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Interview with

M. L. REA

April 14, 1980

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

M. L. Rea

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing M. L. Rea for the North Texas State Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 14, 1980, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Rea in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, 36th Division, which was the Texas National Guard. Mr. Rea was a part of this unit which was captured intact on the Island of Java in March of 1942, and the men in the unit ultimately spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps throughout Asia.

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

Mr. Rea: I was born on April 16, 1917, in Comanche County, Texas. I lived there until I was five years old and moved to Lubbock County with my parents in a covered

wagon in 1921. We lived in Lubbock County for four years, and I then moved to Swisher County, where I grew up on the farm.

I finished high school at Kress, Texas. From there I went into oil field work in Comanche County again. I went back there after I grew up and worked there awhile. I came back to Plainview and worked there in construction some. And then--this was in 1938 when I finished high school--in '39, I worked these two jobs. In the latter part of '39 and early part of '40, I was still in construction work.

Then in October, I volunteered for the National Guard and became a part of the 36th Division then. We were mobilized on November 25, 1940.

Marcello: Let's go back and fill in some of the gaps in your biographical sketch. You mentioned that you were a high school graduate. Now, in a sense, you were in many ways the exception rather than the rule at that particular time, were you not? Again, we're talking about the period of the Great Depression, and there are a lot of individuals that didn't finish high school.

Rea: That's true. I worked at the high school in the NYA program, I guess. It was a government pay thing--paid \$7.00 a month. I was doing janitorial work and stayed with a couple and did farm labor on the weekends for my room and

board--the latter part of it. Of course, I just went to Kress for my junior and senior year. I had gone to a rural school up to then. I participated in athletics. And I had to help with the family income prior to that, and I was a little older, I would say, than most high school graduates when I finished high school.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the National Guard in 1940?

Rea: Well, they were going to draft people my age, and I knew I was going to have to register for the draft. And I didn't know where I'd be sent. So I thought, well, I'll join with this unit here and be with some men that I know and am acquainted with and have grown up with. And that caused me to join when I did.

Marcello: Identify that unit in Lubbock which you joined.

Rea: It was the Plainview unit.

Marcello: Oh, I'm sorry. You joined in Plainview?

Rea: Plainview. It was A Battery, which was the 1st Battery in the 1st Battalion. Being experienced in driving trucks, I was one of the prime mover drivers. I drove for the 3rd Section, which had the 75-millimeter guns.

Marcello: Describe what the Texas National Guard, in general, was like, and your unit, specifically, was like in that period prior to mobilization. What sort of activities did it participate in?

Rea: I wasn't a part of the National Guard when they had gone

on summer maneuvers, on active duty in the summertime when they would make their active duty. But they had participated in that several times. The equipment we had at the time was very limited. This was 1940, and some of the vehicles that we had at that time were 1933-model vehicles. That was the first mobilized unit that they had issued to the National Guard after the cavalry portion of it was cut off.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that A Battery was a firing battery.

Rea: Right.

Marcello: What kind of weapons did it have?

Rea: The 75-millimeter.

Marcello: It did have the 75-millimeters there at the unit armory in Plainview?

Rea: Yes, sir.

Marcello: How seriously did people take this National Guard activity prior to mobilization in November of 1940?

Rea: Not too seriously. They figured that they were going into the service and that they might be actually called into active duty. This was when Hitler was beginning to rise up a little, and we could get the news about him. But we had no thoughts that this might occur at that time.

Marcello: I gather that a lot of people joined just to pick up a few extra dollars along about that time, or maybe even before that.

Rea: True. This is correct on some of the men that'd been in it prior to me going into it, but I did not make any of the activities other than one or two weekly meetings prior to the mobilization.

Marcello: What sort of activities took place at the weekly meetings?

Rea: Kind of close order drill.

Marcello: So you really didn't have any Army basic training as we think of basic training today when a recruit goes into the service.

Rea: That's true.

Marcello: That would all come, I guess, after you got to Camp Bowie.

Rea: Right.

Marcello: Okay, now like you mentioned, mobilization occurred on November 25, 1940. What did mobilization mean to the Longview unit? In other words, what took place within the unit after the Texas National Guard had been mobilized?

Rea: All the personnel that had not been making regular weekly meetings was notified that they should report immediately to the unit. Those that didn't, I remember, the sheriff was sent after them.

Marcello: So you reported directly to the armory there, I suppose, at Plainview. What happened at that point then? Did you remain there for a certian period of time before you moved on to Camp Bowie?

Rea: We had quarters in the old armory there, and at that time,

there was a unit nearby they called the Plainview Dairy Barn, and some of the personnel of the unit slept in the area of the dairy barn. It had heat in it. We were there for about the remaining part of November, December, and the early part of January before we moved to Camp Bowie, Texas.

Marcello: What did you do during that period between mobilization and the move to Camp Bowie? What sort of activities did the unit undergo there?

Rea: We were taking training on the handling on the artillery equipment and close order drill. Incidentally, our mess hall was in a park building, and they cooked and prepared the meals there for us, and we had to march a couple of blocks from where the armory was to this . . . what they called a community building at that time.

Marcello: Now were you staying at the dairy barn, or were you at the armory?

Rea: I was staying at home at night and reporting early of a morning.

Marcello: In other words, if you lived close enough, you could go home in the evening and then come back for reveille and what-have-you in the morning.

Rea: Right. There was one or two of the trucks that made kind of a route picking up personnel, bringing them to the armory each day.

Marcello: At that time--and you would have to estimate this--what was the approximate age of the average person in the unit?

Rea: I would say from twenty to twenty-three years old.

Marcello: Again, how seriously was this situation being taken now that mobilization had occurred?

Rea: Well, I didn't take it too seriously at the time because we thought . . . well, we were going to be moving down to Camp Bowie, and we didn't think too much about it until we saw the massive movement that there was after we got to Camp Bowie. Then we realized that there was possibly a need for us to think about what the future might hold.

Marcello: Without putting words in your mouth then, at the time of mobilization, you saw a year of active military service, and that would be the end of it.

Rea: We thought that.

Marcello: Okay, you pointed out that you moved in January, 1941, to Camp Bowie, Texas. What did Camp Bowie look like at the time you got there?

Rea: Well, at that particular time, there was lots of rainfall in Brownwood, Texas, where Camp Bowie was located. There was a portion of it that was under construction and a portion of it that might have been livable at the time, but mainly it was all under construction. We did not have any hard-top streets except in the main thoroughfares. And all the areas where our tents were . . . we

didn't have barracks. It was just kind of a bungalow or square thing with a tarpaulin over the top of it. And there was six men that lived in those tents. The only thing we had that was a building complete was the mess hall and the latrine.

Marcello: And I guess it can get pretty cold down around Brownwood at that time of the year, too.

Rea: It certainly did (chuckle).

Marcello: What kind of training did the unit undergo after it got to Camp Bowie? And I assume that the training procedures changed rather drastically.

Rea: Yes. We started on maneuvers or march orders and so on and were training in that, and we were getting all the equipment together and going out into a firing range and practicing, actually firing into hillsides. We were going through the actual thing of what it would be with the exception of them shooting back at us.

Marcello: Were you still basically working in the transportation section with the trucks and so on.

Rea: Yes, sir. I was driving the truck, moving one of the big guns.

Marcello: Now once the unit got to Camp Bowie, did the actual firing of the guns take place there?

Rea: At periods, yes. We'd go out into the lease area, which the government had leased, to the firing range there. My

understanding is that later they retained this area because there was some of those warheads that didn't explode when they went off.

Marcello: Did you ever undergo any small arms training or anything of that nature here?

Rea: No, sir. We were not issued any type of small arms. Actually, we trained with a gun that was actually a stick-- that was our gun. The first firing arm that I had assigned to me was the old Springfield rifle after we were preparing to go overseas.

Marcello: In the summer of 1941, the unit went to Louisiana on the 3rd Army maneuvers.

Rea: Right.

Marcello: Describe what took place over in Louisiana during those maneuvers.

Rea: They took all the units down into Louisiana, and it was a mock war--the Red and Blue Army, they called it. We were actually going in and moving into areas and moving as if we were making advancement of one unit to the other, I mean, like we were on the battle front.

I remember at Ruston, Louisiana, after we had been on maneuvers possibly two weeks or something like that, the particular units where my unit was located . . . I don't know how they got there because there was units all the way around, but the Red Army was in our area, and they

took two units as prisoners. The umpires came in and put white streamers all over everything, and we were held. They finally took us out of there through the Blue Army lines and took us into the area where we were actually used as laborers to unload things and like we were later on. I remember we were taken to a railhead and unloaded loaves of bread . . . not loaves of bread but clumps of bread. They looked like a big rock, and they were in big boxes. And we took them out of the cars and put them in the trucks.

Marcello: Ironically, in a sense, you were getting your first taste of what it was somewhat like to be a prisoner-of-war.

Rea: Right. They kept us in this area for about three days. Then they had what are called prisoner exchanges. Now this took place at Ruston, Louisiana. We were given so much gas to get out of the area where we were there and get back into the area that was on our side. Then it was up to us to get gas to get back to our unit. So we left out after making, I think, two stops. I had to arrange for gas at two different areas for the unit to get back.

Marcello: I gather that the 2nd Battalion--and you were in the 1st Battalion at this time--made a pretty good record for itself there. That's the unofficial word that I get, anyhow. I've never seen anything official about this, and it's only something that I've heard.

Rea: Well, I never did know just exactly how it was chosen, but about the time that this happened, the orders came through that those that was twenty-seven and older would be released if they so chose. Now there was several of them that did make that choice and went back home. In other words, they were not in the service at that time. This only lasted a short time, and they recalled them after, you know, the situation got worse in Germany. That's the reason why the 2nd Battalion and the 1st Battalion was merged together-- to make up a full unit in the 2nd Battalion.

Marcello: I gather that this occurred after you returned from the Louisiana maneuvers, isn't that correct?

Rea: Right. On returning from the Louisiana maneuvers, my orders was at that time for our particular unit to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. And at the time I got a furlough to go home, and at that time I got married, which was on October 9, 1941.

Marcello: This was a girl back in Plainview or in that area?

Rea: Yes, sir. They called us in after that, and we never did go to Fort Sill. The orders came through that we was being prepared for this PLUM, which was given as our destination.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute here. Also, after you returned from the Louisiana maneuvers, the entire army underwent a reorganization in that it changed from the square divisions to

the triangular divisions. Were you aware of that particular reorganization that occurred around that time? Among other things, they were making the army division a smaller unit, and, also, I think, the 2nd Battalion got caught up in that reorganization that occurred.

Rea: Well, I didn't have too much knowledge of that at that time, but it is vaguely in my mind that that is what occurred.

Marcello: So you get married between the time of the return from the Louisiana maneuvers and the actual boarding of the train and going toward San Francisco.

Rea: Right.

Marcello: Is there any particular reason why you got married at that time? Other than the usual emotional reasons?

Rea: That's the only reason I knew. We just thought it was time for us to get married, and we wanted to. My intention was to bring her down to Brownwood, which there were some that had brought their wives down there. We thought we were going to be there for some time after that.

Marcello: And as you also mentioned a while ago, when the men over twenty-seven had the opportunity to get out of the unit, their ranks were then filled with people from the 1st Battalion, is that correct?

Rea: True.

Marcello: And this is how you got from the 1st Battalion into the 2nd Battalion. Was this voluntary, or were you ordered

into the 2nd Battalion?

Rea: That's another situation that . . . some of us volunteered, and some did not. I remember the lieutenant that interviewed me on it, and he asked me if I wanted to go. I said, "No, sir, I do not want to go."

Marcello: Now were you married at that point?

Rea: Yes, sir, I was married at that point. He asked me why, and I said, "Well, I just got married, and I'd rather not be separated from my wife."

Marcello: Did you know that the 2nd Battalion's destination was PLUM at that time, that is, at the time of this interview?

Rea: Not definitely. They said they was going to make up the 2nd Battalion out of the 1st Battalion to make it . . .

Marcello: Bring it up to full strength again.

Rea: Full strength, yes.

Marcello: Okay, so you told this lieutenant who was interviewing you that you didn't want to be transferred and that you were not going to volunteer. So what happened at that point?

Rea: I told him that I did not want to go. He still lives in Plainview, Texas, today, and he's a good friend of mine. When I started to leave, he said, "Thank you for volunteering." And I said, "Don't put it down that I volunteered because I am definitely not volunteering." I said, "If I'm forced to go--I have no alternative other than that--I'll go along with it." But there were lots of days--

the few days that was between that time until we were actually put on the train to go to San Francisco--that the thoughts came strong in my mind of saying that I just want to get up and go home and leave it. But I knew what the consequences would be possibly if I did that, so I thought, "Well, I'll hang on."

Marcello: What were the rumors and scuttlebutt going around as to what PLUM stood for or as to what the destination was? Do you recall?

Rea: The only thing we had was that we was going to San Francisco, and we didn't know where PLUM was from there.

Marcello: Did you have any opportunity to go home and visit with your wife prior to heading for San Francisco?

Rea: Yes, I went home after we found out we was going overseas and spent the weekend with her. I think I had probably a week's furlough that we were together. And then I made arrangements for her to come to Brownwood and stay down there until we were sent over. She was staying with another of the men in our unit. His wife was down there, and they were staying together. And the morning we left on the train, she and this couple was supposed to have met me and see me off on the train. This was Travis Luttrick and his wife. He was the corporal in my gun section. But the vehicle he had then was an old Model A, and he got up that morning and had a flat on it, and they didn't

get it fixed in time to make the train before we left.

Marcello: That must have been a rather sad experience for you.

Rea: It was a sad experience. That's when I thought, "Well, AWOL's the word for me." (chuckle) But my second thoughts again were, "Well, this is not the way to do it."

Marcello: I don't know if this is the proper sequence to ask this question or not, but as you look back upon everything that happened to you from that point forward, would you still have gotten married prior to going overseas.

Rea: Yes, I certainly would have.

Marcello: Again, this is perhaps jumping ahead of our story, but was that perhaps one of the things that ultimately helped pull you through this ordeal?

Rea: I think it was one of the main things because I always had this expression in mind when hard times hit and doubts came along. I said it several times that I told my wife I'd be seeing her.

Marcello: Well, we'll probably talk more about this later on, but just in case I didn't ask the question I wanted get it in at that point.

So you board this train, and you're on your way toward San Francisco. I guess this is about as far away from home as most everybody in the unit had ever been before.

Rea: Definitely for me it was.

Marcello: Was this a rather uneventful train trip from Brownwood to

San Francisco, or was there anything out of the ordinary that happened that you would like to get as part of the record?

Rea: Well, nothing happened. We just boarded the train, and there were stops along the way. There was nothing particular that I saw.

Marcello: How did you occupy your time?

Rea: As best I recall, we'd be reading, and then we'd be playing cards. If there was any money in the bunch, some of them would be playing poker (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, you get to San Francisco, and I think you're put up at Angel Island for a short period of time. I don't think anything really happened in a military sense there at Angel Island, did it? In other words, you didn't undergo any training or anything of that nature?

Rea: Nothing at all except just the preparation of the shipment of our belongings that came along. I recall that there was two men out of the A Battery that was supposed to have gone with us. Their lockers came along with the shipment to San Francisco, but in some way or another they never did get the information that they were supposed to be in the unit. So they weren't there even though their belongings was there. But the two that didn't make it was still attached to this unit.

Marcello: Now when you were transferred out of A Battery, into which

battery did you go?

Rea: Well, we went in the alphabetical form. A Battery went to D Battery. You see, A, B, and C was in the 1st Battalion, and then D, E, and F was in the 2nd Battalion. A Battery went to D Battery; B Battery went to E Battery; and C Battery went to F Battery.

Marcello: So you were now in D Battery.

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Of the 2nd Battalion.

Rea: 2nd Battalion.

Marcello: Okay, you didn't stay in San Francisco too long. Incidentally, did you get a chance to go in to San Francisco and see the sights?

Rea: Yes, I went in one weekend. We rode a ferry from Angel Island into San Francisco, and when we were out, we went by Alcatraz. There were some of the personnel on the ferry, I guess, that had business there, or maybe they were personnel that worked at Alcatraz. They docked there at the Alcatraz at one time. I think I actually made two trips into San Francisco.

Marcello: I gather that at that time nobody had too much money. You hadn't been paid.

Rea: No, we hadn't. And the pay was real big then, too--\$21 a month (sarcastic remark).

Marcello: Okay, on November 21, 1941, you boarded the USS Republic

on the first leg of your journey overseas. As I recall, there were other units aboard the Republic besides the 131st Field Artillery. I think the 26th Bombardment Group was also aboard. Anyway, the Republic must have been rather crowded.

Rea: It was. It was a big ship. And the first experience at sea was one we'll all remember.

Marcello: Do you want to describe that?

Rea: Yes. When we first got on the ship, the departments was all open; the doors to them was all open while it was in dock. And you could go from area to area pretty easy through the doors that they eventually closed after we got underway at sea. And for the first four or five hours, everybody was out on deck and happy as could be.

And then we begin to hit the land swells, and the ship began to roll and take some pretty heavy movement. And some of us, being up on deck while they were closing those doors to where we knew our way to get to our sleeping quarters, had difficulty in finding where we was supposed to go. I remember it took me quite some time. But the problem we had at that time, I think, was mainly the amount of food that we had been given or which was served for Thanksgiving dinner at Angel Island, which was the day before we loaded on the ship. We were all very well-fed there with the richest food, I guess,

Thanksgiving could bring about. And this was partly the thing that caused us all to get so terribly seasick, I guess.

Marcello: You included?

Rea: Me included (laughter). But I believe 85 percent of us that were seasick within five hours after we got underway.

Marcello: I gather those sleeping quarters weren't too habitable as a result of all the seasickness.

Rea: No, they weren't (chuckle). You'd go to a drinking fountain, and you didn't want to drink any water, I'll guarantee you, because they were all sick, and anyplace they felt like they could "lose it" without being all over everything, that's where it was.

Marcello: I also gather the Navy didn't help by serving cabbage that first day or whatever. Do you recall that?

Rea: Yes, I do. The cabbage odor, I think, had as much effect on us as the seasickness did because being sick at your stomach and then getting that odor from cooked cabbage added to the sickness, I think.

Marcello: Up until this point then, there were several rather ominous events that had occurred. You mentioned that you had already been taken prisoner-of-war, in a sense, during that mock battle in Louisiana; you had been "volunteered" for transfer into the 2nd Battalion; and now your voyage wasn't getting off to a very good start as a result of the

seasickness.

Be that as it may, you first land in Honolulu, and you get there on November 28, 1941. It took you a week to go from San Francisco to Honolulu, so I gather that the Republic wasn't exactly a fast-moving ship.

Rea: I think its maximum speed was nine knots.

Marcello: I gather that most of the people received at least some few hours of shore leave once they got to Honolulu. I believe most everybody got about four hours. Did you manage to get ashore while you were in Honolulu?

Rea: Yes, I went ashore for a very short time. But, as you mentioned earlier, there had been no pay, so there wasn't very much that we could do--only just go and look.

Marcello: Did you notice whether or not Honolulu seemed to be on a wartime footing at that time? Did you notice anything out of the ordinary in terms of military preparedness?

Rea: Not to my knowledge.

Marcello: So you get back aboard the ship once again, and you're still on your way toward PLUM, which, as we know today, was the Philippine Islands, where you were to help form a new Army division. On December 7, 1941, you, of course, received word of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. Describe, first of all, how you received that news.

Rea: The first we had of the knowledge of Pearl Harbor was that we were ordered to go into the hold of the ship and

get out all of our equipment, including our helmets, our guns. I think we actually took some of the 75-millimeter guns and sat them on the deck of the USS Republic, buckled them down to where they could be fired from the deck of the USS Republic.

Marcello: Did you receive the news over a PA system after you had been assembled, or how did this come about? Do you recall?

Rea: It came in formation through our commanding officers.

Marcello: What were your reaction and the reactions of your buddies once you had received this news?

Rea: Well, of course, we were all very nervous about it. I was very nervous about it due to the fact that I never had been a water lover. And in preparing for--it came later--the event that the ship was sunk by a torpedo or what, we went through, in practice, the abandon ship drill. And I'll never forget that in the formation I was the last one that was supposed to leave the ship, and my responsibility was to take an ax and chop the rope in two that released the lifeboat.

Marcello: At this particular time, did you and your buddies feel that this was going to be a relatively short war?

Rea: Yes, I think that was in our minds.

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

Rea: Slant eyes, brown complexion, small person.

Marcello: Did you more or less look upon the typical Japanese as being an inferior, so to speak?

Rea: Not particularly.

Marcello: At this time, the Republic was actually part of a convoy, was it not? There were several ships in this convoy.

Rea: Yes, there was a Dutch freighter which we later on went to Java in, which was the Bloemfontein. And there was another ship that the . . . I don't know whether it was the . . . it was still another part of an artillery unit on this other ship. And there was an escort of some kind. I think the USS Houston was in our escort for a while.

Marcello: The Pensacola, I know, was in your escort.

Rea: Well, it could have been at that time.

Marcello: Okay, so you take a zigzag course, so to speak, and obviously you're no longer on your way to the Philippines because the Japanese had hit the Philippines almost simultaneously with the attack at Pearl Harbor. You put into Suva in the Fiji Islands, and I think you only stopped there very briefly for fresh supplies.

Rea: That's right.

Marcello: Did you get off the ship there?

Rea: No, sir.

Marcello: Okay, you get back aboard, and now you're on your way toward Brisbane, Australia. You land there on December 21, 1941.

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you get to Brisbane?

Rea: We unloaded off of the USS Republic and were put up into an Australian racetrack.

Marcello: Ascott?

Rea: Ascott. And they had small tents around the perimeter of the racetrack, and that was our living quarters. But the main thing that I remember most distinctly is that we were supposed to have been in Australia at least two days earlier than we were, and they had mutton stew that had been cooking for two days in open-fire pots outside. And that was a meal that I could not take. I never did like mutton, but that was definitely one meal that I just couldn't eat. So I just did without.

Marcello: I gather that the unit did not undergo any type of training or anything of that nature here in Brisbane. It was just a transient station.

Rea: Right. The last orders that we had, actually, after we . . . well, we stayed for about five days in that area. Then there was word that we would stay there. Then there was other word that came, and they took us back to the ship which they were preparing--this Dutch freighter. They had to make some corrections in the latrine facilities and so on. They were building that during this time and setting up a open-air kitchen out on deck.

Then they loaded our unit--the 2nd Battalion--on the ship. And we were supposed to have . . . my thinking was --and the scuttlebutt come down to me--that after we had been aboard ship, orders came through that we were to unload off of the Bloemfontein and remain in Australia as quartermaster troops for our oncoming troops into Australia. Well, due to the fact that the freight and so on that was coming on to the ship had a lot of rum in it, that some of our men and the Australians had brought to them and so on, there were several of our men that got intoxicated on that rum and were not capable of walking back to the tents. So they chose to keep us on the ship overnight. And when I woke the next morning, thinking that we'd get off the ship, we was sailing up the bay.

Marcello: Backing up just a moment, what sort of reception did you receive from the Australians when you landed there in Brisbane?

Rea: It was quite a reception. I remember kids on the side of the road when we were marching from where we unloaded off the USS Republic to this racetrack. And I can't call the name of it again.

Marcello: Ascott.

Rea: Ascott. The kids were walking along there, and they was making a remark, "Do you have any cents? Do you have any cents?" That was their speaking of the penny, you know.

In Australia, I never did learn to deal with their money there.

Marcello: Did you receive an invitation to spend Christmas dinner in one of the homes of the Australians? I know that this happened to some of the people in the unit.

Rea: As an individual, I did not.

Marcello: There's another thing that seems to strike the attention of the men in the unit, and that was the fact that there seemed to be a lack of young men in Brisbane at that time. Did you notice it?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Evidently, they were, of course, all overseas fighting, mainly in the Mid-East, I guess, or else at Singapore or wherever.

Rea: Well, I'm not sure, but I think they were under the British rule at that time, and Britain had gone to war with Germany. I'm sure the Australians was part of that activity.

Marcello: Okay, so you board the Bloemfontein, and now you're on your way from Brisbane to Surabaya, Java, in the Dutch East Indies. Did anything eventful happen on the voyage from Brisbane to Surabaya?

Rea: Not that I recall, of any outstanding thing.

Marcello: Some people refer to a submarine scare. Do you recall it?

Rea: Well, since you brought it up, it seems like there was. We had watches that was mainly to be on the lookout for

periscopes that might be protruding out of the ocean. And I think there was possibly some rumor that there was some spotted, but as far as actually seeing anything, I did not.

Marcello: I guess New Year would have been spent aboard the Bloemfontein on that voyage.

Rea: Yes. Incidentally, this is where I became interested in the barber work. To back up a little bit, when we were on the USS Republic, we crossed the equator, and we had what we called the "equator initiation." And one of the initiation things was that they took a pair of old hand clippers and just dug into our scalps and cut the hair off, you know, in just spots and patches. And while we were on the Bloemfontein, or even still on the Republic, some of them decided that we could take a pair of scissors and a comb and kind of improve the looks of the hair a little bit. I came to be the one that could do the best job, so I started doing it on several. And this was the beginning of my barber work (chuckle).

Marcello: And we'll be talking about this later on, also, I gather, when we get you up into the jungle and so on.

Rea: Right.

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

Rea: Our unit is taken from Surabaya up to a camp at Malang, Java.

Marcello: Now Malang is the town, and the actual camp is Singosari, isn't that correct?

Rea: I think that's right.

Marcello: How did you get from Surabaya to Singosari?

Rea: The first trip we made was by train at night. We came from Surabaya by train, and I don't recall just exactly how we got out to the camp. It seemed like the Dutch government had their trucks there that they carried us out to camp.

Marcello: And I gather that you had no idea what you were doing in Java. You had not been told anything.

Rea: No.

Marcello: Was there any griping or scuttlebutt or rumors as to why you were in Java?

Rea: Not at the time. We later learned that we were there as a decoy to draw the Japanese activity, or a fleet of Japanese ships, into Java.

Marcello: Rather than toward Australia?

Rea: Right.

Marcello: Okay, describe what Singosari looked like from a physical standpoint. Describe the base in terms of your quarters and the other physical installations.

Rea: This evidently had been a Dutch Army camp at one time. They had wood frame buildings with tile roofs. I guess you'd say it was a summer area or a kind of a summer re-

sort. It wasn't real hot, and it wasn't real cold. But all the buildings were open-air. They had doors on them, but they had louvers in them, in other words, to keep the rain out, I guess. But the buildings were not as we know them, where we'd close them up to keep the air out of them. They were open-air. They had tile floors. There was a paved area around in the camp there. It was real nice quarters.

Marcello: Were you living in a barracks, so to speak, that is, was there a large group of men within the sleeping quarters?

Rea: Yes. I recall the barracks would probably accommodate twenty-five to thirty people in the unit.

Marcello: Had you been issued mosquito nets or anything of that nature by this time?

Rea: Yes, we had been issued mosquito nets, and I believe we were given army cots with a straw mattress on it. They were so constructed to where you could tie a mosquito net at the head of the bed on a wire that ran along there that was tight enough to hold it. Of course, you could tie it on the back and tuck it under after you got in bed. It was very comfortable sleeping, and the mosquitoes didn't bother you at all.

Marcello: Had you received the usual shots and inoculations prior to this voyage overseas?

Rea: Yes, we had those before we left Camp Bowie.

- Marcello: Okay, what sort of activity does the unit undertake after it is settled in at Singosari? What do you do? For example, what do you do with your weapons . . . your heavy weapons?
- Rea: Well, I remember on January 11th, I believe it was, we had an air raid. And we had several of our 75-millimeter guns, which at that time had the split trail . . . the original old French 75 had a single trail on it. And these American 75's was much more maneuverable to where you could swing into different positions more rapidly. And they fired at some of these planes with the artillery guns. I don't recall whether there was any accuracy on it or not, but there was a bomb dropped that partially covered up one of our gun crews there in Singosari.
- Marcello: I also know that at the time you got to Singosari, the 19th Bomb Group was there. Isn't that correct? Or else they came in shortly thereafter.
- Rea: They came there from the Philippines, is my understanding.
- Marcello: Did they come after you arrived there, or were they actually there when you got there?
- Rea: I believe part of them were there when we got there.
- Marcello: Is it not true that some of the people in the unit served as ground crew for those bombers that came out of the Philippines, and, also, I believe, some of the men even volunteered to fly missions with those bombers.

Rea: They did. One particular person that lives in Plainview yet was one of them. I believe his name is Adrian Connally. He transferred into the Air Corps and was back in the United States on Christmas of 1941. They used our unit--the artillery trucks and so on--to haul supplies, and we actually went through the moving of bombs, bringing them in there to load the planes, hauling fuel for the planes. Some of them were assisting in the maintenance, I think, of the . . . I believe they were all B-17's, and, occasionally, I think there was a few P-38's that were there. I recall one time hearing about a dogfight, with some of the Zero fighters.

But it was a first experience of being under fire, and it's something you just can't describe.

Marcello: Well, why don't you try. According to my records--and I'm kind of contradicting something that you said earlier--the first raid occurred on February 3, 1942.

Rea: That's true because we landed in Java on January 11th.

Marcello: Okay, so describe this air raid. As you mentioned, this is an experience that I'm sure you'll never forget.

Rea: Well, at the airport there was a large siren. In size, to describe it, it'd be as big around as a fifty-five-gallon barrel. And that was the most mournful sound I've ever experienced, I believe. But this thing went off, and, of course, not having been through anything like that, we

didn't know what was coming. But in about five minutes, we did know, and Zero fighters were strafing the camp there in Singosari.

Marcello: Did they seem to be going after the planes rather than after personnel? Of course, maybe it didn't seem that way at the time to you (chuckle).

Rea: I'm not sure whether they had any planes on the ground at that time. But I recall that we left the camp area to take cover out in ditches out around there.

Marcello: So you had no trenches or anything dug at this time. You mentioned ditches, so I assume you had no trenches.

Rea: We had no trenches. Actually, we were caught unaware that this might happen, evidently. But this was the first experience that I recall of anybody saying anything about firearms. Of course, we were given orders that when we left out that we was supposed to keep our rifles with us. There was actually some of the guys that fired at the planes with a rifle.

Marcello: How long did this first raid last?

Rea: As best I remember, it was something like an hour.

Marcello: And was it just about entirely all Zeroes, or did high-level bombers come in after the Zeroes had done their work?

Rea: I think it was Zero fighters. Maybe the bomb that fell at that particular time was maybe a dive-bomber or something like that.

Marcello: What damage was done to the base? Now you mentioned that this one gun did get covered, more or less, as a result of this first raid. Was there any damage done to the buildings and the runways and things of that nature?

Rea: Yes, some of the buildings had some damage on them.

I recall one instance. It's rather amusing. There was one fellow in our unit that had gotten hold of a pet monkey. And I spoke about this wire that we tied the mosquito nets on. He had a chain on this monkey, and he had the length of that wire to travel from bunk to bunk in this thing. And we were issued these hemp pillows, which is a semi-cotton thing. During that raid, that monkey got excited and had the run of all the bunks. And when we came back into the barracks there, that monkey had strewn those pillows, and it looked like somebody had picked a thousand geese in there (chuckle). It was just everywhere. Everything was covered with the contents of the pillows.

Marcello: How many of these raids occurred off and on during this period? Do you recall?

Rea: I believe . . . well, I'd say eight or ten.

Marcello: Is it not true that after that first raid, you dug in those artillery pieces in such a manner that they would be able to shoot into the air at these airplanes?

Rea: True. This might have been when this occurrence happened--

when the crew was partly dazed from the bomb. I'm not sure exactly when it occurred, but I do know that this did happen.

Marcello: In subsequent air raids, were you subjected to actual bombing from high-altitude or high-level bombers? Or was it mainly always strafing that occurred?

Rea: Not in Java, I don't think. There might have been some, but I don't recall too much.

Marcello: In other words, it was mainly all strafing there at Singosari.

Rea: Now I take it back. Being a truck driver, as I was, our unit was used to transport the warheads and so on that was put on the planes. And I recall one time that I was sent . . . there was three of us, I believe, that was sent back to Surabaya to pick up supplies, these warheads. We had a bombing raid while we were on that trip. I remember leaving my truck setting on the side of the road with those warheads loaded on my truck. I left the truck, and (chuckle) if it hit it, it wouldn't get me.

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

Rea: Not entirely, no. You got to where you had more control of your body then you did to begin with because at the beginning we couldn't control them. We were so excited.

Marcello: As a result of all these air raids, things eventually become untenable for the 19th Bomb Group, and it leaves on

February 27, 1942. What do you recall about the departure of the 19th Bomb Group? I guess what I'm saying in effect is, how did it affect the morale of those that had to remain behind? By this time, I'm sure you knew that things were getting a little serious.

Rea: Yes, we did. Of course, we'd all have liked to have left there, and we were kind of sorry that we didn't volunteer so we'd be flown out of there. But they only took those that had transferred into the unit.

Marcello: Nevertheless, did you feel that you would be evacuated by the United States Navy or somebody very shortly?

Rea: I think it was the attitude that we had a short stay regardless.

Marcello: So what happened to the 2nd Battalion once the 19th Bomb Group has departed?

Rea: Well, the intensity of the war became worse.

Marcello: And you evacuated the base the next day, did you not? I think the 19th Bomb Group went out on the 27th, and you evacuated on the 28th.

Rea: Yes. We were called into action and our . . . well, E Battery was sent back to Surabaya, I believe, and we never see them anymore from the time that we left there.

Marcello: So what did the other remaining units do at that point then?

Rea: We stayed together as a unit. But at the time we were preparing for action, they advised us to take what we could

put in one barracks bag--as supplies--with us. Evidently, they were thinking that we'd come back to our quarters there at Singosari. But this didn't happen because I recall that I had bought some stuff to send back home, and it was in my footlocker there, and I never did see it anymore.

Marcello: I gather that from this point forward, certainly right up to the time of the surrender, that the unit was constantly on the move.

Rea: Yes, I think that was the secret of the whole thing--to leave the impression there was more personnel there than there actually was. The particular unit I was in, I recall, had about three or four trucks with maybe one or two of them with a two-wheel trailer behind it with a tarp over it. We'd go into a town late of an evening, and we had permits through the Dutch government where we'd gas up our units. But everytime we stopped anyplace to gas up, why, there'd always be somebody coming around asking questions: "How many American personnel is there on the island?" When they approached me, I never did say anything.

Marcello: Were these native Javanese who were asking these questions?

Rea: The ones I recall were well-dressed. I took them to be educated people. And it is my thinking that they were probably spies trying to get information.

Marcello: But were they Javanese or Dutch or Orientals of some type?

Rea: Most of them were a cross between the Dutch and the Java-

nese, I think.

Marcello: What contact do you have with other Allied contingents while you're making these moves around the island?

Rea: English and Australian. They had some units there.

Marcello: I gather that some of the units did provide artillery support for the Australians. Do you recall any of that activity?

Rea: I think there were some areas where they did, but my particular unit did not.

Marcello: I've also read that because so many Japanese landed--and I've seen figures that as high as 40,000 Japanese troops landed--that they were continually outflanking you and getting behind you. This is another reason why you had to keep moving, that is, to keep from being surrounded and ultimately annihilated, I guess. Anyway, during all this moving, you really don't see too many Japanese, do you?

Rea: No, sir. It was rather hard to distinguish whether they were Japanese or who they were if they were dressed, you know, similar because the Javanese looked much like the Japanese.

Marcello: Okay, on March 8, 1942, the word comes down that the island has capitulated, and you are to surrender. How did you receive the word, and what was your reaction when you heard that this was the situation?

Rea: Well, our commanding officer at that time was Colonel Tharp from Amarillo, Texas, and he called the unit together. I believe he might have informed the battery officers, and then they got their units together and informed us. But, anyway, the word came down that the island had capitulated, and we were to surrender our equipment. Again, I can't recall the name of the racetrack where we lined it all up.

Marcello: Garoet.

Rea: Garoet. But it was close to the capital.

Marcello: Batavia?

Rea: No.

Marcello: Bandung?

Rea: I can't think of the name of it. Anyway, this racetrack was just a little ways from there, and we just circled the track with all of our unit.

Marcello: What was your reaction or your emotions when you heard that the unit had capitulated? You really hadn't seen that much action.

Rea: Not really. Up to this time--well, this time or any other time--I never fired that rifle that I was issued. I almost did at one time. We were sitting on the side of the road, and some personnel came up and was looking over the unit and something or another. And when I came back to the truck, being the only one around the truck at that

time, this one particular person started running. I recall taking the rifle out of the scabbard, which was tied on the side of the truck, and leveling down on him, but I never did pull the trigger.

Marcello: So, again, what was your reaction now that you were in essence becoming a prisoner-of-war?

Rea: The first thought I had was to remove all identification as to what my capabilities was. So, being a truck driver, I took the government-issued truck driver's license out of my pocket and destroyed it. Some of the personnel did not do that even while we were still there in the area of this racetrack. They came in and got some drivers that we never did hear of for quite some time. Some of them I never saw until after we were liberated. I don't know what they did. I never have questioned any of them exactly.

Marcello: Did you have any amount of fear as to what was going to happen to you?

Rea: Well, naturally, we had fear that we didn't know what the future held for us.

Marcello: What were the rumors going around so far as the Japanese attitude toward prisoners-of-war?

Rea: Well, there was all kinds of rumors because they said that we'd be put before a firing squad. Others said that we'd be taken prisoner-of-war and these various things.

Actually, for about four or five days, there just

wasn't anything--no activity. We moved from that area and kind of took our pup tents and built a little, so to speak, camp area and down close to a river where we could cook and sleep there. Eventually, they came in and gave us orders, and they took us from there and loaded us on a train and took us into Batavia.

Marcello: You did not go to a tea plantation in the meantime?

Rea: Right. We did go by truck up there in our unit--up to a plantation--and we stayed there for, oh, a couple of . . . well, I don't know whether it was two weeks or what. As I recall from there, there was a volcano back in the southeast area that you could see every once in a while that'd gush up the smoke out of it. It was active part of the time.

Marcello: Upon surrender, what did you do with your artillery pieces and so on?

Rea: The artillery units, itself, as far as I know, remained right there on the racetrack.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying in effect is, were those pieces destroyed or rendered useless to the Japanese or anything of that nature?

Rea: I don't have any knowledge what happened to the 75-millimeter guns. The last activity I had with the motorized units was moving a jeep to an area down close to where we were taken from there to Batavia. But at the time we

surrendered, we had some Dutch equipment. In other words, the officers were issued a civilian car. They drained the oil out of those and started the motor and let them burn up.

Marcello: Did you surrender your Springfield rifle intact?

Rea: Yes . . . well, I say I did. I don't recall whether we took the firing pin out of them or what.

Marcello: While you were at Garoet, how much contact did you actually have with Japanese there?

Rea: The only thing that I actually remember is that this Japanese officer who was in command came in and was talking with Colonel Tharp, and his first question was, "Where is the rest of your unit?" The rumor was that there was 40,000 American troops there. And he said, "Where are all these people?" Colonel Tharp said, "This is all I have." But that evidently was the reason why we were moving around over the island in small units--to lead them to believe there was lots of units there.

Marcello: What thoughts did you have about heading for the hills or trying to make it for the coast and get off the island?

Rea: There was lots of talk about it at one time. Some of them tried it. Well, I believe Colonel Searle was the . . .

Marcello: Colonel Searle?

Rea: Yes. He was the senior grade officer who was with us. He even, I believe, had seniority over Colonel Tharp.

Marcello: And he was with the 26th Brigade, wasn't he?

Rea: Right. I think he and his driver and one or two more tried to make it to the coast where they could get off the island. Actually, after this particular time, I never did see Colonel Searle. I don't recall seeing him after that.

Marcello: Is it not true that by this time the attitude of the native Javanese had also changed.

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: They were not nearly so friendly as they had once been.

Rea: No, they kind of went with the Japanese because they were in command--they were in control. This is true with those people over there: "Whoever can give me the most is who I'll follow."

Marcello: Now you mention that you remain there at Garoet for just a short period of time, and you're not harassed or anything of that nature. Then from there you move up to this tea plantation. What did you do at the tea plantation?

Rea: Nothing in particular, only just get a little recreation, what little we could do there.

Marcello: So far, being a prisoner-of-war really wasn't too bad.

Rea: Wasn't too bad at all, no.

Marcello: Did you have your own vehicles?

Rea: We had some of them.

Marcello: And I assume that you were living off your own supplies.

Rea: Right.

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that, after being there for a short period of time, you are then moved once again. Describe the move from the tea plantation into your first actual POW camp, and, of course, we're referring to Tandjong Priok. Okay, describe this move from the tea plantation into Tandjong Priok as best you can remember.

Rea: The best I remember, they took us from the tea plantation to a railhead and put us on the train. As I said earlier, we were only allowed one barracks bag of clothing and supplies. And from the area where they took us off the train to where we had to march into the compound where they kept us for a while was quite a distance. And, of course, it was very hot, very uncomfortable. Several of the men then became exhausted trying to carry this and keep up with the group, and they just discarded their supplies--threw their barracks bags to the side and just went off and left them. Their supplies was gone; their clothing was gone. I was fortunate enough to be able to retain mine. And after we were in this area, those that had discarded their equipment didn't have any blankets or anything, so we kind of split up and shared those with one another.

Marcello: I understand it was also around this time where you experienced your first harassment from the Japanese soldiers. Do you recall any of the harassment that occurred on this

journey between the tea plantation and Tandjong Priok?

Rea: Well, this is the first time we'd actually saw any kind of pushing us around.

Marcello: Describe what these Japanese soldiers looked like, first of all. They were kind of scruffy-looking characters, weren't they?

Rea: Yes, they were. Some of them were wearing tennis shoes with the split toe in them and kind of a tight-legged pair of slacks or britches, a very loose-fitting shirt, and a little cap with a bill on it that . . . they had streamers, rag streamers, or something around the back. I guess this was to protect them from the sun or something. And all of them . . . I never did figure out just exactly what the content of this little bag was, but around their belt they had a little thing on a string just about that big and square (gesture). What that was in there, I don't know, but all of them was wearing it.

Marcello: In other words, it was about two inches high and maybe about three inches long.

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Was it something made out of leather or cloth?

Rea: Leather-covered. I don't know what the contents of it was.

Marcello: How big were they, or how small were they?

Rea: Well, the average one would strike you about shoulder-high . . . strike me about shoulder-high.

Marcello: I've heard some of the men say that they look rather comical with the rifle and a long bayonet on it.

Rea: Right. Some of them were smaller than others.

Marcello: What was some of the harassment that you saw being dealt out by the Japanese here.

Rea: Well, this is the first time that we really felt that they felt that they were superior over us. It seemed like they took pride in overpowering a big man. In other words, it really gave them pride to be able to walk up and abuse an American soldier and him not be able to strike back at them.

Marcello: What kind of abuse were they carrying out?

Rea: Mainly, slapping you or kicking your shins.

Marcello: And a lot of yelling, too, I guess.

Rea: Oh, yes, lots of yelling.

Marcello: Now did this occur while you were boarding the train, or was this mainly occurring on the march from the train into Tandjong Priok or both places?

Rea: Well, both places--anytime they were trying to get us to move faster.

Marcello: Were you subjected personally to any of this harassment?

Rea: No.

Marcello: Okay, so you move into Tandjong Priok. Describe what this camp looked like from a physical standpoint.

Rea: Well, actually, it looked more like a stable than anything

else. It was a building of some kind that looked like it'd been deserted. So we cleaned it out, and that was our sleeping quarters .

This is the first experience that we had with the diet that we were to get adjusted to, which was trashy rice, I'd say.

Marcello: We'll come back and talk about this in a moment. Let's describe some more about the camp. I gather there was also a barbed wire fence around this camp, is that correct?

Rea: That's true.

Marcello: What were the quarters like inside, that is, where you slept and all that sort of thing?

Rea: Well, they looked like they had either had animals in there or stored hay, and there was human excrement in areas of it.

Marcello: So you were simply sleeping on the floor then?

Rea: Right, a blanket in the floor, and there was your bed.

Marcello: Under these circumstances, what kind of military discipline is being maintained within the unit?

Rea: We were still in units at that time. Our officers was with us. We was just kind of trying to survive together and seeing what tomorrow brought.

Marcello: Were men still obeying their officers and things of this nature?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: How about such military formalities as saluting and so on,

that is, an American enlisted man saluting an American officer? Had that sort of thing ceased by this time-- by mutual agreement?

Rea: By mutual agreement it had, but we still honored our officers.

Marcello: Well, discipline was going to be a necessary ingredient for survival, was it not?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: And I guess you found that out very quickly or realized that very quickly?

Rea: Right. If you didn't agitate them, you got along with them a lot better. But if you did anything to agitate them on purpose, that's when you really got bashed. The best thing to do was to swallow your pride and let them know they were superior to you.

Marcello: Okay, you were talking about the food awhile ago, so let's get back on that subject. Describe what the food situation was like here at Tandjong Priok.

Rea: Evidently, it was the first time that the cooks in our unit had any experience with rice, and they had no idea of how to prepare it. The first meal, I recall, was fixed like we would normally fix rice in a cereal here--kind of a porridge-type. And they were given these big ol' copper quarries. It was a big, pot-looking thing that you cooked the rice in by putting wood under it to heat the water.

And it was very trashy. I don't know where they got the supplies, but this was our first experience with the rice diet.

Marcello: When you say the rice was "trashy," can you elaborate?

Rea: Well, when they put it in to cook it, they poured the rice in there and had to skim off the bugs and trash and so on on the top of it and throw it out . . . even cockroaches. There was a worm in there that had kind of a web around it, and you might have one of those.

Marcello: About how big were these worms?

Rea: Oh, some of them was an inch, an inch-and-a-half long.

Marcello: And even after you were served the rice, I'm sure that you would have to go through it and make sure that there were no more of these critters in there.

Rea: That's true. But the first meal they served us was, as I said, this cereal-type, porridge-type, that they cooked. They cooked it into a kind of a mush, and it had the taste of a gunny sack. And it sure didn't help the diet any at all.

Marcello: Did you eat it at that time?

Rea: Not too much of it. They issued us kind of an ol' chunk of bread, it seems to me like, that you could trim off some of it. Then they had some aged cheese that was kind of like a Limburger cheese. It was green on the outside, but you could trim all that off and eat the cheese inside of it.

Marcello: Did you still have any company supplies at this time yet?

Rea: Not being in the kitchen area at that time, I didn't know.
I don't remember.

Marcello: Were you being fed a sufficient amount of food here in terms of quantity?

Rea: No.

Marcello: In other words, you were already on a reduced diet.

Rea: That's true. After some of them refused to eat the rice, there was plenty of what was there if they wanted to go back for seconds.

Marcello: What sort of work details did you go on here at Tandjong Priok?

Rea: They were mainly working us on the docks--taking us to the waterfront and working us there.

Marcello: What kind of work would you be doing there at the docks?

Rea: It was mainly moving crates of stuff. I don't know what the contents of it was, whether it was military or what, but it was crated stuff.

Marcello: Were these work details voluntary, or were you assigned to them?

Rea: To begin with they were voluntary, but eventually they started coming in saying, "We want so many men." They'd take them out under a Japanese guard or maybe two or three.

Marcello: Would there usually be an officer who would accompany one of these work details, that is, an American officer?

Rea: Yes, he was in charge of the work detail.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what his function would be.

Rea: Well, he just kind of was the, like we'd say here, foreman of the working crew.

Marcello: I guess he was the go-between, was he not, between the Japanese and the enlisted personnel?

Rea: That's true.

Marcello: Was there ever any resentment at this early time about officers not working?

Rea: There possibly could have been some with some of the personnel, but I never heard any remarks about it from the ones that I was with in particular.

Marcello: I understand that some people wanted to go on the work details because there were opportunities to supplement your diet. In other words, you could steal things.

Rea: That's true. There was one particular time, too, I remember, while we were here at this area. There was a case of whiskey or alcohol of some kind that was found on the docks. And there was one of the personnel that I was with who had an Australian can which had a porcelain . . . you know, all of our canteens were aluminum. But he'd come in possession of an Australian canteen that was porcelainized inside and out, and he took this whiskey or whatever it was out of the bottle, poured it into his canteen, and dropped it down in the water there on the waterfront. He

hid it there until we were going back to camp. He got back to camp that night, and he started to hitting it pretty heavy.

And there was one of our men in the group that had been bothered with rheumatoid arthritis. His name was Harold Sewell, and he's also from Plainview, Texas. And this particular person, which his name was Sickels, became interested in getting this fellow up and walking him for exercise--that'd be doing him good. After he'd come under the influence of alcohol, he proceeded to do that. The rest of us around him decided that he was putting a little too much force on him, so we took over for the young man that had the problem.

And I remember a big fellow--his name was Russell--from Wichita Falls. After this ol' boy became so unruly that nobody could handle him, he just backed off and just caught him one on the "button" and dropped him like he was shot (laughter).

Marcello: What was the conduct of the Japanese like on these work details?

Rea: If they walked up and asked you to do something and you hesitated, this riled them real quick; if you were hesitant in doing something that they wanted you to do immediately, this irritated them. Back talk . . . if you talked back to them or indicated that you didn't want to do something,

this irritated them. If they caught you in stealing anything, this irritated them real red. They really would take after you then.

Incidentally, talking about this guy being under the influence of the alcohol, he was a very bold person, and he got abuse that no one else did due to the fact that he asked for it.

Marcello: What sort of conduct were you expected to perform in the presence of the Japanese, whether we're talking about a common, ordinary foot soldier or a Japanese officer?

Rea: Anytime that one came around, you was supposed to bow to him, whether he was a one-star, two-star, a colonel, or whatever.

Marcello: Was the bowing done inside or outside or both?

Rea: Anywhere you came in his presence. When he made his appearance, then you was supposed to bow.

Marcello: Was this humiliating to you and your buddies?

Rea: Yes, it was, especially if some of them just prided in doing that to you, making you do that.

Marcello: Did you ever have to salute?

Rea: Yes, in the barracks.

Marcello: I guess if they were covered, that is, if they had a hat on or something, then did you salute? Was this the usual procedure?

Rea: Not our salute. We just had to bow to them.

- Marcello: I understand that it also was not good sense to try and get too close to any of these guards, that is, to try and become friends with any of them.
- Rea: Well, there was some that did, but I stayed my distance from them. If I could get by without having anything to do with them, that's what I did. I just left them alone.
- Marcello: And you learned this quite early?
- Rea: Yes. But I found out real early that, in the circumstances we was under, it looked like there was no gain in resisting their commands, so I went along with them.
- Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago, and I just want to pursue it one step farther. I gather a lot of times the bashing occurred because the prisoners asked for it.
- Rea: That's true. Yes.
- Marcello: In other words, the Japanese laid down certain rules and regulations. You knew what happened if you would break them. And the Japanese didn't bluff.
- Rea: No. I think the Japanese control of their personnel was through fear.
- Marcello: You noticed that physical punishment was a way of life in the Japanese Army, too.
- Rea: That's true. That's right. So they carried that to us. Fear was what they counted on as keeping things under control. It didn't make any difference in their ranks whether it was a one-star, two-star, or three-star, which is their

privates, you know, classification or rank. A two-star could just work the other one over, and he just had to stiffen up and take it. A three-star can work over the two-star. If you got on up, it didn't make any difference. If he was a step higher than the other one, and if there was any discipline, he proceeded to administer discipline, and they just had to stand there and take it.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that if the prisoners observed an officer catching hell for something, by the time the day was over, it was going to filter all the way down through the ranks until it got to the prisoners.

Rea: That's right.

Marcello: Everybody had to save face.

Rea: That seemed to be their thinking--that if I catch it, somebody else below me is going to catch it, too.

Marcello: What were your bathing facilities like here at Tandjong Priok?

Rea: Concrete tub with water in it. You use your canteen cups to dip it out and pour it over you.

Marcello: So the bathing facilities were quite limited?

Rea: Yes, very limited.

Marcello: Could you bathe, more or less, whenever you had an opportunity?

Rea: No, it was certain hours, certain times.

Marcello: How about the latrine facilities? What were they like?

- Rea: I don't know whether that was the time that they dug holes and put pipes in it that you, you know, urinate in. It seemed like it was there for a period of time that we had that. Then there was some of them that had slit trenches that we had to dig ourselves.
- Marcello: I gather that the work really wasn't that difficult here at Tandjong Priok.
- Rea: Not as much as it eventually got to be.
- Marcello: Now you arrived at Tandjong Priok on March 31, 1942, and you left there on May 14, 1942. So you weren't there much over two months . . . not quite two months. Is there anything else from your stay at Tandjong Priok that you think we need to talk about and get as part of the record? We've talked the guards and the food and your quarters and the other types of facilities there. Is there anything else that stands out in your mind about Tandjong Priok?
- Rea: Yes, there was one incident. I guess it was something that was a personal thing to me. As I spoke of earlier, about making this march, carrying all these barracks bags and it being so hot, I developed a rash in the pubic area around in my body, and it became very, very irritated. And I went to the doctor, and he gave me . . . I think it was just pure iodine.
- Marcello: Was this Dr. Lumpkin?
- Rea: Lumpkin, yes. He said, "Just paint yourself with that all

over." Of course, this breaking out had become very tacky, sticky, and mucus was running from it. And I remember just pouring that on me, and it did blister. It just blistered me. I took a little cloth then and spread it. And if I've ever seen anything that was liquid fire, that was liquid fire. But, fortunately, this was what I needed, I guess. I got over it to where I could live with it, but I came back with some of that still on my body.

Marcello: At least, at this particular time yet, the doctor and the medics did have at least a limited supply of some of the more standard medications?

Rea: Evidently, they were allowed to keep this together and maybe a vehicle for it to be transported in. I'm not sure just exactly how it worked, but they did have supplies at this time.

Marcello: As I pointed out a while ago, on May 14, 1942, you were moved from Tandjong Priok to Bicycle Camp. You probably weren't too unhappy to leave Tandjong Priok, were you?

Rea: No, we weren't. That was a very bad place--one of the worst places we stayed, outside of the jungle, I think.

Marcello: Bicycle Camp wasn't too far from Tandjong Priok, was it?

Rea: Not too far. I don't remember whether we were transported by truck or whether we walked there. But, anyway, it was quite a change from what we'd been living under in this other place.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint. And, again, I'm referring to the grounds and your barracks and quarters and so on.

Rea: Well, it was similar to the area that we were at when we first got into Java. It was a little different. It was a compound that had barracks, long barracks, all the way through. And there was a section that divided, say, the center of it, and there was a cross-hallway and a hallway down the center. It was a wood frame building with a tile roof on it. The best I remember, there was porches on one side of it, and some of the men slept . . . their sleeping quarters was there. Their bunks were there.

Marcello: Now were you in large areas inside this barracks, or were there cubicles, or was it subdivided in any way?

Rea: There was areas. The kitchen was down at the north end of it. There was barracks down in there, warehouses next to it, and storage places. There was an area out in front where the guards stayed all the time--a building for that. And there was a barracks on either side of the main street in there. Eventually, we finally started to having entertainment after we got there, and there was a large area with a stage. I don't know whether it was there originally or whether we constructed it or what. But, anyway, we had quite outstanding entertainment there for a time.

Marcello: I gather that the British were great at putting on these

stage shows and so on.

Rea: Yes, they were. They put it together pretty good. But in Bicycle Camp there weren't any British with us. It was all an American group there, mostly. There were some Australian; not many, in the compound with us.

Marcello: What were your bathing and latrine facilities like here at Bicycle Camp?

Rea: Well, it was quite a change from what we were accustomed to where we moved from. It was better facilities . . . where you could have a shower. The bathroom facilities was a hole in the floor with a place for your feet to be on, and you'd jump up. The water was running through it all the time . . . water circulating all the time.

Marcello: In other words, these were the Dutch-style latrines.

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Could you take a daily shower here at Bicycle Camp?

Rea: Yes, you could take a shower.

Marcello: What did you use for soap and things of that nature?

Rea: Well, whatever they gave us. Mainly, it was a soap that was . . . evidently, they made it there. It came in about a inch square bar, and it was maybe twelve, fourteen inches long. We'd get so many of those. They'd just chop it off and dish it out to us.

Marcello: So the Japanese did issue you soap here?

Rea: Yes.

- Marcello: When you arrived at Bicycle Camp, the survivors off the USS Houston were already there. Describe what their condition was like and what you did to help them.
- Rea: They were already in Bicycle Camp. Of course, as they abandoned ship, they didn't have any of their supplies left at all. They had been issued some clothing and so on by the Japanese. But when we came in there, most of us had retained all of our blankets and so on, so we shared ours with them. Some of them had been there for some time, and they didn't even have any blankets.
- Marcello: Was this generosity a spontaneous thing? In other words, did you have to be ordered to do it, or did you . . .
- Rea: No, we did it.
- Marcello: You did it right away.
- Rea: We did it on our own, yes. We shared. This is where we kind of started a buddy system, I think, one helping the other.
- Marcello: Describe this buddy system because I know that this is going to be very important later on when you get up into the jungle. Exactly how did this buddy system work, and what was the value of it?
- Rea: Well, as the time went on, we saw the necessity of kind of sharing together. The person that I particularly shared with was a young man from Chicago, Illinois. His name was Eichorst.

Marcello: He must have been off the Houston then.

Rea: No, he was a draftee. He came to us in Camp Bowie. We kind of shared things together. And I don't say it boastingly, but possibly he wouldn't have made it through if we hadn't been kind of buddying together.

Marcello: Is this something we'll talk about more when we get up into the jungle?

Rea: Jungle, yes.

Marcello: And his name was Eichorst?

Rea: William Eichorst. We called him "Bill," Bill Eichorst. He's a rather small man and Catholic in belief, and he adhered to the Catholic belief because on Sunday he fasted until he'd been to mass. And that's one thing they did. They always went to mass. As we got into Bicycle Camp, we started church services ourselves--on the sly.

Marcello: You say you started church services "on the sly." The Japanese would not allow you to have them at first?

Rea: Well, anytime there was a group together, they had a little suspicion of what might be going on. So they kind of veered away from encouraging that, and, you know, we had to kind of be on the secret with it. There'd be small groups of us.

Marcello: How well attended were the church services?

Rea: Not by all personnel, but there was several of us.

Marcello: How important was religion to be as a factor in survival?

Rea: To me it was very important because I always felt like

my prayers were being answered. And the same thing stood true with my wife. I prayed daily for our reunion, and she did, also.

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

Rea: The expression came from lots of them that, "I just can't stay. If it's another two weeks, I can't make it." This was the very early part of it. I remember there was one person in particular that was a large man. He weighed 230 pounds or in that area, and he never did accept the rice diet. He just thought he couldn't survive on that.

And after we got into Bicycle Camp there, our food improved, also, as well as our living quarters. In other words, they had begun to learn how to prepare rice, and it was steamed and would be cooked to where it would separate, grain from grain. And they also issued pinto beans, and they cooked those in . . . that was our . . . well, that was like strawberries to us. Man, that was really a survival item. And the food was real good then. But when we had the evening meal, that was beans and rice. Some of them probably have not mentioned the fact that the chow hounds really showed up then (chuckle).

Marcello: We'll come back and talk about the food in a minute. I have one other question with regard to the buddy system. How did you normally select a buddy?

Rea: Well, it was someone that we just become, you know, kind of close to, and, really, I guess, it was someone we'd been bunked next to.

There was one of our cook's that I spoke of earlier in this incident where we came from to Bicycle Camp. This person had rheumatoid arthritis. We tried to take care of him, and make him as comfortable as possible there. This was really one of the things that I was interested or instrumental in, is getting him to where he was more comfortable. We finally got a hold of a sponge rubber seat out of some kind of a thing and made him a mattress out of that to where he would be more comfortable.

Incidentally, I took the trimmings of it, or some part of it, and made a pillow for myself out of it. For a cover, I took britches legs, one of our dungaree britches legs, and made a cover out of it, filled that with that chipped rubber, and carried it all the way through.

Marcello: I'm sure that under circumstances such as you were experiencing, you did have to resort to ingenuity and "make-do," so to speak.

Rea: Yes. Actually, at this time is when we begin to realize that it was going to have to be an individual survival or you and your buddy survive.

Marcello: Incidentally, are you and Eichorst very close today?

Rea: Not real close. We corresponded for many years, and I

visited in his home in 1953 when I went to the Lion's International Convention in Chicago. And then we met in Amarillo in 1975. That's the only two times we've been together since then. He's been to the "Lost Battalion" reunion, I think, once. Incidentally, in the last recent correspondence I had from Crayton Gordon, one of the men from Chicago is one of the two that has not been located so far--Frank Gnat. He and Eichorst and myself and a fellow by the name of Guzzy was kind of a quartet together in our sharing.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about the food, so let's pursue this matter a little bit farther. You mentioned that the food here at Bicycle Camp was better and that you were getting essentially a better quality rice and better-prepared rice, and you were also getting these pinto beans. How about vegetables or meat or anything like that?

Rea: We had some of it but not regularly.

Marcello: I do know that here at Bicycle Camp, company funds were used to purchase food on the outside. What do you know about the use of those company funds in the purchase of food?

Rea: Evidently, this came from some of the officers themselves. The personnel as a group, I don't think, had that knowledge. I know that I as an individual didn't. But possibly the

quartermaster, officers, and so on had this knowledge.

Marcello: So you are not familiar with the use of that company money to purchase food on the outside for the general use of the prisoners?

Rea: Well, as an individual, I never went in the parties that went out for the purchase of food. But this did happen; it was brought in.

Marcello: I understand what would happen a lot of times is that if a man were going out on a work detail, he would be given some of these company funds to purchase things on the outside while he was on the work detail. This occurred on occasions. I gather from what you said that you never had received any of this company money to purchase goods on the outside.

Rea: That's true with me. I was not given money to purchase food.

Marcello: From time to time, I also know that there were rumors that the officers seemed to be living better than the enlisted men, that is, that the officers were using some of this money strictly for their own personal benefit and not for the benefit of everybody in the company. Had you ever heard rumors of that nature?

Rea: Well, those are rumors I'd heard, but I had no knowledge of it as being fact.

Marcello: Was it possible to get seconds on food here at Bicycle Camp?

- Rea: Yes. This was one of the maneuvers of the men fast on foot. If he could get in the front of the line and be served first, he'd eat his while the others were going through the line, and then he'd line up the second time. We had one man from Wichita Falls we called the "chow hound." His name was McElreath. McElreath hung his canteen on the fence by the entrance into the area where we went to eat, and as soon as we'd come in from the working party--he didn't take a bath or anything--he stood in line until it was time to eat, and he was the first one in line. That's where he got his name "chow hound."
- Marcello: Normally, when you went through the chow line, how much food would you get?
- Rea: Those of us that had mess kits, they'd fill it full of rice and then pour probably a cupful of pinto beans on top of it.
- Marcello: When you say they would fill the mess kit full of rice, are you referring to the frying pan part of the mess kit?
- Rea: Right.
- Marcello: And they would kind of level it to the top of the frying pan?
- Rea: Well, they had ladles and measurements and so on. It was pretty well-proportioned out to the individual each time. Everything was about the same.
- Marcello: And I'm sure that everybody was watching those servings like a hawk to make sure that nobody got more than somebody else.

- Rea: Well, that's true. You really got growled at if anybody chiseled in line, too, got in line in front of somebody.
- Marcello: And I guess there were probably more fights over food than any other single thing in the camp.
- Rea: That's probably true.
- Marcello: There's another procedure that kind of interests me about the chow line, too. Is it not true that when you went through, you had to dip your mess gear in boiling water before you even picked up your chow?
- Rea: This was provided by the kitchen crew. They had boiling water there that you dipped your . . . sterilized all your eating equipment in.
- Marcello: So already you were learning that sanitation . . .
- Rea: . . . was very important.
- Marcello: Describe what the work details were like here at Bicycle Camp.
- Rea: We were working in . . . well, it was actually military objectives. We were moving oil drums from place to place. I remember one particular time that we were moving automobile tires, tires of various types, from one area to the other.
- Marcello: So the Japanese seemed to be looting the island, in other words--shipping things back to Japan, probably.
- Rea: I don't know where they was taking them, but they was moving stuff around right smart. This is the first ex-

perience that I had seen of the punishment of the Dutch women in working parties like this.

Marcello: Describe this detail.

Rea: Well, one time in particular, a crew of us was moving some tires from place to place, and we went by a compound where evidently they had taken the Dutch soldiers. And their wives would come there in hopes to visit with them in this area. But, anyway, there was lots of Dutch women and their children on the streets. And it seemed as though the Japanese personnel that were in charge of the working parties took pride in harassing the women to a certain extent. If they did anything at all to cause them to stop and have any right to harass them or punish them in any way, why, it would seem like it made them stand tall in their judgment.

But this particular time, there were several women that was at the intersection of where we crossed, and it seemed like one of them was on a bicycle, and she didn't hesitate for the truck to pass or something, and they proceeded to give her a working-over and stomped on the bicycle. The driver of the truck first started slapping her, and then the guard started slapping her. I believe there was one in the back of the truck, and he got down, and they wanted him to take a turn at her.

Of course, this excited the woman, and she was just like anybody else under excitement--she couldn't control

urination--and she just urinated all over herself, which was a very difficult thing for us to see happen. Of course, we knew that it was very fatal for us to step in. But this happened several times.

Marcello: So you had a real feeling of helplessness and maybe even a sense of humiliation, even though this isn't happening to you.

Rea: Right. You just wanted to really get out and tear things up, but you said, "Well, there's no chance of you gaining anything from it, even though you'd like to help the lady."

Marcello: How hard or difficult were those work details here at Bicycle Camp? Did they work you pretty hard?

Rea: Not really. There wasn't any quota of production per day put on us at that time.

Marcello: I guess it would depend upon the work detail, too, would it not?

Rea: Yes, and possibly the person in charge of it.

Marcello: I understand if you were lifting around those sacks of rice, that could be rather taxing work from a physical standpoint?

Rea: Yes, some of these were 200-pound sacks, and to have one of those dropped on your shoulders and have to walk very far with it is pretty taxing.

Marcello: Would you go out on the work detail every day?

Rea: Not every day. They kind of spread it around. There was

so many each day.

Marcello: What would you do in your spare time, that is, when you weren't out on a work detail?

Rea: A lot of my time was put in cutting hair. We started doing that there in Bicycle Camp. Incidentally, I have in my possession today--not with me today, but in my keepsakes--a list of all personnel that I had given haircuts. The agreement was that they was to pay me 25¢ in American money when we came back to the United States, and for many years, at the "Lost Battalion" reunion, I was still collecting for haircuts (laughter).

Marcello: In other words, everytime somebody received a haircut, you kept a record of it.

Rea: Yes, I made a mark in the listing, and I have that listing still in my keepsakes.

Marcello: Where did you get your scissors and your razor and things of that nature? Were these your personal possessions?

Rea: I bought some of them, you know, outside. And the Japanese were insistant that we do keep our hair clipped after so long a time. For a period of time we could cut it, you know, GI-style if you so choose. Later on, they wanted us to clip our heads. You would clip them, oh, not more than once a month. They'd tell you when to get a haircut.

Marcello: And it was your job to give the haircuts at that stage?

Rea: Yes. Part of the time, I was doing this barber work only. I

eventually was assigned to that.

But you spoke of pastimes. Another thing I did . . . I spoke of having hobbies and things that I did. After we got to Bicycle Camp in Batavia, they took all of our helmets away from us and just discarded them. Well, the inside of the old . . . we didn't have the World War II helmets at that time. The inside of the old American World War I helmet was lined with leather--the headpiece of it. I took the leather out of several of those as they gathered them up and discarded them, and I stripped that into leather string with a pocketknife--just cut it in little strips. I round-plaited several strands of it, four-strand round-plait, then took another one and laced it together and made a belt out of it--leather belt.

This is when I lost the lid to my mess kit. I took the lid to the mess kit and cut it out with a pocketknife and the various things that we had to do with and made the belt buckle--the frame of it--out of that and covered it with leather. Then I found--I don't know whether it was silver or what, but, anyway, it looked like silver--silver spoon handle and made the prong (tongue) for the buckle out of that. And this is one of the displays of the crafts that various ones had made while we was there. Of course, we lost them after we went to the jungle and left them. But some of them had made replicas of ships and this and that.

Marcello: You mentioned the displays of the crafts. I've heard before that periodically there would be kind of like an organized display where the prisoners would share what they had made and so on.

Rea: Put them together, yes. They had that there in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: During your non-working hours, what was the thought that was most constantly on your mind?

Rea: When is this going to be over (laughter)? That was the main thing, I think, in all of our minds, that maybe tomorrow will tell us a new story.

Marcello: So by this time, are you living from day to day then--even as early as Bicycle Camp?

Rea: So to speak, we were, I think, in a sense, thinking tomorrow would change it.

Marcello: How much of a topic is food?

Rea: At this particular time, we weren't concerned too much about food. We were being fed well and were satisfied with our diet.

Marcello: Were you generally holding your weight?

Rea: Most of us was holding our weight pretty good. There's one individual I spoke of earlier that just couldn't accept this diet. I think, to my knowledge, he's the first man of the whole battalion that died. But he lost from being 230 pounds down to just nothing, eventually. Well, he was still alive when we were moved from Bicycle Camp

and when we went to the jungle, but I understand he died shortly after that.

Marcello: What was your weight when you went into the service?

Rea: About 165 pounds.

Marcello: I want to keep that in mind because later on I'll ask you what perhaps your lowest weight was after you were up in the jungles and so on. In your spare time, did you find it very helpful to think very much about home, that is, in terms of your wife? Or was this a topic that was best not to dwell on too much? I'm sure you couldn't help but think about it.

Rea: Well, of course, I dwelled on it some, but I thought, "Well, someday this is going to develop that I will be back with her." This was the hope that I had and, I think, something that I hung onto all the time. It helped me.

Marcello: I guess, in a sense, though, you had to put first things first. First, you've got to get out of here, and in order to get out of here, you've got to get enough to eat. Maybe those were immediate needs that you had to think of first. They were a means to an end, the end being to get back home.

Rea: Right. Well, my thought was that I had something to live for. I had a wife back home.

Marcello: Talk a little about the Japanese guards in this camp. And we are still talking about Japanese guards, are we not?

Rea: At this period, yes. I remember one in particular. We had

a nickname for him. He was the "Brown Bomber." He seemed to pride himself in coming in and making everybody line up and bowing to him. And if anybody meddled in to where he had a chance or had the right to bash you around, he liked to do that. He took pride in it, it seemed like.

I remember one time in particular. As I spoke of earlier, these barracks were open . . . well, the ends of them weren't open, but in the center of the corridor there was a cross-section in it. Well, he came through the barracks that I was in and was down in one of the ends to where the opening was enclosed. And he was caught down there. He had to come back up the aisleway to get out. And the lights went out--electricity failure of some kind. Of course, when that happened, everybody started hollering about the lights or something or other. Him not being able to understand the language, I guess, or something or other, it excited him so until he just almost run over everything getting out of there because he had a fear of what might happen to him in the dark, evidently. But we all got a kick of him scrambling out of there like he did.

But another time, I remember, I was on a wood detail. We was carrying wood into the compound or using it for the heating of water to make the steam to cook by. And he was on work detail. Something happened with one of the boys, and he started working him over pretty good. He

backed up next to the fence, and they had barbed wire, you know, and it'd come out over it. In some way or another, in striking this, he hit his hand and stuck it on the barb of that wire. He continued to slap this guy around with his hand bleeding until he had blood all over this man's face. This man still lives in El Paso, Texas. Hubert Griffith was his name. We thought he had almost just really worked him over and cut him real bad, you know, with all the blood on him. But his blood was on Griffith's face, and Hubert didn't get a scratch himself (chuckle). But he looked terrible. But that is the first loss of blood we saw from the Japanese and, I guess, the most, because he had blood everywhere.

Marcello: Are these guards the same ones that you had had at Tandjong Priok, or were these new ones here at Bicycle Camp?

Rea: The best I remember, this one in particular, the "Brown Bomber," was even on our move into Tandjong Priok. He was a guard along with us on that, and I think this is where we became familiar with his tactics by his pushing us around a little bit.

Marcello: Again, are you finding it best to stay away from the guards?

Rea: Individually, yes.

Marcello: Do you ever strike up any conversations with them? Are there any friendly ones?

Rea: Occasionally, yes. Later on, we'd strike up a conversation

with them.

Marcello: What do you know about any secret radios or news from the outside world?

Rea: Well, in Bicycle Camp we had one man that was a radio technician.

Marcello: Was this Jess Stanbrough?

Rea: Yes, sir. I think he brought in parts and assembled a radio to where we were getting information in. But it was only being given to certain personnel. In other words, he was very secretive.

Marcello: I guess the fewer people that knew about that radio or the location of the parts, the better it was.

Rea: That's true. I learned part of this after we were liberated-- that this went on. That's how close it was guarded. In other words, in order to do it, he would assemble it, put it together, and then he . . . I don't know just exactly how he did handle it, but, anyway, he kept up with the information from the outside.

Marcello: What do you know about a Lieutenant Stensland?

Rea: Well, he was one of the personnel of the 26th Brigade that was with us, and we called him . . . we nicknamed him, too-- "Bulldog" Stensland. He was about the strongest officer to stand up against the Japanese of any officers we had. He stood out. Maybe it was because he was out with the working group more than some of the others were. But he

was a very rough-talking guy, and he'd talk back to them, even though he got in trouble sometimes. But he'd stand up for what he thought, and he tried to protect us against abuse from them as much as he could.

Marcello: What sort of recreation did you participate in here at Bicycle Camp? Now you mention the crafts and things of that nature. What were there in terms of sports and . . . well, you also mentioned the stage shows.

Rea: Yes, we had stage shows, and also we had volleyball teams. There was some real competition between the Australians and the Americans in volleyball. I played some on it, not a whole lot, but I was on the team some.

Marcello: You mentioned the Australians. What sort of a relationship began to develop between the Americans and the Australians?

Rea: Really, the closeness with the Australians was more prevalent than it was with the English, I think.

Marcello: Why was that?

Rea: Well, I don't know whether it was the age factor in it. It seemed like the Australians were more our age, and the English were older. This might have had something to do with it. Then there was possibly a personality clash between the English and Americans some way, to some extent.

Marcello: I know that later on when we get up into Singapore and Changi, there were some real animosities that developed between the English and the Americans. But we'll, of

course, talk about that in a moment.

On July 4, 1942, the Japanese tried to force everybody to sign a non-escape pledge. What do you know about that?

Rea: Well, there was lots more controversy as to whether we would or we would not do it. The best I remember at the time, there was some of them that said they would not do it. Those that refused, they moved them into an area, and they proceeded to administer punishment and so on--make them get down on their knees and sit on their toes. Then they'd get on their heel and press down, you see, in order to try to . . . this was, I think, a scare tactic more to force you than anything else. But in the conversation with our officers and in discussion with one another and this, there was some of them that still refused. But my personal attitude was, regardless of whether I signed that or whether I didn't, if an opportunity presented itself that might give me a fifty-fifty chance or greater, I would still take that chance.

Marcello: Did the Japanese actually have to worry about people escaping?

Rea: Not in reality because there wasn't anyplace to go.

Marcello: Was there a lot of so-called "cheap talk," however, about escape in your bull sessions, or wasn't that something that was mentioned very much?

Rea: We probably talked about it, but when you think about leaving an island that's surrounded by water, what are you going

to do when you get to the coast? That's what they encountered when they left--there wasn't anyplace. Unless there was some pre-arrangements made and something to be there waiting for you, there was no advantage to it.

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

Rea: They said that they would behead them.

Marcello: Did you have any reason to doubt them?

Rea: At this particular time, in Bicycle Camp, we might have had a reason to doubt actually how cruel they could be. But later on, we had no doubt that if they threatened you, made a threat, that there was a possibility that they'd definitely carry it through.

Marcello: At this stage the Japanese, of course, are still winning the war, and they're really under no pressure. I guess at Bicycle Camp they're still trying to figure out what to do with you.

Rea: I think this is true because they were maybe a little bit confused about what they found there in the number of personnel and maybe just a little bit agitated at us that they were suckered in. Now I've always felt--and I still feel today--that our going to Java was similar to a decoy sent there to get the personnel of the Japanese fleet to come in there. But after they came in and found that there wasn't anymore personnel than there was there, they was just a

little bit, I think, agitated from that fact. They were misled.

Marcello: Incidentally, had the Japanese ever processed you in any way? In other words, did they come in and get your names and ranks and serial numbers or any other information and so on, and in turn did they issue you some POW number for identification?

Rea: Yes, they came in and asked questions as to what our crafts were, our abilities as to whether we had any specialist work, or what type of occupation we were before we were in the service. I think this is possibly where they separated some of them to send them to Japan to do particular things rather than leaving them with the group. I know there was some of them that indicated that they had specialist training, and they were shipped to Japan--some as welders, some as mechanics, some as electricians. Now we was speaking of Stanbrough awhile ago. They knew that he was an electrician, or they found that he was an electrician, or he indicated that he was, and I'm not sure where they took him. But he wasn't in the jungle with us-- I know that. And we were issued numbers at that time, too.

Marcello: Were you issued numbers on some sort of a name tag or something of that nature?

Rea: I remember the one that I had was made on a piece of wood, kind of cut on a piece of wood with a leather string in

it that you wore.

Marcello: In other words, the number was more or less stamped into that piece of wood.

Rea: Right. Evidently, they recorded your name, rank, and serial number--Army-wise. That was part of our record.

Marcello: Now in October of 1942, the Japanese begin moving people out of Bicycle Camp. In the meantime, is there anything else about Bicycle Camp that we need to discuss and get as part of the record?

Rea: Nothing more than possibly going into the entertainment that we were privileged to have and work with. There was some that had special training such as I spoke of. Our battery clerk was a piano player. His name's coming to me . . . his name was Armstrong. He played the piano. There were some others that . . . one in particular was good with musical arranging. His name was Cole from Amarillo. He played several instruments, and he was our bugler. Of course, he was good with all wind instruments.

And they organized a band, and I think it was Wednesday and Friday nights that we were entertained. Some of them had vocal groups, and there were just all kinds of things that we could do ourselves to entertain. The Japanese guards, themselves, they enjoyed coming in and listening to us.

Marcello: Were these concerts and so on well-attended by the prisoners?

Rea: Very well-trained. The fact of the business is that we was all there, I'd say, in the compound. Everybody was there.

There was one thing in particular that I had come in possession of that I kind of prided myself, and I wanted to bring home with me, and that's one of these big air horns. It was a horn with a rubber bubble on the end of it that I had come in possession of. I forget just exactly how I got it. But, anyway, they needed this as part of the band area and so on, and they used that for some of the sounds in it. I tried to keep up with it all the time, but I lost it, and I didn't get it back home.

Marcello: I assume all the prisoners are becoming scavengers by this time. Any item laying around or something that's found is immediately picked up because it might be of some future use, either personally or as trading material or something of that nature.

Rea: I think that stood true with all of us, if we thought that we could maybe better ourselves by something we found or came in possession of for trading purposes, even our jewelry and so on we had, watches and rings and so on.

Marcello: When did you begin trading your personal effects for food and that sort of thing? Did that occur later on?

Rea: My first experience was after we got to the jungle and traded for various types of medicine. In my particular

instance, I still had my high school band at that time, graduation band, and my wristwatch. Well, I traded the high school band for quinine.

Marcello: When you speak of a high school band, are you referring to a ring?

Rea: Ring, yes. I traded that for quinine, which I felt the need of having some that I could go back on in the event that I had malaria attacks, which we had begun to have malaria attacks at that time--not as much so there in the early part of it. We were still possibly thinking what the future might hold. But when we found that we were going to leave there and possibly go into an area where we'd need more medicine than we'd be able to get through making sick call, I began to feel the urge that I needed to make preparations for maybe medicine that I could have personally.

Marcello: As I pointed out earlier, groups began leaving Bicycle Camp in October of 1942. Did the Japanese prepare you for this move? In other words, did you know some days or weeks in advance that you would be leaving?

Rea: Possibly a few days. I don't know the number of days, but they began to kind of put us together. I think they just went through the roster looking for those that was physically able to answer and wasn't sick or anything like that. If you made sick call the day before, they

didn't even bother.

Marcello: Was it rather unsettling to leave Bicycle Camp? I mean, after all, by this time you had probably gotten into some sort of routine, and things weren't too bad in Bicycle Camp. Of course, in a sense you didn't have anything to compare it with other than Tandjong Priok. Do you recall what your feelings were when you were told you would be leaving?

Rea: My feelings was that I didn't want to leave. I thought that this was in one of the best areas we could find, and we was thinking all the time that possibly things might happen within a week, two weeks, or a month that we'd be freed. But this wasn't true. The group that I was in, they marched us down to the waterfront and put us on a ship, Japanese freighter.

Marcello: Now were you one of the first groups to go out, or did you go afterwards? I think the first group out was the Fitzsimmons group, was it not? This was the group that was headed by Captain Arch Fitzsimmons.

Rea: I was in that group.

Marcello: Okay. They left maybe as early as October 7, 1942.

Rea: It was about that time because I remember we were in Burma on Halloween, October 31st.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of the ship that you boarded?

Rea: No, I do not.

Marcello: I know there was one in here called the Dai Nichi Maru, but I'm not sure whether or not your particular group went on that one. Anyhow, describe what conditions were like aboard that ship. And you are, of course, on your way to Singapore.

Rea: Singapore. The ship in itself was just a Japanese freighter. I don't know what it's cargo was that it had on it. I do know that we were under very crowded conditions and were put down in what's called the ship's hold, the third deck below the weather deck. The only means we had of any air circulation when it got real hot was an air chute that was tied up here where air would come down. We were so congested in there that it was almost only sitting room. You couldn't stretch out.

Marcello: Could you stand up?

Rea: Well, you could stand up. But there was that many of us in there that . . . and we'd sleep in shifts, you know. Some of them would lay down while the others sat up. A lot of us could sit up and lean over on what belongings we still had. But it was very, very uncomfortable all the time.

Marcello: What else can you say about the conditions down there in terms of the temperature and things of that nature?

Rea: Well, it was hot--very, very hot--night and day. The food that we had on there, what little there was . . . I remember

being up on the weather deck one time, and it looked like they took mutton out of a deep freeze, and it was green-looking all over. I thought, well, I hope they don't feed that to us. I don't know whether they did or not, but, anyway, the food was terrible on there.

Marcello: Were the Japanese cooking the food?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: How were you fed? What was the feeding procedure aboard that ship?

Rea: It was prepared in large containers and just let down in the hold and dipped out of these large containers to individuals.

Marcello: In other words, would you simply come by the container and get your usual mess kit of whatever they were feeding you?

Rea: Yes, or someone would ladle it out to you.

Marcello: How about drinking water?

Rea: We were issued drinking water--canteens. We'd fill our canteens, and that's about all there was to it.

Marcello: In other words, did you get a canteen of water per day, or how did it work?

Rea: Something like that. I don't remember just exactly the quantity.

Marcello: Did you ever have any opportunity to get up on deck, that is, up on the weather deck?

Rea: We did for a while, and then finally they kept us retained in the lower deck all the time.

Marcello: What would you do about going to the latrine and things of that nature?

Rea: There was an area where we could go.

Marcello: Was this up on deck?

Rea: Up on deck to where it could be washed overboard.

Marcello: In other words, it was kind of like the outhouse that swung out over the side of the ship?

Rea: Right.

Marcello: I guess you're lucky that dysentery really hadn't set in at this time.

Rea: We sure were very fortunate that that hadn't set in because under those living conditions, if one of us had had it, we'd all get it probably.

Marcello: Fortunately, this voyage didn't last too long, did it?

Rea: No, it didn't last too long. I don't remember the number of days, but it was in the neighborhood of a week or ten days.

Marcello: And then you land at Singapore.

Rea: Yes, at Singapore.

Marcello: Okay, describe what happens at that point then.

Rea: They took us off the ship and marched us quite some distance to the compound where we was kept for approximately two weeks before we were taken back to the waterfront and boarded another ship. In our course of the marching distance from the ship out to the compound, we would see occasionally a

skeleton head sticking on a fence post that'd still have the hair on its head. It was our understanding that it was the Chinese people that they had beheaded. Our living quarters there was very unsanitary, very crowded conditions.

Marcello: I gather that in going to Changi Village, you had to go past Changi Jail. Do you recall that?

Rea: To be able to say that I was mindful of the fact that we was passing it, I couldn't say we was, but I did see things that I don't want to remember.

Marcello: Describe what Changi looked like from a physical standpoint, that is, where you were held for these two weeks.

Rea: The best I remember it, it was a tile building of some kind, or brick, maybe. The latrine part of it was the most distasteful part of it. It was very inadequate and not well-kept at all, and this is where we really became careful about flies and so on and so forth, sterilizing all eating gear, and so on.

Marcello: I understand that bedbugs and lice were a problem here in Changi, too. Did you and your group experience that when you came through?

Rea: That was our first experience to really have any problems with them.

Marcello: How do you get rid of bedbugs?

Rea: You don't. The only means that we found that would probably get rid of the live bedbugs is by pouring scalding water on

them. But in a few days they'd hatch out again because the scalding water wouldn't kill the eggs.

An experience we found later on occurred when we were sitting in the chair, leaning back, while we were shaving. The bedbugs would come out of the cracks of the chair you were sitting in and just leave a line up and down their back where they'd bite them while they was sitting there getting shaved.

And after we got into the jungle, we encountered them even worse there. I think we were possibly following native personnel in some of those camps we were at later on.

Marcello: I gather that Changi was run by the British; I mean, the Japanese were in nominal control, but the inner-workings of the camp were taken care of by the British here.

Rea: The Japanese had taken over, and I think they were making them take care of it because they were actually under the Japanese rule at that time.

Marcello: What were your impressions of the British here at Changi?

Rea: Well, I didn't have any personal contact with any of them that I can recall--any particular instance that stands out to me. I do recall this is the first opportunity, I think, that we had to get some mail, any type of mail. I think they issued us cards there that we could check various questions and so on--that we were well, we were working, we were entertained, and such like that. I recall striking

out or drawing lines through wording at the bottom of it as a message to my wife. There's one I think of in particular where I marked the words out, and I spelled out the words "I love you."

Marcello: Did she get this card?

Rea: Eventually. It's in my possession now.

Marcello: It's almost surprising that it was able to get through the censors.

Rea: Yes, it is. Evidently, they didn't figure it out, or they let it go through or whatever it was.

Marcello: I know that some of the later groups of Americans that came through Changi had all sorts of problems with the British. Perhaps you weren't there long enough for any problems to develop.

Rea: Not that I recall. We had a very short stay there, and I don't recall a whole lot of the incidents that stand out to me at Changi.

Marcello: What kind of food were you getting here?

Rea: Some more of the same--rice and a little stew. The food wasn't good, I know that.

Marcello: Were your cooks preparing it, or were you getting it from a British kitchen.

Rea: I think they possibly took some of our cooks in to assist them in cooking it.

Marcello: Describe your leave from Changi. Since you didn't stay

there too long, I guess there isn't too much else we can say about it.

Rea: Well, they put us back on a Japanese ship, and it was practically the same thing again, and they took us to Burma from there.

Marcello: Okay, describe the voyage then from Singapore to Moulmein, which, I guess, is where you went in Burma.

Rea: It was crowded quarters just like before . . . poor food. I don't remember how long the voyage was particularly, but it was several days, and we landed at Moulmein, Burma.

Marcello: Up until this time, had you really lost anybody yet?

Rea: Not in personnel that left there with us, no.

Marcello: I believe the only fatalities that you had up until this point were those that had gone up in some of the bombers that had been shot down. Other than that, you really hadn't lost anybody to disease and so on. Or if you did, there were very, very few.

Rea: The only one I remember is this one I spoke of earlier that . . . well, to my knowledge he hadn't died at that time. That's the man who had lost so much weight.

Marcello: Were conditions on this ship any better or any worse than those on the first ship.

Rea: If anything, they were worse.

Marcello: Why was that?

Rea: It seems like we were more crowded. It wasn't quite as

big a ship. It seemed like there was a weather deck out on it, and we were out on top some of the time. Especially, it seems as though after dark they'd let us be out.

Marcello: Are they harassing you very much on this ship?

Rea: I don't recall any great amount of harassment.

Marcello: Okay, so you get into Moulmein, Burma. What happens at that point?

Rea: Well, they took us into a compound that was next to a leprosy colony, and we were not mindful of the fact at the time that it had been a leprosy colony. Leprosy patients had been in the compound where we were. And we became very concerned about the possibility of contracting leprosy and were very concerned about that.

Marcello: How long were you at this compound?

Rea: Oh, in the neighborhood of a week, two weeks, something like that.

Marcello: What were conditions like here, other than your concern about the leprosy?

Rea: They were fairly comfortable. We had bathing facilities and lived in huts or buildings. It seems like they were two-story buildings.

Marcello: They did not put you in a prison, though, here?

Rea: There was a prison around us. We saw some prisoners with a ball and chain on. I did at one time.

The most vivid thing that I have in mind was the Buddhas,

I guess, that you'd see there and the toll of the bells from this Buddha twice a day. It looked like, just with the sun shining on it, that it was a gold dome, but I don't know whether it was or not.

Marcello: Was this the famous Moulmein pagoda of Kipling's story?

Rea: It could have been. I never was mindful of what it was actually called. But I do remember, when those bells would toll, the howl of the dogs everywhere. It just sounded like there were thousands of them. But we were certainly glad to get out of there, even though they did take us from there to the jungle proper.

Marcello: So you didn't do anything while you were in this compound?

Rea: No.

Marcello: And they didn't harass you in any way?

Rea: No, not that I recall.

Marcello: Okay, where do you go from Moulmein?

Rea: They took us by trucks out into the jungle where we started the Burma railroad work.

Marcello: Did you go through a base camp first of all? I'm referring to Thanbyuzayat.

Rea: Yes. This is where we encountered our first experience with the story of the Japanese colonel that was in charge of doing the railroad.

Marcello: You're referring to Nagatomo?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Describe your encounter with Colonel Nagatomo.

Rea: Well, he had us all in a big compound out there, and we was all in a . . . I don't know whether it was formation or just a large group standing around. He was out on a little tower made of bamboo, and he told us what we were encountering--that our lives didn't amount to anything as far as we were concerned; that they were concerned in producing a railroad; and that if it came to it, our bodies would be used as railroad ties. If we worked, we would be fed; if we refused to work, our rations would be shortened.

Marcello: Now up until this time did you know that you would be working on a railroad?

Rea: No.

Marcello: Did it mean very much to you at the time? I'm referring to his speech and the fact that you'd be working on a railroad. Did that have very much significance to you?

Rea: Well, we didn't worry about it too much at that time. To start with, we were taken out in working parties, and we was moving a certain amount of dirt. In other words, we'd start to work at a certain time, and we'd quit at a certain time. But as time moved on and sickness became more prevalent in the group, the amount of dirt that was supposed to be moved daily just kept stacking up higher on those that were still working.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm a very sensitive person

with my skin, and I had more problems than the average person due to the fact that I sunburned so bad while some of the others didn't. With the sun and perspiration, loss of salt from my body, I became a victim of beriberi early. You know, if the salt leaves your body, you just crave salt. I'm a very free sweater, and when I'd lose the salt in my body, this created the need for salt, and we didn't have as much salt as we needed. For a time I think they tried to give us the salt tablets to replenish our bodies. This is where some of us started running into problems to begin with.

Marcello: Describe what it is like to have beriberi.

Rea: It starts out with--I guess you'd call it--swelling of the lower limbs where they'd be puffy, and you'd press in on it, and it'd leave the depression in the skin where you pressed in on it. And your body would hold the fluid for a while, and then when you threw it off, you had similar to a painful ache.

I was one of the first ones, I guess, that made sick call with it, and this Dutch doctor, Dr. Hekking, prescribed for me the liver diet. That was part of the medicine that he prescribed for me, is to be issued a portion of liver from the beef that we were killing for meat out in the jungle. Then we'd fry that, and this would replenish the vitamins. When it got to where we couldn't get the liver,

he had us to . . . when they'd slaughter an animal, we'd go down and catch the blood as they bled the animal and boil it and slice it and then fry it to replenish the substance to this loss of vitamin or whatever it was in our bodies that we'd lost.

Marcello: Let's back up here a minute now. Do you recall to which camp you went from Thanbyuzayat? I know a lot of the people started out at the 18 Kilo. Do you recall the name of the particular camp where you started working the railroad?

Rea: Today I couldn't recall the name of it. It was designated as kilo, of course.

Marcello: Describe what one of these kilo camps looked like from a physical standpoint, and I assume that when we're talking about one, we're talking about all of them.

Rea: They were bamboo huts, just a long barracks or things with bamboo poles tied with hair rope or some kind of various strings for the uprights of it, the main support of it, with stripping on top of it with bamboo poles there. Then they had a thatched roof made out of palm leaves that were tied on the top. The shelter part was made out of this. It, again, was a large building where there was bunk areas on each side of it with a hallway down the center and then a cross-section in the middle of it. But it was all made out of bamboo.

Marcello: Describe what your sleeping facilities were like within

these huts.

Rea: The flooring of it was about knee-high from the ground. Of course, the bamboo poles was tied there for the flooring area, or what we would normally call floor joists was tied across it, and then there was large bamboo poles that was split open and split in areas and making a mat which tied onto that. That was the flooring on it. This is where our sleeping quarters was.

Marcello: So you were, in essence, sleeping on a platform which extended the length of this hut?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Is that basically what it was? And there would be a hallway or a pathway down the center.

Rea: Right.

Marcello: About how much room would you have?

Rea: Oh, possibly thirty-six inches, the length you could spread out . . . thirty-six to forty inches.

Marcello: And maybe about how long would your area be then about? Six feet?

Rea: Something like that. Six or seven feet.

Marcello: And you literally lived there. That was your living area.

Rea: That was our living area.

Marcello: And, of course, there was nothing else in these huts.

Rea: Nothing else. Just that flooring and the roof.

Marcello: Now you mentioned electricity back in Bicycle Camp. I

assume you have no electricity here.

Rea: None whatever.

Marcello: What do you do for light?

Rea: We'd gather wood in the daytime and spread it out normally about the cross-section of the barracks and keep wood burning there at night. That was the only light we had.

Marcello: Did you ever make any candles or other types of makeshift devices for light.

Rea: We made some out of tallow that we'd boil down from the fat of the slaughtered animals.

Marcello: Of course, I guess a lot of times that fat was used in other ways rather than for candles.

Rea: Yes, it was used as food.

Marcello: Let's describe what a typical day was like while working on this railroad from the time you got up until you got back to your quarters at night. I'm referring to that period prior to the initiation of the "Speedo" campaign and the coming of the monsoons. I guess what I'm saying in effect is, what was a typical workday like during the early part of your time on this railroad.

Rea: They would take us out early in the morning in parties, and there was a certain area of the railroad that each . . . it seems like they were sectioned off, and a group would work this area. They were issued a pick, a shovel, a wicker basket of some effect, maybe a bamboo pole with a rice sack with a

piece of wire to where it would make kind of a pocket. Two men would carry it, one on each end of the bamboo pole. They'd load that with dirt, and two men would carry that up on the embankment where they was moving the dirt. As an individual, you might pick this basket up. There was some of us that did that as an individual. They'd load this basket, and you'd carry it up and dump it on the bank that they was building.

Marcello: So you would either be moving the dirt in one of these wicker baskets or else in this rice sack or whatever it was.

Rea: That's true.

Marcello: One man would be picking, one man would be shoveling, and the others would be hauling dirt.

Rea: Carrying dirt, yes.

Marcello: Did you have a quota?

Rea: Oh, to start with we had . . . oh, it seemed like a half a meter, something like that, that we had to move per day. As a description of what it was similar to, if you see ants moving dirt, that was just a kind of a typical . . . we were just like ants moving dirt up on that embankment. There were thousands of us out there, I think there was 50,000 English, Australians, Dutch, and everything--Americans--altogether to start with.

Marcello: Now is it not true that the area of dirt to be moved would

be staked out every day by the Japanese engineer?

Rea: Right. And as the personnel became sick and was unable to make the working parties, they never did reduce that per person. There was that much to be moved each day. And eventually, as time moved on, if there was enough light from the moon at night, they worked us into the night in order to reach our quota of moving dirt.

Marcello: Well, in the beginning, when everybody was relatively healthy, is it not true that you could meet that quota sometimes as early as noon?

Rea: Yes, that's true. And to start with they was letting us do that.

Marcello: But then what did they do?

Rea: They saw that we could do more, and then they started adding more to it.

Marcello: They started increasing the quota?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Were you ever with any of the groups who would move the stake back when the Japanese weren't looking?

Rea: Well, I'd say that that happened occasionally. But we made sure that the original impression where the stake was was well-camouflaged (chuckle).

Marcello: In essence, then, most of your work in those early stages consisted of making either cuts or fills. If you came to a valley, you filled it with dirt; if you came to a hill,

you cut away the dirt.

Rea: Right. We was either taking in or putting . . . if it was a low place, we'd dig out on the side and make ditches on each side of it and carry it up on top. If it was a hill, we'd cut down the hill and bring it into the low places.

Marcello: In the beginning I think you were working on relatively level ground, were you not? You really hadn't gotten back in the jungle right away.

Rea: That's true. But still, at the same time, they were working a little rise, in other words, the railroad bed itself.

Marcello: In some areas it'd be three feet high, and some of it would be twenty feet, eventually, when we got into the lower areas.

Marcello: Now before you were actually making the cuts and the fills, I gather that the timber would have to be removed, is that correct?

Rea: That's true.

Marcello: Would there be other special details to take care of the timber cutting and all that sort of thing.

Rea: It seems to me that we weren't involved in moving the timber. We were just moving the dirt. To my knowledge, it seems as though they eventually started using elephants. In some areas they were using elephants to move the timber, to clear the area.

Marcello: And then I assume that after the cuts and fills were made,

other prisoners would be coming on behind and putting down the stones for the bed and laying the ties and putting down the rails.

Rea: That's right. They brought the rails in by little dolly cars. You know, they'd have one end of the rail sitting on a little car, and then down at the other end, there'd be another set of cars. And they were joined together by securing these rails to those little cars and then pulling them down. As a normal thing, the engine would be behind it pushing the cars, you see, rather than pulling it. And as they moved along, they'd lay the rails to be able to move farther.

Marcello: What was the worst job you could have on that railroad?

Rea: Driving spikes. That was the hardest work there was-- driving spikes. Well, you know, I don't know whether it was driving spikes or handling the rails. It was very difficult sometimes to handle the rails.

And one of the most difficult things there was in it was to be moving the heavy timbers in to build the piles for the bridges across the streams, because we had to pick up large tree trunks, maybe thirty feet, some of them, and carry them on our shoulders to the area where they used it. They made the framework out of bamboo. They'd stand this tree trunk up on its end with the bottom of the trunk up, and they'd drill a hole in it and put a steel rod in there.

And they'd sharpen . . . make a "Y" out of the other portion of the tree trunk and put a piece of metal over that, spike it on it, and this is driven in the ground by lifting a big weight. There was this spider web of rope that they would . . . everybody pulling at the same time would lift this heavy weight up, and it would fall back and fall on this rod. That's the way they drove the piles into the ground. This was the structure of the rails that went across streams.

Marcello: Everything was done by hand.

Rea: Everything done by hand.

Marcello: Maybe there was some dynamiting, and there was the use of elephants from time to time, and that was about it.

Rea: That's it.

Marcello: So in your experience on the railroad, did you participate in just about all these jobs, that is, cuts, fills, driving spikes, and all that sort of thing?

Rea: Yes, I participated in just about all of them. Even after the rails were laid and the train had been going over it some, we even were given a detail of cutting wood and bringing it to the railroad so they could stop and load the wood for the steam engines.

Marcello: Why did you find that driving the spikes was the most difficult and worst detail so far as you were concerned?

Rea: It was under the close observation of the Japanese, and

if you didn't do it right, they were harassing you.

Marcello: What was the food like on the railroad? Again, I'm referring to the early stages of the building now, before the monsoons hit and all that sort of thing.

Rea: If you were able to work, you got comparatively good rations; but if you got sick, you were on half-rations. It mainly consisted of rice, and for a time they'd send a crew out . . . evidently they were . . . I don't know whether they was bullocks or cows or what, but, anyway, they'd go out, and the Japanese would shoot those.

Marcello: Probably some poor native's stock (chuckle).

Rea: They'd shoot them, and they'd slaughter them right there and quarter them up and bring them back into camp. Then eventually they fixed kind of a corral around the camp areas and brought cattle in there every once in a while.

Marcello: Again, at this early stage, you're relatively close to civilization, so you have more access to food, isn't that true?

Rea: Yes, we were at the 18 Kilo, just out a short distance.

Marcello: So the first camp that you started at was the 18 Kilo?

Rea: I think that would be it, yes. But as the monsoon season came on, it was more difficult for us to get the supplies in due to the fact of the mud and so on.

Marcello: There was a road that paralleled the railroad, isn't that true, and this is how you got your supplies?

- Rea: Yes. When we first stopped there, it was just dust, dust, dust. It was very difficult to keep our clothing clean sometimes because it was so much dust.
- Marcello: I've heard it said that on this hike from Thanbyuzayat out to the 18 Kilo Camp, everytime you took a step on this road, a puff of dust would come up. It was that thick on the road.
- Rea: Yes, it was just cut all to pieces with the traffic that was over it. Now due to the fact that some of the supplies were coming out on bullock carts that they'd pull down, the animal traffic, the steel traffic, and the rubber truck traffic just kept it all stirred up, cut up.
- Marcello: So there was one big cloud of dust all the time during that dry season. What kind of a portion of food did you receive? Was it your usual mess kit full?
- Rea: Again, it was about what could be contained in a mess kit.
- Marcello: And was this meal given three times a day?
- Rea: Yes. The drinking water we had had to be boiled. And the cooking part of it was . . . some of it was done in half of a fifty-five-gallon barrel, and some was done in these copper quarries, we called them, that you built a fire under. Some of the water was boiled by a big fire built under a full fifty-five-gallon barrel. Of course, the English and Australians had to dump a little tea in it (chuckle), so we became kind of acquainted with what hot tea tastes like. I never did create a taste for it.

Marcello: How about the noon meal? Would it be brought out to you on the job?

Rea: They would take these halves of a fifty-five-gallon barrel and make a wire loop in the top of it on the opposite sides, stick a bamboo pole in there, and they would carry it. Two men would carry this out on the working parties. One would have the soup in it, and the other would have the rice.

Marcello: How much time would you have for the noon meal?

Rea: Thirty minutes.

Marcello: Did they ever give you any breaks during the day?

Rea: Oh, to start with, they gave us . . . well, every little while they had what they would call a "smoke-o," and you'd sit down and rest a while.

Marcello: How long was a workweek? Maybe workweek isn't a good term to use, but how many consecutive days would you work before they'd give you a day off?

Rea: Well, to start with, we was working six days a week. On Sunday we got off. But eventually they cut that out all together. We was working constantly.

Marcello: Around this time you also encountered the Korean guards, did you not?

Rea: Yes. They were brought to us while we was still in the Burma jungle.

Marcello: Describe what those Korean guards were like. I guess what I'm saying is, compare them with the Japanese guards that

you had had previously.

Rea: They were larger in physical being than the Japanese. Some of them stood six foot and weighed probably 160, 170 pounds. Some were . . . I don't know whether you'd call them less educated or what, but they became a little more brutal as time went on than the Japanese ever were--in reality. When we first started getting them, they were comparatively nice to us, but as time went on, they became more persistent in being a little more brutal than the Japanese.

Marcello: Did they seem to go out of their way to harass the prisoners? You know, we mentioned awhile ago that a lot of times the prisoners actually had it coming with regard to punishment from the Japanese, but did you find that maybe the Koreans seemed to go out of their way to harass the prisoners?

Rea: I kind of accepted it that way, that they were more prone to be a little more pushy than the Japanese were.

Marcello: How did their harassment compare or contrast with that of the Japanese? I guess what I'm saying is, what would the Koreans do?

Rea: Well, mainly the Japanese would just use a hand slap or something like that, but once in a while they would use the butt of a gun. But the Koreans became more active with the contact with gun butts and so on than the Japanese actually were.

Marcello: Also, I guess the Koreans had been low men on the pecking order until the prisoners came along.

Rea: They didn't have the same rating, evidently, as the Japanese did because the one-star Japanese soldier could work over a Korean. Evidently, they were higher-ranking personnel than the Koreans were.

Marcello: Did you have nicknames for the Korean guards?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Do you recall any of them?

Rea: "Buffhead."

Marcello: "Buffhead?"

Rea: "Buffhead."

Marcello: How'd he get that name?

Rea: I don't know just exactly how he did come into that, but he was the type that would . . . when he'd start to . . . well, it seems as though he delighted in abusing personnel by slapping them. I guess he got his name by when he'd slap you. He'd back up and shake his head, you know, and sputter a bunch of words. We never could understand what it was, but, anyway, that's his habit.

Marcello: How about "Liver Lips?"

Rea: Yes, "Liver Lips" and "Blue Beard." We had one, "Blue Beard," who was as brutal as any of them. We all feared "Blue Beard" because he was comparatively big, and "Buffhead" was, too. He was a comparatively big person.

Marcello: I guess most of the Japanese that you're running into here are the engineer personnel, aren't they?

Rea: Engineer personnel and maybe . . . I don't know what they'd call them, but there was a Jap who was over the guards that was over us.

Marcello: They're some sort of a camp commandant, I guess.

Rea: Supervisor or something or other.

Marcello: And I guess as time goes on, everybody is beginning to feel the pressure--the officers, the Koreans, and then, obviously, the prisoners, too, because work's kind of behind on that railroad, and the monsoons are coming and all that sort of thing.

Rea: Right. We learned to do for ourselves more in the Burma jungle than at any other time. One particular thing I remember, on our days off, we could go to the kitchen and get a small portion of rice, either by snitching it or stealing it or they'd ration it out to us. Anyway, we came into possession of a small amount of rice, and occasionally they'd have . . . I don't know whether it was a liquid that they cooked with or what, but, anyway, there was glass bottles that was made available in the area. We'd take that glass bottle and get us a hard piece of board or something like that and grind this rice with the glass bottle. And then at that time, we could build a fire outside the barracks there and cook various little

things for ourselves.

And at this time, we were beginning to be able to pick up on the outside . . . it was a kind of a brown sugar block of stuff. It was made in kind of layers and sliced into about a two- or three-inch square, four or five inches long, and wrapped in leaves and tied with a bamboo string. We could take that and boil it with water and make kind of a sugar syrup. And with the ground rice, we'd make kind of patty or hot cake, and that was our delicatessen. We'd have those things when we had days off together.

Marcello: I guess you were always looking for anything that would give that rice some flavor.

Rea: Definitely, something to change it some way or another to give it a different taste.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of prisoners talk about red peppers.

Rea: Yes, red peppers.

Marcello: They would throw red peppers into that rice.

Rea: And then another thing we did . . . it was the doctor, who told us. Dr. Hekking told us it was good for us to drink tea from burnt rice. Lots of times in cooking the rice, there would be a portion right in the bottom of the pot . . . there'd be a crust that had stuck to the pot.

Marcello: It would almost be like a form of charcoal, wouldn't it?

Rea: Right. We'd take that, and it was burnt. In other words, to get it out of the quarry, you had to really build a fire

sometimes to burn that kind of loose where you could get it out because it's just in there that tight. Occasionally, this brown part of it was real crusty, and it was tasty because the slight burnt taste changed the taste of it. Lots of people liked that; I mean, they would come around and get that if any of it was available. But mainly we took this rice that was stuck to the bottom of the pot, those quarries, and continued to brown it until it became dark enough . . . it'd be burnt enough to discolor the water, turn it dark, and this was part of what we called rice coffee or tea or something like that.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you would obtain this brown sugar, and I assume that you got this through trading with the natives?

Rea: Yes, from the jungle people that'd come through.

Marcello: And this was when you began using whatever personal possessions you had, that is, watches, rings, and things of that nature? Cloth?

Rea: Yes, and about this time--well, at the beginning--they were issuing us a small amount of . . . oh, 15¢, you know, or a little paper money, something like that, as a token for our work.

Marcello: So you did get wages for working on the railroad?

Rea: A small amount of it. Then we used this money some. That's what we bought some supplies with.

Marcello: Were you allowed to conduct this trade with the natives, or did this have to be done on the sly?

Rea: It was done on the sly. They wouldn't allow them to come into the compound. It would be out on the working parties that this would be done on the sly.

Marcello: How was your clothing holding out? I'm referring to the early stages of the railroad building.

Rea: For a short time, we had clothing that we had in our possession when we were taken prisoners. We were still using that, but some of them were being worn out. Actually, some of the men who worked on the railroad would maybe take a britches leg and a shoe string or something like that, and they made a G-string. That's all they had-- just something to cover the middle--a skirt--and they'd sew it at the back, and it kind of covered you there, and this draped over in front. And that's all they wore. There were no shoes. Eventually, they ran out of shoes.

Marcello: So do you go barefooted, or do you try to make some sort of wooden clogs or something?

REa: We did try to make some wooden clogs. Well, even in the very beginning, we tried to do that because this was the means of getting out of the shower and keeping the sand off you feet and dirt off your feet in getting from the bath to the sleeping quarters.

Marcello: Did you have to rig up your own showers or bathing facilities

if you weren't close to a river or creek or something?

Rea: As we got into the jungle, yes, we had to find water holes and so on so we could go wash our clothes and take baths.

The first wild animal I saw was in there. There were four or five of us out one afternoon trying to find a place to wash our clothes. There was a large tree--it might have been thirty feet in the air--and we walked up to this place where this water was standing. Up above us was a big black panther. It started to move from tree to tree.

Marcello: Did you ever encounter very many snakes or any other critters of that nature?

Rea: Occasionally, we'd see a small snake. I spoke of this buddy system we had. "Ike" and I just happened to be out together that day taking the food out to the working party. On the way back, we were coming down the railroad track back to camp, carrying the empty containers, and, oh, probably fifty yards, twenty-five or fifty or maybe seventy yards in front of us, we saw something crossing the tracks. And it was a large snake. It looked like it might have been six inches in diameter. When we saw it, we stopped. It crawled on across, and when we got up to where we thought it was, "Ike" insisted that we see what it was, see if we could see it any further. And I said, "Well, I've been as close to it as I want to be." I didn't know what it was, and I knew it was large enough that it

could have been a boa constrictor or something like that. So I just didn't bother. I said, "We'll just stay on the railroad tracks as far as I'm concerned." So we did.

Marcello: So you didn't look upon that snake as a potential source of protein then?

Rea: No. Now there was some of them that did, I think, kill snakes and try to prepare it as food, but to my knowledge I didn't eat any of it.

Marcello: On May 5, 1943, the so-called "Speedo" campaign began. This was when the Japanese were evidently behind on the work on the railroad, and so they decided to move things along at a more rapid pace. It just so happened that the "Speedo" campaign and the monsoon season coincided. Do you recall where you were when the "Speedo" campaign and the monsoon season occurred? It could have possibly been the 80 Kilo Camp, or it could have been the 100 Kilo Camp, or it could have been both of them. Do you recall where you were at? Do you recall either of those camps?

Rea: I remember one that we were at, and we were working on the structure of bridge timbers across the river, but I don't know the name of the camp. But we had been working on the structure of the framework under the bridge and had completed it and laid the rails across it, and one train had come across it. And during the night, there'd been such a downpour . . . and the day before. It started about, I'd say, noon,

the day before, and it rained . . . well, I recall that we were moving rails at that time, and the rail yard was right there at this river. It began to rain, and within an hour's time, the whole area, even where we were working, where we took kind of shelter from the heavy rain, was so deep in water until there wasn't any ground showing anywhere. Now this is the area with the biggest stream that we had to build a bridge across. As to what camp that was, I don't know. It could have been 80 Kilo. But we had just completed the bridge timber work underneath and laid the road, and this river rose and knocked all the piles out from under it. Just the rails and the ties ran across there.

Marcello: Describe what it was like working during the monsoon season.

Rea: Most of the time we weren't privileged . . . well, we'd take refuge sometimes when there'd be a downpour, and we couldn't work in it at all. But if it was just a steady rain, we continued to work. And, too, during that season, there was what we called a sand fly. It was a small insect that would sting you. In other words, when you'd stop working, moving around, they'd settle on you, crawl up under your hat brim or through your clothing, just any place. It'd just feel like that there was just kind of like hot pepper on you. There was that much irritation to it. We called them sand flies. I don't know whether that was what it was or not. But, anyway, when we stopped working, we'd

get into a place where there was mud and get mud all over our legs and so on where they wouldn't bite us on the legs. And in order to keep them out of our face and so on, we had a little oil tobacco imitation. It was wrapped in leaves, and we'd smoke that and, you know, kind of fan it around to keep them out of our face. But as long as you were moving about, they didn't bother you very much.

And then there was the monsoon fly. The monsoon fly, itself, is a kind of a helicopter-looking insect with wings up on top of it that were kind of a clear color. And thousands and thousands and thousands of them would just be in the air. I remember one night I was helping in the cooking area. A fellow by the name of King and myself were preparing the meat for the next day. We had a candle made out of the tallow from the beef, and it was burning there at the table where we were cutting up the meat for the next day's meal. And the monsoon flies was flying into the candle so that we'd have to take a stick every once in a while and knock them away to keep them from burying the candle and put it out. They'd fly into this, and the flame would hit them and then singe their wings, and they'd just fall there. They were that thick.

Marcello: I assume that there is nothing dry during the monsoon season.

Rea: No. It started and along, I believe, the first of May and rained through, oh, probably the latter part of July, the

first part of August.

Marcello: Are these thatched huts that you're living in able to keep out the rain?

Rea: The most of it. As long as it's just no wind with it, we could stay comparatively dry, but if there was any wind with the rain, it would just come through everything. And, fortunately, there wasn't a whole lot of wind with the rain.

Marcello: But I guess you can't imagine how hard it rains during the monsoon season unless you actually see it, is that correct?

Rea: You just couldn't believe it. I have no way to tell exactly how much it did rain that afternoon we were out there at this particular place I spoke of earlier. But it seemed to me, within an hour, I would judge probably that there might have been eight or ten or twelve inches that fell. In the particular area where we took shelter while it was raining so hard, was similar to the barracks we were living in, which had the bamboo flooring about knee-high. It got up over that bamboo in this particular area.

Marcello: What is the disposition of the Japanese and the Koreans like during this "Speedo" campaign?

Rea: Well, they became much more irritable with us.

Marcello: Do we say their disposition changed from bad to worse?

Rea: I would say so, yes.

Marcello: Or from worse to worst (chuckle).

Rea: From bad to worse (chuckle). He was already bad enough,

but he got worse.

Marcello: Describe just exactly what took place.

Rea: The main thing is the increase in the number of hours we had to work per day. We were started out working possibly eight hours a day and moving half a kilo of dirt. And during this time, when they was putting this heavy push on, to get things completed by a deadline--we took it to be--we were working fourteen, sixteen hours a day, and some were moving as many as three meters of dirt per day. That's a whole lot compared to what it was to start with.

Marcello: And like you were mentioning before, you were having to move more dirt with less people.

Rea: Right. The reason why it built up to be an increase in the amount was because the number of personnel working dropped off due to death, sickness, inability to work. And by this time we was beginning to lose lots of personnel.

Marcello: Okay, describe some of the various diseases and ailments to which you were subjected during this particular time. When I say "you," I'm referring to you personally, and I'm using the term "you" in a collective sense, also.

Rea: Well, during the course of the time that I was in the jungle proper, altogether I can remember--and I've quoted the figure many a time--sixteen different attacks of malaria. It would strike you with a very high fever and go into just real rigors of chills. You would just feel like every

bone in your body would just break apart, you'd shake so. This would occur the first day of the attack. Then if you were fortunate enough to have the quinine to counteract it, after you got the quinine in your system, you'd start perspiring. This would be an indication that the fever had broken. And you would go through this sweat period for probably three or four hours, and then you'd have more strength and begin to settle down a little bit more. You'd go possibly for sometimes three weeks or maybe a month without another attack. But this was occurring to all of us.

And this is why I'd fall back on the individual supply of quinine that I had. Then later on, when we left the Burma jungle, we went into a portion of Thailand--we moved to that area--and I traded for an additional amount of quinine and a tablet they called sulfanilamide. I think there was five of those sulfanilamide tablets that I used to treat places that looked like were going to erupt into a tropical ulcer. I'd take a knife and shave that powder off that big tablet and pack this little pit where an ulcer would start. And I came out of it without any ulcer scars.

Marcello: You mentioned tropical ulcers, and let's pursue this subject a little bit farther. This also turned out to be one of the big killers during this period when you were at the 80 and 100 Kilo Camps.

Rea: That's true. Any little scratch that started--unless you could stop it from continuing to get deeper with that little pit that started--it looked like it was just kind of rotted out in the center. It just gets deeper; it kept spreading bigger. Some of them had the areas that would cover the entire shin part of the leg, that big (gesture). And the treatment for it was--on some occasions--was to take a tablespoon and scrape out all the deteriorated flesh.

Marcello: I'm sure the pain must have been excruciating for those that had to be subjected to this kind of treatment.

Rea: I'm sure it was. Fortunately, I didn't have to go through that.

Marcello: This was an innovation of either Dr. Hekking's or Dr. Bloemsma's, wasn't it?

Rea: Dr. Hekking and possibly Bloemsma, both. There's a fellow that lives in Lubbock today, Glen Self, that has a scar that probably runs from the top of his shoe--if you were wearing a shoe with a top on it laced up--to within four inches of his knee. That much of his leg was covered with ulcers.

Marcello: What over treatments did you see being used to try and get rid of tropical ulcers?

Rea: They'd wash them out with saltwater, salty brown water, and various other things. I think Dr. Hekking for a time would go out into the woods and get herbs, kind of gather

herbs, and made a poultice for it. And, of course, the native treatment over there was to take a banana leaf and cover the area, to seal it off to keep the flies and so on from further infection.

Marcello: Did you ever see men use maggots to try and eat out that dead flesh?

Rea: I didn't witness it myself, but I heard about it being done.

Marcello: I assume that another one of the big killers was dysentery.

Rea: Yes, dysentery, I think, was the number one killer.

But there was one of the officers in the group that was allergic to quinine, and, of course, if you took malaria and didn't have anything to counteract it, you didn't last very long. So he didn't last very long after the malaria attacks started.

But the dysentery was . . . well, when they lost interest in taking care of the sterilization of the eating instruments and so on is when it took over. They lost interest of being sanitary.

Marcello: Were there any remedies for dysentery, that is, once you had it?

Rea: I think this again is one of the things that Dr. Hekking prescribed, is this charcoal from burnt rice.

Marcello: How sick did a man have to be in order to be kept off the railroad during this period?

Rea: If he was running a high fever, and if he was in a deep

sweat or something like that, they would let him make sick leave. If he had dysentery and he was in a weakened condition and he couldn't make it, they'd let him be off from work through that. But unless you had some outward appearance of really being sick, you just didn't even try.

Marcello: Who ultimately determined whether you were sick enough to stay off the job or well enough to work?

Rea: Most of the time the doctors intervened for us--what doctors we had. If he said we wasn't able to go out, they'd listen to the doctors more than they would maybe to one of the officers in charge of the working parties. Occasionally, when a person would go out on working party, and he got to where he became nauseated or sick out there, they would let him come in. This happened some occasions.

Marcello: But, ultimately, wasn't it the Japanese or the Korean guard, himself, who determined who was sick enough and well enough to work? In other words, if that guard needed some men on a work detail, they had no compunction about coming through the hospital ward and pulling out some additional men, did they?

Rea: Yes, especially if there was, say, a truckload of stuff that came through, kitchen supplies or something like that. Anybody that he could get that was available, regardless of his condition, if he could do any work at all, he would get him out there doing it if there was a need for it.

Marcello: Like you mentioned awhile ago, if you were sick enough to stay off the job, what little rations you received are cut even further.

Rea: That's true. I was fortunate, I guess, in a sense, because I wasn't as sick as some of them. I didn't get dysentery because I guess I was over-cautious about always trying to sterilize my eating gear more than anybody else. Even if there wasn't any hot water or anything available to sterilize it, if there was an open flame or a hot coal anyplace that I could set my eating equipment in, mess kit or anything, I tried to make it to where I could make sure they'd be sterilized.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that most of the people tried to stay out of the hospital hut if they possibly could. Evidently, that was just not a very pleasant place to be, sick or not.

Rea: Well, fortunately, again, I wasn't in but one hospital camp. But one of the closest friends that I had during my Army life, I guess, that I started out with, was a boy from Plainview, Ed Wilson, that was killed while in a hospital camp by mistakenly dropping bombs on a hospital area rather than . . . they didn't know what it was. They were pumping water for . . . it was one of these two-man, hand-pump things. And the water tower that they had for the hospital there was evidently taken as maybe a machine gun emplacement or something. But they dropped a bomb, and he was unfortunate.

They just cut the top part of his back out with shrapnel. This happened, I think, as I spoke of earlier, in my history of the barber customers I had. I entered the date of his death by his name there on that history sheet.

Marcello: Now were you in a hospital camp yourself when this took place?

Rea: No, I came into the same camp he was in something like two weeks later for a short time. I was there, oh, four or five days.

Marcello: Now I would assume that food was very scarce, too, with the coming of the monsoon season. It was hard to get supplies from the base camp up to the camps where the prisoners were during this period.

Rea: There again, the knowledge of the Dutch doctor, Dr. Hekking, was important. He would take four or five men out into the jungle and gather green vegetation that he knew was edible and bring it in and prepare food from that that was gathered out in the jungle itself. He was well-enough acquainted with the jungle growth that he knew what was edible and what was safe to eat. I don't recall having a real shortage with rice, but, of course, it was cut back some due to the fact they couldn't get it to us during the monsoon season.

Marcello: Did you ever see cases during this period where men simply gave up and died?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Describe how you could tell when somebody had literally given up the will to live.

Rea: You first noticed it in the personal hygiene of the person himself. He'd begin to get lax in taking care of himself in his body cleanliness, in his eating equipment. When they got to that extent, unless somebody took over for them, it just took over pretty fast.

Marcello: How about in terms of eating? Would they eat during this period, or would they more or less lose interest in food?

Rea: Eventually, they lost interest in it--just gave up all together.

Marcello: Is there anything you could do to snap them out of this state?

Rea: To a certain extent, I think, we could encourage one another this way. We tried to. Again, this is where the buddy system would help out. If the other one could tell that he might be able to assist his buddy by bringing stuff to him to bring him through a depressed time or sickness, something like that, this helped.

Marcello: Describe what the burial details were like because I'm sure you did lose a lot of men during this period. What was the procedure?

Rea: The area where it began to happen is probably the third or fourth camp. The deeper we went into the jungle, more personnel died from it. It would first start when their

personal hygiene would fall off, and they didn't take care of themselves. Dysentery would set in, and they would just dehydrate. The first thing you know, they'd begin to get where they'd be unconscious, and for a time they'd just lay with no stir of the body. The mouth would drop open, and sometimes the eyes wouldn't close. When this happened it indicated that death was just not too far away.

Then when death did occur, we would take pieces of bamboo and cut us a large piece of bamboo and then make a mat to place them on and then cover them with their blanket and just lower them into a partially dug hole or grave. It didn't have to be any certain depth. It was just down . . . you know, I forget how deep it was. Then for a time, we always tried to have a little graveside ceremony and then place either a wooden cross or something to that effect. I have gone into the jungle myself and gathered the small limbs of bamboo, which was kind of palm leaf things, and so arrange it into a wreath if I could find wild flowers and tie it together. I made some of them personally, myself.

Marcello: I guess that digging a grave was relatively tough work, considering the physical state that a lot of the prisoners were in.

Rea: Yes, in the area we were in, some of it was rocky, and some of it was difficult to dig in . . . even roots and so on.

Marcello: Were careful records kept on the location of these gravesites?

Rea: Tree trunks were marked at the beginning, but it has been my understanding that after the railroad closed up and was gone, sometime or another someone has gone through and destroyed all evidence of any markings that might have been there.

Marcello: In August of 1943, Dr. Lumpkin died. Were you in the same camp as Dr. Lumpkin when he died?

Rea: No, I was not. I remember his death, but he was connected with a hospital camp.

Marcello: Now sometime during this period, you evidently got off the railroad and were working on the kitchen detail?

Rea: Yes, it was mainly because I was doing some work cutting hair during the time when I was off. Then again, those that lost so much strength through heavy perspiration, the doctors recommended giving them light duty work, and that was when I was put in. I was one of those. Due to the fact with sun exposure and heavy perspiration loss, I was put on light duty, and this is the activity that I got into.

Marcello: What kind of work would you be doing in the kitchen?

Rea: Cooking rice, which was building a fire under these big pots. We'd put three one-gallon buckets of water to one one-gallon bucket of rice in there and circulate it enough to where the trash and so on would be formed at the top,

and then we'd just kind of skim that off to get rid of the chaff, bugs, trash, worms, as much as we could. In some areas, after it was cooked, the men would take their water out of the canteen and pour enough water over it to float the weevils out of it and then skim that off, too. Also, we were peeling potatoes and preparing this green vegetation that I spoke of earlier.

Marcello: Did all the food come from a central supply house that the Japanese maintained?

Rea: Well, after the railroad was completed enough to bring loads of food in by rail, it was brought in by rail. And after that happened, the monsoon season didn't have as much bearing on the shortage of food as it did prior to it.

Marcello: I would assume that there was a certain amount of pressure involved with working in the kitchen. Did you always have to face the accusation or the suspicion that maybe you were living just a little bit better than the guy who was working on the railroad and things of this nature?

Rea: I think that occurred with a lot of them. They thought, "Well, he's fortunate. He don't have to do that." But still, there's others that didn't want to get involved in that. But I think there was maybe a feeling sometimes that maybe they were being showed a little partiality.

Marcello: Now you mentioned earlier, I think, that one of your jobs would be to carry the rice from the kitchen out to the men

working on the detail. What was the temptation in snitching a little bit of food, so to speak, on your way out there? I assume there would be nobody around you, and nobody would know about it except you and your partner.

Rea: Well, there might have been that that happened in some instances, but I don't recall that even entering my mind as to what we'd do on the way out or coming in. We never did bring anything back. It was always an empty container when we came back.

Marcello: How important does religion become under these circumstances? Or would this be an individual thing?

Rea: I think it was more or less an individual thing. It is what you've been brought up to be or how you'd been trained in younger life. I count it as one of the things that brought me through. I don't say that that was it entirely, but I think that that was . . . it created hope.

Marcello: How much of a problem were such things as rats and bedbugs and lice? Now we talked about bedbugs earlier when we were back in Changi, but how much of a problem in these camps are rats or those ever-present bedbugs and that sort of thing?

Rea: Well, as far as rats are concerned, we weren't bothered with that in the jungle near as much as we were the bedbugs. As I spoke of earlier, some of the camps we went into evidently had been occupied by native personnel or previous

people that had the bedbugs in their gear.

I remember one particular camp that we were in that we got in there late of an afternoon, and, of course, we all spread our stuff out just like we had in all other huts. But in the night, the bedbugs was so bad that we had to get out of the bunks and get out on the ground and try to shake them off of our blankets because they were just absolutely running us ragged. It seemed like they was all over you. We came to find out that those that had been left there was starved for blood. They're a blood sucker, you know, and they were starved for blood. When any new blood would come in, they was after it (laughter).

Marcello: Were you ever in any camp where they had a cholera scare?

I understand when some of the men were at the 105 Kilo Camp, there had been a cholera scare. Are you familiar with that or aware of it?

Rea: Yes, we had a cholera scare, and I think, if I'm not mistaken, we were given cholera shots.

Marcello: Evidently, this was something, then, that the Japanese were very, very scared of, too.

Rea: They were, They sure were. In other words, if there was areas where cholera had been found to have been there, diagnosed as it being a cholera case, they stayed away from it. They didn't go near it.

Marcello: During this very trying period, what kind of qualities of

leadership were the officer exhibiting?

Rea: Well, in the jungle area, they were still with us and was in charge of the working parties. In other words, as we went out to the working areas, they were in charge of us. They were, as we said previously, the negotiators between the guards and the working group.

Marcello: I guess what I was trying to say is, under these circumstances were they providing inspiring leadership as much as could be expected?

Rea: I would say, yes, because we sort of spoke of Stensland earlier. He was out to make it easier in any way he could. And all other officers that was in charge had the same attitude, although they were not as forceful as he was. In other words, he was a strong contender in getting his way if he could get it at all. If he could convince them by being a little more vocal about it or demonstrative about it, he'd do so.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with the Japanese or the Korean guards during this period?

Rea: Only if you had an occasion to maybe be sick or have to go to one to get permission to go back to camp or be relieved of the area you were in. If you stayed on the job with the group to where they were not having to personally look into anything that you were doing, they didn't bother you much. But when you became in a situation

to where it was you as an individual, they took an interest. If you did something that got their attention and they objected to, they'd let you know they were there then. But as a normal thing, if you were in the group, and the group as a whole was going along and things were smooth, they didn't bother you too much.

In the event that one had been singled out sometime in particular for some particular thing, they was the first one that they always encountered. They was on the lookout for that, well, I'd say, one problem maker or something or another. Once you got their attention, they never did forget you.

Marcello: I would assume that during the period of the monsoon season and the "Speedo" campaign, these guards were suffering to a certain extent, too. I guess the conditions weren't exactly too great for them.

Rea: Yes, it was problems for them to survive. There was one thing that I mentioned before, that possibly could be brought in here, that we noticed the Japanese enduring. The doctors had warned us that when we laid down at night to never lay down without something across the stomach, either a light blanket or something just across your stomach to keep you from having what they called a chilled stomach. This started diarrhea or dysentery, and, evidently, the Japanese were affected the same way because they wore a kind of a knit

band around their stomach all the time out in the jungle. It was to keep that portion of their body warm, I guess, but it was just a kind of a sweater or knit thing that it always protruded out of the top of their trousers.

Marcello: You mentioned that, at one point during your stay in the jungle, you were sent back to a hospital camp. Describe the circumstances under which this occurred.

Rea: Well, I'd become bothered with the swelling in my legs to the extent that I couldn't hardly continue to work, and they sent me back there to where I could get some treatment. This is one of the things that they would look at as an observation--if you weren't able to work because you had lots of swelling evidence in your legs.

Marcello: They could see this, that is, the guards could observe this.

Rea: Yes. So I was sent back for this.

Marcello: Now when you say you were sent back . . .

Rea: Sent back to the hospital camp.

Marcello: Do you know at which particular location this camp was?

Rea: I believe the working party was at the 50 Kilo, and this was probably back about the 25 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like in this hospital camp.

Rea: Well, they was similar to the working party, except you weren't called out daily for work, you know, early and late hours like we did when you were in the working camp.

But if you were able to do any light duty work, they might come and get you to do that. For instance, like I spoke of earlier, the crew that was pumping water, they had been through a malaria attack, I think, and sent back to the hospital camp, and this might have been what brought me back there. I don't recall exactly. But if they were able to do light duty work for maybe an hour or so, two hours, they'd come and get you to do these things.

Marcello: What were your rations like when you were sent back to a hospital camp?

Rea: It was some difference to what it was in the working camp. But I do recall while I was in that camp at that time, when we went back to the hospital camp, we were put in with English, Australians, or Dutch or whatever was. We weren't kept together as a unit like we was--the Americans here, the Australians there, and so on. We were thrown together in the hospital camp.

But the most vivid memory I have is of an ol' Australian . . . two of them. Where they got hold of the food that they were preparing, I don't know--whether it come from the kitchen or what. But they had green tomatoes and onions. Where they got the onions, I don't know that, either. But they built a fire out at the end of the barracks and was cooking those--frying those onions and tomatoes together.

And that was the most pleasant aroma I remember while I was in POW camp. It sure was appetizing, but, unfortunately, I didn't get any of it.

Marcello: What food did you seem to be craving the most?

Rea: I craved salt more than anything else, due to the loss of so much of it, I guess.

Marcello: What kind of treatment would you receive here at this hospital camp? Or was it simply a place to rest, and that was about it?

Rea: Well, since this kind of refreshed my mind, I think I was sent to the camp with a malaria attack, due to the fact that they didn't have a sufficient amount of medicine at the camp, and they did have in the hospital camp to treat the malaria.

Marcello: Did they have a doctor or a medic or a combination of both at one of these hospital camps?

Rea: As best I remember, it was a combination of both.

Marcello: Now I know that on a lot of occasions the hospital camps were usually nothing more than death camps. They would send people there who had no hope of recovering. What was the general condition of the people at this hospital camp where you were located?

Rea: Well, fortunately, I didn't get into the area where the real bad patients were. I never was taken there, so to say what happened to them after they got in this condition,

I don't have that knowledge.

Marcello: How long did you stay at this hospital camp?

Rea: Just about a week.

Marcello: And then did you rejoin your original group?

Rea: I went back to the same area I came from.

Marcello: Incidentally, were all of the members of your little clique well and good at this time? Had you lost anybody out of your little group?

Rea: Not that I have any knowledge of--that was in our particular group, that is, the original group that left Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: I'm specifically referring to the smaller group of men who looked out for one another. You mentioned yourself and Eichorst, and I think you said there were maybe two other people in this group.

Rea: None of this particular close group had anything happen to them at that time.

Marcello: And so were you reunited with them again?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: This is just something to satisfy my own curiosity. I've heard some of the prisoners talk about actually splitting paper in order to make cigarettes. Do you remember prisoners doing that?

Rea: Not in particular. I still had my service testament, and a lot of them had a service testament with them that they tore it up and used it for cigarette paper. But I still

have the original one that I was given when we left Camp Bowie--still in my possession. But I do know that there was all types of paper used for cigarette paper.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that that so-called "wog" tobacco that they obtained from the natives was rather potent stuff.

Rea: Well, I wasn't a heavy smoker, so I didn't . . . I smoked a little bit just when . . . as I mentioned earlier about when we'd have these breaks in our work area, we'd smoke to keep these particular insects from stinging us so.

Marcello: Okay, now between October and January of 1943 and 1944, the groups were moved out of the jungle because the railroad was virtually complete. I think they left some details behind to cut wood and get involved in maintenance and things of that nature. Do you recall the circumstances under which you left the railroad and got out of the jungle?

Rea: I don't know the circumstances that caused me to be in a group that left there, but I was in the group that did leave. There was a number of them that was kept there for wood detail and, as you said, maintenance. And we went into a camp in Thailand at that time.

Marcello: Was it Kanchanaburi?

Rea: Kanchanaburi is correct.

Marcello: That was a large camp, was it not?

Rea: Very large. And even after we got there, we was still building more huts out of bamboo and thatched roofs and so on.

Marcello: By this time, you had learned how to build those huts yourself?

Rea: We were beginning to learn. We learned there. I worked on some of them myself.

Marcello: I guess when you were going through the jungle, most of those camps had been pre-built by natives and so on. And like you mentioned, I guess even some of the natives labor had used those camps.

Rea: This was the first area where I was designated as a barber only. We would cut hair and shave all day long.

Marcello: Again, were you charging twenty-five cents a whack?

Rea: No, this was just part of our work team. There were some 30,000 prisoners there, and there was an area where they went to that had about seven or eight people that were shaving. We were required to keep close-shaved at that time, and this was before they required the clipping of the head. But I was put in with the English and Australian barbers to cut hair of all the prisoners there.

Marcello: How did this come about?

Rea: Well, I guess I was designated, or they asked for people that could do that and had the equipment, and I still had a scissors, comb, and a pair of hand clippers.

Marcello: Was your health pretty good at this time?

Rea: Comparatively good. And again, it was, I guess, another area where it was considered light duty--light duty work.

Marcello: Well, Kanchanaburi was closer to civilization, so I guess

the food was a lot better here, wasn't it?

Rea: Yes, the food improved there. I'm not sure what river it was that we were close to there, but in the afternoon, after the work was all finished, they'd take us down to the river shore, and we'd bathe in that river. Was this the River Kwai, a branch of it?

Marcello: Well, I don't think there is such a river as the River Kwai, but I think it is that river upon which that movie was based.

Rea: But I know, to me, it was a welcome thing because working all day with cutting hair, it just stuck to you, just caked on you, having no shirt or anything on, and to go down and get that hair washed off of you in that river was a great feeling (chuckle).

Marcello: How did the food differ here as compared to what it was in the jungle?

Rea: A little better grade of rice and possibly a little more meat.

Marcello: Wasn't there also a canteen established here?

Rea: Yes, you could buy certain items. This is where you could buy some of this shintagar, we called it.

Marcello: That's the brown sugar?

Rea: That's the brown sugar.

Marcello: How about eggs? I understand they were a delicacy in any of these camps. Was it not true that you could purchase duck eggs at this canteen?

Rea: Not as much there as it was later when we got into Saigon. We were beginning to get things through the canteen there.

Marcello: You mentioned that you could purchase things in this canteen. Were you purchasing these things with the Japanese occupation money?

Rea: Yes, yes.

Marcello: And who ran the canteen?

Rea: Well, it'd be put in charge of some individual, you know, like, one of the officers was in charge of it. I remember after we got into French Indochina he was the manager of it.

Marcello: While you were at Kanchanaburi, did you come under any air raids?

Rea: No, not to my knowledge.

Marcello: How long were you there altogether?

Rea: I think it was less than three months--not too long a time.

Marcello: I know that after they moved people out of the jungle, they were also in the process of sending people back to Japan. What were your thoughts in terms of going back to Japan?

Rea: Well, they'd given us the speech about going back to a place where it was much better for you than the jungle, but they didn't say it was Japan proper. They got a group together and put them on the train, and we left Kanchanaburi and went to Bangkok, Thailand. I remember my twenty-seventh birthday was spent in Bangkok, Thailand, on the way to . . . well, we finally wound up in Saigon.

Marcello: In other words, from Kanchanaburi you were put on a train to Bangkok.

Rea: Right.

Marcello: And was it their purpose, at that time, to ship you back to Japan? Or didn't you know what they were going to do with you?

Rea: We didn't hear too much about it until we got into Indochina, at Saigon.

Marcello: Describe the train trip from Kanchanaburi to Bangkok. What kind of a train was this?

Rea: Well, we left there actually on flat cars. It was just a flat car with small sideboards on it. We would travel at night, and when we first started out, we would travel some in the late evening. You know, it was late in the evening. And then during midday . . . I don't know whether they had knowledge of what flights they might encounter or when they might be there or what, but we would travel mostly by night and some by day.

Marcello: Was this a very harrowing trip? Physically taxing?

Rea: Not too bad, to my knowledge. They didn't have us too crowded. It was a comparatively pleasant trip until we got into the area where we had to start to march from one place to the other to reach the destination we was going to due to the fact that the rails had been blown out or had been destroyed.

- Marcello: So by this time then, you must have some sort of an idea that the tide of the war is beginning to change?
- Rea: Yes. They finally took us into an area where we got on a riverboat and traveled about . . . I think we was on that riverboat for about three or four days, and this was a pleasant experience. We was on the riverboat day and night, you know, bunked on it, slept on it. And during our trip here, we were able to, at various times, buy fruit of various kinds, bananas . . . mainly bananas.
- Marcello: Okay, so you finally end up in . . . well, let me back up a minute. I know that one group that passed through Bangkok was more or less put on a siding in the railroad marshaling yards there at a time when all sorts of air raids were occurring. Were you a member of this group?
- Rea: No, I wasn't a member of this group.
- Marcello: Okay, so you move into Saigon. Where did they billet you after you got to Saigon?
- Rea: Just across the street from the docks where we landed off the riverboat.
- Marcello: Describe what this compound looked like from the physical standpoint.
- Rea: Well, there was quite a number of English and Australians already there, and Dutch. Supposedly, this was a delay on our way to Japan, and I don't know why the plans were changed. We were under the impression that we'd be there only temporarily

and then would board ship and continue our trip to Japan.

Marcello: I'd asked you this question earlier, and I'm not sure you answered it. Did you want to go to Japan?

Rea: Not particularly, because being on the high seas and water, I didn't have any desire for that--ever.

Marcello: Describe what your quarters were like, then, here at Saigon.

Rea: Well, we were upgraded a little bit to what we had in the jungle due to the fact that we're in structured huts with a tile roof on it that would shed water. And it had double-decks or two decks of sleeping quarters in it where you could spread your blanket. And they were boarded up to where you'd spread your blanket on wooden slats or these kind of floors, and it was comparatively comfortable to what it had been.

Marcello: You did not have bunks as such, though, did you?

Rea: No, you spread your blanket on flat wood.

Marcello: How large a camp was this?

Rea: Well, to start with, after they all got in there, after our arrival and the ones that had been there, I think the capacity of it was about 5,000--English, Dutch, Australians, Americans.

Marcello: Was there a barbed wire fence around this camp or anything of that nature?

Rea: There was a bamboo fence about nine feet high with wire on top of it--bamboo poles standing side-by-side where you just could see through the cracks of it.

Marcello: Did your same guards accompany you here to Saigon, that is, the same guards that you perhaps had on the railroad?

Rea: Some of them were. It seems as though there was a replacement now and then of some personnel that had been with us. This particular area was the first time I ever encountered being bashed around by Japanese any at all.

Marcello: You might want to describe this incident.

Rea: Well, as I said, I was being more known as the company barber, group barber. I would cut hair in the morning and work in the PX during the noon hour when they'd all come in from the working party and so on. And we are getting supplies through, from the outside, that they'd deliver in there by, I believe, these one-horse carts. Captain Fowler was the manager of the canteen at that time. That was before the officers were taken away from us. And there was about four or five of those little one-horse carts that came in with the canteen supplies on it, which consisted of duck eggs, bananas, and there was a certain amount of . . . it seems like there was some of that brown sugar stuff in it and maybe a few other little items. But mainly it was bananas and duck eggs. And I do remember there was a loaf of bread, a small loaf of bread, being made and brought in in baskets there.

We were trying to unload this cart, and this little horse to it--it was a small horse--was acting up quite a

lot. Evidently, it hadn't been used for that purpose very much, but, anyway, he was acting up right smart.

And this little Japanese guard that was kind of over the thing--struck me just about halfway between my waist and shoulders--was standing there with a rifle. He decided we wasn't unloading it fast enough, so he backed up and decided he'd work me over by slapping me. And he had to reach up, almost, to hit me, and the thought hit me one time to throw up my elbow when he started to swing at me, but I thought, "Well, he's not hurting me too bad, and maybe it'll be over in a minute." So he took about five or six cuts at me. I got busy putting the bread back, and he backed off.

That's the only real encounter I ever had with the Japanese really bashing me around. Oh, I'd been kicked a time or two and pushed around a little bit, but as far as just really walking into me and really trying to work you over good, that never had occurred.

Marcello: Is this sort of bashing that you just described more humiliating than anything else?

Rea: I would say it's the most humiliating thing . . . you just feel . . . I had the feeling, "I could just take you in one hand and just shake the life out of you!" That kind of hit me all at once, but, again, I thought, "Well, he's got the advantage. There's others standing around here,

- and it wouldn't pay off to try to resist or anything like that."
- Marcello: And this one was a Japanese as opposed to a Korean guard?
- Rea: To the best of my ability, I think he was Japanese because the Japanese wore a red bar with a gold star on it, and the Koreans wore a kind of . . . what do they call that G.I. color?
- Marcello: Olive drab?
- Rea: Olive drab star on a black background. And that was the only way I could distinguish a real Japanese from the other.
- Marcello: You mentioned bread a moment ago. This must have been the first bread you'd seen for a while.
- Rea: It was the first bread. It was made out of, evidently, rice of some kind. It was a little loaf about so long and about so tall (gesture).
- Marcello: Maybe about six or seven inches long and maybe four inches tall?
- Rea: Well, two or three inches.
- Marcello: Was it good?
- Rea: Yes, it was pretty good. We would always toast it. It wasn't wrapped in anything; it was just open bread. You could trim off the outer edge of it or sear it over with a hot flame.
- Marcello: Saigon and most of the French Indochina at that time was a fairly lush region in terms of the growing of food and

so on and so forth. Did you find that you were perhaps eating better here than you had at Kanchanaburi or certainly back in the jungle and so on?

Rea: Much more so than back in the jungle . . . than what we were getting in the jungle. Then eventually they . . . the area where we was evidently had been filled with soil brought up because as the tide came in, water came up over that, and as the tide went out, the water went out with the tide.

As we started building bomb shelters and so on outside . . . by the way, we'd already had some bombing raids there in Saigon. But as we took the soil out of some areas to build the bomb shelters, it lowered the soil to where the water would come up and stand there. Well, I don't know whether they bought the ducks or hatched the ducks or just exactly what, but they brought ducks in and put them on these ponds. Well, there was some of us . . . I wasn't particularly in it because, you know, either natives or some of the personnel might have been designated to go out in the water and gather the eggs that the ducks laid, and this is where they sold them outside or something or other. But anyway, there was lots of ducks out there.

Marcello: So you were living better, then, in terms of food?

Rea: Much better than we had been while we were in the jungle.

Marcello: Was the rice of a much better quality here?

Rea: Yes, the rice was a good grade. It had a good flavor to it, wasn't near as trashy like it was back in the jungle.

Marcello: So were you getting enough to eat?

Rea: Yes, we were getting sufficient food of its kind then.

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that they had probably sent you to Saigon with the idea of shipping you back to Japan. That plan evidently changed as a result of the bombing raids. I gather that after a while the American carrier planes and so on were bombing everything that moved out of that area. Do you recall some of the air raids that took place here at Saigon while you were there?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: Describe them.

Rea: I believe it was in January, 1944 . . . might have been 1945.

Marcello: You probably got to Saigon around April of 1944, is that correct? Does that sound reasonable?

Rea: Yes, I believe that's about right.

Marcello: So this may have been 1945 when the air raids occurred.

Rea: Right. As I said, our barracks where we were staying were right across the street from the docks where the channel came up. They unloaded ships and loaded ships there. Just across the street was where our compound started, and we would go and work on the docks across there.

And on this particular day, when we had the air raid, it started just as we were making formation to go out on

the working party that morning. The air raid alarm went off. And, by the way, there was a triangle which had a big folding bridge at this point, a big water tower here, and a big twin-steepled church here (gesture), and our compound was in that triangle. We didn't know at the particular time that they knew where we was, but evidently they did. But to continue with the story of the air raid, they had some slit trenches and so on and so forth, so to speak, inside the camp then. We'd gone through the training course of . . . in the event of a air raid or anything, and if there was fire that occurred, there was so many staying in camp to fight the fire--be there to fight the fire. And the rest of them were taken out to a compound outside that they'd built out there. At this particular time, we didn't have all our bomb shelters built outside.

But I recall the dive-bombers coming in and dropping bombs in the dock area right across the street from us. I remember this particular time that there was one plane that come in just like he was coming after me here, and he looked like he was bombing. When he turned loose, you could see the bombs turned loose. And it looked like he was coming right straight for our trench. You could see him just coming right at you. He hit across the street, and I don't know whether he was in the bay or in the docks or just exactly what. But anyway, he tore up one of the

warehouses--a portion of it there. But that's quite an experience to set there and see a dive-bomber come down and that bomb just come right at you. But it fell short of us.

Then a few minutes later there was one that come in from the opposite direction. This first one was coming from the south and coming into our area, going north. And in a few minutes, there was one that came in from the north and was making his dive and coming back out to the south. And an ack-ack gun evidently made direct connection with it. It was just looked like the two wings just went this way (gesture), and it hit across the bay there.

Marcello: I gather that at one time one of these air raids lasted all day. Do you remember that one?

Rea: Yes. I think this was the day. It started early in the morning and stayed until, oh, 3:30, four o'clock that afternoon.

Marcello: And evidently they just tore up everything in the harbor, in particular.

Rea: You could see the smoke everywhere around, all around the harbor.

Marcello: What did this do for your morale?

Rea: Well, we had this feeling that definitely that there was something being done now. We could see action, although we had fear that possibly the next one might come at us.

Marcello: How did the attitude of the Japanese change as a result of these raids, or didn't it?

Rea: Well, about this time, as I spoke of before, they started building these bomb shelters outside. At the same time or shortly afterwards, they went to each corner of the compound, and instead of having the opening for the machine gun slit pointing out from there, it had the pill box or whatever it was in the corner with that slit coming toward us. It entered from the outside. They built one of those in each corner. And we learned later that in the event that an invasion started there, they was going to open fire on the whole camp. That was just scuttlebutt. But, fortunately, it never did happen. This is when that occurred.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever seem to get meaner or more ornery as a result of these raids?

Rea: They got a little more edgy about things. I think they were beginning to feel that they might be losing the upper hand.

Marcello: What kind of work details are you going on here at Saigon?

Rea: Well, mainly, we were working on runways at the airport there in Saigon.

Marcello: You were doing more military work, in other words?

Rea: More military work and loading and unloading ships out at the docks there. One particular thing that might be interesting is: since they were working just across

the street from us, rather than carrying food out to them, the working parties would come back into camp to eat during the noon hour. And somebody run across a case of Palmolive soap, hand soap, you know, bath size, or just Palmolive in that size. There wasn't any variations in it, I don't think. But, anyway, they run into a case of that. So me being in camp with two or three others that was off the working party that day, they said that we . . . at a certain time during their evening break that evening or when they had, you know, a break in the working party, they would start throwing these bars of soap across the street over into the compound and for us to be on the alert and start picking them up. So they threw a whole case of Palmolive soap across there (chuckle). We sure did help.

Marcello: One bar at a time?

Rea: One bar at a time. There was about five or six of them throwing them (laughter). We was out there gathering them up like Easter eggs.

Marcello: That's the first real soap you had seen in how long?

Rea: Oh, boy, did it smell good (chuckle)! Oh, it'd been possibly eighteen months.

Marcello: I assume that in working around the docks, you were presented with an opportunity to steal all sorts of things?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: I gather that one of the hot items here was cloth, cloth

of any sort.

Rea: Yes, bolts of material that you could sell. You could take it outside, and if you could get to where you could sell it to the natives, that's where some of them made their money.

Marcello: I understand some of these prisoners would take that cloth and wrap it all around themselves, under their clothing and so on, to get it out of those warehouses.

Rea: That's right.

Marcello: But I had heard that that was one of the prized items for trading with the natives.

Rea: They'd take it out that way, too. They'd either find it or buy it from somebody and then take it out the same day or the next day or a few days later and sell it. When we'd go out to the airport, there would be natives out there that we'd work with, and they wouldn't be noticeable. They wouldn't be breaking from the working party, from the work time, to negotiate for it at that time. You'd be working with them or in contact with them periodically, and the bargaining and exchange of merchandise would happen then.

Marcello: How different was the work here in Saigon?

Rea: Well, if you was in a detail where you was having to move that rice off of the ship onto the warehouse where they'd drop that 200 pounds onto your shoulders and you'd walk a catwalk off the ship into the warehouse, it was pretty

difficult. A few days that I was out in the working party, we did that, but I mainly filled in for someone that would feel like he was not able to make the working party. I'd fill in for some occasionally that way and take their work hours--go in instead of them.

Marcello: But, generally speaking, you were back in camp still working as a barber?

Rea: Yes, most of the time.

Marcello: Now during our pre-interview conference, you mentioned that, at one time here, you were sent up into the northern part of Indochina to build some tunnels, probably up around a town called Da Lat, which, I think, is a resort city or was a resort city. Describe this particular episode in your life as a prisoner-of-war.

Rea: Well, on the trip up there we went by rail, and we had noticed evidence of heavy bombing on our trip up there. It was--I don't know what--some seventy-five or maybe a hundred kilos up there. It was to the height that it was cold--got cold enough to frost in the early morning. And we were issued some heavier clothing, since they knew we would be cold up there, of various types.

They took, oh, it seemed like, about probably seventy-five or eighty of us up there, and we worked in the . . . well, before we get to the top of the mountain . . . we went up by regular train part of the way, and then they finally

got us on a cog train, one that clogged down the center between the tracks that the big cog would roll on. It was that steep. Evidently, a regular train would slip on the tracks. The elevation of the last few miles was very steep.

And we were put into a compound up there, a camp area, that was comparatively comfortable. It was to where we could cut the cold air out during the night for sleeping, and the bathing facilities was . . . they took these big rice quarries that they'd cooked in, you know, like we used to cook rice, and set several of those in areas where they could build a fire under them and put concrete, you know, over the bottom of it, such as a grate in the bottom of it. They'd build a fire under that to heat the water for us to come in and bathe in at night, which was adequate for cleanliness and so on. We enjoyed it. We still had to dip water out with a cup or bucket to bathe from.

Then they'd take us up into the town area, and maybe start under a house and go up through a hill. I remember one particular place that started from the garage area of a house, and it was built on a slope, and from the front of the garage it went into this hillside. We started under there and took all of the dirt out as we dug the tunnel, and as we dug the dirt out, they'd take railroad ties and stand them up like this for walls. (gesture).

Marcello: Stand the ties up vertically?

Rea: Yes, and put them this way for the top (gesture).

Marcello: And then put some across the top for shoring?

Rea: For shoring, yes. We were up there . . . this was our work for . . . oh, I think we was up there maybe sixty days.

Marcello: Was this very tough work?

Rea: Some of it was pretty heavy work.

Marcello: So I guess you were back to pick-and-shovel work again then?

Rea: We were back to pick-and-shovel. There'd be two or three of us up where the dirt was being dug up, digging the dirt and shoveling it out, and there'd be several of us with the rice sacks or gunny sacks, you know, wire and bamboo pole, carrying it out.

Marcello: Do you suspect that they were building these tunnels in order to make a last stand up there or something?

Rea: We never did know exactly what their intent was, but they finally came together here in some areas.

Marcello: That is, they actually connected some of the tunnels?

Rea: Right. I never was in it, but they said there was one room that was dug down where one of those connecting areas was. There was a room dug out underneath there.

Marcello: Did the guards seem to be pressuring you on this detail, that is, pressing you to get it done?

Rea: Not so much as they did back on the railroad.

Marcello: How many of you were there working on these tunnels?

- Rea: There, again, I'm not accurate on the number, but it seems to me there were probably seventy-five, eighty, or a hundred of us.
- Marcello: Was the food pretty good?
- Rea: Comparatively, it was a little different food than what we had had. It had more vegetables and little more flavor to it than it had back in the . . . but not a whole lot of food. We could buy fruit and so on up there, also.
- Marcello: It was colder up there, too, wasn't it?
- Rea: Yes, it was cold there. As I say, some mornings there was frost.
- Marcello: What kind of clothing did you have left by this time?
- Rea: Well, I still had a shirt that was heavy enough that I'd be comfortable in until it warmed up. Then they gave us additional clothing. It seems to me like some of them was the Dutch green clothing like the Dutch Army had. It was probably picked up from there somewhere, and they issued some of that to us. There were some of them that still . . . well, there wasn't anybody sent up there that didn't have adequate clothing to keep him comparatively warm. In other words, there wasn't anybody still working in G-strings up there, by no means.
- Marcello: How many guards did they take along?
- Rea: I don't recall, but it seems like there was possibly one guard to about every twenty people.

Marcello: So there wouldn't be too many guards, then--no more than a half-dozen perhaps at the very most, if even that many.

Rea: We would still go into a compound where we was fenced in at night.

Marcello: As I recall the trip from Da Lat back down to Saigon was rather interesting, too. Again, I guess those railroads had been pounded pretty heavily by air raids, hadn't they?

Rea: Yes. Even the short time we was up there, we had more broken spans where we had to walk between--blown-out places--than there we had going up--much more.

Marcello: Did you have any contact with the natives while you were heading back down to Saigon again with regard to the course of the war?

Rea: Possibly a few. Occasionally, we'd get a hint that there might be maybe stronger activity in Japan than we had ever heard of before. It wasn't showing there too much, although this situation back in camp that we left, with the openings to the pill boxes being inside, was still in our minds as what those were going to be used for one of these days.

Marcello: On April 12, 1945, Franklin Roosevelt died. Did this news get back to you?

Rea: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Did the Japanese announce it?

Rea: Yes. We were in formation early one morning before we went on the working party, and the commander, I think, passed

the word down that President Roosevelt had died. And we heard through the Japanese personnel all day that for the American horios--that was their word for prisoners--"No change! No change at all! President dead." They called him Roosevelt. They could pronounce his name. It was always strange to me, during the course of all those places we'd been into, that they could pick up our language much faster than we picked up theirs--enough to get by with.

Marcello: Had you learned any Japanese at all, other than to count?

Rea: Yes, I could speak a little (chuckle).

Marcello: What was the reaction among you and your fellow prisoners when you heard about the death of Roosevelt? After all, he was the only president most of you had ever known in your adult lives.

Rea: Of course, we didn't know what the situation was, and none of us knew then who the vice-president was. This came to us at a later date. But ol' Harry (Truman) hung in there (laughter).

Marcello: Okay, so you're back down in Saigon again after this approximate sixty-day stay up in Da Lat. What happens when you get back down to Saigon? I assume you're around here when the war is over.

Rea: Yes, we were there. There was one incident that kind of gave us hope, I think, on the way back down there. Of course, we had one person in our company that had to be . . . well,

he was on a stretcher at least part of the time, and we alternated carrying him and our cooking gear and so on and so forth, among those that was carrying their own gear, during the areas we had to walk from one blown-out area to the other on the rail track. But I remember one particular incident. There was a younger boy in our outfit that was from Wichita Falls. They had moved us all day long the day before, and we walked a big part of the day, and they'd found an area or just let us fall off the side of the road in an old vacant house and various things around there that we slept in that night. The next morning they moved us down to the railhead to reload us on a train again, and we was sitting there in the rail yard waiting for the train-- whatever was holding us up--and there was a nice-looking Japanese personnel who came down with his riding boots and little quirt in his hand and white, starched shirt. Oh, he looked crisp as could be.

And this young fellow was sitting there, leaned up against a fence of some kind, and he just made the remark as this guy was walking by, he said, "I'll be so damned glad when they get through pushing us around over here, and we can settle down and do something or another." And this guy stopped in front of this young fellow, and he said, "Cheer up, lad, it may be over sooner than you think it will be." And we felt, "Well, where'd that come from?"

Very rarely would one ever come out and speak any English. We come to find out this guy was educated in the United States. He could speak English very fluently. But he just came out with that; "Cheer up, lad. It may be sooner than you think. Changes may come sooner than you think."

Marcello: All this time, had you ever received any Red Cross packages?

Rea: Not until we got back to Saigon.

Marcello: How welcome were they?

Rea: Oh, they were welcome, even though they had been boxed up so long until everything in it . . . there was a bittersweet chocolate bar in there, and everything in it had that bittersweet chocolate smell and odor.

Marcello: What were some of the things contained in that Red Cross package?

Rea: Well, outside of this bittersweet chocolate, there was cigarettes, toothpaste, toothbrushes, safety razor, some blades, probably a little shaving soap, and, oh, it seemed like there was powdered bouillon. I got sick on some of that (chuckle). It ruined my taste of beef bouillon from there on.

Marcello: Did you get a full Red Cross package?

Rea: One full box. One full box. Now there was a little discrepancy on it to start with. The English and Australians held out that we divide it equally among all prisoners. But the Japanese camp commandant said, "No, one box, one

American. One American gets one box as long as they go. Any left over, okay, split it between." Well, this caused a little bit of, you know, animosity among the English and Australians. They got over it.

Marcello: When you got your Red Cross package, did you eat all the contents as quickly as possible, or did you try and stretch them out?

Rea: I think that was the experiment some of us went through. Now this bouillon was very concentrated, evidently, very rich, and in trying to put it on rice, we didn't know the proper mixture of it. It was too rich, and it backfired on us. So that was the experience. We smoked the cigarettes even though they did have that chocolate smell to them.

Marcello: Okay, describe the events leading up to the Japanese surrender and your ultimate liberation.

Rea: Well, I believe it was August 14, 1945. . . . no, it was the day before. Prior to that they had come through and gathered up everything that had any sharpness to it that might be used as a weapon or any glass that might be used to cut with or anything like that. Any sharp objects of any nature, they had you to just pitch it in boxes. In other words, they went through all the gear and took all that out.

Marcello: In other words, you lost all your barbering gear?

Rea: No, I didn't lose my barbering gear. That was the only

thing that was left. I had to keep it in a roll, together-- all of the scissors, the razors--and I was the only one that was allowed with it. Of course, at that time, I had gone through and sharpened some table knives, just regular table knives, that we could shave with. They were stainless steel, and you could finally get enough edge on it with proper stropping on it that you could shave with it, and we were using that to shave with, along with what razors we had. But that's all. We could keep those things together. It was marked that I was allowed to keep that. Everything we had that was personal, that they had inventoried that we could keep, was stamped that we could keep it. They had gone through even our wallets and everything, all our pictures. If anybody had any jewelry, they took that up.

And about the twelfth or thirteenth of August, they called a working party together one morning early, and they went out and got all these boxes of stuff that had been gathered up and just brought it out in the compound and dumped it. If there was anything there that belonged to you and that you wanted to retain, you could go to it and pick it up and take it out. This was an indication that something had happened that we didn't know anything about. We still didn't have any knowledge about what was actually going on.

Marcello: In the meantime, had you kind of developed any contingency

plans in case the war was over and the Japanese lost and they were planning to get rid of you?

Rea: No, we never had any inclination that that was fixing to happen, although we had been worried about it all the time as to what these slits coming into the camp meant. And one particular time there was a guard, I think, talking to me one day when I was either cutting his hair or was working on the camp commandant's, and he was there. But, anyway, after . . . oh, he came and got me and took me to the camp commandant, and something or other was said about it. He had broken English enough to say that one day it would be terrible to be inside. I didn't know what the meaning of it was at that time. Evidently, their plan was, in the case of invasion, that they would probably destroy us or try to destroy us. Now to continue the story with my barber work, after we came back to Saigon . . . we were actually in Saigon almost eighteen months, and during this time, I was barbering and shaving at night and doing the various activities of barber work that I'd been doing. But this Dutchman who'd been cutting the camp commandant's hair got sick. And at this time we were having to clip all of our hair--keep it clipped close all the time. This was regulations that the Japanese had, also. They had to keep their hair clipped. Well, occasionally a guard that would be out in the compound walking the fence inside the

compound would stop long enough, and he'd want me to cut his hair. And I had a place set up in the barracks over there where they could sit in a makeshift barber chair, on a stool and so on. But he wanted his hair cut and shaved-- the outline over his ears and all. He wanted it shaved between his eyes and over his ears, on his forehead. If there was any fuzz on his ears, he wanted that shaved off, too. Well, I didn't particularly want to get started working on them because I didn't want to be bothered with them. So I thought, "Well, I'll just fix this one to where maybe the word will get around." So instead of coming down the hairline on each side of his neck when I shaved it, I brought it in to where it was nearly a "V" in the back of his neck. He stuck his finger up there and felt that, felt where I'd shaved it way over into his hair. Oh, he just had a fit! He never did strike me, but he sure did blast me out (chuckle).

Then, at a later date, I was called over to the camp commandant. He knew that I was barbering. He'd been walking through the area and saw me working on various ones. So he called for me since this Dutch guy was sick and wasn't able to cut his hair. And along with the Red Cross supplies that had come in, evidently there had been quite a number of these Oster hand clippers, big, broad ones about that wide (gesture).

Marcello: About three inches wide.

Rea: Yes, and I'd been wanting a pair. I'd been using a pair that a Dutchman had made extra handles for, since it was broke. They were German clippers and still worked pretty good, but they pulled hair pretty bad.

When I got over to the camp commandant's quarters, he had a pair laying up on his stand there, brand new ones, and he pointed to me that I could use them on him. Well, I picked them up and had no knowledge--it never even occurred to me--that he could speak English at all. And I just made the remark as I picked them up, I said, "Well, if that Japanese sergeant hadn't walked out with about three or four pair and took them downtown and sold them, I might have had a pair of them." I just made that remark to myself. He kind of looked up at me out of the corner of his eye and never said anything. I went ahead and cut his hair and got through and took my barber roll and everything and went back to the quarters. A few days later he sent a pair of these clippers to me.

And rather than try to bring them out when they took us out of the compound with the rest of them when we was liberated, I left mine with the Englishman who was still working there--these new ones. I wanted to retain the ones that I had used all the time. But my buddy system broke down right there. I was called to go stand on guard

the night before we were flown out of there--to stand guard at the hotel where the men who came to liberate us was. I left instructions with "Ike" to gather all my stuff and be sure to put it in my barber roll. But the only thing he put in was scissors and comb, and he left the clippers out, and I didn't get my clippers back. But that's the story of the final part of the barber deal.

Marcello: Okay, so we were talking about the steps leading up to the end of the war and your ultimate liberation. You mentioned that they had gathered all these sharp instruments and glassware and things of that nature, and then at a later date they had dumped them all out and told you you could get what you wanted. It was at that point that I guess you knew that something was up.

Rea: Yes. On August 14, there was about three or four big planes that flew over and dropped pamphlets. We was standing out in the compound, and you could see them just turn those pamphlets out, and they'd just flutter everywhere. Some of them, we thought, were eventually going to drift down into our compound, but, unfortunately, there never was any that got into our compound. But daily, this Chinese--we called him "George" (chuckle)--was bringing in our canteen supplies, and he brought us some in with our canteen supplies the next day. Printed on it in three or four different languages were orders for us to stay in our compound, that

the war was over and for us to remain in your compound until further notice. And after about the second run over the city, they opened fire on one of the planes, so this kind of killed our morale again because we thought, "Well, this is another false maneuver." We'd been getting these little hints that the war might be over and that things was kind of turning our way--through outside information.

But in a short time, there was a group of Japanese personnel that some of us had been working with out on the airport, and they came into the compound and said that--well, they were elated over it just like we were--that the war was over, that the Japanese had surrendered. And the next few days, they moved us out of this compound over into a cavalry camp.

Marcello: In the meantime, what kind of celebrations took place?

And what was your reaction when you were pretty sure that now the war was over?

Rea: Well, we was eager to hear what the next news was all the time. But the only thing that I remember after that was the distinction that we were at liberty to go out into the town, you know. One Sunday afternoon, after we had moved from this particular area and into the cavalry camp, which had brick buildings--terrazzo floors, tile roofs . . . real nice buildings, beautiful place. We stayed there about, it seemed like, a week, week-and-a-half, or two weeks, and

they began to bring in a larger quantity, a better quantity, of food. And all the people that was in the hospital, they moved them. They had gotten straw mattresses and mattresses of any kind and put them on those in the hospital. This camp commandant had gone out and come in with truckloads of those things.

But this particular Sunday afternoon, there was five of us that was downtown when this native uprising occurred, I guess. For two weeks before this happened, when we was out on working parties, we'd see large gatherings of people-- natives--and the Japanese would be up on a stand with one of these PA system horns, you know, speaking to them. I don't know whether they were the ones that agitated the natives against the French people or just what, but, anyway, I think there was some of the French personnel that tried to get in there, and the natives was against the French at that time. I never did know the exact history of it as to where it came from, but there was some that was dropped by parachute, and these natives attacked them. I don't have any concrete evidence. Whether anybody else has spoke of that, I don't know.

Marcello: In other words, I guess it wasn't too safe to be wandering around that city as a white man.

Rea: Not too safe. It sure wasn't. But this Sunday afternoon, we were down in the area, and before anything happened,

we were in a little eating joint or cold drink joint or something or another, and there was high booths. When you sat down, you couldn't see the top of anybody's head, but we heard a familiar voice of a person up there, and somebody kind of peeked out around the side of it, and somebody said, "There's 'Buffhead!'" And, of course, we all raised up and he had left our compound, and he was dressed in a snow white uniform then--shirt and slacks. And he saw us and he drifted.

Marcello: Was he armed?

Rea: No, he wasn't armed at that time. He was just dressed like a civilian then. But that expression and his voice and so on, we knew it. And when he heard "Buffhead" from somebody . . . evidently, he heard that word, and he took off. That's the only encounter.

Now there was some of them that stayed in camp with us--that had come to us late--and they stayed with us even until we was liberated. But most of them didn't stay. They headed out. But now that was the experience with "Buffhead."

Now this particular Sunday afternoon, they started marching in a circle, just building up volume all around--these natives was--and sometime or another some hothead fired a shot, and that set things off. So we had quite a little activity and gunfire that afternoon. There was

five in my party, and we backed up into an area there that was kind of a staircase, and right down in front of us was all the firing. We kind of backed up in there for protection and to see what was going on.

There was some French people, that was in the quarters above this, and they came down and opened the door and asked us to go up to their quarters. The five of us went up and spent the night there that night--the remainder of this night.

The next morning we decided we better get out and get back to camp. So we was making our way back to camp, and at various places there would be a white woman, a French woman, and maybe a child or two that the natives wouldn't let out of that area to go back to their home. Maybe they was two doors down or something like that from the house that they lived in. But all the natives was armed with bamboo poles with a steel spear on the end, and they were almost everywhere like that.

I don't know what the others encountered, but on our trip back to the compound that day, these women would come out and ask us to walk them from their house to the other. If they were with us, these native guards would let them go free, you know, from one place to the other. But they would not let them come out unless we were accompanying them. Now, why, I don't know.

But before we were liberated, they had brought French women and children into the compound where we was, and they were living in the compound where we was. That's another experience (chuckle).

Marcello: Do you want to elaborate on that?

Rea: Not too great. I don't know whether the others have mentioned it or not, but the French morals is pretty low. It didn't make any difference to them whether you was dressed or whether you wasn't dressed. If they wanted to come in, why . . . and prior to them coming into the camp, we could go out to the water tanks in the area and take a bath just standing outside. But after they came in, we had to go into the cavalry barn areas, and somebody would stand at the door to keep them from coming in where we was bathing. And there's other things that took place here that's not worth mentioning. But the French morals . . . I always heard they was bad, but I experienced some of it.

Marcello: And these, in many cases, were married women?

Rea: Many of them were.

Marcello: They had children and so on.

Rea: Many of them were with small children.

Marcello: When you talked about the end of the war, you didn't mention whether or not the Japanese commandant of the compound gathered you together and gave you official notification

that it was the end of the war and what you were supposed to do. Did this not occur?

Rea: The only time that I remember him gathering us together and making any comment to us was when we went to the airport and was waiting to embark on the plane to leave. He spoke English to us then. And we knew then that he was . . . we'd come to find out he'd been to college in the United States, too. But he told us, in the course of this, that he would try to make it just as easy for us as he could while we were under his command, and he hoped we had a safe journey home and so on.

Marcello: But you had no instructions to remain in that compound until you were liberated?

Rea: None other than the pamphlets that we received.

Marcello: And, of course, once you found out the war was over, nothing could keep you inside that compound, I guess.

Rea: Well, most of us remained there after this encounter with natives outside. I didn't have any desire to get out anymore because I felt like that this was the best thing. And, of course, we were sad when we got the rumor later on that the colonel that came in to liberate us was killed in the hotel where I stood guard that night. Stray bullets went through the window and killed him in another one of these uprisings and firing of guns and so on and so forth. I don't know whether anybody else has mentioned that to that

effect or not.

Marcello: Describe the actual liberation, that is, the Americans or the Allies coming in and getting you out of that camp.

Rea: Well, as I said earlier, on August 14, the planes came in and distributed the pamphlets. The next day, I think, there was possibly some more planes that came in, but I'm not sure whether it was the second or third day after that. But about 4:30 in the afternoon, there was a big American plane that came in, and we could see over the horizon that indicated that it landed at the airfield where we'd been working. And in a short time there was Captain Fitzsimmons and this American colonel that came in to liberate us, and, oh, it seemed like there was a sergeant or two. They drove up in front of the gate in a jeep with a .50-caliber machine gun sitting up on the tripod on it.

And I was back out in the compound there from the main gate where the guards were staying, and it's a very, very vivid memory to me that this jeep drove up to the gate. One of the sergeants got out of the jeep, came to the gate, and was going to open it. And the guards wasn't paying any attention to them at all. Evidently, there was some of them that was supposed to have been watching the gate, but they were just sitting there asleep. But this sergeant walked up to the gate and rattled it, and he roused them up. And when he turned with his back to him, they could

see that American flag on the back of his jacket--flight jacket, I guess. And, boy, you talk about things turning over! Those guards really came to their feet. So they opened the gate and let them in. And they came in.

Captain Fitzsimmons, of course, when he came into the compound, everybody was there to see what was going on. Captain Fitzsimmons told them that part of the personnel had already been liberated, and this group had come in to organize and see how many planes was needed to carry us out. That happened one afternoon, and I believe we spent that night and the next day, and the word was that the planes were leaving at a certain hour the next morning.

And some of the personnel, after this first outing, never did come back to camp. They had gone into quarters with French people and spent the night. And they went through the area with the PA system on this jeep, saying that the planes to liberate the American personnel would be leaving from the airport at a certain time and that there would be a truck at the hotel that would bring the guards and so on that was standing guard at the hotel to the airport at that time. If they intended to go as the Americans liberated on these planes, they were to be at the hotel the next morning.

After the morning came and we got everything taken care of, they came in with the truck and gathered up the

guards, which I was standing guard at that time, and the rest of them was already out at the airport. We flew from Saigon to Bangkok, Thailand, and from Bangkok into Calcutta, India.

Marcello: Is this where you went into the 142nd General Hospital?

Rea: Yes.

Marcello: When did you get your first good meal, your first square meal?

Rea: I guess it was in Calcutta, India.

Marcello: Were you able to handle all that food?

Rea: I was, myself, because my appetite was . . . well, I just felt like . . . the first time I tried the taste of a Coke, I couldn't swallow it. It was cold and I couldn't swallow it. When I'd try to swallow, it would just come back on me.

Marcello: I hadn't thought about that, but I guess you really hadn't had anything cold of any nature, had you?

Rea: No, and that's my experience with Coke. I tried to drink one, but I'd take a swallow, and it just wouldn't go down. Well, the first day or so with meals, I remember I had a good meal, and they had these ice cream bars, you know, like they had in the Army. They was putting them in hot ice to keep them, and we had a bar of those on our plates, and some of them hit that pretty heavy. And there was some of them that didn't get out of the mess hall because they "lost it." It was just too rich for their system. It wouldn't accept it. Well, it took me almost as long to

become accustomed to the American diet again as it was to become accustomed to the rice diet.

Marcello: I guess this was one of your first experiences with seeing women in uniform, too, wasn't it--the WAC's?

Rea: Yes, it was. There's an experience that I forgot back here earlier. While we were in Saigon, after we came back from Da Lat, being in the area where we were, I received correspondence from my wife, Ester. I believe there was twenty-one different pieces of mail in card form, you know, that came through. And among the letters there was a picture of her. I have a picture that's a copy of it with me now. That's the same picture that I received about thirty to forty days prior to our liberation (shows picture in wallet).

Marcello: That must have been a real morale booster to have received that mail from home.

Rea: It sure was. I have this picture that I received during the course of time before we were liberated, and the time I received that, as I had spoken of earlier, I had my leathercraft and so on. When we were in this cavalry camp, there was lots of leather harnesses, leather things, left there. And I run across . . . I guess it was an ammunition pouch--leather pouch of some kind. Anyway, I took this leather case and trimmed it to where I could make a picture frame out of this leather and found a piece of glass that I could put in the front of it. I put the leather backing

on it and the leather frame around this three-by-five picture I'd received from here, and that's in my possession yet.

Marcello: After your liberation, did you ever give any depositions regarding atrocities committed by Japanese or Korean personnel?

Rea: No.

Marcello: I know that some of the men did, and I was wondering if you had.

Rea: No, I have not. I think I was given the opportunity possibly once, but I didn't feel like there was anything I could add to or take from it. Not having been abused as much as some of them, I didn't think there was any point. The abuse that I received was way under what lots of them received. I considered myself very fortunate.

Marcello: Were you ever processed or prepared in any way for the world that you were going to have to face now that you were liberated?

Rea: No.

Marcello: In other words, you received no psychological tests or anything of that nature?

Rea: Not to my knowledge. We spent about two weeks in Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D. C., after liberation. Some of them, prior to being flown to the United States, spent some time in Calcutta, India, for health purposes.

But we were liberated on September 6, 1945, and, as I mentioned earlier, Ester and I were married on October 9, 1941. We met in El Paso, Texas, on October 11, 1945-- four years and two days from the time we were married.

Marcello: When you get home, do you have any problems adjusting to civilian life once again?

Rea: Yes, I'd say I did for a period of time. One of the greatest adjustments that I think I had to overcome was the fear of, I guess, what people thought when I was not able to control my emotions. I still have problems today. But the worst battle I had, I guess . . . my wife has relatives that live in Oklahoma. And in the fall of 1946-- I believe it was '46--I'd come down with her relatives, her mother and father and her, and come down with her relatives into Oklahoma to go quail hunting . . .no, I take it back. She didn't come. Her father and I came down there.

And during our visit down there on our hunt through the day, one of her cousins was courting his future wife at that time, and he invited me to go to the show with him in Waurika, Oklahoma, the night he and his girlfriend was going out together. We went into the theater, and there was a Japanese movie on. I don't even remember the name of it. But in the course of the movie, there was the jungle scene of the battle of . . . I don't know what

area it was in, but, anyway, it was a jungle scene, and the Japanese were battling against the . . . during the war. And it was so vivid to me that I guess I got so absorbed in it, and it became so plain to me that I began to shake. I couldn't control my legs, my arms, and all over. This couple asked me if I'd like to leave. And I said, "No. If I walk out of here, I possibly **will never** get over it."

Marcello: I know a lot of the other fellows that **I've talked to had** problems in terms of being around **crowds of people**. That kind of bothered them quite a bit. **And I've heard** others say that they couldn't **stay in one place** very long, that they had to keep moving **around**. **And** others had trouble adjusting to a good bed.

Rea: Well, I didn't have **any problems** there, I don't think. Having gone through **this experience**, in a few minutes--to continue the **story**--I was able to settle down and **overcome** the jerks and so on and so forth through the rest of the movie and had no more problems. Since then I've been able to talk about most of it without **any emotions**; but occasionally it gets so vivid that it still affects me (weeping).

Marcello: I have one last question, and I think we've discussed this off and on throughout the interview, but I think we can kind of draw it together here. As you look back upon your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you

see as being the key, or keys, to your survival? How come you came back, and some of them are still over there?

Rea: I contribute it mainly to having a wife at home that I could come back to.

Marcello: Something to live for back here.

Rea: Because as long as I was over there, I kept saying to myself, "I'll be seeing you." And that help and the power of God brought me back.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Rea, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having participated in our project. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars will find your comments most valuable when they use them to study this portion of World War II.