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Interview with
George Burns
March 12, 1974

Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing George Burns for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 12, 1974, in Decatur, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Burns in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a captive of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Burns was a member of the "Lost Battalion," which was a Texas National Guard outfit that was captured virtually intact on the island of Java early in March, 1942.

Mr. Burns, to begin this interview would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me where you were born, when you were born, things of that nature, and be brief.

Mr. Burns: I was born here in Decatur, Wise County, on October 27, 1917. Other than my military service, I've lived here all my life.

Dr. Marcello: What motivated you to join a National Guard unit?

Burns: It seemed like that everybody my age and my running buddies belonged to the National Guard, and before they mobilized, they wanted me in there and I signed up.

Marcello: How old were you at the time that you entered the National Guard?

Burns: I wish you hadn't asked me that (chuckle). I can't tell you. I really don't know.

Marcello: Were you right out of high school?

Burns: Not right out of high school. I was out of high school in '35, and the National Guard mobilized in '40. Yes, in 1940.

Marcello: It was 1940 when you went in the National Guard.

Burns: Yes, when I went in the National Guard.

Marcello: I think a lot of people considered the National Guard to be some sort of a social club in a way, isn't this true?

Burns: Not when I went in. I knew they was going to mobilize, and I realized the world situation was getting more serious than what it was before I joined.

Marcello: Did you ever think about joining the National Guard as being a way of possibly avoiding the draft or anything of that nature?

Burns: I never thought about the draft.

Marcello: Was there a National Guard unit here in Decatur?

Burns: Yes, there was a National Guard unit in Decatur.

Marcello: How big a unit was it?

Burns: At the time I went in, it wasn't at full strength. I believe there was possibly sixty to sixty-five in it.

Marcello: And all of these men were from the Decatur area?

Burns: Most of them was from the Decatur area.

Marcello: Well, as you mentioned, in 1940 the Texas National Guard was mobilized. I think immediately after mobilization, or shortly after mobilization, you then went on maneuvers, isn't that correct?

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now is this when you went into Louisiana and were on maneuvers all over Louisiana?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: You were never really at one particular place in Louisiana. I think you were just kind of moving all over that area, were you not?

Burns: Yes, right.

Marcello: When in 1940 was the National Guard mobilized? Was it spring, summer . . . just exactly when?

Burns: I joined in the fall, knowing that they were going to a camp in Brownwood.

Marcello: Now this is at Camp Bowie, isn't it?

Burns: Yes, Camp Bowie.

Marcello: Well, I think it was in November of 1940 that the National Guard went to Camp Bowie for further training there. What in particular was your function in this National Guard unit? What did you do?

Burns: I was in the war section, what we called the war communication section.

Marcello: What was your particular rank at the time?

Burns: Well, of course, I went in as a buck private. I went in as a \$21 a month man.

Marcello: I assume that all of the training and so on that you received occurred here at Camp Bowie.

Burns: At Camp Bowie.

Marcello: Could you identify your unit in full at the time you were at Camp Bowie?

Burns: What do you mean by my unit in full?

Marcello: Thirty-sixth Division and go right down the line.

Burns: We were the 1st Battalion, Headquarters Battery, 36th Division.

Marcello: Actually at the time that you arrived in Camp Bowie, you were still attached to the 36th Division, isn't that correct?

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: And it was while you were at Camp Bowie that a couple of . . . what do we call them? What's the word I'm looking for . . . the whole outfit was a battalion, a couple of companies.

Burns: A company is an infantry unit, and we was the field artillery. We was a battery; that's why we was called a headquarters battery.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, what I'm trying to get at is that it was at Camp Bowie where a certain group of you were detached from the 36th Division. In other words, the Army had square divisions at the time, and they created triangular divisions. Your particular detachment from the 36th Division. Now how many units were detached from the 36th Division.

Burns: There was a headquarters battery, three firing batteries, and a medical unit.

Marcello: And these all made up what eventually became the "Lost Battalion," isn't that correct?

Burns: That's correct.

Marcello: How or why did they decide to detach your particular unit?

Burns: Well, it was our idea that after maneuvers our unit performed pretty good. That's the only reason I know.

Marcello: What sort of training did you undergo here at Camp Bowie? In other words, was it extensive training, or was it good training?

Burns: It was good training. As far as being extensive, I thought it was extensive at the time, but later it might not have been.

Marcello: What sort of equipment did you have?

Burns: Of course, I was in a headquarters unit. As far as I was concerned, we was more of a communications unit.

Marcello: Was the equipment modern and up to date and things of this nature?

Burns: At that time our weapons weren't hardly up to date.

Marcello: In other words, you were using the old French 75's yet, is that correct?

Burns: That's right, that's right.

Marcello: One of the points I'm trying to make here is that I want to know in your opinion how prepared this country was for war in 1941 when your particular unit was mobilized.

Burns: Well, in my opinion, which is not much, but I don't think we was very well prepared.

Marcello: And you make your judgment on the basis of the equipment and the training that your particular unit had.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Okay, well, like I say, you were at Camp Bowie, and this is where, of course, you were detached from the 36th Division. From there, as I recall, you were transported to San Francisco.

Burns: Right.

Marcello: Actually you were a part of Operation PLUM and your ultimate destination was the Philippines, only you didn't know that you were going to the Philippines.

Burns: No, that's right.

Marcello: All that you knew was that you were heading somewhere in the Pacific.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now what did you think about the idea of going over to Asia, let's say?

Burns: Well, it was kind of nerve-racking at the time. I remember talking to a fellow who had come from the Philippines in San Francisco, and it was the first time that I was really concerned about what was taking place. I was concerned about what was going on over there, and he was just coming out of the Philippines. But he was coming out on retirement, and I was wondering why we was going in. Nobody thought anything about war at the time.

Marcello: Well, this is one of the questions I was leading up to. You mentioned awhile ago that you were almost positive that the country would be going to war when you volunteered for the National Guard, but I assume that your eyes were turned toward Europe.

Burns: That's right. I'd never thought anything about Japan. We'd always hear about what was going on over there in Germany and France and Britain and all. I never thought anything at all about Japan.

Marcello: Well, anyway, so you boarded a ship at San Francisco, and I think this was the USS Republic, isn't that correct?

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: From San Francisco you proceeded on to the Hawaiian Islands, to Honolulu, where you didn't stay very long.

Burns: No, we stayed a very short time there. We did have leave there, but that was a very short leave.

Marcello: About how long did this leave last?

Burns: I had one leave that was less than twenty-four hours.

Marcello: Did you manage to get around Honolulu very much during this short period?

Burns: No, because the dollar was short then, and we never did get any pay. From the time we left, we ran off and left our money somewhere.

Marcello: While you were on Honolulu and while you had leave, did you perchance notice any extraordinary precautions being taken to guard against a possible attack?

Burns: Yes, on the streets you could hear people saying, "Are you going back to the States?" You'd hear a lot of women talking in casual conversation as they were going down the street, "Are you going back to the States?" The fellow I was there on leave with, well, I said to him, "Something's up. What are these people talking about leaving?" We couldn't come to but one conclusion, and still we was wondering why they wanted to leave Honolulu.

Marcello: But so far as military preparations, did you see anything of this nature taking place while you were there?

Burns: Not a lot. No, not anything to speak of at all because we didn't have time to really look around.

Marcello: Incidentally, we mentioned, of course, that you boarded the USS Republic for this journey. As an old Texas boy, did you get seasick or how'd you make out?

Burns: That's as sick as I've ever got.

Marcello: Is that right?

Burns: We lived a pretty rough life for a few days before we left, and we boarded the ship, and we was all tired out. I got up in the middle of the night to go to the . . .

they called it the head, but I call it the latrine. I went on in the latrine and started out . . . and the ship we was on was a very slow ship. I started out in the latrine, and (chuckle) all this where they'd puked and everything was all over, and you could see people in the head sick and puking and going on, and I wondered what was the matter with them. I never thought about it; I was half asleep. I got back to my bunk and a lot of people was gone, and I was wondering what was going on, and I heard somebody puking (chuckle). I just realized that those people were seasick, and before I could lay down in my bunk, I was seasick, too.

Marcello: This was an experience, I gather, of quite a few of the people on this particular trip. Anyhow, you leave Honolulu, and your ultimate destination, like we pointed out awhile ago, was the Philippine Islands. Now at the time you left Honolulu, you were part of a convoy, isn't that correct? Wasn't there more than one ship that accompanied you?

Burns: Yes, there was more than one ship, but I don't remember now how many there were. There was very few.

Marcello: I think one was a cruiser, isn't that correct? I'm sure there was some sort of an escort for this transport ship.

Burns: Well, for a long time there weren't. There was a little gunboat, but I don't remember a cruiser or anything like that with us when we left Honolulu.

Marcello: When did you pick up the Bloemfontein? Did that come later on when you were in Brisbane?

Burns: We boarded the Bloemfontein at Brisbane. The Bloemfontein was a Dutch ship. We boarded it at Brisbane.

Marcello: That came a little later on, but at this time you were still on the Republic when you had left Honolulu.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, now I think you also stopped at the Fiji Islands to take on some fresh water and perhaps some provisions, and it was in the vicinity of the Fiji Islands that you received the word of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Burns: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Can you remember what you were doing and what your reactions were when you heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Burns: I was on the bridge on guard duty at the time that the announcement came that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard about it?

Burns: Never thought much about it.

Marcello: I'm sure that you didn't know the extent of the damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor.

Burns: Oh, no, no. If I had've, we would've been concerned.

Marcello: What was your opinion of the Japanese? In other words, did you think this would be a pretty short war?

Burns: Well, I sure did. I thought we could whip them with a cornstalk (chuckle).

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually think of?

Burns: Well, a little slant-eyed guy (chuckle).

Marcello: Probably with horn-rimmed glasses and buckteeth.

Burns: That's right (chuckle).

Marcello: What seemed to be the general reaction of the rest of the fellows on the ship? I'm sure that you talked about this particular incident.

Burns: I think that is the general opinion--that there was no problem there.

Marcello: At the time that you heard about the attack, did you know Frank Fujita yet?

Burns: Yes, I knew him.

Marcello: Were there any ill feelings toward him as a result of what happened at Pearl Harbor?

Burns: Not a bit! Not a bit!

Marcello: He was more or less accepted as one of the boys.

Burns: Oh, yes.

Marcello: In fact, I guess he had a little bit of rank compared to what the rest of you did. I think he may have been a sergeant by this time.

Burns: I don't remember what Fujita was. I think he was in a service unit, but I don't know. He wasn't in my own headquarters unit.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, your destination of the Philippines was now changed. Quite obviously the Japanese had already invaded the Philippines virtually at the same time they hit Pearl Harbor, and you were diverted to Brisbane, Australia.

Burns: We didn't know it at the time.

Marcello: Right. This occurred on December 21, 1941, I think it was when you got to Brisbane.

Burns: It was shortly before Christmas.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you receive from the Australians at Brisbane when you landed?

Burns: We received a good reception. In fact, we were the first American soldiers in Australia after the war was declared, and we was treated like kings.

Marcello: Where were you billeted while you were at Brisbane?

Burns: We were billeted at Ascot Racetrack.

Marcello: What were the quarters like there?

Burns: We was in tents. They had a boarded floor and a tent above. Everything was nice there except they liked lamb, and we couldn't hardly go for that lamb (chuckle).

Marcello: Do you remember how you spent the Christmas of 1941?

Burns: I sure do. We thought we was going to get a Christmas dinner and we did, but it turned out to be lamb, and that's the only thing I didn't like about it.

Marcello: Now were you one of those that had been invited out into the Australian homes? I know a lot of times the Australians took you into their homes, did they not?

Burns: Yes, a buddy of mine and myself got a pass into town, and as I said before, we was broke. We didn't have carfare to town. He had a radio and we decided we were going to take that radio and sell it. We got permission to go into town and caught a ride into town. A fellow came by and picked us up, and we got acquainted with him. He was a businessman in town, in Brisbane, with a company that furnished furniture and everything for Hotel Brisbane. He asked us what we was doing, and we told him we was going into town. He asked what we was doing with the radio, and we told him we was going to sell it, and he advised us that that would get us in trouble. There was something about selling something there. I don't know what it

was--customs or something. He said, "Are you broke?" We said, "Yes, we just want some money." And he said, "Well, go with me." He took us up to his private club in the hotel, and that gave us a good impression of the Brisbane people.

Marcello: This was at the Hotel Brisbane?

Burns: Hotel Brisbane.

Marcello: Well, now you weren't in Brisbane too long, possibly no longer than about three weeks at the very most, isn't that correct?

Burns: I don't believe we was there that long. As well as I can remember in my mind now, it was a very short time--two or three days. But we did have another leave. We had time for another leave into Brisbane. We went in and, of course, it'd been a long time since we'd seen any girls (chuckle) so we . . . I think this fellow let us have some money just on a loan. So we got out on the street and said to the first two girls that came down the street, "Let's get acquainted." And they did. We took them to a movie. We had to report back to the camp at a certain time, and we made arrangements to get out again that night and went to these girls' homes. We had to move fast then because we didn't have much time.

Marcello: I gather then that your reception from the Australian people was very pleasant.

Burns: It was pleasant. There was a few guys who kind of messed up right on the last moment, and that made the Australian people kind of bitter towards the next Americans that came in. But as a general rule, I think that most of the people acted decent. The chaplain that we had then was the chaplain that I met when I first came back to the States, and, of course, he was a higher-ranked man and everything, and I recognized him as soon as we walked in the Biltmore Hotel in Florida.

Marcello: Now what was the hotel you went into in Florida?

Burns: Biltmore Hotel. It was turned into a hospital.

Marcello: I see.

Burns: He was the first guy to come around and talk to you. I asked him if he was the same chaplain that was there, and he said, "By the way, some of the guys in your bunch kind of messed up in Brisbane before you left."

Marcello: Now during the time that you were at Brisbane, you really didn't engage in any sort of trading or anything of that nature, did you?

Burns: No, we didn't have time for that.

Marcello: Okay, so somewhere around January 10 or 11, 1942, you boarded the Bloemfontein at this time.

Burns: Well, it's been a long time, but in my mind it was sooner than that.

Marcello: Is that right?

Burns: In my mind it was sooner than that. We came back into camp one night, and we thought they was already gone. Pretty soon we boarded the Bloemfontein, and they was still undecided whether we could leave or not. Some had boarded, and they stopped them, and then we went ahead and boarded and still stayed there for some time before they ever moved out. They was undecided whether to leave out or not.

Marcello: Well, I think from Brisbane you then proceeded up the coast first of all to Port Darwin.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: And you only stopped there for a very short time.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen from this trip from Brisbane up to Port Darwin? You had the submarine scare a little bit later on, didn't you?

Burns: A little later things got a little serious. When we pulled into Port Darwin, I believe it'd been bombed.

Marcello: You never did get off the ship.

Burns: No, we never did get off the ship. We sat out in the harbor there.

Marcello: You were only there for a matter of hours perhaps?
Not very long.

Burns: Not very long. I don't remember how long we were there.

Marcello: Anyhow, from Port Darwin you proceeded over to Java,
and, of course, you landed at Surabaya in Java.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: What were your impressions of Java when you landed there?

Burns: Well, it looked like an exotic South Sea port, island,
just like you'd always read about.

Marcello: What did the general terrain look like?

Burns: Well, all I can remember is that everything looked green
and nice until you got out in it, and then it got places
in it that were a little nasty.

Marcello: Well, you proceeded from Surabaya out to an airport on
the outskirts of town. I think it was called Malang,
wasn't it?

Burns: Malang, right.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to this airport?

Burns: We was near this airport. This camp was sitting over
to the side of this airport. We went to this airport
to work on these planes. They took us over there, and
we didn't know a thing about them, but there was just so
many there, and there was so many planes that had gotten
off the Philippines.

Marcello: Okay, these were the planes from the 6th, 7th, and 19th bomb groups, I think, that had escaped from the Philippines clear down to Australia.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: That's right. They came from Clark Field. What exactly were you doing with these airplanes? Were you acting as service troops or what?

Burns: All the time I was over there we was tearing down those motors. It was pretty complicated for someone who had never seen one. They had somebody there to tell us what to do, but we were doing the best we could.

Marcello: In other words, you were acting as service troops for these airplanes.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Perhaps loading them with gasoline and ammunition and tearing down the motors and things of this nature.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now at the time that you were at the airport at Malang, had you yet had any contact with the Dutch forces or the native Dutch?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: What were your original impressions of these people?

Burns: At first these native Dutch seemed like they was, you might call it, "on the ball." They was scared to death!

From camp into Malang they had a lot of checkpoints, and those native Dutch on those checkpoints were trigger-happy. We'd been warned that they were, and they surely was.

Marcello: Okay, now up until this time you had not yet had any contact at all with Japanese troops, and then on February 5, 1942, you experienced your first air raid. Can you describe what you were doing and what you did and what it was like to be under that air attack?

Burns: If that's the date, during the first air attack I was under . . . we'd set up guns, even the 75's and .50-caliber guns on jeeps around the camp. We buried the tails of the 75's and kind of camouflaged the jeeps around. I was on a switchboard, and we'd had drills for this. I stayed in there until somebody had got the-- they had a switchboard out in the boondocks--I stayed in there until they'd made contact. As well as I can remember, before this first attack I was already relieved from the switchboard, but they'd dug some trenches for us to get in out there, and they dug them right by the gas supply. You just could look up, and there was the gas pumps there. I guess it was the only place they had to dig them in the camp.

Marcello: Well, describe what this attack was like.

Burns: Well, the first time they came over--I don't know how many planes there were, fifteen, twenty, possibly seventeen--I looked up and saw them coming, and, of course, they was high, white. Then one bunch split off--about half split off--and the others came over and they made a cross right at the gate--just as you go into the gate of the camp to the cook shack on the left. One bunch came over and dropped their bombs, and it seemed like they were just trying to drop them right on that cook shack. The other bunch then came across the other way and they just made an X right on that gate. The huts there were pretty nice. They had tile roofing, and those bombs was falling around that tile roofing, and whether they hit or not, the concussion made them shed right off, like rain pouring off. One bomb hit right in the cook shack, and I think one hit right in the officers' mess. One bomb hit in a building there where they had been unloading condensed milk off a ship and storing it in this building. One bomb hit right in the back end of a truck in this building loaded with this milk. You can imagine how the condensed milk was scattered there (chuckle). The back wheels of the truck went one way, and the front of the truck went another, just parted out of that building. This was the first time I realized what war was like.

Marcello: What did the camp look like after this initial attack was finished?

Burns: It looked like a mess!

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese had done a pretty good job on the camp.

Burns: They sure had.

Marcello: How much resistance did the camp put up?

Burns: Well, they didn't have much resistance. They kept firing--the battery units was firing--the 75's and the .50-calibers on the jeeps was firing. These Japs had strafing planes that swooped down over us after they bombed. They swooped down back and forth . . . actually they was going . . . see, the airfield was right over from it, and they was shooting at the planes on the airfield. Of course, everybody was trying to get a bullet in, but they were not very effective.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there were .50-caliber machine guns mounted on the jeeps. Had these been guns that had been cannibalized from the airplanes or something of this nature?

Burns: Some had, some had. We had a few guns; in fact, we had some 37 millimeter guns. We wound up over there with no ammunition for them. The Dutch was pretty good. In a very short time after we got there, they were making ammunition for 75's.

Marcello: How many air attacks did you come under at this airfield while you were there?

Burns: Well, I don't know.

Marcello: Was it more than one?

Burns: There was more than one, I'll put it that way.

Marcello: Do you ever get used to something like this?

Burns: No, you don't get used to it. If you're on one end of the hut and haven't got a job, you'll go to the other; and if you're on the other end, you'll go to the other.

Marcello: What was the general reaction of the men when these air attacks took place? Was it one of panic, bravery?

Burns: I wouldn't say there was any panic. We had a certain thing we had to do. One time--I don't know if it was the first attack or second or what--there was a bunch of us out there in one of those trenches they dug, and there was two officers there; one officer was Keithley and one was Wade Hampton. They was all there around these trenches, and Hampton said, "This is just not the right place for a bunch of guys to be with all those gas pumps there. If they hit anywhere near here, somebody's going to be in trouble." I remember somebody saying that the timber was not far and, let's see, what'd he say? Oh, yes, he said, "Keithley, what do you say, let's let

them out of here. Let's get these people out of here." And I don't know if Keithley had time to say yes or no; everybody was gone (chuckle) out of that hole.

Marcello: In other words, you transferred your trench from this area near the gas tank to an area that was nearer the jungle or perhaps even in the jungle.

Burns: That's right. There was a short space within a couple of hundred yards there that was kind of jungle-like.

Marcello: Okay, so finally then sometime in March of 1942, I guess it was, the Japanese invaded the island, and I assume that up until the time the island actually capitulated, you really hadn't even seen any Japanese yet, other than those you witnessed through the air attacks. Well, anyhow, the order to surrender came down on March 9; but before we get to the surrender, what did you do after the Japanese landed on the island? Did you do anything?

Burns: When the Japanese landed, we were supposed to go where they were. In fact, as far as I'm concerned, I didn't even know what was taking place. We was going one way, and the Dutch was coming back the other. They was coming back all camouflaged up, and there we was going just opened up, just strung out way across the island like this (gesture). There was plenty of people there. I think that was the general idea--to show yourself, to

show we was there. I know they was coming back giving us the "V" sign, and we thought they was going to where they was landed, and instead we was going to where they was landed!

Marcello: And the Dutch were retreating?

Burns: (Laughter) They was going back the other way. We was wondering, "Them old boys is going into the battle." Really they wasn't; we was just out there showing ourselves.

Marcello: Do you have any idea why this particular sort of tactic was adopted?

Burns: Yes, I think our forces wanted the Japs to know that there was a lot of Americans on the island. We found out later that the Japs was coming down through those islands towards Australia with considerable force. The idea was to make them land there, to give them a little more time.

Marcello: In other words, it was kind of like a delaying action, would you say?

Burns: I'd say, I'd say.

Marcello: In other words, you were trying to delay the Japanese so that they possibly wouldn't be able to invade Australia.

Burns: To give them a little more time down that way.

Marcello: I see. Well, anyhow, on March 9, 1942, the word came down that the island was capitulating, and the American forces were . . .

Burns: In my mind it was the 8th.

Marcello: Well, okay, we'll say March the 8th or March the 9th. What were your reactions when you heard that you were to surrender?

Burns: Well, we didn't know what to think. The officers lined us up and said, "The Dutch have capitulated. They've given us a choice to do what we want to as long as we didn't blow up any of their bridges or tear up any of their country." They left it that way--to us. The officer that spoke to us said that we was capitulating. He told us there was supposed to have been some ships down somewhere on the other end of the island that were supposed to pick us up, and we was on our own. We had a choice trying to make it down there if we could get enough transportation and gas to get there. Otherwise, the ones that stayed there would still stay organized in a unit. They told us they didn't know how long this war was going to last. They said, "Who knows? Three months, six months. Who knows? It might last a year." That's what they told us and we thought, "My goodness,

we'll be out of here in six months." This one old pessimistic boy came around and said, "Gee, we'll be here for two years." (Laughter) We thought he was crazy.

Marcello: In other words, you still had the impression that the war would not last very long and that the Americans would very easily defeat the Japanese.

Burns: That's right. They told us, our own officers told us, that they presumed that the Japanese would go by the Geneva Convention, and if they did everything would be all right.

Marcello: Were there ever rumors that the Japanese didn't take prisoners?

Burns: Well, I didn't ever hear anything like that.

Marcello: Did the thought of ever heading for the hills cross your mind?

Burns: Yes, it did. And I had a chance.

Marcello: What held you back?

Burns: I thought I'd have a better chance in an organized bunch because the bunch that was going there, they'd run and grab my vehicle and be ready to take off when they didn't know where they was going, and they had no road map or didn't even know how much gas was in the vehicle they had. We was white and that was a black

country; we shined like new money. I thought I'd be better off in an organized bunch.

Marcello: How old were you at this time? When did you say you were born?

Burns: I was born in 1917.

Marcello: And this is 1942. So you would have been somewhere around twenty-five.

Burns: Twenty-five, something like that.

Marcello: Was this the average age would you say of the troops that were in there or were they younger?

Burns: That was a pretty average age because when we left Brownwood, they took the older guys out and gave them the choice to go back or to stay there. They replaced them with other units in the battalion. I think we drew several from battalion headquarters out of Wichita Falls. Some of their older boys had been drafted in to bring the unit up to strength. I know some of them stayed back.

Marcello: Okay, so the word came down that you were to surrender, and you did surrender. What happened from this point? What happened after you got the word to surrender and you decided not to head for the hills?

Burns: We had an order to stack our guns and get rid of all the excess equipment we had--that's including personal

stuff and everything. I believe they told us to get rid of everything except what we could carry comfortably. I know they told us that our unit would go to a racetrack.

Marcello: Another racetrack.

Burns: Yes, another racetrack. Only this one wasn't quite provided for like the other one in Brisbane.

Marcello: Now where was this racetrack located?

Burns: I don't know where that racetrack was located. I sure don't. I know we pulled trucks and all right on into that racetrack.

Marcello: Did you destroy your guns, or were you ordered to simply stack them?

Burns: The order that I got was to stack the guns. I know in stacking handguns and everything like that, people would load them, throw the safety off, and throw them in a pile, not realizing that we was the ones that had to handle those guns and load them up and everything. We was thinking somebody might pick one up and shoot themselves with it, but we was the ones that finally picked them up. It wound up that way anyway.

Marcello: What sort of possessions did you have with you at the time that you surrendered?

Burns: I didn't have a lot of possessions at that time because my particular unit, before we started out down to the island there, was moved into the city of Malang in a camp in there, and I had a footlocker with just about all of my personal stuff in it, other than what I could carry in a ditty bag.

Marcello: What did you have in your ditty bag?

Burns: Well, I had three suits of khakis, my shaving gear, some razor blades, and stuff like that.

Marcello: Did you have your mess kit or anything else?

Burns: Yes, yes, I had my mess kit.

Marcello: Did you have any blankets?

Burns: I believe I started out with two blankets. I believe I did. Two blankets and a half pup tent.

Marcello: How long was it after the surrender that you had your first contact with Japanese troops?

Burns: I don't know how long it was. I was on a detail to go in and do something, and I don't even know what it was now. We met some of them, and they didn't seem so unreasonable.

Marcello: What did they look like?

Burns: Well, the first thought was, "My God, people like this taking us over!" All I thought was, "People like that conquering people like us!"

Marcello: Did they simply ignore you in this first contact or what?

Burns: They stood with their hand on the trigger. They surely didn't trust nobody.

Marcello: Now these were front line troops, I guess.

Burns: These were front line troops. These were the first troops that we made contact with.

Marcello: Was this just a passing contact or . . . well, what happened from this point?

Burns: Well, from this point . . . I can't remember.

Marcello: When did the Japanese gather all the Americans together? How long after the surrender?

Burns: I don't know how long it was. There was a few days in there where we didn't see anybody, only the planes flying around and observing us. They marched us into a camp, and some old Jap officer gave us a speech.

Marcello: Now was this when you marched into Bicycle Camp?

Burns: Yes. The Bicycle Camp was probably the first camp that we was really in.

Marcello: Well, some people went to Serang, and some people were kept at Serang for a while, and some people worked on the docks in Batavia prior to actually going into Bicycle Camp. Were you among this particular camp?

Burns: The way I remember it now, we was in Bicycle Camp,

and that's where the work parties went out--from Bicycle Camp. We'd work anywhere.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like. As I recall, you went into Bicycle Camp sometime in May of 1942. Now what did it look like?

Burns: Well, it was an old Dutch camp, military camp. The floors were old, hard clay or marble floor, and, of course, a tile roof. The barracks . . . just old barracks . . . long, barracks-type buildings.

Marcello: Were they one-story or two-story buildings?

Burns: One-story.

Marcello: What were the sleeping facilities like?

Burns: That floor. That was the sleeping facilities.

Marcello: You slept on the floor, or was there a platform?

Burns: Floor, there was a floor there.

Marcello: Did you have a mattress or a mat or anything of this nature?

Burns: No, no, unless we could scrounge something. When we went in there all we had was a blanket and that's it.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that very shortly after you entered this camp you were given some sort of a speech by the Japanese officer there. Can you remember what the text of this speech was?

Burns: Well, I remember him saying that we was prisoners of the great Dai Nipponese Army. We didn't know what Nipponese was then. There was no such thing as Japanese; if you said Japanese, you got boxed for it. It was Nipponese. We'd be shot if we tried to escape, and that's the text of it right there.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever try to get you to sign any sort of agreement that you wouldn't escape?

Burns: Yes, they sure did!

Marcello: What happened with regard to that incident?

Burns: At this time the officers was in one barracks, and the men was in the other, and they without any warning or anything lined all the officers up and took them out of camp. We thought that was all for them, but they took them off--I don't know where they took them--but they took them off from camp, and then they came around with this thing for us to sign that we wouldn't escape. It didn't mean anything to me (chuckle). I don't know whether I even signed it. I guess I did. I guess everybody signed it. I don't remember signing it, but that's what it was all about.

Marcello: Do you recall if there ever was any protest staged or anything of this nature about not signing it?

- Burns: I don't think so. It wasn't worth the paper it was wrote on anyway.
- Marcello: What other nationalities were there in this camp besides the Americans?
- Burns: There was Americans, Dutch . . . that's where we met the survivors off the cruiser Houston.
- Marcello: Now were the Houston survivors in the Bicycle Camp when you arrived, or did they come afterwards?
- Burns: They were already there.
- Marcello: What sort of a condition were they in?
- Burns: They was without clothes. Those boys didn't have any personal stuff, and we did have a few clothes at the time.
- Marcello: Was there a readiness to share what you had with these guys off the Houston?
- Burns: Yes, we gave them clothes. Everybody parted with some of their stuff. I think everybody parted with something. Yes, because these boys that were in there was in G-strings or little old shorts or something like that. Maybe Dutch shorts or something. But I think they got a little hoggish there (chuckle). Of course, there was a little bit of resentment between the Navy and Army, but everything was straightened out.
- Marcello: What sort of resentment was this that took place?

Burns: Well, there's a bad apple in every bunch. Some of them would come down, and you'd get acquainted with them, and you'd give them something, and they'd go back and hide it and put on a rag again and come down to somebody else. I shouldn't have said that, but a spade's a spade.

Marcello: Well, we want to get this sort of thing in the record.

Burns: As I say, as a whole, they were nice guys. But that did occur, and we was warned about it.

Marcello: We mentioned awhile ago that there were several nationalities in the camp; what sort of relationship existed between the Americans and the other nationalities here at Bicycle Camp? Now I want you to limit your comments to Bicycle Camp.

Burns: I don't believe that we could get along as a group, as a few individuals. You can't judge a group by a few individuals or anything like that, but as a group, I don't believe we got along with the Aussies very good.

Marcello: That's here at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: Yes, at Bicycle Camp. There was a few of them that was nice guys. But as a group, they're kind of scroungers or something. We hadn't been paid, and in this particular camp we used our money--not individually, but the officers--they used our money to buy a little

extra stuff if they could get it. Of course, the Aussies came in, and they wanted part of that money. Of course, we considered that our own personal money even though they hadn't dished it out to us. It was just like a payday. They wanted part of that money, and you can imagine what came with it there.

Marcello: In other words, the money that we're talking about would be the company payroll.

Burns: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: And I gather that the officers were still in charge of this money.

Burns: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: And the officers were the ones that were using this money to buy additional food and this sort of thing.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Where were they able to buy food, or from whom were they able to buy food?

Burns: Well, it was bought above board. The Japs knew it. Where it came from, I don't know. Captain Charles Allen Cates could tell you. He or some service officer that was with us could tell you that.

Marcello: Was there ever any rumors going around that the officers were using these company funds for themselves and weren't actually sharing it with the men?

Burns: Well, if it did happen, I just wouldn't want to get it in the record.

Marcello: What sort of treatment did the Japanese guards deal out to the prisoners at this time? Let me go back and rephrase my question. First of all, what sort of rules did the Japanese lay down for the prisoners? What were the things that you had to do? What were the things that you could not do?

Burns: Well, I don't know exactly what you mean. We had to treat them like gods. We had to salute them even if it was a one-star private. We had to bow to them. If one went up the street we had to . . . even if a private was walking up the street, the first man that saw him had to draw everybody's attention. Instead of hollering "Attention," it was "Ki o tsukete," and you came to attention. You didn't slouch to attention. If you didn't, you'd suffer the consequences.

Marcello: What would the consequences possibly be for disobeying their instructions?

Burns: They had a way of walking up to you and making you stand up there straight. They'd fold their hand, not in a fist but like a . . . thumbs down, fingers down like that (gesture), and they'd go across one way and back the other way.

Marcello: Usually across your face?

Burns: Face, yes.

Marcello: Did you ever see much hitting with gun butts or things of this nature?

Burns: Yes, I've been hit with a gun butt. In fact, they'd try to kick you in the groin. I was hit with a gun butt the day before the "blue" was over.

Marcello: The day before what?

Burns: The "blue" was over. I mean before the war was over, before they told us the war was over.

Marcello: Well, let's just stick right here to Bicycle Camp for a minute. What other forms of punishment did you see the Japanese deal out to the prisoners here? Now these that you mentioned are certainly the common things.

Burns: I don't remember what the punishment was for, but I know they'd take a guy and stand him up in front of the guardhouse. They had a guardhouse at the gate of each camp. You'd go in and there are several guards there, and one was sitting down in front. They'd put a stick in behind your knees and make you sit down on it, or they'd put one back here (gesture) at your back, on a stick back there, or they'd make you stand up at attention until you'd collapse. I know on one occasion--I don't know what the boys did. I don't even know if they know what

they did or not--they had three guys standing up in the sun and after they stood there for I don't know how many hours, one of them said, "Well, let's just fake a fade-out and see if we can stop this." One of them just dropped. Well, they got his fellow prisoners to come out and take him off. So the others did the same thing, not together, but a little while later the other one just collapsed, and they came and got him, and then the other one . . . something like that.

Marcello: Was most of this punishment deserved, or did they seem to take a certain amount of pleasure in simply beating up on Americans?

Burns: They took pleasure in beating up on the biggest guy they could find.

Marcello: In other words, it was kind of like they had some sort of inferiority complex?

Burns: That's right. They'd get mad at a working party, and they wouldn't jump on the little guy; they'd want to punish the whole works. They'd go down the line just hitting the big ones.

Marcello: Was this kind of punishment that we're describing a rather common occurrence? In other words, would you witness something like this every day at one time or another?

Burns: I'd say you'd witness something like that every day, every day.

Marcello: Now at the time that we're speaking here at Bicycle Camp, you still had Japanese guards yet.

Burns: We had Japanese guards.

Marcello: You wouldn't meet the Korean guards until later on up in the jungles when you worked on the railroad.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now at the same time, did you witness the type of punishment that Japanese troops would deal out to their own troops? In other words, did you witness the same sort of punishment that Japanese sergeants, perhaps, might deal out to privates? What I'm getting at, was hitting a way of life in the Japanese Army, too?

Burns: I've seen that happen--not to this extent--but that's the same punishment they gave to their own troops. They was real strict on their own troops. They was disciplined real well. One of their officers could walk by them, and they'd just go into fits hollering "Ki o tsukete" and stiff-necked and everything else.

Marcello: What sort of food did you receive in Bicycle Camp?

Burns: I think the general diet was just rice and stew.

Marcello: What sort of a stew was it?

Burns: Now it comes to me, the first camp I was in. I don't know what the name of it was. The first camp I was in, we went into a . . . it was an old barracks that had been abandoned.

Marcello: Now this wasn't Tanjong Priok, was it?

Burns: I don't remember what it was. Anyhow, it was the first barbed wire I saw. I'm sorry, but it's just now coming to me.

Marcello: Now this particular camp was before Bicycle Camp.

Burns: This was before Bicycle Camp. It was near the coast; we all went in it. We was starving for water, and there was one tap there, and everybody was running to this tap to get water, and the colonel runs up and says, "Has this water been tested or anything?" Nobody knew; we just all went and drank it anyway. But it turned out that the water was good. This old camp was infested with rats and about four-inch long stinging lizards.

Marcello: Centipedes? Were they a type of centipede?

Burns: They just looked like our own stinging lizards, but they were about four inches long and black. We had to drag out old soot and dust and everything before we could even find a place to get in there. We had to get inside; they wouldn't let us sleep outside.

Marcello: How long were you in this particular camp?

Burns: I don't know, I don't know.

Marcello: Was it a matter of days or weeks?

Burns: It was weeks. That was the first camp they took working parties out of.

Marcello: This may have been at Tanjong Priok, but I'm not sure about this. Or it could've been at Serang, one or the other.

Burns: It's one or the other.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do on these work parties?

Burns: That's when our first work parties went out. That's when we went to the docks. I know on one particular work party there, we went to some warehouses and handled bicycle tires. This whole warehouse was full of bicycle tires. We went there with the promise that we'd get a little better food, and we did. We'd get sweet tea; they'd let us have sweet tea there and something else extra. I don't know what it was. Once you got in there and got to working, they'd let one guy go and prepare the sweet tea and all of us work, and they'd declare a rest period. That's when you'd want to get out of this rotten camp--on one of those working parties. They didn't work you hard there.

Marcello: But I think you must have only been there for a matter of days or just a couple of weeks possibly.

Burns: Yes, just days.

Marcello: And the bulk of your time was spent in Bicycle Camp while you were on Java.

Burns: That's right. That's right. In the first camp, I know, every day there was a reconnaissance plane that flew just right over the hut, and I know in the evening, right before dark he'd go out--this Jap reconnaissance plane, every evening--and it was just for days.

Marcello: Do you have any idea why this Japanese reconnaissance plane was doing this?

Burns: Yes. Because before we were even captured, there was a Dutch officer who came in there and said there was so many Americans fixing to land there. He was a major in the hut there, to see how many would go in a hut. I know that they were supposed to come in, but they had a big sea battle down on the coast there, and that's what stopped it all right there.

Marcello: Getting back to this food at Bicycle Camp again, you mentioned that the food consisted mainly of rice and stew. What sort of a stew was it? Could you describe it?

Burns: The stew was made out of . . . sometimes there'd be meat in it, but most of it would be . . . I forgot what

they'd call it, but it was long and shaped like a watermelon, only all inside it looked like the rind. They tried to feed us that all the way through, and we had one officer out of the health unit who went up and talked to the Japanese in charge about it and told him that a working man had to have so many calories a day to live. He said he held up one of those old melon things and said that there was not a calorie in a carload of them. The Japanese officer said, "That's the best we got."

Marcello: What was the quality of the rice like that you were receiving?

Burns: The rice for a long time was . . . we'd get up in the morning and eat it. The first morning we ate it, it wasn't too bad because we was hungry. But when they'd take it to the light, all these worms would be around the outside, and that kind of disgusts you eating in the dark. It was just old screwworms, it looked like.

Marcello: Well, when you saw these worms what did you do? Did you eat the rice anyhow?

Burns: For a meal or two you'd turn it down. But after so long, you'd just flip them off and start eating. I know we found a bunch of cheese--I don't know if it

was in the Bicycle Camp or the first camp--we found a bunch of cheese that'd been buried. This cheese was working alive with maggots. If it'd been good cheese, the Japs would've kept it. In the clean-up somewhere someone had turned up all this cheese. We took this cheese and washed it. It was holey cheese. We washed the worms out of it and hung it up and let it dry and ate it. It was pretty good at the time.

Marcello: In other words, even when you were in Bicycle Camp you had reached the point where you were getting pretty desperate for food.

Burns: We was getting to the point where we could eat . . . if you're hungry enough you could eat anything.

Marcello: How much rice did you get? In other words, quantity-wise, was the amount of rice that you received sufficient?

Burns: We would get what we called a ladle. It's a flat paddle, possibly four to five inches in diameter. We'd get this ladle of rice. Actually, I think people got just about all the rice they wanted. If one guy didn't get enough, he could always get a little off of somebody that couldn't eat all theirs.

Marcello: How many times a day did you get fed?

Burns: We got fed three times a day at Bicycle Camp after everything was set up and got everything going.

Marcello: I assume the meals were monotonous. It was the same thing every meal.

Burns: Every day it was the same thing.

Marcello: Did you ever have any ways of supplementing your diet here at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: Yes. That's when they was buying outside a little food.

Marcello: This was when the officers were buying food from the outside with the company funds.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: And this was when there were rumors to the effect--unproven--that officers actually were perhaps getting a little bit more to eat than the enlisted men as a result of having this money.

Burns: Right.

Marcello: Like we pointed out awhile ago, these were simply rumors, and so far as we know, they're unproven rumors.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now were work parties a welcome relief here in Bicycle Camp?

Burns: Most guys liked to get out of the camp. The work wasn't really too hard; it was relief to get out.

Marcello: If you stayed in camp, did you just do nothing?

Burns: If a fellow had some cards, you could play cards or something like that; otherwise, there was nothing to do. In this camp they had so much flour--they furnished so much flour--and they had a little bakery. Every evening you'd get an issue of bread. It was a small loaf, possibly four or five inches long and maybe a two-by-two. There was one loaf to two people, which supplemented the diet. It didn't last long, and you couldn't count on it every day, but most nearly every day there'd be a piece of this bread to two people.

Marcello: Who was doing the cooking at this time?

Burns: The Australians were cooking at this time. I don't think we had a representative in the kitchen.

Marcello: Did they have trouble cooking the rice in the beginning, until they got the hang of how it should be mixed?

Burns: That's right. They did. I know our bunch didn't know how to cook rice, but they got to where they could steam rice and it'd fluff up. The first rice we got was creamed rice. We found out later that the creamed rice was of no value at all.

Marcello: Is that the polished rice?

Burns: That's the polished rice. We found out that if you get the polishing off of the rice, it had more food value

than the rice itself. The rice polishings--I don't know if it was this camp or the next or what--they had rice polishings. You'd line up and go by and get a spoonful of polishings. It was a pretty bitter dose, but by that time we realized that we needed something else.

Marcello: I would assume that very quickly after rations became short that everybody became very very calorie-conscious.

Burns: That's right. They began to realize that they was going down and they needed something extra.

Marcello: Now at Bicycle Camp you were not losing anybody yet. Everybody was fairly healthy.

Burns: Fairly healthy at Bicycle Camp. There was a few that had sore feet, possibly infected feet or something like that, but other than that everybody was still fairly healthy.

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

Burns: The latrine facilities was pretty good compared to what we'd see later.

Marcello: How about bathing and shower facilities?

Burns: I believe we had bathing and shower facilities there. Anyhow, there was plenty of water, plenty of water there.

Marcello: Were you free to use as much of the water as you wanted, or was it turned on at certain times?

Burns: I don't remember. As far as I know we had plenty of water all the time there.

Marcello: What was morale like here at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: Morale was still pretty good there. I'd say morale was still pretty good.

Marcello: Were you still looking forward to a very short stay as a prisoner-of-war?

Burns: That's right, that's right. We even had a dentist there. I had a tooth pulled there. There was no anesthetic but it was pretty clean facilities there. I don't remember if it was a Dutch doctor or what, but anyhow, he got the job done.

Marcello: While we're on this subject, what were medical facilities in general like here at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: Nobody was getting sick then, and nobody thought much about any medicine or anything like that, any headache pill or anything.

Marcello: What was discipline like here in this camp? In other words, were the officers still in full command of their men? Were the men obeying their officers?

Burns: Yes, yes. I'd say discipline was good at this time.

Marcello: I'm sure this was a necessary thing for survival.

Burns: That's right, that's right. The officers stayed in command up until the last of the "blue."

Marcello: How did the chain of command work? In other words, did the order go from the Japanese to the officers to the prisoners?

Burns: No. If a prisoner done something wrong, the officer or the Jap guard . . . he was right at the prisoner. He didn't go to his superior for it. One time I think there was a hundred men in our barracks, and at that particular camp, when we'd go out on these working parties, we'd scrounge for a nail, a piece of bamboo, something to make a bed out of or anything like that, that we could use and we could bring in a little stuff like that. If we'd bring in a piece of bamboo every day, in several days we'd have enough bamboo to make a bed. The Japanese guards told our hut commander, officer, for the men not to bring anything else in. He didn't tell us. When we came in that evening, everybody had a bamboo stick or a board or some nails, a few nails in his pocket, or something like that, and, of course, their eyes brightened up, and they lined us up there, and they'd go down kicking and rifle-butting

and everything. That's when they'd run and get the hut commander. The hut commander said, "I distinctly told these men not to bring anything else in." That many men couldn't be wrong--he didn't tell us. Everybody got a bashing. I know one fellow had a few nails in his glove hung from his belt, and it was kind of comical . . . he shook that glove and found those nails, and he jerked that glove out of there and that Jap guard hollered, "Nails!" He beat that old boy in the face good with it. He didn't know what the score was; he thought he was doing something right. He didn't even know he was doing anything wrong.

The Japs wore a band around their stomach for some health reason, I think to help digest their rice. One fellow found an old inner tube; he wrapped it around his stomach and put his clothes over it. They came to that inner tube, and they thought that was for digesting his food and never said anything to him. He'd stole the inner tube somewhere to do it (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned the prisoners were bringing all these things back into camp. I would assume that all of you had become scavengers by this time and were trying to pick up anything, any article, that you thought might be of some future use to you, no matter how remote that use might be.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: If nothing else, it might have represented trading material.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now was there a black market going in this camp yet here at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: No, I don't think . . .

Marcello: I know the black market would function later on up on the railroad.

Burns: I don't believe it was anything that drastic going on.

Marcello: Did you ever see any acts of compassion on the part of the Japanese? In other words, did you ever see any good Japanese guards here at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: I don't believe any of them did me any good there. Not to my knowledge.

Marcello: As you look back on your stay at Bicycle Camp, would it have been relatively pleasant had you been able to stay there for the entire war?

Burns: I think it would've got pretty boring.

Marcello: But physically, you weren't really in too bad a shape, were you?

Burns: No, we weren't in too bad a shape. There was a lot of comical things going on there. A lot of days we'd just

go out and cut grass for forty-five or fifty minutes and rest for ten--no hard work. I think the general purpose of that is, a big line of prisoners walking down the street here and showing the native population that they was number one. They'd come down the street in those cars with those musical horns on them, and there'd we be walking down the street and they'd holler, "Ki o tsukete," and there'd come this officer down the street playing "California, Here I Come" on the car (laughter). There was a lot of things going on that was funny.

Marcello: Can you think of any other funny things that happened here at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: No, not really. Not at the moment.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, sometime in early October, 1942, they moved you out of Bicycle Camp.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you found out that you were going to be leaving? What I'm getting at is this: did you kind of get used to a place, and then when you found out you were moving, was there a fear of the unknown?

Burns: Sure, there was a fear of the unknown. We didn't know what was happening. The first thing I thought of was-- I didn't know but that the Americans were right around the corner--and the first thing I thought of was that

they was putting me on a boat and being bombed or shot at by our own people.

Marcello: Well, we'll talk about that a little bit later on. That's getting a little bit ahead of the story about the air raid, but I think it's something we definitely will talk about later on. How did you get the word that . . . what procedure did they use in moving you out of the Bicycle Camp? Was it a sudden decision, or did you know it was coming?

Burns: As far as I recollect now, it was a sudden decision. The first time I knew about it was when one of the noncoms--I think it was the master sergeant--came around and said they was going to take us somewhere and work on a railroad, and the noncoms were going to run the machinery, and the officers were to have their quarters, and just the enlisted men would do the manual labor. That's the first I'd heard anything about it.

Marcello: Well, describe the actual journey that took place. Okay, you're leaving Bicycle Camp; describe the trip from Bicycle Camp to Changi, which is near Singapore. Describe the journey from the time you got on the boat to the time you got to Changi.

Burns: Well, this is one of those times that is a blank to

me right now. I believe we were on a train first for two or three days.

Marcello: Now I think this is getting ahead of the story. This is when you went from Changi up the coast and eventually got on a ship and went to Moulmein.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: But I'm referring now to the trip that you took from Bicycle Camp . . . you probably went to Batavia or somewhere like that, and then from there you boarded a ship, Japanese freighter or steamer or something, and went to Changi.

Burns: Well, I'm sorry, but I can't put that in there.

Marcello: Okay, but anyhow, you boarded this ship, and you did go to Changi Prison Camp, which is near Singapore.

Burns: That's right, that's right. That's on Singapore Island. That's right. That's when we went into the British camp.

Marcello: Now how did Changi compare with Bicycle Camp? First of all, just from the standpoint of morale.

Burns: When I went into that camp, a buddy of mine and myself were discussing that we'd just like to sit right here until this war was over. They had had a Red Cross ship in there with some food on it. It was kind of a coconut island. Those coconuts were available. It

seemed like the food was better. It was clean. It just seemed like a better place.

Marcello: Now this is unusual because just about everybody I've talked to hated Changi, and they couldn't wait to get out of there.

Burns: Now I'm speaking of the British camp on Singapore. That may be the place that I heard we was going to build a railroad. But I believe right now that that was the camp.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there were plenty of coconut trees at this particular camp. Did you have a lot of trouble with the British in getting these coconuts?

Burns: Oh, those coconut trees--they was the king's coconuts! Those British, they just didn't like us.

Marcello: Well, can you describe this particular situation and how it all came about?

Burns: Well, we thought the coconuts belonged to the Japs, and when we had a chance, we'd steal them or get them somehow or another. The British would catch you for doing it, and they'd want to go up to their house and tell them we was stealing the king's coconuts. I think they kind of gave up on us (chuckle).

Marcello: Was it at this point that relations between the Americans and the British soldiers kind of soured?

Burns: It did; it soured. I know one occasion there where the British had stored cook stoves and beds and furniture and stuff in warehouses, and we was laying up there on the old hard floor. I don't know whether it was a tile floor or what. But anyhow, it was right on the equator. It rained . . . it was clean. It was a clean place. It would rain and wash everything off. We went down and broke in one of those warehouses and got one of those stoves. Boy, here came the British down, and they was . . . I thought we was going to get prosecuted! Our old sergeant was a cook sergeant. He says, "Give it back to them." And we just turned the little old trailer outfit we had the stove on over in the ditch. That started the fuss right there.

Marcello: Did relations ever get so bad that fights actually occurred between the Americans and the British?

Burns: Yes, yes, they'd come to blows.

Marcello: What would the Japanese do when this sort of thing took place?

Burns: It never did take place as far as I'm concerned; I don't think the Japanese ever saw any of that.

Marcello: I've heard other prisoners complain about the fact that the British seemed rather dirty and unsanitary here at Changi.

Burns: Well, I think the British is unsanitary anywhere they're at.

Marcello: But did you notice this yourself here at Changi?

Burns: In their quarters and everywhere, that's right. Their officers was neat and clean, but there was too much difference in their officers and their men. Our officers was closer to their men than the British officer is to their men.

Marcello: How did the Japanese treatment of the prisoners differ from what it had been at Bicycle Camp?

Burns: We wasn't as closely guarded there. There was work parties there. By this time the Japanese had enlisted Indian troops, and they was kind of guarding us at that time. We'd started kind of truck gardens, and there'd be a "no-man's land" you'd cross, and you had to have a flag to cross that. On each side of that there'd be Indian guards instead of Japanese guards. As far as I know, we had very little difficulty with the Jap guards there in Singapore.

Marcello: From the physical standpoint what did this camp look like? You've described it a little bit, but I want to

get it on the record again to be clear. How did the barracks stand up here?

Burns: They had battle scars there. The British had destroyed a lot of stuff there. They had bunkers that was well marked with shell marks. The British had destroyed the . . . they had a large gun there. I don't know what size it was, but it was the biggest one I guess they had. It was the biggest mounted stationary gun they had--that was a big mistake. It pointed to sea and wouldn't point back to land, and that's how they took the thing in the first place. The Japs knew it. But, of course, there was a lot of unexploded shells laying around there. What I gathered there, the Scots put up a pretty good battle there. I don't know about the British, but the Scotsmen put up a pretty good battle in Singapore. Where I was at, it was a pretty clean place.

Marcello: What sort of work details did you have here at Changi? Now you mentioned the truck gardens, but was there anything else that was done here?

Burns: I can't think of anything else right now. I don't remember a lot of the things that we did there.

Marcello: But you do think, or rather it is your opinion, that

this camp was a pretty nice one. In fact, you liked it better than the Bicycle Camp.

Burns: That's right. I did, I did.

Marcello: Were you still getting the same kind of food from the Japanese here?

Burns: Yes. As best I can remember now, it was just about the same thing.

Marcello: It was still rice and stew.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, you remained here at Changi a relatively short period of time--maybe a couple or three months.

Burns: I don't remember how long we was there.

Marcello: I guess it was in January of 1943 . . . you'd almost been a prisoner for a year by this time. In January of 1943 you were moved out of Changi Camp.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Here again, what did it feel like to leave Changi? By this time did you know that you were going to be ultimately working on a railroad?

Burns: Yes. We began to realize now that this war was going to last longer than we thought. Everybody was wondering what was going to happen next.

Marcello: Up until this point you really hadn't lost anybody yet.

Burns: No. To my knowledge right now I don't think we'd lost anybody.

Marcello: Okay, so you left Changi Prison Camp, and as I recall and as you mentioned, you boarded a train and you went up the coast a short way until you boarded another steamer, a Japanese ship of some kind. Do you remember what that train trip was like from Changi up the coast?

Burns: No, I don't. I know we boarded a train.

Marcello: Were you in boxcars, passenger cars, or do you recall that?

Burns: I don't know. I know we was in boxcars . . . it wasn't a boxcar, it was an open car.

Marcello: Was it like a cattle car?

Burns: No, it was open-topped.

Marcello: I see.

Burns: Everybody was standing just as thick as they could stand. Sometime . . . I don't know whether it was there or after we got to Moulmein . . . anyhow, I just can't remember that.

Marcello: Okay, so you went up the coast and then boarded a ship, and you were on your way to Moulmein.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Describe the trip on this Japanese ship from the coast

of Malaya up to Moulmein. This is where, of course, the air raid took place.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Before we talk about the air raid, what were conditions like aboard that Japanese ship? Do you recall? You were part of a convoy; there was more than one ship.

Burns: Yes, there was more than one ship. It was thick. They put us down in a hold, and all the space you had . . . you crumpled up sitting down, and that was it. Possibly two-by-two feet, double-decked down below. It was just about the space the sheep would be transported in. One man right after another . . . hot . . . not enough water . . . no place to void or nothing.

Marcello: Were you ever allowed above deck?

Burns: Yes, the best I remember, sometimes you could go above deck for a short spell, but I don't know how long it was. Before we left, I got all the water I could carry. I think I had an extra jug of some kind, a bamboo jug with water, and that ran out. It didn't take long. People was sweating, stinking. It was a mess.

Marcello: Did very many people have dysentery at this time yet?

Burns: No.

Marcello: Well, you were fortunate in that respect.

Burns: Yes, we were.

Marcello: Did you still have most of the possessions that you had when you had been captured?

Burns: Not when we was captured. It seemed like in every move you would have less stuff to carry.

Marcello: How long were you on this ship altogether? Was it a matter of a couple of days, couple or three or four days?

Burns: Couple or three or four days.

Marcello: Okay, now describe what the air attack was like.

Burns: Well, I believe they gave some kind of alarm on that ship.

Marcello: Were you below deck?

Burns: I was below deck. On this particular ship I was on, they had a little red cross up on it, a little neon cross probably. It looked like a foot, one-by-one, cross on it. Someone said, "This ship's got a red cross on it; they won't bomb it." They'd made a pass and hit the ship in front of us.

Marcello: Could you see this?

Burns: Yes, the hold up here (gesture) was open. Someone suggested that a signalman off the Houston . . . they might take him up there and give them some kind of signal that there was prisoners aboard. He and one officer went

up, and they asked permission to signal these planes, and they wouldn't let them do that. The next pass-- or anyhow, the pass that they made on our ship--they made a hit on one side and on the back. They had some kind of an old gun on the back, and they hit the ammunition there and caught it on fire. There was a Japanese officer up there--there was some fellows up there trying to put the fire out--and this Japanese officer made everybody get back. He went and kicked that ammunition off. They had an old gun in front, and they was firing at these planes, and they turned the gun around and hit the bridge (laughter). Our latrines was some kind of construction built right over the edge of the ship, and one of those bombs hit over there by that and demolished it. It knocked some holes in one side. I didn't notice it at the time, but I think everything stopped or slowed down at the time. One of the ships was hit. The bomb hit right in the hold where there were some Japs. On the front of it was a train locomotive and a bunch of rails. By that time a lot of us was out on deck.

Marcello: The Japanese had no objections to you moving out on deck?

Burns: I don't think . . . they'd probably had had to shoot a bunch of people.

Marcello: What sort of a reaction did you have? Was it fright or curiosity or what?

Burns: Both. I was wanting to see what was going on, and you couldn't see much just looking straight up. I got out of there just in time to see it, and it didn't seem like it had been three minutes. You could just see the point of that ship going down. It just had so much weight or something, it just went down. That's when we was slowed down and picking up survivors. There wasn't any Americans on the other ship. All I saw come aboard was Aussies and possibly some British.

Marcello: Weren't there some Dutch on that ship, also?

Burns: Yes, there was Dutch on that ship, too. There was a bunch of us up on deck of that ship, and we didn't know the ship had been hit on the side. A Jap officer came around there and spoke as plain English as I could speak, and he said, "You men get on that side of the ship. There's too many on this side of the ship. It's been hit and is sinking." It didn't take us long to get on the other side (chuckle). It was possibly the same officer that kicked the ammunition off the back.

Marcello: I would assume that your particular ship was really crowded now, since you had been picking up these survivors.

Burns: We'd been picking up these survivors, and there was blood and everything else there. It was kind of a mess then, sure enough.

Marcello: How long did this raid last altogether?

Burns: I wish you hadn't have asked me that. I don't know.

Marcello: It probably seemed like hours to you, but I'm sure it was only a matter of minutes probably.

Burns: It was just minutes. They might have made three runs on it or might have made two. I don't know how many runs they made on it. I don't know how many planes was bombing.

Marcello: What was the attitude of the Japs as a result of this raid?

Burns: They was getting bitter. They was screaming and hollering out commands and everything. They was getting bitter.

Marcello: Did your rations vary as a result of this raid?

Burns: Well, you know, I don't remember eating while I was on that ship. I don't know whether they fed us on that ship or not. We might have had something with

us already. I don't know. We might have had rice with us, but I don't know. I just don't remember eating on that ship.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, on January 9, 1943, you docked at Moulmein in Burma.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: What happened after you got off the ship? I think you stayed in Moulmein a little while, just a day or two or three?

Burns: We stayed out there in the water. We couldn't get to the dock. They came out there in barges and picked us up. We climbed over and got out. While we was waiting for the barge, we went in circles. A ship don't go like an outboard motor; it leans over. So they went in a circle to favor this where it had been hit by a bomb. Then this barge got there, and they all wanted to lead on this barge. They loaded us into this . . . that's where we got another talking to, telling us--this long-winded Jap telling us--that we were going to build a railroad if it killed every prisoner and every Japanese on the line, and we'd be shot if we tried to escape and so on.

Marcello: Well, you really hadn't gotten to Thanbyuzayat, to the railroad itself, yet. Didn't you spend a night

or two in Moulmein? You were in Moulmein for a little while, and I think they put you in all sorts of places while you were in Moulmein. Some of you were in an old jail, and I think others were in a mortuary, things of this nature.

Burns: That's right. I stayed in a Moulmein jail.

Marcello: What was it like?

Burns: Well, it was just another lock-up. I remember this-- there was some prisoners, civilian prisoners, in this jail. We was pretty close to them. There was wires and possibly a room or two between us, but in the grapevine way we found out that they was civilian prisoners.

Marcello: Just common criminals?

Burns: Just common criminals, yes, murderers or something like that that they was holding there.

Marcello: But you only remained here at Moulmein a couple of days, didn't you?

Burns: A very short time, I don't know how long. Very short time.

Marcello: And then from Moulmein you were sent out to Thanbyuzayat, which was actually the base camp. I think there was a hospital there, and it was kind of like the railhead, and there was a depot and a transit place and things of that nature.

Burns: Yes. From Moulmein, that's where we got on another train with plenty of guards, and that's when there was open cars. I think there was fifty or sixty to a car, and those cars weren't as big as our train cars. We was thick in it. How long we was on there, I don't remember now.

Marcello: But then I think it was at Thanbyuzayat where you got this lecture or this pep talk by Colonel Nagatomo.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Do you remember him very well?

Burns: No, I don't.

Marcello: You probably wouldn't have seen him very long anyhow.

Burns: They all just kind of look alike to me. They all look alike.

Marcello: Do you recall how long you stayed at Thanbyuzayat before you moved out on the railroad itself, that is before you went to the first of the Kilo camps?

Burns: No, I don't remember that. I don't remember.

Marcello: Was it just a short amount of time?

Burns: It was a short time. Yes, it was a short time. In fact, things was going pretty fast then.

Marcello: Okay, so now you're ready to work on the railroad.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: This was a railroad going from Thanbyuzayat to . . .
where was it . . . Ragoon or . . .

Burns: Ragoon, right on over, yes.

Marcello: It was going to be built by prison labor and by native
labor.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: The Japanese troops and the Korean guards were close
at hand.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, now the work, of course, had already begun to
progress on this railroad, and you picked it up at the
18 Kilo Camp.

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now describe what the 18 Kilo Camp looked like. It had
already been built for you, had it not?

Burns: That's right. The natives went ahead, and they was good
at constructing bamboo huts. Bamboo was plentiful
there; you could eat it, sleep on it, under it, and
everything else. They'd take it and run the biggest
old huts up in no time. The natives would be so thick
on it that it was just like blackbirds in the field.
The top was to keep out the sun and rain. They built
the beds up about two feet high on each side of the

hut. They'd take bamboo and split it and just keep splitting it to where it would lay out flat. That was the bed. They'd have that solid on each side of the hut.

Marcello: In other words, this was like a platform on each side of the hut.

Burns: With a walkway down the center of the ground. It was softer than the tile floor we knew back in the other places.

Marcello: I would assume that they really didn't have to guard you too closely in these camps.

Burns: There wasn't anywhere we could go. There wasn't anywhere to go and we were white.

Marcello: Escape never got past the talking stage in other words.

Burns: That's it right there. To my way of thinking, in a group in a place like that, you're better off. Possibly there might have been some attempts to escape, but I don't think any Americans tried to escape.

Marcello: They warned you that if you did try to escape and were captured, you'd be shot. Did you believe them?

Burns: You bet I believed them!

Marcello: You didn't think they were bluffing.

Burns: They wasn't bluffing a bit.

Marcello: Did you ever see them execute anybody for any reason at any time while you were a prisoner?

Burns: No, I didn't. I thought they was going to kill somebody but they never did.

Marcello: About how many prisoners are we talking about now in this 18 Kilo Camp? Could you give an estimate?

Burns: No, I can't. They started out in kumis. There was about fifty men to a kumi; that's a group, fifty men and one officer. As far as Americans were concerned, I don't know how many there were there.

Marcello: There were two batteries of you here? One battery had been sent back to Japan; there were two batteries working on the railroad.

Burns: No, there was a headquarters battery and two other batteries.

Marcello: What were the other two batteries? These would be two of the artillery batteries.

Burns: Yes. The E Battery went to Japan. Let's see, there was D, E, and F. D and F was with us.

Marcello: About how many Japanese were in this 18 Kilo Camp? Japanese and Koreans?

Burns: I don't know.

Marcello: Again, I assume there weren't too many; there didn't have to be too many.

Burns: There wasn't too many there. There wasn't too many. Actually, I think there were more Koreans. Their

engineers were Japanese; their officers were Japanese.

Most of the guards were Koreans.

Marcello: Describe what the Korean guards were like.

Burns: The Korean guards were really worse than the Japanese guards. They'd treat you worse because they had the Japanese over them.

Marcello: In other words, they kind of found somebody now that was below them on the pecking order.

Burns: That's right. They were disciplined. They were well disciplined. They was taught to be mean.

Marcello: What original punishment did they come up with that was perhaps different than what the Japanese did?

Burns: Well, right now I don't know if it'd be any different. I think they was just probably taught by the Japanese to do what the Japs wanted them to do.

Marcello: In other words, it was the same kind of punishment but more of it.

Burns: More of it, that's right.

Marcello: Did they ever provoke the prisoner so that the prisoner might do something rash so that he could be punished?

Burns: They might, for instance, draw on the ground a little round circle and say "Japan" and over here draw a big circle and say "America" and tell "1941" when the war

first started. Then they'd draw America getting smaller. In '42, America was getting a little bit smaller and Japan was getting bigger. In '43, America was getting a little smaller, and Japan getting bigger. They'd always come up with that. Or they'd come up and say, "Nipponese number one," and they'd want you to say, "No, America is number one." You'd soon know how to appease them.

Marcello: Describe what work was like on this railroad. Now we're starting here at the 18 Kilo Camp, and I assume that the work remained virtually the same all the way through until you were finished on the road.

Burns: When we first went in there, these engineers had set up a line where this railroad would go, and they'd take bamboo sticks, set up a stick upright on each side and one across just like the railroad, how this dump was supposed to be, and then one angling on each side to tell the angle of the dump. We looked at that and said, "My, we'll never get this done." But we soon found out that they had enough work cut out for each man, that it didn't take long to fill that in. When we first started, they assigned one man one meter--that's a cubic meter.

Marcello: Now this would be on a cut.

Burns: On a cut, that's what you had to take out. The officer drew a meter, too. So in a kumi of fifty men and one officer, that's fifty-one cubic meters of dirt that you moved and put up in this dump. You'd dig it out on the side and carry it and put it on this dump. It wasn't long before we found out that there wasn't any machinery; it was all basket or a towsack and a bamboo pole and worn out picks and shovels and what have you.

When we first started we was in pretty good shape; it wasn't too bad. A man in a day's time could fool around and move that meter of dirt. We got to getting done a little before night, so they began to add on. A lot of guys got wise right quick about how much to do. A lot of times that got up to 3.1 where the digging was easy and we didn't have far to carry it, or it was just shoveling here and shoveling over there (gesture), and that's hard to do. That much dirt is hard to move for one man.

Marcello: How many days a week would you be working? Was this seven days a week?

Burns: We worked ten days and laid off one. I believe that's the way it went. We worked ten days and laid off one.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what was the food like as you were working on the railroad?

Burns: They paid us. They paid us ten cents a day, a regular private working, and we could buy an egg, a duck egg, for ten cents when we first started.

Marcello: Who did you buy this from?

Burns: They'd come from the natives through the Japs. The natives would have the eggs there, and we'd take our money and buy those eggs. We first started like that, and then we organized there to take twenty cents . . . they paid us every ten days . . . twenty days, maybe it was twenty days. I know we'd get \$1.80. We could buy eighteen eggs. We'd take twenty cents and run it to the kitchen to let them cook up something and put a little something extra in the rice. When we first started, we'd get a little meat. There was enough meat in there, in the rice and stew, that you could tell there was meat in there.

Marcello: You were still getting rice, also?

Burns: Yes, we'd get rice.

Marcello: In other words, the eggs were something to supplement your diet.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: How often could you get these, about every two weeks, did you say?

Burns: When we got paid we could get those eggs. I know several guys that would get eighteen eggs and sit down-- it'd take them awhile--but they'd eat eighteen boiled eggs. That's how it got. I'd try to stretch mine out a little bit. I couldn't eat that many eggs (chuckle) at one time, but some of them would just hoard up and sit down, and that's what they'd live for from one pay day to the next. They'd eat them eighteen boiled eggs.

Marcello: Of course, as you progressed farther and farther into the jungle, I would assume that there was a point reached when the native traders couldn't keep up with you.

Burns: Supplies got scarce. Eggs went up, they got to be twenty-five cents apiece. It got to be up there where you couldn't buy anything with your money. They had what we call goulash--it's a sugar made out of sugar cane, and it's in slices, possibly half an inch slabs. We could buy a little bit of that. That got scarce. There was some kind of old native cookie you could buy; that got scarce. You couldn't hardly eat it, it tasted so bad. But it was a cookie. They had a tobacco, native wog, that came in a rolled up bundle; that got scarce, and you couldn't buy that.

Marcello: By the time that these scarcities occurred, we're probably into May of 1943 which was when the monsoons came and the "Speedo" campaign started and all that sort of thing.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: And you were probably at the 80 or 100 Kilo Camp.

Burns: I don't know which camp we was in at the time, but there in that country it is six months dry and six months rain.

Marcello: We'll get to that in just a minute because I have a few more general questions I want to ask before we get on specifically to the 80 and the 100 Kilo Camps. How regularly were these various camps spaced on this railroad? In other words, where did you go from the 18 Kilo Camp? Do you recall?

Burns: I believe our particular group went from the 18 to the 80. I know it was a long walk. I believe we went from the 18 to the 80. Somebody had been at another camp in there in between.

Marcello: I would assume that all these camps virtually looked the same.

Burns: They all looked the same, yes.

Marcello: While you were working on this railroad, for the most

part you were either making cuts or making fills, one or the other.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Which was the easiest? Six of one and half a dozen of the other?

Burns: It's according to whether it was rocky or what the ground was like. Some of it was easy to dig, and some of it was hard. Some cuts where you didn't have to go down so far were pretty easy to dig out and tear up. You'd run onto a place where you'd have as much as five meters to dig out for the rail to go through and the ground got pretty hard.

Marcello: Were there ever occasions where blasting would have to be done?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Who would do the blasting?

Burns: The engineers themselves. They might have prisoners help, like drilling holes in rocks or something like that. If they had any real labor, they'd have prisoners do that.

Marcello: Was there very much bridge building done on this railroad while you were working on it?

Burns: Yes, there had to be. There was all kinds of terrain through this country. The British started this thing years before we started it.

Marcello: And decided that it wasn't feasible?

Burns: It wasn't feasible and they had all kinds of machinery. That shows you what kind of engineers the Japs are-- that they can take enough men and a little bamboo and a pick and shovel and do it. When we first started out, it didn't look like that they'd need anything like bridges.

Marcello: You started out in pretty flat country, didn't you?

Burns: Yes. As we got up in the jungle, it got worse. Some of those bridges were two or three tiers high, and they was built with plenty of lumber, plenty of trees, teakwood. If a fellow had that teakwood here, he'd make a fortune off of it. The teakwood there, they'd burn it and a lot of it they'd just put in the dump itself. They'd cut a teakwood tree down and cover it up with dirt and that was part of the dump.

Marcello: When you refer to a dump, you're referring to a fill, I guess.

Burns: Yes, the fill itself. As I said, those tiers were about . . . they'd put them up in stacks. They'd cut those logs possibly in twelve feet lengths. After they'd drive their piling in for the bridge . . .

Marcello: How did they drive the piling in?

Burns: It's a crude method. They have a weight with a hole in the center, possibly a 500-pound weight with a hole in the center. This weight would run up and down on a rod. They'd bore a hole right in the middle of the piling and set this rod in the center of this piling and build a scaffold around with the pulley in the top of the scaffold. The rope ran down to this weight, and they'd get enough men on this rope to pull this weight up and down. They'd run up and down this steel rod that goes into the top of the piling. They'd just run back and forth and just keep beating.

Marcello: In other words, the men would be pulling on this rope, and at a certain point they'd release the rope, and the piling would fly down and drive the log into the ground.

Burns: Yes, into the ground. Once they'd get that set, they'd lay a log then so that had so many of those pilings across. They'd lay a log then horizontal across that and tie it with U-type rods that they'd drive in.

Marcello: Now these were steel U-type rods.

Burns: Steel rods. Then they'd set another pole, log, upright on top of that. Three or four across or five--whatever it takes. They'd lay another log on top of that and tie it all with these steel U-rods. I've seen them three tiers high.

Marcello: How well constructed were these bridges?

Burns: Well, they was pretty shabby. When a train would go across, they'd shake all over. Their trains are not as large as ours or as heavy as ours. Some of these bridges they'd put up during the monsoon season, and they'd wash down or lean over, and they'd just get enough men on the ropes the next day with elephants on the side pushing and men on the other side pulling. They'd pull them back and line them up and brace them a little and let them go.

Marcello: On occasions they did use elephants on this railroad.

Burns: Yes. We used elephants to pull stumps or drag logs.

Marcello: I think Pete Smallwood told me that the elephants were pretty smart; they would test a log before they picked it up.

Burns: The natives generally rode the elephants. They drove them. An old elephant can get just as lazy as a man. You'd get down there and have him pulling the stump, and he'd wrap his trunk around there and just grunt and go on and raise cane and bellow. The native would rap him with that kind of a pick-looking thing, and that old elephant would wrap that trunk around it and jerk it out before you could say, "Scat." There was

nothing to it. They knew how to play off, and the native would let him do that unless an engineer or guard would holler at him to get to work or something like that.

Marcello: Smallwood was saying that the elephants seemed to test the weight of logs before they picked them up. If they were heavy, the elephant wouldn't pick them up, and then the prisoners had to pick them up.

Burns: That's right. The elephant would go along and feel of the log to get to the center, to balance it right. Then he'd pick it up at the right place. They was smart. I saw an elephant have a runaway one time. He was pulling some kind of old cart--they was getting some dirt up on a hill--and he was running down the hill to the dump with this dirt. They had this elephant pulling it back and forth. One of these carts turned over, and it looked like a huge turtle. He looked around and saw that thing following him, and he took off (chuckle), threw that native, and they liked to never caught him. He finally hung his harness up on a stump somewhere.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were building these bridges and using a lot of teak. Who had been cutting the teak?

Burns: The prisoners.

Marcello: This was pretty tough work, was it not? Teak is hardwood.

Burns: Well, teak there is green. It's hardwood, but you could get it down.

Marcello: Who was actually laying the ties and the rails themselves?

Burns: It was the prisoners. That's where the hardest work came in. They'd ship these ties in on a . . . as the rails came in . . . they'd work the ties and the gravel up on these cars. Somewhere they'd load these ties on a closed boxcar and fill it to the top. It seemed like during the monsoon season was when those ties would be coming in.

Marcello: In other words, you were not cutting the ties?

Burns: No, we wasn't cutting them ties. I don't know where they came from. They'd come in there, and they'd have to kick those ties out. They were green. They'd kick them out in that mud and the prisoners would have to come along and pick them up. There were two men to a tie, one at one end and one at the other. They was heavy and wet and muddy and hard to handle. That's where the hard all day and night work came in.

Marcello: In other words, the actual laying of the rails and ties was much tougher than making the cuts and the fills or building the bridges?

Burns: I think it was.

Marcello: Did you ever have much opportunity to sabotage the work on this railroad?

Burns: No. The only thing that you could sabotage would be maybe a locomotive or something like that, and they'd have guards all around it.

Marcello: Did the guards ever harass you very much when you were actually working?

Burns: As long as you were doing a good job, they'd let you alone. If you looked like you wasn't doing your job, they'd let you know about it.

Marcello: I have some other general questions, but I think I'll hold on to those for a minute because there are a couple of specific camps I want to talk about here. You were progressing into the jungle, and then in May of 1943 the so-called "Speedo" campaign started. Work on the railroad had not been progressing on schedule, and so they decided to speed things up.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: It was also around this time that the monsoons started, isn't that correct?

Burns: That's right.

Marcello: Now was this around the time that you were at the 80 Kilo Camp? Or were you at the 100 Kilo Camp at this time?

Burns: I believe we was at the 100 Kilo Camp at this time. This railroad was supposed to be finished--this Japanese officer told us back on the line--I believe it was in October. They gave us a specific date on the calendar. When this monsoon season came on, we was going through a jungle swamp, and it was raining every day and night. You'd carry up a basket or a sack of that mud to put on there, and as you'd come off the dump, it would follow you down. You just couldn't make any headway. Then they started working you at night--twelve o'clock at night--with an extra meal. They told us they'd be real good and give us an extra meal. They'd bring the regular evening meal out to us, and then when we got back into camp at twelve o'clock, they'd feed us again. For a little while there they got to feeding us a little better, kind of a green bean thing. It was dry but it was green bean thing there. Then they got a little short on that.

Marcello: When did the real sickness and the real trouble begin? Was it around the 80 Kilo Camp?

Burns: It was a little past the 80 Kilo Camp. It was around the 100 Kilo Camp where the sickness began. That's when the monsoon came on.

Marcello: By the time the monsoon came on, I gather by this time the native traders couldn't get to the camp, and even the regular supply trains couldn't get to the camp.

Burns: They couldn't get there either.

Marcello: Is it true that there was a road that ran parallel to the railroad?

Burns: There was a road--maybe not parallel--but there was a road somewhere close to that in the jungle, and they couldn't get up that road at all. A lot of times we'd have to go to this road to work on this road to pull these trucks through to get anything out of there.

Marcello: Did the punishment and the harassment increase while you were engaged in this "Speedo" campaign?

Burns: Yes, it did. You could tell that they was pushing. They was being pushed, and, of course, they'd hand it right down to us.

Marcello: By this time how would you describe the health of the prisoners?

Burns: It was going down fast. People was getting more scratches on them, and they was getting infected. Most everybody was going barefooted at this time, and a little scratch one day would be as big as a dime the next and a half-dollar and a dollar the next.

Marcello: You're talking about the tropical ulcers.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: They were a real problem.

Burns: Yes, they was a problem.

Marcello: Did you yourself have any tropical ulcers?

Burns: Yes. Then there was dysentery coming on. Malaria fever came on. It seemed like the malaria started first. I believe the malaria started first. There were two distinct types of malaria there. One kind runs you crazy, and the other kind was what we'd call, in layman's terms, just plain old malaria.

Marcello: What were the hospital facilities or medical facilities like by this time? By the time you were at the 80 or the 100 Kilo Camp?

Burns: I believe at the 80 our first to die was our medical doctor. Among our first to die was our medical doctor.

Marcello: This was Dr. Lumpkin.

Burns: Lumpkin. It kind of lowered the morale. I heard him speak to the colonel there one time; that's why I say malaria's the one that started first. There was one or two guys that turned up with the chill and fever, and he told the colonel, "Colonel, these men are going to start dying of malaria, and there's not a damned

thing I can do about it." It wasn't long after that that he died. Just a little while after that we lost another officer, and they just started in.

Marcello: In other words, it was a combination of things that caused the deaths to occur. The camp, I gather, was located in a terrible location--in a swampy, low area.

Burns: This is the 100 Kilo Camp. The barracks I was in, the water got up . . . people was nearly dead. It'd wash their mess kits. All they'd have to do was reach down, and there was water running under them. It got so muddy in the huts where they'd walk that you'd just go halfway up to your knees, and they got to throwing logs and things in there where you could get to your bed place. In fact, it got so soggy in there where you'd lay down that the platforms on the side would sink themselves.

Marcello: By this time, I assume that all of your clothing had given out. Were you down to your G-string by this time?

Burns: Yes. At this time I had a pair of shorts that I was still wearing. They was just shorts. There wasn't nothing to them.

Marcello: You mentioned the tropical ulcers awhile ago. How did you possibly treat these tropical ulcers? You might describe the ones that you had.

Burns: Well, the one that I had . . . let's see, what started it was that I just stepped in a hole and got a little bitty scratch on my leg. The next day it was real red, and the next day it was ballooned out there about the size of a dime, and the next day it was about the size of a half-dollar. A tropical ulcer looks like the inside meat just turned out. It grows. I've seen on one boy that died, on the side of his foot (gesture), you wouldn't think there'd be a sore that big on his ankle, but that's how big his ankle was.

Marcello: In other words, it was the size of his ankle?

Burns: Yes, the size of his ankle. In fact, his ankle swelled up as big as a gallon bucket, and his ulcer was just that big. Our master sergeant, his name is Shaw, Jack Shaw, he had an ulcer on his foot, and his leg started swelling up, and that thing was just growing by the day. He could mash on it up here (gesture) and juice and stuff would run out on his foot down there.

Marcello: How did you treat these tropical ulcers?

Burns: Hot water. That's all they had. There was always . . . you could get hot tea and pour on it. That's how the Americans treated it. Now the Dutch lost fewer men and fewer legs. The Dutch would hold their men and take a

spoon and dig it out. They'd dig it out to the quick. They'd just pour hot water on it.

Marcello: In most cases you were treating them with hot water? In other words, you would soak a rag in hot water or something?

Burns: We didn't have no rag; we'd just pour the hot water on it. That was it.

Marcello: How often did you have to treat this ulcer? Was it a continual thing? Did you have to treat it as often as you could?

Burns: As often as you could and felt like it. If you didn't, it'd just grow. Those things grow just like something on fire.

Marcello: But it was something that you had to keep after all the time.

Burns: Yes, keep after it all the time. I know a lot of guys that died with ulcers, that if they didn't have to work with them and had the time to keep that hot water on them, it'd save a leg or saved a life. I saw one guy--his name is Georgia Brown from Florida--who died with an ulcer on his finger. It started on the end of his little finger, and it just started eating. It got down to this part, and the joint fell off. It got right

on down, and when it got to his hand, his hand swelled up as big as a gallon bucket, and when it got to his hand, he died. But you could just see it just eat it up.

Marcello: Were they one of the worst things that could happen to you in this camp?

Burns: No. I think the worse thing that could happen to you was to take what we called the "crazy malaria." They would kind of lose their mind; it gets into their spine and brain. We had one guy that got that, and he stuffed a rag in his mouth and went out and jumped in the latrine head first.

Marcello: Did you ever see men simply give up, simply sit down and die?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: How could you tell when a person was giving up?

Burns: Well, they just quit trying. They just quit trying. They just quit trying to treat themselves. They didn't have nobody to encourage them. Nobody had time to encourage them to treat themselves.

Marcello: Did their minds begin to wander? Did they think a lot about home or . . . what exactly were the symptoms?

Burns: I don't know. I think they would just kind of lose their mind and go crazy or something. I know one fellow

whose teeth was falling out, or he had pulled them just with his fingers. He was just crazy, you know, just said, "Look here, I just pulled my teeth." He'd pull them out. Of course, they was infected and all and he just died.

Marcello: About how many men were you losing a day while you were at the 100 Kilo Camp?

Burns: I don't know. I don't know. First thing you'd do was feel the guy next to you. I just don't know how many we lost there.

Marcello: Did you ever participate in any of the burial details?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: What were they like? Would you care to describe what they were like?

Burns: Well, the first man that died, we tried to do it right. In fact, the first man that died, they even built him a coffin. The ship's carpenter built him a nice teakwood coffin. And possibly the second and third had coffins, but they got to coming so fast, and they just didn't have time to do it. They had two or three men digging graves in one place, and one boy one day was digging a grave--they knew they was going to be there awhile, and they wanted to keep one or two dug--he said, "I'm digging my own grave." He was the biggest man we had in there.

Marcello: Did they try to keep records as to who did die and things of this nature?

Burns: No, I don't think so. I don't think there was anybody to keep them.

Marcello: I would assume that they tried to use all of the possessions and belongings that the dead had, such as clothing and things of that nature, if they had any of that.

Burns: Everybody had a few possessions, whatever there was. There was very little.

Marcello: How sick did you have to be before you didn't have to go on a work detail?

Burns: If you could walk you could work. That's their policy.

Marcello: I know that when you were back at the 100 Kilo Camp, they did take a relatively large group of prisoners back to the 80 Kilo Camp. These were the ones that were quite sick.

Burns: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Were you perchance in that particular group?

Burns: Yes, I went back to the 80 Kilo.

Marcello: What was your condition at the time you were sent back? Obviously, you had the tropical ulcers as you mentioned.

Burns: Well, I had pleurisy. I had water on my lung, and I couldn't breathe, and I couldn't go to work. They was

sending a few guys back out of this camp; there were also some out of the other camps there. Of course, they didn't tell me and I didn't know at that time, but they said that they had a hospital camp down there. You'd go down there, and they said they had guards that would feed you. You didn't have to work. I went down there.

Marcello: What was the trip like back to the 80 Kilo Camp? Did you go back by truck or did you walk back?

Burns: You know, I don't know how I got down there. I think I went by truck.

Marcello: I do know that there were a good many prisoners, and there weren't very many guards.

Burns: There was . . .

Marcello: Which was a good indication I think of the condition of the prisoners.

Burns: Yes. I think there were two guards down there. There was an American officer which was sick, and there was a Dutch officer there who was sick. I believe they had a doctor there. It wasn't an American doctor.

Marcello: Was this Doctor Hekking? There was a Dutch doctor that a lot of the "Lost Battalion" boys have talked about.

Burns: I never did know him. I never did know that Dutch doctor, unless he was down there. Now he might have been in a later camp up there, but I never did know him.

Marcello: Did they have very good facilities here at the 80 Kilo Camp to care for the prisoners?

Burns: Well, at that time, these camps . . . the worms and insects eat these camps up in very little time. By the time we got back down there, the camp was deteriorated. In fact, a lot of huts was leaning over, and there was no work there other than keeping the camp up. The food was just the same, if not worse.

Marcello: In other words, the only difference between the 80 Kilo Camp and the 100 Kilo Camp was that you really didn't have to work at the 80 Kilo Camp.

Burns: That's right, that's right.

Marcello: How long were you back at that camp altogether?

Burns: I don't know.

Marcello: Was it a matter of weeks?

Burns: It was some time. It was some time I was there. There we could go out and scrounge in the jungle. When we were there . . . see, they'd feed you peppers, hot peppers. All around in that camp there was . . . wherever the trash was dumped or anything, peppers came up, and that pepper would come up . . . if you'd eat that pepper, pepper was good for dysentery, if your stomach could take it. That's the reason there wasn't

many Dutch that had dysentery because they eat a lot of pepper. There was a jungle weed we'd go out and gather. It's something like . . . probably the same food value as poke salad here in this country or something like that. If you'd get a little . . . now there wasn't as much rice there. You could get enough. Everybody was so sick that they didn't want anything to eat, but you could get enough. You could go out and gather up some bamboo roots and cook up your own concoction.

Marcello: Did you ever resort to eating snakes or things of this nature?

Burns: Yes, at the 100 Kilo, I've eaten dog.

Marcello: Yes, I hear dogs and cats here were kind of standard fare if one ever happened to stray into camp.

Burns: I've never eaten a cat, but I have eaten a dog.

Marcello: Did you have any second thoughts before you dug into it?

Burns: None whatsoever. It was kind of stringy, but that was it. It was meat.

Marcello: What was the thought that was most constantly on your mind during your time as a prisoner-of-war? What did you think about more than anything else?

Burns: Something to eat.

Marcello: This is a 100 per cent consensus of every prisoner I've ever talked to.

Burns: Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you ever resort to the practice of dreaming up menus?

Burns: Oh, yes. I was dreaming up something I could fix to eat.

Marcello: What food did you perhaps think about the most?

Burns: I think it was milk. I'd think I'd just like to have milk or ice cream.

Marcello: It's funny because I think every prisoner had his favorite food that he thought about.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: I can remember one thing that he could actually smell bacon and eggs cooking somewhere in the camp.

Burns: Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: I heard another one who thought of nothing but peanut butter in some form or another. Everybody apparently had their favorite food that they thought about.

Burns: I had worked around dairies . . . drinking cold milk. I had that cold milk on my mind all the time.

Marcello: After you had recuperated sufficiently enough at the 80 Kilo Camp, did they send you back on the railroad again?

Burns: Yes. They picked me up at the 80 Kilo Camp and took me back to, I believe, 105. That's when there was a lot of rail laying then and crosstie laying.

Marcello: While you were a prisoner, was it every man for himself, or did the prisoners form little cliques that looked out for one another?

Burns: In there you generally found a buddy to scrounge with. It seemed like it kind of paid off; what one wouldn't think of or could do, well, maybe the other one could. We kind of buddied up a little bit.

Marcello: What did you do with whatever spare time you had? I know you had very little working on this railroad. What did you usually do? Was it a matter of resting or washing your clothing, what little you had, and things of this nature?

Burns: Well, right now I don't remember any spare time, but the day when we did have that day off, we'd clean up a little and just lay there. I just don't remember any spare time.

Marcello: During your stay in the jungle while working on this railroad, did you ever have an opportunity to send out any mail at all?

Burns: Yes. Towards the latter part we had the opportunity and did send out a twenty-five-word card that was preprinted. There wasn't anything to write; it was already there. You just crossed out something.

Marcello: As I recall, the card said, "My health is . . ."

Burns: "Good . . ."

Marcello: "Good, fair, poor," and if you didn't circle "good," the card probably didn't get out.

Burns: Yes. I remember one fellow sent out a card and it got home. Two fellows that he knew had died . . . or one had died. He wrote in there, where it said, "Some friends I am with . . ." he wrote, "Jack Post--Hume Shaw." He was telling somebody back home that Jack Shaw died. He wrote, "Jack Post--Hume Shaw."

Marcello: Now, Hume Shaw . . .

Burns: All right . . . Jack Shaw--posthume.

Marcello, I see, yes.

Burns: It went through. That's about the extent of it.

Marcello: Were there ever any secret radios in any of the camps you were in?

Burns: Yes. I believe it was the last camp I was in that had a radio in a part of a homemade broom.

Marcello: When you say the last camp you were in--the last camp on the railroad?

Burns: Yes. The British had control of it. I think they finally had to discard it or something.

Marcello: Were you ever able to keep up with the news from the outside world?

Burns: No, no. They'd just get to turn it on once in awhile. At one time we was working in a place pretty close to some natives, and one of them told us, "We expect the Allies in six weeks." We was just walking along down the road, and he was standing there, and he turned his head and said that as we walked by.

Marcello: I'm sure that did wonders for your morale.

Burns: Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: Did bombers ever hit this railroad while you were working on it?

Burns: Yes. By the time we got it operational, the bombers started bombing.

Marcello: Did you mind them blowing up your handiwork?

Burns: Oh, it didn't make any difference (laughter). I saw them one time bomb a train just as it hit a bridge-- just as the train hit a bridge--and knocked it off. We was relatively close to it.

Marcello: What did the Japanese do when they saw something like this occur?

Burns: Well, when something like that happened, they'd just start screaming and hollering and throwing fits. They soon settled down. I think by that time they realized that something was happening. It wasn't going just right for them.

Marcello: I understand that there was an extensive black market that got started here in the railroad camps. Did you know anything about it?

Burns: No, not in the camp that I was in. There was some boys that was going over the fence in the camp towards the last.

Marcello: This would have been out of the jungle, however, would it not?

Burns: Yes, this was out of the jungle. This was what they called a hospital camp. I think that benefited those fellows that was just kind of a group that would go out and scrounge and come back in. Some of it would eventually get out to some of the needy ones, but not all of it. They was taking care of themselves, but some of it was going out to somebody.

Marcello: One prisoner told me that it seemed like that whatever camp he was in the Americans always seemed to live better than anybody else. Maybe it was a result of their ingenuity, I'm not sure.

Burns: Well, I don't know. It could have been. It could've been.

Marcello: Was this kind of your observation?

Burns: That's right, that's right. There was one little Dutchman, real small. His name was Bill and that's as far as I know.

He was a brave boy, and he could go out. With a little help he could get out and get something. I've seen him climb across a water ditch and climb a straight-up bank and go on and go over the fence with the guards nearly looking at him. He could get by with it.

Marcello: Did you ever see any evidence of collaboration in any of these camps, that is, Americans who curried favors from these Japanese?

Burns: Well, I saw one. I wouldn't want to call any names, but I saw one where the man was hungry, and he was buddying up to this Jap and getting a few favors, a little extra to eat, but he let it out one time and said, "You treat me right while you are here, and when Americans come, I'll treat you right." He shouldn't have said that. They turned him in knots when he said that. They threw him over their shoulders and stomped on him and everything else. He shouldn't have said that.

Marcello: How about religion? Did you see religion play a very large part in the lives of the prisoners when things got tough?

Burns: Well, yes. I think it's just the American people. The things get tough on them, and they start thinking of the hereafter, and as things lighten up, they forget about it. We had a chaplain, Australian chaplain, that

had turned a commission down in the Australian Army, at a camp on towards the last of the war there. He was a real good fellow. He turned this commission down to be with the men. He was a good influence on a lot of people.

Marcello: Finally, in November--sometime in October or November of 1943--the railroad was finished, and there was a ceremony at a place called Three Pagodas Pass. Did you perhaps attend that ceremony?

Burns: No.

Marcello: I'm looking for a prisoner that attended that ceremony; I can't find anybody that I've interviewed so far who has actually attended that ceremony.

Burns: Is that where they drove the spike?

Marcello: I think this was where they drove the spike, and they had some sort of memorial services for everybody who had died on the railroad and things of this nature.

Burns: Yes, I know about it, but I wasn't there.

Marcello: How come you were not on that ceremony? Were you doing some of the clean-up work on the railroad, or had you been sent on to Kanchanaburi by this time?

Burns: By that time I was sent on to Kanchanaburi. I know they had details to go to this place where they had the statue

or whatever it is fixed in honor of all the dead on the line.

Marcello: As soon as the railroad was completed, I gather that you were moved on right away to Kanchanaburi.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: In some cases I think they still kept skeleton crews on the railroad to do clean-up work or whatever needed to be done--to put the finishing touches on the railroad. But you moved on to Kanchanaburi. Now what was Camp Kanchanaburi like? This was the hospital camp, was it not?

Burns: Yes. It was new, very new, when I got there. There was the same kind of huts, the same kind of food, but it just wasn't as much work. When I went in there, there were very few Americans there.

Marcello: This was a huge camp, was it not?

Burns: It was a big camp. Right along about then, that's where those guys was going over the fence. They had a big canal dug around the camp and a high inclined embankment that was straight-up. Out from there they had a guard on top of this ramp, and he walked around all the time. Out a little farther there was a high fence. They had medical doctors there; they didn't have

anything to work with, but they made their own alcohol, they performed operations, they cut off legs and arms and made crutches and so forth. There was a lot of sick people in there. It soon got nasty, and the huts got bad, and it deteriorated. Maggots got so thick on the ground that you couldn't see the ground around the latrines.

Marcello: I assume we're talking about open-air latrines--pits.

Burns: Yes, pits. They had a little hut built with a top on it. They was enclosed all right, so far up. Those things would fill up and run out, and the maggots would run out. The Japs had a lot of ducks there, and these old ducks would come through there and eat those maggots. There was a lot of conniving going on in this camp, too.

Marcello: Conniving of what sort?

Burns: Getting something to eat. Stealing duck eggs from those Japs. I guess there was more out of the jungle where you could get a little more if you could get out.

Marcello: Generally speaking, conditions were much more healthful here, were they not?

Burns: Well, I don't know. There was so many sick people there that it was . . .

Marcello: What I mean is, I think that these people were sick as a

result of having been in the jungle; they didn't necessarily get sick because they were at the camp.

Burns: No, they came out of the jungles.

Marcello: Right.

Burns: They came out of the jungles.

Marcello: What sort of work was done in Kanchanaburi?

Burns: Other than trying to keep the camp cleaned up, I don't think there was a lot of work going on. In fact, there wasn't any work going on. They had special details for keeping those latrines empty, which they didn't have enough of for the people. Those that was able was trying to take care of those that wasn't able.

Marcello: How did the guards treat the prisoners in this camp? Any better, any worse?

Burns: I don't think it was any better. The guards . . . they'd count them every day; every day they'd have a count. They'd come through the huts . . . I don't know but that they wasn't just as strict there as anywhere else.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you have any nicknames for the guards?

Burns: Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: Can you think of some of the nicknames?

Burns: One of them was "Horse Collar" (laughter).

Marcello: "Horse Collar."

Burns: He'd talked . . . he was the ugliest man I ever saw.
I don't know what his name was. He couldn't talk plain.
He'd get up in your face and talk at you and spit on
you all at the same time (laughter) trying to talk.

Marcello: Can you think of any other nicknames?

Burns: I know one that's on the end of my tongue, but I can't
think of it. He was a mean one. I used to know them
all, but I can't think of them.

Marcello: Can you estimate how long you were in this camp at
Kanchanaburi altogether?

Burns: No.

Marcello: Was it a matter of months?

Burns: I believe it was. I believe it was.

Marcello: Did you ever experience or witness any air raids while
you were at this camp?

Burns: At this camp, that's when the . . . yes. They raided
a camp just out from us which was up on the line. They
wasn't actually raiding the camp. It was our own
people that was trying to blow up a bridge up there.
They overshot it and shot into this other camp. They
brought all the wounded down there.

Marcello: Including prisoners?

Burns: I mean prisoners. This was a prison camp.

Marcello: I see.

Burns: They lost a lot up there then. They had misinformation or something. They had to come over a hill to hit this bridge, and in the strafing and bombing they lost a lot, mostly English or Australian.

Marcello: How did the attitude of the Japanese usually change here at Kanchanaburi as a result of these bombings?

Burns: They seemed to quiet down, the Japs. About then there wasn't any officers . . . I mean, they'd separate the officers . . . there was an officer over a hut there. There were about 300 to the hut. This hut was three different sections with 100 to each section. They took that officer off that hut and put a noncommissioned officer on a hut. Of course, he had somebody under him, and I was fortunate--or unfortunate--enough to be in one of these huts. It was my job that everytime that Jap came in there . . . I had to teach everybody to number down in Japanese and see that everybody was there. He'd go wild if there was one man gone. He just couldn't understand it.

Marcello: Would he usually take it out on you?

Burns: No. He'd just start running up and down the hut and hollering and bellowing out something in their language

until he got the count right. Somebody would mess up, you know, on the count. In this camp, they was bombing Bangkok then. They was flying over every night, and we could hear them bombing. We could see them come back. That's when we first saw that big plane.

Marcello: B-29?

Burns: B-29. It came over one night, on a moonlight night, and they had their cabin lights on and everything, and you could almost just mark out the plane, and we all noticed it. Then that's when they got real rough. They wouldn't let anybody stick their nose out from under that hut when those planes was coming over.

Marcello: I would assume that this must have done wonders for your morale.

Burns: It did.

Marcello: By this time, you knew that the course of the war had changed, and they probably knew the course of the war had changed, also.

Burns: Yes, I think so.

Marcello: Did you notice their treatment easing up any at all?

Burns: I don't believe their treatment eased up until the thing stopped.

Marcello: Did you have a fear that they would kill you if they lost the war?

Burns: Yes. One of these guards told one man--and I didn't know who it was--but the guard kind of liked this man or something. Anyhow, one of these guards told this man that if they ever called a sudden inspection for everybody to line up outside, he said, "Don't line up." He told him that. He knew what it was all about. They took a lot of us out of this camp into Bangkok.

Marcello: You went from this camp into Bangkok?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Do you remember about when that would have taken place?

Burns: It was right close to the last because at the time we went in there . . . I think there was just two of us, two Americans.

Marcello: Was this where you were eventually liberated--in Bangkok?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: I know some of the prisoners went into Saigon, and they were liberated in Saigon. What did you do in Bangkok?

Burns: They took us down there to a dock. We was building air raid shelters and stuff like that.

Marcello: By this time, the "Lost Battalion" had really been split up.

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: You were scattered over Asia.

Burns: They took all the officers out. There was a fellow by the name of Crum from Jacksboro and I, and we were the only two Americans that they took to Bangkok at that time. That's when I got scared.

Marcello: In other words, you were the only two Americans that went to Bangkok.

Burns: At that time, yes. We was the first in there.

Marcello: And you went with a bunch of Australians and British prisoners?

Burns: Australians, British, and Dutch, too, I guess. We got into this place at night. They'd just bombed it and . . . all the screaming and . . . I can't tell when the date is. I don't even know.

Marcello: We're getting up into 1945 by this time.

Burns: Yes. That's when they told us it was over with. We was going down into town--they was taking working parties down into town then--and building air raid shelters and other things.

Marcello: Was this the sort of work that you were doing?

Burns: Yes.

Marcello: Where were you staying while you were in Bangkok?

Burns: Right there on the river in a warehouse.

Marcello: There couldn't have been too many of you, then, altogether.

Burns: No, there wasn't too many.

Marcello: Was there less than a hundred?

Burns: No, there was more than a hundred. But right before it was over or when it was over they started bringing more in there. They even let the officers back in there. When we went downtown in Bangkok and when they was coming back, they had us all in the street there, and there was Japs all in their units and even horse units and beat up and everything. You might as well say they were bivouacked right on the street, and we knew that something was going on because we could . . . some of those natives was giving us the "V" sign, and we knew something was happening.

Marcello: How long were you in Bangkok altogether? Can you estimate? Was it a matter of a couple of months?

Burns: No, no. It was more like two weeks.

Marcello: I see. Describe the events leading up to your liberation. How did you find out about the surrender, and when did the Americans finally come?

Burns: The best I can tell you right now . . . we knew what was happening. The Japs hadn't told us, but we knew what was happening, and one morning there we woke up and looked out of this warehouse we was in, and the Korean guards was gone. There wasn't any Korean guards.

In fact, all that was left there didn't have hardly any clothes on--no belts, shoes, or nothing. The Japs turned the Koreans out to pasture right quick--took everything, all their personal stuff, and everything. The very same day, they was bringing some officers back in there that they had separated from the men and had been up the country somewhere. They just lined us up out there and told us that . . . they didn't put it that America had won the war, but they said that the great Dai Nipponese Army and the Americans had signed a peace treaty.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you heard that peace had come?

Burns: Well, it was kind of a mixed feeling; you didn't really know what was happening. By that time I'd heard . . . you would just hear all kinds of things. You knew it was going to get over sometime, but you just didn't know how to take it.

Marcello: How long was it before the Allied troops came? Before I ask that question, let me ask this. What happened after you heard the word of surrender? Were you given any particular instructions or anything of this nature?

Burns: Yes. We got word that there was a unit back up in the jungle without anything to eat, and there was supplies

somewhere there that we could get and take them to them. There was two American officers and one Australian enlisted man and myself loaded on a truckload of peas and cigarettes and stuff, and we started up there with two Japanese guards. We said these guards would go along to protect us from the natives.

Marcello: Now the war was over by this time?

Burns: Yes, the war was over. We started up there and I think we was about two or three days getting up there. It was real wet and everything. I know one night we went as far as we could and got stuck and was coming back, and those guards didn't want to stay there, didn't want to go on, because they was afraid of bandits. They had to go back through all this mud territory to get back to a town, and then the next day went on, and I think we made it the next day into this camp. This particular camp we went into had a little airfield they had built there for the Japs, and there was an American major who walked into that camp that had been trained up in the woods--he'd trained some natives up in the woods for a coming invasion of that territory. We had a radio and he radioed out what the situation was, and they made arrangements for planes to come in there on this airfield and evacuate this camp.

Marcello: Were these prisoners that were up in this camp?

Burns: Yes, prisoners in this camp.

Marcello: And they had more or less been liberated by this American and these native guerrillas.

Burns: Well, no, they didn't come in. Nobody came in except this one major who walked in the camp in front of the guards and everything. Of course, the guards claimed they were there to protect the prisoners from the natives. Shortly after he came in that night, they dropped another guy in there by parachute and cigarettes and stuff like that.

Marcello: Were you flown out from this field yourself?

Burns: Yes, I was flown out from that field.

Marcello: Where did they fly you to?

Burns: They flew us to . . .

Marcello: Calcutta?

Burns: Calcutta, eventually. But there was two stops. We flew from there to another well-known place--I can't recall it--and then on to Calcutta.

Marcello: What happened in Calcutta? Were you given a physical examination and put in a hospital?

Burns: Yes, there was a hospital camp there. We wasn't there long, but we was there awhile.

Marcello: Incidentally, how much did you weigh when you went in the service, and how much did you weigh at the time of your liberation?

Burns: I don't remember what I weighed when I went in. At one time in the camp I weighed ninety pounds.

Marcello: So you probably lost somewhere around sixty or seventy pounds.

Burns: In the 80 Kilo Camp, I weighed so many stones or something.

Marcello: Yes.

Burns: That's Australian.

Marcello: Yes.

Burns: They figured a little over eighty-nine pounds.

Marcello: As you look back on your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you think pulled you through more than anything?

Burns: Well, just knowing that I was going to get back.

Marcello: This seems to be a general feeling. Speaking here now, in 1974, when you look back do you have any ill feelings towards the Japanese or has time healed the wounds?

Burns: I don't think time will heal it.

Marcello: Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life once you got back to this country?

Burns: Well, not a lot. I came back to the hospital in Denver. I wasn't in too good of health. In fact, that first eight years I was out, I spent four of it in the

hospital. So it was a slow adjustment to be made.

Marcello: I'm sure there were all sorts of adjustments that had to be made from a physical standpoint, but I'm speaking now in terms of getting a job or settling down or things of that nature.

Burns: Yes. You just didn't have much ambition when you got back. You just felt so far behind that you wouldn't want to catch up anyway.

Marcello: Were you kind of bewildered when you came back? Had things changed a great deal?

Burns: Yes. Absolutely. It had changed. It even seemed like the hills wasn't near as high (laughter).