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Interview with
W. L. Starnes
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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing W. L. Starnes for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 2, 1974, in Decatur, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Starnes in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Starnes was a member of a Texas National Guard outfit known as the "Lost Battalion." This was a unit that was captured virtually intact on the island of Java in March of 1942 and subsequently spent the duration of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps scattered throughout Asia.

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

Mr. Starnes: Well, I was born here in Wise County on February 6, 1919. I went to high school here and finished high school here in Decatur. After I got out of high school, I worked at various jobs around here, and when I was inducted into the service, I was working for Shell Oil Company in seismograph work. Since I've come home from service, I've been in politics here. I was county clerk for three terms. After that, I went into the automobile business in 1952 and have been in it ever since. I'm still in the automobile business.

Dr. Marcello: When did you join the National Guard unit here in Decatur.

Mr. Starnes: Well, I wasn't a member of the National Guard unit. I was inducted in the service in January of 1941.

Dr. Marcello: I see. In other words, you were one of those draftees that filled out the ranks in the "Lost Battalion" eventually after it got to Camp Bowie?

Mr. Starnes: That's right. I was inducted and sent to Camp Bowie, but I was sent to Company F, 142nd Infantry, and spent all of my basic training there in the infantry. Just before the Louisiana maneuvers, I transferred over to my hometown unit which was Headquarters Battery, 131st Field Artillery.

Marcello: Now was this a voluntary thing on your part, or were you ordered into this particular unit?

Starnes: No, it was voluntary. I asked for the transfer.

Marcello: Why did you want to get into this particular unit?

Starnes: Well, of course, I knew everybody. I knew all the boys, and I wanted to transfer to be with them. We, like everybody else, assumed that we'd be in for a year, and then we'd be back home, see?

Marcello: I gather then that you did accompany this unit on its maneuvers into Louisiana.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: What were those maneuvers like there?

Starnes: Well, we thought they were rough, really, but they weren't (chuckle). Of course, I had been, like I said, in the infantry for . . . well, from January till September, I guess it was. I believe we went to Louisiana in September of 1941, and, of course, infantry training was rough. I was pretty well used to it, but when I transferred over there, I was put in the maintenance division as a maintenance truck driver which was, to me, real easy, you know, after what I'd been through in infantry and everything. So I spent the rest of the time as a maintenance man and driving a maintenance truck in the Louisiana maneuvers.

Marcello: Incidentally, how come you hadn't been one of those people who joined the National Guard unit here in Decatur? It seems to me that almost every young man of your particular age had joined the National Guard unit.

Starnes: Well, I don't really know why I hadn't ever gotten into it. It had never really crossed my mind. Probably a year before the mobilization of the Guards, I was away from here around Mineral Wells and Weatherford working on seismograph work--just a kid, you might say--and was staying away from home most of that time, so consequently I never even thought about joining the Guard. When I found out that all the boys here had mobilized and a lot of the boys that I'd gone to school with and grown up with had already been inducted, I came back and asked to be sent, too. I knew it was a matter of weeks anyway, or months, so I just came in and asked them to go ahead and send me to Brownwood if I could get that on, and sure enough they did.

Marcello: It seems to me that the National Guard at that time was considered to be almost a kind of social club by a lot of the people who joined it.

Starnes: Well, I'm sure it was. I really didn't know much about the National Guard. I didn't attend any of their meetings and was working all the time, you know.

Marcello: Well, then as you mentioned, after the Louisiana maneuvers, the unit went back to Camp Bowie once again in Brownwood, and I assume that the training continued once more at Camp Bowie?

Starnes: Yes. When I got back to Camp Bowie, Captain Roberts sent me to an umpire school. We had gotten word that they were going to make a triangular division out of that and move us out. But he assured me that I wouldn't leave. I'd stay in this umpire school and go to North Carolina to umpire maneuvers. But ten days prior to sailing or to leaving for San Francisco, I was notified that I would have to go. Consequently, I had just gotten married. I married on November 1, and we left Brownwood on the 10th, I believe.

Marcello: I assume that this was kind of a blow to your morale, was it not?

Starnes: Well, it sure was. It sure was.

Marcello: You talked awhile ago about the Army being reorganized from square divisions into the triangular divisions. This is something that has never been explained very

satisfactorily to me. Exactly what were those square divisions, and what were the triangular divisions, and why did the change come about?

Starnes: I don't really know a whole lot about it. I was told that most divisions in wartime or when war was declared were all . . . you had three batteries of field artillery and three companies of infantry, where at Camp Bowie in its original state, we had four of each. We had four companies of field artillery and four companies of infantry, which they called a square division. But they pulled the 131st out and sent us . . . well, supposedly, we were going to the Philippines to reinforce the Philippines.

Marcello: You, of course, were a part of Operation PLUM?

Starnes: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Would it be also true that this reorganization from the square to the triangular divisions took place in order to make the divisions more mobile? In other words, that square division, I gather, was a pretty large unit, was it not?

Starnes: Oh, yes. I forget how many men was down there. Something tells me it was around 30,000 or 35,000, but I'm not real sure about that. I'm sure that that would

enter into it. We would be a little more mobile and be able to move quicker and farther and . . .

Marcello: I've heard it said that the American military was impressed by the organization of the German divisions in Europe, and more specifically, they were impressed with the speed and so on with which their smaller divisions seemed to operate, and consequently this was perhaps one of the reasons why this reorganization took place.

Starnes: Yes, I'm sure this was true.

Marcello: What were your impressions when you found out that you were on your way to the Philippines? Of course, you didn't know exactly where you were going in the Far East, but everybody had more or less surmised that it was going to be the Philippines. What was your impression when you heard that you were going to the Philippines?

Starnes: Well, of course, this was before Pearl Harbor, and I was really enthused about it and anxious to go and to see that much more country. I figured it would be an experience, still with the thought in mind that in twelve months I'm going to be back home, see? We had no idea that Pearl Harbor would happen or any of this stuff.

Marcello: I gather that when you thought of the possibility of war, you thought mainly in terms of Europe rather than in terms of Asia.

Starnes: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Incidentally, why was the 131st Field Artillery singled out for duty in the Philippines? In other words, why didn't they pull some other unit out during that reorganizational shift from the square to the triangular divisions? Do you know?

Starnes: No, I don't. I don't know why we were selected. I don't know if it had anything to do with the maneuvers in Louisiana and the capability of each battalion or what, but I never did know why we were selected to go.

Marcello: What was the story on married men at this time? If you were married, did it make any difference so far as this move to the Philippines was concerned?

Starnes: No, I don't think so. I think there was an age . . . I don't even remember now. It seems to me like it was forty or forty-five or somewhere along in there that they wouldn't take married men that was that age, maybe with children or maybe not even married, but that age.

Marcello: In other words, if you were over a certain age a replacement would be found for you if you so desired.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: Okay, so you embarked from San Francisco aboard that very, very fast transport ship, the USS Republic. I'm being very facetious when I say that it was fast, of course.

Starnes: The USAT Republic (chuckle).

Marcello: The USAT Republic, was it? The United States Attack Transport Republic?

Starnes: The United States Army Transport.

Marcello: I see. Describe the trip between San Francisco and Honolulu, which was your first stop. Now here you were an old Texas boy getting on a ship.

Starnes: I'm afraid that was kind of a horrible trip, too, because I was about as sick as the rest of the boys (chuckle). Oh, boy, that was about the roughest ride I've ever taken, I guess! I think I stayed sick from the second day out till we got there.

Marcello: Well, you frankly made your first stop in Honolulu. Were you one of the fortunate ones that was able to go ashore for a few hours leave?

Starnes: Yes, I did. I went . . . I don't even remember now. It seems to me like six hours maybe or something along that line. I saw as much of it as our feet would let

us, you know. We just took off. I don't remember a lot about it. Of course, we, I'm sure, saw it at a bad time, for you can't see much of anything in six hours. I was kind of disappointed in what I saw there, really. Of course, you're always expecting the hula girls and all this type thing, you know, and you get off at the docks down there and see the worst part of it, I'm sure, that you can possibly see in six hours.

Marcello: As you wandered around the city of Honolulu, did you hear any talk by either civilians or military about the possibility of war coming to those islands?

Starnes: No, I didn't hear anything.

Marcello: Did you see any preparations for the possibility of some sort of an enemy attack?

Starnes: No, nothing unusual. There was nothing that I saw that would even hint of an attack or that there might be an attack.

Marcello: Okay, so you stayed at Honolulu a very, very short time.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: And I gather the next morning you took off again aboard the Republic, and now you were also being

escorted by a small corvette and, I think, a cruiser, the USS Pensacola. You were floating a convoy.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: Well, shortly out of Pearl Harbor--I'm not sure how many days it was--you received word of the Japanese attack.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: Do you recall how many days you were out of Pearl Harbor when you heard that?

Starnes: Well, I've always thought that it was six days. Now why it is that's stuck in my mind . . . but I believe that's right. I think six days out of Pearl Harbor, why . . . I don't know why that stuck in my mind but it has.

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

Starnes: I don't rightly remember. I know we were concerned, not particularly scared, I don't think. We didn't know really what we were getting into. Of course, being young and full of vigor like most of the boys were, we could have cared less, and it really didn't . . . I don't think it upset anybody. Of course, we didn't want to hear it and didn't want this to happen

but so what! We were into it. Why not make the best of it! I don't think anybody was really upset or scared or . . . maybe we didn't know enough to be scared.

Marcello: I'm sure that you did not know the extent of the damage that had been done to Pearl Harbor.

Starnes: Oh, no. We had no idea.

Marcello: How old were you at this time? Could you estimate your age?

Starnes: About twenty or twenty-one, I guess.

Marcello: Was this, generally speaking, the average age of the members of this unit?

Starnes: I'll say it was a pretty good average, yes, pretty good average age.

Marcello: Did you think that this would be a short war that we were getting into?

Starnes: Yes. I didn't figure . . . I figured that probably by the time we got over they'd have it over with (chuckle).

Marcello: What was your opinion of the Japanese?

Starnes: Well, really the first bunch of what I thought was Japanese turned out to be Koreans. Of course, they were monstrous-sized people, and of all the stories

and pictures and things that I had read, they were a small race, and, of course, whether they were speaking Korean or Japanese, we didn't know the difference between them. I was real surprised at the size and the . . . I don't know, the ferocity, I guess you'd say, of those Korean soldiers.

Marcello: Now you met these when you eventually were in prison camp.

Starnes: Well, yes, when we were captured, yes. They were the first enemy soldiers we seen--the Koreans. I think maybe we met some Mongolians. But I know what impressed me was the size those guys were. They were as big as I am.

Marcello: In other words, I gather that at the time you heard about the attack, you looked upon the typical Japanese as being small, probably with horn-rimmed glasses, probably with buckteeth, and always smiling. Is that a general impression perhaps?

Starnes: That's about a general impression--just a small race of people that . . . well, we didn't figure it'd take a whole lot to slow them down.

Marcello: Now among your buddies on board the Republic was a Japanese-American, Frank Fujita.

Starnes: That's right.

Marcello: What was the general reaction of the men toward Fujita after the word of the Japanese attack was received?

Starnes: Well, I don't think anything ever changed toward Fujita. He was just a GI like the rest of us. There was never any question about that boy. He proved himself all the way. There was never any question among any of the boys that I ever knew anything about. He wasn't in my particular Headquarters Battery, and I didn't get to know him too well even . . . of course, I've gotten to know him even better since we came home than I did all the time over there. You didn't get acquainted with anybody too much when you was in a PW camp unless you were just right with them all the time, and usually, why, we were separated quite a bit.

Marcello: I gather that he's credited with having killed quite a few Japanese during what little bit of fighting was done on Java.

Starnes: That's right. They gave him a lot of trouble, being Japanese and an American soldier.

Marcello: Okay, so you had been on your way to the Philippine Islands. Now, of course, you were diverted to Australia. On the way to Australia, you stopped off at the Fiji Islands strictly to take on fresh water and maybe some additional supplies, and I don't think you were there very long, were you?

Starnes: No. I don't remember just how long. I don't believe anybody got ashore there. Maybe a few did, but I didn't.

Marcello: Finally, on December 21, 1941, you landed at Brisbane, Australia. What happened when you got in Brisbane?

Starnes: You know, I don't remember a whole lot about that thing. I know they put us in a bivouac area there.

Marcello: At a racetrack, Ascot Racetrack.

Starnes: Ascot Racetrack, I believe is right. We had a little guard duty and nothing that was . . . I think they were just marking time trying to decide where and when to send us somewhere else. I don't know what they had in mind. I don't think they even knew at that point, probably. I guess we left there about the ninth or . . . of January.

Marcello: It must have been around the ninth because you arrived in Java around the eleventh of January. What sort of

a reception did you receive from the Australians when you landed in Brisbane?

Starnes: Oh, they were beautiful! They were about the nicest bunch of people, I believe, that a man ever run into. They were just . . . I've always said they reminded me of maybe the West in the 1800's, you know. They were . . . they're not as advanced or weren't as advanced at that time as we are here, but so far as hospitality they were tops! They were just the best! They acted like they were really glad to see us. They were glad we were there and showed that they were.

Marcello: I gather that this was one of your first experiences with eating mutton.

Starnes: Oh, yes, it sure was!

Marcello: What did you think of mutton?

Starnes: Well, it wasn't too bad really. Of course, I would prefer some of the other meats, but I liked it alright.

Marcello: I gather that some of the soldiers were lucky enough to be invited into the private homes of these Australians for the Christmas holidays. Were you one of these fortunate few?

Starnes: No, I didn't. I did go into some of the homes. They'd just catch you walking down the street and just make

you come in and visit with them, and they wanted to talk with you and . . . but I believe, if I'm not mistaken, I caught some guard duty along about Christmastime.

Marcello: What were your barracks or your bivouac area like here at this Ascot Racetrack?

Starnes: You know, I can't even remember where we stayed there. I don't know if we stayed on the racetrack. I'm sure we did, but I don't remember what the facilities were. I'm sure they were alright. I don't remember anything unpleasant about them at all. But I sure can't remember what type of barracks we stayed in there . . . or tents or whatever we stayed in. I don't even remember.

Marcello: Okay, be that as it may, you left Brisbane somewhere around the ninth, I suppose, eighth or ninth of January, 1942, and you were on your way to Java. At that time, had they told you you were going to Java?

Starnes: No, I don't think so because we were wondering maybe if they weren't going to drop us off at Port Darwin, which is in the north part of . . . and I think we did maybe stop there for a little while, but we didn't go ashore.

Marcello: Somewhere in that vicinity you had a submarine scare, did you not?

Starnes: Yes. I don't remember exactly where. I know they told us that there had been a submarine aimed at us or something and this was on the . . . we were on the Bloemfontein.

Marcello: This was a much better ship than the Republic.

Starnes: Smaller but much better.

Marcello: And I understand it got along at a fairly fast clip. And this was a Dutch ship.

Starnes: Beautiful ship, it sure was. Clean as a pin and just real nice.

Marcello: I gather then that you knew nothing about this alleged submarine attack until after it had taken place.

Starnes: Oh, no! We didn't know anything about it.

Marcello: Okay, so you got to Java, and you landed in Surabaya.

Starnes: Surabaya, that's right.

Marcello: What were your impressions of this place when you saw it both on board the ship and after you landed?

Starnes: Well, I don't know. It was really fascinating. The people . . . of course, we had never encountered anybody like the natives of Java, and--I don't know-- it seems like there was a tremendous amount of people. They'd just swarm the island and . . .

Marcello: Yes, I guess being an old West Texas boy, you had never seen that many people lumped in one place before.

Starnes: They told us that on the island of Java you could never get out of the sight of a native. I was convinced. That must be true because, boy, they were sure there! I understand there was 40,000,000 on the island.

Marcello: That's not a very big island either.

Starnes: No, it's about 600 miles long and 250 miles wide, maybe, at the widest point.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, you kind of just passed through Surabaya on your way out of town, and, as I recall, you were sent to an airfield, a Dutch airfield, outside Surabaya, the name of this airfield was Malang.

Starnes: Malang, that's right.

Marcello: As I recall, it is close to the village of Singosari, isn't that correct?

Starnes: Yes, Singosari. I'd forgotten that until after you mentioned it, but that's right.

Marcello: How big was this airport?

Starnes: Oh, it was a fairly small field. I know the planes, the bombers, the B-17's and later the B-17E's, had trouble landing on it because of the short runways, and we had . . . of course, we wasn't doing much as

a field artillery unit, and we worked on the airfield quite a bit, getting those planes back up on the runway when they'd run out in the rice paddies or somewhere, you know.

Marcello: Now I gather we're talking about the remnants of the 6th, 7th, and 19th Bomb Groups that were left from the Philippine Islands?

Starnes: That's right.

Marcello: And, is it not true that the 131st Field Artillery actually acted as the service troops for these airplanes?

Starnes: That's right, ground crews, whatever you call it. Well, we . . . I suppose they didn't bring hardly any of their ground crews, so we consequently worked loading the planes with bombs and doing as much of the ground work as we could do.

Marcello: Up until this time, how much contact did you have with the Dutch on the island?

Starnes: Well, not a great deal, really. On going into town . . . of course, I drove a truck a lot to haul supplies in from Surabaya, and, of course, we would eat in town a lot, and I thought they were . . . they really treated us nice. I liked them. I liked the Dutch.

Marcello: Well, on February 5, 1942, the airfield came under the first of several Japanese air attacks. Were you there at the time, and if so, what were you doing and what did you do when the attack took place?

Starnes: Well, I got in a hole like everybody else. I don't know. I was working in camp there. We had a maintenance shop, of course, and we had a lot of vehicles running, jeeps and trucks and command cars. Later, they got a bunch of jeeps and mounted them with twin .50 caliber machine guns, and I ran one of those during the attack. Now I'd be at camp all the time, and when the air raid siren would go, I'd get in this jeep and "hook 'em" over to the airport, and we'd set up around the field under trees or any camouflage we could get under when those strafers would come down, and we'd try to keep them at as high a point as we could.

Marcello: Describe what the first attack was like as best you remember it.

Starnes: Well, it was pretty nerve shattering. Being on the ground, you'd never think about seeing strafers come down low enough that you could see the guy look over the side of his plane at you in the slit trench out

here, you know. Of course, all we had was .30 caliber rifles. I'm sure they weren't too effective because we didn't . . . they strafed us pretty good out there.

Marcello: Those French 75's you brought over with you from the United States didn't serve you too well as an antiaircraft weapon, did they?

Starnes: No, they sure didn't. We dug little trails in trying to get as much elevation as possible, but they just wasn't made for antiaircraft guns.

Marcello: What sort of damage did the Japanese do during that first attack?

Starnes: Well, they hit . . . I'm not sure about the first attack. I know they tore the barracks up. They hit the barracks I was in. I wasn't in it at the time, but I mean they hit this . . . these barracks was just made in little old cubicles, you might say, where a couple of men might stay in each one of them, and they were open with the hallway down the center. They hit a couple of cubicles down there. Well, of course, it just blowed that whole end out of the barracks.

Marcello: What damage did they do to the airplanes that were at this field?

Starnes: Well, it was pretty severe. They got just about everything over there.

Marcello: In other words, they caught quite a few of those airplanes on the ground.

Starnes: Oh, yes, they sure did. With nothing there to keep them off of them, they would just come down and do like they wanted to, you know. They didn't have any trouble at all.

Marcello: What did you find more nerve-shattering, the bombers or the strafing that was done by the fighters?

Starnes: I believe the bombing, especially the night bombing. Daytime bombing wasn't too bad because you could usually tell pretty well where they was going to hit. But at nighttime, why, all you could do was hear the plane. You couldn't see them to tell which direction or where the bomb was going to hit.

Marcello: I hadn't realized that the Japanese had resorted to night bombing raids on the airfield at Malang.

Starnes: No, they didn't. I'm thinking about later, after we were POW's, on those night raids. I don't know. At that time, of course, all we got was noontime bombings nearly and strafings. It's hard to say. Of course, the bombings were pretty rough. The strafers, you could usually pretty well tell where they were going, and you could either get in a hole or get to the

right or the left. After I got on that jeep with a gun on that . . . if the guy came across the field strafing, and we strafed him with our .50 calibers, he'd come back looking for us, but we'd be moved. So it was fairly safe.

Marcello: I gather that after that first raid, those planes that had been destroyed were stripped of whatever armament they had on them, and these machine guns were then mounted as part of the antiaircraft defense. Isn't that correct?

Starnes: That's right.

Marcello: How many of these air raids did you come under altogether when you were at Malang?

Starnes: Well, I don't know. I was there all the time. When I say all the time, I got caught in town a few times in a truck, and I'd usually go to an air raid shelter. Not many times. Most of the time I was in camp, but there was a few times I got caught in downtown Surabaya or maybe on the way out or something. I'd just stop and get in an air raid shelter somewhere.

Marcello: What sort of attitude could you detect on the part of the native Javanese toward these attacks?

Starnes: I don't know that I ever thought about what attitudes

they had. Of course, we couldn't understand them. You couldn't talk to them and do any good at all. Of course, they were as afraid of the Japanese air attacks and everything else as we were. We assumed they were on our side. Of course, I think they were on anybody's side that had the big stick, you know, that was taking over the country. They certainly helped the Japanese when they took over. I guess they were more or less prisoners, about like we were. They didn't have any other alternative, I'm sure.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were a married man at this time, and I'm sure that there were at least a few other married men in the unit, also. Was morale ever a factor among these married men, or did most of you seem to feel that you perhaps had a little bit more to live for or look forward to after you got out of this mess?

Starnes: Well, I think that may have been true.

Marcello: Of course, you can only speak for yourself.

Starnes: That's right. I think we still all felt like it was just a matter of months instead of years, of course, that this thing would last. I think nobody had any idea that we'd be . . . you know, it was a three and

a half or four thing that we were looking at here. If we had, we probably wouldn't have made it, but everybody felt, I'm sure, just like I did--that it was six months or a year and that thing would blow wide open and be over.

Marcello: Awhile ago I asked you how many attacks you came under here at Malang, and just by way of estimating, would you say that it was less than ten?

Starnes: I'd hate to venture a guess hardly. I don't even remember how many attacks there were. I'm sure it was at least that many. It seems to me like it was twice that many, but, you know, you probably would feel that way.

Marcello: On February 27, 1942, what remained of the bomb groups left Java and flew to Australia.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: What was your feelings when you heard about this and saw it taking place?

Starnes: Well, I felt like we should be going with them. We didn't know to what extent the Japanese was going to hit the island, but we felt like they were certainly going to take that part of the country. We didn't have anything there, and I felt like they should have

flown us back to Australia and maybe regroup and come back rather than sit there and try to defend that thing with no more than we had to defend it with.

Marcello: I would assume that this was more or less the attitude of most of the other men in the unit, also.

Starnes: Well, yes, I'm sure it was.

Marcello: In other words, you had no choice as to whether or not you wanted to stay or leave in the bomb groups.

Starnes: No, we didn't.

Marcello: What did this do to morale?

Starnes: Well, I'm sure that, like myself, we kind of wondered about the thing. Of course, we didn't know really who was giving the orders and why they were giving them, but we could see no reason in the world for sitting there on the island, especially with the Air Force gone. Of course, we knew it would only be a matter of time or felt like this was going to be true. That kind of excited everybody.

Marcello: Well, very shortly after the planes left Java, the Japanese invaded the island. I gather they landed in overwhelming strength. I've seen estimates as high as 200,000 as to the number of troops that the Japanese landed there. What did the unit do after

the Japanese landed? Here again, I think you need to speak in terms of what you and your particular group did.

Starnes: Well, we moved out of Malang, or moved out of the camp, then started . . . Lord, I don't know where we were going. It seemed to me like we just roamed day and night there for days. They set up some guns somewhere on this river out there that the Japs were supposed to come across, which they did. I was driving a command car for Lieutenant Hampton and Lieutenant Fillmore between headquarters and out where the guns were. I was making a lot of runs back and forth. And also, I was driving a truck hauling some ammunition out there. Of course, we had a bivouac area. I don't even remember where it was now in regards to Malang or Singosari, but it was somewhere farther up the island, I think. Like I said, I spent most of my time either driving the command car or hauling ammunition.

Marcello: Did you personally have any contact with any Japanese troops during this period immediately before the surrender?

Starnes: Only in mortar fire and this type thing when I'd go up to the guns hauling ammunition and stuff. We'd get under mortar attacks.

Marcello: In other words, up there at the river where these artillery positions were located, there actually was fighting and firing between the two sides?

Starnes: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe what this was like.

Starnes: Well, I don't know. To me that mortar fire is about the worst thing you could . . . having a little bit of knowledge of mortars, which wasn't . . . I hadn't fired any, but knowing that they were not as accurate as they probably would like for them to be, but you couldn't tell . . . if one hit here, that didn't mean the next one would. It meant it'd hit twenty foot over yonder or fifty feet over there somewhere else. They moved those things around. It was kind of nerve-racking, really.

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that you moved all around the island. I would assume that you did not stay in one place for very long.

Starnes: No. They told us that they were trying to create an impression of more troops than were actually there, and we was kind of a hit and run proposition-thing and keep us moving all the time to make the Japs think there were actually more troops on the island than there was.

Marcello: I gather that you might be advancing into one sector and meet the Australians or the Dutch who were just coming back from that sector.

Starnes: Well, that's about the way it worked.

Marcello: By this time, were you more or less getting the idea that you were sacrificial lambs who had been sent to Java to divert the Japanese from Australia? Was this thought entering your mind at this time?

Starnes: I don't remember it entering my mind. Of course, we really wasn't thinking about why we were there. Of course, I think nobody does when they get in that situation. They're trying to survive more than anything else, not for any particular cause or reason. I didn't know why. They kept telling us that any time we wanted to we could get down to the coast and get some boats and get out of there even this late a date. But I wasn't one of the ones that tried to get to the coast. There was no reason. Of course, they had command of the sea and air, so there wasn't anywhere to go.

Marcello: Was this basically the reason why you didn't try and head for the coast?

Starnes: Oh, yes. I couldn't see any reason. A majority of

them didn't, and our officers told us that there wasn't any use. Of course, the Dutch had already capitulated.

Marcello: I gather the Dutch weren't too anxious to put up too much resistance against these Japanese. They were property holders there, and they didn't want to see their property destroyed.

Starnes: That's right. They didn't want the island completely destroyed, and I think they thought they could save that island by quitting a little early.

Marcello: On March 9, 1942, the orders came down that the island was capitulating, and this, of course, included the American forces there. What were your impressions or what were your thoughts when you learned that the troops were going to surrender and that you were to become a prisoner-of-war?

Starnes: Well, of course, I'm like everybody else. I'm sure I had mixed emotions about this thing. I had never thought about being a prisoner-of-war, and anything that I might have read or might have heard about it prior to this time was bad, you know, that prisoners-of-war really had a hard time. I wasn't particularly too anxious to become one, I felt like, and still was feeling like, at this time, that it was just a matter

of time. I just thought, "Well, now they can't . . . maybe we will be lucky enough to make it for six months, and they'll be in here and get us out of this mess."

Marcello: Did you ever hear the rumor going around that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Starnes: Oh, yes. Of course, nobody knew and being in the service for a year or two, you could hear anything you wanted to. You would just kind of suit yourself about what you wanted to believe or not believe. But I never did . . . I felt like we would be taken prisoner. I don't know. It never did enter my mind that they'd just line us up out there and shoot us. We had destroyed all our equipment and were willing to quit, so I couldn't see them taking all these men out there and lining them up and killing them.

Marcello: What happened at that particular point then? The order came down that you were to surrender. What procedure was followed from that point?

Starnes: Well, they gave us orders to destroy all of our arms and all of our vehicles, and about the only thing I did was destroy the . . . well, at that time, I was driving a nice, new 1941 Oldsmobile command car, so I

destroyed it. I drained the oil and water out of that thing and pushed the throttle about half open on it and let it run until it died, which completely demolished that engine. Of course, we took axes and chopped the tires and the upholstery and knocked all the lights out of them to where they were just a total loss, you might say. There wasn't any parts about them that they could use or that would do them any good. They certainly weren't able to patch them up and use them.

Marcello: How long was it before you came in contact with your first Japanese troops after the surrender took place?

Starnes: I don't know. I was trying to . . . I don't know how many days it was. It seems like we sat there in that area for maybe three or four days. I'm not even sure how many days it was. It wasn't very long.

Marcello: In the meantime, between the time that you surrendered and the time that you came in contact with the first Japanese troops, what did you do during that interval other than destroy your equipment?

Starnes: Well, I don't remember doing anything particularly, except destroying that equipment.

Marcello: Were you instructed to go to any particular place, or

did you remain right there at your position? I know some of them were sent to another racetrack in Batavia, were they not?

Starnes: Oh, I'm trying to think where I . . . I wound up in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Yes. Eventually, of course, you did end up in Bicycle Camp, but I know some people ended up in Batavia, and I think others--maybe the same group, in fact--ended up at a tea plantation outside Batavia.

Starnes: Yes, I remember that. I made that, but I don't remember for how long. I'd even forgot about that.

Marcello: I don't think you really did anything after you got to that tea plantation, did you?

Starnes: No, we didn't do anything. I don't even remember how long we were there--not long.

Marcello: Well, describe your first encounter with Japanese troops after the surrender. That ought to be a rather vivid impression.

Starnes: Well, actually, it isn't. They moved us into Bicycle Camp, and about the first real impression that I got, that I had actually become a prisoner-of-war, was when they shoved us in that camp with that barbed wire stretched ten foot high all the way around it.

I thought, "This is it." I'd never felt like that I was really a prisoner-of-war until this happened.

Marcello: In other words, up until that time, you really didn't have that much contact with Japanese troops.

Starnes: No, no, we sure didn't.

Marcello: Your officers had apparently been receiving instructions and orders from the Japanese, and you'd been carrying them out. During this first encounter with Japanese troops, were you roughed up or were you looted in any way?

Starnes: No, I wasn't. Of course, we didn't have a lot of things. We just had our personal stuff, a few clothes. They didn't take anything away from us. At least, they didn't take anything from me.

Marcello: What sort of gear did you have when you went into the Bicycle Camp? You mentioned that you had your personal stuff. Could you be a little more specific?

Starnes: I don't hardly remember. We just had . . . I don't even remember how many suits of khakis and . . . maybe a couple of pair of shoes and shaving gear and all this type of thing. They let us keep all that.

Marcello: Did you have a mess kit?

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, each man that went into Bicycle Camp had a fairly good collection of personal belongings that would at least last him for some time during his stay as a prisoner.

Starnes: That's right.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like. You mentioned awhile ago that it did have barbed wire around it.

Starnes: That's the only thing I remember seeing. I couldn't any more tell you how that camp looked now than nothing.

Marcello: What were the barracks like?

Starnes: I don't remember. They were alright. I suppose they were originally some of a troop barracks.

Marcello: I think it was an old Dutch Army camp.

Starnes: It probably was but it was fairly comfortable. We got to know a lot worse (chuckle).

Marcello: We'll talk about this later, but I think the general impression of the prisoners that I've talked to has been that if you had stayed at Bicycle Camp for the duration of the war, being a prisoner wouldn't have been too bad an experience.

Starnes: That's right.

Marcello: After you got into Bicycle Camp, is it not true that

the Japanese commandant or some of his subordinates gave you some sort of "pep talk" as to what was expected of you after you became a prisoner?

Starnes: I don't remember. The only pep talk I remember getting was just before the Burma Railroad, but I don't remember one in Bicycle Camp. I may have missed it, or I may have just totally forgotten it. I don't know why I would have missed it, really.

Marcello: Also, at Bicycle Camp, very shortly after you got there, the Japanese demanded that each of the prisoners sign a statement swearing that they would not escape or attempt to escape. Do you remember that particular incident?

Starnes: This, you say, was in Bicycle Camp?

Marcello: Right.

Starnes: No, I don't, really. I don't remember signing or not signing anything.

Marcello: What was the food like at Bicycle Camp?

Starnes: Well, the best I can remember, it wasn't bad.

Marcello: What did it consist of?

Starnes: Gosh, I don't remember now. Of course, I'm sure it was a lot of rice. That's about all I can remember about that thing--the rice part of it. But Bicycle

Camp was . . . we had a variety of food. I do remember that, but as to what it was, I can't remember to save my life.

Marcello: Generally speaking, was there a sufficient amount of food quantity-wise here in Bicycle Camp?

Starnes: Yes, as best I remember, there was. Of course, we were maybe in much better physical condition and didn't seem to take as much food or to have to have as much food as we might have needed, but I don't remember anything particularly bad about Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: I think you were able to supplement your food here through purchases from native merchants. In other words, I think the company used . . . or the officers, I should say, used company funds in order to purchase food for the prisoners.

Starnes: Yes, that's what I understand.

Marcello: This brings up a somewhat controversial question. I've heard it said by some of the enlisted men that the officers actually used some of this company money for their own personal benefit, and the food wasn't shared in equal proportions with all the men in the outfit. Had you ever heard about this or was it ever discussed?

Starnes: Well, it was mentioned, but to my actual knowledge I don't know of any of it ever being true. It may have happened or it may not. I never did know that it did, but they seemed . . . I think we had a good bunch of officers, and I believe they were trying to do the best they could for the men.

Marcello: How did you spend your time in Bicycle Camp?

Starnes: I was just trying to think awhile ago if this was when we started working on the docks from there. I think it is. We loaded everything, mostly rubber and tea and coffee, rice, and just worked as longshoremen loading their ships. They were sending them back to Japan.

Marcello: Now we're talking about the docks at Batavia, of course.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: These were voluntary work details, were they not?

Starnes: What do you mean "voluntary?"

Marcello: Well, you didn't have to go on them. In other words, they would ask for volunteers, and I think a lot of the prisoners went simply to have something to do and to get out of camp.

Starnes: Well, you know, I don't remember that being voluntary. I know I spent an awful lot of time down there. I

can't believe I volunteered for all that (chuckle).

Marcello: Did they work you pretty hard down on the docks?

Starnes: Pretty hard. At least we thought it was hard, and it was hard. Most of their stuff is put up in 100 kilo bags, which makes about 220 pounds, and it's kind of hard to handle. I don't remember them working us the long hours that they did later. It really wasn't too bad. Time passed a little better, too, if you were out there doing something than it was if you were sitting around looking through the barbed wire.

Marcello: How did you spend your spare moments here at Bicycle Camp?

Starnes: Well, we played some volleyball and . . . I don't know. That's about the only activity that we really had there that I can remember. Some of the boys may have played some softball and stuff. Volleyball is the only thing I can remember.

Marcello: What sort of harassment did you receive at the hands of the Japanese troops at this camp? I'm speaking now in terms of physical punishment and things of this nature.

Starnes: The only thing that I ever encountered there was that they had a roll call one day. I don't even remember

if it was morning, evening, noon, or when it was. They came in and called everybody out to roll call, and I was in the latrine. I didn't hear it and by the time I got out there they'd already counted off, and here I come straggling up. I guess they thought I'd been hiding or something--I don't know--but they sat me down and put a bamboo pole behind my legs, you know, and set me back on my heels and let me sit there for a few hours. Then it takes you a day or two to get up to walk again after this.

Marcello: How long did they do this to you? You say it was a couple of hours?

Starnes: The best I remember, two or three hours.

Marcello: What does this feel like?

Starnes: Well, it hurts like the dickens for a while, and then it doesn't have any feeling. It cuts off the circulation and it's just numb. It's afterwards that it hurts.

Marcello: In other words, it's awhile before you can actually begin to walk again.

Starnes: Oh, yes, it takes awhile.

Marcello: Were you ever hit around or boxed around here?

Starnes: Oh, yes, we were boxed around.

Marcello: Was this standard operating procedure here at Bicycle Camp?

Starnes: I don't remember it being too severe there. Now we had a few guards that kind of enjoyed this type of thing. They seemed to pick on six foot guys probably because they were shorter, and they'd want to stand you down in the ditch and them stand up on the bank where they could reach you, you know.

Marcello: I've heard of one of these instances where this one little Japanese guard tried to hit this big American, and everytime he would take a swing this American would simply lean back a little bit and the Japanese guard would miss him. So finally he marched this American over to a set of steps, and the Japanese guard climbed the steps and made the American stand at the base of these steps and then proceeded to hit him.

Starnes: Well, they would do this. They would try to put us where they could get up on it, and if they couldn't do that, well, they'd take that rifle butt and reach you.

Marcello: Is it true that in a great many instances the prisoners perhaps deserved this sort of treatment? In other words, sometimes did the prisoners ask for it?

Starnes: Well, of course, you get kind of fed up with this type of punishment or this type of work and being a prisoner-of-war. I don't think at this time that we had the "don't care" attitude that we might have had later on. A lot of us or a lot of them didn't like to be told in this manner and would kind of neglect to understand when maybe they did understand the Japanese. They'd kind of get themselves in trouble, but I can't say that we probably ever deserved the punishment that most of them did put out.

Marcello: Is it not true that physical punishment was also a way of life in the Japanese Army?

Starnes: Well, that's true. Yes, they punished their own people the same way.

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

Starnes: Well, they were good. They didn't have the toilet facilities like we know them, but they were good and they were sanitary.

Marcello: In other words, I think you had those Dutch facilities where the water flowed through or something of this nature.

Starnes: Yes, maybe a couple of bricks to stand on there, you know, and . . . it was alright.

Marcello: Now had the Japanese confiscated razor blades and knives and things of this nature here in Bicycle Camp?

Starnes: Not razor blades, I don't believe. I don't remember them taking razor blades. In fact, I don't even remember that they searched us for pocketknives, which they must have. I think we had to lay out all of our stuff for an inspection or something. They came through and . . .

Marcello: Do any individual Japanese guards stand out in your mind here at Bicycle Camp, either for their rough attitude or because of some nice things they did?

Starnes: Yes, there's two or three but none of them for the nice things they did. The "Brown Bomber," we just nicknamed him. We had no idea what their names were. "Liver Lips," I believe, was one of them.

Marcello: Were these people at Bicycle Camp, or did you meet these later on on the railroad?

Starnes: The "Brown Bomber" was in . . . and I thought the other one was, too. I'm pretty sure those two were.

Marcello: In other words, these two were in Bicycle Camp.

Starnes: In Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: And I assume that they achieved their names because of some physical characteristic that they had and

also because of the rough treatment that they had dealt out to prisoners.

Starnes: Well, they were unusually mean, I guess you'd say. They were just mean! It seems like they just really enjoyed, you know, knocking you around.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with the other nationalities here in this camp? I know there were some Dutch and Australians here, were there not?

Starnes: Well, we worked with them some. I got to know and to like the Australians awfully well. I think they're a grand bunch of people. Of course, I got this impression the first time I ran into them in Brisbane. Being with them in PW camp just boosted my opinion of them. I thought they were a grand bunch of guys.

Marcello: Also, while you were at Bicycle Camp, you came in contact for the first time with the survivors off the USS Houston. What did those guys look like when you entered Bicycle Camp? They were there before you.

Starnes: I don't remember. They didn't look too good. Of course, they didn't have anything. We gave them part of what we had. We figured we had more than enough to last for the duration anyway, so we just kind of divided with them. They had had a pretty horrible experience.

Marcello: Well, this is one of the things I wanted to get into the record, and I think it's important because it's more or less indicative in many cases of the American attitude toward other Americans throughout the duration of your tenure as a prisoner-of-war. In other words, you entered this prisoner-of-war camp, and here were these other people much more worse off than what you were, and there was no question about sharing what you had with these people.

Starnes: No, they were sure worse off than we were. They just didn't have anything. Of course, they just barely did manage to get ashore. Some of them swam. Some of them were picked up by the Japs and brought in and just . . . I think it's remarkable that as many of them as did got ashore.

Marcello: Now I gather that during the whole time that you were here at Bicycle Camp, all of you were fairly healthy. The tropical diseases hadn't set in yet. I suppose there was still some medical supplies and things of this nature in case anything did happen to you.

Starnes: I had no problems that I can remember now at all at Bicycle Camp. I don't remember anybody having any particular problems being able to get treated for anything they might have had while they were there.

Marcello: Well, in early October of 1942, you were moved out of Bicycle Camp. Now by this time, you'd probably been getting used to the routine of the camp. Was it kind of upsetting when you found that you were going to have to pull up and leave, or didn't you really thing about it too much?

Starnes: I don't think we really thought about it because we didn't know where we were going. I think maybe most of them thought maybe like I did--that they were going to take us to Japan proper, you know.

Marcello: Did you worry about having to go to Japan?

Starnes: No, I didn't. I don't remember worrying about it. I didn't feel like it would be any worse off by going there. It never entered my mind what the public attitude toward Americans would be.

Marcello: Now was it at this time when the "Lost Battalion" became separated? In other words, what battery was it that eventually went to Japan rather than going on to Singapore and then working on the railroad? Was this E Battery?

Starnes: I don't remember. Having just joined the Headquarters Battery prior to leaving the States and then never working as a field artillery unit . . . I worked with

. . . nearly everybody was doing the same thing, and I never did get the batteries distinguished. I didn't know which man was in which battery. We were all out there doing the same thing, even in the PW camps. Today I can't remember which guys were in which battery because we never worked enough in that respect for me to distinguish which guys were in which batteries. We were just all 131st Field Artillery. It was just one single unit as far as I was concerned.

Marcello: Well, you boarded the ship in Batavia, I guess it was, and you were on your way toward Singapore.

Starnes: Right.

Marcello: Can you describe what the trip was like between Batavia and Singapore? You were on your way to Changi, of course, Changi Prison Camp. Can you describe what that trip was like?

Starnes: I don't remember too much about that trip from Batavia to Singapore. I don't remember anything particularly bad about it. Of course, everytime they moved us it was bad. They'd crowd you and maybe feed you once or twice a day, but I don't even remember how long it took to get from Batavia to Singapore. I don't remember anything particularly bad about the trip.

Even Singapore itself wasn't too bad. The food was beginning to get a little on the scarce side. The variety of it was cutting down to where we didn't have what we had been used to.

Marcello: So you got into Changi Prison Camp somewhere around October 11, 1942. Describe as best you can the physical layout of Changi Prison Camp. You might try to compare and contrast this with Bicycle Camp.

Starnes: I don't remember a lot about that camp. The food, I remember, was pretty short there. I know we were trying to steal everything off the Japanese that we could to eat. They didn't work us too hard. We did garden work and yard work. That's really about all I did. I don't know. Some of the boys maybe did some dock work there.

The barracks themselves, I don't remember too much about, but I don't remember them being particularly bad. It seems to me like they were . . . they must have been a military camp at one time or something. They weren't too bad. At least you had a roof over your head, and your toilet facilities were alright.

Marcello: I gather that this camp was quite a bit larger than Bicycle Camp, and it was at this particular camp that

you came in contact with a tremendously large number of British prisoners-of-war.

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: And this is where the trouble actually started. I gather that Changi was a rather unhappy place, and most of the Americans who entered there were kind of glad when they left this place. I understand that British morale was very, very low here. Do you recall any of your contacts with the British here?

Starnes: No, I don't. I don't remember too much about that camp. I was trying to think how long we were there. Two or three months maybe?

Marcello: It wasn't very long. I think you left there sometime in early January of 1943, so you wouldn't have been there more than anymore than three months at the very most probably.

Starnes: Yes, that's what I was thinking. It was a short time.

Marcello: What sort of treatment did you receive here from the Japanese guards?

Starnes: I don't remember receiving any bad treatment at Changi. Of course, I can remember doing a lot of work, and we were on work details quite a bit. Usually, if you were on work details and did your work, well, they

weren't too severe. Of course, that didn't mean you'd get a lot to eat, but at least they were inclined to be maybe not quite as brutal.

Marcello: Did you ever participate in stealing the king's coconuts here on Changi? I gather this caused quite a bit of consternation among the British officers when the Americans started eating the king's coconuts.

Starnes: I didn't participate in it. A lot of the boys did. We stole a lot of . . . I say a lot. We stole several ducks out of the Japanese guards' pen, and then we took the feathers over and dumped them on the Dutch. That caused quite a commotion (chuckle).

Marcello: In other words, you were to the point now where you were thinking about food almost 100 per cent of the time.

Starnes: Yes, you were beginning to . . . the primary now was being able to get the nourishment, get something to eat. That was pretty well on your mind all the time.

Marcello: Had malaria started by this time, or were most of the prisoners still in pretty good health? When did their health begin to break down?

Starnes: I don't remember us having any problems here. I know I didn't. There may have been a few cases of malaria

but nothing that I can remember that was outstanding about it.

Marcello: Did this particular camp have any sort of barbed wire enclosure or fences or anything of that nature that distinguished it?

Starnes: Yes, they had some barbed wire. I don't remember too much about how they . . . I know the guardhouse was way down kind of at the foot of the hill away from us, and they must have had a fence or something around. I don't remember too much about the enclosure of that thing. I know there wasn't any possibility of going anywhere. It never entered anybody's mind as far as actually trying to get away.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you worked on a garden while you were here. Was this the huge garden project that a great many of the prisoners worked on?

Starnes: I don't remember any tremendous amount of gardens. Most that I fooled with were rather small. Most of my work there consisted of yard work--keeping the lawns of these officers' quarters and pulling up the weeds and working some flower beds and this type thing.

Marcello: In January of 1943, you were moved again. Now you're on your way ultimately toward Moulmein, Burma, and

your objective was to work on this railroad. Now by this time did you know where you were going when you left Singapore?

Starnes: No, I didn't.

Marcello: You still didn't know where you were going. Okay, describe your trip up the coast before you boarded the transport that would take you to Moulmein.

Starnes: The best I remember we went by train up there, which was crowded and hot. I don't even remember how long that trip was now. It wasn't too long. We went to . . . I believe . . . I was thinking the name of the place was Penang.

Marcello: This is where you boarded the transport?

Starnes: We boarded the Japanese ship to go up to the top of the Bay of Bengal to Moulmein.

Marcello: Okay, describe what this particular trip was like. There were some very interesting things that happened on this trip.

Starnes: We had a little trouble on this trip. I don't even remember how many days we had been out. We weren't too far out from Moulmein, Burma, when some American bombers spotted us. Of course, we were on unmarked ships as far as PW was concerned. They were flying

the Japanese flag, and so they proceeded to try to sink us. They did sink one of the ships with Dutch aboard, and I understood there were several hundred of the Japanese troops on the other ship. They got a near miss on us. It was pretty hectic. That old boy that was running that ship was pretty sharp, I'll tell you, because he twisted that thing around and kept them from getting a direct hit on us.

Marcello: Now were you able to witness this attack in any way?

Starnes: Oh, yes. I was sitting right out on top of the deck. In fact, I was sitting there when I first heard these planes. By now, we could distinguish the difference between the American planes and the Japanese, so there wasn't any question about whose planes it was. When they started circling and . . . they knew, too, that they was American planes, so they started doing some figure eights out there in that water with those ships, and they were pretty good. They hit this one ship. They made a near miss on us, set us on fire. We stayed there, I believe, the rest of that night, that afternoon and that night, picking up survivors off of the other ship.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese when this attack took place?

Starnes: Well, Lord, I don't know. They was pretty excited about as much as we were or more so. I know that there was . . . they must have lost an awful lot of men. I never did know how many they lost. They said there was about 500 troops on the other ship besides the crew, and I don't know how many survivors they got, but I know they did lose a lot. The Dutch told us that none of the Dutch had life jackets on the other ship, but I'm going to say that 50 per cent had them when they come aboard. So they might have left a few of those Japs out in the water, too.

Marcello: What did you yourself do when these bombers came over?

Starnes: Well, there wasn't anything to do. I stayed there on top, stayed close to a hatch. We didn't have life jackets, and I figured if maybe we got a hit, why, I could at least take some hatch boards over with me and try to maybe make it to land somewhere. You were just kind of like you were the rest of the time--trying to figure out a way to survive this thing. That thing was pretty small. You didn't have very much running room.

Marcello: Now I gather that when you were aboard this ship, you did have the opportunity to come up on deck at times.

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: Were you free to come up on deck if you wanted, or were there certain allocated times when you could come up?

Starnes: I don't really know what I was doing up there. I don't remember if it was time to eat or . . . I don't remember them making us stay in the holds. I'm sure everybody couldn't have come up on deck, probably, but I was just sitting there. I didn't have any . . . there wasn't any reason to be up there other than to come up and eat.

Marcello: What was the food like on board this ship? Do you recall?

Starnes: No, I don't, not really. I never did . . . I believe they only fed us maybe twice a day.

Marcello: And I gather that the quarters were pretty crowded on board.

Starnes: Oh, boy! They sure were.

Marcello: How crowded were they?

Starnes: Well, you didn't hardly have room to sit down, much less lay down. They just had it crammed full.

Marcello: Isn't it true that they even took one of the holds and actually partitioned it off so that there would be two

holds? In other words, they made two holds out of one hold, which meant that the height of each one was very, very low.

Starnes: Yes, that's right. They did. There was beds . . . of course, to stack that many men that close together anywhere is bad.

Marcello: How close were you to the man next to you?

Starnes: Well, it was just against him, just right against him.

Marcello: You got into Moulmein on January 17, 1943. You apparently left Singapore on January 9 and got to Moulmein on January 17. Where did you stay in Moulmein after you got off the ship?

Starnes: I can't think of the name of that . . . I believe it was a prison.

Marcello: You were one of those that was put in the prison that had been built for common criminals.

Starnes: Yes, where all the crows were.

Marcello: Where all the what were?

Starnes: Crows, black crows. There were millions of them flying around there.

Marcello: I've never heard anybody talk about that.

Starnes: Really? Oh, Lord, yes! I can remember those things. We would have probably ate them if we'd caught any of

them (chuckle). Boy, there was thousands of those things there! That really stood out in my mind about that old prison. They were just everywhere. I don't remember a lot about that old place. I know it was just a dungeon-type prison.

Marcello: You didn't remain there too long. I don't think you really did anything while you were there, did you?

Starnes: No. We were waiting to be shipped up there on the railroad.

Marcello: Okay, so after leaving the prison, I think you were sent up to Thanbyuzayat, which was more or less the base camp for this railroad that was going to be built between . . . well, from Bangkok to Rangoon, I suppose, did it not?

Starnes: No. We were waiting to be shipped up there on the railroad.

Marcello: Okay, so after leaving the prison, I think you were sent up to Thanbyuzayat, which was more or less the base camp for this railroad that was going to be built between . . . well, from Bangkok to Rangoon, I suppose, did it not?

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: Now when you got to Thanbyuzayat, is this where you got the pep talk by the Japanese Colonel Nagatomo?

Starnes: I didn't remember where it was. I know it was before we started this work.

Marcello: Do you recall that pep talk?

Starnes: Well, the only thing that we can recall or that I can recall and that most of us ever talk about was him telling us that we were going to build this railroad across there--I forget how many kilometers, 250 kilometers or something--and that we would built it and that it would be finished if it took a prisoner for every crosstie that we laid on that railroad. And I guess it nearly did.

Marcello: In other words, he spelled it out for you.

Starnes: He spelled it out.

Marcello: Now you didn't remain at Thanbyuzayat too long. I think you almost immediately went to the first of these kilo camps that had been established, and the first one that you hit was the 18 Kilo Camp. Can you describe what it was like from a physical standpoint? I assume that this description would almost hold true for all of these camps.

Starnes: Well, any pictures I have of that Burma Railroad PW camps were just the pole buildings with the thatched roof and the bamboo mats built up off the ground,

maybe eighteen inches or so. If you were lucky, you had two blankets to throw on top of that, one or two blankets. They had little old walls built around them three or four foot high to . . . and that was about the extent of it.

Marcello: These camps did have a little wall around them?

Starnes: Yes, I'd say about four foot high, and then you built the . . . well, they had a walkway down through the middle where you walked on the ground, and then if you got off of that, you sat down on a rack or just a bamboo tabletop thing where we slept. You'd just sleep on it then. You just had enough space there for a man to sleep, maybe three foot or four foot wide or something like this.

Marcello: But there was no wall or enclosure around any of these camps, was there?

Starnes: Oh, no.

Marcello: There was really no place to go.

Starnes: No place to go.

Marcello: And I assume that the thought of escape may have crossed your mind, but nobody was ever foolish enough to try it.

Starnes: No, there was nowhere to go and you couldn't . . .

your odds were too great that you wouldn't have a chance.

Marcello: Well, describe what work was like on this railroad.

Starnes: Well, they were just kind of a daylight till after dark proposition, you know. You just worked as common labor, pick and shovel and rice sacks and "yoyo poles." That's about it. We just moved mountains of dirt and dug a lot of cuts and made a lot of fills, cut a lot of crossties, busted a lot of rock, built a lot of bridges with pile drivers, and it was just almost built from scratch.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, most of the tools that were used to build this railroad were all hand tools.

Starnes: You bet, good old Baldwin shovels and picks made in the USA.

Marcello: Is that right? Baldwin shovels and picks? Of all of the work that was done on the railroad, what did you find to be the toughest? It was all tough, but there must have . . . it must have been relative.

Starnes: I don't know as I . . . of course, it was either picking, shoveling, or carrying dirt on this bamboo pole or carrying crossties on your shoulder or busting rock. I don't know that one was any worse than the other one as far as that was concerned.

Marcello: I assume that the prisoners used to shift off on this work.

Starnes: Yes, we did. Some guys, I guess, could do some things a little better than others. I was lucky, I guess. I'd been used to outside oilfield work and digging ditches and slush pits, and, you know, it wasn't anything new to me to work. I think I might have made it better than some, but it was tough.

Marcello: As I recall, in the beginning . . . well, all through this experience, you had a certain quota of dirt you had to move each day, did you not?

Starnes: Yes, they marked you off so many meters square and then so far down, and you moved it before you went in.

Marcello: What happened if you fulfilled your quota, let's say, by noontime?

Starnes: You didn't do that. The second day they'd give you enough to keep you out there (chuckle).

Marcello: In other words, they kept increasing the quotas, and you found that out quickly.

Starnes: You bet, real quick.

Marcello: Now I gather when you hit these camps along the railroad, you also came in contact with the Korean guards in rather large numbers.

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what these Korean guards were like.

Starnes: Well, they were pretty brutal. I don't think they had a lot of regard for human life, maybe not even their own. I don't know. My impression was that they were pretty illiterate. They were about as scared of their officers as we were, if not more so. I think they tried to push us to the point to make an impression on their officers, and then a lot of times you'd see brutality from a Korean guard that wasn't necessary because he wasn't trying to impress anybody because there wasn't anybody else around. He just naturally hated Americans, I guess, or anybody that was opposing them.

Marcello: What were some of the common types of brutality that you saw being carried out by these Korean guards?

Starnes: Well, most of it was just taking either a rifle butt or a belt or a bamboo pole and just beat you with it over the head or anywhere he could hit you, you know. You try to duck and dodge and miss it and throw up your arms, but sooner or later he's going to work you over pretty good with it.

Marcello: Would it be safe to say that almost every American

who worked on this railroad felt the wrath of these Korean guards at one time or another?

Starnes: I'm sure everybody did.

Marcello: What was the best way to avoid being beaten? Was it just to get as far away from them as you possibly could?

Starnes: Well, I always said--and I tried to do this--if you could pick up that language to where you could speak it and never speak any English to them because they didn't understand English and they didn't want you saying anything in English to them, you seemed to get along better. If I couldn't say it in Japanese, I didn't say it. I'd rather he'd . . . because he's going to beat me anyway if I say it in English, so you may as well not say it. Your instructions were given to you in Japanese, and if you didn't understand them, it was drawn out for you or beat into you. But I believe that was the best way--just to try as quick as you could to pick up enough of the language to let them understand that you . . . or that you could understand what they were trying to tell you to do. I think a lot of the beatings maybe were because they couldn't get their point across to you as to what they wanted you to do, and the guys didn't

know what they wanted him to do and consequently maybe didn't do anything, and they'd start working on him. I'm sure this was true in a lot of cases. Of course, there were a lot of cases when, for various reasons, they'd come in and beat you half to death with a stick, and maybe you'd never know why.

Marcello: What role did your officers play in the work on this railroad?

Starnes: Well, they were mostly in charge of getting the work parties together and . . . well, I'd say primarily. We had a few officers who went out and worked, not too many of them. Of course, they'd want so many men out every day. If you had a camp of a couple thousand PW's in there, they might say, "Well, we want 1,800 of you out there today." There might not be 1,800 of them that could walk out there, but they're going to take 1,800 out. Sometimes to leave a man in camp, the officers would go out and work in his place.

Marcello: Was it usually up to the officers to determine who did and who did not go on these work details?

Starnes: Well, yes, to a point. But we kind of helped along on that, too. We knew pretty well who was able to work and who wasn't. We tried not to let anybody stay

in camp that might be able to go out there then have to have to help somebody out there that really should be staying in camp.

Marcello: Generally speaking, were most of the prisoners pretty conscientious about this sort of thing?

Starnes: I think so. I think they were . . . of course, you've got deadbeats in everything, but I'd say as a rule that most of them were real conscientious about this thing and would go out there and work if they possibly could get out there at all.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what was discipline like while working on this railroad? I'm referring here to the attitude of the prisoners toward their own officers and things of this nature.

Starnes: Well, I'm going to say that most of it, I think, was good. There were some instances when a lot of guys felt like the officers maybe could work more, but I'm inclined to think that me and everybody else would have gotten out of it if we could have, if the opportunity had presented itself. I never did hold it against them. I don't think those officers were as capable of doing the work that most of the men had been doing. They weren't seasoned to it, and most of

them were older. We had a few officers that did. Wade Hampton was one of them that worked every day that he could get out there, but he didn't come back either. He wasn't an old fellow, but he was ten or fifteen years older than we were, and then . . . I don't know. We lost several officers, but he stuck in my mind because I'd known Wade all my life. He was from Decatur and was in the National Guard unit here. I liked him. He was a good officer and a good man with it. He sure did his part of that railroad.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that one of the tasks on this railroad also involved building bridges. Could you describe the Japanese methods for building a bridge?

Starnes: Well, we cut the trees and sharpened them, and then we had a weight. They were put on tripods and, you know, there would be ten or fifteen men or whatever it'd take to pull the weight on it, and drive it in the ground and do this all the way across these rivers and tie it together with other poles and lay that track on top of it. They were just about as crude as you can get it, but it was serviceable.

Marcello: As you look back on your experience on that railroad, do you ever wonder how the Japanese managed to stay in

the war that long, given the primitive means of building things that they employed?

Starnes: I sure don't. Boy, it just was sheer strength in numbers, I guess! I don't know what else. Boy, they sure didn't have the equipment, and they were crude, but they got it done! They got it done!

Marcello: This was something that the British couldn't do when they tried to build that railroad before.

Starnes: They gave it up. They said the cost in human life would be too great to do it.

Marcello: And the Japanese had plenty of labor to use.

Starnes: Plenty of both (chuckle).

Marcello: Now at the 18 Kilo Camp, what was the food like here? Now I'm referring specifically to the 18 Kilo Camp because I know that it got much worse as you proceeded into the jungle. Now here at the 18 Kilo Camp you were still fairly close to the base camp, Thanbyuzayat. The weather was still fairly good. The monsoons still hadn't set in yet. So I would assume the food wasn't great, but it wasn't bad compared to what you were to get later on.

Starnes: Later on. I don't remember too much about the food there. Of course, I know as we really got into that jungle, it got really bad.

Marcello: What sort of opportunities did you have to trade with either the native Thais or the Chinese?

Starnes: Well, I don't . . . after we got into the jungle, we didn't do any trading. We stole a lot of the carabao and killed them and ate them, but they finally got smart and kept them away from us. Some of the boys caught some wild chickens. We, of course, caught a lot of snakes, but never enough.

Marcello: I assume that dogs and cats didn't stand a chance when they came into camp.

Starnes: Oh, no! Well, I never did see any cats, and very few dogs. It was just a matter of survival now when we got into this jungle, and it was just . . . anything you could get your hands on to eat, you tried to do it.

Marcello: I assume that this was the thing that was most constantly on your mind at this point--food.

Starnes: That's right. That was it.

Marcello: I've heard several of the prisoners say that they used to sit around whenever they had spare moments and dream up all sorts of recipes and things of this nature. Was this one of your favorite pastimes, also?

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: Did you have a particular food that you thought about more than any others?

Starnes: No, not unless it would have been pies (chuckle).

That's about one of my favorite foods still. Those caramel pies that mother used to make all the time, boy, I thought about those a million times!

Marcello: Now you started out at the 18 Kilo Camp, and then you proceeded on to these various other camps that had been established previously in the jungle, and I gather that the two worst camps were the 80 Kilo Camp and then the 100 Kilo Camp.

Starnes: Eighty and 100 or 105, I don't know.

Marcello: Okay, let's say those three, the 80, the 100 and the 105 Kilo Camp. Now you reached those camps sometime probably around May, 1943, sometime in that neighborhood. This is when the monsoons started, and this is also when the Japanese instituted the so called "Speedo" campaign because work on the railroad was falling behind. Can you describe what conditions were like during that period when you were at the 80 Kilo Camp, the 100 Kilo Camp, and the 105 Kilo Camp? This is when the monsoons had come. This is when the "Speedo" campaign was instituted.

Starnes: Well, of course, that was, like you say, the worst part of the thing, and we had so many guys that . . .

well, not so many that weren't able to work. Nobody was able to work in our way of thinking today, but they were just laying there with their ulcers and their dysentery and their beriberi and malaria. A lot of guys were working with half of those diseases or more. Of course, guys were dying at a fantastic rate. It kind of got you to wondering. People would . . . you work with a guy all day long, you lie down and go to sleep with him that night, and you wake up this morning, he didn't. It kind of got you to wondering.

Marcello: Now it was during this period when you also lost the doctor, Dr. Lumpkin.

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: I understand that this was a great blow to the morale of the troops. Not that Lumpkin had a whole lot to work with in terms of medicine and so on, but nevertheless he was a doctor and then he was gone.

Starnes: Yes, I think that really floored a lot of the guys. I don't know what I really thought about it. I figured, "Well, it looks like a doctor could at least stay alive if anybody could." But he was a good fellow, a good doctor, and really did try to take care of his

troops, and I think he maybe worked too hard. He should have gotten maybe a little more rest. I don't know what his background was as far as his physical makeup, but we sure felt a loss.

Marcello: What sort of afflictions did you yourself personally contract during this period?

Starnes: Dysentery was my biggest problem, I guess, and maybe malaria. I had only a couple of small ulcers, which I was very fortunate. I don't believe that I had very much beriberi. I had some swelling in my legs, but it never got out of hand.

I had managed to keep some salt that I guarded with my life all through this thing, and I guess it comes from being raised in the country and thinking that hot, salty water is good for anything. I got an ulcer on my foot, and I never did lose but a few days work with it. Every night I'd take, oh, maybe a half a teaspoon of salt in my canteen cup and stick my foot in it. It was on one of my toes. I'd sit there and just cook it just as hot as I could possibly stand it, and it didn't spread on me, and I'm sure that must have been the reason it didn't.

I think, too, possibly, that I forced myself to eat a lot of times. A lot of the guys couldn't eat that food, I mean, they just couldn't stomach it. They'd rather just, I guess, lay down and die than to . . . they just didn't have the constitution it takes to force it down.

Marcello: How bad was the quality of the food by the time you got to the 80, 100 and 105 Kilo Camp?

Starnes: I don't know. It was just a watery stew with the poorest grade of rice you can imagine. It still had a lot of the husk on it, which maybe might have been really to our advantage to get some of the nourishment out of the husk as well as that old rice, but it was just about as bad as you could . . . barely able to force it down, but I knew it was either that or stay over there.

Marcello: Did you ever see very many cases of men who simply gave up and sat down or lay down and died?

Starnes: Well, I think a lot of the boys . . . I say a lot of them. I don't know. Of course, they all feel like they wanted to live, but some of them, at the last when they got so bad that they couldn't get up . . . maybe you could see leg bones or toe bones showing

through those ulcers, and I think they decided they weren't going to make it anyway and they just gave up.

Marcello: Could you kind of tell when a person had given up?

Starnes: Yes, I think you could tell. You could see the guys sitting there with their hot water, if nothing but just pure water in a canteen cup, and pouring it on those things day after day after day. Then after awhile you'd see him sitting there not doing anything. Of course, I don't know. Maybe he wasn't able or maybe he just decided it wasn't worth the effort.

Marcello: Now I gather that at the 100 Kilo Camp those who were most sick and who looked as though they were going to die were sent back to the 80 Kilo Camp. Supposedly, a hospital had been established there, which was a big farce. Did you go back to the 80 Kilo Camp, or were you able to stay here at the 100 Kilo Camp and continue on?

Starnes: No, I stayed. I didn't go back.

Marcello: During this whole period on the railroad, did you ever see any instances of collaboration on the part of the prisoners, that is, prisoners who perhaps curried favors from the Japanese in order to get food and things of this nature?

Starnes: No, I never did see any of this. Of course, we didn't have anything to trade . . . well, you just didn't have anything of any value, so you couldn't trade any with them. I'll tell you what. They didn't fare a whole lot better than we did in that jungle, those guards didn't. They were pretty short on supplies, too.

Marcello: I gather that these monsoons had simply washed out the roads, and the supply trains or the trucks or what have you couldn't keep up with the camp.

Starnes: I'm sure this is true.

Marcello: What was it like living in that monsoon season?

Starnes: Oh, boy! That's about as rough as they come. I don't know though. I think the dry season was about as bad, as far as I'm concerned, as the wet season was. Of course, it was pretty miserable sleeping in that wet bed every night because it rained day and night for months on end, it seemed like. Your water was bad. You had to boil every drop you drank. Of course, you got plenty of it there, but . . . I don't really know which I think was the worst. When it turned dry, it turned about as dry as it was wet. The dust would choke you, and I believe it was just about as bad one way as it was the other.

Marcello: What was the condition of your clothing after you had been in the jungle for an extended length of time?

Starnes: Well, everything was G-strings.

Marcello: The jungle, I assume, rotted everything very, very quickly.

Starnes: Oh, yes! We took what was left of our khaki pants and cut the legs up and made G-strings. No shoes, no nothing. I think I had a little old white sailor hat--it was white at one time--that I kept pretty much through the whole thing. I don't know when I got rid of that thing.

Marcello: What opportunities did you have to maintain personal hygiene? In other words, what opportunities did you have to bath and things of this nature while working on the railroad?

Starnes: Well, of course, in the rainy season, why, you didn't have to worry about it. You were wet all the time. But usually these camps were fairly close to a river, and I don't remember having any particular trouble being able to wash. Of course, the dry season was worse than the wet as far as . . . I know I grew a beard, but I shaved it off in the dry season because I couldn't ever wash it. I clipped it off with scissors.

We did have plenty of water. That's one thing about it. We didn't have any problem with water. Whether or not it was good water or not, I never took any chances with it. I always boiled it before I drank it.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you had dysentery. Quite obviously, there was no medicine available, so what home remedies were concocted to cope with dysentery?

Starnes: I don't remember doing anything about it.

Marcello: Did you ever eat the charcoal or drink the charcoal water?

Starnes: Oh, yes! We ate that charcoal, or I did.

Marcello: What kind of charcoal were you talking about? Was this the burnt rice, or was it actually the burnt wood at times?

Starnes: I always tried to get that burnt rice out of the bottom of those pots that we cooked it in. It was just charcoal, is all it was, burnt to a crisp. Of course, when they cleaned that rice out of those pots, it just left a crust there maybe a quarter of an inch thick, see? Of course, you had to be pretty fast to get up there and get some of that, but you could usually manage to get a piece every day or two.

Marcello: Did you see prisoners becoming very religious under

these adverse circumstances, or did religion simply play a remote role so far as survival was concerned?

Starnes: Well, I didn't see any great display of religion. I'm sure that everybody, when they lay down at night, said their own prayers. I think people in that situation kind of . . . maybe kind of withdraw into themselves and don't say a lot under those circumstances when you feel like your chances of getting out of this thing are very, very slim.

Marcello: Did you ever have any chances to sabotage the work on the railroad at all?

Starnes: Yes. A lot of times . . . this was really later on when we did some work after we left the railroad, and we were working on the railroad north of Saigon, and the trains would come up. We'd unload them up with the rations and put them on barges and take them across the river and put them back on another train and send them on while we were rebuilding those bridges. We did most of this at night because of the bombing raids during the day, and we'd manage to kick a lot of it off in the rivers we'd go across, you know.

Marcello: This must have given you some sort of personal satisfaction

even though it perhaps didn't effect the outcome of the war in any way.

Starnes: It sure didn't, but it . . . that's right. It gave you a lot of feeling that, well, at least there's one mess of stuff they won't get across the river.

Marcello: Now while you were working on this railroad, was it every man for himself, or did little cliques form where two or three men looked out for one another? What sort of a social organization developed while working on the railroad?

Starnes: Well, it was just like you do in any organization probably. You'd have guys that would band together as maybe some kind of mutual interest or maybe from the same parts of the United States and just get together because they were all from the North and these was from the South. I think it's a common thing, really, that these things would happen. Guys that more or less had the same interest even in civilian life would band together and kind of help one another along. I know that we . . . I more or less buddied with the same two or three guys all through the . . . you know, you learn those boys, and you know what to depend on, and you know what you can do for them because they'd do the

same thing for you. If you go out here and steal a pound of salt or a pound of sugar or something, and you don't mind splitting it with them because tomorrow they may do the same thing and repay the favor.

Marcello: When you are that hungry and you resort to stealing, and you know that if you get caught you're going to be punished severely, are you still more apt to take chances that you normally wouldn't take?

Starnes: Well, you're going to take a chance if there's even the slightest chance of getting food. You're going to take the chance.

Marcello: Even though you know that the punishment for being caught is going to be pretty severe?

Starnes: That's right but you're still going to take it because chances are they're not going to beat you to death if you're able to work, and the chances are you're liable to die if you don't get any food, so you're going to take the chance. Everybody did.

Marcello: While you were working on the railroad, were you ever on any of the burial details, or was this usually performed by the men who were too sick to go out on the work parties?

Starnes: I did go on a few burial details but not many because

I usually worked. I think I only missed twenty some-odd days of work on the railroad while we were in the jungle.

Marcello: How sick did you have to be in order not to have to work on the railroad?

Starnes: Well, Lord, I don't know. You just had to be down and not able to get up. If you could get up and get around, you're liable to have to go out. Maybe somebody would have to help you out there. They'd find something for you to do.

Marcello: During this entire period while you were working on the railroad, were you able to receive any news from the outside world?

Starnes: Nothing that you could ever depend on. You didn't know if it was two weeks old or six months old. I don't remember receiving any news in the jungle on the railroad.

Marcello: At this time how were you living? From day to day? From week to week? From month to month?

Starnes: Day to day, just from day to day. Boy, you were just hoping that every morning you'd wake up! That used to worry me more than anything else because I had two guys to die beside me that I had talked to before

we laid down and went to sleep. Now for some reason they didn't wake up, and I didn't know when they died, and I didn't know if they just stopped breathing because they didn't wake me up, and that bothered me because apparently they felt as good as I did when we laid down. They'd worked right with me all day. So why should he die or why should I wake up and he didn't?

Marcello: In other words, it was almost a case where you were more or less fearful of going to sleep at night?

Starnes: Yes, yes, I sure was!

Marcello: During your time on the railroad, were you ever able to write any letters or send out any sort of communications home to let your wife and family know that you were alive and that you were a prisoner?

Starnes: No, not while we were on the railroad that I ever sent anything. We wrote a card somewhere back down the . . . I believe we did this in . . . golly, I don't remember where we did that. It seems like it was before we ever left Java that they gave us some printed cards to write, but they were printed, and they'd say, "I am well" or "I am sick," and then you'd scratch out one or the other, and it had better be the one (chuckle).

Marcello: You'd better scratch out the fact that you were sick and indicate that you were well (chuckle).

Starnes: You were able to list one friend's name that you were with. I sent old Lawrence Brown's name on mine. I think Dad still has the card down there. I may have it now, but we didn't . . . wasn't much correspondence that went on.

Marcello: Okay, finally, in October of 1943, the railroad was finished, and they had a big ceremony at a place called Three Pagodas Pass. There were memorial services held there, and a great many of the prisoners attended this memorial service. Did you perchance attend that?

Starnes: I don't remember. Evidentially I didn't. I don't remember where I was or what I was doing, but I didn't. I don't remember attending it.

Marcello: You know, this is one of my big objectives. I have yet to find somebody who has attended this particular ceremony. I know there were prisoners who attended it, but I haven't found any yet. Now whether these were all British soldiers who attended it or whether some Americans and Dutch and Australians attended also, I don't know. I'm trying to find somebody who took part in that ceremony at Three Pagodas Pass.

Starnes: I don't remember it.

Marcello: By the time the railroad was finished, were you still feeling that help was on the way and that you would soon be liberated?

Starnes: Yes, I think that all the time we were there we felt like if we could just make it another six months we'd be liberated or they'd stop this thing or something, you know. I don't believe anybody, or very few, would have ever made it the whole three and a half years had they known previously that they were going to have to be there this long. I think that everybody did it on a six months basis at the most. In three to six months, why, this thing will change, and they'll get over here and get us out of this mess.

Marcello: And I assume that even by October of 1943, when the railroad was finished, the camp was still one big rumor mill, that you were still hearing all sorts of rumors.

Starnes: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Where were you transferred to after the work on the railroad was completed? Did you go to Kanchanaburi?

Starnes: Kanchanaburi. Yes. I don't remember too much about that camp. It was kind of a stopover there on the way

to Saigon. I don't remember how long I was there. I know that we did get a little rest and relaxation. We even played a little ball there, volleyball. We worked some. We dug a well. Old Lawrence Brown and a Dutchman and I dug a well, and it caved in on Lawrence and covered him up. We dug him out (chuckle). I got caught stealing some duck eggs with Luther Prunty, who is tax assessor over at Jacksboro, and they made us dig a slit trench as long as one of the huts for stealing those two duck eggs.

Marcello: But you didn't get beat around in any way?

Starnes: No, but they made us dig a hole about waist deep about . . . I don't know how long it was. I guess it was seventy-five feet long probably.

Marcello: Did you have to work on this trench constantly until it was finished?

Starnes: I don't remember how long it took to dig that thing, but boy, it was work and they stood right there and watched us!

Marcello: Did you manage to keep the duck eggs?

Starnes: I think we had already eaten them (chuckle).

Marcello: I gather that Kanchanaburi was a relatively large camp, was it not?

Starnes: Well, yes, it must have been. I don't remember too much about the size of that thing. I don't even remember how long we were there.

Marcello: I think it was a matter of months, was it not?

Starnes: Yes, I'm sure it was, and not very many months. I wasn't there that long.

Marcello: Do you recall what the quarters were like here at Kanchanburi?

Starnes: Well, I think they were still in the . . . no, I started to say they were still the hut-type, but I believe they weren't. I believe they were some sort of structure building, but I don't remember much about them. I think they had a kind of a double-deck, loft-type thing where some of us slept above, some below. I don't remember what it was constructed of. Maybe wood, I don't remember.

Marcello: What was the food like here at Kanchanaburi? Was it better than it was in the jungle?

Starnes: Oh, yes! At least I don't remember it being bad there, so it must have been somewhat better at Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: Were you in this area when the bridges there were bombed, or had you moved on by this time?

Starnes: Well, now we got some raids there. I think that's where the night bombing started, too.

Marcello: You might describe what that was like.

Starnes: Well, it's just pretty nerve-racking. If I'm remembering right--and this is where those night raids started . . . well, I don't know what you'd say it was like. You just lay there and hoped that they missed you because you couldn't tell where they were coming from. You'd hear these planes, and maybe there were anywhere from thirty planes to ninety, and they felt like they was covering the whole earth, you know. That to me was about the worst type of warfare, I guess you'd say, you could have. It was the night air raids, high level bombers at night.

Marcello: And I assume that they were trying to knock out those bridges there. There were some other strategic bridges around this camp, were there not?

Starnes: Well, yes, I think so.

Marcello: What was the attitude of the Japanese when these raids took place?

Starnes: Well, they'd run just like everybody else till it was all over, then they'd come in and raise hell with the Americans because those were American planes that were out there doing that bombing. They'd beat you. I don't know what connection they made there,

but those are American planes, you're American. I'll work on you if I can't get him. That's about the attitude they seemed to have about this thing.

Marcello: Generally speaking, were you able to recuperate somewhat as a result of your stay here in Kanchanaburi?

Starnes: Yes, I think we did kind of recuperate a little bit. Of course, we needed much more than we ever got there, but like you say, it was a kind of recuperation period.

Marcello: By the time you got out of the jungle, had you more or less been able to heal your tropical ulcers?

Starnes: Yes, I sure had.

Marcello: Incidentally, what was the principal way that most prisoners had of coping with these things?

Starnes: I don't know. Of course, we had a Dutch doctor that worked on those things. He had encountered this, I suppose, in his life and knew quite a bit about them. He didn't have anything to really treat them with other than just keep them cleaned and scraped and bandaged, but these guys would . . . about all they could do was just sit there and try to keep them as clean as possible and put scalding hot water on them. That's the only thing I've ever seen them do.

Marcello: I gather that the scraping of these ulcers was an excruciating process.

Starnes: Oh, boy, it sure was! I never did have one of mine scraped. I got it started back the other way before I had to, but I've heard some of them holler from the medical hut, if you want to call it that. It was just another hut that they used, and, boy, they were just yelling like you was killing them!

Marcello: I understand that scraping one of those wounds was a three or four-man operation.

Starnes: You bet, at least! Usually four men and the doctor.

Marcello: Did you ever see any instances where maggots were used to try and eat out that dead flesh?

Starnes: I don't think that I ever really ever saw them in there. I know they did use them, and I wasn't too interested in watching, but they did put them in there and get them to . . . I think that was this Dutch doctor's idea to do this.

Marcello: This Dutch doctor that we're speaking about was Doctor Hekking?

Starnes: Yes, Doctor Hekking and Doctor Bloomsmeier because they called him "Spoonsmeier" because he used that spoon sharpened to scrape them ulcers with.

Marcello: I assume that you saw some of the most primitive types of medicine being practiced in these camps.

Starnes: Well, I don't know. They didn't have anything hardly. I didn't mess around that medical hut.

Marcello: I assume morale was low enough, and that would have made the morale go lower to go over there.

Starnes: It was bad enough to come in at night and try to guess how many bodies are going to be laying out there for you to go dig graves for.

Marcello: Were there any efforts made ever to keep records of the dead and this sort of thing?

Starnes: Well, I'm sure there must have been. I don't know who did it. I'm sure probably some of the officers did. Now we marked those graves pretty good with crosses and their names carved in and all this stuff. I understand that they were able to go back and to identify those graves and bring those boys home.

Marcello: Where did you go from Kanchanaburi?

Starnes: Well, I wound up in Saigon. I don't remember going to any other camp between the two. They put us on one of these little narrow gauge railroads, packed us into a bunch of freight cars, and sent us to Saigon.

Marcello: Now by this time, I gather that the "Lost Battalion" was really scattered.

Starnes: Yes, pretty much.

Marcello: About how many of you were sent to Saigon? I'm referring specifically to members of the "Lost Battalion." Could you estimate the number?

Starnes: No, I can't. I don't know how many had wound up in Japan. I'm going to say possibly 250, but I could be off. I don't know, but I'm assuming that that's somewhere in the ball park.

Marcello: When you got to Saigon, can you remember where you stayed and what your quarters were like there?

Starnes: You bet. We stayed down on the . . . well, it was about a block off of the river. There was a row of warehouses between our PW camp and the river where the ships docked and unloaded, and we had a camp of about, as best as I remember, about 3,500, I guess. It had a bamboo stockade fence around it--I don't know--ten or twelve feet high, I guess. I don't remember too much about the buildings we stayed in there, but they were better than what we had had, and we worked all around Saigon--airport, oil refineries, and dock work.

Marcello: I understand you had several opportunities to pilfer goods while you were working here in Saigon.

Starnes: Yes, we did pretty good as far as stealing a few extra goodies, I guess you'd say, in the way of sweet milk or sweetened milk, condensed milk, and a little sugar and . . .

Marcello: Didn't you also steal yards and yards of material here that the natives seemed to covet--material that you traded with the natives?

Starnes: Well, now some of them did. I didn't get in on that. I went from Saigon . . . I forget how many men. They came in and got a bunch of us and sent us up on that railroad to build some bridges back that the Allies had knocked out.

Marcello: Now this was on a different railroad or the same railroad?

Starnes: Different railroad, the one between Saigon and Hanoi. It runs up the coast, and as best I remember they took about fifty of us up there, and I was in that party.

Marcello: How long were you in Saigon before you went on this railroad repairing detail?

Starnes: Well, I don't remember. A few months. Two or three or four, something like that.

Marcello: Generally speaking, was this a rather good period here in Saigon?

Starnes: It was a good period compared to what we had had. The food was better, and the living conditions were better. We had water and a place to bathe. They worked us pretty good, and we were having bombing raids that were a little bit rough because the Allies were bombing us pretty regularly.

Marcello: Now I gather that this is a period when they really did a job on the Japanese ships in Saigon Harbor.

Starnes: That's right. They sunk everything in the harbor, and they set the oil refinery on fire, and they got every airplane in the airport out there. They came in early one morning and stayed all day dive-bombing and strafing, and they really did a job on that whole city.

Marcello: What did the Japanese do with the prisoners during this particular air raid?

Starnes: Well, we were in camp. They came in early in the morning just as we were getting up and getting ready to go out on these work details, and, of course, we had air raid trenches dug around camp, and, of course, we went out and got in these air raid trenches around the camp and some of them in the camp, and that's where

we spent the day. They were bombing this river within a block of the camp, and after a few hours, we decided that they weren't after the . . . they could either see the PW camp or they knew where it was, and we just crawled out on the bank of the foxhole or slit trench or whatever you call it, air raid shelter. All it was was a hole in the ground. You know, we'd dig it about four feet wide and six or eight feet long and put as many men in it as you could get in it. After so many hours, they wasn't dropping anything on us, so we just got out and sat there and watched the show the rest of the day. It was a pretty good one.

Marcello: I would assume that this did wonders for your morale.

Starnes: Oh, boy! The only thing that bothered me about that was I kept feeling like they might be, since it was so severe, that they might be going to land there. We had no idea why they'd want to land in this particular spot, but then what would happen to us if they did make a landing there? We felt like that they might try to kill all the PW's to keep them from helping in any way in a landing.

Marcello: Was this a fear that was constantly in the back of your mind? In other words, did you ask yourself the

question "What's going to happen to me when the end of the war does come?"

Starnes: That's right. That sure was. That was constantly there because you didn't know how that end was going to come. You didn't know if it was going to be by total surrender or by an Army coming in and taking over the country by pure force. It was always there. That fear was always there as to what would happen to us.

Marcello: Did you ever sit around and discuss this situation and what you thought you would do?

Starnes: Well, yes, we talked about it, and everybody was about the same opinion that . . . well, you didn't know what to do. You didn't know where you were going to be when it happened. You didn't know whether you'd be in camp, out on a working party, out at the airport, down on the docks, or out at the oil refinery. It would have been a bad situation, I think, if this would have happened, and you never know whether they would have tried to keep us all in one area or . . . of course, in case of a landing at the coast, which we were thirty miles inland, they would have had time to do anything they wanted to with us before they got that far inland.

Marcello: With this fear in mind of possibly being killed by the Japanese, did any of the prisoners ever secretly hoard any sort of weapon or anything of this nature?

Starnes: Not to my knowledge. Of course, you had your mess gear and your knife and fork which was all the weapons, you might say, that you had. A regular GI knife is not much of a weapon, but, of course, with the numbers that we normally had in camp, we could have probably have taken over a camp at any time, but whether we could have held it any length of time . . . if we had known about an invasion early enough or quick enough and could have timed our takeover with it, then we might have survived. Maybe some people would have gotten killed, but we always outnumbered our guards by a lot. There wouldn't have ever been any problem as far as taking over our guardhouse because we could have done it by sheer numbers if nothing else, but they would have known about the invasion before we did. That's what bothered us more than anything else.

Marcello: Now by this time, the Japanese guards obviously knew that the war had turned against them. What differences did you perceive in their attitudes toward you as prisoners?

Starnes: Well, it was a noticeable difference along about this time because . . . of course, I went on this work detail up on this railroad that goes from Saigon up to Hanoi, and we'd go out on these working parties. This is where we were repairing those bridges that the Allies had been bombing and tearing them up out there. We'd go out there and rebuild them back, and this is where they brought those supply trains up, and we'd unload them, put them on barges, carry them across the river, put them back on the trains, and send them on while we were repairing this bridge.

Now we'd steal a lot of stuff off of these trains, and the guards would let us get away with it. This is something that they'd never done before. They'd take probably half of what we stole, but at least they'd let us steal it and not beat you half to death for doing it.

This is something that . . . and another thing, too. Somewhere along there--I believe it was when we got to Saigon or maybe right after we got to Saigon--they switched from Korean guards to Japanese guards, and the Japanese guards were much better toward us than the Koreans were. Now had the war not been

going against them, I don't know whether this would have taken place or not, but we always felt like the Japanese troops, the actual Japanese troops, were better toward us than the Koreans were because we had had those Koreans jump down our throats for three years or two and a half years or whatever it might have been. When the war started turning the other way and we got the Japanese troops, they were better toward us, but we wondered whether they would have been had we had them all the time.

Marcello: This is an interesting point to make, I think, because for some reason the prisoners don't talk very much about the brutality of the guards after they reached Saigon, and I think you've gone a long way toward explaining exactly what happened at this point. I gather that generally speaking the physical harassment slowed down considerably.

Starnes: Slowed down considerably. It sure did.

Marcello: In other words, you were perhaps almost back to the point where you were when you were in Bicycle Camp.

Starnes: Yes.

Marcello: Is that a safe assumption to make?

Starnes: Yes, I think that's about right.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were working at the docks--and I assume that you were loading and unloading supplies here--and then you also mentioned that you were working at an oil refinery. What sort of work did you do at the refinery?

Starnes: Just moving mostly fifty-five gallon barrels of oil and gasoline and stuff out away from the refinery and camouflaging them out in the trees and covering them with brush and stuff.

Marcello: I would assume that this may have provided some opportunity to commit a little bit of sabotage, also.

Starnes: It sure did. We were unloading some ships of gasoline, aviation gas really, there on the docks. They'd managed to get a couple of ships through. They were sinking nearly everything that the Japs tried to get through to Saigon from Japan, but they had managed to get a couple of ships through, and we were unloading these drums of gasoline, carrying them outside of town and putting them in a river plantation and scattering a little brush over them.

I happened to be on that working detail. I think there was--I don't remember--fifty people, seventy-five maybe. I don't know, maybe a hundred, but quite a few.

Well, they just came into camp, and they gathered up this bunch of guys to go unload this ship. Well, when we took this gasoline down in this river plantation, we managed to . . . they laid those barrels down, and we put that bung on the bottom and managed to loosen it. Well, they'd miss that for a while till they started out there and needed some of that gas.

Well, they tried every way, I guess humanly possible to find out who was out there. Well, really, nobody knew who was out there except the man that was out there because if I went out there that day, which was a couple of weeks ago or three weeks ago, why, even my closest buddy didn't know whether I went or not because I might have gone anywhere. But they never did find out. They tried and they beat a lot of heads trying to find out, cut our rations in half, and just totally demolished that camp. They just kicked us out of bed at all hours of the night trying to find out who was out there, but nobody ever said, and they never did find out who did it. That stuff was precious stuff to them--that aviation fuel.

Marcello: I guess by this time you were really glad that you had not been put aboard any ship for a journey to Japan.

Starnes: Oh, yes!

Marcello: Was this still a constant fear, also?

Starnes: Well, I think probably by this time we'd given up any thoughts, maybe, of ever going to Japan. We felt like with the intensity of the bombing raids and all that this thing was finally coming to a head, to a close. I think our biggest worry might have been that they would make an invasion and something happen to us that we couldn't control.

Marcello: Up until this time, that is up to the time that you were here in Saigon, had you received any Red Cross packages at all?

Starnes: No.

Marcello: In other words, it wasn't until after the war that you learned that they had warehouses full of Red Cross supplies.

Starnes: Yes, we heard that but I never did receive any.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you were at Saigon for a couple of months, and then there was a party of fifty that was sent out to repair these various bridges and what have you that had been bombed on this railroad between Saigon and Hanoi. Generally speaking, was this hard work or had the Japanese become lax so far as work was concerned?

Starnes: I think they had slowed up a little bit on that. Like I said, we had Japanese guards and they didn't seem quite as severe as the Koreans were, and I think they were kind of tired of this war, and they weren't . . . I don't know. They just didn't seem to have the push that they'd had back earlier. Too, they were being bombed constantly, everyday. We laid out in the brush and tried to rest in the daytime, and we worked at night most of the time on this . . . because they bombed those bridges, either bombed them everyday or flew over with reconnaissance planes everyday, and we never knew if it was the reconnaissance planes or the bombers coming over, so we wasn't getting anything done in the daytime, so they reversed it and had us working at night and sleeping during the day.

Marcello: I gather then that you were standing out in the open most of the time.

Starnes: A lot of the time we were. Now we had a camp there at . . . I don't remember. I want to say Tai Hoi or something like that, and it was a fairly decent camp as PW camps go. It wasn't too bad.

Marcello: Now by this time were you perhaps gaining back a little bit of your weight?

Starnes: Well, of course, I don't know. I don't know what I weighed. I weighed 119 when I got out. I don't know what I might have been down to before that.

Marcello: What did you weigh when you entered the service?

Starnes: When I went overseas I weighed 190 pounds. Up here we were doing a little bit better. We were eating a little better, being able to get hold of a little more nourishment. We weren't working quite as hard. The climate maybe was a little better.

Marcello: By this time had you gotten rid of most of the diseases that you had contracted in the jungle? I'm sure you still had malaria yet.

Starnes: Oh, yes, malaria, but I'd kind of controlled my dysentery, and my ulcers were healing, and I was considerably better than I was when I was in the jungle.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that while you were working on this railroad repair detail that there was a party of approximately fifty prisoners. Were you able to get any closer to the Japanese guards in order to find out what their feelings were or what they thought about this war or anything of this nature?

Starnes: Yes, I think so. I know that we had a . . . well, I don't remember what they called them now. They wore five little gold stars on their shirts, and they were technicians. One of them in particular that worked with us out there got to where he'd bring us a few cigarettes, and he was . . . he had to be careful. He was a civilian who had been kind of drafted into the Japanese army. He was an older fellow, and I'm sure he knew his job, and he had even been to San Francisco on some visits. He was pretty nice, even a little comical. He kept telling us that they were bombing Washington, and they'd killed the President, and we were running out of gas and didn't have anymore gas to finish fighting the war with. You could talk to him. I know I told him one day. I asked him if he knew where Texas was. Of course, we had to do this in Japanese and English together. He didn't speak very much English, and I didn't speak very much Japanese. But I asked him about Texas, and yes, he knew that Texas was the biggest state, you know. I said if no more of the states had anymore gasoline, Texas had enough to fight this war. He laughed. That's something you didn't do to Korean guards, but

he did have a little sense of humor. I think he was smart enough to know that they weren't going to win the war. There was no way they could win the war. I think he knew this, but he had to keep up his front and do his job, and yet he tried to help us as much as he could and get by the guards. He was about as afraid of the guards as we were.

Marcello: Now I do know that while some of the prisoners were up in the northern part of Indochina they also dug some caves or emplacements of that sort back in the hills. Did you perchance work on that particular detail?

Starnes: I sure did. I'd forgot about that. In fact, I don't remember too much about it, but we sure dug some . . . where in the world was that? It kind of was cold up there.

Marcello: Was it at Da Lat?

Starnes: Da Lat, I believe, was the name of that.

Marcello: This must have been some sort of an indication that maybe the Japanese intended to make some sort of a last ditch stand up in that neck of the woods.

Starnes: Well, I think that's some more of our worries--that they would try to hold out there.

Marcello: By the way, did they ever tell you what was going to happen to you if the Allies did invade that particular region?

Starnes: Not to my knowledge. They didn't ever say anything about it. I don't know if they really looked for . . . of course, they knew, I'm sure, or at least their officers did, about what was going on and where the invasions were and where most of the American troops were, and they probably never even gave it a second thought that there might be an invasion. We had no way of knowing this. Of course, they increased the bombing and all. Especially the dive bombers were coming in and staying all day in wave after wave. That might have given them a little food for thought, too, about an invasion. It sure did us.

Marcello: How long were you working on this railroad repair detail altogether? Was it a matter of several months?

Starnes: Yes, I'm going to say three or four months, maybe six. I don't remember.

Marcello: During this period, did you have very much contact with the natives, and did they perhaps tell you anything about how the war was progressing?

Starnes: No, no, we didn't have any contact with the natives, at least not to my knowledge.

Marcello: Now in April of 1945, Franklin Roosevelt died. Did you learn about this from the Japanese, and did this more or less boost their morale somewhat?

Starnes: Well, yes, but they told us that they'd bombed the United States and killed our President, and I don't know if that was a week after he died or two months after he died.

Marcello: Did this have any effect on you as a prisoner? First of all, you probably did not believe that they had bombed Washington.

Starnes: No. Well, we had no way of knowing. Since this thing had lasted as long as it had, we didn't know what might have happened, but still, the fact that they'd killed the President or that he had died didn't make a lot of difference. Of course, we didn't know what was going on.

We didn't know whether to believe them or not either, so . . . just like when the thing was all over or when they dropped the atomic bombs on Japan. I know they came into camp there that morning when I was up there on that railroad between Saigon and Hanoi and told us that peace had been declared. They didn't say that we had thrown in the towel or given up or

capitulated or anything else. They just said peace had been declared, and we figured it was an armistice that they were negotiating for peace. We fooled around there for I don't know how many days, and we didn't go out there and work. We just sat around in camp. They didn't take us out.

One day they got us out there and marched us down, put us on a train, sent us back to Saigon, put us back in that . . . some kind of a French military camp there in Saigon where everybody was. We still didn't know too much about what really happened.

Marcello: But they did tell you there had been an armistice signed.

Starnes: They said peace had been declared, and we figured it was just an armistice. We didn't really know. Of course, we didn't know anything about the bomb, and I don't think that the troops that were our guards knew anything about it either. They may have known, but they sure didn't indicate it to us.

Marcello: When you heard from the Japanese that an armistice had been signed, what sort of feelings did you have?

Starnes: Well, I guess it'd be kind of hard to describe really. Of course, we were hoping that it was true and that

. . . and we felt like it was true because their attitude had changed, and we weren't out working. That was very unusual. Of course, we were just hoping that if it was just a temporary thing that they would get it settled, and we felt like that when they took us back to Saigon and stopped all the work out there that something definitely was in the wind. Something had happened, but we still really didn't know what was going on.

Marcello: What happened when you got back to Saigon?

Starnes: Well, they still had their arms and were still guarding us, but some of the guys--and I did, too--left camp, and we knew then that something had happened because they didn't stop us. They let us out of camp. Of course, the French and the . . . what were they called then? It was . . .

Marcello: A native Indochinese, I suppose (chuckle).

Starnes: The Indochinese were having problems and were battling right downtown, so that kind of stopped us from going down there. They couldn't tell us from the French, so we didn't have any business down there with them trying to kill all the French.

Marcello: You might describe this in a little more detail. I think this is kind of an interesting point for current

history. Just what was happening here in Indochina at the end of the war between the French and the native Indochinese?

Starnes: Well, I never knew a lot about French Indochina or the . . . you know, of course, that it was France who controlled it, and for years they'd been trying to gain their freedom, and they figured, I guess, because the Japs had taken the country and then were giving up or had lost the war that it was a good time for them to start trying to really gain their freedom, which they did, I guess, didn't they? I know after one trip down there, I never did go anymore. There was too much going on down there for me to be down there. I stayed in camp. I don't remember how many days elapsed from the time they brought me back from on that railroad and put me back into camp with everybody else, or this particular group that I was with. I know they sent . . . I believe it was three planes they sent in there from India and picked up all the bed patients, guys that weren't able to sit up. They flew them out of there. The next day there was an old boy who came in there by himself in one old C-47 that he'd been flying new over the Hump into China.

He said that he could take ten people. He was on his way back to India then, but he could take ten people with him. He said he'd take the first ten that can get ready, and I was standing right by the jeep when he said that, and I just crawled over in it and sat down. I didn't go back for nothing. I just had on a pair of shorts and a pair of Jap web-toed shoes, and that's the way I left there--with him in that jeep. It filled up just as quick as he said it. There was guys all around him because they figured they'd come in after some more PW's. I don't know how he learned about this. I'm sure he probably heard it on the radio and everything else, but he stopped there and picked up ten of us, flew us to Rangoon. We spent the night. He had to stop there for some reason. Maybe it was to refuel. I don't really remember why we stopped, but we stayed all night, and we slept under the plane out there in the field. We got up the next morning and went into Calcutta.

Marcello: What sort of a feeling did you have when you were back in friendly hands again and, shall we say, back in civilization again?

Starnes: Oh, gosh! I don't know how to describe it hardly. I think it took us awhile to believe that this thing was

over and that you could be overnight out of it because it was just that quick. In just a matter of hours you was completely away from it into friendly hands and American hospitals. I don't know (sigh). I think it's beyond description.

Marcello: What was your appetite like when you got back to the real world again?

Starnes: Well, I felt like I could eat a washtub full but you couldn't. They'd let us eat anytime that we wanted to eat.

Marcello: Was this when you were back in India?

Starnes: Yes. We got back to the hospital there in India. We could go down and get food anytime we wanted, but you couldn't eat much. I know I drank sweet milk just constantly, and it wasn't long till you could eat quite a bit. But, boy, at first it just . . . I guess it just . . . well, your stomach had shrunk, I'm sure, till you weren't able to hold much food, but we soon fixed that (chuckle).

Marcello: After you got back to the United States, what were some of the most difficult readjustments you had to make? I'm referring now to the period after you were mustered out of uniform.

Starnes: Gosh, I don't know. Of course, we hadn't been . . . in the situation we had been in, we hadn't had anything, and people at home had been rationed, I understood, and, of course, this thing, by the time we got home, there was no rationing . . . very little if any. I don't remember having any problem making any kind of an adjustment. I came home and got two ninety-day furloughs with a two-week extension on those, and I went back to Fort Sam Houston and was discharged. That was in 1946, and I was already running for office here in this county. As far as I'm concerned, I didn't have any trouble making any adjustments (chuckle).

Marcello: I'm sure it was a matter of getting reacquainted with your wife again, since you really hadn't spent too much time together before you had actually been sent overseas.

Starnes: No, we'd only had two weekends. It was a wonderful time to get back home.

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

Starnes: Well, I think it was just really wanting to get home and the fact that I was married. There was only two

boys in my family. My parents only had two children, my brother and myself. He's four years younger, and at the time I left home, he was not even in the service. Of course, I knew he would be, and I had no idea where. During the four years I was gone, he got in, went to Europe, stayed two or two and a half years, and came home and was discharged. Our family was pretty close, and I think wanting to get back and . . . of course, I had, as everybody does, a worrying mother. It almost or did ruin her health. I think I just had a pretty big determination to live. That's what it took. Oh, it took some determination!

Marcello: At the time that you were freed, what were your feelings toward the Japanese?

Starnes: Well, I don't know. I guess, probably like everybody else, if I had had the time and circumstances permitted, I would have probably killed all of them I could have gotten my hands on. I think it happened probably the best way it could have happened on our release. The Japs were still holding their arms, and they come in and pulled us out of there and took us out without us ever, you might say, having the upper hand of the Japs. I'm sure there would have been a lot of problems.

Marcello: Did you ever see any acts of revenge being taken upon the Japanese at that time?

Starnes: No, I sure didn't.

Marcello: Has time healed the wounds? In other words what are your feelings today in 1974 with regard to the Japanese?

Starnes: Well, it's not near as bitter. Like you say, time will heal a lot of wounds, and those old boys that were Japanese troops were led to believe that they were right, even though they were, as I still say, a very illiterate race of people as far as their fighting troops were concerned. They were doing what they were told and what they thought was right just like we were. Of course, we didn't know a whole lot about Pearl Harbor at that time and what all else had happened. But I don't know. Like you say, thirty years has made a lot of difference. Like I say, I'm riding their motorcycles. I might not have done that the first ten years I was back.