

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
366

Interview with
Thomas A. Whitehead
February 2, 1977

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: open-End
Approved: Thomas A. Whitehead
(Signature)
Date: Feb 2, 1977

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Oral History Collection

Thomas Whitehead

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Thomas Whitehead for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 2, 1977, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Whitehead 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. Whitehead was a member of the 2nd Battalion of the 131st Field Artillery, United States Army, and was captured on the island of Java in March of 1942 and subsequently spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

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

Mr. Whitehead: I was born on the 23rd day of March, 1920, in Wichita Falls, Texas. I attended school in Texas in Wichita Falls; however, I did not graduate from high school. I'm a dropout.

After dropping out of school, I went to work in the oil field construction business for one of the local firms there in Wichita Falls and worked in the oil fields in construction work until we mobilized in 1940.

Marcello: Let's just back up a minute. When did you enter the National Guard?

Whitehead: I joined on the 7th of January, 1937, in the 131st Field Artillery, 2nd Battalion, D Battery, which was an artillery battery.

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

Whitehead: Well, all my friends--most of my friends that I knew and had been attending school with and knocking around with--were members. My next door neighbor was a member, and he talked me into it. Of course, at that time us kids in that area and in most of Texas were looking for a little extra. . . and the excitement that went with being in the Guard and making drills on Sunday, you know, and so forth. It didn't pay much, but we had a good time.

Marcello: From what I gather in talking to the members of that National Guard outfit, the National Guard was almost like a social club in that particular period.

Whitehead: Well, not per se. It had its social activities, but only among the members of the organization. As far as military bearing,

it had its military aspects of life. We knew we were training; we knew what we were there for. So as a social organization per se--no, due to the fact that each year we went to encampment and trained and improved our proficiency in our specialties. So, yes, we did socialize, but on a local level and not as a socialized organization--no.

Marcello: What was your particular function within this artillery unit?

Whitehead: Well, when I first went in, when I joined in January of '37, I was a tail gunner on a French 75-millimeter. Then I got promoted to assistant truck driver; then I got promoted on up to a driver. The reason why is any. . . as I said, in the construction field that I worked in as a young man, I drove trucks and worked on trucks, so they recognized my talents and put me in there. Then when we mobilized in 1940, I was classified as a mechanic. So with the background that I had and my work as a young man, that got me into the transportation field.

Marcello: Now sometime prior to 1940, the Guard unit did go on maneuvers in Louisiana, did it not?

Whitehead: Yes, we did. We went down there in 1939, I believe. In the year of '37, we went to Palacios; in the year '38, we were in Bullus; in '39, we went to Louisiana. Then we mobilized in '40 and went back to Louisiana again in 1941, I believe it was, just prior to going overseas.

Marcello: What sort of maneuvers took place when you were in Louisiana?

Whitehead: Well, it was a combat-type situation. They split the forces up. I don't remember, but I think I was in the "Blue" Army. They had the "Blue" and the "Red" Army down there in Louisiana both years that we were down there. This was sort of . . . it was really combat-oriented in training. The fighting forces was the "Blue" force against the "Red" force.

Marcello: Did you have sufficient equipment and so on with which to carry out the maneuvers?

Whitehead: Well, we did. Our particular unit did because we had our guns, and that was our business--field artillery. We utilized our guns. Now rumors came out of that that they were using broom sticks and certain other make-shift items of equipment for the infantry and some of the Army forces, but as far as our battalion--no. We had our regular equipment, our weapons and so forth, which was the 75-millimeter field artillery pieces.

Marcello: Evidently, the 131st Field Artillery compiled a pretty good performance record on those maneuvers.

Whitehead: Yes (chuckle). That's why they say we were picked to go to the Far East to help form this triangular division that they were going to form in the Philippines. We were to be joining that outfit based on our abilities and our performance while we were in the Louisiana maneuvers in 1941.

Marcello: Now it was in November of 1940 that the National Guard was mobilized, and you were subsequently sent to Camp Bowie in Brownwood for further training. In 1940 you were seventeen years old?

Whitehead: Correct.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast with current events and world affairs at that particular time?

Whitehead: As a matter of fact, I wasn't--just to be frank with you. We had. . . I had. You know, I say "we." I'll put my own personal experience in here. I had no knowledge of what was going on when we mobilized with exception that through the radio. . . and I didn't read papers at that time, but through media like the radio we were getting information about the situation in Europe--Britain and etc. So we knew that we were mobilizing for a purpose which we hoped would never put us overseas like the troops in 1918 in World War I.

Marcello: In other words, your eyes were turned toward Europe if you thought of the possibility of the United States getting into a war.

Whitehead: Absolutely! No one even considered, I don't believe, that there was war imminent between the United States and Japan at that time. Of course, at that time the President's word was out that we would mobilize for a year and do a year, and then

we'd be released. So that's about all the thought that was given to it by me and, I'm sure, by other people.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were seventeen years of age at that particular time. If you would have to estimate this, what would you say was the average age of the men in your unit?

Whitehead: Well, as I recall, we had many older fellows in the unit. My first sergeant was, oh, I'd say, twenty or twenty-five years older than myself. However, I would judge the age to be. . . estimate it at around twenty-four or twenty-five years of age as an aggregate estimate or average.

Marcello: In other words, you were one of the "kids" in the battery.

Whitehead: Really, yes.

Marcello: What happened when you got to Camp Bowie? In other words, what sort of training did you undergo there?

Whitehead: Well, I'd like to answer that by saying that before we pulled out of Wichita Falls and went to Brownwood, we more or less went through a basic training period there in Wichita Falls. We were mobilized; they put us in the auditorium. We were there somewhere six to eight weeks before we moved to Brownwood. Consequently, we had our hikes, our outings, our marches, our foot drills--sort of a basic training program.

Marcello: Which you had not had up to that time.

Whitehead: Other than our weekly drills and our yearly encampments of two weeks each year in '37, '38, and '39. Then after we arrived

in Brownwood, we sort of dropped the training program per se as a military unit and helped build the camp (chuckle). They moved the artillery in there first because we were mobile; we had trucks. So after we went in there and got situated and got into our location, then we began to haul the infantry troops in from within the state--the other units such as the 142nd and 141st Infantry, some of the medical units that was in the division. So our first duties to perform was to help build the camp--make the streets and the sidewalks and so forth on the camp--and then haul in the infantry. That's basically what we did until. . . then we got started on the regular routine program--military training program--and set up house just like military unit would and went from there.

Marcello: How seriously was the mobilization being taken at this stage? You mentioned earlier, of course, that the mobilization was to be for a year, and you fully expected to be home after a year.

Whitehead: Well, really, we didn't expect to be home after a year. We was only hoping that (chuckle) maybe the year would do it. But after we got to Brownwood, the situation changed, and then we knew that it would last longer. I did. I realized it would be longer than that. So we went from there, and even though the days were full. . . and being in the transportation field

and automotive maintenance, we had a heavy workload, because we'd received new trucks; we'd gotten brand new combat-type vehicles; each one of them had to be serviced. So we were pretty well loaded with work activity.

Marcello: Now it was during this period, was it not, that the Army divisions were reorganized from the old square divisions into the triangular divisions. What do you recall about this process, and how did it affect the 131st Field Artillery, the 2nd Battalion in particular?

Whitehead: Well, to the best of my knowledge, there was no reorganization taking place until after November 11, 1941, when we left Brownwood. Up to this point we remained intact as a division, which they classified as the square division. . . meaning to me, a square division had all of the elements of a combat unit. It had infantry, artillery, cavalry--both mechanized and horse--the Corps of Engineers, etc. Now that was a square division, as I understood it at that time and later on.

As far as experience with the triangular division, I never had any. I don't even know what the make-up of a triangular division would be. This was the word that we got--that we were going overseas to form a triangular division in the Philippines. So actually, my experience between the square division and the triangular division--I had none.

Marcello: But the reorganization. . .

Whitehead: I have only impressions, and my impressions were that the triangular division cut down on the number of men and reduced certain support elements to a division of fighting men. I would assume that it would reduce it down to infantry and artillery.

Marcello: But the reorganization did affect you to the extent that it was responsible for your being separated from the 36th Division and ultimately sent overseas.

Whitehead: That's true. That's true. Backing up to what we was talking about while ago, we were picked as a sort of . . . one of the best French 75-millimeter of artillery in the Louisiana maneuvers. That gave us, shall I say, the honor of being a battalion of artillery to be picked to go form a triangular division in defense of the Philippines.

Marcello: I'm sure as you look back upon it, you wish that they had given that honor to somebody else. On the other hand, maybe you wouldn't wish that honor on anybody.

Whithead: In a way yes, and in way no--being as I'm a survivor of what we went through in subsequent years. I can't discount the experiences I had as adding to my broad bank of knowledge. Had I not been there with the unit, I would have not experienced it. However, I don't wish this same experience on anybody else.

Marcello: When did you leave Camp Bowie for your ultimate destination, which was known as PLUM at that particular time?

Whitehead: It was the morning of November 11, 1941--Armistice Day. I'll never forget that day in particular. We had worked all during the night of the 10th up until--the fact of the matter is early into the morning of the 11th--getting our equipment loaded on the trains and flat cars and etc. and getting ready to depart Brownwood on that particular morning.

Marcello: What was the speculation running throughout the unit? Surely you were wondering what PLUM meant.

Whitehead: Yes, I'm sure all of us did. And, of course (chuckle), there was all types of speculation in what it meant; what the destination would be; where we were going. But I think most of us had the feeling that we were going to the Pacific due to the fact that we knew that we were going to San Francisco for subsequent shipment.

Marcello: Is this when they also gave the married men the option of remaining behind? Now they did give the married men this option in here someplace, did they not?

Whitehead: Okay. Now we're going to back up a little bit. Before our departure date, we had a reorganization between the two battalions in the 131st--we had a 1st Battalion and a 2nd Battalion. So we had a reorganization. . . realignment, not reorganization

per se, because the name of the units or number of the units didn't change. It was just a switch of personnel--a realignment of personnel. That took place immediately after returning from the Louisiana maneuvers to bring the 2nd Battalion up to full strength and insure that all policies had been met with regard to personnel assignments going with the unit.

Yes, some of the married people. . . and the fact of the matter is this friend of mine that lived next door to me, that got me to sign up in the National Guard, was a married man with a child. He was over the age of twenty-six, and he was relieved and let out. Now those that were transferred out of the 2nd Battalion into the 1st Battalion--I don't have any idea of how many of those people were relieved under these policies of marital status, age status, etc. So we did have married people to go with us. It was their own choosing. I'm sure of this. They just didn't have a blanket policy to relieve all married men, because our officers--Clyde Fillmore for one, who wrote the book P.O.W.; my individual battery commander, Clark Taylor--they were both married people. My own immediate sergeant boss, who was the first class NCO of the automotive maintenance shop--he was in maintenance--was also a married man. So the policy of relieving married people was not widespread. I assume that these people could

have stayed behind or gotten out or transferred had they so desired. I don't know.

Marcello: Where did the replacements come from?

Whitehead: We had draftees. Now while we were in Brownwood in our training period, draftees were brought in--drafted, brought in, and assigned to both battalions--1st and 2nd Battalions. But the regimental people--that's officials in regimental headquarters--trained them as a regimental unit. I recall they done their basic training--their foot drills and etc., learning basic military courtesy and etc.--right there at Brownwood within the regimental area prior to being assigned to any one of the batteries within the battalion. So we had many draftees in the 2nd Battalion; some went to the 1st Battalion, which ultimately went in the division to Europe and landed in Normandy.

Marcello: Was there much of an adjustment taking place here? In other words, I would assume that originally everybody knew everybody else in the battery. Then you have these draftees coming in and. . . I guess what I'm saying is, was there any friction involved before they actually got assimilated into the unit?

Whitehead: The best I recall, when they were drafted, they were already assigned to a unit. Now there was a bit of a separation. . . during their training, they were already assigned to the

batteries. So in a situation that we had, it wasn't hard to get acquainted with these draftees because they were living within the batteries among the other men. They just wouldn't go to their assigned duty stations like we would--the older troops, the original troops. They would, instead, go out to their training sessions everyday. Then when they finished their training, then they picked up a normal duty right within the sections within the battery. So there wasn't all that separation; we didn't have a separate area for the trainees, the draftees. No, they were assigned right to the batteries, but they would go to do their training while the rest of us went and carried on the normal duties of a fully organized military unit.

Marcello: Okay, so you get to San Francisco, and you board the transport Republic. Describe the Republic and then talk a little bit about the first leg of that voyage to the Hawaiian Islands. From the physical standpoint, how would you describe the Republic?

Whitehead: Repulsive, to sum it up in one word! This is my first experience with riding a ship, a boat, a tub, or what-have-you. I recall the day we boarded it. They had fish and cabbage, I believe it was. I know they had cabbage. I never was a connoisseur of cabbage in any form, even when I was a youngster

growing up during the Depression and having to live the way we did and eat what we had to eat. So I went down to the galley, and I had a big feed. We sailed. . . I believe it was a little lunch or sometime in that area. Of course, those folks that have experienced the ground swells immediately leaving the Golden Gate will know what I'm talking about; they'll understand it, because they're tremendous. Well, this ship at an eight knots. . . and I don't think we got up to that speed until we got on out into the Pacific. That ship just turned me every way in the world--upside down. Well, I got sick, and I'll have to say I stayed sick for the whole journey. I think it was thirty-seven days we lived on that thing. I wasn't too happy with the United States Navy, to say the least. As I say, it was my first experience and my first experience, also, with the seasickness, and I've been seasick ever since.

Marcello: (Chuckle) Okay, you finally get to the Hawaiian Islands. Were you one of the fortunate ones to get a little time ashore here?

Whitehead: Yes, I got four hours' shore leave. . . little good it did. I didn't get to see much.

Marcello: I had no money. I think I had thirty-five or forty cents in my pocket. But myself and two other fellows--we walked uptown --we went uptown. You couldn't see anything; you couldn't

visit because the Military Police and Shore Patrol were patrolling in three's. Everytime you'd stop on the corner to look up or down the street to see which way you wanted to go, you got prodded with a club and told, "Move on, soldier! Don't stand here!" So we didn't get too overly excited about the place at the time because of the situation and circumstances . . . and it was at night so you couldn't tell too much about where you were or what it was. All you knew was that you was in Honolulu.

Marcello: Did you sense any tensions or anything of this nature that might give some indication of a forthcoming war with Japan while you were here in the City of Honolulu?

Whitehead: This is when I really began to think about where I was, why I was there, and where my ultimate destination may be. Even though I was not a high school graduate, and had very little training in this area of wartime or combat-type situations--actual--I began to think about why these people were so concerned there in Honolulu. Not only did you see the Military Police walking the streets in three's, they also had jeeps, weapons carriers running around the streets in Honolulu with .50-caliber machine guns. However, at the time, we did not know. . . now I'm not too sure of this fact, but we learned later that while we were there, Honolulu was under martial law.

Now whether this is true or not, I haven't studied the history books to find out if that's true. You hear all kinds of stories and then many documentaries on the television to this affect, so I assume it to be correct. But after we went back aboard the ship, this is when I sat down and began to think about where I was, what I was doing there, and as I say, what was our ultimate destination.

Marcello: Okay, so you leave Honolulu on the next leg of your journey, and you're outside Honolulu when you receive the news of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. Describe where you were and how the news was relayed to you at that time, and then you might talk a little bit about your reactions to what had taken place at Pearl Harbor.

Whitehead: Well, to the best of my recollection, we were six or seven days out of Pearl Harbor about this time.

Marcello: Had you picked up your escort by this time?

Whitehead: Yes, sir. Yes, sir, to the best of my knowledge, we had.

Marcello: Did you get it in Honolulu?

Whitehead: I believe we picked it up at Honolulu, yes, sir. Sure do.

Marcello: What were the ships in that escort or in that convoy, maybe we should call it?

Whitehead: I believe we had a round-stern cruiser, which was the Pensacola: we had a small frigate ship--I don't know the name of it--and

one other. I think there were four ships in the convoy. Now I didn't become aware, that I recall, of having a gunship such as the Pensacola in the convoy until, oh, when we were out of Honolulu five or six--five days anyway. But I've been told that the convoy formed at that time. I think it was on the fifth day that we could see the Pensacola on the horizon, so we knew we had gunship--warship--in our convoy.

Marcello: Okay, before I interrupted you with that particular question, we had been talking about your getting word of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and your reactions to it, so why don't you continue that particular episode.

Whitehead: All right. I don't remember the hour of the day. Up until this time, we had just an open ship. What I mean by "open ship" is that there were no blackouts, no curtains over the doors; it was just like a pleasure cruise that we were on. Our guns were all below deck; no ammunition; no gun positions being manned on the ship. So it was like a pleasure cruise. Then at the hour--and I believe it was late in the afternoon; I could be wrong about this--the word came over the PA system of the ship. There was a short, brief notice that a state of war exists between the United States and Japan. Exists-- didn't say it happened but just said it exists. At that time we didn't even know about the bombing of Pearl Harbor; they

didn't put out this information. Then they went on to say what would happen aboard the ship. The ship would be darkened after dark; and they passed out, I think, a pamphlet telling us about the smoking lamp--when it'd be lit and how, you know, and that you'd get the word over the PA system.

It so happened aboard the ship, we had. . . Bill Taggert. Now Bill Taggert was a pastor of a little Lamar Baptist Mission Church, which was right around the corner from where I lived. Bill was aboard the ship, which I didn't know at this time. He was with an aviation battalion--aviation engineer battalion. Well, he looked up myself and another fellow--Hal Walling. Hal and I both attended his little Baptist mission right there next door. Bill more or less filled us in on what was going on, and that's how we began to put two and two together to make four and to understand what did exist and what was happening. Of course, my reactions, again, was similar to those back, as I said, in Honolulu. I stopped to think about where I was, why I was there, and where I was going, and what could happen or what may happen. So that's the. . . at that time--that point in time--is the only things that I can remember.

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

Whitehead: You know, I really never thought about what the Japanese were like or what type of individuals they were at that time. I

didn't give it a thought; it didn't even cross my mind. Because I still wasn't convinced that Japan was a strong enough nation to wage a war against the United States, really. So I didn't give the people any consideration of what type of people they were, you know, I don't believe. I may have and don't recall it today.

Marcello: Were most of you fairly confident that the United States would handle Japan in relatively a short period of time?

Whitehead: I think I would have answered to that question in the affirmative if I would have been asked at that time. And I may have been, but I don't recall; but I'm sure I would have.

Marcello: One of the members of the unit was Frank Fujita, a Japanese-American. Did you know him at that particular time?

Whitehead: Yes, I knew Frank at that time.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the men toward Frank as a result of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor?

Whitehead: I really don't know because I wasn't that close to Frank, even though I knew Frank. I don't know what some of the reactions were. I don't recall having any reactions toward Frank or his nationality at the time. I just don't have any impressions of what maybe some of the other people thought.

Marcello: Okay, your next stop on this journey is the Fiji Islands. What happens at the Fiji Islands? By this time, I gather, you were diverted a little bit off the original path.

Whitehead: Yes, we were diverted! The next real information we got was a couple of days later, I believe--about the 9th of December. We could tell that we had a diversion in course because of the sunset and the sunrise. We knew that instead of going toward the sunset, we were going south. So we knew we had a diversion in route. Then the next thing we knew, here we're going to cross the International Date Line, so we had this. . . what did the Navy call it?

Marcello: It was an initiation ceremony.

Whitehead: It's an initiation ceremony for crossing the International Date Line and the equator--Davy Jones' locker and that sort of thing--an old tradition in the Navy, I understand. So we went through this and then all of us were initiated--all of us polywogs. I think that's what they called us. . . land-lubbers and so forth. Then we did pull into the Fijis to take on supplies and fresh water. None of the troops, with exception of the supply officer, the pay officers, and maybe the chaplain and some of the doctors, disembarked and went ashore. The rest of us remained aboard ship.

Marcello: In the meantime--that is, after you had received the word about the Pearl Harbor attack--what sort of activities did you undergo aboard the ship, or was it just business as usual?

Whitehead: Well, my activities aboard the ship, as I said, were limited from the time we were four hours out from under that Golden

Gate Bridge. I was sick. They assigned us all one of those hammocks in the hold. Well, to this day, the best I recall, I never spent more than fifteen minutes in that hammock. I was always dodging the water hoses and the deck men cleaning up the deck outside. I'd find a hole in a corner and cuddle up. Honest to goodness, it's the most severe sickness I ever had in my life! To me it was just . . . again, I was so sick that there's a lot of things I didn't think about.

Marcello: Okay, so you get into Brisbane, Australia, on December 21, 1941.

Whitehead: I believe that's the date, yes.

Marcello: Describe what happens at this point.

Whitehead: Well, I recall the first exciting thing that happened. We started up this river there at Brisbane, and they were going to turn this Republic around and got it stuck from bank to bank. That's one of the most exciting things I recall in our first entry into Australia. They had to turn it around to dock it. Well, they finally "jig-sawed" and "see-hawed" and got enough tugs and equipment to turn this thing around and then backed us in there and docked us. Well, of course, everybody, I think, at that time, including myself, we wanted off of that dude. It took about five or six hours before anybody ever started down the gangplank to disembark.

Then the next thing that happened was the Australians provided the transportation and took us all out to a race-track called Ascot. We set up tents and et centera, et cetera. Then my duty became back to the ship to unload the ship. All of us people involved with transportation, our duty was to off-load the ship of our equipment and get it on the dockside. So I spent most of my time down at the dock after we docked. I would only go to the camp for dinner--for eating--mealtime and that sort of thing.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you receive from the local population there at Brisbane?

Whitehead: Well, the best I recall, our reception was favorable. I don't recall no incidents of animosity on the part of the Australians. They accepted us with open arms and really welcomed us. I think they realized what was going on more so than us bunch of troops on that Republic.

Marcello: Were you one of the lucky ones who got invited out for Christmas dinner at one of the Australian homes?

Whitehead: No, I didn't. I ate mutton at one of our Australian mess halls!

Marcello: You say that with a certain amount of disgust.

Whitehead: Yes, because it took me about three days after eating that mutton to get my jaws unlocked! Oh, I don't know that it's all that bad; it just so happens that I think anybody recalls

eating in a military mess or a mess hall and that the food is not always at its peak in heat. So mutton is awful hard to get through when it's cold.

Marcello: I would assume that the unit really didn't undergo any training while it was here at Brisbane. It was more or less a case of waiting until transportation was provided to take you on the next leg of your journey.

Whitehead: I think it was a case of re-evaluation from the War Department as to what they were really going to do. It was a waiting period, yes. I do know that the Republic had already been recalled. That's the reason why we were ordered to off-load it. . . get our equipment off of it. The Republic had been recalled; it was to make a return trip back to the States, and I think we were in a waiting period of awaiting orders as to what to do with the unit.

Marcello: Okay, so you next board the Dutch ship, the Bloemfontein, sometime after Christmas of 1941. Describe what the Bloemfontein was like, or maybe I should say, contrast it with the USS Republic.

Whitehead: In size, it was a much smaller ship; in speed, it was a much faster ship. I might say right here that I spent Christmas Day loading the Bloemfontein, and that's the reason I didn't get invited out to dinner. Because our duties were, as I said, to handle our equipment; all of our mobile equipment had

to be handled, and we had to handle it. The longshoremen-- the Australian longshoremen--they handled some of the supplies aboard that went from off of one ship to the other. But all of us people in the automotive maintenance and transportation were down at the dockside working most of the time handling our transportation equipment, our guns, and et cetera. So we loaded, then. . . during Christmas we were loading the ship, getting our equipment ready to load, and et cetera, et cetera.

Then when the final call came to board for movement. . . now I don't remember exactly what day that was--somewhere around the 20th or 21st. Maybe we loaded that morning and pulled out that afternoon, but I'm not quite sure of the times and dates. We left Brisbane, then, and headed north. I don't remember any of those ship channels, lanes, and et cetera. I understand we went out by the Barrier Reef off the east coast of Australia and on up toward the Dutch East Indies.

Marcello: Now by this time, did you know that you were going to the Dutch East Indies? You must have guessed it since you were on a Dutch ship.

Whitehead: Yes, we had word that we were going to the Dutch East Indies. We didn't know what particular island, and I think there's what--five islands in that group? Bali, Timor, Java, Sumatra, and another one--but we didn't know which one was the final destination.

Marcello: I think you had a submarine scare somewhere along in here, did you not?

Whitehead: Yes, we did but I don't recall it. The stories are that we did have one.

Marcello: Were you still battling seasickness?

Whitehead: I was still battling seasickness.

Marcello: (Chuckle) In fact, you were probably almost wishing for a torpedo attack to get you out of your misery (chuckle).

Whitehead: Well, (chuckle) yes, in a way; but I'm glad it didn't happen.

Marcello: Okay, so you pull into Surabaja, Java. What happens at that point?

Whitehead: Well, we docked in Surabaja.

Marcello: And this is about January 11, 1942?

Whitehead: Somewhere around the 11th, yes--10th or 11th of January, 1942. Again, having the type of job that I had, I had to off-load the power equipment, mobile equipment, automotive equipment--that's what I'm trying to say--and get ready to move our troops wherever they were going. At this time, I didn't even know myself--I'm sure I did but I don't recall it--where we were going from there. But all of us fellows got busy, and it was not only the automotive people or the transportation type-people. Other people were involved in off-loading this equipment, getting it ready to move and transport our people. We weren't

the only ones. A lot of people already. . . they had a train and coaches setting out there ready for them to go. So the rest of that day and the next day we spend off-loading. We slept on the ship--stayed on the ship--and off-loaded the ship before I ever went up to our destination, which was Malang, Java--an air base up there.

Marcello: Now you were actually not in Malang but at a base outside of Malang.

Whitehead: It was outside of Malang, and I can't recall the name of that air base.

Marcello: Singosari, wasn't it?

Whitehead: Singosari. Yes, that's it--Singosari.

Marcello: A lot of these men were impressed by the tremendous number of people they saw concentrated in a very small area. Did this impress you at the time? I'm referring now to the overall population of Java.

Whitehead: Yes. . . of course, it didn't impress me all that much. I think what did impress me most of all was that here we were on an island with people that we didn't know, and the lifestyles they lived--the way they lived--impressed me more than the total population on such a small island. I'm talking about the lifestyles of the way they washed their clothes, the type of toilet facilities they had, the way they ate, and et cetera. . .

the type of transportation they used. This fascinated me and had an impression on me more than, say, 400,000 people in such a small area of land mass.

Marcello: Describe what Singosari looked like from a physical standpoint when you got there.

Whitehead: Well, the best I recall, it was just an airstrip with a grass-dirt runway. It had one big hangar on one side of the field, and in the living area where we were was a set of barracks. Well, I say a set of barracks--a group of buildings that was referred as a barracks area, which is where we were moved into and given a stall and a spot on the floor to stuff our mattress sacks with hay and pile up and sleep awhile. It didn't impress me as being a place or a strip--airstrip--large enough to handle anything larger than a old T-6 (chuckle), which I was familiar with at that time. Well, the T-6's weren't too old at that time. That's about the impression I got from it. However, once I looked out there and saw those B-17's setting on the ground, then I wondered how they got there, because the airstrip did look short and not too conducive to handle a B-17 bomber. I wasn't all that familiar with the B-17 bomber, but I knew it was a larger airplane; I knew it was a four-engine airplane; and I knew that it would take a lot of runway to handle it.

Marcello: Now had the remnants of the 6th, 7th, and 19th Bomb Groups already arrived by the time your unit got to Singosari, or did they come after you were there?

Whitehead: Well, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But I know there was B-17's . . . I know there was a B-17 setting on that runway when we arrived at Singosari--at least one.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get from the Dutch after you arrived there? I assume that there were Dutch personnel on the base.

Whitehead: Yes, but I wasn't in contact with them that much to get an impression of what our reception was.

Marcello: What did the unit do after it got to Singosari? What was its function?

Whitehead: Support the airplanes, support the aircraft. They immediately assigned people to go over and start working on these B-17's. We had one B-24 there that I cranked bombs in. They were loading, gassing, servicing the airplanes. That was their primary function. Of course, there were other supply functions that had to be carried out, other administrative-type duties.

I recall one incident there where we had, oh, several thousand cases of canned milk that we spent all day loading up there and hauling off to the jungles. I think that was later in the program after we had been there several weeks, but I

remember we did work hard all day loading cases of canned milk on those trucks and hauling it up into the jungle somewhere.

Marcello: Did you ever have the opportunity to go into Malang for a liberty or anything of that nature?

Whitehead: Yes, I went in a couple of nights. I went into a local bar down there and had a few drinks. But other than that, no. We had a lot of work to do.

Marcello: Did you notice any hostility on the part of the local native population?

Whitehead: Not that I recall. Not that I recall.

Marcello: Okay, sometime in February--approximately around February 5, 1942--the base experiences its first air raid. Describe that particular incident from your personal standpoint.

Whitehead: What I recall at this time--we'd had this flight of airplanes that come in from the north. Now we'd been mounting on our trucks .50-caliber machine gun stands and the guns. These airplanes come in from the north--they were at a pretty high altitude--escorted by fighters. I believe this was the first one we had. Of course, we'd already dug some trenches out behind the buildings over there. The Dutch had a pretty good alert system--aircraft warning system--so the sirens went off, and we knew what it was. So we all headed for these trenches. Some of the boys jumped on the trucks and manned the guns, if they had ammunition.

I jumped in a big hole out there with another fellow who manned a Browning Automatic--a fellow by the name of "Humpy" Campbell. I think his name was Leonard; we called him "Humpy." Of course, "Humpy" was trying to knock down some of these fighter planes--I don't think there was more than four or five fighters escorting that group of bombers. Well, then I was looking right straight up at these bombers when they dropped it, and it was just a mass blanket bombing; they just dropped them all at one time. They fell east of us, I think it was--east of us a few miles. They missed the runway; they missed the whole base. The excitement was the gunners trying to knock down these fighters. I don't think they hit any of them.

Marcello: Did the fighters strafe the base at all during this first raid?

Whitehead: Yes, they did. They did. They done more damage than the bombs because the bombs, as I said, fell a considerable distance--just how far I don't recall. But the fighters did strafe the base.

Marcello: What sort of emotions or feelings did you have being under this initial air attack?

Whitehead: Well, I reflected back to my thoughts, as I said, while I was in Honolulu. Then I began to realize where I was, why I was there; and it all came around. We knew then that we were in war. Well, we knew before then, but now we'd begun to experience a combat situation.

Marcello: Was it during this period that the artillery pieces were elevated in such a manner that they hoped to use them as antiaircraft pieces?

Whitehead: Yes, they were. This did happen; however, I wasn't too aware of it because that wasn't my job. My job was strictly working on the vehicles and keeping them in shape, so I wasn't too much aware of what was going on in the firing sections of the firing batteries. See, I was in Service Battery, which separated me from the firing batteries. So just what was happening and preparations with the guns, I wasn't too aware of. I might add--backing up--before we left San Francisco, we were given the new split-trail 75's. So I don't think they would have had. . . I don't think they could have elevated these old box-trail 75's like they did handle the split-trail 75's. . . which they did try to make antiaircraft guns out of them. That's correct.

Marcello: With what frequency did these air attacks occur?

Whitehead: Oh, mercy!

Marcello: In other words, how many of them were there?

Whitehead: The best I recall, there were only three attacks--only three--and one of them I remember. They came from a different direction, and I didn't stand still by staying on that base. I was headed off down a back road and just run as hard as I

could run to get out of the line of the target. I was completely exhausted by the time I thought they was about ready to release their bombs, and, of course, I fell in the ditch along with several others that was right with me in the same group. I think I ran the 100 yard dash in about 9.2 seconds that day (chuckle). It wasn't that fast, but, anyway, I recall just falling in this ditch and looking straight up. Again, I saw them drop their bombs right out of the . . and it looked like if you would stand on a roof of a tall building and drop a handful of these little discs that they use in putting on siding or . . . just a glitter . . . it looked like a handful of quarters, you know, when the sun caught them. Then, of course, when I saw them coming getting closer, why, naturally I could only do but one thing, and that's cover my eyes and stick my head in the mud and say a little prayer.

Marcello: I assume that your artillery pieces weren't very effective as antiaircraft weapons.

Whitehead: You'd have to assume this due to the fact that I don't think they knocked any down (chuckle). So it would have to be assumed that they weren't very effective.

Marcello: How much damage did these raids do to the base itself?

Whitehead: Well, in that one raid they did manage to hit the base. Again, I can't recall if that raid was supported with fighter

aircraft, but we did get some damage over on the strip, lost a few airplanes. But just how much damage, I don't . . . I'm sure it was assessed, but I didn't assess it in my own mind.

Marcello: Now on February 27, 1942, the bomb groups leave Singosari and are ordered to Australia. Describe this particular event. If I can be more specific, what effect did those bombers' leaving have upon the morale of the troops that had to remain behind?

Whitehead: I don't know how it affected the majority, and the fact of the matter is that I don't think I gave a second thought to it. I wasn't in the flight business--Air Corps. I think I concentrated my thinking strictly to my job at hand--what I was supposed to do. Of course, I was told what to do. I don't think I gave it a second thought. I did hear rumors later that the commander of that aircraft unit over there, which was Colonel . . . well, I'll recall his name later. He offered to take his men out and come back and get us, but that's a rumor. I have nothing to substantiate that at all. It's just word of mouth that he offered to come back in, liberate us all, and fly us back to Australia. So I didn't give too much consideration to the airplanes leaving, the aircraft people leaving . . . that I recall.

Marcello: Now sometime in early March, the 131st Field Artillery left the base, also.

Whitehead: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do when you left?

Whitehead: Well, after the planes left, we began to prepare for movement. I assumed--and I still assume--that we'd change commands, which later was verified. I say I still assume--it was later verified that we were put under the control of the Dutch. Rumors had it that the Japanese had this big convoy set up out there in the Indian Ocean; they were expecting a strike on the island; and we were beginning now to fall into the role of doing what we were there for--acting as an artillery unit. So we began to re-group, get our forces together, and prepare to move out and move into the front lines or back up the infantry on Java, which happened to be out on the west end of the island.

Marcello: Okay, describe what happened when you got out on the west end of the island. What activities took place there?

Whitehead: Well, as I recall, we traveled two or three nights, and we traveled at night just like we did when we was on the Louisiana maneuvers. We traveled at night with the lights off--no lights--and traveled in convoy a couple of nights getting out to the west end of the island. Our first stop

in getting into a gun position or setting up in a field position to serve as an artillery unit was in a little place . . . and we called it the "rubber plantation," and I don't have any idea what the name of the closest town was. We were there for a couple or three days. . . a couple of days. Don't recall engaging in any combat at the time at all. Again, I wasn't too close to the firing batteries. I did know that we only had two firing batteries with us because E Battery had separated; they went back to Surabaya, I think, so we only had D and F Batteries with us.

Marcello: Well, I assume you did not remain in static position. You were moving around quite a bit during this period.

Whitehead: No, I don't recall moving around too much. I think we took a good direct line when we left Singosari for where we were going. I don't think we maneuvered too much. Of course, all the movement was at night--most of it--and I think we went on a pretty direct course from when we left the Malang area and went west up the island. Now I don't think there was too much maneuvering around done, as I recall.

Marcello: Okay, on March 9, 1942, the word comes down that the island and all of the military forces are to surrender. You really hadn't had a whole lot of combat against the Japanese, actually. What was the reaction when word came down that you were to surrender?

Whitehead: Well, I like to recall that date as March 8th rather than March 9th. We were in this rubber plantation. . . again, backing up and saying where we were located, we were in this rubber plantation. The word did filter down through our commander--we had a formation--and he told us that the island itself. . . and that we were not prisoners of the Japanese, but before going into their control, we were going to destroy a certain amount of our war-making or fighting capabilities--all of our trucks, all our guns. We pushed most of our guns over a big cliff down there next to a river within two miles of there. I recall destroying some of the vehicles and some trucks by draining the oil and letting them run until the engine just konked out on them. Several of the trucks with loaded ammunition was run over the cliff; I didn't witness any of them but got word of it later. So with exception of a few of the guns, most of our rifles and small arms were destroyed. Now they moved us, then--we had to keep enough trucks to move the body of people--the mass of people--and they moved us to a place, I think, right outside of Garoet to a race-track. This is where we assembled the guns; we assembled the remaining vehicles we had; and we stacked our rifles.

Marcello: What sort of emotions or feelings did you have when you were told that you were to surrender?

Whitehead: I really can't recall any significant emotions or feelings that I had. It was at this time, I guess. . . we were so tired--I was--because we were getting very little sleep--a few days there between the time we left Singosari and the date of the 8th of March. I think we were just ready to--I was, I believe, if I recall right--just ready to lay down and rest awhile.

Marcello: Also, we're talking about you as an eighteen-year-old at this time.

Whitehead: Well, yes. . . well, a nineteen-year-old. I think it was just a matter of my impression--I mean, my feelings--at that time was that I just wanted to rest awhile, you know, the best I recall.

Marcello: Had you heard the rumors that the Japanese didn't take any prisoners? Were you apprehensive about what would happen to you?

Whitehead: I don't recall that. Yes, it has been said that that was their feeling--that they didn't take prisoners. But I don't recall what my reactions were when I heard this. I just don't recall.

Marcello: Okay, what happened after you got to the racetrack and you had stacked your arms and so on and so forth? What happened at that point?

Whitehead: Well, we were mustered into units, and here come a band, a group. . . well, I guess you could call them a . . . a party of

Japanese to accept the surrender and et cetera, et cetera.

Marcello: Were these the first Japanese that you had actually seen?

Whitehead: The first Japanese I'd actually seen, yes.

Marcello: What was your impression of them?

Whitehead: Well (chuckle). . . it wasn't good. But then I don't recall specifically my impressions with exception of . . . I think I called them 'little yellow bastards' just like everybody else.

Marcello: What did they look like in terms of their uniforms and so on?

Whitehead: Ragged; shaggy; ill-dressed; ill-equipped. That's the impression I got of them. I might have gotten a different impression if I could have understood their lingo. . . their language. But I guess that about sizes up my impression of them.

Marcello: What did they do?

Whitehead: They just took roll call and at that time advised our commanders where to go from there and what to do from there. At that time, we were just sleeping wherever we could sleep; we had no bedrolls, no nothing, with exception of our personal gear--what we had--and we'd just bed down anywhere. I believe it was later in the afternoon that they moved us to an area which we called the "bamboo road," which wasn't too far from this racetrack.

Marcello: Now did you ever give any thoughts to 'heading for the hills?'

Whitehead: Yes, I sure did. But I thought that my security and my chances of surviving or getting anywhere was en masse. Now that does impress on me.

Marcello: In other words, there was comfort in numbers, so far as you were concerned.

Whitehead: There was comfort in numbers, as far as I was concerned, yes. I knew that. . . I didn't know anything about Java; I didn't know that much about the people; I didn't know that much about where the Japanese may be. With this saying held over our head about. . . I mean, this saying about they didn't take prisoners. . . I had no arms; I had no food. I felt more comfortable in numbers. So I did not try; I didn't make a move. I just stayed with the group.

Marcello: Okay, so you were sent to this area that you labeled the "bamboo road."

Whitehead: Yes.

Marcello: What happened there?

Whitehead: Well, we just laid around. I remember that for several days we just laid around there along this road. We had our trucks lined up along this road, and we were living in and around them over in the bamboo area, trying to be as comfortable as we could with what we had. We were still living on our rations that we had at this time.

Marcello: I gather that the Japanese were not harassing you at all.

Whitehead: Not at this time, no, sir. . . that I recall. No, sir, they sure weren't.

- Marcello: Are you still sitting around and speculating as to what your fate is going to be?
- Whitehead: Yes, at this point in time, now you begin to wonder where you go from here. What do you do next? Well, it was a short few days. They told us what they wanted us to do. We all lined up in that road and marched to a local train station. We left the trucks; we left all. . . you know. We marched into this train station, and right there's where we engaged, I think, our first group of guards.
- Marcello: What happened there at the train station?
- Whitehead: They crowded us and pushed us and shoved us on these coaches and packed us in there just as tight as they could get us. And up the island farther we went, or down the island back toward the coast. That's when they took us into Batavia.
- Marcello: What did you do when you got to Batavia?
- Whitehead: Well, we off-loaded and marched out to this camp, which is out there close to the dock area. I think they called it. . . Tanjong Priok--that was the name of it. Of course, then, when we walked through that gate and went behind that barbed wire, that's our first experience of going behind barbed wire.
- Marcello: Now you actually didn't stay there at Tanjong Priok too long, did you?
- Whitehead: Well, the best I recall, we was there three or four weeks.

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

Whitehead: Well, some of us did nothing outside; some of us went on working parties. I went out on one working party while I was there, and I went down to the docks and off-loaded a ship that was laden with quinine and cheese.

Marcello: Describe what that cheese was like?

Whitehead: Well, it was rotten (chuckle). No. . . yes, it was. It had been aboard this ship, and, of course, I guess the humidity and the heat in that hold had caused it to . . . not spoil, because the British and the Australians say cheese won't spoil; it'll get old but it won't spoil. They're right, really. It had been in that hold so long that I guess the flies had been on it and maggots had set in. Of course, they hauled a big bunch of it--several hundred pounds of it--over to the mess hall there. One Englishman. . . I think he was a mess officer in the camp there. That's before we set up our own kitchens. When we went in there, the British was doing the cooking. The British and Australians was already in this camp.

Marcello: There were already Australians and British in this camp.

Whitehead: We were bringing our food over from their kitchen over into our area and feeding us. That's the first experience we had of eating rice, also.

Marcello: You might describe that experience.

Whitehead: It was mushy. Of course, I don't recall eating too much rice before I went into the service or before I got to that point in my life. . . maybe a little rice pudding. But as I recall, the first rice was just a mushy, brown rice. It didn't even have the husks off of it; it wasn't polished. It was pretty hard to bear. Some of the fellows. . . and I think I did, too. I stood off from it until I got hungry. Then I had to have some nourishment, so I began to eat it.

Marcello: Was the rice wormy at this particular time yet?

Whitehead: Well, yes. Yes, the rice even had worms in it at this time. That's another reason, you know, several of us--me, in particular--stood away from it for awhile.

Marcello: How did you get rid of the worms?

Whitehead: Well, you picked around them. . . or ate them. It so happened that in that one particular working party I went on, I got pretty hungry. I don't recall eating any of that cheese we off-loaded at that time, because it looked so rotten and sour. But when I come in that night, I was ready to eat, and it didn't make any difference. Well, of course, it was after dark; we had no lights. So what they were dishing out, I ate.

Marcello: In other words, even at this early stage, that is, here at Tanjong Priok, you were already on short rations.

Whitehead: Yes. Oh, yes, yes. Because we had . . . as I said, that was our first encounter with the Japanese diet or the Japanese food.

Marcello: How often were you getting fed, and what were you getting besides rice?

Whitehead: You know, I just don't remember, with exception of some. . . watery soup, I think, was the extent of it, with a few leafy vegetables in it; maybe some fatback--pork. It was watery soup and this mushy rice, is what I recall.

Marcello: How often did you get fed?

Whitehead: I think they fed us two times a day.

Marcello: Would this be in the morning and in the evening?

Whitehead: Yes. It might have been three times a day.

Marcello: How much did the Japanese harass you here at Tanjong Priok?

Whitehead: Well, here again, I don't think we were. . . I wasn't. Now some may have been, but I wasn't because, as I said, I didn't go outside this camp while I was at Tanjong Priok but one time.

Marcello: Were there very many Japanese guards around this camp?

Whitehead: Yes. Yes. The fact of the matter is over next to the British kitchen was the Japanese compound where the Japanese guards stayed. Of course, they changed guards every so many hours around the camp. They walked the fencelines outside the camp. But they didn't come inside the barbed wire; they did not come in and make person-to-person contact at this time, that I recall.

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

Whitehead: Well, they were just. . . I recall the one I lived in. I'll tell you the truth, I don't remember how many buildings was in that compound. The one I lived in was, oh, a building, I'd say, 115 or 120 feet long, about 35 or 40 feet deep; it sort of had a porch on the front of it--lean-to porch; and it was just bare, and we were just thrown in there to sleep on the floor with what blankets or bed gear we had and clothing we had.

Marcello: What sort of gear did you take along with you into Tanjong Priok?

Whitehead: I went in there with a full set of clothing. I think it was khakis and a shirt, a hat, shoes, mess gear, one or two blankets. That's about it, with exception of . . . toothbrush. By this time I'd run out of toothpaste.

Marcello: What sort of container were you using to carry all this gear?

Whitehead: We had our packs at this time.

Marcello: When you say 'packs,' you're referring to a field pack or a duffel bag?

Whitehead: Talking about a field pack. We had a field pack at this time. See, when we left our trucks and was told to march, most of us --I'm sure that most of us felt this way at that time--weren't carrying and trying to lug all those sea bags or duffel bags.

I know I didn't. Of course, I just stripped down to what I could carry on my back, which was a field pack. So that's what I walked into Tanjong Priok with--just what I could get in this field pack.

Marcello: What were your bathing and shower facilities like here at Tanjong Priok?

Whitehead: Well, I recall that there was one stall shower in one of the little buildings over there in that compound. It seems to me like we were rationed or controlled as to who could and when to take a shower.

Marcello: Did you get a daily shower?

Whitehead: I don't recall taking a shower daily. I recall taking a couple of showers in that stall--I can just visualize that stall. I can remember showering twice in it, I think. That's it. . . maybe more, I'm sure, but I just recall two incidents of showering.

Marcello: Okay, in May of 1942, you moved out of Tanjong Priok, and I assume it's at this time that you go into Bicycle Camp.

Whitehead: That's correct. If I recall, we had another train ride from Tanjong Priok. Again, we marched to the rail yard and were put aboard coaches again--crammed, crowded. These were open-type coaches, regular passenger coaches. We were moved, then, across town to this Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint as you entered it.

Whitehead: It was a camp that was quite compact. . . very little open space that I recall. The buildings were fairly close together --no room. There was no area, with the exception of the little area right in front of the mess hall or the cook shack, that was any size where you could even mass a group of people or form a group of people. The main road into it and down to it was fairly wide, but between the buildings was very little space. It wasn't a large area; it was fenced, of course, all the way around.

Marcello: There were a lot of people in this camp, too, were there not?

Whitehead: There were a lot of people in that camp. The fact of the matter is. . . I don't know but what it wasn't a little overcrowded.

Marcello: What were your barracks like?

Whitehead: Again, they were typical open-air, breezeway-type buildings for the tropics--no screens, no glass, just open windows. It didn't even . . . as best I recall, none of the windows or doors were even framed for doors or windows. They were just open-type barracks with porch-like awnings out over the sides of them. They were of masonry construction--concrete and bricks.

Marcello: What were your sleeping quarters like?

Whitehead: Same type of building. Again, they had hard concrete floors--we slept on the floor. There were no bedsteads, beds, mattresses,

or this type of thing. You just picked a spot on the floor, and that's where you bunked up.

Marcello: What sort of reception did you receive from the Japanese when you entered Bicycle Camp? In other words, did the commandant or one of the officers give you any sort of a pep talk or orientation as to what was expected of you and this sort of thing?

Whitehead: No. The fact of the matter is I never recall of having that type of a reception of where they give you any type of a pep talk or talk to you. What they had to say to us was translated through or passed on down to us through our own officers and interpreters--policies, procedures, and expected conduct, et cetera, et cetera. It came down from our own personnel through our own officer staff. Never do I recall any type of a reception ceremony or anything of this nature.

Marcello: What sort of conduct was expected of you toward the Japanese?

Whitehead: I think I can turn it into one phrase--total respect for the Japanese army and its people.

Marcello: Did you have to bow to any of the soldiers or anything of this nature?

Whitehead: Yes. And in this area of respect, I mean politeness, bow, salute, what-have-you; treat them as though they were the imperial forces that they considered themselves to be. That's

what they expected of you. Of course, they expected you, also, not to try to jump the fence or steal any of their property or barter with the natives or deal with the natives or talk to the natives. Just high respect for their positions that they were in--that's what they expected.

Marcello: What sort of warnings did they issue relative to escape attempts?

Whitehead: Death. . . through any means, I assume--firing squad; decapitation; maybe solitary confinement until they passed sentence on you. It, I think, in most cases resulted in death of any person that tried to escape and was recaptured.

Marcello: Did you think they were bluffing?

Whitehead: No, I didn't. I took them at their word. Again, it's just . . . I looked at it as though they were in power; we were weaponless; we were at their mercy, really. So as a matter of survival, you tried to comply.

Marcello: What sort of physical punishment, so on and so forth, was dealt out by the guards here in Bicycle Camp?

Whitehead: I don't recall any serious punishment being dealt out to any one of the boys. I recall, I was sitting in my building standing in the window--and I could see the main gates from where I was housed up--and a working party came in one afternoon. One of the boys was pulled out of the formation and stood over by the guardhouse at attention and boxed around pretty well

after the main party had already marched on into camp. They stood him out there in front and slapped him around pretty well, and then finally they let him on into the camp. Now I'm sure that there was more incidents of this nature that took place and that I didn't witness--heard about--which I couldn't verify. But as far as I know, I never did have any type of confrontation with the guards while I was in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Why was this? Was it mainly because you simply tried to avoid them?

Whitehead: True, true. I felt for what benefit I may get out of dealing with the natives--bartering with the natives, or talking to the natives or what little item I may steal from them--was not worth taking the chance on being beaten or harassed or what-have-you.

Marcello: Were they using Korean guards at this time, or were you still being guarded by people from the Japanese army?

Whitehead: You know, I believe we still had at this time mostly Japanese guards. Now there could have been a few Korean guards among these people, but I know that the officers in charge were Japanese at all times. There were no Korean officers that I recall. I seem to think that we still had some regular Japanese army occupation troops at Bicycle Camp, and possibly before we left there some of those were replaced by Korean troops.

I'm not too sure on this. I just have the feeling, though, that when we first went into Bicycle Camp, they had not gotten these Korean people down this far into this area. Before we left Java, I'm sure we had some.

Marcello: Did you ever witness physical punishment being dealt out among the Japanese soldiers, that is, did you ever see a sergeant beat on a corporal and a corporal beat on a private and so on and so forth?

Whitehead: Not before I got to the jungles of Burma. I witnessed this in Burma. Again, I'm sure that he was a Japanese sergeant--he was a sergeant. I don't recall now how we distinguished between the two. But the regular Japanese army wore some type of an emblem that the Korean guards didn't wear. Again, I did not witness but one case of this where a sergeant. . . and it wasn't all that bad. He boxed him around a little bit--this Korean guard--and that was up in the jungles of Burma when we was building the railroad.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any cruel or unusual punishments here at Bicycle Camp?

Whitehead: No, sir, I sure didn't.

Marcello: Do you remember the incident where the Japanese insisted that every prisoner sign a pledge that he wouldn't escape?

Whitehead: No, I don't. I don't recall that.

Marcello: What were the sanitary facilities like here at Bicycle Camp?

Whitehead: As best I recall, they were good. They were the slit-trench type of facilities within a building, with running water through them at all times.

Marcello: In other words, it was a typical Dutch toilet, was it not?

Whitehead: Typical Dutch toilet, correct.

Speaking of the typical Dutch toilet, I'd like to back up and recall an incident aboard this Bloemfontein, if I may, and toilet prompts this memory. Our first sergeants and officers aboard Bloemfontein all had staterooms. My first sergeant, M. T. Harrelson, who now lives in Mineral Wells, invited me up to his stateroom one night for a visit. Well, we were good friends before the war; when we first joined the Guard, he and I were good friends, and we traveled back and forth to Wichita Falls while we were in Brownwood. Well, anyway, M. T. and I were pretty good friends even though he was a first sergeant and I was just a private first class. He invited me--asked me --to come up to the stateroom and visit with him that night, and I did. So while there, I had to relieve myself. So he said, "Well, the toilet's right there." Okay. So I go in, and I dropped my pants and sat down. Well, when I'd finished, I hollered at him, I said, "Hey, where's the toilet paper?" He said, "It's on that little button on the wall. Just push it."

I said, "You gotta be kidding!" He said, "No, just push that little button; that paper'll pop right out of the wall!" Well, I pushed this button, and a stream of water hit me right in the rear.

Okay, relating this and bringing it on up to the Bicycle Camp, this is our first experience where the Dutch would carry a bottle of water with them to wash themselves after they had a bowel movement, you know. So that's a typical Dutch toilet.

Marcello: What were the shower facilities like--or bathing facilities--here at Bicycle Camp?

Whitehead: They were the stall-type, just like we had this stall-type shower that I recall over there at Tanjong Priok. They were stall-type. I think we were more free there to bathe as often as we wanted to, yes. We had plenty of running water.

Marcello: Were they issuing soap and things of that nature?

Whitehead: It seems to me like we did get an issue of soap there, yes, because I think soap was plentiful in the Bicycle Camp. I remember "Zip" Zummo. I think he bathed two or three times a day! It had a smell that was not the fragrant smell of our soaps, you know, that we were used to. It might have been an old lye soap, I don't know. But we had good . . . I'd say, compared to the situations and the conditions we were living, I think our latrine facilities and shower facilities were adequate for a POW.

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

Whitehead: Well, by this time, our people--our own cooks--had gotten into the food preparation for us. . . because they'd gotten into this at Tanjong Priok and begun to learn how to cook this rice where it was palatable, more edible, more appetizing, appealing to the eye to eat. On several occasions--and I remember a couple of times a week--we'd have red beans.

We had one boy, I recall there, that we called McElreath. Poor old McElreath didn't come back; we lost him in the jungle. He seemed to always to get at the head of the line. On those days when we'd have red beans to go with that rice, he managed to get in the front of the line so he could get in the first of the "seconds" line. Well, I must say, by the time we got through feeding all the troops, there were very few "seconds" to be had, but the mess people would always put out the remainder of what was left. McElreath, he always managed to be the first man in line on those days we had red beans.

There's my first experience of eating eggplant. I had a very good friend that was one of the mess cooks. Well, he was a mess sergeant, but he cooked in the mess galley for us. They got these eggplants, and I don't think any of our cooks knew how to prepare eggplant. So what they did is they boiled them down, with the little sugar rationing that we had, and made

preserves out of them. So that meant we had eggplant preserves with rice, which made a decent meal.

Marcello: What other types of food were you liable to receive here at Bicycle Camp?

Whitehead: Oh, I think we had a good variety of green vegetables. I think one time we had some green beans. Basically, the diet was soup and rice. Whatever they got in in the way of vegetables went into a soup. . . a meat. . . just a big pot and boil it up and make a soup out of it or a stew, what-have-you.

Marcello: Were you on short rations here?

Whitehead: Yes. Not at first, I don't believe, our rations were too short. Toward the end of our stay in Bicycle Camp, naturally, I think the rations had begun to thin out a little bit, the best I recall. I don't recall a shortage of rice at this time.

Marcello: Were you maintaining your weight?

Whitehead: At this time, no, I think we'd all begun to lose weight. I'd begun to lose weight at this time. It just began to gradually fall off. Such a diet would cause you to lose weight, naturally, but I don't recall myself having any serious weight loss at this time while I was in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that, as time goes on during your stay in Bicycle Camp, the rations did become shorter. When you first entered Bicycle Camp, there was company money, was there not, for the purchase of food on the outside?

Whitehead: Yes, I've been told this. The fact of the matter is my own commander said they went out and bought food. Now company money --how much--I don't know, but I know that Captain Taylor, who was my Service Battery commander, was in charge of those funds. The fact of the matter is that he was the battalion supply officer. He did say that he went out and bought food on the local market; that the Japanese allowed him to do this. I assume that when his money available to purchase this food ran out is when our food supply begin to get short--the food provided by the Japanese.

Marcello: Was there ever any griping or complaining that the officers seemed to be living or eating a little bit better than the enlisted personnel?

Whitehead: Yes. Yes, there were. Again, I can't confirm it because I had no knowledge of it. I assume these people that made these statements were either jealous or what-have-you. Then again, I must look at it on a realistic side--some of the officers went into camp with money in their pockets, which, if they had an opportunity to buy food to supplement the Japanese food supply, they would do so. And I would have done the same thing had I had money.

Marcello: Were you down to the point, yet, where you were eating dogs, cats, or anything of this nature?

Whitehead: Not at this point in time, no. I did experience eating dog; however, it was not in this early part of my captivity.

Marcello: What sort of work was being done in Bicycle Camp by the prisoners?

Whitehead: The work parties that I attended was mainly at one refinery and one area where there was a great big open area and then surrounded by trees, et cetera, where we moved oil drums filled with gasoline. That's the only type of work party I worked on all the time I was in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Describe what this work was like.

Whitehead: Rolling drums; hiding them; covering them; moving them from one place to the other, which I assumed was through their own distribution system of their fuel supplies. . . from a protection standpoint plus distribution system in their own. . . and sometimes I think it was . . . we moved them drums out there in that open storage area just to have something to do for the prisoners. Because I remember rolling the same barrel and moving it from one big clump of trees to another several times while I was on that party.

Marcello: How difficult was the work from a physical standpoint?

Whitehead: It was pretty heavy work. Naturally, anytime you go to handling --one man or two men go to handling--a fifty-five-gallon drum of liquid--oil, fuel, or water--and loading it on a truck or rolling it and then getting it to a point and one standing it up on its end, it's pretty physical work.

- Marcello: How long would a typical workday last?
- Whitehead: Well, while we were there in Bicycle Camp, we wouldn't go out until after daylight and come in before dark.
- Marcello: Was this seven days a week?
- Whitehead: Seven days a week. However, I don't think--I didn't--and I don't know--if anybody else worked a full seven days a week. I might add, while we were there, they instituted this ten cents a day program. They'd pay us ten cents a day for every day we worked. So those that were able to work would volunteer for work parties so that they could gain. . . of course, it was script money, but they would work so they could make this ten cents a day.
- Marcello: Did the Japanese ever open up any sort of a canteen or anything there in the Bicycle Camp where you could purchase goods?
- Whitehead: It seems to me like they did. Back down in the back part of the camp, I think they did open up some type of a canteen. I think it was restricted to what it had in it. It was local food. I remember that the most abundant canned food that you could find over there was two items--sardines and pineapple--canned, chunked pineapple and sardines. There seemed to be an abundance of that in the camp.
- Marcello: Would you purchase them with your money?
- Whitehead: I never purchased anything out of that that I recall. . . that I know of.

Marcello: What did you do with your money?

Whitehead: Well, I didn't earn much (chuckle). I didn't earn much while I was there in Bicycle Camp. But we had another fellow that would purchase. . . well, another thing was this sweet cream--Eagle Brand milk--and raw cocoa was available and some sugar. Old Joe Bowman from Wichita Falls, he got into the candy-making business, and he'd make chocolate candy, I remember. Every dime I could save, I'd buy chocolate candy from Joe Bowman. He made it in a five-gallon tin. I recall that.

Marcello: Who was supervising the work details?

Whitehead: Officers. Officers would go out with each work detail--our own officers. Then depending on how many people was in the work party would determine how many guards they'd send out.

Marcello: Were the guards harassing the prisoners on these work details, or did they more or less remain in the background?

Whitehead: I don't recall ever getting harassed on a work party--not one time, myself. I'm sure it happened, but I didn't experience it--not at this point.

Marcello: What did you do for recreation here at Bicycle Camp?

Whitehead: Nothing. Nothing that I recall. I think some of the Dutch officers in the camp had some sort of a volleyball or handball or some type of a . . . and I think some of our officers participated with those folks. No, we'd just sit around and talk and "shoot the breeze," and if we had a deck of cards, we'd

play pinochle, or we'd take up some sort of a hobby. I remember some of us got into this art of tying square knots to make belts and such as this from the material the Navy personnel brought from aboard the ship. Of course, I don't remember where we got the string, but it was just regular old string--twine. I recall M.T. Harrelson, while we were in Bicycle Camp, made a kidney belt because he was a motorcycle enthusiast. He spent many, many hours building this . . . making this square knot kidney belt. Most motorcycle riders wore those in that day and time before the war. He spent many, many hours on that. Of course, I made a belt or two. I don't remember now where we even got the twine.

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

Whitehead: Oh, they hinged around what we did before we mobilized. We looked forward to the day we could get back and do some of the same things, you know.

Marcello: How long did you think the war was going to last at this point?

Whitehead: Well, again, going back to a question you asked previously about evaluating the length of time that we thought we would be overseas. . . and our superiority over the Japanese. . . after we did realize we were prisoners-of-war and that we were there for the duration . . . we didn't think the duration would be too long, really. We didn't think it would last as long as it did --I didn't. I know I didn't.

Marcello: Now at the time that you arrived in Bicycle Camp, the survivors off the cruiser USS Houston had already been there.

Whitehead: They were there.

Marcello: Describe what they looked like and so on and so forth when you entered camp.

Whitehead: Well, you know, I don't really recall having an impression of what they. . . I just recall just a change mainly in the type of uniform. Here we were in khakis, and they were in blue denims, most of them--those that survived the ship with any wearing apparel at all. Some of them survived the ship with nothing--no clothing. I'm sure that some of them donned or discarded their denims or cut the bottoms off of them because of the heat over there--they'd already cut them off and made shorts out of them. But the contrast between uniforms was the main outstanding thing. We knew they were sailors because of our experiences aboard the Republic.

Marcello: Evidently, they were in sorry shape--a lot of those people were--when you entered Bicycle Camp.

Whitehead: Yes, they were. They'd already established a hospital area; the Navy medical people had already established it--set it up. Then, of course, our own particular doctor and our medics out of the battalion joined them and went into the medical facilities down on the backside of the base here at this time.

Marcello: You really didn't lose anybody here at Bicycle Camp, though, did you?

Whitehead: Not that I recall. I don't think we lost anybody there. We have unconfirmed information that we lost one or two in Java after the main body had left. I think we have that on record, but I don't know how the information was relayed. I know that we did leave some people in Java that spent the whole entire time in Java.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that if you had remained in Bicycle Camp for the duration of the war, life as a prisoner-of-war might not have been too bad, certainly in comparison to what it was later on?

Whitehead: Well, naturally, not experiencing it, you have no way of measuring. However, with the pressure that had been applied by the Allies in the various parts of the Pacific. . . which I call a mistake on the Japanese Imperial Army's part of breaking up that convoy to land on Java, which from the information we had, they were intending to hit Australia; instead our propaganda machine convinced them that it was worth their while to break that convoy up and get into the island of Java. I think the pressures that had been applied to the Japanese army in the various areas of the Pacific War did cause them to withdraw such a bastille from the island

and regroup them somewhere else, which to me meant that they reduced their manpower on the island to where they had to be a little more lax; they couldn't be as strong and forceful with what prisoners they had. Because I'm sure that there's many of the black Dutch and many of the white Dutch that remained in Java all during that time as prisoners-of-war. Then, of course, there was no problem as far as handling the civilian populace because those people, to me, took the attitude, "Well, if they wield the stick, we'll abide."

Marcello: They were loyal--the local population--to whomever had the guns.

Whitehead: Correct. That was my evaluation of it.

Marcello: Okay, now in October of 1942, you leave Bicycle Camp.

Whitehead: Correct.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you left Bicycle Camp.

Whitehead: Well, there's a bit of a blank period in my memory from the time we left the camp; how we left the camp; what mode of transportation, if we had any other than foot, to the dockside to board. . . and I believe it was Dai Nichi Maru.

Marcello: That's correct.

Whitehead: (Chuckle) They're all "Maru's," of course. So I'm not quite . . . I don't recollect how we got to the dockside.

Marcello: Is it a rather unsettling experience to have to pick up and

leave a place where you've more or less fallen into a routine?
You're going into the unknown again.

Whitehead: Yes, but under those circumstances, as I look back in retrospect, anything that called for a change in your daily activity was a rewarding rather than, shall I say, an adverse effect. You were looking for . . . like a prisoner you were looking for something different to see or do, really.

Marcello: Did you more or less have the attitude, then, that nothing could be worse than what you already were experiencing?

Whitehead: You might say that; you might use this phrase to describe it. Yes, I would . . . because you get in on these work parties, and they get routine, you know. I know this was one of the things that we'd all discuss: "Well, what did you do today? Where did you go?" if they didn't go on the same party with us. Then we'd always say, "Well, I'd like to get on that work party." But you never knew what work party you were going to get when you lined up out there because they would never tell you, you see? So you're always looking for the unexpected, really--a change or something different to see what experiences would come out of it.

Marcello: Describe what the Dai Nichi Maru was like.

Whitehead: Well, the best I recall, it was a similar type of ship to our old liberty ships. In the hold, they had racks built; I

think they were something like four feet between each rack. They shoved you in there just like shoving bread in the oven or on the rack in the grocery store. All of the toilet facilities were built up in shacks overhanging the sides of the ship. Where the food was cooked, I don't know--somewhere on that ship--and then brought to the hold in containers and dished out.

Marcello: How crowded were those holds?

Whitehead: I was going to say--pretty crowded. People were laying on these racks shoulder-to-shoulder next to each; there wasn't all that much room in these holds. I don't know if it was a single-stacker or a two-stacker, really; it wasn't too large a ship.

Marcello: How long were you on there altogether?

Whitehead: It seems to me like we were on that thing about eight days . . . and we went to Singapore.

Marcello: Was it a rather uncomfortable trip on this ship?

Whitehead: I don't recall it being too uncomfortable.

Marcello: You were still in fairly good shape at that time yet.

Whitehead: Under the circumstances, we were still in fairly good--I was--fairly good physical condition. So I don't really recall any real bad conditions. Sure, if you had to go out of the hold, you had to get permission to go out of the hold to go to the

benjo. Incidentally, benjo is toilet. You had to get permission. They would only allow so many of us prisoners on the deck at any one time going to the benjo. But I don't recall this ship ride being all that adverse toward our physical being or your mental capacity, you know.

Marcello: Okay, so you get into Singapore, and from there you're sent to a prisoner-of-war camp at Changi.

Whitehead: Changi. That's correct--there at Changi.

Marcello: Describe what Changi looked like from a physical standpoint. First of all, I guess, you were pretty glad to get off that ship, were you not?

Whitehead: Yes, we were. Again, as I said, anytime I got aboard ship, I stayed sick most of the time.

Marcello: (Chuckle) I bet you must have had a lot of friends aboard that ship!

Whitehead: Yes. Again, I'm going to I can't recall how we got from that ship out to Changi. I think we were trucked out there. The particular barracks that we went into or building that we went into was a two-story building, open bay, open area, a veranda-type of building down the outside. Then the inside of it was just open area. I don't even recall the bathroom and toilet facilities at Changi in that building. I know we had it, but I don't even remember what end of the

building it was in or what. Right out at the corner of it was a small building where the mess hall was located. It set up on the top of the hill next to that river that come in there. I don't even know the name of the river. Down below us was some British and Australians; behind us was some officers--British, American. But this is just one great big two-story white building there at Changi that we lived in. Again, we just went in and laid down on the concrete floor side-by-side and filled up the building. We did have all the Americans that come out of Java up there with us in that group; we were all together in this one building.

Marcello: How would you make yourself as comfortable as possible sleeping on that floor? What was the procedure? In other words, how would you make up your bed?

Whitehead: Now you began to trade and barter and beg, and, if you could, steal from anybody except your own comrades--anything that would make your bed comfortable, softer, or what-have-you. I recall that somehow or other I got hold of a gray British army blanket there. I don't remember how I got it but I got it. I only had one of my GI blankets--OD blankets--so I had two blankets while I was at Changi. Some of the fellows had managed to keep their bedrolls; some had managed to bring along their old mattress sacks. So that's about all I remember of bed

gear. We slept right on concrete floors just like we did there at Bicycle Camp and back at Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: What was the food like here at Changi?

Whitehead: Now this is where we first experienced eating what they called "_____ bait." That was a little fish, oh, somewhere in the neighborhood of three-quarters of an inch long. It looked like a minnow, but it was white in color and dried. (Chuckle) Our cooks tried to boil this up, and I think their experience in boiling fish brought out much of the oil, and it was just pretty hard to eat. Then they found a way of frying it in some peanut oil, which made it a little better. But it was, the best I recall, it was a gritty-type of a little thing. And then we had it with the rice. Now this is where I encountered my first setback in health. By this time, we were eating polished rice, and we had been eating polished rice ever since we got into Bicycle Camp. Now it began to make its showing on our physical conditions by the lack of appropriate vitamins. While there at Changi, I got what they called dry beriberi; I lost control of my right limb, and I'd slap my foot when I'd walk. Then the doctor put me on eating rice polishings; I ate the polishings off of rice, which we could go over to another warehouse and get them. Trying to eat these rice polishings just mixed with water is just like trying to swallow

a mouthful of hay. It's just dry, you know, because these rice polishings doesn't absorb water--they'd just float in it. So you just, you know, get them down. Well, by eating these rice polishings--I ate a canteen cupful a day--by eating these rice polishings, then, I put certain vitamins back into my system, then, that I finally overcome this dry-type beri-beri.

Marcello: How long did you have this?

Whitehead: I remember leaving Changi with it and going up the jungle. When I left the jungle, I was still affected to a minor degree--I don't know how much. By this time, the amount of rice polishings I'd eaten had given me, shall I say, relief or had improved my condition in the right leg.

Marcello: How was this dry beriberi affecting you?

Whitehead: Loss in control of my right leg. I'd swing my leg, and I had no control over it. The foot would just be limp, and I'd walk with what they called a 'slap foot'--the doctor called it a 'slap foot.' Now I don't know if this affected the nerves or the muscles--and I'm sure it's the muscles more so than the nerves--but that's how it affected me.

Marcello: I'm sure that by this time, everybody's becoming vitamin-conscious.

Whitehead: Yes, I'm almost sure everyone was. I don't think that I was

the only one that had this beriberi condition--what was termed as beriberi. I don't even know it was beriberi; that's what the doctors called it--the dry-type beriberi.

Marcello: Was there anything else that you were getting to eat here besides these fish and the rice?

Whitehead: Well, we had the routine that'd we'd been eating for quite some time. I mean, they was providing beef now and again and pork now and again. There we did get a few vegetables out of the vegetable gardens that the British had put in. I worked on the garden detail most of the time that I was there at Changi, raising fresh vegetables, onions--you know, the garden-type variety of food, vegetables. But most of them went to the Japanese. And then I think the British had priority over them; I don't think we got too many of them, but every once in awhile we did.

Marcello: I'm going to turn the tape over at this stage (tape turned over). What was the quantity of the food like here? In other words, were you getting as much food as you had been getting in Bicycle Camp?

Whitehead: The best I recall, yes. I think our quantity was as large; I don't know that the quality improved at all any. Because when we speak of quantity and quality, they both declined as the years went on. But I think our quantity of food at Changi was

just something similar to what we experienced in Bicycle Camp up until that point. Yes, the quality did increase a little bit because every once in awhile we'd get a few fresh vegetables, as I said, out of these gardens that we were working. At this time, I think beef and pork was more plentiful--still plentiful enough for them to ration us out pretty good portions per week per person.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing here at Changi? You mentioned that you were working in the vegetable garden at least part of the time.

Whitehead: Now that's the only working parties that I ever went out on while we were there at Changi. I went out into the gardens--in what we called the garden parties--and it was nothing in the world but the use of a hoe and planting and gardening and hoeing weeds and gathering the vegetables as they would become available for harvest.

Marcello: How long a day would you put in out in the gardens?

Whitehead: We wouldn't work much more than the daylight hours. Of course, they were scattered all over this island in this area. The best I recall, this whole area out there where this Changi was part of . . . they had fenced off other areas. It was all a military bastion at one time which the British controlled. . . bastille, I should say, not bastion. Which is correct? Anyway, they had it divided off. They had a hospital area, of

course, and you had to go through gates between these areas. There was one area which they called "no man's land," which there was nothing--just a big open space. Then these gardens were spotted around in this whole area on the island there. You might work one garden today and another one tomorrow. These were all controlled by the British. The British had control over these; the Japanese didn't do anything. They just took you out there and guarded you and let you do your work and then bring you back to your respective camps. In the gardens, as I said, any normal home gardener's garden. . . and where they got the seeds and the starts for some of these, I don't know, but we grew fresh radishes, onions, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, you know, celery--all the normal vegetables that anyone would grow. Of course, that's a good climate over there for raising vegetables.

Marcello: Were you able to steal anything?

Whitehead: No. . . oh, you might eat a raw radish or something like that while you're out there in the garden working. The fact of the matter, we did; we ate raw onions and celery and that sort of thing while we were working--if they were in season.

Marcello: Was this a fairly good detail to get on so far as the work was concerned there at Changi?

Whitehead: Not having any experience with any other details, I thought it was the best. It took me back to my childhood days when I

was growing up out at the edge of town and having to spend every Saturday and Sunday on the end of a hoe handle in my own daddy's and mother's garden, you know, so this wasn't anything new to me--swinging on the end of a hoe handle. I appreciated it because we weren't harassed at all out there. We'd just go out there under the supervision of the British, and they'd tell us what to do--to hoe out and, you know, to work these gardens. Our main physical problem here was the use of physical dexterity in doing this type of work--pushing these motorless lorries, they called them. They had a bunch of old trucks that they'd taken the engines out of and just stripped them down to the frames, and us guys would push them up and down those hills to haul the stuff on. So it had manpower instead of motor power.

Marcello: You mentioned a "no man's land" awhile ago with relation to the physical setup here at Changi. What was "no man's land?"

Whitehead: Well, this area we were in was fenced off. Down at the foot of the hill where we'd go down was a guard gate, and our guards there were these--what do they call them--Sikhs or Indians that they had captured, and of course, they were turncoats, I called them. We'd get down to this gate, and we'd cut through this gate. Like for instance, in going to the hospital, if our doctor wanted us to go to the hospital to see another

doctor, why, they'd group us in a party every morning and march us over there. Sometimes there'd be as many as twenty-five or thirty in this hospital party, and we'd march over to the main hospital over there, which is all controlled by the British and Australians. We'd go through this gate on our side, and we had about a mile and a half that we went across what they called a "no man's land"; there was just nothing out there until we come up to the guard gate on the hospital. The hospital area was all fenced in just like ours --chain-link fence.

Marcello: Now was your dry beriberi serious enough that you were prevented from going out on the work details?

Whitehead: No. No. I recall working when I had this condition. It was just that I had this impairment of my walk. Well, there when it was at its worst, I didn't go out, no. Of course, they didn't call--the best I recall--they didn't call for as many people to go on work parties there at Changi as they did while we were in Java because I think the British done most of that garden work. We had some people to go down on the work parties that they'd load them up on trucks and haul them down to the docks. I didn't get on any of those work parties. Of course, they tell me and tell the rest of us about going down there and loading and unloading war materials--bombs and that sort of thing. I never did go down to the docks to work at Changi.

Marcello: Describe the relationship that existed here at Changi between the British and the Americans.

Whitehead: Well, at this time--at this point in time--I don't think I had had that much relation with the British. . . prior to . . . of course, in a group of people like this, and two different nationalities you have this situation that exists--it exists today, really--that until you get to know a people, all types and all kinds of remarks are made about. . . I just looked at them as human beings myself and didn't get to know, really, any of them at this time. Sure, they were given the titles of "blokes," and we'd heard they were lazy, lackadaisical, nasty-type of a people. I didn't draw this opinion of them because I didn't know them that well at this time. I'm sure that some of the other fellows had their own impressions of what type of a people they were, and I didn't pay too much attention to them.

Marcello: Do you remember any incidents involving the "king's coconuts," so to speak?

Whitehead: No, I don't. This is another story that I've heard come out of some of these stories, but I'm not familiar with it other than just having it relayed to me and told to me.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that the British were not nearly so fastidious in their personal hygiene as were the Americans.

Whitehead: Well, as I stated awhile ago, some of the people got the impression that they were a nasty-type of people; personal hygiene, they let go or sort of ignored. I think if one could visit their own homeland, they might understand this a little bit better--which I've had the opportunity to do in recent years. At that time, I didn't draw any of these impressions of the British people because I didn't know them. I guess I'm one of the type of people that. . . I've always thought about something before I made a statement, and maybe I was that way at that time. I don't recall. But I just don't remember having any personal viewpoints toward the British people, per se, at this time.

Marcello: What sort of relationship existed between the Americans and the Japanese here at this camp?

Whitehead: Well, again, we only saw guards if we went to the gate, and we didn't see too many Japanese at the time. Because as I said, these guard posts were manned by the Sikh Indians, and maybe you saw one Japanese and maybe you didn't. The fact of the matter is, on these work parties out to the gardens, we had one guard for maybe fifty or sixty people in a work party, so you weren't that close to the Japanese here, really. They had it pretty well-secured with high chain-link fences--fifteen or twenty-foot fences--and I don't think it required much guarding

because the whole island was surrounded by water, you know. So I don't think they concentrated too many troops in this area--the Japanese themselves--to serve as guards.

Marcello: I gather, then, there was really no physical harassment here as such so far as the Japanese were concerned.

Whitehead: I don't recall any; I don't recall experiencing any. Now there might have been some down on some of these work parties outside--down at the docks or what-have-you. I didn't experience any.

Marcello: To what extent was military discipline being maintained here at Changi? If I may be more specific, were you still respecting and obeying your own officers and things of this sort?

Whitehead: We did this throughout. I think those that didn't were the same type of people that you see today or you read about today in the military that just object to taking orders from anybody--the rebellious-type. I think the military has had those type of people from time immemorial. Even back in the Revolutionary War days, I think there was those type of people, and I think we'll continue to have them. But the majority as a whole respected our officers and maintained military discipline.

Marcello: Well, I would assume that discipline was one of the keys to survival.

Whitehead: Absolutely! Absolutely! Discipline was a necessary ingredient

along with, as we was saying earlier, numbers. These were absolutely the key elements to survival.

Marcello: In January of 1943, you're uprooted once again. You leave Changi and, I assume, once more your destination is unknown. Pick up the story at this point.

Whitehead: I'm lax in my memory again as to how we get from this barracks at Changi village to the dockside in Singapore. I think we were transported by truck. Again, we arrive at the dockside; we linger around on the docks until they get ready to load us aboard this ship. . . Mara Maru. Then we start filing up this wooden gangplank to load aboard this ship. Okay, it was equipped similar to the Dai Nichi Maru that we came up on. Again, there were these shelves in the hold, and the benjos were constructed where they overhang the outside of the ship. We loaded aboard the ship. . . no, I'm going to have to retract that statement--all of it. We went downtown and got aboard a train--that's what we did; we didn't get aboard this ship until we got up to Penang. So okay, we went downtown and got shoved into these cattle cars--that's what it was; we took our first train ride in cattle cars--that's correct.

Marcello: Describe that experience.

Whitehead: Okay. They put us in these cars, and we were standing shoulder-to-shoulder, breast-to-breast, back-to back, butt-to-butt; that's

what it amounted to. I think that when they started loading us it was like something like two hours, and the sun was hot and, oh, it was terrific. It was two hours before the train ever moved. Well, by this time, it was in the afternoon, the best I recall, and we'd begun to try to settle down and get comfortable in this damned cattle car. Well, we had people that was laying down with their feet stuck up the side of the wall--I recall this; we had some sitting down against the wall with their feet stuck out; and we had people standing; people were just entwined with each other in trying to get comfortable. We traveled about four hours, I think, before we ever stopped for food. I think the first meal we had was in the afternoon --about 4:30 or five o'clock in the afternoon. We pulled into this station, and, of course, they had food prepared, and they brought it to the train and just dished it out. We stuck our mess gears out the doors to receive this food, and it wasn't nothing but rice with some watery soup thrown on it. Then in about another hour and a half or two hours after we stopped--we traveled all night--I think we arrived at George Town.

Marcello: That's correct.

Whitehead: Arrived at George Town sometime around noon or just before noon the next morning, I think. I don't know what we did and how

long it was and where they put us, unless they kept us there at the train station until they got ready to load us on this ship. Then that's when they moved us down to the dockside, where I thought it was in Singapore. But it's up at George Town. Now this ship is anchored out in the harbor. Now we've got to get on these little barges--that's right. We've got to get on these little barges, and we were just stacked in there standing up, and they transported us out to this ship, which was anchored out there in the harbor. We went up this wooden thing, then, and started.

Okay, now I'll pick up in the description of the ship that's similar to the Dai Nichi Maru, where the holds were the same and the toilets were over the side. Now we was aboard this ship, and it seemed to me like we was on it, oh, several hours before we ever sailed, the best I recall. Then we sailed out of . . . and there's an island out there called Penang, I believe it is, just off. . . it's an island out in this inlet or harbor.

Okay, we set sail. We knew we were going north because that afternoon when the sun set, it was to our left, you see. So we knew we was going north; we had to be in going up the Burma side. So we set sail; we had a frigate--a little Japanese frigate--and one other ship, which they told us later--we found

out later after the bombing--that it was all black Dutch and some Japanese troops. Now the time gets away from me again; I don't know how many days it was before we caught this bombing.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you cramped down in the hold of that ship?

Whitehead: Oh, certainly! It was cramped; it was definitely cramped. It was cramped, I think, and it was tighter with more people in it than what we had on the one coming up from Java to Singapore. It was definitely more crowded because we had some Australians on the back of it. We were all in the forward hold--the Americans were--best I recall, and then in the back-end of our ship was all Australians. Then on this other ship, as we learned later, was mostly Japanese soldiers--probably the guards--and the black Dutch people.

Marcello: So they were still segregating you according to nationalities.

Whitehead: In essence, yes, they certainly were. Really and truly, they kept us segregated according to nationalities throughout the whole thing--pretty much so.

Marcello: What was the food and water like aboard the Mara Maru?

Whitehead: Well, as I recall, it was about the same as it was aboard the other one--Dai Nichi Maru. The Japanese done the cooking on there. I remember eating a lot of pork fat on that ship--just

chunks of pork fat boiled up in water and the rice. This was the first incident that I recall, though. . . it was either this ship ride or the one we made from Java up where the Japanese would put barley in their rice. I believe it was on this ship; I don't believe it was the other one. But we were getting barley, also, cooked in this rice. Incidentally, I cook barley in my rice today (chuckle). I think is the first experience we had with eating barley--boiled and cooked with the rice.

Marcello: Did it make a more palatable meal than just plain rice?

Whitehead: Yes, I enjoyed it. I say I enjoyed it (chuckle). Yes, it was; I'll answer your question and say "yes" other than saying I enjoyed it. I did like it better than just the plain rice.

Marcello: What was the atmosphere like down in that hold in terms of, you know, fresh air, breathing, and things of that nature?

Whitehead: This was a problem definitely because this was the time of year that it was hot in that part of the country at that time of the year. The heat at times, in the heat of the day, in the middle of the day, was almost unbearable. Needless to say, when you're crammed in there with a bunch of men like that and the naked bodies. . . perspiration . . . without having a shower for three or four days. . . I think I only took one shower aboard this ship, and that was out in salt

water. They just hung a pump over the side, I think, and pumped in salt water for you to shower in. We learned right quick not to use soap in our head in our hair, anyway, because you couldn't wash off the soap with that salt water. So you just got in there and washed off the perspiration, more or less, and what body odor you had. Needless to say, under these conditions without having the modern day anti-perspirants, it didn't take you long to where the next man--your fellow bed man--could smell you. You know, the old saying is, by the time you begin to smell yourself, somebody has smelled you for three days (chuckle); it held true.

Marcello: (Chuckle) Okay, let's talk a little bit about the incident involving the air attack that was directed at these ships.

Whitehead: This happened. . . the time of the day was, I believe, somewhere around two o'clock in the afternoon. I don't know if I was fortunate or unfortunate, but I remember having to go to the bathroom just prior to seeing the incident taking place. I'd gone to the foot of the steps and asked the guards . . . I told him I wanted to go to the benjo. I went up . . . I went up on board, and I went to the bathroom. I was in the bathroom, sitting there doing my business, and I'd just gotten up and pulled up my shorts and stepped out on the deck when I heard the commotion. The term for aircraft is

hikooki, I think it is, in Japanese language, and they began to ring this big bell on the front of the ship--great big bell mounted up there--and hollering "hikooki."

Of course, the Japanese began to scamper and run here and the bridge became active, you know, and we were right forward of the bridge in the forward hold. They had a gun mounted on the front; a few of these Japanese run up there to man this gun. It was just a short. . . as best I recall, it was a short snub-nosed 5-inch. Of course, I'm going to make my way back down to the hold; now why, I don't know, but that's the instinct that I had at the time--make myself back down to the hold. Well, I couldn't . . . from the confusion of the Japanese going here and there, and they blocked off this letting anybody out of the hold.

I happened to be on the main deck--out on deck--when this took place. I couldn't look over in the hold and see the boys, you know, see the fellows down there. I knew what they were going through with because I was going through the same thing. I'm looking up there; I see these bombers coming. So what I did, just like I did back there in Java, I said, "Well, if I'm going to go and this is my time, I'm going to see what hits me." So I just laid down right on that deck flat of my deck, and it was wet with salt water. I just laid there and watched them bombs fall.

Here they come. Then four B-24 Liberators just flew right over and dropped them bombs. Well, we got two near misses down the side, and they hit the other ship--the one that had the Dutch. Okay, I'm still out on deck during all this confusion. The bombers flew on off; they didn't even make a return that I recall. They might have returned back across it to see what damage they'd done.

But by this time, complete chaos was taking place on that ship. We had those near misses, and from what evidence was available, the ship had started to take on water. So I was grabbed off by a guard and put into a line, and we were just guided down to the midship down in the hold, and we get off down in there. By this time, they'd scraped up some axes, and they began to tear some of the battening and grab up and get. . . gunny sacks. Some of these holds along the waterline, we'd begin to poke them with gunny sacks and drive or poke stakes in them to hold out the water. The main damage was below the waterline, which they couldn't get down into, and the midship was where most of their supplies were stored. So I assume that they blocked off these hatches, closed off these compartments, to hold this water. After being down there a couple of hours, they brought down some more--brought some Australians from the back--and then I got on back up and

come on back up and went in the hold. They relieved us of that.

Well, nightfall had begun to come along, and we was sitting there, then, and they were trying to pick up the survivors of the other ships--the black Dutch and some of the Japanese. We were up into the midnight sitting there picking up the survivors of this other ship that went down. Then it was sometime in the early part of the next morning when we arrived up in Moulmein, Burma, and we had a pretty good list. The ship had, oh, I'd say, a ten or fifteen or twenty-degree list to the right when we started up that channel there at Moulmein, Burma, up the river.

Marcello: Now did the attitude of the Japanese change any toward the prisoners as a result of this raid?

Whitehead: I seem to think that it did--for the worse, especially these guys that was guarding us at the time and was on board the ship. Yes, we'd become the monsters because we had sort of disrupted their plans or their military operation. Yes, it had begun to change, yes.

Marcello: Did the change in attitude result in more physical harassment?

Whitehead: I think the guards--the Japanese--that were aboard those ships --both ships--those that were survivors of the ship that was sunk and those that were aboard with us and went on into Burma

with us and come down the railroad--definitely their attitudes was affected by the experiences that they had through this bombing.

Marcello: Incidentally, had you been able to receive any news from the outside world up to this time?

Whitehead: I had not, no. No word from the outside. Oh, there was rumors of word while we were in Changi of how the war was going. To me they were strictly rumors because I had no firsthand knowledge of the information received. There was supposed to have been clandestine-type radios and that sort of thing there in Changi, and the word was spread from mouth to mouth, and you know how that goes. You start telling a story to one; by the time it gets to the end of the line, it's blown out of proportion. Yes, we began to get this type of information back in Changi.

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you get to Moulmein, Burma?

Whitehead: Okay, we pull into Moulmein and we dock. Incidentally, they docked that boat with the listing side next to the dock.

Marcello: This was about mid-January of 1943, was it not?

Whitehead: Yes. Yes, it was about mid-January. I can't remember the exact date. Well, after they off-loaded us from this ship and we disembarked, we went into what they called the "Moulmein Jail." It was a jail. It was a regular prison with high gray

walls; the barracks of two-story nature with iron bars; individual cells in some of the buildings and in some of the buildings they were open-bay-type buildings with just iron bars on the outsides of them. Also, within this prison, they had these concrete slabs out here where they would lay the dead and do ever what they was going to do with them before they put them in the ground. That's what they said. They were dished out, and they had a headstone like a pillow--all in stone--where you lay your head. We assumed that's what they were; I don't know, really, what they were there for. The fact of the matter is one of our boys, old "Fat Boy" Wilson, he used one of them out there at the back to shave us. He'd lay us down on that thing, mop our face, and shave us with. . .

Marcello: How long did you remain there at the prison altogether?

Whitehead: You know, I don't really know how long we were there. I don't remember how long we were there. I remember some of the moonlight nights we had there. Also, Moulmein is known for those gold pagodas, you know, the domes. On some of those moonlight nights we had there, I remember those things just glistened in the moonlight there in Moulmein. One great big one was not too far from this prison. We just sat over there less than a mile. I don't even remember what type of food we had.

We had our own people, again, cooking the food, and it was about the same type of food.

Marcello: I assume they weren't locking those cells or anything.

Whitehead: No. No, because if anybody could scale that wall, he'd have to be a pretty good athlete. Of course, the front gate was guarded, you know, so I don't think anyone was going out the front gate. To the best of my knowledge, we had no work parties while we was there in that prison in Moulmein.

Marcello: It was just more or less a transit station.

Whitehead: More or less a holding stage until we hit the railroad.

Marcello: Okay, what happens at this point? When do you leave Moulmein and describe what happens next.

Whitehead: Now I can't tell you the exact date we leave Moulmain, but we go out and get on another train for a short run; it's only about a three or four-hour ride. We get on this train, and we go to the end of this rail line, and I can't think of the name of that place to save myself--I can't.

Marcello: Not Thanbyuzayat.

Whitehead: I think maybe that's it. Thanbyuzayat, that was it--where the railroad stopped.

Marcello: And there's also a base camp here, is there not?

Whitehead: No.

Marcello: Well, that's some other place.

Whitehead: No, that's eighteen kilometers from Thanbyuzayat. Okay, we get off this train, and we start walking. Well, now some of this roadbed had already been worked, and I think it was roadbed that was left by the British several many years back who tried to put this railroad through Burma. We'd walk along this roadbed and some paths, and we built out first camp at 18 Kilo.

Marcello: Did you actually pass through Thanbyuzayat?

Whitehead: Yes.

Marcello: Do you remember having received a pep talk as to what was expected of you? I'm referring, now, to a Colonel Nagatomo. . .

Whitehead: I don't recall.

Marcello: . . . who gave a pep talk to some of the troops that went through there.

Whitehead: I don't recall it. As far as I know, the American body or the American troops that went through there, I was with. The main group went through there. I don't remember a pep talk; there possibly could have been.

Marcello: Okay, by the time you get to the 18 Kilo Camp, you realize that you're going to be working on a railroad.

Whitehead: Yes, we realize it; we know it by this time--what we're there for.

Marcello: Describe what 18 Kilo Camp looked like. All these camps will be designated by how far they are back into the jungle.

- Whitehead: True. As best I recall, 18 Kilo was not fenced.
- Marcello: You're not really in the jungle yet at 18 Kilo, are you?
- Whitehead: No, no. We're just outside; we're still in the flatlands in the upper part of Burma. As best I recall, it's still flatlands. . . dry, very little greenery, very little shrubbery, no tall trees at all.
- Marcello: The camp has already been made for you.
- Whitehead: I think the camp had been, yes. I think if we had any kind of fencing, it was split bamboo fencing, if we had any at all. I just don't remember. This is the first place--first camp, naturally--that we had experience of living in any kind of a thatched hut--bamboo thatched roof huts. Again, they were built up off the ground--the sleeping platforms--were up off the ground. And split bamboo mats just matted the whole thing. I don't recall how many days it was after we moved in there until we got out on the first leg of starting this railroad.
- Marcello: Now is this your original base camp that you're working from, that is, 18 Kilo Camp?
- Whitehead: That is the original base camp that the group--the main group; Group 5, it was called--went into. Because we were assigned . . . we were given the number of Group 5, and 18 Kilo was where we started work on the railroad.

Marcello: Okay, describe the work on the railroad from the time you get up until you come in in the evening.

Whitehead: Well, in the early part of it. . . of course, they metered out or they allocated so much per man to do. In the early stages, we were just going to continue this roadbed.

Marcello: When you say they allocated so much work for each man to do, can you be a little bit more specific here?

Whitehead: Yes, I will. When we first started, we were to move a meter of dirt per day per man.

Marcello: That's a cubic meter of dirt.

Whitehead: That's a cubic meter of dirt per man per day.

Marcello: Now at this stage, you thought you were pretty smart, didn't you?

Whitehead: Right. And working in a group, you see, each group had an officer in charge, a guard or two, and you really. . . we looked at it, I guess, like "Let's get this work done. Let's see how fast we can finish before Lieutenant So-and-so and his . . . " As soon as we'd finish, we'd come in by groups. We'd go out in a body. . . allocate the work--they'd mark it off, stake it off, "This is what you've got to do." Well, this went on for two or three weeks, and we was back in camp by one or two o'clock, you know, after getting out there about daylight or a little after. So I guess that they saw we were

such good, fast workers. . . the workload got heavier.

Marcello: In other words, they increased the allocation.

Whitehead: They increased the allocation. It finally, I think, got to three meters a day per man.

Marcello: How much is three meters of dirt?

Whitehead: Well, it's thirty-nine inches deep, thirty-nine inches wide, and thirty-nine inches long. It's a cubic meter. If you have fifty people in the work party, it's fifty times that. Now when you go to digging a hole and moving this by basket or a gunny sack on a pole, it takes quite awhile to move it.

Marcello: How would they measure whether or not you had removed your allocated meters of dirt?

Whitehead: Well, it just so happened that the engineer that was out there to lay out this used a yard stick.

Marcello: A meter stick, in other words.

Whitehead: A meter stick. And that's what he carried--just a meter stick. He didn't carry a roll of tape that would measure so many meters; he just marked it off with his meter stick. Where you left off the day before, if that's where he wanted to start, he would start from that edge and measure back so far. He knew how many men was in the work party, and he'd measure back so far and he'd put a stake.

Marcello: I see. In other words, he didn't measure each man's cubic meter or three cubic meters of dirt. He simply allocated

however number of meters that number of men ought to move that day.

Whitehead: Correct. He knew how many men was in the party--each engineer. Sometimes when we'd get out there, we'd have to wait because there wasn't all that many engineers to measure it off, and some of the working groups would have to wait until the guy come along to measure off your allocation before you could even start to put a pick in the ground.

Marcello: Now at this particular stage, you were constructing roadbed, as you mentioned.

Whitehead: Roadbed.

Marcello: You weren't really into the cuts and fills yet.

Whitehead: No, sir--roadbed. It was just strictly moving dirt in this early part--digging it out over here on the lower side of both sides of the roadbed and bringing it up on the roadbed and dumping it out of these sacks.

Marcello: Now how long would it take you to move three cubic meters of dirt per day per man?

Whitehead: Well, when we got to the point of three meters, I can recall being out there as long as eighteen hours at one time before we could come in. And that was part of their program. You start your work; and go in when you finish it. That's the reason why we was getting to come in early when on this first

meter per man business, because moving a meter of dirt per man takes a lot less time than three meters per man (chuckle). It's just mathematically true. Then, of course, by this time we saw. . . we began to realize. . . "Okay, we're helping this outfit." We looked at it from two angles: one, "We're helping them build a railroad here to be used against us"; and two, "If we're going to be all this gung-ho about this thing, we're just going to get ourself deeper into a lot more work, and we'll never get back to camp." I think we all arrived at this concensus--"So let's slow this thing down. Let's slow our pace down." All right, by slowing our pace down, then, it took much more time to move the three meters than it did the one meter. But that's just, I think, typical Americans in such a situation that if you tell me I can do this and I can go home, why, that's why I'm going to get it done and forget it and go home. But we found out that it didn't work that way because they just laid on more work.

Marcello: Were you fed out on the job?

Whitehead: Yes, sir. We sure were.

Marcello: How did the chow routine work? Would you get a meal in the morning before you left and then another one on the job?

Whitehead: We'd always eat the morning meal before we left the camp.

Marcello: And what would it consist of?

Whitehead: Rice and soup--watery soup. By this time, the soup had begun to get pretty thin due to the fact that up in that part of the jungle, they . . . and everything that come up that part of the country, you see, had to come by ship--the shipping lanes. We'd begun to get control of the shipping lanes by this time out there in the Indian Ocean, and that's the reason we got bombed on the way up there. Our people had gotten pretty close. So naturally, what food supplies they got up to that end was grown locally or what they shipped up there. They made sure that they had ample food for their own troops, you know, and then the rest went to the POW's.

Marcello: So anyway, you did get another meal, then, out on the job?

Whitehead: Yes. They fed us three meals a day, such as it was. But we were given three meals a day. Now at noontime. . .

Marcello: Did you carry your food out with you on the job?

Whitehead: No, sir. At noontime everyday, a work party from the kitchen would bring the food out in utensils strapped on their shoulders or on what we called a "yo-yo pole." They'd bring it out to the work site.

Marcello: These were fellow POW's that were bringing the food out.

Whitehead: Fellow POW's. You can bet your life that a Japanese guard never picked up a "yo-yo pole" unless it was to do his own thing for himself or some of his buddies. They'd bring the

noon meal out. Now if it appeared. . . and somehow or other, their communications was organized enough that they could get word back to the base camp as to whether they wanted food brought to a work party that was going to be late in the evening or wait until we got in. Many times I recall getting in after ten or eleven o'clock at night and eating my late meal because of the time it took to accomplish our daily task.

Marcello: Now how much were the guards harassing you on these work parties?

Whitehead: Well, again, now I never got harassed all the time up until this point. We had a few that. . . some of the guards, if they didn't think you were moving fast enough, keeping up a pace, or if you was a little bit lax . . . what they thought was a little bit lax, and you weren't carrying your weight, they did have a few incidents. Some of the boys were harassed, yes.

Marcello: What form would the harassment take?

Whitehead: Oh, a slap across the face. I understood that some of them said that they were hit with rifle butts. I think some of them were even stood at attention after they got back to the camp--stood at attention in front of the guardhouse. If they sassed one of the guards, he'd take reprisal action, certainly. Sure they would. I didn't have any incident up to this point with them--none whatsoever.

Marcello: How big a camp is this here at 18 Kilo?

Whitehead: We had two . . . we had two areas. We had the black Dutch and the Americans, and I seem to think we had some Australians in there. Because I know there were Australians on the back of this ship that we were on coming up there. But I don't now that we had any Australians in that camp. I know we had the black Dutch and us Americans.

Marcello: Now has your health seriously deteriorated yet? Now obviously, you're beginning to weaken, and probably some of the typical ailments are cropping up.

Whitehead: This is the camp where my health--my personal health--began to deteriorate. I'd gotten back a little of this beriberi--dry beriberi--situation or condition. And also, out on one of these work parties, I was given a detail. . . we had, if I can describe them right, sections of small-gauged rail. I think they were only about 22 or 24-inch gauge rail--with some handcars, like you'd see in the coal mines, that they utilized. In repositioning these rails one day, which I was on the detail, we reached down and we tried to pick this weight up in unison--because they were heavy--to carry them on bamboo poles. I collapsed; my back gave out on me. Of course, I managed to get into camp and went to see the doctor. I didn't do anymore work the rest of that day; I just laid out

there and tried to sooth my back because it was hurting.
Finally, I got into the camp.

Well, the next day, then, the doctor put me on--well, that night--the doctor put me on the sick list and told me that the only thing I could do was rest and that I'd strained my back, and he recommended me rolling up a small roll of blanket or anything and putting it under my back and arching my back for a few minutes or few hours and strictly bed rest . . . bed rest or slat rest. So I did this. I was out, oh, a couple or three weeks that I didn't go out on a party.

Marcello: Now at this time, were the doctors determining who was and who was not fit to work?

Whitehead: Yes, they relied on our doctors that was in our group to tell them who was and who wasn't able to work. However, when we speak of quotas, they had a quota, also, of so many men per day on that railroad. If enough people could not turn out normally to satisfy their daily work requirement of manpower, they would go into the sick huts and evaluate these people themselves. If they said they were able to work and they needed them in the work parties, they went. Only at such time would they do this if enough people didn't show up out there to work. Then the Japanese would come in and make their own medical evaluation as to whether you were fit to work or not. It just so happened that at this stage of the game, our sick

rate was low enough that enough people could be provided every day for the work parties.

Marcello: And I guess they were fairly well on schedule so far as the construction of that railroad was concerned.

Whitehead: I'm sure they had a time schedule which they were working against based on weather, progression of the war, available supplies, and this sort of thing. I'm sure they had a time schedule.

Marcello: What were the medical facilities like here at 18 Kilo?

Whitehead: It was just a bamboo thatched roof hut just like the rest of them.

Marcello: Did the doctors have very much in the way of medical supplies and surgical instruments and things of this sort?

Whitehead: I'm not too familiar how much or in what quantity--not quality, certainly but quantity--of the medical supplies that our medics had at this time. I'm sure that up this point in time they still had a few because I've heard of the boys talking about packing some of the medical supplies--carrying them in addition to their own personal gear to help bring them along. I'm not sure how much--in what quantity--medical supplies were available. It seemed as though quinine was pretty well available all the time, and I think the Japanese provided that. I think so; I think they provided it. Because they had a fear

of two diseases--fever and cholera. I think they provided the necessary medication to fight these two.

Marcello: When you say fever, are you referring to malaria?

Whitehead: Malaria, the fevers--the tropical fevers--of dengue, malaria, or what-have-you. I'm sure that they provided a certain. . . I know they did later on. Any Atabrine or quinine that we got was provided by the Japanese, just like our cholera shots.

Marcello: How great a problem was dysentery at this time?

Whitehead: I can only . . . I can only recall my situation. I don't think dysentery was that much of a major problem among the most of us. Sure, we all had the bowel runs up until this point, but I don't think it had progressed to . . . and I may be wrong. I'm just trying to recall or recollect from my own memory at this stage or at this point in time of dysentery being a real problem to the doctors. I'm sure we had cases of it; I didn't have it other than the runs and, you know, loose bowels and et cetera.

Marcello: How long did you remain here at 18 Kilo altogether?

Whitehead: You know, I don't really recall how long we were at 18 Kilo. I just don't remember exact dates, but seems to me like it wasn't more than six or eight months until we had moved.

Marcello: Where did you move to from 18 Kilo?

Whitehead: Sixty-five Kilo.

- Marcello: Now in terms of its physical appearance, was 65 Kilo similar to or different from 18 Kilo?
- Whitehead: Similar to 18 Kilo but more into the jungles, more into the jungles.
- Marcello: You're into the jungle now.
- Whitehead: Now we're getting into the real . . . the jungle area. Now we're getting into the hilly, rocky, mountainous jungle area at 65 Kilo. That's about the only difference.
- Marcello: How does the work vary here now?
- Whitehead: Well, I think here, the best I recall, it was still somewhere around two, two and a half meters per day. When we first moved into 65 Kilo, I think we were going out in the morning and being able to come in at a reasonable, decent hour, say, around dark or a little after. We began to get into a little different type of construction because now we're getting into moving rock--busting rock--in this roadbed. In this area, I think, is where we first witnessed our first blast of dynamiting to clear the minor cuts. It'd gotten completely out of dirt work; now it's a rock mixture-type of earth movement.
- Marcello: You're either making cuts, which means removing rocks and earth, or making fills, which means putting rocks and so on in.
- Whitehead: Correct. Correct.
- Marcello: Is there any difference in the degree of difficulty in working on cuts or fills, or are they equally hard?

- Whitehead: Well, you know. . . looking back, naturally, it'd take you longer to move a mound of rock than it would a mound of dirt because you can handle a mound of dirt with a shovel and put it into these baskets or into these gunny sacks and let the men tote it off. But in rocks, you have little rocks, you have big rocks, some of the smaller gravel--pea gravel--or rocks the size of baseballs that you could handle with the shovel, and some of it was big enough that two men could hardly carry the one rock on a basket, on a "yo-yo pole." So the time varied with moving this type of material--earthen material--than just the plain dirt with no rock involved.
- Marcello: Who's doing the dynamiting?
- Whitehead: The Japanese. We would sling the sledge-hammers and drill the holes, and then they would stuff them and pack them and set the charge and shoot the dynamite.
- Marcello: Does the food differ any in terms of quantity or quality as you're now moving up to the 65 Kilo Camp?
- Whitehead: No, I don't think I recall any difference in the quantity or quality of food; it's still just basically rice with the watery soups at this point. It's about basically the same substance.
- Marcello: Okay, now in May of 1943, the so-called "Speedo" campaign began; this is in the midst of the monsoons, also. Now do you recall where you were when the "Speedo" campaign started? Do you recall what particular camp you were at?

Whitehead: May of '43. . .

Marcello: I assume it would have been either the 80 or the 100 Kilo Camp.

Whitehead: Eighty Kilo. Eighty Kilo.

Marcello: Okay, now describe what the "Speedo" campaign meant to you as a prisoner. "Speedo," of course, is a Japanese word, which means "hurry up."

Whitehead: Correct--"Hurry up! Get moving!"

Marcello: How did it affect you as a prisoner?

Whitehead: By the time I got to 80 Kilo, I was having more difficulty--more problems with my back--and by this time I had lost quite a bit of weight. I'd gotten down in weight.

Marcello: And I assume everybody had by this time.

Whitehead: Everybody had by this time. You could really begin to tell now that the deficiencies in our food--our diet--had begun to take their toll. Eighty Kilo, when we first went in there, was still deeper into the jungle and more densely jungle; it was just a mass of jungle.

Marcello: A camp has already been constructed for you again?

Whitehead: No, sir. No, sir, only part of it. There was some huts in this camp. But when we first got there, that's what we had to do--build huts. This is where I first remember tying on a thatched shingle, was right there at 80 Kilo.

Marcello: Who was supervising the building of these huts?

Whitehead: The Japanese engineers. We had Japanese engineers all along on this railroad--all along. Also, I believe, at the 80 Kilo or the 85 Kilo. . . 80 Kilo--that's about all I remember about 80 Kilo. And it was back out on the railroad moving dirt and rock and so forth. I don't think we stayed at 80 Kilo too long. I don't recall just how long we were there before we moved to 85 Kilo.

Marcello: And this is when things really start to get bad.

Whitehead: That's when the "Speedo" really started; really, I think, at 85 Kilo was when the program of "Speedo" really started. Now it got to where every man that was available--could even walk --went out on a work party.

Marcello: They're way behind on their timetable, probably.

Whitehead: I think so. I think so. The best I recall, and looking back in retrospect, I'm sure that's what it was--they were behind on their timetable. Now this is where we had our first experience of working on a party where we drove piles for bridging because now we're up in there where we got to span some rivers --creeks, I call them--water streams. Now we get into this shaping piling and driving piling for some of these bridges--not long, not big--but having to bridge some of these rivers. Instead of filling them in, they bridged them.

Marcello: You might describe the process of driving in the piling.

Whitehead: Well, on this bridge erection work party that I was on, it's the first time that I had ever used an adz--I think that's what its called--one of those things you chop toward you. . . wide-blade thing that you chop toward you. I was assigned to a detail after these trees had been brought in there by the elephants--hewed out in the forest, brought in there--the straight ones--hewed and brought in by the elephant--drug in there. We had to sharpen the points. We sharpened them to a wedge-shape. The Japanese, then, had a metal cap that they put on this. They used old crude, heavy nails about the size of a railroad spike, but they weren't railroad spikes. They'd put these on there--on this wedge-shape that we'd cut on the end of these. Up on the top of it, then, they would put a band--a metal band. Now this is to keep this pile from splintering when you drive it.

The pile driving rig was nothing in the world but a four-legged tower constructed out of long, straight timbers, which that country is famous for, about four, five, six inches in diameter made into a tower similar to a drilling rig. They had a great, large weight of, say, 500, 600, maybe 1,000 pounds that slid up and down a two-inch pipe. In the top of this piling, they'd drill a hole for this weight pilot to sit down in, and with long ropes the POW's would stand out to the side of this thing and pull these ropes, raising this weight and

letting this weight fall to drive that piling (gestures)--great big old weight. Well, there was two Japanese. . . always the Japanese sat up on top of this rig--this tower--to insure that the piling was going straight and to handle this pipe that this weight slid up and down on.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that there was no modern machinery used in the building of this railroad (chuckle)?

Whitehead: I would say so. The only piece of modern machinery that I recall seeing while we were over there were the trucks and the motor vehicles that we had--is the only modern machinery that we had.

Marcello: Another prisoner-of-war described the pile driving to me, and he was mentioning that it was done with a certain . . .rhyme or some singing and so on and so forth.

Whitehead: Rhythmic movement, if you want to call it, yes. Unison? Yes. It kind of reminded me of the days back when we'd see the movies of the 'darkie' down on the Mississippe levee--"tote that bale" or whatever it is--how they would load and handle these cotton bales to a rhythmic. . . yes, yes. We'd set this up. . . you had to because you had to pull together; it was a team effort, in essence, which if you got that weight high enough, you had to pull in unison.

Marcello: Anyway, he was telling me that on this particular detail, one of the rhymes that they would sing in rhythm came out, "Piss on the Japanese." Do you ever remember that?

Whitehead: Yes. Yes. Of course, that's one (chuckle). But, yes, you had to do this if you accomplished what they wanted accomplished, and if you didn't accomplish what they wanted, of course, you subjected yourself to the harassment.

Marcello: Now as they get into the "Speedo" campaign, does the physical punishment dealt out by the guards increase any?

Whitehead: I don't know that it did at this time--at this point in time. I think it was about comparable.

Marcello: Well, now you run into the monsoons at this stage, too, do you not?

Whitehead: Yes. Yes.

Marcello: What was it like working in the monsoons?

Whitehead: Well, you just let the rain fall and keep going is about, really, all I can say. You never tried to take shelter from it except when you got into the camp and were trying to find a dry place to lay down and sleep.

Marcello: Which was almost impossible.

Whitehead: Which was almost impossible with some of those. . . because the dry season over there would curl those thatched roof up, and it'd take quite a while for the rains, then, to level them back off. I remember having to patch the roofs many a time right over my own bunk to keep the water from dripping on me. These monsoons. . . it didn't make any difference with them;

they had to keep going and they did keep going. You just went out and worked in the rain just like the sun was shining.

Marcello: I would assume the workday got even longer at this time.

Whitehead: Yes, in some days it did; in some work parties it did. Some would go out, and it'd be maybe a day before they'd come in, and some. . . you know, it'd depend on just exactly what you were doing and how these engineers felt about when they wanted to knock off.

Marcello: How was the food supply holding out?

Whitehead: Well, now the food supply. . . I think it began to diminish just a little bit by this point in time. They were still trying to provide us with a little meat. Occasionally, we'd get a cow or a beef or a pork, the best I recall, about this time.

Marcello: Now when is it that the death rate comes into being? In other words, when do you really start losing men in relatively large numbers?

Whitehead: Well, now my recollection of that was after we moved to 85 Kilo--we moved up the road. We weren't at 85 Kilo long until I was separated from the group. I went over to Group 5 headquarters, which is at 83 Kilo, I believe it was, and started driving the ration truck, or supply truck, I'll call it, for the group camps. This is when I began to recollect a period of time when we began to start losing people because after we moved to 85 Kilo, we left all of those that were sick at 80 Kilo.

Marcello: They had established a hospital camp there.

Whitehead: They had established 80 Kilo as a hospital camp.

Marcello: But that's kind of misleading to call it a hospital camp, isn't it?

Whitehead: I think it would better be termed as a place to put those that are not able to work--put them on a limited ration and let them either get better or worse.

Marcello: In other words, simply, the hopeless cases were put there or what they thought were the hopeless cases.

Whitehead: Correct.

Marcello: Now I assume that you must have got a little lucky during this stage in being assigned to drive a truck. Is that a good way to put it?

Whitehead: I come by this truck job--the truck driving job--through a maintenance officer, who we lost since we've been home. If you'll notice on my card there, when we first made those out in Bicycle Camp, I put my occupation down as a cook because I didn't think I wanted to be involved in any of their war machinery involvement.

Marcello: Besides, being a cook might give you access to a little bit more chow.

Whitehead: The fact of the matter is I didn't know how to boil water at that time. So he came to the camp one day, and he said, "We

got to provide a truck driver. They want a truck driver over at the group headquarters, and I think it would be a benefit to you to take it." Well, I said, "Whatever you think." So I went over and started driving the truck. That's how I got the truck driving job. They levied the commander of our camp, Colonel Tharp, with providing a driver for a truck. He, of course, went to the maintenance officer--our motor pool maintenance officer--and he in turn come to me and thought it'd be better for me to take it.

Marcello: Okay, now what did this truck driving involve?

Whitehead: All right. Group 5 at this time was spread from about 80 Kilo all the way up to . . . well, no, 65 Kilo; we still have people out at 65 Kilo, because I think Captain Archie Fitzsimmons and his group was at that time when we were at 85 Kilo; I think he was down at 65 Kilo. We had people already . . . we had camps all the way up to around 90 Kilo. . . 90, 95 Kilo, up in that area.

Marcello: While we're talking about these various camps, I gather that that 100 Kilo camp was perhaps the worst.

Whitehead: I didn't have too much experience with 100 Kilo, because I was only in and out of there when I was hauling rations. This is the camp I went back into when I come out of the jungle.

Marcello: Okay, so you're hauling rations.

- Whitehead: I'm hauling rations, driving this truck. It happens to be a Japanese truck, what we called a Nison; it was a cab-over type; engine setting right under your feet; had no hood for it, so I got the heat of the engine right up in the cab with me. I had made several trips back into Thanbyuzayat to haul rations.
- Marcello: Now are they building a road beside the railroad, or how does the supply road run?
- Whitehead: Yes, we also had a road running--not parallel, but intertwined --along the rail line.
- Marcello: Had this previously been built?
- Whitehead: No, it had not. I don't know who was the basic people that worked on some of these roads. I'm sure that some of the prisoners helped build these roads, but they had a lot of the local natives working on these roads. There were several Burmese up in that area, which were separated in different camps and which I didn't come in contact with until I got to driving this truck. Then I got more experience of what was up and down that rail line by traveling up and down it and up and down this road. I'm sure that a lot of the road work was done by some advance parties, and I don't know who this would have been unless it would have been the Burmese and some Thais that they had up in there. I don't think there's too many of our people who worked on the roadbeds; I know I didn't work on any roadbed.

- Marcello: Were you able to steal any food or supplies while you were driving this truck?
- Whitehead: No, as a matter of fact, any food that you could have gotten away with wasn't fit to eat in its present state; it had to be cooked before you could eat it. The same way with water-- I was always careful not to drink water that had not been processed or boiled properly, because we knew by this time what the scare of cholera was up in that area. So you made sure that you protected your own health as much as you could. I'd never eat anything raw; I knew better than this.
- Marcello: On these truck driving jobs, were you accompanied by a Japanese guard or anything of that nature?
- Whitehead: I always had one guard and sometimes two; mainly just one guard, because he knew where to go, how to go. . . I mean, what went at certain. . . I never did know what went off here and what went off there. This guard did. Naturally, he was more or less a supply sergeant but acted in two capacities-- as a supply sergeant and a guard.
- Marcello: Did you ever get very close to him in terms of an acquaintance and so on?
- Whitehead: No, I never did because it was always a different guard. Oh, I maybe had the same guard twice in two different runs, but I was not assigned to one guard or one guard wasn't assigned to me to take my truck. We had three trucks down there.

Marcello: Were you ever harassed?

Whitehead: Yes, I certainly was. Back there in those days and times, one night I had to get up and go to the benjo, and in so doing I happened to get tangled up in my mosquito net. They provided us mosquito nets over there as a truck driver, which they didn't for the others. So . . .and we only had five of us over there.

Marcello: Now where were you located as a truck driver?

Whitehead: Eighty-three Kilo.

Marcello: At 83 Kilo.

Whitehead: Headquarters, 83 Kilo. It was the headquarters camp, which had the commandant of Group 5. This is his headquarters and had all of his henchmen and all of his administrative people-- Japanese, of course. But we had three Australians, one Britisher, and myself; there was five of us who drove trucks--the only POW's in the camp. So they provided us with mosquito nets in our little old barracks--bunkhouse there. Well, one night after I arrived, I got up to go to the benjo. I happened to drag the mosquito net between two of my toes--of course, bare-footed--and it rubbed it raw, just like a rope burn. Okay. So it got infected, and consequently I had the beginning of a big ulcer.

Marcello: You're referring to a tropical ulcer.

Whitehead: Tropical ulcer. Okay, so this begun to get worse, began to swell. I began to do what I could with it--heat water when I could and soak it and so forth. Driving this truck, et cetera, et cetera, it wasn't getting any better. I was traveling up and down the rail line hauling these rations.

So one day I had a load of rations, and I pulled into 100 Kilo, parked the truck right in front of the mess hall. The Jap guard got the interpreter and told them what all to take off. Of course, it was the last stop up the line for me. They took off the rations, and, of course, I go to start the truck and it won't start. Well, I was limited in the amount of tools I had; I had a screwdriver, a pair of pliers, and a plug wrench. So I pulled the plugs out, and this old truck had several million hundreds of miles on it. The fact of the matter is the engine was so loose, the pistons was just swapping holes with each other. So I built me a little torch and burned out the spark plugs and tried to start it, and I couldn't start it.

Well, I come to find out, I'd run the battery down. Okay. So in running the battery down, the generator wouldn't charge, wouldn't put out. So here I was--I was dead; I couldn't move. So I explained to the guard and got the interpreter, and he said he'd call the headquarters. Okay, so they got on the denwa,

and he relayed the message to the headquarters that the guard and myself were there, and we needed help to get the truck going.

Well, it so happened that the guard that I always worked for--my boss--Misaki, we called him--happened to be up the rail line on some sort of an inspection tour with the "wheels," so the guard got word to me that he'd be down in a couple of days. So I had three days there, I think it was.

Finally, they come back down the rail line and stopped there at the camp, and he come over and called for me. I was down in the hut, and somebody come down there out of the kitchen and got me. I went up there, and he wanted to know, through his Pidgin English and my Pidgin Japanese, just what was wrong, and I tried to tell him. It irritated him, and right there beside the truck, why, I got a few blows up aside the head and et cetera. So then he told the interpreter that he'd send another truck up as soon as he got back to base camp --down to headquarters camp. He'd send another truck up there, and we'd tow that one back down to the camp. Okay, in another two days, finally, the truck showed up and brought the rations.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you just sitting around doing nothing?

Whitehead: I was just sitting around doing nothing. I was visiting with the people there--the sick and the lame that happened to be

there. I was there when we lost the first sergeant of the headquarters squadron--Sergeant Shaw. He died while I was there. Now most of the people were in this camp; most of our group was in this camp with the exception of those that was with Archie Fitzsimmons.

Marcello: Now this is the 100 Kilo Camp.

Whitehead: This is 100 Kilo Camp. So anyway, the next day or two, the ration truck came up, and it was driven by a Japanese. None of the other POW's come with him--just this Japanese. We had a Japanese truck driver there. He drove up there; we tied onto it; and my guard that was up there with me got in the cab with me, and we drug it back down to 80 Kilo, back down to the group headquarters.

Well, as soon as we parked, why, this boss of mine was out there on me. I mean, he was on me. He took me out behind the little shed there where we were doing the work on our trucks and policing up on them, and he stood me at attention and took my hat off, and that's where he really gave me a good working over. He took off his belt--his Sam Brown belt--and he worked me over pretty good after he stood me at attention.

Marcello: With the leather end or with the metal end?

Whitehead: With the leather end. He worked me over pretty good. Well, by this time, my foot was just about so-big (gestures) around,

and that ulcer had just. . . oh, it had eaten me up, almost. So I collapsed. Well, I remember that Ron Hubbard, who was the Britisher, and the other boy--the Australian--were there at the time. Well, they carried me up . . . he gave them permission to carry me up to the barracks.

Marcello: I understood one of the worst things that could happen was to fall because they'd just work you over with the boots and so on then.

Whitehead: That's correct. That's correct. Well, after he'd done punished me and give me a good beating, he just left me standing there at attention in the hot sun, and I just normally collapsed. Well, anyway, they got me up to the barracks, and they took care of me and give me some water, you know, and treated me the best they could.

By this time, he'd already evaluated this truck, and old Ron Hubbard had evaluated it to the point that he just told him, you know, and he accepted his opinion and evaluation of the truck--that it was just gone and couldn't be repaired. So I don't think the truck run anymore after that.

I laid around there for, oh, I guess about a week, and then they decided to let me get back to the main camp, and then that's when I joined the group back at 100 Kilo. I want to think that I went back to 101 Kilo, but I have people that

tell me that I was at 100 when I rejoined them. Well, by this time, I was down to about 128 pounds, and that ulcer was eating me up, so I wasn't too cognizant of really what was going on.

Marcello: How did you finally get rid of the tropical ulcer?

Whitehead: Well, after being there in this 100 or 101 Kilo, whichever the case may be, being there a month. . . our only medical officer we had at this time. . . because we lost Dr. Lumpkin there at 100 Kilo. Our only medical doctor at this time was Dr. Epstein out of the Navy. Well, Dr. Epstein evaluated it . . . and we had no medical treatment at this time. He wanted to amputate the leg, and I told him, "No," that I thought that I could survive and I could live with it. Just give it a little bit more time, and I thought we'd be out of that part of the country and be back in the hands of our own people. I'd rather trust keeping it; I'd soak it and so forth and we'd do what we could. I didn't want to lose it right at that point in time. He said, "Well, it's strictly up to you."

Marcello: Besides, not too many people survived those amputations, did they?

Whitehead: To the best of my knowledge, not too many of them. I know of two that survived them up there in the jungle. One of them that we never thought would ever come out of 80 Kilo is little Bert Jones, who lives over at Bridgeport. He survived one.

Marcello: How big was your ulcer by this time?

Whitehead: Oh, by this time, I'd say that my foot was, oh, eight or ten times the size of normal size. The size of the ulcer was just under the size of a saucer. . . say, a demitasse saucer-size. It covered the whole top of my foot.

Marcello: These things simply rot away the flesh, do they not?

Whitehead: That's what they do; they just rot away the flesh. It was just a great big open, deep, mess-looking sore. So then that's when I got back with my buddy from Wichita Falls. He and I were great friends--good friends--Nick Karr. He was the one that cooked in the mess hall. When he was on duty, I'd go down around the mess hall and sit, pet my ulcer, and talk with him while he was on duty, and he was on duty mostly at night.

Marcello: What would you do--soak it in hot water and use rags?

Whitehead: Hot water, yes. Nick kind of took care of me and helped me through this period.

Marcello: What did he do for you?

Whitehead: Moral support mostly (chuckle), you know.

Marcello: I'm sure that you saw cases where men simply gave up and died.

Whitehead: Yes. Yes, I witnessed a couple of those.

Marcello: How could you tell when a person had given up?

Whitehead: Well, I recall one incident--a friend of mine. This friend of mine's name was Bill Baxter; he was also a member of D Battery

when we mobilized. Bill happened to be in 80 Kilo Camp--put back there with the rest of the boys that was severely ill, seriously ill. About three days prior to my finding him dead, I was in the camp with a load of rations, and I visited with Bill. Bill not only had dysentery; he had fever and he had sores--tropical ulcers. He was sort of in a despondent mood; he didn't want to live; he wasn't eating. We'd take his food to his bedside; he wouldn't eat.

Marcello: That was always a good sign, was it not, that is, when the person would not eat?

Whitehead: That's correct; that's absolutely right. When they got off the food, it was kind of like an animal, you know. When an animal gets off of its food and won't eat, you know that they're sick. Well, Bill was this way. Well, then three days lapsed --about three or four days, maybe a week--and I was back into the camp, and I went back to see Bill. I raised the edge of the mosquito net, and there Bill lay dead. Well, anyway, I gathered my compusure, and I went back up to the front and informed the medics that Bill had passed away and that they should do something because it appeared to me he'd been dead in excess of twenty-four hours.

Marcello: And I assume that he had the symptoms of just about everybody else who had given up.

Whitehead: I would think so, yes.

Marcello: In the meantime, what was happening to your ulcer? Was it getting any better, or did you receive any additional medication?

Whitehead: No, I still had my ulcer, and it wasn't any better. I don't believe it was any worse than what it had been two months prior.

Marcello: How long were you nursing this altogether?

Whitehead: This ulcer?

Marcello: Yes.

Whitehead: Oh, I'd say about eight or nine months.

Marcello: And it was about the same size most of that time. . . after it had reached its peak.

Whitehead: After it had reached its peak, yes; it remained at that same size. I was hobbling; walking on the heel of the right foot where the ulcer was located--on the right foot. So in answer to your question about witnessing. . . this is my firsthand knowledge of witnessing a person that I thought had just given up the boat and didn't want to live and consequently just wanted to lay there and die.

Marcello: You mention that in your particular case, you were bathing your ulcer in hot water to try and remedy this ailment. What were some of the other methods that you saw being used to try and get rid of these ulcers?

Whitehead: Well, some of the fellows used mud packs; some would use a . . . there was a leaf on a tree that grew in that jungle that they would paste over these sores as if to say, "Well, cut out the outside elements, and it'll heal from the inside." Again, I wasn't too smart, but I knew that something had to be done outside before it could be healed from the inside. So I always looked at mine as leaving it open, getting ventilation to it; I never did want to seal it off. Now some of the fellows reported having satisfactory results and effects from sealing it off--packing them with mud and putting these leaves over them. I recall many of the natives on these same type of sores, they patched theirs or put these leaves over them. To what extent and what good they did, the only knowledge I have --firsthand knowledge--is some of the comments made by some of the boys that used these methods.

Marcello: Did you ever see anybody put the maggots on these tropical ulcers?

Whitehead: No. Now this was supposed to have been experimented with one of the doctors in that area over there, but I never saw a case firsthand. I got reports of it that that was what they were trying to do. I think it would be a better method of using . . . letting the maggots eat up this old dead, raw flesh rather than sealing the ulcer off in the method of using a mud pack or a leaf to seal off the atmospheric pressure or conditions.

Marcello: Now in August of 1943, Dr. Lumpkin died. What effect did that have upon the morale of the troops?

Whitehead: I really can't answer that question because I was driving a truck, and I wasn't in the camp when Dr. Lumpkin died. He died shortly after my incident of that dead truck up there. He died sometime between that incident and the time I got back with the group to come out of the jungle. So I really can't . . . I have no firsthand knowledge of what the feelings were of the troops at that time, but I'm sure they all . . . I would have . . . even not being right there in the camp with the main group, I had a sense of loss. Because he was the only doctor that I recall of treating me in all of my experiences over there other than Dr. . . . the Navy doctor.

Marcello: Epstein.

Whitehead: Epstein.

Marcello: I would assume that Dr. Lumpkin was a symbol. He did not have anything to work with in the way of medication or instruments and things of that sort, but just the fact that he was a doctor offered a certain amount of comfort, I would assume.

Whitehead: It certainly did to most of us--me, especially--because in those times you no knowledge of what was going on or any information or knowledge at all in the medical field. You had to turn to someone. So naturally, anytime you turned to him with

a complaint, you got a certain amount of comfort and solace from talking with Dr. Lumpkin. I thought he was a very fine man.

Marcello: This seems to be the overwhelming opinion of just about everybody who was there. What did you do once you were taken off the transportation detail and put back in the 100 Kilo Camp?

Whitehead: Well, my foot was in such shape that I could not work on the work parties. I think the work parties, by this time, had dwindled down somewhat through loss of fellows and the completion of the railroad. The fact of the matter is, before I ever left the jungle, they were ready to drive the "Golden Spike," which was up around 114 and 115 Kilo. So by this time, the majority of the work on the railroad had been completed, so the workload had diminished to where there was very small pockets of men going out to police up. So I didn't go out on anymore work parties after I returned to the base camp with the main group.

Marcello: For the most part, then, you were not participating in the work that was done out of the 100 Kilo Camp.

Whitehead: No, sir. Definitely not. I did not work on that railroad . . . didn't lift a shovel to work on that railroad after I left them at 85 Kilo and went to driving a truck.

Marcello: In the meantime, how were the prisoners supplementing their

diet? Obviously, by this time, they were resorting to cats, dogs, and other exotic forms of food.

Whitehead: My experience in this area is limited. However, based on one experience that I had in one trip into 100 Kilo when I was delivering rations. . . I'd left the mess hall one night and was headed toward the barracks, and our butcher, old Clyde Jones, hollered at me, "Hey, Whitehead, come over!" "Yeah, Jones, how are you doing?" He said, "Got something here I want you to taste." I said, "Well, if it's anything good to eat, I'm willing." So he threw me a cupful of--a dipperful --of stew on the top of my rice and said, "Sit down. Eat your meal right here with us." So I sat down there and I ate it. All they had burning was an old tallow candle in this little old cubicle there in the side of the mess hall. I sat down there and ate that and enjoyed it, really. He said, "You know what you just ate?" I said, "I have no idea, but if you got anymore of it, I'm ready." He said, "Well, we killed that old bitch dog out there that's been running around the camp this morning, and we decided to put her in the stew." I said, "Is there anymore out there? Pretty good eating!" So that's my experience of eating animal, and it tasted all right. I don't recall now just exactly how it did taste, but old Jones and them annihilated that bitch dog and put it in the stew, and I got a little of it.

Marcello: In what condition was your clothing by this time?

Whitehead: I had no shoes; I was going bareheaded; and I had one pair of shorts that, honest to God, if I could have kept them, would have been about fifteen layers of patches. They were lice-infested. Naturally, there was lice in between some of those patches and down in some of those seams that even the strongest fumigation or boiling process for a week wouldn't have killed them all. But that's all I had, is a pair of shorts. Of course, I had my mess gear. But in terms of clothing, that's all I had, is one pair of shorts; no headcover; and I was barefooted --no shoes.

Marcello: In that situation, what can you do so far as personal hygiene is concerned? I'm referring now to such things as shaving, haircuts, bathing, brushing the teeth, things of that nature.

Whitehead: Well, the best I recall while I was at 100 Kilo, at this point in time--that's when you're talking about--they had a little creek down there that they'd allow us to go down and bathe in. As far as shaving is concerned, they would provide--and we did get soap all along--that crude native-type soap, so you could make a lather up out of this, and always somebody had some instrument to shave with, and, of course, passed it around. I know that what I used was a case knife--and it had pretty good steel in it--that I made into a razor--broke the blade

off of it and sharpened it up. You could sharpen it up on just about any stone, you know, well enough to shave. It wasn't the best, but it got the whiskers off.

Marcello: What did you do about a toothbrush?

Whitehead: We didn't brush our teeth. I used a finger--my finger--and it was just gum massage mostly. Toothbrushes are out of the question; I guess we went three years without a toothbrush.

Marcello: Some people, I think, would break a branch off a tree and chew the end of the branch into a brushy . . .

Whitehead: Yes, some of the boys, I recall . . . I don't know who it was that did, but they relied on some old home remedies that their mother, I think, who dipped snuff, and they'd find a tree root and chew it, and they'd say that's the best thing or best substitute for a toothbrush. I don't think I ever did this, but I'm sure that some of them did go back to the old stories that their mothers and fathers told them, you know, and tried to make do. I remember my mother dipping snuff, and she used a mosquito root and chewed it to make a snuff brush.

Marcello: Now in the situation that you were in, do you see men becoming more religious? Does religion play a factor in the whole process of survival under the circumstances that existed at a place like 100 Kilo Camp?

Whitehead: Well, here's an area I can't answer for most men; I can answer for myself. It didn't change my . . . or I didn't change this

late in life or late in the situation. No, I began to ask myself questions way back there when Bill Taggert talked to me aboard the Republic and give consideration to it. Until I lost it, I carried the little testament that we were given. Bill Taggert gave me one personally, and I lost it somewhere in the jungle. But I would read scriptures and study my testament. I can't speak for the rest of the fellows; I don't think I noticed a widespread turn to religion. But I began to think about who I was and put my hands in God's hands.

Marcello: Is theft very prevalent in these camps? Now when I am referring to theft, I don't mean among the prisoners but stealing from the Japanese. I assume the Japanese would be fair game if you thought you could get away with something.

Whitehead: Yes. Again, I have no personal knowledge of this; I've heard many a stories that came out of there from some of the boys telling of their experiences. I have no personal firsthand knowledge of it, no, but I'm sure it did take place. I don't doubt but what some of these stories these fellows have told me are not true. I have firsthand knowledge later on of a fellow losing his life--an Australian--because of theft, but at this point in time, I have had no personal knowledge of theft.

Marcello: On the other hand, I would assume that theft among the prisoners was virtually unheard of.

- Whitehead: I'd say so, yes; that's my evaluation of it, yes. I don't know of anyone that stole from each other. There might have been, but I didn't hear of them.
- Marcello: In this situation, do little cliques form? Now when I refer to cliques, I mean, are there maybe two or three, four, fellows who band together and more or less take care of one another, look out for one another? This is not done in a malicious sense or anything of that nature, but do you develop some friendships that are closer than. . .
- Whitehead: Well, I think you develop friendships that are closer than what you would have as a whole, in a mass. I think this is just nature. I don't think the surroundings, the situation, or what we were confronted with caused it or created it. You just buddied with those that you knew a little bit better than some of the others. But overall, I don't think this was, as you say, any significant factor, because I think that any one of us would have responded to the need of another one, regardless of whether he was a close friend--a real close friend--or just an acquaintance.
- Marcello: Where do you go from the 100 Kilo Camp?
- Whitehead: I went out of the jungle. They put me aboard a train and took the sick people, and we went down into Thailand.
- Marcello: Now at this time, your tropical ulcer is really no better?

- Whitehead: No, sir, it's bad at this time. It's bad enough that I'm on crutches by now--can't even walk on it.
- Marcello: Now you would have probably left the 100 Kilo Camp sometime around November 26, 1943?
- Whitehead: I think that's just about when it was. I think that's about when it was--sometime around November of '43. . . right.
- Marcello: Was this a rather uneventful train trip?
- Whitehead: Yes, I don't remember the trip at all.
- Marcello: Were you on the railroad that you'd just helped to build?
- Whitehead: I was on the lower end of it that I didn't help build.
- Marcello: That was the British end.
- Whitehead: That was the British end, correct. That was out of Burma, down in the northern part of Thailand, and into what is now known as where they built the bridge on River Khwae.
- Marcello: Now you must have known how that railroad had been built at your end. Did you have any qualms about having to travel on that railroad?
- Whitehead: Not really, because at this point in time and the condition I was in healthwise, I didn't pay too much attention to the ride down. I just remember very, very significantly that I was so sick that anywhere or anything was better than where I was.
- Marcello: Now even when you're lying down and have the weight off your foot, does the tropical ulcer still pain you?

- Whitehead: At that particular time? Oh, yes! Oh, sure!
- Marcello: There was simply no relief for it.
- Whitehead: It might be explained or might be said that it's a throbbing type of pain. I have assumed since then that it's because of the blood vessels or the blood veins in the foot area. . . the blood couldn't get down there and return. It was just going down there and stopping, and I think that's what caused the throbbing pain.
- Marcello: And again, for the record, how large was this tropical ulcer?
- Whitehead: It got to be almost the size of a common, ordinary coffee cup saucer; I'd say it was about the size of a demitasse saucer.
- Marcello: Okay, so where was your ultimate destination?
- Whitehead: Well, when we came down, they stopped at this camp right there on the river where the bridge is.
- Marcello: Was this Kanburi? Kanchanaburi?
- Whitehead: I went into Kanchanaburi at a small hospital camp. There were two camps there at Kanchanaburi. One was a larger camp, and it was all of bamboo huts. This one we went into was what was called a hospital camp; it was the smaller of the two. It was of a wooden-type buildings; even though it had thatched roofs on it, it was a wooden structure-type thing rather than bamboo.
- Marcello: Now how many of you were there in this party that went there?
- Whitehead: I judge there was about thirty-five or forty, maybe a few more, Americans that went into this camp. This is where we came in contact with Dr. Blomsma, who was also a Dutch doctor.

Marcello: Okay, why do you bring up this particular doctor's name?

Whitehead: Well, this doctor's the one that treated my ulcer, and this is one of the most significant times in this whole period for me. He scraped my ulcer.

Marcello: I understand that was a very painful experience.

Whitehead: Well, to say the least. With no anesthetic.

Marcello: How do they go about scraping these ulcers?

Whitehead: Well, he came around and looked at it. He said, "I'm gonna scrape you tomorrow," and I said, "All right." So when he came down to perform the operation or this scraping process, he brought five of the biggest, healthiest troops there was in that building. They got right up there on that sack with me and moved a couple of the other sick patients over so they could have room to hold me. That was the anesthetic I got; they just held me, and he started to work. Well, naturally, I passed out, which done as good as if he'd had a local or any type of anesthetic to provide or to administer. Of course, he scraped it up, and he scraped it right down until the blood flowed, and then he policed up on it and wrapped it in bandages. Now if he used any medication, I don't remember.

Marcello: Have you ever experienced anything more painful in your life?

Whitehead: Never! Never!

Marcello: You say that without any reservations.

- Whitehead: Without any reservations, I say that. It's the most painful thing that's ever happened to me.
- Marcello: How long did it take you to recuperate after the scraping? In other words, he has just scraped out the dead flesh, is that correct?
- Whitehead: He scraped out the dead flesh and got to the good flesh and started the healing process. That's what this scraping did, right.
- Marcello: How long did the whole process take before it was healed sufficiently that you were pretty well back on your feet?
- Whitehead: I would say anywhere from thirty to forty-five, maybe fifty, days. I was back ready to go to work; the fact of the matter is I did in about, oh, forty-five, fifty days.
- Marcello: And in the meantime, did you simply stay off your feet and did no work at all or else were on light duty?
- Whitehead: I stayed off my feet and did no work--not even light duty. I done no work; I stayed off my feet; I stayed right there in the hospital bay area until the swelling went down. Then I was still bandaging it, and I'd go over twice a day to the hospital and change the bandages on it and go on from there. Then when it healed, why, it left me with a hammertoe--the middle toe on the right foot. It left me with a hammertoe, because this ulcer had eaten all the ligaments, and, of course, when they grew back, it pulled the toe up and shaped it into a hammertoe.

Marcello: I would assume there weren't very many guards here at this camp, because all of you are in such bad shape that they don't really need that many guards.

Whitehead: I don't recall having that many guards there at that camp. Again, it was completely surrounded with a fence--a high fence --and most of the people in it were sick enough that they couldn't have gone outside anyway.

Marcello: How long were you at this camp altogether?

Whitehead: You know, I don't remember just how long I was there.

Marcello: Now according to the record, you were transferred on July 21, 1944, but were there any stops in between there?

Whitehead: Yes, I left this camp and went back to the Tamarkan camp with the main group. I went back with the main group at Tamarkan. Then somewhere along, oh, I think, about the seventh month of '44--it'd be August, September or July, August--somewhere in there. . .

Marcello: July.

Whitehead: . . . of '44, there was four of us Americans--one sailor and three of us Army boys--that was pulled out of there and sent down back on into Thailand at a place called Non Pladuk.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, had you done very much of anything while you're at Tamarkan?

Whitehead: While I was at Tamarkan, I went out on two work parties. One of them was down on the river, and I worked on that substitute

bridge that they put across when they bombed out the main one. I worked on that bridge; again, I drove pile on that bridge. Then I made a couple of trips up that mountain. I can't remember the name of the mountain, but they had a lookout up there, and we had to carry that food up to those Japanese up that mountain. I made two trips up that, and I think I worked on two parties--work parties--out there on that bridge driving pile for that substitute or that bridge that they built there to by-pass the main bridge.

Marcello: Now did the air raid actually take place while you were at Tamarkan?

Whitehead: No. I had left Tamarkan; the raid took place after I left there. I recall the incident.

Marcello: In other words, there had been a raid before you arrived at Tamarkan because that's why you were constructing this substitute bridge.

Whitehead: Yes.

Marcello: And then there was another raid after that.

Whitehead: There was a raid after that. So I wasn't at Tamarkan; I didn't witness the raid--either raid.

Marcello: What were the Japanese like here at this camp at Tamarkan?

Whitehead: At Tamarkan? I don't think, really, that I recall their being any different than they had been all up and down the railroad.

I think it was just now beginning to come home to them, again, that they were within striking capability of our forces--our air forces. I recall an incident that happened there--being told about an incident that happened there with one of our officers and a couple of the Navy boys--but I wasn't there so I don't have firsthand knowledge of it.

Marcello: Okay, so you were moved once again out of Tamarkan, and you say there were only about four of you that were moved?

Whitehead: There was four of us. There was one boy by the name of Mel Mahlandt out of the Navy, myself, Albert Smoke, and Warren Voge.

Marcello: How come they picked you four in particular?

Whitehead: I've never to this day understood why or who picked us . . . for this voyage to join up with the British.

Marcello: Okay, so describe what happened when you left Tamarkan.

Whitehead: We left Tamarkan, and again we went by truck. We went down the rail on into Thailand at a place called Non Pladuk. Okay, this was basically a British camp; it had Australians and British in it. The troops were commanded--the POW troops--were commanded by a good friend of mine--got to be later on--Colonel Toosey. We got to be good friends, and later on I had a tour of duty in England, while I was in the Air Force, and we got to be better friends.

When we arrived, Colonel Toosey met us and welcomed us, and he gave us a choice of where we wanted to live--if we wanted to live with the British or live with the Australians. Well, not knowing either nationality any better than I did, I kind of went along with Mr. Lahlandt, who outranked me because he was a chief petty officer in the Navy, and he chose for us to be housed down with the Australians. So that's where we went; he housed us over with the Australians. Well, after it was all over, I'd just have soon to have been with the British as the Australians because I had friends in both nationalities.

Marcello: What was this camp like at Non Pladuk?

Whitehead: The fact of the matter is, it was one of the better camps I was in all the time I was over there--outside of Bicycle Camp back in Java. To be a camp on the railroad, which it was, it was a very nice camp. Of course, they were up on stilts, but they had wooden floors in them. They still had bamboo rafters with thatched roofs on them, but the outside of the building or the walls of the building was wooden rather than bamboo. We had an area where we could exercise; we had plenty of room out in what we called the compound area or the paddock area, the British called it--the paddock area. Somehow or other, the Britishers there had them a football; they'd engaged in a little football.

Well, we got assigned--the four of us--got assigned to a permanent detail. We'd go out every morning and come in every afternoon--rebuilding and reworking some of the Japanese trucks and motor vehicles, which was right out the back gate and over on the opposite side of the base--on the backside of the base.

Marcello: Did you gather that that's why the four of you were picked out of that group at Tamarkan?

Whitehead: That's why I think I was picked, but I can't understand the other three, because not one of the other three was involved in either transportation or maintenance.

Marcello: While you were up there at Tamarkan, how did they pick you out? Was it just a case of, "You, you, you and you are going to Non Pladuk."?

Whitehead: I don't know how the process worked; I don't know . . . just really, I just know that the sergeant major of the camp--and I think it was one of the American sergeants--just came to us and told us that that's what we were going to do, and I didn't question it. Again, going back and reflecting back, you always look for something different, because you thought any other experience was something you needed to have. Being as you was there, you might as well get all the experience you could. So I wasn't too impressed with that camp at Tamarkan, anyway, because the food wasn't too good, the living conditions wasn't all that great, and I thought maybe that, "Well, down the road

it might be a little better." So I was ready to go; I didn't question it.

Marcello: What were the bathing and shower facilities like here at Non Pladuk?

Whitehead: Non Pladuk? We had wells. Another thing about down in that part of the country--part of Thailand--is that 150 feet below the surface of the ground, you had water. We had about four wells dug in the compound within the camp area. All you had to do was go draw your water and take a bath at any time of the day you wanted to. There's no restrictions on the use of this water as far as bathing is concerned. Naturally, it was just like all water--before you drank it, it was boiled in the mess hall.

Marcello: Now there's a question I should have asked you earlier, and I just thought of it again. You keep referring to a mess hall. In all these camps, did you actually eat in a mess hall, or is that simply where you drew your food and then you ate it wherever you wanted to?

Whitehead: I will make this clear.

Marcello: The mess hall was the cook shack, I guess, in other words.

Whitehead: Cook shack--that's the better term for it. It was a cook shack rather than a mess hall. No, not any one of these camps had a mess hall per se, where you go in, get your food, and sit

down and eat it. No, they were mess shacks or cook shacks or whatever you want to call them. I'm used to using the term mess hall because of staying in the military, you know.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you regaining your strength? Obviously, you couldn't have gotten any worse; you must have been getting a little bit better.

Whitehead: Yes. After we got to Non Pladuk or got out of this hospital camp. . . and I might add that back there in this hospital camp, the food picked up a little bit. It got to be a little better.

Marcello: In what way?

Whitehead: We began to get a lot of dried fish. . . seafood. We began to get a lot more seaweed, which contained iodine, and that sort of thing--not in abundance, but a little better variety than just the plain old grass soups that we'd had up the jungle. I assume that the Japanese, being as they had designated this as a hospital camp and took the effort to put the red crosses on top of the building, that by this time they'd intended to have a little mercy on those that were really sick. Of course, I know our food got a little bit better there. Of course, when I went back to Tamarkan, then, I don't think the food was all that great, because it was still a working camp, and consequently they were on working rations--workingman's rations or well

people's rations.

Then when we got to Non Pladuk, well, we found that our rations were about the same or equivalent to those that we'd had there in that small hospital camp. Then again, in going over to this little repair shop area where we worked, there were a lot of banana trees, so we had access. . . the guards over there were all Japanese. . . there were no guards. They were all Japanese engineers. They were much better to us when it come to eating the native fruits--papayas, mangos, bananas, and that sort of thing. So the food situation began to pick up a little bit.

Marcello: I gather, then, that you weren't being harassed here by the guards or anything. . . by the engineers or anything.

Whitehead: No, I can't say that we were. No, sir. No.

Marcello: Had you lost the Koreans altogether by this time?

Whitehead: No, no. Definitely not. Our camp there at Non Pladuk was still guarded by the Korean guards; we only worked for the Japanese engineers over there in this automotive repair area. But the guards would take us and bring us, and then they would turn us over to the Japanese engineers throughout the workday. Then they would control us and take care of us during the work period and then turn us back over to the guards and take us back to camp.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that you were actually working steadily here at this repair shop but not necessarily hard?

Whitehead: It wasn't necessarily hard, no. It was just a steady job. We were rebuilding engines, working over vehicles--that sort of thing. It wasn't necessarily hard. There was none of this "Hurry, hurry! Speedo, speedo!" like we had back up in the jungle to finish that railroad, no. It kind of calmed down by this time and sort of leveled off into just a, "Do your work and go home to the barracks," type of thing.

Marcello: About how long a day would you be putting in?

Whitehead: About an eight or nine-hour day.

Marcello: Seven days a week?

Whitehead: No, we were off on Sunday; we were off on Sunday. By this time they began to acknowledge that we were religious-type people, and they'd give us the Sabbath day off there while I was at Non Pladuk.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with the natives here at Non Pladuk in terms of trading and things of that sort?

Whitehead: There was a lot of trading going on . . . I didn't engage in any of it.

Marcello: Did you have anything to trade?

Whitehead: I had nothing to trade. This group of Britishers that was . . . main body of Britishers and Australians in this camp, many of

them didn't go up on that railroad. They worked in the lower part--the lower end of it--and consequently, they've had still many personal belongings that they had not utilized or was hanging onto. So there was considerable bartering going on between the natives and some of the British and Australians; but as far as us Americans was concerned that had come out of that upper part of that jungle, we didn't have anything to barter or trade or even . . . to do anything with.

Marcello: Did the Japanese allow this bartering to go on freely, or did it have to be carried on clandestinely?

Whitehead: It was carried on clandestinely, naturally, because they had not changed their policies about the POW's associating with the natives; they still had that policy. They didn't want you to, and if you were caught, well, you suffered the consequence.

Marcello: Up until this time, had you been able to either send any mail out of the camp or receive any mail--in any one of the camps you were in?

Whitehead: Okay, it was in Non Pladuk when I got my first card. I had not received any cards from my mother, any correspondence from my mother, out of, I think, four cards that we had been able to send out prior to that. I got my first response from my mother while I was at Non Pladuk. Up until this point, I had received nothing from home. The best I recall, the first correspondence I got was a letter that had been edited, had been censored--some of it cut out--which had been written three years prior.

Marcello: What did that do for your morale?

Whitehead: Well, it boosted my morale; however, when I stopped to think about the time lapse, I naturally had questions regarding my mother, the rest of my family. "Are they still alive?" Because this was written three years ago. "What's their situation now?" Also, I give thought to the fact, "Have they received my card?" because she didn't mention it--receiving any correspondence from me of the three or four cards that I had sent.

Marcello: You might describe what these cards were like--those that the Japanese allowed you to send.

Whitehead: Well, they were very brief. They'd tell you what they wanted to say, and you either said what they wanted to say or scratch it out. You were limited, I think, to one or two words that you could write in your own hand and then, of course, sign your name. They were pre-printed forms: "I am well. I am working for pay," or "I'm working"--scratch out the pay--or "I'm sick, but not too bad"--this sort of thing. They said what they wanted you to say, and you could either say it or scratch it out. You didn't have to check anything or scratch out anything--just sign your name. But you tried to get a message into it that your folks or whoever you were sending the card to could understand.

Marcello: By the time you reach Non Pladuk, are you receiving any word from the outside world? In other words, do you have some sort of an idea of how the course of the war has turned?

Whitehead: No, I didn't. Some of the fellows did, because they had been involved in this clandestine-type radio operation or had talked with some of the natives, so they said. By this time, of course, there were a lot of rumors flying, and I always treated a rumor as such. "It's just a rumor." Many of the rumors proved true, and some of them proved false. But personally, I had no personal experience of anyone outside; I never talked to a native that I could understand and get any firsthand information from until the war was over.

Marcello: Now did you remain at Non Pladuk until the end of the war?

Whitehead: No, I did not.

Marcello: Somewhere along about, oh, nine months prior to the date of release, which is. . . I was released, I think, about the 29th of August. About nine months prior to that, or maybe a year-- August or September, maybe October, of 1944, they loaded us all on . . . the British, the Australians, and all got on trains and went to Bangkok. They moved us to Bangkok, and they put us in some "go-downs," what the British refer to as warehouses along the river out there, and I can't think of the name of that river. They staged us there for about six or eight weeks,

and we worked at the refineries, down at the train yard--the working parties that I got on while we were down in this "go-down" area at Bangkok. I remember we had two raids while we were there. . . air raids by our own forces; they were both at night. How we escaped, we don't know. They missed where we were living, but they hit the other bottom end of those "go-downs" and set a lot of raw rubber and other materials on fire that burned for about two weeks or the remainder of the period of time we were there. Then they loaded us on a train and took us out at a place called Ubon.

Marcello: Okay, let's just back up here a minute. While you were working in these "go-downs," were you able to do any stealing at all? Since you were working warehouses, I was thinking that perhaps you may have come into contact with some food and so on.

Whitehead: Well, no. They had these. . . there were two sets of these warehouses; they were divided. As I remarked awhile ago, the upper end of them is where we all lived--all the POW's, because they had a group of us in there--and then the lower end was where these supplies were, and I don't think there were any edible supplies up there or any bartering-type supplies that you could handle. We do know that raw rubber was up there and maybe some other war material-type supplies, but nothing that I recall being small enough that you could make way with and do any bartering or exchanging with the natives with.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you had come under this air raid?
How did you feel about that?

Whitehead: Well, by this time. . . backing up to Non Pladuk. . . in my stay at Non Pladuk and getting acquainted better with the Australians and the Britishers. . . I might add right here that--I'd like to add--I made some good friends among the British and among the Australians.

The fact of the matter is one of my British buddies I still correspond with regularly. He happened to be our pig-keeper there at Non Pladuk. His name is "Patty" Flaherty-- Bill Flaherty was his name, but we called him "Patty" because he was an Irishman. Bill and I got pretty close together. We were talking about cliques awhile ago--I recall, again, this is a friendship type of thing. It's not a clique to me; it's just who you get next to and who you go to buddying with and what you have in common that draws you together. Bill and I got to be pretty good friends there at Non Pladuk. So when we took off on this excursion--when they got us off on this trip to Bangkok--Bill and I traveled together; we bunked together there in these "go-downs." Well, Bill and I would talk about home; we'd reminisce, you know.

We were laying there one night before our first air raid, and I said, "Bill, what do you think'd happen if the Allies

--either British or Americans or maybe Australians--bombed this thing and we were in the middle of it?" "Yank, don't even think about it!" I said, "Well, it's something you might consider." Well, you know, that's the type of conversation we'd have; and as I say, we'd reminisce about home and so forth and what would happen.

Well, the next day or two, they put us all out on a work party--everyone in the "go-down"--they put us on a work party, and we went out there about 250 yards from that thing, and we started digging slit trenches in a "W"-shape or "V"-shape. Well, then we knew that they knew it was inevitable; our allies were getting close enough that they . . . because I think they'd already bombed Saigon by this time--an all-day raid. Some of the boys got reports back that they'd already been bombing Saigon. So we knew, then, that our bombers were close enough because. . . I didn't tell you about the bombing incident there at Non Pladuk; I'd like to back up and tell you about that.

Marcello: Go ahead.

Whitehead: But let me finish this little bit right here. So after we got these trenches dug, then, it was about two or three days. We were laying there one night about eight o'clock and the sirens went off, and, of course, the Japanese, surprisingly enough,

got us all up and routed us out of the building and told us to head for them slit trenches. Had it not been, we'd have probably lost some lives, but the best of my knowledge, we lost nothing.

Now I'd like to tell about this bombing incident there at Non Pladuk while I was there.

Marcello: Now you were coming under some real bombing raids when you were there in Bangkok, I would imagine.

Whitehead: Absolutely! Absolutely!

Marcello: In other words, it was probably nothing like those raids back at Singosari in terms of the numbers of planes and the size of the planes and things of that nature.

Whitehead: That's true. That's true. Absolutely. But if I may digress just a bit and go back to the major incident that happened there at Non Pladuk. . . again, we'd just come in off of that work party over to the Japanese automotive shops that afternoon, and we were standing in front of the guard shack for tinko-- being counted. It so happened that the officer in charge of the guard at that time was standing up in the guardhouse, which was raised and elevated, and he looked over our head and, again, reported an aircraft--hikooki--or whatever they call them. Of course, we all turned around, and here come that flight of B-29's right down that rail line.

Marcello: Were these the first B-29's you'd ever seen?

Whitehead: The first B-29's I'd ever seen. So, of course, they dismissed us immediately. Well, we all knew where the farthest part of the base was from the main gate and the mess shack--cook shack --up in the corner, so . . . and the pig sties. . . my friend Bill Flaherty was back there in the pig sty area, and I headed that way. So I come running up, and old Bill wanted to know what was the matter, and I said, "Just look up yonder and look at them coming! That's what's the matter!" He said, "My goodness!" About that time. . . he had a hole dug around there behind his little old pen there, and we both got around there and stuck our heads in it. Then I looked up, and here them dudes were. They were dropping their bombs. Of course, we got three hits in the camp and lost ninety-one British subjects as a result of this bombing raid. Then after they dropped their bombs, they went on down and circled and came back from the south and dropped incendiaries and wiped out, incidentally, the barracks I was living in with the Australians, which was right next to the mess shack, and the mess shack--just burned them right down.

Marcello: In other words, they tore that camp up pretty well.

Whitehead: Right in that corner. Right in that corner, because the camp was built right next to the railroad, a marshalling yard.

Whitehead: What was your reaction to these bombing raids? On the one hand,

I'm sure there was fear that you might be killed; but on the other hand, did they do something for your morale?

Whitehead: They certainly did boost the morale, because we knew that we had operating air bases close enough that they could get to us. Just taking a geographical look at it, we figured this bombing that on that ship up toward Moulmein was just a test of our strength; really, I think it was a patrol of B-24's rather than a bombing raid. They was just out looking and searching. And then those raids down into Thailand there on the bridge, why . . . and then we were hearing the airplanes go over at night, while I was in this little hospital camp there at Kanchaniburi, going over to make their raids on Bangkok. So we knew that they were bombing Bangkok before we ever got there. Then we had this bombing raid there at Non Pladuk, which more or less told us that our bombers were in striking range and that we could expect more of it. Then, of course, then another thought was, "It's the beginning of the end."

Marcello: In either one of these raids or after either one of these raids, how did the attitude of the Japanese change?

Whitehead: I don't know that they changed all that much, because as I said earlier, after we come back down out of the jungle and they had satisfied their requirement of building this railroad--they'd accomplished their mission--I think as a general rule, it kind of let up all over as far as harassment. I just say this from

started clearing the jungles to what we assumed would be a clearing for a fighter runway--a base for fighters--because it wasn't all that long, and it wasn't that wide. That's what we did while we were out there at Ubon.

Marcello: How big a camp was this camp here at Ubon?

Whitehead: Well, we had something like about, oh, I'd say, 1,500, 1,600, maybe 1,800, 2,000 people. Yes, it was big. We had British; we had Australians; we had black Dutch; and, of course, us four Americans were with that group.

Marcello: I would assume you are living in the typical thatched huts here at Ubon?

Whitehead: Yes, we built thatched huts just like we had up in the jungle--same type of huts.

Marcello: What were the guards like here at Ubon?

Whitehead: Well, here agin, when we built this camp, we built this bamboo fence--high fence. Oh, I'd say it was eight, ten, twelve feet high, and then on the outside of it--about four feet from the base of the fence--we dug a six-foot moat all the way around it, you see, which meant that. . . and then the guards walked on the outside of that--outside the fence. They never did come inside the fence. We never had any guards inside the fence, down in between the barracks, or in the barracks--never. So the guards patrolled the outside of the fence, and we didn't have any come in.

my own experience and from where I was located at the time. I'm sure that other fellows that stayed up there in the jungle found it different, but I didn't find it so. I found that generally they laxed, let up, as far as harassment, because they'd accomplished their mission in that part of the country, and they had utilized most of the manpower that was over there --quite a portion of it--to accomplish this mission. So I think that the pressure was kind of off, and, of course, I'm sure that they were receiving word out of their own homeland about what the situation was like, and maybe it was the beginning of the end, as I said awhile ago.

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that Bangkok was only a staging area so far as you as a prisoner-of-war were concerned. Where did you go from Bangkok?

Whitehead: Well, I stated that we went up to Ubon, Thailand. Now Ubon is in the north--I think it's considered the northeast part of Thailand--and at that time, it was up close to the border of Cambodia. I believe it was Cambodia. We went up there, and it was the end of the rail line; it went out that way. They dumped us off out there, and, of course, we built a camp. They took enough guards along that surrounded us at night and watched over us. During the daytime, we'd build the camp; we built a high fence around it--built our camp; built our huts. Then we

Marcello: Was the work tough here at this camp?

Whitehead: Well, we go back now like we did originally when we went up on the railroad; it was pick and shovel work and cutting the trees and getting them out of the way and then using the picks and shovels to level the land and dress it up to flatten it out for what we thought would be a runway.

I might add that. . . and I can't remember the date, but one day--it was close to the day that they dropped the atomic bomb--coming in that afternoon, one of the guards come up on my side of the rank-and-file and was telling one of the boys in behind me about the Americans dropping a bomb in Japan and trying to describe it as taking all the flesh off, you know. Of course, this. . . we couldn't. . . didn't even guess what type of bomb this was. Well, then the next day we out on that working party; we started digging trenches across this area we'd cleared--six-foot trenches, six feet deep and six feet wide. So we knew, then, that the end was getting closer by this time.

Marcello: Are we to the point where we need to discuss the closing days of the war and the eventual liberation?

Whitehead: Yes.

Marcello: Or are there any other incidents in here that we need to talk about?

Whitehead: Well, I think. . . no, I think that pretty well sums it up as the highlights of it and most of the details that I remember. I might reflect upon one of your prior questions about the bartering or trading and so forth with the natives. I do recall one of the British boys there. I can't recall his last name, but he was redheaded, and, of course, everybody who's redheaded they called him "Blue." Old "Blue" was one of these guys that was jumping the fence and going under the fence down at Non Pladuk, and he also continued his operation when we got out to Ubon, and one night he got caught. So the story goes--again, I didn't witness this firsthand--but as the story goes, they took "Blue" out of the camp one morning and took him out there, and he was supposedly to show them and take them to the natives that he'd been bartering with. While they were outside, they shot him--they killed him; they murdered him. Then they come back in the camp. . . well, we didn't have officers at this time. They come back in the camp, and British Sergeant Major MacTavish, they called him over to the guardhouse and told him. He got a couple or three troops and went out there and picked up "Blue's" body and brought it into the camp and then got a burial detail together and went out and buried him under one of them big oak trees out there just in front of the gate.

Marcello: Okay, how was the food here at this camp at Ubon?

Whitehead: Well, when we first got there, it seemed to be pretty good or about as good as we'd been having ever since we'd been in Thailand; but then, again, when we got word that this bomb had been dropped, why, the food supply began to run short--even rice. We'd even begun to get rationing of rice at that time, because in that part of Thailand there was a lot of fresh vegetables, because in that part of Thailand there was a lot of fresh vegetables grown. Cucumbers--I never saw the like of cucumbers in my life! It seemed to be, everytime you turned around, that's all there was to eat--cucumbers and vegetables. I've drank many a cup of cucumber soup--just cucumbers boiled, that's what it amounted to. That was the basic vegetable we had there while we was at Ubon.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us up to the days immediately prior to the actual liberation itself. What I want you to do is describe how you received the word of the liberation and what your reaction was and what the guards' reaction was when all this came about. Maybe we ought to say surrender--the Japanese surrender--rather than the actual liberation itself.

Whitehead: One morning. . . and I think it is somewhere along about the 26th of August, because I was actually liberated on the 29th of August--that's the record I have on it--they fell the working parties out in normal fashion there at Ubon. We knew that something was to be announced, because out came the colonel--the

Japanese colonel. MacTavish had us all out there in line. . . I think MacTavish knew it before us, but, anyway, they had a regular formation to make this announcement.

Out come the colonel, and he had an interpreter. As they usually did--would do--when they had a speech to make, they'd want to get above you and get up there somewhere higher than you, so they could look down on you; some of them, I guess, they're still doing it. But I recall this colonel. He had a special bamboo stand made for him to get up on so he could get above all of us and make this big speech. He had it carried out there in the main parade area where we always assembled for these work parties, and the interpreter got up there by him. The colonel just stood there--this Japanese colonel--and the interpreter made the statement, you know, that "the war between the United States, Australia and England and Japan is over," and gave a time and the date. I think it was the 26th, really, was the surrendering date, and I think that was the morning that we got the word--the 26th. He went on to say that, even though the war was over, there'd be no more work parties; we were relaxed; he wasn't going to turn us loose; we'd still be confined to the camp; and that within a day or two, our officers would be here to get us. Well, I knew what officers would be coming up there--it would be Colonel Toosey and his officers that was with us there in Non Pladuk before they took them away from us.

Marcello: What was your immediate reaction when you heard that the war was over?

Whitehead: Well, sort of . . . one of complete relief, if I should say so, of the rigors, of the war, of the past forty-three months' experience, of just . . .

Marcello: Now you were still only twenty-one years of age at this time, is that right?

Whitehead: No, I was twenty-four at this time. I was twenty-four--this was '45.

Marcello: You were born in 19. . .

Whitehead: '20.

Marcello: 1920.

Whitehead: Right. So I was twenty-four. But it just took a big load off my mind, you know. My personal reaction and feeling was it just took a big load off my shoulders; I felt relieved and now we were going home, but it was a matter of how and when. I never even give a consideration of how or when; I just thought, "Well, the good Lord has brought me this far; the good Lord will now get me home," you know. This is my reaction to it. So the next couple of days, then, I . . .

Marcello: Is there any sort of celebrating during the next couple of days?

Whitehead: Well, yes. . . sort of . . . because it had only been about five days prior to that day that they'd taken "Blue" out and done

away with "Blue," so we were still sort of reminiscing over "Blue's" fate. But I recall that I began to get together some scrap paper--some old paper together--to make me a signature book. I began to collect these names and addresses; I still have it. . . both Australians and British that I'd made friends with, because I wanted to correspond with them and keep up with them, you know, after we got home. So really, I concentrated on that and spent that two days doing this while waiting for Colonel Toosey to come and talking about, "Now I'll write you," you know, and, "I'll see you one of these days," and that sort of thing. That's the way the time was spent. It was, if you want to call it, a time to reminisce and celebrate and get yourself together ready for the next step and phase in your life.

Marcello: In the meantime, what were the Japanese doing?

Whitehead: To the best of my knowledge, nothing. They were staying to themselves, staying out of the way. Those two days, we still . . . the guard would go with the truck driver and haul the rations from down at the rail depot--they was still bringing those fresh vegetables down at the railroad. But as far as having anything to do with us, no; they just completely separated themselves, because they lived outside. Their compound was outside the main gate or main base, so they just stayed out there to themselves. I don't recall that we had anybody that tried to

walk out of the gate and go on their own, because, here again, most of us thought in terms of the group. Togetherness was the answer to it rather than this lone individual in pursuit of freedom.

Marcello: Okay, now describe your getting out of that camp.

Whitehead: Okay, on the 28th, then, Colonel Toosey had come up from Bangkok. He'd commandeered a train. . . an engine--steam engine--and I think he had four coaches that he'd commandeered there in Bangkok that he brought out there, and he knew where we were. I'm sure that the Japanese told him where the majority of his people were--his camp--and he came out there. Of course, we were all ready to greet him; as soon as he hit the camp, why, we all knew it.

He come straight to the four "Yanks," which he called the "Yanks"--these four Americans. He came to us and he said, "I've got a train setting down on the siding." He said, "I'm going to load it up with my most sick people--those that can't wait a few days--to get them into Bangkok to get them into the hands of the medical people." He said, "I want you four Yanks to get on it and go down, because that's where the bulk of your people are." He said, "They're in that 'go-down' down by the river," and asked us if we knew where it was. Of course, we confirmed this, because we'd come through there; even though he wasn't with

us, we had come through there. They had staged us there in Bangkok before going out to Ubon. So we got on the train and left Ubon, and headed for Bangkok.

Marcello: Did you have any thoughts about seeking revenge at the hands of those Japanese guards or anything?

Whitehead: Not at this point in time, I didn't. I think some of the fellows did, but I didn't.

Marcello: You were just so glad to get out of there, I guess.

Whitehead: I was just glad that it was all over and that I was a free man again. I would leave that. . . if anything did cross my mind in that area, I just shoved it aside and left it and said, "I'll take that up later with myself." No, at this time, I was just so elated and so happy that it was all over and that I was still living and that I'd survived it. I was just ready to come home and then think about those things later--if it even crossed my mind.

But anyway, we got aboard the train and started toward Bangkok. The best I recall, we left there somewhere after lunch . . . a little after noon, twelve o'clock one day, and we traveled that afternoon and at night. We arrived in Bangkok about, oh, eleven or twelve o'clock the next day on board this train, because some of the rail line had been bombed out and disrupted, and they'd bypassed it and made patchwork. A couple

of times, I remember, we stopped for two or three hours at a time until the situation cleared up before we could come on. But we were traveling in style--the best that they had in Bangkok or in Thailand at that time. They were coaches with cushioned chairs in them--seats, and benches. So it was quite a contrast to traveling aboard the old cattle cars back there when we first rode a train under the Japanese.

So along about sundown that first evening out of Ubon, back toward Thailand, we'd made a stop and they took on water. Of course, those engines over there, they fueled them with wood; they didn't have coal. They'd have to stop and take on wood and water, so they were steam engines. I remember we stopped at this siding to take on wood and water, and, of course, the natives, then, were all trying to be the right type of people toward the Allies, you know.

Marcello: They knew who had the guns.

Whitehead: Oh, yes. So anything we wanted, just ask for it and they'd give it to you; you wouldn't even have to have money or barter with them. But the significant incident of this trip down is when we made this stop. Someone brought us four Yanks a package. . . a little sack. In this sack was a towel, a razor, shaving cream, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste--the essentials for personal hygiene. Never until this day do I know who it

was. They just put four of these individual packages on there and said, "Give them to the Yanks." Well, all the British knew us; everybody on that train knew who we were--the Yanks. I guess they said Americans rather than Yanks, because to the British and all the Aussies we were Yanks; we weren't Americans. So, of course, we opened these packages; to our surprise, that's what was in them! Well, there was nothing for me to do but taste that toothpaste and that toothbrush, and that's the first thing I done. I busted out that toothpaste and that toothbrush and stuck it in my mouth and started brushing, because that's the first time in about three and a half, almost four, years (chuckle). So that was the main incident that I recall that sticks in my mine real vivid--real strong--of that train trip.

Marcello: You mention that you received this package there. Had you ever received any Red Cross parcels at all anywhere along the way?

Whitehead: But while we were in Non Pladuk, the Japanese released some Red Cross parcels to Colonel Toosey, but they were so old that the only thing in them that was consumable was the canned stuff--the pressurized, sealed cans. There were some biscuits, which was field ration biscuits that was canned and sealed; some of the potted meat; the cigarettes were all molded--you couldn't smoke them. Some of the packaged stuff in the cellophane or the aluminum packages like hot chocolate or coffee, it was good. It

had to be sealed. Anything that was in there that might be exposed to the elements or the weather was completely ruined, like the cigarettes. Even though they had cellophane around them, they mildewed, and you couldn't smoke them. But we only got one distribution, and we had to break one package, which was an individual package, we broke it down between six of us. Now that's the only Red Cross supplies that I ever come in contact with all the time we was over there. I understand there was a lot of it shipped over there. I think some of the boys have reported or said that they got a little more, but that's the only Red Cross material that I remember getting.

Marcello: How much did those Red Cross packages mean to you at that time?

Whitehead: Well, at the time, they would have meant if we'd have got one of those (chuckle) American cigarettes, as long as we'd been sucking on that "wog tobacco."

Marcello: What is the "wog tobacco?"

Whitehead: Well, it's a native tobacco that is just crudely processed. It's gathered and dried and washed and hung out to dry like in the old days when the mamas used to do the baby diapers and just hang them out to dry. It was just an old rough, crude, processed tobacco. I guess the reason because we called it "wog" was because I think someone hung the title on the

native Thais and the Burmese as "wogs," you know. It was a term used for "native."

Marcello: Would you simply roll up any piece of paper and put that tobacco in any rolled-up piece of paper?

Whitehead: Well, I can assure you, when I started looking for enough paper to make this book or make this little . . . put enough paper together so I could get enough together to write addresses on, it was very difficult to find enough paper to do so. I finally did. I guess you'd call it old rice-skin paper. It was pretty rough, but it would hold a . . . you could write on it with a pencil or pen. . . and a pencil was about all we had. I don't know where pencils come from, but there seemed to always be a pencil available. Pens, no; ink, no; but pencils, yes. There seemed to always be somebody with a pencil. So I managed to get me a pencil and take these addresses. I still have them in this book.

After we had this stop and these packages given to us. . . I never know to this day who put them on board the train. However, I've been told since then by some people that went back over there or some people that seemed to know more about what happened in time area that I do . . . they say that we had people. . . these Chinese. . . what kind of forces were they? Some type of forces that infiltrated down out of China

and was in the northern part of Thailand at that time. They could have--at any time they wanted--they could have taken over our camp at Ubon, Thailand, and liberated us, but they had no way of getting us out except back over the Himalayas and back out. . . . not Himalayas, but that mountain range back in toward China. They knew that the war was pretty close to the end and just let it come out the normal way, but they were in there. I assume that this was correct, because the packages that they put together. . . and I don't know if they gave any to the British or Australians, but I do know that on that particular train, they only put four packages aboard the train and said, "Give them to the Americans." So they must have been American officers and knew that there was four Americans in that camp by somehow or we . . .you know.

Marcello: I assume that you eventually ended up in Calcutta.

Whitehead: Yes, I did. We arrived in Bangkok aboard this train the next day, which was the 28th of August. I remember that date because that's the date that I use as the date of my actual release, even though on the 26th we got word that the war was over. The 28th I use as a release date because that's the date that they flew me out of Bangkok back into American hands.

We arrived in the train yards there at Bangkok aboard this train, and Colonel Toosey had a truck. He'd already made this

prior arrangement to have a truck sitting there for the Americans to get on and go out to the "go-downs," because he'd told us that that's where Colonel Tharp and our main body of people was located there in Bangkok. Of course, we knew where it was. So this truck driver just hauled us out there.

We drove up and I'd just jumped off this truck, and it was right at lunchtime because they were just getting ready to feed the troops there. I jumped off of this truck and started toward the back dock where they had the chow line set up, and up drove a jeep. . . an unfamiliar face. . . an unfamiliar vehicle. . . had just a normal World War II jeep and had this two troops in it, one of them dressed in flying gear. I knew that there was something going on, so now I wanted to hear; I wanted to get next to them. So he drove up and stopped his jeep, and he got out and he asked the first person that was close to him, "Who's in charge?" I don't remember exactly who it was, but they said, "Just a minute, and I'll get him." Well, he went into the "go-downs" and hollered for him--Colonel Tharp.

Well, I think about this time, Ira Fowler stepped out the back door onto the ramp--Ira was a captain at the time--and he got into the conversation with him, I think. Well, in just a second or two, Colonel Tharp showed up; Jack Wisdom was there

on the back ramp--1st Sergeant Jack Wisdom of Headquarters Battery. I heard him say. . . make this statement, "I've got some trucks coming, and I've got five airplanes setting out at the runway ready to take off with as many people as I can get to load these planes."

I dropped that mess gear. . . the fact of the matter is, I just slung it. I said, "I don't need this anymore" and got right back on that truck; I never even ate lunch. So it didn't take them long to get enough people. He told them how many he wanted, and we filled up the trucks. I think there were five trucks--flat beds, stake beds. . . filled up the trucks--got enough on these five trucks--and away we went to the airport. We got out there with those "gooney birds"--C-47's--sitting on the runway.

We all loaded up, and from there we went to Rangoon. We stopped at Rangoon, refueled, and had our first bite of American food since the day we was taken POW over there at the rubber plantation in Java or there at Garoet.

Marcello: You might describe that American meal.

Whitehead: Well, it wasn't a meal there. They had some light sandwiches and fruit juices. That's about all they gave us. They had some light sandwiches. I think some of them were cheese spread-type sandwiches and some maybe tuna fish or something of this nature. They asked us not to eat too much but drink all the

liquid we wanted. Well, of course, I downed that orange juice like it was going out of style.

Then we were on the ground only long enough to refuel and load back, and then we went over to Calcutta. Well, when we landed at Calcutta, it was later in the afternoon. The fact of the matter is, I think it was around six or seven o'clock; it was about dark. They loaded us on ambulances there. Mind you, I've still got on this same pair of shorts that's just about fourteen thicknesses with patches. They loaded us on ambulances off the airplanes and took us out to the 142nd Field Hospital. They was all set up to receive us out there. The first thing we did was shed every one of our clothes and went through a shower and a detoxification and fumigation process. We went through this shower, and they sprayed us down. That's the last time I saw that set of shorts. We threw them in a pile, and I assume they burned them from there.

Marcello: Oh, you still had your old shorts from the POW days?

Whitehead: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Sure did. Sure had them. That's all I had; that's all I was wearing. I didn't have no shoes; I didn't have a headgear. I had on only that set of shorts. As I said, I threw that mess gear down back there at that "go-down" in Bangkok. When that major said, "I've got five airplanes out here, and I need a load of people for everyone of them," I just

slung that mess gear out over that truck and said, "Let's go!" I got rid of it, and I wish I'd brought it home, you know. I could have kept that; they wouldn't have taken that away from me at Calcutta. But anyway, I didn't. When I got into Calcutta, that's all I had, was that pair of shorts on my rear end and nothing else.

Well, I had this sack. . . they even confiscated that. I couldn't even bring it in, because I had brought it out of the jungle, and they wouldn't let me keep it. I had that sack that they gave me up there on that train coming down, and that's all I did have. Of course, it was a bag about so long (gesture), and it had long strings on it. I hung it over my shoulder. But I just dumped that mess gear and had that and my shorts, and that's all I had. When I got into Calcutta, they wouldn't let me keep that; I had to throw it in that pile or heap of clothing that we'd all shed.

Marcello: Was it safe to say that you were a pretty scroungy-looking outfit when you came out of the jungle?

Whitehead: Yes (chuckle), I think it'd be safe to say that. However, I think, the best I can recall, I'd had a fresh-shave head about a week before I was liberated, so my hair wasn't too long. Of course, again, I think most of us shaved about every day or every two days, you know. No, that was one of the requirements-- that slick head and slick face--with the Japanese, because. . .and

I thought it was appropriate because of hygiene, you know, personal hygiene; I thought it was very appropriate. I think it proved so in the end. It might have been a harassment to some people to have your head shaved, but I think, healthwise, it was the best thing that could have happened to us.

Marcello: What sort of procedure did you have to follow after you got to Calcutta?

Whitehead: Well, I don't know that there was any specific procedure other than we were all interviewed, and I might elaborate on this. I do want to get this in here; I want to tell you about it, because I think it's very significant as far as the results of the war trials. This is my first opportunity, after processing and getting checked out medically and getting a new set of records and going over my history and getting some dates down and so forth. . . this is my first opportunity--all of us, I think, that come through Calcutta--it was our first opportunity to file any type of atrocity charges that we may have to file or want to bring against an individual.

Well, naturally, I had one, because I was a victim--a very severe victim--back there in the jungles of Burma. As I stated earlier, this Misaki worked me over, and I thought nothing was wrong about me filing an atrocity charge against him.

I'm probably the only one that'll ever mention the name, because I worked for him as a truck driver, and he was not a guard on any other part of that railroad. Anyway, so I sat down and I was interviewed with regard to the charges, and I related this whole incident to the people that was taking these charges. I would assume it was the War Department or the arm of the bureaucracy that done that at that time out of the War Department. So I filed the charges. Well, our stay in Calcutta ended, and we come on home. I come to Wichita Falls, and we had our gathering up there with the "Lost Battalion."

Marcello: Now when was this?

Whitehead: This is in October of '45--our first battalion get-together in Wichita Falls. In October, we gathered there and reminisced and had our first reunion, really, as a result of the women's organization that they had formed. They formed the Lost Battalion Association while we were gone--the women did . . .the mothers and wives of the boys. It was formed right there in Wichita Falls. That was our first get-together. It was our first reunion but not official reunion as the Lost Battalion Association. It was just decided that we'd all get together, and a lot of people didn't get the word, so a lot of people didn't come. It was pretty easy to get

the word to all the boys living in Texas, but a lot of these fellows that was outside of Texas who were draftees, they all went home and they didn't know about it, or I'm sure a lot would've come. So we had our first get-together there in '45; we set the date for the next one, which they moved it to August. We celebrate it in the month of August now. The date was set, and the first officers was elected for the first-year reunion, which was '46.

Anyway, after this get-together we kind of settled down, and we made another reunion, I think in February, down in Abilene, because Abilene wanted to have a get-together and the city wanted to celebrate and bring their boys home and honor them and so forth. So most of us went off down there and celebrated that. I had a three-week convalescence over in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in this period of time.

Then now we come down to the nitty-gritty; I got to do something--go back to work or something. So I went back to work for the same firm that I was working for when we mobilized. It had changed names, but I went back to work for the same guy--a fellow by the name of Bill Burns. When I quit working for him and when we were mobilized, it was Larrick Construction Company, and when I came back, well, Larrick had sold out, and I can't think of the name of the man. But

anyway, Bill Burns just lived two doors from me. . . where my mother was living, and I went back to work for him. We went on a job down at Jacksboro building a repressure plant down there on one of the oil leases just north of Jacksboro. The details I won't go into, but it was taking the gases out of the ground, repressing, building up the pressure, putting them back into the ground to push the oil out. They use another process today.

Okay, so I'm up there putting on sheet iron on a roof, and I saw this black Ford drive in out there on the lease and up toward the building. A man and a woman were in it. This man got out, asked one of the workers there who the boss was, and, of course, he pointed him to Bill Burns. I saw them chatting there; I'm sitting there looking, you know, because I'm headed that way or looking out that way. I saw Bill make a motion, pointed up there on the roof, and finally he hollered at me. He said, "Tom, come on down! You have a couple of people here that want to talk to you!"

So I come on down, and I walked out there, and he says, "Are you Thomas A. Whitehead?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Is your serial number 20813861?" I said, "It certainly is." He said, "Were you a member of the 131st Field Artillery, 2nd Battalion, who was a POW in Burma and in Thailand?" I

said, "I am." He said, "Have you filed an atrocity charge against one of the Japanese guards during your captivity?" I said, "Yes, I have." He said, "Do you recall his name?" I said, "Yes, his name is Misaki." He said, "Okay, that's sufficient for now." He said, "Mr. Burns, do you mind if Mr. Whitehead goes into the county seat with us?" Jacksboro's the county seat of Jacksboro. He said, "If you can't cover his salary, why, we'll cover it for him the length of time he's gone." "But," he says, "we need to take him in before a notary public in the county courthouse to verify some documentation." He said, "That's fine." Well, Bill understood.

So I got in the car and we started to town. He was driving, and the young lady opened a briefcase, and she dug out some pictures. She said, "Do you recognize this man?" I said, "Yes, I do." "Will you tell me his name?" I said, "It's Misaki." She said, "Fine." Well, then he just had a few questions about the conditions over there and so forth until we got to the courthouse, and we went into the courthouse. Of course, I saw Prunty and Tilghman, because Prunty and Tilghman had already gone to work for the county; they were working there.

We went into the county clerk's office there at Jack County, and I signed some papers and they were notarized

right there to further verify my original filing of this complaint. He told me I would hear. Well, they took me on back to the job, and I went on and I'd kind of forgotten about it.

I don't have it today, but I've got confirmation through the mail from the War Department--I can't remember just exactly what division or so forth, but I think it was a special commission that was set up--that they'd had this old boy's trial over there in Bangkok in those war crimes trials and found him guilty and sentenced him to death. Evidently, prior to my time or after my time--my association with him--they'd had other atrocity charges filed against him, so they were compounded. He was supposed to have been killed. . . found guilty and sentenced to death.

Marcello: Did this give you a certain amount of personal satisfaction?

Whitehead: Well, at this time now, I'm going to answer a question you asked earlier. Did I have any thoughts of reprisal action against these people? This kind of opened it up. This reaffirmed in my mind that we had the greatest nation in this world. Here I am: I'm that far away from home; this incident happened to me; and then our own government would go so far and spend the time to verify and go through such a lengthy process to see justice rendered. You see?

Then I began to have thoughts about what I would like to do personally. Well, I just thought about it and dropped it.

I might add, if you don't mind. . . and maybe I shouldn't tell this story, but I'd like to tell it. I've told it to several people, but it related to my POW days. I remained in the service, and I was stationed in Long Beach, California, in 1949 when the Korean War broke out. I went overseas to the Korean War. . . back to Japan and Korea with a bomb wing light Air Force unit--452nd Bomb Wing Light, equipped with B-26's. We went back to Japan. . . I wasn't supposed to according to the Secretary of the Air Force at that time. Any ex-POW of that country was not supposed to return, but, anyway, I went because I couldn't beat the red tape.

I got over there, and we were assigned to a station out in the western part of the main island, which is Honshu, the main island. It's just across the channel from Korea. Being in automotive maintenance, we were working--the allied troops were--the occupational forces were working with the indigenous population. I'd been given three Japanese to work in the grease pit. I'd given one of them instructions of what to do--to get a truck--specific truck--put it on

the rack, and grease it. After I got through telling him, giving him the number, he turned around and he sassed me in his own language as if to tell me. . . you know. . . and I won't repeat what I thought he said.

But it struck me so quick that I couldn't do anything; I couldn't control myself; I seemed to gain strength of Goliath. I called him over to the corner of that thing, and I just took him by the shirt collar and grabbed him with my left hand and pulled him out of that four-foot pit--deep pit--and slammed him over in the corner of the building--sort of a jutting like that there (gesture)--and laid one on his chin. I couldn't control myself. Well, it got to the front office, and I won't make the story any longer. I got a transfer out of Japan and was transferred to the Philippines and got down there and . . . that's it.

Marcello: As you look back upon your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, Mr. Whitehead, what do you see as being the key to your survival?

Whitehead: Faith! Faith in man; faith in the Lord. Knowing that I was from a country that, if it had the people I knew it had in it, that there was no way that we wouldn't and could not defeat whoever we may be up against. . . this forbearing. Second, faith in God. I knew that if I would help take

care of myself and ask God for help, he'd bring me through. So it was faith in America, faith in its people, and faith in God. I think they were my keystones. . . the key elements in my returning to the United States.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Whitehead, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for taking time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and very important things, and I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments most valuable someday when they use this material to write about World War II and, perhaps more specifically, about prisoners-of-war.