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Interview with

Henry B. Stowers

May 25, 1973

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Mr. Henry Stowers

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas Date: May 25, 1973

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Henry Stowers for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 25, 1973, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Stowers 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. Stowers was a member of the North China Marines. He was captured in that country almost immediately after the war had started. Mr. Stowers, to begin this interview, just briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me briefly when you were born, where you were born, your education, your occupation--things of that nature. Just be brief and very general.

Mr. Stowers: I was born in the little town of Searight, Alabama, in 1911. That's the cotten area of South Alabama. It's right on the Florida-Alabama line. I graduated from high school in 1926 and joined the Marine Corps to get away from that cotten patch!

Marcello: I was going to ask you why you had joined the Marine Corps. People have various reasons . . .

Stowers: I was a poor cotten picker!

Marcello: You know, some people say that they like the uniform; some people say that they wanted to travel. But in your case you wanted to get out of the cotten patch?

Stowers: I couldn't pick cotten! I was terrible!

Marcello: Well, from what I gather from the other buddies of yours that I have talked to, you made a career of the Marines, isn't that correct?

Stowers: I had actually planned to spend four years in the Marines, and as you know very well, the depression came along during that four years. I peeped out and saw food lines, soup lines. You couldn't get a job for fifty cents a day, and I ducked back in and got that re-enlistment bonus of, I believe, it was fifty dollars then, and I re-enlisted for four more years until times got a little better. That's the start of it.

Marcello: When did you get to China?

Stowers: My first tour in China was in . . . I was playing on the All-Marine football team at Quantico, and in 1937, I believe, the Chinese-Japanese War broke out, and they took the whole football team and canceled

out our schedule and took the whole brigade and shipped us off to Shanghai at the International Settlement as guard duty. We were there, I guess, just seven or eight months, almost a year. That's thirty . . . I hate to say how many years ago! Before you were born (laughter)!

Marcello: I'm sure it was! Like I told you awhile ago, I don't expect you to remember all the details, especially ancient things like that.

Stowers: No, I don't remember them.

Marcello: In other words, I gather from what you have said that you had two tours in China.

Stowers: Oh, yes. I had two tours over there.

Marcello: How did you like China?

Stowers: I loved it! It was prior to the takeover by the Communists; it was wonderful duty for a serviceman. Your exchange rate was about three or four yen to one American dollar, but one of the yen would buy approximately what an American dollar would buy in the States.

Marcello: Well, this seems to be a general opinion of all of your buddies that I've interviewed. Most of them thought that this was pretty good duty in peacetime.

Stowers: It was. It was wonderful duty. It was good peacetime duty.

Marcello: And I gather that generally speaking, all the duty in the Asiatics was pretty good duty--either in the Philippines or someplace like that.

Stowers: Yes, it was. All the stations were very good--even Wake Island before World War II. The "gooney birds"--I'm sure that you've heard of them--are the world's best performers. No show I've seen at the Radio City Music Hall or anywhere could compare to a natural show by the "gooney birds." It was wonderful.

Marcello: Well, I gather then that your first tour of duty in China was a rather short one. Like you mentioned, it didn't last a whole year.

Stowers: A little less than a year, I believe, yes.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen during that first tour that you think ought to be in the record?

Stowers: No, we were in pillboxes, sandbagged deals, during the day mainly because the Chinese and the Japanese had a lot of short rounds, as we still have in the artillery, and it would drop unintentionally on us, and occasionally we would get one. But we really got into no combat. We just observed the Japanese and Chinese airplanes fighting dogfights over us, the

Japanese bombers dropping bombs right and left on the city of Shanghai and the surrounding area. We had no part. None of us fired a shot that I remember. If we did, it was accidental.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you had a second tour of China. Was this a voluntary tour?

Stowers: Oh, yes. All of them were!

Marcello: Oh, even the first one was voluntary, too?

Stowers: Well, voluntary in the sense that "you, you, and you are going to this one." But it was nothing I objected to, particularly. I probably could have gotten out of either one of them if I had asked to. But the whole brigade was shipped out. Nobody asked to get out of it as I remember. Maybe a few of the married people did. I was a bachelor at the time, and maybe a few of the married people, the people with families, hardship cases, got out of the transfer, but I can't remember it.

Marcello: When did you go back to China for the second time?

Stowers: Well, I had gone out from . . . I was in the 1st Defense Battalion, and that was the first anti-aircraft battalion the Marine Corps ever had, and we were sent to Wake Island under Major Devereux, James P. S. Devereux, Jr., and I no more than unpacked my diggings,

and fifty of us were sent on over to Peking, China, to dismantle and . . . that was in 1940, I guess . . . dismantle the embassy equipment at the American embassy at Peking. Let me set this thing in perspective. Everybody out there knew that Japan and the United States were coming to a showdown. The embassy had been moved to Chungking, and they left a lot of boxed up supplies and a radio station and a Marine guard that they had there, that they were entitled to . . . they had a machine gun company, and that company had been shipped out to the Philippines. They were eventually on Corregidor. But fifty of us went in to help pack everything and get it out, dismantle the radio station and so forth.

Marcello: As a young Marine . . .

Stowers: That was in 1940, and I suppose it was in June or July, I think. I wasn't young at that time. I had fifteen or eighteen--some . . . fifteen to eighteen years of . . . I was a master gunnery sergeant at the time.

Marcello: Had you been following world events that closely?

Stowers: Well, I don't . . . I think you know better than I do that servicemen are so busy . . . they're out in the woods and on maneuvers, and they're training and

they're firing and this and that. They're sort of waiting on orders. They don't follow . . . they don't sit and read daily newspapers and radio broadcasts, and, of course, there wasn't any television at that time, and, in fact, we had no radio out there with the States except with the short-wave. I'll have to say truthfully, except with the oldtimers who had had a lot of combat in Nicaragua and Haiti and Cuba and so forth . . . you smell these things coming. I don't know how to explain it, but suddenly there is this atmosphere. You know something is about to pop, and you don't get it from any magazine or newspaper or anything else. You just . . . I really don't know how to explain it. But, you know, I've seen it happen many many times--in Korea, you know, and Nicaragua, everywhere. Old combat troops, they know. The top secret operations nobody tells them, but they smell it.

Marcello: Just for our record before you go on, would you identify your outfit in full?

Stowers: My outfit on Wake Island was the 1st Defense Battalion of the United States Marine Corps, and Major James P. S. Devereux was in charge. Then when I went from there to China, it was the American Embassy Guard,

and Colonel William Ashurst, who is now dead. He made general before he died. He was in charge of the embassy . . . an old-time Marine.

Marcello: I have heard the name Ashurst before. I think he fought . . . well, he was with you in prison camp, was he not? In fact, he may have been the ranking officer.

Stowers: He was the ranking officer. After we were joined with the . . . after we were captured and thrown in with my old gang, the Wake Island Marines . . . Major Devereux, of course, was the . . . probably he was two ranks below Colonel Ashurst, and in our prison camp Colonel Ashurst was the senior officer.

Marcello: Incidentally, what was a typical day like for a Marine in China?

Stowers: Before the war?

Marcello: Before the war. Before you were captured.

Stowers: Oh, it was really kind of hectic. We were within about eight hours of work from dismantling bunks, unscrewing them, footlockers, locker boxes, field ranges, and galley equipment, and boxing them up and crating them up and getting them ready to haul over to the railway station to ship them to Chinwangtao where they were going out. And then, of

course, about . . . it was really hard work. About five or six o'clock . . . we had a little club, the Marine club there, and we would go over and have some beer or maybe we would play . . . you know, most of us were bachelors, and we'd play tennis or take a swim. It was very good duty. There was nothing really hard about it. It was good duty, something like you would run across in the States.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with Chinese?

Stowers: Oh, yes. We talked with Chinese all the time. In fact, I've always enjoyed languages, and everywhere I have been . . . when I first got to China, when I was in Shanghai, while I was over in 1937, I started learning Chinese. I went to classes and then when I went back again to Peking, I resumed it. That was one of my hobbies. During off-duty hours, I studied the language.

Marcello: Now was this the exception, or was this the rule for most of the men?

Stowers; Oh, it was . . . maybe I should say the exception. Most of them just wanted to get through working. They'd work hard all day, go out and have some beer, find them a girl, and that sort of thing.

Marcello: What seemed to be the general attitude of the American soldier toward the ordinary Chinese? Was it one of respect? Disgust? Superiority?

Stowers: You have to remember that the old "Can-Do" Division of the Army was out there. They were left there during the Boxer Revolution, and then they were pulled out, and they had a small detachment of Marines take their place. Our sole duty was to guard the embassy personnel and to guard mail and shipments from Peking to Tientsin to Chinwangtao and back, riding in the trains. It was routine duty. There was no action. We couldn't even stir up any if we wanted to (laughter).

Marcello: You mentioned the "Can-Do" Division awhile ago.

Stowers: That's the Army, the old . . . I've forgotten the name of it . . . but they occupied . . . they remained in Peking after the Boxer Revolution. I can't remember the name of that division, but they stayed out there for thirty or forty years.

Marcello: I'd never heard that expression before, "Can-Do."

Stowers: That was their motto. A lot of them retired out there. They loved it and you asked about the attitude and feeling . . . I could probably remember forty or fifty of these Army personnel. The Marines hadn't

been out there that long. They took over after the Army division moved out, and I don't remember the year. It was probably in the 1930's or something like that. But the Army moved out, and the Marines moved in with a smaller group. But a lot of the Army people who had twenty years or thirty years and so, they retired. They lived like a million, married Chinese girls, had families, and spoke the language real well. I suppose there was probably a hundred of them that retired and elected to live in China.

Marcello: Incidentally, I'm going to ask you a question now that nobody has ever found the answer to. You mentioned that you were moving equipment and so on out of Peking to Chinwangtao. Recently in the news there has been some speculation as to what happened to the bones of the Peking Man. What do you know about that?

Stowers: I had never heard of it except what I read about it in the magazines. Not long ago I got a query on it. I never heard of it. I'm absolutely innocent. I didn't do it (chuckle)!

Marcello: (Chuckle) I was just wondering if you had ever seen it or come in contact with it or anything of that nature.

Stowers: The only thing I know about it is what I read in magazines, but we didn't . . . I'm sure none of my group was familiar with it because I was very close to them, and I'm sure that if any of them had heard about it they would have told me since I was one of the senior non-commissioned officers. If some guy had wanted to talk to me . . . I'm sure none of my group knew about it.

Marcello: Incidentally, how much contact did you have with the other foreign contingents in Peking?

Stowers: Quite a bit. Actually, we were . . . let's see, I believe the English, Italians, French . . . the Russians had pulled out . . . but we visited their clubs and they visited ours. We were all very friendly.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with the Japanese?

Stowers: Really, not much. By that time they had occupied that area of China, and they were very aloof to us but not antagonistic, but they were not friendly either. They were just aloof, I'd say. They had nothing to do with us. We had nothing to do with them either. We didn't trust them, and they didn't trust us. It was sort of a mutual agreement.

Marcello: That more or less brings us up, I think, to the beginning of World War II. It brings us up to Pearl

Harbor anyway. Can you remember what you were doing and what your reactions were when you heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Stowers: I'll never forget it. It was before daylight, the morning of the seventh . . . out there it was the eighth . . . seventh of December, 1941. And as a master gunnery sergeant we had separate quarters from the other men. Of course, the officers had their quarters. We went to breakfast at about . . . as I say, I was a bachelor, so I didn't have any family out there. I went to breakfast probably an hour before daylight, and there were only three or four officers there, and the senior non-commissioned officers took turns as officer of the day. And we had on this particular morning our first sergeant, Dutch Miller, who died not too long ago, and an old-time, twenty-year Marine that had been over there, and he came charging in . . . we were eating breakfast in the staff NCO mess. Dutch was acting officer of the day, and he came charging in with his broken English. He said the Japs were everywhere, all around, on the wall and everywhere . . . machine guns. He said he was going down and run them off. We knew Dutch well enough to know that he'd try to do it.

Somebody woke the Colonel up, Dutch left, and Colonel Ashurst was awakened and pulled Dutch down from the wall. There was a big ramp up about forty feet high, and he was up there demanding that they get out of there. Everywhere we turned we'd see machine guns pointed down to us, all around the embassy compound. Colonel Ashurst had secret orders not to offer any resistance. Actually, we couldn't. We were in the heart of the North China Expeditionary Force of the Japanese Army.

Marcello: Well, the Japanese were all around you.

Stowers: Well, something like 500,000 were headquartered right in Peking . . . not that many in the city, but . . . and there was less than a hundred of us, I suppose. So the Colonel ordered Dutch to come back down. Nothing happened till about . . . we went ahead and had breakfast, and we were sitting drinking coffee and waiting for some word. The station had not been completely dismantled, and the radio operator came running over, and I heard him tell the Colonel that Pearl Harbor in Hawaii was being bombed . . . at the time. It was at this very time. Of course, this was about daylight in Hawaii by that

time, but it was still pitch dark out there and cold, snow knee-deep, and the temperature was down to eight or ten degrees. That's how we learned that the Japs had hit Pearl Harbor.

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

Stowers: Well, really it was no surprise. We had expected it. We were working on sort of a deadline to get out of there, and like I say, we were old professionals, and we knew it was about to happen, and we said, "Oh, shit!" Put that on your tape (laughter)! You know, we just didn't make it, so we didn't get out.

Marcello: Well, what happened next then? So you finally have received the news from Pearl Harbor . . . there were Japanese all around you, quite obviously. They were occupying the strategic points in the city or in the compound.

Stowers: Right. Eventually a contingent of six or eight officers, one high ranking officer, came down. We could see them talking to Colonel Ashurst. I don't know what they said, but I'm fairly sure that they demanded our surrender, and he agreed to surrender to the Japs with not a shot fired.

Marcello: What happened next then? So he surrendered . . . was there any sort of a formal surrender? Did he have to . . .

Stowers: Yes, there was. And it was the saddest thing . . . I suppose next to some close relative dying it was the saddest thing I ever went through. We had to line up and stack our arms, and that was about seventy to eighty men . . . and nobody had a machine gun, only rifles and pistols. We had to stack arms, back up four or five paces, and then the bugler blew taps, and they brought the American flag down, and the Japanese bugler blew their reveille or some bugle call, and they raised the Japanese flag. I looked . . . you know, you cut your eyes even though you were at attention, and I cut my eyes down, and every Marine there was crying . . . we all were. It was pretty sad.

Marcello: I assume that at this point the Japanese had in no way roughed you up or had abused you physically in any way.

Stowers: Oh, no. They were really very nice to us up there. Colonel Ashurst had established social contact with the higher ranking officers while he had been there a year. He knew the colonels and the generals, and they had had cocktail parties and so forth. They

treated us very nice, and they left us in our quarters for about two or three weeks. Then one cold morning we were herded up and put in cattle cars and shipped to Shanghai to a prison camp. We had it very nice for about three weeks. We had our own food, our own cooks . . . the only thing that was different in our routine was that Japanese guards were all around. They didn't come down and bother us, didn't rough us up or anything. I don't remember ever talking to one during that time. Maybe I did, but I don't know.

Marcello: I gather that some of the North China Marines considered themselves embassy personnel and thought that perhaps they would be repatriated. Was this the general feeling in your group?

Stowers: No, no.

Marcello: Even though you . . . at this time, you had not been serving any guard duty or anything of that nature, had you?

Stowers: No, not . . . maybe some of the young boots. You know we had a lot of youngsters, and possibly some of them thought we were embassy personnel, but all of us old-timers, officers and non-commissioned officers, we were Marines and we knew that we were prisoners-of-war. We had no idea of getting out of this thing.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you have the same sort of uniforms and so on as the embassy personnel? I know the North China Marines were a pretty spit-and-polish outfit. They had the fur hats and the long overcoats and the tailor-made uniforms. Did you have all that equipment?

Stowers: It was awful cold up there.

Marcello: Do you know that Sparkman still has his cap? The fur cap? He sure does. He still has the fur cap from that time.

Stowers: I don't know how he got through prison camp with it. But everybody has a few things. Of course, as a bachelor and senior NCO, I had accumulated quite a few things, and only the . . . the only thing that I got through the war with . . . I think every prisoner had something that was part of your security blanket--getting something by them, maybe a watch or Sparkman's hat. I hadn't heard about that. Mine was a jade ring that Ti Ling in Tientsin, China had made for me. A doctor had picked the piece of jade out for me, and I had a setting made. I tied it around my leg. Everytime we'd transfer, I'd hide it with care. When we'd transfer again, I'd dig it up. They could shake you down all they wanted to,

and they would never have found my ring. My wife has it now. That's the only thing I got out with.

Marcello: You mentioned Ti Ling awhile ago . . .

Stowers: That's the name of a Chinese jeweler, a very famous jeweler in Tientsin.

Marcello: Sparkman had his cap because I saw it, and in addition he and one of the other people . . . I can't remember which one . . . it may have been Crews . . . had a photo album. Apparently a lot of the North China Marines had photo albums.

Stowers: A lot of those fellows . . . in my particular case, we sent those home.

Marcello: You went through a Swiss firm, did you not?

Stowers: Yes, and we shipped them back home. I forget how we did it.

Marcello: Did the Japanese allow you to do this?

Stowers: Oh, yes. This was before the war broke out.

Marcello: Oh, I see. This was before the war.

Stowers: We were . . . we got rid . . . the word was around if you had got anything valuable, ship it back to your mother or your wife. And most of this stuff was shipped back before the stuff hit the fan, as they say.

Marcello: I see. Several of them have told me that a Swiss firm, you know, took care of that operation, and that was all before the war.

Stowers: I believe in a few cases--they didn't in mine--but I do remember that Colonel Ashurst had some guns, shotguns, that he used in hunting, and several of the other officers and maybe a few of the enlisted men had personal things, and Colonel Ashurst, as I said . . . up there this take-over was very amicable. There were no hard feelings. It was a professional army taking over a professional army. The Colonel boxed his personal things up, and the officers did. Some of the enlisted men . . . most of them, like in my own case, I had nothing. By that time I had known it was going to happen, and I'd shipped what I wanted to keep, you know, pictures, souveniers, so forth. I had sent it home to my mother. I had nothing except this ring. Of course, you know, I had watches and personal clothes.

Marcello: You mentioned that during this three-week period while you were still at Peking, the Japanese more or less let you alone. Did you detect some sort of fear on the part of the Japanese? Maybe fear is not a

good word, respect? They didn't know really what to expect out of these Marines who all were obviously a little bit bigger than what they were.

Stowers: Yes, there was . . .

Marcello: Awe, perhaps, might be a good word. They kind of held the Marines in awe or something of that nature.

Stowers: Yes, they did. We had been up there a long time. We had been out to their . . . they had their rifle range right close to ours. We would go over and we would borrow their rifles and just out-shoot them. We had been in contact before the war. And then after they took over with their goose-steeping and all . . . we were prisoners and we were standing out there watching their guard mounts and so forth, and everybody was laughing at our captors goose-stepping in their ill-fitting uniforms. They were little short guys. So they understood that. They were very aware of us looking down on them because we were pretty sharp at that time. Later on the situation changed.

Marcello: Well, you mentioned that you were at Peking for about three weeks, and then they shipped you to Shanghai via cattle cars. What kind of trip was that? Describe the trip from Peking to Shanghai.

Stowers: Terrible!

Marcello: In what way was it terrible?

Stowers: It was ten below zero. It was very cold in these slatted cars, and there was straw in there. Of course, we were a very low priority. Any train that had any priority at all, they would side-track us and pass us, and we might set two or three days, and the food was . . . we suddenly began to realize that we were prisoners-of-war, and things were going to be tough. The food was either non-existent or very poor, you know, just cold rice. They'd dish out maybe once a day a bowl of it in the cars.

Marcello: What sort of belongings did the Japanese allow you to take with you?

Stowers: Just what we wore. If I remember, I believe they did allow us a duffel bag with our personal belongings. This was, I'd say, a three week trip cooped up in those cattle cars.

Marcello: It took you three weeks to go from Peking to Shanghai?

Stowers: Three weeks to go 500 miles. As I said we sat on the sidings for two or three days. It was very cold. Of course, we had clothing, too, and we huddled up . . . there were fifty of us in each end of these cars. We got to the Woosung Prison Camp, and they

had already . . . by that time they had captured Wake Island, and my old outfit--all the men who had survived it--were in pitiful condition.

Marcello: I was just going to say that you guys were in great shape compared to those Wake Island boys.

Stowers: As far as the clothing and everything. Of course, we were five hundred miles south, and it wasn't as cold down there, but we shared our clothing with them. There were a few instances, you know, where they felt that we hadn't shared, and they tagged us as the rich Peking people. But, in general, I'd say that everybody shared his wool underwear, his shirts, his long-handled drawers, and clothes. Most of them had khaki shorts, and snow was on the . . . when we'd left Peking, it was probably zero or below. We got down to Shanghai, and it was probably about freezing or something like that. But there was still snow on the ground.

Marcello: I gather you actually got off the train in Shanghai, and you had to walk from Shanghai to Woosung, didn't you?

Stowers: Yes, yes.

Marcello: It was kind of like a suburb or just a camp on the outskirts of Shanghai or something of that nature.

Stowers: Yes.

Marcello: Well, describe what the prisoners' quarters were like at Woosung.

Stowers: Well, we were right between the Shanghai International Airport and the Chinese military airport that the Japanese had captured, and we were not over 300 yards from either airport--right in the middle in some old beat-up barracks. The Japanese had abandoned them because of the proximity of the airports and the danger. There were no wooden floors, just dirt floors, and no heat or anything. They were just sort of like barns. Of course, they called them barracks.

Marcello: How many stories were they? Were they just one story?

Stowers: One story, yes.

Marcello: Did these barracks have any sort of washing or bathing facilities or heads or anything like that?

Stowers: Outside they had straddle trenches for that part, and then they had long pipes with those little faucets on them with cold water that you could bathe in. No soap or they wouldn't allow us any razors at first there. Later on they did, but at first they allowed us no razors, no toothbrushes, toothpaste, nothing.

Marcello: Did you have unlimited access to these bathing facilities?

Stowers: No, really, as I remember it now, they would turn the water on like from three to four o'clock in the afternoon, and you'd have to get your water and take your bath, and you'd have to get your water for your . . . we were in a double ring, electric barbed wire camp with the towers all around, and we boiled our drinking water, and we got it from these pipes.

Marcello: You mentioned the double ring of barbed wire a moment ago. You know, I think that this was one of the few camps where such a thing existed. I am referring now to all the interviews that I have had with former prisoners-of-war.

Stowers: The only one I was in. Now there were many other camps, but that was the only one that I was in that had two barbed wire fences around it.

Marcello: Did they have any sort of regulations concerning how close you could get to that barbed wire fence before they would open fire? In other words, was there a boundary?

Stowers: No, there were . . . of course, you knew that if you touched it you were dead. This would come along

later when a number of young fellows actually committed suicide by going out on rainy dark nights, and gloomy, and they decided the war would last six or eight months and they couldn't hold out that long! Actually it was for four years, but they would grab the fence. There were several that went that route.

Marcello: Incidentally, at this point did you think that the war would be of a rather short duration, or were you expecting a long war?

Stowers: No, not the old-timers like myself. We had a lot of people like one of your people that you interviewed, Sparkman, and they were recruits and we had to keep their morale up: "Look, fellows, this thing will be over very soon." But we never said three months or six months. But the old pros knew it would take three or four . . . I figured that it would take three or four years, most of us did. We knew the logistics involved in a big war like that, and there was no doubt in our minds that it was going to be a long, hard war.

Marcello: What sort of sleeping quarters did you have in your barracks?

Stowers: On the ground!

Marcello: You slept on the ground?

Stowers: We slept on the ground, no pillows, no nothing.

Marcello: Did they give you a ticking or anything of that nature?

Stowers: No, nothing. A few of them would let you go out and cut grass. I believe that in some instances in some of the barracks . . . it kind of depended on who your barracks sergeant was. If you had a fairly reasonable barracks sergeant, Japanese, he'd let you go out and . . . I forget . . . the thing you cut grass with . . . a scythe . . . and cut grass and fill up an old mattress ticking with it. Some barracks had it and some didn't. In my particular case, we just slept right out on the ground.

Marcello: You mentioned a barracks sergeant awhile ago. I assume that this was the Japanese who was in charge of each barracks.

Stowers: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: How did you enjoy sleeping on the ground?

Stowers: Well, how would you like it (laughter)? You're young, you might like camping out. I don't. I like a mattress. It wasn't too bad. We were old pros. We had fought in Nicaragua and Haiti and different places, you know. We had slept with a blanket around you and

without a blanket or with whatever you could get. That wasn't really too bad for the old-timers. It was a little rough on the recruits, the young kids.

Marcello: I gather that a lot of times it was so cold that prisoners would actually pool their blankets.

Stowers: Right.

Marcello: In other words, you know, a bunch of prisoners would sleep under a bunch of blankets.

Stowers: Probably so. I can't remember. They would divide a room into sections, four areas, and maybe there would be eight or ten men, and they would each have a little thin blanket that they had issued in real cold weather. You'd just huddle real close together with all the clothes that you had on, and then pull all the blankets over the top of you and underneath you. There was no other heat. You had no heat at all.

Marcello: What were these blankets like? Were they wool or were they made out of quilt?

Stowers: No, I would say they were made out of cotten, if I remember correctly. I never saw a wool blanket in all my . . .

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that this cold weather was perhaps the bitterest part of your captivity here at Woosung? Or were there things worse than combating the cold?

Stowers: Of course, that's an individual question.

Marcello: Let me phrase that in another way and say what to you was the hardest part of that captivity?

Stowers: The hard work and the poor food. The long hours of work and the cold weather we could cope with, and the toughest thing I saw was youngster after youngster . . . we would go out in the morning and work twelve hours . . . hot . . . this was in July and August and working ditches and building roads. We'd have no water with us and no lunches. We would have a bowl of rice in the morning. You'd work twelve hours, and you'd come back and you'd have another bowl of rice and maybe some cabbage soup for dinner. Our cooks would have a pot of boiled water to drink . . . that they had boiled maybe an hour or so. During the day, the hardest thing for me personally to go through . . . being an old-timer, second hand, an old Chinese hand . . . that's what we called ourselves . . . and the youngsters would . . . their lips would

get parched, and their tongues would swell up, and they couldn't talk because of that hot sun . . . they'd see a Chinese out in a canal dipping up water with his hands and drinking it, and we would tell them, "Don't do it!" They were immune to it, you know. The death rate for young people was extremely high out here, but the ones who do survive are immune to all this, but you are not. You'll get cholera, dysentery. You tell a young eighteen year old boy that, and then you see the fellow out drinking nice cold water and splashing it on his face, and suddenly he'd just break ranks and go out there and start drinking it. Three or four days later you'd have to bury him. That was the cruelest part and the most terrible part to me. I'd go through with it. We were disciplined, the old-timers, and I think the old-timers went through it better than the lesser trained men did.

Marcello: You know, this seems to be a general observation of just about all the prisoners that I have interviewed. I'd say that I have interviewed somewhere around forty or fifty prisoners so far, and most of them have made this same observation--that the old ones seemed to

survive better than the young ones whether it was on Bataan, Corregidor, North China, or wherever it might be.

Stowers: That's true.

Marcello: I gather that the quality of the rice that you received was not the best in the world. Sometimes it had pebbles in it. Did you ever notice this?

Stowers: Yes, and weevils and worms and . . . but you'd just get over in the dark part of the area where you couldn't see them and eat it. There was no extra charge for the worms and the weevils.

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

Stowers: Yes, with rats. Some of us were raised outdoors and had a lot of training on survival. We would make a figure-four trap and trap a crow or a rat or a dog or a cat and take a can and use charcoal, you know, and put that animal down in there and cook it.

Marcello: Did you yourself sample these delicacies?

Stowers: You better bet (laughter)!

Marcello: Well, when did the first Red Cross packages arrive?

Stowers: I don't know. It was after I was . . .

Marcello: Would it have been sometime in the summer of 1942?

Stowers: You know, we really didn't get many. There were a number sent out there. We would see them unloading them over at the Japanese camp, but they would never get over to our camp. I'd say it was in late summer or fall of '42 that we might have gotten one, and then there were months with nothing. I know there were many hundreds brought in, but the Japanese took them.

Marcello: Did you find that these boxes you had received had been looted or anything?

Stowers: No, but the ones that we really got, they were intact. But we could see them right across the fence and watch them having a big party with the majority of the boxes. And to be fair with the Japanese, these were men that they had yanked out of rice paddies, you know, illiterate, and most of them didn't even know how to use indoor toilets, and they fed them very simple rations. When they got a chance to steal our Red Cross packages, it was a big deal for them. It was a party. Actually, they were just small, maybe four to six-pound packages. They had a little can of butter and vitamin pills . . . that's another thing later on. They'd give us the vitamin pills because they didn't know what they

were. They were afraid they were poison. They'd hand them to us, and some older hands, you know, would come around and give you things.

Marcello: I would gather that the packages also contained powdered milk, Klim, cheese . . . wasn't there usually cheese in these packages?

Stowers: Little cans of cream cheese and butter, and I believe you're right--there were some cans of powdered milk.

Marcello: Klim, wasn't it called? Milk spelled backwards?

Stowers: Yes. That's a long time ago! I had forgot the trade names!

Marcello: Just as an aside here, I think it was Permenter telling me that he always had a warm spot in his heart for the Kraft products. Apparently, the Kraft products would come unspoiled, whereas the Borden products would always be spoiled.

Stowers: Well, I don't . . . (laughter)

Marcello: You remember that?

Stowers: No, I really don't.

Marcello: It's funny what individual prisoners remember.

Stowers: Yes, it is. I don't remember that part.

Marcello: I would assume, though, that those Red Cross packages were real lifesavers regardless of what they contained.

Stowers: Oh, they were wonderful! Of course, we all got those at Shanghai.

Marcello: Well, how did you utilize those packages? Did you eat everything at once, or did you spread it out?

Stowers: No . . . well, that again was an individual deal. Some would just eat everything they had and get sick, and some would ration theirs and some would ration theirs longer and some would . . . different ways. Maybe one fellow would take a little tin of butter, and he'd put that on his rice every day for maybe a week . . . make that can of butter last for a week. Another fellow would eat the whole can of butter with his fingers as soon as he got it, so it was solely up to the individual.

Marcello: Incidentally, were you allowed to maintain any vegetable gardens or anything of that nature?

Stowers: No, not in any camp I was in.

Marcello: You probably wouldn't have had a whole lot of time for that anyhow. We'll talk about your routine later on, but I'd assume that you didn't have a whole lot of time to spend on that sort of thing.

Stowers: No, no gardens at all.

Marcello: Were you a smoker at that time?

Stowers: Yes. That's where I quit for four years.

Marcello: Well, I was going to ask you, did you ever trade any food for cigarettes? I know the Red Cross parcels contained cigarettes.

Stowers: Yes. By the time we had got the Red Cross packages, we could . . . of course, they paid us off in Japanese cigarettes, and we'd swap those to the Japanese sentries, who were also rationed, for balls of rice and different things. Then our own cigarettes, they were very valuable trading material, tremendously valuable. You could just buy what you wanted with them, and each parcel only contained two or three of those packs of . . .

Marcello: I'm sure they were either Lucky Strikes or Camels, probably.

Stowers: I forget what they were. In my own particular case at that time, why, I didn't even smoke any of them. I just traded them with the Japanese sentries for maybe some lard or some salt, something, you know.

Marcello: But there were actually prisoners, were there not, who actually from time to time would trade their food for cigarettes.

Stowers: I don't remember anybody being that hard up for a cigarette! I don't know of any from my own personal

experience. I don't know of anybody . . . they realized they were wonderful trading material--but with the Japanese, not with other prisoners. In my own experience I don't remember that.

Marcello: Incidentally, you mentioned that the Japanese gave you a ration of rice. Did you have to provide your own cooks for the rice?

Stowers: Yes.

Marcello: Was this simply somebody . . . was the job of cook rotated, or was there a permanent cook for each barracks? I'm still referring to Woosung, of course.

Stowers: At Woosung, I think the people who were less able to work and who were in the worst physical condition . . . and regardless of what they . . . actually what can you do to rice? You put in some water and boil it, and you boil some water and boil some cabbage and soup, and so the cooks were . . . I can't remember how they were picked. Whether we told the Japanese that these were the ones we wanted to pick out . . . I can't remember . . . it was so long ago I don't remember now. But it sticks in my mind that they weren't regular cooks or anything or bakers. They were people who were . . . we figured that if they had

to do what we had to do every day, they wouldn't live three days. They had dysentery, diarrhea, you know, different sicknesses. I remember the water man later on in Woosung was a pilot who had been shot down, and they had to amputate his leg. He made a bamboo crutch and hopped around--a most cheerful guy. He was in charge of boiling the water. Of course, he couldn't go out and do the hard manual labor that we had to do. So people like that were our cooks. They were not really cooks at all. Somehow or another we got them . . . I can't remember how we did it.

Marcello: I would assume that everybody would watch the cooks very very carefully when they were dishing out the chow. Let me put it to you this way. Did you notice the cooks perhaps were a little fatter than the guys that were working out on the projects.

Stowers: No, I really didn't notice that. There wasn't anything but rice and cabbage soup, and maybe they got a little more rice than we did, but I don't know. You couldn't stand over them and check, but they were certainly not fatter than the rest of us. They lost weight with all of us.

Marcello: Incidentally, we will come back to this later on, but what was your weight at the time you were captured?

Stowers: I weighed 210 pounds when I was captured, and I got down to 112 pounds in about three months, and I held that weight right on . . . just guessing because I had no scales, and that was about what I weighed when I was repatriated. But I was one of the fortunate ones. I was one of the big guys. A lot of them weighed seventy or eighty pounds. I never even had a cold. I was fortunate in that I never was ill in any way at all.

Marcello: Describe what the guards were like here at Woosung.

Stowers: Now there again--I'm sure you've run across this before--the reserves and the 4-F's that they brought in there were pure hell. They were dangerous. They'd kill you; they'd bayonet you. They thought by treating the prisoners rough, they were winning the war. But occasionally we would get a group of old regulars who had been in New Guinea, Guadalcanal, and so forth, that would be pulled in for a rest after many months of hard battle. They were old pros. We would get them and they would say, "Ah, the hell with it. Take it easy." They'd give us cigarettes, and they were really good to us . . . the old pro soldiers. The 4-F's, the reserves, people who weren't trusted to ever get into battle, they were the terrors.

Marcello: What were some of the types of punishment or physical harassment that they would deal out to the prisoners?

Stowers: Oh, just beating you up. They would line you up . . . you had to learn Japanese, had to count off in Japanese; you'd have to ask them if you wanted to go to the bathroom in Japanese. You'd foul up a little bit, and they'd whack you with a rifle butt and stamp you with their feet. A good friend of mine . . . there was a sentry outside. He was a young reserve. We were out on one of these . . . had been working all day . . . and came in . . . and he was a staff sergeant, and we were at the faucets washing ourselves down . . . and I remember his last name was Cash. And we were closer than you and I washing, and he'd sight his rifle on me and then on Cash. Cash says, "Hank, what is that bastard doing?" I said, "Don't pay no attention to him, ignore him." And suddenly "Bang!" He shot him through his throat. I tried to hold his jugular vein, and blood was just spurting, and he died in a second or two. That kind of stuff, you know. Well, the officer would come out and chew him out a little bit--you shouldn't do that, and that kind of stuff. It was real rough!

Marcello: I gather that there were certain procedures that you had to follow. You had to bow to the guards, bow to all Japanese soldiers, I assume, and things of this nature, or salute. If you didn't do it, you got a good beating or something of that nature.

Stowers: We got a lot of that, too. The Marines wouldn't do it at first. A lot of them never did--a few like me. I got a lot of beatings.

Marcello: What sort of beatings were they, usually? With the fists or gun butts or things of that nature?

Stowers: Slapping, gun butts, kicking with the boots, and that stuff.

Marcello: After awhile, I guess you kind of get used to this sort of thing, don't you? You know, it still hurts, but you come to expect it, and the shock is kind of gone, I suppose. Here again, I'm sure that you observed the same sort of brutal treatment taking place among the Japanese, did you not? Wasn't it true that the superiors would tromp on the inferiors in the ranks and this sort of thing?

Stowers: Not as bad. They had a way of slapping each other, and it never went beyong that. A corporal would slap a private, and a Pfc would slap a private, and the private would slap us! And you had to stand at rigid

attention. If you dropped your head, you got it worse, and we did, too.

Marcello: I also gather that some of the camp commandants here at Woosung were something else again, also.

Stowers: Well, let's put it this way. If you were a chief of staff assigning commandants to prison camps . . .

Marcello: . . . you'd put the eight-balls in the prison camps.

Stowers: Right. Guys who couldn't hack it out in . . . old colonels and majors and captains that were alcoholics or so dumb they couldn't do anything else. You'd put them in these . . . you know, a prisoner-of-war camp was way down in the priorities! It is not a prize assignment.

Marcello: You mentioned alcoholics awhile ago, and I know that one of the camp commandants at Woosung went by the name of "Handlebar Hank." Do you remember him?

Stowers: Yes. Yuse was his last name.

Marcello: Well, that was Colonel Otera. Yuse was the commandant before "Handlebar Hank." Otera died in the fall of '42, I think.

Stowers: You're right. Both of them were alcoholics.

Marcello: But I assume that "Handlebar Hank" got his name because he had a mustache.

Stowers: Yes, a long mustache, and he would go along twiddling it and . . .

Marcello: Incidentally, what were some of the other names you had for Japanese guards. I'm sure that every guard was named.

Stowers: Oh, yes. I suppose that the . . . we had "King Kong," and others probably told you about him.

Marcello: There was one called "Tiny Tim."

Stowers: "Tiny Tim," yes.

Marcello: I think his favorite recreation was running the prisoners-of-war through surprise drills and inspections and that sort of thing.

Stowers: We had names for all of them, just like we do for our own officers.

Marcello: I think another one was "Popeye," and apparently "Popeye" was a pretty good egg. He was the guy who gave the prisoners cigarettes and things of that nature. I don't know if you ever ran across him or not.

Stowers: Yes, I remember "Popeye" very well.

Marcello: We'll talk about another one, later on, not really at this time among the . . . well, this guy wasn't exactly a guard that I'm going to talk about later on, but I think his name was Ishihara.

Stowers: He was an interpreter.

Marcello: Yes, he was an interpreter. We'll talk about him later on in a minute. I remember I mentioned to one

prisoner that he was a "son-of-a-gun" and the ex-prisoner corrected me and said he was a . . .

Stowers: . . . "son-of-a-bitch!"

Marcello: . . . "son-of-a-bitch!" That's exactly what he said. Well, we'll talk more about him later on, I think. Now at this stage, then, let's talk just a little bit about the camp routine. Describe what a day at Woosung was like from the time you get up in the morning until the time you went to bed in the evening. In between we will talk about some of the projects and that sort of thing that you were engaged in.

Stowers: Well, you'd get up in the morning about daylight, and our cooks were inside the wire, and each day we were issued so many pounds of rice. They had to boil that rice in the mornings. We never had--if I remember right--we never had anything but just a little aluminum bowl of rice. Everybody had the same amount. It was just leveled off. Each section would get a bucket of rice, and the bowls would be filled from that, you know. Then we'd go out, and the guards would line up . . . the guards would come in through the electric fence, and the guards would come in and count us all off--so many, and so many prisoners per

group of guards. Then they would march you out to the project or wherever you were working--drainage ditch, a road, a rifle range, or . . . one project we had . . . I'm sure they have told you about the "Mount Fuji" project.

Marcello: "Mount Fuji" project, yes.

Stowers: You'd go out there and work all day long--no breaks, no rest. And about sundown they would march you back in, and by the time you'd return, the water would be on, no soap or anything, and you'd wash off. And the rice and cabbage soup would be ready. You'd have a bowl of rice and a bowl of cabbage soup. But the main thing you really worried about by that time would be water and getting something to drink. We'd have them big cups, you know, and we'd all dip water out of this . . . it would still be hot, you know, where they had boiled it for hours. That would kind of relieve your swollen tongue, lips, and so forth, you know. Then it was bed by dark and that was it. Of course, they'd come in at unexpected times and come in for inspection, and you'd have to stand up, and each little section would have to count off in Japanese.

Marcello: What was work like on the projects? Let me put it to you this way first of all. What were some of the projects that you participated in here at Woosung?

Stowers: Well, the first one was building roads. That was just with shovels, a dirt road, building it up in the middle with a drainage ditch on each side. Then the next one was digging a drainage canal. And then, of course, the third one and the longest one, the one till we were transferred up to North China when the air raids started hitting us so heavy . . . I am sure they told you about that. And that was "Mount Fuji."

Marcello: "Mount Fuji" was the rifle range.

Stowers: We figured it was a backstop for a range, but none of us . . . in my own particular case, I was trained in small arms, and we have never had a range and backstop or anything like that. They had that thing up seventy or eighty feet high. Normally a backstop for a rifle range will run ten or eleven feet. But we figured it was a . . . to the best information that we have . . . we never did know what they had in mind.

Marcello: Incidentally, before we move on now . . . we'll talk about this later on, but you know the "Mount Fuji"

project was not here at Woosung. That was at Kiang Wang. Remember, they moved you there from Woosung. Do you remember that? I think that was in December of 1942 that they moved you from Woosung to a place called Kiang Wang. It was very close.

Stowers: Oh, they probably did.

Marcello: It was very close. I think it was only five miles away.

Stowers: Oh, they probably did.

Marcello: While you were at Woosung, did you ever have any . . . were you ever able to get any news from the outside world at all?

Stowers: No, and we had one fellow who was a radio expert in Peking, and I can't remember his name . . . he was a sergeant at the radio station in Peking. I don't remember whether it was there, but I kind of think it was at that project where he made a radio out of some parts he had stolen or smuggled in with some of the other fellows. About once a week, he'd get a radio broadcast, but it was a very dangerous thing. It was something you could have got killed for, and I wasn't in on the deal. I think he was working with Colonel Ashurst. Now the officers didn't have to work with very few exceptions. I think this

sergeant worked with them, and we just kind of got it second or third hand, and occasionally we would get a pilot who was shot down who had known that Shirley Temple had married or something like that. Otherwise, he didn't know anything. I believe that they didn't let them know anything--those young fighter pilots right out of college. I got to be friends with several of them. They didn't know anything! You know, the old-timers knew every . . . for years we had gone to school--recognition school . . . cruisers . . . we could recognize that this was a destroyer . . . little differences in superstructure, differences in destroyers and carriers . . . we had two or three . . . and battlewagons and cruisers. We could identify every one of them. We knew the different aircraft. These youngsters didn't know all that. They didn't really know. They didn't know what we had and what had been sunk. They said we were winning the war and not to worry about it.

Marcello: I was sure that even that did wonders for your morale, did it not?

Stowers: Oh, well, especially the younger people, but the older ones realized that they didn't know anything, and we

knew why--because they were very prone to be captured. They were front line . . . it's just like a buck private going out and fighting a battle. The chief of staff doesn't give him all the secret plans because he is apt to get captured, and there are ways . . . they can put your testicles in a trap, and you can tell everything you know, and they know that. They don't let them know much, no more than they absolutely have to know. That's the way it was with our young pilots.

Marcello: What sort of discipline was maintained among the prisoners? In other words, were they still obeying their non-coms and their officers and things of that nature?

Stowers: That was sort of second nature in the old Marine Corps. They did. They looked to the old-timers--the sergeants and the corporals--and looked to them with respect and advice, and it was, I'd say, pretty good.

Marcello: I would assume that that was one of the keys to survival, was it not? It had to be done.

Stowers: Yes, we had to be that way. For instance, I was senior non-com, and we'll say you were a private and you didn't bathe, and I'd say, "Docter, you didn't

take a bath tonight. If you don't get a bath and go out there and bathe, I'm going to put two men on you and scrub you down." And "Yes sir!" He'd go out there and bathe. Actually I couldn't have enforced it no way in the world. I had no backing, not even from the Japanese.

Marcello: All you could do, perhaps, in a way, is just . . .

Stowers: Bluff them!

Marcello: . . . bluff them and say, "Well, when this war is over," you know, "if you don't do such and such we are going to bring these charges against you," and things of that nature.

Stowers: You could say something like that, but most of them . . . they knew better than that. They weren't that dumb.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever allow any newspapers of any type in camp?

Stowers: I never saw a one the whole time I was in captivity.

Marcello: I think it was in December of 1942 that you were moved from Woosung to a place called Kiang Wang. And this, of course, is where you actually got started on the "Mount Fuji" project. Like we pointed out, this was only like about five miles from Woosung. I gather that this place was even worse than Woosung.

Stowers: Yes, it was.

Marcello: Now was this the camp that was built close to a swampy area or something of that nature, or was it Woosung?

Stowers: It was right near an airport, too. I'm sure that the others told you we began to get air raids in there. But it was near the river, and it was a very dank, sort of an unhealthy, area. Well, Woosung was, too.

Marcello: I gather that it was here that you were engaged on the "Mount Fuji" project. The Japanese, I think, told you it was a park, but it turned out to be a rifle range or something of that nature.

Stowers: Well, we never really did . . . as I say, I specialized all my life on rifle ranges, and word got around "rifle range." But you don't build a rifle range eighty feet high. I really don't know what they had unless it was a memorial deal that they had planned. I just don't know.

Marcello: Well, what sort of work did you have to do on this "Mount Fuji" project?

Stowers: Well, actually, I'd dig dirt. I'd carry it . . . on your back on wicker baskets up a long line and dump it up there and come back and get some more. Some had carts that you had to load up and push the cart up railway things . . . you know, eight or ten guys

pushing it and it was a matter of removing dirt from down on the valley below and building a high ridge . . . I still don't know what it was for.

Marcello: Did you have a certain quota of dirt that you had to remove?

Stowers: They were always telling us that, but even the Jap guards didn't know how to figure that out. We didn't either. They'd have a guy every so often with a club that would keep you moving.

Marcello: Now I gather that this is where Ishihara was particularly bad.

Stowers: Oh, Ishihara was the interpreter and couldn't speak English very well, and he had a short riding crop, and he'd been turned down by the Army, was 4-F, and he was trying to win the war by using that riding crop and whipping everybody and screaming, and he was a bundle of energy, I'll tell you that much! I don't know why they couldn't use him in the army, but . . . whether it was mental or physical . . . probably mental. But he was a terror.

Marcello: How long were you working on this "Mount Fuji" project?

Stowers: I don't know. A long time. A year.

Marcello: I meant how many hours per day?

Stowers: Twelve hours a day . . . minimum.

Marcello: What did this strenuous work do to the health of the prisoners? Quite obviously, you were working twelve hours a day; rations were still very, very short. Was this perhaps the . . .

Stowers: This will give you an idea for a fat farm. I could make myself rich if I could get all these fat people who want to reduce and do that work and eat the rations that we did. I could guarantee you that in three months I could get them to any weight they wanted to get. It was terrible! There were a lot of drop-outs, and a lot of people died. It was tough.

Marcello: I would assume that by this time you had no resistance at all. You had been captured for over a year, food was low, so quite obviously you had no resistance, and I would assume that a great many of the prisoners caught everything that came along.

Stowers: Amoebic dysentery, beriberi, colds, cholera . . .

Marcello: And most of these things come from dietary deficiencies, with the exception of cholera which you mentioned last.

Stowers: I would expect so.

Marcello: I understand that there were even a couple of cases of tuberculosis here at this camp.

Stowers: There probably were. I don't remember.

Marcello: Do you remember anything about the black market activities that occurred here at Kiang Wang.

Stowers: I'm sure that other guys have told you about the torture that three of us went through on that black market.

Marcello: No, they sure didn't.

Stowers: Well, we were working on this "Mount Fuji," and there was Jack Bishop, who is still living, and Mike Schick, who's dead. He had amoebic dysentery and after he got . . . he lived through the prison camp, and then he was stationed in Washington, D. C., and his stomach lining just gave way on him and he died. But Bishop is still living. The three of us were yanked out of bed one night . . . now we had been . . . here was the whole thing about this. In that "Mount Fuji" project, they also had some Chinese working right along with us.

Marcello: These were coolies?

Stowers: Coolies. And one of them got up to me and Bishop that could speak English and said he was an agent for Chungking. He gave us some rice balls. He smuggled them to us, and we put them in our pockets while we were digging. We were loading the carts to go up.

Now one night shortly after that we began to . . . he'd send us notes, little letters, to our superior officer, you know, who was Colonel Ashurst. We'd take them in and Colonel Ashurst would . . . we could . . . we had access to our officers. Although they lived in separate barracks, we could see them occasionally, you know. I gave the letter to Colonel Ashurst and he wasn't . . . he says, "Stowers, this could be a trap." He says, "There is nothing really in it except this fellow is reputed to be an agent from Chingking, and they want to know how many prisoners we have." He says, "I'm going to send a dummy back." So I took that back and gave it to him. Really I didn't know . . . Colonel Ashurst said, "I'm not going to tell you what's in it because then nobody can make you say so." I took the envelope and smuggled it back. That went on for two months, I guess.

Marcello: Just all sorts of various messages back and forth?

Stowers: I didn't know what was in them. I didn't want to know, so I couldn't be tortured into telling. Then suddenly one night Bishop, Schick, and I were yanked out of bed, and we went through hell on this earth. We were tortured and beaten and given the water cure and just

really beaten unconscious. We all thought it was because of this, and we all knew that if we admitted something like that, we were dead. They'd just line you up and shoot you. It finally turned out that some sentries had observed this guy giving us rice balls, and they killed him.

Marcello: So you don't really know to this day if he was an agent or if he wasn't.

Stowers: He was an agent.

Marcello: He was?

Stowers: He got word into Chungking that so many prisoners . . . that there was a group of prisoners-of-war in Kiang Wang. That was in this camp. Up to that time they had been strafing us and bombing us, and suddenly they knew that we were in there, so we figured that he was on the level.

Marcello: You mentioned that they pulled you and your buddies out of bed and proceeded to work you over. Can you describe exactly how they worked you over?

Stowers: Well, the first thing was just slapping.

Marcello: Did they interrogate you in any way?

Stowers: Yes, Ishihara was the interrogator and a very poor one. He says, "Confess!" And we'd say, "Confess to what?" "You know what we want!" And another slapping

and working over with the bullwhip that he had. And then the sentries would work us over and kick us. We didn't know what to confess to. And we didn't. We didn't know anything except that swapping of letters. That's really why Ishihara had started this thing. This sentry had told him that he saw this guy giving us balls of rice. We didn't know this at that time; we thought it was in connection with the letter.

Marcello: How long did this punishment continue?

Stowers: It was hours. Each one of us was given the water treatment and tied down with wet towels on your face and water poured until you choked and almost drowned and was almost unconscious. Sometimes you would become unconscious, and they would revive you and say, "Confess!" And we'd say, "Confess to what?" And they never would say, you know, exactly what they meant.

Marcello: Now by the water treatment, you mean they would continue to force water into you . . .

Stowers: . . . we were tied down with a wet towel over your nose and your mouth. And they would pour water over that towel, and when you would try to breathe, you'd suck the water.

Marcello: All you could do would be to swallow the water.

Stowers: Gag and swallow and so forth.

Marcello: Then after they put you through this treatment, did they simply let you go back to the barracks, or did they confine you?

Stowers: They gave us each one what we called the "double lock-up." You sat cross-legged in this little . . . nothing but . . . just naked in there . . . and nothing but just concrete . . . like in a dog pen. Some of these guards that would come on, you know, the reserves . . . this was in freezing cold weather. They'd throw a bucket of cold water over you, and it would ice over. It was pretty rough.

Marcello: How much did you think about escape?

Stowers: A lot. We talked about it all the time. But you have to remember that you were in the area where you stood out very prominently, and then the Chinese were . . . we knew them well enough to know that the coolies for five pounds of rice would turn you in. There were a few tries later on, but I'll tell you about that later. Later on I did try to escape, but not from this . . . I didn't think I had a chance.

Marcello: Well, I guess it was probably in the winter of 1944 . . . now you had been in this camp for quite awhile working this "Mount Fuji" project maybe for about two

years, almost two years, and I guess it was in the winter of 1944 that the B-29's began to bomb Shanghai and the surrounding area. How did this make you feel?

Stowers: Good.

Marcello: In what way?

Stowers: We knew we were winning (chuckle)!

Marcello: I would assume that this did wonders for your morale.

Stowers: Oh, yes. In addition to that we had this fighter plane--and I'm sure the others told you about this--that got with us. That's the reason we had to abandon the project; they had to move us out. They were almost daily. Chennault's Flying Tigers and the P-40's and P-51's would come down out of the clouds and strafe and bomb and just raise holy hell. By the time one raid would be through and you got out of your foxhole, here would come another one. They finally moved us out of the camp.

Marcello: Did these raids work over the "Mount Fuji" project at all?

Stowers: No, really they . . . no, they didn't. I don't remember them knocking out our project. They did . . . some of them . . . even though word had gotten around that . . . you know, they knew where our camp was located, but we were right between two airports,

and these eager beaver young eighteen or twenty year old fighter pilots . . . I mean they were right on the ground . . . anti-personnel two hundred pound bombs, .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine guns. They'd strafe us and bomb us, and we'd wave to them (chuckle)!

Marcello: Incidentally, what was the attitude of the Japanese toward the prisoners after all of this bombing started taking place?

Stowers: Oh, after each bombing they'd just raise hell, cut your rations, maybe not even feed you that night. All privileges such as you had would be cut off (chuckle).

Marcello: Did they ever try and get you inside when the raids took place so that you couldn't see what was going on?

Stowers: I can't remember that. They didn't like us to show our heads and wave at these guys. They didn't like that at all, but possibly they did make us go inside. I just don't remember.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there was an incident at Woosung involving 1,500 Canadian soldiers that we neglected to talk about, so let's just put it into the record at this point then.

Stowers: These fellows were captured at Hong Kong when the Japanese captured Singapore and Hong Kong, and they

had 1,500 of them in a freighter down in the hold. Seven hundred, roughly half of them, were in the aft hold, and half were in the forward hold. They were torpedoed by an American submarine not far off the mouth of the Woosung River. The people in the forward hold managed to form a human pyramid and got the hatch open. The Japanese just battened the hatches down, took to their lifeboats, and left them all. There were no Japanese on the ship, and so the 750 in the forward hold, roughly 750, formed this human pyramid and got the hatch open. Most of them got out, and before this ship sank they got into the water. The Japanese gunboats and destroyers and anti-submarine boats were cruising all around, and they had target practice on these boys in the water, swimming. They killed hundreds of them. Some swam over . . . one was a Dr. Lynch, and I became very familiar with him, and he swam over to an island, and about forty or fifty got on this island and were later picked up by the Japanese, and there about, I would say, 150 brought into our camp in Woosung. The reason I particularly know about Doctor Lynch is that they all came down with diptheria. I don't know

his first name; he was a Canadian medical doctor. And he came over and asked us for some volunteers to help bury and wait on the ones that were dying and so forth. I would say that out of the 200 there was probably forty or fifty that survived. Doctor Lynch was one of them. He had no medication, not even aspirin tablets. They put them into one end of this big compound there at Woosung, and I was one of the four or five volunteers that took food over to them and waited on them and washed their clothes and buried them and dug holes for them when they died. It was pretty terrible.

Marcello: Did these Canadians accompany you all the way through the rest of the camp?

Stowers: No, no. We got separated after Woosung . . .

Marcello: "Mount Fuji?"

Stowers: "Mount Fuji."

Marcello: Incidentally, I would assume that by this time the prisoners had become pack rats. In other words, I'll bet that you collected and gathered any odds or ends or articles that you thought was going to be of some value to you later on, whether it was a piece of string or broken glass or anything of that nature.

Stowers: Regularly, you got shook down and all of it taken away from you. But it was fun and games to see what you could get through the guard.

Marcello: What sort of articles did the Japanese forbid you to have? Other than, of course, knives and firearms.

Stowers: Paper and pencils, and they were very suspicious if you even sat there and two or three of you were drawing what looked like a map or something on the ground with a piece of stick. They didn't like that at all. They were very suspicious. That was, of course, because they were ignorant. They didn't know . . . a lot of them couldn't even read or write.

Marcello: By this time was it more or less every man for himself, or did you form certain cliques to look after your buddies?

Stowers: No, no. As Marines, we stuck pretty close together, and I can't remember of anybody being brainwashed and wanting to go over to the Japanese or . . . of course, there is always one or two weak persons who would trade his grandmother for a bowl of rice, but the others knew about it, and they stayed right on top of it, and we didn't allow them to do much of it, and we cordially hated the Japanese and they cordially

hated us, and I think in that respect we had a far better time of it than the Korean prisoners-of-war and the Vietnamese prisoners-of-war. I believe that this brainwashing started in the Korean War, which I was in, of course, and I had friends who were captured again for the second time in Korea. I talked to several of them, and they told me, "Hank, you think it was rough with the Japs. You get with these North Koreans and you've really been through it then!" Several I've talked with either escaped or were repatriated, so it was much tougher because they tried to brainwash them and convert them to the Communist ideology and they had to recite the words of Chairman Mao before they could get their bowl of rice.

Marcello: Incidentally, we are now up to about May of 1945, when you made the long railroad trip that eventually took you over to Japan. By this time, by May of 1945, what was the thing that you thought about most as a prisoner-of-war? What was the thing that was most constantly on your mind?

Stowers: Food!

Marcello: I wanted to get that into the record because people who are unfamiliar with these interviews jump to the

conclusion that sex was the thing that was first and foremost on your mind.

Stowers: Never heard the subject, hardly (chuckle)!

Marcello: But, you know, almost to a man, I would say every prisoner that I have interviewed has placed food as his top priority while he was in prison camp.

Stowers: You would dream of it at night, and you'd wake up, and your whole face would be wet salivating where you had dreamed of eating some greasy beef stew or steak or pork chops or something! You'd wake up in the morning and just wipe saliva all over your face. You didn't dream of girls!

Marcello: I'd gather that you would continually make up menus or recipes.

Stowers: Very true.

Marcello: You know, some prisoners have even mentioned that they thought about food so much and so often that they could even imagine that they could smell a particular type of food cooking.

Stowers: That's true.

Marcello: One prisoner swears that from time to time he could smell bacon and eggs cooking somewhere. He knew that there was bacon and eggs somewhere in the camp.

Stowers: In my own particular case, it was such an obsession with me that I built a restaurant. I still have it, in North Carolina.

Marcello: You built a restaurant . . . you have a restaurant in North Carolina?

Stowers: I sure have, and that . . .

Marcello: I want to talk a little bit more about this restaurant now. You mentioned that you did actually have it . . . still have a restaurant? And you really feel that it stems from your ideas that you had in prison camp.

Stowers: Of course, Doctor. I don't think I ever had in my life the idea of being a restaurant man, but until prison camp . . . and I think that's all that Iris, my wife, a lot of the recipes that we'd swap in prison camp. They were so greasy, and we had nothing with any fat in it. Everything was rice and soup with no fat. You get a craving for fatty foods, rich foods, you know. Some of those recipes would gag you now.

Marcello: Oh, I could show you some of these recipes because some of the prisoners were able to keep some note-books or diaries. The diaries and notebooks consist

of virtually nothing but page after page of menus and recipes and things of that nature.

Stowers: And all fat foods.

Marcello: Most of them are, and just some of the most god-awful deserts you have seen in your life. They are just amazing, they really are. Like I said earlier, to a man food was the thing that was constantly on everybody's mind.

Stowers: Sex was completely obliterated, and it was keeping warm and keeping healthy and getting food and water and being warm. This was hundreds of young men in the prime of their life and about eighteen years old. Of course, I was older than that. They were at the most vigorous sexual age. You never heard, like you normally would in the barracks, about all the girl friends they had. They didn't talk about girls. They talked about recipes and keeping warm and getting out alive--things like that. Sex never really entered into it at all. It was hard to understand, but it's true.

Marcello: How far ahead did you live? Did you live day by day, week by week, month by month?

Stowers: You had to live day by day. You had to get that philosophy, and if you didn't you were . . . if you

began to think, "Well, it's going to be two years before I get out of this mess, and can I put up with this for two years, can I stay healthy and stay alive two years? A few did go out and grab the electric fence or just give up. Some would just lose their will to live and just, you know, die.

Marcello: Here again, this is a general feeling among the prisoners that I have interviewed. Like one of them has told me very very succinctly, the ones that give up are still over there yet. That's about what it amounted to.

Stowers: That's right. They're under about two feet or a foot and a half.

Marcello: That's right. Now in May of 1945, you were moved again, and this was the beginning of that long train ride. It took you, first of all, from the "Mount Fuji" project to a little town called Fengtai, which was near Peking. Describe this trip. You went by railroad again, did you not?

Stowers: Cattle cars, and as the others have probably told you, it took weeks. I wouldn't verify that but it may have been months. I just don't know. I don't remember.

Marcello: It took you about a month because I think you started in May of '45, and you got to Pusan on June 19, 1945. Pretty close to a month.

Stowers: They would sidetrack us, and then they would parade us through towns, small and fairly large towns. We were sat down on the sidings of railroad tracks. The main thing, I think they got out of it, they wanted to see what terrible characters they were fighting against, what they were like, you know, just parade us.

Marcello: Here again, I think it was also a kind of a form of humiliation. In other words, they could say to the Chinese, "Look what we as Japanese have done to these white men, who for so long thought they were so omnipotent, superior."

Stowers: "Look at them, there they are, too." There were guards all around and no place to go to the bathroom, and half of them had diarrhea and were so sick they didn't care. They had no modesty at all. It was pretty humiliating, and they wanted the Chinese to see that.

Marcello: What sort of rations did the Japanese provide on this train trip?

Stowers: I don't remember--the same old junk, I guess. I do remember it was my first introduction to fried grasshoppers.

Marcello: Where did you get hold of those?

Stowers: That was between Feng Tai and Pusan . . . up in Manchuria. It was a holiday, and each one of us got a little wooden box. We got it in addition to our bowl of rice. We got a little wooden box about half the size of a cigar box, full of fried grasshoppers. They were very delicious (laughter)!

Marcello: At that point, I think anything would probably have been good. Incidentally, sometime during this train trip there was an escape, was there not? Wasn't it true that a couple . . .do you know anything about that escape?

Stowers: I was in the car where they escaped. I was invited to take part in it, and a young lieutenant that I hunted and fished with a lot named Jim McBrayer . . . he retired as a general, I guess, or a colonel. He whispered over to me that he had found a loose . . . in this cattle car they had found a window with bars that were loose. In each end they had twenty-five of us, and there was just hay and grass and straw in the cars.

Marcello: I assume that there was barbed wire between the two ends, and the guard was in there.

Stowers: Two or three guards were in there, and there were kerosene lanterns, and Jim whispered to me, "Hank, do you want to go with us? Me and . . .

Marcello: McAlister, Kinney, Huizenga . . .

Stowers: . . . Huizenga, Kinney." Now Kinney was killed, and there was another fellow, a civilian it seemed like it was . . .

Marcello: According to Devereux's book, it was McAlister, Kinney, and Huizenga, McBrayer, and Bishop.

Stowers: Bishop was killed and Kinney was killed. Kinney was a pilot on Wake Island. I remember they brought Bishop's body up to the train. They stopped after they found them, and we stayed there about two days. But McBrayer and Huizenga and one other . . . maybe just two of them, but they split . . . they went individually and McBrayer told me all this. Have you interviewed McBrayer?

Marcello: No, I sure haven't.

Stowers: Would you like me to tell you what McBrayer told me what happened to him?

Marcello: Sure, you bet. First of all, how did they get out? Now here were these guards, you know, who could always see to the back of the car.

Stowers : This is how they did it, and I was in on that. I told them thanks, but no thanks. I didn't believe that we could make it. We were going along, and it was a dark, stormy night, and it was rainy, and we were going along about thirty or forty miles an hour in this train. We were rattling along. He told me if I'd turn the . . . you know, they got the bar loose where they could get out. They were going to have to go out head first, and he said, "I don't know what we are going to hit. It may be a bridge, concrete. We don't know. It's pitch dark out there." We talked it over for an hour, I guess, and that's when I said that I was going to pass. He says, "Well, will you do this for me? Will you turn the wick down in the lantern, so it will be dark back here." I says, "I'll do that." So I took the lantern and turned it down where it went out. It was hanging and swaying, and I was trying to mess with it. There were three guards between the barbed wire that was strung to form a corridor for them from one side of the boxcar to the other. The barbed wire corridor was the width of the doors of the boxcar. It was a very feeble light. So I cut the light and told the Japanese and motioned to

them and begging them . . . I turned it down into the lantern where it went out. And then I handed it to them. They had a flashlight, and they got it back up and messed with it and finally got it lit again and had it back hanging on the wire and I hung it back up. In the meantime, I noticed that two of the bars were out, but the Japs didn't notice it. I guess we had gone ten miles or fifteen miles, and four of them had gone out through that head first, and that train was moving forty miles an hour. That was more guts than I had. So then they decided that . . . every so often they had orders to count us, so they came up in our section of the car three or four people--I forget how many--four people short. Twenty-one were back there. So they waved the lantern and stopped the train, and everybody came running back, and we stayed there two days while they searched for them. They brought Bishop or Kinney--I forget but it was one of the bodies of one who was killed--and Huizenga and McBrayer got away. Well, they all went out maybe at a mile or half a mile intervals. McBrayer hit and rolled down an embankment, and then he went walking through China, and he came to a river. He swam

this river and he was so tired that he crawled up under some rocks and he just passed out. When he woke up it was middle of the day, and the sun was shining, and a lot of the Chinese were around him and talking to him. And one guy come up to him and said, "Come on with me." He came with him, and he fed him and he put him in a little hut, and about a week later some guerrillas came in, and they took him with them to an airfield, a disguised airfield, from which the airplanes had been making strikes on us, and they picked him up and took him to Chungking. I heard how Huizenga and the other fellow got out, but I've forgotten. But McBrayer was a close friend of mine, and I remember that particular deal. They were the only prisoners that successfully escaped during our . . . many of them tried it, and most of them were killed.

Marcello: So this train trip finally ended up in Pusan in Korea on June 19, 1945. I gather that this was a rather harrowing experience here in Pusan, was it not? Can you describe what it was like?

Stowers: It was terrible! We were put on twenty-four hours a day hard labor loading salt. It was just mountains of

salt piled up in Pusan by these docks there. These Japanese coastal steamers, those little small ships, would pull in there to the dock. We had no modern machinery. We had just baskets that would fit with straps around your shoulders, and there was just an endless chain. You would go up the ship, dump your salt in the hold, and down the ship. About every ten or fifteen feet there was a Jap guard with a stick, a club, you know, keeping you moving. You had no chance to rest or goof off or anything. It was the only time in all my work details that you could not goof off. You were right out there in broad daylight, and they kept this chain moving.

Marcello: You weren't there too many days, fortunately.

Stowers: No, the Navy . . .

Marcello: I think there were only about three days that you were there.

Stowers: Oh, more than that. About two or three weeks, and the Navy bombed and burned the town out. They burned everything out, and then they moved us to Japan.

Marcello: I understand that while you were in Pusan you were living in a warehouse, were you not . . . almost like a warehouse of some sort?

Stowers: An old warehouse.

Marcello: I understand that the flies were bad and everything else.

Stowers: Yes, and that was burned out, too, in the bombing raid. Most of the bombs were just thousands of these incendiary bombs to get some kindling to burn.

Marcello: Incidentally, up until this time, were you afflicted with any of these physical ailments that we have talked about?

Stowers: No.

Marcello: You had nothing up to this point?

Stowers: No, I never did.

Marcello: So you were there for a couple of weeks loading or unloading this salt, and from there then you were sent to Japan. What did you think about going to Japan? How did you look upon that?

Stowers: Trying to survive. We knew where we were going, and on the way across there were five of these ships. We were battened down in the holds. Two of those were sunk. The one I was on was hit, but it didn't sink. Many of my friends were lost on this short trip across. The Americans dive-bombed it. There were five of those little freighters. We got to Hokkaido, the island of Hokkaido, and I don't remember the port.

Marcello: I don't think you went straight from Pusan to Hokkaido. You kind of hit the lower island of Honshu and worked your way north from there.

Stowers: We got bombed over there, too.

Marcello: Yes.

Stowers: That was the last pair of shoes I had. They put us ashore on Honshu. That's right; you're right. How many years has that been, thirty some-odd?

Marcello: That's been some thirty some-odd years, right! You're not going to remember everything, that's for sure!

Stowers: That's right. I remember we . . . the ship I was on after this raid, the three that survived it angled off and put in on the main island of Honshu. We got to an old schoolhouse there in a little village, and the first night . . . I think Sparky and a bunch of them were in that, weren't they? That's the last pair of shoes I had. I had patched and re-patched them with old automobile tires, and I had them under my head on that dirt floor sleeping in that schoolhouse, and suddenly the whole world blew up, you know, with all this bombing out there. We got a direct hit on this thing, and the first thing I grabbed for was my shoes to try to get out of there (chuckle). Fires were

everywhere, and it had thrown me away from my shoes. I never did find my shoes. The rest of the war I went barefooted.

Marcello: Let's go back here a little bit. You mentioned that on the trip from Pusan to Honshu you were under rather constant attack by American planes. I gather that the Japanese had in no way marked these ships as being prisoner-of-war ships.

Stowers: No, no marking whatsoever.

Marcello: What were your feelings about being bombed or being torpedoed?

Stowers: Kind of divided. Really, it's hard to explain, but you kind of think, "Come on in and hit the son-of-a-bitch so maybe I can get off it." But that's the way you felt. You're charitable but still you're scared to death that they are going to hit you. And that's, you know, kind of a funny feeling.

Marcello: Well, I gather that by the time you got to Japan, you were able to notice that Japan was being hit pretty hard. Weren't you able to observe the bombed out cities and so forth?

Stowers: Oh, yes. They had the cars . . . that's right. When we got bombed out in this schoolhouse, we went to

Yokohama, and that's where we got attacked--in Tokyo. I guess it was Yokohama at the airport. The B-29's . . . it was a clear day, and you could see them way up in the sky, and bombs were just fogging down! They had these little shutters, and the guards would go up there, and we'd pull one out and look, and just everywhere you would look there was just desolation.

Marcello: This was on the train?

Stowers: On the train. We got into Yokohama, I guess, or Tokyo, and there was a long dock, a concrete dock, at a station that had been bombed out, and there were just hundreds of bodies stacked, and they were hauling them out on flatcars to burn them for sanitary reasons, you know. The whole town looked like it was on fire, and it was pretty rough. Then we got attacked by just hundreds of civilians, and there was about fifty in the group I was in.

Marcello: I assume that these civilians attacked you because of the bombing raids?

Stowers: Oh, yes. They were very upset. Of course, we took . . . I remember I took my shirt off and told everybody around me to form a little group like the Indians and the cowboys. We took our shirts off--what we had--

and shorts and put rocks in them and used them to fight these civilians off. The Japanese guards, soldiers, finally came in and rescued us and got us out of there. But it seemed like a long fifteen hours even though we fought for only about thirty minutes (chuckle)!

Marcello: I don't know if it was this particular incident or not, but I have an interview with an old boy who was telling me about a similar experience in Japan where they almost had to run the gauntlet of these civilians, and apparently one of these civilians spat on this American, and the guard wasn't looking, and this old American apparently stepped out of line and just popped this civilian a good one and stepped back in line again.

Stowers: (Chuckle) Yes, we had that happen.

Marcello: I'm sure that this was a rather scary thing--to be confronted with this mob of civilians.

Stowers: Yes, it was rather hairy.

Marcello: But, on the other hand, I guess that you had been through so much by this time that . . . I don't want to say that death was a commonplace thing, but maybe you didn't worry as much about it as when you had been first captured.

Stowers: Well, you accepted it as kind of routine, but I don't mean by that you still didn't get scared. But you didn't get terrified; you didn't lose your mind. You got mean and you wanted to fight back any way that you could. That's kind of the way it went.

Marcello: So finally you ended up on the island of Hokkaido. Where about on Hokkaido? Was it at Hakodate?

Stowers: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do there?

Stowers: Dug coal. Worked in a coal mine (laughter)!

Marcello: So you got out of a cotten patch in Alabama to dig coal in Hokkaido.

Stowers: I'll always have a soft spot in my heart for any of John L. Lewis' coal miners. They can have it!

Marcello: Well, first of all, describe the camp. What was the camp like here at Hakodate?

Stowers: You've seen these Al Capp cartoons of Upper Slobovia and Lower Slobovia? We were in Upper Slobovia up in the mountains where the snow never melted. They had the winter Olympics there last year. I can't imagine how they . . . but at that time even the Japanese wouldn't live up there. It was so cold and miserable and had such a short growing season. The only industry

was coal and steel. Our camp was, again, a barbed wire fence and a slab camp . . . just built out of old pieces of slats. The wind howled through it. It was cold and miserable. That's where I tried to escape, and a friend of mine and I got captured and beat up.

Marcello: We'll talk in a minute about your escape attempt, but I have a few more questions about your camp itself. Describe what it was like mining coal.

Stowers: Well, the mines were probably a mile or a mile and a half deep, and you had a lot of earthquakes there, as you know. That's terrifying. You're a mile deep under the earth, and the ground would begin to shake and top falling out. Everyone of us tied a shovel to our belt, you know, because we were working up in little feeder shafts, not in the main shafts. All of this, as I said, was very primitive; you had no machinery. Prisoners . . . the guys up the shaft would dig enough coal to fill up a cart, and the prisoners pushed it a mile up a slat to the top. No power at all. The lights were all kerosene lanterns. One time up in a feeder shaft, it caved in on me and I dug out. Fortunately, it was only eight or ten feet,

and I dug back out to light. The shoring was old rotten timbers, and they had slave labor up there, Koreans and Chinese prisoners, and when they'd have a cave-in, they'd just seal it off and not try to rescue anybody or nothing. That was a pretty horrible part of it.

Marcello: What sort of a day did you work there?

Stowers: There were two shifts--twelve hours in the day and twelve hours at night.

Marcello: Did you have a certain quota of coal that you had to unload?

Stowers: Everywhere they set quotas. They didn't mean a hoot, though, because the guards didn't know how to figure it. We just goofed off as often as we could. You would get up in the shaft and you'd tap, tap, and you'd dig with your pick, and now and then you'd roll a piece down. In the first place, the Japs were not going up in there to check on you. They were scared of it (laughter)!

Marcello: Well, were you still under military supervision here?

Stowers: Oh, yes.

Marcello: I wasn't sure if it was the military or if you were under civilians.

Stowers: It was still military.

Marcello: Incidentally, now you had been a prisoner for almost four years. Did you ever run into any Japanese during this time who had shown any amount of compassion for you?

Stowers: Oh, yes, mainly the old professionals, almost invariably the old professionals. Unfortunately, we never had them very long. Because when they would pull out for a rest . . . and the wounded ones and so forth . . . they didn't believe all that propaganda--that Americans were a bunch of cowards and dogs. They had fought against the Marines at Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima and different places. They knew. They were really professional soldiers like we were, and they were very kind and generous. I mean they didn't have anything either, but they were not brutal to us. They had a job to do. We understood them, and they understood us. We got along real good with the professional soldiers. God deliver us from the reserves and the 4-F's! That's the ones that terrified us.

Marcello: Also, after four years, surely your original clothing must have started to give out. What did the Japanese issue you in replacement of that?

Stowers: They gave us Japanese soldiers' uniforms . . . a shirt and a . . . they have a very fine system in the Japanese Army. They make one size, and that's about a size forty or something, and everybody wears the same size. If you are a little bitty guy, you just double it up and tighten your belt up over it. So we had no problem with fit. We didn't have any shoes, but they didn't either. They had these three-toed sandal things. But we didn't even get those. We were barefooted up there.

Marcello: In this cold weather you were barefooted?

Stowers: Yes!

Marcello: I would assume that this was one of the roughest places you were at.

Stowers: It was.

Marcello: Do you think you could have lasted another year there?

Stowers: I couldn't have lasted three more months there, I don't think. I don't believe any of us could have lasted. We were right down to the end of our ropes.

Marcello: What kind of food did the Japanese provide at this camp?

Stowers: Same old staple rice, except up there they harvested it too early and it was green, and it gave all of us diarrhea. It was green rice, and they gave us . . . the

only difference was that we got seaweed, and it was a very bitter seaweed. It was seaweed that they'd pull out of the sea and chop up and make a soup out of. It was a horrible tasting stuff, but they say it's high in nutrition. It kept us alive. But I don't believe any of us could have lived over three or four more months.

Marcello: What were your barracks like at this place?

Stowers: Well, just an electrified barbed wire deal, and then it was chopped into the side of a mountain. Somebody had done it before us. There was a little hut with earthen floors, and you slept on the ground. We did, in this area, have a lot of coal up there, and in each room or section they'd let you have a kind of a square in the middle, and they let us put coal in there to keep warm, or otherwise we would have frozen to death. At night . . . it was probably 7,000 or 8,000 feet in altitude, and we would've frozen to death because it gets down to zero at night and snows the year around.

Marcello: I assume that you had to share blankets and so on here also?

Stowers: We had those old cotten blankets, and we just huddled up together like a bunch of pigs in a pen and kept

just as close together as we could, and everyone doubled the blankets, and along with the fire, we made out.

Marcello: How much of a problem were bedbugs and lice in this camp?

Stowers: We never did have that problem at all.

Marcello: Probably too cold for them (chuckle)?

Stowers: I don't know. I really don't know. You'd think there would have been a lot of them, but we really didn't have them.

Marcello: How about bathing facilities? Obviously, you guys must have been as black as the coal you were digging.

Stowers: Well, there again, you had a pipe that run out of one of the faucets with cold water, ice cold water. You'd come out and strip off your clothes--no soap or anything--and you just washed off as best you could.

Marcello: I gather that many of the prisoners really didn't lose that black color until they were liberated. You never could get it all off.

Stowers: No, it took me two or three months to get the coal out of my skin.

Marcello: I think this more or less brings us up until the time of the liberation. Let's just talk about the events

leading up to the liberation. How did you know the war was over?

Stowers: As I told you, we were on two twelve-hour shifts, and there was about 200 men in our camp, I suppose. A hundred of us would work twelve hours, and as we'd go into camp, we'd meet the other hundred going back to the mine. And on this particular night, we didn't . . . and I was on, say, a twelve-hour shift. I think it was the day shift. This night shift wasn't coming on. No, I was on the night shift coming off in the morning, and the morning shift wasn't coming on. We didn't meet them. We got to camp, and they were all still in the barbed wire fence, all standing around in little clumps talking. The Japanese had one radio, and they were all huddled around it, and nobody called anybody out, and, of course, we were too excited to sleep, although we had worked twelve hours. We were very tired. That night the town, I guess, two or three miles below us . . . and up till this time, you have to remember that the Japanese themselves . . . if one of their own civilians . . . if you struck a match they were just . . . and we hadn't noticed any airplanes coming over for

two or three days. They were coming over, but they weren't dropping any bombs in our area. Just dozens of them, you know. You could see them . . . contrails coming over. We knew they were ours, and this particular night the lights all went on in the town down below us. We had no officers in this camp. Major Devereux and Colonel Ashurst and all of them were in a different area. I don't remember where they were. There were just the enlisted men in this camp. I was one of the senior ones, and a sergeant major was senior to me, and his name was Dietz, and he got the old-timers, noncommissioned officers, and staff concoms, and he said the signs all showed that the war is over. He says, "Either the Japanese have won it or we've won it." We thought, of course, that we had won it. Otherwise, that town wouldn't have been lit up when our aircraft was flying over. So he says, "Each one of you go back and tell everybody to get any weapon he has." They told us, you know, if they lost the war they would kill us all and commit hari-kari. They were so fanatic that we weren't sure. We half-way believed them, and we just didn't know. At any rate, Dietz went down--I was with him--and this arsenal of knives and clubs and everything suddenly appeared.

Marcello: You didn't even know all these things existed, I guess.

Stowers: I didn't, no. I didn't want to know. Of course, I had a couple little items myself. We went down to the fence and told the guard to tell the commandant . . . he was a young lieutenant who could speak a little English. Not very well, but he could speak English. We didn't have an interpreter in this camp. He came up to the fence and Sergeant Major Dietz said, "Lieutenant, the Americans won the war, and we want the surrender of this garrison. I'll take your sword, and we'll treat you as honorable prisoners-of-war." And he peeled off . . . he stood there a long time and looked at him, and finally he just unbuckled his belt and handed his sword to Dietz and then wheeled and saluted and walked off. But the guards still stayed in the camp, and an hour later the lieutenant marched them all off. We wasn't sure whether they had turned the electricity off, so we checked . . . we threw some wires on it and checked it, and they had turned the electricity off. So we went out and we took over the camp, but the Japs all got away.

Marcello: They all left. Did you ever have any thoughts of

revenge against any of the Japanese guards had you got hold of them?

Stowers: There was one that some of our guys got . . . when they got out of the camp, they just split up. Everybody was on their own. One man had been particularly brutal, and they brought him back up and had a rope around his neck. I guess they told you about that?

Marcello: No, they sure didn't. I didn't hear about that.

Stowers: They were going to hang him, you know. Some of the older hands talked them out of it, and so then the war was over.

Marcello: What were your feelings?

Stowers: Oh, very elated, and you can just imagine after four years of that. But we didn't know what do do. Dietz, the sergeant major, detailed me to go down into the town about three miles and get some food. I went down there, but everybody had eaten everything; there was nothing, no food. I found an old horse, swaybacked like the caricature, and I brought him back up, and we butchered him and had a stew, and we got a sack or two of green rice . . . and one thing that we did get, though, was the . . . the guards had left the radio. We kept messing around with it until we got an English station, and MacArthur's headquarters in

the Philippines was telling everybody that the Japanese had surrendered, and that prisoners-of-war were to stay where they were and mark the camps. We went around and found some lime that they just used to pour in the toilets, you know, the slit trenches. We put POW . . . several of the guys took off, and they finally got out. They couldn't wait. But most of us stayed there, and in about two days a bomber came over and three guys parachuted out of it, and they were a medical evacuation team--a young doctor and two corpsmen. They brought a whole lot of medicine, bandages . . . and the other bomber circled around and dropped some food. They radioed in that they wanted two more food drops. This is a sad thing. I'm sure that some of them told you about the guys getting killed by the food drops. The first airplanes came in low, and we had a drop zone marked off. We had whitewashed the rocks all around where the drop was to be. Some of the old-timers began yelling at them because we saw the other bomber coming in with the bomb bays open, and they kick out these drums . . . what they were were old gasoline drums that had been steamed out and with parachutes on them. They were packed with peaches and spam, and some of them would

break loose, you know . . .

Marcello: They were just like lethal weapons, I suppose.

Stowers: Seven of our boys were killed. A good friend of mine had the top of his head taken off by a can of peaches after four years in prison camp. Of course, these fellows that came down had a radio, and they radioed to Yokohama, and we had to march down about ten or fifteen miles. We took the guys that couldn't walk on stretchers. Then two airplanes picked us up down there on a dirt airstrip. They took us to Yokohama, and there was nothing like this greeting of prisoners-of-war this last time. I mean everybody shook our hands and was nice to us, but everybody was busy, and hundreds of ships were coming in, and thousands of occupation troops were coming in, and we were just a little side bit of the whole action. They put us in an old bombed out hangar the first night in Yokohama, and the next day they put us on an old freighter, and a typhoon hit.

Marcello: It was just one thing after another!

Stowers: You began to think that you were born to lose (chuckle)!

Marcello: Right.

Stowers: This freighter I was on tore loose about 300 feet of concrete dock and just heeled way over, and they gave

the word to abandon ship. I was in a compartment with about forty or fifty liberated prisoners. We weren't the only people on; a lot of people were getting off. I told them to belay that, hold on. Waves were breaking all over us, and guys were chopping hawsers and got it in an upright. The people who did abandon the ship, about half a dozen of them got drowned. Then we banged into another ship right there in Yokohama Bay, and it was a mess (chuckle)! But we finally got over to Guam, a field hospital there. Nobody, no band, no nothing! We were trucked out to these quonset huts, and we stayed there about two weeks. They gave us all kind of tests. From there, I went to the Naval Hospital at Honolulu. I was there about a week, and it was in Honolulu when I first called my family. There were no facilities at Guam for a long distance call, but Pearl Harbor had a modern hospital, and that's when my folks first knew that I was alive.

Marcello: In other words, you had not been able to send any mail or receive any mail the whole time.

Stowers: They had received nothing from me at all, and I received nothing from them in four years. So I called my family

and called my mother's home. I didn't know whether she was still living or not. She was pretty old. I got my sister and gradually over about fifteen minutes time I found out that one of my brothers had gone into the Marine Corps and was still in the Yokohama area, actually, at the time when I shipped. Two others were in Europe. I talked to my sisters and found out everybody was fine. I didn't know when I could get . . . nobody told you anything . . . when I would get back to the States. I didn't know when I would get back to the States.

Marcello: As you look back on your tenure as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as being the key to your survival?

Stowers: Discipline.

Marcello: Here again, when you speak of discipline, do you mean obeying orders, maintaining proper hygiene and sanitation.

Stowers: Discipline covers a vast field, and that means, as you said, hygiene, not drinking water unless it has been boiled even though you are just desperate for it, brushing your teeth with a brush you picked off a limb and chew it up and brush your teeth and massage your gums, conniving every little bit of food

you can, and stay as clean as you can. Then luck . . . you know, next to discipline is luck because germs are not too prone to care any about discipline. They just happen to hit you. They didn't in my case, and I believe about 60 per cent of the prisoners in the whole deal were killed or died in captivity. I believe that you'll find that. That means out of a hundred young men, say seventeen to thirty years of age, top physical condition, top physical shape, you know . . . and when you say discipline, you don't claim to be the only . . . you're not the only one that had any discipline. All had a certain amount of discipline, but some had more than others.

Marcello: What were your feelings toward the Japanese at the time of your release?

Stowers: Hated them . . . still do!

Marcello: I was going to ask you if time has healed the wounds at all.

Stowers: I'd like to say I'm not a racist, but to be honest about it I still hate them. I have a feeling that as long as they're equal or you have the top hand, they're the most ingratiating people you've ever seen . . . the most polite . . . once they get the upper hand on

you, they're the most brutal and unfeeling people . . . that's something I have never run into. Now most of us never realized that human beings could be so brutal to another human being, and we went through it, and so we distrust them. I think you'll find throughout the prisoners that we distrust them and have no use for them as a race. Even as individuals, I don't have a single Japanese friend, and I know that that's not fair. That's not fair at all. There is a whole generation in the thirty-some years since I was captured. Youngsters like my son were born many years since that. They don't know anything about it except what they read. But still as a race I just distrust them and I hate them.