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Interview with
M. T. HARRELSON

May 9, 1985

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: *M. T. Harrelson*
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

M.T. Harrelson

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date of Interview: May 9, 1985

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing M.T. Harrelson for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 9, 1985, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Harrelson in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, during World War II. More specifically, Mr. Harrelson was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during that period of time. His entire unit was captured in March, 1942, on Java and subsequently spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war-camps.

Mr. Harrelson, 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, and things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Harrelson: I was born on April 19, 1919, in Wichita Falls, Texas. I went through high school in Wichita Falls and one year of college, which was at Hardin Junior College then and is now Midwestern University.

Dr. Marcello: When did you join the Texas National Guard?

Mr. Harrelson: I joined the Texas National Guard in May of 1937.

Marcello: Why did you join?

Harrelson: So I could make a dollar a week. A dollar a week at that time was eating money. My mother was a widow, and she had myself and three young brothers at home, and she needed the help.

Marcello: As you look back, was that one of the factors that motivated a lot of the young men to join the National Guard at that time?

Harrelson: That was some of it, but I had a personal ambition that was never fulfilled. I wanted to go to West Point. That was really why I got in that Guard--to get a little experience. Then I suppose one or two things happened. I wasn't lucky enough or I wasn't smart enough, but I never did even get to try out for an examination to go. I just wasn't fortunate enough. It was an ambition, that's all.

Marcello: I guess it is safe to say, however, that around that time, not too many people were joining the National Guard for patriotic reasons or anything of that nature. Many people did join it because of the pay, however so slight, and it was a chance to do some socializing with some of your buddies, too, wasn't it?

Harrelson: That's right. We had our summer encampment, and it was sort of a vacation. Of course, it was hard work--definitely hard work--and dirty and hot, but you enjoyed it.

Marcello: Which particular battery was that at Wichita Falls?

Harrelson: D Battery.

Marcello: D Battery. Was that one of the firing batteries?

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Did you remain in D Battery all the time?

Harrelson: No. After we mobilized I transferred to Service Battery.

At the beginning of the war, I was in Service Battery.

Marcello: We know now that the Texas National Guard was mobilized on November 25, 1940. How did that affect the training of the unit? Now I'm referring to that period before the unit actually moved on to Camp Bowie. You were mobilized in November of 1940. How did that affect your training?

Harrelson: Well, when we mobilized we took quarters at Wichita Falls in the auditorium. Everybody was quartered there at the auditorium. Of course, we turned in there every day.

Marcello: And what was the name of the auditorium?

Harrelson: It was the Wichita Falls City Auditorium.

Marcello: I see.

Harrelson: We was there, oh, maybe a month or six weeks, and then we went to Brownwood.

Marcello: What kind of training took place during that approximate six-week period when you were there at Wichita Falls in the auditorium?

Harrelson: We had quite a bit of close order drill both inside and outside. There was adequate room on the stage for close order drill for the squads. Then we had simulated firing

training on the guns and instrument training for the instrument and telephone sections and that sort of thing.

Marcello: How seriously was mobilization being taken by you and your buddies at that time?

Harrelson: Very seriously. Let's put it this way. I said we were taking it very seriously. I guess we were very patriotic, but we did not at that time have any thoughts of entering into a war. Even President Roosevelt said, "I hate war." But nevertheless, we trained well. We was trained not really to go fight a war, but we competed. It was one squad versus the other squad--one firing squad against another firing squad--and that sort of thing. That was where competition was keen.

Marcello: What was your particular function within the battery at that time?

Harrelson: At the time we mobilized, I was the chief of the instruments section.

Marcello: Which means what?

Harrelson: Well, that was the fire control instruments--range-finder, aiming circles, telephones, semaphore flags, and that sort of things. Prior to that, I had been, oh, in different phases. You know, they keep you in one phase and then move you for training. I had been chief of the firing section, and, of course, I'd been a gunner corporal and a first class gunner and that sort of thing. I also had completed the Ten

Series and Twenty Series of the field artillery correspondence courses for reserve commissions, and after I had finished the Ten Series, I taught the school to the other boys in the battery, several of whom went on to get their commissions. As a result of my training and study...like, you know, correspondence study for me comes hard. I really had to study because my memory isn't that good. But as a result of all that, I was a first class gunner.

Marcello: Who was the battery commander of D Battery?

Harrelson: At the time of mobilization, it was Leroy Ziegler.

Marcello: And how did you think that mobilization was going to last?

Harrelson: A year,

Marcello: And then you'd go back to your usual civilian pursuits again.

Harrelson: Right. See, I didn't go back to college the second year particularly because I knew the training was coming up. We had already been told that, and I wanted to get that year behind me and then go back to college. But it didn't work out that way.

Marcello: So mobilization actually interrupted your college career.

Harrelson: It definitely did. But then I could have gone. They would have given me a discharge--no problem. It's just I had an ambition to get that training.

Marcello: When had you entered college? What year?

Harrelson: It would have been the fall of 1939,

Marcello: Okay, so that would have meant you would have been in school

almost through the fall of 1940, like you mentioned, and then that's when mobilization occurred. Now once the unit had been mobilized, did you stay there in the auditorium all the time? In other words, you didn't commute between your home and the auditorium every day, did you?

Harrelson: No, we had quarters there. We had rooms with cots and our field kitchens. We had our meals there. It was the total bit. It was not too bad. As a matter of fact, other than having to climb a lot of stairs, which we weren't used to (chuckle), actually the quarters were somewhat better than the tents at Camp Bowie. And it wasn't near as muddy.

Marcello: You mentioned Camp Bowie, so let's go on and talk about it a little bit. At various times in December of 1940 and January of 1941, the units began moving to Camp Bowie. Do you recall when the D Battery left Wichita Falls for Camp Bowie?

Harrelson: I don't remember the exact date or even the month. It just seemed to me like it was about a month to six weeks after mobilization, but I don't remember the date.

Marcello: What was Camp Bowie like when you got there?

Harrelson: Muddy, terribly muddy. The streets just had been graded-- no hard top, no gravel, no nothing--just mud. Of course, the drainage ditches were graded. The culverts were put in, and, of course, they had plumbing and kitchens built and the latrine facilities built. I'm trying to think...I suppose

they had concrete pads for the tents, as best I remember.

Marcello: You did live in the pyramidal tents while you were there.

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What kind of training did the unit undergo once it got to Camp Bowie? I'm sure the training differed here from what it had been in Wichita Falls.

Harrelson: Somewhat. When we got to Camp Bowie, of course, we had a lot of similiar training like we had in Wichita Falls, but it was just more extensive. Then we had a lot of training in the field as a battalion and regiment. At that time, of course, to begin with, the division was a square division, and we had regimental training. Later on, like, a year later, they started converting it to a triangular division. I don't know what they ever did with it (chuckle).

Marcello: When you were there at Camp Bowie, did you actually ever fire the guns?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. Yes, we had a lot of simulated training, and it just was to get people used to doing one thing. Then we had a lot of actual firing with live ammunition. Sometimes that would be at a still target or a pillbox. A lot of times it would be at a moving target being towed behind a vehicle.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that here at Camp Bowie you were undertaking more field exercises as opposed to close order drill and military etiquette and that sort of thing?

Harrelson: We had a lot of both. In fact, every day you did something,

but I can't say that we had more field exercises. I'm not sure about that because we had to train inductees that were inducted under the draft system. They had to go through all that close order drill, the manual of arms, breaking down small arms--the total bit--scrubbing of the tent floors (chuckle). I suppose, however, that you wouldn't say that we had more extensive field training because the purpose of the unit was being able to fire. Unfortunately (maybe I can say unfortunately) for our unit, we were pretty expert at that, and that's why we were detached from the 36th Division to be sent to the Philippines.

Marcello: You've brought up a subject that I think that we need to pursue, so let's move on to the Louisiana maneuvers, which took place in the summer of 1941. Now these were the rather extensive 3rd Army maneuvers, I understand.

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What went on there during the Louisiana maneuvers?

Harrelson: Well, of course, during the maneuvers we didn't use live ammunition as such. Everything was dummy, including some of the dead. Some were people just playing dead if they had been in an area that had been bombarded. They were classified as dead. Other than live ammunition, it was about as real as any maneuvers you can get into, as close to a war as you can get into, without being shot at.

Marcello: What was the weather like there in Louisiana?

Harrelson: Sometimes it was terrible rainy. It rained hard. We had some weather like the monsoon seasons.

Marcello: Do you think somebody was trying to tell you something?

Harrelson: I guess they was getting us ready for it (laughter).

Marcello: Now you mentioned that the unit distinguished itself during these maneuvers. How?

Harrelson: During the maneuvers we had referees, and generally the referees were field grade officers. Most of the time, they were a colonel or better, and they were from what we called the "Old Army," not National Guard per se. They were "Old Army," and they knew exactly what to look for. In our particular battalion, the majority of the noncommissioned officers had more than two years of college. Now that didn't make them so great, but I'm just saying that they had the ability to learn faster than someone who wasn't well educated formally. They could grasp math a lot quicker, such as firing. Okay, the technical sergeant that was in charge of our battalion fire control center was a graduate from Cornell. He was a draftee, but he went up to tech sergeant real quick because he was a "brain," particularly a mathematical genius-type "brain." He could have the firing problem set up in his mind before we could hardly get the guns set up across the line of fire, and, of course, that's where the inspectors would go first. They would hit there first. Well, he was just smart enough that he and his crew could have two

or three problems fired before we could unload the guns (chuckle). That's all theory, and it don't work that way; but by the time the inspectors got there, he may have fired two or three problems, and we were still hooked to the truck.

Now perhaps Service Battery wasn't maybe as critical. All we did is bring food and ammunition--supplies and that sort of thing--but all of my noncoms but two had three years of college. The majority of them had gone to Texas Tech. They were in the Regimental Service Battery and/or C Battery.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there was a certain amount of skill and efficiency in the unit relative to setting up the guns and solving the firing problems and so on and so forth. Would this also include the accuracy with the guns and things of that nature?

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: With the actual firing?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. As a matter of fact, the battalion had been chosen to do special duty at the Fort Sill Firing Center to fire for the school. Some of the officers had already gone up there to set up the place and make provision, but the War Department decided they was going to overrule that and pull our battalion out of the division and send it--we found out later--to the Philippines.

Marcello: You know, your explanation of this is very important to me,

and I have never exactly heard it explained like this before. I've heard many people say that one of the reasons the unit was detached was because of its outstanding record in Louisiana during those maneuvers, but nobody could ever be very specific about it. I'm glad you brought out these things that you've mentioned.

Harrelson: Well, I just mentioned one--the tech sergeant in charge of the fire control center at battalion headquarters--but on the other hand, every battery had a battery fire control center, and those boys were equally sharp in their jobs. Of course, going back before mobilization, we had one day a week, normally Sunday afternoons for training, in the National Guard at that time. But every Thursday night, we had a place at the armory where we would meet--a meeting room for those who wanted to--and we would go through these correspondence courses together. You learn a lot when you get on a gun, but the real technical parts you learn at the conference table. If you don't know the answers, then we would bring that to the officers, and they would get us an answer. On the other hand, we had a major and a sergeant that the Army attached to the National Guard, and their job was to handle the correspondence courses, and they were sharp.

There's just one other thing. I think the whole thing is down this--we had competition between each battery and

one battery versus another battery. The fellows that could get set up the best and the quickest, without error, and set up that gun and fire that gun and hit the target with the most accuracy would be the winner. We didn't win any prize. It's just that you stick your chest out and say, "We beat you."

Marcello: It was a matter of pride.

Harrelson: That's it. Definitely everybody in our unit had that kind of pride, so naturally, when mobilization came, and the Louisiana maneuvers, it didn't matter whether you were trained for a job real well or not. If it had to be done, somebody would do it voluntarily. For instance, we lost through discharge our mess sergeant while in the Louisiana maneuvers, and people that had been section chiefs, like, in the ammunition section--all he done was haul ammunition to the firing batteries--those people would take that kitchen and do a good job of it, not knowing a thing about cooking. They were kind of like I am, I suppose. If I'm going to cook, I want it tasty. That was the pride we had in our unit, so I think that's what got us in the mess we got into (chuckle).

Marcello: I'm going to come back and talk about this later on, although maybe it didn't affect you too much after you became a prisoner-of-war. One of my theories is that the fact that most of you were from the same area, the same hometown and

so on, had a lot to do with the sort of thing you have been talking about. Do you think there is some accuracy in a theory like that?

Harrelson: Definitely. Yes, sir. Definitely,

Marcello: My own theory is that it had a lot to do with pulling those guys through when they went up to work on that railroad and so on and so forth later on during the prisoner-of-war experience.

Harrelson: There is no doubt about that. We could look at units other than American units and see that they weren't as close-knit as we were. Everybody seemed to have to buddy-up, and they would take care of one another. That's what pulled us through. I think more Americans came out of the prisoner-of-war camps--the bad ones--than did any other nationality.

Marcello: What is kind of interesting, however, is that we also do interviews with Bataan and Corregidor survivors, and generally speaking, the impression we get from them is that in their circumstances it was every man for himself. That was the first thing that struck us relative to differences between their experiences and your experiences.

Harrelson: Well, that in my mind is definitely a thing to consider in that we were pretty close-knit as a National Guard unit in our hometowns. We were friends. A lot of the people in my section I went to school with. During the summer I worked with some. It was that sort of thing. There were

some relatives, like, brothers, in some instances, twin brothers. In several instances, in the same unit brothers did go overseas with our unit and that sort of thing. But they didn't have to be related to be close-knit. I think that part of that was the way this part of the country is. In North Texas, Central Texas, and in Northwest Texas where I lived, people definitely were that way. They were pretty close-knit. They'd speak to you everytime they saw you. They was friendly, and if they could give you a helping hand, they'd do so. It was kind of the way we were brought up. I think that that's at least part of it. That's in my mind, true or not.

Marcello: How long did those Louisiana maneuvers last? Was it for most of the summer, or wasn't that long?

Harrelson: My memory fails me on how long it was. I know it was in excess of six weeks, but I can't tell you if it was three months or not. I don't remember.

Marcello: It was an extended period of time.

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Okay, when you come back to Camp Bowie, I believe that's when the reorganization took place. This is when the Army began to form the triangular divisions out of the old square divisions, and it was in this process that the 2nd Battalion actually got detached.

Harrelson: That is true. Actually, when we came back from Louisiana,

we had been told we were only going to be there in camp a couple of weeks, and then we were going to Fort Sill to fire for the reserve officers firing school or training school. In the interim we had been given leave to go home, you know, just a pass to go home for a week or ten days or whatever, and some of us were called to come back to camp before our leave was up. We didn't know what was happening. When we got back we found out we weren't going to Fort Sill at all. We were being detached, and we was going to a place called PLUM.

Marcello: What was the rumor going around as to what PLUM stood for?

Harrelson: Really, the rumor was that it was the Philippines.

Marcello: So it really was not much of a secret as to where you were going?

Harrelson: Apparently, it had leaked out some place (chuckle).

Marcello: Now when was it that you transferred out of D Battery into Service Battery?

Harrelson: I transferred out of D battery somewhere around two months, it seems to me, after we went to Brownwood as such.

Marcello: Why did you decide to transfer?

Harrelson: Well, I was due to go before the board for a reserve commission because I'd done more than my work. I'd passed the Ten Series, which qualified me, and I'd also taught the school and had passed the Twenty Series, which qualified me not just as a second lieutenant reserve but as a first lieutenant. I

had to go before the board in order to get my commission, and the new battery commander that took over--one of our lieutenants took over the D Battery--would not submit my name to the board. I asked him why, and he said, "Well, Sergeant, you're the only man here who knows every function of the battery, and I just can't do without you." So that made up my mind that I needed to transfer out in order to do what I had intended to do. I never did get there, but that was the beginning.

Marcello: And what sort of a function did you then perform in Service Battery?

Harrelson: Probably eight months or nine months later, I was an ammunition chief, and on top of that I taught the Selective Service people, draftees or whatever they were called at the time. What were they called? They weren't called rookies. Well, it's not important.

Marcello: They didn't call them "boots" because that's the term they use in the Navy.

Harrelson: Well, it probably wasn't nice, so we can skip that. I don't remember.

Marcello: Now once it was determined that the unit was going to go overseas, didn't the married men and those over a certain age have the option of transferring out of the unit?

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Do you recall what the age cutoff was?

Harrelson: No, I really don't. There's one other thing along with that. Due to the fact that we were not in a war--declared war--nobody had to go. You had to volunteer. We actually didn't volunteer; we were sent. But if we had protested, they would have transferred us.

Marcello: Second Battalion consisted of D, E, and F Batteries. Is that correct?

Harrelson: It was D, E, F, Headquarters, and Service. They also had a medical detachment.

Marcello: Isn't it also true that at that time people from A Battery, B Battery, and C Battery of the 1st Battalion transferred into the 2nd Battalion?

Harrelson: That's right.

Marcello: I guess they were some of the replacements for the married men.

Harrelson: It would have been A, B, C, and Service of the 1st Battalion, and the medical detachment of the 1st Battalion. On top of that, regimental headquarters also transferred. Some of those people--all of them--transferred to fill in.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, they had to fill in for those who had opted to get out or not go overseas.

Harrelson: Yes, sir. Actually, they didn't volunteer to transfer. They were transferred on paper, and due to the fact that they didn't say, "Hey, I don't have to do this," you didn't have to do overseas duty without volunteering.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard that you were going to be sent overseas?

Harrelson: I wanted to go. I had even talked to one of my older uncles that had been in World War I about going over there, and I told him we thought it was going to be the Philippines. That was the rumor, and our rumors panned out pretty close. His suggestion was, "It's something you'll never regret." But he didn't know (chuckle).

Marcello: Do you recall whether or not many married men opted to go overseas?

Harrelson: Some did; some did not. In the enlisted part, most of the married men took their transfer or discharge.

Marcello: So the unit that went overseas was overwhelmingly unmarried personnel.

Harrelson: Except for the officer section, yes.

Marcello: Okay, you're on your way to PLUM. Like you mentioned, almost everybody thought that PLUM meant the Philippines. You go by train to San Francisco. Did anything eventful happen on the trip over to San Francisco?

Harrelson: Not really, except it was just a long ride. We was on the slow train. All of the fruit trains had priority, so we had to pull off and wait. Other than that it was rather an uneventful trip, as I remember it, on the train as such.

Once we got to San Francisco and started unloading, we went to a place called Angel Island. Now really, it just

sticks up like the butt end of an ice cream cone out in the bay. In order to get there, you had to go on the supply boat that went to Alcatraz, and you stopped at Alcatraz first. You didn't necessarily have to go in, but you had to stop there. Angel Island particularly was a place for people to get all of their shots and indoctrination, both going and coming or embarking and debarking, I guess. It was just a huge bunch of barracks. The mess hall, incidentally, was a central unit, a huge central unit, and you lined up and stood in line for a hour or so until your turn. You ate in shifts. Of course, everybody that was out there--every battery--had to furnish their mess sergeant and cooks on particular days for duty at that central mess. But I would like to say this. You have often heard an abundance of gripes about the Army mess. On Thanksgiving Day we had Thanksgiving dinner at that central mess, and I'm going to say undoubtedly that's the best meal I've ever had anywhere. As they say, they went from "soup to nuts." On top of that they had cigarettes open on the table, and chewing gum, and just everything you could imagine to eat. It was not cafeteria-style; it was family-style. There were serving bowls on the table, so you could sure eat all you wanted to.

Marcello: I gather that, like you pointed out a moment ago, Angel Island was like a transit station for shipping people somewhere else.

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: You mentioned that you got shots here?

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: The last POW that I interviewed mentioned this, and let me throw it out to you. One of his theories for the high survival rate, compared to other nationalities, was that the Americans had so many shots, had so many inoculations and so on. He claims that maybe in part this also was a factor in determining the eventual survival.

Harrelson: It could be. I'm kind of getting ahead of myself, but I noticed that when we prisoners were with other nationalities, as a group we were by far in better physical condition. Our mental attitude was better, and our physical condition was better, particularly physical condition and desire.

Marcello: On November 21, 1941, you go aboard the USS Republic.

Harrelson: That's right.

Marcello: You're on your way for your first part of the voyage. Describe the trip between San Francisco and Honolulu, which would be your first stop.

Harrelson: That was roughly a week. The Republic was something like a nine-knot maximum ship. It was a huge ship but slow. The quarters had, as you can imagine, these Navy-type canvas fold-up bunks, and they were stacked something like four or five high. There were just as many in one of these rooms as you could put in there, so people were kind of

close. But on our first late evening out, we hit the land swells, and I've never seen so many people get seasick in my life at one time. The rails of the ship were utterly elbow-to-elbow with seasick soldiers (chuckle).

Marcello: How about you.

Harrelson: Yes, I got sick the first evening. Once I got over it, I didn't get sick again until I went ashore and went back out to sea and hit the land swell. But everytime I did, I got seasick--just one evening. I didn't get hardly as sick as some because I figured I was going to, and I laid off of the evening meal.

Marcello: Do you recall what the meal was when you first went aboard ship?

Harrelson: The first meal we had, part of it, was boiled cabbage. I remember that because it stunk to high heaven (chuckle). And walking up and down the corridors, if you were slightly seasick, the smell of that boiling cabbage would just absolutely send you to the rail.

Marcello: The first leg of your journey took you to Honolulu. Some of you were lucky enough to get shore leave. How about you?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. We were going to be there something like maybe a week, we were told, and we had been given passes to go ashore. We arrived in there on a Saturday morning. We went ashore and, of course, saw the sights and came back to

the ship that evening or that night late for quarters and food and that sort of thing. It was great. The next morning, which was Sunday--that was exactly a week before Pearl Harbor was hit--we got orders to leave. We thought we was going to be there a week, so they had to send the Shore Patrol into all of the--let's say--hotels, cafes, beer parlors, honky-tonks, what-have-you, and round up all of the soldiers that had gone ashore because some of them hadn't come back to the ship. But we were leaving quickly, which we did.

I noticed that when we were out Lord-knows-how-many-miles--it was several hours from Honolulu; you couldn't see the island at all--we got airplanes flying over from Hickam Field, and they were observing everything pretty carefully. Also, we noticed that there were gun emplacements on every street corner and around the docks, and they were being manned, and they had live amunition. They were expecting trouble. We didn't see very many of the Pacific Fleet tied up at the docks that particular day. It looked like a week later they all were there, and everybody was asleep apparently.

Marcello: How long were you able to stay ashore there?

Harrelson: Well, I guess I went ashore in the morning before noon, as best I remember, or around noon; and I stayed there until maybe one-thirty at night. When things started closing up,

it was time for me to go back and get my beauty rest.

Marcello: I gather that most of you didn't have too much money at that particular time.

Harrelson: I never did have much money. Prior to our leaving Brownwood, due to the people getting out and transfers and that sort of thing, I was made the first sergeant of Service Battery. That gave me more money, but then, as I said before, my mother was a widow, and half of my salary was allotted direct to her. That didn't leave me an abundance to spend in any case; and, of course, the soldiers that liked to gamble generally wound up losing their salary because there were a few professionals, you might want to call them, who were sharp. They won all the money. They were enlisted people just like the rest of them, but, boy, they were sharp gamblers. So the ones that lost all their money would come to me and say, "Sarge, I need toothpaste." "I need a toothbrush." "I need boot polish." They'd say that sort of thing, and you was all the time trying to make loans. Of course, there were at that time loan sharks that would loan you a dollar for two dollars come payday. It was strictly illegal, I think, but at the time we didn't know it. Subsequently, a lot of people got took on that.

Marcello: The Republic left Honolulu around November 28 or November 29, 1941. You were part of a convoy at this point, were you not?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. There were ten ships in our convoy, total. Our protection for that convoy was one light cruiser and one minesweeper. The Pensacola was the name of the cruiser. I don't remember the name of the minesweeper. Incidentally, I didn't know mines got dirty (chuckle). That was not nearly enough protection for those ships. We probably were their transport, and the Republic was probably the slowest one. I know at maximum, which was roughly nine knots, when it went into a hard turn, which we had to do for evasive action, then it would shake all over and just quiver. So we assumed it was straining.

Marcello: We should also point out for the record that the 2nd Battalion was not the only group of soldiers aboard the Republic. Isn't that correct?

Harrelson: That's correct. I don't recall all of the units. There were some units that were Air Corps.

Marcello: Was the 26th Brigade aboard the Republic? The reason I mention it is because I think some of those people eventually ended up in your unit as replacements.

Harrelson: Yes, they were. Colonel Searle was the commanding officer of the 26th Brigade. Of course, they were being sent to the same place we were, and he would have been our commanding officer in any case. I know that the Republic was terribly crowded, and you would have to take turns on the decks taking exercises or getting out of the hold just to get fresh air.

You'd get thirty minutes, and then you'd have to move; and if you didn't move fast enough, then there was all kinds of complaints and dirty words and things like that thrown at you.

Marcello: On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Describe what you were doing, how you got the word, and what your reaction was when you heard about the attack.

Harrelson: As best I remember, we actually heard about it while it was going on. I was having breakfast, and then we was called to General Quarters immediately. So that means you left everything right where it was and went to your battle stations, or so-called. But on a transport, there's not a whole lot of battle stations. You just had a place you had to report to. We went there, and we stayed in those positions roughly an hour, and then we were advised that the Japanese were attacking Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Did this come over a P.A. system or something of that nature?

Harrelson: It's possible. We got a lot of messages over the P.A. system. On the other hand, our officers who were present in our vicinity were called to General Quarters, and we were standing by those areas, and we were told a certain amount over the P.A. system, and then the officers had been advised in their conference prior to coming out to give us the word. Then at that time, the column of ships immediately headed south, and we started what they call evasive action of the zigzag-type.

We were doing all the speed ahead that the slow ships would do.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard about the attack at Pearl Harbor?

Harrelson: Well, my reaction at the time was that they were just fools because, after all, I had a whole lot of pride in the United States, and I figured they'd squash them awful quick.

Marcello: So this was going to be a short war.

Harrelson: It would be four or five days.

Marcello: None of you, of course, knew the extent of the damage.

Harrelson: Oh, no. No, no.

Marcello: When you thought of the Japanese--a typical Japanese--at that time, what sort of an individual did you usually conjure up in your mind?

Harrelson: Small, like, not over five feet, not over maybe 120 pounds, and, of course, as we all said then, with the slanted eyes.

Marcello: The usual cartoon caricature?

Harrelson: That's right. Then a lot of them, we thought, had thick glasses, and that meant they couldn't see, and they couldn't shoot--which proved to be a lie, if that's a good terminology. They were very accurate with their knee mortars and their marksmanship. They'd get up in these trees, and they were very accurate. So somebody just didn't know, or they was trying to fill us full of hogwash.

Marcello: So it's safe to say that none of you at this point still

actually understood the seriousness of the situation.

Harrelson: Oh, no. No, it didn't mean a whole lot. We knew that we was in a war, but we also knew that with the might of the United States and through all the propaganda that we'd heard that it wouldn't be long, that they'd just slap the Japanese down, and then they'd have Germany to look forward to. But that's not the way it happened.

Marcello: As you mentioned, the convoy changed course, and your first stop was in the Fiji Islands.

Harrelson: The Fiji Islands, in Suva.

Marcello: I don't think anybody got shore there.

Harrelson: No. There was one or two people who went ashore for supplies. I think my battery commander and one sergeant went ashore for some supplies. I'm no even sure about that, but it just seems to me like two people went ashore to get fresh vegetables and milk and stuff like that.

Marcello: From there you proceeded to Brisbane, Australia, where you landed on December 21, 1941.

Harrelson: That's right.

Marcello: Describe what you did during your brief stay in Brisbane.

Harrelson: We were quartered in tents at the Ascot Racetrack. It seems to me they have a cigarette by that name, but I'm not sure. But that was Ascot Racetrack. It was a little ways out of Brisbane. The city of Brisbane reminded me of a small West Texas town of, say, ten thousand population back in the 1920's,

and the people reminded me somewhat of the Texas people of that era. They were very friendly. They were hard workers. They were easy to get along with, but they'd fight you at the drop of a hat. And they talk rough. Of course, you have to learn their slang. Some of their slang words that means to us something dirty or nasty does not necessarily mean the same to them at all, and vice-versa.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that this is where the lasting friendship between the Americans and the Australians actually began?

Stanbrough: It did on my part because to me they were just misplaced Texans, and I kind of liked Texans, myself (laughter).

Marcello: A lot of the Americans were struck by the fact that there were very few Australian men around who were their age. Did you notice that, also?

Harrelson: Yes. There were very few men around, period. They were either extremely young or extremely old, and we wondered why; but then we were told that they was in North Africa fighting Rommel, which proved to be so. Some of those that were interned with us later had been there and was trying to get back home.

Incidentally, several of us was invited to the non-commissioned officer's mess by some of the Australians--their noncommissioned officer's mess--for Christmas dinner. Though it's not exactly like you would have had at home, it was great to be invited to their place. We enjoyed the

food up to a point. I'm going to say, up to a point. They eat a lot of mutton.

Marcello: What was your reaction to mutton?

Harrelson: Well, my first experience with mutton was the first morning after we got ashore late in the evening. This was just before dark, and we was assigned some small tents to quarter in and put our bed sack, so to speak, our blanket, on the ground, because December in Australia is like the Fourth of July here. That was my thought about the Christmas dinner, that they had Christmas dinner on the Fourth of July because it was in Australia. That was on December 25, but it was the hottest time of the year for them (chuckle).

On the very morning after we arrived there, the Australians were going to feed everybody, and we had to take turns because there was lots of troops that landed. They did a wonderful job with so many people. But we had a piece of toast, a little pad of butter, a slice of cold roast mutton with that thick grease deal on it, and a cup of hot tea. Well, I wasn't used to hot tea, and I wasn't used to cold mutton or any kind of mutton; and actually, we all had to try it, but that's all we did. Nobody ate it; we just tried it (chuckle).

Marcello: You were only in Australia for about a week, and I assume that you really did nothing of a military nature while you were there.

Harrelson: That's right, no. We just unloaded our equipment off of the

cargo ships and reloaded it on the Bloemfontein, a Dutch ship. It was a Dutch motor ship which would do roughly nineteen knots.

Marcello: A pretty fast ship for its time.

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, you pull out of Brisbane aboard the Bloemfontein on December 28, 1941, and you're on your way to Java. Describe the trip.

Harrelson: Actually, we were still trying to get to the Philippines, and all of the military that was concerned was still trying to get our one battalion to the Philippines, which was under attack, as best I remember, at that time. I don't know how much the Japs had done because I don't remember that well way back there. We had three cruisers and six--either corvette or destroyer class--ships to protect one transport of five hundred men and three batteries of artillery (chuckle). We had mounted our artillery pieces up on the deck of that ship and lashed them down in order to use against the torpedo ships kamikaze stuff, you know, with our shrapnel and that sort of thing. I don't know how much good it would have done. Then we had our machine gun emplacements mounted on deck. We started out and was going to go up around Borneo and then cut back in to the Philippines, but when we got over near Java, the Navy said, "Sorry, boys, we just cannot get you in there. There's too much Japanese Navy and

submarines between here and there." So they said, "This is as far as we can take you. Get off."

Marcello: So you get off at Surabaya.

Harrelson: That's right.

Marcello: And from Surabaya you move inland to Singosari, which was a Dutch airbase near the city of Malang.

Harrelson: That's right.

Marcello: How did you get from Surabaya up to Singosari?

Harrelson: Oh, in our trucks. We had our trucks. We had to unload those. My battery stayed a day or two on that ship and at dock helping get stuff unloaded, you know, the equipment like the trucks and all that. Of course, you had to have the batteries out and the gasoline out and the whole bit before you can put them aboard a ship. We unloaded all of that, unloaded the guns and everything like that. My battery was the last to go up to Singosari.

Marcello: Describe what Singosari looked like from a physical standpoint.

Harrelson: Singosari was nothing but one grassy field...or it looked like a bunch of fences down it, actually. Those were moveable, but it was one runway. Then way back near the mountain edge--and that mountain was rather like a horse-shoe--right back in that thing, there was some revetments for big aircraft, and those were dirt. There was one hangar. There were living quarters that the Dutch had used for part

of their military, which most of their military on Java was the Javanese natives and with a few white Dutch as officers.

Those barracks were actually pretty nice. They were not to be compared to our pyramidal tents because we had good latrine facilities. There they did not. Nothing worked. Water would work part of the time, but the septic tanks were always running over because that's a very, very wet climate. The barracks themselves were tile and some kind of plaster. The floor itself was kind of a mosaic ceramic--very beautiful. They make a lot of it there, and those natives get down, and they'll make figurines all over the place. They were beautiful. The roof tile was this old clay tile, and it wasn't nailed. It had a little dog. It just sat on a slat, and you'd set one down, and the next one would lock to it, and they'd lock in place. During the bombing raids, those things would shift, and you might lose half of the tile just from concussion. What it would do, it would just shift and start dominoeing down and fall off the buildings (chuckle).

Marcello: What was your function in Service Battery once you got to Singasari? What were you doing?

Harrelson: Service Battery had to send trucks and men down to the docks at Surabaya to unload certain ships that had already left the United States. They were merchant ships with merchandise for the Army in the Philippines. For instance, we unloaded

one ship of Chevrolet cars of all kinds, with the steering wheel on the right-hand side and that sort of thing. Another one had khakis and shoes--military type--but they was all too small for us. They were for the Philippines. That was the United States Army in the Philippines. Then we had to supply, of course, food and ammunition. That was a function of Service Battery. On top of that, when we got to Singosari, the B-17 crews that had flown out of the Philippines...now I'm going to say that was the 19th. I think that's right.

Marcello: Nineteenth Bomb Group, yes.

Harrelson: Right. They had just skeleton flying crews and no appreciable ground crews at all. They had no kitchen, so we took Service Battery's mess sergeant, which was "Quaty" Gordon, and his cooks and his kitchen equipment and sent them en masse over to cook for the 19th. They would replace the Dutch because the Dutch had been taking turns, you know.

But we figured they just needed to be treated better. They had been having it rough. They was fighting a real war. We also gave them some machine gunners. We'd take ground-to-air and ground-to-ground machine gunners and transfer them over there, and they would train them for air-to-air combat as machine gunners because they was losing a few. The B-17's would come back in after a mission with holes you could walk through, but they'd keep coming back. One other function of everybody, in case of attack, was to

try to protect the airfield and the B-17's. Also, later there was some B-24's there. We also got a later group of...I think it was the 9th--but I can't swear--that came in there for a while.

Marcello: The 9th Bomb Group?

Harrelson: I think so. I know I had admired the colonel that was in charge of the 19th. He came from the Philippines.

Marcello: Colonel Eubank.

Harrelson: Yes, right. Later he went on up to be a general. I forgot how many stars he got, but I guess it was about as many as you could be awarded at the time, because he was really a great officer. What I liked about him was that he wanted the people to realize that they were in a war, and to be a soldier, and that they were in a foreign country and to act like citizens of the United States, not like jerks.

Marcello: How would you describe the morale of the members of that 19th Bomb Group?

Harrelson: Well, it was rather low when we got there because they was hungry and tired. Now they would go. They'd go back out on the mission without hesitation, but they had to be given plumb out. They had to be hungry; they had to be tired. When we got there, they were so glad to see an American. It didn't matter that we was artillery. Another function we gave was that the battalion motor sergeants would take some of their mechanics over there to work on the planes.

Our machine gun sergeant would take their crews to put in new ammunition. Of course, we would furnish...oh, just anybody that could drive a truck would help gas those planes up after a mission.

You asked about unloading ships. We unloaded a whole ship of Wright Cyclone engines. I don't know whatever happened to all of them because there was a shipload, but if something happened to an engine, like, a spark plug fouled out...of course, on those engines you've got dual spark plugs and that sort of thing for every cylinder, but nevertheless they do foul out. Well, our mechanics were not trained for airplane engines, and they did not really have to be. The 19th people had shown them how to pull an engine and put on a brand-new one. We got to laughing: "If a spark plug fouls out, put on a new engine." And that probably happened.

Marcello: Did the 19th Bomb Group have any fighter escorts there? Were there any fighter planes?

Harrelson: Yes, there were some...what? P-40's. They weren't at our field. They was up on the mountain field. I forget the name of that particular place. In later years I ran across one of the pilots that was shot down and burned pretty bad.

Marcello: These were mainly or strictly bombers for the most part here at Singosari,

Harrelson: Definitely bombers, yes. The only planes other than bombers

there...for a short time there was a small aircraft that was a dive-bomber. I don't remember the designation of it; it was like a two- or three-man plane, and it was a dive-bomber. There was a few of those, but they didn't stay there long.

The boys on the B-17's would go out and make a mission and come in and grab a sandwich and, while they were doing that, maybe lay in the shade under the wing and get a few moments sleep. Then maybe they'd go back on another one, and that was kind of constant. You just had to hand them credit. They was on the go. They was hitting the Japanese where it hurt--their shipping and everything they could find.

Marcello: What sort of relations developed between the Americans and the Dutch while you here at Singosari or Malang?

Harrelson: Well, I can just speak like on my part. I thought they were wonderful people. They were different of course. They was raised in a different part of the world. Their language was a little different, but basically, when you get right down to it, they're just good human beings. As I recall we didn't have any ill will at all.

Marcello: Basically, were the Americans running things here at Singosari?

Harrelson: At Singosari, yes. Colonel Eubank was in charge of the airfield and the 19th Bomb Group and any other group that came in there for a while. As best I remember, he was the top man, and very well should have been, because he knew

what he was doing.

Marcello: What kind of an attitude did you detect on the part of the native Javanese to all this activity that was taking place?

Harrelson: Well, when we first got there, the Javanese were being trained as infantrymen by the Dutch, and you'd see them out in the fields working. Then all of a sudden, when a whistle blew, well, they would go and pick up their wooden guns, and they'd go into training right in the field. Then a Dutch officer would show up or a Dutch sergeant or something, maybe a warrant officer, in order to give them training. They seemed to really go for that. I don't know whether it was a lack of getting rest from work or what, but further down the line, when it became apparent that they needed them as infantrymen, they wasn't worth having.

Marcello: On February 3, 1942, the base experienced its first air raid. Describe that experience from your standpoint from beginning to end.

Harrelson: When the siren went off to indicate there were enemy aircraft in the vicinity, that meant that you had to go to your post for defending. We'd been assigned an area on the post for defending the airfield in case of any kind of raid, particularly a paratrooper attack. So we went to those positions. For one thing we were very apprehensive and, I might say, maybe scared to death, huh? Something like that. Then all of a sudden there was--it seemed to me like--three fighter planes.

Maybe they were Japanese Zero fighters. They had hit a steam engine at a regular depot in a small native town not too far from the Singosari airport. You could see that huge amount of steam when they blew that engine up. That was the first sign we saw of the enemy when they were attacking and diving and strafing that engine. We saw that large amount of steam escaping and heard the noise when it blew. Then the next thing, they hit the hangar and was trying to pick out any aircraft that was out in the open, and there was some out in the open that had gotten off the end of the runway. It was grass and mud, and they had stuck. In fact, there was two that got stuck, and they were shooting at those.

Marcello: These were simply fighter planes. There were no bombers at this stage?

Harrelson: Not yet. The bombers came, but they wasn't there yet; and they didn't come from the direction that you thought they would, either. We thought they'd be coming from toward Singosari, but they didn't. They came from over the edge of the mountain--the opposite direction.

Marcello: Not from Singosari but from Surabaya?

Harrelson: Yes, from Surabaya. And Malang was down in that direction--both. But they came from over the mountain--the fighters--and then the bombers came later.

Marcello: About how long did the strafing continue?

Harrelson: Well, the whole thing probably didn't last more than ten minutes, but it seemed like forever. During the strafing, they came in and they'd just hit and go up and keep coming back in different directions, like, figure eights and that sort of thing, shooting everywhere, shooting at anything that moved.

Then the bombers came in sight...and we had positioned our guns and dug a hole and got the trench in so we could fire as best we could with our field guns as antiaircraft weapons. We didn't have any antiaircraft shells, nor was the tube long enough on that gun, really, for an antiaircraft gun; but we fired it for maximum height, set on antipersonnel shrapnel. It didn't get to them, but it got up close enough that they knew they was being fired at, and they veered off enough to miss everything. Really, the bombers didn't do a great amount of damage on that first raid at all. They just about missed.

There's one other incident on that that was just, oh, something you do. You always wondered, "What will happen when I get under fire?" A person never knows until he gets there. Once you get under fire, the back of your neck kind of bristles, and you're ready for it. You get ready for it, and then you will fight. There may be a rare instance when somebody just can't hardly do that--he may break--and when it does it's going to be the one that you

least expect to break. That's the hard part about it. The one that you think would "turn chicken," as we'd say, never does.

Marcello: Generally speaking, do you have an attitude that you hope you can do your job and not let your buddies down? Was that one of the feelings or thoughts that you have when your in a situation like that?

Harrelson: I've often explained it to people who've asked that question like this: "What do you do when you come under fire?" So many people say, "Well, there's no way I'd break. I'd stay there and shoot it up." They might do it. They might not. Until they get there, they're not going to know. I figured I'd stay because our training was that way; and I figured that most of the boys would do it, too. But the thing is, if somebody gets hit through some of that strafing...because those shells were going everywhere, and they were shooting those .50-calibers that would hit and then explode. If a shell explodes right next to you, whether it damaged you or not, you get fighting mad, and then you're ready to fight. If, for instance, one of your buddies gets hit, then you throw a little caution to the wind. You don't keep your head down as good, but you get up there and fight; and if they come close, you get a piece of them. That's the attitude that all of our people had once we came under attack. When they came in, we was ready for the fight,

although maybe we were not equipped good enough.

Marcello: So in the meantime, that is, before the raids actually took place, the unit had taken its weapons and had more or less placed them around the edge of the airfield.

Harrelson: That's right. Everybody had a particular position to go to.

Marcello: And where was your particular position?

Harrelson: I was on one particular corner, and the corner was just opposite of our barracks and away from the airfield. Our barracks was totally destroyed. In fact, there was several buildings in that barracks group. I was just on the corner opposite, and I had one corner of an L-shape. Mine was strictly observation. The only thing I had was my .45, and it wouldn't have done damage to anybody unless they had been close. I had telephone communications with the battalion headquarters, and, of course, to the battery commander and that sort of thing. As a matter of fact, on their second raid it was me that spotted them. They came from the opposite direction, and actually they was coming directly from the moon, it looked like.

You mentioned awhile ago the fighters--the P-40's. You just got to hand it to those fellows. They would go in and try to protect the bombers and that field at great odds, and a lot of times there would be six and twelve Japanese fighters to one P-40. You just got to say that one P-40 pilot that will go in there and attack that many planes has

got to have a lot of guts, a lot of dedication. Some of them didn't make it, and they were the same kind of people. They were people you can be proud of.

Marcello: Surprisingly, throughout most of these raids, you really didn't lose anybody, did you?

Harrelson: No. We got some in the hospital. For instance, Sergeant Sparkman was in...he was in charge of a gun--one of the fieldpieces. There were dugouts near those, just L-shaped or irregular trenches. There were so many bombs hitting that area that one hit close enough to him that it covered him up totally. We dug him out and, of course, had to send him to the hospital because he was...well, let's say he was shell-shocked, and he wasn't clear in his mind what he ought to be doing. I guess I wouldn't, too.

There was twelve bombs that hit within thirty-six feet of the little dugout I was in, and you would see them all, and then you'd hear them when they got closer, you know, the whistling [imitates effect]. That's the time to duck. So you get right down on your belly in this little trench, and when those bombs hit, they would pick you up bodily and slam you back down against that ground hard enough, if your chin hit it, to knock you out. Usually, it'd just knock the wind out of you. Sure, you're scared. You think one's going to hit right in there with you, but fortunately we managed to get through it.

Marcello: With what regularity did these air raids occur?

Harrelson: Well, the first two that happened were a few days apart, as best I remember, and then they started hitting us right at noon, every noon. They would wait until, like, 12:05, and that means we'd all be sitting in the mess hall and with our food and ready to eat. There would go the sirens for enemy aircraft. They did that every day for Lord-I-don't-know-how-long.

Marcello: How much damage did they actually do to the base and to the runways and so on?

Harrelson: They did some, but they never closed it down. One of the courageous feats that several of the boys did occurred when those two B-17's came in and ran into the mud. They weren't in revetments; they were out in the open. They took some of these six-by-six Chevrolet trucks of ours and went out there under attack and pulled those bombers into their revetment. There were several people doing it. One that I remember particularly by name was Sergeant Whatley. I don't know the names of the rest of them. My memory's not that good. But it's not that easy to crawl out of a trench, where you're are in there to keep from getting shot by these fighters strafing the field, and go out in the open with no protection and pull those planes into a revetment and get them unstuck. But they did it, and that's the kind of boys we had. You were asking about attitude.

It takes just some kind of attitude to do that.

Marcello: What was the thinking going through the unit at this time as to your odds of getting out of this thing?

Harrelson: Well, I always knew we would. First, as far as the fight on Java, we figured that if they came ashore, we could whip them. After all, wasn't there five hundred of us (chuckle)? I don't know. I didn't read what history said later, but we was told they had three landing parties of roughly seventy thousand each, and that's a lot of people for five hundred to take on (chuckle).

Marcello: And did you still think that there was a lot of Navy ships out there, also?

Harrelson: Yes, we actually figured there were, but we didn't have any communication with them. We figured we had, after all, the total Asiatic Fleet.

Marcello: Now I assume that all through this there was no shortage of food or ammunition or supplies or anything like that on your part.

Harrelson: Not until the capitulation. After the Dutch capitulated, when our supply group would go in for, like, gasoline and groceries, then you had to get what they'd let you have, and they wouldn't let you have all you wanted.

Marcello: On February 27, 1942, the 19th Bomb Group evacuates. What kind of effect did that have upon you and your buddies? What was the reaction?

Harrelson: Well, we knew that the Japanese was getting close enough

that they had to move, because we was getting hit too often. We figured that they were going to Australia. We figured they could do more damage from there, like, in various parts of the Coral Sea, perhaps.

We still hadn't made up our mind, or it didn't ever enter our mind, that the island was going to fall, that the Japanese was going to capture us, or that we was going to be anywhere close to being that long as a prisoner. That hadn't even entered the picture. As a matter of fact, I don't know that we ever did get the total picture until it was way down near the end of the war.

Marcello: So there was no grumbling or griping relative to the fact that they were leaving and you were staying.

Harrelson: No, no.

Marcello: Okay, the next day, the 2nd Battalion leaves.

Harrelson: Yes. Two firing batteries and Service Battery and most of the medical detachment left. We went up to a particular bridgehead, and we was supposed to be held in reserve.

Marcello: Now this is where you get seperated from E Battery, is it not?

Harrelson: Yes, we left E Battery there, and they went back down to the Surabaja area.

Marcello: So you mentioned that you leave, and you go to this bridgehead. In what direction were you going? Was this going toward Bandung or someplace like that?

Harrelson: Well, as best I remember, it was between Bandung and Batavia.

It was closer, of course, to Bandung. We didn't really go through the town; we outskirted it going up, and a lot of driving, by necessity, was at night.

Marcello: What happens when you get to this bridgehead?

Harrelson: Well, the Dutch requested that we stay back undercover in reserve. They said, "We'll just call on you if we need you." Before we knew it, the Japanese was down at the bridge to cross it. Of course, we had observers down there, and we set up some guns and started firing on them just beyond the bridge itself. We probably knocked out one or two trucks, and, of course, they stopped coming in. They eventually tried to get in, and then they spread out in the trees. We were on the hill side of the river, and they was on the flat side with the trees. Then we got some Australian infantry to go in there and help give protection. We had no infantry at all.

The Dutch native army of infantry, as such, had disappeared. That sounds kind of nasty, but it's the fact. They just disappeared. I think they took off their uniforms and put their sarongs on, and that little fez cap, and went back home. They probably had no enemies, and if they had any, they probably thought it was the Dutch. We didn't know, but I just assumed that from what happened. We were just left high-and-dry, and the Japanese walked right in on us. We held that bridgehead for, like, ten days.

Marcello: So they're on one side of the river, and you're on the other side?

Harrelson: Right. Then the Dutch asked us to move out, that they would take over the bridgehead. They had sent an armored vehicle and some motorcycle battalion troops with, like, Thompson submachine guns at that time. We figured that was great. Of course, we had to move out at night, but one of the problems was moving out. I'm not talking about our unit, because we had no problems moving out at night.

But the Australians did. They were out in the open on the hill side of the river. This was that infantry unit, and part of those were...they call them sappers. They're like engineers. They had a pretty good problem because they wanted to hold that bridge until they got a chance to get their troops out. In order to do that, they had to send a detachment across the river, right in the Japanese's front door. While they were across there, one of the Dutch liaison officers blew up the bridge, and they couldn't get back. Some of them got back, but most of them were killed. Some of them got back and was in the prison camps, and that's where we found out what had happened. I think there was some argument between them and the Dutch liaison officers as to when to blow the bridge. Maybe it was a lack of communications.

Marcello: Okay, so you leave this bridgehead. Where do you go from there?

Harrelson: We went back to the edge of Bandung, and most of the time we stayed where we could hide under the coverage of rubber plantations, rubber trees and stuff. We stayed in kind of a park area with a lot of these rubber trees. It was near Bandung. Part of the time, we were on the roadside.

I don't know exactly whether it was English or Australian or what, but part of those were on the roadside, and these Japanese dive-bombers come in, and they just blew them to smithereines. That was, like, maybe only two or three days before the capitulation, at the most, because it don't seem like very long after we moved back to that Bandung area until the capitulation of the Dutch took place. They said they were going to do it, and we moved from there to the racetrack.

Marcello: Now you moved to the racetrack after you received word of the capitulation.

Harrelson: As best I remember, yes.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the capitulation, then, which occurred on March 8, 1942. Describe what your reaction was when you got the word.

Harrelson: Well, we were wondering and real curious: "What is going to happen to us?" Now this is before we went to the racetrack as such; we were still under the rubber trees near Bandung. Our liaison officer told us the Dutch was going to capitulate, and if we wanted to, we could go in to meet them. We hadn't

made any moves at that time, but once the Dutch capitulated, we were told by the Japanese, through our Dutch liaison group, what to do and where to do it. So in other words, they knew exactly where we were, how many of us there were, and they had us under observation from the air and from the ground constantly.

Marcello: Some of the men have told me that they felt a certain sense of shame in capitulating, since the unit really hadn't done a whole lot of fighting. Was that kind of a reaction on your part, or how would you describe your feelings?

Harrelson: That's not a bad description, because you wonder, "Here I am, I've been trained; the government spent a lot of money on me; I'm a good American citizen; and I did vow, if necessary to give my life. Here I am, I'm surrendering." And you often wondered, "Will I be spit on when I go home?" and that sort of thing.

Marcello: Had you heard about some of the atrocities that the Japanese had committed in other places like China for instance?

Harrelson: No, not really. I hadn't. I think at one time I saw a picture, in a Lowell Thomas newsreel before leaving Wichita Falls, of a lone Chinese infantryman, and he came up on a rise and looked and saw the Japanese Army there, a group of them. He turned and ran, and they let him go maybe a hundred yards and then shot him from the rear while he was running and killed him. That to me was war, but I had

heard of none of the atrocities.

Of course, we were told to move down to this racetrack, and we did. While we was clear, in the open, they sent an observation plane around--a fighter plane or a light bomber--one of those little twin-engine bombers--to observe us about every two hours.

Marcello: In the meantime, that is, between the time of the capitulation and your going to this racetrack, what did you do with your weapons and things of that nature?

Harrelson: Okay, our ammunition as such...we had kept some of those with the explosive fuses and flung them over a cliff into, like, a riverbed or ravine and exploded them or burned them up, and we burned up some vehicles. We still had some of those civilian Chevrolets that we had taken. We burned those--just drained the oil and let them run maximum speed until the engine melted down and set afire. Our small hand guns--like .45's--we stripped those, like, the firing pins and parts inside them and junked them, and then we put the body of it back in our holster. After our colonel had capitulated then, of course, we had to stack all of those arms that was left. We had none of our big guns, not too many trucks, none of the cars, and the small arms we had were non-operational.

Marcello: Did you ever have any thoughts of heading for the coast and possibly getting off the island?

Harrelson: Well, there was a group selected under the guidance of Major Rogers--twenty-odd men. I forgot the number. It could have been twenty-one, or it could have been twenty-seven. They was gone, it seemed to me like, two, three, or four weeks in trying to find a way to get the group off the island.

Here's the thing. My battery commander, Clark Taylor, was supply officer, and in his command car, which I occupied with him as his first sergeant, he had a safe that had in excess of a half-million dollars in cash--Dutch guilders. He had a letter of credit from the United States government or the Federal Reserve or whatever it is to the Dutch government and any bank of the Dutch East Indies for a letter of credit for an extra two million dollars. In those days that was a lot of money.

With a half-million dollars we figured we could buy a ship and get off of that island, but what we didn't know--because we didn't go with Major Rogers and his group--was that about every hour-and-a-half to two hours, a Japanese ship, either a destroyer class or up to a battleship class, would pass just about twelve miles out; and they'd circle by there, and they'd come back in about another hour-and-a-half to two hours--all day long and probably at night, too. Then overhead there were observation planes of the twin-engine bomber-type and fighter-type. Even when we'd moved from the racetrack, after we capitulated, to that mountain and

that tea plantation, they knew where we were at all hours. They was kind of curious because there could have been a few problems. They had heard there was 70,000-odd American troops on Java, and there wasn't anything but one battalion. They didn't understand that, and that caused some of them higher officers to get beat up on a little. The Japanese were wanting to know where them other Americans were.

Marcello: Awhile ago you talked about the Captain Taylor and the \$500,000 worth of Dutch guilders. I'm sure we're going to talk more about that later on because that money becomes very important. Do you know who had control of that money at that point?

Harrelson: He did.

Marcello: Then he was essentially carrying all of it around. When I say "carrying it around," I mean, he had the safe and so on and so forth, or access to it.

Harrelson: That's right.

Marcello: In other words, he didn't distribute the money among a group of people yet.

Harrelson: Not at that time. Now what he did do--let's see--for those days that we were at the racetrack and the days we were at the tea plantation, he had to buy all of the supplies, and they became expensive. A bundle of that money was used. He'd spend money every day, and quite a bit of it.

Marcello: And this \$500,000 was in Dutch guilders?

Harrelson: Dutch guilders, yes. I didn't count that money; he just told me what was in there. I had no reason not to believe him. He said, "If we need to, we can buy a ship. If we need to, we can buy this." Okay, those are things to think about. I know that once the island fell, inflation started hand-over-heel. The natives particularly, if they had anything to sell, wanted ten or twelve prices for it, so it went high. Of course, that's who you had to buy from-- all your vegetables and beef--if you got any--or duck eggs, bananas, papayas. Everything like that we bought from them... tobacco, tea. We had to buy tea. There was some coffee but not in abundance.

Marcello: And you say that this buying on the civilian market began once you got to the racetrack.

Harrelson: Well, he bought in the civilian market all the time we was in Java. That was his job as supply officer, and he knew how to deal with them.

Marcello: What happens when you get to the racetrack? Now this is at Garoet.

Harrelson: We were there--I don't know how many days--several days before we moved. That was when the Dutch demanded that Colonel Searle come in and surrender his troops, that this was his last opportunity. Of course, he went in and offered his own surrender and told them he was not authorized by the United States Government and/or military services to

surrender his troops. He could only surrender himself. All he could do was pass on the word. Then, of course, they slapped him around some, and I think that was kind of their habit. They liked to do that, particularly to Americans.

Marcello: How much contact did the enlisted men have with the Japanese here at Garoet?

Harrelson: Hardly none.

Marcello: And what did you do there?

Harrelson: We just stayed there around that racetrack, had our meals and stayed there, did a few exercises to keep from getting stiff; but we had nothing to do. We was orderd to go there by the Japanese and ordered to stay there. Then after the colonel went in to surrender as such and came back and told us what he had had to do, he made a statement: "Well, we'll go into a concentration camp, and they have to feed us and give us medical supplies," and all this stuff that's in the Geneva Convention. He mentioned that they had to do these things. Well, they didn't do that. But he said, "Besides, MacArthur will be back through here in three or four months at the most."

Marcello: And did you believe that?

Harrelson: I certainly did. It didn't happen that way, but we believed it. So then we said, "Well, we can't get off." If you can't get off, and you're here, and you haven't got any arms, you haven't got any ammunition, and your food is

running out, what else can you do? And that was when we said, "Okay." The enlisted men as such didn't surrender-- never did--but you didn't have to. You had no choice--just your being there and not being able to move, having the enemy forces surround you and knowing exactly where you were.

That was when we ran into the Japanese troops, and they weren't five feet at all, and they weren't 110 pounds. All of them that we hit was in excess of six feet, weighed more than 200 pounds, and looked like a Charles Atlas. They were the Mongolians or a species of Mongolian. They was what they called the imperial palace's...what were they called?

Marcello: Well, some people refer to them as the Imperial Marines, but I think their title was Special Landing Forces.

Harrelson: It could have been, could have been. But I know we were told one time that they were some kind of imperial palace guards, for instance. All of them were hand-picked and selected, and they were all big in stature--and they were. That's the first group we saw.

Marcello: Now where did you see these people?

Harrelson: In Garoet.

Marcello: At Garoet?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Is there any harassment at this time, or did they more or less leave you alone.

Harrelson: They left us strictly alone. They weren't even close to us.

Marcello: I guess they had more important things to do. They were still kind of mopping up and so on and so forth.

Harrelson: I imagine. They were taking over all civilian operations as hastily as they could, too. But they just told us to go to the racetrack and stay there, and the only Japanese we saw was two, which was the driver and the general of the landing forces that took the surrender. I think he was a general, or he could have been an admiral. But as I recall, he was a general. He was in charge of part of the landing forces.

Marcello: What kind of equipment did you have at this point? I'm referring to personal equipment.

Harrelson: Well, you had a majority of your clothing. We kept our clothing. In fact, I might as well say we had kept all of it. That was your field equipment. We'd left our footlockers and all our personal equipment back in Singosari or Malang, wherever you left from.

Marcello: It still could be in a warehouse there today (chuckle).

Harrelson: Probably, unless they was tore open. But they were put in a warehouse.

Marcello: Did you have other personal gear with you, such as your mess kit and things of that nature?

Harrelson: Yes, that's part of your field equipment, like, your razor

and your toothbrush and your mess kit and your clothes and an extra pair of shoes.

Marcello: So you had enough clothing and so on for the six months you were going to be a prisoner (chuckle).

Harrelson: Oh, and then some, yes. But we hadn't banked on several things. One is running into people that had been sunk on a ship with no clothing. Second is what the Japanese would allow you to keep.

Marcello: How did you carry this equipment? Did you have field packs?

Harrelson: No, we had a barracks bag, really. That's what it was in-- just an old army barracks bag.

Marcello: Okay, so from the racetrack at Garoet, you are then sent to this tea plantation.

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Basically, I gather you are on your own. In other words, they tell you where to go, and you go there.

Harrelson: That's right. They give us those instructions through the Dutch liaison officer that was with us, and we hadn't even really hardly contacted the Japanese.

Marcello: How long a ride was this from the racetrack to the tea plantation?

Harrelson: Gee, I wish I could remember. It don't seem far.

Marcello: Is it a matter of hours?

Harrelson: Well, it was. We made that in a day--the whole group. But the thing is, that tea plantation is up around ten or twelve

thousand feet on a mountain. That's kind of slow going even without convoying up a little mountain road like that. We managed to get up there all right, and we managed to get places to kind of bunk down.

Marcello: How long were you there?

Harrelson: It wasn't more than two weeks.

Marcello: And what did you do while you were there?

Harrelson: Nearly nothing. We just sat there and wondered what was going to happen to you. The highlight was taking a bath, and that was in that mountain stream. It was colder than Alaska water. Ooh! It was pretty, but actually it was so cold that...of course, this is funny about being right on or near the equator or near. A change of twenty degrees in temperature there will freeze you to death. You could get in that little mountain stream that was coming from probably melted snow and that sort thing--who knows--and it sure was cold. If you got under the bamboo that made a hood all the way over this little stream, you just couldn't take it. You'd have to bathe in the sun in order to take that cold water, but once you did, it sure was refreshing.

Marcello: What did you do with your time while you were here? Did you just sit around and shoot the bull?

Harrelson: Just sat around and talked to one another, tried to keep each other's morale up. Then once a day, we'd do about an hour of exercise as a group and then, of course, fall

in for three meals a day. That was about it.

Marcello: Now usually in a situation like this, somebody or several people have decks of cards and card games going.

Harrelson: There's a lot of that going on anytime you stop, but that's not one of my hobbies. I don't even yet care for dice or cards and that sort of thing. A lot of people did. Me and some of my buddies...oh, back then I had a mandolin. I didn't take one with me. I left mine at home with my mother, but I bought one when we got to Java. Of course, I'd sit around and pick on it and shoot the breeze with my buddies and wonder what was going to happen and how long it would be before MacArthur actually got there.

Kind of the highlight of this thing was...in other words, the Japanese had sent us up there, and they knew where we were. They sent those...an observation plane sometimes came over about every hour-and-a-half to two hours to be sure we was still where we was supposed to be. They didn't shoot or nothing. They just looked down and made the observation and flew off. Then somebody would come back later.

But one of the boys had kind of gone a little over the "deep end." I don't know whether he had acquired anything to drink or not, which wouldn't have been surprising. But he was the colonel's driver, and he jumped in the command car, and he must have thought, "I've

had all this. I'm going." So he headed down the mountain, and he got right down to the foot of the mountain at the crossroads. A Japanese tank pulled out of the brush right in front of him and lowered the gun on him, and one of the Japanese in the tank stuck his head up and said, "Sorry, my good man, you must go back up the mountain." (chuckle)

Marcello: Now from the tea plantation, you go into your first POW camp, which was at Tanjong Priok. Describe the trip from the tea plantation to Tanjong Priok.

Harrelson: But we had a stay in between. We moved from the tea plantation down near an old...I would call it a ball field or soccer field, something of that nature. We stayed on the side of the road. A lot of us were in the vehicles. We just had enough to carry the people; we'd destroyed the rest of them. We were there several days, and that's when the Japanese finally got us all together on this big, open field and told us we was Japanese prisoners and that we was less than dirt and that sort of thing and that some would be going to Japan and help Japan because Japanese were in the war. They didn't say it in words, but they figured they was God's chosen people for this earth.

They actually respected somebody that surrendered less than dirt. We didn't know that until after the war was over, but once you're a prisoner, you sort of find it out the hard way. They gave us all of this spiel of

which we couldn't understand a word. The guy standing up there hollering at you in Japanese scares you to death because they've got these machine gun emplacements around there just ready to fire in case somebody wants to make a break for it.

Then from there they took all of our trucks, and our colonel argued, "Look, I've got enough trucks, and I've got enough gasoline to take us wherever you want to intern us. You just tell us where to go." The Japanese said, "No, you don't have any trucks, and you don't have any gasoline as a prisoner-of-war. Those are ours," which is right. They're bounty. So they came out and took all of the trucks. Then we were told that we would not have to walk all the way, that they would carry us on the train part of the way. Of course, we did bundle up what we could carry.

Now this is where part of your personal belongings started falling by the wayside. You bundled up what you can carry. You first think, "I can carry everything I got here." You start with it, and you get about 300 yards, and you throw one package away. In about a mile, you throw some more away. Until you get to where you're going, you haven't got but just your bare essentials left.

We wound up at this railhead near Garoet, and they put us on small cars. Those cars were designed for thirty people, and there was sixty to sixty-five people per car. So we was kind of like sardines--just shoved in them. But we didn't

have to walk.

Marcello: Now I've heard it said that it's around this time that you get your first dose of the slapping and the hitting and the pushing and the shoving and that sort of thing. Is that correct?

Harrelson: You didn't have a lot of it, but they had one guard on every train, and they started pushing you in there. But they pushed you with the end of a bayonet, and you don't argue with that too much. My personal experience of having seen it was later on--before there was any actual slapping. Now there was nudging with the butt of a rifle, and particularly with a pointed bayonet, and it don't take too much of that to move you. What they was trying to do was shove more men in the car than wanted to go in there. There wasn't no seating capacity. It was standing room only. They didn't care. That's what they wanted you to do--get on in there. We learned quick that you had to get in there. We rode up to the major bridge--it may have been one of those near where we was fighting; I don't know--and it was blown up, so, of course, we had to walk on a foot bridge across that river. We got on another train that took us into the area close to Tanjong Priok, and we stayed there roughly three months.

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

Harrelson: Well, in our mind it was less than nothing. It had been a

Dutch native army--or Javanese part--training camp, and the barracks as such, although they had a roof, were open. They had one center wall down that long barrack, and then every cubicle was open, like, four feet to the ceiling or the roof to the outside. So everybody had a door. Actually, it was an opening, and you walked into a semi-open room. That was the way the huts were.

It was right on the ocean, so all of the septic tanks were overflowing, and all of the facilities--showers and commodes and stuff--were overflowing. They didn't make any attempt to get a septic tank truck, which was available. They just didn't make any attempt to ever get them. So we tried to dig entrenchments that we'd use and then cover them up like we'd done in the field maneuvers. Well, it doesn't work too good that close to the ocean because the water table is, like, six or eight inches below the surface of the ground. It was a source of pollution, and there was a lot of diseases.

Marcello: What were your barracks like inside, that is, your sleeping quarters?

Harrelson: Well, that is kind of the inside (what I described awhile ago). In other words, it really wasn't a closed room barrack. It was an open room.

Marcello: But did you have bunks or cots, or did you sleep on the floor?

Harrelson: No, not there. We slept on the floor, and all we had left was a blanket. Just you and your G.I. blanket and the floor.

Marcello: Was there any sort of a fence or enclosure around this camp?

Harrelson: There was a barbed wire fence originally on the outside of the camp only. Later on, they put it around every hut. Now those huts would hold maybe, like, 100 men or 150 men--that sort of thing. They'd put the wires around them in that camp--each particular one. We had one around our section. That section at one time had all of the batteries. All of the Americans were in three or four different huts, and they was surrounded by one entanglement of barbed wire or barbed wire fence.

At that time the guards stayed outside the fence. We still hadn't witnessed the bowing and the scraping and the slapping and stuff yet. We got another indoctrination before we got off of the railroad--the train--at the Tanjong Priok railhead. The Japanese were hollering about us losing the war and all that, which we was pretty aware of by that time.

Anyhow, in the camp it was dirty, just downright dirty, and then we had no kitchen facilities. They'd taken our kitchen equipment and our trucks. Actually--I'd forgotten this part of it--Lieutenant Schmid had put the kitchen equipment on one truck, and he was authorized to drive through and carry that by the Japanese in Garoet; but when they got

near Batavia, the Japanese put him into a prison in an old schoolhouse someplace, and he stayed about three months at that area with all of our kitchen equipment.

Marcello: You mentioned that the place was dirty. What attempts were made to clean it up?

Harrelson: Well, your immediate barracks you could wash. That was not a problem getting those clean. They were infested with body lice and chich bugs and cockroaches by the million. The only way you could actually ever get rid of those in that area is to get it in the sun. We'd just about tear the building down and turn all the boards over and keep turning them. In the bathing and toilet facilities, it must have been six months before they ever done a thing to it. We stayed there at least three months, and they was still doing that kind of operation when we left there.

Of course, immediately after we got into there...I'll have to back up a minute. When we got ready to leave the Garoet area, all of the battalion food supplies, such as canned goods, were divided equally, with each man given six or seven or eight cans to carry. We brought that in with us, and as soon as we got in, we had to turn it in and take it to the kitchen--turn it in to the kitchen--which was supposed to have been used as food for all prisoners.

That did not happen. The British officers took that food and put it in boxes and kept it, and I saw part of it

two years later when I made another tour and stayed at that camp. They was using it to set on; it still had cream in it.

Marcello: Is this the beginning of the poor relations that developed between the Americans and the British?

Harrelson: You bet! In the first place, they always wanted to treat us Americans as colonials, and they looked down upon you like they were really something great. Actually, when we got to talking to them individually, they were good people. Collectively--excuse the French--they're a bunch of bastards. That's not good terminology.

Marcello: Well, I think that's a pretty unanimous opinion among all the Americans I've interviewed, however.

Harrelson: Well, we thought that.

Marcello: They were called worse, too.

Harrelson: Yes, okay (chuckle). Like I say, individually they were pretty good people.

Marcello: I understand that their attitudes toward cleanliness and things of that nature left something to be desired, too.

Harrelson: I would think so. Of course, in certain places that we were in, their army didn't seem to be as strict on cleanliness as ours. They weren't trained that well. Back in Camp Bowie, we wouldn't throw a cigarette butt down because you had to pick it up. They didn't worry about that sort of thing. They didn't have personal cleanliness habits like we did. They didn't care whether they bathed or didn't, so

that could have been part of the problem with those latrines and showers when we hit there.

Marcello: Did you have very many British here at Tanjong Priok?

Harrelson: The majority of the camp was British. We was in the minority. Then they started a big argument as to who was the senior officer because actually they had been there first. It wound up probably, very likely, that the oldest colonel there was our Colonel Searle, you know, in rank for the number of years. But then the British figured that they'd better run things. They had one or two generals sitting back that didn't ever come out and say very much. One time we got one Australian, and he was pretty forward---in a different camp. But the British liked to run things, but they liked to run things around the conference table. I never found one that would actually go out and do anything, but they can have a big conference and do great at it.

Marcello: What was the food like here at Tanjong Priok?

Harrelson: That was where we got our first taste of rice--red rice. Red rice is that unpolished stuff that's still got some of the husk on it. What we got had been shipped by the Japanese from Japan in the hold of their ships, which had some leakage, and saltwater got in it, and it had mildewed.

Our cooks did not know how to cook rice, so they'd take a fifty-five-gallon oil drum and clean it out and put some rice in it and a lot of water and stand there with a

big paddle and stir it. It would come out like a lot of billboard paste, and it stunk. Now when I was a kid, we had a dairy farm, and part of our cow feed was called cow chow. It was a sweet mixture. It had some syrup in it and ribbon cane ground, and when it mildewed, it smelled just like that red rice smelled that had mildewed in the hold of the ships. Actually, we couldn't eat it. We finally had to, because we got nothing else.

Marcello: I've heard there were all sorts of critters in that rice, too.

Harrelson: Well, yes, there were, but they tasted better than the rice. At first you couldn't think about eating it. It was later on that you found out that those fat, juicy worms were better than the rice.

Marcello: What did those worms look like?

Harrelson: They looked like a maggot, a big overgrown maggot.

Marcello: I guess, if you stopped to pick out all of those worms, you didn't have very much rice left.

Harrelson: That's right. There would be a whole lot, and you figured, "Well, they don't eat much, anyhow."

Marcello: What sort of a portion of rice would you get for a meal?

Harrelson: We was supposed to get 100 grams per man per day according to the Japanese, but by the time the natives hauled it and took their share, we actually got about sixty grams of dry rice per man per day.

Marcello: So when you went through the chow line, how much rice would they put in your mess kit?

Harrelson: Roughly three-quarters of a little tin cup, and we'd get that twice a day.

Marcello: At noon and in the evening?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: What would you have for breakfast?

Harrelson: Well, I said noon and evening. That's not necessarily so. Sometimes in the breakfast, we'd get boiled water. Sometimes there would be a little tea in it if we had any tea, but other than that, you got your rice and water for the day. It had to be boiled.

Marcello: Before I turned over the tape, we were talking about the quality of the food, and we were also mentioning the variations of the rice that you got for each meal. You were describing the morning meal, I think, and it was a little bit different than the other meals. Is that correct?

Harrelson: You'd get two cups of rice a day. Sometimes we'd serve that morning and evening. It'd be at noon, but sometimes it would be light for the morning meal, and then we'd get our cup of rice at noon, particularly because just about this time we started having to make what they called the working parties--unloading ships, building emplacements for guns and revetments for aircraft, patching up runways, dismantling vehicles and loading them on ships to go to Japan, tearing

down steel bridges and steel light posts, putting up bamboo or wood to make wood bridges instead of steel. Also, they was taking up dismantled railroad engines. They was taking the heavier gauge railroad engines off of Java and sending them to Japan and replacing them with narrow gauge and that sort of thing. That was in the Batavia area. Of course, we went out on working parties.

Marcello: Before we get to the working parties, let's just continue with the food a little bit more, although I do want to talk later about those work parties. A lot of times, I've been told that the first meal would consist of kind of a mushy rice know as "pap." Did you receive that here on Tanjong Priok?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Did you ever have anything to supplement that rice?

Harrelson: Very, very seldom. In later months we managed to be able to spend that ten or fifteen cents a day we got for working. You could buy food from an Indian merchant, you know, one of those guys from India that lived there. He was a merchant, and he'd bring it in under the supervision of the Japanese. Then you could buy it, but what happened on those occasions is that it cost so much that you really couldn't get much of a food supplement.

Marcello: Well, I guess what I was referring to was that money that Captain Taylor had. Was that being used here in Tanjong

Priok yet?

Harrelson: Not yet. We had no place to spend it. You weren't allowed to talk to the natives; you weren't allowed to send it out for purchasing, not yet.

Marcello: So is it safe say that even at this early date, everybody was hungry all the time? Hunger was a constant thing?

Harrelson: That's right. I can phrase it...I hope it's nice enough to go on tape. Normally, when you get a bunch of Army boys sitting around, they talk first about going out with women and making love and drinking, and that's about all they talk about. Maybe each one is a little bit different in his mode of explaining it to the other, but that's about the way they talked on their free time. During the first week or so, we was just good ol' American boys, and that's the way we talked. After that we would drop the drinking stories, and it was women and a little food. A month or so after that, you never thought about drinking, and you never thought about women; you thought about food, and that's all. By that time you was down to...all of your fat had just about been eaten up by your body from living off of it. As they say your belly was rubbing your backbone, and everybody was losing weight.

Marcello: So food does become the major topic of conversation.

Harrelson: Exactly. In later years--in fact, a couple of years or so for me--I had quite an experience with an operation that I'll

go into later, but while I was out, that's what I thought about, food.

Marcello: I assume everybody is already making up recipes or talking about the first thing they're going to eat when they get back and all that sort of thing.

Harrelson: Oh, yes. Now my mother was of German descent, and she cooked--like they say--the old-fashioned way. Everything she made was tasty. If it wasn't tasty, she didn't serve it. Naturally, when we started talking about food, well, for myself, I thought about my favorite dishes that my mother cooked, and I supposed everybody did the same. They talked about the dishes that were favorites for them and that their mother cooked and that sort of thing. But you definitely thought about it. If you were out scavenging around for anything, it was for food. If you took a chance on getting beat, it was for food.

Marcello: What does it feel like to really be hungry? I mean, really hungry like you guys were. Physically, what does that feel like?

Harrelson: Well, physically your innards are gnawing at all time-- just rumbling and gnawing. You not only have the hunger in your mind; you've got it in your stomach, in your body. Your body is literally starving for food. You haven't got anything, so you can't feed it. So like myself, I weighed 190 pounds when we were captured. I got down to

eighty-seven pounds. It took awhile--a couple of years, maybe a little longer. But eighty-seven pounds for a guy that's twenty-four or twenty-five years old and 5'8" or 5'9" and a broad-shouldered boy, that's just skin and bones, like a skeleton with skin pulled over.

Marcello: And I suppose that since you are on almost strictly a rice diet, you're always looking for something to flavor that food.

Harrelson: And anything at all will flavor rice. Actually, the most prevalent things you could find in those islands was little peppers. They're hotter than nine kinds of thunder, but they are delicious, and you learned to eat them. It doesn't take a whole lot of pepper in your mouth to flavor a spoonful of rice. But that will do it. Other things we found that would flavor it is a few roasted peanuts. It don't take many. Of course, you didn't get many, either. A piece of a banana when you could buy them was good in rice. They weren't that plentiful. Duck eggs were used, too. Duck eggs are terribly strong; they're strong-tasting eggs. They're bigger than a chicken egg, and one egg is a lot more than one person needed. Your stomach wouldn't hold a lot. You got down to where you could hold a cup, and that's it. Of course, five minutes later--like they was talking about the Chinese food--five minutes later, you need to eat again (laughter).

Marcello: Who finally taught the American cooks how to prepare that rice? Was it trial and error?

Harrelson: No, the Dutch cooks, and it was in another camp. We moved from Tanjong Priok to Bicycle Camp, and once in Bicycle Camp the Dutch had installed rice steamers. They were huge, round containers with a pressure cooker lid on them that looked to me like an old washing machine in the laundry here at home, just from the outward appearance. But it was a steam-operated rice cooker. They taught them how to cook dry rice. It's not that difficult; we just didn't know how. We used way too much water and stirred it.

Marcello: I'm going to come back and talk again about food in a minute because it ties in with my next question. At this early stage, that is, while you're still here in Tanjong Priok, is military discipline still being maintained among the Americans?

Harrelson: Definitely. We never had a real problem with military discipline. Well, actually, when we had to form for tenko or nose count every morning and every night outside of our barracks on the parade ground, the Japanese would inspect them and do the counting themselves, too. Of course, you called them to fall in for being served your meal, you know, cup of rice or whatever...tea or water. We didn't really have a problem. Oh, there may have been a few instances that you would expect anyplace, but there

was not a major problem with discipline. There was nobody who just said, "Well, we're a prisoner-of-war now. We don't have to do this and do that," because the Japanese expected it to be done that way. They not only expected it, but they more or less demanded it. Your officers were in charge of you. There had to be an officer with every working party that went out, or a senior non-commissioned officer with every working party, and that sort of thing. So you just expected it, and it carried through the whole time we were prisoners, really.

Marcello: And it was going to be one of the keys to survival, was it not?

Harrelson: Oh, I think so. I think so. I definitely think that there was so much that you learn in...like, close order drill. Now I'm not talking particularly just about marching. I'm talking about the field maneuvers with rifles or with handguns in close order. You learn so much to do on a command that it's second nature. You don't stop and argue, "Well, I don't have to do this. I'm a POW."

Marcello: I gather that some of the military formalities did cease, however, at the initiative of the officers, such as saluting and things of that nature.

Harrelson: There was a certain amount of it that would not be done. Go back to Brownwood, for instance. My battery commander would come into the orderly room in the morning, and I'd

come to attention and give him a salute; and that's all he wanted for the rest of the day. So regardless of how many more times he entered, unless there was other troops in there, I'd just keep my seat and continue to work. That was the way he wanted it. It was pretty much that way in the prison camps, but we didn't try to really lose our respect or try not to give them the respect that they deserved, even the officers that didn't deserve it.

Marcello: I have another question that kind of combines both the discipline aspect and the food aspect, Is it not true that when you went through the chow line, there was normally a barrel of boiling water where everybody dipped their mess gear to make sure that it was clean and so on? It seems to me that's a form of discipline, also, that was maintained. And wasn't there usually an officer or a noncomm there to make sure that everybody did dip their mess gear?

Harrelson: Generally, in our case, most of the time it was the mess sergeant that observed that. They also would look at your fingernails to be sure they weren't real dirty, because they are a method of filth that you could spread to other people. Of course, in the prisoner-of-war camp, you don't stick to that hardly as strong as you did back, say, in your regimental-type of soldiering; but nevertheless, we honored that thing. The soldiers between themselves maintained that because if they got somebody that had too

much body odor, they'd give him a bath. And if they gave him a bath, he didn't stay dirty anymore (chuckle).

Marcello: Now I think we're ready to talk about those work parties that you mentioned in general terms awhile ago. What sort of a system was set up for people to go out on work parties?

Harrelson: Generally, the Japanese would tell the British...we'll start at Tanjong Priok. He would give the British commanding officer a number of people that he wanted out there, a number of heads; and they would be generally in groups of fifty or a hundred men. They would be on various parties taken out there by your guards and the Japanese that was in charge of the work. They had two different sets of people. One was your guards that was supposed to be protecting you, which was the ones that stuck you with the bayonet; and the other was the Japanese that was in charge of getting the work done, whatever that may be or wherever that may be.

Basically, we went to the docks and unloaded ships and loaded ships. There was a few incidents that took place like. The Japanese let it be known that they did not tolerate two or three things, even from their own troops--stealing, rape, and...gosh, the other I don't remember. I do remember those because of the Dutch women. Bless their souls, they were troupers. We knew that all their men was gone. The men were in the concentration camps

with us, and the women just kind of fell prey to the Japanese. We could imagine all kinds of things, but we understood the Japanese did not tolerate rape. Whether they did or whether they didn't, I don't know.

Marcello: Were these work parties voluntary, or did they simply draft people to go out on them?

Harrelson: Well, for most of the time, you would just detail them, but in the beginning they were voluntary because the boys wanted to get out of camp and see what was going on. Now that was the first three or four months, six months or so for myself. I didn't necessarily ever have to go on a work party while there in that camp because, being the first sergeant, it was my job to detail them and see that they got out there--the number that my battery was supposed to supply.

But I did go. On this one occasion, there were two things that happened out there on those. The first one we went out on, we got down there, and they had us unloading a ship. Some of the things they had were barrels of aviation gasoline, and they had ammunition. We just refused to unload it because we just told them, "Look, that's against the Geneva Convention. We're not going to do that." So the Japanese being nice people [facetious remark], they said, "Okay." Then they marched us back to camp, and they sent guards over and posted guards on our kitchen. They

took our kitchen and all of our food supplies and kept it there and said, "You don't eat until you work." Of course, that lasted a couple of days, and you got hungry enough and said, "Okay, we're being forced to work, so we'll work." They had told us all along that they did not honor the Geneva Convention, but we sort of refused to believe it. We kept trying to quote it, and it always got you slapped (chuckle). But that was on the first working party.

The second one was when we were unloading just a cargo ship, and we took our noon break. This Japanese guard came over there, and he was bragging, of course, in sign language and in Japanese. He'd put his hands together like a flying airplane and said, "Zzzzzzzzz! San Francisco--barroom! That means it was blown up, finished. "New York--zzzzzzzz-hroom!" So Dempsey Key was from Decatur, and he said, "What about Decatur?" And the ol' Japanese says, "Zzzzzzzzzroom!" (chuckle) Those were incidents that kept you going. Particularly, the working parties or in the camp or everyday existence was so desperately bleak that if it weren't for people like that, and comics, that would try to get you to laughing at the darkest thing, you just never would have the frame of mind to make it. And we always had them.

Marcello: I understand that the Japanese couldn't understand that, that is, how Americans and so on could laugh at certain things, given the circumstances.

Harrelson: That's right. They have entirely a different outlook on life than we do--completely different. That's why it was so hard for us to understand things that they did. For instance, if it were around the other way, I can't see me standing up to somebody and slapping them, that didn't understand what I was getting at. I would prefer to get an interpreter and tell him what I wanted done and let him go do it. That was just our way versus their way. For another thing, in their army one grade could take one lesser grade and stand him at attention and just beat the holy mackerel out of him. That went from the highest rank down to the lowest peon in their army. We couldn't understand that.

But there are certain things that we tolerated in order to exist. I've been told so many times. "Well, one of them little slanty-eyed bastards would never stand me up and slap me. I'd do this, and I'd do that." Maybe you would. We did, too, in the beginning, until you found out the consequences--when you take a person and nail him down on gravel in that hot a sun and keep him right there for two days and night or two days and two nights, and put a bamboo under the joint of his knees to separate them, and let him lean back his weight back on his heels and hold your hand straight out and put a half a brick in each one of them. If one ever bobbles, then they'll hit you

across the neck with the butt of their rifle. You can take your hand like that (gesture) and hit a person right there (gesture), and he can't pick his arm up. You learned fast that sort of thing would so mistreat your body that your chances of survival was poor.

There was another bad habit they had when they was just a little mad. All of them wore hobnailed boots. Now for people that don't know what a hobnail is, it looks like a furniture tack. And those were on the bottom of the leather of their shoes and around the heels. If they kicked you in the shin, it would break the skin. In later years and months, when your health was down, you'd get tropical ulcers everytime. So you learned not to do things that upset them and that was going to cause you physical harm.

Marcello: What you're saying, in effect, is that here at Tanjong Priok you are learning how to be a prisoner-of-war.

Harrelson: We was trying, but it was difficult. We hadn't got the message yet.

Marcello: Is rule number one to stay as far away from them as possible whenever you can?

Harrelson: That's the first rule, because if you're within their sight, you have to come to attention and bow. That was the hardest thing for us to do. We could salute them without too much grimace or whatever, but it got you right in the guts when you had to bow. That was required anytime you was uncovered.

And you had to be uncovered inside a house.

Marcello: How about outside?

Harrelson: You could be covered, and if you were covered, you could salute. But if you were uncovered, you had to bow--required. You learned how to bow (chuckle)--most of the time by being hit behind the head with the butt of a rifle real hard. That'll get you down there (chuckle).

Marcello: I understand, also, that it didn't pay to try and make friends with any of them because you never knew when one of them was going to turn.

Harrelson: Well, that's so. That's the way the Japanese were, at least those that we ran into. They were like that right down from the top to the bottom. You get one that's friendly, and he's after something. They can look you right in the eye and just smile and make motions like you're the greatest person in the world, but they don't mean it at all. As soon as they find out that you've got a watch or a fountain pen or any pictures in your billfold that they want, they'll take them. That's all they was after. They didn't want friends.

Marcello: Compare the power of the noncom in the Japanese Army with his counterpart in the American Army. I'm referring now basically to a Japanese sergeant. What kind of power does he have?

Harrelson: Well, like I was saying awhile ago, he can stand any one of those people up at attention and beat on them until they fall

dead if necessary. The American can't do that. That's one thing. Other than that, of course, I didn't see what they...you weren't close enough in combat to see what the sergeant does to his troops. But there's no doubt about it. They had to "hop to it."

Marcello: His powers were almost unlimited.

Harrelson: I think like this: anytime you can keep a person standing there until you beat him near death or death, it's got to be just about unlimited on it. It seems like it to me.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that it was basically their noncoms that were running these camps? Obviously, you had a commandant at the top and so on, an officer above you.

Harrelson: In all cases some noncoms were really running everything. To start with we had Japanese guards and a Japanese sergeant in charge of the guards and a Japanese sergeant in charge of the work details. They took all the nose counts and that sort of thing. So it is true that they ran nearly everything. They didn't have that many officers when Java fell. They had their field officers, but they needed them in those units. I'm just talking about for occupation duties and stuff. Then the officers that they brought in, most of them, was Japanese desk soldiers. I ran across some of them that I didn't think was too smart, you know, in any kind of common knowledge, but then on the other hand, like you said, their sergeants would pretty well run things,

and the warrant officers.

Marcello: Suppose you saw a sergeant thumping on a corporal one morning. Could you expect that sooner or later that physical punishment was going to go right down the line to the prisoners?

Harrelson: Everytime! Everytime!

Marcello: Everybody had to save face.

Harrelson: Oh, yes. And that corporal would line up a first class, a three-star private, and a three-star a two-star, and two-star a one-star. That one-star was as low as they went. Then when it got to him, the first prisoner he met got it. And here's the thing about it--he was always right. We knew he wasn't, but then you could complain through your interpreters and your series of officers to the camp commandant; but they always took that Japanese guard's word, as if it was law, for everything. Your word meant nothing.

Marcello: Did the guards do very much harassing on the work details?

Harrelson: Not a whole lot. Actually, our first guards were Japanese. Later on, they were Korean. When you get later on to the Koreans, they did more harassing than the Japanese did--far more. We didn't understand that, but then we later found out the reason is that the Japanese had taken over Korea and had had it fifty or so years, and they considered the Koreans to be just a dog. So the Koreans was trying to get back part of that face, I'd guess you'd say. To

them the prisoners-of-war was just dogs, at least underlings. They they would do the harassing.

I found it strange that the Japanese in the first few months of prisoner-of-war camp didn't do a whole lot. We hadn't run into bowing and saluting. They were strictly outside of the encampment at that time. I guess it took maybe three months in there and making various work details and stuff before they finally issued the order that when a Japanese guard was in sight or hearing, you had to call attention and call it in Japanese; and you had to come to attention and salute if covered or bow at the waist if uncovered. We didn't go for this, but then by a series of beatings and getting into trouble, you learn that that's the best thing to do.

Marcello: What kind of common corporal punishment was dealt out by these guards? Let me give you a more specific question. On occasions you have used the term slapping. Describe what you mean when you talk about slapping. What did they do?

Harrelson: Well, to start with, by that time we got into the Japanese that were short in stature. We got back down to the general run of the Japanese, and they would stand up on their tiptoes in order to slap you in the face with the broad of their hand. Now that to them gave them a lot of face because they had you standing at attention. If you moved, then they would jab you with the bayonet--not enough maybe to kill you

but just enough to draw a little blood--or they'd kick you with their hobnails on the shins. They delighted in this. Then if they couldn't beat you, they would generally make you follow them or lead you to a place where they could get up on something where they could look down upon you and slap you in the face. Now that they like to do. They liked to look down on you.

Marcello: In the beginning at least, did it take a certain amount of self-discipline to stop yourself from just hauling off and belting this Japanese back? In other words, you're a lot bigger than he, and you know, all things being equal, that you could tear him apart probably.

Harrelson: In the beginning we couldn't do it. You hadn't made up your mind you had to, and you could do it. It was just like when we were at home. If one of your buddies slapped you, you'd hit him a good one. And that's what happened to the Japanese. When they first started this harassing, they...maybe they'd had a bad night, or maybe they'd been pushed around. Then it was time for them to push around some prisoner-of-war.

One of them came in one day, and they reached up and slapped one of the boys that was a Marine off of the Houston that was sunk. Of course, he hit him back a good belt right on the "button" and laid him out. Then he put his rifle across him and put his arms across his chest and just

left him laying there. The next guard found him, and when they got into the guardhouse and got him revived, he gave the number (because we had little ol' metal tags with our number on it). They found him, and, of course, he caught it. That's one of the first we saw of the harsh punishment that I was talking about awhile ago--on the gravels with the bamboo under your knees and stuff. And the beatings... oh, they beat him every few minutes. They beat him across the neck and shoulders with their rifle butts, and he was just--oh, we would say--about two shades away from death when we was allowed to go drag him back to the barracks. So we figured, "You're going to have to learn to do this," because the punishment that he went through was physical punishment. You might not live through it. The punishment that you put yourself through by bowing at the waist or taking a slap in the face is very little compared to this. Mentally, it's degrading. That's what you had to deal with, the mental part. You'd say, "Now I think I can tolerate this just to live to get back home." And that's the part that made you a survivor, and that's the part that so many people don't understand when you talk to them. They say, "Well, I could not have ever done that. I'd have done this and that." You need to be there to find out.

Marcello: In other words, like I mentioned awhile ago, you have to learn how to be a prisoner-of-war.

Harrelson: You sure do, and it takes a lot of learning. It takes a lot of guts, too, because we were just not trained that way.

Marcello: Even on work parties, is it safe to say that you're kind of checking out which guard is in charge of the work party? You avoid some, and you might want to go with others.

Harrelson: That's right. There's some that they may be the lowest peon in the group, but if there's any beatings that take place, they're always on that tail-end (with the lowest ranks). And you don't want to go on no work party with them. Your chances of getting by the day without getting pushed around real heavy is better if you're on with a corporal or sergeant that does the pushing around rather than the peon that gets it. That's true.

Marcello: What would they do if they caught you stealing?

Harrelson: I can't really say because they said they would shoot you in a firing squad or whatever. There are two or three of them who got some wood alcohol and brought it back to the camp. They was on the working party, and they got caught with that; and the ones that didn't get caught went blind from drinking it. They got caught with it, and they was given a terrible beating. They kept them at the guardhouse, and they put them through all kinds of torture for, like, twenty-four, thirty-six, or forty-eight hours; and then we'd go and drag them back to the barracks.

I thought one of the harshest punishments was like I

described awhile ago, this first fellow, when they put that big piece of bamboo under the joint of your knees, because it actually disengages those joints when you put your weight back on your heels. Then your legs go to sleep. Then you say, "Well, I can't hold half a brick out there ten minutes," but people have done it for twenty-four hours because they had to. The human body can do more than you'll make it do. It's just the circumstances under which you have to do things.

The hitting around the head and the shoulders with the butt of the rifle always hurt because they're heavy, and they got metal and the whole bit. Those bruises lasted a long time and hurt for a long time afterwards. It's not like the puncture of a bayonet. That'll heal up, and once it heals up, you're over it.

As some of the punishment that they gave for various things, they would bury you up to your neck in the ground and just leave you there. Most of the time you didn't survive.

Marcello: Let me come at the punishment from another angle. Is it safe to say that, given their rules and regulations in terms what you were supposed to do and not to do, that the prisoners often asked for what they got? Do you understand what I'm saying?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: The Japanese have certain rules. If the prisoners violate those rules, regardless of how ridiculous those rules may have been, they're going to suffer the consequences.

Harrelson: They sometimes deliberately broke rules, but most punishment did not occur because of that. Generally, the rule of punishment was lack of being able to understand Japanese.

Marcello: How important was it, then, that you learned Japanese?

Harrelson: Well, from a health standpoint, it was very important that you learned enough to communicate with them in sign language or pidgin English or a few broken Japanese phrases and a lot of Malay. Where I was, I learned a lot of Malay because most of them spoke Malay.

Marcello: I think you talked about this a while ago, and what you say here only confirms it. One of the ways that a relatively uneducated--and himself abused--Japanese guard could make the prisoners understand was to give them a couple of belts, right?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Physical punishment was his way of making you understand what he wanted you to do. As ridiculous as it seems, that's what he was doing.

Harrelson: Well, that was one thing. If you didn't really understand, then he'd get your attention. It's like getting the attention of a mule with a two-by-four. That would do it. That would get your attention, all right. On the other hand, some

of them came out there with the idea of getting your attention because they had been mistreated by the upper echelons as you mentioned earlier. That was true, too. A lot of times for minor punishment, not major punishment, like, for stealing and that sort of thing, they'd give you a major beating. If you hit a Japanese guard, they'd give you a major beating. Those were good ones, and you didn't get over them in a week or so. There's one or two of those boys that we had to carry back to the barracks and then massage their muscles for two or three weeks before they could even get up and walk and feed themselves. Now that's harsh punishment. Just a slap or one belt or a kick or two, you could get over that pretty quick. Generally, those came not from your breaking a rule. Generally, it came because he was hunting for somebody to pick on, and boy, when they are, they'll find you regardless of what you're doing.

Marcello: Well, again, all this goes back to something I mentioned earlier. It's best to stay as far away from those guards as you can.

Harrelson: Exactly! If you can do it.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned processing, and you implied that each of you had a little tag with a number on it. When did this processing take place?

Harrelson: This is something, like, maybe four months after we were captured. Now for our unit we had spent roughly the first

three months in Tanjong Priok. Then they moved us to Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: And that's where the processing took place.

Harrelson: That's where we got the cards, and they made out your name, rank, and serial number. Then they gave you a metal tag with a pin on it that you wore at all times...and a number.

Marcello: On May 14, 1942, the unit was moved from Tanjong Priok over to Bicycle Camp. Describe that move.

Harrelson: We had to first walk from Tanjong Priok to the depot. Now the depot was quite a walk for us. It was, like, two miles. We had all our heavy equipment and all of our gear. Then we got on electric rail cars. It was several cars, and it was overhead electric-operated. We went from there to a depot on the edge of Batavia, then walked from there, which was a matter of another couple of miles to Bicycle Camp. Now Bicycle Camp had much better quarters and sanitation facilities as a whole than Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint. Let's suppose that you and I are entering the front gate to Bicycle Camp. What would you see?

Harrelson: From the road, before you go in the gate, you see barbed wire fences, and they're like, eight feet tall with barbed wire entanglements on top. There was barbed wire in some places, and they had concrete posts, a concrete wall with broken glass on top, at other places. All of the fences

are lined with atap mats, and you can't see through in either direction. So all you can see is a walled fence there with atap, and you can see some barbed wire and a few posts and a few guards. They have the guard posts at the corners.

Marcello: So you really can't see out of Bicycle Camp. Is that correct?

Harrelson: That's right.

Marcello: Because of the atap mats?

Harrelson: Yes, that's right. From the outside you can't see in.

At the gate there's brick posts, and, you know, they have that ornamental overhead steel work over the gate and with an ornamental iron gate as such. Of course, when you go into that, then there's one main street or road that goes right straight through the camp from side to side. On the opposite side of that camp--which would have been the north side--the gate was totally closed and atapped up. There was nothing back there.

The barracks were at each side of the road, lengthwise running away from the road, and each barrack would hold roughly 100 to 150 men easily. In this particular barrack, they had inside and outside cubicles. They had a large corridor running straight down through the center of the barrack with cubicles on either side. The cubicles were maybe two-and-half-to three inches thick, and they were

made out of plaster-type substance or stucco.

Marcello: You mean the dividers between the cubicles.

Harrelson: The dividers, yes, all the walls.

Marcello: Would the cubicles more or less be three-walled. In other words, there would be an opening on each side where you went to a cubicle.

Harrelson: Yes. The front of the cubicle was open to the corridor, and then you had a wall between you and the next cubicle on both sides. If you had sufficient cubicles, you would try to put just two men to a cubicle. Originally, they was designed for one man in the Dutch Army. They also had cubicles on the outside, which was open to the world outside. Those had about a three-foot or a four-foot wall about wainscot-high, you might say, except for the opening that you went through like a door. Actually, there was no door there, but just an opening. There were, of course, no ceilings. They had a clay tile roof, and they had ceramic tile floors. Just about every building we was in had that beautiful ceramic tile floors that's made there. I guess they must have made a lot of it in Java. But it is pretty, and there's all kinds of figurines like you see in Oriental art.

Marcello: You were mentioning this street that ran down through the middle of the camp. What was it composed of?

Harrelson: Well, it was just like a concrete or blacktop or a hardtop

street with concrete gutters on each side, drainage ditches. Those drainage ditches did a lot more than just run off the rain. They also carried off water from your showers and kitchen water and that sort of thing.

Now the bath facilities for the most part were not showers as we know them; for the most part the latrines were not latrines as we know them, like, with commodes and such. Most of the shower facilities in that camp was a huge trough, like a horse trough except deeper and wider and full of water. It had this tile that I mentioned before to stand on, and you had the atap for the outside walls, and there was a tile roof. You'd go in there and strip off, and you took a shower with a bucket or a pan or whatever. You just dipped it in the trough and poured it on you and soaped up and rinsed it off. It's not like standing under a shower.

Marcello: So I guess it would be more accurate to call them bathing facilities as opposed to a shower.

Harrelson: That's right. Now the sanitation facilities was in a building similar to the bathing facilities. They had running water. For the most part, other than those near the officers' quarters, they didn't have commodes. They were just trenches with running water. They were like straddle trenches. That's about it on those. However, that was a lot better than what we had at Tanjong Priok as far as being able to keep clean, which you could do.

You could bathe quite often if you weren't out on the working party. Once we got to Bicycle Camp, our working parties definitely got to be more fast and furious.

Marcello: Before we get to the working parties--and I'll pick that up in a moment--this is where you encounter the survivors off the USS Houston.

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Describe that encounter.

Harrelson: In the first place, we were glad to see some more Americans--not glad to see them prisoners, but being the fact that they were prisoners, you was glad to be in the same camp with them because that meant that each American that you got on your side that gave you that many more against the British, or per se the English. There were some among the British who were Canadians...there were just a few, but they were wonderful. The Australians as a group and as individuals were wonderful. There were a few Irish as such that we liked real well; a few Scots as such that we liked real well; a few Welshmen and that sort of thing. They were just good people. There were a few English individually that was real good people, but collectively we had a running battle with them. They wanted to treat us like no-nothing colonials and look down on us. Of course, being from Texas we like to brag, and we held our own. I know we would generally get them...this is not too nice,

but I'm going to go ahead and put it in here. We would tell them that we may be considered by them colonials, which we were not; that we were Texans and damn proud of it; and that they weren't too much, after all. We told them that a high-priced prostitute named Wally Simpson went over there and pulled their king off the throne and married him. That took the wind out of their sails because they're real strong on king and queen and royal blood. It wasn't nice, but we sure got back at them (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess a lot of those survivors off the USS Houston were Texans, too, were they not?

Harrelson: Yes. Yes, they were, and we was glad to see them. The only problem they had was that when they were sunk, they had just what they had on; and when they hit the water, they tried to strip off to nearly nothing to swim ashore, the ones that could swim. So we divvied up our shoes and our clothes and stuff, because we had a barracks bag full. Like, for myself, I had three or four or five pairs of khakis and dungarees (the old blue denims) and three pairs of shoes (the one I was wearing plus two extra pair). I gave them the extra shoes. I kept one pair and gave two away. I gave away all of the dungarees and two suits of khakis. The only thing I didn't have was a hat. I didn't have any hat at all because when we were captured I just had the helmet, and they took our steel helmets. Not that

it was a real good headgear, but I didn't have anything for a long time. I wore Captain Taylor's campaign hat, and it was a blessing to me. I had bumps on my face, those moles; and they would get sunburned and cause all kinds of problems.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the people from the 131st divided their clothing and so on with the Houston survivors. Was this a voluntary and spontaneous thing, or were you ordered to do so by the officers?

Harrelson: To tell the truth about it, I don't know; but from my own personal standpoint, once I found out they didn't have any, I wanted them to have part of what I had. So on my part it was rather spontaneous, and I assumed it was for the others. Of course, we did this not individually; we did it collectively, so we would be sure that everybody had something to wear, like, a pair of shoes and at least one uniform (shirt and trousers) and one suit of underwear at least. So from that standpoint, I kind of felt that we just got together and did it.

Marcello: They were in pretty bad shape, weren't they?

Harrelson: Definitely. They were in good spirits. You couldn't beat them for being in good spirits. They had no mess gear. I guess when you get into fighting on a ship and you're being sunk, you don't have time to go pack a barracks bag and get your mess gear (chuckle). They had nothing. Some of them just got off with their bare skin. When we ran across

them, some of them were nearly that bad off because the Japanese gave them nothing. As a matter of fact, while we're speaking about clothing, the only thing they ever gave me, as such, was two small hand towels that eventually, when my clothes wore out, I used for G-strings.

Marcello: Were the Houston survivors and the 131st people housed in separate barracks?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. We had, as I recall, two barracks for the 131st, and then the third barrack was for the Houston survivors.

Marcello: Now once more, however, I assume that the senior American commander would be the commander of the combined group. Is that correct?

Harrelson: That's correct.

Marcello: And who was it at this point now?

Harrelson: Colonel Searle.

Marcello: It's still Colonel Searle. Where does Colonel Tharp come in.

Harrelson: Well, Colonel Tharp was the battalion commander, but Colonel Searle was the senior officer. He was due to become a brigadier general at that time. He was a full colonel. Well, I guess Colonel Tharp was, too, but Colonel Tharp didn't have him outranked on number of years at that rank yet.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were mentioning that the work parties were different here than they were in Tanjong Priok. Can you elaborate on that?

Harrelson: Well, they had us doing more things, working harder and

longer, and prodding you each day to get more work done. In other words, they wanted a quota. When you first started working, like, at Tanjong Priok, if we didn't get a ship unloaded today, we'd come back tomorrow and finish up; and whenever we got it finished, fine. Now they'd keep you moving. We'd get into line, and one guy would grab hold of something and start walking out with it, and then another one. We didn't get into a run; it was just a slow pace.

Once we moved to Bicycle Camp and went out on the working parties, they had both the guards and the Japanese that was in charge of the work detail prodding you to get more work done, hurrying you up, and belting you if you didn't get a move on and that sort of thing, giving you less time for your noon break.

Marcello: Were you essentially doing the same kinds of work, however?

Harrelson: Actually, we started doing different kinds of work there. We weren't unloading and loading ships as such--not too many. Occasionally, we would go there, but that was left for the British that was still at Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: And Tanjong Priok is essentially the port city, is it not, for Batavia?

Harrelson: Yes, it is. Actually, that base camp at Tanjong Priok was the camp that the Dutch used for their own army that handled that part, and when they would get ready to ship them to another island or for duty on that island--you know,

their military--I guess it was kind of a point of embarkation, maybe.

Marcello: Take me through a typical work day here at Bicycle Camp from the time you got up in the morning until you retired in the evening.

Harrelson: A normal workday in Bicycle Camp was basically during daylight hours, and you would have to get up maybe an hour before daylight in order to kind of get that "pap" or whatever you got for breakfast, and then you got a canteen of water. Now in that particular camp--in Bicycle Camp--our water was coming from the same source as used by the city of Batavia, and we didn't boil it--you know, our drinking water--so you could get what you wanted. At other camps you had to boil all water, and you got one cupful. Now when they took up our canteens and didn't leave us with canteens, then they gave us coconuts with a stopper in it--a piece of wood as a stopper--to carry your water in. I'd get up in the morning--an hour before daylight--and get ready by roughly daylight. You'd fall in and start forming with the larger group down near the guardhouse.

Marcello: Is that where the roll call takes place?

Harrelson: No, that's after roll call. You have roll call en masse.

Marcello: And who takes roll?

Harrelson: The Japanese. Generally, that's done on the parade ground.

Marcello: And how would they go about taking roll?

Harrelson: Well, they formed you in lines of four deep, and he'd go along and just count each person in the front line and then multiplied it by four, which is a tally. Then you have to come up with all missing, such as people in the kitchen, people doing latrine duty, people in the hospital. Now the hospital didn't amount to anything there. It was just a building that had a few doctors, but they had no medicine, so you went over there just to complain with the other sick.

Marcello: Okay, so after roll call, you go down toward the guardhouse.

Harrelson: Now after roll call, you went back to your barracks, and you got ready for your working party. Then you formed in front of your barracks, and you was marched down near the guardhouse. Then the guard counted noses on work parties. If they wanted so many hundred men, they had to be there. Now after they were there and counted, then they'd start detailing you out. For every fifty men, there would be one Japanese guard or Korean guard--whichever you had--and there would be one Japanese per fifty men that was in charge of the work, like, of the Japanese engineering battalion, for instance. The various work we did out of that camp... we dismantled automobiles. They took up all automobiles up from the civilians, and those were dismantled and loaded aboard ships in pieces and hauled back to Japan for scrap iron.

Marcello: They were evidently looting those islands.

Harrelson: Yes, no doubt. See, even all the steel girders on bridges came down, and they put back up either wood--because they had a lot of big trees--and bamboo. Boy, they could use that bamboo. They took down steel lightposts--the cast iron types and that sort of thing--they were loaded back on ships. Some of the other things that we did at various places was where they had a company or a battalion housed or barracks. Then we'd go out there and build a dirt emplacement for machine guns. We'd dig these bomb trenches and that sort of thing.

One of the hardest things for us to do was to go to the original imperial palace deal that had been the governor's mansion and mow the law. This wasn't like going up there and taking a lawn mower or was it like taking any kind of scythe or sickle. You lined up a hundred or so men in a line, and you dropped down on your haunches like the natives do, which is very difficult for us to do, and you go along with your fingers, and you crop this grass. If you was lucky enough, you could use a pen knife or fingernail scissors or something like that, but for most of us those things had already been taken, so you just cropped that grass with your fingers. You have to stay down there, and it's hard for us to first squat down on our heels; second, to stay bent over that long because our bodies weren't used to that--never. That was about as hard as

any work I had to do. The physical labor wasn't too hard. It was just staying down there. When you raised up to get the kinks out of your legs or back, that's when you got hit with the butt of a rifle or jabbed with a bayonet or kicked on the shins.

Marcello: Also, awhile ago, relative to the work parties, you talked about coming in contact or seeing the Dutch women. Describe what you meant by that and why you had this admiration for the Dutch women.

Harrelson: Well, the Dutch women were not basically afraid of the Japanese. Now I'm going to go back here and say that most of the Dutch women on Java were German. The Dutch themselves --the Dutchmen--told us this, that rather than marry basically from Holland itself--some did--they wanted women that had a little bit stouter constitution to take what it required to live as a Dutch wife on the island of Java. They found the better stock just across the border in Germany. Whether that has any bearing, I just mention that was what we was told by some of the Dutchmen themselves.

Nevertheless, we would see them on street corners, and they'd always try to wave; and everytime they did, well, the guards and the Japanese work detail would go after them and try to beat them. But they'd take the beating, and just like they say about "take a licking and keep on kicking," they'd come back the next day and do the same thing. We

just wondered in years later what they really had to put up with.

Marcello: Did they ever try to slip you any food or anything of that nature?

Harrelson: We was never allowed to get that close. We might be within forty or thirty yards, but never as close as ten yards and never close enough to really be passed any messages or ...that's what they said they didn't want us to be doing--receiving and passing messages. Of course, everytime they jumped on one of those poor Dutch women, they would accuse them of trying to pass messages. They never did produce any notes, but I guess they thought we was doing it by sign language or semaphore or something.

Marcello: When would the workday end?

Harrelson: Most of the time, you would get back to camp just about dark. That was in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Would they ever shake you down when you came in?

Harrelson: Oh, yes, and you never knew when, because they didn't allow you to pick up anything or bring back anything, which we all did. Once we started getting that hungry...during the noon break sometimes, like, that early in the stage, the Korean guards would meet at one place and have their lunch, and the Japanese would meet at another place, and they would have their lunch. They'd kind of leave the prisoners on their own. That's when you would sneak around and do your

dealing with the natives. That was when you got the opportunity to spend them Dutch guilders. That was in the beginning.

If you, for example, got caught bringing back into camp an egg, a banana, peanuts, or palm sugar--which was the staples we were after--you would always catch it. Of course, you would lose that merchandise first. If they shook you down and found it, you knew you was going to get beat, but you'd take that chance because you might get away with it.

There was one other reason. In the camps like that one when we first hit it, the main facilities--bathing facilities and latrines--were right outside of our own hut. Everything was running over, and it was stagnant. It had probably been that way three months or four and just sitting there. As a result a lot of our boys were getting dysentery and various other things. We found that if we could get them some green, leafy vegetables--not spinach as such, but like spinach--or bananas, they could eat those and get by. It'd pick them up and help them. We would take that chance and try to get something back there that they could eat. As long as you showed good enough health to go on the working party, you could make it. You knew in your own mind that you could make it. For that poor fellow back there that had a bad case of dysentery,

or some of them even with bad cases of malaria, an egg would do them a little bit of good. I guess any kind of food would, really.

Marcello: What were some of the ways you had of slipping food back into the camp?

Harrelson: Well, most of the time, you tried to put it inside your mess kit because our mess kits had a lid and a handle that folded over and kept it clamped. You'd put it in there and put your mess kit in your knapsack. Well, that knapsack's got a long strap on that hangs over your shoulder, and it's a little bit bigger than a book satchel, you might say. That's generally what I carried mine in.

Marcello: Where would the Japanese usually search?

Harrelson: Oh, that's one of the first places they'd look, and then they would look under your hat if you had a hat on. Some of them got some of these Dutch Army straw hats, and they had a higher crown, so they could hide stuff up in the crown of that hat. Then they'd look around your waistline, near your belt. That's about it. They very seldom ever stripped you off and got down to the nitty-gritty of searching, but they generally found something if you was bringing it in.

Marcello: In other words, if you did steal some food out on the job, you'd kind of--in many cases--eat it on the job if you could.

Harrelson: Well, I'm just taking what you said. Normally, we didn't steal anything; we bought it. We took a chance on getting beat if we got caught talking to the natives and purchasing first. Then we took a chance on getting beat if we got caught with that purchase going back into camp. But we knew it. So we knew we was taking those chances, but we did it willingly for, first, our own hunger and, second, for our buddies.

Marcello: What would you normally do, then, once you got back into camp at the end of the day?

Harrelson: Generally, the first thing you would do is take a shower. You would go over and take your little bucket or your canteen cup over and take a shower. Of course, that was without soap. We had relatively no soap. If you had a bar that was still lasting, you was one of the lucky. I had a half-bar of Lux, but I had it in a little tobacco tin, and I kept that strictly for shaving. That lasted me all the way through the prison camp--just for shaving. For bathing, as such, with soap and washing your teeth with any toothpowder of any kind, that was a thing of the past; and you just had to improvise.

Then once you had your shower over, pretty quickly you'd have a nose count while it was still daylight. Everybody'd have to go to the parade ground, and we'd form at our huts and march down there and have a nose count. Once

they'd counted everybody and was satisfied, then they'd let you march back to your huts. Then we was ready for that evening cup of rice. After that we had one hour that was designated as which day or which days that we could get together more than two men. If we wanted to sing or play a musical instrument, we could; but that was only at that designated day or hour.

Marcello: So you were limited as to how often a group of you could get together, I take it.

Harrelson: That's right. Now we could sit there in our own cubicles and see four or five people, you know, like they say, "within spitting distance." But when the camp commander was really upset, it was his orders that there be no congregations of more than two people. Of course, you could always have your buddy.

Marcello: Who was your buddy here at Bicycle Camp?

Harrelson: Tommy Whitehead. He was a mechanic in the battalion, motor mechanic. He was a friend of mine in Wichita Falls and was a friend of mine in D Battery, and we both went to Service Battery.

Marcello: I've interviewed him. Let's return to the subject of food again, and I'll bring you back to Captain Taylor and his \$500,000 worth of Dutch guilders. How was this money used in Bicycle Camp to supplement the rations?

Harrelson: Once we got in there, what was left...of course, there was a bunch of it spent. I don't know how much, but a

bunch of it was spent.

Marcello: In other words, you had been spending that money when you were in Tanjong Priok?

Harrelson: Yes. Well, excuse me, I don't even know that they could purchase anything in Tanjong Priok, but before we got into the concentration camps, like, down at Garoet and on the roadside and the racetrack, all of those weeks he had to buy everything.

Marcello: I see.

Harrelson: He bought everything he could buy to, first, get rid of the money that he knew, if it was found, would be taken, and to convert that to food. That's why we had a lot of excess food when we left that roadside at Garoet and started on the train trip. Each man brought a certain amount with him. Then Lieutenant Schmid hauled cases on the kitchen truck with the kitchen equipment, and there was a lot of food on that truck. Now the balance...they gave each man a partial payment when we got into Bicycle Camp, and that we could use to buy food with.

Marcello: Now was that considered your personal pay, as such, or was this still considered company money?

Harrelson: No, it was a partial pay, as such, and it was on record, although our records was destroyed, and it was reported by each one of us when we returned, and it was taken out of our money due--which it should have been. It was a partial

payment, and it was worth it because that's what you bought something to eat with, if you could. Now we didn't begrudge that at all.

Marcello: Now did you ever have any additional food here at Bicycle Camp in order to supplement your rice?

Harrelson: Yes. When Lieutenant Schmid got out of that school prison that he was in temporarily for, like, three months or so and came to Bicycle Camp shortly after we came there, he brought with him what excess food he'd had on that kitchen truck. Then we got back part of the food we'd turned in to the British at Tanjong Priok--part of it--and that we brought into Bicycle Camp. Then we turned it all back in to go to the kitchen.

Marcello: I've heard it said by other prisoners that the officers seemed to be eating a little better than the enlisted personnel. What do you know about that?

Harrelson: Yes, that is true. The majority of the canned goods that was brought in and turned in was converted to officer's mess, and, of course, they got paid, like, \$25 a month per officer. Well, we got like ten cents a day for the average soldier.

Marcello: When you're talking about pay now, are you talking about the pay that the Japanese gave you?

Harrelson: Yes, that the Japanese gave us. Now some of that food that was canned goods that we carried in from Tanjong Priok to

Bicycle Camp was turned in. Like I said, most of that was converted to the officer's mess and stored below the officer's quarters because that had a second floor underground; and that's where their mess was and their kitchen. At that particular time, they had some of the cooks that were Chinese cooks off of the Houston doing their cooking. Yes, they ate a lot better than we did. We was on rice, but we had a little bit of supplement of the canned goods, but not a lot.

Marcello: What kind of reaction or resentment did that cause among the enlisted personnel?

Harrelson: Oh, it caused a lot by all of the enlisted personnel. Of course, when they thought they was going to be shipped down by the Japanese, they took those boxes of food, and they stored some up in the attic on boards. They had no real ceiling in there. They just put some boards up there and put them boxes of food in the attic above our quarters, and some of our soldiers would slip up there at night and get into that food and eat it. The officers tried to find out who it was so they could court-martial them. Of course, nobody was about to squeal, even if you knew.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that this caused a deterioration in the relations between the officers and the enlisted personnel?

Harrelson: Quite a bit. Quite a bit. It's kind of hard to put your finger on, but from my personal view--and I noticed the

other soldiers with me were very much the same--we had a definite respect for a military officer, and it was just kind of bred into us, drilled into us, and it was just part of the game. You didn't resent anybody; as a matter of fact, if he was an officer, he deserved a salute, and he got it. Now if you knew him personally, and he was a real horse's butt in civilian life, once he put on the uniform, you gave him the same respect that you gave anybody else. You just did it.

However, once that incident came about, in the first place, we figured they didn't deserve any more of that food than the rest of the people. We were all Americans; we were all prisoners. If it were going to be divided, it should have been divided equally. Then they can do what they want to with theirs. Okay, once that food was gone, we didn't resent them eating better than we did so much because they got more money, and they could buy it from the Indian merchants that was allowed in once a month. Of course, they bought that stuff and stored it under their living quarters, and then their mess was right outside. It was cooked down below, and they ate right outside. You'd sit there at the fence and watch them eating eggs and that sort of thing for breakfast when you had had "pap." Sure, there was some resentment--a lot of it. It made you lose a little respect.

Marcello: As an interviewer in this case, I'm supposed to remain

neutral, of course, in all my questions and comments and so on. You mentioned something awhile ago that I'd like to follow up on. You mentioned that they were making more money than you and therefore could buy more food. Yet it still seems to me that perhaps the right thing to do would have been to still share what they bought with the enlisted men.

Harrelson: Perhaps. But when it came to that point, and the majority of the canned goods that was brought in there was gone, that was paid out of the battalion fund, then for my part I didn't resent them spending their money for food and eating it. I was sorry that I wasn't in the same boat and couldn't afford it. You had to turn your order in, like, two or three weeks ahead--written order--and give them the money for it. The officers had the money, and they could do it. They pooled all their money and bought their food and kept it and could eat better. I was glad they could eat better. That part I didn't resent, because they was buying it, paying for it. The part I resented was when they was eating what I classified as food that belonged to all of the people of the United States.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you did get some partial pay out of that money that Captain Taylor had left. What happened to the rest of it? Was that used to buy food for everybody?

Harrelson: I don't know that there was any rest of it. No, there was no

food purchased for the rest of them at that point, and as far as I know, there was no money left. So I have no idea. I know that we got a partial pay--it was maybe two weeks' pay or half a month or something like that per man--and that didn't even come close to using up half a million dollars, so I'm assuming that the rest of it was spent before we ever got there.

Marcello: From time to time during the interview, we've talked about the Korean guards. Give me your opinion of the Korean guards.

Harrelson: They were a bunch of bastards! I guess to me they was the sorriest people on the face of the earth because, in the first place, we didn't really understand them. We didn't understand the Japanese to start with, when we got the Koreans, in our mind, well, these were not Japanese, and if the Japanese had subdued them and owned them and run over them for fifty years, they were going to be on our side. But they were not. They were exactly the opposite. They were a lot harder on us as individuals, as prisoners, than were the Japanese.

Marcello: And is it in Bicycle Camp where you first encounter the Koreans?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. See, we had both at Bicycle Camp, and at different times. Sometimes they would pull the Koreans out and send a battalion of Japanese soldiers in there that would be in

the barracks near by. They'd do guard duty there, but they was much easier on the prisoner-of-war than was the Koreans.

Marcello: What kind of an attitude did you detect the Japanese having toward the Koreans?

Harrelson: Well, they thought they was dogs, dirt under their feet, and that's about it because the lowest Japanese in the Japanese Army could call to attention and bat the thunder out of a sergeant of the Korean occupation army. All the Koreans, regardless of their rank, had to kow down to any Japanese, regardless or what.

Marcello: Did the Koreans have the same kind of uniform as the Japanese?

Harrelson: I believe so--same kind of star, same kind of other insignias, and same little ol' kind of a pea-cap.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the Koreans were also cruel to the extent that they liked to torture animals. Several prisoners have remarked about what they would do to a dog or a carabao or something, whatever.

Harrelson: Yes. And they thought this was a lot of fun. We finally decided that they just liked to torture, but that's not so. It's just as long as it ain't them being tortured. Now they think it's funny to just tie up a dog and everytime somebody walks by to just knock him down until he's dead, or if they start beating him, just beat him right into the

ground until he's dead. But we also found out that if it's a Korean, himself, being beat, it ain't funny, and he doesn't like it all. He doesn't appreciate the torture or the pain. His buddies will laugh at him being beat, but if one of his buddies should take his turn there at the being beat post, it ain't funny.

Marcello: What kind of nicknames did you have for the Korean or Japanese guards?

Harrelson: Well, as a whole we just called them one thing--you little slanty-eyed bastard. Now that's not good terminology, but that's classified.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of a guy called the "Brown Bomber?"

Harrelson: Yes, I have. Oh, there was in every different camp, in every different series of work details, you had various people given nicknames--"Brown Bomber," "Elephant Snout." Oh, right now I can't recall all of the nicknames. One Japanese, for instance--a corporal way down the line in Sumatra--we called him the "Mad Corporal" because we thought he was about half-crazy.

Marcello: So you did have nicknames for all of these guys, and in many cases it related to some physical characteristic or behavioral characteristic.

Harrelson: Generally, the ones that got the nicknames were the ones that was mistreating prisoners one way or the other. And the ones that mistreated them to start with continued to

do so for as long as they were around prisoners. I guess there were some of those in everyplace I was in.

Marcello: How prevalent was theft in Bicycle Camp? Let me ask this as a two-part question. First of all, how prevalent was theft with regard to prisoners stealing from prisoners?

Harrelson: As far as I know, none. Nobody ever stole anything from me. This was particularly the case with Americans from Americans.

Marcello: Do you think in part, at least, this has to do with the fact that most of you were from the same area, same town, that sort of thing?

Harrelson: Well, that was part of it. Part of it was from your training in the Army at Camp Bowie; part of it was the National Guard training where we would go into encampments for the summer. If we needed something that we couldn't get legitimately from the supply depot, then we may get a group of people together to send out to steal it; but we would never steal it from anybody in our own battalion or our own regiment. It would be another regiment way on the other side of camp, probably infantry.

Marcello: This is one of the things that distinguishes your group from the Bataan and Corregidor people, for example. In the interviews that we've done with them, evidently it was more or less every man for himself, and there was a great deal of theft involving American against American.

But what you've told me is in agreement with what other people out of the "Lost Battalion" have told me relative to theft with your group. That's why I asked that question. How about theft against the Japanese in Bicycle Camp?

Harrelson: Well, in the camp, as such, you had relatively no opportunity because the Japanese quarters were outside the camp, and your chances of getting out of there was pretty slim, if not impossible. It was just impossible to exist after you got out because the natives would turn you in for the bounty, which was small. They would even turn in their own kind and their own kin for the bounty.

This theft that you did from the Japanese would generally be while on the working party. You might pick up, for example, some small copper wire for an antenna for Jess Stanbrough to hook up his radio equipment. That's an example. Nobody ever stole anything just for the sake of stealing. It wasn't that at all. It was either food of some kind to eat or in one instance something to drink. In most instances it was something that could be put to use and not necessarily for themselves. It wasn't a kind of a selfish deal. You would steal, just like I said, antenna wire or maybe a radio tube of any kind.

Marcello: You mentioned Jess Stanbrough, and, of course, I've got to pick up on that, since we interviewed him just a couple of weeks ago. I think everybody knows he's the person who

was able to eventually put together a radio. What do you know about Stanbrough's radio?

Harrelson: Well, he was a real good ham operator in Wichita Falls prior to mobilization. He was real good on putting together ham equipment. That was his hobby, and he was just smart at it. He studied it a lot, and he was well-trained in it. On top of that, he was the communications chief, and justly so, for the regiment and later on for the battalion. The radio equipment that he put together was kind of small, but we could pick up certain broadcasts, like, some of the more powerful stations from maybe the United States or from Hawaii or Australia or wherever. You could only do this late at night and under particular cover, and sometimes you could not hear every word that was being spoken; but he would get the gist of the conversation enough to give you a little bit of news, and a little bit was always better than nothing. It kept your spirits up.

Marcello: How was the news passed from person-to-person?

Harrelson: It was just mouth-to-mouth. But it didn't take too long because any kind of news at all would go through that barracks like a wild fire.

Marcello: It would be interesting, I would imagine, to have heard the news when it first circulated and then to have heard the same story at the very end of the line.

Harrelson: Oh, yes. There's no telling how it had changed (laughter).

Other than that, we didn't get a lot of news. Now I don't recall how long he got to keep that piece of equipment because everytime we'd make a move, they'd have a major shakedown of your equipment, you know, your personal belongings. They'd go through there and take anything they didn't want you to have when you was moving one camp to the other.

Marcello: Well, for your infomation he had it all the way through. He took it to Japan with him and still had it at the end of the war.

Harrelson: Great! Great!

Marcello: Now for the record, I am assuming that his radio was a receiving set.

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What did that do for the morale? Maybe in the first year of the war, it didn't do too much for your morale because there wasn't too much to brag about.

Harrelson: Well, see, for my part I was only with him a few months, but it was good for our morale simply by knowing that we was picking up information. Now all the time, it wasn't great information, but radio stations would put out a little propaganda like they might do today, and that propaganda was a morale booster for us. On the other hand-- of course, I didn't hear it myself, and I don't even know that it happened, but it's possible--he might have picked

up Tokyo Rose. Although she would give reports of somebody going to be killed or destroyed or blowed out of the water, it wasn't that aspect you thought about; it was the fact that they were there fighting.

Marcello: Was the camp one big rumor mill?

Harrelson: Probably. Like I say, most of them rumors came straight out of the latrine (chuckle).

Marcello: How long were you going to be a prisoner?

Harrelson: I was a prisoner most of forty-three months.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying is, when you were in Bicycle Camp, how long did you think you were going to be a prisoner? How soon were you going to be liberated?

Harrelson: Two or three months.

Marcello: So you lived two or three months at a time.

Harrelson: Oh, well, eventually, you got to living day-to-day, but, yes, at that point we was living about two months or three months. We knew MacArthur was supposed to be back through there and take that island back over.

Marcello: Were you still at Bicycle Camp when the Japanese forced everybody to sign the non-escape pledge or non-escape oath on July 4, 1942?

Harrelson: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe that incident.

Harrelson: First of all, they lined everybody up in the battalion as a group, just lined you up; and then they brought you

into a room at the Japanese headquarters one at a time. They put it out there, and they had an interpreter to speak English to tell you what it was and that you had to sign it. We had been told prior to that by the colonel that it was going to be required and that we had already refused and that they cut off our food for a couple of days. He went back and said, "Okay, if we are required to sign it under this kind of deal of cutting off our food and it affects our health and stuff, we can sign it without violating the Articles of War." That's what he told us, so we went in. Some of us signed; some of us didn't. Those that didn't were sent in to the second room, and that's where they got the hell beat out of them. There was a bunch of Japanese there, and all of them were beating on him. When they got through beating, they wound up signing it.

Marcello: Did you sign it in the first room or the second room?

Harrelson: First room, because we'd done been told it was no problem. It was under duress and couldn't be held against you.

Marcello: What threats did the Japanese make in the case of a person escaping and then being caught?

Harrelson: You would be given death by firing squad.

Marcello: Did you doubt them?

Harrelson: No, I didn't doubt them.

Marcello: They didn't bluff too often, did they?

Harrelson: I don't know. You don't know, because those that escaped and they said they caught, you never did see. So you don't know whether they sent them to another camp or whether they were actually executed. I never did run across anybody. We just got rumors back from some the natives--the Javanese that had been in the Dutch Army. Some of their key leaders had been put into the prison camps, too.

It was easy enough to get out of any camp we was ever in. It was just staying alive after you got out that wasn't easy. The Japanese would put a bounty on your head of "X" number of Japanese dollars. By that time the natives--a lot of them--were starving to death themselves, and they would turn in their own relatives for the bounty. So we knew that if a native in an island of natives couldn't make it, then a white person didn't have much chance. Now that was in Java. It wasn't a matter of not being able to get under that fence or out of the camp, because you could do that.

Marcello: Awhile ago we were talking about your buddy, Thomas Whitehead. Of what value or of what importance was the buddy system?

Harrelson: Well, the buddy system was what brought most of us back home. If you were a loner, you didn't last long. We just sort of figured that your buddy...well, let's say that at what you considered your life's darkest moment, your buddy is what kept up your morale. There was so many incidents

like that of people that would make something funny out of things that were not normally to me funny. Sergeant Drake, for instance, is no longer alive, but he could take a small paperback book, any kind of story, and read a passage and then give his version of it, which he would do just talking to the group. He would be nine times funnier than what he had read in that book. Those are the sort of things that kept you laughing, kept up the morale, kept up your spirits, and the desire to come home. Once you lost the desire, you didn't make it.

Marcello: Getting back to the buddy system again, would buddies also share any extra goodies that they happened to receive?

Harrelson: Oh, that was standard. Yes, that's right. If you managed to get back in with a banana or sometimes a can of fruit... most of that fruit you got in those islands was canned fruit. Most of it was grapes in there. You'd see mixed fruit like peaches and so forth, but actually when you got into it, it was a can of grapes. I know on several instances I managed to get with a fellow that had a communication outside--one of the Dutch. He'd give him some money, and he'd get me a can of fruit. It was bought under the fence from some of the natives, and being well-versed in their language, he knew how to do it. He was just black-marketing the stuff. I'd give him enough money for two, and he'd give me one and keep one. I guess that's

fair enough. But then that sort of thing I could share with my buddies, and there was enough in one can of that, with our rice, to go around for several people, because you couldn't eat but just a little, anyhow. You just couldn't hold it, and that sort of thing you couldn't save.

Marcello: Did you ever get any kind of greens or stew or anything like that with your rice?

Harrelson: Once in a while, yes. Sometimes we would get some kind of a soupy-looking water. When the Japanese got a beef, we would get the feet and the hide and the head and generally the heart and the liver, kidney, and the guts. That's about it. We got no meat as such, but we did find out, though, that the most tender and tasty part of the cow is the tripe. I didn't even know where tripe came from until I got in there. It's the inner muscle of the stomach. It has a terrific lining on it, and we would clean that lining off, and that tripe is like white chicken breast, except more tasty. Now this soup you asked about, when we got that it would be one spoonful per man, and all it was was just about greasy water. It would have a few pieces of green floating leaf, which was the chopped-up cotella leaf, no food value in that at all; but the cotella root has quite a bit of food value. It's a starchy food. Now there was a green vegetable--if you could get it. It wasn't supplied. We had to try to buy it. It was a little bit bitter. It didn't look like spinach, but it was slimy like spinach.

And it had a lot of food value. I don't even know the name of it, but you could always find it where the natives sold anything. They'd sell that.

Marcello: We talked about the work parties awhile ago. Did you work every day on a work party?

Harrelson: Every day except the emperor's birthday. We get sometimes half a day off; sometimes they give you a whole day off. On Christmas day they didn't make us work.

Harrelson: Otherwise, you worked every day, and that is everybody.

Harrelson: Everybody everyday.

Marcello: There were enough work details for everybody to work every day?

Harrelson: Let me classify that. Not everybody because it didn't take too many months until you started having people that had dysentery, malaria, worms of some kind, stomach worms, tropical ulcers. They couldn't work. Normally, it depends on the camp, like, in Bicycle Camp we're still talking about that, so we'll just say there they had a hospital barrack. They had relatively no medicine. About the only thing that they had an abundance of, that the Japanese would give them...oh, it's about the same stuff as the bluing that you use in your laundry, but it was purple in color. I'll think of the name of it. Tomorrow I'll think of the name (chuckle). They gave us plenty of it.

Marcello: It wasn't quinine.

Harrelson: No, it's ginseng violet. Is that right? It's close to that. It's kind of like an antiseptic, but it's purple. We had a lot of that quinine, but it was raw--the bark. And you would make it into balls with some of this flour from the cotella root. You would have to take five or six of those balls, and they would be about the size of a jawbreaker sucker--hard to swallow and very, very bitter. That's raw quinine. It also sort of tore your stomach up.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how was your health holding up here at Bicycle Camp.

Narrelson: Pretty good, except that one time when the masses of the battalion started moving out, I had malaria. I had just taken malaria, and they moved me into the hospital barrack. I was going through that series of freezing to death and burning up for four or five days.

Marcello: What did people do with their leisure time here at Bicycle Camp?

Harrelsons: Actually, you couldn't do very much. You were not allowed to congregate. Like they said, the standing order most of the time was not more two people or three people at any one gathering. You weren't allowed to play music. Some of them played a few cards. Some of them played maybe dominoes or checkers, if they had any, and that sort of thing. Maybe you'd go from cubicle to cubicle

talking to other people for a little while and then go and talk to somebody else. We were just marking time, figuring that any time now MacArthur would be back.

Marcello: Were there any sports or stage shows or anything like that?

Harrelson: Early in that Bicycle Camp, before the Japanese decided that they wanted details for all these working parties for various parts of the world, they had us put on track meets and boxing tournaments and that sort of thing. They set up an endurance course of obstacles and stuff, and they'd time you. They set it up and told us it was just for sport, but what they was after was getting the healthier bodies to send to the jungle to build that Burma railroad particularly, and work in coal mines in Japan and that sort of thing.

Marcello: Okay, in early October, 1942, they started moving people out of Bicycle Camp. Maybe they had even moved the skilled people out of this camp earlier and had sent them to Japan. From our pre-interview conversations, we, of course, know that you didn't leave either to go to Japan or to eventually go up to Burma to work on the railroad. Describe what happened to you and why you stayed back in Java, at least temporarily, before they sent you on to Sumatra.

Harrelson: When they started moving our battalion out...I don't really remember, but it seems to me like Captain Fitzsimmons took the first hundred to Japan. We didn't know where they was going.

Marcello: Well, Fitzsimmons took the first group that went up into the jungles.

Harrelson: Is that the way it was? All right. I didn't know where he was going, but I knew he left first, and then others started going out, and my battery wasn't too long behind that, Captain Taylor and my Service Battery group. But I had malaria and was in the hospital, and they wouldn't take me. I wanted to go and stay with the group, but the Japanese wouldn't let me go. So I stayed there, and there was thirty-eight Americans who stayed in Bicycle Camp. Some of those were off the Houston; some were the battalion boys. One of those from that group was Colonel Searle.

Now we just did various details, and they moved us into a small hut that had been our officers quarters when the whole battalion was there. They grouped us thirty-eight together. We did various details in cleaning up inside our camp, and eventually some of that group...well, like our battery clerks and the boys off of the Houston...what do they call them? Yeoman? Okay, they had a permanent job and worked every day, like, from eight until five at the Japanese headquarters, typing out prisoner-of-war card information that they was given. There was two or three of those that was the camp carpenters. One particularly was Warrant Officer Beauchamp, off of the Houston. He was

what they originally called in the Navy a wheelright, but he ran the carpenter shop. I never did see a whole lot they made, but I know they stayed busy. Out of that thirty-eight, most of those had permanent jobs. I was one that didn't have a permanent job, so I occasionally was called to go out on detail.

Marcello: How was it that you managed to stay behind?

Harrelson: I had malaria, so I had to stay behind. Then once the malaria was over, well, we got back in this group of thirty-eight together, and I would go out occasionally on a detail. In order to make up enough men, they'd call for me to go on a work detail. They would let me go in lieu of an officer because they wanted an officer with every fifty to a hundred men.

Marcello: Now by this time, the Americans were really in the minority, were they not?

Harrelson: Oh, yes, definitely. They was moving in people from all over the island to Bicycle Camp and then moving them to the docks and sending them to various overseas places. Some of the things we had to do--of which we didn't do a very good job, but we made a mess of it to look like we did... when they would run through, say, a company of Dutch or a hundred or 150 Dutch, they'd put them in one barrack. Then they would take them in the middle of the night and put them on the parade ground and keep them out there with machine

guns setting all around to be sure they held them there. Then they would wake us Americans up and take us down to that hut and make us go through every piece of equipment they had--their personal belongings. Generally, it was all tied up in a pack. You'd have to go through there, and they wanted you to pull out knives and any utensils of metal--screwdrivers and pliers and that sort of thing. Of course, we didn't do that. But if the Japanese commander, who was Lieutenant Sony...he had mental problems, but, anyhow, we'll get into him a little bit later. He would go into a rage if he ever came behind us and found a barracks bag or a pack we'd gone through and had left anything in it. So you had to be kind of careful if you was going to leave anything--be sure it was covered up or hidden pretty good. But we'd get woke up early, and nearly every night we'd spend about three hours going through people's baggage down there instead of sleeping. We'd still have to get up and go do our daily work the next day.

Marcello: Was it kind of disconcerting when all the Americans were leaving and just you few were left behind?

Harrelson: Oh, very much so! Very much so! Each one of us really wanted to go with them and stay with their friends, but you had no idea where they was going. Of course, once you got back home and found out, they said, "Well, you was fortunate you didn't." But I'm not too sure.

Marcello: How bad was your malaria?

Harrelson: Well, when you have it the first five or six days, it's as bad as you can get. It's the kind that repeats, that you don't get over. There's names for all of it, but they say the bug stays in your blood. You get over the chills and the fever, but it can come back at any time. Of course, I had it recurring plenty.

Marcello: Now do you pick up a new buddy at this stage?

Harrelson: I really didn't. I just kind of tried to look after all of the soldiers, and the sailors that were enlisted personnel and was still part of that thirty-eight left behind. There was, as best I remember, three officers at that time. One of them had been a P-40 pilot who had been shot down. His name was Gallion. There was Colonel Searle, and the other had been an ensign in the Navy. His name was Ensign Levitt, and we kind of enjoyed him particularly, because every day at noon he'd go down and visit Sony. He knew when Sony's lunchtime was. Of course, when he'd go in to have a tete-a-tete with Sony, Sony would have to invite him to lunch (laughter).

Marcello: In terms of rank, what was your status or position among these thirty-eight, officers excluded?

Harrelson: I was in charge of it.

Marcello: And what exactly would those responsibilities entail?

Harrelson: Actually, for that group it didn't entail a whole lot

because a majority of them was on permanent assignments that they did every day, and you didn't have to tell them where to go or when to go. They knew and they did their own bit. For the others I just had to make sure that those left behind--the sick, lame, and lazy--of which I was one--cleaned up the barracks and the grounds outside every day, clean up the toilet facilities and shower facilities every day. Then when the Aussies, British, or whoever didn't have enough men for the working detail, well, then they would send to the Americans for a certain number of heads, and I had to see that somebody went on that.

Marcello: Now where were you taking your chow at this point?

Harrelson: We had a central mess, and what we would do, we would go up there, and they would give us kind of a wooden box. It would have enough ice in it for thirty-eight. You'd have two different men go and receive that at the central kitchen, bring it back, and distribute it for each meal. You didn't assign that permanently to anybody because they didn't do it permanently. Just each day it was two different groups.

Marcello: Generally speaking, did a close bond form among these thirty-eight who were left behind?

Harrelson: Generally speaking, yes, because it was our thirty-eight against the world at that time. They were bringing in more Dutch, and we were of the opinion...it's kind of hard

to put this in words. For the most part, I kind of liked the Dutch, but once they capitulated, they figured that they would be allowed to return to their civilian jobs, and they didn't give two weeks in hell whether the Americans stayed in prison a lifetime or not. We resented that attitude. The attitude they had prior to capitulation was so different, and I guess their new attitude was due to that resentment of that particular point. Actually, they were never allowed to return at all. They stayed in those camps the same as we did. But they changed their attitude; and when they changed their attitude, we changed ours. They had the attitude that we were guests in their country. Originally we were, but once they capitulated, they didn't have a country. So there was a little bit of animosity there. We were in their country; yet it wasn't their country. That thirty-eight was from everywhere in the United States, I guess. There were some from Texas, but also there was some from New York City, San Francisco, and you name it. On the other hand, we was just, like I said, thirty-eight against the world, waiting for MacArthur to come back.

Marcello: How long did you remain here at Bicycle Camp then?

Harrelson: Altogether I stayed right at two years from the day we actually went up there, I guess it was.

Marcello: So you were there from May of 1942 to approximately May of 1944?

Harrelson: It could of been, like, March or April or along in there because I've got a little bit of breakdown in my memory. I know it was two or three months at Tanjong Priok and then Bicycle Camp for about two years.

Then I had some breaks in between. It wasn't too long after the battalion moved out, maybe a month, and after I'd made a few working parties and stuff, that all of a sudden, they came along, and they wanted sixteen Americans. That was all of them that wasn't on permanent detail. They had a special assignment for us to go on with some Australians and English. They sent us to a prison camp that had been a penitentiary for the murderers and so forth in the Batavia area. This was with the concrete walls, and the wire and glass on top, and the bars and the whole bit. We made rope out of sisal on the old hand-operated machines. Then we turned sisal into string, then made string into rope, then rope into bigger rope. We was up there for three or four months.

Then we went back to Bicycle Camp. I guess we was back there a week or two, and then they took some of us out, about six of us, on a special detail, and we wound up at another prisoner camp which was a garden camp. They planted tomatoes and beans and that sort of thing that the Japanese harvested and either used or sold. We never got it in the prison camp. I worked out there about two

weeks. Literally, one night they came in and woke me up and said, "You've got to report to the headquarters." So I went down there, and this is kind of out in the country away from Batavia, maybe eight or ten miles. They took us right back into Bicycle Camp, and we stayed there about two nights, and then we wound up out at the docks getting aboard a ship.

Then we went to Singapore. Actually, I think, from all the indications, we were headed for maybe Japan. It never worked out because there was getting to be quite a bit of American submarines operating over in that area by then, and the Japanese were losing a lot of shipping. Of course, the ships that we were on were cargo ships, and they were loaded down to the gills with cargo. They had that steel and stuff they'd picked up and taken off of those islands, and then they would put the prisoners-of-war just right up on top that and stuffed all they could get down into the holds. They'd make you stay in those holds. I was fortunate. I was one of the late arrivals, so I got to get up on top of this steel on the deck.

Marcello: Describe that trip from Java to Singapore. First of all, when, more or less, did it take place?

Harrelson: Okay, that was, like I say, about two years from after we went into Bicycle Camp, I guess it was.

Marcello: Was it disconcerting to pick up and leave Bicycle Camp?

You'd been there for, more or less, two years, as you mentioned, and I'm sure that you had fallen into some sort of a routine.

Harrelson: Well, in a way, yes, but we had had various excursions. I left part of it out that I'd forgotten. We wound up back at Tanjong Priok for maybe another two months or so. We didn't stay in Bicycle Camp per se. We stayed in the Batavia area. I've often said Bicycle Camp, but that's not so. We was up there a few weeks when the battalion moved out, or maybe two months, and then I went over to this prisoner camp to make sisal rope. We stayed there, like, two or three months, went back to Bicycle Camp for a month or so, and then went to the garden camp. We then came back. After we had gone into make that rope, they took all the Americans and sent us out to Tanjong Priok. At that point we joined up with some merchant marines that had been sunk and captured by the Germans.

Marcello: At this stage I'm going to turn off this tape and put on a new one. Before I put on the new tape, we were talking about you going back to Tanjong Priok, I believe it was, and running into the merchant marine sailors. Describe what happens at this point.

Harrelson: We were put in the same barrack and came together as a group; but the service personnel--the Navy, Marines, and soldiers--were more compatible as group than were the group

of merchant marines. The merchant marines as a group just really never got to be as friendly, one to the other. The buddy system didn't work. They were more like you said about other people you talked about--individualists--and they didn't respect or honor military discipline that they was required to adhere to by the Japanese. They didn't like it, so they just gave you a bunch of trouble, really. I thought that's what it was because of my responsibility.

They did have some of the officers, including the captain off their ship and their first officer. In fact, I guess they had all of them. They sunk the ship, all right, but they took everybody off of it before they sunk it. They put a shell into it. Then they allowed them to get aboard the boats and get off, and then they took them ashore. They just took them aboard that German sub, and they stayed down around off of South Africa, between there and the South Pole. They sailed for roughly six months. They finally wound up in Java, and they turned them over to the Japanese.

That's when we went out and got with them. Of course, we were required to do a head count and use them on working details, and they didn't want to go on the working details we was assigning to them. You couldn't go and report them. That's just not the thing you do. So you just say, "Look, we're going to go. Now I'm just telling you that you ten men or you fifteen have to go, and you know you have to do

it. So if you want to, you just stay there, and we're going to go down there, and if there ain't enough head count, the Japanese are going to come get you themselves. We're not going to turn you in; we're not that kind of people. But you'll get the message if they have to come after you." So with that they kind of learned little by little to sort of fall in line, but they never did...I guess what I'm trying to say is, they just never did become soldiers (laughter).

Marcello: And they were all Americans.

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: And how long were you with them?

Harrelson: All except the captain was an American. He was Norwegian.

Marcello: How long were you with these guys?

Harrelson: Well, two or three of them were with me the rest of the internment, but we stayed there together as a group for as long as I stayed in Java at one place or the other. Some of them--not all of them, but some of them--were sent with us. Like, we went from there to that penitentiary deal to make rope and then went back to Bicycle Camp. Some of them went out to the vegetable farm, and some stayed in Bicycle Camp. Then when we left Bicycle Camp to go on a really quick, short emergency detail that they told us about, we wound up on board this ship going to Singapore.

Marcello: Just for the purposes of chronology, and for the record,

you were mentioning off the tape several minutes ago what your itinerary had been, so to speak. Would you, if possible, simply repeat that so we have it on the record. For instance, you go into Bicycle Camp in May of 1942.

Harrelson: Right. Okay, from Bicycle Camp we went back to Tanjong Priok for a short spell. From there we went back to Bicycle Camp for another spell. From there we went to this penitentiary to make rope for a spell. Then we went back to Bicycle Camp for another spell. Those spells could be from two weeks, two days, three months--you didn't know. Then from there a small group of us went to a gardening camp about eight or ten miles out of Batavia. I was the only American picked out of the group that went to the gardening camp to go back on a detail with some Dutch and Aussies on an emergency detail. We wound up back in Bicycle Camp for overnight, like, maybe two nights, and then we wound up out at the docks, actually. We didn't go back to Tanjong Priok. We went straight to the docks and aboard one of those cargo ships and loaded up and shipped out.

Marcello: I have just one question, and this is relative to the penitentiary. Did you stay in the penitentiary while you were there?

Harrelson: Oh, constantly.

Marcello: In other words, you were living in a cell where they had kept civilian prisoners.

Harrelson: Well, there was sixteen or eighteen Americans at that place, and we had a small hut inside the walls of the prison. In fact, all of their barracks and huts and things were inside the prison, and we had a small one just like a small house. It had one door and one window, and they both had steel bars. Other than that, there was no ventilation than that, and that's an awful hot climate. But during the day, the hottest part of the day, you didn't worry about being in there because you was over in the part that had been the classrooms. They used those for classrooms for a certain kind of education. They also used them for manufacturing. Those were actually the best buildings. They were still within the penitentiary, but there were three sections to that penitentiary, three housing sections, and the intermediate section was the parade ground. But it was all inside the fences.

We didn't know how to make--I didn't and none of my men did--didn't know how to make rope out of sisal. We'd never seen it done, but it don't take but two or three hits behind the head with a rifle butt to learn. About four strands was about all you could wind on to the string to make your string or cord out of it. If you use more than that, it won't go through that needle eye that it has to go through for sizing--for the size string your making--and it takes a little bit of doing. You've got to be a real artist to reach down to the string hanging on the side of your belt on a loop, and

you pull off four strands at a whack (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, you finally leave Java on your way to Singapore aboard this freighter.

Harrelson: Yes, and the freighter was Dai Nichi Maru.

Marcello: That one must have plied the route quite often between Java and Singapore because some of the other groups that went up to the railroad went aboard that ship. Describe what your "quarters" were like when you got aboard the Dai Nichi Maru.

Harrelson: We went aboard, and I was one of the last to go aboard. They had loaded down steel that they was scavenging off of Java, and that included a few rails from part of the railroads, the streetcar systems, some engine parts, automobile parts, lampposts, and anything else made of steel. That was on deck--up on the open deck--and, of course, we got to sit on that.

Now here's the way they placed you. They sit two men down back to back, and then you draw your feet up. You put your toes up like that (gesture), and the fellow over there facing you puts his feet right against yours. And there's a guy against his back, and then there's one right beside. That's all the room you got. Then when one person wants to stand up, that's all right, but there can't but about one do it here and one over there and over there. You can't all stand up and sit down. Then when you decide to lay down, you just have to take turns laying across that

steel. It's kind of just making the best of it, really.

We had it better than the people in the hold. They were in the same situation like sardines--some standing room only and some sitting room only. If they were down in there sick, and it wasn't time for their breather, they was in trouble, particularly those with dysentery or a touch of it, because the toilet facilities was wooden out-house frames hanging over the side of the ship. If they weren't allowed out of the hold, which they weren't except one time a day, it got stinky down in those holds. I was lucky. I didn't have to stay in there.

Marcello: In your case could you go to the restroom whenever you needed to?

Harrelson: Pretty well so.

Marcello: Was this ship part of a convoy?

Harrelson: No, it really wasn't. It was a single ship by itself. It had no protection, no convoy. We got several scares, and it was kind of hair-raising because of their whistle aboard the ship. You hear them in the Navy. It goes WHOOP! WHOOP! WHOOP! That thing would sound, and then it would be all quiet. They'd cut the engines off and coast, and it'd be all quiet. They wouldn't allow you to move then. You had to stay right where you were. That was some kind of a submarine scare, I imagine, because the ship that had left before us got sunk, like, 200 miles from Japan. Incidentally,

the one after us got sunk, too. We was kind of lucky. We made it on into Singapore.

Marcello: How long did the trip take?

Harrelson: Well, it was a short distance, but it took us about seven days.

Marcello: Were you hugging the coast as much as possible?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. Everytime we were hopping from island to island, and we was staying within, it seems like, a mile from the coast or half a mile from the coast, depending on the water and the coral.

Marcello: Again, that's evidence that they were fearful of submarines.

Harrelson: Very much so. They would go for periods of getting right in as close to the island as they could, depending on the water and what was under the water, like, coral build-ups. When they had one of those scares, they may stay there three or four hours without ever moving, and then when we moved, it wasn't fast. But they would head toward another island--zigzagging toward another island--until they got right up near it.

Marcello: What was the weather like on this trip?

Harrelson: We didn't have any bad weather. It was just a normal, real hot day.

Marcello: What happens when you get to Singapore?

Harrelson: When we got to Singapore, they dropped anchor in the harbor, and we stayed aboard that ship for three days right there in

the harbor, thinking we was going to leave and go to our destination at any time. Then they finally pulled us into the dock and unloaded us.

They sent us up to the temporary camp--the atap hut part--of Changi. Then we worked on the docks and in the warehouses. We didn't unload ships as much as we moved supplies that already had been unloaded on the docks--to the warehouses. There was warehouses on the docks. We worked everyday.

Marcello: Now were there still thousands of British POW's there at Changi?

Harrelson: Oh, yes. There was a huge amount of Indians, and they was kept over in the permanent part of the camp. We were closer to the docks and to downtown Singapore than the buildings that were brick buildings. There was a lot of brick buildings back on the farther side of camp from where we were. The ones we was in were in the temporary part. I just call it that because there had been a wall or a fence dividing those two camps, and it had just an opening cut in it to go from one to the other. We would have to go over there and draw supplies for cooking rice and stuff. We'd go out every day for work, and that was a majority of that group. They didn't leave many in camp. You went out and worked.

Marcello: This is a mixed contingent, is it not?

Harrelson: Yes. There was ten Americans. Now there wasn't ten Americans

in that group. There was just two--me and a Marine. His name was Winters. He was off of the Houston. There were two Americans in that group. The rest was English, Aussie, and Dutch, and there was a lot of officers of those nationalities..

Marcello: Where were the other eight Americans? You said there were ten Americans.

Harrelson: Well, some of them were on the other ships that came to Sumatra.

Marcello: I see.

Harrelson: Most of those were merchant seamen. The other eight were merchant seamen.

Marcello: Did you and Winters more or less buddy together?

Harrelson: Yes, we did. As long as we could, yes. Now right there we bunked side-by-side, and we would go on to a working detail. Of course, I was in charge of the working detail, so I always tried to pick something that was easy for him, which was all right. Somebody had to do it.

While working down there, I ran across one other American, and he had been there before. He had been on some other island. It could have been Borneo. I don't remember. Then they brought him back to Singapore after they completed the deal. They went someplace to build an airstrip, and then they brought him back to Singapore. His name was Saldonia. He was from, as best I remember, San Antonio.

Marcello: How hard was this work here at Singapore? Or how easy was this work?

Harrelson: Well, when you're getting down pretty much, if you've gone, like, two years without really having anything substantial to eat, your health is not that good, and, of course, they pushed you to the limit. Where the load should take ten men, they'll give you eight to do it and just push you or make you do that. The thing is, they keep you going. You might slow down to a snail's pace, but they never let you stop. So you have to constantly keep moving. You'll pick up something, and then you'll carry it and drop it and get back in line. It looks kind of like a bunch of ants working. In fact, that's the way most of that work went.

Marcello: Would you have preferred to be in Bicycle Camp or Singapore, having been in both of them?

Harrelson: Bicycle Camp. By then our food supplies were being cut down pretty good, too. Incidentally, while we was there, I volunteered to go on rice-hauling detail. We had to go on over into Changi per se, where the contingent of Indians were, to haul back that dry rice for the group over in this temporary camp. We went over there, and there was just utterly hundreds and hundreds of them empty cartons that the Red Cross had sent over that was supposed to be coming to American prisoners but that we never got. I got one package from them while in Java, and Lord knows how many they sent. But those were given by the Japanese to the

Indians to try to encourage them to join some kind of international army that they wanted to get started up there.

Marcello: Where did you get that Red Cross package?

Harrelson: While in Java.

Marcello: Was this before you went to Singapore?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: What was in that Red Cross package?

Harrelson: There was a pair of shoes, which was low-quarter, and not of real good quality. When they got wet, they came apart like cardboard comes apart. But they were shoes and I had none, so I could wear them. What I had had wore out. I wore them until they came apart. There was razor blades. Gosh, I had razor blades for everybody. There was a toothbrush and food, but mostly food. Now I may be telling a lie. I might have got the razor blades and toothbrush from my mother through the Red Crosss. But the Red Cross packages were food packages. I got that when I was in Bicycle Camp and prior to going to that gardening prisoner-of-war camp. When they jerked me out of there that night, they wouldn't let me carry anything except one change of clothes, I think ...one or two changes. I had to leave the rest in my barracks, including the food packages, my mandolin, and a few things like that, with one of the other Americans that stayed in that gardening camp. What we did with those food packages was, we would open one can and divvy it up with some

of the other prisoners that got nothing--some of the British that you thought highly of. It'd be a small spoon of, let's say, bully beef. Actually, I'm kind of fond of it. I've heard a lot of soldiers say that they didn't care about Spam at all. I still eat Spam, and I like it. We got some Spam, and one small spoonful with your cup of rice is all you could absolutely eat because it was kind of rich on your stomach, and it fills you up real quick. When you open up one of them little cans, gosh, it could take six or eight people to give them a spoonful, and they'd have a delicious dinner.

Marcello: But you didn't get to consume all of your Red Cross parcel.

Harrelson: No, I didn't--very little of it. You know, you couldn't consume more than one can a day. We had just gotten it a few days before going to the gardening camp, and I was out there about three days or four--less than a week--and then I was jerked out of there.

Marcello: That must have been a real blow.

Harrelson: Well, they had told us. Of course, it wasn't the Japanese telling you; it was the British officers in charge of the camp. They said, "You're going on special detail, and you'll be back here in a couple of days. Just leave all your stuff here. It'll be here when you get back." Shoot!

Marcello: You mentioned that you were only in Singapore for about three months, and then you were sent back to Java again. Or did you go directly to Sumatra?

Harrelson: To Sumatra.

Marcello: Okay, describe this part of your journey--how it takes place.

Harrelson: Okay, now this was real hair-raising because they could only take something like, at the best, a hundred people, maybe just sixty. I don't remember. We was put aboard a riverboat. I don't recall if it had a paddle wheel or whether it was just propeller-driven riverboat, but it was a small boat. It had just one story above the open or first deck, and then there was just one deal below the first deck. It was a small boat, and we were crammed on there kind of like sardines, and we weren't allowed to go up onto the open deck part. There was plenty of room up there, but they didn't allow you. They kept you in the hold.

Then we left there and went out and hit the land swells going out past those guns that the British had put in there (that didn't fire backwards), and we went out that channel. It seems to me like it's eight or ten miles getting out of that channel alone, because it's quite a ways. And there was a lot of coral build-up--small islands. Then we was on the open sea, which was extremely rough in that little bitty boat, just a riverboat. We left there, say, mid-morning --nine-thirty or ten o'clock in the morning--and we must have hit the shoreline and started up the river at Sumatra, oh, someplace around noonish or two o'clock, one o'clock, along in there.

Marcello: The same day?

Harrelson: Yes. As a matter of fact, it just seemed like it only took that long. Now I may be telling an untruth, but it just seemed like it only took that long. But anyhow, we went up this river, and we was overnight and the next day to about four o'clock in the afternoon roughly before we got to our destination. It was kind of a slow go. It was a small river, and we were in a small riverboat. It may have taken a lot longer to go from Singapore over there than I can imagine. That may have been where most of the trip was, because we did have to spend the night on the thing. But we wound up at a real small kind of a native village called Pakanbaroe. That's the best I remember. I picked it out on some map, but it's not on all maps. They had a small dock there for this riverboat, because all the supplies that came in or left there went by riverboat. Some of the natives that had their rubber to sell would--what do you call it--cure it into the balls and sell the balls, and it would have to be loaded on that riverboat. It would go from there to Singapore or other destinations, maybe Palembang.

That was kind of the railhead of another Burma railroad, and our purpose there was to build a railroad through the jungle of Sumatra. There was two assignments given to us. We found out that one was to go up and connect with a coal mine. They had some prisoners-of-war. They weren't American, probably British, working; but they wouldn't let us get close

enough to them to talk to them. We did tie up this railroad to that coal mine. That was one. Then it extended on. I wasn't there at the time, but they told us we was supposed to go through this mountain range and join another railroad being built out on Padang. Padang is a pretty good-sized town on the west coast. Sumatra's not exactly north and south. It was on the Indian Ocean side, west coast. I don't know that we ever tied up with anything there, but I do know we got back to that coal mine. Sort of in my own mind, I thought that was what we was going for, is building a railroad so they could haul that coal out.

Marcello: By this time are you getting used to moving? Does it not bother you anymore?

Harrelson: Well, not as much. The first couple of times when you're moving, you lost most of your close buddies--not all of them but most of them. Then you had to take on new friendships. By this time it was just no soldiers of the battalion at all. It was one Marine and me,

Marcello: This is still Winters?

Harrelson: Yes, just the two of us on that. We stayed there together. We went on that riverboat, and we went to Camp Number Four, where we first set up. We started our work from there, and then we connected up with some of the merchant marines. Some of them had been sent out of Java on a ship that left there before us, and then some of them came in later.

- Marcello: Are these some of the same merchant marines that you'd been in contact with back in Java?
- Harrelson: Yes, sir. Now the first officer's name was Hickey. Their boatswain's name was Gortzske. They had a junior officer. I really don't remember what his duties were.
- Marcello: Now you mentioned that you go to Camp Number Four. First of all, how large a camp was this?
- Harrelson: Okay, this camp had about roughly a thousand people.
- Marcello: Now why was it named Camp Number Four? Do you know? Was this the fourth camp from the railhead?
- Harrelson: Yes. The number one camp...see, the camps didn't have names like in Burma. They gave theirs particular names. Ours had numbers. Number One was right down at the railhead, which was down at Pakanbaroe; Number Two was, like, two kilos out, and it was the base camp and hospital camp for all of Sumatra and all the railroad; Number Three was a couple of kilos or three up the railway from that; and Number Four was just three or four kilos past a huge river.
- Marcello: And this is the railroad that was being built from the railhead up to this mine.
- Harrelson: Right.
- Marcello: Describe what this camp was like, and I assume that all of these camps along the road were probably pretty similar.
- Harrelson: This was relatively a new camp. Some of them were old and had been used by the Dutch because they had started a railway

and then had gave it up. They had built part of it. Some of those camps were old atap huts that had been used by the native workers. Those old ones were infested. We was in the new camp. They'd send in a group of natives to build these out of atap and the bamboo. They were free of lice and bedbugs and that sort of thing...cockroaches. Those were the three varmints that really got after you. It was relatively a new camp, and it was built right in the jungle in a rubber plantation, like, under rubber trees. There was no fence around it--nothing. There was a perimeter that had been cleared out, and then beyond that it was undergrowth and jungle. You was just told not to go in there. Of course, they didn't have to tell you because you could only go through that underbrush less than a quarter-mile in a day. There were tigers in there, and there were elephants, and there were water buffalo, the carabao-type. And they're all mean in the wild.

Marcello: I guess, when I think of that neck of the woods, I also think of snakes.

Harrelson: Well, they had some snakes. I'm sure some were poisonous, but they also had the python, and those were pretty good-eating. We captured those. It would take several men to capture one when one was sighted. Then the people that knew how to cook them, particularly those natives, like, some of the Ambonese and some of the Javanese and, I suppose, some

of the natives that was from Sumatra, too...but they knew pretty well how to clean these things and how to prepare them, and actually it tastes better than fish. They do have a fishy-type odor or taste, but not too strong. You don't get it that often, and your stomach can't eat much, either (just a spoonful first). You taste it and say, "It's not too bad," and you go and eat it with a little bit of rice, but if you ate much and got to thinking about it, it'd make you sick at your stomach.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that there is no fence or enclosure around this camp, and that's because you've got no place to go.

Harrelson: That's right. The only place possibly you could go would be up or down the railroad, the bed. The right-of-way had been cleared out of thin jungle, and at intervals they've got a Japanese guard where the train had to stop and that sort of thing. Their own guards walked around the camp and through the camp all hours of day and night. It wasn't a matter of not being able to get out of there. You could get out of there easy. You just couldn't go anyplace.

Marcello: I would assume they don't have very many guards. They don't need very many guards.

Harrelson: They just need...they send about one out with every fifty men. Generally, at each camp they'd have from thirty to forty, and they'd have more engineering battalion men than they had guards.

Marcello: Now were there mostly Japanese here, or do you still get a mix of Japanese and Koreans?

Harrelson: The Koreans were the guards, and the Japanese were the engineers.

Marcello: Are the Koreans still as mean as ever?

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Describe what your work was like on this railroad.

Harrelson: Now on the railroad, our work was a lot worse than any other place had been. Our working day started around four o'clock in the morning because you'd have to get up and get your pap and your coconut of boiled water. That had to last you for quite a while. You'd get that, and then you'd have your nose count, and then you'd form your working parties; and by daylight the Japanese would be there to take the working party. There'd be one Japanese to fifty or a hundred men, and one Korean guard to the same fifty or hundred. They would take those out, and they would make details for clearing the right-of-way. Then there'd be another detail for building up the right-of-way with dirt; another detail would be for cutting and placing crossties; another detail was for setting rails; another detail was for spiking the rails; and there was another detail after that to ballast them up and true up the lines and that sort of thing.

Marcello: Did you get the impression that this was a make-work project, so to speak, or did they find this project to be

a real crucial one?

Harrelson: Very crucial. They was after the coal. They needed it desperately, apparently.

Marcello: Which meant that they were pushing you.

Harrelson: Yes, you bet. So when we started to work, and we'd leave by not later than daylight, sometimes before, and we'd walk out, like, two or three or four kilos, depending on where the camps were spaced, to work. We would work as long as there were daylight hours. Then we'd march back to camp and get our evening cup of rice, and, if possible-- which was a lot of times not possible--bathe in a stream. Then you'd hit the sack. By the time that you knew it, it was time to go back.

Now the one problem about that is that they gave you seventeen centimeters to sleep on. Now that's not enough for you to sleep on your back shoulder-to-shoulder. So what you'd have to do is, if one guy wanted to sleep on his back a little while, the next two would have to sleep on their side. You'd just have to take turns. Regardless of who they were, whether it was your buddy or a total stranger or whether they was British or whether they was Dutch or native or whoever they were, you knew without saying that all of you needed more than seventeen centimeters. My shoulders was broader than that, probably my hips (laughter).

Marcello: When you were on the work detail, did you have a quota of dirt

that you had to remove or anything of that nature?

Harrelson: They would give us a quota of all kinds of work. We had to move a cubic meter of dirt per man per day, whether that was in loose dirt or in rock bed. Now when you got into some of these hills and hit that hard rock, it's terribly hard, and we had no tools for dislodging and getting out rock.

Marcello: What kind of tools were you using?

Harrelson: Well, we had some good tools that they had gotten somehow from the Americans. They was Ames-Baldwin number two, short-handled, D-handled shovels. It was a shovel about this long (gesture) with a sharp point. They were excellent shovels, but that was about the only good tool they had. There was Japanese tools that weren't worth having.

Marcello: So this was about a four-foot shovel or something like that.

Harrelson: Yes, right. We had a bunch of those. We had some good picks. We had a few pick-axes or grubbing hoes, and we had a lot of chunkels. A chunkel is the native tool, but it's used for nearly everything. It's kind of a heavy, wide-bladed hoe or grubbing hoe with a short handle, but they're very useable.

Marcello: Now did you work in teams while you were building the right-of-way?

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: One man would perhaps pick, one would shovel, and one would

haul the dirt away.

Harrelson: Generally, when we took this detail, it might be a hundred men on the roadbed. There would be roughly a third digging up the dirt and loading the basket; a third would be dumping the dirt; the other third would be spreading it and tamping it. Then in the afternoon, you could change your detail so that one man wouldn't get...now that hard work was really and truly the picking and shoveling. When carrying that dirt, those people would walk along at just an old, slow shuffle. Of course, it's kind of hard to stoop over there and pick it up. They'd put about two scoops of dirt into a little ol' basket that looked like a great, big grain scoop, but it was just a little wicker basket with a couple little handles. They'd look like a group of ants going back and forth.

Of course, we got into Camp Four late in the afternoon, before dark but late in the afternoon, maybe four or five o'clock. We just got time to sort of get situated on where you was going to rest for the evening that night, and the camp commander sent for me. I went up there, and he said, "We've got to go over to the Japanese headquarters." I went over there, and them lying bastards told the Japanese that I was an American engineer. They had me out at dawn on that railroad and building that "mother," and I had never seen a railroad in my life. I had seen them, but I never

worked on one (chuckle).

Marcello: How long did it take the Japanese to figure out that you were not an engineer?

Harrelson: They never did.

Marcello: So what kind of jobs were you doing there?

Harrelson: Well, I was the hancho (chuckle). I was in charge of it all. That meant this: that when one little peon down there, or one of those natives, decided that he wanted to buck up and give the Japanese trouble and they started beating him, then they'd holler, "Hancho!" That meant I had to run every step of the way down there, and that meant I got beat, too, just because he wasn't doing what he was supposed to do. So I learned to wave my arms a lot and shout a lot and holler and use a lot of profanity and a little bit of Malay and little Japanese and little pidgin English.

Marcello: So you were not actually doing too much of the actual pick-and-shovel work on the railway.

Harrelson: I didn't do hardly any.

Marcello: How did they figure out the quota? Did they actually measure it off?

Harrelson: Well, they would quota your dirt. Yes, they'd measure off so many cubic centimeters of dirt per man, and if you hadn't done it by dark, then they would set up these rubber flairs and set them afire, and you could keep working until you

got that much done. Sometimes it was impossible, and along about midnight they'd let you go back to camp, anyhow. But they would try to keep you there until that much was done or more. On a rare occasion, if you was in soft dirt and you got it done way early, like, mid-afternoon, they'd take you to the stream and let you go in and take a bath, which was to us sort of a gift because when you get back into camp where there is no stream and no place to bathe and no water, you don't get a bath. For setting the rails, they would bring up, like, ten cars of rails, for instance, or however many it would take, and they'd bring them to a certain kilometer. See, they then knew that so many cars of rails, when they came up, and had been set, and that had done our work. Of course, you could set them faster than you could spike and ballast in behind them. So generally, when we got them laid down there...and whether all of the toe plates were bolted together joint-to-joint, whether they were totally spiked, and whether the ballast was there or not, we didn't have to accomplish that everyday. We could come back and finish up tomorrow. You start where you left off.

Marcello: Did they ever increase your quotas? In other words, if you finished by noon, did they not simply increase the quota?

Harrelson: They wouldn't do that. As a general rule, they didn't do it. Now at one time they did, and we said, "We're not

going to do this anymore." So we started...that late in the prison camp, our health was not that good. Nobody's stout. You don't get much to eat. So we do a lot of foot-dragging and a whole lot of things that you're not supposed to do that we got caught up with later. Everytime you got caught, you got beat.

We was filling in a ravine, and I knew that they couldn't do this. It would wash out come the first typhoon or rain season. All they was doing was just filling in with loose dirt and brush and just building a rail right across it, so in order to accomplish our days work, we took a lot of brush with leaves and threwed it in there and put the dirt on top of it. Comes the first rain, the whole blooming mess washed out from under the railroad and left the crossties attached to the rails, up in the air and suspended.

We started out to work that morning, and they decided to get us out quick, so they put us in two of these cars that had been used for hauling rails. They hooked that truck that they used for an engine to carry us out there, and the ol' boy came over the rise and looked out; and he had some rails there, but he didn't have a bridge. So we stopped without really going over the side, and we all got off. Then the next time we went back, we had to start back and build a bridge--a good bridge. That's where we learned to put about ten men on a rope with a series of pulleys with a

heavy weight riding between the two piles. You do your pile driving, and you have to sing that old song, "Yo, Hee, Ho," and the "Volga Boatmen" and all this, but we had to learn in Japanese (chuckle).

Marcello: Let me just go back again and fill in with some questions.

What exactly were your functions as one of the hanchos?

Harrelson: Basically, my function was to see that we got the rails set. I worked more with the rail setting crew. They had, like, four teams of ten man, and they'd put these rails on their shoulders and go up and then drop them in unison in place. Then they'd go back. They'd have two teams on each side of the car just to carry those steel rails up. After all day long at that, their shoulders were like this puffy (gesture) from having those steel rails on them. Really and truly, I had to get away from them and go up to the head of the railroad and see that that group was doing what the Japanese wanted them to do. I did that just to get away from one job to the other.

Everytime I got up there, then they'd call me right to the tail-end. Generally, it would be either an Ambonese or a Javanese or a Eurasian who had got their back up, and they was causing trouble. If the Japanese or Korean guard started beating on them, their temper increases and their voice increases. The louder they get, the more they work themselves into a rage. If you don't get them stopped before

they get off the deep end, they'll kill somebody. So in my mind, they'd always holler, "Hancho!" and I'd have to get up and run every step of the way and get there. As soon as I got within where I could see what was going on, well, I'd start hollering and raising hell and waving my arms.

Generally--not everytime, but generally--the Japanese or the Korean, whoever was doing the beating, would figure that maybe I had it under control. That poor bastard couldn't understand a word I was saying. It was just all hollering and put on, but at least I got the Japanese to stop beating them.

I could call him anything I wanted to, which I did. A lot of it was foul language. I learned a lot of foul language. He didn't understand any of it, but it was loud, and it was noisy. I'd tell him as best I could, "Don't build a railroad. We're not after accomplishing a feat for the Japanese. But don't take your life in your own hands by being so obstinate while he's standing there." That's what they'd do. If they'd wait until he left and then not work, that's great.

Marcello: So is it safe to say that whenever there would be any foul-ups, you might be the one to get punished? And what would they usually do to you?

Harrelson: Slap me. That generally did it--a hit up across the head or the side of the head with the butt of a rifle. For most

of them, if they just slapped me a couple of times, that saved face.

Marcello: That was basically to humiliate you more than anything else.

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: As opposed to trying to hurt you.

Harrelson: Yes, and to let me know that it was my responsibility to keep everybody doing what they wanted to do--when I couldn't understand what they wanted done (chuckle) and didn't really care.

Marcello: Now did any of this work take place during the monsoons?

Harrelson: Oh, definitely. We never had days off. During the monsoons, when it was raining hard, we'd have to set up details at the bridges because the debris from up river would set against those pilings and just absolutely bend those bridges into a U-shape. We would have to send men out on those piles of debris, and they had snakes and bugs and stuff you can't imagine, stuff we had never seen. But they got to go out there and hook a rope onto limbs, and we would have to pull those things so we could turn them loose and let them go downstream where there was no pilings and that sort of thing --during the actual rain. Gee, we worked in the flood waters from those rivers getting out of streams, like, this deep (gesture).

Marcello: Describe what the monsoon season was like.

Harrelson: Well, it's kind of like a hurricane season in this country

in that you're right in the middle of a strong wind and a terrible lot of rain. That's the monsoon as such, if you actually get into one. Now in the monsoon season, the rain seems to hit the same time everyday. If it starts at one o'clock on a day, well, it'll hit tomorrow at the same time, and it may continue to come at that time for all of that many weeks.

On the other hand, you might be in a position where you get absolutely no rain at all. You can just see the clouds from where you are. But if you get right into one of those, it's like being right in the eye of hurricane or going right through a hurricane. You've got terrific winds and terrific rains. Anytime you get in that part of the country and you get wet, you nearly freeze because the temperature drops about twenty to thirty degrees. Well, sometimes it drops more because that's not too far off of the equator. There was certain places we was in where the temperature might be normally at 112 to 115 degrees, and it would drop down to about eighty. Well, you say, "Well, eighty is not bad." But it would be bad if you didn't have any clothes, if you didn't have any protection. Anything at all that you could get under to protect you would help you, but if you didn't get under something, chill bumps would form, you'd just think you was going to freeze to death.

Marcello: I guess that those atap huts really didn't keep out the

monsoons when they were at their height, did they?

Harrelson: They did pretty good. Of course, they did let rain in, but it had to be right in the force of the gale blowing through because the atap on the side of the huts was only up part-way. Part of it was open, and it was atap on the roof, but then it was set on there loose; and the wind could blow it up like loose shingles on a house, and when it blew those up, it was open. However, if it was just a strong rain force, it was surprising--they didn't leak as much as you'd think they would.

Marcello: Way back yonder you mentioned that your canteens had been confiscated. Maybe that took place back on Java.

Harrelson: It did, yes.

Marcello: Why was that done?

Harrelson: I don't know. I guess they just wanted the metal. I have no idea. It was aluminum.

Marcello: What was the state of your clothing while you were working here on this railroad?

Harrelson: When I first got down there, I still had a khaki suit, and I had the street low-quarter shoes that I got, I believe, in a Red Cross package. They didn't last long, maybe three or four months, and then they were gone. You got holes in the knees of your trousers and in the seat of them. You'd cut the legs off of them to start with. Then the first thing you know, you had nothing to patch them with, so I made a

pair of trousers out of my pup tent and managed to keep the trousers for the most part. Then after that was gone, I had a G-string. It was just that little towel that they'd given me, that little hand towel. It was the turkish towel-type, but thin and small. You just use it and tie a string around your waist and use that as a G-string. That was in general what you wore because that's about all you had. Your shoes had gone, so you was barefooted.

Marcello: During the monsoon season, did the amount of food you received diminish or vary any?

Harrelson: Anytime that you didn't work, they'd cut you down to what they classified as 100 grams to 60 grams of dry rice. We never did get a hundred grams of dry rice a day, but, nevertheless, yes, they would cut you down. That would give you an equivalent of one cup a day on days you didn't work. Then if you were in a work camp and was among the "sick, lame, and lazy" too often, they would put you on short rations. They'd cut you down to one cup of rice a day in lieu of two.

Marcello: Who determined when a man was too sick to work?

Harrelson: Generally, they'd have a doctor. It may be a Dutch or a British, be it English or Australian or whoever, in the prison camp that would first make the determination; but then just every so often, if you didn't show up a large enough head count for the working party, the Japanese would come through, and they would just start detailing people

regardless of their ailments. If they couldn't physically see what was wrong with you, they thought you could work.

Marcello: In other words, if you had malaria, it was pretty tough to get off of work detail.

Harrelson: Yes, because they couldn't see malaria. Now if you went into chills and shivers, they could see that; but other than that, no, they couldn't see it, so you'd go back out on the work party. The only thing that they didn't really fight, that they was so scared of, was dysentery. Now if the doctor told the Japanese that this person had dysentery, they left him alone. They could see tropical ulcers, and those were massive. If you got one in the jungle, it got to be massive.

Marcello: Did you ever have any?

Harrelson: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Describe this situation.

Harrelson: I got the scratch on my left ankle, and it started out just as a little sore, and it kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. My whole foot and ankle swelled up to just about the size of a football. This open sore would be something like four inches in diameter, and it would be, like, two inches from the top of that down to that little layer of stuff over the bone...whatever you call it...tissue. It was just an open, massive sore, and there wasn't anything you could do particularly because we had no medication.

Well, we had a whole lot of that gentian violet, but it wasn't good for anything. It was sort of an antiseptic.

Finally, an Ambonese doctor came into that camp as part of a move to bolster up some of the sick that had returned to the hospital camp, and he told me to at least twice a day--and more often if I could--take a cup of water that had been boiled and just little by little pour it in this sore, which I did. It started closing up, but it was closing up at the skin, at the top. He said, "No, we can't allow this." So he took some little bitty finger-nail scissors and cut that back to open it up while I was standing there just shivering. Of course, I had been used to that sort of thing like that before. It's not that big a deal. It is painful. That opened it up. Then he got the guards to allow him to go back into the jungle out of the camp, and he got some leaves and some herbs and boiled that. He wound up with a green solution that looks like Prestone anti-freeze. He put about half a teaspoon of that into that ulcer. He heated it up, and it was good and warm. And those things are touchy. But that started it healing from the bottom. It finally healed from the bottom out, and it saved my foot. If it hadn't been for that, my foot and part of my leg would have probably had to been cut off.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that was perhaps your lowest point as a

prisoner-of-war?

Harrelson: It could have been.

Marcello: About how long were you laid up with that tropical ulcer?

Harrelson: It just seemed to me like a month. I could have been longer than that because you were in such bad health that it took awhile. Now after it got to healing from the bottom and to where you could see some improvement, then I had to go back on the work detail. They was that short of heads.

Marcello: And, of course, while you were off the work detail, you were on half-rations or partial reations at least.

Harrelson: That's right. You got one cup of rice a day instead of two.

Marcello: I also gather that a lot of people didn't want to go to any of those sickbays if they didn't have to because they were kind of depressing places.

Harrelson: Very much so, because too many people that was in there for very long lost the will to live; and once they lost the will to live, they didn't live.

Marcello: How could you tell when somebody had lost the will to live?

Harrelson: Most of the time they just started quoting and reading the Bible pretty heavy. You could tell. When you went in there, he'd sit down and say, "Hey, let me read you this passage" or "Let me say so-and-so," and he'd turn to a passage and start reading out of the Bible. You'd say, "Well, I'm a believer in God, and I'm a believer in the

Bible, but we've seen too many of them go this route. He won't be here two weeks." And generally that happened. Now it's a shame for me to sit here and classify a prisoner that's lost his will to live as one who read the Bible or accepted Jesus Christ or anything like that, but it did happen. And you knew it happened, and you knew what was going to happen, and it generally did.

Marcello: I've also heard that a lot of times they would have little or no interest in eating or food, and they kind of got a blank stare or a blank look.

Harrelson: Well, once they got the blank look, you knew that maybe tomorrow you'd be throwing dirt in their face. Now I really can't tell you about the eating. I know the ones that didn't have a will to eat was the ones that had extremely bad dysentery. Winters had dysentery a lot, and I always managed to buy some bananas, duck eggs, and a few of those green vegetables and get it into camp for him. Probably that very well may have been what got him over the dysentery and got him back home.

Marcello: Did you ever have dysentery?

Harrelson: No, I didn't actually. I think I got "the bug," and as far as I know, I still have it. They can't get rid of it. But I never had the results of dysentery. I know I had the amoeba, and they had been found; but as far as I know, I didn't have the amoebic dysentery.

Marcello: Now are all of these things taking place during the monsoon season?

Harrelson: Oh, not necessarily. In that working detail, we called the monsoon season the wet season. We had wet season and the dry season, and it didn't make any difference. We had to work just the same. Actually, in some instances, if you were in hard dirt, the wet season helped you because you could dig it a little better; but in other places, like, around them big rivers, the wet season caused you untold trouble.

Marcello: Did you ever have to work on any of the burial details?

Harrelson: Not really. I was never in one of the camps where one of the Americans died. Three of the merchant marines in Sumatra did die, but I was never in the camp where they were.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you had bought some bananas from some natives. Did this have to be done on the sly? You had a lot of jungles, so I'd assume it might have been easier to trade under these circumstances.

Harrelson: Well, it was, but you just had to be more careful, because you never knew when they was going to do a shakedown at the gate going back into camp. They would always wait until they got you right to the gate or right inside, and then they'd stop you and start the shakedown. Then, of course, if you was caught with anything, well, you'd get it.

The times when we was pretty well assured that we wasn't going to be shock down was when we had to work until after dark and got back in real late. Then when you got back, the guards would count you and shove you in as fast as they could. So you sort of learned.

Marcello: They wanted to go home, too, so to speak.

Harrelson: Yes, or go back and sit down, whatever. The engineers wanted to go back to their camp, and I guess they got tired of being out there, too, maybe.

Marcello: Were they suffering at all through any of this adversity, that is, during the monsoons or whatever?

Harrelson: I couldn't tell it if they were. I'm sure that they didn't enjoy it any better, but they had clothes. They had rain-coats and rain gear, rubber boots, and that sort of thing to keep dry.

Marcello: And I assume they were eating better than you.

Harrelson: Oh, definitely.

Marcello: Were they paying you to work on this railroad?

Harrelson: Yes, sir, a dime a day.

Marcello: And that's the money that you used to buy things from the natives.

Harrelson: Yes. How we would handle that...the natives always knew where we was working, and they would get their merchandise for sale, which were generally food items: duck eggs, bananas, cotella (most of the time they'd boil that and

sell you a piece), and some kind of a green leafy vegetable that was good in vitamins (I don't know the name of that one).

Marcello: How often did you get paid?

Harrelson: About every ten days.

Marcello: And the Japanese would actually pay you?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Occupation money?

Harrelson: I still got some of it.

Marcello: Occupation money?

Harrelson: Yes, sir. It was definitely occupation money. What would happen on the details is that about noon the Japanese and the Koreans would take their break. They'd assemble all in one group, and they'd kind of leave the prisoners around where we was boiling the water for drinking. We'd take one or two men out of the group, and everybody'd give them some money, and they'd buy whatever they could. If you mentioned you wanted a duck egg, he'd know about what it was going to cost him. Back in those days, you couldn't buy much because a banana costs \$16, and you made ten cents a day. Duck eggs was about \$22. On Sumatra there's palm sugar, and, Lord knows, you could get just a small amount for, like, \$10--maybe two or three spoons. Two or three spoons of peanuts cost \$10 or \$12 when they was available. Everything got to be so high that you just can't imagine.

I know when I was being transferred back to the base hospital camp...I wasn't particularly sick, but we already hooked up to the coal mine, and they was sending some of the sick back, and I got fortunate enough, I guess, to get on that detail, and they sent me back. I told you I had made a pair of trousers out of the pup tent. Well, I had enough for two pairs of shorts, and I made a second pair eventually. I sold those to the native breakman on the train for \$360. I used that particularly to buy food with for me and any Americans that happened to be around. When I got back to base camp, there was some of the merchant seamen in there.

Marcello: How long were you working on that railroad altogether?

Harrelson: Nearly sixteen months.

Marcello: So almost the rest of your tenure as a prisoner-of-war was spent working on that railroad.

Harrelson: That was it, because I was there in Sumatra when the war ended.

Marcello: During the work on that railroad, are you now living from day-to-day?

Harrelson: Pretty much so, because you can't see much past tomorrow. You're always looking for tomorrow. You live today and then hope you wake up in the morning. And you really didn't know, because those were pretty open camps with roving guards going through your barracks at night, and on their payday at the end of the month or the first of the month or the fifteenth,

whenever they got paid, they would go on drunken binges.

If you get a drunken guard going down through a barracks of sleeping prisoners at night, you never know what might happen. Of course, it was kind of hair-raising.

Marcello: Under circumstances like this, what role does religion play? Now you talked about those who had given up awhile ago and their quoting of the Bible and so on. For a normal prisoner --as normal as one can be under these circumstances, that is, one who has not given up--what role does religion play?

Harrelson: I can tell you this, when you get into the circumstances we run into as prisoners, you find even the so-called atheists on their knees praying. So they don't last as atheists in that situation very long. That I know. I witnessed that.

Marcello: What do you pray for?

Harrelson: To get back home, for food, to stop hurting. It depends on your problem. Most of the time, for myself, other than getting back to see my mother, I didn't really have too many prayers for me. It was really for the group, for all of us. I wanted MacArthur to get back through there like he was supposed to and get us back home--all of us.

But on the religious part, I've seen natives--Christian natives in the jungle--that was by far more religious than I was. Now I believed and I had prayers, but I didn't give thanks everytime I got a cup of rice. And those boys did.

Marcello: Were organized divine services ever held in any of these camps?

Harrelson: Oh, yes, they were--when you could. Now you couldn't do it out in the open too much. Way back in Bicycle Camp, the Dutch Catholic priest on every Sunday morning held a mass for the Catholics, and they would go down into that basement under the officer's quarters for a quick mass, in and out.

Marcello: But how about out here in the jungle?

Harrelson: Well, when we were allowed to, yes, we held services. We weren't allowed all the time. Then if we had anybody that was a preacher at all of any faith, then if he was allowed to...first of all, we were generally every day on the working party all day long. Second of all, if we had a day off, like, Christmas, if we were allowed to and we had a preacher, which wasn't the case all the time at all in those camps, then we might have a service where everybody would turn out. But in most of those camps, we didn't have preachers.

Marcello: How would you celebrate Christmas?

Harrelson: Generally, it would be a better meal for the noon meal.

Marcello: The Japanese actually did that for you?

Harrelson: Not really. But they would allow us to acquire stuff. They would take a couple of men and take them with a couple of Japanese to go through the jungle and try to get a pig. There was a lot of those wild pigs like over in Arkansas, the razorback-type. If they was lucky enough to get one, well, one pig would flavor up a whole lot of that water to go on the rice for a bunch of people. They weren't really

allowed to kill the carabao except on schedule, and neither were the natives at the village. Those carabao was supposed to belong to the herds of the native villages, and they would allow one so often for them. Occasionally, the Japanese would try to shoot one. If they ever did, we'd get the skin and the intestines and feet and head, but all the good meat they got themselves.

Marcello: Would you sing Christmas carols or anything like that?

Harrelson: Generally, we'd do that, and then we would have a prayer and maybe sing a religious song or two. On one occasion I remember we were allowed this privilege, and we sung-- what we could of it--"The Star Spangled Banner" and "God Save the King" and all that stuff for the various nationals. When they got into the Dutch national anthem, only the Dutch could sing it (laughter).

Marcello: How about the receiving and sending of letters?

Harrelson: In Sumatra there was none. There was no attempt. In Java we was allowed to send a card a month, but you didn't make up the cards. They provided the cards, and you made a check mark at the statement that you wanted to tell your parent.

Marcello: In other words, the card would say something like "I am..."

Harrelson: "I am fine." "I am well." "The Japanese are treating me good," "I'm getting plenty to eat." Those kinds of statements were printed on the card. None of them were true, but you was allowed to send it. So you'd pick up one or

two things and make a check mark, and that's what you wanted it to say, and then they mailed it. My mother never got any of them. I sent one everytime I had the opportunity. I was hoping she would find out I was still alive. Not that I wanted to tell her that I was being treated fine. That wasn't it.

Marcello: Did you ever receive a letter?

Harrelson: One. I got one letter from my mother and one package. The Red Cross finally got in there, and this was in Java. I was in Bicycle Camp, and they came through there. The Japanese made us spend an extra day...instead of going on work parties, we scrubbed that camp from top to bottom with the old G.I. clean up-type. Then over at the kitchen, instead of you having rice, they put some great, big shelves and brought in some bakery bread and just loaded those shelves down with that. Oh, it smelled so good, but they left a Japanese guard in there, too. They was going to have an inspection by the Swiss Red Cross, and they wanted to prove to them as to how good they was treating the prisoners-of-war, because the Red Cross had apparently got rumors as to all of this maltreatment and the Japanese was denying it. Then they set it up and made that the prettiest-looking camp, and everybody sat around and smoked cigarettes and took it easy and cleaned up the yard. There was actual bakery bread in the kitchen. They had a hind quarter of beef

or at least a leg, a big steamboat round, hanging up there uncooked and being ready to serve. Actually, the Red Cross didn't come through there. The Japanese stopped them and sent them elsewhere for some reason--didn't let them in. They came along and immediately took that beef and that bread out of there, and we didn't even get a smell of it hardly.

Marcello: What did that letter do for your morale?

Harrelson: Well, the letter let me know in my mind that my mother knew I was alive. But she didn't. She had just taken a chance. She had finally learned that I was alive, but it took better than two years after we were captured. What happened is that the first Christmas, after the big masses of the battalion moved out of Java, there was a Japanese that ran that radio station in Batavia. He had been trained in Los Angeles, I believe, at one of the radio stations there, and his understudy had graduated from the University of Washington. They were part of the civilian force that came in and took over the radio station. They came in and took six or eight of us out to the radio station, and we got to cut a record. We didn't see it being cut. I just got to make a short announcement to my mother. You gave your name and your rank and your serial number and made this to your mother--gave her name, first name and last name. You were allowed to say, "I'm fine." "The Japanese are feeding me

well." It was just like the card. You had to say that. Instead of it going out over the air like you thought it was doing, they made these records. Then later, they played those back, when they wanted to, for propaganda.

We made these actually the first Christmas that we was . prisoners-of-war, or the day before or whichever; and some year-and-a-half later, they played those over the radio for propaganda. A shortwave radio fellow up in... if I said Wyoming, I wouldn't miss by more than five or ten states. He picked this up and then called my mother, and he made a little bitty record of what was said and sent that little record to her. It just stated my name, rank, and serial number and her name, and that I was fine. It might quite possibly have said who she was and gave her address, like, town and state, because the radio operator had to have some way of knowing how to contact her. He had got hold of some of the shortwave guys in Wichita Falls and gave them this message. Finally, he managed to get hold of Mother and talk to her, and then he sent her a cut of the record he had made over the air by picking it up. It was one of them guys that operates around-the-clock, you know, picking up messages sent out by the Japanese all over the world.

Marcello: Without being too personal, what did she say in the letter?
Do you recall?

Harrelson: I don't. I'm ashamed to say that I don't remember what she said in the letter. But it was like, "Hope you're doing fine. Hope you're doing well. Hope you're getting plenty to eat. Hope to see you soon." That sort of thing.

Marcello: How many times did you read that letter?

Harrelson: I read it until I wore it out, and then finally it got taken away from us. They took all paper away from us of all kinds. Some of the things they stamped and gave them back to us, like, a few photographs, driver's license, Social Security card, and that sort of thing. Those I managed to get back with, I think.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that once the railroad was built, you went back to the hospital camp. How long did you remain there?

Harrelson: About two months, and that brought the end of the war. And it was sort of a dramatic end.

Marcello: Describe how that took place.

Harrelson: While I was working out of that hospital camp, we were doing various duties. The best duty was going to a garden detail, which normally officers went on. All they did was garden-- dig up the dirt and plant. I went out on it. There was very little work on the railroad as such in that particular camp.

One morning we lined up for detail, and we stayed out there. It was about an hour before daylight, which was normally when you got up and got ready to go, and we stayed

out in front of the guard shack for about an hour. This, of course, got us well into daylight.

Here comes one of the Japanese messengers from the headquarters, which was across the road and up a little way. He came down to get the camp commander, which was a British wing commander. He was the camp commander.

We stayed right there--lined up and ready to go to work. The guards was looking at us and sitting up there on their deals, but no engineers came. Finally, the camp commander came back after maybe about thirty or forty minutes, and he said, "We have to have a tenko," which is when everybody has to fall in for a nose count. So we went to the general parade ground, and he made the announcement that the war was over, that the Japanese had surrendered.

Marcello: He did say that the Japanese had surrendered, and not that they had simply agreed to stop fighting.

Harrelson: He said that they had surrendered and that Lord Louis Mountbatten was in Singapore and had ordered the Japanese high command to issue orders to their forces wherever to give sustenance and food and medical supplies where available to any Allied prisoners-of-war until they could be relieved of that duty. So he said, "Now they're going to have to give us protection here," because in the northern part of Sumatra there was still what they called head-hunters or the natives. They didn't like any whites. We weren't that

far north. We was about in the middle of the island. Anyhow, he said, "That's what's going to happen." So, of course, the rest of the day we was so joyous, and your spirits was so high that you couldn't even go to sleep.

Marcello: Now up to that point, when he made the announcement, did you have any inkling that the war was soon to be over?

Harrelson: Not a bit. We were still lined up to go to work. We worked there the day before. We lined up to go to work that day and had no inkling at all from anyplace. Now this was on September 18.

Marcello: Had you ever seen any evidence at all that the tide of the war had changed?

Harrelson: We knew that from way back. It started back in Java because this commander at Bicycle Camp, Sony, liked to post information, like, the Japanese forces had repelled a force at Guadalcanal and killed so many thousands of troops and sunk so many ships and knocked down so many airplanes. Then about two months later, they would have repelled a massive force at another group of islands. Then about three months more, it would be, like, Truk or Palau or Iwo Jima and that sort of thing. Everytime it would get closer to Japan, so we knew the way the war was going. We wasn't told, but you could just follow what they said, and everytime they said they repelled a massive force and killed so many people, it was closer to Japan. That was in about the first two years,

and then a little bit in Singapore. When we got into Sumatra, you never did just get anything other than just rumors.

Marcello: You were really in the boondocks in Sumatra.

Harrelson: You better believe it! That is jungle. That is deep jungle. There was things back in that jungle that you wouldn't imagine would exist. There are ants, for example. Most are big, huge, black ants, and I think they're wood-eating ants. They must be an inch to an inch-and-a-half long, and they stand about three-quarters of an inch high. They're huge. The tail section is as big as the end of your little finger. You can see them, and they don't seem to want to attack you, but you sure do leave them alone.

Mosquitos...if you go back into the dark part of the jungle like we had to go to fell trees to make the timbers for the bridges, the mosquitos will just eat you alive back in those dark places where the sun don't hit in the swampy parts. The hard part about carrying the timbers out --you needed about ten men to carry out these huge tree trunks--is that you're walking over this massive undergrowth of fern, beautiful fern; but there has been so many centuries of it that's died that it has formed these pockets. If you fall into a pocket and you're carrying part of a load, and you fall plumb out from under the load, you just almost disappear because it may be six feet to the actual ground. That would put all the strain on just a few men, and that

would just nearly bend them in double.

Marcello: Once you had heard that the war was over, was there any kind of celebrating that went on?

Harrelson: Very much so. We was so elated. Our spirits was so high that it's hard to explain. You just was so excited that you couldn't go to sleep. We stayed up most of the night, just sitting there talking. We just finally fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, and when we woke up the next morning, there wasn't a sign of Japanese anyplace. We didn't hear them leave. In the still of the night, they stole away from our camp. Not by vehicle. They had to go by foot. We don't know where they went, but they sure did leave-- all of the Koreans, all of the Japanese. Like I said, they had been ordered to offer us protection, but they didn't do it. They moved! And, I mean, they moved quick! They may have been afraid.

Marcello: And what did you people do at that time?

Harrelson: The camp commander took some of these Gurkhas and put them around the perimeter as guards.

Marcello: They had no weapons, did they?

Harrelson: Well, he had found some of these old Lee-Enfields that the Japanese headquarters left behind, but they didn't have any ammunition in them. They was really just about useless because the Koreans had used those a lot of times to carry on work parties. They had a clip of ammunition--each one of

them--for them, but we didn't find any ammunition at that headquarters.

Marcello: What were you doing in the meantime, that is, until you were finally liberated and taken out of there? What were you personally doing?

Harrelson: Well, that was hospital camp, and there weren't too many real well people, so right in the later stages, I took charge of the rice hauling detail because I was stout enough to help haul the rice from our little railhead down the camp kitchen. Then I worked the rest of the day in the kitchen as such, helping cook.

After a couple of days, a British major and two Chinese from part of Chiang Kai-shek's group came in there, and they brought a pack radio, you know, one of them little kind that you have to wind up by hand. They talked to Singapore and back, and they said the Americans were going to send their own plane down there to pick up the American troops. The Australians had started flying into a little landing strip. This is kind of funny in that this landing strip was big enough for fighters. There was a huge grove of trees at one end of that landing strip. The fighters could get airborne and jump over it, but the bigger planes couldn't make it. So we had to have that extended about two or three hundred feet. These two Chinese said they could do that. So they disappeared, and about a day later there must have

been two or three thousand Chinese. Where they came from, Lord only knows, but they were Chinese. Maybe that is too many. A thousand is a whole lot. Anyhow, in two or three days, they had that jungle cleared out and that landing strip extended several hundred feet.

The Australians started flying in C-47's out of Singapore and picking up the sickest first. So there started to be an argument between the Dutch and the British as to who was going to get to go first, which bed patients needed to go first. As I mentioned way earlier, these Australians are kind of rough-and-tough like people we remember back in Texas in the twenties. There was always an Aussie nurse on every plane that came into haul a group out. When the Dutch and the British got to arguing over who was going to go, she went in and took charge with a few well-chosen swear words and put them in their place. Then she went along and said, "Take this one and this one," and she detailed who was going. That's the way they got them out of there. If they had left it to the group that had been in there, we'd still be there arguing. Now they loaded some of the ambulatory patients on that boat to go back down and go back by riverboat, like we came up. But me and the remaining other six Americans--there was seven of us altogether--went down to this little landing strip, and we camped down there for three or four days.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you getting kind of anxious?

Harrelson: Very. We had been assured by the wing commander...he had talked to the high command in Singapore over that radio they had. They had a pre-set time when they would be listening for their calls and everything. They reassured us the Americans were going to send our own plane after us, so we were just to stay there. Okay, we stayed, and we just figured that at any hour they'd come in, but they didn't. Like, the third night we stayed all night. No plane. Then in that interim a plane did come in. This was a pretty nice little twin-engine plane, but it belonged to Lady Mountbatten. She came in there from Singapore and went over to the camp and observed everything and then left in her private plane. I got to meet her--a very nice lady. But we got terribly anxious. By that time the last ambulatory patient and everybody that had been left in that camp was getting loaded on that riverboat, and they was getting ready to leave. If they left and a plane didn't show up, we're still in that jungle.

Marcello: Now are you eating pretty well by this time?

Harrelson: Oh, yes, because the Liberators...

Marcello: The B-24's.

Harrelson: The B-24's was flying out of the Calcutta area and dropping those food parcels in the parachute, and we had more food... we couldn't have ate that in six months--what they dropped.

Marcello: What kind of food were they dropping?

Harrelson: Well, most of it was high protein canned goods--bully beef and you name it. If it was in a can, they dropped it. They dropped some C-rations and some K-rations that I've heard a lot of gripes about, but we thought they were delicious. We really did. To us they were great. But we couldn't eat much. If you opened up one can of any kind of meat, you couldn't eat much of it. If you ate too much, you got sick at your stomach. So we'd still stick to the rice and just supplement that. We cooked that rice, like, two meals a day because we couldn't eat more than about... our stomach was maybe that big (gesture).

Marcello: About as big as a fist?

Harrelson: Yes.

Marcello: Were those B-24's dropping the food in the barrels?

Harrelson: Yes. They were dropping them awfully close to camp, too. And, too, they dropped in some of those paramedics and a doctor. I got to hand them credit. They came down to less than 500 feet and dropped from there, and that gets you to the ground awful quick in a parachute, especially those old-types. But they came in, and the doctor was an Englishman (the first doctor that parachuted in). They helped what they could. They brought some penicillin, and they dropped some penicillin. The only thing is, when we got it, we didn't know what to do with it. We'd never heard of it.

It could have saved some boy's life if we'd have known.
Once that doctor got in there, he knew what to do with it.
But penicillin was after our time (chuckle).

Marcello: So when did the Americans finally come in?

Harrelson: They didn't. Later, something like the fourth or fifth evening down at that air strip...like I said, it was getting awful late, and the riverboat was about ready to leave, and we was several miles from that riverboat. So we was getting more than apprehensive--frightened.

Here comes a speck, and it dropped in over those trees, and it was a C-47. We just knew that this was our plane. It pulled up there and bounced to a stop and swirled around, and this Australian pilot stuck his head out and says, "You blokes want to go to Singapore?" So there was, like, thirty-two people there--ourselves plus some Australian and English or British. We got aboard, and the pilot told us, "I've got about three or four more bodies than we're supposed to carry on this plane." So we had to get in a huddle and lock arms and get right up by the fire wall behind the pilot. He backed that plane right up to the very fence. He put his brakes on and revved the engines as high as they would go and let the brakes off and got a run at that thing and kept on the ground until he got awfully close to them trees, and then he just pulled it up and jumped over them. It got up to the top and started settling

back in, and we sure did think we was going back into the treetops.

Actually, we weren't scared. We had seen enough already that that was kind of a highlight. Even if we'd have cracked up, some might be killed, but some may have not. That wouldn't have bothered us as much as what we'd already been through.

But that was the highlight of the entire war for me, was that less than two hours from the jungle of Sumatra to the best hotel in Singapore--with sheets, with soap, with running water, with toilets, and with a mess hall that had beef in it. There wasn't much beef, and it wasn't real tender; but it was better than what I had had for quite a while. I stayed in Singapore about ten days.

Marcello: Were you under American jurisdiction or British?

Harrelson: American. They had a total wing or maybe an entire hotel --one of the best in Singapore. When we got in there, there was no doubt about it. They took us right to the best place and put us in the best bed they had.

Marcello: What kind of medical treatment did you receive there?

Harrelson: Nothing. We didn't really need any at the time. If you had an ailment, of course, they would have taken care of it. But I had no complaints. I couldn't see anything better than sleeping in a clean bed. On top of that, we had mosquito netting, which in the jungle we didn't have.

So that helped. We had good food even though we were not used to eating much. The troops that came in there...out of various places in India was where most of them came from. They complained about the food and about this and about that, but I had no complaints. That was so much better than what I'd had in several years that to me it was great.

Of course, during the day you could walk all over Singapore and just have a look-see. When we were there as prisoners-of-war, we had a very short look-see, and most of that was at the docks where you worked.

After about a week or ten days, we got aboard a C-54 and went to Saigon and spent the night. There was an uprising at the time in Saigon. Of course, we ex-prisoners didn't really know what was going on, and we weren't scared. If we had known what was going on, we might have been. The natives was really in arms against the French at that time, and there was lots of killing going on. We went into this hotel where the Americans were supposed to have taken it over, but it had been taken over by the Viet Minh, if that was who it was that was taking it over from the French. Okay, so we couldn't stay there, and we got out of there, and we thought, from the looks of this colonel's face that was with us, we got out without getting killed, which was...they took us out to a Catholic orphanage, I think

it was, for girls. We spent the night out there and got up in the morning, and they gave us breakfast. When we got back to the plane, the pilot said, "You all don't know it, but the nuns out at that orphanage gave you all the food they had for breakfast this morning." He said, "When I get back to Calcutta, I'm going to see if the military authorities won't load this plane down with rations and let me fly it back in here, and I'll do it."

Marcello: Now had you been reunited with any of your old buddies?

Harrelson: No. We just spent the night in Saigon, and then we turned and went back the other way. We figured we was going to the Philippines, but we didn't. We went back to Rangoon and then into northern India and then to Calcutta. Once I got into Calcutta, I was reunited shortly with a lot of my old buddies. In fact, there were several hundred.

Marcello: What kind of reunion took place there?

Harrelson: For most of them, they just stayed overnight. I was one of the last to get in there. They'd been there, and they was getting ready to leave, and a majority of them left the very next day. Some of them stayed on two or three weeks. Of course we had a get-together and hashed old times, but I would get to talking about where I had been and what happened, and they'd say, "Oh, don't give us a sob story." They'd start telling me about where they'd been and what

they did, and I'd say, "Oh, don't give me your sob story."

Of course, it was fun just finding they was still alive. I stayed in that 147th General Hospital in Calcutta thirty-six days, and I gained thirty-five pounds. But then I was allowed to eat five regular meals a day, and then if I so desired, I could go into the mess hall at any time during day and night, and it was standing orders to feed me whatever I asked for. I couldn't eat much, and I certainly didn't run there and ask for special meals.

On the wards they had ice boxes--refrigerator-types--and they was stuffed full of milk and chocolate milk and ice cream and fruits like apples and oranges and stuff. Why, shoot, I didn't do anything but lay around and get fat.

Marcello: What food did you crave more than anything else?

Harrelson: Fried potatoes--that was my favorite--and beans. I like beans, like, pinto beans. That's what I really liked. My first craving in the mess hall--and there wasn't that many of them--was fried potatoes. That's kind of strange, isn't it (chuckle)?

Marcello: Fried potatoes and pinto beans (chuckle).

So from Calcutta do you come back to the United States?

Harrelson: Yes. I stayed there that long. They had lost my papers, is why I stayed so long, because I had first priority to leave. Finally, I went to the executive officer and said, "Sir, when am I going to get to go home?" He said, "Soldier,

when you have been here as long as I have, you'll have a right to complain. Now go on back to your ward and just sit down and take it easy." I said, "Yes, sir." So I looked over there on his sleeve, and he had three hash marks. He'd been there, like, a year-and-a-half--six months for the hash mark. So I went back to my ward and took off those pajamas and put on my uniform, and I had all them hash marks. We had seven because we was just four days short of four years--I was--being gone from here. So I went back and reported very military-like. I said, "Sir, I'm First Sergeant Harrelson. When am I going to be sent home?" He looked up, and his eyes got as big as horseshoes, and he said, "My God, Sergeant, where have you been?" I said, "I've been over in the South Pacific and here in the CBI Theater for almost four years now." He said, "You go and turn in all of your equipment except the uniforms. They'll allow you to keep them. And stay at your barracks."

Within two hours I was on board a C-47 and in flight--just that quick. He lost my orders and didn't know I was still around (chuckle). It might be the fact that since I had first priority, he could bump anybody he wanted to except general officers. They were the only other ones at that time that had first priority. But the actual plane I was on had a lot of stretcher patients, like, burn patients.

Some were the pilots that had been shot down and burned and stuff like that. People who were shot up bad was being flown back with us. There were stretchers, and they had five nurses. They had a pilot and co-pilot, and then they had two reliefs on there. They'd take turns sleeping in a little sleeping cabin. We flew from there to Karachi to spend the night, got back aboard, and flew to Tripoli and stayed in Tripoli a couple of days and then flew to Cairo. We got to stay in Cairo about a week. The Red Cross carried us out to see the Sphinx and the pyramids and stuff like that.

Then we went to Casablanca and got into Casablanca, and they put us into a barracks that was behind high walls and bars, and they said the natives was on uprising, and any white person, any infidels, would be beheaded if caught on the streets. I didn't want to go on the streets, anyhow. I was there about--it seemed to me--thirty minutes, and the orderly came back and said, "Get your baggage ready. You're shipping out immediately." So then I went on up to the front desk to see if I was really being shipped out, and there was a colonel up there that said, "Sergeant, do you want to go on this flight that's leaving now, or do you want to wait until the morning and go on the plane with the people that you came in here with?" I said, "I'd just as soon stay overnight and go in the morning." He said,

"Great! I wanted a seat, anyhow!" (chuckle)

So we flew out of there in the morning, and we flew to the Azores, then up to Newfoundland, and landed in Newfoundland. And of all things, we got up there, and it was colder than blue blazes, and the Red Cross came out there and gave us ice cream (chuckle).

Then from there we flew into someplace on Long Island. It was a good landing field with military barracks right close. We landed during a snowstorm. It was in November. We got on there and got into a bunk. This was a nice, warm bunk. They had some of these girls that sing over the radio, quartets--good-looking babes who came out there to sing to us. And they could sing. They just finished a couple of songs, and the orderly came up and says, "Get your clothes on, and let's go."

So with in a matter of a few more minutes I was on my route to Haleron General Hospital over on Staten Island. It's one of the Army's general hospitals--permanent installation. The ol' boy that was driving the ambulance was born and raised on Long Island. This was only supposed to have been a short trip to get a ferry and go across to Staten Island, but he made the wrong turn someplace and got lost. Anyhow, we managed to get to the ferry at about two o'clock in the morning, but what made me suspicious was that we passed that blooming racetrack where the horses race--Belmont

or whatever it is--twice, and after we passed it the second time, I knew we was lost. But he finally made the right turn, and we got over there in the middle of the night to that hospital. They gave me a quick medical examination the first thing the next morning and said, "Well, you're fit to go on nearer your home, to your next destination."

I tried to get the Red Cross to approve me for one of these furnish-your-own-transportation things from there to Wichita Falls because the Air Force was flying planes from there to Sheppard Air Base at Wichita Falls. They said they could get me a ride, but she got it all set up, and then she backed out and said, "No, if you do this, you could go and file for pay for furnishing your own transportation." So she wouldn't go, and I had to sit there and wait about ten days until they got me a booth on a train.

The train sent me out to El Paso to William Beaumont. It's kind of funny. I went into William Beaumont, and they started running me through one place and out the other, and then they transferred me to Moore General Hospital, North Carolina, for three or four months. Then I wound up back at William Beaumont, and a year to the day, exactly from the day I entered there, I wound up in the same ward down at the annex at William Beaumont in the same stinking bed I'd first had when I got there. They hadn't as much as given me an aspirin, but they kicked me from pillar to

post. All I wanted was treatment, and they just wouldn't give it. So that just about wound it up.

I finally got a little treatment and got some I didn't want. They gave me a lot of X-rays on the face that I didn't need. It caused me subsequently to have skin cancer, which I've been having problems with. Other than that, that's about it.

Marcello: When did you finally get home?

Harrelson: To my home in Wichita Falls?

Marcello: Yes.

Harrelson: I don't remember the exact date because my mother and older brother and sister-in-law and a friend from Abilene, Texas, drove to El Paso and met me at the train. I immediately went to the hospital, turned in, and got a leave. They didn't want to give it. They stated, "No, you've got to stay here and go through all the rigmarole of exams." I said, "I don't have to. I may be going absent without leave, but my mother's here, and I've been gone over four years without seeing her. I'm going home because the President gave us 104 days of temporary duty, all ex-prisoners. I'm going to take part of that, and I want it to start now." The doctor said, "Well, you need to stay here, and you'll get this." I said, "No." He said, "Well, let me give you half of it." So they did that. They settled on that, and we went into El Paso and spent the night and then headed into

Abilene the next morning. We must have stayed a week in Abilene and then went to Wichita Falls. But my mother was with me.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Harrelson, I guess that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview.

Harrelson: I think so.

Marcello: I want to thank you very much for having taken all this time to talk to me. You said a lot of interesting and very important things, and I'm sure that historians and students will find your comments most valuable.

Harrelson: There's one more thing. To me it was important. During my tenure in Bicycle Camp in Java, I had an attack of appendicitis. As you well know by now, we was allowed relatively no medicine by the Japanese. But we did have a surgeon that was off the Houston, and they had him at kind of a base hospital camp just outside of Batavia in a place that had been a Catholic convent. The Japanese took that over and made a hospital camp out of it.

They needed to get me out there because they had declared I had acute appendicitis. So the Japanese finally got a truck that had been hauling cement and just laid me down flat on the back of this truck amongst that loose cement that had fell out of the bags. They hauled me this eight or ten miles.

When I got out there, the doctor examined me and then

immediately went into surgery, and he said, "I do not have the right medicine, but I'm going to make a concoction here that might work for a spinal tap or block." He gave that to me, and it worked temporarily until he got me open and then started looking for the appendix. Whatever word I'll say is wrong, but he said it was the type that's underneath, hidden--retroceded or something similar. So due to the fact that he couldn't find it, he had to start down my intestines and pull them out like a well rope looking for it until he found it and snipped it off.

While that was going on the spinal block wore off, and he didn't have anything. So it was during this period that I would pass out from sheer pain. I guess men can be grateful they can't stand as much pain as women without passing out. Due to the fact that if they could, there'd probably be no births. Anyhow, during that period of passing out, I would dream of food and Glen Miller's orchestra, whom I love. Of course, I would see every dish my mother had cooked that was my favorite.

I came out of this, and there was a Scotch doctor that was a friend of ours, named Rutherford. He was trying to assist, but there wasn't really a whole lot he could do, except he was holding my head. There I was, going into stages of sort of dry-heaving, and he was trying to keep me from strangling. And he was doing a good job of it.

So about this time the doctor said, "Are you hurting?" "I sure am, Doctor." He said, "Do you think you could hold on a little while?" I said, "I'm sure going to try." About that time he got one of these little bitty towels like they gave us, and he put that little small towel around his hand, raised up my head just a little bit, and hit me right on the chin. I went out like a light. When I came to, he had me sewed up. But he said that in the interim, the Japanese that was there, one of the guards, had been sent for some ether. He brought back about that much ether (gesture) in a test tube from wherever their doctor was, and they poured it on a piece of cotton and kept me under long enough to sew me up and get everything shifted back into place.

It took just awhile to get over that incision because of my health. Then the adhesions lasted for years and years after I got home. Anyhow, I forgot to get that in where it belonged.

Marcello: Well, I think that's a good part of the story, and I am glad you mentioned it. Once more I want to thank you for your cooperation in this project.

Harrelson: Well, I thank you, Doctor, and I sure appreciate your time and efforts on this.