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Interview with
Crayton R. Gordon
January 31, 1977

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Crayton R. Gordon
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Crayton Gordon

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Crayton Gordon for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on January 31, 1977, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Gordon in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Gordon was a member of the so-called "Lost Battalion" and subsequently spent almost the entire war in various prisoner-of-war camps during World War II.

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

Mr. Gordon: All right. I was born in Itasca, Texas, on July 8, 1919. I was educated in Itasca public schools, finishing in 1937, and moved from the area that year to West Texas at Lubbock . . . wound up in Lubbock. I started to

Texas Tech College then, I believe it was called, in the fall of 1938 and attended that school until the fall of 1940 when I was mobilized into the Army with the Texas National Guard.

Marcello: When did you join the Texas National Guard?

Gordon: May of 1940.

Marcello: Why did you join the Texas National Guard?

Gordon: To get a buck to spend (laughter).

Marcello: You know, this is a reason that a great many people give who joined the National Guard at that time.

Gordon: Young people. Really, another factor. . . and I suppose . . . I said to get the buck, but maybe not because I was working. . . waiting on tables in a nightclub and made pretty good money for that time of my life. But I had three very close friends who had joined the National Guard prior to that living in the house that I was living in with my mother, as a matter of fact. They lived with my mother; she kept students there at Texas Tech. They had joined the guard, and, man, seeing them in their boots and riding britches was something else (laughter). So that may be as big a factor as anything. You know, you say, "that buck," because, you know, we was all looking for them at that time.

Marcello: You have hit upon a very interesting point. It seems to me that the National Guard at that time was almost like a social club in a way.

- Gordon: Right, because there were so many students in Texas Tech that were in the National Guard. Because it did mean a little activity for them and a little pocket money . . . a little bit, not much--a little bit.
- Marcello: What sort of a National Guard unit was this here at Lubbock?
- Gordon: This was . . . they had two batteries to the 131st Field Artillery. One was C Battery, which was a firing battery; and then there was Service Battery, which was called a Regimental Service Battery. Of course, later this split into two battalion services, and at a later date, I was in the 2nd Battalion of the 131st. But it was the old Regimental Service Battery when I joined it.
- Marcello: What was your particular function within the unit?
- Gordon: Cook.
- Marcello: How did you manage to get into that particular occupation?
- Gordon: Oh, I'd burned a hamburger or two along the line (chuckle). No, I had had experience in restaurants and cooked a little bit in this nightclub that I was working in, and I also had quite a bit of experience in baking. I worked in a bakery while I was in school--the earlier part of my schooling--until I got run off, which I was very, very glad of (chuckle).
- Marcello: But evidently, you had no formal training at all to become a military cook.
- Gordon: No schooling as a cook, none.

Marcello: In other words, it was all on-the-job training.

Gordon: Right. Right.

Marcello: At the time that you entered the National Guard, how closely were you keeping abreast with world events, either in the Atlantic or the Pacific?

Gordon: Not too much. Not really too much, especially when I joined in May of 1940. At that particular age, if something happened, it was going to be one big adventure anyhow, which it later turned out that it was a little bit more than I bargained for.

Marcello: Now when was it that the National Guard was mobilized?

Gordon: November 25, 1940, I believe, was the date.

Marcello: And when you were mobilized, where did you go?

Gordon: To Camp Bowie, Texas, at Brownwood.

Marcello: What took place at Camp Bowie after you were mobilized and were sent there?

Gordon: Well, actually, I went to Camp Bowie from Lubbock, and I believe it was on December 14th or the 15th. We were drawing supplies for the regiment, delivering them to various batteries who were still at their home station, and pulling a helluva bunch of trucks through the mud down at Camp Bowie (chuckle). I mean, it was deep; man, it was deep. Because it was under construction, and naturally it was torn all to pieces. But our primary purpose for going early was to draw

supplies for our various firing batteries and the other batteries in the regiment. Sometimes, they came down and would draw these supplies there at Brownwood or at Camp Bowie; other times, we would take them to them.

Then another function at a little bit later date was that we would go out . . . I didn't drive a truck, but our truck driver would go out and pick up units that didn't have mobile units with them, such as the infantry, and bring them into Bowie. That was another function. . . not the primary one, of course. The primary one was to draw these supplies, and they needed to be re-outfitted and get them to our various batteries.

Marcello: How seriously was this mobilization being taken by the fellows in your particular unit?

Gordon: I never really discussed it with too many of them. To me, a year's mobilization was a type of relief from the grind of studying, which I wasn't doing very good at--working full time. I thought it'd be a real big relief and something different--a change, a relaxation--from school work. I'd get back, and then I'd be ready to hit the books again. It was a little bit long.

Marcello: What sort of training did the unit undergo here at Camp Bowie? I'm referring to those people other than those in the . . .service battery, I guess I should say; let's say the artillery batteries.

Gordon: You mean what did the firing batteries do rather than the unit that I was in?

Marcello: Yes.

Gordon: Of course, I'm not too familiar with it. After we reached Bowie--and I believe it was after the first of the year--we got our first recruits or the first draft, I believe it was. Of course, these men went under a thirteen-week basic training, which was strictly a training situation; they couldn't be used to do the KP and latrine duty and what-have-you. The so-called guardman was rather busy maintaining the units. Naturally, the specialists were sent to various schools. I'm not familiar with it; I never did go to a school. I was promoted to a corporal shortly and was transferred into the motor pool as a dispatcher. As I say, I didn't get any formal training, but we had to get these vehicles. We were getting many, many new vehicles at this time, and naturally they had to be inspected completely, had to put a hundred miles on them before we turned them over to the various firing batteries.

Marcello: So you were transferred, then, from cooking into the motor pool.

Gordon: Right.

Marcello: Did you ever have any basic training as such?

Gordon: No. Close order drill.

Marcello: And I think the unit had spent a little bit of time over in Louisiana on some maneuvers previously, had it not?

Gordon: Yes. Yes. See, I was cooking then. I made the Louisiana maneuvers in 1940, and I was cooking there. As far as any warfare training, no, I had none. I did go through gas chambers. Let me see, I'm trying to think how many rounds I fired on the firing range with a .45-caliber revolver. Oh, maybe I fired twenty-five rounds, I don't remember . . . but with an old .45-caliber revolver.

Marcello: How long did you remain at Camp Bowie altogether?

Gordon: From December 14, 1940, until November 11, 1941. Of course, we hadn't . . . extensive training period . . . our training was supply, naturally, because we were supplying the remainder of the regiment. Well, if it came, they split the unit into . . . my unit into two service batteries. In other words, one was the 2nd Battalion and one was the 1st Battalion, and I went with the 2nd Battalion. In fact, well, we supplied the 2nd Battalion of the 131st.

Marcello: Now it was during this period that the 131st Field Artillery was separated from the 36th Division, isn't that true?

Gordon: Yes, it was either. . . I don't know when the actual paper-work took part, but I know when I left on November 11, 1940, I was shipped out, and we proceeded by train to San Francisco for destination PLUM.

Marcello: Now this wasn't in November of 1940, was it?

Gordon: 1941, I'm sorry. 1941. Mobilization was in 1940; 1941 was when . . . as I say, I don't know the date of the break. They triangularized the 36th Division, see. They did away with one artillery battalion and one infantry regiment. That fell to the 131st, 2nd Battalion, and the 144th Infantry. Therefore, they shipped us out. Of course, as it wound up, we were to be replacements or sent to the Philippines . . . not replacements but as added personnel.

Marcello: Okay, I think at this point, then, it's a good time to identify your particular unit in full after the Army triangularized the divisions. So identify your unit in full at this point.

Gordon: It was the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, and I was in the Service Battery.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, in November of 1941, you were shipped to the West Coast. . .

Gordon: Angel Island.

Marcello: . . . as a part of this so-called Operation PLUM.

Gordon: Our destination was listed as PLUM. As far as an operation is concerned, I don't know whether they had one or not. You know, being low in the ranks, naturally I wouldn't know. At this time, I was a sergeant, again back in the kitchen.

Marcello: You were back in the kitchen one more time.

Gordon: Right. I was promoted from corporal to sergeant and became an antiaircraft sergeant and didn't have any antiaircraft guns. In Louisiana in 1941, while we were on maneuvers there, they sent me to the kitchen to become a mess sergeant. There I remained until we went behind the barbed wire.

Marcello: What was the speculation going around when it was found out that you were enroute to what was called PLUM?

Gordon: Well, it was possibly some anxiety. We had a first lieutenant that put it to us rather bluntly, Ross Ayers, who later became a major general. He has retired as the commanding officer of the Texas National Guard; I'm trying to think of his title. . . Adjutant General, I believe, but he was at a rank of major general. He was our first lieutenant in our battery and did not go overseas with us, but he put it to us rather bluntly. He said, "You haven't been trained for nothing. With the world situation the way it is, I believe that there will be something to happen before you return. Try to remember your training." And he said, "Our country hasn't spent this vast sum of money and energy and resources to train this number of men for nothing." He turned out to be quite correct. Whether it was a guess or whether he'd been peeping or not (chuckle), I don't know, but I'm sure it was just an educated assumption.

Marcello: Was the rumor going around that you were ultimately headed for the Philippines?

Gordon: No. No, it wasn't. We had all of our winter gear. It wasn't that at all. . . possibly not until we left the Hawaiian Islands.

Marcello: When did you leave San Francisco on the first leg of your journey?

Gordon: The 21st of November.

Marcello: Okay, do you recall the name of the transport that took you on this first leg?

Gordon: Oh, hell, yes! The USS Republic.

Marcello: Describe what it was like.

Gordon: (Chuckle) Well, the day we went aboard, it was a Friday. Of all the dern menus . . . naturally, the fish was there, but they had to throw in cabbage, too. While tied up to the dock, the darn watertight doors was open. My god, we had that cabbage smell, I think, from then on (chuckle). It was, you know, rather funny. That's something that was brought up. It was rather cramped quarters, but I do understand that later troop transports were even more so. I haven't had the experience but only the one time. We were in bunks four tiers high. I don't know whether we were below water or not; it was a far piece down. But I stayed on deck most of the time. As soon as we left Frisco harbor,

of course, under the bridge, we all looked up at that, of course, and said, "Oh, my God! Will we ever see it again?"

The sea was not rough, but the land swells outside of 'Frisco Bay, I understood, is something. Man, it really started! I tell you, we wasn't outside of that bridge when they started getting sick. I didn't get sick until the third day when I finally had to go to the head . . . and it was in such a mess, it was enough to make you sick, you see. That's what made me sick in reality. I stayed up on deck most of the time and let the spray, the wind. . . and it was real fresh.

Marcello: I would gather that was the first time, just about, that all of you Texas boys had ever seen the ocean.

Gordon: Oh, yes, yes. We had, I remember, a Clyde Jones. I believe his name was Clyde Jones. He was a sergeant from Wichita Falls in D Battery. He had been in the service before and had gone somewhere where he had crossed the equator, because he did beat the hell out of us when we crossed the equator (laughter).

Marcello: You're referring to that ceremony and initiation that takes place when one crosses the equator.

Gordon: Initiation, yes. When you become a "shellback."

Marcello: That's correct.

Gordon: But I remember distinctly that he was part of the initiation crew, because he was the only one that I knew of in our battalion that had been across the equator.

Marcello: Okay, now your first stop on your journey was at Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands.

Gordon: Right. That's right.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to go ashore when the Republic pulled in?

Gordon: Four hours.

Marcello: What did you do during that four-hour period?

Gordon: Well, with \$2.60 in my pocket, not much (laughter). No, I borrowed \$2.60 from Frank Anderson and went ashore. I think I made a couple of bars, naturally, and then I wandered around over the city. But it was . . . that brought to mind something in Hawaii there. They were under some kind of alert apparently, and they had roadblocks. . . sand bag emplacements, GI's in full field equipment, machine guns mounted. So whether they were expecting something or whether they were just on a problem, I wouldn't have any way of knowing.

Marcello: Did it make any impression upon you at that time?

Gordon: You bet it did! You know, that's what it was all about in reality. But, you know, being twenty-two years old, it didn't really soak in; it really didn't. See, that reverts

back to why they get these young men for soldiers (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that you only had a four-hour lay-over there in the Hawaiian Islands, and then you took off again. And it's some time after you left the Hawaiian Islands that the Japanese did attack Pearl Harbor, and you found that the United States had now entered World War II.

Gordon: The day after we crossed the equator.

Marcello: Describe that particular scene. In other words, what were you doing, and what was your reaction when you heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Gordon: Well, as I say, it was the day after we had crossed the equator, and I was hurt pretty bad and in sickbay.

Marcello: What had happened?

Gordon: Initiation. The "shellback" initiation.

Marcello: Oh, I see. You had been physically hurt during the initiation?

Gordon: Oh, very badly, yes. I had a dislocated right shoulder (chuckle); I had a concussion and both knees all bunged up.

Marcello: What did they do to you during that initiation?

Gordon: Oh, they beat the hell out of me (chuckle)! Really and truly, it was really a situation that maybe got out of hand. I don't know; maybe they do it to all of them. I don't know. But it hurt me; it hurt me bad. Getting a little ahead of myself there, I remained in sickbay until we reached Australia.

As I say, I did have a dislocated shoulder, and, of course, my knees were just bloodied and skinned real bad . . . had big scabs on those. But it took me a few days to get over the concussion, too.

What it was, they had canvas bags that they stuffed with waste, and they soaked these in the salt brine. It was just like knocking you in the head with a bois d'arc post, you know, and it hurt me pretty bad. I was dragged out of the thing and carried to sickbay where they reduced my shoulder, and, as I say, I remained there the rest of the time.

Now I did . . . I couldn't put on a life jacket, but the next morning when we went topside, we had to carry a life jacket. The next day is when the war broke out, and someone brought the message to the sickbay that the war had started; they had bombed Pearl Harbor. I grabbed an old life jacket and just threw it over my left shoulder, and I went on deck and listened to the PA system.

Marcello: What was some of the speculation and rumors going around up on deck?

Gordon: Well, at this particular time, people were just in awe, you know . . . couldn't believe the situation.

Marcello: You obviously had no idea of the extent of the damage at Pearl Harbor.

Gordon: No. No.

Marcello: Did you think it was going to be a pretty short war?

Gordon: Yes. As it turned out, I thought so, because later down the line after we were imprisoned, why, we all put in a guess. Most of the men in my battery put in a guess when we'd be liberated--when we'd get out of prison--and I guessed eleven months. Of course, there was a lot of boasting of what we'd do to the Japs and stuff like that. See, I was away from my group of people, and I was in with a bunch of sick men, and there wasn't too much of that there. But I had heard when I'd maybe get up on deck every now and then . . . I'd hear people say that "what the hell they'd do to those yellow so-and-so's," you know.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what sort of an attitude the men had toward the Japanese. In other words, when you thought of an individual Japanese during that particular period, what sort of person did you conjure up on your own mind?

Gordon: Well, you know, being an old country boy from Texas, I didn't have much idea what a Jap looked like (laughter). Really, I can't recall. That Jap was a little, short, "four-eyed" man, and we got that attitude changed real quickly when we first met the combat troops.

Marcello: Now, of course, an interesting fact is that there was a Japanese-American in the 131st Field Artillery, and I'm referring to Frank Fujita.

Gordon: Yes.

Marcello: Did you know him at that particular time?

Gordon: Yes, I knew "Fu," yes.

Marcello: Did he come in for any practical jokes or anything of that nature as a result of this?

Gordon: Oh, yes. I have heard men say that they went to Frank and say "Hell, Frank, call them damn people and tell them to call this thing off!" (laughter). But Frank was very much a soldier.

Marcello: But there was never any resentment toward him.

Gordon: No. No. He is as true an American as you'll ever find. He's short in stature, but, of course, he didn't wear glasses, you see (laughter).

Marcello: And he doesn't have buckteeth either.

Gordon: No, no (chuckle). I didn't know him well; I didn't know him well at all. But I knew Frank Fujita.

Marcello: What sort of changes in tactics and so on did the Republic undergo when the news of the attack was received?

Gordon: Well, of course, the information that I give will be more or less second-hand, because, as I say, I was incapacitated. But I'd go up on deck later, and they'd have machine guns set up. I'll never forget around the rail the derved old Lewis gun; I looked those over. Then they had some . . . on the rear of the ship, I believe they had a big 5-inch gun

that was . . . a Navy crew manned those. Up in the super-structure, they had some machine guns set up. I never did get up there, you see, to see exactly what they were, because I wasn't able yet; I only had the use of one arm.

Marcello: Was the Republic part of a convoy?

Gordon: Yes. There was one . . . the Halbrooke, and, of course, the Pensacola was our escort. There was two other transports of the . . . I thought, of the president. . . that had president names. . . Harrison. . . I don't recall the other one. Then there was a little Navy ship, a very small, little converted ship of some kind that was manned by Navy. But the Pensacola was our primary escort--a light cruiser, I believe.

Marcello: Okay, so during this period, then, you were diverted from the Philippine Islands to Australia, but in the meantime, you did make one stop in the Fiji Islands.

Gordon: Fiji Islands, yes.

Marcello: What occurred there?

Gordon: As far as I know. . . as far as the men was concerned--nothing. Apparently, we took on . . . I don't know whether they took on fuel or not, but I'm sure they took on fresh water. And they did lower the gangway plank to bring in supplies into the ship--fresh fruit, vegetables. I think that's what it was.

Marcello: But in other words, nobody really got off the ship here. . .

Gordon: Oh, no.

Marcello: . . . and you didn't stay there that long.

Gordon: No. No. We was only tied up just a very, very short time, but now we were out in the harbor overnight and part of a day--but tied up at dock. It was a short time, a very short time.

Marcello: In the meantime, how are the troops spending their time?

Gordon: In the chow line (chuckle). Again, I had my food brought to me, naturally, in sickbay. But there was a lot of lounging on deck, a lot of card playing. When people didn't run out of money, why, they got into blackjack games and poker games for keeps, and there was a lot of bridge playing, too.

Marcello: I gather that the seriousness of the situation hadn't really sunk in yet.

Gordon: Oh, no. No, not really. After we left the Fijis, we had an alert. It seemed to be rather serious, but it was only the fact that we met some Australian Navy vessels. The Pensacola took off; they catapulted their planes up and took off to the west with great haste, leaving a tremendous wake; you could see it. . . we knew that they were going at a high speed. After awhile, we saw smoke on the horizon, and it turned out to be the Australian Navy ships that had come to meet us or escort us on into Brisbane or something.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that most of the men in the 131st Field Artillery were relatively young men. If you had to make an estimate, what would you say was the average age of the individual in the 131st Field Artillery?

Gordon: At that time, the time we went overseas, let's see. . . average. . . possibly twenty-two. Because there was lots of men below twenty. I was twenty-two, and some of our NCO's were a little older. Some of our--I call them draftees, because they came in through the selective service--were one or two years older than me. So the average was twenty-two to twenty-three possibly . . . twenty-one to twenty-three, something like that.

Marcello: Let me just back up here a minute and ask you a question that I probably should have asked earlier. Sometime previously, did the married men have an opportunity to get out of the 131st Field Artillery?

Gordon: Men twenty-eight years of age or older. . . now as to married men, I can't answer that question; I don't know. But anyone that was twenty-eight years or older had the opportunity to remain . . . not get out, I don't think, but to remain in the States. Yes, this happened before we left Camp Bowie in October, I believe.

Marcello: Oh, this was even before the mobilization took place.

Gordon: No, no.

Marcello: Oh, October of 1941.

Gordon: '41, yes. Again, it goes back to this time. . . it might should have been brought out that we were brought up to strength, also, from men out of batteries of the 1st Battalion primarily. I say primarily, because we did have a few men out of the 132nd and the 133rd that came into our outfit. I have been told since by some of these men that it was more or less a disciplinary action that was being administered to them (chuckle). But we were brought up to strength by, should I say, our sister batteries of the 1st Battalion, because we got all of ours primarily from the 1st Battalion Service Battery. And the firing batteries did the same thing, except E Battery got quite a few . . . not quite a few . . . several from the 132nd and the 133rd. That's the only battery that I know of that got any outside of the regiment. Headquarters Battery did get a few people from our brigade headquarters--specialists possibly.

Marcello: Okay, so you land in Brisbane, Australia. Pick up the story at this point. What happens when you land at Brisbane?

Gordon: Well, again, I was in sickbay. The troops left the Republic and for a destination that I didn't know, but I remained aboard. The scuttlebutt or rumors per se. . . scuttlebutt was a better word then, naturally, being with the Navy crew aboard the Republic. . . that we would be shipped out to an

Australian military hospital.

One of my lieutenants came aboard the day after debarkation, and I caught him and asked him, 'could he get me the hell off of that ship?' And he said, "What's wrong with you." I had my arm taped in a sling--my right arm incapacitated--and I asked him, "Could I get off?" It so happened that our MO, Captain Lumpkin, was aboard, so he asked him about it, and he said, "Well, he doesn't need anything but convalescence, that's all." So they got my gear and didn't say "Boo" to anybody, and I joined the battalion at a racetrack in Brisbane; it was called Ascot. Four days later, we were shipped out. Of course, there was a party of two along the way before we shipped out.

Marcello: From what you say, I gather that almost everybody knew almost everybody else in the unit, since you were all local boys for the most part.

Gordon: Yes, a great number of them, yes. Of course, as I say, we had . . . our first big contingents of selective service were Texas people. Then we had one from the East Coast and one from the West Coast and one from the Middle West, but they wasn't big numbers like our very first was. The first one was large, and they were all Texas people. Of course, just like this little unit that I was in, the Service Battery, the original regimental service battery was only composed of

thirty-six men; it was split. So therefore, it was only, say, eighteen to each unit. We were filled up to strength then by transfers from other batteries and selective service people. Not condemning anyone, because we got some fine, fine men, but you can rest assured we got the undesirables from these batteries, too, and we had a rather hard time the first few months. . . our unit. . . because we did have these people.

Marcello: As you pointed out, these were the disciplinary problems that you were getting into your unit to fill up the ranks.

Gordon: Well, as I say, from our regiment. . . these various battery commanders, you can't blame them one iota. We got very, very good men, but we got some "eight balls," too, which is only natural. If you had a problem, you'd get rid of it; nobody would blame you. Not all your problems but some of them. So that was a case that happened, but this finally was weeded out before we went overseas.

Marcello: Where did you spend Christmas of 1941?

Gordon: In Brisbane, and I had dinner with an Australian family . . . a fellow by the name of Laffie Mundy from Wichita Falls and I. He's now deceased.

Marcello: How does this come about, that is, your invitation to the Australian family's home?

Gordon: We were merely walking the streets of Brisbane there. I don't recall if it was in the downtown area or if it was in a residential section, but this gentleman stopped with his car and asked us if we would like to have dinner with him and his family. We accepted and he carried us to his home. It was on a hill overlooking. . . one thing I remember distinctly, he broke out the field glasses and let us watch the races, because it was on a hill above one of the race courses there. We had a very nice dinner; he had a lovely family.

Marcello: What'd you have for Christmas dinner?

Gordon: Chicken.

Marcello: No mutton?

Gordon: Now at camp, mutton (chuckle).

Marcello: I understand that mutton didn't . . .

Gordon: It didn't go over very good, no! But with these people, we had roast chicken. But at camp, it was strictly mutton.

Marcello: I heard the Texas boys had a lot of trouble getting used to that mutton.

Gordon: Yes. At a later date, which will come up later, when we was moved from Java to Singapore, that mutton sure did taste good there, though (laughter).

Marcello: I gather that the Australians gave a very warm reception to the American troops.

Gordon: They did. They did. And they were fine, fine people. We were . . . I guess this is one of the fortunate things that come out of being overseas real early. The Americans were you; they hadn't been overrun by them yet. So it was even better for us than, I'm sure, it might have been at a later date when they, you know, kind of got their belly full of American GI's, you see.

Marcello: According to my records, you had arrived in Brisbane on the 21st of December. How long did you stay there?

Gordon: I thought we arrived on the 23rd. We may have been dumping fuel and water to get up into the river, but we left on the 28th, I think--the 28th of December.

Marcello: Okay, now you left the Republic at Brisbane, and you picked up a new ship.

Gordon: Bloemfontein. . . Dutch ship.

Marcello: And this was a Dutch ship.

Gordon: Right.

Marcello: Okay, compare or contrast the Bloemfontein to the Republic.

Gordon: Well, I can't give you a good comparison, because, as I say, I was in sickbay. . . had those clean white sheets and those fans blowing on me; man, I had it made! (Chuckle) I didn't get well either before we got to Brisbane! But the Bloemfontein was a freighter. Men were put in . . . you had to get in the freight compartment for quarters. I had the job of setting up kitchens on the open deck of this Bloemfontein.

Marcello: Now by this time, you were recuperated.

Gordon: Well, I still was incapacitated in my right arm, but I could give orders, you see. They asked me if I'd do this. God, it was hot! Of course, Christmastime would naturally be hot down below. . . in Australia. I went down to oversee setting up the kitchens aboard the Bloemfontein. I say it was out on open deck. . . our latrine was built on the side overhanging the side of the ship, because they didn't have facilities to take care of that number of people.

Marcello: Now the Bloemfontein was a faster ship, was it not?

Gordon: Yes, it was a motor ship; it was a motor ship. It was a faster ship and apparently had an experienced crew. . . or the top echelon was experienced, anyhow.

Marcello: Did you have any submarine scares while you were making this trip?

Gordon: Yes, yes. I didn't sleep down in the quarters below decks. I was very, very fortunate. My sister had given me an air mattress just prior to going overseas. So I'd throw this air mattress out on deck and sleep on topside. I damn near got thrown overboard one morning from dodging a so-called torpedo. . . a maneuver that the skipper had made to evade torpedo action.

Marcello: Did this more or less shake up the battalion, or didn't most people really know what was going on?

Gordon: It was rather early in the morning. Some knew it, and those that didn't know it found it out very soon. Of course, we had . . . I think that's where we had our own guns set up on deck. . . the old fieldpieces set up on deck.

Marcello: Did you know that you were heading for the Island of Java at this time?

Gordon: That I can't recall. I just don't know; I just don't know.

Marcello: How long a trip was it from Brisbane over to Surabaya, which is where you were going to land?

Gordon: It seems like to me it was from the 28th to the 11th of January. The 11th of January is a date that stands out with me. We did have a delay in Darwin. . . of course, in the harbor of Darwin, strictly not ashore, because no one went ashore. I don't recall just how long that was. Then we had a real submarine scare around the Straits of Bali, I believe; that's where we had them. It seems like they sunk a ship in front of us and in the rear but quite some distance away. We could see the smoke from the burning of them. But I don't know any of the details at all.

Marcello: Has the realization of the war actually sunk in at this point yet?

Gordon: It came pretty close then, but not really, not really. I didn't see it, because, as I say, we were young people; it's still an adventure. The realization of war came about at a later time, I think--the real realization of it.

Marcello: Okay, you land in Surabaya, Java. What happens at this point?

Gordon: I stayed in Surabaya for two or three days. I don't remember exactly what my duties were. . . why I stayed aboard. The battalion left and went to a place about sixty kilometers, I think, from Surabaya to a place. . . a little town of Malang. We went to a Dutch air base, which was Singosari.

Marcello: What were you doing in Surabaya during this approximate two-day period?

Gordon: I was aboard this Bloemfontein, but for the life of me, I can't recall what I was doing, why I was there.

Marcello: Then did you pick up the unit at the airport at Singosari?

Gordon: Yes, at Singosari, I went back to the unit and started in the kitchen again, and we had other batteries. I think we had two kitchens, and let me see how many batteries we had to eat in the kitchen. . . I believe it was three batteries that fed out of each kitchen. . . just set up two kitchens there. Then after a short time, I was transferred with my section to a Dutch camp. . . still in the Singosari area. I was transferred, along with my section, to the Dutch camp working in a Dutch kitchen for the Air Corps.

Marcello: That is the Army Air Corps.

Gordon: Army, yes, Army Air Corps, yes.

Marcello: Describe Singosari from a physical standpoint. What did it look like? I'm referring now to the runways and your barracks or living quarters and things of that nature.

Gordon: Okay. The barracks where we first arrived at, or the quarters, were tiled roof quarters. The walls, I'm sure, were stone, but I can't remember exactly--open windows, no screens, no glass. Center parade ground; macadam streets; open gutters. The reason I say open gutters, I distinctly remember milk running down the things after we was bombed, you know. Canned milk was punctured everywhere, and milk was running down these gutters. But as I say, it was open gutters. And the airfield was sod runways.

Let me try to get my directions straight. There was a roadway running completely across the airfield on the south, and this artillery camp was on the southeast portion of the airfield. . . off the airfield but southeast of it. The Dutch quarters, where I was, was on the southwest approximately a quarter of a mile from the entrance to the airfield. Then proceeding from there directly north, we'd go down the west side of the airfield and make a turn, and our hangars were at the north end of this airfield, and, of course, there was a big drainage ditch across this thing. But they were sod runways. Of course, we lost lots of planes because of this. Our pilots weren't accustomed to this, especially our new ones that were coming from the States at a little bit later date. . . the replacements, in other words, They'd pile up those airplanes. We didn't get very many good ones out of it.

Marcello: What sort of reception did you receive from the Dutch?

Gordon: The Dutch received us quite well. They kind of got fed up with us a little bit later, because we paid their native labor too much money--stuff like that, you know. But we were received well, I would say, by the Dutch.

Marcello: Had you ever seen so many people in your life? I've heard some of the Texas boys say that they were impressed by the tremendous numbers of people that they saw on this small island.

Gordon: Yes, there was a tremendous amount of people, and I understand that this Malang area is one of the most densely populated areas of the world, to be a so-called rural section, and it was. But there was danged near wall-to-wall people. Of course, after I went over to the Air Corps, I got to trading with these people quite a lot, because I was having to buy all my supplies out on the open market. We didn't have a so-called quartermaster where we could go draw this stuff; I had to buy where it could be found. I'd spend the majority of the day doing this. Of course, the fellows working under me--the cooks--would prepare it. Now we would only prepare, believe it or not, breakfast and dinner; we didn't prepare lunch.

Marcello: Why was that?

Gordon: The Dutch served them their lunch, and they had a tremendous lunch. But their breakfast was very slim pickings, and the evening meal was very slim pickings, so that's what they wanted. We cooked breakfast and the evening meal and prepared lunches for our combat crews and took those to the planes and put them aboard.

Marcello: Well, like you mentioned, very shortly after you arrived at Singosari, remnants of the 6th, 7th, and 19th Bomb Groups came in there from the Philippines.

Gordon: I think primarily at Singosari, it was remnants of the 19th. Now we had one Liberator, which I'm sure wasn't part of the 19th. The 19th had B-17's, I believe, and we got some dive bombers in there . . . a squadron of dive bombers in there once, too, but they didn't last very long. I don't know what they were. I just don't know the particulars there. I just remember the 19th Bomb Group primarily. You're more versed in that from studying about it than I am, I'm sure.

Marcello: What sort of stories were these airmen bringing back from the Philippines?

Gordon: (Chuckle) Well, what fascinated me was some of the older combat crew people. When I say older, they had come out of the Philippines as a combat crew, but when they got to Java, why, they thought they was a little bit too old to fly sometimes. So that kind of amazed me. They were a rugged bunch.

Marcello: Were they relaying to you the seriousness of the situation as it existed in the Philippines?

Gordon: I don't believe they knew it anymore than we did from what rumors we'd hear and what the news that we'd hear. I don't believe they knew a bit more, because they'd get out ahead of any drastic stuff and go back and bomb it then. But they knew the Japs were damn sure there, because they had to go back and bomb them.

Marcello: Now during this period, were they going out on missions?

Gordon: Oh, yes.

Marcello: What were the conditions of the planes when they came back in?

Gordon: Oh, pretty well shot up. See, a lot of these planes, at this particular time, were old models. They didn't have the turret, so-called; I believe the E-model was the first one that came out with the turrets, and we got those as replacements at a later date. But at the beginning, these old planes would go out on a mission, and they'd get shot up pretty bad. They'd come in and patch them and work on them and get them ready to go for another one.

Marcello: I gather that a great many people in the 131st Field Artillery served as service units for these airplanes, did they not?

Gordon: Yes. Oh, yes, we did. We did. That was my job primarily . . . strictly. Of course, our vehicles were available at their disposal to service with bombs, and even some of our

mechanics helped out. The mechanics of an airplane engine is far different from a vehicle engine, but if you're versed in one of them, you soon could learn about the other one. They used some of our mechanics and strength--physical strength --to handle bombs and things like that, and haul bombs.

Marcello: Is it not true that some of the people even volunteer to go on the missions with these air crews?

Gordon: Oh, yes. Yes, we transferred several men into the Air Corps there, and we lost two men that were shot down in a plane that was up on just a trial flight, I believe, and was shot down by the Japs.

Marcello: In the meantime, what's the rest of the unit doing?

Gordon: I got to think about that a minute, because, as I say, I was away from them. We did set up our fieldpieces around the perimeter of the airfield and served as a defense unit for the Air Corps. Even these old field guns, they would dig the trail of them in and dig out underneath the rear end of the gun where the recoil would come back and have room to recoil. See, these fieldpieces had a tremendous recoil on them. They'd even elevate them up and throw up a smoke bomb or a shell or two and, you know, create a little bit of fuss when those flights came over. But, of course, you couldn't do any good with them, naturally.

Marcello: Now these were the old French .75's that the troops had.

Gordon: American modified .75's, because the old French .75, see, had a solid trail; the American modification had a split trail, yes, and it set a little higher off the ground. Therefore, we could get a little more elevation and, of course, dug out between . . . the only way we could do that . . . because it did have a split trail, you could dig a hole there for the recoil mechanism to come down. But see, I wasn't a gunner or anything like that, so therefore this is just what I have heard, of course, from other fellows, and I've seen some of the guns when they were set up in position.

Marcello: Now according to my records, the first Japanese air raid occurred on February 5, 1942. Regardless of the date, describe that initial air raid conducted by the Japanese.

Gordon: I think I'm correct; I'll give you my version of it, which will be different from any other, I believe, that you have, because, as I say, I was over in the Dutch camp. I took off to the west (chuckle). We had some warning, so my section left the kitchen, and we were west of the Dutch quarters, barracks.

Marcello: Did you have pre-arranged shelters to go to?

Gordon: Slit trenches. But I took my section plumb out of camp, because if they bomb, that would be one of the targets other than the airfield--would be the quarters. No, we would go plum away from it.

I believe this is the air raid where they hit the artillery camp this particular time and destroyed some of their guns, some of the supplies, and punctured our milk. I believe this is the air raid where they hit some of the warehouses in the artillery area. My section and myself went there shortly thereafter--after it was over with--to see if any of our friends may have been hurt or anything like that, which they hadn't been.

Marcello: What sort of planes were taking part in this raid?

Gordon: Two-engine. I believe they were called Mitsubishis.

Marcello: Mitsubishi.

Gordon: Mitsubishis.

Marcello: But they were high-level bombers, were they not?

Gordon: Oh, yes, high-level bombers.

Marcello: Was there any strafing at all this first time around?

Gordon: No, I don't think so.

Marcello: What were your feelings or your emotions in having come under this sort of situation for the first time?

Gordon: Of course, excitement and I guess anxiety, too. I recall definitely laying flat on my back watching the bomb bays open and watching the bombs come out. I could tell . . . I had never had any experience, of course, but I knew they weren't coming to our area at all because of the position they were in and the direction they were flying. It wasn't too long after

they opened the bomb bays that we saw those things come out and they went to exploding. This is the realization of playing for keeps, because after we got back in and got in the truck and went to the artillery camp where some of these fieldpieces were out in the open, they had been literally cut to pieces by fragments of bombs. . . just melted these big tubes and sliced some . . . and we saw the damage that bombs could do. That was the beginning of the realization of what it was all about.

Marcello: Did they do quite a bit of damage on that first raid?

Gordon: They hit . . . (chuckle) some of the fellows said, "Them damn Japs knew what they were doing, because they hit our so-called canteen," you see (chuckle), which was in the warehouse where our supplies were stored. They put a bomb in that.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, one of the things that was vivid to you was the fact that they had punctured all these milk cans and so on.

Gordon: Right, right--these condensed milk cans. And this milk was running down in the gutter. Then a few days after that, it was as rancid as it could be!

Marcello: How many raids were there altogether?

Gordon: Gee. . .

Marcello: Were they a daily thing or several times a week, or just exactly how or when would they occur?

Gordon: Around noon, I'd say, from eleven o'clock to 2:30 to three o'clock. I know I was caught out in a strafing raid that was quite late. . . exceptionally late, as a matter of fact. I was out feeding combat crews, standing-by their planes. It was late in the . . . not late in the afternoon . . . 2:30 approximately. That was the only time that I really got caught short, was in a strafing raid. I was right in the big middle of it, and it stunted the hell out of my growth (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you find to be worse--the strafing or the high-level bombing?

Gordon: I think that strictly depends on the situation that you're in. In a slit trench, you can get out of the way of strafers, and a bomb can come in there with you. But out in the open, I think the strafers is more antagonizing than a bomb would be.

Marcello: Well, describe the situation when you were caught out in the open.

Gordon: (Chuckle) Let's see if I can remember that . . . I should. At this particular day, I was to feed the combat crews . . . carry a meal to the field and give them a good meal at the field, because they were standing by the planes in case strafers did come in, so they could . . . or if they got a warning . . . that they could move their planes out of there. I had my truck . . . I had used up all the dishes that I had, and I had to go back to the hangar and wash up some dishes. . .

get some water and wash up some dishes before I could finish feeding all of them. I had about one or two more crews to feed.

So I went out on the field and was feeding this last crew. I had the truck parked right by the wing tip. I had one cook, a driver. . . I had a little native boy with me. The remark was made when I was dishing up chow out of the back-end of the truck there. . . along in the south, why, we saw this formation of planes. One of the Air Corps fellows made a statment, that that was the most P-40's he'd seen up at one time in many a day, and nothing more was said.

Then all the sudden, all hell broke loose, and the strafing started. Naturally, we quit the truck . . . very hastily, as a matter of fact. . . wanting to get flat and did. There was eight crewmen in the plane and four in my section . . . the driver never got out of the cab in his truck; the rest of us got behind the dual wheels of that old six-by-six until the plane caught fire. Somebody said that . . . one of the Air Corps fellows said there was some live ones (bombs) aboard, so we "hooked it" across the runway. Out across the field . . . seventy-five to a hundred yards. . . seventy-five yards away, I suppose, was a machine gun emplacement. The way the emplacement was, it was built up on the surface with sand bags with a tripod in the center with a .50-caliber

machine gun on the tripod. Eleven of us was in this one pit, and as luck would have it, I got hurt again.

Marcello: What happened? How did you get hurt?

Gordon: Well (chuckle), see, I must have really "hooked it" up the runway, because I think I was one of the first into the pit, and wanting to get to the very bottom of it, why, I caught an ammunition box in my chest. I didn't know it at the time, but I broke five ribs and tore my chest loose at the middle here (gesture). As I say, the Japs didn't hurt me too bad, but they sure made me hurt my damn self! Anyhow, there was too much excitement to know about pain at that time, and as I later found out, I got three or four little old fragments . . . just surface fragments. One fellow was hit pretty hard, pretty bad--one of the Air Corps fellows.

Well, after the raid, we got out of this thing, and my driver wasn't to be found anywhere. So I went . . . and the old truck would run. As much as it was shot up, it would run. So I took it and went to the hangar. I was going to get the hell out of there. The captain asked me if I would take my truck and pick up some of the wounded. This is where I lost my native boy, and my cook had gone somewhere at the hangar there.

So I took the truck and picked up several wounded people and carried them to the aid station and was standing-by. They

asked me to stand-by with this truck in case they needed it because a lot of them had been burned; a lot of trucks had been burned by the airplanes and on the field, and mine was in running condition. This is when I discovered that I had a few nicks here and there. But it never did hurt me; it never did hurt me a bit in the world, because, as I say, there was too much anxiety.

Marcello: Do you ever get used to these air raids?

Gordon: Hell, no! (Chuckle) I don't mean to answer that abruptly, but I never did. But we didn't have enough of them, either. Possibly. . . four . . . five, maybe . . . five or six was the most we had.

Marcello: By the time those raids were finished, had the field been pretty well torn up?

Gordon: No. No. The airplanes had but the field wasn't. See, there was no bombing in this particular raid that I was caught in the middle of; it was strictly a strafing raid. But we lost all but three of our B-17's. They burned them or shot them in such condition that they couldn't fly, but most of them burned.

Marcello: Okay, now on February 27, 1942, the bomb groups leave Java and evacuated to Australia.

Gordon: And me, a fool, I didn't go with them.

Marcello: Did you have a chance to go with them?

Gordon: Oh, yes. Yes. It was our section.

Marcello: Why didn't you go with them?

Gordon: I couldn't get them to give me a written order.

Marcello: When you say you couldn't get them to give you a written order, you couldn't get the Air Corps to give you a written order?

Gordon: Right. See, like Captain Baker was the mess officer, and he wanted me to go. As a matter of fact, he asked me to get all the canned stuff that I possibly could to put aboard these planes in the bomb bay. He come to me and said, "It's too hot for us; it ought to be too damn hot for you! But we'd like to have you; we don't know where we're going or what facilities we're going to have. We'd just like to have you and your section go along."

I didn't go because . . . I asked him, I said, "Well, write me out some orders and let me go. My fellows in the section are anxious, very anxious, to go." But I said, "Fellows, we can't leave here without some orders."

I don't know whether this was on the 28th or not, but I had two opportunities. . . two invitations to fly out, and both times I couldn't. The first time I just ignored it more or less. The last time. . . I don't know whether it was the 28th or not. I believe it was on the 28th--last time that I asked for a specific order--and I couldn't get a specific order. Because after all, I was artillery, and I had not been transferred. I was merely attached and in a "help-out" situation.

So I didn't go, and the Air Corps all left, and I went back to my regular unit--Service Battery. Then we moved . . . started moving to the west then.

Marcello: What did this do to morale, that is, the fact that these bomb groups were leaving and the rest of the people had to stay?

Gordon: Well (chuckle), I really don't know, because there was moments of anxiety naturally. But complete realization of war hadn't come about. There'd been a lot of frightening experiences, and all had a little bit of growth stunting, but the realization of war really hadn't really come about. The type of warfare that a field artillery unit would be engaged in, really it never did show up.

Marcello: Did they ever tell you why they were keeping you or sending you to Java?

Gordon: No. No, not to my knowledge. I'm sure they told the higher echelon, possibly. Possibly it was to set up a defense perimeter around this airfield. . . possibly. As it turned out, we were part of a strike force of Australian combat troops, possibly at a later time after we left Singosari and Malang. We moved into Malang . . . got our equipment ready to go and moved out . . . I don't know what date it was, but we stored our excess baggage in Malang and started moving to the west. There was a British antiaircraft unit along the road.

The first experience I had with the Australians was after we had reached the western part of Java and gone into a defense position. We were supporting two battalions of . . . one was a machine gun battalion; one was a pioneer unit, which is very much like our combat engineers, so I'm told; a company of engineers--Australian engineers; and then a light tank unit. Their heaviest armor was a .50-caliber machine gun.

Marcello: Okay, what did you do after you left the airfield and were out in the field, so to speak?

Gordon: Well, again, I had the kitchen. I kept the groceries going, is about all I can say that I did. I kept food and made sandwiches where I could make sandwiches for fellows going out on supply missions. This was my job, so I fed my battery; that was it. I didn't . . . naturally, being a service unit like that, we wouldn't be up with the guns, anyhow. Of course, we had left one battery back at Surabaja. We only had two firing batteries when we went to the west part of Java.

Marcello: Did you stay in one place, or did you move around quite a bit?

Gordon: We went . . . let me think now just a minute. We went into a defense position supporting this strike force of Australian troops and was there, it seemed like to me, three days. Then we moved back. I don't know whether our mission had been accomplished or whether, as a strike force, we were supposedly to hit where the concentration was . . . detain them and move back.

Well, we hit the Japs on a river, and what detaining we done, I don't know, because when we pulled out, the Japs followed us on in. They were . . . so I was told . . . were pulling a pincher-type movement, because they had such a narrow front. We had to pull out.

Marcello: They evidently landed on Java in overwhelming numbers.

Gordon: I have heard this, and, of course, we didn't know at the time what size task force had been in there, but we heard that it was around about 120,000. This is when, of course, the Houston was sunk. The Houston got right into the middle of the landing party apparently there in the Sunda Strait at the west end of Java. But we didn't know how many Japs there were. As I say, this was a time of anxiety.

Marcello: But you're mainly just hitting and running, isn't that correct?

Gordon: Actually, we hit once and run. This was the object of a strike force--hit, delay, move out; and supposedly Dutch forces were to take over, but this never happened. We pulled back and never had an opportunity to regroup and go back into a defense position. When we got back into the mountains where there would have been excellent defense positions, why . . . see, we were under Dutch command, and they moved us right on through.

Marcello: I understand that the Dutch weren't too eager to put up any resistance on Java. Their thinking was that if they didn't put any resistance, then the Japanese would probably treat

them a bit more kindly, and perhaps it might even revert to business as usual.

Gordon: Possibly, I suppose. I know of no other reason why they shouldn't have engaged them, because they had a fairly good army in Java--the Dutch did--composed of a lot of native troops, however.

Marcello: Now on March 9, 1942, the order comes down that the Allied forces are to surrender. Describe what you were doing and what your reactions were when you heard that this event was occurring.

Gordon: Well, I suppose this was one of the most undecisive times of my life. The thought of blowing the top of my head off entered my mind very strongly; going to the hills and trying to stay away came into being; trying to get a boat, but I'd been informed there wasn't nothing afloat by the fellows who had been down to the coast--there was nothing afloat. Going to the hills was ruled out, because after discussing it, you would stand out like a sore toe, anyhow--white man in a black country or brown country, yellow country. So the decision was to wait and see. . . on the advice of many people, you know.

Marcello: Were you hearing rumors that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Gordon: True. True. This was the whole thing about why the thoughts of ending it all there came about. If there's a good place to hear rumors or stories, the Army's damn sure the best

(chuckle)! So every story that you may have heard was probably brought up. But it was . . . we come to the conclusion that they wouldn't last too long, you know, and we'd get out of there.

Marcello: You were still foreseeing a short war.

Gordon: Yes, right. Right. We hadn't gone against that Jap yet. . . only at a distance, you know, where exploding shells were taking their toll. And I didn't see that, of course.

Marcello: What sort of an effect did this have in terms of morale? I've heard some of the men say that they felt ashamed.

Gordon: Well, sure it entered the mind of people. . .of why this surrender business. Why not fight until the last? Well, this I don't know. The shame aspect naturally would enter it.

I would like to go back a moment and relate a little story to you that will point out some of the preparedness of our people. Aboard one of the troopships going over, we were issued Springfield rifles; maybe an NCO had a .45-caliber automatic. But these men were issued Springfield rifles--the corporals, privates. Okay, while at Singosari, half of the battalion was sent to the firing range. . . extremely short on ammunition, so they only got five rounds. The other half was to go at a later date, and it never did come about. So half of our people got five rounds on the firing range, and half of them didn't. When we went into action, we had to send out

patrols to clear the roadway . . . the infiltrators that was on each side of the roadway.

I'll never forget this particular incident. Sergeant Mallard and a Sergeant Webb was to take out a patrol to go down each side of this roadway to check on snipers or infantry, because we were to move our supplies up to the firing batteries. The sergeants were giving the men information on what their primary object was and the procedure they were going to take.

I'll never forget a fellow from Detroit. . . I can't think of his name . . . Tremonte. . . he's dead; he died. He was from Detroit. . . Detroit or Chicago. I'd have to look up some records, but I believe he was from Detroit. He spoke up and said, "Sergeant, how do you load this damn thing?" He didn't even know how to load his rifle, you see (chuckle). It so happened, of the twelve men that this Mallard was taking out, seven of them didn't know how to load their rifle. Never fired . . . well, I say they didn't know how to load his rifle; I'll retract that statement. They had never fired a rifle. A couple who had been raised up in the city didn't know how to load their rifle. But this was something else about being the type of people that we were . . . the walk of life that we came from. This hunting with a rifle or a shotgun was an everyday occurrence to a lot of these boys that was raised up in the

country, you know, in our neck of the woods. But that was a story to relate just how this thing affected one man: "Sergeant, how do you load this damn thing?"

Marcello: Okay, what procedure was followed now after the word had come down that the surrender was to take place?

Gordon: All right. We were congregated at a racetrack there in Java, and arms were to be turned in. The orders were to clean your weapons and turn them in. Well, that was rather an absurd thing, so people thought, so hell we just cleaned them with battery acid. That did a pretty good job, you know (chuckle). And we also swabbed the tubes of the fieldpieces with battery acid, too. I'm sure a short time later they were so pitted and all that they weren't any good; that's what we had hoped, anyhow. All right, at this racetrack arms were turned in.

Marcello: Who were they turned in to?

Gordon: The Japanese.

Marcello: Was this your first contact with the Japanese?

Gordon: Right. Right.

Marcello: Describe this initial contact.

Gordon: Well, the Japanese were there with vehicles to load the things, but we didn't actually come into contact with the Japanese troops. I did have contact with some, because I had gone on a detail with Lieutenant Schmid again--Eldon Schmid--and we had to go through a road block because we were trying to get

foodstuff and supplies. We had to go through Japanese road blocks, and we had passes to do this. The first contact with these troops. . . it was a time of anxiety. . . of the unknown . . . just what the hell would happen. But it was so different from the imagined. . . the imagination that had gone through your mind so much.

They were very, very curious in a mannerly way--no brutality. They were curious of the type of people they were up against; we were curious about what they were. See, the same damn thing.

Marcello: What'd they look like from a physical standpoint?

Gordon: The ones we came in contact with were the combat troops. We came in contact with troops that were large men.

Marcello: What'd their uniforms look like?

Gordon: Oh, scraggly as hell, you know. . . wrap-leggings, baggy britches, and that damn little old cap. That little old Japanese cap didn't look like much at all. Of course, they had their steel helmets swung on their back. The rifles were extremely long; that was something that always amazed me--just how long those damn rifles were. This occurred even more so at a later time when we come up against the more or less occupational troops that were much, much shorter and much smaller in stature; sometimes that rifle came damn near to the top of their head (laughter).

But back again, we'd stop at these road blocks, and they had some kind of a shelter set up at every one of them. We'd dismount from the command cars what we were in. It was a thing of curiosity; they wanted to see photographs of our families. Those few or the ones that tried to speak English, they wanted to know what kind of life we had in the States and things. They were just curious, real curious. At this time, there was nothing out of the ordinary at all as far as brutality was concerned. I didn't find this until a later date.

Marcello: Now were you actually staying there at the racetrack?

Gordon: Yes. Yes.

Marcello: How long did you stay there before you were moved out?

Gordon: Well, we stayed there about four days; then we went to a tea plantation.

Marcello: This was up in the mountains, was it not?

Gordon: Up in the mountains, yes--a tea plantation. It was a thought that we may be imprisoned where we were. The idea of our officer in charge and the Dutch liaison people also was to get to a place where we could possibly raise our own foodstuffs, sustain ourselves. So we went to this tea plantation and remained there three or four days, was all.

Marcello: And you had no contact with the Japanese?

Gordon: No. No, they was liaison now but Japanese soldiers, no. Then we moved from the tea plantation to a roadside area; I don't know what town it was near. I was separated for the first time from the main group of people again. I was sent on an advance party, and I had given up my mess sergeant duties in the meantime. I told my first sergeant he could take it and stick it "you-know-where," but, anyhow, that's beside the point; it doesn't pertain to this one iota. It was a conflict of personality.

So I was sent on this advance party. They picked one officer and three enlisted men from each battery and sent on an advance party. We were put on the train and sent to Batavia. We got into Batavia late and, of course, were being marched through the streets. The Japanese Army's just like the American Army; it's just a "hurry-up-and-wait" situation. So we stopped many times during the night.

Marcello: They didn't try to humiliate you or anything of that nature before the local population?

Gordon: No. No. We moved through the streets of Batavia--the British, Australians, and Americans.

Marcello: But there were very few American troops.

Gordon: Right. At this particular time, there was a great number of British and not too many Australians. I had been up the night before and . . . you might think it sounds silly (chuckle),

but, hell, I played poker all night the night before, so I was extremely tired. Everytime we'd stop, I'd fall down and put my head on my pack and go to sleep or try to. But anyhow, we reached this, as it turned out to be, a Chinese school, and we were put in there and put into rooms. The next morning is the realization that came about of the imprisonment.

Marcello: What happened?

Gordon: There was Japs everywhere stringing barbed wire. This is my first contact with the fork-toes shoes--tennis shoes; I thought that was something else. But those Japs, they were stringing barbed wire over every opening around. The entire school was just surrounded with coils of barbed wire. This is the first realization of imprisonment. We had rather cramped conditions; there were quite a lot of people there. But the Chinese school wasn't bad at all. In our packs we had extra foodstuff.

Marcello: You say you had extra foodstuff. Were the Japanese providing any additional rations for you?

Gordon: They had rice; they had rice. At this particular stage of the game, I don't know whether we ate any of the dern vegetables that came in or not. I don't recall. I can remember cooking rice.

This Lieutenant Schmid showed up again. He was one of two Schmid brothers--twins, as a matter of fact, and one was a lieutenant and one was a sergeant. Anyhow, he showed up

with a truck, and, of course, the truck was taken, and he was put in the compound with us. This was several days after we'd reached this Chinese school. He had lots of potatoes on this truck, so we got them all inside; we had potatoes most of the time. Another thing that he had that came in quite handy, believe it or not. . . he had thousands of saccharine tablets, so we had sweet tea (chuckle).

We had a Jap guard . . . he wasn't a guard; he was never armed with anything more than a bayonet. He was never armed; I never seen him carry a rifle. He always had his bayonet. He spoke English very well. He said he had worked in Shanghai before the war for the Japanese Imperial Airlines and that he had come in contact with many Europeans and Americans as well. He was a real fair person . . . a very fair person to the prisoners. He didn't insist on us working; he insisted on us keeping him out of trouble. He would always take . . . this particular group was . . . he would take out the Australians and the Americans on work parties.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing?

Gordon: We were clearing the rubble from the airport--Batavia airport. It had been demolished--a lot of bomb craters--and the demolition had been carried on there by the Dutch. This is what we were supposed to do; we didn't do anything we didn't have to do. He would take us to the back side of the airfield. There

was a shelter there and atap, palm leaves. . .I don't know whether you know what the word "atap" is.

Marcello: Atap, yes.

Gordon: Okay, that created their shade. He would put out, oh, six or eight men out so-called working and tell them to keep their eyes out and if they saw any suspicious vehicles coming up, why, get everybody out and wake him up. So this was the type of fellow he was; he never made us work at all.

At noontime he would take some of the fellows to go down where the natives had congregated to try and sell their wares and let us buy foodstuff, cigarettes, things like that. He was always our go-between. If the price was too high, he'd just take it from them, you see, and pay them a trivial amount. He would check the price for us; if it was too high, why, he'd make them get right. He was a very decent fellow.

I have seen him be quite brutal to natives who were trying to take advantage of prisoners. . . you know, exorbitant prices for their commodities. I seen him get quite brutal with those . . .slap them around quite heavy.

Then there was another incident there. I was running a little old tractor--Fiat tractor--clearing the rubble from the terminal building, I believe, and I kept having trouble with a cable. I finally got down and fixed the thing. A Jap

officer just out of the clear blue said, "Good old Yankee know-how!"

But anyhow, at this Chinese school, it was real good situation for the prisoners.

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

Gordon: Possibly six weeks. About that . . . six weeks to two months.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, is everybody still in pretty good physical shape?

Gordon: Oh, yes, good physical shape; good physical shape.

Marcello: Did the Japanese loot you at all? In other words, did they take watches, rings, things of that nature?

Gordon: No. No, I don't know of an instance that happened this way.

Marcello: What were some of the belongings that you had at that particular time with you?

Gordon: Of course, I had my glasses; I wore glasses. I didn't wear them very often, but I had a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. I had a birthstone ring--a ruby ring--gold with a ruby setting for July. I had some money. . . a little bit of money, not much; my pocket knife that my father had given me the last time I was at home. As a matter of fact, I kept that knife up until three months before we were liberated. And I had an air mattress--my most prized possession. I think I had the only one in the battalion (chuckle). I could fall down on the hardest concrete and get a decent night's sleep. That's all I had; I had nothing else.

Marcello: Did you have a mess gear, a blanket, some things of that nature?

Gordon: Oh, yes. Mess gear, canteen, blanket, clothes, shoes--good shoes.

Marcello: Did you have some extra clothing?

Gordon: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I had a real good pair of shoes.

Marcello: What were you carrying all this equipment in? Did you have some improvised deal or what?

Gordon: Well, I carried it in musette bag and a barracks bag, because we didn't have an actual pack, you see. But later on, I managed to get hold of an Australian pack on a walk up into the jungle.

Marcello: So you really didn't work very hard, and life was fairly good here at this Chinese school.

Gordon: Right, it was. Just like, I was trying to stress this one particular Jap . . . what a difference it was between him and later Japanese people that were in charge of us.

Just like we wanted to put on a minstrel show. I'm sure you've been to those minstrel shows. See, back when I was a youngster, it was the black face and . . . I don't know what it was called . . . but the colonel, you know, would designate duty for everybody else. We wanted to put on one of these minstrel shows, and we told him it'd be a helluva lot better

if we had some liquor. We managed to get some by his help, and we put on a terrific show.

But then we were moved, and we were moved into the Bicycle Camp, which I'm sure you've heard of. That's where I came up with the rest of the unit and the survivors of the USS Houston for the first time.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about the Bicycle Camp from a physical standpoint. First of all, how did you get there?

Gordon: Walked.

Marcello: Was it a very long walk?

Gordon: I don't remember. A distinctive thing happened here, and I don't know whether you've heard this story or not about the white cockatoo.

Marcello: No.

Gordon: This Lieutenant Schmid was a very tall man, and he had this cockatoo--white cockatoo.

Marcello: For the record, what was the name of the cockatoo?

Gordon: "Piss Pot." As it turned out, he would raise hell everytime a Jap would start into the area where he was; he was just outside the officers' headquarters, and the Headquarters Battery was right beside it. This cockatoo would raise hell everytime the Jap guard would come in the area. But it was quite a sight--this Lieutenant Schmid walking with a campaign hat and having this white cockatoo on his shoulder--and he was tall enough

that the cockatoo stood out above everybody else, you know, because of the tall man and the cockatoo on his shoulder. That was quite a sight walking down the streets of Batavia (chuckle).

Marcello: Did he carry this cockatoo into Bicycle Camp with him?

Gordon: Oh, yes. He carried "Piss Pot" in with him.

Marcello: And the Japanese had no objections to this at all.

Gordon: No, no objections. I carried in . . . at this time, I also carried in just the interior of a cabinet-model radio. . . just the guts in one of our GI stock pots, you know--Henry Drake and myself. He's now deceased.

Marcello: Now I assume that this had to be done surreptitiously.

Gordon: Well, we just walked down the road with the stock pot between us. We had a lid on it, of course. The Japs didn't inspect it or nothing.

Marcello: But what I'm saying, in effect, is that the Japs would have certainly confiscated that, had they known you had it.

Gordon: Possibly so. I gathered that they really didn't care a heck of a lot at this particular time, because everything was going their way.

Marcello: Yes, they were winning.

Gordon: Yes. Everything was going their way. There was Jess Stambrough and a Paul Patterson, who lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who were radio technicians. Heck, man, they had radios setting

up there listening with headphones. Had the Japs wanted to detect this, they certainly could have in my opinion. But as I say, the idea that I got . . . the reason that they didn't was because things were going their way anyhow, and there was no good news coming in, I'm quite sure. At a later date, they were strict about radio equipment.

Marcello: Okay, so describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint.

Gordon: The front entrance off of the streets of the city . . . of course, you had the guard stations on each side of it. When it was a military camp, I'm sure, it was the headquarters area which the front gate passed through. Of course, this was housing guards at this particular time. Coming in was a macadam roadway; this macadam roadway ran completely through the camp with buildings each side. To our later knowledge, we found out these buildings were made of teakwood--beautiful things. Get that paint off, and they was beautiful wood. They were open buildings, and we were quite crowded in there. I slept on the veranda of one at this particular area. The sanitation facilities here were very, very primitive . . . so we thought at the time. But as it turned out, hell, they were first class (chuckle).

Marcello: What did they consist of?

Gordon: Open half-tile with water running through it all the time, and showers. But the latrines were open tile, and it was clay

tile, approximately eight inches in diameter or maybe twelve inches in diameter. The surrounding area was tile, so we were able to keep it clean. But the waste and all was just running down an open ditch. But our showers were fine; we had showers there. There was good water apparently, because we drank the water.

Marcello: Did you have an unlimited supply of water?

Gordon: Then, yes. We had an unlimited supply then. Because just like I say, water ran through this gutter at all times--at all times--carrying the waste away whether it was the middle of the night or coming in from a work party.

Marcello: And were you able to take as many showers as you wanted within reason?

Gordon: Yes. To my recollection, we could have; we could have. Also, we had volleyball courts set up there. I don't believe there was any basketball at this time, but volleyball became real, real competitive--very competitive. And we had boxing matches, also, in this camp. We was still in good shape. When I went in prison, I weighed around 190 pounds.

Marcello: I've heard it said that if you could have spent the whole war at Bicycle Camp, it wouldn't have been too bad an experience being a prisoner-of-war.

Gordon: I don't . . . not compared to later. However, I came as close to dying there as I did anywhere. But Java is noted for

producing food, see, and that would have been right down our alley, naturally. Scrounging material out on working parties, of course, early like this, naturally it would have been good, because we scrounged a lot of stuff. . . foodstuff, you know. We got it back into camp, too. Rice. . . they started here giving us very low-grade rice.

Marcello: Now who was cooking the rice?

Gordon: We were.

Marcello: Now were you back on the cook detail again?

Gordon: No, no, I never got back on the cooking until a later date; in '43 I had a little bit experience in the kitchen.

Marcello: Did it take the cooks a little while to get the hang of cooking that rice?

Gordon: Well, I taught . . .yes. I had an experience in the Chinese school that . . . not my regular guard or the one who took us out on work parties, but an area guard came up to me. I was cooking a pot of rice, and I cooked it the way my mother did --stirred the hell out of it, you know. It was like a gruel, you know, like mush. Man, he kicked pots, slapped me upside the head real good, and he shouted out in Japanese which meant, "No!" He made me go get water and wash the pot and get more water and rice.

He sat right there and cooked a batch of rice and never touched it. After he thought it was done--and it was--he

open this littel hole, and it was very dry completely to the bottom of the pot, and then, of course, the rice just came apart--fluffy rice. Now that's how I learned to cook rice. This was at the Chinese school. I was just helping out a fellow that was doing the cooking at this particular time; I was going to cook the rice for him. But that Jap taught me how there.

I had tried this at Singosari, but I kept hearing the words "steamed rice." Hell, I didn't know how in the heck they were doing it, and I was trying to literally cook it by steam, which was impossible.

Marcello: What other food were you getting here at Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: As I say, I got real sick at Bicycle Camp. I contacted amoebic dysentery. Our doctor wasn't versed in tropical diseases, and I got to a very low ebb. At the particular time, we were getting a very poor grade of rice, but we had milk and we'd get potatoes; we had more or less a supply that we . . . people on these work parties would buy this stuff, bring it into camp, and turn it into a central supply, so to speak. We'd get bully beef and sardines and milk and anything that was edible; we'd buy it and bring it in. We had quite . . . there was quite a bit of money in the till at that time. I think we went in prison with maybe 250,000 or 300,000 guilders.

Marcello: Now were you getting three meals a day?

Gordon: You know, I don't remember; I don't remember.

Marcello: Was the food adequate in terms of quantity?

Gordon: No, I didn't think so. See, mine is different, because I was sick, and it wasn't any good to me at all.

I was going to tell you about this rice. . . the poor grade of rice. It had worms in it. With this milk that we'd add to it, man, those worms would float to the top, and you'd see that brown head (laughter). And also we had a green bean, which came in lengths of about twelve inches long, we'll say, approximately that. Then they'd come in bunches six to eight inches in diameter. The way they'd prepare these things, they'd just take a knife and slice down through them and throw them in the pot and boil them. To this day, if green beans is not seasoned just properly, well, I don't want any part of it. It stems from this experience. But I was so sick.

Marcello: Well, now you mentioned that the rice had worms in it. At that particular stage, was the rice thrown away when you saw the worms, or were you already eating it?

Gordon: No, you'd skim a little bit, you see. But with this milk in there. . . had you not had the milk in there, you would have never known it. But they'd float in this milk (laughter). Their little brown heads would show up. Also, at this time, they brought in some cheese from the dock area. Man, it was higher than a Georgia pine (laughter)!

Marcello: In other words, it was spoiled rotten.

Gordon: It was rancid. Limburger didn't hold a light to it (laughter), but it would sure camouflage the hell out of rice (laughter)!

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that you got sick here at Bicycle Camp. You came down with amoebid dysentery. What does that do to a person?

Gordon: It does two things: you have both diarrhea--not at the same time, of course--and a constipation.

Before this happened to me, I dislocated a shoulder again. That damn shoulder kept coming out of the socket (chuckle). When this shoulder would dislocate, it could never be reduced without anesthetic--never. Many times it's been tried; I've been wrestled for hours trying to get that shoulder reduced, and they could never reduce it without anesthetic. But anyhow, I dislocated the shoulder.

Marcello: In the meantime, had your ribs and so on healed fairly well?

Gordon: Yes, they had healed. I got skinned when they took the tape off of me with that damn rib business. Oh, that was the sorest, most miserable time of my life, I believe--terrible!

But anyhow, amoebic dysentery affects a person. . . you can have diarrhea; you can be constipated and really constipated. I really never. . . you can have two types of dysentery at the same time, so I have been informed. You can have your bacillary, which is strictly a diarrhea situation. The amoebic, or amoeba, is one that's in the intestines and remains there. I got away, way down physically. . .down to 100 pounds.

Marcello: Well, in your case, was it mostly diarrhea or constipation or about equal between the two?

Gordon: Well, amoebic, I think it would be equal; it'd be somewhere close to equal. I don't quite recall. You know, when you get so sick a lot of times, things are very vague, too. But I was very fortunate. Dr. Lumpkin, who was much of a man but inexperienced in this particular facet, got information from Dutch that were in the camp on what was needed to treat this. Of course, I don't know the name of this, but some of the fellows happened to get some of this from a Dutch nurse that had been thrown in the civilian concentration camp. She gave him this, and the doctor gave me this medicine, and it healed up the amoebic dysentary.

Marcello: What sort of medicine was it, or don't you know?

Gordon: I don't remember. I don't remember. It was a little lead-colored pill, was what it was.

Marcello: Did Dr. Lumpkin have very much in the way of medical supplies and medical facilities?

Gordon: I can't answer that; I don't know. He was not in my section; therefore, I have no knowledge of this.

Marcello: Did the Bicycle Camp have sickbay for the prisoners?

Gordon: Yes, they had a hospital unit there. Of course, they had two Navy doctors there, too: Dr. Epstein, who's in Oakland, California, now; and Dr. Burroughs, who's in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, now. Dr. Burroughs did remain in Java throughout

the war. But they had Dr. Burroughs, Dr. Epstein, and Dr. Lumpkin, so they had pretty adequate medical facilities there. I think there was a Dutch doctor working with them, and I don't know how many of Australians, because they were . . . the part that went down to the center of the camp, they were on one side, and we were on the other side.

Marcello: Well, at the same time, the physical condition of the men wasn't really too bad here.

Gordon: No, no. It wasn't too bad. I think we only lost one man in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: In other words, the medical facilities weren't really being taxed here.

Gordon: No. No, because of the reserve that the men had.

Marcello: What sort of work were the prisoners having to do here at Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: We was moving lots of oil drums and, of course, going through the various warehouses, factories, for anything that the Japs could use--auto supplies, gasoline, oil, foodstuff. They were carrying into the docks to send it back to Japan, is what they were doing with it.

Marcello: Was this hard work?

Gordon: Handling those oil drums was pretty damn hard.

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

Gordon: We'd put in maybe eight hours a day then.

Marcello: Seven days a week?

Gordon: Yes. But we had the physical stamina to do this. As I say, I didn't go out too often because of the sickness. It seems like I was always sick when things happened (chuckle), doesn't it?

Marcello: Did you actually go into the sickbay when you did come down with this dysentery?

Gordon: No, no. I never did. I stayed in my own quarters.

Marcello: Did you just remain in the barracks?

Gordon: Right.

Marcello: Who determined whether or not you were sick enough to work? Was it your doctors or the Japanese?

Gordon: The doctor at this time. We were pretty well-protected by . . . we had our full quota of people at this time. Also, in this camp is where the thing came up about signing your pledge that you wouldn't escape. Have you run up against this?

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about that non-escape pledge.

Gordon: Right. We had to sign it, so to speak, and, of course, the men wouldn't do it.

Marcello: Okay, again, go into some details on this, because maybe it's important.

Gordon: Well, it was brought up that the Japanese required us to sign a pledge that we would not attempt an escape, and, of course, it was unheard of; we just wouldn't do it at all.

Marcello: Was this attempted very shortly after you arrived at camp?

Gordon: It was a little time after we arrived at camp. I don't remember the time that elapsed. But we would not sign this, so one day the Japanese brought in a couple of truckloads of troops and broke out the machine guns and said, "You will sign, or you will be executed!" Well, all men were out in formation, and they had the machine guns set up in front, and we thought, you know, "That could be it," still didn't really know anything. But anyhow, the Japanese officer in charge, after his display of power, so to speak, came to the commanding officer, Colonel Tharp, and told him, "This will be done if you do not." So the powers that be, our staff, got their heads together. We'd be signing a pledge under duress anyhow, so it wouldn't mean a damn thing. So the pledge was signed. Really, it didn't mean a thing in the world.

Marcello: Do you recall what the wording was of the non-escape pledge?

Gordon: No, it was in Japanese. But it was pledging to them that we would not attempt to escape from their custody.

Marcello: What threats did the Japanese make in the event that a prisoner did escape and was caught?

Gordon: Well, at this particular time, I can't answer that. At a later time, after we arrived at Singapore, it was a matter of execution. And if he made his escape good, it was a matter of execution for two unrelated people. I say unrelated . . .

they were picked at random and executed. I think this fact had as much control on men as any one thing. First of all, where would you go? Second, you'd get in the jungle and probably die anyhow, but yet two men still had to pay for it. If you made it good, it'd be a helluva thing to live with. So I think this one thing had as much control on . . . see, they executed quite a few in Singapore.

Marcello: The Japanese weren't bluffing.

Gordon: No, they weren't bluffing; they weren't bluffing.

Marcello: And you knew they weren't bluffing.

Gordon: That's right. They proved it by the executions, you see--our witnessing of executions.

Marcello: Okay, we'll probably talk about this particular event a little bit later on, so let's just concentrate our questioning at this point at Bicycle Camp. What sort of a reception did you get from the Japanese guards here at Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: Here again, we had good and bad ones. We had one that was called. . . have you ever come up with the name "Brown Bomber?"
(laughter)

Marcello: "Brown Bomber?" I think I have at one time or another, but describe the "Brown Bomber."

Gordon: Oh, he was a little banty-legged bastard that (laughter). . .
oh, he . . .

Marcello: You're laughing now, but I bet you weren't laughing then.

Gordon: Oh, no! Hell, no (laughter)! Well, you see, Dr. Marcello, something that is a beauty part of the make-up . . . I don't know whether it's just of our race or whether it's all Caucasians. . . I think if we dwelled on the horrors of this thing, we would have been mad long ago. So you see, the comedy of all of it, why, it's the only way you can live.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the "Brown Bomber."

Gordon: Okay (chuckle). The "Brown Bomber" was about knee-high to a grasshopper. No, he was short in stature, and apparently this was something that didn't set very well with him, you know (chuckle). Goddamn, he equalized it with that rifle (chuckle)! He'd come up there, and, man, he'd smash you upside the head with that damn rifle in the bat of an eye. Had you known the Japanese language real good, I imagine every other breath would have been a cuss word at you, you know; he'd call you a 'no good so-and-so.' I'm quite sure of that because of his attitude and his look. But he had been so . . . (chuckle) he was really brainwashed, in other words, if there's such a thing. It was strictly their training, naturally. He probably was a very low-class coolie to begin with, but, damn, he wanted to make himself known, and he damn sure did.

Marcello: Was physical punishment a rather common thing here?

Gordon: Punishment, I don't believe, would be the word for it. Harassment . . . or belittling, see. Just like here's this little

banty-legged devil talking to you and knocking you upside the damn head with a rifle butt, and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it. See, that's belittling you. Your teeth do rattle (chuckle).

Marcello: At the same time, would communication difficulties play a role here?

Gordon: Oh, many times it has.

Marcello: In other words, the peasant soldier could only make you understand what he wanted you to do by giving you a good shot alongside the head or something.

Gordon: Well, he'd get your attention that way, anyhow (laughter). The language barrier was one of the main things.

Marcello: Did you ever see a Japanese sergeant, for example, tromping on a Japanese corporal or private?

Gordon: Oh, yes, many times. See, here is the whole thing . . . the reason that we thought this ordeal was so damn rough. I lay it to three things: standard of living, discipline, and religion. It was so different from ours, so therefore it made it rough as hell.

Marcello: But physical punishment was a way of life in the Japanese Army.

Gordon: Right. This is the way of discipline . . . a way of life, too, incorporated into discipline. But you could never find a Jap officer that'd ever sign a piece of paper to discipline anybody in that method--never. But you take one man--a Jap--

that did something wrong and maybe got the whole platoon in trouble, they'd put him in the middle, and they'd just beat the hell out of him . . . I mean, literally, until he was unconscious. That's the way they would administer their own punishment. An individual of a higher rank could administer a slap upside the head to a lower rank. There wasn't anything lower than a damn prisoner, see (chuckle), and that coolie second class, he'd give them hell, too (laughter).

Marcello: Did you personally ever get roughed up any here at Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: Only a couple of times--a slap upside the head with a fist.

Marcello: After awhile, do you sort of learn to roll with the punch, so to speak?

Gordon: Oh, yes. Yes, you have to.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that the worst thing that can happen is to fall down when you've been hit.

Gordon: Oh, they get you down where their feet are. You bet! Don't get down where those damn army boots were! Of course, it wasn't so bad when they had their tennis shoes on, but, man, when they had them damn boots on (chuckle), well, it's something else! Those shoes, you know, army shoes.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that they especially liked to pick on the bigger men.

Gordon: Yes, I think so. I think so. It gave them prestige; it built

up their ego. That's so elementary, you know. That's why, I say, I couldn't understand why it built up their ego and all when they was . . . it seemed to me to be very coward-like, because they had the advantage anyhow, and there wasn't a damn thing a man could do about it.

Marcello: Okay, now we mentioned that there were bad guards. I think, in all fairness, we should also mention some of the good guards.

Gordon: Oh, yes, there were. We had guards that always . . . many of them . . . the "Brown Bomber," he always came in with his damn rifle, but we had other guards that always wore their bayonet. They would come in and want to learn our customs, learn the language, and talk about religion. There were some Christians in the . . . so-called Christians, I think. Maybe they wanted to keep it quiet from their own people, but I think there were some so-called Christians amongst the Japanese. We had . . . what was that rascal called there in Bicycle Camp? "Holy Joe," I believe.

Marcello: I'm sure you had nicknames for all the guards.

Gordon: Oh, yes, we did; we did. But anyhow, he was a very mild fellow, shy to a degree, I'm sure he was shy with his own people. But he would just come into the groups of men to learn more than anything else and to associate with . . . as I say, he seemed to be a very religious man, anxious to

learn more of the Christian religion. I think that's why he got the nickname of "Holy Joe."

But out on work parties, again, you'd have good ones and bad ones, and you would learn . . . the word would get around who you could trust when you wanted to try to make a buy or something or when you wanted to try to bring something back into camp and things like that. You'd learn who to trust and who not to trust.

Marcello: And I gather you really didn't want to become too friendly with any of the guards, even those that for the most part appeared to be friendly toward you.

Gordon: Only to use them. This was a matter of existence. That's a bad terminology to use, but you used any method available to you, and that was one of them, of course. If you could become friendly enough to get you an egg, why, hell, get you an egg!

Marcello: Did you ever see any of the prisoners lose their self-control after they had been hit by one of these guards and rise up and take a swipe at one of the guards?

Gordon: There was one big Marine, but this was at a later date up in the jungle. . . after things were extremely rough. He didn't much give a damn whether he lived or died, you know. The face . . . by the expression, the Jap knew that he was angry enough to want to use violence, but he never did hit the Jap;

he never did hit him. But the damn Jap knew that he was right on the verge of it, because he was about six feet four. He had beriberi so bad at the time, and, of course, he was barefooted and his feet had swollen and burst. He was naturally cursing this guy, calling him everything, and his lips were drawn back, and his teeth were gritting. So you knew that he was . . . and he was, he was. I'm sure he had to restrain himself very, very much to just end it all right then and there. And that's what would have happened had he hurt the Jap . . . or Korean. See, these people are Koreans; when we speak of Japs, we're talking really about Koreans.

Marcello: But did you have Korean guards here at Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, that "Brown Bomber" was . . . they were Koreans . . . occupational troops. This was the case throughout. You would have some Japanese in a supervisory capacity and Japanese officers. There may have been some Korean officers, too--I don't really know--but the guards are primarily Koreans.

Marcello: I would assume that even the Japanese that administered these POW camps were not the cream of the Japanese Army. The good Japanese soldiers were out on the front lines probably.

Gordon: I'm sure of that; I'm sure of that. Maybe it was a . . . I know in one case it would be a drunkard. I knew of one Jap

lieutenant . . . I don't know whether he was a commandant of the camp or not, but everytime I saw the man, he was drunker than a skunk.

Marcello: Where was this?

Gordon: This was in Thailand.

Marcello: Okay, well, let's just stick here with Bicycle Camp.

Gordon: Okay.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you would get food from outside sources, that is, trading with the natives and things of this nature.

Gordon: Right,

Marcello: Now there's one touchy issue that comes up here, and I need to have your ideas concerning it. You mentioned that there were some company funds, and the company funds were being used to purchase food.

Gordon: Right.

Marcello: Most of this was done by the officers.

Gordon: The purchase of the food?

Marcello: Yes.

Gordon: Not necessarily.

Marcello: Well, what I'm getting at is, there seems to be some stories that the officers seemed to be living quite a bit better than the enlisted men here.

Gordon: I've never seen any army yet that that wasn't true.

Marcello: But even under these circumstances, I understand it caused some resentment between the enlisted men and the officer personnel.

Gordon: I'm sure of that; I'm sure of that.

Marcello: Do you remember that particualr incident at all?

Gordon: No. No, I don't. The officers were always segregated, and a different mess. But it is an accepted fact, and maybe it's to be expected--I don't know. Even at a later date. . . we never had in our Army servants or as the British call "batmen." This even happened with our people, also, at a later date up in Burma, I believe. I wasn't there; I was not there.

Marcello: For the most part, was military discipline being maintained here at Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: Yes. Yes, it was.

Marcello: In other words, you were still obeying your officers and things of that nature.

Gordon: True. They were a go-between, literally.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what function the officers played in this camp, and I think you just mentioned it in part.

Gordon: Yes. They were a go-between with the Japanese.

Marcello: Orders came from the Japanese to your officers and in turn were sent down to your non-coms.

- Gordon: Right. Right. Right. But later, you see, all enlisted people were completely segregated from the officers--at a later date, I believe, up in Burma and Indochina. I wasn't there.
- Marcello: How much contact did you have with the foreign prisoners-of-war here, that is, the British and the Australians and the Dutch?
- Gordon: Well, we had contact with Australians; there was a lot of Australians in Bicycle Camp. There was a few Dutch high-ranking officers right at the end of the hut that I was in. I learned. . . well, as a matter of fact, I got a little extra foodstuff from a Dutch cook that was there . . . servant, so to speak. He taught me, you know, how to fix various stuff that was available to us at the time. Because I had to work with Dutchmen at the Singosari airfield in their kitchen.
- Marcello: Now were you doing very much trading with the natives during this period?
- Gordon: Yes.
- Marcello: What did you have to trade?
- Gordon: Money.
- Marcello: Well, to me that would be, you know, buying things, but I was thinking in terms of bartering and so on.

Gordon: No, not at this time, because money was used, and who knew when you were going to need another pair of britches or a pair of socks, you see, or shoes? They just weren't available; you didn't know where any were coming from. After seeing. . . well, when we came into Bicycle Camp, we gave away a lot of clothing to the Houston survivors; they were practically nude.

Marcello: You might talk a little bit about the condition of those Houston survivors when you arrived at Bicycle Camp, because they play an important part in the story.

Gordon: Yes. They were extremely glad to see other Americans even though they have to be prisoners. It was a pathetic sight to me, because we still had our uniforms, our good clothing, and had eaten pretty well. They had been in combat, of course; they had been burned; oil had burned them. So their physical appearance shook us quite a bit. We could just assume--we could never comprehend--but we just assumed what they had gone through from the sinking of the ship in a battle. So there was a great deal of respect of them in my opinion. They were very glad to see other Americans.

Marcello: Did the people of your outfit share their clothing and other belongings with these survivors off the Houston?

Gordon: Oh, yes. Yes, sir. That was one of the things; we had adequate clothing at the time because it was early, and we

shared with them because God knows they needed it.

Marcello: And I assume they very shortly then blended in with the rest of the prisoners.

Gordon: Right. See, we kept a so-called military organization, so to speak--in other words, battery performances. We weren't just a group of men; we had Headquarters Battery and Service Battery, D Battery, and F Battery and, of course, the medics. But they were kept as an organization. The same thing happened with the Houston people; they were in a hut to themselves, too, right next to us--one, two, three buildings that they had the American prisoners in them. . . Headquarters, Service, D Battery, F Battery, and the Houston people; E Battery had been left at Surabaya.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that there was military organization and that there was military discipline. I would assume that these things were essential to survival.

Gordon: Right. When you have a rabble, you have nothing. So the better organization you had, the better off you would be in reality. Of course, I'm sure that there was some resentment at times; there always is under the best conditions, and I'm sure there was some under that. I don't recall any. I don't resent any to my knowledge at this particular time.

Marcello: What sort of recreational facilities were provided here at Bicycle Camp?

- Gordon: Primarily volleyball, and then we had the boxing matches. They were intermingled with sailors, artillerymen, Australians --competition. And there was highly competitive volleyball, highly competitive; it was good exercise.
- Marcello: Did the Japanese ever participate in any of these sports?
- Gordon: No. No, they didn't.
- Marcello: Were they ever spectators?
- Gordon: Yes. Oh, yes, many, many times. We also . . . another recreation we had here was a theatre group that we had here in Bicycle Camp. We put on the minstrel show again that we concocted in the Chinese school. Then I don't know where all this damn stuff come from that all these people turned up with--I swear I don't (chuckle)--but musical instruments came about.
- Marcello: What happened to your radio?
- Gordon: I don't know what happened to that after we left Bicycle Camp; I have no idea.
- Marcello: What happened to it in Bicycle Camp?
- Gordon: Oh, it was just like the fellows that was operating it. They would lay up there and listen to it when the opportunity presents itself, and they'd try to get news, you know. I don't think there was any shortwaves.
- Marcello: How would the news be circulated?
- Gordon: Word-of-mouth. Man-to-man. It really didn't make a lot of difference at this early stage of the game.

Marcello: What did you do with the radio after you took it into Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: I turned it over to Paul Patterson--Sergeant Patterson.

Marcello: Did you ever see it after that?

Gordon: No. We took it, and it was in a cabinet; it was an old cabinet-model radio--Crosby. It was in this truck that the lieutenant came to the Chinese school in. We took it out of the cabinet. We didn't operate it in the Chinese school at all. We took it out of there and carried it into Bicycle Camp, because we thought maybe we could use it someday.

Marcello: Now at this stage, how long did you think the war was going to last?

Gordon: This is where the eleven months came in . . . or possibly . . . no, I take it back. Actually, it was just before we were sent to Batavia where my guess of eleven months came about.

Marcello: I think we had been talking about this off the record, so you might explain just exactly what you're referring to when you say that this is where the eleven months came in.

Gordon: Well, there was a big session, so to speak, talking about the progress of the war, what little bit was known, and the idea of the people how long the war may last or how long it would be before somebody would capture an island where we were

and liberate us. So there was a piece of paper passed around, and each man put down the date that they thought they'd be liberated. So I just picked out eleven months from that date and guessed that that was where it would be. I didn't miss it but by two and a half years (laughter).

Marcello: Do you know if anybody won it?

Gordon: I don't know. Of course, we separated; I don't even know what happened to this piece of paper. . . never knew what happened to it.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that even here in Bicycle Camp that rumors were floating around as to when you were going to be liberated? In other words, somebody said that he had received word that the American fleet was right over the horizon or something of this nature?

Gordon: Yes. Oh, yes.

Marcello: And I bet you believed every one of those rumors.

Gordon: Well, true. You know, about naval engagements and stuff like that, you wanted to believe it; see, you wanted to believe it. Yet, I'm sure a lot of it was taken with a grain of salt, but primarily you wanted to believe it. You damn sure didn't want to look on the dark side of it.

Marcello: When was it that you left Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: October, '42.

Marcello: October of 1942.

Gordon: Right. I went to Singapore.

Marcello: Now was this an unsettling experience? You had been at Bicycle Camp; you had gotten into some sort of a routine. Now you were being uprooted.

Gordon: Right. Uprooted, yes. Yes, there again was the anxiety of the unknown. We just didn't realize, of course. It was horrible enough, but, hell, it was like a Sunday school picnic compared to later, but we didn't know.

Marcello: Okay, describe the process by which you got from Bicycle Camp over to Changi prison camp in Singapore.

Gordon: Okay. Batavia has a port. Batavia's inland a few miles. Tanjong Priok is the port city to Batavia, and we were trucked to Tanjong Priok; we didn't have to walk. We brought our supplies of foodstuff that we had in Bicycle Camp there; some was distributed to each man. This was very helpful in sustaining us in the hold of this Japanese freighter, which was not a large freighter at all . . . very dirty.

We were down in the compartments--cargo compartments--and very, very cramped. Hot! God Almighty! It was hot! Soon the stink of men, the stink of the bowels, what-have-you. . . men couldn't get to the latrine, which you had to get up and get permission to go out and get on deck to do. So many of them missed. It was five days of a pretty antagonizing situation.

Then, of course, the Japs had, again. . . I don't know where they got the idea, but they had old field guns on the deck of this ship, too. But theirs were the old iron-rimmed wood wheel field gun . . . like a horse-drawn unit. I was on deck at one time, and they were firing at a Chinese sampan . . . I don't know whether it was Chinese or not, but that type of vessel. They sunk it. Whether they was doing it for purposes of meanness or for just the hell of it or whether it was an ulterior motive, you know, to really get rid of opposition, I don't know. But they were firing rounds at that. But I was in the hold times before when they'd fire them guns, and, man, they'd jar that deck, and that rust and dirt and dust would damn near stifle you.

Marcello: What sort of food and water were they providing for you on this trip?

Gordon: Water was very, very scarce. Thank God for our canteens.

Marcello: Were you being fed up on deck, or was it lowered down into the hold?

Gordon: It was lowered down to us in the hold--primarily rice again. But there was some dehydrated potatoes in the hold of this thing. When we got to Singapore, I had a bag full of them when I left to go into that prison there in Changi.

Marcello: Now by the time that you boarded the ship for the trip to Changi, had you recovered from your dysentery?

- Gordon: Yes, I had; I had recovered from dysentery. I was in fair shape but not the very best. At a later time, malnutrition is one of the things that kept me from going with the main group of men up into Burma. But I was in pretty good shape. I don't know what my weight was; I had no way of knowing.
- Marcello: Did you lose anybody on this trip from Bicycle Camp to Singapore?
- Gordon: I believe there was one man who died about the time of arrival in Singapore. I believe it was of dysentery. I don't know who the man was. It might have been an Australian.
- Marcello: How tightly were you packed in those ships?
- Gordon: We all couldn't lay down at once, so it was a shift-type thing to get to sleep.
- Marcello: Now were there all nationalities in this ship?
- Gordon: Yes, yes--Australians, British, Americans, Dutch. I don't know the percentage of each.
- Marcello: Did you know where you were going?
- Gordon: No. No, I don't recall knowing. We did leave some men behind in Bicycle Camp. Some remained there the entire war, I understand. But it was damn nice to see the daylight of Singapore, I tell you for sure!
- Marcello: Now let's just back up here a minute. When did you say that you left Bicycle Camp?
- Gordon: October.

Marcello: Okay, October of 1942. And you arrived in Changi somewhere around October 11, 1942?

Gordon: No, no. It was about five days later. . . around the 16th or 17th.

Marcello: I see.

Gordon: I thought we left on about the 11th or 12th.

Marcello: Okay, you left about the 11th or 12th, okay.

Gordon: Right. I think so. I believe that's the approximate time. I can't remember the exact date.

Marcello: Okay, now that we have you to Changi prison camp, why don't we take a break here and go to lunch? (tape turned off)

Marcello: Okay, so you came into Singapore, and I'll let you pick up the story at this point.

Gordon: Well, what I wanted to relate to you was the . . . on the way from Singapore--the city of Singapore, the harbor area--to Changi, we passed this huge civil prison that I'm sure you have heard about. And I said, "Oh, my God!" (chuckle) We thought just sure as hell this is it! It had walls that reached the sky practically, but, sure enough, we went on by. We did stop there momentarily for reasons unknown, and we saw people in the windows, which were women, men. At that time they had civilians in Changi prison itself. . . Changi Jail, which was a civil prison there in Singapore. But I thought that was worth relating to you the thoughts (chuckle)

went through our minds after seeing that damn jail. Incidentally, that's where I wound up.

Marcello: When it was all over, you mean.

Gordon: I was in that jail when it was all over (chuckle). But anyhow, we went on into the Changi area, which was . . . I think it had several sections to it. . . Selarang, Roberts Barracks, and then a hospital area . . . I don't remember what that was called.

Marcello: What was the first one called again?

Gordon: Selarang.

Marcello: And this was a particular section of Changi.

Gordon: Section of Changi, yes. It was divided up into segments.

Marcello: And then there was Roberts Barracks?

Gordon: Roberts Barracks, yes. That's where they sent us.

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

Gordon: Well, it was a beautiful locale with trees. . . laid out very well. The buildings themselves--the barracks themselves--were very nice. Of course, there again, in the tropics, there were no windows . . . the three-story buildings with the verandas on two sides; stairways at each end, of course.

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

Gordon: Just open . . . we just went in; that was it.

Marcello: In other words, you were sleeping on the floor?

Gordon: Right. I found . . . I learned later it was an Indian bed composed of wooden rails down the side, four square posts, and about a thirty-inch bed, I imagine, or thirty-two-inch possibly, with rope weaving. I said, "Oh, hell! I've got it made!" So I inflated my air mattress, put up my mosquito net, and I had the cat by the tail. But that night, I just dern near got ate up. So the next day, I looked over my mosquito net real good and mended a place or two that needed it, but it shouldn't have let in that many mosquitos. So that night, I got ate up again.

Marcello: By mosquitos?

Gordon: Well, I was getting around to that. Man, I just had danged welts all over me. So I was cleaning up around my bed, and I happened to just kind of pick up and bounce it over. My God, it looked like I'd poured peppercorns on the floor--bedbugs (chuckle). So I just took this mattress off of it and mosquito net and just dragged the thing--I was on the second floor--dragged it out on the veranda and threw it over the side.

Marcello: And that's the last you ever saw of that bed.

Gordon: No. No. That night I had to try to get some way to sleep. I didn't want to get on that . . . oh, I did sleep on the floor that night, and I damn near got ate up again. The bedbugs was coming out of the masonry. . . floors and the masonry, I

suppose. Then the night after that, I took my blanket and made me a so-called hammock. That didn't sleep very good at all. So I got to thinking about that bed, so I went out and got it, took it completely apart, got me a five-gallon square oil can, got me some water, and put that rope in there, and just boiled it for hours, and had this good, big fire going. I took each piece of this bed and really singed the devil out of it . . . let the flames and everything go into the crevices. Where there was crevices, I'd stick it down in this boiling water and let it stay there for awhile and then put it back together and put it in four cans of water. . . the legs in four cans of water. And I had me a bed that wouldn't quit then (chuckle). That's what I kept the rest of the time I was in Changi.

Marcello: Now what were the sanitation and bathing facilities like here at Changi?

Gordon: They were good there. See, this was an army garrison for Malaya or Singapore or the Far East.

Marcello: Were there relatively unlimited supplies of water?

Gordon: Yes. Yes, there was; there was. It was very good. The only thing that was bad was that we had just plenty of British (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, you might talk about the British a little bit, because I think for a great many of the American prisoners, Changi was a rather unhappy place.

Gordon: To a degree it was because of the regimentation that was there. In reality after analyzation, had we stopped to analyze it, really, it is one of the greatest things that ever was because of the lack of communication between actual guards and prisoners, per se. The Japanese had more or less turned the administration over to the British of the interior of the camp. Of course, they passed the orders on to the British in charge, and they appointed the people who were in charge. The British seemed to keep a rigid rein on military organizations. Their discrepancies between enlisted or "OR's" as they call them--"Other Ranks"--and commissioned officers is even far more than what ours is. This was a bone of contention. They had their dogs and their chickens, things like that, and we were on very slim pickings as far as rations were concerned. So we had to help ourselves to both the dogs and the chickens.

Marcello: What sort of problems did this lead to?

Gordon: Oh (chuckle), well, you know, when the chickens started disappearing, that didn't set too well with the British, either. When their dog would maybe turn up missing the next morning, that didn't set too well. Then one of the main things, I think, that we had talked about once before was the "king's coconuts." I think possibly you've heard the story on this before, too. They didn't like it one iota . . . of us getting

the coconuts from the palm trees that were in the camp itself, and there were lots of them!

Marcello: And they referred to them as the "king's coconuts?"

Gordon: Right.

Marcello: You might elaborate on this just a little bit more.

Gordon: Of course, we'd skin up these trees when we possibly could and pull these coconuts out and eat the dern things. The British didn't like it at all. There was a bone of contention there. And, of course, this Jack Moss made a pair of climbers . . . literally made them. Man, he had all the coconuts in Changi (chuckle)! He had a lot of them, I mean, a lot of them.

Marcello: Did the antagonism between the British and the Americans ever lead to physical clashes?

Gordon: Oh, yes. Yes, it did. I remember one distinctly of Sergeant Hensley--John Hensley was a sergeant in F Battery. There was a work party, and there was a warrant officer that was giving the orders. I don't recall what led up to it, but Hensley really hit him a devastating blow. . . laid his head wide open. That was the only outward violence that I actually saw at this particular time.

Marcello: But there were no mass riots or anything of that nature.

Gordon: Oh, no, no. We were outnumbered immensely so, you know.

Marcello: Now I had heard it said that the British in this camp were not maintaining very good discipline so far as the relationship

between their officers and their enlisted men was concerned. In other words, there was a feeling among the enlisted men that they had been let down when Singapore fell.

Gordon: Possibly so. This is quite likely, quite likely. But there was a very abrupt distinction between the two, and this may have been a bone of contention for years. I don't know about the British Army, but with me it damn sure was!

Marcello: What was the food like here at Changi?

Gordon: Fair. Fairly good supply. While we were there, this is when we received some mutton that had been brought in on some Red Cross ships. It sure tasted a helluva lot better than that did (chuckle) in Australia, because we were hungrier then.

Marcello: How often were you getting fed here at Changi?

Gordon: Twice a day. Most of the time, it was twice a day.

Marcello: Morning and evening?

Gordon: Yes, morning and evening.

Marcello: And I assume that most of the food consisted of rice.

Gordon: Right. That was primarily it and some vegetables.

Marcello: What was the quality of the rice? Was it similar to what it had been at Bicycle Camp?

Gordon: No, we only had one bad spell of the rice in the early game. What I think it was, the Japs in the early part were using up maybe rice that had been stored in warehouses for a long period of time and sweeping off the floors from the shipping areas.

Because sometimes we'd cook rice, and it may turn any color, you know, from the chemicals that may have been swept up with it, you see. But really, in the latter part of the war, the quality of rice was good, but the quantity toward the end was poor. The quality was better, because they'd used up all this old stuff, I'm sure.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that the Americans were actually stealing the mascots or dogs and so on of the British. Had the food situation reached the point at Changi that men were apt to eat dogs and cats and so on?

Gordon: Not as desperate as it may sound. This may have been a two-way street. . .spite.

Marcello: I was thinking that. That was going to be my next question.

Gordon: (Chuckle) Spite. You know, that dog's got to eat something! What that dog could eat, we could eat (chuckle), see. This could be it.

Marcello: Plus just the fact that it belonged to an arrogant British officer or something really made it fair game to be stolen.

Gordon: Why, certainly he was! As I say, he had to be eating something that could be converted into human consumption. The idea of eating a dog is not so repulsive as it may seem. I've had cats and dog both, snakes and snails and whatever that walks or flies (laughter); it doesn't matter. But it was two-fold --a way of getting back and food to which . . . we weren't on

starvation. See, we weren't on starvation rations at this particular time. The food situation in Singapore got more drastic toward the end of the war because of the supply situation because of the sinking of the Japanese shipping by the Allied navies. But at this particular time, it was definitely two-fold.

Marcello: What was the work like here at Changi?

Gordon: Work wasn't very much at all. I think they had started gardens at this time, and we worked in the garden areas getting ground ready to make gardens. These gardens came about even greater further down the line.

Marcello: Was this just a case of clearing the land and so on?

Gordon: Yes.

Marcello: Was this on a rubber plantation or what?

Gordon: Yes, a cleared-out rubber plantation. We used the wood for cooking as well, you see, as a dual purpose. Of course, the rubber was old rubber groves or rubber plantations, was what it was, beyond its capacity of production. . . beyond its life expectancy, of course.

Marcello: What were the guards like here at Changi?

Gordon: We didn't see any, see. We didn't see any. So therefore, the British had MP's and all just like in the military, and this was one of the resentments. You couldn't see much further than the end of your nose, you know. Who could you get at?

The damn British was the only one you could get at (chuckle), you see, because the Jap wasn't there, but he was giving the orders.

Marcello: Did the Australians seem to have this same disdain for the British that you had?

Gordon: Right. Right, to a great degree. Because even though their army is fundamentally the same, there is much more laxity, much more democracy, in the Australian Army than there is in the British. Yet it come out of the same shell, so to speak, the same pot of peas. But the people made it different.

Marcello: How long did you remain at Changi altogether?

Gordon: I remained there from October until May. Now there is one group of these men that was there only momentarily in October. . . maybe a period of a week.

Marcello: Were these the ones that were eventually sent to Japan?

Gordon: No, these were the ones that went from . . . a few days before we left Bicycle Camp, a group under a Captain Fitzsimmons went and was only in Changi a few days. They were sent on to Moulmein, Burma, in October of '42.

All right, the next group of Americans that left Changi left in January and went to Moulmein. They went to Penang up on the west coast of the Malayan Peninsula and from there by ship on to Moulmein. It was one of the ships in the convoy that was sunk; I know nothing about that. I'm sure you've heard about it.

Marcello: Yes.

Gordon: I wasn't there. I was sick at the time with a malnutrition-related thing. It was something that the interior of my mouth became very raw, my lips cracked open, and gums became raw. Even at night when I was sleeping, my lips would stick together because of the rawness of it. It was a malnutrition thing. On the advice of Captain Lumpkin, I remained at Singapore but left Singapore in May . . . I believe it was May 5, 1943, and went to Thailand by rail.

Marcello: Now how many of you among the Americans were left behind?

Gordon: I can't give you the number. I know how many went to Thailand with me.

Marcello: How many went to Thailand?

Gordon: Nineteen.

Marcello: In other words, all the rest of them had either gone to Japan or had already left for Moulmein.

Gordon: Yes. See, the ones who went to Japan that early in the game left from Java. Now they may have gone by Singapore. That was a group under a Captain Zeigler. . . Lundy Leroy Zeigler. Leroy was what everybody called him--Leroy Zeigler. He was from Sweetwater; his wife still lives in Sweetwater. He died several years ago.

Marcello: But anyhow there were only nineteen of you that were ultimately left in Changi.

- Gordon: No. No, there were several; I don't know the number. But there was nineteen of us of the group that was left in Changi that went to Thailand with H Force.
- Marcello: Now how did this come about?
- Gordon: I don't know how we were picked. We had a second lieutenant from the Marine Corps left in charge of the Americans that remained in Singapore. How the selection came about, I don't know, because we even had men that . . . one fellow, Frank Ficklin, from Wichita Falls, had been in the hospital in Changi and had at least half of his stomach removed from stomach ulcers at the age of twenty. He even went up into the up-country. I had had head surgery, and I went up, also.
- Marcello: I'm sorry. I didn't quite understand that. You had had head surgery?
- Gordon: I had had head surgery there in . . . well, it was to remove a papilloma, which really had been on my head all my life, but the sanitary conditions made it so that it became irritated. It was just like a . . . very much around the edges of it was like a wart, so to speak. It was a birthmark, was what it was. But under the advice of a British surgeon, he said, "I would advise you to remove it," because it would stay irritated from lack of proper shampoos. So they sent me in the hospital, and the surgery wasn't much. It was strictly a superficial thing, but it hurt like hell! They used anesthetic,

but when they got down to the stitching, it'd just about worn out. It hurt like the devil!

There's a real funny story if I may relate it. I was in the hospital area, and they merely did a local to do this bit of surgery. They had me on an operating table, and they had me to pull off my shirt, but I left my trousers on. They had me in such a position that the blood was supposed to have run off at the head of the table . . . feel elevated a little. But something happened to the elevating device, and blood just went everywhere. When I came out, why, I had blood on the rear of my trousers down almost to my knees where it soaked it up. We had to go through an area between the hospital area and Roberts Barracks area, what we called a "no-man's land." We had to go under guard, and the top-ranking prisoner, whether he be commissioned or non-commissioned, was in charge of taking these parties across under Korean guards of Japanese guards. So I was rather faint, but still, hell, I had to go back. They turned me loose and put me in the hospital and had my head all bandaged up. Then I put my shirt on, went out, and waited for the party to gather. They waited until they got a certain . . . not a particular number but a group.

We was walking across that, and I felt rather faint. I don't know whether it was the heat, loss of blood, or the effects of the local anesthetic or what, but, anyhow, a Jap

--this guard--stopped the column near a big mango tree and motioned me to get under . . . go over and sit under the tree. He gave instructions to this British lieutenant that he'd better get those soldiers on across that area there, or he would do him harm, you know, so to speak. So the lieutenant carried the people on across.

This Jap sat out there with me, oh, thirty or forty-five minutes and let me recuperate. Every now and then he'd ask me if I was okay. This was another one, you see, that wasn't all that terrible, either. He could see something was wrong, and he didn't take advantage of it. But then we very slowly walked the rest of the distance--just he and I.

Marcello: What was this "no-man's land" that you were talking about?

Gordon: It was . . . we called it that. It was an area between the Roberts Barracks section and the hospital section that was not fenced . . . didn't have barbed wire around it, in other words. We had to go between the two under guard. When you had to go the hospital, you went under guard. You could go, but you had to wait until a party came through and go under guard.

Marcello: Was it very unsettling to you personally as you saw your buddies gradually being pulled out of Changi camp to go to Moulmein or wherever they were going to go?

Gordon: They weren't gradually pulled out; it was one big operation. . . one big time. As I say, on the advice of Doctor Lumpkin, he

said I should remain, because they didn't know exactly where they were going. See, he saw the organization, and he knew the medical facilities there in Singapore. They had a good hospital setup there in Singapore, and they had damn good equipment. Because pieces of equipment, I have been told by Britishers and Australians, this stuff was at various field hospitals and various general hospitals in the area of Singapore Island itself. They had dismantled their equipment and brought it a piece at a time. . . men had carried it a piece at a time into the prison with them, and there it was reassembled. And, of course, they had two general hospitals in Singapore. . . army hospitals, big ones. All this was brought to one. They had extremely good doctors.

Marcello: Nevertheless, was it unsettling when you saw everybody leaving and you were staying?

Gordon: Yes, it was another time of anxiety, because there again, all throughout this whole episode--this whole period of life--there was constant anxiety, one decision after another, not knowing. . . not having the experience of knowing what to do.

Marcello: Okay, let's describe the process by which you got out of Changi prison and into H Force, which was essentially a British component, and got up on the railroad.

Gordon: Right, British and Australian. There was about 3,000 troops in H Force--some Dutch, Australian, and British. But I was

primarily in a group of British. They divided these up into segments of 600, and I was primarily in a segment of Britishers. They may have had two, I'm not sure. We were put aboard a train in Singapore and rode for five days--very, very compact situation.

Marcello: Were these cattle cars or anything of that nature?

Gordon: Boxcars.

Marcello: Boxcars?

Gordon: Boxcars, yes. There were no ventilation. We rode from Singapore to near Bampong, Thailand. We would stop periodically and have some rice balls. A lot of times they were fermented, soured, but you had to eat them, anyhow. We would (chuckle) even slip up to the engine and get water out of the boilers. Oh, God, it was . . . you know, being used to bathing when we wanted to, it was terrible by the time we got to Bampong.

Marcello: Did it bother the British very much?

Gordon: I'm sure it did. But whenever they got somewhere, they washed up high as the knees and down as far as the knees (laughter) and that's . . . they used to wear those shorts, you see, and they washed their feet and their legs up to the damn shorts. They'd wash the top of their body down to to their shorts (laughter).

Marcello: I understand that the British didn't practice the same types of sanitation that we did.

- Gordon: No, no, they didn't. It proved, I think, later to be their unending. I really do.
- Marcello: What were the bathroom facilities like on that train trip?
- Gordon: Hanging out the door (laughter). I'm just glad it wasn't a damn mail run where they have them hooks to hook them bags (laughter). You had to hang there.
- Marcello: In other words, you were allowed to keep the doors of the boxcar open.
- Gordon: Yes, yes.
- Marcello: Otherwise, you'd have probably suffocated in there, I guess.
- Gordon: You would have, being a boxcar. You had to hang out the door to relieve yourself, you're damn right. In some cases, it was rather often, too. You get a case of diarrhea, you know, and it was (chuckle) real often, as a matter of fact. It was a helluva ride. The heat, the lack of food, and the lack of water was terrible. Fortunately, the canteen came in handy there again. Some people who didn't have shoes. . . this comes later. I'll wait and relate this later about the shoe business.

We was taken off the train at Bampong, and we rested a day, and we started walking. We'd walk at night. We had a macadam road, and we'd walk at night. I don't recall the number of nights that we walked; I think it was . . . oh, anywhere . . . I've even lost track of the days there, because we walked anywhere from fifteen to eighteen days . . . nights

and days--not continuously--but either nights or days.

Marcello: How were you holding up?

Gordon: I was holding up very well . . . very well, indeed. When I left Singapore, I had tried to prepare myself. I had gotten rid of the old barracks bag situation, had gotten rid of a musette bag, got rid of the GI mess kit and got me a Dutch one. I got an Australian pack; I got me a pair of British shoes--hobnail shoes--and six pairs of socks that had been thrown away, because they was worn. But I unraveled some and . . . didn't knit. . . I just kind of weaved it back together and had six pairs of good socks, which I was very, very fortunate to have; believe me, I was.

Marcello: Why did you trade your GI mess kit for a Dutch mess kit?

Gordon: Bigger. It was also a cooking pot. A Dutch mess kit is approximately four inches deep, six or seven inches in diameter, and it had an inch and a half lid that fit on top of that.

Marcello: Did you think you'd get more rice issued to you that way?

Gordon: Oh, I didn't . . . I thought maybe I would cook it if I got it, see (chuckle). No, you could cook in that pot, where you couldn't cook in a GI mess kit. I think that's the reason that I swapped . . . got it some way. Then I got this heavy canvas bag, and I also managed to get hold of a rain cape--an Australian rain cape--which served as both rain cape and ground

cloth. That was a very good piece of equipment. . . and my air mattress.

Marcello: You still had your air mattress.

Gordon: Still had my air mattress.

Marcello: I would assume that by this time every prisoner was becoming quite a scavenger.

Gordon: Oh, definitely. And there wasn't a nail big enough to hold it down either (chuckle). No, they had. It was a matter of survival, you know.

Marcello: In other words, an article, no matter how inconsequential, would be picked up and hoarded for the day when it might have some use.

Gordon: Yes, if you wasn't walking. Now if you were walking. . .

Marcello: You threw it away.

Gordon: Right. Because you couldn't carry all of it.

Marcello: Were you walking on this macadam road for this entire period?

Gordon: No, no. No, we walked at night on the macadam road as long as there were roads. Then we had to start walking in the day-time to . . . just jungle paths, you see. . . mud up to our . . . of course, we couldn't leave any of our men . . . many of them got sick. Here again, the shoe factor came in. Many of these men had not had on shoes for a long period of time. Well, they tried to give everybody a pair of shoes when they went up-country. This may have been the reason some of them

went up-country--to get a pair of shoes, you know (chuckle). But it wasn't worth it. But a lot of the men got blisters on their feet, and they became infected; they became delirious, had to be carried. A lot of these men weren't in good shape at all; a lot of the Britishers wasn't in good shape.

Marcello: How were the nineteen Americans holding out?

Gordon: Good. Even those that had been in the hospital and all were holding up good. We helped one another. . . helped them carry their pack or something like that, relieve them as much as possible. This is one thing that I have to commend the fellows on--they helped each other.

Marcello: Now when you say they helped each other, are you referring to the nineteen Americans?

Gordon: Right. Right. Because, you know, you're kind of step-children then (chuckle).

Marcello: I would assume the fact that you were with so many more British helped to further cement the bonds between the nineteen of you.

Gordon: Oh, yes, it did. It did; it did.

Marcello: It brought you closer together, in other words.

Gordon: Right. But the shoe business took its toll in the blistered feet. A young fellow, "Cy" Moore, from Abilene. . .that was a nickname; his name was Glenn, but everyone called him "Cy." He lived in Abilene, a young boy. He bumped his shin on a

piece of bamboo, and by the time we got to our destination, he had a pretty good-sized ulcer going.

But then we started walking in daytime. We got to Kanburi . . . I believe it was Kanburi . . . had a period of lay-over there; I don't remember exactly how many days. Here six men left us and went to a transport group. Do you want the names of those men?

Marcello: If you remember them.

Gordon: I remember them. Joe Bush, a sailor; Ralph Morris, a sailor; Charlie Fowler, a sailor. Now the sailors are the USS Houston people. Frank Ficklin, who we mentioned earlier; Ben Keith; and "Willie" Robertson . . . or William J; we called him "Willie." They remained . . . were separated from us in a transport group. What they transported, I never knew; but I think it was supplies up and down the line. That left thirteen of us.

Marcello: Now had you reached the railroad by this time?

Gordon: No, we were in Kanburi. All right, we had a time of wait there. As I say, I don't recall, because I got hurt again. We were unloading rice off of a Japanese truck and swinging it, getting underneath it on our shoulders, and carrying it. I dislocated the damn shoulder again (chuckle) and dropped the rice, and it broke open. That wasted some rice; I got hell beat out of me by the Jap guard.

Here's another thing. There was no rhyme or reason to it. I got . . . the Jap guard or the Jap in charge--it wasn't a guard; didn't have his rifle or anything; had his bayonet, of course--started giving me a good thrashing because I had dropped the rice and the sack open. I really wasn't paying him a lot of attention, because I was in pain. Then he realized that I wasn't dodging his blows or anything like that; he saw something else was wrong. Then he happened to notice that my shoulder. . . of course, I didn't have a shirt on, and you could see a sink in my shoulder socket there. I was holding my arm, and he realized I was hurt.

So they took me to a tent that had been set up as a hospital tent, and he went along with me, and they laid me down. So he went to get somebody to take care of me, and he finally made a doctor come over there and look at me. They started trying to reduce the shoulder, and they couldn't put it back in place. They was hurting the hell out of me, which it always did hurt, trying to pull that thing back in the socket. The way they did it, they took their shoe off and put the heel into the armpit, pulled out to try to push that knob back up in the socket. It just wouldn't go; it never would go! I was very fortunate that they had the pain killer, and they gave me a shot and relaxed me enough until they got it back in place.

Marcello: Was this all being done by the Japanese?

Gordon: No, no. No, Australians. But the Jap was there. So after they got it back in place and put my arm in a sling and tied it to my body to keep it immobile, this damn Jap was coming back that afternoon or the next morning several times bringing me iced coffee, cigarettes (chuckle), because he done beat the hell out of somebody that didn't pay him no attention (laughter). No, I was hurt, and he had beat me; he was trying to regain face, was what he was trying to do--in my opinion. He looked after me pretty good for a couple of days . . . gave me the tea and coffee.

Marcello: Now this was still Kanburi.

Gordon: Right. We was there several days, and we started the journey up on in the jungle even with this arm like it was. I could have remained behind, but I chose to go because I was the only NCO in the group, I think.

Marcello: What were your thoughts about proceeding up into this terrain. You might describe what the terrain was like.

Gordon: Well, I had hopes. . . well, we really hadn't seen the terrain yet. I had hopes in the back of my mind all the time of maybe reaching camps up in the jungle on the railroad or somewhere up there and meet our other people. That's what I had hopes for. We sure didn't know they were going to Burma when they left Singapore. So I thought I may run into those.

So we started walking again, this time by day, and then we cross this so-called bridge on the Kvae River, you know, which was not over the Kvae River.

Marcello: Yes.

Gordon: It was on the Mae Klong, I believe. It's a different one that comes through Cambodia and Indochina. But the bridge was over that river, and the railroad was built along the east bank of the Mae Klong.

Marcello: What did this bridge look like?

Gordon: It was just an old trestle-type bridge. From then on, we walked by day, and how many days, I don't know!

Marcello: Well, describe what the jungle itself was like.

Gordon: Well, of course, we were on a path; it wasn't just through the . . . we was on a path. The Japanese were using the same path to move their troops up to Burma . . . or up to India. But the jungle off to the side of this thing was just . . . real, real thick with bamboo; the bamboo clusters were everywhere, and huge teakwood trees and various trees. I don't know . . . the only thing I remember is one they called an ironwood and the teakwood, which we used a great deal of in the trestles of the bridges. That's what I worked on after I got up to . . . we went to a place called Tarsau, and then Tamarkan was at the river.

Marcello: Did you simply pass through these places?

Gordon: Yes, we passed through. Of course, we would get food as we went up the route from existing camps. We finally got to an area where we run across some Australians that had been in Bicycle Camp. I thought, "Well, hell, maybe the other Americans are near this area," but they had never seen any of them either after questioning them. This was a place called Hintok. They had two camps called Hintok, or maybe they just moved one from there in the jungle down to the river and carried the same name. I don't know. That jungle stay is rather a vague time, because there's nothing, nothing like it that I've ever heard of or actually seen.

But anyhow, they moved us, oh, several hundred yards from this group of Australians who were in F Force. It appeared that they had a good supply, because they had cattle; they had onions and, of course, the rice. I believe it was pumpkin or sweet potatoes that they had in their stews. But they were supplied out of a Bangkok command, and we were under the Singapore command, and we didn't have nothing; supplies were extremely skimpy. Then they would give us some of this food, but then their guards told them that if they had too much food and they could afford to give it away, then they was getting too damn much, and they had the fear of losing their rations if they gave us anymore. I had some friends that would . . . I'd go over late, late at night and get some extra rice sometimes

or maybe some beef broth. They would save some beef broth, also, for our very, very sick. It didn't take long that we had a helluva lot of sick.

Marcello: I would assume that you probably didn't have too many Japanese guards, did you?

Gordon: We had . . . in this camp, it seemed like . . . I wouldn't even venture to say. They had a cook house set up there, and they used some prisoners to work in their cook house.

Because I'll never forget one (chuckle) . . . a Jap had --and we wore some, too--wooden shoes that had the strap across them. I'll never forget the Jap hit one of these Englishmen with one of his wooden shoes and broke his jaw. They had to lace his teeth together, and one of our doctors had some wire that he could lace teeth with. . .lace his jaws together with. He had to push that rice through them teeth then (chuckle).

And another thing in the jungle . . . as things progressively got worse, the same saw . . .there only was one saw, and that was what the Japs had in their kitchen, so we had to wait until it was not being used and take it and sterilize it to amputate legs. . . a damn big old toothed saw. You just can't imagine.

Marcello: Now this would just be like a common wood saw?

Gordon: Right. One where you pulled to cut rather than push, you know.

Marcello: Okay, let's kind of get some of these things in order now.
You're here at Hintok; how long did you stay there?

Gordon: Oh, let me tell you the quarters. We'll start with what we had as quarters.

Marcello: Was this going to be your base camp from which you were operating?

Gordon: Right. Right. Tents. . . old British tents. Most of all the other camps along the line were bamboo huts; this was tents.

The Australians had built a reservoir . . . water reservoir here--a dam, in other words. Of all the bamboo that was available, man, they had the most elaborate pipe system you've ever seen--water piped everywhere. But as it turned out, in season the water was contaminated with cholera. But it was very nice for showers. You'd keep your mouth shut. We could pull a plug out of a trough going by and here came a good stream of water down, you see.

Working conditions at this jungle camp. . . we had to walk approximately four miles to the work site, which was a trestle; that was the project at this particular camp.

Marcello: Now the British end of that railroad consisted of a lot more bridge construction than the northern end, isn't that correct?

Gordon: Possibly so. It may be because of the . . . as the . . . after you cross the Three Pagodas Pass in Burma, the river started there.

Marcello: Yes, well, right. It was because there were more rivers down there.

Gordon: Yes. More feed-ins to it, I'm assuming. Instead of filling up and building an underneath drainage in a draw, a canyon, or a valley, they're trestled. They'd build trestles instead of . . . my God, you'd have to carry a helluva lot of dirt in those peck-sized baskets to fill up a big fill like that. But that's the way . . . they trestled across these ravines.

Marcello: What I was going to say was that you probably were not making as many cuts and fills as they were on the other end of the railroad.

Gordon: No. I worked a little bit in a cut at the end of this trestle, but most of my work was on the trestle itself in this particular area.

Marcello: You might describe what this trestle construction was like. Was it primitive? What sort of tools did you have--things of this nature?

Gordon: Well, I'll start off at the beginning. . . getting the footing ready to go. The ground was cleared, the dirt cleared off of rock. Star drills and a sledge hammer was used to drill holes for dynamite, and dynamite was used . . . or possibly some gelignite for blasting these rocks. Then where the concrete --the cement--came from, I don't know, but they leveled it off then when they got the rock down far enough, well, they poured a foundation.

Marcello: Who was responsible for using the dynamite?

Gordon: Japs. However, we benefitted later from the dynamite, which I'll relate to you later on. But this hand-drilling for this dynamite was slow, and it was a helluva lot of work slinging a sledge hammer. But anyhow, we got the base poured. Then they used a base log to start the trestle, which was a teak-wood log, oh, thirty inches, three feet, and they used adz to square it. They used chisels to drill sockets in this thing for uprights. Part of this trestle that I was working on was a three-tier thing. . . approximately ten feet per tier. I don't remember the height. . . but ten or twelve feet--just a vague recollection. This thing . . . cut the trees right out of the jungle alongside the right-of-way and hauled them down. They did have one big saw . . . round saw.

Marcello: It was a power saw?

Gordon: It was powered; yes, it was powered. This was primarily used for the cross-brace support. They'd just rip an ironwood log into a long slender log and use them for cross-timbers and, of course, drilled holes by hand with a hand drill and bolted this thing together.

I worked on this trestle for quite a long time, until I got hurt again. . . dislocated my shoulder again. Oh, I had dislocated this shoulder shortly before I had gone up to Thailand there and Singapore playing basketball.

Anyhow, I dislocated my shoulder on the trestle. I was lowered to the ground by a fellow that I was working with . . . and I had dropped my wrench. I was tightening a bolt up there, and I slipped and, of course, dislocated this shoulder and was hanging on with my left hand. Some fellows --Americans--helped me get down to the ground.

When I got to the ground, why, a Korean guard beat the hell out of me again, because he assumed that I was throwing the wrench at him, you see. There again, the beating wasn't as severe, or didn't feel as severe, as it would have had I not been hurting from my shoulder. But I got beat up quite extensively with a handle similar to pick a handle, and I got teeth knocked loose there. The amazing thing . . . I pushed them back in place, and, damn, if they didn't tighten up. They were laying inside of my mouth, and I just pushed them back in place, and they did tighten up. I was very, very fortunate.

But at the same time, I was having diarrhea, not necessarily dysentery, but I was having diarrhea. And with one arm trying to pull . . . trying to take one (defecate) on the way back in, it took me hours to get back into camp . . . and with a shoulder out of socket. My shoulder was out of socket this time about sixteen hours. Because we went back into camp, and they tried to . . . the English doctors tried to put my shoulder back in place, and they just could not manage it. They got permission from the Japanese to let one of the men go to the

camp below. . . Kanu II, I believe. They had Kanu I and Kanu II, and that was more the headquarters for H Force and primarily was Australian. They let a man go there, and he got some chloroform and brought it back, and they gave me some chloroform to reduce that shoulder. But sitting there trying to be immobile, and muscle spasms and all, it was torture . . . literally torture!

Marcello: Now what time of the year was this when you were here at Hintok?

Gordon: From the later part of May until October . . . counting Hintok and the river.

Marcello: That was May of 1943. . .

Gordon: '43.

Marcello: . . . until October of 1943.

Gordon: Right. Of course, in October of '43, we were down on the river . . . the Kvae River, and I'll come on down to that a little bit later.

Marcello: Now at this particular time, the "Speedo" campaign had started. This was in May of 1943.

Gordon: Yes. Right.

Marcello: How did that affect you?

Gordon: Long hours of working.

Marcello: Well, you might describe it.

Gordon: (Chuckle) Well, we would . . . the work parties would be formed long before daylight, and we'd draw our bit of rice to eat. I

will take it back; we got a couple of rice balls to take to work with us. We would fill our canteens with tea; we had all the tea in the world. We'd fill our canteens with tea; of course, we'd definitely boil our water. We'd go out. The sand flies were terrible. Little old sand flies, sand flies they were very, very small. They'd just bite the hell out of you before daylight. Then we would walk in the dark to work and reach the work area at approximately daylight. Many, many times it would be into the night before we would get back to camp again. The work hours were anywhere from fourteen to eighteen hours a day.

Marcello: Now was this also during the period of the monsoons?

Gordon: Yes, yes, all this time. One overlapped the other, you know.

Marcello: Describe what it was like to work in the monsoon season.

Gordon: Hell, getting to work was the worst part, because, you know, you'd be pulling this mud. You'd be absolutely exhausted by the time you got to the work area. Working in the trestle wasn't bad in the rain, but getting to work was where it was so terrible.

As I say, I got hurt on this trestle . . .and this severe beating that I got. The Japanese in charge of the segment that we was working on . . . he was actually Japanese. I guess he may . . . he didn't seem like a soldier; he was more or less a civilian . . . maybe an engineer, I don't know. But he spoke English very well, and he was a decent sort of a fellow. He

made a statement . . . just in perfect English, he said--after I got this beating, it was a helluva time for him to put in his two cents worth--he said, "That was all uncalled for." But he wrote me out a little piece of paper in Japanese, and he said, "You keep this, and this will state that you was injured on the job, and you won't have to come back to work until you get well." Hell, I never did get well (chuckle)! But I went back into this hospital camp, and, my God, it was terrible!

Marcello: Now where was the hospital camp located?

Gordon: Inside Hintok--just a few tents, you know, designated as hospital.

Marcello: What was the hospital area like?

Gordon: Where the men went to die--strictly . . . no medicine, nothing. You got well or died. . . and mostly you died. Here tents leaked. We made bamboo platforms, you know.

Marcello: How many men were there to a tent?

Gordon: It varied because the tents varied in size.

Marcello: I see.

Gordon: And, of course, the Americans were isolated to themselves. But when I went to the hospital, which I had to do to not go to work, I was with British, and we had a few Australians in this group of people, too. For example, there was an Anstralian here, an Englishman, and myself (gestures). Well, this Englishman died in between us, so we thought it might be a good idea not to tell anybody for a couple of days and draw his rations. So we split

it (laughter). Then he got to stinking so bad, we had to tell them he was dead (laughter). So they started to haul him away, and he had a pretty good blanket. So we said, "Hell, he don't need that blanket where he's going," so we'd take turns using his blanket (chuckle). God Almighty!

Marcello: Let's talk about some of the various afflictions that one might have in working or living under these conditions. One of the common things that I've heard other prisoners talk about was the tropical ulcers. Describe what they were like and how they could be treated and so on. Because here I think we get into the whole business of improvisation and folk medicine and things of this nature.

Gordon: Right. All right, this Moore that I related to you earlier, "Cy" Moore, bumped his leg with bamboo going on the way up, and his ulcer developed finally to where he was immobile, and he just couldn't walk. He got in terrible shape and couldn't walk . . . and had no facilities, no bandages, no medicine, nothing. The man . . . either they just took his leg off, he died, or what-have-you. Of course, dysentery killed a lot of men--a lot of men.

But this tropical ulcer, it was a thing that was just almost unimaginable to someone who hasn't seen it. But they would take, in severe cases, half a man's leg. It was a huge sore filled with pus scabbed over. Many times maggots. . .

maggots could be to your advantage if you did it right, and this comes up with the medication business. We had . . . later there was some merchant marines that came up with the officers group of H Force that came up to Hintok.

Ralph Hauk, he had an ulcer on his leg, and he was very, very alarmed at it, because he could see death every day from this very thing. So we had heard from an Englishman about putting maggots in there and watching it. So we convinced him we ought to put maggots in his leg, and we did.

Marcello: And I assume maggots weren't hard to come by.

Gordon: Oh, man, they were everywhere. But you had . . . maggots were to an advantage up to a point. After they cleaned the dead flesh, they'd start eating on the proud flesh if you didn't keep them under control. Of course, when I was a kid, the way we kept maggots under control on the cattle was with chloroform. But we had no chloroform. But we would put a specific number of maggots in an ulcer if it wasn't too large, you see, and take out the same number. The only way a maggot could get in there would be from a blow fly, you know. So we would take out a specific. . . the same number as we put in there; therefore, we let them eat all the rotten flesh, pus, stuff like that. If they didn't get down to the good raw meat, then it was advantageous. "Cy" had gone beyond that stage. He had a leg that practically half of his leg was covered with ulcer.

I had one . . . small. After I had this remedy I'll tell

you about, it was used later on with small ulcers, because it couldn't be used on large ones. But there was a fly in the area that would drill through the scab of any sore and get down to that proud meat and just tear you up terrible . . . sting. Actually, it hurt. So I started . . . I got some yellow clay, and I put me a thick layer of this clay on this ulcer to keep the fly off . . . keep it from drilling through that scab and hurting so bad. Well, I'd come in at night and take the clay off; off would come scab, pus, and it would leave it just as clean. . . and it healed up.

Marcello: In other words, it was almost like a poultice or something that drew out that pus and so on and so forth.

Gordon: Right. Right. I don't know what it was, but it was a yellow clay, and I'd just make a good, thick deal of it, and it would dry. It would keep these flies off. And I'm sure it would have kept blow flies off, too, but I wasn't bothered with blow flies. But I'd keep this clay on there, and it actually healed my leg. It actually healed it.

Marcello: Was there any other alternatives to getting rid of the tropical ulcers? I've heard just the very primitive method of sterilizing a spoon and digging it out.

Gordon: Scraping. Right. Well, have you ever heard the name "Spoon-meier?"

Marcello: No.

Gordon: Okay. This was a Dr. Blumsmeier, who was a Dutch doctor.

They nicknamed him "Spoonmeier" because that's how he would treat these ulcers. He was a colleague of Doctor Hekking; they knew each other very well. Anyhow, I heard this; I wasn't associated with him at all. But maggots would get in these ulcers; they'd get beyond control; men would go mad from it. Possibly they may die before they went mad. If they went mad, why, maybe that was a relief before they died. Who knows? But I have seen them both ways . . . die from it; I've seen them amputate legs.

Marcello: You might talk a little bit about the jungle surgery involved in amputations.

Gordon: Very, very primitive, of course. As I was relating while ago, the only saw available was the one that was in the Jap kitchen, and we'd have to wait until they were through with it to sterilize it in boiling water to do the amputation . . . saw the bone, strictly to saw the bone. Very, very coarse-toothed thing, but it was all we had. Rarely, rarely a man lived after an amputation, because he could be standing on crutches, and you could see the drip of pus from the stub of the leg. It soon took the entire body and then drained it so much that it was impossible to recover from. I saw this after we moved out of the jungle.

Marcello: Now normally, would the amputations have to be made because of tropical ulcers and things of this nature?

Gordon: Yes. Yes. But this soon stopped, because they had no anesthetic.

A man couldn't take an amputation without it. I've seen it tried without it. . . no way.

Marcello: Did you actually see cases of men giving up and just dying?

Gordon: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe what it was like when a man gave up.

Gordon: They would merely . . . of course, they were very, very sick . . . very sick indeed . . . not far from death, I'm sure. But they would become very quiet. If they had a blanket, they'd be wrapped up in it; if they didn't, they'd be laying there and possibly . . . will themselves dead. Of course, they had a helluva lot of help from the diseases in the body. It didn't take them long to go.

Marcello: I have heard it said that one of the symptoms of a man giving up was the fact that he didn't eat.

Gordon: Right. True.

Marcello: And everybody ate if you had any will to live.

Gordon: Right, right. Some of our people, you would have to damn near force them to eat. . . get very vicious with them and make them eat. This was characteristic of this thing. They wouldn't even get up to get a ration, you know. Like later on down in Kanburi when they went into a hospital camp, they just lay up their . . . this was later after they brought us out of the jungle . . . strictly a place to live or die, you know. But in this hospital area--so-called hospital area--cholera set in before I got sick . . . before I got hurt. We'd have to . . . we burned

all the cholera victims. There was a few that got put in the ground, but we tried to burn all that we could, because we would destroy the germ, so to speak, because it comes right back out of the ground in season. But it was quite a trying experience to go to work . . .

Marcello: Did you actually have to participate in the burning of those cholera victims?

Gordon: I have helped build the piles for them, but I never actually put a body on it, nor have I ever participated in burning one. But I have seen a many one burn in various stages.

Marcello: Now I gather from what you've said that you missed most of the so-called "Speedo" campaign because of this dislocated shoulder.

Gordon: No, as I said, I was hurt in July. I had from May . . . latter part of May, I guess, by the time we got up in the jungle, until sometime in July when I got hurt. So I had two full months of it there. Of course, I saw the results of it on the men. But now going to work in the mornings or maybe coming home from work when maybe we did have a little daylight . . . either coming or going, sometime or other. . . it was a helluva sight to see. They built these piles of wood in advance, because it was happening every day. If you didn't build them in advance, you couldn't keep up with it. The thought when you passed . . . we had to go by the damn area every day--every day--and you just wondered, "Who in the hell is going to be

next?" whether it would be you, one of your closest friends, or what-have-you. At this stage of the game, it came down to the fact that maybe a man was a shirker that died; that's hard to believe.

Marcello: A man that what?

Gordon: Was a shirker. Shirker his . . . put more load on the next guy. Hell, he'd wind up and die, you see, and then put more work on somebody else. I mean, that's a hell of an expression, but you get so calloused, so very, very calloused. In other words, sometimes you'd think it was an "out" for a man to die, because it wasn't no problem to die, and you'd be through with it. Going by this funeral worked on your mind, if it could, under these conditions.

Marcello: By this time, what was the condition of your clothing?

Gordon: Well, it was all G-string work. The men worked in G-strings, because through the rain and all and this long, long walk, you carried only your bare essentials, which was an air mattress (chuckle). But, no, it was G-string work strictly. Oh, I had a pair of shorts. If a man would die and if he had a pair of shorts, you'd get hold of that. You see, doctor, there was so many men that died where I was, that there was bits of rags and clothing. Because there's no need to bury a man in anything, because he didn't need it.

Marcello: Were very careful records kept of the deaths and the burials and so on?

Gordon: No. No, no marked area where I was. There was such laxity.

Marcello: But here, again, now I think this must have been a characteristic of the British, because at the other end of the line, there were fairly good records good kept.

Gordon: Well, down in Kanburi there was good records kept, too, and in Tamarkan there was good records kept.

Marcello: But I'm even referring to the various kilo camps at the northern end of the road.

Gordon: There were, yes. Yes, I understand this--a better organization. Of course, we was only there for the "Speedo" campaign.

Marcello: Now as one proceeded back into the jungle with the "Speedo" campaign and the monsoons and so on, I would assume that rations became rather short.

Gordon: Right. Right.

Marcello: Because the supply trains, I would assume, couldn't get up to the camps and so on in all that rain and so on.

Gordon: See, it came up the river. It was hauled in on your back from the river.

Marcello: What'd you find to supplement your food? How did you supplement your food? In other words, by this time, were you down to cats, dogs, snakes, and so on and so forth?

Gordon: Snails, a few snails; some bamboo shoots, dried some bamboo shoots. There was always some rice--always. Not a helluva lot, but some. Because parties would bring that up--we, the parties--would bring this up from the river on our backs. Vegetables were very, very slim pickings; meat was out of the question. There was this group of F Force that I mentioned earlier; they had the cattle. Everytime they killed one, they couldn't give us the meat, but they would dump the entrails. Man, it was like a damn bunch of vultures in there. Every little particle of suet was stripped off and used. You've heard of British tripe?

Marcello: No.

Gordon: You've never heard of tripe.

Marcello: I've heard of tripe.

Gordon: Well, you know what it is. It's the waste bag of the animal. Well, these (chuckle) damn Britishers tried to make them some tripe, you know. We had a few little onions in our . . . so they tried to clean this bag. Hell, it was impossible. But I guess all that was left in it was just a little bit of seasoning, I don't know (chuckle). I tried once; I never would try it again. But I tried to get the little particles of suet off of the entrails or whatever was dumped out . . . every little bit that I possibly could.

Marcello: Now you mention that you had eaten snails. What sort of snails were these?

Gordon: They're just plain old snails in a shell. You would just crack open the shell and get them all out and boil them a little bit . . . tough as damn leather, but you could chew . . . pretty good chewing (chuckle).

Marcello: How was . . .

Gordon: There were baboons here. But they were . . .

Marcello: Baboons?

Gordon: Yes. They were more vicious than the damn prisoners were (chuckle). Boy, in the morning, it was the damndest commotion you ever heard about daylight or a little bit before. Along this creek where our camp was, to the southwest of us there was a cliff, and this is where the tribe of baboons were. And of all the hell-raising early every morning, it was that! The damndest thing! And, of course, a few of the fellows thought they may try to tackle one. You'd run across one of them in the jungle every now and then going down and hauling rice. Hell, he looked meaner than you did (chuckle).

Marcello: How about snake? Have you ever tried snake?

Gordon: Cobra. I tried cobra. An Australian . . . I never ran across a snake myself. I damn sure tried it. But I have eaten some cobra that an Australian had caught. It was beautiful meat,

really. It's a pinkish meat, and, of course, it becomes white when it's cooked. And it's between a fish and a chicken taste to me. I just never could get enough of it was the only trouble I found with it.

Marcello: Now at this stage, what are you doing so far as soap, razor blades, toothpaste, and things of this nature are concerned? Obviously, you were going to have to improvise in some way or another.

Gordon: We did without--without. No soap. My toothbrush had wore out long since. Have you ever seen an older woman back when you was a child dip snuff?

Marcello: Yes.

Gordon: With a peach or plum little stick?

Marcello: Yes.

Gordon: That's a toothbrush.

Marcello: In other words, you would take the stick and chew it.

Gordon: Chew the end of it and work it up and work a . . . you didn't have a hell of a lot to pick out of your teeth (chuckle).

Marcello: (Chuckle) Well, that's true. I never thought about it that way. How did you keep sharp whatever razor blades you had?

Gordon: I had a GI mess kit knife. Are you familiar with that?

Marcello: I know what you mean.

Gordon: And it had excellent steel to it, and that's what I used to shave with.

Marcello: How did you sharpen it when it became dull?

Gordon: Stone. Piece of slate is what I used.

Marcello: I know a lot of people would also use the concave side of a broken glass bottle or something as a more or less a . . . would you call it a stropping device?

Gordon: For a razor blade, yes.

Marcello: Yes, for a razor blade.

Gordon: For a razor blade, yes. Use the inside of a bottle or a glass, any kind of . . . beer bottle . . . but who could find a beer bottle (chuckle)?

Marcello: Now I assume that as you were proceeding back into the jungle, trading with any of the natives was out of the question, because they weren't back there.

Gordon: I didn't see any in the jungle. Some were down on the jungle that I got some coffee from, smoked fish. "Slick" Staber, from Cuba City, Wisconsin, he and I got into coffee-making. We got hold of some coffee from a Thai peddler that came to the river there off the boat. So we started making coffee. And if somebody had a little money, they'd buy any damn thing. We would sell this, and we was able to buy some dried smoked fish.

If you didn't keep this fish in your smoke near the fire all the time--one of us had to sit up and watch it all the time --the damn flies would blow it (chuckle). You'd see maybe a

fly get to it when your fire'd die down and wouldn't have no smoke to keep them off, and they'd see a damn string of eggs on this fish. You'd have to rake them off, because soon they'd become maggots, you see. Oh, I guess you could eat the maggots too; hell, they'd been full of fish, too, pretty soon (chuckle). Isn't that terrible (chuckle)?

Marcello: Do you see men becoming more religious under situations like this, or what part does religion play in this type of situation?

Gordon: Where I was we did not have a priest or a minister. There was one with H Force, a Catholic priest from Sidney, I believe, Father Marsden. . . and much of a man, much of a man. Now he is the one later at Kanburi that mapped all the cemeteries, had the diagram for where each man was buried, who was buried in what.

But up in the jungle . . . back to the religious aspect, yes, men . . . even an athiest would become desperate for something. There damn sure had to be somebody greater than himself to bring him out of it. That was the thought of many men, as well as myself; there had to be something. I questioned many times, "Why was I chose to be punished so damn much? Why did I live and others die?" There's a lot of questions that come up . . . unanswered questions . . . today unanswered. It's the "why." I don't have an answer for that all. All you can do is have faith; that's all it amounts to.

Marcello: Did you ever try and sabotage this work in any way? I'm referring now to the work involved in building the bridge.

Gordon: I think there was sabotage from the word "go," because you really never put out all that you possibly could. What we built, in my opinion, damn sure wouldn't carry much traffic (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you ever have to ride across that railroad?

Gordon: The damn elephants wouldn't go (chuckle), so I didn't think a train would be able to make it (laughter). No, we had elephants, you see, and they wouldn't walk across that trestle; no, indeed, they wouldn't. Yes, I rode some segments of the railroad from Tarsau to Tamarkan to Kanburi. . . later after they brought us out of the jungle. They carried me from the area that I was in by barge down to Tarsau. But as far as sabotage per se, no, not really. You were trying . . . you didn't have any damn thing in mind about sabotage; you were merely trying to stay alive.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about theft.

Gordon: There wasn't anything to steal up there.

Marcello: Even from the Japanese?

Gordon: No. It was watched very, very closely--very closely--and they were in a different segment from what you were. If you wasn't working for the Japs in their kitchen, you was never around them.

- Marcello: What was the thought that was most constantly on your mind during this period?
- Gordon: "When will it be over?" Not necessarily the war but this particular facet of the confinement. It had to be over sometime, because, if not, there would have been far, far more than what was buried over there. See, we wound up in the jungle about 525 in this group that I was with. When we got back to Singapore in December of '43, 116 was all that was left. So you can see how they were dying.
- Marcello: I would assume that food was a thought that was constantly on your mind, also.
- Gordon: Yes, yes.
- Marcello: Did you sit around and dream up menus?
- Gordon: Oh, hell, yes! Man, we cooked every day (laughter)!
- Marcello: What was the food that you thought of more than anything else?
- Gordon: Well, I thought a lot about a business that I would go into, which was a food business--a restaurant business. I said, "Hell, I never want to be very far from it!" (chuckle) That was a thought many times--going into the restaurant business.
- Marcello: I gather the prisoners would sit around dreaming up various menus and so on and so forth.
- Gordon: Yes, this happened a great deal, but it could be antagonizing, too. Yes, it could be. Thinking about that, hell, you'd just

damn near go mad, you see (laughter). But thank God for the British to vent our anger on.

Marcello: Now how did this work out?

Gordon: Well, see, pardon the language, but that was the only son-of-a-bitch you could take anything out on (chuckle), you see. You didn't want to do it to your own people, and you didn't dare do it to the damn Jap that had a rifle, you see (laughter), so the poor old Englishmen caught hell!

Marcello: What were some of the things you would do to the Englishmen?

Gordon: Oh, cuss him, you know, call him what he was (chuckle). See, you vented your anger in that direction. Possibly some of this came up so often that you began to kind of believe some of it, you know. Their life was so different from ours--I'm not talking about the Japs; I'm talking about the British theirself. It didn't seem like their will to live was quite as great as ours. I think I wanted to live a helluva lot worse than some of those, I believe, because there was so many of them that died. I've seen men lay down--be extremely sick --and it's like I said earlier, maggots were working both ends of them. I don't see how a man . . . unless he's unconscious . . . when he's alive, I've seen maggots in and out the rear end, up in the rear end, and in his mouth cavity--and he's conscious! You knew he was going to die, but yet you couldn't

put him out of it. You, you know, wouldn't; you couldn't. You weren't built that way.

Marcello: What evidence of collaboration did you observe? Did you ever see any collaboration? I'm referring, now, to prisoners currying favors from the Japanese in order to get better treatment and so on and so forth.

Gordon: Not to the expense of their fellow man; I didn't see any of that. Now I have seen them gaining favors of the Japanese guards up in the jungle there to get something to eat. Because they'd . . . well, the Japs had them waiting on them, of course, but after they helped cook their food, maybe they'd get some while they were eating, clear the table and take the scraps-- things like that. I don't blame them; I don't blame them a bit.

Marcello: What were the best jobs that a prisoner could have when you were working on this railroad?

Gordon: I imagine working in a Jap kitchen. Next would be working in your own kitchen. Let's see, the next thing probably would have been a medical orderly.

Marcello: Was there very much resentment about the fact that people in the cook shack were a little bit fatter than the people working on the railroad?

Gordon: I'm sure there was; I'm sure there was. These Englishmen didn't . . . they were damn poor cooks. Of course, they didn't have a helluva lot to cook with, but they were damn poor cooks

in my opinion. I had had some experience in it but never to that low degree. However, after I got out of the jungle down to Kanburi, I wouldn't . . . they wanted Americans in the kitchen, and they asked me to . . . they knew that I had had a lot of experience in the kitchen, and after I got hurt, I helped them set up some better facilities in the jungle kitchen. But then wanted me to run the hospital kitchen in the hospital area where they'd sent us into in Kanburi, but I wouldn't do it at all; I didn't want that responsibility. However, I did work in that for awhile merely boiling water for the consumption. I mean, we had to boil all of our water. And it took a lot of effort to keep wood and stuff like that to boil this water . . . not in the jungle but after we got into hospital camp, because water was hard to get in the first place--very hard to get. When it wasn't raining, water was very short. Then when it would rain, why, we'd catch rain water and boil it even because of the contamination of the buildings--the atap--if nothing else.

Marcello: We were talking about your clothing awhile ago, and we really never dwelled on the subject of your shoes. Did you still have shoes?

Gordon: I maintained shoes until, oh, approximately a month. . . the last month, somebody stole my shoes. I had this ulcer on my

shin, and I let a Dr. Phillips, Stewart Phillips . . . he's now deceased. He was an Englishman and a man if there ever was one. He would hold sick call with no equipment whatsoever, no medicine--strictly a psychological thing. He had a huge ulcer on his leg; he couldn't heal that. Men would go into the tent where he was sleeping, bring him outside, set him on a log, and he'd hold what the British called "sick parade." As I say, he had no equipment, no medicine, nothing; it was strictly encouragement, assurance, or something like that. He'd have a "sick parade," and then they'd take him back in his tent.

But I hurt my back in the jungle very badly, and it became where I could hardly walk after I got to Singapore. He, through therapy strictly with his hands, got me back in a position where I could walk again . . . well, walk well. He would make me walk to his quarters: "If you'll come to my quarters, I'll see if I can help you," and he would do this type of therapy. He got me in real good shape, but I thought he ought to come to me; but he was making me walk that distance for a reason--to keep me in as good a condition as possible. . . my muscles in my leg and lower back.

Marcello: We haven't talked about malaria. How great a problem was malaria here? Everybody had it?

Gordon: I think so; I think they did. The cerebral malaria was the most deadly. Doctor, any of these diseases that was in the

jungle was a contributing factor to the death of a man. You would get one . . . we'll say malaria. You'd have malaria-- have several bouts of malaria; it would get you in a weakened condition. Dysentery . . . kill you. An ulcer on your leg would take strength out of your body, naturally. Dysentery . . . kill you. One would get you in a condition where the other would kill you, see. This happened time and time and time again.

Marcello: Did you eat the charcoal in order to try and hold down the dysentery?

Gordon: Right. Right. Charred rice; even charred wood, charcoaled wood, yes.

Marcello: Did that help any?

Gordon: I don't know; it might have psychologically. A lot of things was psychological. The venting of your anger on a dead man helped you. You know, "The son-of-a-bitch died to get out of this, and now I've got to bury him."

One of the worst episodes that I went through as far as relating my feelings to other men was men dying--Britishers. We had a "parade" before we went to work and asked volunteers to bury these . . . I think it was three or four that had died that night . . . and no one volunteered. Then this lieutenant, who I was a friend with, asked me if I would get a party and

bury them. I blew my stack, and I called him a "low-bred son-of-a-bitch," you know, that "if they would stoop low enough that they wouldn't bury their own dead, they were beyond the realm of a human being." I really let off a good chunk, you know (chuckle). I belittled them real, real bad, and I vented, also, that, "if one of the Americans died, I'd kill the son-of-a-bitch that buried him," because that was our job and they'd better not touch him.

This came to surface later on when one of them did die, and we didn't know it until he was already buried. But, you know, that vents your anger, gets it out of your system, and keeps your teeth in your head. So, you know, the Jap would knock them out otherwise (chuckle), you see (chuckle), if you vented it on them. But back to this burying, I buried a lot of men in unmarked graves.

Marcello: Were they, in most cases, just a common grave or a mass grave or something of this nature?

Gordon: Mass grave. You would start off. . . say, you had six or seven to bury. By the day's end, by the time you got the hole dug, why, they already brought you some more corpses.

Marcello: That was probably a helluva job digging the grave, considering the conditions you were in.

Gordon: Damn right it was! You're damn right it was! It was a helluva job--roots, mud--and you'd have to clear an area.

Marcello: Water--I bet you hit water fairly fast in the monsoon season, didn't you?

Gordon: Oh, yes. Of course, when you'd start digging this, you'd make you a mound where the water . . . you'd pick an area where the water wouldn't run in the first place, and then you'd have a mound of dirt around it to keep the water from running in while you was working in it. Of course, you'd still have slop in the bottom of it; you had to work barefooted. But I have buried as high as seventeen in one grave. I started off . . . had nine dead one morning and wound up putting seventeen in the hole.

Marcello: Here again, does this become a rather impersonal common experience?

Gordon: Yes, it became very impersonal, very callous; it never bothered me one iota, not one iota. I never buried one of my own . . . when I say "my own"--American.

Marcello: Is there any sort of a prayer or ceremony held for these people?

Gordon: Oh, yes. You know, "Dust to dust, and ashes to ashes," you know is about the only thing you could do. Usually, there was one of these . . . there was one English captain that would always conduct the prayer at the burial. There was always a prayer offered for them, yes. We wasn't that calloused, you know. But you was calloused to death, itself, per se; not to an individual but overall.

Marcello: You speak of being calloused. Is this the same attitude that you have toward the captors, or is it hate in their case?

Gordon: No, I say calloused . . . becoming used to your environment. Just like a continuous sore, you soon learn to live with it. So we became calloused in that respect. The death of a man didn't bother you like it did at the beginning. Like, we carried men on the train going up. Had we known the ultimate goal that they'd wind up in a damn slop hole grave, you'd let them die on trail. . . let the Jap put a bullet through their head--see, like that. You'd have left them there. But you became calloused later on, and death didn't bother you. But it did at the beginning. It would have been far better not to have carried that man, to let him stop on the side of the road, and let a Jap either put a bayonet through or a bullet through his head, and that would have been the end of it. Whereas, you carried him and let him go through all that agonies of hell in that jungle. But that was clinging to life; that's what it amounted to.

Marcello: When did you finally get out of the jungle?

Gordon: October.

Marcello: Of 1943?

Gordon: '43. Latter part of October and then I went into Kanburi hospital camp.

Marcello: Did you ever participate or witness the ceremony at Three Pagodas Pass when the railroad was completed? Didn't they have some sort of a ceremony there?

Gordon: No, I wasn't in Thailand when the railroad was completed, I don't think, unless it was completed . . . I don't know what date it was really completed. I was never at Three Pagodas Pass; I never was that high. . . from the Thailand end, that is. It was that low from Burma end (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, so where did you say that you went when you left the jungle?

Gordon: Kanburi. It is the old town of Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: What did you do there?

Gordon: It was strictly a hospital camp right beside the railroad in a . . . I believe it was an old field, maybe even a rice paddy, because it was very low. When it rained, the water was everywhere.

Marcello: And this was a huge camp, too, was it not?

Gordon: Our segment wasn't too big. But just right across the fence, now, there was a native segment--Indians, Chinese, probably Thais, also. Merely what this thing was really, as I see it now, is to let those die that were going to die and the remainder get well to carry them back to Singapore. . . of our group of people--H Force.

Now the Indians across the fence . . . I had an Australian friend, a staff sergeant that was a medical student in Australia--Melbourne--that I had carried a scalpel with me, and I gave it to him. It had already gotten rusty, but I carried this in my gear--a surgical scalpel. I gave it to this fellow, so he went over to practice on some of these Indians (chuckle). Oh, you know, they had huge pus. He worked on one in particular that had an ulcer. I watched him for a little while, and I couldn't bear to watch anymore. He had a huge ulcer around his spine, and you could see the backbone in there. He was going to try to clean this thing out, and he literally tied him to a bamboo fence . . . with his permission, of course. No anesthetic whatsoever. He started to work on that, and naturally the fellow screamed, naturally--it hurt. Soon he passed out from pain. The reason he tied him up like that was so all this stuff would drain out the bottom of this Indian, see. He had nothing to mop it out with or anything like that. So he got to try out that new scalpel.

Marcello: What did you do here at Kanchanaburi?

Gordon: I worked in the kitchen boiling water at this place. We lost two men here. We lost one coming out of the jungle and had to leave him at Tarsau. He had dysentery very bad; he couldn't

walk, and he had to leave him at the camp there. Then we lost this Glenn Moore, "Cy" Moore, in this hospital camp. His ulcer . . .

Marcello: But now conditions were better in this hospital camp than in the jungle.

Gordon: Yes, it was no work.

Marcello: Of course, anything would have been better than the jungle.

Gordon: Right. There was no work; rations wasn't too plentiful but better than the jungle; water was extremely short. All the water had to be hauled in from a well across the railroad, and you had to get permission to go get it.

Marcello: What sort of living quarters did you have here?

Gordon: We had atap huts with bamboo sleeping platforms, you see. It was a hospital camp, so to speak. Here I got to see some very primitive surgery.

Marcello: Did you manage to catch up with any of your other buddies from whom you had been separated in Changi?

Gordon: No. Never.

Marcello: I know that they eventually, also, ended up in Kanchanaburi, that is, most of them.

Gordon: Right. Right. But I had gone to Singapore by then. No, until we was liberated, I never saw any of my men.

Marcello: How long did you stay here at Kanchanabrui altogether?

Gordon: About two months. We was sent on to Singapore in December of '43.

Marcello: Okay, now you were talking awhile ago about some of the primitive surgery that you had seen.

Gordon: Yes, they had an operating theatre set up there (chuckle). They had some mosquito netting around one end of the hut, you see, and that's where the theatre was. I saw an emergency appendectomy one night; it was amazing. One of the doctors, Dr. Fagan, I believe, an Australian, a miracle man, a miracle man . . . he performed this emergency appendectomy. They had a light in the emergency equipment that he was going to use, but the batteries were gone. You know what they used? They used a lamp--no chimney--just a flame on a wick to do that damn surgery with soot just flying from it (chuckle). I watched that.

Marcello: How come you had a chance to watch this surgery?

Gordon: I had an Indian friend . . . Nickel Marcell. We called him "Nick" and he was an Indian in the British Army. He was a medical orderly, and I became friends with him. He gave me a powdered substance that we used on these ulcers. . . tropical ulcers. I had one then right back of my big toe nail, and he would give me some of this. We became friends and talked a great deal. I was visiting him in the . . . we talked in the

theatre--the operating theatre--because there was no mosquitos in there, and that's when it all happened. So he said, "Oh, sit where you are. You're not going to be in the way," because they have a bamboo table where the operating table was--a bamboo table--and I watched that. They had the anesthetic that they could administer.

Marcello: Now you evidently had left Kanchanaburi before the air raids had occurred, is that right?

Gordon: Yes. Yes. Yes, I left there then. They may have had some air raids before December, '43, but not where I was.

Marcello: Did you get fattened up a little bit since you said you were working in the cook shack?

Gordon: Some. The food was some better, but I had scabies real bad. I guess that's a lack of various vitamins. . . especially Vitamin C, isn't it? There was a fellow, "Doc" Morrow, from Wichita Falls; his name was Adolphus, but everybody called him "Doc." He was cooking rice in the cook shack. But we would get out and get us some water and scrub each other at night with a brush. We got hold of a . . . it wasn't a brush per se; it was made from a coconut husk and had the fibers sticking out. We'd trim it off and scrub these scabies; we was just as raw as hell. We had some ointment that we put on these. It had sulfa in it, and we got in pretty good shape that way.

We was also taking care of this Glenn Moore, "Cy" Moore. We had pilfered a little bit of salt from the kitchen, and we'd make a saline solution and clean this ulcer. I had left Java with a sarong that I used in my bedding, and I had torn that up into . . . and I had two bandages. We would bandage "Cy's" leg; we'd change this daily and wash it. We'd take sand, and we'd clean this bandage--all this mucus and pus and stuff off of it--and then boil it. We changed this daily, and we got his ulcer to where he could walk.

He took dysentery. . . and he had gone through so much hell. Somebody had done something for him, and they had to put him in isolation with dysentery. That killed his will, and he got up to go to the latrine at night and fell and hemorrhaged to death. That was one of our casualties there.

Billy Thomas from Romeo, Michigan, died in the hospital camp . . . a combination of a lot of things--dysentery; of course, malnutrition was always with us. But he got in such a condition. . . I don't know whether he was weakened or whether it was some malady I didn't know of, but he couldn't hold his head up; it'd just roll on his shoulders. I think Billy was a religious man, and he knew he was dying. He didn't fight it; he didn't give up, by any means, but he didn't fight it a great deal.

Let's see, that was . . . we lost this other one up at Tarsau--a sailor by the name of Rosselle. I don't know where he was from. He and a boy from Woodward, Oklahoma, Norman Stevens, were very close. He lives in Woodward, Oklahoma, now. They were very, very close. . . always talking about escaping in the jungle. Where in the hell would you go to? But we left Kanburi and Thailand by train.

Marcello: And when did you leave?

Gordon: In December.

Marcello: December of 1943.

Gordon: '43, right. They sent us to Singapore--entire H Force.

Marcello: What was left of H Force.

Gordon: Right. But here's the Oriental mind again. They used the same number of boxcars to take us back as they brought us up with. So there was just one every now and then in there . . . plenty of room. But that was the Oriental mind (chuckle).

Marcello: So by comparison, it was a better trip going back to Singapore than it was going up.

Gordon: Oh, hell, yes. Just long as you was headed south, you see (chuckle). We went to a camp called Sime Road, and we met up with the other six that had been separated from us on the way up to the jungle; they were back there. This camp was pretty good--pretty good. We had good rations. Men worked in the

gardens; I worked in a shop in the camp making handles for garden tools. This is where I set up my still.

Marcello: You might want to talk about this, because it sounds like an interesting story.

Gordon: Well, I became friends with two corporals--one Australian and one Britisher. They handled the distribution of the food to the two or three kitchens that was in operation, or they handled the food that came into the camp. They did this along with the Japanese; rations came into the same building. All right, there was some fruit coming in, but I would say 90 per cent of it was fermenting and rotting . . . or rotting or in the state of fermentation before rotting, really, in that temperature. There was some big earthenware jars there, and I said, "Why can't we fill that stuff in there and make something out of it?" I said, "We can make wine out of the damn stuff--pineapples, bananas, papaya, mongey stone.

Marcello: What was that last thing?

Gordon: Mongey stone. It's a little old . . . when you peeled it, it was a little old white fruit, and it had a seed inside that. It looked something like a peeled grape, but it was a fuzzy-type outer shell. That's what they called it; I never seen anything like it since or before or before or since.

But anyhow, I saw all this and said, "Hey, let's ferment it." This Australian, he said, "Is that gonna make pretty good wine?" I said, "Well, if we had some sugar, it'd be a helluva lot better." So he stole some unrefined sugar from the Japs. We didn't have any; we stole some from the Japs and would throw a little sugar into it every once in awhile (chuckle). This Joe Bush that I had mentioned earlier, who stayed on the transport group. . . he was from Tulsa, Oklahoma . . . Choctaw Indian--half-Choctaw--he made a copper still. We had this wine now; I said, "Damn, I'd like to run some of it off and make some whiskey," and Joe came up with a seven-gallon boiler.

Marcello: Where'd he get it?

Gordon: It was a British tea urn. . . the guts of it. He took a piece of sheet copper . . . the parties got it some way. He made a domed lid with a collar, and we sealed the collar in the lid with some ground up rice. . . made a paste and sealed it (chuckle).

So we cooked off our first batch of mash, and I think we got about five twenty-ounce beer bottles. Oh, you had no thermometer, nothing; you'd take a spoon and out of the cooling . . . through experimentation, why, we had to develop a two-worm cooling system through a five-gallon can. We even got

solder and soldered in copper tubing, and it didn't take long for water inside this can to get just as hot as the devil, so we had to have a pipe and hose and finally got running water going through this thing with an overflow.

The way we tested it (chuckle), of course, was by tasting it and also catching some of the liquor in a spoon and pitching it in the fire, and if it made a good blue flame, it's still alcohol, you know (chuckle). You'd be so damn drunk by the time (laughter) you run off a couple of bottles of that, you couldn't see straight, anyhow.

Marcello: How much did you make altogether?

Gordon: Oh, I'd say the first time I run off any, I made five bottles. Well, we had to establish an "out" (chuckle), because, man, the way that stunk, you know you was going to get caught (laughter)! So I cleaned the boiler out and put this back in it and re-run these five bottles, and, man, I got me one bottle of liquid fire! I carried it to the hospital; they didn't have any, and they were damned pleased to get it. After I kind of explained to the doctors and all, I think they even sampled it, too (chuckle). But it came in very, very handy in the hospital.

Marcello: How long did you keep this still in operation?

Gordon: Well, until they moved us to that big prison.

Marcello: About how long would that have been?

Gordon: Four months.

Marcello: And the Japanese never knew you had it?

Gordon: I guess it was five months. Yes, I got caught.

Marcello: What happened?

Gordon: Everytime that I run off a batch, I'd always send one or two bottles to the hospital. I had verification from the hospital doctors that I was making alcohol for the hospital and verification from the lieutenant that was handling the supplies that we weren't using anything edible.

Marcello: Well, didn't the Japanese know that you were using their sugar, though?

Gordon: No. No. There's strictly mash from this rotten fruit.

Marcello: Okay, in other words, they saw the still, but they assumed that everything that was being produced was going to the hospital in the form of alcohol.

Gordon: Right. I finally got caught. We set up a system that we had a lookout, but there's no way you can put out the fire and hide the smell and all that sort of thing. But when I did get caught, they literally walked through the door in this . . . and I was . . . see, we weren't allowed to have any fires in camp except in the kitchen and in this workshop that I was in charge of to burn the shavings from the handles. . . making

the handles for the garden tools. (Chuckle) So that gave me an "out" for having a fire.

Marcello: But now they were able to see the physical still and so on, but they still assumed that you . . .

Gordon: They did; they actually saw it. They actually saw it. As I say, they came in--my lookout went somewhere--and they actually walked in on me making . . . just a couple of us in there.

Marcello: But they had probably seen the still before but assumed you were only making alcohol.

Gordon: No. No, this is the first time ever, and through the interpreter, man, there was questions barging right and left. The English lieutenant told them that I was in charge of this, because they asked that question. Then the interpreter turned to me, and this old Japanese captain, who was with the inspection party, through the interpreter questioned him about . . . for me to explain if I was in charge of this place. . . made everybody else hush and for me to explain. I said, "This is very, very simple. They had this rotten fruit or fermenting fruit, and it was unfit for human consumption according to our doctors, so we made a mash out of it. We're making alcohol for the hospital, which we're in desperate need of." After this was relayed to the Japanese officer and more questions asked, and

I gave it to them to the best of my ability.

When they started to leave, they didn't make me quit my operation. When they started to leave, the Japanese captain turned to me and said, "Sergeant, you're doing a damn good job with what you have." Those are the exact words he used. All the time he could speak English perfect, but he was going through an interpreter, because I was too low to carry on a conversation with him. (Chuckle) I suppose that was it; he was keeping me in my place--low.

Marcello: But in other words, you did not have to shut down the operation of the still.

Gordon: No, I didn't shut down the operation. Even at a later time . . . at this particular time in this period--I don't know what month or date--the Royalist forces of Italy got out of the war; King Immanual surrendered the Royalist forces. Some Italian submarines were in Singapore harbor. They threw them in prison with us. So, man, they brought in some good groceries off their submarines and ships, you see.

Marcello: Okay, but let's just stay with the still here for a minute.

Gordon: I know. This is the whole thing--the still. I traded some of my "rot gut" whiskey for some of their good cognac, you see (chuckle). That's what I wanted to relate to you. Because they brought some of it into prison with them, and I got to trade some of mine for theirs.

Marcello: Now what did you do with the whiskey that you were manufacturing? Did you sell it, trade it? What'd you do with it?

Gordon: No, gave it away. Most of it went to the hospital, really, because there was nineteen headaches to every damn swallow (laughter)! It made you drunker than hell, too (laughter), I'll tell you! Sick! My God! I've been so damn sick I couldn't even get my head out of bed. . . had to roll it over to the side and let her go (laughter). But, no, I didn't drink too much of it, but there was a helluva lot of it consumed all right. But I did consume the so-called wine and mash . . . let it settle, strain it. It had some vitamin contents to that damn stuff; I got in pretty good shape. . . beer belly and all, you see (laughter).

Marcello: I gather that the wine was of a much better quality than that whiskey that you were making.

Gordon: Well, I didn't . . . I think somebody would have issued me a "do better" slip for that distilling business I was in (laughter). But, no, I assume that the wine had possibly some vitamin content to it from the fermentation aspect, because I did get in pretty good shape in this particular camp, and I lay part of it to that. And I did, I drank quite a bit of that mash or wine, really, is what it amounted to.

Marcello: Did the treatment that the guards meted out to the prisoners ease up somewhat in this camp?

Gordon: In this camp, there wasn't any that I knew of. I never got outside the camp, you see. I never got outside the camp, so therefore I didn't come in contact with any guards except the ones that came there to take their rations back to the . . . I wasn't in the same building, but I was very near it, and I was in that building at the times when they did come in. There was no mistreatment here that I know of.

Oh, there's a story here that'd be real good. You may appreciate it. In your area they don't have okra, but in this country down here, this part of the world, they do, you know. Okay, when we came into Sime Road, there was tomatoes, hot peppers, and okra, because there had been Indian prisoners in this camp. Of course, they left it when they left. So when we got in there. . . my God, we went after that okra just right now. We'd get to the . . . naturally, the strong green pods of okra. The English came up and said, "My God, mate, let it ripe!" They was shelling the seeds out eating the damn seeds (laughter). They said, "My God, mate, let it get ripe!" (laughter). But we had some pretty good eating there from what was left. It didn't last long, but there was tomatoes and okra and the chili peppers.

Marcello: How long were you in this camp altogether?

Gordon: About five months, about five months.

Marcello: And then you mentioned that some Italian prisoners did come into this camp?

Gordon: Yes, yes.

Marcello: About how many?

Gordon: About thirty-five. The ones that remained loyal to the king came in; the Black Shirts--fascists--did not. But those rascals . . . when Italy got out of the war, the Japs grabbed them, too, and threw them in prison. This was toward the last, you know--towards the end. But this was . . . when they threw the fascists in, well, we were in Changi Jail then. There was friction even between the two groups of Italians, even at that stage of the game. . . quite a bit of friction.

But Sime Road was a good camp because of what had preceded it; that was the main thing. We had, as far as bedding is concerned, nothing; we didn't have anything . . . maybe a tattered blanket.

Marcello: Were you still in the usual atap huts?

Gordon: Yes, we was in atap huts, yes. Some of the buildings even had wooden sides to them and just the atap roofs on them.

Marcello: Okay, so when did you leave this camp on your way back to Changi again?

Gordon: It was approximately five months. In May . . .

Marcello: Of 1944?

Gordon: In '44 we left from Sime Road to Changi Jail.

Marcello: Was this a rather uneventful trip from Sime Road to Changi?

Gordon: Yes, it was uneventful trip from Sime Road to Changi; nothing happened knowingly.

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you get back to Changi?

Gordon: Now this is Changi Jail, not Roberts Garrison.

Marcello: I see. This is that high-walled prison that you saw before.

Gordon: Yes, this is the high-walled prison. Changi is an area on Singapore Island, and Changi Jail happened to be in that area, too. But this is that high-walled civil prison, and there is where I was sent. There was three men to a one-man cell. There was four to begin with, and it was just impossible to sleep that way. So one man moved out of each cell out onto a metal matting between the floors and slept out there. But in this . . . I don't know whether you've heard anything about Changi Jail or not . . . the cells were one-man cells; the bed was a slab of concrete with a concrete pillow. And, man, that air mattress sure did come in handy there (chuckle)!

Marcello: You still had it.

Gordon: Still had the air mattress. I had bled rubber trees to get the liquid rubber to repair this mattress several times. But

I still had my air mattress. Many times I had used this air mattress merely as something to lay down to sleep on because of the punctures that I had. But, anyway, I got it repaired where it would hold air again.

Changi Jail wasn't too bad, but it was very regimented by the British, again. There was Colonel Newey; he was of the Malay Volunteers, and he held a pretty strict hand. He had military police; it was very regimented. He may have gone a little . . . but I thought he went a helluva ways overboard, but I wasn't to be the judge of that. I did get thrown in solitary confinement--not by the Japanese, but by Colonel Newey--at this place.

Marcello: How did that occur?

Gordon: I was on a working party in the gardens. Our apparel was a G-string, so you couldn't conceal a helluva lot in a G-string (laughter). We were walking back in, and I picked up three little pieces of root, which were tapioca root we raised for our food. Apparently, it had fell off of a wagon cart that had been hauling this stuff from the garden into the jail. Of course, marching in, I saw it on the ground, and I picked it up, went through the gate, and had it in my hand. I was seized by these military police on the gate and carried in front of Colonel Newey, and they told him what

had happened. So I went to give my explanation of it, and he wouldn't even let me speak at all. He hollered out, "Fourteen days in solitary!" and they drug my rear end off and threw me in a solitary cell.

Marcello: What did solitary confinement consist of?

Gordon: It consisted of solitary confinement with rice and water, and my sentence was fourteen days. Strangely enough, with the skimp rations, what I wanted most when I came out of there was something to smoke. . . being a smoker in those days.

But Colonel Newey, I believe, would have been murdered, had the prisoners been able to get their hands on him.

Marcello: In other words, even the British did not like him?

Gordon: No. No one did. I believe he committed suicide shortly after the war was over, and I believe he would have been murdered by the prisoners,

Marcello: How much did you suffer as a result of being in solitary confinement?

Gordon: I didn't suffer any. Rations weren't as well as it would have been had I been outside.

Marcello: Now when you were in Changi Jail, were you actually in cells, and were these locked, or were the doors just open?

Gordon: Right. No, they weren't locked, no. See, in this prison, there were two walls--an inner wall and an outer wall--and a

void space in between. The Japanese did have guards in the watch towers and so on on the gate, but here again the British did most of the controlling. They had their MP's. What made it "rub the fur" the wrong way was these MP's drew extra rations to keep them in good physical condition. That didn't go well at all with any particular segment of the prisoners, whether it be Dutch, Australian, British, or American.

But getting back to Changi Jail, why, we met back up with the people who we had left in Changi when we went up to Thailand, plus an addition of some merchant seamen, some Air Force people that had been shot down up in Indochina up over Hanoi, and also some that had been shot down in Burma; they had brought them down to Singapore for imprisonment. But that practically is the only eventful thing that may have happened in Changi Jail as far as myself personally.

Marcello: What sort of work parties were you participating in here at Changi?

Gordon: Primarily, working in our own gardens. Now there was the performance of labor, common labor or coolie-type labor, on an airfield near Changi and also working on the docks in the Singapore area loading tin, raw rubber. . . tin ingots, raw rubber, and various and sundry goods being shipped back to Japan.

Marcello: Was the work very difficult here?

Gordon: No, no, it wasn't. Working in the gardens, we got a noon meal while we were out at the gardens cooked at the gardens, you see. So we would use the vegetables out of the gardens--no rice but strictly a stew. You could steal. . . we didn't raise pineapple in the prison gardens at all; that wouldn't take care of many people; nor bananas. We raised tapioca root, sweet potato for the vines--not the potato but for the vines--and a weed that was very much like a . . . down in this part of the country . . . a careless weed that we cultivated for the greenery because of the rapid growth and used that for greenery. That was the primary growth of the gardens.

We would . . . I did on occasions get through the brush and get a pineapple or steal some bananas or something like that from the Chinese or the Japanese areas that was out of bounds. I'll never forget a stalk of bananas that I kept my eye on for ever so long, and when they got mature, why, I'd already dug me a hole and lined it with some grass, you know, some dead grass, mound it up where water wouldn't get into it, and had me a little piece of wood that I covered the hole with where water wouldn't get in there to it. I finally got the chance to get these bananas, and I put them in this hole where they'd ripen. I think I had had two off of it--and they were

rather green--and somebody stole the whole damn stalk off of me (chuckle). I got a few pineapples every now and then. . . going out of bounds and getting them and let them ripen.

Marcello: Now I would gather from what you said that you really didn't run into too many Japanese guards here.

Gordon: No. No, only some that was patrolling the area. After a period of time, and I don't remember how long it was, they moved the Americans outside of the jail into atap huts outside the walls.

Marcello: Why did they do that?

Gordon: Space, I suppose, but it was much, much better than inside that damn jail. Of course, you had freedom that you could skin up a coconut tree every now and then and go through the barbed wire and trade a little bit with the Chinese, get a little tobacco every now and then, you know. So it was much, much better outside than it was inside the prison.

Marcello: How many Americans were there here at Changi now? And again, we're talking about Changi Jail.

Gordon: Changi Jail, yes--Changi Jail. See, there was no more Changi per se as it was when we first arrived in Singapore, because all the prisoners were congregated in Changi Jail or immediately outside the area. Now there was work parties that had been out in there into other camps on Singapore Island helping buildings some of the defenses and things like that for the

island. But I'm trying to think of the number that was liberated. We had survivors off of two merchant ships. . . I would say there was . . . between fifty and sixty; I don't know the exact number.

Marcello: And these were an assorted group there.

Gordon: Assorted, very assorted. Survivors out of the H Force group, merchant seamen that their ships had been sunk by German raiders, air crews that had been shot down over various areas in Southeast Asia, and, of course, still some of the 131st, when E Battery that had been left in the east end of Java had come through Singapore. Some of them was sick; why they didn't go on to Japan, I don't know. See, some of these people were from E Battery that I went up country with.

Marcello: Now obviously, by this time, the war was taking a turn for the worse so far as the Japanese were concerned. How did their attitude change?

Gordon: Their attitude, as far as I can tell or as far as I can remember, didn't change a great deal. We noticed it in our rations as far as rice is concerned; it got shorter and shorter as the war progressed or as the end grew nearer. And it was pretty slim pickings at the end.

Marcello: Obviously, they were suffering from short rations, too.

Gordon: I'm sure they were. I'm sure they were. See, at this stage of the game, we'd lost, I think, sixteen men aboard Japanese

ships that were sunk by Allied submarines. I believe it was sixteen. I didn't know anything about it. This happened in 1944.

Marcello: Did Singapore experience any air raids while you were there?

Gordon: Oh, yes--B-29's.

Marcello: Did you actually witness this?

Gordon: Oh, hell, yes!

Marcello: You might describe it.

Gordon: You know, you'd clap one hand and say, "Get away, you little bitch," and then another one would come over (laughter). Oh, yes, on the first raid that we had, there was 105 aircraft that came over, I believe is what that is across the strait from Singapore. It was the British old dry dock area; they hit that.

Marcello: I guess you'd never seen anything the size of those B-29's.

Gordon: Oh, hell, no! That was the biggest airplane I ever saw in my life! Naturally, it was. They were a beautiful sight--real high--but yet you knew what they were carrying.

Marcello: And you actually did count them, and there were 105 of them.

Gordon: Hundred and five in the first volley and then 107 in the next one. The next hit with incendiaries; they hit the "go-down" area, the dock area, and did precision bombing down there. . . precision bombing. Of course, we saw the results of that. There was a huge, wide boulevard in the dock area that separates

the city from the warehouse, the docks, and "go-downs," as they called them. There was none--to my recollection or I distinctly saw them--of the bombs that hit on the city side of this big boulevard. Of course, they drop out of a huge incendiary encasing, and they'd open up and spit out these little . . . oh, what they are called . . . this was actually a little incendiary bomb that did all the burning.

Marcello: What did that do for your morale when you saw these planes?

Gordon: As I say, you know, you clap with one hand and told them to get the hell out of there with the other (chuckle).

Marcello: The Japanese obviously have not marked the prisoner-of-war compound in any way.

Gordon: Oh, no. Oh, no. No.

Marcello: What did this do go the attitude of the Japanese?

Gordon: They didn't like it worth a damn, but they didn't take it out on us, which was very beneficial that way. I'll never forget one air raid that came off. We was out in the huts, and naturally we had clotheslines between these huts, you know, to hang our rags on our G-strings or anything. (Chuckle) The air raid sounded, and up a ways from us there was a guard station. Man, here come two Koreans blazing down this road and cut in between two of these huts, and they hit a clothesline about neck-high (laughter). It damn near pulled them out

of their shoes (laughter). That was just comical. We had to stay in our huts, you see.

Marcello: Did you even have to laugh at it at the time?

Gordon: Oh, hell, yes, we had to laugh. Rifle went one way; helmet went another; feet went another (laughter), you know. They like to tore their head off (laughter). As I was saying, it almost jerked them out of their shoes (laughter). But it was so funny! Three days later we got orders to take down all clotheslines (laughter). We damn near beheaded a couple of them (laughter)!

Oh, another thing that happened at Changi Jail, getting back to the garden aspect. All urine was saved and used in the gardens . . . diluted and used in the gardens. It'd make good greenery (laughter). But no human waste and all.

Marcello: Did you have any qualms about eating the greenery out of the gardens that had been fertilized in that way?

Gordon: Oh, hell, no. Just tell somebody, "Man, don't pour it on the top! Pour it on the bottom!" (laughter) No, it was diluted, and it really did make . . . you might think the salt factor would have stunted the growth. But it did; it really speeded the maturity of this greenery.

Mrcello: Did you fear what would happen to you if the war ended and Japan did lose?

Gordon: That was a constant thought with people--the repercussions the Japanese may have. That was, I guess, the most predominant thing of all, because we had news of the progress of the war. Just like when the atomic bomb was dropped and even when the war ended, there could be no jubilation shown, because you didn't know what the hell that Jap would do.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever threaten you with what would happen when and if they lost the war?

Gordon: No, no. You know, talking to an individual soldier, why, you know, the hara-kiri sign and stuff like that. He'd shoot me and then commit hara-kari, you know. But that was, I'm sure, talk on their part.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were able to keep up with the course of the war. How were you able to do that?

Gordon: Concealed radios. Not me, but in the camp area itself.

Marcello: And again, was the word passed by mouth?

Gordon: Mouth, right--passed by mouth.

Marcello: And I assume you never really did see the radio.

Gordon: Oh, no, no. Never. No, no.

Marcello: You didn't want to know where it was probably.

Gordon: No, no. Very few people did; very few people did know. But this was the whole thing--just one or two people.

Marcello: Do you get a little anxious? Do you get a little impatient when you know that the tide has turned and the Allies are going

to win, and you're wondering when the hell that liberation day is going to be coming?

Gordon: Well, we kind of knew about the liberation date. Through the radio again, they got the message that they was going to drop paratroopers in the area. As a matter of fact, they flew planes in there and with speakers on these planes . . . tremendous speakers related it, and they dropped pamphlets. I thought they was going to drop paratroopers. Do you know how many paratroopers they dropped?

Marcello: No.

Gordon: Four (laughter).

Marcello: Now by this time is the war over?

Gordon: The war had been over, oh, not but about a week, I imagine.

Marcello: Are we ready to talk about your liberation at this point?

Gordon: I think so. Because really, there's nothing. . . it was just . . . well, I had dysentery, and I had malaria here at Changi, dislocated the shoulder a couple of more times, and I had a real bad problem with the back situation again. But nothing . . . you know, it was a humdrum sort of existence, you know --nothing to compare with the jungle. Had this group of people that I was with in the jungle, had they been there another six months, I dare say there wouldn't have been ten men left. I just don't believe there would have. You know, this, I think,

was a higher rate than there could have been anywhere else. The Americans didn't suffer as many casualties up there--the group that I was with--we lost three out of thirteen. The British lost their . . . lost about three out of four. So you can see the comparison, and I don't know what it was.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about the events leading up to your liberation. I suppose we need to start with the procedure by which you got the word that the war was over and then talk about the reaction of the Japanese.

Gordon: Well, here again, we had been moved, at this time, back into the prison behind walls. There this kid stayed. After the war was over, some of them got outside, went amongst the Malays and the Chinese, who were at each other's throat as soon as the war was over and the Japanese left. The Japanese just more or less vanished. There was a few who stayed, but no arms were in sight.

Marcello: How did you get the word of the surrender?

Gordon: We got word by aircraft coming in dropping leaflets and the amplifying system on the plane itself and, of course, the radios that we had. I think they dropped some radios, also, by small chutes.

Marcello: What sort of emotions or feelings did you have when you heard the war was over?

Gordon: Oh, God! Jubilation! You never seen the like! We thought there would be . . . boats would have to come in after us. We didn't know how long it'd take a damn ship to get there. But we were very, very fortunate; they brought in C-54's in and flew us out.

Marcello: Why did you decide to stay in the prison camp rather than go out and test your new-found freedom?

Gordon: I'd done been through too much crap to go out and take a chance on getting my butt shot off (laughter), because the Chinese and Malays were at each other's throats.

Marcello: Had you been instructed, through the pamphlets and the loud-speaker system and so on, to remain in the camp?

Gordon: No, not necessarily. We had been by the people in the camp itself, but that didn't make any difference to some people. They went out and got some extra groceries.

And the Japanese turned loose Red Cross supplies at this time. Now backing up a little bit, we got some American Red Cross supplies in Sime Road shortly after we came down out of the jungle.

Marcello: What did these supplies consist of?

Gordon: Cigarettes, canned food, meats, and sweets. We got one full carton, the Americans did, and then one other time, we got two packages of cigarettes. Then after the war over, the Japs

turned loose a lot more, and we had extremely good rations there, as a matter of fact, really too much, because our digestive system wasn't able to cope with it. I got in bad shape again from eating so damn much, you know.

Marcello: How important were those initial Red Cross packages that you received?

Gordon: How important?

Marcello: Yes.

Gordon: As far as morale, it was great. It wasn't enough food to sustain anybody, necessarily, to keeping you alive. It did help, and you knew it was the beginning of something good, possibly. However, we didn't get them regularly. The Japs held them. We'd see them smoking good American cigarettes a lot of times, but we never did see many.

Marcello: Incidentally, had you ever been able to send any cards or anything home to indicate that you were alive?

Gordon: Yes, there was, I believe, about four occasions that you could fill in the blank of about four statements. You checked one of them.

Marcello: In other words, "my health is good, fair, poor," or something of that nature, and you'd better say the best, or the card wouldn't get through.

Gordon: Something about . . . "had been wounded but am okay." You know, it didn't relate to anything. You just checked one. My

mother received two of these from me. I received nineteen letters while I was in prison--seventeen one time and two another time (chuckle).

Marcello: When did you receive those?

Gordon: After I had gone to Changi Jail. It was in '45.

Marcello: I'm sure they were real morale boosters, too.

Gordon: Yes, but they were nearly two years old.

Marcello: But at least they were word from home.

Gordon: Oh, yes. Yes, yes--seventeen one time and two another time.

Marcello: Were they censored quite a bit?

Gordon: No. No. I'm sure they had instructions what to write at home. But, oh, yes, it was a morale booster. These American airmen was a morale booster even though they were prisoners. They could relate to us just what was happening and how the country had gone on.

Marcello: It's kind of interesting that the Japanese didn't keep those pilots in isolation or away from you people for that very reason.

Gordon: They did for quite some time; they did for quite some time. But it was just real, real good to talk with these fellows. Then, of course, after these fellows did land the C-54's and they came out to Changi to take us out of there, hell, I was like one of their damn shadows; I wasn't about to leave one

of them--afraid they'd go off and leave me, you see (chuckle).

Marcello: How long did you remain in Changi after the war was over and after you received the word?

Gordon: I left Changi on September 7, 1945. . . flew to Calcutta. That was the first time that I had seen any of the fellows that I had been parted from in January of '43. . . first time that I had seen them.

Marcello: What sort of a reunion did you all have?

Gordon: Oh, God! Man, there was beer and Hershey Bars in great quantities (laughter). There was no restrictions on diet, and I damn near killed myself, really.

Marcello: What particular food did you have a craving for?

Gordon: Hell, all they had (laughter); really, all they had. I got very, very miserable. My digestive system wasn't able to cope with the intake, so it merely laid in my belly. I lay up there in that bed, and that belly'd get bigger. Then finally, it broke from both ends. . . gas from both ends of it. Man, from here to that latrine, we'd go. But everytime they blew that chow whistle, back to that mess hall we'd go again and go to that canteen in between and get those Hershey bars, you know.

Fresh vegetables was the thing, and we didn't have that until we hit the States. I'd go into a restaurant after I got

to the States, and I'd order . . . you know, a quarter head of lettuce and some thousand island dressing was . . . I'd order half a head, you see, or sometimes even a whole head of lettuce and a quart of milk, not a glass, a quart. We had a craving for fresh milk and fresh vegetables, because in that part of the world, you had to cook all vegetables because of the dysentery aspect. They were cultivated with human manure, too, you see, so you had to boil all vegetables.

Marcello: You might have to estimate this, but what was the lowest that your weight got down to?

Gordon: I know of two occasions; one time I weighed 106 pounds and another time, 108. I'm estimating about 108 when I was liberated. I wasn't in too bad a shape. I had had a bout of dysentery, and I'd had a bout of malaria in the hospital there in Changi with this. But I wasn't in too bad a shape when I was liberated . . . just about down to my fighting weight, you see (chuckle).

Marcello: But you did mention that your normal weight was around 190 pounds.

Gordon: Hundred and ninety pounds when I went in prison, yes, in Java. I had been, I think, lower than that on a couple of occasions, but I don't know how much lower. I'm just going by how far the bones stuck out, you see.

Marcello: As you look back on your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as being the key to your survival? I'm speaking about you personally.

Gordon: I would have to say primarily it would have to be my early life, my upbringing as a farm boy. I truly believe that. As a farm boy, a country boy, so to speak, possibly you may learn a little bit more of home remedies; you may reach down and grab something raw and eat it, you know--maybe. I don't know this; that's the only thing that I can see.

In relation to the British, I think it's our standard of living which gave you possibly more desire to get back to that standard. Our way of life in this country, I think, built up a reserve in a man's body to endure for longer periods of time. So many of the British were war babies of World War I, and in the slums of London and Manchester and Liverpool, I don't think living conditions were the best, possibly, from stories I have heard related. Just like this casualty figure, I can't pinpoint what caused the vast difference in the group I was in. I don't know how it was other places; I don't know.

Marcello: Without trying to put words in your mouth, I would assume that just that consuming will to live was a very dominant factor.

Gordon: Right, yes. It grew from your standard of living, you see-- the will to get back to that. Yes, the will to live, I think,

was a great deal of it. You know, we just said, "Well, I'll show you, you son-of-a-bitch! I can make it!"

Marcello: Did you have any problems adjusting to civilian life once you get back to the States again?

Gordon: I had problems settling down, staying in one place. I was home five days, and I had to go. I had trouble staying put, really. I came into Washington, D. C., in the hospital at Walter Reed for . . . September 25th to October 7th, I believe, or 8th, because I got to Fort Worth on the 10th of October. I was there a couple of weeks, we'll say. . . ten days. As soon as they let me loose there, they headed me back to the station nearest my home, which they sent me to Fort Sam Houston. Well, I already had my mind made up I was going AWOL; I wasn't going to Fort "Sam"; I was coming home. But I missed getting off the train at the wrong place (chuckle), so I went on to Fort "Sam" and merely spent an overnight there and was given temporary duty at home for awhile. I was home a week, and I made excuses to my mother and father to go see somebody; I just could not stay put. I just could not.

Marcello: How long did this attitude continue?

Gordon: Oh, for about a year, about a year. Of course, I was in the hospital about a year later after I got back, and I had to stay put there. I had to have that shoulder rebuilt so I could

get out. Of course, they were trying to chase these parasites that were in my system out, but they never were able to make it. I was discharged with this amoeba problem, and I said, "Well, my God! What do I do with that damn thing if it's still active?" I mean, they said, "Well, it's not active; it's dormant." I said, "What if it comes back on me?" He said, "Well, you go to the hospital then." That was encouraging (facetious remark). That was encouraging.

But it was a big adjustment, a very big adjustment. The people had changed over a four-year period; it was nearly four years since I'd been gone. I noticed morals had declined immensely during the war; it was one of the great things that I noticed--the attitude of men towards the women. Well, mine was just as strong as it ever was, don't get me wrong. . . but speaking out, you know. I just wasn't raised up to "call a spade a spade" with a female, you know. I noticed that greatly in the hospital in Washington, D.C.; I really did. This is typical of a wartime situation, is the decline of your morals, isn't it?

Marcello: Yes, it is.

Gordon: Yes, I noticed that distinctly. Then I got married while I was still in the service--June of '46. I married a girl that I had met while I was in the hospital at Walter Reed. I went back

to school at TCU after I got out of the service; I had three children; then I had a divorce. I kept the children, and I have a lovely wife now, just a lovely person. I don't see how in the hell she ever put up with me (chuckle).

Marcello: Suppose I had conducted this interview in 1947 as opposed to 1977. How would it possibly have differed?

Gordon: I don't believe . . . there might have been more details on more subjects.

Marcello: How about bitterness? Would there have been more bitterness toward the Japanese in particular?

Gordon: I don't think so. I don't think so. You see, Dr. Marcello, I look at this thing from the aspect of their discipline, their religion. And their standard of living was so far below ours; that's what made it so hard. I believe that; truly, I believe that. The animosity . . . I don't think I have held any animosity towards those people. Yet, I have not been confronted by one who had dealt me a hurt, so I couldn't swear to this. It may change (snaps fingers) that quick if I were confronted by one. But I haven't held any animosity through the years. We had the British to vent our anger on, you see (laughter).

Marcello: I have one last question. Whatever happened to "Piss Pot?"

Gordon: I don't know. I don't know. Probably wound up in a stew someplace. I don't know what happened to that cockatoo. He

was left in Bicycle Camp when we went to Singapore. But he probably wound up in somebody's stew.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Gordon, that's all the questions I have. I want to thank you very much for having participated in our project.

Gordon: My pleasure.

Marcello: You've said a lot of very interesting and also very important things, and I think scholars are going to find this material very valuable someday when they use it to write about the experiences of the Americans who were prisoners-of-war during World War II.

Gordon: I just hope that the occasion never rises again . . . not with me, but with others. I just hope it doesn't. I don't think a war will ever be that long again. Of course, actually, it was short compared to the early days of Vietnam. But it was damn sure long enough for me (chuckle)!