about sixty-three, and we had an outstanding softball team. We usually never had space or places to play baseball, so we played softball. We played against units of the Philippine Army. We played commercial teams, particularly Hickok's team in Manila, the champs of the Philippines, the sailor teams. Wherever we went in the Philippines, usually we would be challenged. The natives, the Filipinos, like in on the island of Palawan, down at Porto Princessa, and in Zamboanga and Cebu, the Filipinos would have heard of us, and when we would come into the port, well, they would send word out that they would challenge us to a game, and we would go play. But about one week before the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor, we had gone over at 1300--that's one o'clock p.m.--in the afternoon to play a team of sailors from Canacao Hospital. We'd never played them before. They were new. And so we'd gone to play them at one o'clock, and when we left everything was normal. There was no change in routine. We were in the Navy Yard in Cavite, and we were undergoing

certain repairs. For instance, we were going to put on new searchlights. We had four of them on the mainmast. That was aft . . . the mainmast was aft. We had taken the old searchlights off. They were sitting down on the docks, and the new ones probably were not yet there. They were probably on some ship that was coming into Manila. But we had taken the old ones off. We were putting on two 1.1 inch pom-pom mounts; that's the four-barreled antiaircraft weapon, 1.1 inch in diameter. We had the degaussing cable . . . that there is the cable that runs around the ship's hull that, when energized, sets up a magnetic current that counteracts magnetic mines, and we were to make certain refinements and modifications to our degaussing system. Most of the Navy Yard workers there in Cavite are Filipinos; there are some retired American sailors and so forth, but mostly Filipinos. These people were working on these various projects, and, then of course, the usual hammering and chipping of paint and all that to take off this paint and put on a new coat of paint. When we left at 1300 for this ball game, everything was normal, just routine.

When we came back about three hours later--that would have been about 1600 in the afternoon--well,

everything had changed. In that period of three hours, from 1300 to about 1600, the Shore Patrol had received instructions to round up all sailors and any Marines that might have already gone on liberty and return them to the ship. The Navy Yard workers had been informed that they would work around the clock, that we would complete immediately these modifications to our degaussing cable. The old searchlights were lifted back off the dock onto the ship, and then this completion of these two gun emplacements was to be done in around the clock work. There would be no liberty from that time. I think it took a couple of days. I don't remember exactly but about a couple of days to complete all this work. When it was completed, the Houston left Manila and we went south, and we went to Iloilo on the island of Panay. We were there, oh, about some four days.

Marcello: You know, this doesn't really surprise me--what you've been relating so far--because from all indications and from all the intercepts Washington authorities were getting through "Magic," it was quite obvious that the Japanese were up to something, especially in the East Indies, and apparently there was a great deal of ship activity and troop movements in that direction or in that area of the world.

Pryor: So we went into Iloilo, and there we were given liberty, but liberty expired in the early evening hours. There was no overnight liberty, no extended liberty such as we had enjoyed in previous times, and I recall that on the morning of 8 December--it would be the 8th of December in the Far East--at about . . . we were standing gun watches. We had begun standing gun watches for some period of time. But usually we had, oh, eleven men on . . . like on my gun crew. I was the gun captain. I was a sergeant at that time and was a gun captain on gun eight. That would have been on the port side, the after five-inch dual purpose gun which served both surface responsibility and as an antiaircraft gun. Usually with a crew of eleven, well, if I found five of them, that was a pretty good number, so we'd man the gun with five, so that we could man the key positions. I know that my crew that morning had the . . . we say the four to eight, but we went on actually at 3:30 in the morning. I'd found about five of them, and we'd gone up to man the gun, take over from the crew that was on there. We usually then only manned half the guns. We had eight five-inch guns, but we would only man four, and we only had a half crew on the four. Just after we'd gone up, they

called down from our central control and asked each gun to report the number of men that we had on the gun. I only had about half of them. I reported about five or six, and the sailors reported about the same number, and so we were told then. I suppose this would be about four o'clock; I'd say probably about four o'clock in the morning on 8 December. Then our officer told us, "Go get all of them. Get your full crew up here and make ready your ready boxes." Immediately adjacent to each gun you had a box in which you stored shells. We called it a ready box; it was five-inch shells immediately ready to use. So he said, "Make ready your ready boxes." That meant take the waterproof door off and lay the cover back over so that the shells were exposed. He says, "The Japanese have hit Pearl Harbor. We are virtually at war with Japan." And that's how war came to us. Well, we didn't worry about it a whole lot. I guess we were cocky, certainly ignorant of what war would be. Throughout most of that day we remained at anchorage, keeping a very good lookout for Japanese planes. We knew that the Japanese warships would be in the area of the Philippines and that airplanes operating from carriers and so forth would be able to search us out. Then later in the

afternoon of that day, Admiral Glassford came aboard ship. Admiral Glassford had commanded the Naval District there in and around the Philippines, that's the Fourteenth . . . Fourteenth? I believe the Fourteenth. Fourteenth or Fifteenth Naval District. Fourteenth, I believe. So Admiral Glassford came aboard with his staff late that afternoon. Oh, I might say that back in the summer of '41, Admiral Hart had transferred his flag to the beach--he and Admiral Purnell. So we were not carrying a flag at the time that war broke out, and Admiral Glassford brought his flag aboard the evening of December 8th. Immediately after it got dark, we left Iloilo, and I don't know when during the night we rendezvoused with the USS Boise. The Boise was out in those areas. The crew didn't know anything about it, but the next morning, we were in company with the Boise. Then that day we picked up our sea train. We didn't know until then that Admiral Hart had caused all the naval ordnance--mines, torpedoes, bombs and so forth, that we had in the dumps and so forth around Cavite and Manila--to be placed on our supply ships, the supply train, we called them, and they too were in southern Philippine waters. So a week before the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor, Admiral

Hart took effective action. Admiral Hart was not caught with anything. He acted and those people there in Pearl Harbor sat there and were caught. Now if Admiral Hart had no more information than they had, the thing is, he acted and acted intelligently and wisely with, I guess, complete recognition of the military consequence, and we saved what we had of the Philippines, and they were caught.

Marcello: I think this is a very good observation because obviously it's the duty of any commander . . . every commander is responsible for the security of his base, no matter how close or how far it is from the scene of action, and I think this is a good example of what happened in the Philippines and what did not happen at Pearl.

Pryor: Right. It did not happen at Pearl. But nevertheless, we picked up the supply train and we headed south, and we were informed that we would be taking these ships . . . convoying them into the East Indies. About the second day out, I guess, as we were way down near the very southern end of the waters, just almost at sundown, we picked up two ships.

Marcello: Why were you headed for the East Indies?

Pryor: Well, I would suppose that the Admiral thought that we had to get her out of the Philippines, that the Philippines

would be an immediate war zone. The Philippines would be subject to attack from Formosa, and we needed to go on down and possibly try to eventually hold Indonesia. It would be the wealth of Indonesia that the Japanese would want--the raw materials, particularly the oil and petroleum, the petroleum resources. We would go there and our operations would be in and around that area. But on that second evening, we saw these two ships, and they were identified as Japanese--a Japanese cruiser and destroyer. And they came in . . . they approached us from the starboard bow. If you looked to the bow of the ship, it would be on an angle of about forty-five degrees. They came in on the starboard bow, and so the Houston and the Boise moved away from the convoy to intercept them before they could move on the convoy. We placed ourselves between, and we loaded the eight-inch guns, and we broke out star shells. It was near sundown; the sun was just about to go down.

Marcello: I've heard other people talk about these star shells. What exactly were they?

Pryor: The star shell is a shell that contains a phosphorus element attached to a parachute. At nighttime, in the days before radar . . . and the Houston carried no radar,

it was too new an invention; it had come out since the Houston had come to the Asiatic station, and so you had to range visually. You had optical ranging apparatus that could, through matching up certain increments, get a range. But you had to see the target visually. Well, you might fire and conduct firing practices or engagements at night, so you had to be able to see a target. These star shells were designed to . . . you'd fire them, hang them over the target area, and these magnesium flares would illuminate the area. The parachute part would let it drift down slowly, so that you'd have a period in which to observe. My gun and gun seven, the Marine gun on the other side, were the ones that fired these star shells. Normally the gun was controlled by electronic directors, but to fire star shells you had to compute some part of it at the gun. That was my responsibility, so I would take the firing data sent down from the director, and then I would have to make certain computations to it. I had special training in this business, so that we could place these star shells correctly.

I know that evening, we were asked to break out these star shells and be ready to illuminate for the

main battery. I know that the Boise . . . I could see the Boise traveling to our right; she was pretty much on our port stern, and we could see that she was prepared to fire. She had fifteen six-inch guns, rapid fire six-inch guns, and we could see that they were trained and elevated. The last range I heard called down from the director up there was 20,000. These ships came within 20,000 yards, and they were well within the range of the Houston. We had eight-inch guns. I suppose we'd range out to 30,000-32,000 yards, and they were well within our range. But the orderly came down later on and said Admiral Glassford said they may not see us because we had the sun behind us. We were in the favored position. He believed that they were scout vessels for a Japanese force, and he said, "I don't believe they've ever seen us. If they don't, we'll not fire because then if we do, well, then the main force might get to our convoy, and we'd lose all that we've got." So we never opened fire, even though they came within 20,000 yards. Apparently they never did see us.

I know that that night we more or less, you might say, heaved to. We had to go through some straits between Borneo and an island of the Philippines, and

the Admiral was fearful of going through there during the hours of darkness. He thought that a Japanese fleet might have been on the other side and that these were decoys, and if we charged through there that we might run into the Japanese fleet when we didn't have any maneuvering room. So I know that we pulled up short that night, and the next morning, after it had gotten light, we put a scout plane up and then sent a destroyer through the straits and see what was on the other side. It was all clear, and we went on through.

The only other eventful thing that happened . . . I guess it really was not an eventful thing, but it seemed like it was to us at the time. Sometime about the second day after that, the Houston and one destroyer turned back from the convoy and headed back in the direction that we'd come at very high speed. Throughout most of the night we traveled at this high rate of speed. Very early in the next morning, oh, well after daylight-- I guess the sun had come up--they called away the ship's boarding party. You've got all sorts of organizations aboard a warship. One of the organizations you have is called a ship's boarding party. If you need board a ship, which not many are boarded in modern warfare,

but if you need board a ship, well then you've got a complement of people that have certain skills. There'll be engineers from your ship's forces, engine rooms, that know how to operate a ship's machinery. There'll be water tenders, and there'll be machinists, and there'll be quartermasters for navigational purposes. There'll be communications people, and then the security force will be Marines, again. You have special arms and equipment, and you're to provide the security if you meet any resistance as you attempt to board the vessel. You have a certain number of them that go aboard then, and certain others that stand off with automatic weapons and so forth. Usually those that are to go aboard with the party would have Thompson submachine guns and rapid fire weapons for close quarters. So they called away the ship's boarding party, and I was the sergeant in charge of the Marine detachment of the boarding party, so I mustered all my people. Then we saw this ship. As we neared it, it was low on the horizon. When we neared that thing, we could see this great red ball on the side of the . . . it was right amidships where you carry the flag. We could see this red ball in that early morning light, and so we said, well, this is it. We had gone through this once in the summer of 1940,

early in the summer, I guess, of 1941. We had boarded three vessels in Manila Bay. They were Norwegian, and they belonged to the Maersk Lines. The Hilda Maersk was one of them. I don't know the other two. But we had boarded these three, you know, as Germany invaded Norway. Norway then, of course, had capitulated to German forces, so the United States took over these Norwegian vessels, and we boarded those. Of course, we encountered no resistance. So we knew what boarding parties meant, but this time we knew, too, that this was a Japanese vessel, and that at least her officers would be military people and we would encounter resistance. So there was that little tingle, you know, of excitement. It's just like . . . oh, when you're going into combat, you always get apprehensive. You don't worry about it until actually you're about there, and then you get apprehensive. But as we neared this thing, we sent the destroyer ahead to see what it was all about, and she radioed back that it was an American vessel. This red ball on the side was where they had had the American flag, and she had probably been in Chinese waters when the war broke out, so she'd scraped that off, and this salt spray had caused it to rust. Possibly one of our patrol bombers, PBY's that

we used, had spotted this ship and reported it as a Japanese vessel, so we had turned around during the night and had gone back to intercept, but it was an American vessel, and so then we took our convoy on into Soerabaja.

We made it into Soerabaja, Java, and I missed out on what I thought was a pretty good job there. When we got into Soerabaja, Java, we found that Admiral Hart's flag had been moved from Manila down to Soerabaja. Soerabaja was a Dutch naval base, East Indian naval base, and so Admiral Hart's flag was there. On the first day that we pulled in there late in the afternoon, Admiral Purnell came aboard this ship and told our Marine captain that he wanted a Marine more or less as a bodyguard. He wanted a Marine that was skilled in the use of military weapons, in that he would be armed with a submachine gun as well as a .45 pistol as sidearms. He would accompany him wherever he went, he would sleep in the same room with the Admiral, and he would accompany him, well, everywhere that he went because he carried all this secret information and so much of this--plans, orders. I said, "Captain, I'd sure like to volunteer for this," and he said, "No way. No way." So I missed out on that. Then we

transferred another Marine by the name of Thompson, and I have never heard from Thompson. I don't know whatever happened to Thompson. I don't know whether he was still in Indonesia when the Japanese invaded, whether he got out, or whatever became of him. I've never heard to this day.

But we operated in and around Indonesian waters most of the time. We tried, I guess, to make some sort of belated move toward fortifying in some way the defenses of the East Indies. I know that most of our duty was involved with convoying ships from the States. They ran kind of a triangle, oh, convoy pattern. We would go from Indonesia to Port Darwin in northern Australia. From Port Darwin we would go to an island in New Guinea called Thursday Island; it's a small island, a very small island immediately adjacent to New Guinea. Ships from the Stateside fleet would bring the convoy to Thursday Island, and we would pick them up at Thursday Island and then convoy them on into Soerabaja. This was about the dullest duty, I guess, there is in the Navy. This convoy work is something you just don't like. It's long hours on the guns, and most generally we'd be on watch for four hours, and then we'd be off watch for four hours. There's not much opportunity

for rest, even in this four hours off time, particularly the four hours during the day, because other ship's routine has got to go on, and when half the crew is on the guns, well, then there's not much to carry on the rest of the ship's routine. Of course, you do knock off a lot of that; you don't shine the brightwork as often; there's not so much paint to be chipped.

But later on we got impatient, and a couple of times we thought we would be going into battle. In the late days of January, I recall one afternoon that we got word down on the guns to check our ready boxes, check all our fuses, and see that the fuses were free, and then reset them to safe. We cleaned and we oiled and we got them all ready. The word was that we would probably be in combat within the next twelve hours. I think I could speak for most of our people . . . by thunder, we kind of welcomed it. You just felt kind of like . . . well, we're going in here, and this is what we're trained to do, and we're better than he is, and we're going to win. It's just that thing. It's just like . . . oh, it's kind of like the tingle you feel when you're going into an athletic contest. Well, you're kind of on edge, and you do get kind of the butterflies in the stomach, a little bit, in

anticipation. But it's not fear; you have no fear. It's just like playing a football game; you have no fear out there, but you still get that feeling in the stomach, the butterflies, they say. This is about like most of us I think felt when we believed that we were going to see combat for the first time. But it never materialized. It probably was that there was a convoy coming down through some waters of the East Indies, and maybe submarines got to it. They were very active in those times.

But our first action, I guess, took place on February the 4th. But the day before that though, I guess, we saw our first Japanese planes. We were well outside Soerabaja at anchor; we were at anchor, but not in any naval anchorage. We saw this host of planes pass on through going into attack Soerabaja. They never came close enough for us to range on them; we never fired on them. And the next . . . oh, late that evening we got together with certain Dutch ships. I know that the Java, the DeRuyter, and the Tromp was with us, and I don't know, possibly four or five Dutch destroyers, and the USS Marblehead was with us. It was one of our old four-stacker, World War I cruisers, light cruiser. And then there were maybe some five

American destroyers in our number. I don't know exactly how many destroyers there were. We went out and our understanding was that we were going to Makassar Straits. That would be the straits between the Celebes and Borneo. I guess before we ever got there though . . . oh, up in about the usual Japanese time for their bombing . . . it seems like that most times . . . eleven o'clock. I don't know why. They liked to bomb at eleven o'clock in the morning. Just many, many times we observed this. At about eleven o'clock in the morning, here they came. We had a Dutch admiral that was in charge, so he had us all scatter. Admiral Glassford had left the ship before this time when we first came to the East Indies. So this Dutch admiral had us dispersed as all these planes hit us, and they finally hit the Marblehead. They got a direct hit on the Marblehead. They got one on us, and, of course, when this one hit us, it landed on the number three turret. That's the one on the stern, and it was trained to port.

Marcello: This was one of your eight-inch turrets?

Pryor: Eight-inch turrets. It was trained to port, and the bomb landed right beside it. It was forward of the eight-inch turret and right beside it as it was trained

to port, and it blew all the . . . we had a crew's washroom right immediately by it, and it blew it all to pieces. It just pulverized it and sent shrapnel on through the turret. There was powder in the handling room, and it burned out the interior. I think there was possibly one man that got out of the turret. The sight setter on the opposite side of the turret was able to crawl out of a . . . kind of a . . . well, it's not a porthole. It's kind of a door, a watertight door. But all the rest of the crew in there was just roasted. I know later on when we took people out of there that one of the fellows who sat there . . . the trainer sat there . . . had hand wheels, you know, that you used to rotate and turn the turret, and then another one on the opposite side they used to elevate the guns. This old boy was just embedded; these wheels were just embedded. I guess the concussion forced him forward on these things, and then he just roasted right there at the wheels, still sitting there in his seat with his hands on these wheels, and just roasted.

Marcello: Did you observe these things personally?

Pryor: This, yes.

Marcello: I would assume the realities of war came home pretty fast now after this initial attack and this bomb damage.

Pryor: Pretty fast. I was on gun eight at the time, but we'd had some trouble at the magazine. Before they had made this attack, I had gone down to the magazine area, and we were in the next compartment. Well, we was actually in kind of a . . . oh, it wasn't the magazine area itself. It was the next level above the magazine. We sent the off gun crew . . . we had one crew on the guns, but the crew that was not on the gun at the time the action would begin, we would send into the magazine, and they would man the magazine, that is take ammunition--shells--from the racks in the magazine, place them in a hoist, send them up to the next level, and we had a handling crew then that would take them from the hoist at that level, transfer them to another hoist, and send them up to the guns in another hoist system. So I was at this intermediate level. We corrected the trouble with the hoist, and I was standing there when the bomb hit. And a chief--one of the sailors, a chief--had just come by and talked to me a moment before and had gone on through, and the next time I saw him, they were bringing him through. His right leg had been just blown

completely off. It was just blown altogether off. I know that the hospital corpsman brought him by here. He told them to leave him be, that he was going to die in a few minutes, and go try to help some of the other people. We lost just over fifty people, fifty-two or so, and all of those were just beyond that little thin bulkhead from where we were. They were in the next compartment to where we were. Most of them belonged to the ship's repair party. You know your damage control system aboard ship, you place certain people with certain skills and training around the ship, so that in the event you get some damage, well, these people are immediately adjacent to it so they can repair it or minimize its effect. He was with these people in such a group.

But the war came to us then rather suddenly. We had undergone some three attacks already. Our captain was able to watch the Japanese bombers with binoculars, and when they opened the bomb bays and dropped their bombs, then he would change directions. We were usually turning full speed. The Houston would do better than thirty knots. It was very fast, so we would change directions and skip out from under the bombs. But this one . . . this one . . . well, it seemed to be a crazy

one. They said from the bridge--of course I was below decks--but they said it seemed like it might have hung and been delayed, and it didn't fall with the rest of them. The rest of the string missed us . . . close by but they missed, and this one got us.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you shoot down any Japanese planes?

Pryor: Oh, we would see . . . there were those . . . I don't know. I never saw any shell that we fired, I don't guess. I don't know whether we even shot in the same sky with them or not. Some of those that had nothing to do believed that some planes would be shot down. Maybe they would see smoke or some such thing. None ever fell around us. But when you have a job to do, and your job doesn't involve looking for something like that, well, you don't know. I have no idea. I never saw anything of this. I very seldom saw the planes until they had passed on over. Of course, when you're firing at a bomber . . . these bombers will take a lot of punishment. They might pass on over, and they might be destroyed well after they'd left the immediate scene of combat. They might not be able to make it home. You cut hydraulic lines or various controls, or you put a hole through one, and then the

air turbulence will eventually just keep tearing away the fabric or structure. It's possible that some of them would not have made it home. I never did see any that fell immediately by, but at times I know that we'd be shooting very close to them, and sometimes they'd report that they would see hits on them--those that had time to observe. There were some people that weren't occupied a whole lot. One of those is a retired captain in the Navy by the name of Winslow. Winslow has written quite a lot of that. He was on the way to join the Flying Tigers when war broke out, and they transferred him to our ship. He was one of our ship's pilots. We had four observation aircraft, and Winslow was one of these pilots. Of course, he didn't have anything to do during this combat other than observe. So he usually would run up to the machine gun nest and would observe from up there.

But war came to us in a real way. It knocked all the cockiness out of us, and it didn't take but about three seconds, I guess, to do it because we saw what war could be in its real fury just in that brief few moments. So many of these people were dead, and many others were wounded--many of them severely wounded or

burned--and it made a lot of people sick. I know that when they went to take this old boy off of that seat . . . I know a couple of sailors went to move him, and when they took him that the flesh stuck to their hands, and it made them sick. It just made them sick as all get out. Our executive officer removed him. He was a commander by the name of Roberts, and Commander Roberts removed this boy from that seat. But the Marblehead was hit, too, and critically damaged. One bomb had . . . well, she'd been hit, I guess, a couple of times, two or three near misses, and one bomb had jammed her steering gear, and she was going around in a circle. Though we were dispersed, when we saw the Marblehead in such straits as that, the Houston went back to her and kept the planes off her so they couldn't destroy her, and I think they got a diver over the side and eventually they freed the thing so that they could steer with the engines well enough to make it on into port. When they came into port the next day . . . we made it into the port of Tjilatjap. I think the Dutch gave it more pronunciation of "Chi-la-chep." And this was the port on more or less southern side of Java. Again, it was kind of an unusual port with very shallow water. I know that when we went in there that our

propellers would stir up mud. It would just leave this muddy wake behind us, and I would suspect that when the tide was out that we probably rested on bottom in this place. But we went in there to bury our dead, transferred many of those that were seriously wounded. One of them was the old boy that was gun captain of the gun that I was on, a Marine by the name of George from Illinois. But George was burned and had shrapnel in him--we didn't think seriously--but later on I understand he died. We stayed in around there for just long enough to bury dead and then went back to convoying. Normally, I'd suppose that a ship damaged such as we were would have gone in the Navy yard for repairs and refurbishment, but, of course, there was none of this for us. We just continued on our duty again of convoying.

Marcello: I gather that the eight-inch turret was simply put out of action and wasn't brought back into action again. It was not repaired.

Pryor: No, no, it was completely destroyed. Then our next action--real action--involved a convoy that we took from Port Darwin and intended to take it to Koepang. That was on the island of Timor. We picked up this

convoy. There must have been four ships as best I remember--four ships, merchantmen. There was an Australian Pioneer battalion, I guess, and then there was a unit of American artillery from Fort Lewis, Washington, the other contingent. We were taking them there to Koepang, and we left late one evening, and early next morning a big Japanese flying boat--four-motored flying boat--picked us up probably in the middle of the morning. It shadowed us, always out of range, staying well out of range, circling the convoy, and just before lunch at midday, the thing passed over and we fired on it, and then there we saw smoke on the horizon. It's believed that we might have destroyed it, but we knew the thing had given our position, and so the next day we figured we could expect a lot of attention from the Japanese. About eleven o'clock here they came. I don't know how many planes were there. Oh, some said they counted nine of these four-motored flying boats, such as the one that had shadowed us the day before. Then they said that there were thirty-five . . . I think about thirty-five . . . some of them said about thirty-five of these twin engined . . . oh, I guess we called them Mitsubishi 96's. Sometimes it was their workhorse bomber. It was a land-based bomber.

Marcello: Where were these planes coming from? They had not yet made their landings in the East Indies.

Pryor: No, they had not. They had Borneo, and they had parts of the Celebes, but they did have . . . we believed these came from an island of Ambon. Ambon is kind of in the . . . well, it's at the east end of the Java Sea. And so we believed that they had an established base on Ambon. That's probably where they came from. So these people came after us, and when they made their appearance, the Houston drew away from the other ships in the convoy. It was just the Houston and the old Perry. The Perry was an American destroyer that had been left in Manila. She was in Cavite. The Perry had rammed another ship and had damaged the bow and broken off the foremast in this collision, and so she was in the Navy yard without a bow when the Japanese actually started the war, so they fashioned a crude bow and put it back on her, and she had dodged . . . I think when the Japanese first hit Cavite and Manila they'd tried to get the Perry, and she'd dodged all around Manila Bay, I think, and finally slipped out and made her way down to Australia. But the Perry was with us, and we all believed the Perry was jinxed, and I guess no ship wanted to travel with the Perry.

So we pulled away and the bombers gave their attention to us. They knew, I guess, if they could get the escort vessel, the Houston, then the rest of them would just be sitting ducks, and so they tried for us. They made two runs on us and missed us altogether, and then they left us and went back to try for the convoy in that they hadn't clobbered us. But we went back with them and kept them off the convoy. All these planes finally killed one soldier. They got a near miss on a transport, and shrapnel hit one soldier, and they transferred him to the Houston, where we had surgeons, and this boy died, I guess, during the night. But in this time they dropped them so close to us that the shrapnel just pecked along our splinter shields all around us, and we saw one maneuver there that day that had old sailors shaking their heads. The Houston was doing . . . we turned up full speed, and that's better than thirty knots, and these three groups of planes came in on us one at a time, and they were all to drop their bombs about the same time. No matter which way we'd turn, they figured they'd get us. And the captain of the ship . . . when the last group dropped it's bombs, the captain of the ship gave the change. He ordered the port engines reversed and a

hard right rudder. When you turn a boat, it leans inboard, but a ship will lean to the outboard, and on the starboard side that meant we'd be turning to port, and on the starboard side the water just washed right across the fantail, the stern of the ship. It was awash. The deck was awash. These guys up in the foremast on the machine gun nest and in the foretops, all they could see under them was green sea, no ship. I know that there was old chiefs who came out of those boiler rooms and engine rooms down there who'd been in the Navy twenty-four years or so and had never seen anything like that. One of our Marines, you know, stays with the captain; that's his battle station, is to stay right beside the captain at all times, and he said that Captain Rooks, our ship's captain, said, "Well, I didn't know whether she'd do it or not, but that was the time to find out. They would have destroyed us otherwise, and we just had to know. But now we know what she will do." And it's surprising that . . . Jane's Fighting Ships, which Jane's is the authority on world ships and planes and so forth, always listed the Houston class cruiser as top heavy, but she was anything but top heavy. She really responded there.

But they left us, and we continued on toward Timor, but during the night we got word that the Japanese had already landed and had secured Koepang, and so we turned around during the night and took the convoy back during the hours of night, and then it was some time after midday the next day before we got back into Port Darwin. Just before sundown that same day the Houston pulled out of Port Darwin. We made a run that looked like we were going around to . . . would have been to the west . . . to the west side of Australia, in case, I suppose, any submarines out there were shadowing us or anything. Then during the night we headed back north . . . went back into the East Indies. The next day is when the Japanese launched their big assault on Port Darwin. They caught the Perry, and they caught all these ships that we had brought back in there and destroyed them.

We went back into the East Indies. We went through the Sunda Straits. We went through the Sunda Straits between Sumatra and Java and went on into the other end of the island, the east end, Soerabaja. I know when we got into Soerabaja it was late in the afternoon. I wouldn't even know the date. I don't recall the date, but it was possibly four days before

we were finally sunk. The Japanese had just made their last raid on Soerabaja for the afternoon or evening. They had left some of the warehouses along the waterfront on fire. They had hit a ship that we learned was a merchant ship loaded with raw rubber, and it was on fire. It was sending up great clouds of black smoke, just as black smoke as you ever saw. The Dutch couldn't sink it. They'd run a destroyer out there to sink it with shellfire, and they torpedoed it, and it was setting on the bottom and wouldn't sink. It was on fire just providing the perfect beacon for the Japanese, a good navigation aid.

So we came in there after they left, and early next morning we were down in the Navy yard and took on some fuel. We were taking on fuel when the Japanese came for the first run. They usually came quite early in the morning, then again about eleven o'clock, then maybe once or twice in the afternoon. They were usually making about four raids a day on Soerabaja--three, possibly four, maybe just one in the afternoon. But they didn't know where we were there, but we'd got very careful instructions from the Dutch as to don't fire forward of a certain way, for you'd be firing over residential parts of the city, and actually we were

restricted from firing forward of about 270 degrees. But when these Japanese planes came in there, well, you don't all the time stop at 270 degrees; they were up there, and by thunder, we fired on them. I think they came in . . . the first groups came in at about 12,000 feet, and gosh, we got right into them at 12,000 feet, and they went on up. I think when they left, they were up . . . last raid they made . . . they were up around better than 22,000 to 24,000 feet. So we fired on them real smart like. When the air raid sounded, all these Dutch sailors off the Tromp-- the Tromp was anchored right there by us with a couple of other destroyers and all--and when the air raid would sound all these sailors would leave the ship and all go to air raid shelters. By gosh, that was something we didn't understand, is why in the Sam Hill would they do that. But they did. They'd head for these air raid shelters like a bunch of rats. So we fired on these planes; we got to them hot and heavy. There wasn't as many of them at the last as there was when we came there. I didn't see any of them fall out, but it was an unusual feeling. It was the first time we'd ever fired at anchorage, and we fired right up to maximum limits. That's almost . . . well, it'd be

about eighty-eight degrees. And so we fired up that way, and then the opposite battery would pick them up when they crossed over. But your own shrapnel comes back on the ship, and I know that when we'd cease firing and would take cover, there one time--the first time-- I stuck my head under the platform of the gun there, and then I happened to think, "Well, by thunder, I've only got my head . . . all the rest of me is still out here." I don't know how I scrooched under there, but I got all the rest of me under that thing. There was pieces of shrapnel that came back on this ship . . . oh, I guess some of them would weigh three pounds--jagged things a half-inch thick, maybe three or four inches wide at one place, tremendous jagged pieces of shrapnel from our own shells. Well, that was altogether a new experience. The next day . . . well, that night . . . that night . . . well, see, we came in . . . we came in just before sundown one day, and we anchored there, and the next morning is when all this took place. Then late that evening we went out with the Dutch ships to patrol an island out to the entrance of the channel into Soerabaja, an island of Madoera. It was believed the Japanese might try to land on Madoera and use it as a springboard

for landing on the east coast of Java. So we patrolled this island all night, and I didn't get any sleep at all because this other gun captain had been wounded and had left, and I was the only one that was experienced in firing these star shells, so that meant that all night long I had to stay on the gun, stay awake and be ready to fire star shells to illuminate. So I didn't get any sleep that night. The next morning when we came back into Soerabaja, we anchored out in the channel, and these bombers all came after us. They knew we were there, and they didn't bother the warehouses. They never bothered the docks, they never bothered any of these other ships, they never bombed the Navy installations, but they came after the Houston. We were sitting there like a big, fat, duck right in the middle of the channel. There was an American submarine anchored about, oh, I guess it would be about five hundred yards to our stern. Well, there was a couple of them that came in there occasionally. These American submarines would dive; they'd submerge during the air raids. Then they'd just come up about half-way after all clear. And so they'd dive. These Japanese missed us. They dropped bombs that's just pick us up and shake us and kill fish. We'd see dead fish

floating along by the ship. Some of them landed about half-way between us and these submarines, so I bet those guys were (chuckle) just jittery as all get out, wishing we'd get out of there.

Marcello: Did you ever get used to this sort of thing? You'd been under some rather constant air raids for some time. Does one ever really get used to the bombing?

Pryor: No, I don't guess you get used to it. Well, I guess every man has a breaking point. I've seen some of them that were . . . oh, I know a couple of Chinamen particularly . . . you see, we had Chinese mess boys on the Houston. They were in the Navy, but they were Chinese, and they were Chinese nationals, and they worked as mess attendants in the officers mess--stewards and cooks and so forth. We had one big Chinaman, and his name was Tsao. Tsao must have weighed over two hundred. He was about six feet, six feet one. Tsao used to come down there and help us carry shells. You know, I mentioned this one transfer point from one magazine to another magazine and then up to the gun deck. Tsao would carry two at a time. These five inch shells weighed about sixty-five pounds, and then in their container they probably weighed about seventy or seventy-two pounds, and Tsao would carry one under each arm and

he'd run. He didn't carry one like our guys did, and Tsao would put one under each arm and he ran. He transferred more shells than anybody, just scared to death. I'll mention Tsao again later on, that rascal.

I know the day after we had the big raid, you know, when we were going to Timor, the planes were over us for about an hour and a half; from the time they showed up until they'd gone was an hour and a half, and we fired almost continually for an hour. There was some over us in which we'd be shooting for about an hour, and I know that when we came down from the guns that . . . we'd taken out all the bunks and everything, and our living compartments were just as bare as it is out in the middle of this floor. I had stacked up all the mattresses; my Marines slept on mattresses, and we'd just stacked those up in the middle of the deck. I had a stack of about fifteen of them, I guess, out there. When we came down after the action, I saw water running out from under these mattresses, and I thought, "Well, what is this?" There were no water lines or anything around there, and we looked under those mattresses and here's one of these little Chinese mess boys, these mess attendants, and he had crawled under those mattresses, and I don't know how it kept

from suffocating him or how he'd kept from . . . well, he was just practically dehydrated. But I believe he was the scarest little fellow I've ever seen in my life; he just wouldn't believe that these planes had gone when we got him out from under there. But he said that next time he'd just jump overboard--the next time we saw any planes. I don't know that he did.

I think that we were subject to imminent action so much that you . . . when we knew that it was going to happen the next day, had every reason to have a 100 per cent belief that it would happen the next day, well, you didn't worry about it until the hour approaches, and then you get all on edge. Now, of course, there's where training and all pays off; you go ahead and do it even though you might not want to. Now we certainly by this time . . . most of us . . . I know myself in particular . . . I know I stayed up every night, and then in the daytime when you might be permitted to get a little sleep, well, these planes were over you so many times during the day that you were at battle stations pretty much the day, and then at night . . . I think at one stretch we were at battle stations about twenty-one hours without relief. Then that evening

again, after the planes had bombed us where I said the fish floated by and all this, we went out again that night and patrolled Madoera again and came back in the next day. I believe that day the English cruiser Exeter and the Australian ship Perth--the HMS Exeter, HMAS Perth--and the English destroyers Juno, Jupiter, and the Electra, I believe, three . . . I believe those three joined us. The Exeter made a pretty good name for herself off South America when she fought the Graf Spee. But they joined us. The Exeter was kind of like we were; her number three turret was out, too. I believe they had come from Crete or Malta, somewhere over in there in which she had lost a turret.

Marcello: Had the American four-stackers joined you yet? Didn't you pick up some destroyers somewhere along the way here?

Pryor: They had operated in and out but not with us all the time, but sometimes with us, sometimes independently, more often independently. They were in and out of there all the time. Sometimes we'd have maybe four with us, and sometimes they'd be operating . . . we had about a dozen of them, and the rest of the time they'd be operating independently. So it was just a sometimes thing. But then I know that the one night that the Exeter, the Perth, and then the Houston, Java

and DeRuyter all patrolled Madoera, and the next day we didn't come back in as had been our custom; we stayed out at sea. It was hazy-cloudy that day, I can recall. That would be 27 February 1942, and it was hazy-cloudy that day. We could hear planes, and we could never see the things. It was beyond the overcast, and it stayed with us most of the day. That afternoon the weather kind of cleared away, and about 3:30 we spotted this Japanese fleet, and the action began. We began firing about 3:30. The Houston and Exeter eight-inch guns were able to range. We opened pretty much at extreme range, I think. I think we opened fire at about 28,000 yards, something on that order, and I think we hit with about the second salvo. We hit a Japanese ship in the line. They had some heavy cruisers. We were within their range. Some of their shells was falling over us, some of them fell short of us, and we were constantly changing range to keep them from ranging. So we had a pretty good tussle. We got hit twice that afternoon.

Marcello: Can you hear those shells come whistling in?

Pryor: You can hear them usually after they go by. See, on an artillery shell you've got two bearing surfaces. There's one on the nose of a shell that you call the

Bourllett, and it's a kind of a bearing surface--copper-- and then on the after end of the projectile you've got another copper band that's called the rotating band. You see, this soft copper cuts into the grooves--the lands and grooves of the rifled barrel--and it gives it the spin; it causes it to spin. It's this Bourllett and this rotating band that you hear, that gives it that whistle and swishing sound. You better believe you hear them! I know one time that afternoon the Japanese fired a four-gun salvo, and three of them landed over, and one of that salvo landed short of us. Our Marine captain was sitting up on top of the director-- the antiaircraft director which has little purpose in surface firing--and he was sitting up on top of that, and when this thing went over, you could hear that tremendous whish. Captain Ramsey was our Marine captain, and Captain Ramsey, who talked rather slow and deliberate, said, "You know, if they get much closer than that, I'm going to have to get down from here." He was a very calm individual and an outstanding officer. But the action was so continuous; we just fired all the time. Well, the five-inch never . . . we never had anything to fire at this afternoon; the range was all beyond us.

Marcello: You had two eight-inch batteries operating yet or three?

Pryor: Two. We had two three-gun turrets operational.

Marcello: Two forward and one aft.

Pryor: Well, both of them were forward.

Marcello: Yes, the one aft was knocked out, right?

Pryor: Numbers one and two, both forward. The one aft was out. But the Exeter got hit quite early in the action, and when she got hit, it cut a steam line and reduced her speed, so she had to fall out of the action. Some of our destroyers laid a smoke screen behind which she could retire from the action. Some of our destroyers, I know, made a torpedo attack through the smoke screen at the Japanese destroyers. They, too, were making smoke. That afternoon one of the Dutch destroyers was sunk, I guess, and the Electra, I believe, was sunk. Submarines missed us with torpedoes; we saw the tracks of torpedoes that passed astern of us.

Marcello: The Japanese were apparently throwing everything in, too--cruisers, destroyers, submarines, the works.

Pryor: They had everything but aircraft carriers present, and they did have aircraft overhead--spotter planes. They were quite accurate with their gunfire.

Marcello: Did they have any battleships?

Pryor: Apparently not, at least not that we knew about. It seemed probably the majority of the force was heavy cruisers. By heavy, we meant eight-inch rather than six-inch . . . carried eight-inch guns rather than six-inch guns. But we disengaged about dark and then maneuvered around there in the darkness and then started again about 11:30 at night. We had another brief set-to. We didn't fire much; I think we only fired about three salvos.

Marcello: During this day's action, what was the extent of the damage done to the Houston?

Pryor: Very little. They hit us twice. One time one shell came down at such an extreme angle or high angle of fire--we call it impact angle--it came down at such an extreme impact angle that it entered the side of the ship up forward in the officers country, where officers were billeted and where we had storeroom facilities up there, and exited out of the bottom of the ship rather than out the other side. It came in the port side and exited out of the bottom of the ship and flooded some of our small storage space. Of course, these were all sealed off by our watertight integrity which protected us from flooding other than the immediate storerooms. Then one other shell also came

in from the port side, just over . . . well, just astern of my gun, and it hit the side of the ship, and we had fuel tanks back there, and I know that it hit with such impact that it jarred all our electric power out momentarily. The lights went out, and we lost electric power on the gun just for a brief instant.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what it felt like to have one of those shells come home.

Pryor: Well, it puts you in darkness. You know it's there. Of course, it does shake the ship. It probably was an eight-inch projectile, probably armor piercing, but we had such thin armor in these places that we might not have had enough armor to really activate the fuse, so in other words the shell was a dud. It was probably an armor piercing shell, and it's got to hit with a certain impact before it'll activate the delayed action fuse, and so these two shells were duds. That's the only two hits we took that afternoon, but the Japanese had remarkable accuracy with their gunnery. This was the first time we had really seen surface vessels.

Marcello: Do you attribute some of this perhaps to the forward air observers or whatever we would call them today?

Pryor: Well, they had the advantage that way. That's the purpose of having these planes on your surface vessels

like that, your ships of the line. I'd suspect they made good use of it, but they could not spot altogether, I imagine, for all the ships that were involved, and so I would imagine that most of the fire was locally controlled, that would be each ship controlling it's own fire. Now with our fire, it was very easy for us to spot our splashes. In the nose of our projectiles we have a dye, and one ship will use one color dye, and another one would use another one, so when we fired we could see this red . . . the dye colored the splash, and we knew which one. Had there been other American vessels there, we'd have still been able to distinguish our shells so that we could have spotted our own fire. But the Japanese impressed us with the accuracy and the way they handled their gunnery. It was outstanding. So all this training they'd been doing all this time certainly was good; they were professional, highly professional. But that evening, though, about the time . . . we only fired three salvos from our main battery, and I know I fired four or five star shells from my gun. But whatever target we were firing at was beyond the range of my gun, so I didn't illuminate anything.

Then immediately after that we began to see flares on the water, and we wondered, "Well, what the Sam Hill

is all this?" We couldn't hear any planes, we couldn't see anything, and here we'd run into these flares along the water. They seemed to be along our line. I know I was watching one of these things one time . . . and my gun, having a visible search sector, covered this area from broad on the port beam around to astern, so I had that forty-five degrees that I was responsible for by visual search sector. I had a lookout there, and I don't know how we were in line forward. I don't know the alignment of the ships, but I know that the Java was astern of us, and I was looking right at the Java when a torpedo hit her. And my gosh . . . and I was using binoculars. I was looking with binoculars--she was not far astern of us, maybe not more than 500 yards--and I could see in the glare of all the fire and flame . . . I could see people just visibly blown off the ship. You could see their bodies and other debris from the ship blown through the air, and all this fire was on the water. I thought, "Oh, gosh, these submarines have got us!" Then I immediately turned and was looking forward, and the DeRuyter was ahead of us and slightly to our left, and, by thunder, almost in the same instant that I looked

around there the DeRuyter was hit in the same way. Then a salvo of . . . well, we saw the tracks of torpedos pass astern of us; they just went harmlessly on by. So they missed us. Of course, the old man--our skipper--had turned; he'd turned hard right. They might not have missed as much as otherwise if he hadn't taken that immediate evasive action. But those two Dutch cruisers were lost just almost in that instant. I know then that the Houston and the Perth went on and through that night that . . . well, you just thought . . . and I know that my people and me on the guns, they said, "Well, I need sleep." I needed the sleep. I don't think I'd had ten hours sleep in that week, circumstances such as they were, and it just seemed that, well, if I could just lay down here and sleep awhile that when I wake up everything is going to be alright.

Marcello: By this time you did realize the seriousness of your situation?

Pryor: You better believe it!

Marcello: Incidentally, did you ever know the extent of the damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor?

Pryor: Well, probably not officially, no. We had probably had pretty much the same information that many of our other people had.

Marcello: But on the other hand, since it was quite apparent that the Japs did more or less have control of the sea, it was quite clear that something serious must have happened back at Pearl Harbor.

Pryor: Well, as I've said many times in talking about our part of the war out there, it was a very simple war for us. Anytime we went out, there was not this business of mis-identification. Anytime we went out to sea, we could realize and understand well that any ship that we saw was an enemy ship, and we could shoot at it. Any plane we saw was an enemy plane, and we could shoot at it, too. So we didn't have to worry about, "Well, let's identify it, and if it's foe or friend, well, then take whatever action." We knew it was foe. We didn't have much. I'd guess that we were just the victims of the United States commitment to a principle. The Dutch were an ally. There's very little . . . there was not anything that we could do, really, to prolong or to preclude anything that the Japanese might want to do toward the East Indies. But it was just an American presence there, and I'd guess that our people felt that it was important that we honor any commitment that we had to the Dutch people,

the Dutch government and those people. We believed fully well that we were being thrown to the wolves, and it was for purposes beyond what we could do militarily. We never seriously questioned that. We were trained for war and combat, and if that be it, then it was our job to do the best that we possibly could. We knew very well at that time that there was not anything that we could do to stem the Japanese and their advance on the East Indies. We could make them pay; we could hurt them in some small way, but as to changing the inevitable, no. I think practically all of us realized that.

Marcello: Did you ever talk about the possibility of capture, or did you figure if anything did happen, you would simply be sunk and everybody would be killed? You probably didn't have too much time to think about anything. You mentioned that you didn't even have time to sleep.

Pryor: Certainly, in such a situation, this idea of capture, and you a member of a naval vessel, a naval warship, that is one of the things that is remotest from your mind. The possibility that we would be sunk, that was a real thing. We had experienced this. We had lived with this, and it had been our . . . well, we

had been present when all these things had taken place, so there's that natural inclination for you to believe that this is a distinct possibility--that superior force, should you encounter it, would bring about your destruction. So you believe then that my chances of being taken prisoner are just not even one in a thousand, but your chance of being destroyed completely with the ship, there's that very high probability that that's what's going to take place. So we never had any idea that we'd ever be taken prisoner by the Japanese. But that we might be sunk, we figured that was more than just a passing possibility because we felt that if we were not to . . . well, if our people were not to honor such a commitment as we might have toward the defense of the East Indies, we would have come back to the States before this time. So we just had every reason to believe that we were going to be sacrificed and that most of us would probably be destroyed when the ship was eventually caught up with and finished off. But then we used to joke with one another though, occasionally, but it was nothing more than just a joke. We'd say, "Well, what are you going to do when the Japs get you and you go on that rice and fishhead diet?" We never had the remotest idea that such a thing would ever come about.

Marcello: Well, in a way you were optimistic in that sense, because a lot of Americans simply assumed that the Japanese didn't take any prisoners, that if anybody were captured they would all be killed.

Pryor: Well, we'll reflect on that in just a moment. We came to that time then . . . during the next morning, on in the hours of darkness, we were thankful that we were in an area of thunder showers and inclement weather, and so we stayed in all these showers and rain, these rain squalls. Seemed like we'd go from one to another one, gradually moving on toward Batavia, what is now Djakarta, the capital city. We never saw any more Japanese aircraft or any of their vessels during all that morning, and during the middle of the afternoon when we did approach the port facility of Batavia, a place they called Tanjong Priok, we approached the mine fields, and we saw a Japanese plane, a Japanese float plane, patrolling across this doggone mine field. We thought, "Well, why in the Sam Hill did those" We thought, "Well, those Dutch . . . what are they doing?" Then we identified this thing as Japanese, and we thought, "Well, why are they letting this rascal run around here?" We'd seen three P-40's not long before that and presumed

they were Dutch, and why would they let this thing wander around there? But we came on in through the minefield, and I think this silly plane must have been the same one that attacked one of these mine tending vessels just immediately after we entered the port and began to take on a little fuel. The captain went ashore, I know that. I remember that he went ashore when we pulled in. He came back shortly before sundown, and we saw two or three Japanese planes pass over at high altitude going back in the direction of Sumatra.

Then about dark, we got under way along with the Perth and headed out of there. Oh, the scuttlebutt went around then. The rumor went around that we would be going to Australia and possibly then back to the States. Immediately we cleared port. They set . . . well, condition two is when you have . . . well, condition one is battle stations, all hands at battle stations. In condition two, you've got all your guns manned, but the other crew--the rest of the crew--goes on about their business. In condition three you man half the guns. Immediately after we cleared port they set condition three, and so I was going to have all night to sleep. I would go off the gun at eight o'clock--this would

by 2000--and I wouldn't come back on the gun until eight o'clock the next morning. I know for the first time in a month, I went down below, and I got my mattress, and I brought it back up onto the gun deck and spread it out there and took my clothes off for the first time--my outer clothing--in, I guess, maybe ten days, and was going to sleep. Well, I didn't sleep long. The main battery woke me up at about 11:30. That would be 11:30 at night, 2330. They had opened fire. And so immediately after they opened fire, I jumped out of bed and put my overalls on and my shirt on outside my outer other clothing, stuck my feet in my shoes, and went to my gun--gun eight. When I got to gun eight, I found the sailors were manning my gun. They usually manned the flight deck guns, but in that it was dark . . . it was night . . . and my gun had the star shells in the ready box, they thought, "Well, if we have to illuminate at night, we'd better have somebody on that gun," so they had transferred the sailors from the flight deck guns down to the boat deck guns. So I had to go up on the flight deck and man the sailors' gun and had no idea of what we were fighting or what we'd encountered. I know we passed along and the main battery fired to

starboard, and I could hear the five-inch guns on the starboard side firing, and I still didn't know what we was shooting at. We turned and came back for the port side to fire, and I saw three Japanese destroyers on our port bow laying smoke, so we fired at these destroyers. But things were so confused . . . well, everything at one time . . . then when we turned that way, we could see gunfire all around us, and splashes, and there was a plane over us hanging flares over us, and I know a destroyer run in close to us and turned a searchlight on us to illuminate us, and the pom-poms got after that thing, and it just looked like you take a water hose as you watched all those tracers going right into it, and they shot it out. And except for all the gunfire all the way around you, you couldn't tell what was going on, other than I think at one time every gun on the ship was firing. Even the machine guns were firing at one time. Then they hit us. They hit the . . . I don't know whether they hit the number two turret first or not, but it was trained to starboard, and they hit it right through the face plate, and that killed everybody in there except in the control room. Then we got a hit up forward, up around the paint locker and aviation stores. The ship was on fire

up forward. I know there was a salvo of shells that came through the after stack, and that was right there next to the gun that I was manning . . . through the stack . . . and except for knocking a lot of soot loose, it didn't do anything. It just went right on through. Then about that time we got another hit that cut our steam line in the after engine room, and that cut our speed down to probably not more than ten or twelve knots. A cloud of steam just came up through there, so you couldn't do anything on that boat deck guns. They'd run out of ammunition for the guns up forward--the eight-inch. We didn't have much left for the five-inch; we'd fired everything. At the last about all we had to shoot was star shells. We just fired everything we had. Then they got in with a submarine, and I believe that the first torpedo probably hit us right broad on the starboard beam . . . right 'midships . . . right broad on the starboard beam. They sealed that off; the repair party down there sealed that off pretty much and corrected the list . . . compensated for the list by taking on ballast, I guess. Then we got one up forward, oh, pretty much probably where that shell had hit us the day before. Apparently we could have survived it, but then I guess we took three more immediately afterwards.

Marcello: These were all torpedoes?

Pryor: Yes.

Marcello: Did they ever determine for sure whether they came from submarines or from destroyers?

Pryor: They had to be from submarines. Destroyers never got in that close. They never . . . those destroyers . . . we'd have blasted them good, so it had to be submarines. See, they couldn't have done any damage as long as we were able to maintain full speed, but when our speed was cut down to ten-twelve knots, well, they could maneuver. The Perth was already sunk. I didn't know when she was sunk, but she only lasted about thirty minutes. We fought on for another hour after she was sunk.

Marcello: Was this the Perth or the Exeter?

Pryor: The Perth.

Marcello: The Perth.

Pryor: The Exeter had left the day before; she had withdrawn the day before. But this was the Australian cruiser Perth. She was a six-inch cruiser. I know that we were on fire, and we'd taken these, and we were listing and pretty much dead in the water, and we got the order to abandon ship. I passed on the order to my crew to abandon ship. My number two man that

took over should something happen to me, and he just jumped overboard immediately, and the flight deck is about thirty feet, I guess, above the waterline, and he just jumped over immediately, and I never heard from him. I never knew what happened to him. But I know in my own case, I never had a lifejacket. I had had one on my gun that I kept there all the time, but these sailors were on my gun, so I didn't have one up there. So I knew where they kept a bunch of them down in the hangers; both hangers had a bunch of surplus ones. So when we was going to abandon ship I went down to get one of these lifejackets. I was on the port side. I crossed over to the starboard side of the ship and started forward, and there was a passageway just aft of the bake shop and the ship's galley. Just as I started forward on the starboard side there was a salvo of shells that came through the starboard side, through the bake shop and the galley. I don't know whether it was two or three of them, but there was more than one. I know there was more than one. They ripped through there, and, of course, there was no armor up there, just almost like sheet iron. But it hit with such force that it knocked me down; it knocked me to the deck, and I know when I got up

I thought, "Well, a dead man doesn't need a lifejacket."

The ship was listing to starboard, and I went over to the port side again, out over the propeller guard, and I jumped into the water without any lifejacket.

Marcello: I assume you could swim.

Pryor: Yes, most Marines could swim then. We had to qualify as swimmers. This was part of your training program. You had to be a qualified swimmer. I didn't know I could swim as long as I did then. But the heck of it is, when I came back up to get a breath of air, somebody jumped in on top of me, and I swallowed that fuel oil and salt water, and I was never any sicker in all my life as I was most of that night. I vomited and retched, just got dry retches after a little while. I couldn't see, and, of course, there was a moon out that night. It was not dark. It was not a full moon. Out there in the tropics during a full moon, you can read the newspaper at midnight.

Marcello: You still had on all of your clothing.

Pryor: Right. Yes, I had on all my clothing. Then I had enough sense to ask if there was anybody around that could give me a hand because I couldn't see. I had this fuel oil in my eyes, and I immediately started vomiting when I swallowed that stuff; it just drew

me up in knots. A couple of guys came to help me. One of them, his name was Bain, and he was from Arkansas. Bain came to help me. I guess Bain died in prison camp. But Bain came to help me, and he swam along with me. He had a lifejacket, and he helped hold me up there until . . . of course, you don't need much in that salt water--sea water; you're quite bouyant. He kind of helped me along and helped direct me to a life raft that we'd jettisoned over the side, and so we made it to that life raft. Like a fool . . . if you ever abandon ship don't ever kick your shoes off, keep them. But I thought you could swim better without shoes, and I'd kicked my shoes off but not any of my other clothing. We made it to this life raft, and there were several wounded on it, and one of them on it was this old boy Tsao. I don't guess enough people could have got around there to have thrown Tsao off of that life raft. You're not supposed to ride a life raft; you're supposed to swim alongside it and hold on to the sides when need be. But we had wounded people that were on it, and Tsao wouldn't get off, and the rest of us got along the tow-lines, and we swam and tried to pull that raft. After we had made this thing, currents picked us up. The Houston had not yet sunk, and a

very strong current . . . in fact these straits between Java and Sumatra have tremendous currents. There'll be times when one of them will pick you up and take you clear out of sight of land. Another will bring you right in; you could count the palm trees on the beach. We had this one that picked us up and began bringing us into the ship, and the Japanese were still shelling it. These that would pass over it . . . they were on the opposite side of the ship from where we were . . . those that would fall over it and explode in the water, and this concussion . . . the water carries a concussion just . . . oh, gosh, in a very effective way. It is just like somebody was kicking you in the stomach as these shells would explode and you'd feel all that tremendous pressure. I thought, "Boy, we've had it!" This current was bringing us right into all that shellfire. I'm satisfied that that's how many of our people lost their lives. They were in the water immediately after, and the Japanese shelled it, indiscriminately, and many of them were killed in the water.

Marcello: Were the Japanese still firing at vessels yet, or were they deliberately firing to shoot at the survivors?

Pryor: No, I don't think they were shooting at survivors. I don't guess they could see that well. They were just shooting at the ship until she was gone, and then even after she was gone they still continued to fire. I don't think they knew who all was involved, and I think that sometimes they must have fired maybe at each other. But I know that their firing continued well after the ship was sunk, and I don't have any reason to believe that they were firing at any survivors. Other than these three destroyers, I didn't know who was involved in this fracas until we were on this raft and a submarine almost ran us down. This Japanese submarine passed by, and the diesel fumes from the motors almost suffocated us; it passed that close to us. In fact, the wake bobbed us around and shifted us aside. Just after it passed, then a Japanese transport passed along, and all these Japanese soldiers were lining the rails, up there, and the night was clear enough then and the moon was bright enough that they could see us and we could see them, and they yelled at us as they passed along, "Hey, Joe . . . Hey, Joe . . . Hey, Joe . . . Hey, Joe." When I saw that transport . . . we had a Marine lieutenant on the raft with us and a couple of other officers, and Lieutenant Barrett was the Marine

lieutenant. He lives in Spokane, I believe, or Seattle-- one or the other. I told Lieutenant Barrett, "Lieutenant, we're in the middle of a landing force here. We've been in the middle of a convoy. That's what all this is that we've been shooting at." We didn't know what all the targets were. Then we were pretty close into the shore, and we could see sandy beaches up there. I said, "Lieutenant, we're in the middle of a landing party. They're landing on Java here." We could see some hills, and it looked like a mountainous promontory off to our right, and so I said, "Lieutenant, let's try to make for that. If we get up here on this beach, we're going to be right in the middle of a landing party, and let's all make for these mountains up here." So we changed our direction, and we started for that way, but against currents we never could make any progress. At daybreak, we could see that we were right in the middle of a tremendous, tremendous convoy. Many transports were all around us, and at daybreak, at dawn, they began their activities, sending their motor launches and vessels into the beaches to make their assault, which there was not much assault to be made. There was no more contest or anything. It was not until midday that they finally came out and began to pick us up.

Marcello: How was your condition now? Had you more or less gotten rid of the illness due to swallowing the oil and salt water?

Pryor: Well, yes, by that time I had. I was just exhausted, I guess, because we'd been swimming in the water now ten-eleven hours. I guess about eleven hours. You're just completely beyond exhaustion but you still go. At a time like that you've got some reservoir of strength you never knew you had until you have to use it. I guess you've heard of people in accidents performing miraculous feats of strength. Well, this was such an occasion. Within ten minutes you feel, "Well, I can't swim another stroke," but then eleven hours later you're still going. Then when we saw we were in the midst of all these transports, we couldn't make any headway against all these currents or anything, so we just said, "Well, this is the end of the road. That's it." They came out and picked us up with one of their landing craft, and the landing craft had trouble making headway against these currents, so it was no wonder a man couldn't swim against them when you have a powerful landing craft that couldn't. But they picked us up, and the crew--there was about five or six people on this craft--brought us into the beach.

Marcello: They didn't rough you up any at this time at all.
They just picked you up and put you in the landing craft.

Pryor: No. They brought us into the beach, and there they'd already picked up a number of other of our people, and we huddled up there. Of course, we were just wet and shriveled up as all get out and hungry and exhausted. We looked like a bunch of black people with all this fuel oil all over us, just completely drenched in this fuel oil.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you regretted getting rid of your shoes. Did you regret it at this stage yet?

Pryor: No, no, not at this stage yet. I had big worries then. But I guess we were just so disgusted. There was a Japanese officer who came out, and they lined us all up. He could speak a little bit of English.

Marcello: In the meantime had you been talking among yourselves as to what your possible fate might be?

Pryor: No. No. We were just so disgusted you didn't talk about anything. We were so disheartened and disgusted that we didn't discuss any part of that. I don't think I had any feelings toward it. But this was one of the first things he told us in his "English" that he used. He said, "You are prisoners-of-war. Your lives will be spared." I wouldn't have cared if he had lined me

up and shot me then. I'm not brave. Well, I was just so dad-blamed disheartened that no matter what they would have done, it just wouldn't have bothered me a whole lot. Of course, life is dear and you hang on to it with all that you can, but I had no fear of these people. It didn't worry me from one minute to another whether or not they wanted to line me up and shoot me. It was not any consideration at all. All I could see was that, by thunder, I'm destroyed anyhow. One way or two, my liberty is gone, that I'm no more, I'm no longer. Am I really in command of my fate, as you would say. Until a man is confronted with a thing like that, he just has no conception of what it is. I was just sick to the point, by thunder, that if they had shot us, I don't think I'd have protested a nickle's worth. I just never felt so miserable and low in all my life. But they put us to work. They brought in these mountains of materials. Their front line troops had already landed and . . .

Marcello: You were still on the beach?

Pryor: Yes. We were there to see the landing. Now the infantry had already landed and passed on through, but we watched the landing of artillery, tanks, and then, of course, all

the supporting craft and supporting arms such as engineers. Then, of course, last comes what we refer to in amphibious warfare as the general offloading. That's when you begin to bring in all your logistical support. We provided the physical means of unloading all those supplies and materials. I don't think the Japanese put anything up that weighed less than 200 pounds. Mountains of rice in 100 kilo bags . . . that's 220 pounds. And so immediately two of us grabbed hold of one: "Huh-uh, huh-uh! One man!" So we carried 220-pound bags of rice all that day and into the night.

Marcello: Did they harass you at all at this point yet?

Pryor: No, no. For the most part they ignored us other than these beachmaster groups that were responsible for unloading and putting these materials off the boats, the landing craft. These front line troops seemed to be fairly friendly toward us. I know when they would come in--like artillery and the tankers--they would come in and unload their machines and unload, let's say, their artillery pieces . . . a lot of this was horse-drawn artillery . . . and as they cared for them, well, then they'd break out, oh, to us what we'd say C-rations. They're combat rations. Well, they would

eat that before they moved on up, before they formed up and then moved out of the beach area. They would eat . . . they had, oh, for the most part there'd be meatballs. I noticed they had little cans of, well, just something larger than one of our cans of Vienna sausage, with meatballs in a gravy. They had cans of plums. I guess that's a standard thing they had. Then it looked like mosquito net bags of hardtack, with little hard sugar candies in that. They'd eat whatever they wanted of that, and then as they passed by, they'd give us some of that. That was all we had for that day, was what these front line troops would give us. We worked on until near midnight, I guess, and then those that were in charge of us told us that we could sleep awhile, and so we lay there on the wet beach in all wet clothes and, gosh, it got cold for the tropics. We built fires and all we had to sleep on was the fronds from the palm trees. We'd gather those up and spread them out to keep you off of the sand, you'd cover up with those like some kind of animal. But still, it was tremendously cold.

The next morning we loaded many of these supplies on carts, and I don't know where they got all these two-wheeled carts. One particular one they commandeered

from a native. They had a water buffalo hooked up to this cart. They had us load this cart with the water buffalo, and they loaded it heavy to the front so the water buffalo could support part of the load, and when we started to move out from this area, the water buffalo decided to go to the jungle. Well, he went to the jungle, but in order to get to the jungle he had to cross about a three foot ditch, and the cart didn't make it to the jungle. The cart made it to that ditch. We had to wrestle that thing out of there, and there was about six of us who had to manhandle that cart the rest of all that day. We cut a long bamboo pole, and it made it a lot easier to put that bamboo pole at the back end and let one guy ride on it to balance it. We hit this paved road . . .

Marcello: Incidentally, did the Japanese loot you at this time in anyway? In other words did they take rings, wrist watches--I say wrist watch but if anybody had a wrist watch, I'm sure it was destroyed or damaged beyond repair by this time. Did they loot you at all?

Pryor: No, they only checked to see if we had any weapons, and, of course, none of us did and then watches or rings or anything, they never took any, not from any of the people I was with. Of course, like you say,

after immersion in that salt water, watches would have been destroyed . . . worse than useless. So they didn't do anything on that order at all; in fact, they usually didn't even ask to see one. I know I didn't even have a watch. My watch was still aboard ship in my locker. I was not wearing it. But those that had watches, they for the most part didn't even ask to see it.

Marcello: In other words there was just absolutely no rhyme or reason to the way the Japanese reacted when they took prisoners. In other sections, in other campaigns, in other theaters they looted the prisoners of everything including their clothing right off their backs. This happened in the case of the Wake Island Marines. When they arrived in prison camp in China, they had nothing except their underwear on.

Pryor: Yes, I know. Well, this is true.

Marcello: Here again, you were coming in contact with the invading troops, and you had not given these invading troops a rough time in anyway. They really had no grudges against you. You hadn't killed many of their buddies or things of that nature, and perhaps in a way this accounts for the . . .

Pryor: No, I don't think that's it altogether because we'd been kind of rough with them that night. There was

a lot of Japanese in the water that night. We could hear them, and I know that in the darkness that night, we would drift through oil patches, and this oil would be two or three inches thick maybe on the surface of the water for a big extended period of time, and probably it means where we had sunk a transport, and this oil had leaked out around this place. We would hear Japanese--we knew they were Japanese--in the water. We could hear them calling and crying to one another off in the distance. We had inflicted some damage on them. In fact, later on, I was in prison camp and our gunso--that's kind of like a first sergeant, and it's a rank that would be equivalent to one of our first sergeants, but he carries a lot more water in the Japanese Army than one of our first sergeants does--but we had a gunso that was on one of these transports that had been sunk, and he'd had to get out and swim for it, and we'll come to that little character way on down the line because he was there with us at the time the war ended. Rather I think that the treatment you receive from Japanese forces more or less reflects the nature of the commander of the unit itself. I know that from time to time we would be in the custody and supervised by a certain Japanese unit, and they

would be abusive as all get out. By thunder, with no provocation at all, they'd beat you, slap you with their rifle butts, or grab a bamboo pole and flail you with that. It didn't require any provocation. Then maybe you'd be around another group, and they just didn't pay you any mind. They knew that you were always American. They always singled us out but not for any abuse or anything, but even during all this time we knew they exhibited tremendous respect for anything American. It was just as obvious that he was Japanese and we were American. But by and large any time we found that we came in contact with combat troops, they respected us and they never abused us. I never did have any abuse from those that were considered to be combat troops. Later on up in Burma when they would come through there, they didn't treat you with any disrespect or with any abuse. But all these rear area commandos--these what we called "communication zone people" or these that belong to the army of occupation--many of those were Korean, and they were mean, ornery, no-account boogers.

Marcello: I've heard all sorts of stories about those rascals.

Pryor: I was in South Korea during the Korean conflict, and if I had ever seen three or four of these guys, I'll

tell you they would have suffered unusual consequences because I would have made one horrible example out of four or five of them that I can name right now. If I'd ever run onto one of those guys, I don't care where it would have been, I would have had me a piece of him. We would have gone around and around, and I'd have got retribution for much of this treatment they imposed on me way back there.

Oral History Collection

Mr. Charlie Pryor

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: January 22, 1973

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Charlie Pryor for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on January 22, 1973, in Dallas, Texas. This is the second in a series of interviews with Mr. Pryor concerning his experiences and reminiscences as a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Pryor was on the USS Houston when it was sunk by the Japanese and was subsequently captured and spent the rest of the war in various prisoner-of-war camps. Now when we left off the last time, we had been to the point where you had just reached shore after the USS Houston had sunk, and you had been on shore a day and had in essence been a prisoner for a day. Let's try and pick up the story from somewhere at that particular point.

Mr. Pryor: Well, we had been put to work by the Japanese moving the mountains of material that was coming ashore during the general off-loading phase of the landing operation

there on the west coast of Java. That night, very late in the night--probably near the hour of midnight--they permitted us to lay down and sleep. We got very little sleep--it was so cold. We'd been in the water all day, and, of course, then at nighttime we were terribly chilled.

Marcello: You still had your clothing, I gather, that you had been pulled out of the water in.

Pryor: Yes, I was fully clothed excepting for my shoes.

Marcello: That's right. You mentioned that the last time.

Pryor: If you're ever aboard a ship that sinks, well, believe me, keep your shoes. I know that this was a terrible mistake to leave them, but I'd kicked them off in the water. I, of course, had reason and ample cause to regret that many, many times afterwards. Then the next morning we resumed this business of unloading all the supplies that were coming in in the last phase of the landing operation. About middle of the morning the Japanese had us load many of these supplies on carts of one sort or another. Most of them were wooden-wheeled, two-wheeled carts. It was the intent that we would load all this material of various sorts--rice and other sorts of preserved rations, not C-rations as we know combat rations to be, but great tubs of plums and

pickled seaweed and such items as that. We loaded these carts, and then the POW's--those that were captured at that particular place--were to be the motive power for all these carts and move to some place away from the beach area.

Marcello: What sort of harassment were you receiving from the Japanese at this time?

Pryor: Actually, very little. In fact, I'd say we were very well treated by the combat forces on the first day that we had worked there on the beach. Of course, many of the troops that came in were those that follow the infantry. Usually the infantry would be first to land, and then you land your supporting troops--your artillery, engineers, your mechanized forces. We had preceded the landing of these types of units, and we saw them land the artillery--most of it was horsedrawn artillery that day--and some light, mechanized forces and other motor-transport equipment. As these combat troops formed up on the beach and then made preparations to move on up to the combat zone--if there was a combat zone--well they would break out their packaged rations, the combat rations. For the most part it would be tin cans of some kind of prepared meat kind of like meatballs and some

kind of fruit and then little bitty, tiny, hardtack, cracker-like things with hard-sugared candy in there. The only food we had that day was what these combat troops shared with us. These rascals that were, let's say, rear echelon or communication zone personnel-- those responsible for getting the equipment ashore and seeing that it was ashore and then that it was sent to the place that it was supposed to be sent--combat-support units . . . here in our forces we called them beach master parties. They're part Navy and part Marine Corps personnel. The only abuse we had at all was from these people. Those kind we sometimes referred to as "rear area commandos"--these that very seldom see any manner of combat. This was the thing that we were to note pretty much throughout our time as prisoners-of-war-- that anytime we were around front line combat troops, usually we had very good treatment from them. But most of the difficulty would come from these other people, these that were strictly administrative-type and auxiliary-type persons that stayed altogether behind the line of combat or in the zone of communications, as we called it. But anyhow, we loaded these carts, and I thought I'd fallen into a real stroke of luck there. I was assigned to a cart, a native cart, and

it was powered by one water buffalo. The Japanese had commandeered this rascally thing from one of the natives against his protests, of course. But he didn't argue with them a whole lot, you know. So we loaded this big, two-wheeled cart pretty heavy, and, of course, on their instructions we loaded it heavy to the front so that the buffalo could bear part of the burden. Rather than pull all of it, well, he could bear part of it with the weight of the cart on his back. So when we lined out to move out from this beach zone, this water buffalo decided to go to the jungle. Well, he made it to the jungle, but this cart didn't. He had to cross about a four-foot ditch. It was about two feet deep and about four feet in width, so that cart was left stranded right there, and the buffalo just kept on going. He made it to that jungle, so the Japanese said then that we were going to have to pull the cart. That'll be one of the most miserable days that I'll ever spend in all my life. We made it out to a very short way from the beach.

Marcello: How many of you were there working on this cart?

Pryor: As best I recall, there must have been about ten of us on the cart, and this was in a way too many of us. It was underpowered needless to say. But a little way

off the beach we came upon a concrete road, a paved concrete road, and in the heat of day that thing was just as hot as all get out! I don't know what the temperature would have climbed to on that day, but I know that this concrete absorbed it all. Our feet were all water-logged and very, very tender needless to say; most of us were barefooted. So we marched down this road in all that heat with no water. We didn't have any water so that made it worse. We used to run ahead, take turns about running ahead to just stand in the shade of a tree that shaded the road because the Japanese wouldn't let us leave the road. We would run ahead and stand in the shade of a tree until our cart came along, and then that one that was standing in the shade would take his place on the cart, and the next man would go to the next shade and cool his feet off.

Marcello: Yankee ingenuity.

Pryor: We found that it was easier . . . we finally managed to put a very large bamboo pole in the after end, back end, of this cart and let one man swing from the pole to give it balance. It was much easier. The Japanese, when they saw that one guy riding on there the first time, they came up and whopped him with a bamboo pole

(chuckle) and knocked him off of that thing. We had a devil of a row with him before we could convince him that it was much easier for the rest of us to let one man ride. Of course, thereagain, we took turns about riding on this pole.

Marcello: I'm sure that language difficulties were responsible for a good many of the beatings and so on that you got not only here but probably throughout the camp. A lot of misunderstandings probably arose because of the language barrier.

Pryor: Well, yes, I dare say this would be very much more pronounced in these early days as a prisoner-of-war because in time most of us assimilated some basic knowledge of the Japanese language. I know in my own case, within a period of about . . . oh, I guess from this point to a period of within two months I had a complete mastery of the Malayan language. Well, then it was no formal language, but I could speak fluent Malay within a period of about two months. Many of the Japanese, of course, acquired the same understanding of Malay, so we quite often conversed in the Malay language. Then when you put Malay with what brief Japanese you knew and what smattering of English that

they knew (chuckle), a lot of times you'd be conversing in three languages, which again is not without its dangers in communicating the true idea. But, nevertheless, we managed very well with this. But, of course, I suppose a person when circumstances dictate can communicate almost anywhere in the world and with almost any people. I guess that sign language would be a universal language, and, of course, we could get an understanding of what they wanted. Particularly when force is applied to the right place, you get to understanding in a hurry (chuckle) because they soon get your attention.

But I know that on this day this was the most difficult day I believe I've ever undergone because every step that we made . . . and, oh, I guess, the nearest we can figure it was in the neighborhood of very close probably to thirty kilometers that day. That would be very close to twenty miles--about nineteen, probably about nineteen miles that day under these circumstances. Every step, every step that you made that day was torture. I know that in the course of the day we passed combat troops, many combat units, particularly supporting units such as combat engineers and such as your tank forces and many of these

horse-drawn artillery units that we had seen off-loading the day before. Now we passed them. We went right on up to the vicinity of the front lines such as they were. I know that in one area we went through that day . . . oh, it must have been about midafternoon. We went in through an area along the road that had just been subjected to artillery shelling on the part of the Dutch forces. They had shelled a Japanese convoy moving up to the front, and trucks were still burning along the side of the road, and trees were all just denuded of the leaves, foliage, and so forth. I recall that we saw some few dead Japanese in this. But I recall one thing quite vividly--that there in the very middle of the road was a Japanese shoe. They wore these canvas shoes with the . . . the toe part of it would be separated; the large toe was separated from the rest of the shoe.

Marcello: It was like a split-toed affair.

Pryor: Yes, it was kind of like one of our baseball fielder's mitts--designed in such a way. Of course, we came to know these Japanese have remarkable dexterity using these toes, and I guess for some reason they designed them that way. But this Japanese . . . I don't know where the rest of the body would have been, but just in

the middle of this road was this foot in the shoe and blood still oozing out of what little bit that was left in the foot. But we kept moving on forward, and there was no further action along that way.

Sometime after dark they moved us into a Japanese headquarter's area; it had been an advanced headquarters. The Japanese forces had commandeered . . . oh, it looked like something that might have been a plantation headquarters. I have no idea. I only saw it there in the brief darkness. But they took us into various rooms for our first interrogation. We could see that they had captured Dutch personnel in other places there, and there was a lot of abuse going on. We could know that--torture and such things as that. We could hear these people screaming in some of these interrogation rooms.

But about all they done to us there was just ask us normal things--the information which we could give. It seems they were reluctant to believe, though, that we were members or crewmen of the USS Houston because they had reported previously that the Houston had been sunk very early in the war. They had reported her being sunk, and later on in another engagement we'd had, they had reported that a ship of the Houston class had been sunk. So that was the second time we'd been sunk, so

I guess about every time they run onto us they sunk some Houston-class cruiser. So they just didn't want to believe that we were off the Houston. Again, it was extremely difficult to get across the idea of what a Marine was. I might have mentioned this previously, but I've often wondered just what they did put down. They had no Marine Corps as such--sea forces and land forces, but they're part of the Navy, and they're called Special Sea Forces. That's about the only difficulty that we really had with them. Then I would suppose that we were there for probably four hours in this place.

Marcello: But they had never physically abused you in any way, or any of your buddies?

Pryor: No, not . . .

Marcello: Nothing serious anyhow.

Pryor: Not other than during that day before or when they didn't think you were moving fast enough. I'll tell you, it's difficult to move when you're under a 220-pound sack of rice. They packed this rice in hundred-kilo bags. In fact, most everything was packed in something in the order of a hundred kilos. That's 220 pounds. When you grab on to something like that that really has no . . . well, it's all dead weight. There's not any

way that you can use the package itself to help you;
it's just a dead weight.

Marcello: What sort of shape were your feet in by this time?
Now this was after a whole day of this type work.

Pryor: Well, certainly by the time we got to this headquarters
they were just raw, just like a piece of raw meat.
Then, of course, most of us were so dadblamed disgusted.
I'd think that if they'd just lined us all up and said,
"Well, we're going to shoot you right now!" that I don't
think I'd have seriously protested that. I was just so
disheartened that it had come to such a thing. It was
something that we'd never visualized. We used to joke
about it after the war had begun. We'd oftentimes go
up to one another, "Well, what are you going to do when
the Japanese get you, and you go on this fishheads and
rice diet?" and never visualizing that anything would
happen like that. We never believed that we would be
invincible or any such thing as that, but if the ship
were ever destroyed, very few of us figured that there'd
be any chance of living to talk about it--that we'd
just go down with the ship, and that'd be all there would
be to it. If there would be any rescue, it would be
by our own people. But here circumstances were other
than that, and we found ourselves prisoners-of-war.

But we were not singled out for any particular attention at that time. I would suppose that when they came to realize that we were off the Houston, and they realized, too . . . their own intelligence could tell them that this was the end of the ABC fleet, the combined fleet out there--ABCD, you might say. There was very little in the way of intelligence they could get from us, and so they didn't give us really too much attention. There would have been no purpose, very little purpose, in giving any attention to us. Now with these Dutch people they were still, I guess, yet at some stage of combat operations, and, of course, this was a tactical thing. And so they could obtain some information from them that would be of tactical value in the immediate operation. With us it was all ended, and what we could tell them would be of no tactical value at all. So they never interrogated us and never abused us at any time like that, and the only abuse that we had observed up till that time would have just been random, just random in its nature, and usually because some joker was disgruntled or one of us wasn't moving fast enough or that we'd dropped a rice sack in the wrong place or we had picked up one package rather

than another one. They really didn't have to have much pretext from these people. But if you are referring to abuse with intent, no, we hadn't experienced any of that.

Then during the hours of darkness, after we completed our interrogation, they removed us to a place. We could see there in the dark that it was some type of . . . oh, I guess you might say jailhouse or prison. They put us in cells. In fact, we came to know this was a penal institution--not large. I don't know how much it would have accommodated. I never did get to see all of it because we were limited in our movement in this place. So they put us in cells that were designed probably for about a dozen native prisoners, as the Dutch had employed the system. Well, they put thirty of us in such confined quarters. In some of our cells it would be impossible for all people to lie down at the same time, and then what we had to lie down upon would be a concrete . . . oh, kind of a raised platform. And no sanitary facilities. They put a big tub, wooden tub, in the corner of the cell. This was our first experience in confinement. We were probably the worst-looking lot that you've ever seen.

Marcello: What did you talk about?

Pryor: Well, I guess unless you experience something such as this, they like to say that military people talk about girls, but in situations like that you don't think of girls--food.

Marcello: I'm sure this would have been the case much later on, but I wasn't sure if this would be the case right now.

Pryor: Yes, we were hungry enough then because actually they'd fed us practically nothing--only what the combat troops had shared with us on that first day. On the second day in the march down on this road we had nothing at all; they had not given us any food. So for two days we just, you might say, had had nothing to eat. Then in this place they gave us rice, no more rice than you could hold in your cupped hand, and that's not enough rice to get by with. I don't know how the native prepared it. It came out of a kitchen, and natives had prepared it. I came to know later on that they took a green joint of bamboo, and, see, that bamboo would have a circumference something . . . oh, well, let's say a diameter of maybe four and maybe sometimes near five inches. They would cut it above the joint, cut it off above two joints, and they bore a hole in one of the joints and drop the raw rice through this

hole and then put a little bit of water in there and then put a plug in it and then throw the whole joint in the fire, in the coals. Of course, this rice cooked in there by steaming, and it was like rubber. I think you could have taken it out and wadded it up into a ball, and it would have bounced (chuckle). I've never seen any rice anyplace fixed just like that. Of course, I didn't like rice; I didn't like rice at all. For three days I didn't like rice, but on about the fourth day I decided rice was a pretty good food.

Marcello: How long did they confine you in this jail altogether?

Pryor: We would be there for about six weeks--about forty-two days, about six weeks. We never had too good a count of time along this early. In fact, dates and times never meant a whole lot to us throughout most of this time of captivity. But when you ask what we thought about, it was mostly food. We were, of course, just hungry to the point of it being actual torture, and we'd get this rice maybe twice a day. The only times that we had any soup or stew to go with the rice it was made out of spoiled meat, and very few of us could eat that. It made us sick when we did. Then occasionally we got some greens, some cooked greens with this rice, and these greens were sweet potato vines, and they'd

cut the sweet potato vines and stack them up while they were green, and they'd mold it. You know, it's like hay. You cut hay and you leave it out there until it is dried out until the moisture content has been reduced. So then it will not spoil then when you bale it. If you bale it green, well, it'll spoil. This is what we had for greens, and they're terribly bitter. We had a second variety of green, and we saw the natives later on picking these. They were leaves off a tree. Well, they were actually not altogether leaves, but they were . . . here in some parts of the United States we've got a plant we called pepper plant and a pepper tree. Well, this was like these things. It was kind of like the flowers and so forth off the pepper tree, and we ate those.

Marcello: What does it feel like to be that hungry? You say you're hungry, and, of course, I've been hungry, but what does it feel like to be extremely hungry?

Pryor: Well, when you reach a state when you are really extremely hungry, it's both a mental and a physical state. You have stomach pains, hunger pains--gnawing pains in your stomach. So that's the physical thing other than, of course, feeling weak and being without

any vigor at all. But probably the greater thing is the mental anguish and torture of thinking of food. Believe me, that's just about all you can concentrate on--food. It gets to such a point that at night when you sleep, or other times when you sleep, most of us, I'd guess, dream, and there you dream of food. You might think this was kind of ridiculous, but it's a real, too. When you dream, you even dream that you're dreaming! In your dream you know that it's a dream and that when you wake up that this very sumptuous feast, is not there. It's all been a matter of fantasy.

Marcello: I've also heard some of the other prisoners say that they even reached a point where they could smell a particular type of food cooking. They knew they smelled a particular type of food cooking.

Pryor: This is quite right. You can even imagine that you can smell roast beef, and it makes it so very real. As you sleep, as you sit there and sleep, you just know that you're smelling this roast beef and all these other things that you like. And in your waking hours, of course, you'd get together in small groups and you'd . . .

Marcello: You'd dream up menus.

Pryor: Yes, you'd think of menus, and you'd try to name . . . like, well, for instance, you'd name all the different kinds of ice cream that you could think of. And usually this was a fixture with most of us because it was terribly hot. At times you'd have given ten years of your life for a pitcher of ice water, and in those days we were allotted about a pint of water a day. It was boiled water; it usually came to us quite hot. It really has little faculty for quenching one's thirsts. We were just always suffering from chronic hunger and thirst in this place.

We had no soap with which to wash even if we'd had the water to wash, and so most of us were covered with this fuel oil. In the time that we were in the water we drifted through patches of this. Where a ship had been sunk, well then probably the fuel oil would be there on the water maybe two or three inches deep. We had all this fuel oil all over us. Of course, this was to be a thing that would stay with us for a good long period of time because none of us had razors or any means of taking off all this beard. Then that was another nasty thing. When your beard begins to grow out in about two or three weeks, it is torture. The

only thing that'll take your mind off food is thinking about all this scratching you have to do about that beard that aggravates you and itches. Itching is compounded there in all that heat because you sweat.

We were kept in confinement in this cell except for a brief fifteen-minute period a day. The Japanese would let the prisoners of one cell out for about fifteen minutes out into an exercise yard. Oh, my gosh, most of those that were around there thought that we were all the "Dillinger-types," I guess. They'd sit there with their drawn pistols and leveled guns and so forth figuring that we were violent. Occasionally, one of them would, I guess, go out of his way to express a little bit of concern for us. I know there was one Japanese there who was a three-star private, and I'll always thank some good Christian missionary, I guess, for his work with this individual. He said that he was a Christian, and he said that he had a brother that lived in the Sacramento Valley in California. This old boy had a mouthful of gold teeth. He opened his mouth, and it looked like the sun coming up. All you could see would be gold, you know. We called him "Smiley" because he smiled most of the time. Of course, this will be a characteristic of ours throughout this

time as prisoners. We will put some kind of name onto an individual that characterizes the man because we very seldom knew their true name, but rather we used some descriptive term with which we'd identify them. "Smiley" was one such man, but wherever he is, I would always wish him the very best because "Smiley" done more for us. At nighttime you'd hear some noise around your cell door, and there'd be a little tin of water be slid under the door or maybe a tin of rice that he had taken from the natives' kitchen or something. When the prisoners would be out in this exercise compound, well, he would walk through the area. He always managed to be out there during that time, and even when he was off duty, he'd be out there. He'd lay down three or four cigarettes somewhere in some spot and then move off and leave them and leave the prisoners to pick them up--those that smoked. And those little things Another Japanese that I had . . . oh, I guess we'd have kissed him (chuckle) if we'd gotten hold of him. An officer came there one time. He was a commander of a combat unit, and they had been withdrawn into a rear area for a period of rest. While they were there, well, they were assigned

to guard this prison compound. This officer, according to our guards and so forth, out of his own pocket bought each one of us for the three or four days he was there--I think about . . . something less than a week--bought each one of us a little, about a four-ounce loaf of bread, little bitty, tiny loaves. They baked a complete loaf in about a four-ounce loaf. He bought each prisoner a loaf of bread for those four days he was there. That little bit of bread, I guess, was . . . I've never eaten cake or anything else, I guess, in all my life that tasted as delicious as that little piece of bread.

Marcello: When you get something like that, do you eat it all at once or do you eat just a portion of it and save the rest for later?

Pryor: No, most generally, we'd conserve it--just nibble on a little bit of it and savor the taste of that.

Marcello: Chew each piece about 600 times!

Pryor: Then later on you'd have another part of it, and so you'd draw it out. I know we had one Australian in there with us. He'd been a crewman off the Perth, and I don't know where . . . one time we came by some of this native sugar. We called it gula--the word for sugar. This gula is not a refined sugar. They take

the juice of the cane, and they boil it down until it solidifies, and it still has a brown texture, and it does not have a granular texture to it. It's a very fine texture much like . . . oh, I guess, if you made something like a fudge here, as you know it. Of course, it was sweet and we liked it, but we seldom ever had any of it. But we had this one Aussie that could take, I guess, a one-inch square of that, and it would be about . . . oh, about a half-inch in thickness. I believe he could have eaten on that two weeks and never taken it from his mouth. I don't know how he could have shaved it off so thin. But we used to sit there and think of food all this time and commiserate with one another and wonder how far the Allies were from where we were. Of course, we had no news.

Marcello: Were you under the illusion that help was on its way and you wouldn't be in this too long?

Pryor: Oh, this was the thing that kept us going the most part--is that it'd just be a matter of time. We didn't know when, but it'd just be a matter of time. We never lost that confidence that . . . of course, later on we came to know it was going to be a lot longer time than what we thought it would in the beginning. But

the Dutch used to give us some news--not the men. Now in this part of the prison there were a bunch of Dutch people. Now when I talk about Dutch, there'll be two different groups of them. There'll be the native Indonesian, and there would be then the Dutch, the Hollander Dutch. These were Hollander Dutch that were interned into this system, and the men separately from the women and children. The women I had great admiration for. They used to drop a little piece of soap or a little piece of this sugar. That's probably where we got any sugar that we ever had. Any time they came roundabout they would try to pass on some news to us. Most of them spoke English. But the men wouldn't give us the time of day. I make that distinction between the men and the women. We just had great admiration for the Dutch women. They would go out of their way and take great risks to, I guess, try to either say something or do something they thought would bring some little bit of comfort to us. And the men, well, you'd think that they thought we was the cause of them being in that situation in the first place. We had little respect for them at all because they never attempted to do one thing for us in our

circumstances. But I know that in this period of time we, all of us had been healthy, and that was a fortunate thing. Certainly living under these conditions, our health would have been torn down, would have been broken rapidly.

Marcello: Incidentally, how did you manage to sleep? You had mentioned awhile ago that there wasn't room for everybody to lie down at one time in these cells.

Pryor: Well, there was always a number of them that would want to sit up for awhile, and they'd sit up usually near the door, along in the central passageway out here. They had the two raised concrete platforms that we slept on, and most generally, when you wanted to sleep, you could find a place there in which you could lie down and sleep because there were so many of them that would want to be up and sit out there looking out the door or something else. If you wanted to turn over, well, the next guy had to turn over too. You had to find a position that would, I guess, be compatible with those that slept on each side of you.

But in this manner of wasting away, with so little food, so little water, our people very quickly experienced either one or two situations as far as elimination of body wastes and so forth. You either went most all the

time, or you didn't go at all. I know one time our Navy doctor was in there with us, a lieutenant by the name of Burroughs, and Lieutenant Burroughs was kind of a droll individual. We'd known him fairly well aboard ship as one of our doctors. I know one day out there in the exercise yard one of our old boys that was in the cell there with me went up to him and said, "Dr. Burroughs, there's something that I want to tell you that I just don't know what to do about." Burroughs said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "Well, I haven't had a b. m. for nineteen days!" Old Dr. Burroughs says, "Well, are you bragging or complaining?" (chuckle) So he said, "Either way I've got you beat."

But I know I was one of the fortunate ones here. Most of our people did get dysentery in this time, and, of course, with that you have almost no control over bowel movements at all. It's just a continual thing. Some few of us were affected the other way. Of course, when your whole diet for the most part is nothing but rice, well, there's no waste to rice. Your body consumes all of it. I don't know. I think maybe chemists tell us that maybe something better than 90 per cent of it is water, so there's really no waste to

eliminate. I think in that forty-two days, the best I can recall, I only maybe had two b. m.'s in all that time. But we after about forty-two days, the Japanese took us away from this place.

Marcello: Incidentally, where was this place located?

Pryor: This was Serang.

Marcello: Now there were some other people here who were placed in an old movie theater, weren't there?

Pryor: Theater, in a theater. We knew they were down there, and I don't know . . . through some way we knew who most of them were. We'd get word someway. Now I don't know where it would all come from, but so and so was down there.

Marcello: James Gee, one of the people that I've interviewed previously, was in that theater.

Pryor: But then, oh, after about six weeks they removed us from Serang, and they took us then to the capital city of Java, Batavia then. Of course, they call it Jakarta now--a new name. They took us to a camp that had served as a barracks and compound for the Dutch Indonesian Army forces, and we called it Bicycle Camp. When we got there, there was a vast number, probably 7,000 or 8,000 Australians who were already confined there, and they had a pretty growing concern, you know.

So we came into this camp. We'd just been starved and wasted away down here before. They were feeding, they were feeding the Australians much better than what we'd had down there.

Marcello: I gather comparatively speaking this wasn't too bad a place.

Pryor: No, it'd be like living in the Sheraton Hilton beside what we'd been accustomed to or what we would ever experience again in all this time. Actually, the barracks were nice and well shaded. Of course, it would be hot, but we'd have plenty of water. There was not a great deal of work to be done. Some working parties would go out, and I'll come to that in just a moment. But altogether when we first came into this place, the Australians took a look at us and said, "Oh, blimey, you Yanks have just starved to death!" So they voluntarily permitted us to go to the head of the chow line every day at mealtime. Well, we'd have rice; of course, rice will be the staple diet throughout the whole thing. But in this place we'll have a stew to go with it, and whatever vegetables were in season would usually be put in it. Of course, I won't say there's a whole lot of them in there. We had quite a lot of pork, and they'd just cut up the whole hog and

throw it in there in little pieces. Of course, the top of the soup would be fat; the fat rised to the top. The Aussies felt, I guess, that when we'd go through there first, we'd get more of the meat and the nutrients from whatever was in the stew, and that was a consideration for us. They were very generous and good-hearted people.

I know we went through there, and very few of us, particularly our sailors in there, didn't have anything. We never came ashore with anything. I know that one other Marine by the name of Willey, Lloyd Willey, and I shared mess kits. On the road somewhere we had picked up a helmet, an old helmet that somebody had lost out there, and so this was our mess kit. One of us had found a spoon; I believe I had found a spoon, a little, tiny demitasse spoon. He had made one out of bamboo. So we had an agreement. I would get two bites to his one bite (chuckle). This was this agreement. So we'd go through there with this helmet and get two rations of rice in the helmet and two rations of stew, then put on that, and then we'd tear ourselves off somewhere and sit down, and I'd take my two bites with this demitasse spoon, him one bite with his bamboo spoon. This was a situation not altogether without its

perils and dangers, too, being accorded this opportunity to go to the head of the line as we were permitted by the Aussies because this fat pork, I'll tell you, it can go through you in a hurry (chuckle).

Marcello: You had more than two from now on (chuckle).

Pryor: Yes, you won't go any forty-two days with just two. I know that living in this barracks there would be . . . between two adjacent barracks would be the latrine. And the latrine in these places, they're not something that you would experience in any other country in the world. All it is is little cubicles there with a concrete . . . looks like a little, concrete trench running down through there with flowing water, continuous flowing water through this trench. So you'd go there and straddle this trench. So, this is the land of liquid toilet paper (chuckle). You'd see the Dutch go for this thing with their bottle of water. That's the toilet paper--a bottle of water. It used to amuse me to see these guys. Some of them never dared get more than eight to ten steps away from this latrine, and you'd see them sitting there building some big menu, telling how their momma made this particular cake or how she fried steak or some other such favorite

dish. Boy, right in the middle of it they would scramble up from there, WHSSST, and start beating on these cubicles to see which one of them might be empty, just in a real hurry! Some of these guys used the inside of the huts themselves. You used to look down the length of one, and you'd see some old boy come tearing down through there just going as hard as he could go (chuckle). You dared not get in his way because he'd run over you because he was just in a little bit of a strain. During the night you could hear many of them; some of them would get very little sleep at night. They'd sit out there and build these menus and then head for that latrine just as hard as they could go (chuckle). They didn't dare get away from it.

A little later on, after we had been there some brief period of time--really, I don't know just how long we'd been there--they brought in these other Americans that they were called the "Lost Battalion," the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery of the 36th Division, Texas National Guard. Of course, I was particularly pleased to see them because so many of these old boys were from Texas as so many of us were on the Houston. You'd think that half of the Marine

Corps and Navy used to be made up of Texans and Californians. So we were muchly pleased to see these people show up; so many of them were from Texas and in and around the areas that we knew quite well. Of course, they came in with most of their kit, everything that they'd had, and so they shared many of these things with us. Like I'd said that I came ashore completely clothed; I had a shirt and a pair of trousers and underwear. But the next day I gave my underwear to an old boy that came ashore just as naked as the day he was born, so I had given him my underwear, so then all I had was these . . . and later on I gave another one my shirt because he didn't have anything. So all I'd had left was this pair of pants.

Marcello: At this stage was this sharing rather common? Were most Americans looking out . . . were most prisoners looking out for one another at this stage here?

Pryor: Pretty much so. I would like to think that it was . . . we did have that concern for those of us that were worse off than you were particularly. But then again I'm satisfied that subconsciously we would think, "Well, before long we'll be out of this mess, and I won't really need it." I just seriously thing that had

we known that it would be such a terribly long time that we would not have been so quick to part with what we had individually.

Marcello: Had you gotten any shoes at this stage yet?

Pryor: No, we were still barefooted. But a couple of soldiers gave me a pair of shoes. Well, a soldier gave me a pair of shoes when they came into camp.

Marcello: These were from the "Lost Battalion?"

Pryor: Right. A boy by the name of Claude Thomas from Lubbock, Texas, gave me a pair of shoes. They were pretty well worn; they were not his best pair needless to say. Of course, you couldn't expect that, but I was appreciative of what he did give me. Then, too, they had a considerable sum of Army funds. The Japanese had not confiscated these funds from them, and so they permitted the officers to purchase any manner of supplies that we could. Eggs and beans, I know, were two items that we were permitted to purchase in the native markets outside and bring in and augment them to our kitchen.

Marcello: Who would usually do the purchasing--one of the officers or a couple of the officers?

Pryor: Usually one of the officers would be permitted to go out and purchase this, and, of course, escorted by Japanese.

So we were able to augment our issued ration a little bit with these. Occasionally we would have an egg, and occasionally we'd have a spoon of beans, some kind of dried bean kind of like one of these brown kidney beans. They were not pintos but kind of a brown kidney-bean-type like that. So we fared rather well. Of course, our health improved with these improved rations; we had no sickness. We did lose an officer there in this Bicycle Camp. One of our Navy officers died there--Lieutenant Ross, I believe. I don't know whether he'd made lieutenant commander or not. But I believe it was Lieutenant Ross who died there, and that's the only death that we'd experienced until that time.

We did not have to do a great deal of work. In fact, you kind of welcomed an opportunity to go out on a work party, and most of the work parties that were sent out from this place went to the loading docks down in the port area. The port area is some good distance removed from the city of Batavia itself--a place called Tanjong Priok. We would go there, and most of the work would be concerned with loading materials that they'd confiscated in and around the area--refrigerators, automobiles, machinery of various

sorts. They'd put it on the ships and send it to Japan. There was a refinery down along there, and we used to go work along this. Of course, it was mostly involved in moving oil drums, either filled or empty. I used to welcome an opportunity to go on this, and most generally when I went I was in charge of working parties that would go. So in that I'd be in charge, I didn't have to do any physical work at all. I'd supervise the work of those men that were with me.

Marcello: Did you receive any additional rations as a part of going on these details?

Pryor: No, other than possibly what you might come from by the natives. In around there they might slip a hand of bananas or maybe an egg or a bit of tobacco somewhere around where you were. In the vicinity they'd leave it, and, of course, we pretty soon got wise to look for it.

Actually, I had learned to speak Malay in a period of about three weeks. When we were first brought to this Bicycle Camp, there I had found someone with a Malay-English dictionary, and I had lived with that thing, and I mastered a fluency in Malay in that period of about three weeks. When we went out on these working parties, I was able to speak to the natives, and I could

solicit the natives for news. Of course, that was of great importance to us. At this time, probably the central topic of our concern would be the news. Of course, later on we came to know that they gave us everything but news (chuckle).

Marcello: They told you whatever you wanted to hear, I suppose.

Pryor: Just exactly what we wanted to hear. I don't know whether they really believed what they told us or not, but it was altogether wrong. They would tell us about great naval battles and what the Allied forces had destroyed and that they were on Ambon, or they'd landed to the north in the Celebes or on Borneo, and they were on Sumatra. Oh, it was just a matter of a few days, you know, and they'd be on Java.

Marcello: I'm sure Bicycle Camp was one big rumor mill. It didn't take long for these rumors to get around.

Pryor: Oh, very much so. But we were able to get a little bit of extra out there. One of the most unusual experiences I had was out on one of these working parties at this refinery one day. The Japanese gunso . . . that would be about the equivalent of our first sergeant, and a gunso is a little bit more than one of our first sergeants would be. He's accorded the respect of that we'd give an officer. They'd salute him. But really

he's not the equivalent of even one of our warrant officers--more like a first sergeant. This gunso was out there observing a bunch of new Japanese soldiers, I guess, that had just been sent into the area. They had a couple of the equivalent of a corporal out there drilling these . . . oh, about a platoon of these . . . some of them didn't even have one star, wasn't even a one-star private yet, and I don't think any of them had more than two stars. They were out there being drilled, and the gunso had heard me maneuver our people in and around there--call them to attention and count off and then give them the command--so he came over there after we'd put my men to work around their tasks, and he said, "You come." He took me over there where these Japanese were drilling, and he wanted me to take over this job of drilling these Japanese. He told these two corporals that they were to observe, that I gave commands better in Japanese than they did (chuckle), and he wanted them to sit there and observe and follow along with me and observe me as I drilled these Japanese. So I spent the biggest part of the afternoon over there drilling these Japanese, and these two corporals were going along. The gunso was standing

off out there at a distance watching it all, so sometimes he'd have me stop and then have them take over again. They wouldn't do it right, so then he'd have me tell them what they weren't doing right (chuckle)--some experience. Of course, we enjoyed these conditions such as they were.

Marcello: What did you do with your spare time? Was there any sort of entertainment that you could provide for yourself? Were there any sorts of athletics or anything of that nature here?

Pryor: Oh, yes. The Japanese permitted us to have some athletic gear--volley ball for the most part. That would be about it. I believe volley ball was about all we did have. So we rigged nets, and the Australians organized their teams, and then we had a number of American teams. We had leagues formed, and we played through a regular schedule, and this would be a thing that went on and very enthusiastically received. We had some very fast teams. Oh, I have seen volley ball played like in the Olympics this time, and, by thunder, we had some people that were every bit as good as anything you'd see playing here on these Olympic teams. We had several people that were just unbelievably good!

But then the Japanese had not taken a lot of personal articles away from any of these people, and many of them still had knives. Some of them even still had razors, and most of us shaved off our beards when these soldiers came in that had razors and so forth. We shaved and most of us had our hair trimmed and tried to shave once a week at least. They had their pocketknife, and so they whittled things and made cribbage boards. Some of them had cards, and so we played card games. We had access to some books. The Aussies had a good few books, and they circulated around, and you could read some of these. They had certain individuals that had lived some unusual experiences and would lecture somewhere in camp in the evening hours. I know one of the most interesting ones that I ever ran across was an Aussie that had been a white hunter in Africa for about ten years and had come back to join the Australian Volunteer Corps when Australia went to war. But he was an extremely interesting lecturer, and he'd tell you about his experiences in Africa on hunts and safari and many of these experiences. Of course, I've always had an interest in that. I'd have liked to have made one one time. But then others of them, particularly one of our

officers that had been . . . well, they had commissioned him immediately as Singapore fell. He had been, I guess, a Reuters correspondent in Moscow and then later on had been in Singapore, I think, as a correspondent and as a newscaster on radio. But you had many of these people there that had unusual, really unusual, talent.

Marcello: What nationalities were in this camp other than the Australians and the Americans?

Pryor: Here at that time, just Australians and Americans. There was none others.

Marcello: I assume there was no friction between the two nationalities here.

Pryor: No, very little. There was never very much friction between the Australians and Americans. There would be more between . . . oh, the Dutch. Anytime that we were ever in camp with the Dutch, there was really not a great deal of friction with the Dutch. They more or less kept to themselves. They didn't mingle with the rest of us a great deal. But most any of the friction you'd ever find would be between the English and Australians or maybe Americans and English, but usually not much even here because there was so few of us Americans anywhere here in the total number. We always got along

quite well with the Aussies. We always liked to think that . . . well, it was kind of our belief that Australia must have been something like the United States was way back yonder maybe around the World War I period of time in the things that they'd tell us--that milk was still delivered from cans and dipped into your own container, and the bread you bought was a whole loaf. They didn't know what it was to package it in a wrapper already sliced and such things as that. They told us of an individual that came to Sidney, an American who came to Sidney, and put in a cleaning-pressing plant and promised one-day cleaning service. My gosh, business was such that he just expanded all over the city applying modern methods of that day. We got along well with them. We thought they were highly individualistic people pretty much like the Americans are, and so we found them an accommodating lot.

Marcello: I gather the Japanese more or less left you alone here. In other words, there wasn't a whole lot of harassment, or was there?

Pryor: Well, there was. There was quite a lot here in this place. We will not see any combat troops from now on. They'll be all these auxiliary forces, and for the most part the bulk of them will be Korean--they're

noncoms, of course--and officers will be Japanese.
They'll give us a lot of trouble.

Marcello: Were the Korean guards here in Bicycle Camp? I know they came later on, but I didn't know there were any at Bicycle Camp.

Pryor: Right, right. Some of them we saw there, and later on we'll see in other places, even in Burma and Thailand.

Marcello: In fact, I think you saw more of them there.

Pryor: Most of our guards here would be Korean after we got there.

Marcello: I gather that they were real son-of-a-guns.

Pryor: Yes, some of them particularly. You'll hear some of them mentioned like "Hollywood" and "Liver Lips" and "Boot Head." "Liver Lips" will probably be the worst one that we ever ran onto, and he was turned loose there in Bicycle Camp. He just went through there from one end to the other bashing and hammering and clubbing with his silly rifle--big rascal.

Marcello: How did he get the name "Liver Lips?"

Pryor: Well, from his prominent lips. He was quite . . . well, they looked almost Negroid in their characteristics, and so we called him "Liver Lips." Oh, I think he was just about the meanest and orneriest rascal that we'd ever run onto. You didn't have to provoke him. He'd

just see you, and he was provoked. Of course, the thing that worked in our favor was that he never knew how to really use what strength he must have had, or his size. If he bashed you, well, he probably wouldn't hurt you anymore than if a fifteen-year-old boy would bash you. If he'd have known how, if he'd have known really how to hit, well, he could have killed you because the intent was always there, I think. Of course, he used his rifle. He'd use a bamboo club, anything that he could find to whale you with just without provocation. He was the absolute worst, I think, that I'd ever run onto. Probably the next one, another one that we knew there, we called "Hollywood." He was a quite fastidious sort of individual. He was a very clean-cut, really handsome Korean fellow and always just as neatly dressed and correct as he could be. There was not a thing sloppy about him. That's why we always, I guess, naturally called him "Hollywood."

Marcello: But he was a nasty one too?

Pryor: Oh, he was a mean, ornery bugger--just as ornery as he was neat (chuckle). I'd see him again later on way up in Thailand.

Marcello: How do you rationalize the behavior of these Koreans?
Was it simply a case where they had been beaten around for so long by the Japanese that now they had somebody who was lower than them that they could beat on?

Pryor: I would imagine that this might very well be the most logical explanation for it because they have been oppressed by the Japanese. When was it? Was it about 1903 that . . .

Marcello: 1894-1895.

Pryor: I know that the Japanese whipped the Chinese in 1895, and I guess it'd be about that time that they acquired Korea.

Marcello: Right, that's when they got Korea.

Pryor: They subjected these people to a great deal, I guess, of intolerance and pressure, and so now that they're placed in a position where they have some command authority, they just naturally feel that this is the way they've got to discharge it, to exercise it. Occasionally, you'll find some of them, though, that will kind of slyly admit that he's a Christian, and it's very, very seldom that you'll ever find one of them that ever tells you that he's a Christian that will ever direct any sort of abuse or intolerance toward you at all. But there's not too many of those. Of

course, we didn't know then just how the Japanese had . . . to what kind of treatment or position they had subjected these Koreans or what conditions they'd imposed upon them. But later on when I went to Korea during the Korean conflict and we, of course, lived there among them and came to know so many of them, well, since then I've come to understand. I sincerely believe that you're quite right--that this was all they'd known, and so it was probably just a natural follow-up that they'd want to discharge it in the only way that they've ever experienced it.

Marcello: What were some of the types of punishment that they would mete out other than the usual beatings? Were there any unusual types of punishment in Bicycle Camp that either you experienced or you witnessed personally?

Pryor: Well, yes, there was certainly a common thing that we'll experience throughout our time in prison camp, and this would be standing one at attention before the guardhouse for hours and hours and hours and hours. They might stand him there for periods of . . . I've known of periods of seventy-two hours standing at attention before this guardhouse. Now that would be the whole time. At times I've seen . . . I know these people

would pass out and drop in a heap, and when they revived them in some way, it was still back up there at attention. Usually for stealing, that'd be a common thing. The Japanese didn't hold much for this idea of stealing and theft--thievery. Of course, in many circumstances about the only way that we can find something with which to help ourself--medical supplies or a little extra food or something on that order. Well, the only way we could get it is when we found a source and stole it! This prison camp reduces you to a . . . later on we'll find that when we leave Bicycle Camp and go into the jungles of Burma and Thailand, well, conditions there in prison camp just reduces one almost to an animal-like status--survival of the fittest. You look after me, and if you can, then you look after those of you that are less fortunate than you are at that particular time. Anything that you're to come by that's not given you . . . the Japanese didn't even give us enough, you might say, then at times to sustain life. Well, anything more than that, you've got to acquire it from some other source, and most generally that would mean to steal it. The Japanese was the most general source. Any other source would be to try to barter with a native probably later on, and, of course, that was a

forbidden thing, too, and if you were caught, well, then it was in front of that guardhouse. Then, of course, standing at attention would not be all of it. When somebody came along a little disgruntled, one of the guards, well, he'd whop you a few licks just to let you know that he knew you were there and what you were there for. But that would be a common punishment. I dare say there was no other means of punishment that would approximate that in its attention the Japanese gave to us. Of course, group punishment would be a thing they were addicted to, also. If one in a group did something and could not be identified, well, then, of course, the whole group would be subject to punishment. This is the thing that we'll experience throughout the whole time; just the whole group will be subjected to it.

Marcello: How great was the temptation to escape at Bicycle Camp?

Pryor: Well, I don't think any of us even . . . well, I won't say . . . I know not serious . . . we didn't seriously entertain the idea, but I don't think that any of us even superficially entertained the idea because we knew the situation there--that the Japanese controlled the whole island, and the natives for the most part did not receive us well. I know that on this day that we

marched from the beach area down to Serang that we passed through these little villages. Ofttimes the natives would run out to the edge of the road and pitch sticks or stones at us or dash up to you and try to spit on you. All tried to ingratiate themselves, I guess, into the favor of the Japanese. One of them dashed out there, I know, and spit on me, and that particular time I was riding on this bamboo pole at the back end up off in the air there, hanging onto that thing. He ran out there and saw that I was a good target and spit on my legs. Of course, it was insignificant other than the gesture, and, of course, I clambered off of that, and he WHSSST took off. Oh, I guess, you might think they believed that the Japanese would be a little more lenient toward them if they exhibited some kind of hostility toward Japan's enemy. I don't think there'll be many situations when we'll even seriously entertain the idea of escape--certainly not in Java.

Marcello: What steps did the Japanese take to discourage one from escaping? Were there any sorts of threats made with regard to one who did escape and then was caught?

Pryor: Well, of course, they made it very clear to us that if we tried to escape and were caught, we'd be shot. But this would not be the thing that would dissuade us--

just the practical knowledge that, by thunder, there was nowhere to go! Nowhere to go! You're not in a situation such as a prisoner-of-war would be in, let's say, in Germany or in Italy or in some part of occupied France. There you're of that people.

Marcello: There's always the chance that you can blend in with the population there, and you couldn't here in Java.

Pryor: Right! We're Occidental! Out here we're Occidentals but we're among Oriental peoples. You take in a case like . . . well, there'd be a few Dutch, but even the Dutch . . . these Dutch people there in Serang were interred not for any harm they might cause the Japanese but for their own protection. They let it be known that they were there for their own protection. The natives were hostile to them. So there would just be no place to go.

We'll stay there in this camp until . . . I guess later on they took some of our officers away. They took some other people away, and our understanding was they went on to Japan. Some of them did go onto Japan, we found out later on. A number of the officers were sent onto Japan, particularly the senior officers. Oh, I guess then about September, it must have been about September or so, they took away a bunch of the privates

and seamen, the very lowest of our enlisted grades, and took all those away under the command of an Army captain, Fitzsimmons. We didn't know where they would go at that particular time. They just said they would be leaving. Then in mid-October they took the rest of us from Bicycle Camp, the rest of us Americans, put us on a ship, and we know that we headed north and west, and it was a very uncomfortable boat ride.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of that boat?

Pryor: Oh, gosh, let me think. No, offhand I . . .

Marcello: It seems to me I've seen it written someplace myself, and I can't think of the name of it either, and I was wondering perhaps if you did. It was part of a convoy, was it not?

Pryor: No, we were pretty much by ourselves then. This time we left there, and, of course, we went up through the islands, and all of them were Japanese islands, and we were altogether in Japanese-controlled seas. I know that we passed the island of Bangka. One of the Japanese guards told us that when we passed this island and that it was Bangka. Of course, I was familiar with Bangka. It's one of the world's richest sources of tin ore. And so he told us this. But they took us on into

Singapore. And when we got off the transport in Singapore after this miserable ride--hot . . .

Marcello: I was just going to ask you what this ride was like.

Pryor: Oh, of course, terribly hot! We were confined to a hold, and this hold had double-deck platforms in there, and again you slept so that, well, you just had room to lie down would be about it. I guess there was about as many rats in that hold as there was prisoners. Those rascals would run over you in the darkness there, and I don't know how so many of them could be in there and live--what they lived on. Of course, the Japanese had used it not altogether for a troopship, but I think they hauled livestock--I think horses, maybe some of these horses had been carried in this. We only ate once a day, and we didn't have enough water again.

Marcello: Did you ever get up on deck?

Pryor: Only when you had to go to the benjo. The benjo was just a . . . oh, more or less you just hung it through the life line (chuckle) where it would drop off into the sea. The only time that we were permitted on deck is when you had to go to the benjo--that's the latrine.

Then when we finally got to Singapore, they took us off the ship, put us on trucks, went down through the central city and along the port area, out into the

countryside, and we saw this great, vast, fortress-like building up on a kind of prominent bit of terrain. Really, there's no mountains there; it's appreciable hills. But it was quite prominently situated--a great, vast, gray, stone structure with high, high walls with turrets in the corners, the most unforbidden structure you've ever seen. We got up along the road adjacent to this thing, and the convoy stopped. All these trucks came to a halt, and the Japanese guards came back yelling and told all of us to get off. I looked up at that great stone fortress, prison. It was Changi Prison. I looked up at Changi Prison, and I said, "Oh, my God! What in the world have I ever done to deserve something like this?" There I'd imagine those people probably would be much better off than we would ever be again, but I just felt that this would be as far as a man could go. The very worst circumstances he could ever find himself in is to be confined behind those forbidding gray walls of that vast prison. But then they immediately got us off and lined us all up. Well, then they came along, I guess, and decided they'd made a mistake, and we were supposed to go to Changi barracks. So they put us back on the trucks and we headed out, and I just felt a great sense of relief when we moved on away from that place.

They took us on down to the army barracks, what had been Changi Army Barracks, where the English forces had been quartered. Things will not be nearly as well here in this brief time that we're there that we had experienced in Java, particularly Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: I gather the British and whatever troops were at Changi were just a miserable lot. Morale apparently was an all-time low here at this stage of the war anyhow.

Pryor: Well, I gathered morale had been an all-time low from the time that the combat had begun--such combat activities that actually had been undertaken. Most of the people there were English. I don't know--80,000 possibly. A great number were Australians. The Third Motor Transport had quite a name. I know they had the name of having looted every city down through Malaya that they'd ever been in as they fought on down through there. Then there were some Scotch, a good few Scotch troops there, and Gurkhas and Sikhs and Tamil troops--they're Indian troops that belonged to the British Army. We didn't get along well with the English there at all.

Marcello: What seemed to be the difficulty?

Pryor: Well, of course, they administered the camp. It was all English administration. You didn't see any Japanese guards or anything. They lived outside most of the areas

where prisoners were concentrated, and the English administered all the prisoner-of-war activities. A troopship had just been into port and brought in Red Cross supplies, and there those rascals were eating sweetened cream and chocolate and tinned beef and so forth. All we were getting was rice without any salt and an old melon. We had kind of a melon. It was like an old citron, the pie melon that we used to call them. It looked like watermelon rinds boiled up in water, and I don't guess there's a vitamin in a carload of the things. All we'd had was to boil these up in water.

Marcello: These old boys weren't sharing anything.

Pryor: No, they weren't sharing anything. About once a week we would have some mutton to put in the stew. I guess the refrigerated The English, I guess, used a lot of mutton, the English and Australian troops there, and the Japanese I don't guess would eat it, and that's why they left all these frozen carcasses for prisoners-of-war. Once a week we'd have some of this mutton, and, of course, I'd never eaten any. This was the first mutton I'll have ever tasted, but I soon acquired a liking for it. We saw very few of these people that done any work, real productive work. Sometimes they worked on the docks. But the Japanese

cleared out a large rubber plantation, cut all these rubber trees down and removed them, grubbed out the stumps and so forth, cleared the land to plant vegetable gardens. We were the jokers that done all this work. You didn't see any English out there doing it; old Yanks coming through there that went out and done all this work.

Marcello: In other words, did the English commander assign the Yanks to do this, or the Japanese had assigned the Yanks to work in this garden?

Pryor: Well, we suspected that the English had decided it. Of course, the Japanese directed it eventually, but we always figured that it was the instigation of the English. It'd be hard to convince me otherwise. But we worked practically all the time every day, practically all the time that we were there, clearing this jungle of rubber trees and leveling it and getting it ready for vegetable production which would help to subsist all these English prisoners that were there in this place. There was a good few Scots there, and we did get along . . . Americans always, I guess . . . I don't know of any instance when Americans have not gotten along well with the Scotties. But I saw again some people that I'd known before, not individually, but as a unit, you know. The Seaforth Highlanders were there in Singapore,

and I had known the Highlanders in Shanghai. There were three Highlander regiments there that I knew--the Argyles, the Gordons, and the Seaforths. The Seaforths we had known in Shanghai a long time previously. But we just didn't fare well there at all.

Marcello: Well, how hard was the work in this garden? Was it pretty tough work?

Pryor: Pretty strenuous. It was very strenuous work using saws and axes to fell these trees and then to move them to a place where they could be burned and then to level this land. Most of that would be with a kind of a big old hoe we called a "chunkle" and shovel. We would use this thing to clear this land, level it, and get it ready for planting vegetables sometime after we'd gone. We never planted any up until the time we had left. But this was, I guess, the greatest inconvenience that we'll experience here or torment will be that most of us acquired some form of vitaminosis--lack of Vitamin B₁. Your tongue and the inside of your mouth and particularly around your crotch and scrotum will all get raw, just raw as can be. It was strictly lack of Vitamin B₁, and so then we saw the value of the little bit of bran that was left on rice. All we had there was polished rice, whereas we'd been accustomed to having unpolished

rice in Java. But here it'll be polished, and really most of the real food value in rice is lost in polishing. We used to get the polishings and eat this bran which was unpalatable and not at all tasty.

Marcello: What opportunities were there to supplement your diet here?

Pryor: Again, it would be through thievery and just personal initiative.

Marcello: Had you been reduced to the point yet where you would eat snakes, animals of that nature, yet? When you were cleaning the rubber plantation in order to plant the vegetable garden, obviously, you must have come across perhaps some sort of tropical fruits or snakes or other animals?

Pryor: Well, animal life, no. We just didn't have it. Well, now I'll withdraw that just briefly. There was in this area a number of monkeys, but they were more in the camp area than they were out here where we were clearing this rubber plantation. Now some of the Dutch knew how to catch these things. They'd take a coconut, and where the three eyes are, they'd punch the eyes out and then put a vine . . . they used vines out there to build everything with. These vines are pliable and strong; they're just like a sinew of rawhide. They'd

tie this vine through these holes and then tie it to a tree. Then in the other end of the coconut they would cut out a hole. Oh, I guess that would be about one-and-a-quarter inches in diameter, and they would put some cooked rice inside this and put it out there in some of this area where monkeys congregated. This monkey will . . . silly rascal will come up there and reach in there for this rice, and when he balls up his fist with this fistful of rice, he couldn't get it back out of this hole in the coconut, and the silly thing will sit right there until these Dutch would come knock him in the head with a stick and then bake him or roast him--that's about the only way. I never sampled any of it, but, of course, we didn't know any technique of catching them like these native Indonesians did. They knew what that rascal would do and how he thought, I guess. About the only thing that we ever had to supplement our rice was coconuts, and there was a vast number of coconut trees around there, but they were outside the barbed wire perimeter. The Japanese were around all this area where prisoners were confined and surrounded it with barbed wire--concertina, stack on stack of concertina wire. Then other places they used a combination of concertina and then what we called

either single or double apron barbed wire. Concertina's just the roll that pulls out, and double or single apron is that you drive stakes in the ground and just like building a fence. You have it along these stakes, and then wires on a slant away from it and then across, then across those parallel-wise. But we found places where we could get through this wire and go over to the other side into the areas where the Japanese lived and operated--where these coconut trees were. One of my good buddies who was killed in an accident about a year ago, Hugh Falk, could skinny up one of those coconut trees just like a native. He was born and raised over here in Oklahoma, and he knew how to climb trees. Well, he could sure climb one of those coconut trees. So he'd get up there, and he'd pick these coconuts off, and then a couple or three of us would be down on the ground putting them in a sack when they'd drop. Boy, I'll tell you! You used to think the Japanese were going to be on us any minute. I know they could hear those coconuts for a mile and a half when they'd hit the ground. We'd think, well, if they hear one, they'll think that it just fell of its own accord. So we'd drop one and then we'd wait a spell before we'd drop another one because if they

heard them in rapid succession they'd know that it wasn't natural that they'd fall that way. So we ate coconuts.

Marcello: What would have happened had the Japanese caught you?

Pryor: I don't know. I would suspect that they'd have probably beat the tar out of us, but they had informed us if they caught us over there that they'd shoot us. I don't know whether they would have shot us or not. Probably if they'd seen us over there they'd have probably shot at us. But I don't know that if they had actually caught us whether they'd have lined us up and shot us or not. I don't know.

Marcello: Do you feel that you got quite a bit of nourishment out of those coconuts? In other words, was it worth the gamble?

Pryor: Yes, it was worth the gamble, I guess. When you're that hungry, well, you'll take almost any risk to get that little bit of extra food. Of course, the English fussed at us. They said those were the King's coconuts, and we weren't supposed . . . they discouraged us from getting these coconuts, and they knew we were doing it. But, of course, they weren't as hungry as we were either.

Marcello: I gather also from what I've read that discipline was somewhat lacking among the English troops. I've heard, for example, that they more or less had blamed their

officers for the predicament that they were in--having been captured to begin with--and consequently they had reached a point where discipline was a little lax. Did you find this to be true?

Pryor: Well, certainly we got that idea, and, of course, we got it that it had been lax even during the time that they were in combat. We just didn't think . . . it was just never our thinking that they put up a reasonable fight, and since I've come back and I've read the history of the campaign, the Japanese campaign for Malaya and Singapore, I've come to know that usually the English forces outnumbered the Japanese oftentimes two to one. The Japanese was the aggressor and the victor, and yet he was outnumbered two to one. Now perseverance is just something that you've got to have, and there were just a whole lot of these English troops that didn't have it. Now the Scotties did, and they told us there that the Scotties and the Gurkhas had fought the rear-guard action all the way down Malaya. You'd just never doubt the capability of the Scotties, and we knew the Gurkhas were one of the world's outstanding soldiers, too. But these as a whole . . . why, it was quite evident that they had no more morale than nothing at all. I know that I heard . . . an English major came

over to our area one time and talked to our people, and he said that when he came to Singapore as a replacement it was very near towards the end. Singapore was besieged then, and his first duty when he reported into his regiment was to sit down and study the history, get familiar with the history of the regimental silver. They had some kind of silver service, and so he had to learn that--not go out and learn the dispositions of his troops, but learn the history of the regimental silver. Oh, that may have some place in building esprit de corps. I don't know. The elite units of the world I think, have remarkable esprit de corps and tradition. Tradition builds that, develops that. The Lord knows the Marine Corps is steeped in it. But I don't think that in time of combat that that's the appropriate time to look to tradition. There's other tradition--the tradition of the unit in battle. That's the one that you concern yourself with then. There seemed to be a terrible lack of discipline all the way through, and I think it began at the very highest level. I never heard . . . I don't know the situation. I ought not to comment on it possibly. I was not privileged to any secrets or anything, but I know that in talking to many of these people that they placed no trust at all

in their commander there, General Archibald Percival. They just seemed to think that he was worse than not having any commander at all. He might have been ordered to do much that he did just like Wainwright had been in the Philippines. I know that they had a great deal of respect for General Wavell. Incidentally, I saw him one time; I stood an honor guard for him one time. He came to see our admiral. That was before the war, before we actually got involved in it, and he came to Manila to see Admiral Hart, and we had to fall out for him. Of course, he'd already made a great deal of history in North Africa then, you know. We were honored more than he was honored (chuckle) getting to be inspected by him. But British morale was a thing that was not good, except among some of those elite units--the Gurkhas. The Japanese did form the nucleus of a Free India Army from many of those Indian troops that were captured there, particularly the Sikhs and the Tamils. The Tamil is a black man. His complexion is quite black. He has the Oriental feature for the most part, but his skin is very, very dark. Of course, the Sikhs have long been, I guess, a . . . well, they've long had the opportunity to contribute to the English military forces, and there was a great number of them there. Of course,

most of them went over to the Japanese along with the Tamils. The Japanese tried to get the Gurkha, and, boy, they kept them out on the parade ground for several days in the hot, boiling sun. Not all of them could lie down at one time, and there were no sanitary facilities, little water, no food. The English told us later on that when they came around there and asked them if they were ready to take part in the Free India Army their officers spit on them, so then they forgot all about the Gurkhas. They left them alone from then on; they couldn't break them. But the Sikhs and Tamils, yes.

There was a great number of Aussies there, too, and we got along for the most part with them. In fact, one of the real fine meals that I had there . . . they invited us over to play a baseball game one time. They figured all Americans knew how to play baseball, I guess. So two or three or four days after we were there they invited us over and challenged us to a baseball game. So we went through the barracks there to find out who had ever played baseball, or could play, got up a scrub team, and went over there to play them. So they invited us to have dinner with them, and so we had some of this bully beef (chuckle), we had sweetened cream,

and we had hot chocolate. Oh, my gosh, it was the most sumptuous feast you ever seen in such circumstances. We had everything but rice. Afterwards then, we went out and played this baseball game with them. I didn't know until then that the Australians had played a lot of baseball down there really--had some professional stars, you know. One of these old boys that we played against that day is . . . the Aussies told us he was probably the greatest cricketeer that maybe ever lived, an individual by the name of Bradford. But Bradford was one of the finest baseball players I've ever seen. He was remarkable. But we played several games with them, I think four games altogether, in the brief time that we were in Singapore. I know that I got to be a great favorite of the Aussies. I'd played quite a lot as a kid growing up and then had played in the Philippines. I'd said that we had a tremendous softball team in the Philippines. So they never . . . well, the Aussies never had any power hitters. But in these four games I know I hit seven home runs in those four games, and they'd never seen anything like that. It used to amuse me . . . of course, flatter me a bit, too, I guess. When I'd come up to bat, well, all these Aussies would

be rooting for me (chuckle)--"Lay on one, Yank!" They got a big thrill out of seeing me hit a homer in this because it was such an uncommon thing.

Marcello: I gather then there was time for amusements and entertainment of some sort here at Changi from time to time.

Pryor: Briefly, yes, and particularly so among your own troops. But we for the most part worked most of the time, and it was just only . . . see, we were there from about the middle of October until about the middle of January, and in all that time I think those four times was about the only opportunity we ever had to really get together and play a game with them.

Marcello: What was the workday like there at Changi? When did it start, and when did it end?

Pryor: Usually we would get under way shortly after sunup; we'd be on the way to the work area. We'd usually get back to camp sometimes just before sundown. In most of the daylight hours we'd be out there.

Marcello: Was it a six-day week or a seven-day week, five-day week?

Pryor: You just worked on and on, and it usually would be more on the order of probably a couple of weeks before we'd have a day off. Sometimes maybe they'd let us off on some particular occasion. I know one day we

had off they wanted everybody to stay in and line the silly road, and Marshal Terauchi was to be on an inspection tour around there, and they wanted the whole stinking road lined on both sides--lined with prisoners-of-war--so that they could all bow like a bunch of apes when Terauchi came along this road with his flags flying on the car, big limousine car, and motorcycle kempeis and all out there. WHSSSST!! Why, he was just a blur when he went by. So we all had a day off there and a little bit of extra food that day. It was in honor of the occasion. But most generally we'd not have a day off except every couple of weeks or so.

Marcello: Well, how'd the barracks compare here at Changi with those at the Bicycle Camp, and living conditions in general?

Pryor: Well, living conditions in general were much inferior. They were not nearly as good as what we'd had in Bicycle Camp in Java.

Marcello: Was the water rationed?

Pryor: Oh, we could get plenty of water. They had treated water there, and we could get plenty of water there. That was, of course, one of the redeeming virtues. But, of course, in that we worked out in the fields

all day, the facilities to have water there was not good. We just didn't have the means of carrying it to the work areas with us, and so in that way it was limited. Of course, all the army boys had canteens, and most of us had scrounged a canteen of one type--either Dutch or an Aussie or an American canteen from some source, maybe even a Japanese one. So most of us had a canteen, but that would be all you'd have throughout the day.

Now as for the barracks, the barracks were again for the most part masonry construction and, of course, pretty much open, so that the wind comes on through. That's the air conditioning system--just the lack of windows and the retaining walls and so forth. The most disagreeable thing there was the dadblamed presence of bedbugs.

Marcello: Tell me a little bit about those bedbugs.

Pryor: These barracks were just, oh, gosh, eaten up with these bedbugs. I don't know where so many of them came from, and at nighttime it was just like giving a transfusion with these rascals all around you. Of course, I'd known what they were. Oh, I guess when I was a kid growing up, I know occasionally that mama used to look through the mattress for bedbugs. But then this was the first time I've seen any in years and years and

years--all we have there. I just think now that I could smell one a half-mile down the road, and if I ever smelled one, it'd ruin my whole night. But these would be the thing that we remember most about these barracks. I don't know where they'd have so many, and you'd be surprised that there'd be so many around a military installation. You'd think that they'd have some kind of extermination program that could suppress them through much of this. But I'm satisfied that they could have, but then again, in such places as the tropics life goes on when . . . well, let's say . . . I won't say that it goes on in different ways than it does in some other place, but it just seems to be so . . . life is so accelerated. You can go out here and clear a place in the jungle, and within a week the jungle is back, and it's just like you'd never been there. I know the same thing is true with much of this insect life. Everything grows larger and probably faster than it does anywhere else, so maybe even if they'd had an extermination program of some sort, well, we'd still have been bothered with all these things. But this is the thing we remember well.

Marcello: How did you get rid of them? Or didn't you? You just had to live with them.

Pryor: Well, we didn't. We just had to tolerate the things.

Marcello: How about lice? Was that a problem at this stage yet?

Pryor: No, no. That'll not be a problem yet. I'm satisfied there was some lice, but it was no problem there. The greatest problem really was this lack of vitamins. All of us had this vitaminosis, and that would be the worst thing. Then, of course, there was a compound that was available. Well, I won't say that it was available--that we knew of. The doctors got some, I guess, from the English some way called marmite. I don't know what goes into this marmite. Well, it's the gosh-awfulest smelling stuff you've ever seen, and it looked like axle grease. But it was a highly concentrated form of Vitamin B, and I know that some of the worst of us that got this vitaminosis and all . . . they could put you on just a little bit of that marmite, give you a little bit of that for maybe four and five days, and it'd just all clear up. It had miraculous curative power for this thing. We just never enjoyed our stay in Singapore, and I think most of us found it a welcome relief when we found out that we would be leaving. We left about the middle of January in 1943.

Marcello: Before we leave Singapore, and getting back to living conditions and so on, I gather that the English weren't

exactly the cleanest people in the world either in this camp.

Pryor: No.

Marcello: I understand this caused a great deal of friction between the nationalities.

Pryor: Yes, this was a thing that you noted. Now the Dutch never kept conditions as sanitary as they could have. It was both individual and a collective thing. You take such things as bathing . . . well, just individual sanitation--bathing and washing what clothes you did have. These English there, again like our American soldiers that were captured there on Java, they were permitted to keep their kit, so really there was very little justification and excuse for those people to live in some of the dadblamed filthy conditions that they lived in.

Marcello: Did you have access to soap and water and bathing facilities?

Pryor: Well, we could bathe. We had water to bathe with, but most generally we never had anything in the way of soap. Somewhere or another, along here somewhere . . . I guess even before that time . . . I guess back in Bicycle Camp some of the soldiers had given me a bar of Lux toilet soap, but I just wouldn't even use it to bathe with. I used it for toothpaste. I'd acquired an old bristled tooth brush, and I used this Lux toilet soap to wash my teeth with, and occasionally mix up a little

charcoal in with it. But I never bathed with this Lux toilet soap. You'd just wash off, you'd sponge off with water most of the time. Once or twice we did come by some native soap. Oh, it smelled like Madame Foo-foo's "house of ill repute" down here, you know. It was highly scented and perfumed. I don't know what all went into it, but you could bathe with it, and then they could smell you 200 yards down the road. Well, I believe on two occasions we were probably permitted to buy some with some of these Army funds that we still had left, so that we were able to come by a little bit of this soap.

Marcello: How was your clothing holding out? You'd been prisoner for almost a year now. Had you had to replace any of your clothing, or was it pretty well still the original issue?

Pryor: No, I still had this . . . I still had this old pair of overalls. They had held up fairly well. Of course, most of us by then had gotten kind of accustomed to wearing the G-string, and so when I washed my overalls, I'd be reduced to wearing this G-string. We weren't exactly overburdened with clothes. We never were. It would be a long time before I ever would come by a shirt again. Somebody gave me a shirt months or years

later, years later. We just didn't have a whole lot to be concerned with in the way of keeping clothes clean and so forth. You had to do the best you could, and, of course, you can understand that after a year many of them had begun to look the part, such that we were.

Marcello: Now I would gather also that up to this time you really hadn't lost too many people yet. People were suffering from certain physical ailments, yes, but not too many had died yet.

Pryor: No, we'd not lost any to speak of. I think up to until this time that Lieutenant Ross and maybe one other one was all we'd lost, and to my recollection this will be all that we've lost. Of course, practically all of us . . . now I'm an exception; I never did have dysentery. In all the time I was there I never had dysentery. I never had diarrhea. But practically all our other people had dysentery, and many of them by this time had had fever, so we'd had a great deal of sickness.

Marcello: How about malaria? Did you have malaria?

Pryor: Well, later on. But many of them had had . . . well, most of them had sickness of one sort or another, but it had not been any kind of fatal sickness.

So we'll leave Singapore about mid January of 1943, which we kind of welcomed that, and we are loaded aboard ship down in the dock area again. No, I take that back. We go by train; we're loaded aboard trains--boxcars on this train--and we got to the city up the Malay Peninsula. Well, the city is . . . I guess will be Penang. The port area, I believe, is called Prai, and there we were taken off the trains.

Marcello: I assume this was a fairly short trip.

Pryor: Yes, about a day and a night or so. There again we're crowded into boxcars, and the doors were closed. Again, it's stifling hot.

Marcello: People with that dysentery.

Pryor: And no water--again no water. I think we had one meal in all that time--a terribly uncomfortable trip again, as all of them will be with the Japanese. At Penang or Prai, we were taken off the train and were put on a ship. The Dutch are put on a fairly nice ship, fairly new and modern. It was not new, but it's a fairly modern ship--I suppose a ship of about 10,000 tons displacement. It had been used as a Japanese troopship. The Americans and Australians, about an equal number of us . . . that'd be about a thousand of us, probably a few more Aussies than there were

Americans, but there was about 500 Americans or 550 thereabouts and about a like number of Australians that were put aboard the oldest piece of scrap iron, I guess, in the Japanese fleet. Again, I don't remember the name of it.

Marcello: Did you know where you were going?

Pryor: No, we didn't know where we were going.

Marcello: Did this bother you?

Pryor: Not particularly. We didn't figure it'd be much worse than what we'd experienced, and no matter what it was, it was something that we'd tolerate. But then we went aboard this old ship, and it was a coal burner. The English had built it and had sold it. I guess after World War I the English had sold it to the Japanese, and they had turned it into a troopship and had used it rather than scrapping it. They'd probably sold it for scrap iron, and they didn't scrap it. The Americans were forward to the bridge, and the Aussies were in the two holds astern, aft to the bridge. There was a good number of Japanese troops on there, and, of course, they were all in the superstructure country, in the bridge country. I know I was in Number 2 Hold; that's the one immediately forward to the bridge. So we headed out--no life jackets and again not permitted to come topside.

Marcello: Now this was a two-ship convoy then. Is that correct?
Or were there more?

Pryor: Actually there were three ships. There was two ships, and the escort vessel was nothing more than a seagoing tug--a tug, a vessel about like one of our seagoing tugs. So we headed out into the Indian Ocean from there. We didn't really know where we were going. We'd heard rumors that they were building a railroad up in Burma and Thailand, but we had no idea really where we were going. We were drifting along there, and I guess it must have been the next day . . . I guess the first day out late in the day we met a convoy going the opposite direction--oh, I guess a half-dozen escorted vessels going the opposite direction. Then we sailed on through that night and the next day, and immediately after midday I was laying there on the hatch. We were in the deck just below the main deck, and the hatch was open. There was no cover on the hatch. I was just lying there on the hatch kind of sweating a jawbone poker game (chuckle). Some of these guys had made a deck of cards out of pasteboard, and they were sitting there playing what we called "Stateside Poker." They'd all keep account of how much one owed so and so, and when they got back to the States, well, they were

supposed to pay up. If one won ten dollars, well, this one owed him ten dollars when he got back to the States. So they were playing that poker game, and I was goofing off there, lying there watching some part of it, and we heard this tremendous whomp, whomp, whomp and couldn't imagine what the Sam Hill it was, but I just looked up through there, and I see this great, silver airplane with four motors in front of that thing. I said, "Oh, my gosh, that's a fortress!" I knew it was a flying fortress, a B-17, and then I saw another one and then two more. There was four of them altogether. But they had come along the same direction we were in line. They had come up from our stern and along that same line, and they had bombed this ship, the big ship ahead of us, and they hit it, oh, I think about three times. The rest of the bombs were very near misses. So she was sinking, and they were all leaving it, and on it they had about 1,500 Dutchmen--Indonesians and white Dutch--and about 500 Japanese technicians, we were told. They were not military people. They wore uniforms; some of them even carried their old cake knives, but they were all technicians of some sort. They were engineers and various sorts and machinists and people with technical skills that worked with the Army. You might say they

were paramilitary units and not military. As it turned out, all prisoners and everything on that ship had life jackets. The Dutch all had life jackets, and so they left the ship as it sunk. These bombs, at least one of them, had hit directly in the hold where all these Japanese were, so that out of the some 500 they had aboard we eventually picked up probably some sixty or seventy. The rest of them were lost. Out of the 1,500 Dutch, there were about forty that were unaccounted for. Then the planes went on over and two of them turned to their left--that'd have been to the port--and then made a run on us, and they came in from the port beam. That means right at a 90° angle from our line of movement. Somehow they just dropped . . . there was two planes and they only . . . I believe they must have only dropped one bomb, and that one bomb landed in the lifeboat swinging from the starboard davit. On the starboard side of the ship it hit in this lifeboat, and it exploded right as it hit the water. Well, it blew that part of the bridge off, and luckily this was an old coal burner. Singapore was one of the last coaling stations, I guess, in the world, and so in Singapore this ship had taken on a full load of fuel, and the coal bunkers were all full, and this

bomb couldn't compress the seams. Up above the water line and above the coal bunkers, it just caved the whole side of the ship in. If we'd been an oil burner, it'd have torn all the seams loose, and we'd have been sunk right there.

Marcello: Also, I guess it was a good thing that you were on that old scow that you were on because quite obviously it wasn't going to be a primary target.

Pryor: No, no, it wasn't the first target. That was for sure. It was probably only about a 4,000 ton vessel, but . . .

Marcello: What were your feelings having been under that air attack?

Pryor: Well, like I've told people since, many times I've been scared--you might say "scared out of your wits"--but I would suspect that I was probably as scared that day, and concerned that day, as I'll ever be in all my life.

Marcello: Did it cause quite a bit of panic aboard your ship?

Pryor: Well, panic wouldn't have served anything. We never had any life jackets. In this thing immediately I told several of the people around me, "Get your canteen! Put your canteen on! You'll want the water." I said, "Don't kick your shoes off either. Keep your shoes and get something that will float." There was a box

. . . oh, there was a box in there on the hatch, in the center of that hatch. It must have been about two-feet square, and I grabbed that box. When I went off, I intended to go with that box. It was made of light wood, and as a flotation device it probably would have supported three or four people that couldn't have just hung on it and used it as more or less a flotation device. So I told these that were closest to me that when we go you stay with me and this box and get those canteens. So we buckled those on.

Well, it just wrecked this whole part of the bridge, but it didn't hurt any of us. Two or three of them were cut with some of the glass that shattered down through there, just superficially. I know when I looked up the first time a piece of shrapnel had landed on my forearm. I had laid there with my head covered when they had made the attack on us, and this piece of shrapnel had landed on my forearm, and it was still hot enough that it left a blister there. I didn't even know it until I looked up later on. I never felt it, no part of it. But I figured then on the next run, when they go and make the next run, well, they'll get us--they'll sink us. But when they dropped

that bomb, it exploded. The Japanese had on the stern and on the bow a raised platform built up about, oh, some eight to ten feet above the deck, and on that platform they had an old World War I seventy-five millimeter fieldpiece with old wooden wheels and the wooden trail. They'd rigged this up there so that they could elevate it somewhat and use it as an anti-aircraft piece. They had a crew serving the one up forward and another crew serving the one on the stern. All these rascals run off from the . . . most of them. All these Japanese, they just bailed out, and the officer run up there swinging his sword and yelling and trying to get them up there. We even had some of the prisoners handing ammunition up there (chuckle) for those two or three that had stayed on the gun itself. All the rest of them bailed out. But when they dropped the bomb and it exploded, about that same time the gun on the stern blew up, and it killed about some thirty-some-odd Japanese that was around the gun, and it set all that old wooden platform on fire. So it was on fire on the stern, and the bridge was in a shambles, and there was smoke from that and from the bomb itself. These planes went on over and turned around and came back from the starboard beam, and they passed on over

and never dropped any bomb and took off. We believe that they'd probably gone after that convoy. They'd probably been in Rangoon and missed this convoy and went after it and just picked us up on the way back, just a stroke of whatever kind of fortune you call it.

Marcello: Was it your ship that did circle around and pick up the survivors?

Pryor: We then picked up the survivors off this other ship, both prisoners-of-war and the Japanese. We stayed in that area until about dark picking up the survivors. I know that when they came aboard there was no room for all of them in the hold. There was just people on every available bit of deck space that we had aboard ship. I dare say that there was many of them just had to stand up. There was no room to sit down or to lie down. I know there was three of these Japanese, these engineer-type individuals, who climbed up on the platform on the mast, a big platform . . . and your cargo booms are anchored there on the mast, on this platform around the mast, and it's about ten feet above the main deck, and they climbed up on that and started to look out for airplanes. I know one Dutch came aboard with a cat, and this cat went with us

throughout most of the jungle days up in Burma. We called him Shipwreck, and these Aussies were always fearful these Americans would eat him, and I imagine I would have if I had caught him. Some of the Americans had eaten some cats there in Bicycle Camp in Java. We used to refer to them as "alley rabbits." These Aussies used to see some of us walking down through camp and they'd start up this crying, "Meeow, meeow, meeow" (chuckle). They knew that would attract our attention when we went through. But there was one Dutchman that came aboard with that Shipwreck. I was fearful more of submarines. I was satisfied that we had Allied submarines working in the Indian Ocean area here and that these planes would have given our position, and so submarines might get in the area. There's no way of distinguishing the fact that there's be POW's on these vessels.

Marcello: Why do you think that the Japanese waited around to pick up those Dutch prisoners? I'm surprised in a way that they didn't simply leave them in the water.

Pryor: Well, it was that they probably had their plans made ahead of time for a certain number of work on that railroad and they'd need them in a certain place and that certain work was already allocated for that number.

It would just probably disrupt their whole planned operation if that many were lost and then were unavailable. They'd have to make some arrangement for a contingency plan here. But they did pick them up, and most of them . . . well, luckily, very few of them were lost as a consequence of this bombing.

So we went through the night without happenstance and well up into the morning the next day, certainly between midmorning, I suppose, and noon, probably in the neighborhood of probably ten or eleven o'clock, some of these Dutch standing up on the deck spotted an aircraft coming in from the port quarters. Now the port quarter would be 45° off the port. They spotted this aircraft, and the rascals were all pointing in that direction. These Japanese that had been picked up were just . . . well, the only panic I saw was these Japanese. These three that was up on this platform around the cargo room, they immediately jumped off, and one of them just shattered his ankle. I know our doctor had to try to set this thing after he'd jumped off from about ten feet onto this steel deck. It seemed that those Japanese up around the bridge country . . . those that were on the port side all felt they ought to

be over there on the starboard side (chuckle) so they all dashed over to the starboard side, and those that were on the starboard side dashed over to the port side (chuckle), and they were just dashing around pell-mell. It just seemed that no matter where one of them was he felt that he had to run somewhere else. It was comical. Before you could see the thing clearly, you could hear it; you could hear its motor, and I knew that it was Japanese. I knew it wasn't ours because most of us Americans could always tell the difference between a Japanese plane and an American plane. Ours have synchronized motors, and a Japanese plane sounds like a washing machine motor--an outboard of some kind. So I knew it was Japanese, and when it came on in nearer, well, then they could identify it as a Japanese float plane. But three of these Dutch jumped overboard (chuckle). Three of these standing on the rail, they just immediately jumped overboard out into the ocean, and so this ship maneuvered around and come back and picked the silly things up, and the Japanese commander then told us that anybody else who jumped overboard would be summarily shot right then and there--no pretext, no further questions asked. Oh, along late in the afternoon we came on into the port in Moulmein,

Burma, and there they marched us on down to another prison.

Marcello: You came into Moulmein in the night, did you not?
I think it was in the evening when you came in, was it not?

Pryor: We docked in the evening, and when we went to this prison, it was in the night. Really we knew little about our surroundings. The only thing of any consequence is we didn't even know where we were; we just knew that it was some kind of complex there-- security complex. In the hours of darkness we immediately just . . . oh, we had so little rest and sleep aboard ship that we just almost died. The thing, I guess, that aroused us was the . . . oh, I guess, somewhere along 2:30 or 3:00 in the morning we heard this tremendous banging on some kind of gong--a big, old WHOOOM and this reverberation off of this big, old metallic gong of some kind. Then we could hear some sound which would identify the word as Buddha. But in the light of day we could see this great monastery, dadblamed Buddhist temple. We were right at the foot of a tremendous cliff, a hill, and up on top of this thing was this vast pagoda. The English tell us that

that's Kipling's pagoda: "By the old Moulmein pagoda that looks lazily out to sea, and there's a Burmese girl awaiting, and she's waiting there for me." Well, we were right down at the foot of that hill and that old Moulmein pagoda. They kept us there . . . I guess we were there some four days, about four days. We figured that it was a prison that the British had used for the incarceration for the most part of natives.

Marcello: I gather it had the concrete floors again.

Pryor: Mostly wooden floors, I guess. They were wooden. This was mostly a wooden structure in around there and very little concrete. The compound was gravel, and again there was very little in the way of water or food facilities. Of course, we were not there long-- just those brief four days. One day I know I had charge of a working party that went out to the Japanese headquarters to dig a garbage pit. They wanted another garbage pit, so I took a working party of about twenty men off out there to dig this thing. Oh gosh, I'll tell you that was one of the finest days I ever experienced as a POW. This was a Japanese headquarters area and usually . . . well, I guess those people live like headquarters people do. They usually have a little more than all these ordinary soldiers, but I know that in the

middle of the morning they came out there with ice cold tea. I didn't like tea; I didn't drink tea, but it was cold so I drank tea. At noontime we had rice . . . oh gosh, delicious rice. We had a stew with it, and the stew had a lot of meat and eggplant and some tomatoes and Irish potatoes. It was a delicious stew--not just soupy and all water like we were accustomed to having. Then we also had along with it a portion of some kind of baked fish, and it was cooked in some kind of sauce. It was delicious. It was delicious fish! After we had that meal, they came out and brought us some little watermelons. Oh, I guess, the little things would weigh not more than eight pounds maybe a piece--quite small, not much larger than one of our good-sized canteloupes. They were very tasty. They were orange-meated, an orange-meated melon and, of course, quite tasty. So we had a tremendous, tremendous meal! I'd like to have one like that even now, such as we had that day. Then working in this . . . I picked up a tip that day that was going to serve me well when we got on that railroad. This ground was just like digging in that concrete out there. Of course, this would be the dry season, and the ground was just like concrete. Then using a pick in this, you'd just make a little dust, and

that would be about it. A Japanese soldier came out there early in the afternoon and watched these guys digging in there. Of course, I was sitting there under the shade of a tree and watching these guys that were digging. He came over and took one of those picks and showed us how to use the pick. He told me later on that as a profession he was a coal miner in Japan. That guy was an artist with a pick. I mean where they had just been making dust that Japanese took that thing and almost with no effort was able to break that ground up into large chunks of dirt. I watched him very closely--how he used that thing--and later on when we went on up into that jungle, I was able to use that pick like he'd showed these people of ours to use it. On that railroad I never did anything but use the pick. But nevertheless, that was a very good day.

We came by another thing that was to serve us well, too. There was a number of Australians along with us there, too, and Dutch. There was a group of French nuns, sisters, there. See, the Japanese didn't molest them. They were French and France was already out of the war. Of course, the Vichy regime was collaborating with the Germans so they accepted them. These French sisters gave to our people a . . . well, a number of

pieces of sterling silver. Later on there in the jungle we'll have a craftsman that will be able to fashion surgical tools out of this sterling silver. We've gotten it, so we'll be able to use those. Then they moved us out of Moulmein and moved us on up to the railroad. And the first camp we went in on that railroad will be Eighteen Kilometers.

Marcello: You went into the Eighteen Kilo Camp.

Pryor: We were taken to Eighteen Kilo Camp. That'd be eighteen kilos out of the base camp of Thanbuyzayat, and this will be the base camp or the terminus, the Burmese terminal for this Thai-Burma railroad.

Marcello: Right. As I recall, most of the Americans and the Australians were working from the north in a more or less southward direction, and the British were in the south working north.

Pryor: Right.

Marcello: I think that's the way it was.

Pryor: Pretty much so.

Marcello: Thanbuyzayat was also a hospital camp, was it not? There was a hospital a little later on.

Pryor: Yes, we had a big hospital camp there, too, on that. But they moved us on out to the Eighteen Kilo Camp. It was a . . . well, I guess, natives . . . they had a

native camp there, too, and the natives had been working around there for some time. There had been some work done there in that vicinity. But we went out, and, of course, our first introduction to that would be the picks and shovels and the yoho pole and the moving the dirt. I guess the yoho pole probably got the name from hearing . . . many of these natives in all that part of the country out there, when they carry anything on these poles, they've got that chant. They set up that chant as a kind of . . . they get a rhythm, a rhythm with that thing, and you pretty soon get to know that really the springing weight is not a dead weight on you as you carry this load, this burden, on such a pole balanced out on that. I saw a film here the other night on Communist China, and all these people took off down through there with this chant, and throughout many of these countries I guess we just figure that that chant sounds something like, "Yoho, yoho, yoho, yoho." And so we called it. But we started out working . . . oh, it was not an unreasonable task. We were divided into groups, oh, a group of men of about forty, some forty to forty-five men in a group they called a kumi. This would be the order, and then you'd have a task, and I believe

we must have started out with about a task of, I believe, 1.1 meters per man. That'd be 1.1 cubic meters of dirt.

Marcello: That's a cubic meter of dirt.

Pryor: Either to move it out of a cut or to move it out of a place in order to make a fill. This was a dry camp. There's a well in the camp, but again we had to boil the water, and the facilities to boil it were inadequate, and so we were confronted with perpetual thirst in this place. So the Japanese told us that when we finished, we'd go mandi. Mandi was Malay for bath. We'd be able to go take a bath. Oh, we just got out and fought it like we were putting out a grass fire. Each one of us wanted to be the first kumi to get through and get that bath. All the Americans were . . . we got through. We were through with our day's task by shortly after midday, and the Japanese, they were true to their word. They let us go take a bath. But the next day we had 1.2 meters to do. So we went and bathed, and, oh, gosh, it was well after dark before the Dutch began to come into camp. They'd worked all that day on 1.1 meters. So this old "Momma McCrae" business of do so much and then when you do that, well, then yasumi and mandi and you get water and so on. We always fell for it. I

know that about the time the railroad was ending, the railroad work, Americans were doing about 2.5 cubic meters per man under very trying circumstances. In the rain you'd just move that much mud. The Dutch were still probably not doing more than 1.5. We were doing much more work than the Dutch ever did. Some of the Japanese used to rate us. "American," he says, "number one." An American would get more work than anybody else. "Australian, number two." (chuckle) And then "Englishman, number five." (chuckle) They never had any three and four, but "Englishmen, number five." And "Orlando"--that's what they called the Dutch--"Orlando, number ten." (chuckle) Jotonai, that's what they used to say--Jotonai. They didn't get near as much work out of these Indonesians--Dutch. We always tried to beat the Aussies, and I know that we always did a great deal more work than the Indonesians, the Dutch, ever did. Of course, the reward would be go up and get a bath. We were still at this time pretty healthy. We had not had any serious illnesses, injuries. They were yet to come, so it's good. I think most of us don't mind hard work if you're in shape to do that kind of work.

Marcello: What sort of barracks did they have at this camp?

Pryor: Altogether made out of bamboo. Of course, all the structure and everything would be the bamboo itself and then laced together with vines of some sort, and then along the wall part would be strips of bamboo woven into a kind of a mat--a matlike piece of material. The roofing was made out of what we called atap. They'd take a bamboo pole and then take bamboo leaves, the leaves of bamboo, and bend them over this and then interlace them with a vine. They'd lay those just like you'd put shingles on a house here, and so it would shed the water. So the whole thing was made out of bamboo. We had sleeping platforms raised up off the ground, and these sleeping platforms would be either one or two types. It'd be very large bamboo such as I mentioned, that with a circumference of maybe three or four inches, split and then hammered out, mashed out flat. Or it would be small bamboo with a diameter of maybe three-quarters of an inch and so forth like . . . oh, about like a fishing pole--about fishing-pole size--and put in there. I know when we used to move from one camp to another and the Japanese would count us and then dismiss us so that we could put our stuff away in the hut, boy, you used to make a

mad dash down through the hut until you came to a section that looked like the bamboo was straighter and smoother. That's where you dropped, right there, because if you'd get in an area where there was crooked bamboo, you'd get up in the morning and you'd look like a washboard. It had a corrugated effect. We made that determined effort to get a place where it had good, clean, smooth bamboo. Then there would be, of course, these sleeping platforms, one on each side of the hut and with a center aisle down between. Most generally, a hut would accommodate in the neighborhood of possibly very close to a hundred men in a hut. Again, you slept just shoulder to shoulder.

Marcello: Who had made these huts? Now you mentioned, of course, that you moved from camp to camp. Who was responsible for setting up these camps?

Pryor: Most generally, it would be native labor, conscripted labor. The Japanese would seek these natives out of the woods and jungle, and they would actually construct the camp. Sometimes a clearing might be done by prisoners-of-war for a camp that was to be on ahead. You would move ahead and do the clearing for the camp, but the natives would construct the camp while you were still working in one back maybe below that one. So camps just leap-frogged along the construction right-of-way. But there

in that Eighteen Kilo . . . of course, I guess the work itself was hard, but again, I guess the most undesirable aspect of that whole stay there would be lack of water, particularly drinking water. I guess you can live in filth and dirt. The same dirt don't stay on you day after day because you get out there and temperatures creep on up to a hundred, and you're out working in that, and the sweat just drips off of you in a constant stream. Out there almost in your nakedness, you do not acquire much of a suntan because as you sweat you just bleach out. I'd be no darker there than I am right now. But we would usually work out an agreement. The most desirable job out on this road would be using the shovel. Now many of them wanted to use that pick. Probably the hardest work of all of it was swinging the pick because you had to break the dirt up. Then it will be shoveled onto either a sack or basket hung from this yoho pole. Then, of course, there'd be one guy under each one of that. That was not terribly difficult work, but we didn't particularly like that yoho work anyhow. But using the shovel was the most desirable job, and usually you'd swap off between yasumi periods, rest periods.

So this was rest; it means rest in Japanese. We'd work maybe a couple of hours, and then we'd get a ten minute yasumi break. Then we'd all swap off on these various chores. Not many of them liked to use that pick, and I used it all the time. All the time we were on the road I never used anything but that pick. Again, I sure was thankful that I'd learned that little knack of how to use that thing from that Japanese down there.

Marcello: What efforts did the prisoners make at this stage to sabotage any of the work?

Pryor: Well, there wasn't anything there that you could really sabotage.

Marcello: Would you conveniently lose a shovel or a pick or something like that, or wasn't there even a chance to do that?

Pryor: No, there wasn't much chance to do that. You'd either work with one or work with another one. The only tools we had was the pick and shovel, and that would be about . . . picks and shovels would be about all that we had. There was not any other kind of sophisticated gear at all. It was interesting, I guess, in a way to see how so much can be done with such crude implements. Some of the cuts that you made and that we worked on here, and then the fills you made, and our introduction to so much. You're out in the jungle and in territory

that few people ever see and experience. Our first day out there we'd dug into pockets of scorpions. Of course, most of us know what a stinging scorpion is here, and ours is a little vinegar-colored thing. But these were great dadblamed black, very black or very deep olive green colored scorpions, and their pincers approximated the size of a man's forefinger, middle finger there. Their tails on them would be six inches, maybe seven inches long. You could stick one of these hickory handles of a shovel down there, and this thing could penetrate with its stinger-tail. He could penetrate this hickory, seasoned hickory. We'd dig into a nest of those, and there might be two dozen of them in one nest, and they'd just scatter all over there, and all of us were barefooted and all. And you talk about scattering and being lively, we'd sure move out. We'd dig into a nest of centipedes. One we got one day, the best we could measure him, was twenty-eight inches long. Again, they were black--about the color of the scorpion--tremendous size.

Marcello: How about snakes? Did you run across very many snakes in this digging?

Pryor: Of course, snakes we were always concerned with all up through the jungle. But here on our first day we were

out there, we dug into a little pocket and knocked out a couple of snakes. Oh, I guess that they weren't over anything more than twenty inches long possibly. I'd guess somewhat less than two feet long---not much larger than the size of a pencil and about the same shape as a pencil. They're just very blunt; their tail was very blunt and then the head was very blunt. Again, they were kind of a blackish, grey color. This fascinated us. I had a pair of leather gloves that some soldier had given me, and they let me use them as I used this pick. I went over and I said, "Well, in the United States this blunt head and tail is characteristic of a poisonous reptile." So I figured that the little rascal must be poisonous, but he was so small and harmless looking that we had no fear from him. So we went over and held him with a stick, and I picked him up in my hands with this glove. We took a knife blade and opened his mouth, and there was no fangs, but there was a couple of teeth in the bottom and the top. Particularly the two top ones, they were much more prominent than the others. You wouldn't say they were fangs, but they were quite prominent teeth. So we said, "Well, he must be poisonous." As we were sitting there fiddling around with that little

snake, a bunch of Burmese natives came along the road. They'd been working on up above us, and they were through for the afternoon and were coming along there. They saw us playing with that snake, finagling around with him, and, boy, they just took off. They run a hundred yards off down there--just run like a bunch of sheep! They got off down there, and they all stopped, and they turned around, and they started making all sorts of signs. They would do like that (gesture) with their hands. They would pinch on their forearm, and then they pointed to the sun and then over to the west. They'd do this (gesture). They'd lay their head on their arms like that, like you was going to sleep. When that sun would go down, you would go to sleep. Then they pointed back to the east and no more (chuckle). We got the idea that if that little snake--in this sign language--if that little snake bit you, the sun would go down for you, and you would go to sleep, but there would be no more sun coming up for you because you'd just . . . one more sleep. So we never paid a whole lot of mind to that. When we got into camp that evening, we asked an Englishman there in camp that had served in India for about twelve

years with the English Army. We described this snake to him and asked him what it was. He said, "Well, you clowns were just playing around with a Krait." He said, "That Krait is more deadly than a cobra. You jokers (chuckle) were just goofing off a whole bunch!" From then on, when we'd dig into a nest of them--sometimes there would be three or four in one of those hollowed-out nests in the ground--we'd see the little things wriggling around there, and you talk about moving out of that place (chuckle)! We moved out! There was no more of that picking them up and seeing what the Sam Hill he looked like.

Marcello: I would assume that you had to be constantly on the lookout for things like this.

Pryor: Later on when we'd get on up into the jungle, when we began to . . . now here the right-of-way was clear. It had been cleared. Natives had gone through and cleared much of it out.

Marcello: This was pretty easy work here at Eighteen Kilo.

Pryor: Yes, at Eighteen you're pretty much out of the foothills. You're into the level plains; this was the plains country. There is jungle but this was open country more or less. When we get on up into our next camp--we leap-frog from Eighteen Kilo to Eighty-five Kilo Camp--and there you're

in the jungle. You're in the real jungle. We cleared the right-of-way there, and in these great clumps of bamboo, we had all these bamboo snakes. These bamboo snakes live in and around the roots and for the most part in and around the root structure of these clumps of bamboo. You grub those out, and we done it for the most part with picks. We very seldom ever had an axe to use on it or a grubbing hoe, but just a pick. We'd get in there, and you'd hit one and sling him out there. They're poisonous, too, and they're about the color of bamboo. Most of these bamboo snakes would be anywhere from two-and-a-half feet to three feet in length--a good-sized snake. On up in there, it was not unusual to see a cobra. There were a few pythons up in that area. So we were always conscious of snakes.

Marcello: Did you ever supplement your diet with any of these?

Pryor: No, we never caught any of them. The Dutch ate one at One Hundred Kilo, I guess. One of the Dutch went out to the benjo beside the right-of-way and squatted down there. Then directly, I guess after he had time to look around him he let out a squawl, and they run off down there--the other Dutch working there by him--and there was about a seventeen-foot python stretched

out there by where he had (chuckle) gone to do what he had to do. So they ate that. Of course, anyone of us, I guess, would have eaten that if we could have gotten hold of it because this was in the rainy season then, and we had very little in the way of food. We went from Eighteen Kilo, which was not too bad; the best we'll have on the railroad is out of Eighteen.

Marcello: Now how were the guards here at Eighteen Kilo?

Pryor: Not bad. They never bothered us. We worked; we worked hard. They could get food into us. So there was really not much that they had to do. They never had much pretext or justification. We came in back into camp and did what we had to do and stayed in our huts because it was usually quite late. Then we'd be up and working again the next day. We never had many days off.

I think we worked six weeks before we had our first day off, our first yasumi day. I know when that first day came, well, some of the guys that had any talent at all would . . . we had a concert; we gathered on a bit of high ground out there and let that be the performing stage. Those that could do anything sang a song or recited a poem or something, and they'd do that. We had a Dutchman with us that was a professional

magician. Of course, he was a good entertainer. I understand that he had in civilian life worked on Dutch liners between the United States and Holland as an entertainer on these liners as a magician. I know that we were all out there watching these people go on, and a bunch of natives came across a rice paddy. Their camp was across the rice paddy some 250 yards distance from our own. They came across there observing all this. This Dutch magician went to work doing all manner of slight-of-hand tricks, and then he had one trick with a silk handkerchief. He made that handkerchief dance across the stage and then rise in the air suspended and then flutter through the air. Boy, when he started working with that handkerchief and made that thing rise in that air and flutter, these natives WHSSST. I mean they took off! That was too much magic there for those guys (chuckle)! They were hill people and probably Nagas--Cochin or Nagas. The Japanese could never keep them on the job very long. They could round them up and run them down there to work on this road, and, by thunder, some dark night they'd look around there, and there wouldn't be a one of them left. They'd all be gone back to the hills.

Marcello: I gather that the attrition rate was fairly high among these natives also, much higher than even among the Occidentals.

Pryor: Yes. Of course, later on it will be. This is a thing that you'll note among Orientals. They're fatalists, and when one of them gets seriously ill, well, you can just mark him off the books because he's had it. They lose their will to live with adversity. They just do not have any tenacious will to hang on and beat whatever illness that has hold of them. Of course, this was particularly true of the Indonesians that were with us. Their casualty rate, I guess, was much higher than ours. When we left Eighteen Kilo, we went to Eighty-five.

Marcello: That's a pretty big jump.

Pryor: Yes, way on up there. We worked out of Eighty-five both ways.

Marcello: Now were people laying track right behind you, or did the track laying come much later?

Pryor: No, the laying of the tracks will come along later. There was no track along there then. The only road is the . . .

Marcello: . . . you're building the road bed now . . .

Pryor: . . . was the service road, truck road. They moved us up there in trucks. We never had to march it as we usually had to, but they moved us that distance in trucks. It was in the dry season, and the dust will be inches deep in the roads and so forth. At Eighty-five Kilo we'll be there when the rainy season begins. Soon after we go there, I got a fever, and this fever, I got it at work one day, and the next day I saw our doctor, and he said, "Well, you stay in." They were not pushing us too much then; if you were sick, you stayed in camp.

Marcello: Now this was an American doctor.

Pryor: Right--a doctor by the name of Samuel Lumpkin. I believe he lived in Amarillo. I stayed in camp the next; I had this fever. I think in the first few days of this fever they moved us from Eighty-five Kilo Camp to Eighty Kilo Camp; we moved back down a camp to Eighty. In this place I almost saw the end of me. I had fever for eighteen days.

Marcello: What sort of fever was this? Did it have any other name other than just "fever?"

Pryor: Well, they don't know. Well, we had some Dutch doctors there, too, and, of course, they understand tropical

diseases which are usually of the stomach, internal, intestinal, fevers, and skin diseases. They thought that I had some form of malaria, maybe a light touch of cerebral malaria. It's persistent; it hangs on for a long period of time. Usually it's fatal. Then they thought I had some form of jungle fever along with it. I had a temperature one evening of 107.5. Well, a fever of 105 is not uncommon with some of those jungle fevers. They're quite intense for a very brief period of time, but they don't hang on. Even malaria doesn't hang on for eighteen days--other than, as we come to know, cerebral malaria. Cerebral malaria would last; it was the only one that would last that long, and usually you just died. You didn't recover from it. I only knew of one other man that ever recovered from a case of cerebral malaria--a big, strong Dutchman. I had this for eighteen days. We had no medicine, not a bit. It was hot! One day I thought I was dying. It was along toward the end of my feverish time. I had the worst chill I'd ever had, early in the morning, and then when the chill broke my fever started going up, and shortly after midday I passed out from fever. I couldn't even see the overhead. I came to sometime after the middle of the afternoon. I asked

somebody to call one of our corpsmen down there, and he came down. I asked him if I could borrow . . . one of the guys had a big beach towel, a great big old thing. I asked him if he'd go borrow that towel for me and go down and wet it in the creek and bring it down and put it on me. I was burning up; I was just on fire. He went down and wet that towel and came up and spread it over me and put another one over my head. That afternoon . . . well, that night when they came around to take temperatures, I still had over a 105 fever. I just believe that sometime during that afternoon that if a man ever had 110 fever, I had the 110 because I was hotter than I was when I had the 107.5. We had another boy that had 108. I can't remember his name there, but I know talking about it that he had 108, and he survived it. I got to where I couldn't even hold water. I could swallow water, and I couldn't even keep it down. I got to where I couldn't keep water or food down. I'd swallow it, and it would come right back up. These boys used to come around in the morning and see if I hadn't died during the night, and there was not any of them that at the end of that time that . . . there was nobody who figured I weighed over seventy-five pounds. When I was captured, I weighed

188 pounds, and here now I was down to, they say, not more than seventy-five pounds. I was just nothing but the skin stretched over the bones. On the eighteenth day my fever left me. I got the fever on the fourth day of April and had it for eighteen days.

On the day after the fever left me, the Japanese decided to take me, move me down to Thanbuyzayat to this hospital, so I was sent down there in the back of this truck along with four or five others that were ill. Down there at some camp the truck stopped, and this old boy went in to see some of his buddies. One of them came out there and wanted to practice driving, and the fool didn't know how to drive a truck. He'd get in there, and he'd let the clutch out, and it'd jump and buck. Of course, that just jarred you around in there. I cussed the bugger in Japanese, Malay, English, Spanish (chuckle); anything that I knew a cuss word in, well, I used it on that clown. When he left it, he left it parked right out in the broad sun. When the other one came back to the truck, about fifteen feet up ahead of where he left it there was a tree that shaded the road, and that fool wouldn't park it there where we could be under that shade. So we went on into Thanbuyzayat, and, of course, I never had anymore fever.

There wasn't anything wrong with me then other than just the matter of recuperating. Of course, they had a bit more food. They could buy from the natives there, and you had such things as a little sweetened water-- sugar and sweetened water on your rice in the morning. We had a bit more vegetables in the soup on your rice at the other meals. They had a canteen there where if you had any money you could purchase something. One of my good buddies, the one that died up here--Hugh Falk, a Marine--had given me his shirt and told me to sell that and buy me an egg and some bananas and so forth with what I could get out of that shirt. I was able to sell it and was able to buy a little bit of extra food there. Just before I left there they brought our first sergeant down, a Marine by the name of Harley Harold Dupler; he was our Marine first sergeant on the Houston. They brought him there, and he died there in camp. I just finished reading this book Through the Valley of the Kwai, and they mentioned an Australian doctor, Colonel Coates. Colonel Coates was a King's Surgeon. That's the highest honor, I guess, you can have. Coates had looked after him. He had been a friend. He was from Indiana and knew Chicago well,

and Coates had gone to school at the University of Chicago, and so he looked after him well. We buried Dupler there. Then I went back to the railroad to work.

Marcello: How long were you at Thanbuyzayat altogether?

Pryor: About twenty days. I was there about three weeks.

Marcello: This was a pretty good rest for you then.

Pryor: Yes.

Marcello: Rest and recuperation.

Pryor: Except when I was recuperating I got a form of that pellagra. The Aussies call it "happy feet." Have you ever heard of that term--"happy feet?"

Marcello: No, I sure haven't.

Pryor: Well, it's a form of vitaminosis, and it's a form of pellagra. Now that's what they told me. Pellagra usually, I think, works on the stomach, but this . . . your shins and legs look inflamed. You have red streaks run up your shins, and intense pain shoots up through there. You can hardly touch the balls of your feet to the ground. It's an impossible situation, but you feel like you've got to get out and walk. You would see people throughout the night; they couldn't sleep. You just couldn't rest; you couldn't sleep. You'd just get out and walk up and down, usually pretty much on the heel of your foot because it was just

intolerable to touch the toes to the ground because it was so painful. The Aussies called it "happy feet." I guess I only experienced it for about a week, a week's period of time. Some of them experienced it for longer periods of time, but as I began to recover and get my strength back and put on more weight, well, this went away.

I was there about three weeks and then went back to the jungle. We were still at Eighty Kilo, and so I went back and resumed my place on the road. Most of the time then we were building bridges, working on driving pilings and cutting timber in the jungle and carrying it up to the bridge site and smoothing it down with adzes and . . .

Marcello: . . . with adzes? What are . . .

Pryor: It looks like a hoe, but it's sharp like a knife, and you chop off . . . you can kind of square up timber with it. It has a shape of a hoe, but it's heavier and is sharp like an axe. We used . . . made everything with these, drove the pilings by hand. This was disagreeable work.

Marcello: Now what kilo was this? What kilo are we up to now?

Pryor: Eighty.

Marcello: This is still at Eighty.

Pryor: We were working out at Eighty. Then it's at Eighty that . . . soon after that I get back up there that I get a back injury that still gives me trouble. I was carrying this lumber, this timber. We had an elephant or two around there to help us with this timber, but an elephant's a smart bugger. He tests these logs before he puts much effort into them, and if it seems heavy, well, he'd back off from it. He won't work with it. So when an elephant wouldn't move it, well, the Nips would yell for about eight POW's to get over there and do what that elephant wouldn't do. One of these guys fell. I was under the front end of the log, and the guy that was on the back end of it stubbed on a root or something and fell, and I injured my back. It gives me much trouble at times, even up until this time. We worked out of this place, and then from Eighty Kilo we went to One Hundred Kilo.

Marcello: Now were the guards harassing you at all while you were working?

Pryor: Most generally, they didn't. They just would watch you work and kept you at it. You had a task to do, and they saw that you did this task, so it was just a matter of seeing that you were there more than anything else. They didn't harass you a whole lot because that would take from your work.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you were moving up to the One Hundred Kilo Camp. I would gather that supply was becoming more difficult, was it not, the farther away you got from Thanbuyzayat? I have assumed your supplies were coming from Thanbuyzayat.

Pryor: Well, that would have been the base camp, but some of them came up from Thailand, too. But supply will be the big problem here now that the rainy season has set in with fierceness of purpose. We'll have from now steady rain. At One Hundred Kilo, this is one of the most unlikely campsites that would be on the whole road. It was built more or less in a swamp. The whole camp was nothing but a swamp. You wade around there in the water and in the mud, and we have cleared much of the right-of-way and made the cuts and fills. We have made the bridges, and now supply is a critical problem. There's no bottom to all this mud. The Japanese have three trucks that will move in that area, and all three of them have been captured from the English. They're American trucks--a six-wheel drive Studebaker, and a four-wheel drive Chevrolet truck, and then I think the other one was a six-wheel drive Reo truck. They'd been trucks that the U. S. Army had sold to the English, and then they'd been captured there, and that's all that

would move. These were all six-wheel drive, and then they had the front-mounted winch. So they could move, but they just moved essential supplies. Our rations were drastically reduced, and we were not able to get even near enough to satisfy what you'd want. We were just as hungry as we'd been in those first few days. At this time fever and dysentery became a common thing to our people, and in the midst of this rainy season then we began to get these tropical ulcers. Any scratch or cut you'd get would become infected, and immediately after it became infected, well, it started spreading. We had nothing--no dressings, no sort of medicine with any kind of antiseptic power or antibiotic characteristics that would combat the infection. So these things would grow. I know that I got one just from a cut. We then were making ballasts for the roads, trying to improve the service roads so that we could get supplies and all up there. So we were working on this, and a piece of this rock cut my shin.

Oral History Collection

C. L. Pryor

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: February 20, 1973

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Charlie Pryor for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 20, 1973, in Dallas, Texas. This is the third in a series of interviews with Mr. Pryor in order to gather his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. When we stopped the last time you had just begun to talk about the tropical ulcers that you had contracted and which, I suppose, virtually every other prisoner contracted at one time or another, too. Let's talk a little bit about those tropical ulcers.

Mr. Pryor: We never experienced these tropical ulcers until the rainy season came along, and when we talk of the rainy season there, well, by gosh, it rains every day. I know in one period of time--I believe in the month of July of 1943--we counted that it rained probably fourteen days and nights. We never knew that it stopped, and, of course, we're out in that all the time. Our camp is

built in a mudhole. You're in the mud and filth all the time, and in this jungle, of course, everything . . . well, everywhere you go, there is decaying of some kind--vegetation. So any scratch you'd get would become infected by nightfall. This was my experience. I got a scratch early in the morning, and by nightfall it was infected, and within a week it had spread to something like a . . . oh, I guess three or four inches in diameter and a couple of inches across. It was eaten down to the bone in a week.

Marcello: Had these been caused mostly by dietary deficiencies?

Pryor: No, I don't think so. Of course, I'm not a medical authority on this, but I just rather think that it's peculiar to this rainy season and the conditions of filth that you have to live in during all this time. We'd never experienced these things in the dry season. We were not bothered with them. Even after this time--and certainly as we went along in point of time our bodies became more wasted away, deteriorated--even after this rainy season there in that jungle, well, certainly our bodies just suffered from malnourishment, malnutrition, as much as we ever had, but we never experienced this thing with the tropical ulcers again.

It was just peculiar to that time and those places in Burma and I'm satisfied certainly on the Thailand side as well. But I know that when I got this one we had nothing to treat it with, and it began to spread and eat and grow, and it's always attendant with excruciating pain. The thing eats faster than a cancer can even think of eating. All we had at that time was boiling water to treat it with, so I done this. Every available minute I'd sit there and boil this water, and I'd put a rag over it and drop this boiling water on it. I couldn't keep my fingers in the water, but I could stand it on this. I suppose I had this thing for about a month, and then the Japanese sent the ones of us that had the worst ulcers at this time and those that were suffering a good deal from dysentery and malaria . . . most generally a man had a combination of all these things, although I had not experienced any further recurrence of fever. After this one severe bout, well, for a year I never experienced any recurrence of the fever, nor did I ever get any sort of stomach disease. The Dutch had told us that if we could eat hot pepper, we should eat all of it that we could get, and, of course, I grew up on hot pepper and ate all of it that I could possibly get. I don't know that this helped me in any

way, but maybe it had a therapeutic value there in some way.

But I know they sent about forty-five Americans and about forty Australians from this One Hundred Kilo Camp, which we were located in, back down to Eighty Kilo Camp. This was where we'd had the fever before. This would at this time now be an abandoned camp. After you had built the railroad through this area, well, then you'd just abandon them and leave them to fall apart. The termites get into them, and so very soon they're eaten out and become a hull of bamboo. But they sent the forty-five Americans and forty Australians and about 200 Dutch prisoners-of-war back down there--those that they considered, I guess, in the worst physical condition.

Marcello: Incidentally, who determined which prisoners were to be sent back to the Eighty Kilo Camp? Did the Japanese decide this or did the American, Australian and Dutch doctors decide?

Pryor: Well, I'd suppose that our doctors did it. Probably it would be based on their recommendation more or less, but certainly anything had to be approved and cleared with the Japanese and justified with them. If they recommend one to go back there, well, certainly it was not a thing that one would welcome--to be sent back--

because the Japanese didn't believe in feeding sick people. They had an established ration there, but they couldn't support it very well. I believe during this period of the rainy season they had three trucks that would move along this construction right-of-way, and they were all multi-drive vehicles--American made for the most part. One of them was a Studebaker six-wheel drive vehicle, and another one was a four-wheel drive Chevrolet truck, and then the other one was a British four-wheel drive vehicle. Of course, these were all vehicles they had captured from the English. And so they could not supply the people.

Marcello: I would assume a lot of times even these trucks had trouble getting through, did they not, in the rainy season?

Pryor: Decidedly so, and oftentimes if they would get stuck, they would have to use the winch. Most of them had a winch fixed to the front bumper, and so they could winch themselves out. But in this period of time most transport just came to a halt, even Japanese military transport. See, the Japanese used this really as a supply route on into Burma. Presumably our submarines were active in the Indian Ocean, and they were denying the Indian Ocean to convoy transport. And so apparently

they're moving the convoys into . . . well, let's say Bangkok, and they offload there and come up the railway as far as it was completed, and then they marched overland, and most vehicular traffic was just halted. About the only traffic that came along was handcarts manned by individual Japanese soldiers, and we'd hear them into the night as they'd go along, pushing and pulling on these carts carrying their personal gear and, of course, their military gear, whatever it might be.

Marcello: I assume that this One Hundred Kilo Camp was perhaps about the worst one along the entire route.

Pryor: From our experience it would have been the worst. It was built almost altogether in a swamp, and there seemed to be no bottom to the mud in this place. You just lived in perpetual wetness.

Marcello: In other words this was the period of the "Speedo" campaign, it was in the monsoon season, and the camp was located in a very poor place.

Pryor: Intolerable place. Going on back to these Japanese, we'd hear them come through all this night, and I just oftener wondered, well, what if our troops were dependent upon such primitive means of support. But I'd guess this

was one reason so many of our people underestimated the Japanese. They were tenacious, perservering people. But nevertheless they sent us back to this Eighty Kilo Camp. Eighty Kilo Camp was not too poorly situated. It was well drained and adjacent to a stream, so we fared fairly well when we were there. But these conditions here in these impossible times of getting food and provisions . . . they cut the sick men's ration down to less than half of what a working person was getting, and that was intolerable. So when they moved us back here, I know that of the forty Australians there were two of them on their feet. Both of them had been wounded in bombing activity in Thanbyuzayat. They had been in the hospital camp there when Allied bombers--I don't know whether they'd been American or English--came over and bombed the place. Well, they bombed adjacent to the hospital, and a number of prisoners were killed and a large number injured. So one of them had had his eye put out and his cheekbone all crushed in. The other one had lost his left arm up near the shoulder. So they were on their feet and got about and helped. I was the only American there at one time on my feet, so we went about the task of doing what we could for those that were completely bedridden.

Marcello: I gather that there were no medical facilities at the Eighty Kilo Camp. It was more or less for rest and recuperation more than anything else.

Pryor: There was no medical facilities, no. Rather we thought they just sent us there to die. They thought most of us would not recover, and so they'd have us out of the way of those who might be in better physical condition, and that very soon we'd die off and be out of the way. They sent a doctor back with us--our senior medical officer off the Houston, Commander Epstein. But he didn't have anything to work with. He was a doctor without means of medication. I know out of that number that went back with me originally, as far as I know there's only two of us that live today. The rest of them died.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you ever have to participate on any of the burial details?

Pryor: I did all of it in this place. As the Aussies and Americans died, well, I just felt that they had to be buried, and so I did this for the Aussies and the Americans. As they passed on, we would go up and dig a hole on the side of the hill, a well drained place on the side of the hill on the edge of the jungle. We'd dig the grave, come back, wrap them up usually in

bamboo--well, not bamboo, but rice straw sacks or a mat--put a couple of bamboo poles under his back so he could be carried up there easily and his body would be easily handled, and we'd bury them. I think my busiest time there was when I buried ten in three days.

Marcello: Would you usually take their clothing and things like that because they could be used by somebody else?

Pryor: Yes, this is this thing. Of course, most of us had very little anyhow, but what a man did have was put to use. We knew prisoners that would need a canteen, and, of course, we would pass this on to one that we thought had most need of a particular item that the man had that had died. So a man's belongings--what he had--still continued to be put to some use because most of us were pretty much in the same shape.

Marcello: What sort of records were kept of these deaths?

Pryor: Our doctor kept records, and then, of course, he submitted to the Japanese a death certificate of sorts just identifying a certain prisoner by name and rank and service and nationality and then his Japanese POW number. My number was 10131. And so he would be reported in this manner to the Japanese. We had two Japanese guards there with us, and when we first went down there, the first two or three people that died, well, they came down to see it--to see that he was in effect dead. But

when you come down into a hut and you're in the midst of some 250 people and they're covered with these great ulcers sometimes from the knee clear on down into the foot . . .

Marcello: And these things, I gather, just eat the flesh. Is that correct?

Pryor: They eat the flesh away, and they turn black. Then, of course, the flies get to them, and soon they're just completely alive with maggots. Of course, this was probably a healthy thing, but, of course, by this time you were so far removed that your glandular system couldn't absorb the poison, and then the blood system began to absorb it. As this weakened your whole body, well, then you caught anything that came along. If you didn't have malaria, well, you got malaria. If you didn't have dysentery, most generally you got dysentery, too. You just can't . . . there's no way of describing the stench and the smell that attends one of these ulcers. It's rotten flesh in the grossest way, the basest way. So these Japanese would come down through these the first two or three times, and that was the last of that. They got to where they'd never come down again, and so I toyed with the idea there a couple of times of maybe thinking of escape because

the Japanese would never look for me. I thought that I'd go down, and if the doctor wouldn't fill me out one of these certificates, I'd just fill one out for myself, take it down there, report me as being dead, go up there, fill in a hole on the side of the hill, and the Japanese would have reported that person as dead. They never would verify that he had died or was dead, and so they wouldn't have looked for you. There'd have been no idea that a POW had escaped. But you don't live in that jungle long, particularly in that rainy season, without knowing that jungle as the most formidable barrier and the harshest enemy that you would have.

Marcello: I guess that's why the Japanese only sent two guards back for 200 prisoners.

Pryor: There was nowhere to go. I suppose we were at least 1,200-1,400 miles from the nearest friendly troops. Well, then you would have to pass through the entire Japanese Burma Army, and unlike a place such as Europe where you could blend in with the people, there you just stand out just glaringly so.

Marcello: And these natives had no loyalty to anybody except for the bounty.

Pryor: No, no, all they knew was just a full stomach, and that was all their great concern, too. I suspect the Japanese, of course, had promised them a reward. In fact, we did have instances of prisoners escape from other camps, not in that jungle so much because most of us knew by that time what a foolish, a really foolish, foolhardy thing it would be. We never entertained any ideas for one moment that it could be successful. Even in my case when I knew that they wouldn't look for me, you couldn't beat that jungle. The natives can't beat it. Well, you just think that the animals that live in it don't beat it. But we did get involved in that. I suppose that altogether I would expect that I had a hand in burying by myself--sometimes I'd have someone help me when one of our men might be well enough that he could give me a hand with this--but I would imagine that in the time that we were there--some four months--that I probably buried eighty people. Records were kept and I did make a map, a plat, of the cemetery there. Of course, the Dutch used the same facilities. When we had been in this camp before, one of my good Marine buddies, Sergeant Lusk, had died. Joe Lusk had died as we moved through this camp before.

I was in Thanbyuzayat in the hospital with that fever then. I was not in camp when "Egghead"--we used to call him "Egghead"--Lusk died. His grave had already undergone settling, and so I had reworked it, rocked it over. The cross at the head of his grave was four-inch teak, and those white ants don't jump on that teak. In fact not anything jumps on that teak. This was a form of ironwood, we called it, about the color of this couch, and this couch is black. This doggoned wood won't float in water. You drop it in water, and it's just like a petrified log because it just sinks like a rock. You can whack it with an axe, and the axe jumps back up in the air, and you look down there, and you just barely made a scratch. But we had made his cross out of that and had chiseled his name out, just like you would chisel in a piece of granite. And so that would be a permanent grave. From his grave, I had measured the distance and the direction to every other grave, so from this map of the cemetery that we had drawn, we could locate any person's grave that we might look for.

But this was an unusual time. I could describe conditions that existed there; I don't know anyone that would understand them. You almost have to live

them to be able to understand them. Some of the things that you see . . . you know that with all that filth and stink there's an unending hunger. Then, of course, there were a number for whom food had no appeal during their last days of life. That seemed to be characteristic with most of them that died. Their appetites would go, oh, some two weeks before the last day. All of them were, I guess, usually suffering from a combination of fever, dysentery, and the ulcers, and I daresay that the ulcers influenced the others more than these influenced the ulcer.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you ever know of anybody who had what were called the "death hiccups?" Had you ever heard of those? I've heard some prisoners talk about them that were in this same locality, and apparently again this was a symptom that somebody was on the verge of dying. They would get these . . . I suppose they were uncontrollable hiccups.

Pryor: No, I never experienced that among any of the people that I was ever among, and that would have been several hundred altogether, counting Dutch, Australians, and our own people. I'd never experienced that. Most generally as they lay there, life just slowly left them--just

little bit day by day. You knew most generally that they . . . I think the first sign that death would be within the next two, three, four days was when they'd become irrational. They'd hallucinate just like a person today, I guess, under the influence of some of your narcotic drugs. They'd seem so rational at the same time you knew they were completely irrational. One of our POW's--he used to be a native of Dallas here--and in the days before he died, this bed of his had . . . he'd fallen through it, and so he lay there, and this thing had just completely broken down. I said these white ants hollow out the inside of the bamboo, and so here where he had put his bed, well, it had all broken in, so he laid down there, just like laying in a teacup or some such thing, extremely uncomfortable, I know. In this three or four days before he died, he wanted me to get him a mattress--air mattress. He told me one day when I passed by, he said, "Charlie, you remember when we came through Eighty Kilo Camp before?" I said, "Well, yes." He said, "You know over there across that creek the Japanese built a little house on stilts up off the ground." He said, "Did you ever know what was in that house?" And, of course, I didn't know of any house, but I said, "No, I have no idea." He said, "That

house is full of air mattresses." He said, "I sure wish you'd sneak over there and get me one of those." I said, "Okay, I'll see about it this afternoon." When I walked away, he said, "Hey, if there's not anybody watching, steal one of those pillows, too. Bring me one of those pillows." Well, I knew that it would just be a matter of a few days then until he was dead, and I thought, "Well, he'll forget all about that." About two days later, I came by again and he said, "Well, what did you ever find out about those air mattresses?" I said, "Well, there wasn't any in there." "Oh, my gosh," he said, "I sure was counting on you getting one of those air mattresses."

Another little sailor of ours was going home on leave for two days before he died, and in his hallucinated mind he encountered more trouble, just more trouble, than I guess any sailor in the fleet ever had trying to get on leave. In the first place, they had signed his leave papers, and then they couldn't find them. Somebody had misplaced his leave papers. Then he'd gone down and bought a bus ticket home--and he lived in Arkansas--and so after he'd bought that bus ticket home, well, then in his mind he knew that he was going to get on the wrong bus. He was worried to death about that he'd get on the wrong bus and wouldn't wind up at home. He

died in the morning, but in the afternoon before he died I came back there, and he told me then, "Charlie, somebody's went and stole my uniform that I was going to wear home on leave. I had it all pressed and laying out here, and now, by thunder, I go to get it and it's gone. Will you help me find it? I wish you'd go down and see the master-at-arms." That's the ships' security people. He said, "I wish you'd go down and see the master-of-arms and have him conduct a search and see if he can't find my dress whites."

Well, you just become calloused to all this. In such a situation where you see it, where you live it every minute, every minute of every day, and still yet when you see something like that, it's just so dadblamed pathetic that you just wonder, "Well, just how can all this be the way it is."

Unusual things. I buried another old boy that just committed suicide. There's no way that I'd ever mention his name, but he just in effect committed suicide. I believe he was the laziest man that I've ever met anywhere, anytime, anyplace. As we worked on that railroad, the rest of the people that worked in his kumi--his company--usually had to do his tasks because he just wouldn't put out. Then when he observed that the

Japanese were not making some of these people work with these ulcers and they'd let them stay in and doctor them and treat them, well, he began to cultivate one. We'd catch him sitting there picking at this thing-- this raw sore--with slivers of bamboo, and that bamboo is just as poisonous as can be. My gosh, I tell you if you ever got cut with that, well, right before your eyes the cut would be infected. So he'd pick at that thing with a sliver of bamboo, and you'd find him rubbing this old mud in the thing. I was not surprised there after I'd been sent to Eighty Kilo to see him come down with one of the following groups, and he had an ulcer that didn't need any cultivation then. It was tremendous and he never lasted, I think, only about four days after they sent him down there. He died in the middle of the night, and I was used to any condition I'd ever . . . well, I thought I'd run on to all unusual conditions until the case of this man. I could pick these dead people up, and the great sores and all that pus and corruption would get on my body, on my chest-- the worms from the sores and wounds--and it wouldn't affect me. I'd become accustomed to it. But when this man died in the night, and the next morning I went around and saw that he'd died and came back after digging his grave to wrap him up and put him in it,

and rigor mortis had already set in--he was stiff-- and his arms were in an unusual position. I wanted to put the arms across his chest because this would facilitate burying him, and as I got over him--I had one of my good buddies over here, Hugh Faulk, the Marine that was killed a year ago. He was a Marine corporal. Faulk was there for a brief period of time, and he was helping me bury these people. Faulk was helping me put these arms down, and as we pushed his arms down over his chest--he had died with his lungs full of air--and in pushing his arms down we had decompressed the lungs and all this dead air came out into our face. I have come onto unusual things in the way of smell, but there is not anything like that. There is not anything that can be so sickening. Faulk vomited. I thought I was going to. I don't know why I didn't. Probably there was nothing there to come up.

Then we'd see another case of a man that got this ulcer in his mouth. I came along there one day and found him with a pair of pliers--I don't know where he got them--trying to pull his teeth. I took those from him, and he tried to pull them with his fingers, which is not difficult after two or three days of letting

that ulcer spread. He got worms in his mouth, and, of course, it was not unusual for a man to get worms in and around the anus, you know, because they had this dysentery, and the flies would get around that. This was not an unusual thing. It must have been a painful thing because I know at times I'd come around some of them that were suffering from such things, and oftentimes in their subconscious mind they would undertake some action. You know that this thing was a bother. They'd be back there with their hands or maybe with a little stick if they could find one or come by one and try to do something. So I know that this would be a thing that gave them a misery that they associated with it.

I guess this would be the most intolerable place as far as treatment of people that there might have been along the road. I do not know of any other place where we had so little to do with, and the loss of life was so pronounced and so heavy. But at the end of the rainy season they took us away from this place and sent us to 105 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: You'd been at Eighty Kilo Camp for about three or four months?

Pryor: About four months. We went on beyond the American camp. Most of the Americans were still in One Hundred Kilo.

We went on to 105 Kilo, and this was quite a large camp. I'd imagine there must have been about 8,000 Australians in this camp.

Marcello: Was the "Speedo" campaign still going on, or was that kind of finished since the rainy season was ended?

Pryor: The railroad is nearing completion. There's still yet some finishing work, particularly a good bit of ballasting work going on yet. At 105 Kilo, there's some bit of railroad work going on, but then most of the work right then is directed toward cutting wood out here in the jungle and taking it and stacking it by the railroad so that the trains could use it. They fired the steam engines with wood, and so now we're using that. We stack it by the road, and, of course, trains load it on . . . well, they just load a trainload of wood on and take it to some, oh, probably some supply point. Ofttimes a train would stop and take on a load for it's own immediate use. At this camp all the work was concerned with cutting wood. In a very short while our own people came up there. I'd guess it must have been along toward maybe January, I believe after the first of the year. This would have been January, 1944. I believe our people came up there along about that time, and we organized again into units of Americans, Australians,

and Dutch and so forth as had been our custom before. We were concerned altogether with cutting wood and trying to keep warm at night. Oh, gosh, we were not far from the sea, but we were up quite high. As you look to the map, as you might have noted in that book awhile ago, we're right next to . . . that's the camp right next to Three Pagodas Pass, and that's the pass over the mountains that ran down through the length of Malaysia on into Sumatra and into Java. At night it becomes bitter cold, and we begin our sleep as early in the evening as we can because with insufficient blankets and so forth it becomes very cold . . . impossible to sleep in the . . . I guess along from the time of maybe 1:30-2:00 on. So we'd get up and set next to bamboo fires that we'd make in the hut so that we could halfway keep warm. A bamboo fire is much like sitting in front of a fireplace; you scorch on one side (chuckle) and the other side still gets frozen. But this was the best job that I had on the railroad--cutting wood for these trains.

Marcello: Why was that the best job you had?

Pryor: Well, know-how served us well there. They organized us into teams of four men, and each four man team would get a saw, an axe, and a sledge and a wedge. We cut this

wood into half-meter lengths. A meter, of course, is about thirty-nine inches. So we cut the wood in half-meter lengths, and the four man task for the day would be to cut a rick 1.1 meters high and four meters in length--four meters long, 1.1 meters high. Then, of course, you cut it in half-meter lengths. This Hugh Faulk again worked with my team, and Hugh Faulk was the best man on a saw that I've ever seen. The saw just ran itself when he was on the other end of it. Then one of the other sailors had worked as a lumberjack in Idaho in civilian life, so he was an accomplished woodsman. Modesty deserts me. I only saw one man in all prison camp that could beat me with an axe. We had an Aussie that could make more wood with an axe than I could make. But I had grown up in West Texas, and during my life as a young boy, our fuel in the wintertime was mesquite stumps. We had to work up these mesquite stumps, and, by thunder, you get proficient right quick with an axe when you have to work these mesquite stumps. So this served me well. I would choose the tree that we were to fall and always get one that split easily, that the grain was free and clear.

Marcello: You didn't pick out any teak trees (chuckle)?

Pryor: No, you didn't pick on those. I'd go up and take a chip out of one. You can pretty near tell by looking at the leaves on a tree. If it's small of leaf, it just will not split. The grain curls around and around. If it's a broadleaf tree, most generally the grain is straight and free and has a good cleavage factor. But I would always take a good-sized chip out of the tree and split it with the axe and make sure that it would be good. So Hugh Faulk and this sailor would get on the saw, and I would use the axe while they was sawing the butt-cutts. I'd be working up the limbs. Our fourth man stacked it (chuckle). He carried it out beside the railroad and stacked it. That's all he did. Some days if we got a good saw, a good sharp saw . . . and usually we'd work it over ourselves. We'd get it out there and put a set in it. Ofttimes the set would be way out, and so you had to set it. We knew how. So we would set it so it would cut well, and if we got a good sharp one, we'd set that rascal and we might do four day's work in one day and leave that wood stacked way out there in that jungle. And so the next day, if we got poor tools or didn't want to do anything, we'd sleep all day, lay back there in the jungle and sleep, because the Japanese guards didn't go around out there in the jungle looking for you.

We would sleep all day until time--middle of the afternoon--time to carry out our daily quota and stack it up beside that railroad. So we'd stack up our quota (chuckle). That's why I say this is the easiest time that we had on the railroad--that time that we worked in cutting this wood.

In this area where we had quite a lot of this balsa--like you make the model airplanes out of, you know. Occasionally, just for spite, we'd cut one of these balsa trees. It wasn't altogether as easy work as you might think. It's like sawing paper because you can just throw an axe at it, and it would all fall apart. But to saw it was just like sawing paper. We'd go stack it up, and when these train crews passing through would see us stacking up this balsa (chuckle), they'd just have a fit. Everything impolite in the Japanese language, you know, that's how they'd call us. But that didn't bother us. We didn't work for them. We worked for another bunch of Japanese (chuckle), and these guys didn't care what we brought out there--just so long as it was wood and it was stacked up to 1.1 meters and four meters long (chuckle). They weren't going to throw it into the firebox of a train.

That's one thing that we noted often--the lack, the complete, utter lack of cooperation between organizations of Japanese. Ofttimes you'd see some of these Japanese military units as they passed through here when we were like at One Hundred Kilo. We were breaking ballast for the service road as well as the railroad and working on bridges, too. We had two Caterpillars. We had a DC-6 Caterpillar and a DC-4 Caterpillar with winches, and the only thing we used those winches for was to wrap around a good-sized, granite-like boulder--I'd guess this was all lava formation, volcanic formation, way in the past because the rocks were much like granite--and we would put this cable around one on the mountainside and then drag it off the mountainside down to the foot of the hill so we could jump on it with sledges, and break it up into small . . . make some small ones out of large ones. Another Japanese unit could come by with some motor transport gear and get stuck out there in the mud, and do you think these Japanese would go out there with their Caterpillar and drag them out? They wouldn't do it. They would have to walk off and leave that thing right there in that mudhole because these Japanese wouldn't help those. You wonder how they ever got as

far as they did with such a spirit of uncooperative nature that they displayed. But nevertheless we fared fairly well. The rainy season was over.

Marcello: Did the harassment generally stop by this time, or were you so used to it that it didn't bother you anymore?

Pryor: Well, certainly we had become used to it. It never did stop altogether, but they saw the futility in it about as much as we do, I think, and decided that it was just wasted effort. There's just not much use in getting out there and doing this and that and the other, so many of these things that they'd give their personal attention to in the early days, well, they've become probably even more complacent than we have. Not that they've become better humored, but they just say, "Well, I'm just spinning my wheels if I go over and bash him, so there's not much use in it."

Marcello: I would gather that you were not exactly coming to grips with the most elite Japanese troops back in the boondocks.

Pryor: No, these are occupation troops. For the most part they're Koreans officered by Japanese, and I'd imagine that he's probably not the most brilliant nor efficient Japanese officer (chuckle). That's why they shunt him back here into such a position. It might or might

not be true that some of the non-coms that staffed these groups. I'll mention one later on that leads me to say that it might not altogether be true in the case of non-commissioned officers. We cut wood from about January . . . of course, I'd been there longer; I cut wood probably from late November until March. Then in March things were winding down on the railroad and it was altogether devoted to cutting wood for the most part.

Marcello: Now this was March of 1944. Now the railroad was actually finished around the end of October of 1943.

Pryor: You might say it was finished, but they always had to have repair crews doing this and that and the other. A flood in the mountains would wash out a bridge, so you had to have somebody to do that. Or a mudslide or some such thing would disrupt the line, and so you always had to have crews to go along to repair.

Marcello: In other words by this time--let's say by March of 1944--the bulk of the prisoners had already moved on since the road was complete. Now what remained were simply skeleton crews or maintenance crews of sorts.

Pryor: Skeleton crews. Some of them had gone on, many of them headed for Japan. A lot of them didn't make it, I'm sure.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you perchance attend the ceremonies when the road was completed? Do you remember anything about the completion of the railroad? They had a ceremony at various places, the memorial services.

Pryor: I know they did. They had one on our end of the line, but no, I was not present.

Marcello: Were you back at Eighty Kilo Camp when the road was actually completed, or had you moved up to 105 Kilo by that time?

Pryor: I'd imagine I was still at Eighty Kilo when they said it was actually completed. I was still at Eighty. And shortly after that time, when they had the ceremony and all--we'd heard about it--we moved up to 105 and started cutting wood, but there were still crews that were putting finishing touches. They just didn't run up there and say, "Well, it's all finished right now" and that it was an accomplished fact then.

So in March, about mid-March, the Japanese began to divide us up and move us out, and I was selected with nine other Americans . . . ten of us altogether were chosen to go to . . . well, we didn't know where. We were just ten Americans out of all this number that were picked to go somewhere. We were told on the train into Thailand, but we had no idea what we would be in for.

Marcello: Incidentally, when something like this happened, when all of a sudden you're separated from people that you've become familiar with, does this kind of tear down your morale just a little bit? Is there a certain amount of security that disappears?

Pryor: Well, I suppose so. Of course, we developed pretty close friendships with many people and, of course, fairly close friendship with all our people because your well-being is pretty much dependent upon what others can do for you. At the same time, when you're fit, you help them. You pretty soon begin to understand people. When you live with them under conditions like that, you understand a whole lot more about them than you normally would in any other case. So you do develop some very close relations with these people. This old thing when you refer to them as "give you the shirt off his back," well, this had become a real thing. You know who will and who might not.

Marcello: In other words, being this close for so long under these adverse conditions certainly brought out the very best and the very worst in everybody.

Pryor: Yes, most generally I'd say this would be true--the very worst or the very best. Fortunately, I think

those that would exhibit an unusual character, highly commendable character, far outnumbered those in the other way.

Marcello: How great a problem was theft? I'm speaking now of thievery among the prisoners themselves.

Pryor: Well, with us it never was much of a problem because we didn't have anything to steal, but if you meant the problem of stealing from the Japanese, of course, this was done at every opportunity. But I'm satisfied that if we had had any such possessions that would have been susceptible to theft that we would have gone right along with it. We'd have entered into the spirit of the thing in an unusual way because when you come to a point when life is dependent upon what you might obtain for yourself, no matter in what way . . . of course, our people didn't have anything, so what we could do for ourself there was such things as . . . and particularly here at 105 Kilo. I believe at 105 Kilo more than anyplace that I was around, you watched the birds and what the birds ate in the way of berries and, let's say, buds off of trees or some such thing. We would get out here, dash out and cut our days quota of wood, and then we would pick leaves and little moss-like weeds that grew on the ground. It was kind of a little succulent

plant, but we had seen the lizards eat this thing, and when you boiled it up, it was not altogether unpalatable. It was green so we figured if it's green it's got to have some kind of food value, so we ate those. There at 105, too, there was one place where we used to go to cut wood that there was a number of wild figs. We saw the birds eating these things, and it looked like they relished them a great deal, so we got them and they were not sweet--as sweet as our figs--but they were a type of wild fig, and, of course, we tied into those because sweets were something we just didn't come by. Oh, I'd guess rations picked up a little bit after the rainy season had ended. The Japanese were able to provide for us in a little better way.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with native traders in these camps? I heard that the British did down in the Thai camps. I understand that as you got farther into the interior the traders disappeared, too.

Pryor: No, no, not at this place. Well, you outstripped civilization, and we outstripped civilization immediately after we left Thanbyuzayat because on the Burma side particularly, immediately you got away from the . . . well, immediately adjacent to the sea, you were in virgin jungle. You were in places where your only predecessor

had been a surveying party and the natives, even the hill people . . . it's very seldom that you saw a native in these places.

Marcello: Is it not true that the British prior to World War II had made a survey along virtually the same route that you had followed, and they came away with the opinion that building a railroad there was virtually impossible due to the terrain and the unhealthy conditions?

Pryor: This may be a true story. We did hear it, and now as to its truthfulness, authenticity, I don't know, but we had heard that it had been proposed, and it's quite likely that it had because if they could have entered into some agreement with the Thais, certainly this would have facilitated commerce between Malaya and Singapore and Burma. I would suspect that there's more than a little truth to this story.

Marcello: Did you ever run across a Japanese officer by the name of Colonel Nagatomo?

Pryor: Yes, he was the commander in charge of our branch of the prisoner-of-war camps in Burma. He was the senior Japanese officer, and, yes, I know him. I saw him a number of times. His headquarters were at Thanbyuzayat, and when I was there for that brief period of time, I would see him around camp. Of course, our senior POW commander was an Australian Brigadier, Varley. I

understand Varley was lost on a ship bound for Japan, a ship sunk by our submarines. I know that in reading this book Bridge Over the River Kwai the Japanese characterization there is much like that that we entertained of Nagatomo, and the British officer was very much--in many ways--characteristic of Varley. Varley was much of a man. He was not attended so by any means.

Marcello: I gather he was pretty hard-nosed.

Pryor: Well, I guess he was a holder of the Victoria Cross, and the British don't give that Victoria Cross lightly. I know in one instance up there when we were at 105 Kilo Camp, and it was just before our people had come up from 100 Kilo, and I was down around the cookhouse one day--the Australians ran this cookhouse--and a British officer from the Thailand side was visiting in our camp, and they led this young British officer down around showing him the cookhouse and all that, and the mess officer was an Australian captain, and he introduced him to the warrant officers. We had a RSM, they call it, regimental sergeant major, and he was in charge of the detail at the cookhouse. They introduced this young English officer to the RSM, and that didn't impress him. He looked like, well, so what, until the captain

said "VC." Oh, my gosh (chuckle)! When he put that VC after the introduction, you ought to have seen that young Englishman come alive. Oh, my gosh! His boots clacked together, and you could have heard him a hundred yards down the railroad, and that arm came up in a salute, and it (chuckle) . . . I mean it snapped there for five minutes. He was getting that arm up there (chuckle). That VC made a whole lot of difference in the manner of man that he was being introduced to. But Varley was such a man. I had a great deal of respect for him. He looked after his POW's in an unusual way, and I'm satisfied oftentimes at a complete disregard for his own well being. It seems this is the general idea of how he conducted himself.

Marcello: Incidentally, from time to time I have alluded to the "Speedo" campaign that occurred in May of 1943 when the Japanese were evidently behind schedule in the construction of this railroad, and as a result, of course, they wanted to speed up the work on it. How did things change as a result of the "Speedo" campaign?

Pryor: Well, just the big change, of course, would be in the amount of work that they required you to do. See, when we started out on that railroad, the first day out at Eighteen Kilo Camp, we had 1.1 meters per man to do,

and at the height of this campaign in the late days, each man had a task of 2.5 cubic meters to do. That's not in dry soil; that's in the wet and the mud and the rain, the incessant rain. Then at times, too, we'd have gangs working on bridges, and I know that at the times we worked on these bridges oftentimes it was not unusual for us to work eighteen hours, eighteen hours on through. Once or twice we worked near twenty hours, twenty hours out of the twenty-four, and then you'd be back at it. No longer would there be days off, yasumi days, as we knew them. There was no more of this. It was just work every day that you were able to crawl out there and go to work. You worked with fever, you worked with these great ulcers--I still had mine; I worked a good long while with it--and you worked with dysentery, and you worked without benefit of adequate food. Food was not even enough to sustain life without such intolerable work.

Marcello: I gather that on many occasions camps located a considerable distance from where the actual work on the track was going on, and a lot of times you were marching to work in the dark and coming back in the evening in the dark.

Pryor: It was always in the dark. It was always in the dark in these days. This was just something that was to be-- always in the dark.

Marcello: Did the beatings increase?

Pryor: No, no, they just yelled, and, of course, they probably never had time to beat you. They drove you, but I don't know that beating would have speeded up anything any more.

Marcello: And all of this work was hand labor--no machinery whatsoever.

Pryor: No machinery, all by hand. We had a few elephants there to use to move timber, but these elephants were pretty smart boogers. They'd go out and test a log first, and if it was a little more than they wanted to move, well, they'd back off from it, and no amount of beating them over the head with this kind of an iron hook that they have would get him to get up there and move that log. So most generally if the elephant wouldn't move it, well, then the Japanese would yell for eight men. You knew you had a considerable log there to move around like a bunch of ants.

When we left this place we always had some idea of where one might go and what the Japanese might want. We always changed pretty much our occupation. Their

records keeping system was very poor, and if we heard that they wanted, let's say, truck drivers in a place and we didn't think we'd like the place, we told them we had been students. Another time if we heard they wanted farmers--somebody who knew something about agriculture--and we didn't think we'd like the place, well, we'd tell them we were truck drivers. One time, and this was there at 105 Kilo, we heard they wanted to ship some people out, and whoever they'd ship out would be going to Japan. We'd heard about submarine activity in the Sea of Japan and the adjacent seas and loss of ships that had prisoners on them, and none of us by then had any desire to go to Japan. I hadn't any desire to get on a Japanese ship and go anywhere because we'd been bombed on the way up to Moulmein. So they lined you all up, and they'd have to ask all over again, "What was your civilian occupation?" They asked us and two or three of us got wise, and we told them that we were peach fur pickers. This Japanese was sitting there with his brush, you know, that they write with, and we told him "peach fur pickers," and their English leaves them when they're confronted by such a thing as that, and so they resort

back to the Japanese, and he says, "Nani?" Nani is what. So we repeat again, "Peach fur picker. Pick fur off peach." So he thought on that a little bit, and I guess he thought he'd probably look stupid if he couldn't interpret this peach fur picking, picking fur off peaches. So he thought on that a little bit, and then he stabbed this brush over there in the ink, you know--this lampblack-like stuff they used for ink, you know--so he stabbed it over in there, and then he hesitated again for a minute, and then he put down a couple of explanatory marks, and he thought a bit, and, boy, then he dashed off four or five more right quick, just like the enlightenment had just sunk in, all of a sudden. I've often wondered what that silly rascal actually put down there (chuckle).

Marcello: Did any of your buddies hear what you said? I don't think they could have kept a straight face.

Pryor: Three of us, three of us were there.

Marcello: Oh, there were three of you. I see. There was no other audience around?

Pryor: No, there was three of us who told him "peach fur pickers."

Marcello: You didn't end up picking the fur off peaches, I gather.

Pryor: No, we wound up going to Thailand. As a matter of fact, ten of us eventually went to Thailand. We went into

this place in Thailand, and they took us off the train at this camp there at Tamarkan. This was a big camp, the largest camp that we'd been in.

Marcello: Incidentally, were you going over the railroad that you had just built down to Tamarkan?

Pryor: Well, the part that the English had built on the Thailand side.

Marcello: Did this bother you any?

Pryor: Only a couple of times.

Marcello: You must have known that they were sabotaging the road just the same way you guys had been.

Pryor: Well, you didn't have to sabotage it. Just their jury-rigging system of building something made you wonder how they ever got away with it. Why, I've seen them go out and unload a diesel locomotive . . . well, their locomotives, let's say, it's a truck and instead of the regular highway wheels it had flanged wheels, instead. They used this diesel truck as a locomotive to pull these little cars along the railroad. I've seen them unload one of these things off a flatcar, and they'd take two rails and put one up on the end of the flatcar and the other end right on top of the rail, and they wouldn't bother to stake it down or anything--just set

it up there and then push the thing off. They'd get away with it, but I don't know why the rail didn't slide off, but it most generally didn't.

Marcello: What was it like crossing some of those bridges?

Pryor: You could walk across some of them, and they'd shake and shimmy. Most of them were two tiers of pilings high. We built one there on the Burma side that was three tiers high. This thing must have been ninety feet high.

Marcello: What did you use for pile-drivers?

Pryor: That was just weights that worked on kind of a spider rig. You would have a scaffold set around the piling, and the piling has a hole drilled in the top of it--the top that you use to drive--and they put a guide stem in that, and then the weight of several hundred pounds, probably up to 500 pounds of weight--metal weight, flat on its face, and it has a hole in it that fits around the guide stem. Then you have a rope that comes out over a pulley on each side and then anywhere up to fifty individual spider lines fit onto that rope, and so you pulled it with one motion. You stayed in place, and you'd extend your arms and then pull your arms in toward you to your sides, and that would lift the weight maybe eighteen inches or two feet, maybe

two feet, in the neighborhood of two feet, and then you would release it in one movement, and then you do this from both sides in unison. We used that to drive piling. Then on this one of three tiers, you brace this and then you put runners or sleepers along that and then set the other tier or ties on that. They would just tie them down, not with bolts, but with dogs, what we called dogs. Just a piece of iron . . . well, it looked like a paper clip . . . looked like one of your little swingline paper clips, excepting it would be in the neighborhood of maybe twelve to eighteen inches long and then the spiked ends would be . . . you could drive it into the piling for some four inches into the piling. Then we put a third layer up on top of that one.

Marcello: I would assume that was pretty dangerous work given the debilitated condition of the prisoners and all that sort of thing.

Pryor: Yes, it was but somehow you live with danger every day as just part of your life. We never paid a whole lot of attention to it.

Marcello: Well, at least if you're up there on that bridge the guards couldn't beat on you or something like that.

Pryor: They didn't come after you. They set down there and yelled "Speedo" and that would be about all. You knew they weren't going to come up there and bash you with anything.

Marcello: I also gather from what I've read that on many occasions these logs were never treated in any way with creosote or something of that sort.

Pryor: No, most of these logs that we used on the Burma side were hardwood, and there was little necessity to treat them. They would be rot resistant. They were a form of teak. Now some teak was easy to work, but this ironwood teak was not. We had a kind of a rosewood teak. That was one of the most beautiful woods. It just seemed a shame to cut it up and to use it firing these trains and using it in some of these bridges. It was just such a beautiful wood, beautiful grain, and you knew that it would take an exceptional shine. I've often thought what beautiful furniture this would make, and we just cut it up like . . . of course, it was not altogether in scarce supply around there in such a jungle as we lived in.

Marcello: Anyhow it was quite an experience traveling back across some of these bridges.

Pryor: Then, of course, you don't travel . . . it's not like riding the Santa Fe Chief, either. You're bundled up

in these little cooped-up boxcars, and it seemed that they might have a string of twenty empty cars, and they'd have to put forty men in one car that would accommodate maybe fifteen. So there was no room for all of you to lie down at one time or even stand up at one time, you might say. I don't know why they had to do that, but this seemed to be one of their failings.

But they took us out into Tamarkan, and we only stayed there a few days, and then they moved us out in company with a bunch of Dutch and Australian prisoners, marching. We hit the road. That was quite a relief to know that we weren't going into that train somewhere and possibly wind up in a port city. So we started out marching, and we were barefooted, and they marched us down this concrete road. There's a concrete road between Bangkok and I know at least Bampong and Kanchanaburi. We leave about eleven o'clock, and I guess by one o'clock we're at the edge of the city and heading out into open country. Gosh, that road was hot. It's in mid-March and that concrete road is hot, and a bunch of these Aussies and Dutchmen jumped off of that concrete road out onto the shoulder, and you never saw so much consternation in your life. Have you become familiar with goat-heads here in Texas?

Marcello: Yes, I sure have.

Pryor: Well, this place around Thailand had goat-heads. We had goat-heads there that looked like the granddaddy of all goat-heads. I was raised in West Texas in an area of cotton and goat-heads and careless weeds and milkweed, and I saw the same weeds there in Thailand that I used to see in West Texas and down here in Oklahoma. These old goat-heads . . . gosh, there were just millions and millions of them off these shoulders, and these old boys that never knew what they were jumped off out there, and their feet got full of them, and they put their hands down on the ground to give some relief to their feet, and their hands were full of them. Of course, you know they do make a gosh awful sore at times. But they learned a hard lesson right quickly. They marched us out to a new camp out by a little village called Tamuan. It was about twelve kilometers out from Kanchanaburi. They put us in a new camp, altogether new. There was a few Englishmen there already and a few Dutch, but it was a camp for about 700 men, and another dry camp. There was no water there in that place. This camp was established there for the purpose of building a big workshop area out there in virgin jungle. So they had

brought in probably about a couple of thousand Chinese from down in around Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh down in Malaya. I guess they had probably 2,000 native Thais working out there.

Marcello: It was a pretty big project, in other words.

Pryor: Right, and all these people were specialists with the exception of us ten Americans. All of us were students. The last time we had listed that we were students.

Marcello: Were the rest of these Australians and Dutch specialists also?

Pryor: Right, all of them.

Marcello: They had some kind of skill.

Pryor: They were machinists and metal workers, foundry workers, electricians, and all had unusual technical skills. They had brought them there so that one day they would man these plants--these workshops. So we built this big workshop area right out of virgin jungle, laid the tracks right into it. We dug a water reservoir out of solid rock on the side of a big hill, and we built a big power plant back into the hill, into the rock of this hill. We laid water lines. I was in charge of the detail that laid water lines into all these buildings and these workshops from the reservoir. Most of this machinery had been taken from plants and factories and

shops down all the way into Indonesia, Singapore, up the Malay Peninsula, particularly in around Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh in this mining country--great diesel engines, lathes, a complete foundry. Many of these Chinese were exceptionally skillful at manufacturing parts, creating the mold, putting it in the sand, and then pouring the metal into the mold. They were very skilled at sabotage.

Marcello: I gather that the Chinese hated the Japanese with a passion, even these overseas Chinese.

Pryor: Well, I know that they could put . . . they might pour, let's say, a piston for some big locomotive, and they'd put glass crystals in it, and when they'd put this thing on a lathe and turn it down, then maybe the shaper and planer, and this high speed lathe and when those tungsten and carbide cutting tools hit it, my gosh, they'd shatter it into a million pieces. The Japanese didn't have much of that. You could break one cutting tool, and that machine was out of action for maybe a couple of days until they could scrounge up another cutting tool somewhere. Then in welding I know they could weld a broken tool or some other such thing, a broken piece, and they could put one of the most beautiful welds on

that thing you've ever seen, and it would last just about long enough to bolt it into place (chuckle). It was just a sorry job really, but it looked good (chuckle). They were skillful.

But we pretty soon settled down in this place. I said it was a dry camp, and it was just impossible to get water. There was a native well close by, and we could go there in the evening, the late evening, and fill up a five-gallon tin of water. We used that to bathe and to drink and for the kitchen, but you had to boil it, and the facilities to boil it were just intolerable. But on a working party one time I went into this place Bampong. Bampong is a rail center where one branch goes on down into Malaya and Singapore, and the other branch went on into Kanchanaburi and on up into . . . well, the road that we built. So it sits right astride this terminal. We were sent in there for some reason one time on a work party. I had charge of this group, and they wanted to go down there and stack lumber. This place where we worked was a combination ice plant and lumber plant and a laundry, and we got to snooping around there in this place, and I discovered a five gallon tin of white powder. Well, it smelled like chlorine, and I tasted it and it tasted like chlorine, so

I decided that it would serve good enough. So I found two one-gallon tins, and I packed these two one gallon tins with this white powder on the assumption that it was bleaching compound of some kind. It did have chlorine in it. So we took that up there, and from then on we had all the water that we wanted. Later on the next day I went down and got another gallon, so we had three gallons of chlorine.

Marcello: Did you just throw some of that in your water or run your water through it?

Pryor: Right. We'd go down to the well and get a five-gallon tin of water and then come back and put enough of this chlorine in there so that we could taste it. We figured that killed all the bugs (chuckle). So we could accommodate most of our people then with water. The Dutch, the English, the Aussies, they'd come around and say, "Yank, I sure am thirsty." "Well, help yourself. We got plenty of water. Help yourself to a drink of water." Of course, this has it's beauties, too, such an arrangement. Usually when they came by a little something extra, well, they'd come around and say, "Hey, I got a extra hand of bananas here. I want you to take four or five bananas." Or they found an

extra egg, come by it some way. So you pretty soon learned the real beauty of sharing what little you do have because most generally you'll be repaid many, many times over.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with native traders here at Tamarkan? You mentioned bananas, eggs, and this sort of thing.

Pryor: Quite a lot there. The Japanese permitted us to have a small canteen in which they permitted natives to bring stuff in to sell, and they put it in our canteen and resold it to us. You could sometimes get peanuts and sometimes tobacco and sometimes eggs. You never knew that you were going to get anything such as that, but occasionally. Of course, they paid us for working. They paid us twenty-five sen a day. That would buy one egg (chuckle). An egg was twenty-five sen.

Marcello: Didn't the Japanese also take out for room and board and that sort of thing before you got your pay?

Pryor: No, that's what we got. We got twenty-five sen a day.

Marcello: I see. That's after the room and the board had been taken out.

Pryor: Yes. That would entitle you to buy one egg when you could do so. So we fared a little better in Thailand.

Marcello: You were near civilization now, too.

Pryor: Yes, and Thailand is an export country. They grow a surplus of agricultural products. Before that the Japanese always made us live off the land, but now you're in a land that produces a surplus, so we fared much better in this place. But the work was hard. The hours were most generally from shortly after sunup until shortly before sundown. The tasks remained pretty much the same all the time. If you got it done early today, there was not that following consequence as it had been on the railroad when tomorrow you had an increased task. One time there when we were putting in those ditches and that's before I fell into the job of hancho. That hancho is a sergeant in charge. He's the foreman. Before I got the job of laying concrete water line into all these places, we were digging ditches for drainage for the most part, and the Japanese gunso had set a task for two men to do, one with a pick and the other one with a shovel. Of course, as I said before, I'd learned to use that pick. I didn't see anybody that could do a better job, that could use it any better. So whoever I worked with used the shovel, and we always got through before anybody else. This one day we'd done our task, and we were through by midafternoon. Everybody else was still working, but when we got through we just sat down in the

shade. It was hot. Here comes a little two-star Japanese private, and he waltzed along there and saw us having a yasumi, and so he screamed and squalled and came over there and told us to go to work. We said we was finished. He wanted to know where we had worked and we showed him, and we just insisted that we weren't going to do anymore. So this other old boy that I was working with was bigger than I was. He weighed about 170 pounds in prison camp, and in civilian life I guess he weighed about 215--big old boy, you know. So this little old Nip private made him go stand in this ditch that we had dug (chuckle) so he could bash him (laughter). He couldn't reach him other than that, so he stood him in the ditch, and there he was just bashing the hound out of him. He hadn't got to me yet (chuckle). I knew that my time would be next.

Marcello: He was hitting him with his fists?

Pryor: Yes, he'd leaned his rifle up against a tree and was bashing him with his fists, and the gunso came along about that time. The gunso came over and asked what was going on. He spoke fairly good English, the gunso did. We thought he was the fairest Japanese we'd ever seen, I mean in that his sense of being fair with you, not physically fair, but the way he would have you do.

So I told him that we had done our task, and that when we finished we sat down there under this little tree and the two-star wanted us to do some more work, get up and go back to work. So the gunso asked me to show him our task, and so I showed him where we started and where we ended, and he took his stick--they carried a stick a meter long--and he measured it off, and we'd done just a little over our share, not short, but we'd done full measure. He said, "You have done a good job and that is a fair task." He got out in the middle of the road and he beckoned this . . . they beckon this way (gesture). Instead of the palm of the hand being turned up to beckon to you, they turn the palm of the hand to the ground and beckon that way. So he beckoned that little two-star private over there, and he just bashed the devil out of him (laughter). Well, that little guy ran from us when he saw us from then on (laughter). We never did have anymore trouble out of him.

But we had another unusual job in working with this pipe. We watched the girls. Some of these little Thai girls are exceptionally good looking, and to us that had been out there in the Asiatics so many years, they all looked white, you know. They say after you've been in the Asiatics for six months, all of them are white (chuckle), and the longer you stay the whiter

they get. Many of these Thais are beautiful, and when we'd go out in the morning and see these native work crews come to get their tools for the day around the tool house, and we were in line to get ours, too, we used to look them over and pick them out. We had a list--the ten of us yanks--and we had come to some consensus as this one belongs on the list number one and then the other one would be number two and on down through ten (chuckle), and we would adjust this list from time to time as some new one would come.

One day I had stayed in. They had had trouble with the cows, and I had already been on the cows once. You talked about the traders awhile ago--did we have some contact with them. Well, after we'd been in this camp about two weeks, I got malaria, and I got it again in another two weeks, and I got it a third time in another two weeks--three times in six weeks--and from then on I never had it. After the third time I had it, they lost a bunch of cows. The Japanese had a herd of cows, and they used those for our meat ration and their own. So they had a couple of the Englishmen and an Aussie to look after this herd of cows. Usually a new herd would number up around fifty or sixty, and then you killed those off, and you'd get in a new bunch,

and it would be fifty or sixty again. They were wild as a bunch of rabbits. So they had this new bunch, and, by gosh, they got out there one day, and they'd lost about half of them. They came into camp and told our officer that they'd lost these cows. Well, the Nip had brought them back into camp, and when they asked him what had happened, he said, "Well, we lost the bloody things. We got out there and the first thing we knew they had all gone through that jungle." So he came down through this sick bay there where I was--I had this fever--and he says, "Do you know anything about cows?" He knew I was from Texas, and indeed most of us yanks were from Texas. So he said, "Do you know anything about cows?" I said, "Well, yes, I know something about cows. I was raised with cows." He said, "Well, can you find those bloody cows that these guys have lost out there in that jungle?" "I imagine I could." He says, "Well, you go out there with this Nip guard and see if you know where in the Sam Hill they went (laughter)." He said, "These bloody bastards don't even know which way they went (laughter)." We went out there, found their tracks, and found the cows, and so then I inherited the cow job. I went out and herded cows. All I had to do was go out there and sit

down under the shade trees all day and watch these cows eat grass. Then every morning I'd rope one and take it over to the butcher to kill for the day, and, of course, the Japanese got most of the meat, but we got most of the fun of dragging this over there for the kill. But in those days out with the cattle I came to know many of these tradespeople, most of them women. They'd come in from these kampongs. A kampong is an area of several huts, houses. It would be several houses around a clearing, and from there they go to the rice paddies and do whatever they have to do. So these little girls came in from the outlying areas to the village, and they carry their things in baskets on a "yoho" pole, and they'll buy eggs and tobacco, peanuts, bananas, papaya, mangoes, whatever is in season, and take that then out around these kampongs for resale, to sell around these various kampongs, and I got acquainted with most of them, and I knew just what hour of the day they'd be coming along this trail and what hour of the day they'd be over on that trail and quite often would manage to be around there, and so they'd drop off an egg, maybe a little hunk of tobacco. I didn't smoke but I'd bring it in to the other guys. Sometimes they'd leave a hand of bananas along there, and so I was doing pretty good

until a Japanese officer got the idea that I was doing a whole lot better than I ought to be doing and that I knew too many natives out there. I could talk to them a little bit in Malay. I could speak good Malay, and many of them could speak some Malay because Thai is a kindred tongue. So we got to talking a little bit, and I was living too well, I guess, so he jerked me off those cattle and put me back out there at the workshop.

Nevertheless, after I'd gone back to the workshop, one day they lost a bunch of cows again, and so the Japanese guard that was with the guys was goofing off. He wasn't with them when they lost the cows. This was like liberty for them. They only got liberty about every three weeks, and so down around some of those kampongs, this got like going on liberty. They had girls down around there in woman's oldest profession (chuckle). Then you could buy a little something to eat and drink around some of these places, so immediately after they got outside camp he hustled off down there to this particular kampong. While he was down there, these guys let some of these new cows get out into the jungle. They lost about eight or nine head, and when he came back and found out they'd lost that many, well,

he was frantic (laughter) because he wasn't there and he knew that gunso would just tear him up like wet tissue paper. So, gosh, he hustled out on his own out to this big workshop area and finally ran me down. He was looking for the ushi man. Ushi means cow in Japanese. He was looking for that American ushi man. He wanted me to come and find these cattle. So we had gone and found their tracks, and in a little while I suggested to him, "Well, I know where they are." "You see them?" I said, "No, I don't see them, but I know where they are." I figured they'd gone back to the old native's place that had sold them to him just a couple of days before, and that was down at the village of Tamuan about four kilometers from our camp. So we went down there and six of the cows were already there, and so we brought those back, but the other three weren't. The old Indian insisted that they weren't there. Of course, I didn't know them well enough, but I knew there was a one-eyed bull among them, and that one-eyed bull wasn't among them, so I figured he'd show up. The next morning the old Indian sent word out there that the other three had showed up, and so we had to go get them, and so I was out from the workshop for two days. Then

the two days I was gone these jokers spotted a new Thai girl, Kon Thai girl out there. One of them had spotted her. He is a county agent, I guess, out here at Rising Star. The other one is a manager of a big textile mill. I guess he's over in North Carolina, I guess, now. They spotted a new Kon Thai girl. Kon is man, Thai man. Kon Thai means a Thai person. So they'd spotted this one and said that it was the number one of all number ones. They said, "She's the most beautiful thing in all Thailand." The next day when I came back, well, we saw her. This Japanese that was with us was an obnoxious little bugger. Even the Japanese didn't even like him, and we detested him. He worked with this crew of mine a good deal, and I didn't like him worth a hoot. So about the time that we got out there and got settled down to work, he spotted this girl working in this shop. So he came got hold of me, and he said, "Hancho, you come. You speak Kon Thai girl." I said, "No, I don't speak Kon Thai girl." (chuckle) He says, "You speak." I said, "No, I don't speak Kon Thai." "Yes," he said, "You speak Kon Thai." He dragged me . . . he grabbed me by the arm and dragged me down there: "You speak." What he wanted me to do was to speak up on his behalf. He was just all enamored with her; he

was all taken up with her. So he decided he'd put the proposition to her. So he started out with five bahts. I could speak a little bit of it and a little bit of Malay, and so I could make myself understood. So I passed along what this silly bugger had to say.

Marcello: You say he started out at five bahts?

Pryor: They're on the decimal system. Their monetary system is on the decimal system, and it's sen and baht. Baht would be like our dollar; it's the equivalent of a hundred units. So he started out with five bahts. That afternoon he was up to 200, and she was still laughing at the fool. Later on this old boy caught this Kon Thai girl out there one day and reached over and grabbed her on the breast, and she went and told this gunso. You talk about beating somebody; he beat that poor soul until he looked like a sick pup. His face was just swollen, just swollen up, after he got through with him. He was the fairest man that I ever saw, I believe, to be in charge of a bunch of people such as we were.

Marcello: What were your living quarters like here at Tamarkan-- the same sort of thatched huts?

Pryor: The same bamboo huts that we'd lived in all along. Many of the places that we built out there though were built out of wood and then filled with sand--blastproof. We

built blastproof walls. The shop walls were blastproof. They might be . . . there were two wooden . . . three feet between them, and we filled this three feet with dirt and sand. Then around individual machines within the plant we would built a blastproof wall around it. They could repair locomotives. I'd imagine we probably had eight or ten locomotive repair shops that could accommodate four locomotives at one time. We had railway carriage repair shops, carpenter shops. In this place we could repair and complete almost any kind of job. Oh, I guess it must have covered forty acres altogether in this jungle. Our people must have known it was there. Our bombers along toward the end of the war would come over, and we would hear them first at night. As they'd come over, we never heard any bombing, but we knew they were American planes. We could hear the deep, synchronized motors. We always knew when the Japanese . . . you could well tell the difference between Japanese planes and ours. We synchronized our motors, and their motors weren't. They sounded like washing machines. Somehow the Japanese never knew.

They had us dig slit trenches in through our part of the camp, and we dug a big trench all around our part

of the camp that was about . . . the thing was about three meters deep and along the top it would be about . . . I guess it must have been five meters wide at the top. Then there was a straight wall on the opposite side, a vertical, perpendicular wall, and then slanted inboard, in the inboard side. We had to throw all the dirt on the opposite side. We had to dig on this thing in our spare time after normal work hours out at the plant and workshops. During lunch hour we had to go work on this, too. We thought it served a pretty good purpose because our people would know that we were POW's and that we were confined in this part of the camp and the Japanese were over yonder outside all that big moat. Of course, the Japanese reasoned that, too.

Near the end of our time there we had a great deal of activity going on, but we couldn't understand its meaning altogether. Numbers of strange Japanese would come into our area, and sometimes they'd come around where we were around the workshops. Of course, I was not at the workshops at this time. I was in camp altogether then cutting wood again for our kitchen-- a job I kept for about eight months, every day without a day off for eight months. They circulated in around

our people at the workshops and dressed like natives and tried to get our people to talk and commit themselves and talking to the natives. They tried to entrap many of the natives.

Marcello: Now were these the Kempeis?

Pryor: Kempeis, yes. Kempei-tai--the military police or counter-intelligence people. Yes, they were all Kempeis. We didn't know what they were all up to. We knew there was something unusual going on. Then these planes we'd hear at night and never hear any bombing until very near the end of the war. Then we began to hear the bombing off down country--Bampong. Bampong got pasted regularly, and we knew that Bangkok did. So we wondered about these that had come before, and they oftentimes came usually in moonlight nights, and you could hear them and wondered what they were doing. We didn't reason that they'd be reconnaissance because reconnaissance planes came over in broad daylight, usually the Mosquito bombers. You could hear that thing . . . oh, you could hear it for twenty minutes before it ever got over--tremendous motors. We knew they were our planes. The Japanese used to ask us about this. They'd depend on us to identify these planes. They'd hear the motors of a plane and immediately the guards in the camp would all

dash over and want to know, "Nippon?" They'd ask us "Nippon?" with a questioning attitude, "Nai, American!" Boy, when we said American, they hunted the hole. They got in it. They usually got in the ones over there on our side of the fence.

Awhile ago I said that not at all times did I think they put the deadhead out here, particularly enlisted people, in such duties. Officers, I suspect so. We had one gunso with us--we called him "Puss in Boots." He was a little fellow, and his boots came up above his knees. He had big old clumsy-looking boots and the baggiest britches that you've ever seen. He was everything but military-like in appearance. He wore these great round glasses . . . well, he hardly had enough nose to hang them on. It's a wonder they didn't fall down around his chin. They looked like they were going to. Then his sword that he carried dragged along the ground when he didn't consciously hold it with his hand. It would drag and you were fearful that he was going to get tangled up in the silly thing. I never knew what his name was; we just called him "Puss in Boots." But he had been on one of these ships in the convoy that we had gotten into the night that we were sunk, and we had sunk the transport that he was on, so he had to get out

and swim for it, too, that night. He knew that several of us were off the Houston, at least some of us in there. There was two sailors and myself off the Houston, and he came to know that, but he thought it was all a big deal that we had sunk the ship that he was on. He never entertained any animosity towards us for that. He was quite fair. He was one of the most decorated Japanese soldiers that I ever saw. Oh, gosh, he had a chest full of ribbons, and you know that the little rascal never got it politicking. He told us that he had fought in China, had fought in the Philippines and Malaya and Indonesia. Everywhere that Japan had campaigned, he had been there. You just had to know after observing the little rascal that he'd gotten all his the hard way. It must have been an unusually difficult chore. But that didn't keep him from being concerned for his own safety, too, because when he heard a plane motor, old "Puss in Boots" was right over there right next to us. He got in the foxhole and slit trench right there by our huts (laughter), and he stayed there until he was absolutely sure that they were gone.

Marcello: I would assume that these air raids must have done wonders for your morale.

Pryor: Well, yes. Of course, we never experienced them until right towards the end. Then when they began to come with

regularity, they did, of course, boost us up. Then I recall the day we saw our first B-29's. The Japanese called them "B-Ni zyuu ku." They had asked us before . . . they had come around and asked us questions about the "B-Ni zyuu ku." That ni zyuu ku is twenty-nine. Of course, we were unfamiliar with such a plane. We knew B-17's and the B-24's--Liberators--and the B-25's and the B-26's, but we didn't know any B-29. But some of these guards had told us that B-29's had been raiding Nippon, and they said, "Big plane. Oki. Big." So we didn't know, but the first ones we saw, we counted about fifty of them come over our area one time. I don't know where they were going, where they'd been, but they came over sometimes even a single plane, just a single plane, sometimes three of them, sometimes a flight of nine, but for most of the afternoon one afternoon they passed over us. Probably they'd . . . well, they might have been going on down towards Singapore. I don't know.

Marcello: I would gather there were no anti-aircraft defenses around this place.

Pryor: No, and no air defense in the way of aircraft, either. There was some anti-aircraft around this bridge, this

big steel-concrete bridge at Tamarkan, but they had been put out of commission a couple of times. One afternoon, one of the first air raids we saw, about twenty-five B-25's had come in, and they came in in one flight, all of them together in one great flight, and they came over and dropped their bombs immediately and turned and left. They must have been flying at the very, very limit of their range. They didn't make any practice run. They didn't do anything but make that one sweep over and drop everything they had and turn and headed back the way from whence they'd come. That's about the only time we ever saw the B-25. From then on most of the planes we saw were Liberators--the B-24. In the closing days of the war these Liberators came around and bombed. They bombed a train on the siding right next to our camp one time, and big pieces of shrapnel came back and fell into camp. One such piece probably weighed three pounds--big, huge jagged piece of shrapnel--and the thing came through with a tremendous whish.

Then quite often from that time on, we saw them come in around the area. Ofttimes they'd overfly this workshop area out there, and they never touched it.

They'd just fly around, looked like they were snooping and pooping out there, and I recall that on the last such raid that we saw they came over our camp so very low that the propeller wash and slipstream would cause the atap on our huts--the bamboo leaves folded over the sticks--would just lift that atap right up off just like a tremendous whirlwind or something had hit it. We could see these guys . . . we could see the belly gunner and the tail gunner just as clear as if you had been sitting right beside them. They were that low, and we wondered, "Well, those rascals know that we're down here. They know that we're POW's." But sometimes you wonder, well, what if one of them wants to have fun, what if one of them wants to be a little cheeky and just see what would happen if he let a few rounds go from those twin fifties that he's got there. Then that afternoon they went out over this workshop area, and right down to the treetop level, and they looked this place over, and they did shoot at a cow. They killed a cow out there just like we sometimes wondered, well, what would the fool do. Somewhere out there the Japanese that were stationed at that workshop area opened up with a machine gun, and that little gunso of ours--"Puss in Boots"-- he was over there in the slit

trench right next to where several of us were, and when he heard them cut loose with that machine gun, he come clear up out of that foxhole of his, and he shook his fist out there in their direction. Boy, he was perturbed! He could see us observing what he was doing, and he commented to us then. He'd point up here to his head like that (gesture), and says, "Jo to nai." That means nothing, stupid (laughter). That means you haven't got . . . "jo to" is bad. He said, "These hikoki miru-miru." He said they're flying around up there looking down, and they'll see this silly fool with that machine gun. He said then, "Whomp." It's just shimei, all finished. He thought that was just about as stupid as anybody could get, shooting at that airplane with that machine gun (laughter).

That's the afternoon they knocked out that big bridge, and they went after the wooden bridge which they'd never bothered before . . . they were just content to bother the big one, and they went after the little bridge, the wooden one, and then searched out all the building materials in there, and they dropped incendiaries on everything that would burn. You'd see them start dropping this, and it just looked like there was no end to the number of incendiary bombs coming out

of the bomb bays of this big Liberator. There was one of them showed up, and then in a minute here's another one, just like two hyenas or jackals off here in the jungle, and then here's a third one shows up. They came in one by one, and some of them were searching around the area where we were, and there was about nine of them just got in a circle flying around this bridge. One of them would fly over and drop its bombs and continue on in the circle, and then he'd get back in the circle and drop bombs again. These old boys out on the antiaircraft guns over there just forgot everything (laughter). They didn't even bother to shoot anymore. They just quit. They fired a few rounds when the first two or three showed up, and then they just . . . they probably all bailed out and all went to the jungle because you just didn't hear from them anymore.

Marcello: It must have seemed ironic to you in a way perhaps that you had been able to survive all of that horror in the jungle, and now there was a possibility that you might be killed by friendly bombers.

Pryor: Well, there was a good few of our people who were at one place or another. Down around Bampong some of them had been killed there. Some of them had been killed at

Thanbyuzayat earlier, and in Saigon many of our people had been on the wharves and docks there when Halsey's people had made that swoop down through the South China Sea. Of course, there was no way of identifying what was a prisoner-of-war camp or what was not, and oftentimes, for instance around Tamarkan, a number of our prisoners were killed in Tamarkan by our bombers. Of course, right outside the dadblamed camp was this big anti-aircraft battery. So the Japanese were not altogether, I guess, too conscious of what they might be doing in violation of the Geneva Convention.

Marcello: They never allowed you to mark the barracks or the prisoner-of-war compound in anyway.

Pryor: No, no identifying marks, none at all. So you were always a little bit apprehensive in that we sat right there on that prime target. Our camp was right next to it, and we worked there in these places. Let's say they could be selective and say, "Well, now this is a prisoner-of-war camp. We know that that's what it is." But maybe one of these bombs would hang in the rack a little bit. There's no assurance that when they push the button that all of them are going to fall in the pattern which was intended. Occasionally one of them would hang, and then if it doesn't hang, what'll

be the case of a piece of shrapnel like that . . . they were bombing a train a half a mile over there. It was a good half mile to where this train was on a siding by our camp, and yet that jagged piece of shrapnel came in there that must have weighed three pounds. The thing was about . . . oh, I guess it was about two inches wide, and altogether it must have been about eight inches long. You don't have any control over anything like that. It could just as well hit one of us as landed out there in the open ground. We saw it hit and saw it bounce, and we could hear it a long time before we could see it (chuckle). It sounded like . . . my gosh, it sounded like the thing was a complete guided missile by itself when it came through the air. In this place we were fairly confident that our people knew where we were, and, of course, after the war came to an end, well, then we came to know that they knew exactly. In fact, we mentioned awhile ago that some of these planes came around in the night, and we wondered "What are they doing here? It's a poor time for reconnaissance and they're not bombing anything that we know of." They would fly a way on down, but this was deceitful. They

were dropping supplies to the OSS and the underground. We came to know that there was a lot of OSS activity in and around this area, and many of these Thais-- policemen, military officers, sons of wealthy families and so forth--were disappearing, and they were being taken back up into these jungles and trained by our people in the OSS. I know that one time . . . we used to get pamphlets when our planes would come down; for every bomber you'd think there was another one carrying pamphlets. They could bomb in Bampong and drop pamphlets--Bampong was about forty-five kilometers away--and within the hour--by thunder, this seems incredible--but usually within an hour, we had a copy of that doggone pamphlet in our camp and a translation of it. It would be printed in the Thai language, but we would have a copy and a translation within an hour. It's just remarkable what is done in unusual circumstances such as that.

Marcello: I gather that you never saw any overt guerrilla activity as such, however.

Pryor: Just probably in the last week or ten days before . . . well, it was . . . let's say it was overt, yes, but not in the sense that it involved any sort of military action.

It was more on the order of contact with prisoners. We had kept up with news pretty well in this camp, and one of our Australians was a radio engineer. Well, he didn't just fix radios. He could sit down there and design a whole radio station. He could draw out the schematics for the whole thing, and, of course, fixing a radio, he could do that blindfolded, and the Japanese had a radio at this workshop. There was about 500 Japanese technicians that worked out there, and there was not a one of them in that 500 that could fix their big radio. They had a big console radio, and so they asked our people if anybody could fix it when it was on the blink, and, of course, he told them that he could, and he told them that he had to have certain parts and this and that and the other, knowing they didn't have them, and he fixed it. He fixed that rascal so it came back about every two weeks. Why, he used to get up some mornings and say, "Well, the radio ought to be back today," and most generally it would be. They'd have it in there and he'd tell them ahead of time, "Well, I need so-and-so parts, and you haven't got those parts, so I can fix it and it'll just be alright for maybe two weeks. But in two weeks, 'jo to nai' again. You bring back." They expected it.

Boy, they'd come bringing that thing back. He put a short wave band in it, and, of course, that was against Japanese law. The Japanese were forbidden anything with a short-wave band, but he put one in there, so I've often wondered what the Japanese thought when . . . they always had a man there with it when he worked on it, but he could tune in and around there, and he would listen for certain names, and I briefed him on the names. We had come by a one-volume encyclopedia, and it had a series of maps in it. We could keep up with what was going on in Europe. Gosh, I almost had a battle map in Europe, and I would go there and look for these cities, and we would check our encyclopedia and see those that were important rail centers and communications hubs and manufacturing centers and so forth and so on. So in the two-week period before the radio had come in, well, I'd get with him and I'd say, "Well, now you listen for these names." So if he heard one, that jogged his memory. He was already familiar with it, and then he could listen for a word or two to denote what was happening at this place. So he didn't have to listen to anything. He could just flip the dial by and pick it up, and I've often wondered what the Japanese thought. When they had it they could

never hear all these English language broadcasts, but when he was working on it down there, they heard this New Delhi and then the station out of Melbourne, Australia, and I believe one in San Francisco, KGEI, I believe, out of San Francisco--all short wave stations.

Marcello: So you could keep up with the progress of the war fairly well.

Pryor: We kept up with it there pretty much, very much. There was also a lot of sea activity. Of course, here it was mostly naval activity in the Pacific, and a little bit of hedge-hopping. We'd hear these places, and we kept up with it very well. Then, of course, the Chinese passed on information to us. Of course, you never knew whether to believe them or not. They were about as optimistic as the Dutch had been in the early days of the war. They told us probably what they thought we'd like to hear rather than what was the actual truth. Then we kept up with news pretty much that way. Then along towards the end of this thing, as I said, I was not going out of camp anymore. I was in camp every day working with wood, cutting this wood.

Marcello: Was this a day long job?

Pryor: Yes, it took us all day. There were three of us--an Englishman, an Irishman, and myself. They used to saw,

and I used the axe. About ten days before they finally told us the war had ended, one of our POW's came into camp one day--when the working party came in in the evening--and he had told some of them a story. When he had told these guys--they were Englishmen--and when he had told these other buddies of his, then they had come over to see me that evening. In fact, it seemed that at noontime they'd had their noon meal, and then usually the Japanese permitted them about half an hour to rest after the meal, and he was working around one of these most remote workshops. It was a new one, and there was still quite a bit of jungle around it. They had not cleared too much of the jungle around this small workshop. They were emplacing machines--lathes and shapers and planers. It was to be a new machine shop. And so after he got through eating, he said he just lay down there at the edge of the jungle just to take a rest, and he heard somebody kind of "psst, psst" . . . give that from the edge of the jungle, from the deep jungle. He looked around and he said here's a native--a Kon Thai--and he didn't look like any ordinary sort of Kon Thai, not those that worked in and around there. He said this Kon Thai motioned for him to come out to the edge of that jungle, and he said he sidled

off out there, and he said this guy--this Kon Thai-- could speak pretty good English, and he says, "I am your friend. I am with your friends. Your friends are not far away. Your friends are within fifty-three kilometers. I want to make contact with a Dutchman, an Australian, an American, and an Englishman, and I want to take these prisoners with me." "Gosh," he said, "I was scared to death. I was afraid he was a Kempei masqueraded as a Kon Thai and all this and that and the other. He said, "I don't know anything about this. How do I know you're not a Kempei?" He said, "I am not a Japanese. I am with your friends." He said, "Well, even if you were, if we went with you, how do you know if we run onto the Japanese, they wouldn't shoot us all?" He says, "If we run onto Japanese, it will be bad for the Japanese." He said he motioned towards the edge of the jungle, and there was about half a dozen other natives--other Kon Thais-- who stepped out there where he could see them, and he said they were all heavily armed, and they'd come down there to see me. I was the only professional military man that there was anywhere around there--American. The other guys were National Guard, and they probably didn't

know as much about our weapons. He described the weapons they had, and that's what they wanted to know. They came down there wanting to know if I could tell them what kind of weapons they had, and in his description of them, it appears that about half of them carried Tommy guns, and the other half were carrying what we used to call riot guns--the sawed-off Winchester shotgun that we used to load with buckshot--and they all carried .45 caliber pistols and grenades. This was just about a week before the war ended. He says, "I'll come back. I will come back in a week." I guess he hadn't yet come back when they told us the war had ended.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard that the war was over?

Pryor: Well, probably not what one might expect. Really we knew that it was over before the Japanese told us. The Chinese had been telling us, and the natives had told us the war was over, and this was in that period of time when we didn't have our radio, and so the Chinese had told us that it was over, and they had said that America had dropped one bomb and killed---they told us--- 300,000 people.

Marcello: The Japanese told you this?

Pryor: The Chinese.

Marcello: The Chinese told you this.

Pryor: The Chinese technicians out around there. I said there was about 2,000 of them that worked out there, and these Chinese had gotten word to us that the Americans had dropped one bomb, and they said it killed 300,000 Japanese. One bomb, and they said the war was over. But it was two days after that that the Japanese told us. They called us out right after the noonday meal on the 17th day of August--called us out in parade formation just like we always did. Our interpreter, old "Turtle Neck" . . . he was another one of these I never knew his name, but he had been with us before. He had been with us in Burma. I believe he'd been our interpreter in Java, too, in Bicycle Camp, and then we'd had him again in Burma, and then here he is out there in our camp in Thailand. He was a slight Japanese civilian, and, of course, there they wear a paramilitary uniform anytime they're around such a place, and he had a long neck and his head wasn't much bigger than his neck. That's why we called him "Turtle Neck." Actually, if you could see some of these people, you might think, well, this is kind of an unusual name to refer to an individual by, but you're immediately struck with how

appropriate many of these names are that we had used to describe these people. So "Turtle Neck" came out there, and he told us then immediately. He said, "The war is over. Nippon and America are friends. You are free." He then told us that all the supplies that they had there--rations and provisions--were ours, and he said that soon we would be going home that they'd get their instructions from Allied authorities and that we would be coming home. So they told us the war was over--and that's just after the noon meal--so we immediately turned, walked back to our huts, crawled up on our beds . . . and I had a mattress. All of the Americans had mattresses. I had gone out into the jungle when I herded cows and taken two rice straw sacks, and cut long grass--it was grass kind of like Johnson grass--about six feet long and stuffed these into these and made a mattress. That old bamboo was rough. I might have mentioned that when we'd go to a new hut, when you were dismissed, you ran down through there as hard as you could go, and when you found a spot with the smoothest bamboo, you claimed that for your own. I got tired of sleeping on that old crooked bamboo, so I made this mattress. It was about three inches thick of this grass stuffed inside these rice sacks, and I

thought, boy, this is sure an open invitation to all these bedbugs and bamboo lice which we always had, but surprisingly enough, they didn't get in there. Little ants did. During the day I'd see these little ants moving in and around there, and I suspect they were probably getting after these bedbug eggs and lice eggs. I'd see them carrying off something kind of a transparent color.

Marcello: I suppose you all had a good dose of bedbugs and lice.

Pryor: Yes, at times, particularly there in Burma. At Eighty Kilo Camp, at this hospital place, there it was the absolute worst. For bedbugs, though, the military barracks there in Changi prison--or Changi military barracks--was the worst for bedbugs. It was bamboo lice at Eighty Kilo. This one old boy committed suicide there. He just quit eating or drinking. For ten days he never swallowed a thing, either water or food. He tried to commit suicide by slashing his wrists once before, and they'd put a young man to watch him, and this young man had about recovered from his ulcer. It was no larger than a dime, I suppose, and then the thing went bad, and in a week it had spread over all of his foot and well up through his leg, and he was dead within a week. I had told this old boy, "I don't have time to

mess with you. There's not a thing wrong with you. You're physically fit and able. You're in better shape than any of us. You stir around here, by thunder, and help some of these other guys because I'm not going to help you. I don't have time nor the inclination." So he just lay there and said, "I'm going to lay here and die." I said, "Well, you lay there and die then because that's your wish." And he did. He lay there and he died. After about four days, he went into a coma, and then I tried to get water down him and I couldn't. He got these maggots in his mouth and throat. Every morning I'd go down there to see if he'd died during the night, and he lasted . . . well, he died on the tenth day--just tragic. His blanket that he'd slept on . . . I've never seen so many lice on one thing yet. I boiled it. Immediately after he died, I took it out and boiled the thing so I could give it to somebody else, and I would suppose . . . I believe there must have been to every square inch . . . I believe there must have been at least twelve lice to every square inch of surface on that blanket. That was those that was left on there after I boiled it.

Marcello: In other words, you could in some instances keep this problem under control with the proper sanitary precautions.

You mention here now that you boiled his blanket.

Quite obviously you had boiled your blanket from time to time to get all these lice out of it.

Pryor: Yes, we boiled ours and then every day you went through some period in the day when you picked lice and bedbugs off of all of it. You'd go over it inch by inch and then foot by foot. You'd go over the whole thing and pick all the bedbugs and lice off it and squash them between your thumbnails. This was the ritual that you did every day. Of course, when you worked out on the road, you had little time to do this. About the only ones you killed were the ones you felt. You could physically feel them on your blankets at nighttime as you lay there not in sleep. Of course, a bedbug . . . you can smell them. I think if one of them walked along there a hundred yards from here I could smell him, and I wouldn't rest well all night knowing that he was out there. There's just something about them . . .

Marcello: Nasty little critters, huh?

Pryor: Yes. Some people were just completely taken in by fear of snakes. I didn't fear snakes, but I detested those bedbugs. It was an unusual smell. We were surprised that we were not bothered with it after we

made these mattresses. I made one for all my fellow yanks. We fared rather well in this place. Guys would steal canvas outside, and I made shorts. I got to where I could make a pair of shorts and put pockets in them. These things would stand up by themselves. They were made out of about twenty-four ounce cotton ducking. We used tarpaulin material, and they'd rip off a hunk and wrap it around them and bring it in, and I'd make them a pair--whoever stole it--I'd make them a pair of shorts for enough material to make one for me.

Marcello: Where did you get the thread and the needles and so on to put them together?

Pryor: Well, I had gotten the needle from one of these native girls when I was out with the cows. To get the thread we just unraveled some part of the canvas. That canvas ducking is woven interwoven, and you can just pull out a string of it. To give it body, I had some beeswax. Once while we still went outside to cut wood in the outside camp, I'd seen a tree that had bees in it, and we cut this thing down thinking we might find honey in it, but there was just comb. There was no honey in it, just comb. A very small bee, not like our honey bees, but there was quite a bit of comb. So I didn't know how

to make beeswax, but I thought, well, I'll put this in a can and I'll boil it and it'll be useful to wax my thread with, and that thing worked quite well. You couldn't sew with the needle, though. I got a piece of stiff wire and stuck it in a stick and sharpened one end of it, and I'd use it for an awl. I'd punch a series of holes in the canvas with my awl and then run the needle back and forth through there.

Marcello: What did you do for a cutting tool or a cutting instrument?

Pryor: I used a knife.

Marcello: Had the Japanese allowed you to have a knife or did you have to keep this on the sly?

Pryor: Well, it all depends. Sometime they didn't seem to care that you had a knife, and at other times they'd come in and take up all knives. They'd shake you down occasionally, and sometimes they were maybe looking for razors, and they'd take up all of our razors, if we had one, and leave you a knife. The next time, they'd take your knife and leave the razor. This knife that I used was . . . well, we'd have to use it to shave with. It was a table knife, just like a regular table knife, and we had taken a piece of sandstone and honed it down,

filed it down on a piece of sandstone. After you'd sharpened it as far as you could go with that, then it was honed the rest of the way on a piece of leather, a shoe, the sole of a shoe. And so you can get it, but I don't recommend it (laughter). It pulls out about as many as it cuts off, but we shaved with this little thing, and this is what I'd use. I had such a knife that I'd use for cutting this canvas. We never had any scissors, but we'd use that and it worked quite well. We shaved with one Gillette blade. Three of us used this one Gillette blade for about eighteen months. You couldn't use it on the guard anymore. We'd hone it inside a little glass jar--put a couple of drops of coconut oil or peanut oil inside it and then bend the blade to the contour of the jar and rotate it inside the jar. That would hone it down. It was about as sharp where the holes are inside the blade as it was on the cutting edge.

Marcello: You know they say, of course, that necessity is the mother of all inventions, and I'm sure that was especially true in these prisoner-of-war camps.

Pryor: Yes. I don't know that our people are more inventive than others or not, but I know that we usually lived better than anybody else. Given the same circumstances,

the same place, the same conditions, you could just look around and observe that before long the old yank is living better than anybody around him.

Marcello: How do you figure that?

Pryor: I just figure that it's just get out and get after it . . . just go after it. There didn't any of these other people sleep on mattresses like we did. Why, they'd get up in the morning still looking like a bunch of rub-boards from all that old corrugated bamboo. In our camp I cut wood, and I got a double ration of food, but there was not anybody that wanted my job. It was hard work, and there was not anybody that wanted it.

There was only ten Americans in there. Three of them took care of the water for the camp. Eventually we piped water in from out at this workshop . . . brought a pipe--bamboo pipe. We took big bamboo and hollowed it out and brought that bamboo pipeline into the camp. So everybody would bring their five-gallon tins down in the morning. and these guys would fill them up with water from this bamboo pipe, and then carry them and set them outside the huts. Then, of course, they carried all the water to both our kitchen and the Japanese kitchen.

We had another American that was in charge of the ducks and the hogs. The Japanese had about 200 ducks, and they used those for laying purposes. Out in that country, they don't use chickens to lay eggs; they use ducks. He was in charge of the ducks and the pigs. He carried the scraps around and fed the pigs. Whenever the Japanese decided to kill one, well, he'd volunteer--he was a sailor--he would volunteer to go cut the thing up for them. He'd never butchered anything in his life, but he volunteered to cut it up for them, and we probably had more of the hog than they had (chuckle). He'd slip this meat out, and then when they put it in their containers and cooked it all down and were ready to throw the bones away, he volunteered to carry the bones off. Of course, you know that when you boil pork down there's a great deal of it that sticks to the bone, and, boy, he'd bring these bones over, and he'd have maybe two five-gallon cans of bones with all this meat on them, so we'd have our rice and all this pork, and we'd have then . . . what he usually did when he cut this pork up, he usually cut the strips of fat off and dropped them down inside his britches. He had these English britches that you could button in around your knee, so they

ballooned out and he walked off with a lot of that, and we'd render that out and use that to fry our rice occasionally. We had grease from this fat pork.

Then two other of the yanks out at the workshop was in charge of boiling up tea for all the working parties down there, so all they had to do was go carry up water once in awhile and rustle firewood, build a fire under the pot they used to cook tea in, and then when the tea was done, carry it around to the various working parties so they could have their spot of tea. Seven out of ten of us had special jobs.

Marcello: Strategic jobs.

Pryor: (Chuckle) Yes, and then the eighth one was in charge of--he was the first sergeant--he was in charge of all the Aussies and Americans in that hut, so he didn't go out to work. He was the hut commander. So eight of us . . . there was only two yanks that was working along with all the other working parties. We would just naturally gravitate towards racketeering, I guess you might say it would be (chuckle).

Marcello: When you heard the news of the surrender, did you ever have any desire to exact a certain amount of revenge against your captors?

Pryor: No, I don't think so.

Marcello: Did they still hold the guns even after the surrender?
In other words, they were in charge of the camp until
the rescue team actually came in.

Pryor: No, actually we were free to do whatever we wanted to,
but at that time most of the Koreans we had with us
. . . and this little gunso . . . the officer was a no-
good rascal. I'd like to have whomped him between the
horns; he did me. One of the first air raids that we'd
had around there close . . . the Liberators had come
over, and they had pasted Kanchanaburi pretty good, and
he said that he had heard somebody speak, "Come again!"
So he got drunk that evening, and along about two o'clock
in the morning he came over to our hut. The Aussies
and Americans slept in one hut. I was on the cows then.
I was still with the cows. He came down the line asking
every man . . . he'd stand in front of them and say,
"You speak 'come again?'" "Nai." I was halfway down
the hut, and I was the second American on that side of
the hut . . . the second American he came to. He stood
in front of this one that was being bashed by the little
guy. He was the first one, this big old yank, and he
asked him, "You speak 'come again?'" "Nai." So then
he got over in front of me. "Ah, ushi man," he says,
"you speak 'come again?'" I said, "Nai." Gosh, before

I knew what he was doing, he had hit me across the throat--the windpipe--with the flat of his hand, a dadblamed judo chop. I could hardly swallow for about three weeks. I thought he had broken my doggone windpipe. He knew that I hadn't said it. He knew me. He said, "Some Australian man. Some Australian man spoke 'come again.'" There was only ten Americans, and there was eighty-five Aussies in there. So he went all the way down to the end of the hut, and then he came up the other side of the hut. There was just an aisleway . . . oh, just about five feet across. Some of us would sleep on one bench-like thing, and then five feet across over there the other side of the aisleway, there was another bamboo platform and the other half of the people slept on that side. So he came back up that other side asking every man, "You speak 'come again?'" "Nai . . . Nai . . . Nai" When he got opposite me--the old Aussie that helped me on the cows slept opposite me--and old Craigie was about fifty some odd years old . . . fifty-six or seven years old. Gosh, he'd fought with the Aussies back at Gallipoli back during World War I, and got a toe shot off . . . well, he got all of them but the big toe shot off his right foot. Old Craigie just had that one toe on his

right foot, and it looked like that toe was a foot and a half long because it stuck out there so all by itself. He'd gotten the others shot off in Gallipoli. He was married, and, oh, gosh, he had a house full of kids, but when Australia geared up and went to war, Craig went down and volunteered. By gosh, it was time to go. The Aussies said he got as much family allowance as any general in his pay. The Aussies paid you by family. It didn't matter whether you were a general or whether you were a private, you all got the same, and they said that his pay was more than he ever would have made, by thunder, in civvy street, as they called civilian life. So he got opposite old Craig, and he said, "You speak 'come again?'" "Nai." I thought old Craigie was going to get it because he knew that he was on the cows, too. He was up to as much no good as I was. He looked at him and he asked him again, "You speak 'come again,' Australia ushi man?" "No. Nai," he says. Instead of hitting him and bashing him like I thought he was going to do, the damned fool whirled around real quick and hit me again . . . whopped me up aside the head. Then he spotted a board underneath this one's bunk right next to me. His name was Mallard and he was a soldier, a staff sergeant. So he spotted that dadblamed board . . . oh, it was about two inches

wide, but it was more than an inch thick. It wasn't a two-by-four, and it wasn't a one-by-four, either. It was kind of in between, and it was about three feet long. So he just reached under there and grabbed that board, and I thought, well, boy, we just bought the farm because he aims to lay into us with that board, and he could kill us with that stinking board. So he picked up that board and he turned to the old staff again next to me, and he said, "You speak 'come again?'" He'd already asked him once on the way down and he said, "Nai." So he measured him up with that board to lay it up aside his head, and he'd swing it like that (gesture), and measure him off, and old staff was wondering, I guess, "Well, how fast can I duck?" We had a real set-to. He never did hit either one of us with it, but he threatened both of us. He was drunk and you never knew what he was going to do, but after awhile . . . well, about that time I guess he left us there. The other . . . the warrant officer, they had a warrant officer there at that time, and the warrant officer came over there and got him and took him away, and he never finished asking the rest of us down through there.

Marcello: When did you have your first contact with the American liberators, the ones who liberated you?

Pryor: Oh, let's see . . . about two weeks after they told us the war was over. Not quite two weeks . . .

Marcello: I'll bet those were two long weeks waiting for the yanks to come, weren't they?

Pryor: Oh, yes. Of course, that afternoon after they told us that the war was over, we went back to lay down, took a rest, but I had to go on and cut wood. We had to eat, so I continued on in my job. Everybody else just lay around the camp and didn't do anything from then on but eat and sleep. So I continued on with my job. They kept us there for about a week in this camp of ours. Then after about a week, they took the Americans out, and they took us down to another camp beside this Mekong River, a camp built right near the river. I didn't even know the camp was down there, but it was down by this Tamuan, and we stayed in that camp for again, I guess, just short of a week--maybe three days or thereabouts. Then the Japanese got orders to move us to a camp where they'd built an airstrip off down somewhere by . . . oh, I guess off down by Pattburi somewhere. I didn't even know the name of the camp. I was only there one night. I know that they loaded us on a truck, took

us away from Tamuan and headed off down through Bampong, and we headed on down to the Malay Peninsula, and we had to ford the river near a place called Rattburi, a considerable-sized city. So was Pattburi, a pretty good-sized city. We had to cross the river on a ferry. They had had a bridge there, but I think Halsey's people had knocked the bridge out, and destroyers had moved in, I think, and shelled the bridge a time or two. On the way down there we stopped at noon to have a brief rest near a park, and we never got off the truck really. We stayed on the truck. It just parked under the shade of these trees along this street. As the truck started to move away and continue on, I heard somebody call, "American boy," and I looked around and it was this girl from out at this workshop area--the good looking one. I don't know what she was doing down there. I don't know that that was her home. I had not understood it to be, but she was there and she had seen me on the truck and called. Then it was not far from where they'd built this airstrip, and as we neared this place, just as we came near it, we met a truck coming out that had a bunch of our prisoners on there that had been . . . the guys had been off

first. They'd gone with the first group. I know Captain Hudwright from Lubbock was one of them, and he had been sent with our first group of Americans, all these privates and PFC's and seamen that had gone on earlier. The group that Gee--Jimmy Gee and them-- had been with. I hadn't seen Hudwright since we'd left Bicycle Camp in . . . or they had left I guess in late August or late Spetember of . . . maybe early September of 1942, and here this is August of 1945, and this was the first time we'd seen these people. So as we met them there on the road they said, "We're flying out in the morning." Well, that was when I really, really got enthused--when they said we're flying out in the morning. We'd not been terribly jubilant when they told us the war had ended. We just . . . without any display of any emotion whatsoever--joy or relief or any other such thing.

Marcello: Were you regaining some of your weight by this time? You mentioned they had kind of opened up the stores to you.

Pryor: Well, I had. Many of the Americans had not, but I had. For about eight months I had cut wood for the kitchen, and off and on for longer than that--just between jobs--

and the Japanese gave all three of us woodcutters a double ration of food. With making these shorts like I had done . . . I'd go through the fence either at night or maybe in broad daylight. I have gone through the fence in broad daylight under the Japanese guardhouse, and there was just enough fall there that I could wiggle around on my belly and lift up some . . . this was a solid bamboo fence. The little bamboo were interwoven, and I could slide these things up and scoot under it and go out and sell these shorts that I'd made to the natives. I could sell a pair of them for twelve bahts, and I would use that twelve bahts to buy peanuts, eggs, and bananas with, occasionally. So I ate extra.

Marcello: Were the Japs quite as stringent about escapes and going out of camp at this time as they had been earlier? Earlier, you would have been shot if you had been caught.

Pryor: Well, they probably would have then, too, but they just weren't caught, and you would sometimes take great risks. When you get hungry enough, you will take great risks. So I was in very good shape. After I'd had the malaria the third time in Burma--that would be six weeks after we got there; that would take us up to April, I suppose,

near the end of April, 1944--I never had it again. I was never sick another day until . . . well, I've just never been sick. So I worked every day for well over a year and used that axe every day all day long for about an eight-month period, getting a double ration of food, so I was one of those better looking ones that came out of there.

Marcello: So you were on this truck apparently heading for an airstrip, and the next morning you were going to leave for home.

Pryor: Yes, we got into this camp and we had met the truck just a short way from this camp. The camp had been built there, and these POW's were brought there for the express purpose of building an airstrip. Two or three days before--in fact immediately after the war had ended--OSS people had come into this camp. It was about a week . . . I guess it was about a week after the war had ended, but the Japanese had not yet told them that it had ended. They were still working them. They were mostly Englishmen in this camp--Englishmen and Dutch, some Aussies, and I think only four or five Americans, and they were still working. They didn't know the war was over, and one day they were in for the noon meal, and during the time they were in

camp for the noon meal, here comes these Americans in there--an Army major. There was an Army major, there was a sergeant in the United States Marine Corps, there was a first class pharmacists mate in the US Navy and there was a first class boatswains mate from the Coast Guard, and the radio operator was a Malayan, a native Malayan from Malaya. I don't know what city. There were five of them who walked in there, all of them were armed to the teeth, particularly that old Coast Guard boy. He was one of the meanest guys I'd ever seen yet. He was an Indian. He was an Indian from Oklahoma, I believe from Anadarko over there, so that would probably make him Cherokee. I believe most of the Indians around there are Cherokee. He was about six-two and weighed about 220, and he carried a Tommy gun, and he carried two .45 pistols, and he carried one of these Kabar knives down in his jump boot. They all wore jump boots. Then he had a couple of grenades slung from his pack harness. He was a one-man army. He was a walking arsenal. Those are the only words you could use to describe him. They had walked into this camp while the prisoners were in camp for the noon meal, and this major . . . well, they had a . . . they had constructed a stage there. They had been given some time off--yasumi days--and they had put on talent shows and all that, and so they had a

stage constructed out there near the parade ground where they mustered for head count and all that. So this major got up there, and he says, "Pass the word to get everybody out here." They were amazed to see these people, and they were even more amazed to know that the war had ended. So he got word to the Japanese, too. He says, "You people stay down there in your huts. Don't under any circumstances come down here in any part of this POW camp. I'm taking over the camp and you just stay where you are." And so that's how the end of the war came to those people. We came into camp that afternoon, and the major immediately got us around, and I guess it was kind of like some of the stories I hear from this here, these people. These were some of the things . . . we'd been so out of contact with really what went on. We'd seen a newspaper one time--Red Cross--and all it had in it was news about Sinatra. We didn't know any Frank Sinatra. We barely knew Bing Crosby. And so we heard about this sensational new singer and little else.

Marcello: You mentioned the Red Cross newspapers. Did you get very many Red Cross boxes at all?

Pryor: No, we got to share one right near the end of the war, and that was all I ever saw, and I never did get any mail.

Marcello: Had you ever been able to send any mail?

Pryor: In the time that I was in prison camp, I think I sent four cards, and the last one I had been permitted to send was in March of 1944. Immediately after we got to this camp--this workshop camp--immediately after we came to this place, the Japanese permitted us to send a card.

Marcello: Was this the multiple-choice-type card? My health is good, fair, poor . . . and you better say good or the card didn't get through.

Pryor: Yes, and this thing was real fast in getting there. I came home in October, and I guess it must have been November . . . it must have been November . . . I was home on leave. I had been home for some time, and I went to the little post office there one day to wait for the mail to be put up so I could get it and bring it home, and some young fellow there opened their box and took out the mail, and he looked at this card, and he says, "Nippon? What is this all about. I don't know anything about Nippon." I said, "Well, maybe I can help you." So I got the card, and the old postmaster had put the card I had written my folks in these people's box, and it was a card that I had written . . . here it is November of 1945, and I had written the card in March of 1944, and I was there to receive it.

Marcello: As you look back on your some three and a half years as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as your key to survival?

Pryor: Well, I don't guess there was any key. I guess all one can say is that it was just not yet my time. I saw weaker people survive, I saw stronger people die. I saw people that were probably as good . . . by good, I mean who lived a good life, an exemplary life. Many of them died, and some of the orneriest that you ever run onto lived. So there is no way that one could say that I was better or that I was stronger or any other such thing. I do think that oftentimes we have a perseverance that few other people really have. When you are confronted with adversity, you just try to overcome it. I should have died. I should have died with that fever. There is just no explanation for why I didn't. When your fever goes up and hovers around . . . well, over 107 and probably maybe approached 110 one day, and you have fever of 104 or more for eighteen days, and you get to where when you drink a swallow of water that it just comes right back up, well, you ought to be dead. But I did not die, and I don't know why I didn't die. But on the eighteenth day that fever left me, and I stayed in Burma from that would be April of 1943, and I stayed in Burma then until mid-March of 1944, and I

never did have fever again, and I beat that ulcer. It took eleven months to heal, but I stopped it. Why didn't it go ahead and grow? Why didn't it go ahead and just consume my whole leg before I could stop it? Of course, if it consumed that much, I would be dead, but I was able to stop it. Maybe the reason it stopped was because I sat there sometimes for, I guess, twenty hours out of twenty-four and soaked that thing in hot boiling water, and that kept it free flowing. Sometimes with ulcers that size a guy wouldn't even get a teaspoon of pus off in a day, and I would get, I imagine, two cupsful of pus off of my ulcer in a day's time. It was free. My body never absorbed it; it threw it off. So I don't think there's any key to my survival other than the fact that it was just whatever fate there is that is set for man, and it was just not yet my time.

Marcello: When you were liberated I gather that the galley was just thrown open to the prisoners. What particular foods did you have a craving for?

Pryor: Well, that first meal that we had . . . of course, that was by circumstance of what we had there . . . but this was one of the best meals that I ever have eaten. Our first meal was when we got into those ducks. This boy that was in charge of them got one apiece for all of

us Americans. We had built an oven there at the kitchen, at the cookhouse, and so we roasted a duck apiece and basted this thing down with peanut oil, and then we took rice and we pounded that rice up in kind of a pestle like thing--a log hollowed out--with a rock, and we pounded that rice up very fine, and we sifted it through a double thickness of American mosquito netting and made a kind of a rough flour. One of the Americans--in fact, this one that I have spoken about two or three times; the big guy that they bashed on everytime they had a chance--he had harbored very carefully a bar of Baker's chocolate. It must have been a considerable-size bar. I suppose that thing must have had . . . it must have been near a five ounce bar of Baker's chocolate, and he had had that. Well, I went outside camp immediately and saw some of the little girls that came along the trails, and I bought a couple of great big papayas and some mangoes--good ripe mangoes--and some little custard bananas. We don't know what custard bananas are here in the United States, but the custard banana is not larger than a man's little finger, and the skin on them is not much thicker than a sheet of paper--ordinary paper--and this is beyond a doubt the sweetest tasting banana that a man ever experienced.

There's just not anything that we ever have that would compare to it. They're just the finest thing that we ever found, and so I got a couple of hands of those, and on a hand of those there's usually about four dozen on a hand. I had a native find me a coconut. Now coconuts are not indigenous to that part of Thailand, but one of them told me that he might be able to find me one in a day, so the next day he found this coconut for me, and we cracked it open and took a piece of tin and punched holes in it and grated up this coconut. We had peanuts--we could usually get peanuts there--and so we took these peanuts and we put some of these peanuts and this coconut in with this rice flour, and we had some yeast from the kitchen, and we baked a cake and put that chocolate icing on it. The ingredients with the rice flour cake was the peanuts and coconut in it. We made a fruit salad. We cut these mangoes and these papayas and bananas and put peanuts and coconut in this fruit salad, and we had that roast duck. One man, one duck. We got some sweet potatoes, and we baked those sweet potatoes. We got some dahl . . . it's a little green pea about like what we see here in this what we call split-pea mixture. Well, the whole pea would be in that split-pea mixture, and it is quite tasty. So

we cooked up a bunch of those, and we got some real rice, fresh eggplant, and we halved those and basted them well with peanut oil and baked those, and they were quite delicious.

Marcello: You sure do remember that first square meal, don't you?

Pryor: (Chuckle) And we baked some bread along with this cake. We had enough rice flour that we baked some bread, and that is as good a meal as I'll ever eat in all my life. That was our first real effort on our own.

Marcello: And most of these ingredients you got from the natives?

Pryor: Right, from the natives. Then, of course, when we came back, they brought us back by way of . . . the planes came on schedule the next morning, and we went into Rangoon, ate noon meal in Rangoon, and this was the first real American food we'd had in a long while. It was, I guess, all the packaged rations for the most part. This butter stuff--preserved butter--was like . . . we thought . . . I just wanted to eat the bread and the butter. I thought that just couldn't be beaten. After I got home . . . the thing we'd missed most in prison camp probably was sweets, the little things in the dessert manner, particularly cookies and cakes and pies. This was what you seemed to think of most. But after I got home, I seldom wanted it, and today I very seldom eat cake or pie, just on very rare occasions,

and I never have since I came home, and yet that's what I missed most, and if I had to think of one thing that I enjoyed more than any other--it was something that I never even thought about in prison camp--and that was fresh lettuce. Why, gosh, I could have made a lettuce sandwich after I got home (laughter) and just sat there and eat lettuce. We'd come in and sit down at the breakfast table, and I would ask Momma, "Well, where's the lettuce?" I don't know why that I just was so taken with this taste for lettuce.

Marcello: What re-adjustments did you have to make after you came back to the real world? Was it hard re-adjusting?

Pryor: No, no, it was not difficult. This was something that I'd said way back yonder when I had read of some of the things that were being undertaken to receive all these POW's coming back from Vietnam--that they're going to put them on these bland diets, and they're going to have to have so much consultation with a psychiatrist and this and that and the other, break them in. I said all along, "Bring them back and turn them loose and let them go their own way. Let them do what they want to do and they will do it." This is what they had done to us. We never had all this attention and so forth that they are giving to these people. I will say that there

is no doubt that these people will experience a period of adjustment. You cannot just remain outside the mainstream of all of one's, I guess, society and the things that go on in society, and the very subtle changes to these people would be pronounced changes. We observe them day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, but, by thunder, it's been years and years for these people. It was the same thing with us. I had been away from the United States for over five years, nearly six years that I'd been gone at this time, and so there's just a lot of changes that have been made, and I find that I was restless. I used to like to read a lot, and I just couldn't sit down and pick up a book and read it on through. I'd read a few pages, put it down, and go about something else. Many of the things that I used to remember that I liked to do as a young boy no longer had any great attraction for me, and so you've just got to get adjusted to altogether a completely changed environment within which you live, in which you intermingle with other people, and the things that you do are no longer the things that you expected to do or would do. So there is a period of adjustment, but it is not a traumatic thing, not in any sense, and I think that just give these people the opportunity to go at

their own pace and in their own manner and do what they choose to do. Now there's no need to worry about their diets. Some of them, I daresay, will have some stomach disorder, but Sam Hill, the old body takes care of itself pretty much. You are not going out there and just gorge yourself like you thought you were going to way back yonder. Your eyes are probably a whole lot more deceitful than your stomach is. When you come off of a rice diet and you start eating roast beef and you start eating steak and vegetables that are well seasoned, richly seasoned, such as we customarily have with the bread and quite often with the butter, well, there is going to be a limit as to how much of that you really want, and you sense it very quickly. I figured, well, gosh, I will just eat a mountainous amount of food to catch up with all that that I missed. But you don't do it. You eat just a minimal amount, and you say, well, I'm sufficiently full. That was my experience and I think it's been the experience of most of our people, those that I have talked to. I think they have experienced things pretty much the same way along that way.