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Interview with  
PAUL E. PAPISH  
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas  
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello  
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Oral History Collection

Paul Papish

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Date: January 30, 1989

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Paul Papish for the University of North Texas Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on January 30, 1989, in Denton, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Papish in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war during World War II. More specifically, Mr. Papish was aboard the cruiser USS *Houston*, which was sunk in the battle of the Sunda Strait in March, 1942.

Mr. Papish, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. Start off by telling me when you were born and where you were born.

Mr. Papish: I was born on April 4, 1919, in Pueblo, Colorado. My early boyhood days were spent in

Pueblo. We moved to Denver, and I attended grade school, Filomena Grade School in Denver, and then to Cathedral High School in Denver, Colorado. On February 14, 1939, I enlisted in the Navy in Denver, Colorado.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service in 1939?

Papish: In 1939, I imagine, we could see what was coming. At times on Movietone in the theaters, they had the bombing of the *Panay*. This was quite a thing. Why I was thinking about the Navy, I don't know. I was landlocked, had never seen the ocean, and so I decided to join the Navy. I had started hitting the recruiting station, oh, somewhere in 1938. I graduated from high school in 1937.

But, no, I couldn't get in the Navy. Every time I'd go for an interview or something like that at the recruiting station, I had a physical. They'd strap the blood pressure equipment to my arm, and immediately my pulse would elevate, and I guess my pressure would go up. So I was constantly turned down because they thought I had high blood pressure. I would go to the family doctor, and he'd say, "No, you don't have high blood pressure." When I would go to the family

doctor, the pressure was fine. The minute I would get in the recruiting station, the pressure would go up. So they were turning me down for that reason. Also, they were turning me down because they had found a \_\_\_\_\_ and so I said, "If I get all this tended to, will I still be eligible?" "Oh, yeah." So I had the \_\_\_\_\_ tended to. The doctor gave me medicine to bring my pressure down. He said, "Immediately when you go in the recruiting station, take these blood pressure pills, and you'll be fine."

So I went down early in February, and, lo and behold, I was accepted by the Navy. I was to leave Denver on February 14, 1939. I went home and I told my mother that I had joined the Navy and that I was leaving Denver on the 14th of February. My mother immediately told me, "That's a real fine Valentine gift you've given me." I was an only child, and at that time things weren't...things were good with the family, but not too good. I was working after high school, and it was dull and routine day in and day out, driving a truck. I thought that there had to be something better, so the Navy was my choice. So

Mother never let me forget that I had joined the Navy on Valentine's Day, even up until the day that she died. God bless her soul.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Papish: I went through boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois, in Company 739. After boot camp I was given leave, went home for ten days, came back to Great Lakes, and found out that I was assigned to the USS *Houston*, which was then in Bremerton, Washington. Being the landlubber that I was, we got on the train at Great Lakes and went across the northern United States and pulled into Seattle, Washington. We then took the ferry from Seattle, Washington, to Bremerton, Washington. Coming into the ferry slip was quite a thing, and I thought, "So this is the ocean." Little did I know that this was the Puget Sound area (chuckle). This was not the ocean. But, anyway, we loaded our seabags, and we got off the ferry.

The petty officer in charge from the ship was there to greet us, and we had our seabags and hammocks and our ditty bags. He says, "Okay, sailors, pick 'em up. We're going to go to your ship." Well, we walked in through the gate at

Bremerton, Washington, and it was quite a walk to the area of the dry docks. We were walking along the dry docks there, and I'm looking down at the ships and down into the depths of the dry docks and just shaking my head. About that time the petty officer in charge said, "Well, sailors, there's your ship." And it was beautiful. But I looked down in the dry dock, and I looked at that ship, and I turned to the sailor next to me, and I said, "It won't float."

Two weeks later, after scraping the barnacles off of that ship and painting the bottom of that ship, they flooded that dry dock, and we floated out. It was an experience. It was a real fine experience, as far as I was concerned. I was a sailor. We sailed around after we got out of dry dock. They had done various things, I imagine, overhauling engines and things like that, while we sailed around Puget Sound.

Probably you've heard this before. The USS *Houston* was the President's ship, President Roosevelt's ship. After we had gotten out of dry dock and things were settling down, we sailed around Puget Sound for a while, making ports like

Everett, Washington, and Port Townsend and places like this. I thought this was really big. We marched in one of the parades in Port Townsend, I think, and Olympia, Washington. We marched in a parade, Fourth of July parade. Then, of course, we were waiting for word that President Roosevelt was going to go on a cruise.

Marcello: In the meantime, what were you striking for aboard the *Houston*? I assume that when you first went on, you were in the deck crew.

Papish: I was in the deck force, and I was in the deck force for maybe a year-and-a-half. We finally left Puget Sound, and when we got out to sea, that's when I learned I really wasn't a sailor (chuckle). It was something else.

Marcello: Did you get seasick?

Papish: Seasick clear down the coast to Mare Island or Long Beach. We pulled into Long Beach and had liberty one day and immediately went to the Hawaiian Islands. I was getting to be quite the sailor.

Marcello: So during this particular period, did you ever pick up the President for one of his cruises?



Papish: No. Before we left Bremerton, Washington, all the presidential gear was unloaded--the presidential barge and anything that was on there from his previous cruise. They had just dropped him off in Long Beach before I joined the *Houston* that year. So all the presidential gear was taken off. Of course, the scuttlebutt around the ship...this was about the time that Hitler was starting his war in 1939. I think that probably at that time they could see the handwriting on the wall.

We then went to the Hawaiian Islands, and we had various flags on board ship. In fact, we were flagship of Scouting Force Four. We had our short-range battle practices and drills and more drills and things like that. Scuttlebutt had it that we were going to go back to the States into Mare Island, for what purpose at that time we didn't know. But we found out later that we were going to have a degaussing cable installed around the ship to protect us from any magnetic mines. Here again, rumors get rampant and so forth.

We went to Mare Island, had the degaussing cable installed and a speed run back from the States back to Hawaii. We were on a speed run,

and we hit heavy seas, and the degaussing cable started popping off. So being in the First Division, we were the first ones up there to bring this degaussing cable back. This was one of the hairy moments in my life--strapping yourself to a stanchion and working your way back to where you could pull the cable up and secure it to a stanchion. We got right to the after part of turret one, and a big wave broke over the ship. I was holding on to the life line, but my hands were torn away. When I came to, I found myself between a rope basket, a line basket, and a paravane. The line basket was lashed to the paravane, and nobody could figure out how I had gotten in between that basket and the paravane and just wedged in there. In fact, they had to cut the basket loose to get me out of there. Fortunately, I had no broken bones. When that wave hit, I thought the ship had sunk (chuckle). Anyway, they took me down to sickbay and checked me over--no broken bones, nothing, just kind of shaken up. But when that wave hit, I thought that I was overboard. I woke up later wedged under this paravane, between the paravane and the

basket. When we hit the Hawaiian Islands, of course, they rewelded the degaussing cable back onto the ship.

We were operating around the Hawaiian Islands, and, of course, rumor had it then that we were headed for the Asiatic Station. There was another fellow on a destroyer, the USS *Shaw*, and he wanted to go to Asia. I necessarily didn't want to go to Asia, so we were engineering a swap--swap ships.

Marcello: Why did you not want to go to Asia?

Papish: Well, I thought, "I didn't lose anything out there. If somebody else wants to go, fine. I'll go ahead and swap with him." He came aboard looking for a swap. He was a seaman like I was, and you had to swap rate for rate. I was still in the First Division. So we engineered the swap. For all intent and purposes, the swap was going through, but it had to go through before the ship sailed. There was no word on the swap or anything, so all swaps were off, and I went to Asia with the *Houston*. Later on, in Pearl Harbor, there's a picture of the first ship that was hit. It was the USS *Shaw*, which was completely

disintegrated when the bomb hit. I thought back, and it was really something about it and something about my life. What I mean is, you'll find out as we go through, but I just can't explain it.

Marcello: I've heard several people say similar things. In other words, as bad as the experience of POW was, there were situations that you could have been in in World War II that would have been a lot worse in terms of coming out alive.

Papish: You betcha'.

Marcello: And I think the incident concerning the *Shaw* was a good example of that.

Papish: Yes. Even now I wake up at night, and I say, "Why me?" Because, I mean, the odds are such...but we proceeded on to Manila. We were operating around Manila. One day I was on deck, and I was scraping the deck, scraping the tar out of the planking, just working on the deck. The boatswain's mate came up behind me and said, "Hey, Papish, can you type?" I said, "Hell, yes, I can type. I took typing in high school." So he says, "Report down to the pay office." I thought, "Well, here's another working party. The storekeepers want

typewriters moved or something in their storerooms moved." This was a favorite trick: "Can you type?" And then you end up on a working party moving typewriters or something like that. So I went down to the pay office.

Before that, I actually joined the Navy to learn something and be an electrician's mate. I was always interested in electricity and electronics. So, of course, I reported down to the pay office, and the paymaster sat me down, and he said, "Okay, type this." So I sat down at the typewriter. I hadn't been using the typewriter very much after school. Of course, I began typing, and he says, "Okay, you'll do." So I said, "I'll do what?" He said, "We'll have you transferred from First Division to S Division." He said, "We're going to make a storekeeper out of you." So I went back up on deck, and I said, "Clymer, what in the hell are you doing to me?" I said, "I have had chit after chit in to be transferred to the electrician's gang." He said, "Well, we're going to make a storekeeper out of you. Ha, ha, ha." Just like that. I said, "I don't want to be a storekeeper." He said, "Get

your stuff out of the First Division! You're going to S Division, and that's it!"

Marcello: And who was this person?

Papish: He was my petty officer in charge, first class boatswain's mate in the First Division.

Marcello: And his name was?

Papish: His name was Clymer. He was redheaded so his name, naturally, was "Red" Clymer. I don't know what his first name was. I had looked it up several times, and I knew what it was. Anyway, I said, "Man, you're really doing it to me." So I was transferred to S Division, striking as a storekeeper, and they put me in the pay office.

Marcello: What sort of activity was the *Houston* undergoing while it was over there operating out of Manila? I'm assuming it was part of the Asiatic Fleet under Admiral Hart.

Papish: That's right. We were the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. We were operating and constantly operating. The captains we had aboard that ship, I believe--and I think every man of the *Houston* believes--that they would follow these men through hell. These were real Navy captains. These were really ship captains. We had Captain

Oldendorf, who after made rear admiral, Admiral Oldendorf. Of course, then he was relieved by Captain Albert Rooks. This was a man who everybody believed that the Good Lord had His hand on his shoulder for the things that he brought us through. Of course, a sailor doesn't realize it, until he actually goes into battle, what all this training meant. He's grumbling all the time. He's saying, "Why this? Why that?" But then he realizes later on, when you're in action and everything else, that this is what pays off-- all this training. The training that we did in Hawaii and the training that this crew did in the Philippines, I think, made the crew of the *Houston* the crew that it was. Every man on that ship knew what he was supposed to do, when he was supposed to do it, and I think that we were probably one of the most close-knit crews in the United States Navy. We were probably products of the Depression, and I know probably a number of us believed that our life was made better by being in the Navy. We were helping out at home in this manner, too. There probably wasn't too many affluent sailors aboard that ship or who had

families who were affluent families. Probably in the officers' rank, yes; but as far as the ordinary sailor, he had seen his rough times and things. So this was better than what we were going through.

Marcello: You didn't mention this earlier in the interview, but I've been told by several of the people that I have interviewed that economic reasons were responsible for their joining the Navy in many cases. Even though the Navy didn't pay very much, there was still a certain amount of security.

Papish: That is true. That's very true, because who would leave a \$15 a week job and join the Navy for a \$21 a month job (chuckle)? But, of course, too, it's like you say. We had a bed to sleep in; we had our regular meals. We didn't have that worry, so our \$21 a month was clear, so to speak.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and the coming of war, what changes did you detect in the training routine of the *Houston*?

Papish: The training routine of the *Houston*, we could see, was stepped up.

Marcello: In what way?



Papish: More drills, more general quarters drills, more short-range battle practices. Of course, with Japan acting up, we were more close to the source, I believe, over there. I don't think that there was a man on that ship that didn't believe that eventually we were going to be at war. We maybe had put it in the back of our minds and said, "No, it can't happen." But then, of course, there were questions raised and so forth and so on.

Marcello: At that time, when you thought of war coming or the possibility of war coming between the United States and Japan, did you have any doubts about what the outcome would be and as to how long this war might take place?

Papish: No, I don't think that there was a man on the *Houston* that believed that if we went to war with Japan or war had broken out, even if we would have been transferred to the East Coast and fighting on the Atlantic or something else like that, that we were going to lose any war.

Marcello: At that time what was your opinion of the Japanese Navy, if you can remember what it was

during that period before war actually took place?

Papish: The Japanese Navy, as far as the American sailor was concerned, was that, number one, they couldn't see right (chuckle), that their sight wasn't as good as ours and so forth. Why we ever got some kind of an idea like that, I don't know, because I don't think that we were subjected to propaganda or anything else like that. But just the mere fact of what we saw and the bombing of the *Panay* and things that were happening actually in China, we didn't feel that they were very superior, as far as sailors were concerned or as far as their army was concerned. I think that we were instilled probably with a confidence. In these drills we were constantly told, "Well, this drill was fine, very good, but let's do it better the next time." We were never harassed as to, "My God, you don't know what you're doing," and things like that. We were praised quite frequently by the captain getting on the speaker system and so forth. All in all I don't think that there was any other ship in the Navy that had a crew that the *Houston* had.

Marcello: Let's talk about December 7, 1941. Where were you when you heard the news that the Japanese had attacked at Pearl Harbor? This would have been December 8, 1941, over there.

Papish: Right. On December 8, we were awakened in the morning. We were at anchor at Iloilo off the island of *Panay*. Iloilo is on *Panay*. Oddly enough, this brought back memories to me because of the reason I wanted to join the Navy, because of the sinking of the *Panay*. Then, lo and behold, here we are, on the island of *Panay*. We were told, "All hands, man your battle stations!" General Quarters went: "All hands, man your battle stations!" We went to our battle stations, and the captain got on the P.A. system and announced that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, that we were now at war with Japan, and that the *Houston* and all ships had orders to govern themselves accordingly.

Marcello: Let me ask you this, and you may not know the answer to my question. Why was it that you were at Iloilo rather than in Manila? Iloilo and *Panay* are south of Manila, are they not?

Papish: Yes, it is.

Marcello: Do you know why you were down there?

Papish: Yes. Admiral Hart knew what was coming, and I don't believe that there were two ships in any port around the Philippines together or in the same spot. The *Houston* was down in Iloilo, and I imagine the rest of the ships were stationed around the Philippines. Consequently, the only places where I think we lost ships--and they were small crafts--was in Cavite. They were in the Navy yard in Cavite. We were in the Navy yard, and they put the pom-poms on the *Houston*, but then we had since left and went down to Iloilo.

We were on liberty the night before. That was Saturday night. On Sunday morning when we were aboard ship, we heard, "All hands, man your battle stations!" We didn't have overnight liberty, and I think the curfew was either midnight or 1:00 for petty officers and so forth. My battle station aboard the *Houston*, when I first went aboard the *Houston*, was on the shell deck. I was trained as a shellman, first of all, moving the shells into the shell hoist. I was trained along those lines. Then I was, as you might say, promoted to the shell hoistman,

hoisting the shells up to the turret whenever they called for them. The manual part of my work was over. I mean, getting the shells and putting them in the shell hoist was more or less delegated to the seamen second class and so forth. When you made seaman first class, you got a promotion on your battle station, so to speak. So when I was transferred from the First Division to S Division...now I don't know whether you may have heard from Otto Schwarz, but he came aboard ship as a seaman and went to the First Division, and he went to the shell deck. Well, when I was transferred from First Division to S Division, a storekeeper division, I was assigned a different battle station. I was assigned to an after battle dressing station. This was more or less by the stern of the ship or in the stern of the ship. The after battle dressing station, of course, takes care of any injuries or anything that may happen from probably after the mess deck to the stern of the ship or anything that happens within that area. We were trained in all kinds of first aid and so forth. So that was my battle station, was the after battle dressing station. Here

again, we had training at the after battle dressing station. Here again, we had training after training. The pharmacist's mates, as the hospital corpsmen were known in those days, trained the other people--storekeepers, seamen, and anyone who was assigned to the battle station. We were, like I said, supposedly to take care of the wounded or anything that may have happened in that part of the ship.

Marcello: What was the reaction of you and your buddies when you heard about the Japanese attack and that a state of war now existed?

Papish: Well, number one, we were probably not really surprised, but maybe more surprised that Japan would take on the United States and the United States Navy. I think that that was more or less uppermost on most person's minds, was why, until we later found out how the Japanese had devastated Pearl Harbor. Well, then we were, I believe, in theory supposed to have been the first fleet to go if war ever came between the United States and Japan.

Marcello: Did you ever really know the extent of the damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor--ever?

Papish: Well, yes, because we were afloat from the 8th of December up there until the 1st of March. Yes, we were getting reports, not only from Tokyo Rose about the devastation at Pearl Harbor and what the Japanese had done, but we were getting our own reports, also.

Marcello: So what does the *Houston* do at that point then, that is, after word of war reached the ship?

Papish: Well, after word reached the ship, we waited around Iloilo. Everybody was wondering why we were still anchored, why we weren't putting out to sea. Well, eventually, word got back to the crew that we were waiting for an admiral to join the ship there in Iloilo, Admiral Glassford. As we got it, Admiral Glassford was a convoy specialist. That's what we had heard or was the word that had been passed around. A PBY landed in the bay there, and the motor launch went out and picked the admiral up and brought him back aboard ship. Immediately after he was aboard ship, we were underway. We came to find out that we were underway to convoy ships, more or less, from the Philippines to Surabaya, Java.

Marcello: And you were doing this for a considerable period of time before you actually had contact with the Japanese. It was almost a month, isn't that correct?

Papish: Yes, we were. Ships would come down, and we would pick up ships, and we were, I guess, to convoy them through the most strategic spots, through the Straits of Macassar and places like that. I think aboard ship there was a common idea that, "What are we doing this for? We're trained as fighters, and what are we doing? Whenever we see anything, the word is, 'Don't fire! Don't fire!'" I think that most of us didn't realize that the most important thing was to get the ships through, not to attack.

Marcello: So during this time, the duty was rather routine and perhaps even boring and frustrating.

Papish: Yes, yes, it was, because we were an 8-inch cruiser. We were a heavy cruiser, and we were a man-of-war. Of course, as the sailors know, when you are in a convoy with ships and you're taking care of a convoy, which we learned later on, you can only go as fast as the slowest ship. So you pick up a ship that can go eight knots or ten



knots or twelve knots and you're built for thirty-two knots, and in excess of thirty-two knots, and you feel like if something does happen you're a sitting duck. How are you going to maneuver? What are you going to do?

Marcello: There's another question that I want to ask you at this point. How much in the way of antiaircraft armament did the *Houston* have on board at that time?

Papish: At that time we had four 5-inch .25's on a port side and four 5-inch .25's on the starboard side, as near as I can remember. I'm thinking of the gun placements. Then we had pom-poms, 1.1 pom-poms, which were installed on the ship in Cavite before the war. The 5-inch .25's were a primary antiaircraft gun providing they had the right ammunition, but then, of course, we found early in the war when we were under aerial attack that the 5-inch .25 is not the gun to bring down a bomber that is over 25,000 feet high. So if they found out the range of our guns, all they had to do was go up a few thousand feet, and they were out of range. This, I think, was kind of known aboard ship.

Kind of going back in time, when we were in the Philippines, I wrote my parents once a week. My mother had a letter, and I don't know what I ever did with it. But she had a letter from me that was about the strikes on the West Coast. The longshoremen were striking on the West Coast for about two cents an hour more in wages and were holding up war shipments that were coming out to the Far East because they were striking. I told her in the letter, "They're striking on the West Coast," and I said, "For what?" I said, "The only thing that they're doing is putting us in a hole, and it's a very deep hole," little knowing that she would break out that letter and quote it to me word for word as to what I had to say before the war.

In addition, the guns were fine, but the ammunition was faulty. They had found that a lot of these antiaircraft shells were faulty. So we got whatever we could and shot off whatever we could.

So at times we felt that our hands were completely tied. All that they would have to do

was get a little bit more altitude, and we were kind of at their mercy.

Marcello: That's a point I was going to make. Unless you had some sort of air cover from land or wherever, the *Houston* was pretty vulnerable.

Papish: Very vulnerable because we didn't have any land-based planes. In fact, what land-based planes were in Java, PBY's, would set up over Japanese ships and radio the position of the ships. But the Army Air Force would take off from Java, and they couldn't find the PBY. This again was, "Well, what the dickens?"

Marcello: Of course, at the other end, that is, in the Philippines, most of that air force had been destroyed on the ground, so you couldn't expect anything from that end either.

Papish: That's right. So, like I say, we were very vulnerable. All the Japanese had to do was sit up there, and they were very famous for coming in on waves of nine. You have about a fifty-four-plane attack coming in on waves of nine and making a number of runs. Now this again, as far as Captain Rooks was concerned, is where the men were separated from the boys, so to speak, because he

was a captain that, like I say, men on that ship would follow through hell. And everyone will swear to this day that the Good Lord must have had His hand right on his shoulder because the bombing attacks that he brought us through and afloat from the time that war began until we were finally sunk was due, I think, to some sort of a miracle. Our fleet was practically demolished, but we were out there, and we were fighting. I think that at this time this is where we made history because we must have held them off or caused them to land on Java because, God knows, Australia was next. The *Houston* and the ships that were with the *Houston*, that fleet, I think, forced off any invasion on Australia and gave enough time to get repairs to some of the ships that they could repair and get them out to sea and do something.

Marcello: There are a couple things that we'll pick up on in a minute here. You mentioned Captain Rooks's seamanship, and we'll come back and talk about it a little bit later on. And you mentioned specifically, as I recall, fifty-four Japanese bombers.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: Now that's a good transition for my next question. On February 4, 1942, you had your first direct contact with the Japanese, and it involved an attack on a convoy by fifty-four bombers. Describe what took place that day.

Papish: If I can actually describe it, as I told you before, I was in the after battle dressing station. Turret three was the turret that was hit. Prior to that hit, I was kind of the low man on the totem pole, and I used to run water from the officers' quarters back to the after battle dressing station because that was the only place that the "scuttlebutt" [water fountain] was operative when we were at our battle stations. So I was more or less always called upon to go get some water, because of that heat. Because of the heat that we were in and laying down on the deck, I mean, it was nothing to be sloshing around in your own sweat on the deck. The battle station was in a compartment just aft of where the bomb hit.

Marcello: Now I'm assuming that when the attack actually took place, you were at general quarters, and you

actually were not seeing what was taking place outside.

Papish: No.

Marcello: Okay, describe what you recall when that bomb hit turret three. And it was a lucky hit, was it not, from everything we know?

Papish: It was. It was. To describe where I was, I was just forward of where the after battle dressing station was stationed. There's a bulkhead here (gesture), and there's a hatch that goes from this compartment (gesture), which was a living compartment, a sleeping compartment; and there's a hatch that goes through to the after battle dressing station, which was just forward, to the chiefs' quarters. The barbette was between and more or less bisected the bulkheads. Back next to the barbette was another hatch, which was an access to a living quarters below. This hatch was normally closed during general quarters. I was laying on the deck at this hatch.

When I graduated from high school, I had a beautiful nun who was one of my teachers. She was a home room teacher, and she had given us a miraculous medal. I carried that miraculous medal

around in my billfold. That day I laid down at the hatch cover, and to keep my hands busy I wove a lanyard. I put the miraculous medal on the lanyard, I tied the lanyard together, and I put this very same medal on.

I got up. I moved from that hatch back to the after battle dressing station. Just as I was about to lay down on deck, it was as if someone had just pushed me so hard that it was just kind of a daze. I skidded on the deck, which was wet from sweat, and there was the most God awful roar that anyone would hear. Well, that bomb had hit approximately six or eight feet from where I had been laying previously. Then, of course, the alarm sounded, and the petty officer in charge of the after battle dressing station said, "We're hit! Let's go!" We go out into the compartment with the battle lanterns.

There was a chief sitting on one of the bunks there, and I tapped the chief. I said, "Come on, Chief, let's go!" He fell over off of the bunk, and with the battle lantern, I could see that he was all torn up. Shrapnel had really just scattered through that whole compartment.

I looked around the compartment, and I found a seaman laying on the deck, and he was moaning. He was crying. He said, "Please help me!" I believe his name was Atterbury. I got him in a hatch in the middle of the compartment, midships, which goes up to the main deck. I dragged that young fellow up to the main deck and saw that he was really peppered with shrapnel. Why I looked down as I was dragging him up, I don't know. But I looked down, and there was an organ hanging from his side, which later, I understand, was one of his kidneys. I dragged him up to the main deck, and the pharmacist's mate was up there, and I said, "Here's Atterbury. Please take care of him." He said, "Okay, he'll be all right. See if you can find anything else."

I went back down below, and, of course, it was just more or less carnage in the whole compartment. It was smoke-filled, and also we were fighting fires.

Marcello: Is it not true that when the bomb hit, not only, of course, did the shrapnel do a tremendous amount of damage, but didn't it also catch powder and some other things on fire, also?



Papish: In the turret, yes. That was the main thing, in fact, that caused the death of most of the people in the turret--the suffocation and the smoke, I believe, and the fire in the turret.

Marcello: That powder evidently is highly volatile.

Papish: Highly volatile, yes. Fortunately, they do believe that the only fire that occurred was in the powder circle. When you're in the powder circle, unless you're shifting powder out, the powder circle doors are closed. The doors are only open when they're sending the powder out and up to the turret.

Then, of course, we came looking for wounded and were cleaning up debris and seeing nothing but a finger here or an arm here, in the debris, and men just torn apart (weeping). The after repair party, whose compartment I was in...and then we moved to the after battle dressing battle station to my compartment. The after repair party was practically wiped out to a man. This young seaman, as I say...I might be wrong about the name, but Atterbury sticks in my mind. Later on, he was taken off the ship and, I believe, buried in Tjilatjap.

The things that took place at that time showed the type of crew that the *Houston* had; I mean, when the chips were down, they were there. Of course, you're not going to be able to do anything after the bomb has hit, but afterwards and everything and to a man, I mean, I was proud, very proud, to be a member of that crew, to be a member of the USS *Houston*. That was a proud ship, a very good ship, and one of the best in the Navy.

Marcello: Where did you go after this engagement had been concluded?

Papish: The captain broke off the engagement, and we headed through Bali Straits. All the while and then that evening, there was the sound of hammers pounding, carpenters making the coffins to put the men in. What we did was put the dead on the fantail of the ship. I think we lost forty-eight men that day, or in the neighborhood. Every one of them was a fine shipmate. Anybody on that ship I would be proud to serve with anywhere in the United States Navy. But this was, you might say, our first real taste of war.

Marcello: I believe you then steamed into Tjilatjap itself, did you not?

Papish: Right. We steamed into Tjilatjap and offloaded our dead, buried our dead, put some of the wounded ashore, as I can remember. Then an inspection party came aboard. I believe Admiral Hart inspected the ship. He inspected the *Marblehead*. The *Marblehead* had sustained a hit, also. The *Marblehead*, we learned later, after we had gotten back out of the prison camp, had made it back to the East Coast, was refitted and everything, and came back out to fight again. The admiral looked over the ship and had looked at the *Marblehead*, and he said the *Marblehead* could try to make it back to the United States. She was no longer seaworthy or fit for engagement. She had lost her steering. She had gotten back to the States on her engine, steering by her engine. The *Houston*, Admiral Hart determined at the time...and I believe that this was common knowledge. He was heard to have said to Captain Rooks, "You have only lost a third of your firepower." He said, "You're going to have to go

back to the north of Java and engage the enemy again."

Marcello: In other words, there was no way that that turret could be repaired; it was out of action.

Papish: No way, no way. They finally got it back into a position which the Japanese spotters would still think that the turret was still in operation or that they hadn't done that much damage. Actually, the turret was sort of trained out when the bomb hit. It hit the mainmast, the top of the mainmast. This is where they believe that the bomb was fused. It came down through the mainmast, past the next deck--not actually a deck, but the part of the mainmast--down through that part of the structure, and then hit right at the leg of the mainmast tripod and then went down into the compartment and exploded. It actually exploded on topside, but it had penetrated down below, also. The back of the turret looked like someone had taken an acetylene torch and just burned holes completely, right through steel up to about an inch-and-a-quarter or two inches thick, the rear part of the turret. You just can't imagine holes being in that thick a metal.

Of course, the turret officer was completely blown in three parts. They think that he had the turret door open and was looking out. That compartment was the turret compartment. The officer's booth was separate from the inside of the turret, and he was in communication, of course, at any time with the inside of the turret.

But here again is a young man who still makes these reunions. His name is Leroy Buckner. This young man made quite a name for himself. He was a ship's cook and made quite a name for himself in helping put the turret fire out and things like that--not only helping along with the fire, but running sandwiches back to people, feeding them, keeping something in their stomach and so forth. Of course, not very many people had a stomach for eating at that time. But Leroy was there doing real good. Like I say, that crew was something else.

Marcello: Describe what takes place between February 4, when the *Houston* was hit, and February 25, 1942, when the Battle of the Java Sea took place. In

general terms, what was the *Houston* doing in that period?

Papish: We were sent back to the north of Java, and as we were going through Sunda Straits, I remember it vividly. We were "shooting the breeze" up on the forecastle, and there was an officer there amongst us sailors, and we were talking. We were talking about various things, and then all of a sudden this officer turned around, and he said, "Did you hear a door slam?" And it wasn't in the conversation at all. Everybody kind of looked at him: "What's the matter with you?" I forget the officer's name. "Nothing." Little did we realize that he must have had some premonition or something that if we were going to come back this way that we weren't going to be getting through. After the war and during the prison camp time, I often thought about this: "Did you hear a door slam?" So we proceeded through Sunda Straits, back up to the north of Java, and then, of course, we operated around the northern part of Java with the destroyers and so forth.

Marcello: Was this a mixed nationality of ships?

Papish: Very much so. It included the His Majesty's Ship *Exeter*, which made her fame in the sinking of the *Graf Spee* in the River Platte. How she ever got out there that fast, no one knows, but she wound up in part of the ABDA Fleet. We had Dutch destroyers, British destroyers, and Australian ships, particularly His Majesty's Australian Ship *Perth*, a cruiser. There was the *Jupiter* and the *Electra* and other ships of the British Navy and the Australian Navy. Of course, the Dutch Navy had ships with us, but they practically lost all of their ships in the Battle of the Java Sea.

I particularly remember one eerie night that no one could figure where they were coming from, but as we would go through these flares something would surface on either side of the ship. After we had gone through, it seemed like these flares were lighting, and I couldn't understand. Evidently, it was some sort of Japanese marking or something that was going on. And it was a very eerie feeling about what was happening.

Marcello: Eerie in the sense that you felt that at all times they seemed to know where you were and what you were doing?

Papish: That's it! That's it! No matter which way the ship turned and so forth, it seemed like these things would bob up. It was a feeling like you're being watched all the time.

Marcello: Now between February 4 and February 25, when the Battle of the Java Sea took place, were you engaged in any direct action against Japanese planes and ships in that period?

Papish: Yes, we were. Not the planes so much. Oh, from time to time, when we pulled into Surabaya, yes, we went through some bombing runs and things like that. Here again, the *Houston* was not hit. Then, of course, comes up to the Battle of the Java Sea.

Marcello: Let me ask you this, and this is something you made reference to a while ago. I want to get more specific. You mentioned Captain Rooks and how the crew really during this period developed the tremendous respect for him. This was because of the seamanship that he exhibited, among other things, isn't that true?

Papish: Yes, very much so, yes. I mean, he knew just when to turn and so forth. As I understand it, he had a fire controlman in the foretop who had his



glasses trained on the bombers, and he would inform the captain as to the release of the bombs. I don't know how--maybe through mental calculation or what--but he would relay the height, the speed of the bombs, when the bombs were released, and how much time there was to do this and do that. My God, how can a man just mentally calculate something like this and say, "Right full rudder! Left full rudder! Full speed astern! All engines astern!" and go through every maneuver known to a sailor and come through that thing? The bombs were straddling us and so forth.

My God, I remember running for water at that time, too, from the after battle dressing station and going across the deck and seeing these plumes of water shooting up, you know, all around us. In fact, I remember me even catching some of the spray and some of the downpour from those straddles and bomb hits. Here again, it didn't seem to bother me, but they were dropping all around, and I was going across the quarter-deck in open space up to the wardroom to get water to go back to the after battle dressing station.

Marcello: During this period, what kind of sleep or rest are you and the crew getting?

Papish: Very little, sometimes at the battle stations. In fact, some of the sailors were even taking to sleeping on their battle stations. Even when you're in a secure position, Condition One or Condition Two, whichever you're in, you'd be sleeping right there at your battle station so that you're not going to have to run as far. I think that probably, subconsciously, you're thinking, "Well, I don't want to be below decks. I want to be up topside. I want to see what's happening instead of being below decks." At night, if you're down below and you figure you're going to catch a torpedo or something, you don't want to be in any one of those berthing compartments and so forth.

But, anyway, from the time that we did get hit on up, the crew was acting automatically. I wouldn't say that they were like a bunch of zombies. I'd say it was just an automatic reaction from the training that we did have. A zombie is not the description for it, and going around in a daze is not the description for it. I

think that the description for it is being subconsciously alert.

Marcello: During this period, do you ever hear anybody say, "We're not going to make it."

Papish: No. The only reference to that was, "Did you hear the door slam?" And as I say, later on, when I thought about that, this officer must have had some sort of premonition that this was going to happen.

Marcello: During this period of time, how often had the Japanese sunk the *Houston*?

Papish: Let's see. One time in Iloilo, once coming down through Macassar Straits (Tokyo Rose again), once in Darwin. That was when we had to bring the convoy back, and the next day the Japanese hit that area. Here again, Captain Rooks in Darwin said, "We're going to get underway as soon as we bring the ships back in." We got underway that evening, but Tokyo Rose said they got the *Houston* in Darwin. Then, of course, on February 4, they got the *Houston* again. I think it's either in the neighborhood of six or seven times that the *Houston* was sunk before she actually went down.

Marcello: As a result of all of these claims that the Japanese made, what was the nickname that developed for the *Houston*, do you recall?

Papish: "The Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast." Very affectionately named that by the crew.

Marcello: This brings us up, I think, to the Battle of the Java Sea, which occurred on February 25, 1942. Describe what happened during this period.

Papish: During this period, this was a hectic period-- very hectic. Admiral Hart was gone. He was reassigned. Admiral Doorman took over, a Dutch admiral of the Royal Netherlands Navy, and he had the *Van Trump*, the *DeRuyter*, the *Java*, heavy cruisers, light cruisers, and the *Kortenaer*. Those are some of the names that I can remember. It was a hodgepodge fleet, made up of all different nationalities. We were practically all English-speaking, and yet we had a Dutch admiral in charge who couldn't speak a word of English. So everything had to be relayed through an interpreter. Gosh only knows how it was interpreted.

But, anyway, the Battle of the Java Sea took place around dusk. We engaged the fleet, the

Japanese ships. How many, I don't know. Figures escape me when I go into this.

Marcello: They are now preparing for the actual invasion at Java, is that correct? They are trying to destroy whatever is left of the Allied battle force at this point.

Papish: Yes. I think that that was their thinking, is come out and engage them. The engagement that took place was horrendous. Here again, just before dusk we were going into Surabaya, and all of a sudden we do an about face. In fact, I think at the time we were very close to a mine field, and we were skirting a mine field that the Dutch had put in and going back out to engage the enemy, so to speak. Some Japanese ships were spotted, and so, like I say, we do an about face and go back out. This is about dusk. All of a sudden General Quarters start: "All hands, man your battle stations!" And we commenced firing practically right away. Alongside us was the *Exeter*.

Here again, water was most important down there in the heat of this ship. When you're in that ship and battened down, there's no breath of

air stirring or anything else. I had a very good job, as far as being able to get up on topside and going back and forth. At least I was getting a breath of fresh air. I'd run this water back to the after battle dressing station. Going across at one time, I remember looking to the port side or starboard side. I always get starboard and port mixed.

Anyway, to my right were these ships, and one of them was the *Exeter*. Immediately she starts hoisting all these battle flags. I thought to myself, "This is crazy!" I said, "If the Japanese want a range, they can pick up a range on that!" The ship is camouflaged to a "T." It's painted a camouflage color here and camouflage color there to destroy their range-finding, and all of a sudden here's all these battle flags going up on the *Exeter*. I thought, "What the heck's to stop the range-finders on the Japanese ships from ranging in on those flags?" By gosh, the *Exeter* got it. While I was up there running across the deck, the Japanese had ranged in on her, and they were getting direct hits.

Marcello: And it was over pretty quickly, wasn't it?

Papish: Yes, for the *Exeter* it was. We continued on. When I was coming back with water, I could hear these shells going over [makes whistling sound], and, of course, the first thing that hits my mind is, "Why, hell, they always told us if you could hear them, you don't have to worry about it. It's the ones that you don't hear that's got you." So I could hear these strange sounds just like a freight train going over. They were lobbing over us and firing at these Dutch destroyers coming up. I can't name them. But all of a sudden...evidently, there were submarines within the area, too, because these Dutch destroyers were coming on our right side, and all of a sudden there's a tremendous explosion. This destroyer just breaks in half and comes up and is going down. While it's going down, here's a Dutch sailor hanging onto the flagstaff, the forward flagstaff, of the destroyer, and waving like heck and waving the *Houston* on. And I thought, "That's really something!" I remember, as I was going aft at one time, our destroyers, two of them, were crisscrossing our path and dropping their depth charges, and I thought, "My God!" Then all of a

sudden, I mean, these depth charges are going off, and practically in the middle of all of this water and everything else it looked like it just raised a submarine out of the water, broke it in half, and sunk. I mean, they had found this sub, I guess, and ranged in on this sub.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that we're not talking about a patterned or disciplined activity? It's almost like a melee, is it not, a free-for-all?

Papish: This is it; this is it! It's every man for himself, so to speak.

Marcello: Every ship for itself.

Papish: Yes. Off in the distance we could see the *DeRuyter* afire; we could see the *Java* afire; we could see the *Van Trump*, which was the flagship, I believe. It was either the *Van Trump* or the *DeRuyter*, which was the flagship of Admiral Doorman. All these ships are going down around us. Here we are. We're still spitting out...we're still firing, and we're still going. I don't know how many ships we actually got, but we sure as heck did our part.

Marcello: Evidently, from everything that I have read, the Japanese were very well trained for night action.



Evidently, they had been practicing for years for night battle.

Papish: Yes, yes, yes. That's true.

Marcello: I'm also assuming that by this time, ammunition and so on must be getting pretty low aboard the *Houston*.

Papish: Very low, very low. In fact, the crew started talking, "Well, what are we going to do for ammunition?" Not thinking, "Well, they're going to get us, too." But we're thinking ahead: "Where are we going to get this? Where are we going to get that? Are we going to starve before we get provisions, or are we going to run out of fuel before we can get more fuel?"

Marcello: Were they cutting back on rations at all at this point yet?

Papish: Not yet. We had a lot of ham on board (chuckle) and coffee. As long as the guys had their ham sandwich...and we had a baker aboard ship, and we had flour. I was in the Storekeeper Division. So these things, provisions, as far as that was concerned, didn't bother me because I had sort of a knowledge going around to the various people who were in charge of storerooms and things like

that. I knew what was aboard ship, and as long as they were feeding me a ham sandwich I was okay. That's about all you figured on eating anyway.

Marcello: Okay, describe what happens then when the battle was finally broken off.

Papish: The battle is broken off, and we proceed to Batavia, which is now Djakarta in Indonesia. We proceeded into Batavia to refuel, and we refueled more or less at the point of a gun. I mean, they weren't going to let us have any fuel.

Marcello: These were the Dutch authorities?

Papish: The Dutch and the Javanese. I understand, from what was said in the prison camp later on, that the northwestern part of Java was very anti-Dutch, so at the docks there they weren't going to give us fuel. So we said, "By gosh, if You're not going to give us fuel..." they brought the guns out, and they said, "We're going to take the fuel," as I understand it. So we refueled the ship.

During the engagement we had sustained a couple hits. I remember looking at one hit that came down and went through the forecastle of the ship, through the top, and out the side. We

sustained a small caliber hit in one of the after oil tanks, and that thing went in there and never did explode. In fact, it probably went down with the ship.

So we refueled in Batavia. We got what we could and took off. Dutch reconnaissance planes, as I understand it, had reported back that there were no ships within 200 miles of the Strait.

Marcello: This is the Sunda Strait.

Papish: Sunda Strait. And if we were going to get through, now was the time to go. Well, we took off about 9:00 at night.

Marcello: And what day is this?

Papish: This is the 28th of February, 1942. We took off for the Sunda Strait. The way it's positioned, before we actually got to the Strait, we observed ships and we observed the landing force, the Japanese landing force and these ships in Bantam Bay. The *Houston* and *Perth* went into Bantam Bay in a half-moon circle, going in and firing. Of course, little did they know...well, maybe the captain knew, but I don't think any of the crew knew, that the Japanese ships were standing out, too. So I guess we must have gone in between the

Japanese battleships and cruisers and the landing force. Of course, we started firing. The minute we started firing, the Japanese started firing, too. I think to this day that any man who was taken prisoner figured that the Japanese got some of their own ships, too, because some of the shells, after they were fired, were going past us.

Marcello: Again, we're talking about another free-for-all, is that correct?

Papish: Yes, another free-for-all. But you might say it was a free-for-all in our favor at that time because we knew there was only the *Perth* and the *Houston*, so in any direction that we were firing, I mean, we were firing at an enemy ship. This, again, is a horrendous part. We're being fired at from all sides.

Marcello: With all caliber of weapons.

Papish: All caliber of weapons, torpedoes. My God, I think they even dropped some night bombs. I don't know. The flares that were dropped that night was just as if it was this light that we're sitting in right now.

Marcello: Japanese planes were dropping these flares.

Papish: Of course, the Japanese ships were shooting flares, too. Like, we generally shoot 5-inch flares. My God, those magnesium flares just light a place up just like where we're sitting under this light. It's a ghostly effect. I mean, you just can't actually imagine in your mind of what it looks like, but to this day you can picture in your mind what it looks like. But it's indescribable. Of course, there's firing and firing. We fired our last star shell on the ship, last bit of ammunition, point blank into a Japanese destroyer. A Japanese destroyer had illuminated us, had the searchlight on us, and I remember hearing somebody holler, "Put out that Goddamned light!" And they fired point blank, that star shell, into that searchlight, which couldn't have been no more than the length of this building away from us.

Marcello: So we're talking about a couple hundred feet at the most.

Papish: You could hear screams coming from the Japanese ship where these people must have been hit and so forth. It was just something. Then word come to abandon ship.

Marcello: In the meantime, the *Houston* by this time is just being plastered, is it not?

Papish: Yes. I've got a picture of it at home. I don't know if you have a picture of it, but it's a picture of the ship in action that night. It's coming from all sides. You don't know where to go on the ship for protection or anything else. You're supposed to be laying down on your battle station and so forth, and then all of a sudden, "Abandon ship!" Up the ladder you go, and you figure, "Well, bull! This isn't the place to be!" So you head back down. There's more protection down there than there is up there, you know. But then you get down the ladder, and they said, "Captain Rooks passed the word to abandon ship." "Abandon ship?" You have practiced "abandon ship." You have your various stations that you go to, but that's all by the board. You never expect to hear the words "abandon ship." Here I've been on the ship since June 4, 1939, and it's been my home for all these years. My friends are here and so forth. "No!" And then the second word comes to "abandon ship."

Marcello: Now is Rooks dead by this time?

Papish: Yes, I believe so. The fore part of the ship had been heavily hit. I understand that the officers by his side said the shrapnel had practically torn his back completely out. He was a hero, very much a hero. Then, of course, "abandon ship." Very painstakingly I sit up there on a bit and take my shoes off, I tie them together, and I put them around my neck.

Marcello: You had been trained to do this.

Papish: I had been trained to do this. But nobody told me about flashproof clothing. I had flashproof clothing on, and I had my helmet on. I had my life jacket on, and I look back, and I say, "No! I don't have to leave! We're going to get through this!" I don't know why, but, here again, even at this time, you're thinking, "No, it can't be!"

Marcello: In the meantime, the Japanese are still working it over.

Papish: Still working it over. So the second word came to "abandon ship." Like I say, I painstakingly go through this whole routine, and somebody had taken my life jacket. I had a billfold in it and a life jacket that was assigned to me. It was a kapok life jacket, and I had this billfold with

my pay accounts and everything else because I worked in the pay office. The favorite trick of the sailor was to have an extra billfold with some money in it, with anything in it that you thought was valuable to you, and put it in a condom. Then you tie your condom off, and you make it waterproof so that when you get ashore, you got some money, you've got your pay accounts in case you need them so that somebody could take up your pay accounts, and things like this. Somebody had gotten my life jacket, so I put another life jacket on over the top of the flashproof clothing, and it's right at the after part of the ship. There are two bits where you tie up the stern when you're tying up. I sat there for a while not thinking, but then I thought, "It's time to go." So I got over the life line and was standing there, and I pushed myself off the ship and into the water. To this day I'll never know what guided me through, but alongside the ship is the propeller guards, struts, that are sticking out with bars coming this way, this way, and this round, sort of a protective deal so ships don't get close to the



screws on the ship (gestures). I must have gone right between one of those struts, didn't even touch it. I had the steel helmet on, and if I would have caught one of those struts...and it was strapped on, which shouldn't have been. If I would have gone and caught that strut, I would have had a broken neck, and that would have been it. I could have hit one of those struts there right in the middle, and I could have had a broken back. I mean, that would have been it. But the nearest I can figure, I went right through that thing, right through those struts and all.

Marcello: What was the height from which you jumped into the water?

Papish: The height was about, I would say, was this wall and half again.

Marcello: So we're talking about maybe fifteen or twenty feet?

Papish: Right. Of course, number one, the minute you hit the water, you're instructed to get away, because there's going to be a suction as the ship goes down, and you'll go with it regardless of life jacket or anything. So I'm trying to make my way, and I thought, "Well, to hell with this! I've got

this flashproof clothing on!" So I spot a yellow life raft out there all by itself, one of the aviation life rafts. So I crawl aboard this thing, and I take my life jacket off, and I put it there, and I even tie it to the lanyard that's around the life raft so it doesn't get away. Then I proceed to take my flashproof clothing off--take this off, take the pants off. All the while, stuff is going into the ship. I can see all of the explosions and all this carnage taking place.

Marcello: At one point I do know that the Japanese even raked the ship with machine fire, they were that close. Do you remember that?

Papish: Yes, yes, I do. In fact, when I was aboard this darned life raft and taking off the clothes, I mean, all of a sudden I hear this, "Zzzzing!" and "Psshew!" These shells had gone through the life raft, and the life raft was folding up on me. I thought, "To heck with this!" And I had to untie my life jacket and get it back on and then get away from that raft. In fact, I think that that was the machine gun fire. Here again, "Why me?" Everything was happening around me, and yet to come through kind of unscathed. Now I'm getting

away from this life raft. I'm not burdened down with those anymore.

Marcello: Are you down to your skivvies?

Papish: I'm down to my skivvies, yes.

Marcello: What about a T-shirt?

Papish: No, I took the T-shirt off, too.

Marcello: So you had just a pair of skivvies?

Papish: Dumb me, I came on shore with a pair of skivvies and the life jacket.

Marcello: Do you still have your shoes?

Papish: No. (Chuckle) I lost my shoes on the way there. Then, of course, I'm off the ship and swimming like heck, and I'm hearing these voices in the water and everything else. All of a sudden I figure, "Well, to heck with it!" I'm feeling all this slimy stuff on me and everything else. And I'm feeling kind of hungry, and I pick up something in the water. It must have been a sea onion or something like that. It tasted just like an onion, and I ate it. That was a big mistake because the next morning...and while I was in the water that night, I mean it's such an odd feeling. You feel the concussion of the shells in the ship, but, also, you feel these torpedoes, I

understand, going through the water. Because while I was in the water, it felt like somebody just had their hands on my stomach and was just trying to pull it out. It was just some sort of...felt like a suction.

After a bit I didn't think any more about it, and I got over. Evidently, I found a life raft with people clinging onto it and everything. So I get by this raft, and I'm hanging on to this raft during the night, and we're trying to get bearings and stuff like that, go this way and go that way. Some boatswain's mate is hollering, "Stroke! Stroke!" on some kind of raft over there, and everybody is saying, "My God, where's he stroking to?" Anyway, then comes the dawn.

Marcello: In the meantime there's some pretty strong currents through there, are there not?

Papish: Very much so. Well, this is what we find out later. I mean, it comes the dawn, and you see land, and you figure, "Which way?" You don't know which way you're swimming. You don't know whether you're going to Krakatoa...there's an island...well, St. Nicholas Light and then there's a small island, which I understand some

people landed on. Then there's Sumatra to one side and Java to the other side. So how do you know which way you're going? You don't have a compass, and you don't have your bearings. Of course, you know which way the sun is coming up. That's the way I determined which way to swim. So the sun is coming up in the east, so I figure the best place to swim to is the east, which is possibly Java.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago that during the night you felt slimy and so on all over. Was this from the oil?

Papish: Oil. And that, of course, is the big thing, too. Once you detect oil, they tell you, "Get away from it or get down below it and kind of wash yourself off. If you have to come back up for air, you do. You come back up for air, you take another breath, and try swimming underwater as much as possible." Well, try swimming underwater with a life jacket on (chuckle). Anyway, this is all going through your mind, and you're trained that way. This is why I say the United States has the best trained Navy in the world.

So I'm on this raft, and up comes the sun, or it's daylight, dawn. Immediately we're greeted by Zeroes, and they're coming in, and they're machine-gunning. I'm thinking, "Man, this is something else! We don't have any weapons; we don't have anything! What do they get out of this, machine-gunning these people in the water?" At that time I was on a raft or with a raft. You don't get on a raft if you're not incapacitated. The injured are in the raft, but you're on the outside if you can manage it. So these planes are coming in on us, and here's one of my shipmates, Eugene "Punchy" Parham. He is on the raft. As near as "Punchy" and I can figure out, there was another guy by the name of Reynolds, who was a redhead. "Red" Reynolds, we called him. I looked over at "Punchy," and I said, "'Punchy,' if we're going to get out of this, we better get away from this raft because they're going to dive in on a raft." In other words, "Just stay away from me." Stay away from each other as much as you can, and you're not as big a target.

So we strike out from the raft, and fortunately, every now and then we would get into

a squall, a little rain squall. There is where it just seems like it's heaven sent. You're getting a little water on you, and you're hidden and so forth.

Now in the meantime, the Japanese had picked up a raft and towed it from ship to ship. The guy would go up, and he'd say, "No!" He'd come back down, and this motor whaleboat was hauling this raft around that had us on it to this ship. We thought, "Well, they're going to put us aboard ship for a working party or something like that." Anyway, they came back, and they said, "No!" They took us back out to around the middle of the Strait, cut us loose, and cut us adrift again. Then afterwards is when the Japanese Zeroes were diving in on us. So that is when we struck out away from the raft and were going through these squalls and all.

I understand that Ensign Nelson had traded his Naval Academy ring to one of the natives to go out with his boat and pick up survivors from the *Houston*. I understand "Punchy" was picked up by Nelson, but I don't know how Reynolds got ashore. But some of the people that were on the

raft that "Punchy" and I were on, I don't think, ever made it into the prison camp. I think they either floated out into the Indian Ocean, and that was it and so forth.

Anyway, when I made it ashore, I figured it was about 4:00 in the afternoon by the way the sun was, and that figures out to about eighteen hours in the water. When I got up to the beach and I could get my feet in the sand, I thought...well, in the meantime...well, before this, because of the tide and the current, you'd get in close, and immediately it would take you back out. You'd get in close, and immediately it would take you back out. I was getting pretty exhausted, and I figured, "Boy, if I make it, I'm going to have to make a last ditch effort." So I took off for the beach, and I get up on the beach. Of course, here again, training again is that once you hit the beach, get up as far as you can so that if you collapse or anything like that, the tide that comes back up won't drag you back in or something like that. So I got up on the beach, and I remember trying to straighten up, and I couldn't straighten up. My life jacket



was so water-logged that I just collapsed right there on the beach, and I guess I must have slept through the night.

The next morning when I woke up, I started to take my life jacket off and...going back a little bit, when I was in the water during the dawn, evidently this onion didn't set too well, and I had to vomit. So when I vomited, I vomited blood. I figured, "Well, what's the matter?" In the meantime, through the night, my side had been sore, and I thought maybe it was a stitch in my side or something from all that swimming and activity. I didn't pay too much attention to that because it wasn't paining too much. But it was uncomfortable. So the next morning when I woke up and I started to take my life jacket off, I looked down, and in the side of my life jacket, in the kapok life jacket, was a piece of shrapnel about the size of my fist embedded in the life jacket right in the area where I was hurting. Evidently, it had hit with such force but had not penetrated, and it probably hurt something over here (gesture), and consequently that was what caused the vomiting of the blood during the

morning hours. What has always amazed me is why I didn't notice this piece of metal while I was in the water--part of the jacket, while you're floating in it. Then, of course, when I woke up and I looked, there were several other guys around me.

Marcello: So battle exhaustion had just finally caught up to you by the time you got to shore.

Papish: Yes. And I kind of felt secure when I got ashore. I thought, "Well, to heck with this," and I just collapsed. I guess I slept through from 4:00 until the next day. When I woke up the next day the sun was coming up again. Why I wasn't found, found by the natives or found by the Japanese or anything else, I didn't know. But looking at a map now, Bantam Bay is up on the northern coast of Java, practically on the northern coast. The entrance to the Sunda Strait is this way here (gesture). So the battle is taking place in here (gesture), and evidently a current had taken part of us around this point and then down the coast of Java. As near as I can figure, I was not on the very southern but, you might say, about the mid-section of Java, between Bantam Bay and the

southern part of Java. Evidently, the soldiers were landing up there in Bantam Bay, and we were farther down the coast.

So when I woke up, these guys were around me, and I think we had an officer with us. I think it was Ensign Hamlin. He got us all together, and there were about eleven of us all gathered together. So the first place we make for is this sort of a house, a beach house. Of course, we're looking for food, too, and everything else. Here I am, in a pair of skivvies, barefooted, and that's the sum total of my possessions when I got ashore. So we find some few things to eat. The house was completely deserted, and we found some things to eat. Then we started walking.

Marcello: Were you walking with a purpose, or were you simply walking inland for whatever reason?

Papish: Well, first we were walking in for cover, and, man, it is cover! It's jungle. Anyway, we find a road. We were loose four days before we were captured--this little band of ours. We felt we were walking toward the south of Java where we understood they would be evacuating from--

Tjilatjap and places like that. Well, little did we realize that we were probably walking in a circle there on the northwestern tip of Java.

Anyway, we're walking and we come on a deserted--what appeared to be--hospital hut. They had sheets, and they had some of these cloth things, square cloth things. Somebody says, "Oh, I saw one of those natives when I was on liberty wearing one of these things. They were sarongs." So immediately I thought, "Man, that's for me. All I've got on is a pair of skivvies." So I get one of these blue sarongs, and I put it around me, and I feel a little bit more decent. But I still had no shoes. During this four days I don't know just exactly what transpired, but from March 1 until March 4 we were loose.

The fourth day of our trek, we had found a road--a macadam road, they call them. It's just like our tarmac or paved roads, the oil-paved roads. So we started following this. Evidently, we were going back to the north of Java and Bantam Bay.

Marcello: In the meantime, what sort of a reception are you receiving from the Javanese?

Papish: None whatsoever. They were around us, but they were staying away from us. There's no attempt to even try to contact us. If we tried to ask them for food and things like that, off they'd go. How we subsisted for those four days, I really can't describe it, but there's a four-day interval that we were walking and sleeping at night and then walking.

Then on the fourth day, all of a sudden out comes these natives, and they had these sarongs on, and they had these bolos on their back. This old guy evidently must have been the chieftain of the lot, but he lays us down in the middle of the road on that hot pavement. It must have been at noon or close to noon or something like that, and this sun is bearing down on this hot pavement. He's making this band of eleven men lay down in the road on our backs. So I'm laying there, and he's giving a speech to the natives alongside the road. We're not knowing what kind of a speech or what he's talking about or anything else, but every once in a while he'd utter a cry and put his ol' bolo up in the air, and they'd all say,

"Dodo!" or something like that. That's as near as I can remember of what they were hollering back.

All of a sudden, he jumps up in the air, he twirls around, takes his bolo, runs it down from my chin to my crotch, and I thought, "This is it! This is where Papish meets his end!" So lo and behold, he jumps off of me, twirls around in the air again, jumps astraddle the next guy, and does the same thing. Well, he does that to all eleven, right down the row. Well, the last guy knows what's coming, so he's not worried too much. He's not going to get cut (chuckle). But me, I'm first in line, and, my God, I tell you, you don't know what's going through your mind at the time.

So he does this, and all of a sudden this sort of a panel truck appears on the road; and he pulls over to the side there, and this guy gets out. He's got a turban on, but he's dressed western-style. This panel truck had a red cross on it, and this is where you start thinking, "My God, the International Red Cross is on the scene already, and everything is going to be all right!" But looking closer, this red cross had been filled in to make a fire ball.

Marcello: In other words, it had on it the rising sun of Japan.

Papish: That's it. Well, "rising sun" is the word for it. We had another word for it (chuckle). Anyway, he comes up. Of course, I'm there and he looked at me, and he has this little silver pistol he's waving in the air. I'm looking here at the guy, and he started to talk real good English. He puts that gun to me, and he says, "Did you steal or did you kill anybody for that sarong?" I said, "No." I said, "We found this sarong up there at this hospital thing." He kind of shook his head, and then the rest of the guys said...some of the others had stuff, you know, and he said, "If you stole or if you killed anyone, you must pay with your life." I said, "No, I didn't steal it. I didn't kill anybody for it. I found it." Well, he seemed satisfied with that. He got us in this truck and then took us to a compound down further. We found out later that this was probably near Pandeglang, Java. So they put us in a compound there, and I remember some Dutch women being in the compound, too, and white women. So they had some rice cooking there, and fried

bananas, which later on I found out were plantains or whatever you call them. That was about the first food we ever got, that those Dutch ladies fed us. Then they put us in there. They said, "Okay, you can sleep in there."

Marcello: And how many Americans were there?

Papish: There was eleven of us in this one band. I've been trying to pinpoint some of them. In fact, I think I found one of them at the last reunion. His name is Stoddard. Anyway, now we're feeling, "Well, here we are. Now what?"

Marcello: You're still under the control of the Javanese. There are no Japanese around yet.

Papish: There are no Japanese around yet. So this jail is built...it's not a jail, but a compound--whatever it was. I can visualize a fence around the thing and then these huts that had a dirt floor and a pallet slanting down from the wall to about a foot or a foot-and-a-half off the floor, slanting down. This was our introduction to the way they sleep, I guess, in these huts. So we bedded down. There was about four or five of us in this one room.



We go to sleep, and all of a sudden the next thing I remember is that somebody's got me by the feet and pulling me off of the pallet. He bounces my behind off of the floor, on this dirt floor, and I'm thinking, "This is a hell of a trick to play on a guy!" I come up, and I'm ready to fight. Well, when I'm ready to fight, I got this gun and bayonet pointed at my head, and I'm thinking, "Oh, my God!" Well, it was a Japanese soldier. This is our first introduction to the Japanese--my first introduction. So all of a sudden I just went like this (gesture), and he prodded me out.

Marcello: So in other words, you just put up your hands more or less, like, "I'm not giving any resistance."

Papish: That's it. "Well, go ahead. If you're going to do it, that's it." Anyway, he prodded us and prodded us out of there and got our whole group together.

The next thing we know, we end up in Serang, Java. Now other people had been taken from places and all gathered into this place. It was called the theater. We call it "the theater." We were in

this. It was actually a theater or movie house.

[tape turned over]

Marcello: When we stopped the tape a moment ago, we had been to the point where you were about to enter the Serang theater, as it is now identified.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: Let me ask you some questions. At this point, that is, between the time you had your initial contact with the Japanese and you were incarcerated in Serang theater, were you ever roughed up physically in any way at this point?

Papish: At this point, no, because the eleven of us weren't in contact for four days with the Japanese, and then the time we come in contact with them is with the rifle incident. And this is when you start really thinking.

Marcello: And how many Japanese were there?

Papish: I couldn't tell you. There was maybe a dozen, half-dozen, all going around to these various places where the guys were sleeping and rounding them out, rousting them out. Actually, there was no real physical contact except the harassment with the bayonet and the gun. I don't remember of getting a rifle butt or anything at that time.

Marcello: Were these front-line troops so far as you recollect?

Papish: I would say yes. In fact, these were probably some of the Japanese that landed in Bantam Bay and that we had inflicted the various damages that they attribute us in Bantam Bay.

Marcello: Describe what they looked like physically and also in terms of their uniforms and equipment and so on.

Papish: Physically, they were sort of a small stature. They had this sort of little beanie cap with, as I remember, a star on the cap. They were in, oh, I would say, a khaki cloth that was sort of like our drill uniform. He had wrapped around his legs the leggings. One thing that we noticed right off was the split-toed shoes, sort of a tennis shoe and split between the big toe and the next toe. It wasn't very unusual to see a Japanese standing to attention with his gun to his side and have a bayonet extending over his head. Some of them were of real small stature.

Marcello: How did you get from the jail at Pandeglang to Serang?

Papish: I think they took us by truck, a stake truck, and they unloaded us at this theater, and they herded us into the theater. Here again, they were just pushing you along with the rifle butt, but still no real rifle butt activity. They weren't real aggressive, but it was just the prod sort of thing.

Marcello: Now describe your own physical appearance and so on at this point.

Papish: Well, my physical appearance at this point was probably very lean, because I started out probably at 140-145 pounds. By the time we got into Serang, with just a couple of meals under our belt, I guess we were feeling pretty hungry. One thing that I recall about the theater, here again, is being in the right place at the right time, I guess, if you want to term such a thing as this. I managed to get a spot on the theater stage. A lot of the guys had to make do with the seats and stuff, which were very uncomfortable.

Marcello: Describe what that theater looked like on the inside.

Papish: Well, as near as I can remember, there was a stage at the foot of the theater, and there was

an access of steps going down, or else you could jump down. As near as I can recollect, I don't know whether there was a balcony or not. Anyway, in the back stood the Japanese at each exit and entrance, and you couldn't move without asking to go here or there. Being on the stage, I had sort of a view of what was taking place. Us people who made our beds on the stage could see what was happening. Once, I guess, you staked your claim wherever you were, I guess it was honored amongst the rest of us. In other words, this part of the stage belonged to me, and I could lay down here. There was no encroachment, I don't think, into somebody else's territory, so to speak.

One thing I remember about the stage very vividly is one of our boys who was in turret two, which caught a tremendous amount of shell fire. As I remember him, his name is William Stewart. This boy was in the life raft, and the last time that I had seen him after getting off the ship was in the life raft. Then the next time I see him, he's in the Serang theater, and there's a pharmacist's mate taking care of him. Stewart was completely burned over his whole body, so to

speak. My God! This pharmacist's mate, I don't know how he managed it, but he was able to get water or talk the Japanese into water, which was a very precious commodity. And there was an old sort of a piece of canvas or what might have been part of the curtain from the theater, but he kept Stewart wrapped up in this canvas and kept him wet, constantly wet. Religiously, every morning while we were in that theater, he would unwrap him, and he would pull the dead skin off of his body. It got to a point where it was a stench. You got the stench of burnt flesh. Every now and then I can wake up at night, and this will hit me--the stench of flesh and also dead flesh. It never seems to leave you. But he would religiously just clean him, and he'd take this water and kind of keep him moist. He's still alive today.

Marcello: I've interviewed him.

Papish: You know, I have asked any doctors that I have come in contact with, "Tell me. Is being in this saltwater what saved this young man's life or what?" They can't give me an answer. I tell them how badly he was burnt, evidently in the powder

circle. It caught fire, and he was just one big blister, I guess.

Marcello: You mentioned these theater seats a moment ago. Were there actual seats in this theater as we know theater seats in this country?

Papish: As far as I recollect, yes, but they didn't have the arm in between. It seems to me like it was a folding chair of some kind, a folded seat, anchored to the floor.

Marcello: Was this theater constructed completely above ground, or did you kind of enter at ground level and then descend?

Papish: You entered at ground level, and then you descended a little bit. It wasn't a steep descent, but kind of a gradual descent. As you entered the theater, off to the left was sort of a courtyard thing, and this was our *benjo*, so to speak, our toilet. The Japanese word for toilet is *benjo*. Whenever you had to go, you had to get permission to go, or else you'd get slapped around. Now here is where contact began, I guess. Some guy would have to go in the courtyard, and he'd get up and start to go, and the Japanese

would come over there and really slap the living daylights out of him.

Little did we realize that they do this to their own people. We didn't know that at the time. Their discipline was something else. You get slapped around quite a bit. When you get slapped around and you see that nothing is really taking place about getting slapped around, then you get a little defiant, and you figure, "To hell with them! I ain't going to ask him!" And then you get up and go. Sure, you'd take your punishment and everything else, but you feel within yourself that you're...well, you feel better with yourself instead of raising your hand like this (gesture) instead of just taking off and going.

Another thing about the theater was the food--real raunchy. I remember a raunchy old rice ball, yellow in color.

Marcello: When you say a rice ball, how large would it be?

Papish: About the size of a baseball. There were things in it. Who knows what?

Marcello: When you say "things," can you be more specific?



Papish: Well, I'd think they were worms and stuff like that, but I don't know. Then lo and behold, one day they came in, and they had some meat, and each man got a small piece of raw meat. They gave us this meat, and immediately everybody and their ingenuity now comes to the forefront. We're going to build a fire, and we're going to cook this meat.

Marcello: Now you're inside or outside?

Papish: Inside the theater. But in the courtyard we think we can go out there and cook our meat, see. So they started to go out, and some of our Boy Scouts get together, and they get a fire going. Of course, the fuel is probably one of the seats or something that's found around there--wood. So they start this fire going and put this piece of meat on a stick, and they're kind of burning it and singeing it and stuff like that. Then the Japanese come in, and they see this. They're thinking that that's just the *benjo* out there, and they won't go near that thing. After all, there's feces and urine out there. So a little of the smoke wafts in, and they immediately run out there, and they start kicking this fire out and

everything else. "No! No!" We're still not too well-versed in Japanese, but you get the idea of "no fires." "Well, how are we going to eat the meat?" "You eat! You eat!" Believe me, you sit there, and you eat this raw meat. God only knows what it was. It was probably goat, dog, cat, or whatever. So that was it. I don't know, but I think that time-wise in Serang in the theater we must have been in there maybe two or three weeks.

Marcello: I think it varies. I've seen and heard that some people were there as long as six weeks.

Papish: That could be. I think I was one of the last that left out of there, so six weeks would probably...that would put it into...let's see. My birthday is April 4, and we were captured on March 4.

Marcello: So that may have put it into the early part of May.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: You go to Bicycle Camp in May, do you not?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: Let me ask you a couple more questions about Serang before we leave this. You mentioned that the courtyard was used, among other things, for

the latrine facilities. How large was this courtyard? Give me an estimate.

Papish: Oh, I'd say that this courtyard, as near as I can remember, is probably from that pillar to the wall there and as wide (gestures).

Marcello: So we're talking about an area that's no more than maybe four of five feet-by-ten feet?

Papish: I'd say that my nearest recollection is that's what it would be.

Marcello: Approximately how many people were here at this theater to use latrine facilities of that size, which is not very large?

Papish: Let's see.

Marcello: Let me start this way. Was the theater crowded?

Papish: Yes. They might have been able to lay down in the seats after they put them down when they slept or something like that.

Marcello: Were there nationalities other than Americans in that theater?

Papish: Australian, I remember, and American. I'm very poor at estimating numbers.

Marcello: Let me throw out a figure, and you tell me if I'm right or wrong, and maybe we can arrive at some

sort of a happy medium. Let's start at 500. Were there that many?

Papish: No, I don't think that that theater would hold 500.

Marcello: Were there more than 200?

Papish: I think there was more than 200. It could be a figure, I would, say that maybe it held very little over 200, maybe 210 or 215.

Marcello: But again, going back to the size of those latrine facilities, it seems to me that that would have been inadequate for that many people.

Papish: Well, let me put it this way. At the time, no, it wasn't, because we hadn't eaten very much. I think that I went from the time that I hit the beach until sometime in mid-April before I even had a bowel movement. Now that's going a month or so before I even had a bowel movement. I think that most of the people were faced with that because I remember thinking, "My God! I haven't gone to the bathroom except for urinating for I don't know how long!" But then when I did start, I mean, that was it. I put it down to Serang and the raw meat and, of course, the condition of the rice balls and things like that. I was finally,

at one time, diagnosed as having amoebic dysentery in the prison camp.

Marcello: This is after Serang?

Papish: This was after Serang. The first indication is when they transferred us from Serang into a jail.

Marcello: In that case, then, you probably weren't at Serang the entire six weeks because I think that after two or three weeks at Serang, they did transfer maybe as many as forty of you to a jail.

Papish: Yes, to a jail. That's it.

Marcello: Still in Serang, I think, though, wasn't it?

Papish: Yes. Yes, it was still in Serang. This jail, I remember now, as being a regular jail with the walls around it, the concrete walls and so forth, with a big wooden door. It had sort of a high wall rounded at the top. If I remember, it had the jagged glass around the top. The wall, I think, was maybe ten or twelve feet high as near as I can recollect.

Now after we were in the jail at Serang at about the time that they were going to Bicycle Camp, one morning we were awakened again with trucks pulling up. We hear these trucks outside, and all of a sudden they open these doors and in

come these Japanese troops, and they've got machine guns. They came in, and this officer in charge is giving his orders to his troops. In the meantime, they're going in the cells and rounding us out of these cells. The cell doors are open; I mean, we had access to the courtyard and stuff like that. We weren't actually locked in. So they're rounding up all these people, and they line us up against the wall. In the meantime, when they're lining us up against the wall, the troops were setting up the machine guns. As I remember, there were three machine guns--one at each end and then one in the center. They set the machine guns up and lined us up against the wall, the prison wall, and I thought, "Well, here it goes again." So this is about the third time now that the "end of Papish" is in sight.

We're lined up, against the wall, and this Japanese officer comes up and he says, "Officer? Any officer?" in his broken Japanese. Mr. Hamlin stepped up, and he says, "Yes, I'm a naval officer." I think at the time he was Ensign Hamlin, or maybe he might have been a lieutenant (JG). I don't know. Anyway, I remember this

Japanese officer questioning Lieutenant Hamlin. Okay, he was Lieutenant Hamlin. He's questioning Lieutenant Hamlin, and he told him things about Bantam Bay. When Lieutenant Hamlin identified himself as being on the USS *Houston*, the Japanese said, "Oh, Navy ship! No good! Navy ship sink hospital ship in Bantam Bay!" Also, evidently, we sank a pony ship that hauled their carts for them. Evidently, the *Houston* and the *Perth* did quite a bit of damage in that area. He says, "No good!"

Then he says, "Who's the better man? Tojo or Roosevelt?" Lieutenant Hamlin said, "Roosevelt." So the Japanese officer hollered something back to the troops, he jumped back from Lieutenant Hamlin, and the Japanese start training the guns in on us. So then he stepped forward again, and he asked Lieutenant Hamlin, "Who's the better man? Tojo or Roosevelt?" Lieutenant said Roosevelt again. They started training in the machine guns on him. This happened about three times, and finally Lieutenant Hamlin said...he asked Lieutenant Hamlin, "Who's the better man? Tojo or Roosevelt?" Lieutenant Hamlin says,

"Roosevelt is my leader." Evidently, this sufficed. He talked to the Japanese, and they broke the machine guns down, and they went out. Then they started lining us up to load onto trucks.

Marcello: And is this when you went to Bicycle Camp?

Papish: This is when they loaded us up in the trucks to go to Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Before we get to that point, I was going to ask you some more questions here. I know that a lot of the *Houston* survivors were still encrusted or covered with oil. How about in your case?

Papish: Yes. We had no bathing facilities, that's for sure. We probably had oil in our hair. I don't think so much as for me because I was in the water, I think, long enough that...no, I don't think that I was encrusted with oil because I was in the water long enough. Evidently, it must have just worked off and on the beach there and in the sand. I remember rubbing maybe some oil off of my arms or something like that with sand, and then I went back down to the saltwater. But then that got too stingy.



Marcello: There's another question that I want to ask. You talked about being fed the rice and a little bit of meat and things of that nature. What were you using for eating utensils? Obviously, you hadn't taken anything into the water with you.

Papish: Well, at that time we had no utensils. You just ate your rice ball like you were eating an apple. It was so old that it just stuck together, and it was so old that you just bit it and ate it like an apple, as far as I can remember. Of course, the meat was the same way. No, I did not get any utensils, my gosh, until Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Who was doing the cooking?

Papish: I don't know. This stuff would come in some kind of containers, and then they would start handing out the rice balls. You'd line up and get your rice ball. People were trying to buy food. I know some people came in with money, and some didn't. But utensils were no problem because you didn't really need utensils. I didn't have any possessions except my sarong, my skivvies, and my medal around my neck.

This is another thing, too. The Japanese never did ask why or anything else. They didn't

jerk the medal off of me. They just didn't mess with it. We got slapped around, yes, for being defiant and things like that.

Then the other thing, too, was when they were loading us in the truck at the jail to take us to Bicycle Camp, I thought, "Well, I've been first in line for too long and really have been catching the brunt of it. I'm going to stand back and see what's happening." Well, as each guy would get up in the truck, they had these bamboo poles, and they'd hit them across the buttocks, across the back, or across the legs when his butt was on the tailgate and he'd get up there, you know, how you jump into a truck. They're swinging this bamboo, one on each side, and whaling the heck out of guys. So I was looking the situation over, and I said, "Hmm! They're not going to get Papish that way." I was about last in line, and what I did was that I put my hands on the tailgate, and I boosted myself up around and sat my butt on the tailgate. But about the time that I sat my butt on the tailgate, I caught a couple of bamboo poles right across the back and right across the side of the head. The guys said that

when I woke up in the truck going down to Bicycle Camp...I don't know how long I had been out, but, anyway, they hit me with a force that just pushed me up into the bed of the truck, and the guys just dragged me up there.

Marcello: Now by the time you get to Serang and Serang theater and this Serang jail, have your guards changed? In other words, you mentioned that you were originally picked up by front-line troops, so far as you could tell. Were you now under the control or care of rear-echelon troops at this point?

Papish: I don't know. I think maybe so because I understand later that they were meeting no resistance or opposition except probably from the 131st Field Artillery, which was maybe the only opposition that they were getting. As they were meeting less resistance, I guess this group was delegated to picking up and rounding up the prisoners and so forth. I wouldn't say that it stepped up to the extent of where it was really noticeable, except when you did get defiant a little bit, you were kind of put in your place.

But, no, I still think they were still front-line troops.

Then, here again, that trip from Serang to Bicycle Camp in Batavia was another thing. As I told you before, I hadn't gone to the bathroom or had a bowel movement in about six or eight weeks. Going to Batavia, this is where our knowledge of the Japanese language comes in. *Benjo* is about the first thing that you learn. *Benjo* is "go to the toilet." Going down there in that truck--I mean everybody--we'd go for a few miles or so, and somebody would start hollering, "*Benjo! Benjo!*" The Japanese driver would stop, and the Japs would jump out. More or less the convoy would stop, and they'd jump out, and, man, I mean, they'd disperse over to the side of the road. You weren't going to run, anyway, because the only place you were going to run was to where you were going to squat and have your bowel movement. By that time, I mean, things were setting in, and you'd get that cramp in your stomach, and, I mean, you better go.

Marcello: So you're talking about probably dysentery.

Papish: Yes, this is where I believe that I picked up my amoebic dysentery.

Marcello: Let me ask you a couple more questions before we get you into Bicycle Camp. You'd been a prisoner-of-war for, let's say, approximately six weeks from the time you were picked up until the time you got into Bicycle Camp. What thought was foremost in your mind during that period, if you can recollect?

Papish: During that period was, I think, about the time that your thoughts of survival came in. I, myself, felt that no way am I going to succumb to anything, or no way was I going to let anything get me down. I was going to do the best I could and live the longest I could under the circumstances. I don't know. As I said before, I'm a staunch Catholic. I was not completely raised a Catholic until about the fourth grade when I started playing and going around with some Catholic boys in the neighborhood. They asked me, "What are you?" I said, "I don't know." So I went and asked my folks, and they said, "Well, you're Catholic. You're baptized." So they said, "Well, if you're Catholic, you better go to church with

us at Saint Filomena's," which was a couple of blocks from where we lived. That was the time, I guess, when the whole family got back into the faith, and we started going to church at Saint Filomena's, and I made my first Communion and so forth and then went to school at Saint Filomena's. There was a space of time when we moved back to Pueblo and then back to Denver. I attribute most of my survival as due to my faith. I always had, you might say, my prayers to fall back on when things were getting rough. I handled them the best way I could.

We got into Bicycle Camp after all of this and found out that there was a Dutch priest that was a prisoner-of-war in the camp. He had Mass and everything. The Japanese allowed him to go ahead and say Mass and things like that, so I thought, "Well, this is getting back into it." So I talked to the Dutch priest and everything else, and I asked him, "Father, do you have a rosary?" He said, "Yes, I do." He gave me this rosary here. Periodically it comes apart and everything else, but I've carried that rosary with me ever since the Dutch priest gave it to me. I think

that there's one bead missing off of that rosary. I talk to schools in Denver--my daughter talked me into it--about my experiences in the prison camp and things like that. I show them the rosary, and there's one bead missing. I always tell the kids, especially if I'm talking to kids in the Catholic school, "If you'll notice, there's one bead of the rosary missing." I said, "I prayed that right off the rosary."

Marcello: At this point how long did you think you were going to be a prisoner-of-war?

Papish: Well, at this point I thought it was going to be a short while. We got out onto these working parties. The Japanese started taking working parties out of Bicycle Camp. The prisoners were taken out on working parties. This is where we find the introduction of Dutch trying to help.

Marcello: Before we get to that point, there are still some questions that I want to talk about before we get to Bicycle Camp.

Papish: All right.

Marcello: Pardon me for interrupting.

Papish: No, that's all right.

Marcello: How long did you think you would be a prisoner-of-war at this stage?

Papish: At this stage of the game and into Bicycle Camp, the beginning of Bicycle Camp, I thought that it was not going to be but a matter of a year or so from the time we were sunk. But, by gosh, once the United States got mobilized and on the way and got some of the ships fixed...here again, we didn't think that the devastation was that bad at Pearl Harbor. But, anyway, at that point I thought about a year.

Marcello: You've been a prisoner-of-war approximately six weeks from the time you were picked up until the time you get into Bicycle Camp, with the stops at Serang and the theater and the jail in between. What are you learning about being a prisoner-of-war? Are you learning that there is a particular way you have to act in order to survive? You mentioned a moment ago that survival was foremost in your mind. What were you learning about the Japanese?

Papish: About the Japanese, it was learning that they had the upper hand now, but it's not going to be for long. As I said, I believed at that time that an



invasion was just right around the corner onto Java and stuff like that, not knowing what the situation was or anything else like that. But then I was quickly learning, too, that...for instance, on the working party, right about now you learn that you better start doing things, maybe not to your liking, but you better just kind of stand back and see what's happening and then kind of make sure it's not going to happen to you. The way that I'm thinking is that it's not going to be very long.

Marcello: But is it safe to say that by this time you have come to the understanding that they have the guns, that they're in charge, and that you better do what they say, or you're going to be punished physically? And they really don't care whether you live or die, perhaps.

Papish: That's it! That's it! Yes, so you adjust accordingly. This brings up a point, too. I think in Bicycle Camp is where I got the blow to my way of thinking. We were out on working parties, and this one particular place that we worked in a working party was in the Dunlop tire factory. The Dutch at that time had, you might say, the

scorched earth policy. They set things afire, didn't let the Japanese have anything that they're going to be able to use or anything like that. So I guess it was one of the factories that they torched in Batavia. Well, it fell to the prisoners' lot to clean up what was torched and to salvage what was torched under the direction of the Japanese. So you go out on the working party, and the Dutch women tried to help you. Here's where you learn, too. They'd try to give you food and stuff like that when you're marching in the working party and the Japanese are around. They gave you the food, and then when they dodged out of the line, there was a Japanese on them and just beating the living daylights out of them. You see this, and you can't do anything about it. People did try to do something about it, but then they got the rifle butt, and they got slammed to the ground, and they got kicked and beat. But these women who were doing this, or the civilians who were doing this, are paying such a high price trying to smuggle you the food, so you tell them to keep away. "No, don't put yourself in jeopardy because you feel sorry." This was my way of

thinking. "Don't put yourself in jeopardy for the sake of giving me a few crumbs." In other words, "You take care of yourself, and we'll do the best we can." They were persistent. The Dutch women were persistent. They took their beatings. This is something that I imagine is prevalent in our society. We don't like to see anybody take a beating over something that they're doing for us.

Marcello: Just about all of the prisoners have a great deal of admiration for the Dutch women during this period.

Papish: Very much so, very much so.

Marcello: I guess most of the males were interned or were in some sort of a prison camp, were they not?

Papish: Yes. Right, right. Most of them were. You didn't see very many. You saw native men, yes, but as far as the white man is concerned, he wasn't very much in evidence.

Marcello: Okay, we finally have you to Bicycle Camp. Take me on a tour through Bicycle Camp. As we were coming in the front gate and as we moved around the camp, what would we see? In other words, give me a physical description of Bicycle Camp.

Papish: The physical description of Bicycle Camp, as I remember it in my mind, is that as you come in the gate, to your left as you're coming into the camp was the guardhouse. You marched past the guardhouse, they stopped the working parties, and they searched. Of course, the Americans and their ingenuity always pick up something that they think that they can use and that they can make something out of or something else like that. Everything is searched, and everything is confiscated, and that's it. So here's where you learn your art of concealment. As you're going in, on the left again, a little farther up, was an area which was known as the hospital area. To your right, around the perimeter of the camp, where I imagine that the Dutch soldiers used to stay, was a row of barracks. Then again, on your right you would go possibly twenty-five yards, and there was the first hut. In between was another hut. In all there was about three or four huts on the right side.

Marcello: By huts you're referring to barracks-type structures?

Papish: Yes, barracks-type structures. I was in the first row of huts, and then, of course, there were Dutch, too. I don't know what was completely on the right-hand side. I remember this area of the hospital area, and then I remember another big kind of a structure down at the end of Bicycle Camp. This road goes down the center of it. I think that the Dutch portion...maybe this is why I don't remember too much of the left side of the camp except for the guardhouse and the hospital area. Maybe the Dutch were held in strictly another area because I think that all the Americans and some of the Australians who were picked up from the *Perth* were on the right-hand side. The Dutch were probably on the left-hand side. In Bicycle Camp, I don't recollect of seeing too many Dutch except for the Dutch priest. I even forget his name. I never thought I'd ever forget his name, but right now I don't remember. That was my idea of Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Take me inside one of the barracks. What was the barracks like physically?

Papish: Inside one of the barracks, as far as I remember, some of them were set off in cubicles. Each man

was assigned so much area in each one of the cubicles. As far as I remember, there were no beds as such. You were on the floor. Here is where your scrounging instincts start taking place. I have nothing. I still have my sarong, and that's it. I used a mat to lay down on at night and the sarong to cover me, sort of.

Marcello: Where did you get this mat?

Papish: I think the mat was in the area when it was assigned to me.

Marcello: Were you in that cubicle with some other people?

Papish: Yes, I was. Right offhand, I remember Jack Felez.

Marcello: How many people were in one of those cubicles?

Papish: I'd say there was probably five or six.

Marcello: Give me an estimate as to how large that cubicle was.

Papish: About half of that distance from the pillar and back. I'd say half. There was five or six people. Maybe one, two, three, four were this way (gesture), and maybe two would lay this way (gesture) or something like that.

Marcello: Was it perhaps about four-by-eight or something like that?

Papish: Yes, something like that. It was a small space. Here again, is where you learn...and I guess the Americans just don't encroach on somebody's territory in times like that.

Marcello: These are three-sided, isn't that correct, like a stall?

Papish: Yes, right.

Marcello: Were you simply assigned to one of these, or did you simply gravitate to one of the cubicles?

Papish: Well, you kind of gravitated toward other people. Maybe you swapped off a place or something like that. I know that we had a storekeeper by the name of Albers, and he always used to get us into prison camp because he always used to be thinking up a menu and stuff like that. "Demo" is what we called him. His nickname was "Demo," even on the ship.

Marcello: Describe what these barracks were like in terms of windows and things of that nature?

Papish: Well, they were probably open at the midsection. Down the center would be sort of a hall effect, and then at the end would be about three cubicles across, you know. Then there was sort of a veranda. In front of that first hut, the one that

I was in, was where you'd line up for muster every day and before going out on a working party. You'd get out there, and they'd yell, "Bango!" *Bango* is "count off" in Japanese. You learned to count in Japanese. This is where you start picking up Japanese, or else you get slapped around.

Marcello: Are these barracks one-story or two-story?

Papish: One-story. It's sort of an atap hut. It's made out of atap, the palm fronds.

Marcello: Was this true of the huts in Bicycle Camp? I was under the impression that maybe they even had tile roofs on them since it was a permanent Dutch army camp.

Papish: Well, here again, my recollection of Bicycle Camp is the atap hut. Now this may be the atap huts...come to think of it, it may have been the native soldiers' area. The Dutch were over in their Bicycle area part of the camp with tile roofs and things like that. I remember the hospital part was kind of a tile affair and everything else, but just what was on the left-hand side, I never knew. I think that it was probably where they kept the native troops in the



Dutch army or even the working part of the people over on the right-hand side of this area. I don't think I ever was ever able to stray over into the left-hand side of the area.

Marcello: What sort of bathing facilities were available here at Bicycle Camp?

Papish: Come to think of it, I don't remember any bathing facilities.

Marcello: Were there any showers or anything of that nature?

Papish: No. Where did we wash? Where'd we get our water? Do you know, I can't remember. This is why I think that we were more in a primitive area of Bicycle Camp than were the Dutch. I don't remember too many of our officers in Bicycle Camp, but they lived more or less segregated, too. My recollection of Bicycle Camp is just the atap hut part of it. I can remember a pharmacist's mate by the name of Day, and he was in the hospital area there in Bicycle Camp. He worked in the hospital. All I can remember going in there for is for the diarrhea part and things like that. But, no, the only recollection I have of Bicycle Camp are the atap huts.

Marcello: In terms of living conditions, how would you compare it with what you had experienced either in the theater or in the jail at Serang?

Papish: The living conditions were better than they were in Pandeglang, in the jail in Serang, and the theater in Serang. They were better. This may have been seeing the worst and then looking up for the better, you might say, which would give you a little bit more confidence.

Going on working parties, as I was going to say before, this is where I got the blow to my idea that this war was going to be over real fast. I remember a day going to the Dunlop tire factory and stacking tires. I was stacking tires, and the Japanese wanted them so many high. Well, of course, you got them up so high, and then you had to start heaving them and throwing them up. They like everything just so. So I'm stacking tires in piles over here (gesture) and stack them up over here (gesture) and stack them up. The Japanese would come by and say "Nai! Nai! Nai!" "Here?" "Over here!" So you'd move the stack over here, you know. Another one would come by after you get a couple stacks built, and he'd yell,

"Nai! Nai! Nai!" "Over here!" They kept doing that. Then this one day, I'm stacking tires, and a Japanese comes by, and he says, "Nai! Nai!" "Over here." So I tear into the stack, and I break it down, and I'm cussing a blue streak there. I bent down to pick a tire up, and I hear this voice behind me. "What's the matter, sailor?" I said, "These damned Japs don't know where they want this stuff." I'm reaching down to pick up a tire, and I look behind me, and I see this split-toed shoes. I straightened up, and I looked behind me, and this Japanese is standing behind me here. I look over here, and I don't know where (chuckle) this voice is coming from, speaking just as good English as I am. He looked at me, and he kind of gave a grin, and he said, "That was me, sailor." I said, "Oh, shit!" I thought (chuckle) I was in for it. He said, "That's all right. Listen, I want to tell you something. There's a lot of Japanese who speak good English. They won't be like me." I thought, "Oh, okay." He said, "Remember that."

So come break time, I remember going out and sitting behind a shed and eating my ration of

rice. This Jap comes out there, the same one, and he says, "Everything all right?" I said, "Hell, no, everything isn't all right! I'm a prisoner!" He sat down, and he started talking. I said, "What the hell's with you?" He said, "Let me tell you my story. I drove a taxi in New York. My parents were both in Japan, and I saved up my money. I wanted to go see my parents because they were getting old. I bought a ticket to Japan. I get over here, and I'm over here a few months, and all hell breaks loose. The first thing you know, I'm conscripted into the Japanese army. Here I am." I said, "Oh, my God!" He said, "Don't you say anything about any of this to anybody."

Then he had this can of bully beef, and, my God, that's the first time I ever seen a can of bully beef since the ship went down, or anything to eat like that. He had half of it, and he said, "Here, mix this in with your rice." In the meantime, I had acquired an Australian pannikin for my rice or anything that I may get to eat. He said, "Here." So he fed me that half a can of bully beef, and then gave me a couple cigarettes. Man, I tell you, that was something.

I said, "Look, tell me something. What do you think of this war?" He said, "Well, sailor, I'll tell you this. You and I both know who's going to win, but it's going to be a long one." I thought, "Oh, shit! This is it." He said, "Yes, it will be a long one."

That's the last time I saw that Jap. He did mention something about he was moving on, or his unit or something was moving on. He didn't say where or anything else like that. Then I got back into the camp, and I told these guys. I didn't divulge anything else except, "Today I heard who was going to win the war, but it's going to be a long one." I said, "Some Jap told me that." Of course, everybody takes it that the Jap said that they were going to win the war, and it was going (chuckle) to be long.

Anyway, that was one of the experiences, I think, that just kind of took the wind out of my sails, as far as time was concerned. I think it was about this time that I asked the Dutch priest if he had a rosary or if there was anything he had that I could pray with. That's when he gave me the rosary.

Marcello: I'm assuming from what you said that the *Houston* survivors were in Bicycle Camp when the personnel from the 131st Field Artillery arrived. Is that correct?

Papish: Yes, they were either there, or we had arrived after them.

Marcello: Oh, you came in after the 131st?

Papish: I think so because I know that there were some other Americans, but at that time we kind of strictly stuck to our shipmates and the people off of the ship. It wasn't until very much later that we heard about other Americans having been on the island. I don't think that we quite came in contact with each other as much at first as we did after we arrived in Singapore because they got all the Americans together, and we kind of stuck together when we left Batavia.

Marcello: Now it is my understanding, however, that when the 131st Field Artillery arrived in Bicycle Camp, they came in with full packs, and they actually shared clothing and shoes and so on with the *Houston* survivors. What do you know about that?

Papish: Right, they did. In fact, I guess it was at that time when I got a pair of pants. I got something to wear on my feet other than going barefooted. Of course, immediately, if you got any clothes, you made shorts out of them, anyway--if they were trousers or something like that. We got mess gear. Then again, at the time my mess kit was not an Army mess kit, but it was an Australian kit that was sort of a square. It had a handle on it over here (gesture), and it was about that deep (gesture).

Marcello: About two inches deep?

Papish: Yes. I figured the bigger the mess kit I got, the more I'd get to eat. But I didn't. I got just the same as everybody else. Yes, they did share a lot of stuff.

Marcello: I'm also under the impression that at that point, there was a unified command set up among the Americans. In other words, you went through a common chow line, and the senior officer was in charge of all the Americans and this sort of thing.

Papish: Yes. In fact, from what I understand, most of our Navy officers, the higher-ranking ones, were

taken to Japan immediately. Only some of the junior officers were left with the people in the camp.

Marcello: I believe that Colonel Tharp of the 131st was in overall command of the Americans. He was the senior officer.

Papish: Right.

Marcello: Do you recall who the leading Navy person was here?

Papish: There was Commander Maher, and he is an admiral now. He retired as an admiral. But then, too, he was taken to Japan quite early. Probably the most senior one that wound up and stayed with us was Miles Barrett. He was a Marine officer. He stayed with us, I think, in Changi, also. There was an Ensign Levett in the camp with us. The thing about it is that most of our officers, like I say, our senior officers, were taken to Japan immediately. I guess it was for interrogation and things like that.

Marcello: So most of the officer personnel there at Bicycle Camp, then, I gather, would have come from the 131st?

Papish: Yes, most of them did.



Marcello: What sort of a system of military discipline was established in the prison camp? I'm referring now to such things as saluting, obeying non-commissioned officers and obeying officers, and things like that.

Papish: I think at that time it wasn't the strict military discipline but was more or less a personal choice, as far as discipline was concerned. I'm not saying that the officers were not respected--they were. The senior petty officers were respected. As far as the Navy was concerned, the Japanese didn't put senior PO's in command of anything or rely on them. If you were a petty officer, you take this and you're responsible, you know. You wore your rank if you wanted to. You didn't have to wear your rank if you didn't want to. Well, actually, in Singapore the only thing you wore was shorts.

Marcello: I gather that such military formalities as saluting were dropped by mutual consent between the officers and the enlisted men.

Papish: I think so. You could say that, yes. As far as the sailors were concerned, there was hardly

anybody in uniform because they lost everything they had, so to speak.

Marcello: How important would some semblance of discipline be in a prisoner of war situation?

Papish: Some semblance is necessary, yes. It is very necessary.

Marcello: In other words, you can't have a rabble. You can't have every man for himself, really, going around doing their own things.

Papish: No, you'd have a rabble, and you'd have chaos. If it is every man for himself, so to speak, you don't gain anything. You gain more by discipline and sharing. It is more organized. You have to be more organized in a situation like that, or else you don't exist.

Marcello: Let me follow through with a transition. Several times during the interview, you've talked about the work parties here at Bicycle Camp. How was the system established? That's a very broad question. How was determined whether or not it was your turn to go out on a work detail?

Papish: I don't know. I think that probably, to begin with, it was mutual consent. If someone felt like he was too sick to go out on a working party, he

would see the doctor, and the doctor would excuse him.

Marcello: But at Bicycle Camp there really wasn't enough work that everybody went out every day, was there?

Papish: No, and that was the idea, too. In Bicycle Camp, I think you tried to get out on a working party rather than get out of work.

Marcello: And why was that?

Papish: Well, number one, it was survival. You had a chance to get something to eat, as I explained, as far as the American enlisted men was concerned, and also to pick up any news that somebody may holler to you or something as you are marching along the street. Even if you were sick, such as the people in my condition...this amoebic dysentery was sort of a chronic thing. It was on and it was off; then it was on and it was off. A lot of times it was going anywhere from...well, when I finally wound up in the hospital in Changi, I was going anywhere from between twenty-five and fifty times daily. When the pain hits you, you better go. At Bicycle Camp this was about the first stages, I believe, of

the amoebic dysentery--when I came down with it. The chances of you getting something to eat or hearing something or picking up something while you were on the working party lured you to going out on a working party even though you didn't feel like working.

Marcello: I understand that the work was perhaps steady, but it wasn't really taxing necessarily here at Bicycle Camp.

Papish: At Bicycle Camp, no. The only taxing part of it was the working parties where you had to go out and move these oil drums around. Now that was a working party that you didn't want to go out on, but if you had to go out on a working party and that, well, you'd go just for the idea of picking up something or the hopes of picking up something, I might say--something to sustain you a little longer. Of course, there was the danger, too. These oil drums were full of gas or oil or whatever it was and stored in these open fields. Also, it was on a hilly part. Now if one of those drums would get away from you, that would create havoc, as far as injury is concerned, as far as men were concerned. Men were getting their legs

broken and things like that with drums coming together and something like that. That was the hardest part. Of course, the Dunlop tire factory was the easy one. Again, you didn't know until you marched out of that gate which party you were going to go on or which party was going to go where. So you took your chances, so to speak. It was interesting in the least.

Marcello: At any point on these work parties, did you come to find out which guards were the better ones to work for and which ones were the really sorry ones to work for or work under?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: And I assume you tried to get on the details of those that were kind of lenient.

Papish: This is true. I only met up with this one, and he was a sergeant, I think. I met up with him, and, of course, he told me that his unit was moving on; but he didn't say they was going to move on to where or what or anything else.

Marcello: When you went out on one of these work parties, would an officer or a petty officer or a noncom accompany your work party, that is, an American?

Papish: There was generally an officer along, yes.

Marcello: And what would that officer's function be?

Papish: His function was more or less just to...if a man got into trouble, to try and at least interpret for him or try to soothe it over, as far as the guy was concerned. But in nine times out of ten, the officer was on the receiving end, too. I mean, the Jap would turn on him and give him just as bad a beating as the noncom or the seaman or whoever it was.

Marcello: So the Japanese guard would more or less hold the officer responsible for the conduct of the men in the work party in many cases.

Papish: Sort of, yes.

Marcello: Was there ever any resentment over the fact that officers normally did not work on the work parties, or did everybody recognize what their function was to be?

Papish: I think that everybody recognized what their function was to be. I don't think that any of the men thought bad of the officer because he didn't work or because he didn't turn a hand or something like that. Another thing, too, is that on the working party, if you had a chance to sabotage (chuckle) or do anything, this was also

uppermost in your mind. It was in mine. You couldn't do anything as it was, but if you saw a chance at something, you know, if you could put sugar in a gas tank or something else like that, you looked for the opportunity. Here again was an opportunity to--what you might say--keep your self-respect or something like that by doing a little something.

Marcello: You mentioned the moving of the oil barrels or gasoline barrels a while ago. I understand that from time to time on that detail people would try to loosen the bongs on the drums.

Papish: Yes. That was sort of a game. There again, you could put it down to being a game or competition or anything like that, as to who did this or who did that. But, man, I tell you, when they found one of those things leaking or running out, if they couldn't pinpoint it, they'd line everybody up and let them have it (chuckle).

Marcello: They were great believers in group punishment.

Papish: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: You mentioned that the work parties gave you an opportunity to steal food, for instance.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: Would you have to usually eat the food on the spot?

Papish: Yes, either eat the food on the spot and take your chances on trying to get it into a buddy that might need it or to get it in the camp in some way. Here again, this became sort of a game as to who would make it and who wouldn't be able to get something in. This is another story I have ahead, as far as in Changi.

Marcello: Okay, normally, when would one of these work parties go out? What time of the day here at Bicycle Camp?

Papish: Early in the morning. I mean, you could figure on about daybreak.

Marcello: And what time would it usually come back?

Papish: About sundown.

Marcello: Let's change the subject and talk a little bit about the food here at Bicycle Camp. How many meals would you get per day?

Papish: As near as I can remember, I think it was one. I can't recall. You'd get about a cup of rice a day or the equivalent. But when I look back, I've tried to recall just exactly what we did get. At



times it was gruel, I mean, just ground-up rice, more like a porridge.

Marcello: Is this what the Dutch refer to as "pap?"

Papish: Yes, that's it. So much "pap." That, too, is something else because my nickname was "Pap," the first three letters of my last name (chuckle). So, "Pap" was always in on the "pap."

Marcello: Would you ever get any kind of a vegetable stew or anything like that to pour over the rice?

Papish: At times, yes, but not often. Rice was the main thing.

Marcello: If you got meals once a day, when would you usually have that meal?

Papish: Well, if you were out on a working party, it was on working party time.

Marcello: Would it be given to you before you left, or would it be brought to you on the job?

Papish: On the job.

Marcello: In other words, cook shack personnel would bring the rice in to you.

Papish: In food carriers of some kind.

Marcello: I do know that at one point, at least for a while in Bicycle Camp, there were battalion funds to purchase food on the outside. In other words, I

don't think that the soldiers had been given their last pay, and it was mainly because the officers felt that money would come in handy later on when they got into prison camp. What do you know about that?

Papish: Right, right, they did. There were funds, and I think at one point they were allowed to go out and buy food. I don't know how long that took place and just what kind of food was bought. As I say, as far as Bicycle Camp was concerned, it is sort of hazy. At one point, we used to get what they called "white bait," and this was little fish like minnows. They used to fry those things so crispy that it tasted just like bacon. That was something you could mix in your rice. Well, everything mixes with rice (chuckle). We wanted anything to make it palatable, and that is what you were aiming for then.

Marcello: I've heard that everybody was looking for something to give that rice some kind of a taste.

Papish: Yes, salt, sugar, anything. *Gulamaluca*, which is a sugar that they make in Indonesia.

Marcello: One of the prisoners told me--and this occurred later on--that he found a tube of toothpaste and

actually used toothpaste to flavor the rice (chuckle).

Papish: It could be, yes. I never experienced that one. That's the first time I heard it, but, yes, it would still (laughter) flavor it.

Marcello: What chances were there to get seconds on the food in Bicycle Camp?

Papish: In Bicycle Camp, I don't think, since they were going out and able to buy food, that you didn't get seconds. You got what was given to you, and that was it.

Marcello: When you had spare time here at Bicycle Camp and you sat around in bull sessions, what did you and your buddies talk about? What were the topics of conversation?

Papish: Home, family, food. Food was number one. Strange as it seems, there was hardly any talk of sex. That was practically out. I mean, under the circumstances when you don't have food, food comes first. That's what you talk about; that's what you think about; that's what you dream about. It's food (chuckle).

Marcello: I'm sure that there were a lot of recipes talked about in those bull sessions.

Papish: Oh, you betcha. This "Demo" Albers was famous for this, and he'd get on these recipes. He'd concoct these recipes, and he'd start reading them out to the guys, and they'd kick him out of their cubicle. He just got so bad about recipes around these guys with their stomachs empty--he'd bring it to mind--and they'd kick old "Demo" out (chuckle).

Marcello: I've heard other prisoners say that they would think so hard about a particular food that in their mind, at least, they could actually smell it cooking in the camp, and they would wander around trying to find it.

Papish: This is true. I used to wake up at night with the smell of fresh bread, and it used to drive me crazy. My grandmother used to bake bread, and my mother baked bread; and as far as I was concerned, that was the most delicious thing that there is, is bread and butter. When I was a boy, my favorite was bread and garlic sandwiches. I'd get those cloves of garlic in between bread and have a garlic sandwich. I used to wake up in the prison camp with the smell of fresh bread, and it used to just drive me wild. You knew darned well

that there wasn't any bread baking in the camp, I mean, no bread that would smell like that. But it was amazing that these fish that I was telling you about that we called "white bait," when those fish were fried crisp to where you could eat the whole thing, it was just like bacon. In the woks, when they cooked rice, the hard rice crust tastes just like Rice Crispies. It's something else.

Marcello: What talk or thought was devoted to the possibility of escape there in Bicycle Camp?

Papish: I think the sailors and the soldiers all thought differently. For the sailors, realizing what was between them and trying to get away, it was kind of thoughtless to even think about it. Number one, you've got your color against you. Number two, if you did get away and you got the deepest tan you could ever experience or could ever get, where are you going to go? I mean, there are no planes that are going to fly in and pick you up or anything else. It used to be my dream in Singapore for me to be out on that airstrip working and clearing out there close to the sea and have a submarine surface and me swim out there and go home. I'd be looking out there

daydreaming, and pretty soon, "POW"--I'd get one across the back.

Marcello: Suppose you did escape, how much help could you get from the Javanese?

Papish: I think that that's one of the things that forestalled even thinking about an escape. Possibly the others experiences it, too, but the eleven of us had experienced being turned in by the Javanese up there. Also, with the northwestern part of Java being so anti-Dutch, there was no need in going into the jungle. They haven't really put it down to any facts or truth of any sailors being killed or white men being killed by the natives, but there are some who, we believe, that if they got ashore, they never did survive going into the prison camp.

Marcello: What threats did the Japanese make in terms of what would happen to a person who did escape and were caught?

Papish: They made it clear that he wouldn't ever escape again. I mean, they'd put him to death.

Marcello: Did you have any reason to doubt their word?

Papish: Knowing the Japanese, no. I think that some of those officers that carried those swords and

things like that...I think that most of the people felt that they wouldn't hesitate to use those swords, those Samurai swords or whatever.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about the Japanese guards and their conduct. First of all, what kind of power did a Japanese sergeant have?

Papish: A Japanese sergeant had a lot of power, as far as his own men were concerned.

Marcello: More than his American equivalent?

Papish: I think so because it wasn't beyond a Japanese sergeant to take one of his men, a corporal or a lower-ranked soldier, and stand him up in front of him and just beat the living daylights out of him, and that poor soldier would be getting up off the ground and standing to attention and taking it. There isn't any man, I believe, in the United States Army that would take a beating from a sergeant in the United States Army or a petty officer in the Navy as those people took from their sergeants.

Marcello: So what you're saying is that physical punishment was a way of discipline in the Japanese army.

Papish: Yes, it was from what we witnessed.

Marcello: Suppose a sergeant beat on a corporal for whatever this unfortunate soul had done. Who would get the next beating? Would it be a Japanese private? I understand that everybody had to save face down the line.

Papish: It went down the line, yes. Yes, it went down the line.

Marcello: And who was at the bottom?

Papish: Just the lowly private.

Marcello: And who was below the privates?

Papish: Well, if the private felt that he was unduly punished, I mean, he came in the prison camp and took it out on people.

Marcello: What were the most common forms of physical punishment that the Japanese dealt out to the prisoners?

Papish: The most common form was the...people think it's a slap across the face, but it's not a slap across the face. He starts out with an open palm right across the face, but before he gets there his fist is doubled up, and you catch the brunt of the fist. It looks like a slap and sounds like a slap. But getting hit across the jaws, I mean, you're spitting blood. It's a force. The next



thing is the bamboo stick or the bamboo rod about so thick (gesture), about an inch-and-a-half, anywhere from an inch-and-a-half to two inches in circumference. They'd just whale the living daylights out of you. The favorite place was across the back, across the kidneys, across the buttock, across the backs of the thighs or even up around the shoulders and the arms. Some of them just hit indiscriminately--anyplace that he makes contact.

Marcello: Now would these kinds of bashings usually take place because you weren't moving fast enough or perhaps, for whatever reason, you didn't understand an order; or could the Japanese have just woken up on the wrong side of the bed that morning?

Papish: All three (laughter) because there were times when there was no visible reason, and that was it. I remember one of the Japanese sergeants on the airstrip in Changi making one of our fellows dig a hole because he was a tall man, putting him in the hole--and this was a little, short Japanese--and then just beating the living daylights out of him for no reason. Then he sat

him down on a dirt pile and gave him cigarettes. I don't know whether that's getting up on the wrong side of the bed in the morning or whether it's just the idea of, "I have this power, and I'm going to use it, and that's it."

Marcello: What's the most extreme forms of physical punishment that you saw dealt out to the prisoners here at Bicycle Camp?

Papish: At Bicycle Camp, I think about the extreme form of punishment was catching a man at the gate bringing something in and then just making him kneel down and then just beating the living daylights out of him with a bamboo rod.

Marcello: Did you ever see the punishment where they put the bamboo rod behind the person's knees and made him kneel on it?

Papish: I never witnessed that at all. No, not myself. I had heard that this was possible, but, no, I never saw that. I seen this in some of the Korean and Vietnamese things that they show, but I didn't see that. Maybe they did it up-country. Then, of course, there were some of the extremes that I saw in Changi, too, that were really something. I think that probably--and this is my

personal opinion--we saw, even though it was harsh and everything else, more discipline in Bicycle Camp than in Singapore because of the type of Japanese soldier that was in Java.

Marcello: Now this is an interesting point to bring up. It's never been clear in my mind, and I'm not sure it's even clear in most of the prisoners' minds. In your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, did you ever pick up Korean guards?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: Where did that take place?

Papish: It was in Changi.

Marcello: Okay, let's hold on to that, and we'll talk about it later on. There seems to be a lot of difference of opinion here as to where the Korean guards were picked up. We'll talk about that in a moment. From everything that you've said, what was the best policy that a prisoner could develop or have toward a guard or the guards in general. If you wanted to avoid beatings or bashings, what was the best way to do it?

Papish: Number one, stay out of their way. Number two, just make yourself...I used to call it invisible. Just stay in the background; don't call any

attention to yourself by doing something, moving or otherwise. If you're at attention, stay at attention. I mean, don't call attention to yourself by doing something.

Marcello: How much discipline does it take in the beginning not to just haul off and strike back at those little Japanese who were beating you around?

Papish: Oh, my God, it took an awful lot. There were times that you'd just say, "Well, I don't give a darn how it's going to turn out, but I'm going to take one good healthy poke and then let the chips fall where they may!" But then I guess you think real fast, and you say, "There's really no reason for doing it. You're only going to bring nothing but grief on yourself." Then, too, as you said, the Japanese believe very strongly in force punishment. Here again, you're thinking that you're going to jeopardize the safety of somebody else in the camp because of what you're doing kind of cropped up in your mind--for instance, cutting of rations from hospital people. If you're doing something, and they say, "Well, we're going to cut the rations," then you're putting somebody else's life in jeopardy. I think

that in the prison camp that's one of the things that you do think and keep uppermost in your mind, is "don't jeopardize somebody else's life. It's hard enough the way we're living now, and if he's going to make it through or you're going to make it through, then don't jeopardize their chances."

Marcello: How important is it to learn fragments of the Japanese language?

Papish: It's very important. You learn that early. For instance, *benjo*. If you have to go (chuckle) and you're squirming around and you say, "*Benjo*," they'll listen a little to you. Say you want to go take a leak or anything like that, well, he doesn't understand (chuckle), and he's apt to clobber you as look at you. Number one is counting off, too. When they line you up and you count off, you count off in Japanese.

Marcello: How often would they take roll?

Papish: Every morning and every night.

Marcello: And probably coming and going from the work parties, too?

Papish: You betcha! You betcha! Count in and count out. You come to attention by *ki-otsuke*. It doesn't

make a difference whether he's a buck private or what if he is coming through the hut. Whenever you saw a Jap soldier coming through the hut, everybody hollered, "*Ki-otsuke*," and stood to attention until he left and things like that. Some of these little guys in the lower ranks just delighted on going through the hut just to have these men come to attention. Anybody that didn't come to attention fast enough, he stood there and pummeled him for a while.

Marcello: What were the Japanese rules concerning saluting and bowing? Do you recall?

Papish: What were their rules?

Marcello: Yes.

Papish: Whenever you saw a Japanese officer, you stopped and you came to attention and you bowed. Saluting, I don't know. Generally, in the camp, when you saw him coming by, you'd stop and you'd bow. Salute, I don't think, was as prevalent as the bow.

Marcello: Would you bow outside as well as inside?

Papish: Yes, and if you were spoken to, you come to attention and you bow.

Marcello: I suspect that if you didn't bow properly, you would get bashed again.

Papish: Oh, yes. You were taught how to bow, and you did bow properly; and if you didn't you, stood there for a while, and you made quite a few bows until it was done properly. It was just more or less a form of harassment, constant harassment. There was needling all the time.

Marcello: In the beginning, was it humiliating to have to bow?

Papish: I, myself, thought it was. I just didn't equate military discipline with bowing. I equate military discipline with a salute or something like that. I look a person in the eye and salute him, but this bowing, standing up in a proper bow, to me is sort of a subservient thing. Even though we were (chuckle) in the spot, you had to swallow it, I guess.

Marcello: You mentioned on several occasions that you contracted amoebic dysentery sometime during those first six weeks of your captivity.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: At Bicycle Camp what were the hospital facilities like? Describe them there at Bicycle Camp.

Papish: The only thing I remember about the hospital area was either going in for a scratch...the hospital area, if I remember right, was constantly out of bounds. I mean, unless you were actually in need of hospitalization, you just didn't go there. Number one in my way of thinking was, "Why set yourself open for contracting something?" I'm a confirmed hypochondriac, anyway, and if I see something and the way it's acting, I can develop it in nothing flat (chuckle). So it's the idea of "just don't lay yourself wide-open to it."

I got this amoebic dysentery, and from time to time it was practically hell. It's like I told my children. It makes a baby out of a man. You just had no control over your bowels whatsoever.

Marcello: We've all had diarrhea, I guess, at one time or other in our lives, and I guess we think it is pretty bad. But it's not even close to dysentery, isn't that correct...

Papish: Oh, God, no!

Marcello: ...in the effects it has upon a person?

Papish: No, the effect that it has on a person...I mean, it gives you an idea that if you can't control



your bowels, you can't control much of anything.  
And you can't, as far as dysentery is concerned.

Marcello: Beyond the constant bowels movements, how does it affect you? You were mentioning a while ago that you also developed cramps and pains in the stomach.

Papish: Oh, yes. You get these cramps and pains in the stomach, and it's on so fast that if you don't make your way to the "bore-hole" or the *benjo* fast enough, that's it. It's there and that's it.

Marcello: Did you reach the point where you were defecating blood and mucous?

Papish: Oh, yes, yes, very much so. That, of course, comes with the later stages whenever I had more or less an attack. As I say, it was kind of a chronic dysentery--this amoebic dysentery--and it would come and it would go. Then it would get to a stage where it was blood and mucous, and that's about all.

Marcello: Normally, it comes through a lack of sanitation, does it not?

Papish: I understand it does, yes.

Marcello: What kind of treatment could you get at the hospital there at Bicycle Camp for amoebic dysentery?

Papish: The treatment that was most...the treatment that you got was potassium permanganate enemas. They would mix potassium permanganate with water, and they would give you what they called "retention enemas." I didn't get any treatment for the dysentery in Bicycle Camp. When we got to Changi is when it really started working on me. I would get these retention enemas, and it became a game as to how long a person could hold all that up in there before he had to let it go. It got to be quite a game. Some people could hold it up there and just absorb it. Other people would just sit there and grit your teeth. You're ready to let it go and everything else, and a corpsman is holding you down. "Hold more! More!" He's just urging you to hold this enema as long as you could. Then they'd let you up, and away you go. They'd try to shove the bed pan under you, and that was it.

Marcello: Suppose you were put in the sickbay there at Bicycle Camp. Did the Japanese cut your food

rations, or didn't that sort of thing come into effect at that point yet?

Papish: I actually didn't know about that because, like I say I wasn't much of a sickbay person. I didn't report in. The doctors came around during roll call or before going out on a working party or something, and they'd say, "Well, how do you feel?" If I were sick, I'd say, "I feel all right" or something like that or "I'll make it." I don't recall going to sickbay except for minor scratches and things like that. Oh, I know what I went to sickbay for. I was standing in formation one day, and this was in my early time in Bicycle Camp. I started scratching over here (gesture). I got an itch, and I was scratching and scratching. I took my finger away, and damned if there wasn't a crab. I had crabs in my beard (chuckle). I had to go get that ointment in sickbay. I had them in my beard, and I had them in my eyebrows. The corpsman said, "My God, Papish, you've got crabs in your beard (chuckle)." That's kind of unheard of. Sailors always said, "Crabs never go any higher than your genital area." But these sure made it up to my beard! The guys were standing

there in line, and, my God, they started getting away. I had to look all over that camp for a razor. I shaved my beard. I hadn't shaved since I left the ship. But, man, it was scratching, and itching. Of course, once I found that first one, my God, I was just scratching my face all the time. I had them all over me. They were just crawling. But that was about the only thing I went to sickbay for. That famous blue ointment, I guess, is what they used to issue out for crabs. So if anybody says that they don't go any higher than that area, I tell them, "Don't you tell me that!"

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about hygiene and sanitation. This is probably a good transition from talking about your amoebic dysentery. What were the latrine facilities like here at Bicycle Camp?

Papish: Here again, I really don't remember. In Bicycle Camp, as far as the latrine facilities are concerned, my mind just doesn't go back that far. I've often wondered about that. I imagine that the facilities were the same as anyplace earlier. But when we moved to Singapore, then all this

starts falling in place--the sanitation facilities and things like that.

Oh, I know now. The latrines in Bicycle Camp had a trough going right down the center of atap screens or even out in the open. You used to squat in between. You never stood up; you squatted and this water would go through. The famous wiping procedure in Java is that you don't wipe. You have a coke bottle, and you pour it down. You wash instead of wiping. This is the famous saying that we had back there in Changi: "Don't shake hands with a Dutchman!" (chuckle) We don't want to make it [interview] X-rated, but it was something. Nobody could ever get used to that coke bottle deal. We used to go out on working parties, and we used to look for banana leaves or anything else like that. You didn't use newspaper or bibles or anything like that because you rolled cigarettes with that. But you looked for banana leaves for wiping with (chuckle). Yes, that brings out the famous trough.

Marcello: Speaking of sanitation, what would be the procedure when you went through the chow line,

that is, before you even got any chow put in your mess gear?

Papish: Well, I think the first procedure was as you went through the chow, the first thing you hit was boiling water. I think that that was a "must."

Marcello: In other words, you dipped your mess gear in that boiling water.

Papish: You dipped your mess gear in the water. In those days it was plentiful. Also plentiful in the camp was this potassium permanganate, which, I understand, is sort of a disinfectant. They'd put it in one barrel, which would have the boiling water and the fire under it, and you'd just dip your mess kit in the potassium permanganate-laced water.

Marcello: And then would you clean it again when you were finished?

Papish: Then we cleaned the mess kit again after we were through in the water that was used for the disinfecting. Then, of course, we either air-dried it, or if we had a nice cloth or something like that that we saved just for that purpose, we'd wipe out the mess kit. That was it.

Marcello: How did you obtain your Australian mess gear?

Papish: I don't know. I think that some Australian took a little pity on me. At the time I don't remember of ever having one of the 131st Field Artillery mess kits. I don't remember how I came on it. The Aussies or the English called them "panicans," and they were square and had a wire handle folded out. Now another panican would also fit in this one, making it an enclosed square. Well, I got the bottom half from an Aussie or an Englishman. I forget where I got it. Whether it was in Singapore or where it was, I don't know. I was eating out of something in Bicycle Camp, but right at the moment I can't recall what it was. But then I came on this. I also came on a spoon. This was a silver spoon that's got the hallmark and everything stamped on it, and I have that spoon at home. That was about the only thing I brought out, plus my rating badge, which is made out of aluminum and that I wore on my wrist. That's the only thing I came out of the prison camp with, plus the shorts.

Marcello: How would the rice be measured when you went through the chow line?

Papish: A cup.

Marcello: So whoever was in the chow line would simply scoop out a cup? A level cup?

Papish: Yes, they tried to level it and give each one the same amount. There weren't too many people who would short change anybody under those circumstances and things like that.

Marcello: Food was a serious business, wasn't it?

Papish: Food was serious, yes. You never know until you're starving to death that just how everything else is just small and not important--except having food.

Marcello: Let me ask you another basic question. Once again, all of us at one time or another have been hungry to the point that we didn't think we could stand it. But what is it like to be *really* hungry, such as the circumstances that you experiences as a prisoner-of-war?

Papish: To be really hungry is just indescribable. I can't describe it. It's just the idea that, "By God, here I am! I'm a human being! I need food and there's nobody that's going to give it to me!" Anything that comes along--I mean, dogs, cats, anything--that has meat on it...except we draw the line at rats and mice. I mean, that *King*



Rat story is "for the birds." I never even heard of it in our camp. [tape changed]

Marcello: Mr. Papish, do you recall any secret radios in Bicycle Camp?

Papish: Yes. I can't say where they were or who operated them, but we were getting some sort of news, which at that time wasn't too good, but there were times when things would come through that were a little uplifting and would uplift the spirits a little--as far as ships being completed and ships getting out to the fleet and repaired and stuff like that. I think that the station they were listening to was this KGEI or whatever it is in San Francisco, that they used to pick up.

Marcello: So you knew that there was a secret radio, but you had no idea who had it.

Papish: No idea whatsoever.

Marcello: And probably you really didn't want to know, either.

Papish: That's probably it.

Marcello: Did the Japanese have any rules relative to the possession of a radio?

Papish: Oh, yes, that was immediately punishable by death. Once a radio was found, that was it. At that time they said it meant death, but I don't think they ever put anybody to death that we had seen; and I don't think that they caught anybody with a radio in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: During your time at Bicycle Camp, do you recall any stage shows or sports activities or anything of that nature?

Papish: Yes, I think there was some kind of a review or singing or something like that. I can't recall when it was, but I used to put it down to Hirohito's birthday, whenever that was (chuckle). I don't know. Don't the Japanese celebrate Hirohito's birthday on the first of the year, every year?

Marcello: I'm not sure.

Papish: I'm not, either. Anyway, I think that they got together something just for the morale of the people in the camp. It was allowed, but you had to use a little discrimination, too.

Marcello: While you were at Bicycle Camp were you ever processed in any way, that is, given an identification number or anything of that sort?

Papish: Yes, that's where we got our identification, was in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: What form did that identification take?

Papish: It was in sort of a galvanized plate, and it was, I think, a cloth with Japanese figures on it. I never understood what it was. It could have been numbers, or it could have been anything else. But it had some sort of identification on it, and we were required to wear them, too. There was another thing, too, as far as being in the prison camp, I think, and it's only my observation. If you were Navy, you were pretty good, as far as the Japanese were concerned. I think that one of the things that we kind of put it down to...and somebody...I don't remember who it was that said they kind of looked down on the Army people. They figured that the Army people just gave up, whereas the Navy really fought, you know. If you were there and your ship was no longer afloat...I don't know. Japan being sort of an maritime nation and things like that, I think that they looked on the sailors as pretty good people. I don't know...I always forget what the word for sailor is, but I think it sounds something like

*kaigun*, and if you were identified as *kaigun* (sailor), you were pretty good. You were still treated as a prisoner-of-war, but I think you were a little more respected.

Marcello: Are there any particular guards who stand out in your mind here at Bicycle Camp?

Papish: In Bicycle Camp just that one--that one that I had the conversation with at the Dunlop tire factor. Of course, he could have very well been a naturalized American. He didn't lift my spirits very much about the length of the war, but, I mean, he did a little lifting up of my spirits by just talking there.

Marcello: Are there any others who stand out here because they were nasty?

Papish: I would say about 95 percent of them (chuckle). They all stood out because they're nasty. It wasn't nothing for them to jump out of the guard shack up there when you're going by, and if things weren't just copasetic or if they found some contraband or something in there, they'd just beat the living daylights out of you. There wasn't any special one. They all did it, so to speak.

Marcello: Did you have any nicknames for any of the guards?

Papish: The "Brown Bomber," the "Bastard," (chuckle) all sorts of names. Right now I can't think of the others, but the "Brown Bomber" and the "Bastard" are the two that stand out in my mind.

Marcello: What do you recall about the "Brown Bomber?"

Papish: A very sadistic person. Here at home, I mean, he'd be a real true sadist; I mean, anything and everything goes from kneeing in the crotch, to knocking you down and kicking you, to beating you with bamboo, and to get you with a rifle butt or just anything that came to his mind.

Marcello: And to your knowledge he was Japanese?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: Incidentally, who among the Japanese ran this camp? I've even heard that in many of these camps a sergeant had so much power that they would actually run one of these camps.

Papish: To tell you the truth, I couldn't tell you. In Bicycle Camp I don't know. It could have been, and then again I don't know.

Marcello: Okay, in October of 1942, early October, the Japanese without any prior notice began to move people out of Bicycle Camp. For instance, I know

that among the Americans, the first bunch to leave--and it was a smaller group--was under the supervision of Captain Arch Fitzsimmons of the 131st; and then the second group that went out, which was much larger, was under the command of Colonel Tharp. Do you recall when you left?

Papish: I think it was around the middle of October, and I think that probably it was with Colonel Tharp. Fitzsimmons's unit was much smaller, and I think they took the fittest men. These were the ones, I think, that didn't even see Singapore; I mean, they might have gotten to Singapore, but then they went directly up-country. I was in the bunch that moved out of there under Tharp's command.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Is it at this point that the skilled personnel are separated and sent to Japan, or did that occur once this group got to Singapore and then they were separated and sent to Japan?

Papish: I think the skilled were separated in Bicycle Camp, the more skilled, and separated.

Marcello: About the time that you left?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: And that would be people, I think, such as Stewart, whom you talked about earlier, and some of those people.

Papish: Come to think of it, yes.

Marcello: The technicians and so on like that.

Papish: Yes, the technicians and that.

Marcello: Okay, so describe your leaving and the trip from Batavia or Tanjong Priok or wherever you left from to Singapore. Describe how that all took place.

Papish: From Tanjong Priok to Singapore was probably one of the most...it's a horror story. We were loaded into ships. Now these ships, we were told, is what they moved Japanese troops in, and, my God, if they moved Japanese troops like that, it's something else. These were raised tiers down in the holds of the ship. I forget how many decks down, but there may have been three decks of these things, both forward and aft, and possibly two hatch sections. These are regular ships that have the large hatches. There was one hatch forward and two hatches aft. We were loaded into these ships and given so much space on these tiers.

Marcello: In other words, they took a hold and subdivided it into these tiers.

Papish: Right. You were allotted...I think it was thirty-six inches of space. By that time thirty-six inches across the shoulders wasn't too broad, believe me, but you were allotted thirty-six inches of space. You ate, you lived, and you stayed in this space. You were allowed up on topside in, you might say, sections. They had a *benjo* or toilet built over the side of the ship, and you used this to go to the toilet. At any time during the night or times like that, you were not allowed topside. You were allowed topside only at different time of the day when it was your turn to go up even if you couldn't hold it or if you had dysentery or anything else like that.

I don't know how many days the trip took. I never did count the days. I never did even dwell on it in my mind to go back and pinpoint the date we left Batavia until we got to Singapore. In those days you lived like...I don't know how to describe it. It was a living hell. You lived in your own filth, you ate in your own filth and the



filth around you. I don't know. It's man's inhumanity to man. I can't understand and will never understand how a living human being can treat another living human being the way that we were treated on those ships. Those ships were appropriately named by those people who were transferred from Bataan. "Hell Ships" is what they were.

There was one thing that I witnessed on that ship and had never seen before. One of the young men alongside of me--I never knew his name or anything else--came down with appendicitis. A Japanese doctor came down to look at him, and I thank God that I had my appendix removed in the Philippines before the war. But what the doctor did, he took what looked like incense, and he wet this incense and then lit the incense and put this around this guy's appendix and just let this burn down. This man had to be held down when that incense burned low. I don't know what the kind of treatment it was supposed to have been or what, but that man, if he is alive today, has still got burn scars around that appendix area. But he survived. I have asked doctors about that, and no

one has ever known or ever heard of anything like that.

Marcello: From everything I've read, medical care for Japanese soldiers was almost slim to none. They really didn't take care of their own troops very well.

Papish: My God, I'll tell you, they moved troops...now I could see moving horses and animals in a ship like that, but to move human beings in a ship like that, I don't know.

Marcello: How were you fed?

Papish: To tell you the truth, I don't know. I think that food was brought down and dished out. You leaned over, and they went by, and they gave you a couple spoons of rice or something else like that that they were feeding. It's like I tell these children that I talk to. The stuff that we ate and tried to eat--what we cultivated in Singapore--grows wild in vacant lots here. That was our sum total. It was some sort of a gruel, some sort of a vegetable thing stirred in there, maybe potato peelings or whatever it was. I'd say that here in the United States you find better stuff like that in the garbage can than what we

were fed on that ship. How a person survives this, you don't know.

Marcello: I'm sure that ship must have stunk to high heaven.

Papish: Oh, God, it did. What can I say? After you get used to it, my God, you get up just a little time for a breath of fresh air, and you think the air stinks. Sometimes I try to think of how to describe it, but there's no way you can put it into words. As close as I've ever come is that it's just man's inhumanity to man.

Marcello: How high are these tiers?

Papish: The tiers, I would say, were about thirty-six inches apart--three feet--and back into the hull of the ship. Now this didn't necessarily mean that you had an outside length of thirty-six inches, you know. Maybe there was two men behind you. It was maybe three deep, as far as men. I mean, it's just like stacking cordwood in there with maybe three feet of space between you and the top tier.

Marcello: Obviously, then, you have to sit down the whole time, and somebody might be behind your...you might be sitting between somebody's legs, in

essence, is that correct, if you cram that many people in there?

Papish: Yes! It was something. We had enough room to lay down, yes, three deep; but to sit, I mean, sure, the guy that had the front part of the three from the bulkhead of the ship in had a ringside seat, so to speak. How they could get that many men crammed into a ship and not sink it (chuckle), I don't know.

Marcello: Okay, you finally get to Singapore. Describe what happens at that point.

Papish: In Singapore we were taken off the ship, and we were put into a barracks, an English barracks, there. The thing was completely deserted. It was, as I remember, down by the water, and, of course, this had all been prepared with barbed wire all around and everything else. The barbed wire went down to the water, so you couldn't get down to the water if you wanted to. As I remember, it was a type of barracks, kind of like an open veranda. It was completely square. It had a cement tile floor. To tell you the truth, it didn't look like a barracks to me. It just looked like an open

veranda. We that came off of the ship were put in this one place.

Marcello: About how many were there?

Papish: There were about five or six hundred.

Marcello: Okay, so it was the whole group, then, that was here at this veranda-type structure.

Papish: Yes. Then, of course, this was one part of Singapore and one part of the British base. They had various different names. I don't remember what the name of this part was. Then after a few days or weeks or months, we were moved from there into what was called Roberts area. Now in the Roberts area they had some sort of a hospital, and we lived around in this area. People were being transferred up-country.

The thing about getting transferred up-country began with everybody up for muster and counting off: "Ichi, ni, san, shi, go!" "You go!" Every fifth one was out regardless of condition or anything. "You go!" "Oh, you're going to go to a health camp. You're going to go to a nice place where the food is plentiful and the sun is shining and everything else." So you line up, and then you start thinking, "Now how in the hell am

I going to get in that line so that I can go?" Well, here's where the rub comes in. "Ichi, ni, san, shi, go!" But go doesn't go this time. Shi goes, see. And they keep moving around. Well, for me it got real frustrating because my shipmates were going off to these nice camps and everything else, and here I am, being left behind. So I'm finagling myself around, playing Russian roulette, so to speak, to find the right spot so that I can go with my shipmates. I come to find out that the Good Lord must have had his hand on my shoulder, too, because I never did go up-country.

Marcello: So the only reason that you did not go up-country, then, was because of the luck of the draw.

Papish: Luck of the draw, so to speak. Then later, on, I got dysentery when it got rampant, and I also contracted malaria in Singapore. So the two combined together, and then I got beriberi. I got beriberi in the legs and had what I think they have diagnosed now as peripheral neuropathy. It is the damage to the nerves in the extremities. I have been damaged to the extent that there is

hardly any feeling. I have been outside weeding with a weedeater and gone in the house, and my wife would say, "My God, what happened to you?" I would say, "What do you mean, what happened to me?" Well, the whip would hit me across the instep there, and I'm bleeding, but I didn't feel it. This was when I came and went through the V.A. [Veteran's Administration]. The nerves from my knees on down in my legs are deteriorated. The nerve ends, I guess, have deteriorated to the extent where I don't (chuckle) feel anything hardly.

Marcello: Are these the results of diet and nutrition for the most part?

Papish: Beriberi, yes. Well, malaria, of course, came from mosquitos, and the amoebic dysentery I contracted through the food.

But, anyway, as I say we were moved from Roberts, and then we went to what they called Selarang. Here's where we were thrown in with a lot of the English and a lot of the Australians who were on Singapore. The Australians and the Americans got along real good. The Aussie is a real fine person. One of my best friends in

prison camp who was in a hospital bed beside me was English. The English were kind of overbearing, but this is one guy that never was (chuckle). He was different than all the rest of the English.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. At this point are there just a few Americans left?

Papish: Not just a few, but it dwindled down from the time we arrived on Singapore in October of 1942 up until about mid-1943 or the end of 1943. Well, let's see. We had Thanksgiving in Selarang. That time somebody had gotten hold of some sweet potatoes, and somebody ground some rice, and damned if we didn't have pumpkin pie made out of sweet potatoes that Thanksgiving. That I remember.

We were berthed in what they called an officers' area--the American's were. All the Americans were still together. The Americans then, I guess, started to become renegades of the prison camp.

One of the Englishmen who ran a cookhouse in Selarang had no earthly use for the Americans. He used to go around that camp, and he had a



mastiff, an ol' bulldog. And this ol' raunchy thing, I tell you, was always in the company of this sergeant major. Even his own men didn't think very much of him. But he used to feed that dog, and everybody thought, "Well, what the hell is this? Here we're starving to death, and he's feeding the dog!"

So one day the Americans got the idea that, "By God, we're going to have some meat." So they dognapped this mastiff, and I remember them cooking him in this barracks sort of place. All the furniture was removed, and you just lived on the floors and whatever you could scrounge and things like that.

So we dognapped this mastiff. Nobody could figure out how to kill him or anything else. I remember them wrapping wire around the dog's mouth so that he wouldn't be making any noise and then sticking his head in a bucket of water, and they drowned him.

Well, when they finally got him cooked up and that, it was really tough. So somebody got the bright idea, "Well, this might be better if the beef was ground up. Well, at that time and

early in the war, these cookhouses had a few of the utensils that they had scrounged back through and put into these cookhouses. So they found out that there was a meat grinder in this cookhouse that this sergeant major whose dog we took had. So one of the guys was delegated to go over there and borrow this meat grinder from this cookhouse. So we went over there and borrowed this meat grinder, and we ground up that dog meat. We ate that dog. He was tough, but we had dogburgers. Later on, this sergeant major found out what the Americans did to his dog, and, my God, he hated Americans from that day on.

Anyway, there's one thing I remember, too, and you may have heard this end of the story or something. We had another dog in this living area, and his name was "Knobby." So one of the guys, after we got the meat off the bones, threw "Knobby" this bone, and that dog took one sniff of that bone, he let out a howl, and we didn't see that dog for five days. He wasn't going to eat (chuckle) no other dog's bones, is what we thought.

But like I say, I think the Americans became a bunch of renegades, as far as the English were concerned.

Marcello: Well, you seemed to indicate earlier that a good relationship developed with the Australians, but a poor one developed with the British. First of all, let's take the British. Why was it that a poor relationship developed between the British and the Americans?

Papish: I don't know. I think the Americans thought that the British thought that we were still in the colonies.

Marcello: Is it not true that the British tried to make the Americans salute and so on and so forth?

Papish: Oh, yes. In the first place, they were overbearing, and we didn't think very much of the officers. The only officers, I think, that the Americans had any respect for was the English officers who were in charge of the Gurkhas, those little Indian fighters, and those who were in charge of some of the Indian troops and things like that. The Indian troops were fine; the Gurkhas were fine. The Japs were scared to death of the Gurkhas. When we were finally sent down

into Changi Prison, they wouldn't go inside the compound but threw the rice over into this separate area inside the jail to the Gurkhas because they were afraid of those little Gurkhas.

Anyway, then things started dwindling down. From Selerang, then, we went to Changi. They built huts outside the jail wall around Changi.

Marcello: Let me ask you this, and I want to get a few things clear in my own mind. There was a Changi Jail or a Changi Prison, and then there was also a Changi army compound or army base, wasn't there?

Papish: No.

Marcello: There was not?

Papish: Changi is the prison. Changi was the prison for the Malayan Peninsula under the English rule. It was just like Canyon City in Colorado, which is the state prison. Well, Changi was an actual prison with bars and everything. The Japanese, of course, along with the prisoners-of-war built atap huts on the outside perimeter, and everybody started moving into this one area from Roberts, Selerang. As people went up-country, it just kept going down. Then finally there toward the end of

the war, they moved us from the atap huts on the outside perimeter of the jail into the jail itself. This is where I got in with "Quaty" Gordon, "Herbie" Morris, and Curtis Van Cleave. We were allotted a cell inside the jail.

Marcello: Let me ask you a couple more questions before we get to that point because I don't think we finished up something I mentioned earlier. Let's get back to that relationship with the British. Now you mentioned, among other things, that they took a rather superior attitude toward the Americans. I've also heard that the British were not too clean.

Papish: Right, right. This, of course, goes back to being in the Navy. This was a well-known fact, as far as the British sailor was concerned, and I don't know but possibly the Army was the same way. Even in peacetime, after I got out of the prison camp and was assigned...after we left the University of Colorado, I was assigned to an AKA, heavy equipment transport ship, which was attached to the Service Force with the Atlantic Fleet. It wasn't used as an AKA but as a ship for hauling stores to various places in the United Kingdom,

Casablanca, French Morocco, and then down into the Caribbean and things like that. When I went to Portsmouth, England, on this AKA, you could see these sailors. When liberty call went, the English sailor peels down, he gets a bucket of water and washes, he puts on his real good shore-going clothes, and off he goes. The American sailor goes down, takes a shower and gets clean and everything else, and he goes ashore. But you go to a bar over there in Portsmouth, England, and you see these English sailors over there, and they're kind of hard to be around, believe me (chuckle). Anyway, I think that in the prison camp the English were attributed to the propagation of scabies because they didn't keep themselves clean.

Marcello: Now on the other hand, why was it that such a good relationship developed between the Americans and the Australians?

Papish: The Aussies were more like the Americans. Another thing, too, is that the Australians didn't think very much of the British. The Scotsmen, which we had in the prison camp with us, didn't think very much of the British or the English. And the

Welshman doesn't think very much of the (chuckle) English. I mean, even their factions at home kind of steer away from the out-and-out Englishman.

Marcello: I've also heard it mentioned that the British were accused of not delivering Red Cross parcels and so on that were intended for the Americans here at Changi. Do you know anything about that?

Papish: No, I don't know anything about them not distributing the parcels. I know that we did get one batch of Red Cross supplies, and I think the biggest batch...well, I even forget what it is consisted of, but there were a few cigarettes.

Marcello: Was it at this time or was it later in the war?

Papish: It was later in the war, much later. In fact, the way that the Japanese portioned out things for...this may be hearsay, but the way that they portioned them out, they said, "This box goes here, this box goes there, this box goes here." Well, someone said that the biggest portion that went to Changi was Kotex in a big pile, and so they used them in the hospital for people who had piles and people who had the "runs" and things like that (chuckle). I don't know. This is what they say--that the biggest portion that went to

Changi was not food but Kotex. They wound up with Kotex, which should have gone to the civilian internees in Singapore itself. Anyway, we wound up with a few cigarettes.

Then, of course, another thing, too, the black market was kind of prevalent in Changi. You'd buy a wrist watch off of somebody and patch it up and everything else and sell it to a Jap or something like that for some kind of an outrageous price, and then you were able to buy over in the black market, so to speak. You could sell a gold ring or something. This is where the Americans get the name of bandits and robbers and everything else. You'd talk an Englishman out of a ring or something, or a watch, and then go sell it in the black market and make 1,000 percent profit or something like that. The English were in the black market themselves, too. I don't know whether it was a well-known fact, but it was brought to light that some of the Englishmen who worked in the hospital, some of these hospitalmen, had taken what they called "M and B," which was something like a sulfur drug, and sold it over the wire. I think that some of the



Americans got together and bought some of this back over the wire to give to the Americans who were in the hospital in Changi.

When we finally wound up in Changi, when we were liberated, there were sixty-nine Americans, and I was one of the ones that was in Changi. Well, Gordon had gone up-country and come back down to Singapore. Then when they moved us into the jail, that's when we were thrown in together.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up because we are kind of wandering around here, and we're not keeping these things in some order. Let's talk a little bit more about that period when you first arrived in Singapore until you actually went over to Changi. Now during that period of months, I guess it was, what kind of work were you doing?

Papish: One type of work we were doing more than anything, I think, was salvaging steel. They were loading it on the ship and sending it back to Japan. I know that we were dismantling some things in one area of Singapore there. I don't know where it was, but it was pretty close to the shipyard that the British had. They had a floating dry dock in Singapore, and when the

Japanese came in, they bombed that floating dry dock and sent it to the bottom. Some of the English working parties, I understand, were salvaging this dry dock. Then, of course, we salvaged any metal and stuff like that.

We were out dismantling something one day, and the sadistic guards that we had...here's where we met a change of guards. I think that this was the Koreans who were in Singapore. We were out on a working party, and I don't know what this fellow done. He was an Englishman. He had done something. He was either taking something that he shouldn't be taking or was eating something he shouldn't have been eating. Anyway, they tied him up with his hands on a bar, and then they commenced to beat him unmercifully with a two-by-four across the back and across the kidneys. When they brought that man back into prison camp, I mean, they say that he was just passing nothing but blood. I mean, it was just unmerciful beatings over nothing. I forget what the nickname was of the Jap that beat him, but this was another sadistic one like the "Brown Bomber." I don't know how a guy...he just seemed

to go berserk. This is what they had us working at.

I remember going into Singapore one time and unloading a ship loaded with rice. I couldn't have weighed more than between ninety and a hundred pounds, and I was hauling 200-kilo sacks of rice on my back and down onto the dock. The rice weighed more than me, but they taught us how to carry them. They load them on your back, and it's just like those natives over there. You just kind of jog down the gangplank with the stuff.

We unloaded ships, and we salvaged this metal wherever they were tearing down buildings and stuff like that. One of the main things that we did was on this airstrip. You've probably heard some of the fellows mention the airstrip. That was a working party where we went out and were leveling ground.

Marcello: Now does this occur after you moved over to Changi itself?

Papish: This is when we moved into Changi. This is the transition from Selerang, which I don't think there was very many working parties working out of Selerang. The majority of people were

transferred up-country. Then after moving over into Changi is where I started having my bouts with malaria, dysentery, and things like that; so whenever there was a working party to come up, I was either in the hospital or in the wrong spot.

Marcello: When you were back here in Selarang and some of those places, do you recall ever working on the rubber plantation? In other words, they were clearing...one of the projects here in which some of the Americans participated was clearing trees and so on from a rubber plantation. They were going to make a huge garden area out of it. Are you familiar with that?

Papish: I think so.

Marcello: I'm assuming you never worked on that detail.

Papish: I don't think so. I can't remember working on it. I remember working in the garden area planting tapioca root, and, like I say, some of these weeds that grow in vacant lots we cultivated over there. In any case I don't remember anything being said about clearing it for rubber. I remember that on the other side of the causeway the Japs were stripping out rubber trees, and that may have happened in some of the other

places around Singapore where they had the British in prison camps. The airstrip, then, became the most...they paid more attention to building this airstrip than anything else.

Marcello: But now, again, that occurs after you get up to Changi. Is that correct?

Papish: Into Changi, yes.

Marcello: Again I want to hold off on that because I have a few more things I want to ask you here. I also understand that in some of these barracks there were some terrific problems with bedbugs. Do you remember that?

Papish: Oh, God! I spent so much time with bedbugs that I thought that would just be incidental (chuckle). Yes, bedbugs were something else! It was crawling with bedbugs! You could take your bunk, and you could turn it over and everything else.

Somewhere along the line--I can't remember where--I had acquired a set of bed springs. You've seen just the springs--then springs up here (gesture) and then the woven part and then springs down here and springs on each end. I acquired this, and I carried this thing with me. That was really a good bed. Periodically, we'd

have to take these mattresses out. What I did was, I made a mattress, too. I had acquired some cloth and some kapok, and so I stretched this cloth out. One side was white and one side was blue. I sewed pockets in this cloth like so (gesture), and then I stuffed kapok in all of these pockets, and I had me a mattress, and I could roll it up.

Well, I constructed this mattress wrong because later on I find out that inside these creases were the hiding (chuckle) places for bedbugs. And, my God, I'll tell you, at night you could get up, and if you had to make a call to the latrine, you could see them. If there was any light visible, it was just as if the wall was crawling. I mean, there were bedbugs all over, and how we could have slept through some of this, I'll never understand. Once we discovered that these were bedbugs, my God, I just itched all over. I could barely get a night's sleep.

What I used to do is just take my mattress out at free time after we got back off a working party and take it down below--I forget what deck we were on inside the jail--and just religiously

clean my springs and my mattress and all of that.  
This became practically a daily concern.

Marcello: Now where were these bedbugs? Was it in Changi or was it back in Selerang or Roberts barracks?

Papish: In Changi, yes. When we moved from the barracks outside to the jail itself, my God, bedbugs were all over. I think they are still living over there in (chuckle) Changi--those bedbugs that we had. I don't think anybody could obliterate them things. It was something else. You can picture...I don't want to get off of your track again, but bedbugs were a big problem. When we moved into Changi, now if you can picture a cell as wide as that (gesture), from the pillar there to the wall...

Marcello: Again, we are talking about an area that's about five feet-by-twelve feet, something like that.

Papish: Yes. Okay, now picture a cell out to the end of this table here (gesture).

Marcello: Okay, that's about five feet-by-eight feet maybe.

Papish: From the wall to the table. Now picture in the center of that a big stone slab about this wide (gesture).

Marcello: About two feet wide.

Papish: Yes. It's about two feet wide and coming down the center of the cell, leaving about this much on either side (gesture).

Marcello: Leaving about two feet on either side.

Papish: Two feet on either side. A big stone slab maybe three feet wide and two feet on either side over there (gesture). Over here in the corner (gesture) there, triangular, where your door is is a latrine, a "john." Of course, these are all inoperative. You don't do it inside the jail. Nothing happens inside the jail. You don't use the latrine. Okay, inside this cell four men are allotted to each cell in a one-man cell. Here's "Herbie" here (gesture), "Quaty" in the middle on the stone slab, Van Cleave off to the side on this side (gesture) on the stone slab. So where is the sailor? The sailor has this bunk here (gesture). Painstakingly, I'm able to get something sharp and dig into these cinder blocks and put plugs in there, and I find some kind of metal nail for each end. So up above this stone slab, about four foot up, I've got two pieces of chain that I've religiously taken each time I've moved to new quarters. So I've got this bed, and



I put it up there on these things that I have put on the wall. I take my chains, and I hook it on either end and then run it up to the bars of the window, which is small. Oh, I'd say it was about a two-foot-by-three-foot window up there, barred. So I hang this bunk up over these guys, and that's where I sleep, and that's where I keep myself. Now this was a nice spot because a lot of times I could get up from my bunk and stand on my bunk or kneel on my bunk and look out the bars at the whole area (chuckle).

Marcello: And get some fresh air.

Papish: Yes. So this was the make-up of our cell.

Marcello: Now what was this large slab for in the middle?

Papish: In the middle that was a sleeping slab for one prisoner. Normally, each cell was a one-prisoner cell.

Marcello: So you had one person on the slab, you had two on the floor, and then you were on the overhead.

Papish: I was swung up there on the wall. So all my stuff was up there. In the daytime "Herbie" and "Van" would roll up their stuff to the wall, and "Quaty," of course, would roll his mattress up to the wall. Then I could jump down from my bunk

onto "Quaty's" slab there and then back down onto the floor. But when I had a "pee call" at night, (chuckle) I'd say, "'Quaty,' move over! Here I come!" So they used to have to make room for me. They used to put up with Papish like that.

Marcello: You couldn't quite get up far enough to do it out the window.

Papish: (Chuckle) No! No! No! And another thing, too, these were the real good trial days in Changi, so to speak. We were working at the airstrip, and there was an opportunity, when we were cutting down coconut tree, to chop out them hearts of these palm fronds on the coconut trees and eat as much of that as we could get at. Periodically, somebody would have to stay back, and there would be a working party to go down in the Japanese quarters and clean out their cookhouses and stuff like that and clean out their woks where they cooked their rice.

This was one of the times when I got the biggest beating of my life in the prison camp. I go on this working party, and we are down there cleaning out this wok and scraping out that--not burnt rice--brown rice that I said tasted like

Rice Crispies. And, boy, I'm stuffing my mouth! I'm getting as much of that into me as I possibly can, and behind me stands a Jap. Man, I tell you, he slapped me all over that cookhouse and up one side and down the other and everything else. When I got back (chuckle) they said, "What the hell happened to you?" I said, "Well, I ate too much rice out of the wok." And another thing, too, we had the garden in Singapore, and we finally had this garden going.

Marcello: Since you're determined to get over to Changi, I give up. Let's go to Changi. Now when you first moved over there, had "Quaty" Gordon and Van Cleave and the other guys come down from up-country yet?

Papish: Gordon is the only one that was up-country of the four of us.

Marcello: How was it that you four got together? Was it, again, simply the luck of the draw?

Papish: Yes. When we moved from Selarang into the huts in the back, practically all the Americans moved into one hut. I wasn't near "Herbie" or Van Cleave or anything else when we were in the huts. The sixty-nine of us who were left there in

Changi got along together, and that was true of just everybody that was in the American hut. There wasn't no particular buddies or anything else. We all got along pretty well.

Marcello: Among the four of you, which ones were from the Navy?

Papish: Among the four of us?

Marcello: Yes.

Papish: I was the only one.

Marcello: You were the only one. Okay, when Gordon comes into this group, I'm assuming that by this time we're now into late 1943, and the railroad has more or less been finished.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: What kind of tales is he bringing down out of the jungle?

Papish: He's bringing tales down that to us were unbelievable. We could not understand people working under the conditions that "Quaty" described to us. "Herbie" had diphtheria, and that was one thing that kept him back. I think he also had a heart that the doctor said he couldn't go up-country.

Marcello: Do you think that you were perhaps kept back because of your dysentery and so on?

Papish: Yes, I was and also again the luck of the draw, too. When "Quaty" brought these stories down from up-country--I mean, I don't know--I just thanked my lucky stars that I didn't have to go up under those conditions because I don't think, myself, I would have ever survived.

Marcello: Compared to you what did he look like physically when he came down out of the jungle?

Papish: Well, as big as you know "Quaty" is now, he was about the same size as I was when I weighed about a hundred pounds. Of course, he has a real bad shoulder, and he has a back that is real bad. I think that when he came back down from up-country, his shoulder was just practically gone.

I don't know when "Quaty" went up, and I don't think I knew "Quaty" before he went up-country. I knew Van Cleave from him having to stay in Changi. I don't know why he stayed. His may have been the same reasons as mine--luck of the draw and medical. "Van" was a very quiet, retiring person. I don't know. Here again, when we moved out of the huts and into the jail, we

were probably in line. "You four take this cell."  
"You four take this cell." Maybe it was chopped off there. I'm going to have to ask "Quaty" this when I see him, is just how in the heck we did get in there together.

Okay, we're in the cell, we're moved in and everything else, and this is when a lot of stuff now becomes the hilarious part, which at that time was quite serious. I can look back on some of this stuff and really laugh about it. The four of us are all into this cell together, so rules are laid down. "Okay, if you get this and if you get that and this, I'll cook it." "Quaty" was the cook. So we get a working party, and whichever working party we went out on, our primary mission was to get something and try to get it back into the camp so "Quaty" could cook it.

Marcello: So every consuming minute is spent looking for food.

Papish: Looking for food, right. I mean, cats, dogs, anything that is edible.

Marcello: And during most of this period, you're working on this airstrip.

Papish: Yes. Also, if you're lucky, you got to go to the garden and work. As far as the garden was concerned, at one time I was in charge of the "pee cart." Now this was actually a "pee cart." This is an old truck that has got the water tank on it. The engine is out, and all you have is this tank on a frame with four wheels on it and tires. On the front of this frame is cable and these bars. So I've got six men. I'm a petty officer, third class storekeeper, and I'm in charge of the "pee cart." So I'm driving the "pee cart." I'm steering the thing, if you could steer it, and these other guys are pulling the "pee cart" and the tank. We go around the camp. Our job is to go around the camp, and at various places are these dairy cans and these troughs. Wherever you go throughout the camp, you pee in these troughs. It doesn't go into the ground; it empties into the can. So we go around and empty this pee into this old water tank truck. We take this water tank truck out to the garden, and that is what is being used as fertilizer. This is our rounds every day. I mean, we pick up the pee tank and the cart, and these guys start pulling it.

Changi was built...as far as the jail was concerned, our huts were down here (gesture), and it was a slopping trip up. We'd go into the jail, and we'd pick up what cans were in the jail and empty them into the "pee cart." We'd go around to the officers' country and pick up their pee and (chuckle) around to the other huts. We'd load up this tank, and it would be taken out to the garden, and it would be emptied out there and used as fertilizer. Okay, if you're lucky, sometimes we get out there in the garden, and we start to bring things back in from the garden.

Marcello: Are you accompanied by any guards or anything?

Papish: At first we were, but then afterwards we weren't. So anyway, the "pee cart" goes out, and somebody picks it up and takes it out.

But if you're lucky enough to get on a working party out to the garden, well, this is good too. In my little ol' way--I don't know how I acquired it; my wife asked me this last night--I acquired a regular jockstrap to wear, so I get this idea. "Now if I sew a pocket in this jockstrap, I can slip this tapioca root and everything else into this pocket and into this



jockstrap." So every time I go out to the garden and stuff like that, I steal a little bit of tapioca root or something that Gordon can cook in the cell.

We have a little hibachi there. We were ever picking up charcoal--you know, burnt wood and charcoal--for this hibachi. So one guy stands there and fans the hibachi, and Gordon is there cooking the foodstuff.

But what would happen...what I'd do, I'd get out to the garden, and I'd get these tapioca roots, and I'd break off some good ones that fit just right, and I would slip it down into the pocket of this jockstrap and curve around in between the legs. Then I would bring the tapioca root into the camp in my jockstrap. Whenever they would stopped us for a search or something else like that, well, all I was wearing was a pair of shorts, as far as he was concerned, and a pair of those ol' rubber tire shoes that we used to make, not shoes but "go-aheads," we called them. That's all I had on, was just a pair of shorts and no shirt, no hat, or anything. And every time they came past me, they'd just look me up and down and

go right on. And here I was, smuggling in these tapioca roots and anything that was edible in this jockstrap (chuckle). So you might say that we were pretty well off, the way that we were operating.

Marcello: What were some of the things you were bringing in other than the tapioca?

Papish: Sweet potatoes, if I could manage to get them in there; any of the greens, some kind of spinach or something that we used to grow out there; mushrooms. Then another thing, too, is we that used to grow tomatoes, these little cherry tomatoes. You probably heard the story of the cherry tomatoes. We'd eat the tomatoes, but then what we would do in the feces was look for the seeds, and we'd plant the seeds all over again. It's amazing. I tell you, when you start thinking about food and your stomach is requiring this food, I mean, it's amazing what you do. Dogs or cats. I mean, the dogs and the cats in that camp were completely wiped out except for one. We used to make slingshots to try and get these animals and things like that.

Marcello: Why do you say they were all wiped out except one?

Papish: This one was too smart. He wouldn't be within range of a slingshot. You couldn't sneak up on that dog. You could not get near that dog. But when that camp was liberated and they started parachuting that food in, that was the friendliest dog you ever saw. I mean, you could pet him, and he would come around, and the guys would feed and (chuckle) stuff like that. But before they started shooting that food into us, you couldn't get near that dog.

Then one time I was picked out to work on the airstrip. Damn, I was clearing away a spot there, and I happened to look up into this brushy kind of a tree, and, my God, here's these two beady eyes staring at me. It was a great, big, long lizard, some kind of iguana or something. So I hit that damned thing with the shovel that I had in my hand, and I got it. One of the natives came over, and he said something in his own language. I said, "What?" So they started cutting it up, and the tail was practically meaty. So he gave me part of it, and I brought it into them,

and (chuckle) we cooked it up that night. Food, that's what's uppermost. As I say, there are time, too, that it's hilarious when you look back on it and how you existed, how you lived, and what you did to exist. It's amazing to me. I often think about it. It's amazing what the human body can stand and what it can take, the punishment it can take, and still live.

Marcello: Are the Japanese still supplying you with basic rice?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: How much rice are you getting here at Changi?

Papish: The regular cup of rice. You're getting an awful lot of tea on the working parties. This is something my wife can't understand. I explained to her that I drink my coffee, and my coffee has to be real hot, not just lukewarm. And not just hot but hot-hot. She says, "You must be leather all the way down." I tell her, "Well, out on the working party when we had the tea and it was boiling hot, I mean, you put your cup under there, and you got as much tea as you could, and you drank it as hot as could so you could get back there and get more." Those Army aluminum

cups, you'd rub your lips on there just to get it cool so you could drink it. Boy, you feel it going all the way down, but you could go back and get some more.

Marcello: How many times a day would you get rice from the Japanese here?

Papish: We got rice...a sort of a gruel in the morning, and out on the working party they would bring out maybe a little bit of food cooked up plus your rice plus your tea; and then in the evening you would get maybe one of the small cups of rice. Then there toward the last, you'd start looking at the rice, and I know one time there I started looking real close, and here is a rice kernel with a brown tip on it. I was looking at it real close: "That's not rice! It's a worm!" So I started separating those rice kernels from the brown-tipped rice that I thought was brown-tipped (chuckle), but eventually it turned out that I was getting more of the brown tipped rice over here (gesture) than I had over here (gesture). So I said, "The hell with it!" I mixed it all up, and I'm eating those little brown-headed worms that you see. Meal worms, I guess they might call

them. If you threw them away, you wouldn't have anything to eat, so after a while it just didn't matter what was in your rice, as long as you got your cup of rice and you had something to flavor it with. We also got a ration of sugar--I forget how many times a day--or something. Sometimes some of the guys would save it up, and if they came across a vehicle or something like that, they'd pour it in a gas tank.

Marcello: How important was it for the four of you to work together as opposed to each man being on his own?

Papish: The only way I could describe that importance is that I'm here today. And these four...well, Van Cleave passed away here a couple of years ago, but he would have told you the same thing, that if it wasn't for him I wouldn't be here. If it wasn't for this one, I wouldn't be here and so forth and so on. The mere fact that we stuck together and that we did these things for the common good, as far as the four of us were concerned, meant that we were able to live a little bit better than the other prisoners, I think, than those who would say, "Well, I've got this or I've got that."

Marcello: You mentioned that it's during this period when you still have the dysentery, and then you come down with beriberi and malaria and whatever else comes along. I'm assuming that you are sick enough now that you go to whatever hospital they have there at Changi. Is this correct?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, who determines whether you're sick enough to go to the hospital?

Papish: We had the doctors there. They were mainly English and East Indian doctors.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese didn't play any part in this decision.

Papish: No, no. I think that the Japanese general laid down the laws there and relayed them onto the general there, and then, of course, he says, "You do this and you do that." As long as the English general kept a Japanese general happy, that was it.

Marcello: You bring up an interesting point, and I should have asked this earlier. I'm glad you mentioned that. The Japanese, in essence, allowed the British to run that camp internally, did they not?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't have a whole lot of contact with the Japanese in that camp--inside.

Papish: No.

Marcello: At least that meant that they wouldn't be on your back and so on.

Papish: That was one of the things, yes. Another thing, too, though, was the discipline. You don't get away from the discipline, because when you come marching in from a working party and pass the guard shack, you give an "eyes right" or an "eyes left." One day we were coming in off of a working party, and the Japanese guard yelled for us to halt: "Stop-o! Stop-o!" So they come out there, and everybody is wondering what happened. "What are they going to do? Search and everything else?" Well, they single me out, and they drag me out of the formation. I'm wondering, "What's this?" So they got a little physical and everything else, and then they took me over to the side of the guard shack and knelt me down. You've seen this crushed rock? They knelt me down in this rock, and after a while my legs just got



numb. But after they pulled me out and that, then they sent the rest of the troops on.

So what they did was, they sent ahead for an interpreter to find out just...nobody could understand why I was taken out of the ranks. So they sent in for the interpreter, and it was a pretty good while before that interpreter got out there. And here I am, I'm kneeling down in these rocks. Well, after about five or ten minutes in those rocks, my legs are getting number, but I said, "Man, this is all right. This is a breeze." So I'm having to put my hands behind my back with my head up like so (gesture) and kneeling in these rocks.

So a Jap come around, and he tells me, "Stand up!" Then he reaches down like this (gesture) on his legs. He says, "You!" So he's telling me to rub my legs, and he says, "Fast! Fast! Fast!" He's getting across to me what he wants me to do, so I'm rubbing my legs like this (gesture) and getting the circulation back into the legs. Then he knelt me down again, and, believe me, I mean, each time--this happened about four or five times--each time I was made to

get up and put the circulation back into my legs and then kneel down again. God, that's excruciating!

Finally, the interpreter showed up, and they were back over there talking back and forth. He came around, and he had some kind of a rank. He was an English officer. I asked him, "What's the matter? What did I do? Why me?" He said, "What's your name, son?" I said, "Paul Papish." So he said, "Paul, what you done when you gave an 'eyes right' or when you gave an 'eyes left,' you had a sneer on your face, and nobody sneers at the Japanese." Because I had an expression on my face that they interpreted as being not just quite right when I gave an "eyes left," that was my punishment. I'll tell you, that's something else. It's like you say, though, that the officer who was in charge there, the British general, I guess if he kept things copasetic, the Japs didn't bother us.

When you went to the hospital--and I was in that hospital quite often--the first thing that you would get would be the \_\_\_\_\_. We used to call it the "Silver Stallion." Of course,

they look up through the rectum and everything and find out if there is any ulcerated spots and things like that. Then, of course, this is where you get your potassium permanganate retention enemas that I described before, each POW vying with the other to see how long you could hold it.

But when I first went in the hospital there, we were in a hospital hut, and there was "bore-holes." Now what they did in Changi for sanitation is that they had what we called "bore-holes." They used augers that they would auger down and dig just like a post hole digger, only you did it by hand. They'd go down maybe about from ceiling height to floor height, down that deep.

Marcello: About twelve or fifteen feet.

Papish: Yes, they auger down. Well, over these "bore-holes" they put a cement slab on the filled ones. When these holes get filled, they move a sort of a box and a stool that you sit on. We used to call them the "bore-holes." When these are full, the cement slab was put over it and covered, and then the box was moved back. By the time these are filled here (gesture), then they uncover the

ones in front, and the maggots had consumed all the feces that was in there. Not all, but down to maybe three-quarters of that height. You can look down in there and see all them maggots just working and everything else (chuckle). That was a sanitation deal, as far as the camp was concerned.

Now outside of the hospital hut they had "bore-holes" out away from the hut. Off to one side was a shower where you could get out there and take a shower and stuff like that--clean up. It was really quite something when I first got in that hospital. I'd lay in that bed, and that pain would hit, and I'd take off. Sometimes I would get to the "bore-hole," but other times, I mean, right in between, about where the shower was, I couldn't hold it any longer, and that was it. So I'd go over to the shower in shorts and all and get under the shower, wash off, and wring out my shorts, put them back on, and go back into the hospital hut.

Then it kind of becomes a game or a challenge. This is why I think sometimes, too, that during this period in my life, if I made

something a challenge, I could fare better. It was always a challenge to get from my bed at the hospital out to that "bore-hole" before I had to go to the shower. And finally I made it.

At one time there toward the end of the war, before we were liberated, there was a certain amount of emetine that was given into the camp. I don't know where the medicine came from, but Wisecup called it to my attention. Here in a letter he says, "You remember when King [who was an Indian Army medical officer]...do you remember when we got the emetine, and Captain King figured that we were the ones to get it?" Well, John had the amoebic dysentery, also, and he and I both got a shot of that emetine, which at that time was the cure for amoebic dysentery. We figured...he and I both...I mean, it's like he wrote in his note to me: "Remember when we got that emetine? That cured us of the shits."

Marcello: How did you combat the beriberi and the malaria?

Papish: The malaria, the way we had to combat it out there was, of course, quinine.

Marcello: Was quinine readily available or not?

Papish: The Malayan peninsula is full of quinine. It was available, fortunately.

Marcello: How about the beriberi?

Papish: For beriberi it was more or less up to you. Rice polishings...the Japanese used to give us sacks of rice polishings in the camp, and those are the most horrible things. You mix them with water, and you drink them. Now the polishings off the rice, when they polish the rice, that's where most of the vitamins in the rice is. We used to drink those rice polishings and just try and get them down. To get some vitamin B, we used to try to eat anything green that we could get hold of. Another thing, too, when we got the "runs," when we had dysentery, you could dig down to a certain level in Singapore there, and you'd come across this white clay. That's that kaolin. What we used to do is dig down far enough and get this and eat that to cure the "runs" or stop the "runs" for a while.

Marcello: Did you have the wet or dry beriberi?

Papish: I think it was the wet, where you pressed into your leg and pulled your finger away and the dent just stayed in. Yes, I had the wet.

Marcello: Was it mainly water retention?

Papish: It's water retention, yes. In the diet that we were on, of course, we couldn't expel the water fast enough.

Marcello: Approximately how long did you have the wet beriberi?

Papish: I had it when I was liberated, and, then, of course, when we got back on to the food and the vitamins and things like that, I thought it went away. But evidently it left the damaged nerves.

Marcello: So you essentially had the dysentery, the beriberi, and the malaria for the duration.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: In the case of the dysentery, you would have had it for well over three years.

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: And the beriberi and the malaria you would have had for probably two-and-a-half years.

Papish: Yes, right.

Marcello: And did you still have all three, more or less, when you were liberated, or had you cured the dysentery at that time?

Papish: The dysentery seemed to have gone.

Marcello: But again, that's pretty close to the end.

Papish: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about the guards here in Singapore and Changi. I'm assuming from what you said a while ago that this is where you run into the Koreans.

Papish: I think we ran into the Koreans. I'm not sure, but they were not the regular Japanese.

Marcello: How did their conduct differ from the Japanese that you had come up against in Java, for instance?

Papish: They were much more aggressive and much more sadistic.

Marcello: In what way?

Papish: In beatings and, as I say, the subtle punishment that was meted out, like, me kneeling down in stones; going through the camp and just taking it out on anybody and everybody. It wasn't beyond them just for no reason whatsoever to single somebody out and stand him to attention while they beat on him.

Another thing, too, it was nothing...I witnessed a Japanese private just get the living daylight's beat out of him and knocked down and then told to stand up again and knocked down,



kicked, beat, and tell him to stand to attention again; and he'd just stand there and just take it for anywhere from ten to fifteen minutes. I don't think the poor private knew what in the heck he done, either.

Marcello: Now is it not true that the lowest person in the Japanese army could tromp on the Koreans?

Papish: Yes.

Marcello: The Koreans evidently had no rights at all.

Papish: That's right.

Marcello: And so once more the Koreans then hit the prisoners.

Papish: Yes, you betcha. And that's probably one of the biggest reasons why we got the treatment that we did.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that the Koreans could even be cruel to animals and things like that. There have been accounts where they would just jab a dog or a water buffalo or something with a bayonet just to hear it yelp or watch it jump or things like that.

Papish: I never witnessed anything like that or saw anything like that, but from the way they treated human beings, I wouldn't put it past them

(chuckle). If they can treat a human being the way that they treated us, then, my goodness, what could they do to an animal?

Marcello: During this period, did you ever receive any mail or did you have an opportunity to send any mail?

Papish: Yes, I got three postcards home. In fact, I have them in a scrapbook. My mother had saved them. They allowed us so many words, and I always ended the ending on my postcard by writing, "With all my love to you both, 'Pap.'" Of course, even at home my mother, whenever she called me, called me "Pap." In fact, that's where the kids all picked it up in high school when I was playing basketball. My mother would be up there in the stands: "Come on, 'Pap!'" So that was picked up, and all through high school, if someone called me Paul, I'd generally not even turn around; but if somebody said, "Pap," well, I'd turn around.

Anyway, as far as the mail was concerned, she got these cards. But when I got back out of the prison camp, my mother handed me all this stuff and these letters from the Navy Department and these postcards and things like that. It seemed the normal thing was that Mom said when

she got a postcard from me in the prison camp, right on the heels of it would come a letter from the Bureau of Naval Personnel. They would go on to explain that word had been received, but they said, "We cannot accept this as being an authentic postcard from your son because it's not in handwriting." They made us print it.

Marcello: They were pre-printed cards, were they not?

Papish: We printed on them, too. Then one of them was type-written. We were told what to put, and then they typed it; and then I would sign it, "Pap." So Mom knew that I had survived the sinking, but the Navy Department, up until sometime in March, 1945, or thereafter, they finally accepted it. No! No! No! The Red Cross, when we were liberated, said that we could send a so many word message home. So I sent the message through the Red Cross. I hadn't heard from Mom or didn't know whether both my parents were alive or anything else like that. So when we got back into Calcutta and were allowed to send the message, then I got a letter back from my mother saying that everything was all right at home and everything, and everybody was glad that I was alive and well.

Marcello: So you did not receive any mail at all from home.

Papish: No, I didn't. Dad didn't believe that I was alive even after the postcards and things like that. My mom tried to convince him, but he said, "No, he's not alive. Don't even wish it because you're going to only hurt yourself." But when I did get home, I walked in at home, and my mother came down off the terrace there, and I had to catch her before she fell. My mother called Dad at work, and she just told him to come home. He came home, and I was standing there by the fireplace. Just as he came in the door at home, there was a chair; and he came in the door, he took one look at me, and he just sat in the chair and looked (weeping). It was really something. We lost him in 1947. It was really something. He just couldn't believe it. Of course, Mom was the same way. I lost my mother a few years back. But, I mean, for them it was something else. It was a homecoming I'll never forget, that's for sure. Then I had to go around to the various schools, Cathedral High School and the churches, and take down the black star after my name.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute. There are a few loose ends I want to pick up on here. We mentioned the hospital a while ago. What kind of a hospital was it? In other words, what was it like in terms of sanitation, cleanliness, the availability of medicine? When we say hospital, are we using that term rather loosely?

Papish: Very (chuckle) loosely. The hospital consisted of two or three rows--I forget how many--of huts. It was about three times the length of this room, and in some it was bays. It had a dirt floor and then a bay built up off of the dirt floor. In another part of the hospital was just the dirt floor, and then they had some of these British Army cots in there which were more comfortable than just the bays. People who were not in too good of shape were more or less given the beds and things like that, which, when I was down with the dysentery and malaria and that, I was in a bed next to the Englishmen. It was Wisecup, I guess, who would stand back there and just berate us and everything else: "Go ahead and give up! Die! I'll get your shoes!" He'd say something like that or "I'll get this or I'll get that."

This is what I was alluding to you earlier. John made me so mad. I told him one time that, by God, I was going to get out of there, and I was going to get well enough and strong enough to punch him right in the nose. And he was that type of fellow, a Marine. He's the one that I told you about--the Marine they would beat the heck out and have him dig a hole to stand in.

Marcello: The Japanese would degrade him.

Papish: Yes. And Wisecup was a sparring partner for the Asiatic champion out there in peacetime, and Wisecup would just roll with the punches that that Jap would put out and then sit on the dirt hill there and smoke cigarettes that the Japanese would hand him and then bring some of the cigarettes in and share them. He goaded you enough to make you so mad that you wanted to get back at him so bad. But, by gosh, he was going to make you live.

Marcello: And, of course, he was doing this deliberately.

Papish: Right, right. He was very much different.

Marcello: Again, I've heard that technique being used in other cases, also, because there were people who simply gave up and lost the will to live.

Papish: Just give up. This was prevalent with the Dutch soldiers.

Marcello: How could you tell when somebody had given up and lost the will to live?

Papish: There was nothing you could say to them. There was nothing that would cheer them up. You couldn't say, "Well, do it for your family" or something else like that. It was just, "What's the use?" "Why live like this?" There was more Dutchmen that just gave up, and that was it.

This was another thing, too, about the Americans and the Australians and the Scotsmen, that, by gosh, they weren't going to give up. I think that that's what brought you through. This one Englishman that I tell you about, his name was Berry and we used to call him "Buzz." My God, he had dysentery so bad he went fifty and sixty times a day and things like that. This man, who in peacetime probably weighed anywhere from 180 to 200 pounds, is down to about ninety pounds or eighty pounds and nothing but skin and bones. When I heard from him after the war, he was home.

It took the British--I forget--six months to get those soldiers home after they were

liberated. And why? None of us Americans can understand because we were flown from Singapore to Calcutta and then from Calcutta home after two weeks in Calcutta. I was home on September 27, 1945. "Buzz" tells me...I visited him over in England when I was on this AKA when I was telling you about the Portsmouth Naval Ship Yard. I went up to London, and he lived on Southend-on-Sea. I asked for overnight liberty, and I spent the night with him and his family, or the evening, and the next day we rode back into London. He was the picture of health, but it took them so long to get those people back that none of the Americans could understand why they had to not be near their families that long.

Marcello: There's another loose end I want to pick up on. You mentioned on several occasions the work detail of the airstrip. How long were you on that detail?

Papish: I forget when we started building that airstrip, but we built it enough to where those Zeroes were taking off from it. The day that the B-29s showed up, my God, that was a day! That was a day of celebration.



Marcello: Okay, let's hold off again and talk a little bit more about this airstrip. What kind of work were you doing here on this airstrip?

Papish: Okay, part of the airstrip was in a swampy area probably down near the water somewhere. We would clear this area and cut down these coconut trees and cut up the coconut trees, the logs and everything else. You've seen the regular pictures of how the Chinese work and the Japanese work in building railroads and things like this with one of those chunkles and a basket? A guy would fill a basket of dirt, you'd take it over, and you'd dump it here; you come back, get another basket of dirt, you go over here and dump it. You take your turn at the chunkle, fill the basket for the guys, and they come right around. It's just basket-by-basket. You're building a level piece of land; you're striping the land.

Marcello: Do you have guards supervising you?

Papish: Right. And if you're not moving fast enough, they'll make you move fast enough.

Marcello: How sick did you have to be to get off that detail?

Papish: Well, you had to practically be in the hospital by that time. If you were able to walk and get out and make formation and like that, you went out.

Marcello: How long was a workday on this airstrip?

Papish: The workday was from early morning right on up until evening, and this was seven days a week.

Marcello: In other words, there were no days off.

Papish: Except on Hirohito's birthday, and then you got a package of cigarettes, too (chuckle).

Marcello: While you were working on this airstrip and moving this dirt, would you have to fulfill a certain quota? Would you have to move so much dirt, or were they just continually on your back?

Papish: No, they were just continually on you enough that they kept it moving until it was cleared.

Marcello: I'm assuming that there were bunches of people working on this airstrip.

Papish: Oh, yes, bunches is right.

Marcello: Did you ever finish it?

Papish: Oh, yes. As I said, these Zeroes were taking off from it. When the planes came over when we were liberated and they dropped the supplies into the camp...our planes came over the field and were

dropping the canisters on the airstrip there. But the Japanese had been using it, sure. They had Zeroes on the airstrip. When the first B-29s came in there and bombed, the Zeroes took off, Evidently, their intelligence didn't know very much about the B-29 because these Zeroes took off, and they came in behind these B-29s, and before they knew it the "stinger" on the tail on the B-29s was shooting them down. The B-29s had shot down a pretty good number of those Zeroes. Then when the B-29s came around in the succeeding raids--there was a few more raids after that--they'd start up the north end of Singapore, come down the east coast of Singapore, and then come back up the west coast of Singapore. Well, those Zeroes would take off from the strip, and they would dogfight amongst themselves over here (gesture). Those B-29s would come in and bomb and then come right around, and these Zeroes would come right around with them, and they'd go over here (gesture) and dogfight amongst themselves. They were afraid to come in on those B-29s. The B-29s had those waist gunners, they had those "stingers" on the tail (chuckle), they had that

middle...and I don't know...they just didn't know what kind of armament that B-29 had.

This was a subject of more beatings, too. We would get out on that airstrip, and all of a sudden somebody would straighten up and kind of listen and catch the attention of a Jap and say something [in Japanese] like, "B-29," and, man, those Japs would scatter. They hated those things. Then when the Japanese found out there was a false alarm...whenever we needed a break, somebody would holler [in Japanese] "B-29" (chuckle), and we'd get a little break. But the Japanese would find out who in the heck it was and beat the heck out of him with a bamboo stick.

Marcello: What did those bombings do for your morale?

Papish: Man, I tell you, they shot that morale right up out of the thermometer, but we also were apprehensive and knew that there was going to be something, too, in case this guy didn't want to give up or something like that. But they dropped leaflets into the camp in Changi: "You better lay off. If anybody dies in the camp after now, you're going to stand trial for it." That's the

way we understood it was put, Anyway, the morale just really shot up.

Then, of course, when they dropped the atomic bomb, I remember that day very vividly. This car drives up at the airstrip there, and the guy gets out of the car, evidently a high-ranking officer, and he talks to the Japanese. So the Japanese go out, and they come around, "American?" "Yes, American." They lined us all up, and this Japanese officer came over, and he said, "All American?" Yes, all American." He said, "America no damned good! America drop bomb on Hiroshima! Hiroshima, no more!" We thought this guy had gone completely out of his gourd. After he said that, he said something to the Japanese guards who were around there, and they had this bamboo, boy, and they commenced on going right on down the line beating the heck out of us. Then we knew something was really wrong when he came around the next time and said, "America no damned good! Nagasaki, no more!" I mean, that was practically our introduction to the liberation.

Marcello: Describe how the liberation took place.

Papish: The OSS had parachuted into the camp, and evidently the Japanese had known that the war was over. Anyway, the OSS parachuted into the camp. As I understood it, he went up and told the English general that C-54s were coming in to pick up the Americans in the camp.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute. How did you find out that the war was over? How was that news relayed to you?

Papish: When the OSS man came in there.

Marcello: So the Japanese never made any announcements.

Papish: No, the Japanese didn't. Then, of course, the next thing that showed up was the planes with the foodstuffs dropping on the airstrip and bringing the foodstuffs into the camp.

Marcello: Describe this operation.

Papish: We saw these planes coming over, and they were making a run on the airstrip. As they were going over the airstrip, they were coming in low and dropping these parachute canisters. Of course, they told us in the camp that they were dropping food in and that we would have that food into camp very soon. This was the British. The

Japanese didn't inform us that this was taking place.

Marcello: Did the planes come in with the food after the war was essentially over?

Papish: Yes. Well, you see, we weren't liberated until September 7; that was our liberation day. The war was over...I don't even know the date. For me it's the September 7, but I never remember the date when the end of the war was signed.

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

Papish: My reaction was just total...just like a real total letdown. I think the most inspiring thing that happened to us in that camp, and to all the Americans, was when somebody raised the flag, the Stars and Stripes, over Changi for just a while; and to see that Stars and Stripes up there, I mean, it was just something else. Just a complete, "It's over! I made it!"

Marcello: Was this a makeshift flag, or was it a real flag?

Papish: Yes, somebody had made it in the camp. The British put their flag up first, and then they took their flag down, and somebody ran the American flag up there. Man, I tell you, when we

saw that ol' Stars and Stripes, it was something else because the last time that I had seen that flag was when that ship went down; and because of that flare, wherever it came from, you could see the Stars and Stripes fluttering there at the mainmast as the ship went down. The next time I saw it was that day we were liberated.

Marcello: Were there any celebrations when this happened?

Papish: Yes, but it wasn't like you would think. "Now let's go get the Japanese" and things like that, no.

Marcello: Did the Japanese still have the guns?

Papish: I guess so. But there's one thing that I remember. Here was a little Chinese guerrilla that had come into camp. Man, he had bandoleers across him, ammunition. He had this gun, and this gun was taller than he was when he put the gun down. He couldn't even talk English or anything else. We meet him out there. We see him out there, and he is smiling and everything, and he's just marching down just as big as ever. Whether he went down into the Japanese quarters or what, we don't know. The Japanese lived right down



below the jail there. I guess it was the administrative part of that jail in peacetime.

Marcello: Now once the surrender is over, did the Japanese kind of back off?

Papish: Yes, they just backed off and kept completely to themselves.

Marcello: Did you have any scores you wanted to settle with any of these guys?

Papish: No. I mean, from the time that that flag went up there, it just seemed like "to heck with it." I don't know. I hold no animosity toward the Japanese. I was just caught in an unfortunate war, so to speak. For me to get back and do something to them, my way of thinking is, I'm not going to allow myself to descend to that level as to take revenge or anything else on a person like that; and I'm not going to put myself at that level and drag myself down by saying, "Boy, I'm really going to get them and go after them."

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned a moment ago that shortly thereafter, that is, after the surrender, the American planes come over. Are these four-engine bombers?

Papish: Yes, I think they were Liberators.

Marcello: What were in these containers of food?

Papish: These containers had all kinds of food. I don't remember what it was. I was just sitting there eating. This was bully beef and--I don't know--K-rations. I can't remember what the K-rations consisted of.

When they loaded us into the plane...and, of course, on liberation day they sent those C-54s down, they took us to the airport and loaded us into the plane; and I understand that at the time this OSS man parachuted into the camp, went up, and told the British general or informed the British general these planes came down to take the Americans back to Calcutta. The British general informed him that they had a list of who was to leave first out of this prison camp, and it was a list of British officers and things like that. I understand that the OSS man promptly told him that these planes came down for Americans: "Americans will go back on these planes, and if these Americans want somebody else to go back on this plane with them, they can tell us who they want to go back." We told them that anybody who

is sick, and really sick, we wouldn't mind having them go back with us.

They loaded all sixty-nine of us onto this plane and turned us loose on the K-rations in the back of the plane (chuckle), and I'm back there feeding my face. This is the first time that I had ever been on an airplane--first time I had ever flew. We get out over the ocean, and, of course, I'm back there feeding my face, and they said, "Anybody who wants to come up to the cockpit can see what's up there, see the pilot and co-pilot." Well, the first thing I heard after I had been eating these K-rations was, "Everybody been up to the cockpit yet?" Nobody was answering, and I said, "I guess I haven't." "Go on up." I go up there, and I get in that cockpit, and here's the pilot (gesture) in the pilot's seat, and here's the co-pilot over here (gesture), and they're both back relaxed like this (gesture). I looked at them guys and grabbed them both by the shoulders, and I said, "Drive this thing, by God!" And they looked at me. I said, "Look, I've been in this prison camp for three-and-a-half years! I'm not going to go down

in the ocean now! Drive it, will you?" They (chuckle) looked at me like I was off my rocker.

Marcello: When you were evacuated, where did you first fly to?

Papish: They took us from Singapore to Calcutta.

Marcello: And what happens when you get to Calcutta?

Papish: The first thing that happened is, they took us into the chow hall. Evidently, some of the people had come through before us, and we asked what was on the menu and everything else, and one of the guys who had been up there at the head of the line already said, "It's rice!" And, my gosh, I mean, all heck broke loose. After they got through, there was rice from one end of the mess hall to the other. I wasn't in on it, but, anyway, I was going for the food. I could skip the rice. But they threw rice all over the place. This was at night when we got into Calcutta, late at night, maybe around 10:00 or 11:00 at night. I just ate and then they led us over to one of the wards in the hospital. It was 142nd General Army Hospital in Calcutta.

Marcello: Is that the first time you'd been on clean sheets since your *Houston* days?

Papish: Oh, God, (chuckle)! Yes, a real bed and everything else and no bedbugs. In fact, I think practically all the guys kind of lifted up the mattress to see if there were any bedbugs (laughter), and somebody said, "No, you don't have bedbugs here."

Marcello: Once you got to Calcutta, I suspect that that was the first time you sat down at a table with chairs and so on for quite a while, too.

Papish: Exactly, exactly.

Marcello: What food were you craving the most? Was it still bread?

Papish: Yes, bread. And my mother used to always...I used to like hamburger steak, and she used to cook me hamburger steak. So the first chance I got, I got a hamburger steak.

Marcello: I understand there was a lot of hell raised there in Calcutta once they turned you guys loose.

Papish: Oh, yes. I don't remember going outside the gate at Calcutta, but they turned us loose in a ward. We had a ward all to ourselves, and then off to one side of the ward was a storeroom, and it was all stacked with canned foods. They said, "There you go. Eat whenever you want, as much as you

want." Well, then they paid us some money, and they said, "We know you got at least this much coming--\$200, at least." So (chuckle) I went over to the exchange, and I bought a whole box of Hershey bars, and I was eating Hershey bars and eating that food. I think that was probably one of the big mistakes, too, because I had had stomach pains and everything else and ulcers after the war and things like that. I think they turned us loose too fast onto the food. I think it should have been a gradual getting into it. But there was all the canned food--canned fruits, bully beef, and some Spam. Everybody hollers about Spam this and Spam that, but I love Spam (chuckle).

And they had us there for two weeks, and then we had priority air travel. They loaded us onto planes in Calcutta and took us to Karachi, India. In Karachi we were put on another plane and then came up from Karachi up through the Persian Gulf, up through Aden, which is now Iran, I guess, across to Algiers, Cairo, Casablanca. In Casablanca they put us up in a hotel that Stalin and Roosevelt had met at.

Marcello: Churchill and Roosevelt.

Papish: Churchill, yes. The Anfa Hotel in French Morocco, Casablanca. In fact, it was on TV here just awhile back.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you rapidly regaining weight?

Papish: Yes, in fact, I went from ninety pounds in that two weeks to approximately 130 or 135 pounds. So as I say, it was too fast.

Marcello: In the meantime, are you getting medical treatment during this time?

Papish: Yes, they gave us tests and everything else and said that we were fit to travel and if anything turned up to turn yourself in to an Army or Navy hospital. They didn't even hospitalize me when I got back to the States.

Marcello: When you get back to the States, did you go directly home?

Papish: Yes. I called from Washington, D. C. This was a weekend that we pulled into Washington, D.C. Clothing in the small stores at the end of the month are closed. Since clothing and small stores was closed, they couldn't issue us any clothing, so they took us over, and for the only time in my

life the Navy took us over to "Battleship" Max Combs's Navy Store in Washington, D.C., and they bought us each two uniforms. They outfitted us with two sets of uniforms--two uniforms--two skivvies, two white hats, a pair of shoes, two pairs of socks. They said, "This will take care of you until you get home." They took me around to the disbursing office, and here again they gave me some money--\$2,500. They said, "We know you've got that much coming." And I said, "But they told me that in Calcutta, too, and gave me \$200." They said, "Well, you've got more than \$200; you've got \$2,500." So I had that back pay, and so they said, "You're on leave. We've got the leave papers all typed up, so you can go."

So the first place I went....coming from Casablanca to Washington, D.C., here again, this is the only time I had ever been in an airplane. We got around Bermuda, and the weather started closing in, and this pilot couldn't get up above it. He couldn't get to the side of it; he couldn't get around it, he couldn't get under it. So he was going right through it. This is what he was telling us that, "We got heavy weather, so



fasten your seat belts." Normally, the route from Casablanca is up through Gander, Newfoundland, and down to Washington, D.C. Straight across to Bermuda is extra miles, so to speak. He says, "We're going to head for Bermuda." Man, it was lightning flashing and rain coming down and everything, and I'm looking out that window, and I'm looking at these wings, and they're going like this (gesture) in that weather. I thought, "My God, if I ever get on another airplanes, God help me! If I ever get out of this!" So he landed in Bermuda. The pilot and the co-pilot and the engineer came out of that cockpit up there, and they didn't make it to the back of the plane. They just flaked out right there, right in the middle isle there, and that was it. They were totally exhausted bringing that plane through. We took off from Bermuda, and they took us right into Washington, D.C. Then, of course, that's when they put us on leave.

When they put us on leave (chuckle), I went to the train station. I was going to get a train ticket home. No more airplanes for me. I got to the station (chuckle) there, me and my new sailor

suit and everything and third class storekeeper stripes on my arm, the ol' hat mashed like a real sailor has it mashed. I walked in that train station, and I walked up to the window, and I said, "I want a ticket to Denver, Colorado." He looked at me, and he said, "You want a ticket to Denver, Colorado? Sailor, there's a lot of people out there that want a ticket to Denver, Colorado. Do you know that there has been a war on?" Man, I lit into that guy, and I said, "Do I know that there's been a war?" And I guess I must have really cut loose because I started gathering a crowd, and they were egging me on: "Read him off, sailor! Get him, sailor!" Finally, the guy closed the window. I just explained to him that I knew there was war on. I said, "I spent three-and-a-half years in a Japanese prison camp! I know it was a war!" He closed that window on me, and so one gentleman in the crowd there said, "Sailor, I think you'd have a better chance if you went to the airport." I said, "My God! Ride another airplane!"

So I took a taxi to the airport, and I start learning the ropes. I explained to him that I had

been a prisoner-of-war for three-and-a-half years, and I'm going home on leave. I hadn't been home for five years because my last leave was before I went to the Philippines. I said, "I've got to get home." So he said, "We're all full now, but there can be a cancellation. You stick around, and I'll let you know." In the meantime, he said, "Why don't you go across the field here. The Air Transport Command has flights going into Denver, and maybe you might catch a hop from there. Maybe they got room enough for you. They'll probably put you on a plane." So I went over there, and they said, no, they had weather closing in over Kentucky, and they'd grounded all the planes from Chicago west.

So I went back to the airport, and about the time I got in the terminal there, I hear my name. Here's the guy at the desk, and he's waving me on: "Come on, sailor! Come on! Quick!" He said, "They're holding the plane for you! Here's your ticket! I want so much money!" I spread it out to him, and he gave me my ticket and said, "Get out there real quick!"

So I get in this plane, and it's one of those little planes, and I sit way back before they take off. You're clear back, and (chuckle) you're looking back this way (gesture). So we take off from Washington, D.C., and we get over Kentucky, and the plane starts this (gesture)--up and down and up and down. I'm thinking, "If I live through this, I'll never get on another plane again." I got into Chicago, and there wasn't any planes taking off for Denver because of the weather. I got into Chicago, I went up to the desk, and I said, "Give me my money back for the rest of this ticket. I'm going to take a train."

So I went down to Union Station in Chicago, I went up there and explained to him again, and he said, "I'll put you on it. We'll get you a seat." So he said, "I want so much money." I said, "Here it is." He says, "Okay, the City of Denver leaves at such-and-such a time," and at that time it was an overnight trip from Chicago to Denver. So I caught that train and got into Denver and took a taxi home.

I looked at our house there, and I could see this blonde lady looking out the window. She had the curtain drawn back there and was looking out the window. I said, "My God, Mom's not blonde! Who's this? Maybe they don't live here anymore." I hadn't bothered to ask if they'd moved or anything when I called. She turned around and must have said something. The next thing I knew, here comes Mom out of the house, just tearing out. We had a terrace coming down, a lawn terrace, and she didn't bother to come down the steps. No, she came flying out of there, and she hit the sidewalk, and I had to run from the curb and catch her (chuckle). She just fell right there in my arms. She said, "My God! My God!" And that was it. Then, of course, she called my father. Like I said earlier, it was quite a homecoming.

**Marcello:** Just a couple of last things to end this interview. When did you decide to make the Navy a career?

**Papish:** I had decided to make the Navy a career when I got back to Washington, D.C. I figured that I was feeling pretty good. They gave us ninety days

rehabilitation leave, which put me back on January 1, 1946. I wasn't going to go back on New Year's day, so I wired into the Receiving Station in San Francisco, and I asked for an extension of ten days. They wired it right back: "Extension granted." They asked me when I got back what kind of shore duty I'd wanted, because I hadn't been separated. He said, "Are you going to stay in?" I said, "I might." He said, "We can give you shore duty. Where do you want shore duty?" I said, "As close to Denver, Colorado, as you can get it." He looked it up there, and he said, "How does the University of Colorado sound to you?" I said, "That's Boulder. That's only forty miles from home. I'll take it." He wrote out the order, so I came back to the University of Colorado for shore duty and home. I decided then that I was going to ship over and stay in the Navy if the Navy would still have me. Then it was learned later on, too, that anyone that had been a prisoner-of-war was to be rated as to what they would normally have had had they not been captured. So they gave me a test for chief storekeeper, and I took the test, and I made

that. So I decided then and there that if there was anything going to crop up on me, as far as disabilities or anything else like that, by gosh, the Navy was going to take care of me. Then later on, I found out that there was a waiver on prisoners-of-war, that if there was any physical disabilities or anything else, they would waive the medical exam for prisoner-of-war. So I figured that if the Navy would do that, well, I'd stick with them.

Marcello: As you look back on those three-and-a-half years you spent as a prisoner-of-war, Mr. Papish, what do you see as being the key or keys to your survival?

Papish: The key to my survival, number one, was my faith. I believe my faith in God and faith in my religion and so forth. Also, I learned in the prison camp to have faith in your fellow man. You've got to have faith in your fellow man. Not all men are bad, nor any man is bad. When the chips are down, people take care of one another. Of course, I always put it down to "Quaty," "Herbie," and "Van" as responsible for my coming

through, plus a little help on the side from Wisecup (chuckle).

Marcello: Like you pointed out a while ago, they would probably say the same thing about you.

Papish: I've heard them say the same thing (chuckle).

Marcello: That is, "Quaty" would say that he came through because of you and "Herbie" and "Van" and so on.

Papish: The three of us, right. "Herbie" would say "Van," "Pap" and "Quaty." So when you get friends as fast at that, I mean, you can't lose.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Papish, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. I think we did a complete job in covering your experiences, and I want to thank you very much for having come through Denton and participated in our project. I'm sure that researchers and scholars will find your comments most valuable when they get a chance to use them.

Papish: Thank you very much for this opportunity. We went to New York about a year-and-a-half ago, and I saw a poster in the window. It's an old Navy poster, and it has Uncle Sam pointing, and it says, "Don't read about it! Make history!" I've wanted one of them posters ever since. I've got a



company I've got to write to, and I think that  
they may have one.

[End of interview]