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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Donald C. Brain
(Signature)

Date: March 11th 1981

Oral History Collection

Donald C. Brain

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: March 11, 1981

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Donald C. Brain for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 11, 1981, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Brain in order to get his reminiscenses and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. More specifically, Mr. Brain was a member of the crew of the cruiser USS Houston, which was sunk in the Sunda Strait by the Japanese early in 1942.

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

Mr. Brain: I was born in Long Beach, California, on October 27, 1922. At the age of about three-and-a-half, we left Long Beach. My father worked in the oil fields and took foreign work, and we went to Iraq. We lived in Company

houses that the company built, and we operated out of a town...the headquarters was in the town of Kirkuk, Iraq. We lived over there for...well, my father's contract was a five-year contract, and it took us about six months before my mother and I could go over there, so we were over there for about four-and-a-half years,

Then we came back to the States, and we were there for about three-and-a-half years, and then we took off again when my father got another contract overseas. We were up in northern Pakistan for a year... well, nine months, actually, is how long my mother and myself were there,

Then we left from there and went over to Burma, and, as a matter of fact, we arrived in Rangoon, Burma, on my twelfth birthday.

Marcello: How long did you remain in Burma?

Brain: We were in Burma for five years. What my father would do, he would sign these five-year contracts. Basically, they were supposed to get thirty days' vacation, but my father never took these vacations. He would just pile them all up, and then the company would give him fare back home. It was kind of like a "chit," we called them. He'd go to Cook Brothers, and he would say, "Okay, I want to go here and here and here," and

he would point out to the Cook man on the map where he wanted to go. But eventually he would get back to California. It would probably take us the better part of the year to get back. As a matter of fact, we were in Shanghai for two-and-a-half months. He had a sister there that was quite reknown there in Shanghai, and so we lived in Shanghai for the better part of two-and-a-half months.

Marcello: You mentioned Cook Brothers awhile ago. Who were the Cook Brothers?

Brain: Cook Brothers is a world reknown travel agency.

Marcello: I gather, then, from what you said that your junior high and high school years, as we think of them in the United States, would have been spent in Burma.

Brain: Yes, my elementary school and my high school period. Well, I went from first grade to part of the third grade, and then I left, and then we didn't get back here in the States from Iraq until I was about eight-and-a-half years old. As a matter of fact, I flunked the first semester of the first grade because I wasn't adequate in my English. I spoke mostly Arabian.

Marcello: When you were over in Burma during that period between your twelfth and seventeenth birthdays, were you attending an American school there?

Brain: No, sir, I didn't attend any school at all.

Marcello: How did you compensate for education?

Brain: My mother would try to teach me what little bit she was capable of teaching me, and...I don't even think they got the book in publication anymore, but basically she taught me out of the Lincoln Library, if you are familiar with that book at all. I did go to a Burmese school there. The Burmese children there in Burma have to spend at least one year out of their...oh, from about ten to fifteen is the year they take, and they have to go to a Buddhist school. They are given little slates, and they have to learn their numbers and how to somewhat read and write, and, of course, they are given the fundamentals of Buddhist teachings. We had a gardener there, and my dad had bought me a horse, so I would take this gardener's son to school everyday. We would have a little lunch, and I would go out there and sit there and try to learn what I could there.

Marcello: How much of the Burmese language were you able to pick up during that five-year stint there?

Brain: I pretty well could speak it fluently. They got two classes of Burmese language there. They got "street English," and then they got "higher education" or proper English. And this is what I learned--the commoner's Burmese language.

Marcello: I guess Burma at that time was a British possession.

Brain: It was a British possession, yes. The communists had not taken full control yet.

Marcello: I assume that there would have been quite a bit of English spoken at that time, also.

Brain: Yes, there was a lot of English there.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were there until your seventeenth birthday. Where did you go from there?

Brain: From there we came back to the United States.

Marcello: When was this?

Brain: That was in the fall of 1938, I believe, that we got back. I would say it was probably November, as I remember the best.

Marcello: What was the reason for your coming back to the States? Was that the end of another five-year contract?

Brain: Yes, that was the end of another contract.

Marcello: So what happened when you got back to the United States?

Brain: When we came back to the United States, I went to school. I went to the ninth grade, and I went to the tenth grade and part of the eleventh, and then I joined the Navy.

Marcello: So you must have been in the eleventh grade, then, when you were ninteen or twenty years old, is that correct?

Brain: I would have been twenty-one-years old to graduate from high school (chuckle).

Marcello: What influenced your decision to join the Navy?

Brain: Basically, I liked the water, and I always thought the Navy feeds pretty good, and you always got your cook house with you. I didn't particularly relish the thought of sleeping on the ground or walking around in all this mud and stuff (chuckle), you know, that you associate the Army with. I wasn't very enhanced with the Marine Corps, and I thought that possibly the Navy would be the best way out for me.

Marcello: When did you join the Navy?

Brain: Actually, I signed up in November of 1940, and I took my pre-physicals, and I thought "Well, I'm not going to report in until after Christmas. I'm going to stay home for Christmas." So when I went down and I turned in right after New Year's, then they said I would be ready for the next draft that they were going to take to San Diego.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the service?

Brain: I had a lot of friends that had joined the different National Guard units, and I was aware that the draft was going to get into full swing, and I thought, "Well, I'll get the jump on them," and that way I could choose the branch of service that I would be more comfortable with.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of world affairs and current events at that time?

Brain: I wasn't as well acquainted with it at that particular time as I am today, but I was aware of the fact that it was just going to be a matter of time before...well, personally, I couldn't see how we could keep out of a conflict with Japan, myself.

Marcello: Even at that time?

Brain: Even at that time. I can remember that when we were on our way home from Burma we were in the Philippines, and you kind of sensed it.

Marcello: In what way?

Brain: You seemed to see a presence, a show of more military force in the Far East at that time. They seemed to move around more and show the flag more, as they called it out there. Of course, with conversations and letters back and forth between my aunt that lived in Shanghai along about that time, why, I think we got a little bit fuller impact of it, also.

Marcello: You mentioned San Diego awhile ago, and I assume that is where you took your boot camp?

Brain: That's where I went for boot camp--down in San Diego.

Marcello: How long was boot camp at that particular time?

Brain: They had speeded it up, but I don't remember whether it was twenty-six or thirty-six weeks.

Marcello: Well, that would have probably been a little bit long, wouldn't it, because for thirty-six weeks that would

have meant nine months, and I am sure boot camp didn't last that long, did it?

Brain: I am trying to remember now.

Marcello: It possibly could have even been cut back to as little as six or eight or nine weeks at that time.

Brain: Well, I probably said that wrong. They had just cut it back when I got there, or maybe three or four months before I joined the service is when they cut it back. I'm confused. Maybe at that time it was thirty-six weeks, and then they moved it up. It seems to me that I was there in what they called the training station for four months, so maybe that was the full length of the training.

Then from there I was transferred right out of boot camp and went down to the destroyer base there in San Diego. Different groups of us would be chipping paint and painting on these old four-stackers--getting ready to get those back into commission. Most of the work that I did down there was...they'd procure a bunch of these deep-sea tuna fishing boats, and they were converting these into minesweepers. So you could see a build-up. You could figure, "Hey, something is going to happen, so get ready for something." I couldn't picture why they would be doing it here and sending it to the East Coast. So just in my own little feeble mind, and the background I had had before, I figured they were

getting ready for something out in the Pacific. Of course, with the trouble that they had had in China and on the mainland over there with the Japanese troops, and it was...I never thought about Russia; I mean, that just never entered my mind at all. I always thought, "Well, has something gone wrong with China, or is it a problem with Japan doing all this saber rattling over there at this time?"

Marcello: Describe the process by which you eventually got aboard the Houston.

Brain: After we got through, I went out on the draft out of the destroyer base to Pearl Harbor, and I went aboard the USS Dewey. That was a destroyer. And then they came around, and they wanted volunteers for the Asiatic Station, and I thought "Boy, that is the place for me." I was trying to get into the "black gang" at that time, that is, in the fire room, to be a fireman. There was two of us, and we had a choice--either one could go in the fire room, and the other one could go to the Asiatic Station. So this other fellow and I flipped a coin, and I won--I thought (chuckle). Well, in the long run I think I did, but anyway, then I went aboard the Houston. That was in September, I believe.

Marcello: This is September of 1941?

Brain: 1941.

Marcello: How did you get from Pearl Harbor to the Houston, which at this time was already in the Asiatic Station, wasn't it?

Brain: Yes, it was already in the Asiatic Station. I went over on the Henderson, a troop transport.

Marcello: Which, I think, made regular runs between the West Coast and the Far East.

Brain: And between the West Coast and Honolulu.

Marcello: Where did you pick up the Houston then?

Brain: I think I went aboard the Houston...I think it was south of Iloilo. She was "swinging on the hook" down there, I know that.

Marcello: By that time then the Houston has moved its base of operations south of Manila but still in the vicinity of the Philippines?

Brain: Yes, we would go down south there to the southern islands and "swing around down on a hook" down there for three or four weeks. Well, we were just constantly moving around, and then we came back up to Manila, and then we went into Cavite. We were going to change searchlights, and we had heard rumors that they were going to take the 5-inch antiaircraft guns off and put on a 5-inch/.25, which was a longer barrel gun giving

more elevation.

Then we were just getting ready to go in there, and we were getting some supplies aboard this ship, and I was hauling a sack of beans down one of those ladders; and some guy came up and bumped me and threw me off backwards, and I developed a hernia, so I was in the hospital over in Cavite for about thirty days. Then when I went back aboard the Houston, why, this was in Cavite, and they were taking searchlights off and fooling around with the degaussing cables.

All of the sudden, we got the word that it had happened, and I personally felt that they would probably hit the Philippines first. I never thought that they would have the courage or fortitude to go in and hit Honolulu like they did. Thank God, they didn't follow up.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute. Describe what the Houston looked like when you first saw it.

Brain: My heart sunk down to about my belt because I really didn't want a big ship. I thought I would be able to go aboard a destroyer. I liked them.

Marcello: Was there still kind of a prejudice at that time that one is not really a sailor until he goes aboard a destroyer?

Brain: I think that could have been it, but I just didn't like

large complements. I forget how many of us went aboard at that time, but I felt, "Gee, I'm just lost." It took me about a week to get myself oriented to where everything was, and, of course, we had a bunch of old "plankies" aboard there, you know, guys that had been there a number of years. I can understand that they resented these new people coming aboard and them having to move over a little bit. They didn't have the full run that they usually had, and then it wasn't too long after that that we got a complement of...well, they built up the complement of Marines aboard there. I believe it was part of the 6th Marines out of Shanghai.

Marcello: You mentioned the "plankies" awhile ago, and I assume that you are referring to the so-called "plankowners," guys who had been aboard the ship when it was put into commission?

Brain: That's right.

Marcello: From everybody that I have talked to, I get the impression that the Houston was a very pretty ship.

Brain: It was. Roosevelt used that ship for his world cruises, and it was beautiful. We had some of these old-timers after war was declared...like, darn near all the turn-buckles on the weather deck and all your stanchion joints and everything was brass, and the decks were just beautiful--

just beautiful. Those things were just as white and shiny and nice as could be. Then we had to paint everything gray, and, boy, you could see a little tear in some of those old-timers' eyes because they were proud of the ship. I think that is what made it a good ship, because you had the esprit de corps there. It built up in you after you were aboard there for a while. Of course, I think all Americans do that. They get them a place, and they resent being there when they first are sent there, but pretty soon they get into the spirit of things, and you just follow in step with everybody else, and nobody can say a bad thing about it.

Marcello: What was your particular function aboard the Houston?

Brain: I was hot shellman on the 5-inch battery.

Marcello: Which was located where?

Brain: It was located right over the starboard side of the hangar deck--one of the most forward-most batteries they had there. It was up and aft of the quarterdeck.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about the period when you received word about the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. In the weeks immediately prior to the coming of war, could you detect any changes in the Houston's routine, that is, in terms of where it went or the kind of training that took place and things of that nature?

Brain: Yes, our training was a lot more heavily intensified on performance on the guns. You would probably be yanked out in the middle of the night and have to go up on the training breechblock up there. You would be pulled out at night and be half asleep and have to run up there and go through your maneuvers at night, and they were constantly pushing you to speed up your accuracy. Of course, then watches started to get intensified, and the guns were partially manned twenty-four hours a day. During the early mornings, we went to full general quarters. Just before sunset, that's when we went also into full general quarters.

I had lipped off at one of the boatswain's mates there, who was my immediate superior. He decided we had better wash down the splinter shields, and I made a smart aleck remark at him about...well, I told him, "Well, if we got a direct hit and people got splattered around on the splinter shield, why, we would secure everything and have a clean scrub down." At that time he informed me that I could go mess cooking, so I got put down in the scullery. I was a "scullery mate," and then after I got put down on that duty, then they transferred me off to being a hot shellman on the port watch of that particular gun.

Then I was on the ammunition train below decks.

I took the ammunition out of the magazines--it came up on the electric hoist--and then carried it up to the mess hall onto another hoist that took it up to the weather deck.

Marcello: Describe how you received the news of the Pearl Harbor attack and what your reaction was to it when you heard about it.

Brain: When we heard about it, we were standing watch on the gun, and one of the pointers was...we were talking, and he was voicing his opinion about how we were going to shoot down all these Jap planes if and when they did attack, and my comment to him at that time was, "By God, I hope we go through this war and never have to fire this gun."

Marcello: Where were you when you heard the news about the Pearl Harbor attack?

Brain: It seems to me we were still in Cavite when we heard it.

Marcello: How did they get the word to you of the attack?

Brain: Well, we had had a JV talker--that's the guy that has the direct control--and they had passed the word down through him when we had first heard of it, and, of course, somebody said, "Oh, well, hell, they are just joking! They are just kidding!" Then it came over the PA system that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Marcello: What time of the day was this? Do you recall?

Brain: It seems to me that this must have been around 10:00 or 10:30--right around in there.

Marcello: Actually, that would have been December 8th over in the Philippines, isn't that correct? By that time you had passed the International Date Line.

Brain: Yes, that's correct.

Marcello: At that time, when you thought of the typical Japanese, what kind of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Brain: I was acquainted with these people. I felt that they were quite capable. I didn't think that they would end up being as good a soldier as they were. Of course, I didn't know the training that they had received. I thought that they did one heck of a darn good job, really, and I was surprised that they got as far as they did because we had a lot of "machoism" about us. We thought we were unstoppable, and just as soon as we got our troops over there in Germany, why, that was going to be the end of that, and this thing out here was going to be a short-lived thing.

Marcello: When you thought of the typical Japanese, what kind of a person did you conjure up in your mind in terms of their physical appearance?

Brain: I thought they were a little sneaky and a little bit overly polite, and I knew that they were secretive

because I'd been in Japan Proper prior to my even going into the service. We were terribly restricted when we traveled around Japan. As soon as you get ready, as soon as you come in, there are security people who come aboard these passenger ships, and they would confiscate all cameras, and if you had taken any pictures coming up through the island chain there, they would usually confiscate your film.

Marcello: After having received news of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, what course of action did the Houston follow at that point?

Brain: Well, just like I say, we were still in Cavite, and immediately we went into...it seemed to me like we worked twenty-four hours, around the clock, getting the ship ready to get underway.

Marcello: Where did you go?

Brain: We steamed south, and we stuck pretty close to the Philippine Islands there, going all the way south, kind of wandering around through them, and we picked up a convoy of ships heading south. The old Langley was there. Then we picked up the...I think the first ship we ran into was the Canopus. There was a joke about it. They asked for recognition--it was at night--and supposedly the response the Canopus gave back was, "This is the United States Warship Canopus." (Chuckle)

It was the Langley, the Canopus, and there were several destroyers there, but I don't remember the names of all of them. Then we had a tanker with us. What the devil was that tanker's name? The Pecos, I believe, was the name of it.

Then we headed off down toward Borneo, and then we went to...I don't know if we pulled into Java first. It seems to me we pulled into Surabaja, and then we went south, down to...I don't remember the name of that island we went to, but we met up with some ships coming out...we picked up some supplies down there. What the hell was the name of that cruiser down there?

Marcello: Was it the Marblehead?

Brain: No, the Marblehead wasn't with us at that time, if I remember correctly.

Marcello: The Boise?

Brain: The Boise. The Boise was down there, and we thought, "Gee, boy, this is our relief. We are going to be back to the States and really get fitted out."

Marcello: So basically then you were engaged in all kinds of convoy duty at this point, and you really hadn't seen any Japanese yet.

Brain: That's right. I don't remember if we pulled convoy before this happened or after this happened. I know we

took a bunch of ships...we were going to go down to New Guinea, I believe is where we were taking these troopships. I think it was mostly Australian troops that we were taking down there. There may have been some Americans aboard some of those ships, but I don't know. I don't really remember. Rumors were flying around over there so darn fast that you didn't know what to believe and what not to believe, and, of course, the officers weren't going to take you into their confidence, not a bunch of seamen (chuckle).

Marcello: February 4, 1942, is a date to kind of stands out in my research because I think that was when you had your first encounter with the Japanese. I think you were somewhere down around Bali, and by this time you had hooked up with the Marblehead and a couple of Dutch cruisers, the De Ruyter and the Tromp. Describe that first encounter with the Japanese, as best you remember, as it occurred on February 4, 1942. This was when turret number three ultimately took that hit.

Brain: That's right. We were in convoy at that time, and, of course, I was below decks at that time, so I really didn't know what was going on above decks. I knew something terrible was going on up there because...I remember one particular thing. I could hear those .50-caliber...well, the 5-inchers were being fired up

there, and then all of the sudden you could hear the pom-poms going off--1.1's we had up there--and then you heard the .50-calibers going off. And then when I heard the chatter of those .30-calibers, I thought, "My God, they can't be that close!" (Laughter)

Marcello: Did you have any idea that this was an air raid?

Brain: Yes, we were aware of that. We realized that we were getting bombed.

Marcello: What action was taking place down there on the ammo train?

Brain: Oh, man! We were all just doing everything we could to keep everything abreast and make sure the guys had the ammunition up there that they needed.

Marcello: How heavy are one of those 5-inch shells?

Brain: Probably the powder shell itself, I imagine, it weighs around thirty pounds, maybe--the brass cannister.

Marcello: Is this basically the kind of work you were doing down there, that is, moving 5-inch shells for the most part?

Brain: The brass chamber with the charge in it. These guns had what they called...the Navy came out with the 5-inch projectile that was fixed ammunition. That means the projectile was fixed right into the case with the powder charge. But what we had was the semi-fixed ammunition. Your projectile and your powder charge were separate.

Marcello: While you were down working with the ammo train, did you have any conception of what was taking place above decks. In other words, I gather that the ship was undergoing some rather violent maneuvers during this period, and, of course, the Japanese were dropping bombs. Could you feel the effects of either of these two things down in that ammo train?

Brain: You could just feel it through your feet, and you had the feeling that, "My God, there is something going on there, and I hope these guys are shooting straight!"

Marcello: You could sense the violent turns and so on that the Houston was taking?

Brain: Yes. There was one fellow...we had a bunch of water on the deck, and it got pretty slippery, and one of the follows slipped; and he lost control of his brass charge that he had, and it rolled across the deck, and when he went to get it, it rolled back the other way. So we were having a little problem down there trying to keep good footing when you were going to one ammunition hoist to the next.

Marcello: Could you sense the near misses from the Japanese bombs and so on?

Brain: You could hear them. You know, when you got a near

miss, it was just like two or three hundred woodpeckers along there just going "rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat."

Marcello: In other words, the shrapnel and so on.

Brain: Well, the shock waves. Then there was a few rivets that popped loose down underneath the waterline, and you could hear them let loose.

Marcello: Do you recall, and could you sense, when that number three turret finally got hit?

Brain: That just scared the living bijesus out of me when it happened!

Marcello: Describe that incident.

Brain: Well, man, that thing went off, and I think I probably became just a little petrified because I knew that something had been hit back there. I didn't realize the full extent of the damage, but you could smell the cordite burning. I just stood there waiting for the whole back end of the ship to just completely explode. Just at any moment, I expected that back partition...to be able to look out there and see daylight.

Of course, it never happened. Everything worked like it was supposed to when you get a direct hit like that. We were darn lucky, just very fortunate. The turret was trained out, and it landed partially between the turret and the bulkhead. Later on, after we got up there and we saw what damage it had done to

the turret...of course, my bunk was just adjacent to the...well, just about underneath the turret actually, and that place back there was just a mess.

Marcello: Describe what you saw.

Brain: There was water all over the place; the bunks and lockers were scattered all over; there were people back there hurt.

Marcello: What did the turret itself look like? I assume that what you just described were your living quarters.

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, what did the damage to the turret and so on itself look like?

Brain: You looked at that turret, and you just wondered how come we still had it. That bomb, when it went off, I didn't realize the amount of heat was developed by one of these things and the pieces of shrapnel going out from it because it looked just like a piece of wood that termites had got into. There was a series of little burned holes in there. It was like somebody had taken a cutting torch and had partially burned holes all the way through this thing. It was really rather shocking to me.

Marcello: Of course, evidently, when that bomb hit, there were a a lot of powder bags on the hoist and things of that nature in and around that turret, and, of course, that

didn't help any.

Brain: No, it certainly didn't. I was more amazed...after I got up above and saw the damage that was done up above and below, I just thought, "My Lord, why didn't this whole thing go?"

Marcello: By the time that you had a chance to observe the damage on that turret, had the casualties and the dead been removed?

Brain: No, we were in the process of moving them. Some of those boys were burned pretty bad, and some of them were...really, it was just horrible, and the odor of burnt flesh there...I got to the point where I...well, the only place you could sleep was on the floor down there, so you might as well sleep up on the deck. You just had that pungent odor of burnt flesh, and it lasted for weeks! Once you get that smell in your nostrils, it takes two or three days to kind of get it washed out.

Marcello: So you just moved your sleeping quarters up to the main deck then?

Brain: I just took my blanket and a pillow. I don't even remember if it was my own pillow that I ended up with.

Marcello: I understand that as a result of that action, the crew even respected Captain Rooks more than it had before. Evidently, he showed some remarkable seamanship during that first attack.

Brain: I didn't believe that that ship was capable of making the maneuvers and the sharp turns that it did. He ran that thing like...well, it maneuvered just like a destroyer would maneuver, really.

Marcello: Actually, there was nothing that could be done about that turret so far as putting it back into action. I assume from this point on it was out of action for the rest of the war.

Brain: That was the end of it. No, it wasn't functional at all.

Marcello: I guess the only repair facilities would have been back in the States.

Brain: That's right. Well, we thought maybe we could go back to Honolulu. After we got that hit, we thought, "Well, gee, this is it! This is the golden bird we're waiting for! Why, we will surely be relieved and sent back to Honolulu or maybe lucky enough to get sent clear back to the States!"

Marcello: From this point on, are you operating mainly out of the Dutch East Indies?

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: You really don't go back to the Philippines again.

Brain: No, we never went back to the Philippines. We went back up in that area one time, I believe. There was some word of Japanese ships being active up there,

and we took off, and the Boise was supposed to go with us, but I believe the Boise hit a shoal out there and scraped her bottom pretty good; and so we didn't see that we had enough firepower, so we turned around and came back.

Marcello: Now I don't think it is necessary that we go into a day-by-day accounting of the activities of the Houston at this time, but is it safe to say that you don't get very much sleep from this time forward, or your sleep is not normal from this time forward?

Brain: If anybody got over six hours' sleep at one time, he was hiding out someplace because we were pretty active from this time on. As a matter of a fact, we had been reported sunk several times. We'd got this over the Tokyo radio and one thing and another, and I think that is how the ship got the nickname "Galloping Ghost of the Jave Coast." I am aware of the fact that we were reported sunk twice, by name.

Marcello: It is around this time, too, that the Houston becomes part of the so called ABDA Command (American-British-Dutch-Australian Command).

Brain: We went under the Dutch flag, yes.

Marcello: That must have caused all sorts of problems, didn't it, just because of the language difference, the communication problems, maneuvering, and things like that.

Brain: Oh, yes, there was a definite communication problem, and I don't think that there was too many of us that really had a tremendous amount of respect for the Dutch themselves, other than some of the operations that we were aware of that the Dutch submarine force did. Now we kind of supported these people. From the information that we had gotten about this time, they were doing a pretty "bang-up" job. Everybody else seemed to be...when things got hot, they seemed to run for cover.

Marcello: I was going to ask you why you didn't have too much respect for the Dutch?

Brain: This was it.

Marcello: From my research, I gather that when air raids occurred in a harbor such as Surabaja, often it was only the Houston that was putting up any sort of resistance. In other words, in a lot of cases the Dutch would actually head for shore.

Brain: They would head for shore. They would abandon ship and go into...well, I say abandon them. They would leave the ship, and we were told they would go into bomb shelters. They didn't want to attract attention to themselves. You can probably look at it another way. Maybe they had better information that we had. I think it was a feeling...I know, especially in the division that I was in aboard ship, all the conversion was, "Well, you can't trust them. They are not trustworthy.

They aren't going to fight." You can possibly understand their...you know, if you stop and think about it, if you had been there in peacetime, the island of Java was like a doll house. Everything was neat, clean. As a matter of fact, it was probably one of the cleanest...their cities, Surabaja, Batavia, was probably...well, undoubtedly it was one of the cleanest towns in the Far East that I had ever been in in the South Pacific. Of course, by this time I had not been to Australia, so I didn't know. It was much cleaner than Singapore, Rangoon, Calcutta, or any of these other places that I had been earlier.

Marcello: February 27th is a day that kind of stands out, too. This is when the so-called Battle of the Java Sea took place. Again, describe what you can remember from that particular action. I gather that the group of ships ran into quite a few Japanese ships on that day.

Brain: Yes, we did. As a matter of fact, when that engagement started, I had taken a mattress and pillow, and I'd gone up and I was sleeping under the number three turret. I didn't even hear general quarters because I was so fatigued. We had been carrying this ammunition--projectiles--out of the number three turret and carrying it forward to number one and number two turrets to store in their magazines up there. I was just completely

exhausted; I didn't even hear general quarters. Then all of the sudden, why, really, what woke me up was when they fired the first salvo off. I don't know whether it was the number one or number two turret up forward, but that's what woke me up. I thought, "Oh, my God, I'm going to be in trouble! Goddarn, I hope they didn't pull the muster when they sounded general quarters because I wasn't there."

Marcello: So what happened at that point then?

Brain: Well, I just left everything where it was, and I just ran to my battle station. Everything seemed pretty well under control there. The 5-inch battery wasn't active at this time because everything was out of range of it.

Marcello: Yes, I think the action opened at somewhere around 30,000 yards from my research.

Brain: Yes, we were at extreme long range. I don't know...I will assume that possibly what we were confronted with was probably some heavy cruisers, and undoubtedly... well, I knew that there were some destroyers there, but I think that there was probably some battleships out there, and their range was far superior to ours.

Marcello: This action took place in late afternoon, didn't it, and then continued into night?

Brain: Yes, into the night, yes.

Marcello: Do you recall when the Houston was hit that night? For example, it took an 8-inch shell forward, and I think that one passed through the ship without even exploding.

Brain: Yes, that is right. It hit up forward, and it went up through part of the "officers' country," and it came out on the waterline, or right at the waterline.

Marcello: Then I think it did take a hit in the laundry room. I think it may have ruptured some oil tanks, and, of course, it wrecked the ship's laundry. Do you recall that blast?

Brain: Yes, I remember the laundry getting hit. After that... well, prior to that, why, just about anybody's laundry that got washed was only officers, and then after that, why, it was everybody for themself--keeping his skivvies clean.

Marcello: How was the ammunition holding out at this point?

Brain: We had a problem with the ammunition. I guess it was prior to this battle that we had gone into Tjilatjap, and I remember they started giving us 5-inch ammunition. They had a group out on the dock passing it through, and it was passing through the portholes into the mess hall. After we got it all in there, why, somebody realized it was fixed ammunition, that is, for the 5-inch batteries, and we had to off-load it because it wouldn't work in

our guns. And we were having problems with the fuel, too.

Marcello: I was going to ask you about fuel. What would the problem have been there, since a lot of oil is produced in the Dutch East Indies?

Brain: I don't know whether it was a lack of communications... we went into Surabaja once to pick up fuel, and we just got very little fuel. We didn't get what we wanted. And then we came around to...I believe that was when we went down to Australia to pick up fuel, down to Port Darwin, and I believe that is where we got fuel--down there.

Marcello: Once more you actually come out of that Battle of Java Sea in half-decent shape, considering all the action that took place.

Brain: Taking everything into consideration, yes, we did remarkably well there. Then, of course, I guess it was around midnight, or maybe before...I don't know. Just like I said, I was below decks, and we always didn't get the word, but that is when we lost the De Ruyter and Tromp at that time.

Marcello: Again, I would assume that you really could give no eye-witness account of that sort of thing. You just know what took place.

Brain: I just know what took place. Every once in awhile we

would get...just like I say, at all these hoists they had JV talkers. That was intercommunications--you know, the guy with headsets--we would get word passed down to us this way--what actually was taking place. So a lot of times it was...well, it was second hand by the time we got the word, anyway, and then if you happened to be back toward the stern hoist or coming up out of the magazine, then you would come up forward, and you usually asked the JV talker or somebody who was right there manning the hoist, "Well, what's going on? What's the scoop? What's the dope?" Why, then he would relay it to you as he had received it. Of course, you are busy working. You're trying to do everything right and be sure the other guy is doing things right, so sometimes things get a little mixed up. They don't get the full message, but we were kept pretty well informed.

Marcello: What was the morale like at this time?

Brain: We were "gung-ho." Everybody was "gung-ho." There was no doubt that we weren't going to sink every ship the Japs had (chuckle). Morale was extremely high, I felt.

Marcello: Did you feel at this time that you would be getting out of there pretty shortly?

Brain: Oh, yes, we thought...everytime we took a hit of any kind, we thought, "This is it! This is our ticket home! We are going to get back and get a piece of that golden egg the goose laid."

Marcello: At the conclusion of the Battle of the Java Sea, where did the Houston go?

Brain: We came back up to Batavia. That's the largest port on the northern end of Java, northwestern end I guess you would call it.

Marcello: What did you do there?

Brain: When we came into port, we had a little problem getting through the mine fields up there. I don't remember whether they sent a pilot out to come aboard the ship or not or whether they...they probably brought a pilot out and put him aboard ship, and then the boat that he came out on, why, we probably followed him in through the mine fields until we got into...I can't...they had another name for the port there at Batavia.

Marcello: Tandjong Priok, wasn't it?

Brain: Yes, Tandjong Priok. That's what they called the port area. We pulled in alongside of the dock there and put some people over the side to try and patch that hole we had up forward. I remember...I was out there on the gun deck or boat deck, and I remember this...we all assumed it was one of our seaplanes that they used

for scouting as well as a spotter for the heavier battery. We thought it was him coming down through there, and, my God, if we would have had a hand grenade, we could have knocked him down. You could see the pilot and the observer in the plane as they come by, but, boy, he had those "meatballs" on him. As a matter of fact, he was a gutty little devil because he came by there twice, and, of course, nobody fired a shot. Why we didn't, why our guns weren't manned and ready at that time, I don't know whether it was that we were told not to shoot at anything or not. We just had a gut feeling that the Dutch would just as soon that you didn't do anything and just lay there quiet in the water.

Marcello: This brings us up, I think, to February 28th, and, of course, this is when the Houston finally went down.

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: Describe as best you can what took place on February 28th. Of course, by this time the situation was virtually hopeless, untenable.

Brain: The situation was chaotic. Well, the first bit of information, supposedly straight dope, we got was, "Well, you are going back to the States now." Then the next day it was, "No, you are going back to Australia. We are going to back to Perth and get refitted." Of course,

everybody says, "Where in the devil is Perth?" So everybody tries to find out where Perth is in Australia, and then a rumor would come back, "Oh, you're just going down to get fitted out, just enough to get back to the States. You're going back home."

So we took out of there at dusk, late afternoon, of the 28th, and we headed for the Sunda Strait. When we got down to the Strait there, why, all of the sudden, my gosh, here we had general quarters, and I thought, "Well, gee, this is just standard procedure. They have spotted something, and they don't know what it is. Maybe it's help coming up to us." This is what went through my mind. I couldn't conceive that the Japs were really planning on landing on Java because my own way of thinking was, "Well, why fool with Java? Skip Java and go down and land on Australia." Because by this time we had the feeling that was their ultimate aim--to get to Australia.

That night we got sunk, that was chaotic. That was really bad. I don't know whether our superiors were aware of the fact that there was this type of activity going on in the area or not, but it appears like we were caught pretty flat-footed. I imagine the Dutch may have had the information, but they didn't want to pass it on to us. This is just my own opinion; I wouldn't

say this was true or untrue. I have mixed emotions about this.

Marcello: Describe what took place that night. Start with the initial activity, and then we will get into the actual sinking of the Houston.

Brain: Well, they sounded general quarters, and I went to my battle station. Of course, as we discussed earlier, as far as our ammunition was concerned, we weren't in an actual position to be in an engagement because most of the stuff that we put up that night...when I use the words "put up," I mean, we were taking it out of the magazine hoist, passing it to the hoist that goes to the gun deck. The majority of that stuff that we were sending up there was star shells because this is all we had down there. We had just about depleted all our armor-piercing stuff for our 5-inch batteries, and our antiaircraft shells. As far as the count goes or the percent we had there, I don't know. I wasn't in a position to know; it wasn't my job.

We got a hit, and we lost all electrical control aft there, and we had to run the hoist by hand. I know I got put on that detail. They grabbed the cranks out of the ready locker there and put them in there, and one fellow there said, "All right, Brain,

get on the crank here! We don't have power!"
We were cranking away, and about that time it sounded just like a freight train went through us, just forward of us there. We took a shell hit, and it went through the side there above the waterline. Of course, we had no armor plating in this area at all. It was just steel, and it went all the way through there and went through the uptake and out the other side. It sounds like it I would imagine if you were standing in a train tunnel and the train comes rushing through. That is just what it sounds like; I imagine it would sound like that. It was just a rumble and a bang and a crash, and on it went.

Marcello: In the meantime, is the ship undergoing all kinds sorts of violent maneuvers again?

Brain: Yes, the ship was swinging around, and then pretty soon, why, she just started going one way. She started making a big turn, and we seemed to stay in that position. I thought, "Well, what are we doing? Turning around and going back?" You could feel this motion of the ship. If it turns to the port or turns to the starboard, you can just feel that motion of the ship, and, of course, they were turning it pretty violently. Like I said, I didn't realize that ship could maneuver as well as it did. I think that possibly

a lot of us, even some of the guys in the engineering force, didn't realize that this thing could just get up and romp the way it did and maneuver as sharp as it did. I don't know whether the ship was designed primarily for this type of operation or not, but I'll say one thing--the skipper put her through her paces; he found out what she was made of; and he seemed to have a darn good understanding of just how much stress and strain she could take.

Marcello: I know that on occasions ships were passing so close that actually machine guns and so on were being used to rake each other's decks. Do you have any recall of that?

Brain: Yes, sir. I recall that after we had run out of ammunition and there was nothing left to send up to the guys upstairs, then I left my battle station. It was, oh, about twenty feet, and there was a ladder that went up to the weather deck. I went up there, and about that time there was a destroyer going by us, and at first I thought it was one of ours until I saw the flashes over there. About that time he lit up a searchlight, and I thought he had it spotted right at me really (laughter). You could hear the blowers for their fire rooms, it was that close. Even with all the other commotion, I could hear those blowers

forcing that air down into those fire rooms. We could just hear them screaming. Then, of course, they started opening up with small arms when that Japanese "can" went by.

It wasn't too long after that that I went down below. I thought, "Well, that's enough of that. I don't want them guys looking right down my throat." I went down below and then stood by, and then they passed the word to abandon ship, and I thought, "Oh, my God, where is my life jacket?" Well, I went to get it where I thought it was, and it wasn't there. Then they passed the word, "All hands, man your battle stations," so I went back and stood in the area where my battle station was.

Marcello: Is this worse than actually working on the ammunition hoist?

Brain: Yes. Well, with nothing to do you think,"Gee, this can't be it!"

Marcello: This gives you time to think, and that's probably the last thing you need to do in that situation.

Brain: That's right. That's the worst thing in the world. Just like I said earlier, they had started intensifying our training, and they got us just about to the mode where we could just do stuff in our sleep. The electrical force there, they had an officer there that

wasn't very well liked by the "E" group because he used to roust them out in the middle of the night, all this type of thing, and he was always jury-rigging lines around. After we got our power knocked out, why, the guys did do some jury-rigging, and we got some more power back in there. We got the lights back on. It wasn't too darn long that we were without lights down there.

Marcello: In the meantime, is the ship being pummeled by all kinds of hits?

Brain: Oh, man, you thought they were hitting us with slingshots and everything else. It was just continually hit after hit, it seemed like, and the ship was just shuttering all the time. After they passed the word there to abandon ship the second time, I thought, "Well, this is it," so I left (chuckle).

Marcello: When the second abandon ship order is given, what is the reaction of you and your shipmates? In other words, is everything being done in a more or less professional manner?

Brain: A lot of the fellows, I think, went over on the first time, that is, the group that was down in the area where I was, because I know when they said to man battle stations again, there was still a couple of Marines there, and I think they came up out of the

magazine, is why there were there. I'm not sure where they came from at that time.

Marcello: In the meantime, I think the Houston had also been hit by some torpedoes. Do you remember those torpedoes hitting the ship?

Brain: Yes, that was midship and up forward. Yes, sir, they really rattled that poor old ship around at that time. Well, that was the death blow to us.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you abandoned ship and went into the water.

Brain: Like I said, I went to look for my life jacket, and I couldn't find it. It wasn't where I had left it. I finally found an old life jacket that the side cleaners and the painters had used. All the strings weren't on it, and I thought, "My Lord, I'm going to have a heck of a time hanging onto this thing when I jump over the side of the ship." But when I got up there and went off the side, it was just about a foot to the waterline, she was listing that much.

Marcello: In the meantime, are the Japanese still working her over?

Brain: Still working her over! I finally got in the water, and, of course, there was a lot of diesel oil around there from our stuff and some of the stuff from theirs that got sunk. My first thought was, "My God, I hope

this stuff doesn't catch fire! What am I going to do then?" I didn't know if we were in the open sea or actually where we were at this time. I was not aware of the fact that we were in the Sunda Strait at this time. Anyway, I thought, "My Lord, I hope this stuff doesen't catch fire!"

I immediately did what I would never do again if I was sunk, I don't think. I kicked off my shoes... I had...they gave me some denim stuff that was supposed to be flashproof clothing, and it had a hood on it, and it had kind of these big, baggy pants. Underneath there I had a pair of shorts on, skivvy shorts, and then I had my dungarees on and a T-shirt. I kicked everything off except my skivvies and my T-shirt after I got in the water.

I finally got away from the ship, and, of course, everything...I don't know what the devil everybody was shooting at, but there was explosions going off in the water, and, man, it finally got to you. You would lay on your stomach and try to swim, and everytime an explosion went off, it just felt like all your insides were coming out your back. You would lay on your back, and it felt like you were going out through your stomach. For a good hour after the Houston went down, after you could no longer see her,

there was still firing going on, shooting back and forth. I don't know...I figured out later on, "Well, hell, they thought there was more ships in there or...what the devil? Did we get right between all their ships, and they were cross-firing and firing at one another?" This is the only conclusion that I have ever been able to come up with. I read one book about...supposedly this Japanese officer had written this book about the sinking of the Perth and the Houston, but he didn't seem to admit very much that there was this type of confusion. So it is something I put together in my own head, and I think a few of the other fellows...we've talked about it, and none of them really--at that time that I talked about it--knew for a fact that this is what happened, but we just had kind of a secret feeling that this had happened, that there was a lot more mass confusion amongst them than there was amongst us. Of course, we felt quite badly that the Perth couldn't give a little bit better showing then we did because she was the first one that they seemed to target in on. Damn, I think she didn't last but about three minutes at the most.

Marcello: What was the temperature of the water like?

Brain: The water wasn't bad. It was a nice temperature. I

was a little concerned about sharks, but I was smart enough to know there was enough concusion going on that what was there they was probably killed, and the rest of them would leave the area until it got quiet again.

Marcello: In the meantine, are you around or near anybody else while you are in the water?

Brain: Probably about three hours later, there was a fellow in a life jacket. He was a warrant officer. I don't recall his name. His legs were shot up real bad. He had a life jacket on, so this cord that was around the trousers of my flashproof clothing, why, I took it and tied it on to his life jacket and tied it on to mine.

Well, about dawn the next morning...well, you kind of float around and you kind of sleep a little bit and come back to again. We came across a bunch of guys on a raft, and they took him at that time. The last I saw of them, they went off in the distance.

But earlier on in that night, I got close enough to shore that I could just touch the bottom if I put my head underwater, but, of course, I had no shoes on, and that coral there would just cut the living bejesus out of my feet, so I thought," God, I can't do that," because there is a tremendous tide that

goes through there, an awful surge. If you get it going the right way, you can get to the beach real early, but after things got calmed down, and I decided which was to go, I thought, "Well, gee, this is going to be duck soup because I think I'll be carried right into the beach."

Marcello: Did you notice the lighthouse off in the distance?

Brain: Yes. Well, the lighthouse was out during the battle, and then it comes back on. That's when I could kind of get my bearings. It was closer to Java where I was than it was to get to Sumatra. I didn't really relish going to Sumatra; I'd rather have gone to Java, myself. I thought I would get over there. "There's a few words in Javanese I know, and I can ask them for a banana and this type of thing in their own language." I had been there previously before being in the Navy, so I thought, "Hey, this is the place to strike out for," and I'll tell you, I was pretty disheartened when I couldn't get in, especially with this officer. He would go into unconsciousness and come out of it again.

Marcello: In the meantime, did you pass close to any Japanese boats or ships in the water?

Brain: I saw a few of them, but they were off in the distance, and I never did get close to any of them. It was

probably abot 10:00 the next day when I ran into these guys in the raft, so I gave him to them, and I stayed around that raft for a minute, and there seems to be mass confusion there. I thought,"Well, I don't want any part of this bunch." Nobody knew where they were going, and those rafts, you really can't control them. I thought, "Well, I'll just strike off over there for Java again." So I would lay on my back and swim for a while. Of course, I wasn't feeling to good at this time because I had swallowed a little bit of that diesel oil. It was in your eyes. Your eyes and nose burned, and your hair was all matted to your head.

Then it wasn't until the following day that I got in on the island, and when I came in, there was some Australians going by in a boat, and they had a few Americans in it. A couple of guys that I knew were in the boat, and I asked them to take me in, and they said, "No, we've got too many in the boat." I said, "Well, let me hang onto a rope or something." I still had that piece of line, and I tried to hand it to one of the guys, and one of the guys hung onto it for a little while, but he let loose of it. I don't know whether he passed out or not. Anyway, I kept pretty close to that boat, and we got in on the beach

there. I guess it was maybe 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning of the next day.

Marcello: This was like March 1st, is this correct?

Brain: Yes. Well, about thirty-six hours later, to the best of my recollection, is when we got to the beach.

Marcello: So what happens when you finally get to the beach?

Brain: When we get to the beach, there are a few Americans there, a bunch of Australians, and we mill around there on the beach. There's no Japanese around there, so we had a chief bandmaster there on the beach. We called him "Bandy." He says, "Well, let's strike off down the road, fellows. We got to get home by Christmas." This kind of built all of our morale up a little bit, so we take off down the road.

Prior to that a fellow says, "Hey, there is a village down here, and I'm going to go down here. Give me your skivvies." So all I end up with is this T-shirt on. So I says, "Okay, go on." He said, "You go with them." I didn't feel like going with them. I still wanted to sleep. Of course, we were all thirsty, and I felt that if we go down and get pretty close to the water and figure out where high tide comes in, if you dig down in that sand, I know you can drink the water from the experiences I've had camping along the beach and this kind of thing there when we were in California

before. We did it in high school, and if you tap that water, you can drink it, but you shouldn't drink too much of it because it will make you sick. But it is better than drinking sea water. Well, anyway, these guys took off, and we never did see them again. Finally, ol' "Bandy" said, "Well, come on. We have all got to get going down here and see where those guys went. We have got to get headed down to the shore to head back to the States because we've got to be there for Christmas."

Marcello: At this point all you have on is a T-shirt?

Brain: Is a T-shirt and nothing else.

Marcello: You are bare from the waist down?

Brain: Bare. There would be no problem telling which sex I was (laughter). There was another guy in the same condition as I was. He didn't even have a singlet.

Marcello: What are you calling this? A singlet?

Brain: Well, a T-shirt. Well, we went to one village, and finally one woman ran out, and she gave us a sarong. Well, we both couldn't walk in that sarong, so we tore it in half. So we ended up with a skirt like some of the girls wear today, slit up the side. That's the way we went on.

Marcello: What kind of reception are you getting from these natives?

Brain: Very cool.

Marcello: They knew who's winning.

Brain: These are communists down there. These people became communist back in, oh, I'd say, probably in the early '30's, middle '30's. This movement was already on in Java, clear back then. Like I said, being there before, I had a little smattering of what the situation was there. They were trying to get the Dutch out; they wanted it for the Indonesians.

They didn't come out and beat us or hit us or anything like that, but they still weren't to darn friendly. Of course, unbeknown to us, the Japs were behind us at this time, but we didn't know that. They gave us some coconut milk, and that didn't help us too much. That kind of gave us diarrhea a little bit.

I remember one place we had this officer with us, and,God, we were all so damn thirsty that we just got down and started drinking out of this creek. Well, this water was running pretty fast, and I always thought that as long as you drink water that is moving fast, you're all right. So we go up around the bend, and here is a water buffalo laying there, and part of it is decayed; and there is this water running right

through his rib cage and out the other side, and twenty-five yards down there farther was where we were drinking water. It kind of made you..."Uh-oh, what am I going to catch now?"

They would give you a little bit of rice, just a handful of steamed rice. It was cold. They gave us some darn bananas that you could hardly eat. I don't know what kind of bananas they called them, but they had very little meat on them. They were short, thick, round bananas, and they had seeds in them. This was the first time I had ever encountered this kind of banana, and they were kind of bitter. There wasn't much meat on them.

Finally, a big, burly Javanese came down there, and he had a Sam Brown belt on him for the pistol. So he ran us into some sort of a jail there. It wasn't no concrete walls or anything like that. It was wooden walls and had a tin roof on it. Most of the buildings down there were made out of this bamboo that they call atap and had palm fronds for the roof. But this had a thin shed on it. It had a shelf there to lay on. He ran us in there, and he spoke a little bit of English. Of course, we were dog-tired at this time. This was way late in the afternoon.

We laid down there and went to sleep, and next

thing I know, why, here is a Jap standing over the top of me screaming and yelling and jabbing a bayonet at me. Of course, we couldn't understand what they were saying, but we knew that they wanted us to get outside. Well, they got us out there and lined us all up and put us in a truck.

Marcello: About how many are there?

Brain: There are, all totaled, about thirty-five or forty of us.

Marcello: And you were all herded into this jail by this one...

Brain: By two trucks. No, there was several Japanese there.

Marcello: Let me back up a minute. You mentioned that you first encountered this native with the Sam Brown belt and the pistol. He was alone.

Brain: He was all by himself, yes. He could speak a little bit of English.

Marcello: You put up no resistance? You had no objections to doing what he wanted?

Brain: No, we thought he was the person with authority. So he put us in this prison, and he said that they will come and get us later. They have got to get organized. This much we got out of him.

Marcello: When you say "they've" got to get organized, and "they" will come get you later, you already knew he was referring to the Japanese?

Brain: No, no, we didn't. We thought maybe the Dutch Army was going to come down. Just like I say, we didn't know we were walking behind the invasion that had all ready hit Java. So we had visions of them coming down and putting us in green uniforms and getting rifles and going out and defending the island of Java--at least I did. Then the next thing I know, why, in comes these Jap soldiers screaming and yelling at us.

So we finally all get up and get outside, and they had two trucks there. They took part of us in one truck and part of us in the other, and then this one Jap gets up there with a switch and starts whacking us a little bit and asks if there's any natives that want to come up and do the same thing. A couple of gals got up there, and they did the same thing. Of course, they'd spit on you and this type of thing. Finally, they got that thing all settled, put on their little show. Then the truck took off, and they took us down to a place called Serang, and they put us in an old abandoned theater down there.

Marcello: Describe what this theater was like on the inside.

Brain: It was just a series of concrete slabs that would go out about twenty feet and drop down, say, eight or nine inches, six inches in some areas, and the thing

was just a bunch of tiers because this is the way their theaters are over there. You'll have a lounge chair to sit in there if you pay more, and the cheaper you pay, well, you'll be sitting on a bench when you get down toward the front. There was probably...oh, I'd say that theater was probably...maybe fifty by maybe ninety or a hundred feet from the entrance to the back wall, so when you got in there, you just had to find a place to lay down.

Marcello: So for the most part, then, we are not talking about a theater in the American sense.

Brain: As we know them in the United States, that's right.

Marcello: What are conditions like on the inside of that theater?

Brain: Pathetic, by our standards. Water was just about next to nil. Lavatory facilities were just not there. They were there, but we weren't aware of it. Besides that, the Japs probably wouldn't let us use it. All through Java their public lavatories are...they will have a little shed like you see with an ordinary commode here in the United States, but instead of having a commode there, they have got a ditch going through there with water traveling through it, and you strattle this ditch. I was there for, I guess, the best part of a week.

Marcello: What provisions are the Japanese making in terms of

feeding the people there?

Brain: They would bring in a little rice and a little melon water, and that's just about all we got. It was just plain steamed rice.

Marcello: How crowded was this theater?

Brain: We were packed in there just about like sardines are in a can. There was room for people to partially lay down. Sometimes you couldn't straighten clear out, but you could usually lay down and halfway get comfortable.

Marcello: Did you see anybody in the theater that you knew?

Brain: Yes, there was several guys that I knew in there, and they were there before I got there. Of course, up toward the entrance, we were pretty close to the stage area. We had a large, flat area there. Then up close to the front end, why, it was mostly the British troops that were up in there...mostly Australians, as I best remember. I was there for about a week, and then sombody said, "Hey, they need a working party." I thought, "Well, gee, this will be good. Maybe I can get up and get out, and maybe I can get a little bit more than I'm getting here."

Marcello: Let's just back up a minute and talk a little bit more about these theaters because, again, this is where you get your first taste of what being a prisoner-of-war

was going to be like. What are the Japanese doing while you are there in that theater? Are they harassing you, or are they leaving you more or less alone?

Brain: They will come around, and, of course, not understanding the language, we went more by tones they were using. We were frightened of what they were going to do because we had been more or less informed that the Japanese, from past history, they're not one to take prisoners.

So we didn't know whether...I was kind of amazed, when they took us out of that first small jail they had us in, that we weren't taken out and assassinated at that time. This is what I really thought was going to happen. Then when they loaded us in the trucks, I thought, "Well, gee, what are they going to do? Are they going to really put on a show?" I had no idea how many people they had captured, and I thought, "Are they going to have trials, tribulations, and this type of thing and make a spectacle out of us right there?" When we ended up in that theater, then that convinced me of it. I thought, "Oh, my God, how long is it going to be before we go to trial and get up there and get shot or get hung or whatever they're going to do to us?"

So as the Japs would come around there, I think about the first word they ever used at me was a word that we'd use like, "You S.O.B.!" or something like that. I had the feeling this is what they were saying to you. But at the same time, I felt that they didn't quite trust us yet, either; they were still afraid of us.

Marcello: Do you see any physical harassment at this time?

Brain: Well, if you didn't move fast enough, sure, you would get jabbed with the butt of a rifle or kicked or pushed or shoved or something like this. The hardest treatment that I got was after I left the theater.

Marcello: In the meantime, do you still not have any skivvies?

Brain: No, I still got this T-shirt and piece of sarong.

Marcello: What do you talk about while you are in this theater?

Brain: Well, you are just imagining all kinds of things, and you are plotting this, and you think, "Well, if I get a chance, I'll do this, and if you get a chance, I'll do that. But, boy, I've got to get out of here first before I can do anything."

Marcello: Were you allowed to go outside that theater under any circumstances?

Brain: No, they just had a restroom they called the benjo, and you could go out there. Of course, at this time I didn't have any problems. This way I hadn't had any

nourishment, and I was all dog-tired, and you just didn't have to relieve yourself too often because you weren't getting anything you could relieve.

Marcello: How hungry were you?

Brain: I was hungrier than all "get-out." I was real hungry.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you had met some of the people that you had known on the Houston. Are the small cliques the buddy system beginning to operate this early in the game yet? Later on, that buddying-up was going to be important.

Brain: You kind of buddied up at this point. There would be three or four of you who'd get close together and try to watch out after the other fellow. I know there was one fellow we had there, and I remember him making the statement, "Well, I didn't eat rice at home; I didn't eat aboard ship; and I'm not going to eat here." That was our first death--there at Serang.

Marcello: How would you be served your rice here at Serang?

Brain: You were given it in your hands.

Marcello: Were you put in a line? Did you go through a chow line?

Brain: Yes, they would start up here, and when the bucket ran out, they would go back and get some more and then come back again.

Marcello: Who was doing the serving?

Brain: Usually, it was an Australian with a Jap guard there with

him, supervising. They would have two guys carrying the bucket, and the other guy would be ladling it out.

Marcello: To you as an individual, this must have been a rather humiliating or degrading process, I would think, in that you are having to eat rice out of your hands, and you were virtually naked. How do you feel about yourself?

Brain: Well, I felt that if I could get out of there, I could better myself. What I was going through, I felt, "Well, I'm being degraded, so to speak, and I'm being put on the same level that I had experienced living in all these foreign countries."

Marcello: How long did you say that you were there altogether?

Brain: I was there about two weeks, it seems like, and then they said they wanted a working party, so I jumped up and ran out and got in line there. They marched us from there right down the Changi Prison, and that was a bad blow for me.

Marcello: Let's back up here. Now you probably would not have gone from Serang to Changi Prison because...

Brain: Excuse me, to Serang Prison.

Marcello: So you go from the theater at Serang to the prison at Serang. It is a prison or is it a jail?

Brain: It's a jail. The rooms weren't quite as big as this (gesture), not quite as wide, and they had concrete

slabs on the side, and you had a narrow way going down. You couldn't put your head up against the wall and stick your feet clear out because they would go in the walkway. They were made for shorter people. There was three Americans in there and myself. We got put in this one cell, and the rest... there was some Australians in there, and there was about eight or nine Gorden Highlanders in there.

Marcello: So approximately how many of you would have been in this cell?

Brain: There was probably thirty of us in there.

Marcello: We're talking about a cell that is perhaps 15' x 30' maybe?

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: It would be as big as this room in which we are holding this interview?

Brain: Not quite as big as this room. Probably two feet out from the file cabinets and this wall here would be the width of it.

Marcello: So maybe we are talking about a room that is perhaps 12' x 12'?

Brain: Well it was long and narrow, probably twenty feet long, and it might have been ten feet wide.

Marcello: The reason I was trying to make that clear was because, if we simply say it was as large as this room, whoever

listens to the tape or reads the transcript wouldn't know how big this room was (chuckle).

Brain: That's right.

Marcello: So it was not a very big room for thirty people.

Brain: No. I think it was designed for twelve natives, maybe six.

Marcello: You were behind bars?

Brain: Oh, yes. The only light we had in there was the small door from the front there, and it was heavy scrap iron, and then there was a small hole way up at the top. The little hole was probably...you couldn't have put your attache case through it.

Marcello: So consequently, you were virtually in darkness. Was there any light at all in terms of electricity?

Brain: We had light..that's where we got in a few arguments. We had light from about 10:00 in the morning until right around 11:30. There was a wall immediately outside of our door there, and, of course, there was other buildings on beyond there; but then the sun would get up at that angle, and it would show in one portion of the cell. So we got in a few arguments with the Scotchmen because they seemed to kind of command the door area, and we would try to get up there and get in some of that light.

Marcello: So there is no electricity in this room.

Brain: There is no lights at all, no electricity. It's like being in a hole in the ground, really.

Marcello: What provisions are made in terms of latrine facilities?

Brain: We have a wooden bucket about the size of a milk pail, and that would be dumped periodically. The two guys up close to the door, why, they were the ones allowed to haul this thing out. Finally, they got rid of the bucket, and they did bring one in with a lid on the top of it with a hole in the top of it, and you could sit on top of the bucket. Of course, it was pretty well occupied. Some of the people were developing dysentery in there at that time. Of course, we had no proper facilities to cleanse yourself. We were there for about three weeks, and I think in that three weeks time they had a well out there, someplace there, and we got out to this well. We could get a little bit of water out there, but they didn't leave you out there for too darn long.

Marcello: What provisions did the Japanese make for feeding you here at Serang Jail?

Brain: Well, at this time is where I first ran into my sweet potatoes there. We got a sweet potato one time and the bucket of steamed rice. But still, at that time, we had no utensils of any kind, and we were still eating out of our hands. Your hand was your bowl.

Marcello: How often would you be fed this rice?

Brain: Twice a day. When we first got there, we were fed regular steamed rice, and then they started giving us sort of stuff like pabulum, but it was rice cooked this way. It was just real soupy.

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

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: That must have been tough to eat since it is quite a bit more watery than the regular steamed rice.

Brain: It wasn't hot at this time, see. By the time we got it, it was cold, so the fluid part of it was kind of dry-like. You could hold a pretty good portion of it in your hand. You got real primitive, very primitive.

Marcello: In the meantime, have you had a chance to get any of that fuel oil or anything off your body?

Brain: No, we had no chance to get that off our body until later on, after we left the Serang Prison.

Marcello: I guess about the only consolation is that everybody else is just like you.

Brain: That helped (laughter). That helped terrifically. The only thing is that we wished those Scotchmen down there could have spoken a little bit better English. We had a hell of a communication problem with these people. They were sort of...I had been around Scotch

people before, but I had never had encountered these Highlander people. They spoke, I guess, in a Gaelic tongue, and it was a little hard to understand them.

Marcello: Who were some of the Americans in your cell with you?

Brain: There was a fellow by the name of Dethloff and a fellow by the name of Gore, and I can't remember this other kid that was in there. I think he died later on.

Marcello: What do you do with your time while you are in this cell during this three-week period?

Brain: You slept whenever you got a chance. You kind of had to sleep in shifts, so when one goes to sleeping, why, then the other group would be huddled up someplace. We were trying to stay warm; it was damp there. You had a lot of humidity there, but you would get chills.

Marcello: By this time...

Brain: You are feeling your hunger pangs greatly, too.

Marcello: By this time have you concluded that perhaps they are not going to execute you?

Brain: No, that was still in the back of your mind. I think that was in the back of our minds all through prison camp. That thought was there.

Marcello: Do they take you out on any work details while you

are in this Serang Prison.

Brain: No, I never got on one work detail all the time I was in the Serang Prison. I didn't really care because I didn't have the stamina for it at this time. I was too weak.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you leave Serang Jail and go into Bicycle Camp.

Brain: Well, they came in one morning and ushered us all out, so to speak, Actually, we were driven just like cattle. So we were rousted out of Serang Prison, and we think this is the trial date. This is what goes through my mind. They take us from there, and right outside Serang Prison, there is some trucks there, about eight or nine trucks; and they just packed us in these trucks, and we take off, and we end up down in Surabaja. They put us in what they called...we found out later on they called it Bicycle Camp. How it got its name, I'm not really sure, but, anyway, this is where they used to billet the Javanese Army, and by Javanese I mean the natives of Java that were in the army. We referred to them as the White Dutch and the Black Dutch or the Hollander Dutch.

Marcello: This was actually at Batavia, wasn't it?

Brain: This was at Batavia, yes.

Marcello: Let's take an imaginary walk through Bicycle Camp, and

let us suppose that we are going in the entrance. I want you to describe what one would see as one went through there. I guess I'm asking you to give me a physical description of Bicycle Camp.

Brain: As you stepped out of the trucks, they had us all line up out there. We had to fall in, and they had to muster us. Then we went into this area, and as you go in through kind of an archway with big pilings and a lot of barbed wire...as you walked in this place, a blacktop road went the whole length of this thing, and they had double sets the barbed wire. And they had a big guardhouse there, and they had all these Japanese guards out there.

Right away I had the feeling, "Well, gee, this is going to be a camp that we are going to be in." It was kind of...I felt like I was let out of a bottle going in there, and I thought, "Gee, this is going to be a nice place," because the buildings looked nice and everything else. I thought, "Gee, maybe we aren't going to be assassinated; maybe there isn't going to be a trial." Then you could see these people running around there in British uniforms, which would be, say, half a block away, and you could look down there. Of course, anytime anybody new came in, this was the thing--to get out in the street and look. Of

course, this disturbed the Japanese because they wanted everybody to stay back in their areas and stay out of the main street. And at this time, why, it was still Japanese soldiers, but it was a feeling that things were going to get better.

Marcello: Okay, so we are inside the gate, and we are looking down this blacktop road or street. Suppose we keep proceeding down this street. What do we see off to the sides?

Brain: As you walk down, why, you look to the right, and you look to the left there, and you can see very nice buildings. We thought, "Gee, are we going to be able to live here or are we going to go way down to the end?" We don't know what is down there. "What hovel are they going to put us in down there?" We walked by two sets of buildings, and then at the third set, they broke all the Americans off and put them in there. Of course, there was a bunch of Americans already there--from the Houston. And the Australians came by later, and then they went farther on down to another area. It was just a kind of feeling of elation, really, after this depressed area that we were in before.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that there was double barbed wire around this camp. Do you mean a fence

within a fence?

Brain: Yes, they had an area there, and I guess it was probably about ten feet between the first barbed wire fence and the next one, and this was the area that the Japanese parolled--the outer perimeter there.

Marcello: Okay, so you are peeled off, and you go into one of these barracks. Again, let's continue our description of what the inside of one of these barracks looked like.

Brain: In the front end of the barracks, they were like a short "U" or like an "L" with the short legs on the end, and they would have a cubicle at each end, that was separate from the rest of them. They had their own entry way. I would assume that that is where the noncoms stayed. The rest of it was just a series of cubicles inside--no doors--and they were up about six feet high from the level of the floor. You stepped up three steps, I think. There was a huge concrete platform with these walls built up. As you walked down through there, they had three entry ways to get inside the building. The center one went all the way through, and they had sort of a little porch. But on the inside, it was just a series of small cubicles of different dimensions. There were no bunks, just these little cubicles. As time

went on, we procured things and made bunks in there for ourselves. It was real nice from what we had had previously.

Marcello: How many men were assigned to each cubicle?

Brain: It depended on the size of the cubicle, and each cubicle, as I remember...I think there was six men to a cubicle.

Marcello: Approximately how large was the cubicle in which you were assigned?

Brain: The cubicle that I was in was probably 10' x 10'.

Marcello: Do you recall who else you were in that cubicle with? Were there any Houston personnel that you knew?

Brain: Yes, in the building that we were in, it was all Houston personnel--Marines and the sailors. We had a couple of warrant officers there. Previously, the line officers off the ship were there, but some of them had gone. Two ensigns and, I believe, a lieutenant j.g. were all that were there when I arrived. I don't recall how long the other fellows had been there, but they were all in pretty bad shape. Nobody had any gear or any equipment of any kind. They had just more or less what was on their back when they had gotten off the ship.

Marcello: Offhand, then, you don't remember any of the people you were in that cubicle with?

Brain: Yes, there was a fellow by the name of James Patrick Gore; there was a fellow by the name of Wargowsky...

Marcello: ...Gore was somebody that you mentioned earlier, so he must have come along with you all the way.

Brain: No, he wasn't with me all the time, but this is the guy that was in the scullery with me, or I was in there with him. Then there is a fellow by the name of Wampler. As these people got situated around, they more or less got back into the groups that they were with aboard ship. The gunner's mates usually got in one area; the seamen kind of got in another area; the fellows that were firemen got in one area. You kind of grouped in respectively by your rank or your rate.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese did not necessary assign you to a particular cubicle?

Brain: No.

Marcello: They simply said, "This is your barracks."

Brain: "This is your billet, and this is where you're going to stay."

Marcello: Now you mentioned that when you got there, there were already some Houston personnel there, including officers. Had a chain-of-command or some sort of military organization been set up at this time, or was it soon about to be set up?

Brain: Somewhat. You're taught, when you went through your boot training, that there are only two people in the world, and that is Jesus Christ and your United States naval officers. And, of course, when you get in the Navy, you realize that your different petty officers are senior to you, and you have to follow their directions. So it wasn't too bad because there was somewhat of a system already set up, and the officers were trying to do what they could to make it easier for their people, trying to get any extra things that anybody would have. We got a little bit of things from the British troops that were in there, which were basically mostly Australians--beautiful people. Of course, they didn't have too much really to share. Nobody had double canteens, a mess kit, or things like this. But they did help us kind of scrounge things up. I wasn't there to darn long before I finally got myself a sardine can and a piece of wire, and that was my mess kit for a while.

Marcello: Up until this point, what processing had the Japanese done?

Brain: They hadn't done actually any processing. We were in Bicycle Camp for several months before they did...well, it wasn't until after the 131st Field Artillery came to Bicycle Camp. Of course, they were a little bit more

regimented than we were, and they still practiced their system of things being ordered down through command. They were a little bit more regimented than we were at that time. Then after they got there, we did get a few articles of clothing, which we sadly needed. I think most of us Navy guys are still indebted to them to this day.

Then things did start to get a little bit more regimented. The officers got together and decided what was best for the men, and they would come back and say, "Well, it is going to be like this and this," and everything just seemed to kind of dovetail together. Then I guess we were probably there a month-and-a-half, maybe two months at the most, and then things started to get organized, and people were detailed for working parties, and then the Japs came down, and then they started interrogating us: "What did you do before you got into the service?" and this type of thing. They put everybody in a category.

Just long about this same time, like I say, we started having working details that would go out. We were more demolition people than anything else. We would go out and...like, in one area they were making five-gallon cans at a factory there, and we would go over there until all the steel was gone. They would

make five-gallon cans, and they were sent over to a refinery, and then oil or whatever they wanted to put in there was put in there and sealed up, and they were shipped out. When the raw material for making the cans was completed, then most of the guys that worked there started dismantling all this machinery, and it was moved out.

Later on, we got clear down to the dock area. Here you were loading this machinery and stuff onto the merchant ships. They went around, and anything with a machine, anything with a wheel that turned, was confiscated from the Island of Java and exported.

Marcello: So then eventually they had actually processed you in some way, that is, when they had interrogated you.

Brain: This wasn't through the interrogation that we got from the Japanese. It was just that you were assigned to a work party, and you were to leave there. Actually, I don't think our officers knew exactly where we were going to go work.

Marcello: But I'm still going back to that processing part again. Ultimately, you were processed after you were in Bicycle Camp several weeks.

Brain: Later on, yes. They took all the technicans, the fellows that were, we'll say, schooled as an electricians, machinist's mate, automotive machanic. All these

people the Japanese put in different categories, and then they took a draft of them out. Where they went, I don't know. I will assume--and I thought at the time--the rumors were that they were going to go to Japan Proper. A few of them we finally did meet up with later on.

Marcello: Were you ever given any sort of an identification number or anything of that nature?

Brain: I didn't receive a number to wear until we left Java.

Marcello: You mentioned you were given a number to wear. Can you elaborate on that?

Brain: Yes, I had a unique number, 5440.

Marcello: Was this number on some sort of a piece of metal or what?

Brain: It was on a piece of wood about three inches long and probably two inches wide or maybe four inches long, and you were given a piece of string to...it had a hole burnt in the end of it, and you threaded it through there, and you had to tie it, and you had to hang it around your neck. But that was not in Bicycle Camp that this happened.

Marcello: Where was that?

Brain: That was up in Burma.

Marcello: How long were you in Bicycle Camp before the 131st

Field Artillery came in?

Brain: About a month-and-a-half or two months, something like that, to the best of my recollection. Even today time doesn't mean anything to me; even today they just kind of come and go.

Marcello: I know that they came into Bicycle Camp on May 14, 1942. The Houston went down around March 1. You mentioned that you were about two weeks at the Serang Theater and three weeks in the Serang Jail so...

Brain: All total I was probably in that area about three weeks.

Marcello: In the meantime, that is, up until the time that the 131st Field Artillery came in, what kind of scrounging and improvising did you and your buddies do to make your stay there at Bicycle Camp more comfortable? For instance, you mentioned awhile ago that you got a sardine can and the wire. Could you elaborate on how this came about?

Brain: There was some Dutchmen in an area not to far from us, and I got this tin of sardines from a Dutchman... I didn't get the sardines; I just got the tin. I got it from the Dutchman over there. The wire...I got if off of part of a building that was adjacent to those we were billeted. There was a building out there that had a lot of siding on it, and just day by day you could just see these boards vanishing (chuckle).

This was the way...the Japs didn't seem to worry about it; they didn't seem to be concerned that this type of thing was happening. I can't see how they couldn't help but notice it, but if it wasn't nailed down or somebody didn't have it in their actual possession, it would disappear.

Marcello: I would assume that aboard the Houston there would have obviously been craftsmen of a sorts who could improvise out of what materials were available.

Brain: That was it, We had people that were craftsmen. Even with the Australian people, there were people that were skilled in other things than soldiering and sailoring.

Marcello: Did you still get any replacement for the sarong at this point?

Brain: Not until the 131st came in.

Marcello: Okay, we will talk about that in a moment. Now did you mention that you ultimately did get a bed?

Brain: Eventually, we made one, yes.

Marcello: What did you make if from?

Brain: I made it from bamboo, pieces of board, and hemp, manila line. You would make a framework. I borrowed a knife from one of the soldiers; he let me use his knife. What you would do is take a section of bamboo, and you would work at it until you had designed

yourself a hole that that piece of wood would fit in. Then I got pieces of string and some of this manila line, and you would unravel it, and then you would just make a series of "8's" from side to side in the frame of this bed. That would serve as something to lay on.

Marcello: Where did you get the manila line?

Brain: Stole it.

Marcello: When you were on a work detail?

Brain: On a work detail.

Marcello: How large was your sardine can that you were using as your mess tin?

Brain: Well, after using my hands, it seemed like that thing was probably 10" x 8", but it wasn't that big (chuckle). It was just the average, oblong-type of sardine can that you get sometimes instead of the little short, square ones. I think it was a mackerel tin, actually.

Marcello: In other words, it was larger than the usual kind of sardine can that we are familiar with in our stores here.

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: How would it compare with any Army mess kit?

Brain: Probably half the size. It would hold half the amount that a regular GI mess tin would hold. Then

later on, after we got to working down on the docks, we got into an area there on one of the docks where they had these "thunder mugs." It was a KLM "thunder mug" out of one of their passenger ships. They were all in crates--brand new--and I procured that and eventually that served as my mess kit.

Marcello: What exactly is a "thunder mug?" You might want to explain that for the record.

Brain: A "thunder mug" is the same type of little mug or jug that we used to put on our beds years ago when the latrines were still outhouses. It is quite common to have them aboard passenger ships prior to World War II and somewhat after. It is a piece of glazed pottery that stood about six inches high, and across the mouth of it was probably eleven inches. It had a large lip on it and then curved in a little bit and then bellied back out again.

Marcello: It was in some ways in the shape of the old cuspidors in a sense, except the opening at the top would have been much larger. So this "thunder mug" served all sorts of purposes for you.

Brain: All sorts of purposes.

Marcello: How long did you keep it?

Brain: I kept it until we got into Burma.

Marcello: And somehow did you lose it up there, or did you trade it?

Brain: No, it got broken. After we left Bicycle Camp, why, we got on a ship and went to Singapore for, I guess, about a week. It wasn't much more than that, I don't think. It might have been longer. Then we got on another ship and went up into Burma, and when we got off the ship at...well, actually, we went from Singapore up into Rangoon, and then we changed ships in Rangoon and got on a smaller one and then went around to Moulmein. Then we off-loaded the ship there. I had a tow sack, and I put things in there that I had accumulated along the line, and they just took this and threw it over the side of the ship, and it landed on this steel barge, and it got broke at this time.

Marcello: Describe the entry of the 131st Field Artillery into Bicycle Camp.

Brain: Well, we were quite elated when they came in because we thought that they had had more contact with the outside world, which they had a little bit more than we did. They were just full of all kinds of news, and, of course, everybody was swapping yarns with the next guy and asking, "Where did you come from? What did you do? How did you get in the situation that you are in today? We were just trying to get ourselves acquainted with them a little bit better.

Like I said, they were very, very gracious to us, and they gave us things that we really needed to sustain ourselves with and, you know, kind of build your own dignity back up, self-respect or whatever you want to call it. They gave us clothing and blankets and things like this.

Marcello: What did you get personally?

Brain: Personally, I got a pair of khaki pants; I got a pair of shoes; I got a khaki shirt; and I got a canteen.

Marcello: Do you recall from whom you got that material?

Brain: I don't remember their names.

Marcello: So it would not have all come from one person? Various people would have given you various things.

Brain: Various people. Just like the blanket, I have no idea what individual donated this blanket, but there was a bunch of blankets, and they came down and said, "If anybody needs a blanket, why, get out here, and there will be one given to you. But as far as a fellow from the 131st Artillery just handing it to me, it was one of their sergeants. They had quite a few blankets there at this time. That is when I got issued a blanket.

Marcello: I gather that this giving was all rather spontaneous. They didn't have to be ordered to do it.

Brain: No, most of the things that you received from different individuals was given on a very gracious basis and within themselves.

Marcello: I understand that this was a unit that was still exercising most of the military formalities and so on.

Brain: They were still very well regimented when they came into the prison camp. As they marched in, they didn't march any better than we did--they were kind of scraggly--but you could see that they were still under the control of their sergeants and their officers. They sure looked good. They looked awfully good coming in there (chuckle).

Marcello: Were they housed quite near where the Houston survivors were?

Brain: Just across from us. I imagine the building we were in and then over to theirs was probably fifteen yards at the most.

Marcello: Describe the first good bath you had. I mention that because awhile ago we were talking about the fuel oil and so on.

Brain: That was Bicycle Camp. Prior to that I had been trying to use sand and this type of thing to get myself cleansed with. But when the 131st Field Artillery came in, we got soap and I didn't know

whether to go hide it, bury it, or whether to eat it (chuckle) or what to do with it. I thought, "Gee, if I take a bath with this, it isn't going to last very long." And I thought, doggone, I wonder if anybody else got any soap and are they going to...." It was like gold to me. I nurtured that soap. I only took one bath a week with that soap.

Marcello: What kind of bathing facilities or shower facilities did they have here at Bicycle Camp?

Brain: They had a thing at the far end of our barracks that they called the "tongs." That was a series of earthenwork made out of concrete and rock and brick that this water was running to, and you would take a ladle and dump it over you and then wash yourself off and then take the ladle and wash the water off of you.

Marcello: I bet that must have felt pretty good didn't it?

Brain: Oh, that was just beautiful! We had a few guys jump right in the area there. Of course, we gave them a little hell about that: "Hey, why get it messed up for everybody else?"

Marcello: Had you been trying to bathe with just plain water before that?

Brain: Just water and sand.

Marcello: It just wouldn't take that oil off?

Brain: Well, it took it off better than the soap did, but, gosh, you sure thought you were a lot cleaner with that soap.

Marcello: What kind of access did you have to these bathing facilities?

Brain: You could go there just about anytime you wanted to.

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

Brain: Very similar to what I explained before. Out between the barracks, or at one end of them, they had this water going through there. It was just a concrete ditch that you just straddled, and this water flowed through it. I think there was five stalls that faced our barracks, and right next to it and on the other side there was five stalls for the other group to use. It seems to me they had another latrine out on the other side of their barracks, but I'm not sure about that.

Marcello: We haven't talked about the guards in Bicycle Camp up until this point, so let's talk about them at this time. You still have Japanese guards, is that correct?

Brain: We had Japanese guards, regular Japanese, up until about the time that the 131st came in. Just right around that time is when we got the Korean noncombattant

guards. The other Jap soldiers had a little red patch with little stars sewn on it. These guys had a round patch that, I'd say, was probably four inches in circumference with a large star in it, and it seemed to pin on them or hook into a button hole on their shirt pocket. These were Koreans.

Marcello: Compare or contrast the Japanese guards, which, I assume, were regular army troops, with the Korean guards that came in.

Brain: Well, the closest I can compare that to would be if you would get some guy who was a murderer here in the United States, and he was released from prison and made governor of the state or mayor of a town, especially somebody with a lot of venom and resentment in them. It was like if you take a very, very ignorant and illiterate person and put him in charge of all of this. They seemed to be a lot more bombastic than the Japanese soldiers. I guess they were trying to show us that they were in command, and we were their slave--we had to obey them. Now that would be, I would say, the Americans' interpretation of them or that of the European mind.

But then if you stop and think about it a little bit, you know, the Koreans have been dominated all their lives--either by the Chinese or the Russians or

the...basically it was the Japanese. Back in those days, they were far more brutal than they are today, and they had just been raised and grown up with this thing hanging over their head, and I will assume that that is why they acted the way they did.

Marcello: Describe their conduct in more specific terms.

Brain: They were quick to slap, hit, kick--very overbearing, very demanding, in comparison to the Japanese. The Japanese were demanding, and their whole system was so far removed from our military system. If a Japanese soldier should get sick and couldn't perform his duties, consequently, he would be put on half-rations and allowed no pay. Our system is not like that. If a fellow is sick, we try to get him well again. He doesn't lose any of his pay; he doesn't lose any of his rations. Even the Japanese at this time...if a Japanese...say that you had a Korean sergeant and a Japanese private would pass him by, well, right away he would come into rigid attention and give a smart salute to him. Even though his rank was higher than the Japanese, it was the status that the Japanese was above him.

Marcello: I understand that physical punishment was more or less standard operating procedure in the Japanese Army, too.

Brain: It was. If a Japanese soldier messed up someway, there

was no such a thing as putting him in the brig for two or three days. Lo and behold, if he was a private, and a first class didn't find out that he had made a mistake--we'll say that the sergeant major found out that this poor private made a mistake--the sergeant major would go to the first sergeant and just beat the living daylights out of him. Then he would turn around, and he would get the corporal, and the corporal would come around and get the private first class. And then this poor "yardbird," maybe the sergeant and the first class soldier and the whole bunch would take a whack at him. That was the way punishment was administered.

Marcello: How much contact did you actually have with the guards here at Bicycle Camp?

Brain: Just as little as possible. I tried to stay away from them all I could. The only time I actually fell into contact with them is when we went on a working detail, and they would happen to be near the guard or something.

The first detail that we went out on was quite hilarious--I thought so at the time. Well, not the first one, but after we were there for a while. The first detail you went out on, why, you would probably have two soldiers up in the truck; you

would have probably two or three on the ground; then when everybody would get into the truck, then there would be probably two more soldiers to get in the truck; and then the others that were stationed there, they would remain there. But as time went on, we would take maybe twenty people in a working party, and you would have your four or five guards. There was always one up in front with the driver. As time went on, we even ended up with some native drivers... and, of course, they all had their rifles at this time, with the bayonet fixed on the end of the rifle. As time went on, why, all they came out with to go on a working detail...you would probably have one soldier and one rifle. As time went on, he eliminated his rifle. He didn't carry his rifle; all he carried was a bayonet and a scabbard on his belt.

This one time it was "Pinky" King--I remember him--and Richard Aust and Bert Page--and I don't remember the rest of the fellows--myself, but, anyway, we would go out, and we just got one guard to go with us. So he is telling us to get in the truck and get on, and so we are all climbing up in the truck. Then he yelled to one of the Marines. He was yelling at him and sticking his rifle up to him. He asked him to take his rifle, and then he stands and holds

his hands up so the rest of the guys at the back end can lift him up in the base of the truck. So at this time, they had started getting more confidence in us, and we were getting more confidence in them. Then it was right after that that we got the Korean guards, and the picture kind of changed a little bit, there was a lot more shoving and slapping around.

Of course, when you came in from a working party--if you had a sack or anything--you were always shook down; and if it was something they recognized, why, it was "Katy, bar the door!" because you might stand out there for two or three days at attention. We had one fellow who was a Marine, and he came back, and he had about four or five bottles of Johnny Walker, red and black label. The Japs used to call him "Mr. Whiskey"--a fellow by the name of McCone, a Marine.

Marcello: Is this the person commonly referred to as "Pack Rat?"

Brain: Yes. He doesn't like the name, so I don't use it (chuckle). Most of the guys had little nicknames; they earned them someway or another. Anyway, why, they kept him out there when he came in, and he had all those darn bottles. These Japs just went "bananas" because they knew that it was stolen from their supplies because they had stole it someplace else. So that was the real first harsh punishment that I saw dealt

out to any of the Americans.

Marcello: What military formalities did you have to observe toward the Japanese or the Korean guards?

Brain: If you were present in a room when any of them walked in, like, in our quarters there and our billets there, you had to...you always had somebody that was supposed to be looking to see when they came in, so you could yell attention. You would yell, "Ki o tsukete!" Everybody would come to attention, eyes forward. You didn't roll your eyes; you just stood there at rigid attention. They would come by and just kind of inspect what was going on--to see if you were clean there or whatever--and if they saw something they didn't like, they would scream and yell for a minute, and you might get kicked in the shins, or you might get hit with a rifle butt--if you were in that area--or you might get slapped around the face.

Thank God, they really didn't know how to hit, because if you take a man and stand him at attention and haul off and hit him, why, you can break his jaw. These people, especially these Koreans, really didn't know how to hit.

Later on, there was some hilarious things over a fellow getting slapped around a little bit--the conduct

of the Korean soldier. He got quite irate with this one fellow, and, of course, he was out in front of the rest of the guards. They were all out sitting in their chairs like they do there, in front of the guard-house. This one Korean guard jumped up in the air, and he tried to kick him with both feet and hit him along-side the head with both hands the same way. They just worked themselves in these frenzies, and they would walk around you and jab you, and pretty soon they would get around in front of you. Anyway, this little guy jumped up, and he went to kick him and hit him, and he fell back and landed on his back side. Well, then, of course, all the rest of these guards just roared. They just thought that was one of the funniest things they had ever seen in their life. Well, then he lost face, and consequently the guy didn't get beat up too bad. If the Korean would have "kept his cool" a little bit more, why, the guy would have probably got roughed up pretty bad. If you could get eye contact with them, if you could stand there and stare at them, they'd move from right to left or walk away from you. If you just tried to make eye contact with them, they wouldn't hit you because most of them would come up and they would hold their head down. They didn't look you right straight in the face. You could stare them down.

Marcello: When did you have to do the bowing?

Brain: If you were walking down a pathway or something, and a Japanese soldier would come along, if you weren't covered, if you didn't have a hat on or something, why, then you had to bow. You had to keep very rigid--your legs together--and just bow right at the waist and come right down to a forty-five-degree angle. That was dangerous because, if you didn't bow low enough...and, of course, they always carried their guns at what we called "high port." If you didn't bow down far enough, why, you were liable to get rifle butt right alongside the head or wherever they could hit you. Otherwise, if you were covered, then you could salute to them.

Marcello: With what frequency would they come through the barracks and harass you in that way?

Brain: In Bicycle Camp I only remember about three times when they came through. They got quite upset about something that somebody had down in one of the cubicles, and they slapped a few of the guys around down there. Of course, it was quite a ways away from me, and when you're standing there at attention, you don't dare look down there to see what is going on. I don't actually recall what happened there that day.

But the funniest thing...we had an inspection at Bicycle Camp at one time, and this is when the order came

out that we were supposed to learn Japanese and learn their commands, such as attention, eyes right, eyes left, and we were all supposed to learn to count. This Japanese soldier comes down there, and he is a sight for sore eyes. He had a pair of boots on that hit him just above the knees, and he could hardly walk in them. Of course, he had his ceremonial saber with him, and that damn thing dragged on the ground. His coat fit him something terrible. His pants, I don't know where he got them, but they looked like they would fit an elephant.

We had this inspection, so we were to count out. We had one officer there who could speak Japanese a little bit, so he says, "All we got to learn to do is count to five," and he says, "As the Jap comes in, why, when you yell for 'eyes right,' and everybody gives 'eyes right.'" Then the first rank was supposed to count off. Well, the guys who had learned to count to five the best, well, we put them up front. Then he said, "As you yell a number, why, then you bring 'eyes forward.'" So we got out there, and we practiced this a little bit, and when we passed five, well, nobody could say six at this time. He just said, "Yell anything."

This Jap was pretty sharp, and he found out that these guys weren't counting; they didn't know how to count

past five. So he got out there, and he stomped up and down, and he got quite irritated because we couldn't count past five. As a matter of fact...now this all went through an interpreter. The interpreter says, "He says we should all be ashamed of ourselves. Here we are, full-grown men, and we can't even count to a hundred in Japanese when a small Japanese child of ten can count to a hundred." So we remained out there for quite awhile, and most of us learned to count at this time because they kept one sergeant there, and after he was satisfied that most of us could count well enough to satisfy him, why, then they let us break formation and go back into our billet.

Marcello: I understand that they were always holding musters and counting.

Brain: Oh, always. They went "by the numbers" all the time, and these guys were mathematical geniuses. You would get all lined up four deep and five deep, and instead of going down there and saying "five, ten, fifteen, twenty," they didn't count that way--they counted noses. Some of them had a little knack of coming along, and they'd just hook their finger on the end a little bit and hit you right on the end of the nose (chuckle). Somebody would say, "Hey, George!" And he would turn around and say, "Huh?" (Chuckle) There went the count, and he'd

have to start all over again (laughter).

After we got up on the railroad, they were always holding a tenko. They were always having a tenko on tools and everything. My God, they would get mixed up on the amount of baskets, the amount of shovels, the amount of hoes, the amount of men. Oh, we spent a lot of time on this.

Marcello: I understand this gets rather irritating after awhile.

Brain: It does. It does. And these Koreans were the worst. Most of the Japanese themselves were pretty good, but these Koreans were mathematical geniuses. As far as myself, I'm putrid at math. But, oh, Lord, it was funny when we got up there working up there on the railroad.

Marcello: Again, when you say these Koreans are mathematical geniuses, you are being facetious, of course.

Brain: Oh, yes (chuckle).

Marcello: I wanted to make that clear for the record. Awhile ago you mentioned, too, that they would work themselves up into a frenzy at times when they were working over one of the prisoners. I have heard several of the prisoners mention that these Japanese guards or Korean guards would work themselves into so much of a frenzy that they would literally froth at the mouth.

Brain: They would. They would slobber--just slobber and drool,

like a mad dog. I don't know whether they were trying to build courage up to haul off and hit you and make bodily contact with you or what they were doing, but just walk up and haul off and hit you, no, there always had to be a little bit of conversation going there before they would actually make contact with you.

Marcello: What forms of unusual punishment did you witness here at Bicycle Camp? Now the hitting with the gun butts and the slapping and that sort of thing, I'm sure, were standard operating procedure. What kind of unusual or especially cruel punishment did you see?

Brain: I didn't detect any cruel punishment other than if you were caught with some stolen article, then you were made to stand at attention for a designated amount of hours or until they were satisfied that you had been there long enough. You might stand out there and pass out, and they would throw a bucket of water on you and revive you and make you stand up there longer. This was about the only time that I was ever aware of any punishment administered in Bicycle Camp. It happened later on where it got more harsh.

Marcello: Let's talk about the food here in Bicycle Camp. Describe what the food was like in terms of both quantity and quality.

Brain: At first the food wasn't much better than it was in

Serang until the Army got there. When I say the "Army," I'm speaking about the 131st Field Artillery. When they got there, then our rations just changed altogether. The British there did have what they called bully beef--we called it corned beef--and we were getting some of this. But we were basically at that time eating out of their kitchen.

Marcello: The British kitchen?

Brain: The British kitchen. When we first got there, basically it was just rice and what vegetables they could manage to get there. They didn't really do justice to the food. The British don't really have the best cooks. If they can't boil it, they can't cook it.

Marcello: Why was it that the food changed when the 131st Field Artillery came in?

Brain: Well, they came in there, and they had money. They were allowed to go outside and purchase goods. But getting back to this bully beef, why, say, maybe each guy was issued a can of bully beef or this corned beef. We knew that once it was opened you had to devour it right then and there. If you didn't, the flies would get it, or it would go bad on you because of the no refrigeration. So maybe four or five of us, in our two meals that we were getting a day, we would ration

this can of corned beef out to last the five of us for our two meals. We would get a little bit for breakfast and a little bit in the evening. So then that would keep you going for a few days and make for a little bit more gracious-type of eating, if you want to call it that (chuckle).

Then when the 131st got there, they had quite a bit of canned stuff with them. They had the regular kitchen rations and stuff, and they would intermingle that with what the Japanese were giving them, so the food we got out of the cookhouse was far superior to what the British were eating.

Marcello: What were some of the extras that you were able to get once the 131st Field Artillery came in?

Brain: Oh, gosh, we got meat, we got sweet milk, we got coffee, we got tea, we got sugar and that was just something we dreamed about, but thought we would never get, until these boys got there.

Marcello: But rice was still the basic food.

Brain: Rice was the mainstay.

Marcello: How much would you get when you went through the chow line?

Brain: You would get a pint of rice, a pint of steamed rice.

Marcello: Three times a day?

Brain: No, twice a day. I guess if you stayed in camp, they

would have...they had something that they gave out for the noon meal there, but I don't remember what it was. But basically, your breakfast meal and the evening meal was the main meals.

Marcello: Describe how the procedure would work, that is, how you received your food.

Brain: It was ladled out to you. You would form a line or a "queue" like the Australians did. They always called a line a "queue." We started calling it a "queue," too. So you would take your utensils, and you would go by. You would try to be first because most of the lumps of meat was up in the top, and you got a little bit more grease in your food. I think salt, sugar, and grease were the things we wanted the most.

Marcello: Why was that?

Brain: Because of the type of diet that we were constantly on.

Marcello: Also, you were looking for anything that would give it a little flavor.

Brain: That's right, give it a little bit better flavor. You would just line up, and you would go through, and first you would get your rice to put in your mess there and then the soup or stew, and then maybe, if we were lucky enough, we might have a little piece of bread, or you might have a little, tiny loaf of bread, and in your cup you would have coffee. I will never forget the first

time they broke out there,..one evening they gave us a special deal--the Army did--and we had hot chocolate that night, and, oh, my Lord, that was just...I think it took me four hours to drink it (laughter). When you get something like that, you just savored it. "Man, I want this to last forever!"

Marcello: What chances were there to get seconds?

Brain: There wasn't much of a chance. At first there was quite a bit of seconds, but then they got down and figured... they increased the ration a little bit, so then there wasn't any seconds. For maybe ten guys at the most there would be enough for seconds.

Marcello: Is it not true that all sorts of sanitary precautions were taken even when you went through the chow line?

Brain: Oh, yes, yes. They would have a big bucket there with water boiling in it, and before you got your rations, you dipped your mess gear down in this boiling water and then go ahead and get your rations. This was because of the flies and different bugs they had crawling around that you just couldn't cope with.

Marcello: What was the quality of the rice like here at Bicycle Camp?

Brain: Well, the first bunch of rice we got there, the quality was...I would assume that it was swept up off the warehouse floors and bagged and sent to us

because it was amazing what you would do the first time you got this rice. I was used to eating rice; I have been more of a rice man then I have a potato and bread man. You would look at this rice and start picking out things in the rice. If it wasn't white, you had to pick it out. Then you would end up with probably one-third of your ration, so finally you got to the point where you would just shut your eyes and eat it. There was rat dung in it; there was sticks and pieces of straw. So you just went ahead and ate it.

Marcello: Would I be safe in saying that probably more fights broke out over food than anything else--somebody perhaps trying to horn in on the chow line?

Brain: I would say that probably 99 percent of all fights that broke out in prison camp were based on groceries--most of them that I got acquainted with. Somebody was always saying, "Well, I bought this and I said I would share it with you, and you took a bigger bite" and then it was, "You S.O.B.," and then that's all it took. Tempers got pretty short there, too. They weren't too bad at Bicycle Camp. This happened later on.

Marcello: I have a feeling that there was a lot of pressure on the cooks.

Brain: They got abused something terrible later on.

Marcello: I'm sure that everybody was watching those cooks like a

hawk to see if they were gaining any weight or how they were ladling out the food.

Brain: Why, hell, you know the cooks were always holding something back. There was no doubt in my mind that they did (laughter). I didn't even have to think twice about that, and I knew that they took bigger rations than they were passing out, which is kind of the unwritten law. Oh, yes, they were abused something terrible. I would assume that they probably took a little bit bigger chunk of meat than they were actually handing out there in the stew. But damn it, hell, it was under their custody and control. But then, in another sense, maybe we were getting something they weren't getting, too. I'm not excluding myself when I said they were abused and accused.

Marcello: Generally speaking, were you getting enough food here at Bicycle Camp?

Brain: Not adequately. And, of course, the type of diet that we were on back aboard ship, that thing is cut, and then you're put on a completely different type of diet. I imagine it probably took our systems probably six months to get used to this new diet--before our system could work around and learn how to refine it and get the nutrition out of it that was there, the little bit that was there.

Marcello: Let's shift topics here and talk a little bit about the work details. Describe how the work detail system would work. How was it set up, in other words?

Brain: The officers there in Bicycle Camp kind of had it set up so that everybody had a chance to get out and go on a work detail. I was pretty fortunate there. There was few days after the regimen got going that I stayed in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: You wanted to get out?

Brain: I wanted to get out.

Marcello: Why was that?

Brain: Because it was a chance to procure things, make contacts, try to get information. If there was a chance of escaping, was it possible? Could you escape? Another thing, too, the Dutch women on the island of Java...I'm talking about the Netherlands Dutch, the white Dutch. They were pretty gutty lot of people. They would come up to you and maybe give you a pack of cigarettes or give you a little piece of newspapaper with a note on how the war was going and what was taking place and this type of thing. Oh, the Japs would just beat the hell out of them, but they would be back the next day. The whole thing of it was that they were using their own food to give to us. They would get us to eat canned

meats; they would even give you money--just anything they felt would help you...pipe tobacco, cigarette papers, just about anything you can imagine. They were trying to make it a little bit easier on us. My God, they could see the condition we were in.

But the Dutch men themselves, some of them Dutch officers, they had a hell of a lot of money, they had a hell of a lot of groceries, they had access to just about anything they wanted. We were paying higher prices for things we were buying than the Dutch were. You could give them some money, and, yes, they would take the money, but, hell, kiss it goodbye. You'd would never get anything in return. Now that was my experience.

Marcello: How difficult or easy was the work on these details?

Brain: The longshoreman work was pretty hard.

Marcello: What kind of work might that be?

Brain: Well, you would have to wrestle bales and crates of things, and the Japs weren't too great on using leverage at this time. Everything was moved by brute force. Some of the working details were real easy, but others were...the heavier the commodity that you were fooling with, why, the harder the work was.

But you could get compensated by your own conduct out there. The best deal would be to possibly get down

at the docks and work aboard ship. The sailors aboard these freighters that we would be loading were free with their cigarettes. Sake would be available. You would eat out of their kitchen, which was foreign to a lot of the fellows; they didn't know what different stuff was. Like I say, I was fortunate enough that I had been around this type of thing before, and I was somewhat acquainted with it, so I didn't renege too much on anything that was given to me to eat. So that was the detail that I, myself, would always try for--to get a job working aboard the ship, working in the hull of the ship.

Marcello: Also, would you try and get on a detail with a particular guard? After awhile, I'm sure that you knew who the good guards were and who the bad ones were.

Brain: Oh, yes, you always hoped to get with a guard that was sort of lackadaisical, who didn't care what you did more or less--but just so long as you showed a certain amount of progress. Then you had the other Jap guard that was just rather a slave driver type of thing: "Well, we only did so much yesterday, so let's see if we can double it today." That kind was always striving to do a little bit better. I don't know whether it was to get another star on him or what it was, but it was just his nature to be this way.

Marcello: Did you ever bring anything back into camp, that is, things that you had stolen?

Brain: Anything I figured that I could bring back in that might look foreign to them and that they didn't think it was stolen from them.

Marcello: How would you go about doing this?

Brain: You would try to hide it any way you could. You would tie it to your leg, let it hang down your leg. If the thing was soft enough, you'd try to tie it around you and try to cover it up with a jacket or shirt. If it was something that was somewhat bulky, maybe there was some way you could tie it onto the back of you and let your coat hang over the back of it, like you had a bustle or something. That is the way I got the "thunder mug" in. I had it tied on a piece of rope around my waist. I took my singlet off and just kind of tied it around my waist and kind of let it hang down. I tried to make my buttocks look as small as I could, so I didn't look like I was too deformed (chuckle). Then, too, the guards would come back into camp, and some of them would really shake you down hard. If you had a pocketful of nails, they would take the nails away from you or look at them and say, "Are they good nails?" You'd say, "Yeah." Then he'd get four

or five of these nails and jab you with them. "Ah, that's good." And this type of thing. So you had to be careful about the amount of bulk you brought in. It was pretty hard to steal something and stash it out there, hoping to go there the next day, because maybe you wouldn't and maybe you would. So you would just bring a little bit at a time in.

Marcello: I understand the crotch was always a favorite hiding place.

Brain: Beautiful place! Beautiful place! Another thing was, if you could get yourself a piece of surgical rubber or something, why, man, you could get all kinds of pills or anything and insert it in this rubber and tie it in a knot and then poke it up your rectum and bring it in this way, which wasn't detectable. A lot of times, if something was worthwhile, say, like, maybe you had a chance to procure a wristwatch, you would stick it in the cheek of your mouth and hide the band someplace else. You learn all types of things.

One Australian had some pills. I don't remember what they were. But, anyway, he had about five of them. The best that I can remember, they were some kind of narcotic. He stuck them up his nose, and when he came into camp, somebody came along and hit him on the back, and he had a hell of a time. He got that

pill lodged in his nose.

Marcello: What did you do in your spare time?

Brain: Scrounged! You'd just roam around and see what wasn't nailed down, and if it was nailed down, "Well, what can I get to unfasten it?"

Marcello: What were some of the things that you were accumulating there in Bicycle Camp?

Brain: Nails, wire, buttons, pieces of string, just anything you could get your hands on. Broken pieces of mirror, broken pieces of glass, just anything that you thought you might be able to use--just anything. We all became kind of pack rats in a way--pieces of bone or anything that you thought that maybe at a later date you could use, or maybe if you needed it right then and there, "I know what I'm going to do with that." You can take a piece of glass, like, out of a bottle, and you can take that and rub that on a rock, and you can put an edge on that that you can shave with. It is kind of tedious, a little dangerous, but it gets the job done.

Marcello: I have heard several of the people talk about a car that had evidently been abandoned there in Bicycle Camp, and I've heard them mention that before they left there, virtually every bit of that car had been stripped. Do you recall that?

Brain: (Chuckle) I remember the car being over there. By the

time I got my chance to get over there and see what I could rip off of it, there wasn't anything left. There was just a frame, and the frame and the two arms that held the front bumper up, or the front fender, was there. Part of the engine was there. I thought, "Now, let's see. What is on that thing that I can go over there and get." I went over there, and I looked at it, and I thought, "Well, I don't see anything there. It looks like it's going to be too much work to get that off." I got to thinking, and I thought, "Well, maybe I can go back and get those two arms that hold that fender up." I went over there the next afternoon, and it was gone. A week later, the frame wasn't even there. I don't know how these people tore this stuff off the way they did, and as fast. I think that car was disintegrated in a week-and-a-half (chuckle). We had nobody that was a "Hulk"in the organization that could go up and grab a door and jerk it off. They had to pick and work at it.

Marcello: I understand that somebody had cut a perfect frying pan out of one of the doors. Do you recall that?

Brain: Well, I don't know whether it was a door or the hood, but somebody got a hammer or a rock or something, and they beat a frying pan out of that thing--cut it out. I didn't see too many hacksaw blades around. There

were a few around, but if anybody had one, you had to be a exceptionally good friend for him to loan it to you.

Marcello: What did you talk about when you sat around in your bull sessions?

Brain: Food.

Marcello: That had already become the number one topic of conversation.

Brain: Always. We had one guy that just went around from guy to guy, and he would ask them--a fellow by the name of Demoen. I think he was a cook striker or baker striker. This fellow would go around, and he would ask people, "Now what is your favorite meal? What part of a meal is your favorite? Then he would want the full recipe. For a while he went around there for a while for cakes. Then he went around for pies. That pie deal was hilarious, and we still kick that around today. The guy was a little bit naive, really, in a way. He would sit around, and he would tell you all of his recipes--all different kinds of pie recipes he had gotten--and somebody would say, "Well, Demoen, have you ever eaten a dingleberry pie?" (chuckle) Of course, he was gullible. "No, how is that made?" Well, this joker went into a big detail about how you have got to get...he says, "I

know you have to have a cup-and-a-half of dingle-berries," and then it went on from there. So when a bunch of us get around together even today, we kick it around a little bit (chuckle).

So, you see, there was still humor there. That's why I brought this up. But some way, somehow, there was always somebody there that was ready to come out with a joke or a little prank of some kind to kind of get the laughs and the chuckles going.

Marcello: I understand the Japanese found this hard to understand.

Brain: Oh, they couldn't understand at all; they were just amazed. It was beyond the scope of their imagination. They're very sober. What they seemed to get their chuckles, their laughs, out of the most was something drastic happening to someone. Maybe a guy would be whittling a stick, and he would reach down and cut a chunk out of his finger. Well, to them that was just hilarious. "Look at the dummy! He don't know how to use a knife!" They kind of related that...you can put a correlation in the Polish jokes or the ethnic jokes that we pull here today.

Marcello: It is also not true that they probably felt that you had humiliated yourselves by surrendering or being captured, whatever the case, and you really had no right to be laughing? The good Japanese soldier would

not have been taken prisoner.

Brain: Oh, yes, they go for this banzai thing and hara-kiri type of thing, and it is instilled in them. Well, what you said there is very, very true. You just don't allow yourself to be captured, and if you do, well, then you're lower than a dog. A dog has got more respect, or should be getting more respect, than you. This seemed to baffle them--our fortitude of kind of sticking together and hanging together and growing ahead. You're not a one to one with them, and it was something they just couldn't figure out.

Marcello: I guess, as a result of your spare time and the bull sessions, you pretty soon knew everything there was to know about everybody else.

Brain: Just about. You could do a lot of deep soul-searching there, and it was amazing...there was a lot of people there that were captured that were very, very intelligent people. Some of the people there, especially in the English organizations, were, say, history teachers; some of them had been explorers, white hunters. But with a lot of your free hours, you would have lectures, and you could go, and some guy would...this one thing I went to, the guy was a mathematician, and he took you step-by-step, and he took you through the additional system for showing you that two and two is not four.

It is only three-and-a-quarter, and if you don't believe it that way, he would erase it off the black board, and he would work it the other way.

Marcello: What did you do for entertainment here?

Brain: Well, just like I said, we had people with a lot of talents. There was people that were musicians and magicians; we had people that were lecturers; we had people that played on a legitimate stage; we had people that had managed this type of thing, and they could always get little groups together and put on little skits, which was entertaining. The Japanese didn't seem to confiscate the musical instruments people had. Maybe a guy would have a violin; maybe another guy would have a banjo; somebody, a guitar, piccolos, accordions. The Japanese enjoyed this as much as we did. It's strange, you know, but most tribes of people, with anything that's musical, they will sit down and tolerate it, listen to it, anyway. Then after that's over, it's a different ballgame; they're your guards again, and you toe the mark--no more happy hours, so to speak.

Marcello: Do you recall the stage shows that were put on?

Brain: I recall two stage shows that were put on there in Bicycle Camp. The Dutch Army had a band that they used to practice periodically, and we used to go over

and sit down and listen to it. But there was a couple of stage plays put on. We had one Marine, a fellow by the name of Freddy Quick, who back in the early 1940's, latter 1930's...there used to be a girl that they called Wee Bonnie Baker, and this Fred Quick, to the best of my recollection, could sound just like her, Of course, if I heard her and then heard Freddy immediately, why, you could probably... just anything to just kind of make you hang onto what you had back home.

Marcello: I understand the English were especially good a putting on stage shows.

Brain: Yes, they were quite clever. The English were quite good at putting on something on "in drag." They were great for impersonating women, and they came out with some pretty good stuff. Of course, their jest was a little bit hard for a lot of us to understand, but if they would bring it off corrolating it to something that we did understand, by then we could see the jest in it. They did quite well with the things that were available. It was amazing where some of the stuff came from.

Marcello: How much talk was there about possible escape while you were in Bicycle Camp?

Brain: There was a lot of talk about it, but nothing ever

would come up that could actually be developed. Especially the Navy personnel, we knew what type of position we were in, and if you did escape, where would you go? I had thought about it, not so much in Java but after we got to Burma. I contemplated it several times, but then you stop and really look at reality, and you think, "Well, what chance do I have?"

Marcello: Why didn't you have a chance?

Brain: The opportunity was there fully to escape, but because of the situation there and my physical stature, color of my eyes, I mean, there's no blue-eyed Burmese, no light-skinned Burmese. I knew that I could get bark off of a tree, boil it, get tea and dye my skin. It would take awhile to do this, but then the next thing would be, "Where do I get my rations?" You can't carry enough rice to go from where we were to get over to the British lines. You had to cross two major rivers, if you went straight across; if you went another way, then it would be more difficult.

Marcello: Really, how loyal were the natives?

Brain: A few of them were quite loyal. Others weren't. Like I say, in Java there, this communist influence was there, and they thought that they could achieve what

they wanted to through the Japanese.

Marcello: Here again, when you talk about the communist influence, basically you are talking about their wanting their independence from the Dutch, isn't that correct?

Brain: That's correct.

Marcello: On July 4, 1942, the Japanese attempted to force all the prisoners to sign a non-escape pledge or a loyality oath or whatever you wish to call it. Do you recall that incident?

Brain: I didn't recall a date, but I remember us signing a pledge.

Marcello: What details do you remember from that?

Brain: I remember some of our people said, "Well, hell, go ahead and sign it!" It don't make a darn because you are signing under duress!"

Marcello: What was your inital reaction? Not to sign it?

Brain: I thought, "Hell, I'll sign anything they want me to, but that isn't going to make it so because I have no alliance with them."

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever take any steps to force people to sign it?

Brain: I was never given any Japanese propaganda until we got into Burma, and there was one incident up there where they did bring some film in, and they showed us

the bombing of Japan. Then a few days later, on one of the details I was on, they gave us a little extra time off--it was raining quite hard--and there was a Japanese person who came up there, and he could speak a little bit of English. I never did have the feeling he was educated here in the United States; I figured he had learned it here in Japan from the way he sounded. His words...he spoke what words he knew very proper, right out of the textbook type of thing, and he got quite fanatic about us joining the Japanese Army, signing ourselves over to support the Japanese Army, become a Japanese citizen. He said, "As soon as you do, you will be relieved of this torturous work that you are doing. You won't be in bondage. You will be liberated to be as free as the Japanese soldier is." Well I think I understood freedom better than he did, and if that was freedom, I didn't want no part of it. But I never wavered. I used to think, "My God, it isn't going to be like this forever! There is going to be a halt to it. In the end we've got to win. But just how soon, I wish they would hurry up!"

Marcello: Back in Bicycle Camp, how long did you think you were going to be a prisoner?

Brain: Six months. I think everybody had this feeling.

Ol' "Bandy" always said "home by Christmas," and my feeling was that we would be out of here before then. If we're not, well we would be home by New Year's, anyway. There was just no doubt in my mind. Of course, we didn't realize--we didn't know--just how hard Pearl Harbor had gotten hit. We didn't know we were just about annihilated there.

Marcello: What kind of news did you receive from the outside?

Brain: In Bicycle Camp, very, very little.

Marcello: Were there any makeshift radios ever in operation or anything of that nature?

Brain: Oh, yes, the Australians had...I don't think any of the Americans had anything like that. Well, they might have had a radio in Bicycle Camp. Yes, they did because I remember we had a big shakedown. Them Japs came in there just madder than all get-out, and they climbed up in the rafters in that building and looked all over for radios because they just knew we had one. So I guess...yes, they did have a radio in there, come to think about it, because we used to get a little smattering of news.

Marcello: Had you actually ever seen the radio, though?

Brain: I'd never seen it.

Marcello: In other words, probably just a few people knew where it was and who had it, and news would be spread by

word-of-mouth.

Brain: That's right. Now I did see a radio after we got up into Burma. There was a fellow who had a cork leg or a wooden leg that they had carved for him. He had his leg amputated just above the knee, and he did have a radio in this cast or this peg leg he had.

Marcello: Is there anything else relative to Bicycle Camp that stands out in your mind that we need to talk about?

Brain: Well, it just seemed like a pretty good camp.

Marcello: Comparatively speaking?

Brain: What went on prior to that, I thought, "Well, yeah, I can probably manage to keep my sanity and probably keep up my good health in here if they kept us here for duration of the war."

Marcello: In early October, 1942, they started to move people out of Bicycle Camp. From our pre-interview conferences, you mentioned that you were a member of the so-called Fitzsimmons group, which was one of the first contingents to leave.

Brain: That's correct.

Marcello: Describe how you got the word and what your reaction was when you found out that you would be leaving.

Brain: They took the roster, and they started picking names out of this roster to be transferred out of Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Were your officers doing this, or the Japanese?

Brain: Our officers received word that they wanted "X" amount of people, and then our officers chose us. I happened to be in the group...at the time I was chosen, I was not aware of where we were going.

I went with mixed emotions. I thought, "Well, are we going to go someplace better than Bicycle Camp, or is it going to be worse?" I still had thoughts of Serang Theater and Serang Jail.

Then we got the word that we were going to Singapore, and I thought, "Well, gee, this ought to be a lot better, going to Singapore. Conditions should be better there than they are here." Having been to Singapore several times in my youth, I thought, "This is going to be beautiful." We got down on the boats...they came and picked us up and counted us all out to be sure that we weren't taking too much with us, and then we were given some rations to take with us.

Marcello: Who gave you these rations?

Brain: It came from the 131st Field Artillery. There was cans of beef stew, and...I forget. But there was maybe two or three guys assigned to a can of this and whatever. So we got our buddy system set up again, and they loaded us up in trucks out of Bicycle Camp. I didn't fully understand we going to Burma until I

got to Singapore. So they put us on this troop transport that was just unbelieveable, the conditions that we traveled in.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of that ship? Was it the Dai Nichi Maru?

Brain: No. There was two ships that left at the same time, and I don't know if there were people on this other ship. I seem to have an idea that there was, but I don't remember the name of either one of the ships.

Marcello: These left from where? Tandjong Priok?

Brain: They left from Tandjong Priok, and we headed to Singapore.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like aboard that ship.

Brain: Chaotic. They put us down in these holds. I don't know...they had hauled grain or some darn thing in it, and rice. Down in this very bottom hold...I don't know...I was one of the first groups to go aboard, and, of course, we had to immediately go to the very bottom. There was sacks of grain and stuff down there, that had gotten damp and started to rot. It was hot down there, damp, stinking. There was three tiers, three deck levels, in this hold, and between each deck level they had wooden bunks made in there, and each guy had probably a width of two feet wide, I would say, at the most and probably a length there of roughly five feet.

Marcello: Now when you say each person had a bunk, these were simply platforms, were they not?

Brain: They were platforms that were put in between the decks, and then he probably had...well, the average guy just could get on his hands and knees and crawl up into these bunks--very little space. Now these were on the upper levels, but we were down at the bottom where the ship starts to come in toward the keel. There was a little bit of water down in there. Over at one side they had a bunch of bunks, but most of us slept on the sacks or just laid around where we could down there.

Along about this time people were starting to feel ill. A few people had picked up on dysentery, and the sanitation conditions down there were just horrible. After we went on the ship, it seems to me it took about three days to get to Singapore. This was the very first of October, as I remember correctly, when we left.

Marcello: It seems to me it was October 7th when you left, and you got there around the 11th, so that would more or less correspond with what you mentioned. How were you fed while you were aboard that ship?

Brain: They would hand down buckets of rice to us. The first day we were fed aboard there, when the first bucket of

rice was sent down, everybody got...well, not everybody. A portion of the guys got a pretty good ration of rice, and we thought there would be another bucket coming down. But we come to find out there wasn't any; that was it. It would end up that you would probably get maybe a tablespoon-and-a-half of rice, was all. That would be the part that would have had to have been doled out for everybody to receive rice. There was some complaints made. The next day we received the same amount of rice, so we took precautions to see that everybody got the same amount.

Marcello: How were you served this rice? Would you go through a line again?

Brain: Yes, there would be a guy designated with a measuring cup, and he was just to scoop so much out for everybody. Of course, we had some of this canned rations, so we supplemented that with the rice, the cold stew, which helped considerably.

Marcello: You mentioned that it was hot down there.

Brain: It was muggy. The humidity down there was just stifling.

Marcello: Was it hard to breath?

Brain: Very hard to breath. Then, of course, with this pungent odor, this grain and rice down in there in the process of rotting, it put off sort of a gas. I

think they call it a methane gas.

Marcello: Were you in the dark, so to speak?

Brain: There was one light bulb hanging at each level, that they dropped down on a cord, down in the hold. We had one, and it was probably equivalent to a seventy-five-watt light bulb, and it hung right in the middle of our area. Back in the corners you couldn't see a thing. It was totally dark back in there.

A few of the boys complained about rats being in the area, but I didn't come in contact with any of them. I didn't see them, but it was common knowledge that on most of these type of freighters, there were rodents there. So you suspected it, but I didn't see any. Some of the boys said they did.

The third or fourth day before we arrived at Singapore, we did get an extra ration of rice one evening there, and it seems to me that the following morning we got into Singapore. It was in the daylight hours--it wasn't dark--when we disembarked.

Marcello: While you were aboard that ship, what did you do in terms of latrines?

Brain: They had a latrine up on the topside that was jury-rigged timbers mounted over the side of the ship, and you could go into this area to relieve yourself over the side of the ship. Like I say, we had a few people that

were developing diarrhea at this time, and there was a bucket that was utilized, and it would be hoisted up on a rope by other prisoners. We had no problem with the latrine bucket at this time, going from Java to Singapore.

When we got to Singapore, we got unloaded and put on trucks and went through the town--a portion of the town of Singapore--and I was just appalled at the damage that was done there. I couldn't believe it. Then, of course, as most people know, Singapore itself is on an island, and we went around on the eastern northerly side to an area called the Changi Barracks, the Changi area, and that is an army installation. The area we went to is where they kept native troops, and the quarters were very similar to what we had in Java--the same configuration type of things--concrete floors and very poor grade of plaster for walling, all open, no windows. On the main road going to this area, we went by the Changi Prison, which became quite famous later on, and we stopped there for a few moments. Nobody got out.

Marcello: You were in trucks?

Brain: We were in trucks at this time. My first reaction was, "Good Lord, we're not going to go in there! I hope not!" Basically, it was a prison the British had built

for the natives. It was old. I had been acquainted with the type of prisons the English had built in their colonies all through the Near East, Far East, and Asia, and I felt real low about that time. Then all of the sudden, why, with a little bit of conversation among the Japanese officers that were there, the trucks moved out, and we went on down the road quite a way and kind of come to a staging area, it looked like. We were off-loaded, and there was some carts and some rickshaw-type of carts, and we unloaded everything off the trucks and put it on these carts. I guess it must have been the best part of a mile-and-a-half, two miles, that we had to push and pull these carts with all the gear on it. We were designated some buildings on the side of a hill up from the roadway where we were to be billeted. Directly across the roadway, about a quarter of a mile down, there was quite a big installation. There was buildings down there that housed mostly Japanese guards.

Marcello: Now Changi also had large numbers of British prisoners, did it not?

Brain: Most of the British force were intact in Changi. They seemed to have left their commanding officer there. I don't know what he was--a Brigadier General Wavell or something like that. I don't know whether I am

pronouncing it right, but he was in charge there, and he seemed pretty well to be running this old Changi fort--this old British installation. Of course, he got orders from the Japanese for how many people they needed for different working parties in the area, and he was given a certain amount of details to do within Changi. But it was all run by the typical British officer with his swagger stick and his ribbons and his posh British mannerisms.

Marcello: What kind of relationship developed here at Changi between the Americans and the British?

Brain: I didn't develop any relationships with any of them, myself, personally. I did not think they were good people; however, when I say the British, a lot of people get confused. They think of the troops from India, the Australians, the New Zealanders, and the people from Britain Proper, and the Scottish as all British troops. I single those people out, and I refer to a Scotchman that is in the British Army as a Scotch trooper and the Australians as Australians and New Zealanders. The actual British soldier himself, as an individual, there are some fine people there, but as a group I had just as soon not be involved with them, and especially their officers because of the caste system that they had developed.

Marcello: Did this first dislike develop here at Changi? Is this where it really began?

Brain: No, sir, I think it began when I was six or seven years old, being amongst the people, and later on in life being involved with them over in foreign countries.

Marcello: How long were you at Changi altogether?

Brain: To my recollection, I was there two weeks.

Marcello: Did you do anything while you were there in terms of work details or anything of that nature?

Brain: Yes, sir, we tried to clean up those barracks that they had put us in. They were more like horse stalls with a passageway to one end of the building, but I assume they must have had some type of Malaysian troops in there because this is where we first contacted body lice and bedbugs.

Marcello: Do you want to describe this situation?

Brain: Well, once you get these lice attached to your clothing, we had no means of completely destroying them. The live ones we could destroy, but the eggs and this type of thing...we just didn't have the facilities to destroy them, so you were constantly trying to rid yourself of these animals that lived in your clothing and in your hair. This is where I finally shaved all the hair off of me that I possibly could outside of

my eyebrows. Of course the bedbugs got...we had these little rolled mattings. I forgot where we got them--if they were issued to us or whether we had stolen them--but, anyway, we had them in our possession. I had to get rid of mine because it just got so full of bedbugs. They got so interwoven in this woven matting, bamboo stuff, that the only way you can get rid of them is to burn it. So when we left there, I just left mine there; I didn't take it with me in hopes I would get one at a later date.

My detail area...you asked me if I did any labor there. Yes, I dug latrines for the British.

Marcello: They seemed to want everybody to know that they were running that camp.

Brain: There was no two ways about it. Our officers were informed right away that they fell right under the command of the British, that they were A-1 there, and that what they said was law regardless of what the Japanese said. If our officers wanted to talk to the Japanese or complain about anything, they had to go through the proper chain of command--through the British command that was there. Then if they felt that it warranted taking it up with the British, why, then they would do so.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you had a low regard

for British soldiers as a group. Could you elaborate on that? What was it about the British soldier that you found to your dislike?

Brain: As a group they seemed quite arrogant toward the natives in whatever country they happened to be stationed in. They felt extremely above them, and any of these natives were to be treated as a serf or a slave--commandeer them for anything that they felt they could get away with. They were anything but clean. They lacked the sanitary behavior or education or whatever you want to call it. They just weren't quite as desirable sanitation-wise as even some of the natives.

Marcello: From everything that I gather, this lack of sanitation took its toll later on among the British. I think studies have shown that probably greater percentages of British soldiers died in this ordeal than those of any other nationality.

Brain: With all confidence, I would say that this was probably one of their biggest downfalls through the whole ordeal becoming prisoners.

Marcello: I think there is no question, as you look back upon yourself, that sanitation and hygiene and that sort of thing were going to be essential to your survival.

Brain: It had to be. It was one of the essentials. You

didn't get to take a bath as often as you could, and regardless of whether you had soap or not, you would use something to try to rub your skin clean--sand or a piece of sandstone or something of that nature.

Marcello: Like you mentioned awhile ago, you weren't there too long?

Brain: I never developed any roots there or any compadreship with anybody outside of the immediate group I was with.

Marcello: Describe what happened at this point, that is,your departure from Singapore.

Brain: One morning there was a bunch of trucks that came down there, and they said that all Americans were going to be transferred, that we were going to go on a boat. That is when we got the word that definitely that we were headed for Burma. Immediately, I thought, "My God, where in the hell in Burma are we going?" My mind just...first, I thought,we were going to go up in the northern part of Burma and work in the mines. That was the first thing that cropped through me. Then I thought; "Well, are they going to take us up in the southern part of Burma where it narrows down into Malaya, and are we going to be in the rubber plantations doing that type of work?" My mind just

wandered all over, I thought, "Well, maybe we are going to go up to the Irrawaddy Valley and work in the oil fields up there." Then I got to thinking, "We really don't have any technicians who actually have the expertise to work in an oil field."

My mind just wondered about what type of work we were going to have, and finally there was whispers around that we were going to work on a railroad. I thought, "My God, where on a railroad are we going to work? Are we just going to maintain it or what?" I wasn't privy to getting first class information. It was all hearsay.

Marcello: From your previous stay there in Burma, I gather that you had never heard of the British attempts to build that railroad.

Brain: I was aware of it. But when you are on a real lean diet, your mind don't seem to function the best. After we got working on the railroad, then things started to click back, and we even ran across some of the old survey markings for the old right-of-way. They kept pretty close to it there for quite a while. Anyway, loaded us aboard a bunch of trucks this one morning, and we left Changi and went down to the docks and got loaded on a pretty good-sized Japanese freighter. It was about four or five freighters, pretty good-sized

ones, tied up to the dock and a couple of smaller ones. If I remember correctly there was four of them. One, just from the looks of it, looked like it was European-made. I have no idea what it was. I never did take the time to learn or pay any attention, but it had kind of an old design.

Anyway, we got aboard these transports, freighters, and the conditions there were just as bad as they were coming from Java to Singapore on the first run. Then after we got all aboard, I ended up down in the bottom hold again for some darn reason, but that's where I was with a few people. Our rationing was a little bit more scheduled then it was coming from Java to Singapore. The quantity and the quality was not improved at all. We did get a little bit more.

Marcello: But you are still getting basically nothing but rice?

Brain: We are still getting basically nothing but rice.

Marcello: When you say it was lowered down in buckets, as you mentioned previously, what kind of a bucket are we talking about?

Brain: These are wooden buckets. The bucket is probably twelve inches across the top, and the bottom is probably nine to ten inches, and it is probably a foot-and-a-half deep.

Marcello: So we are talking about something that is very similar

to one of our common scrub buckets?

Brain: That's right--very similar, very similar.

Marcello: And this rice that would be in this bucket would be for how many people?

Brain: Well, I think down there in that bottom area where we were, there was probably someplace between thirty-five and forty of us down there. Then, of course, we had a few more sick people with us at this time. Some of the boys seemed to get a little bit sicker there in Singapore because the British weren't too willing to share some of their rations that they had there. They all looked quite well; they didn't look like any of them had suffered from malnutrition or anything. Of course, the British "Tommy" didn't eat to well, anyway. His basic ration was hardtack and corned beef or salted biscuits and corned beef. But, anyway, we didn't eat too well. Everything was more or less makeshift when we first got to Singapore, so a few of the boys started to slip a little bit.

We got on these boats, and we went to Rangoon. We went up the estuaries on the Irrawaddy River up to Rangoon. That's back up in there about forty miles. I was up at the railing with a few people when we pulled into Rangoon, and there was a lot of speculation about where we were and what this town was. I mentioned to a

couple of guys right next to us, I said, "Hell, I know where we are now. This is Rangoon, Burma." He made some remark, "Well, you're a smart ass sailor! You don't know where we are!" and blah, blah, blah. So I just let it go at that; I didn't want to push the issue.

We got transferred off of this boat and put on a smaller one, and I don't know if this smaller boat had been in our convey or not, but, anyway, they had it unloaded. There wasn't too much stuff on it. Then they really packed us in here. If my memory serves me correctly, it took us about...well, it took us all that afternoon and the whole following day, and it was just about dusk when we finally did get into Moulmein.

Marcello: In other words, they put the same number of troops on a smaller vessel?

Brain: On a smaller vessel. I would probably say there wasn't nothing but just human cargo on this thing.

Marcello: Incidentally, what were your thoughts or feelings about going to Burma? Earlier you mentioned that you were wondering where you would go in Burma.

Brain: I thought that if we could get into Burma, then I was going to be in a far better position than staying in Java or Singapore.

Marcello: This might be a edge for you?

Brain: This was my edge. When we got to Moulmein, I wasn't quite sure whether this was Moulmein or not. But when we off-loaded and were put up into this prison that had been built in the early 1700's, maybe the very first part of the 1800's, it was quite dilapidated. They had a lot of Burmese in here that they had in cells. Anyway, we were ushered in here and taken over to an area that was kind of a prison within the prison. It was quite a large building inside this area, and we thought,"Boy, this is a good area." So we get in there, and we get looking around in this building, and they have got a couple of slabs there that was the mortician's slab. I thought, "Well, gee, this is strange." I couldn't figure out...you know, we just felt like ants crawling all over the place, trying to figure out what this is and where we are. So nobody thought too much about it. We thought, "Well, gee, this is where they hold the autopsies and all this kind of thing," and I thought, "Well, I guess the British did that." I wasn't aware of it; I had never heard about it.

Anyway, the Japs left, and they told us this was the area that we would have to be staying in for a while. So I went back out of there and went down to

where they had some British and some native people there, and I heard one of the British persons there speaking to one of the natives inside this big cage that they had them all in, and I heard this native say, "Moulmein." So I went over, and I asked the native, I said, "Honestly? Moulmein? (I'm speaking to him in Burmese) He said, yes, it was Moulmein. Well, this Britisher was quite astounded. He says, "You're not British. What are you? Canadian? I said, "No, I'm an American." He said, "Well, I'll be a bloody fool!" He says, "How in the bloody hell did a Yank learn to speak Burmese?" I went on and talked to him in English; this fellow was a planter. He had been a planter and had joined up with part of the British forces, and they had been captured. He was with the other British troops that were being held here in the prison.

So talking to him and the Burmese, I found out that this area up there where we were is where they had impounded the lepers. Well, I said, "Just a minute. I'll be back." So I hot-footed it up there. Well, by that time somebody had put something together, and I guess it was one of the officers or something. I believe it was Jimmy Lattimore. He was a lieutenant. I said, Mr. Lattimore, sir, this is a leper area,"

and he said, "Somebody else has said that." He said, "I don't recall where we got the information." He said, "How do you know that, Don?" He called me Brain at that time. He said, "How do you know that?" I said, "I was down talking to a British planter and the natives down there." He said, "Oh!" and there was never anymore said about it at that time.

But then I went back down there later on, after we had cooked some stew. We had eaten that and some hardtack, I believe we had, something like hardtack. Then I went back down there where the area was and tried to find this British planter again, and he wasn't there. But the Burmese that I had talked to earlier, why, he called me over, and he wanted a smoke. I told him I didn't have anything to smoke, and it took me a little time to try to recapture all the Burmese that I had learned before. Of course, he didn't know any English at all, but by drawing a few pictures and one thing and then another, I found out that we were going to construct a railroad.

Marcello: These Burmese that you were talking to were behind bars?

Brain: They were imprisoned, yes. They were political prisoners. This Burmese that I talked to seemed to be a pretty well-educated Burmese, so I would take it

that maybe he had been a head clerk for a British company there or something like that. I never really found out what his status was and why he was in there, but I'm just assuming that he may have been working in the city hall, or he may have even been a judge. I don't know, but, anyway, he was impounded there.

Marcello: What happened when everybody found out that you had been assigned to a leper ward?

Brain: Well, we all had second thoughts about it. Pretty soon, well, everybody realized, "Well, this isn't going to be too bad as long as there aren't any lepers here." One of the officers told the fellows, "You really don't need to be too concerned about it because it isn't that type of a contagious disease," so everybody calmed down and went about their business.

We were there for several days, and then they started pulling the British toops in our cells out of Moulmein, and they marched us through the streets and took us down and put us on some railroad cars. As we walked through the little township of Moulmein, the natives were very gracious to us. They would throw different fruits and vegetables at us, cigarettes--their type of cheroot that they had, and, of course, the guards there are yelling at the natives to keep

them back. The Burmese people are very hospitable-natured people. They are very much like the Americans, except to the extent of you going to their house and, "Sit down, have a cigarette and a cup of tea." Our attitude would be,"Smoke your own cigarettes, and, here, do you want a piece of cake? Here, I got some coffee for you." They are very gracious to anybody that enters their home. They are an outgoing people. They're hard-working, industrious people, but they are genteel people. Their philosophy is kind of like on a parallel of the Hawaiians when it comes to younger people. The young person doesn't necessarily belong to the mother and father; it is kind of everybody's child. However, they are very, very strong Buddhists. They do have superstitions. But they tried to do what they could to help us out, marching through the town, going down to the railroad.

We got on a train, and this train runs from Moulmein, Burma, to a place called...well, just a little bit south of a place called Ye, Burma. We got down so far on this railroad, riding the train in these cattle cars, packed in worse than cattle--if you fell down, you couldn't get up. Then they took us off the train,and it seems to me we marched for about a mile, mile-and-a-half, something like that,

to a place called Thanbyuzayat. This is the first time that I personally was involved with the indoctrination of the theory that the Japanese had of the Greater East Asia Co-Prospertiy Sphere.

Marcello: Are you referring to the speech that Colonel Nagatomo gave?

Brain: That we were dying dogs, that we were the skeletons of a dying generation. He went on to tell us that our people back home didn't care anything about us, that the Japanese were going to liberate us, that it was through the goodness of the heart of the Japanese government that we were allowed to live, that we should work diligently and earnestly for this greater sphere that they were trying to establish down there, and that if we worked diligently and hard, we would be taken care of properly.

Marcello: Did he give you this speech through an interpreter or by himself?

Brain: Through an interpreter. As far as I know, he couldn't speak English. I've never been on a one-to-one basis with him, but I would just go through the assumption that he was speaking through an interpreter.

Marcello: Can you describe what Nagatomo looked like? I've heard his name many times.

Brain: He was a short, stocky person. I don't recall him

wearing glasses, but he kind of had round, pudgy face at this time. I did see him later on, and he had lost, I would say, probably twenty pounds.

Marcello: Did he appear to be arrogant?

Brain: Not knowing the Japanese language and how they talk, the gutteral sounds and the way he talked, it seemed very arrogant to me at the time, because most of the Japanese that I had ever had heard before would be probably two women discussing...of course, the women are very, very quiet. Of course, the man is lord and master over there, and you just don't raise your voice to him. This was really the first time I heard any type of a political speech or anything of that nature.

Marcello: In this speech did he ever give any evidence that he really cared one way or the other what happened to you, just so long as the railroad got built?

Brain: Well, not in the full text of his speech, no. It was kind of a brainwashing speech. If you worked hard and did as you are commanded, you would receive your rewards. But there was a big question mark. What is your reward? Is it a grave or what? Which we started to think about later on.

Marcello: From Thanbyuzayat the Fitzsimmons group moved into the first of the so-called kilo camps?

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: My records indicates that you went first to the 26 Kilo Camp. Does that sound right to you?

Brain: It was either the 25 or 26. There has always been a discrepancy. Some people claim it was the 26; some say it was the 25. Anyway, for the grace of argument here, we will just call it the 26.

Marcello: How do you get from Thanbyuzayat to the 26 Kilo Camp?

Brain: We marched.

Marcello: Describe the march from Thanbyuzayat to 25 Kilo?

Brain: It was dry. All these feet shuffling along raised a lot of dust. The Japanese soldier does not take as big a step as an American does, so we take off and those Japs are trying to keep us all right together, and the first thing you know, my God, we are strung out for a mile or more. Here are the Japs, way back down there in the back yelling and screaming, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" I guess that's what they are yelling; I don't know what they were yelling (chuckle). We thought, "Well, to hell with them. If we are going to get down there, let's get there before nightfall. We don't want to get anywhere we are going in the dark because we don't know what we are getting into." So here these long-legged Texans and sailors, why, just went chomping

off down the road, and these poor devils down following us. It was funny, really, but it was tough on us, no shoes. When you got into conditions like that, that pair of khakis I had that day were just like gold, and that shirt, man, I rolled that up, and I just put on my G-string and went barefooted, and away I went.

Marcello: In other words, you were saving your shoes and your good clothing.

Brain: I was trying to save everything I could because... you were out there, and you might pass a few natives, but what the hell. Modesty went out the window a long time ago by this time.

Marcello: I assume, from what you just said, that now you weren't sure how long you were going to be a prisoner.

Brain: That started to become a question. I thought, "My Lord, here we are--up in here. It's going to take them a month of Sundays to send anyone to get us! My God, why didn't I stay in Bicycle Camp in Java because I know that, by God, they are going to come up and get Java and Sumatra and Borneo back because they'll want to go after that oil."

Marcello: About how long did it take you to get from Thanbyuzayat to the 25 Kilo?

Brain: It must have taken us five or six hours, it seems like.

Marcello: Describe what the 25 Kilo looked like from a physical standpoint. Let's kind of take the same approach as we did going into Bicycle Camp. I assume that when we talk about one of these native camps, we can talk about any one of them--these kilo camps.

Brain: They were all constructed basically the same. They would take bamboo, and they would dig a hole--long poles of bamboo, twenty-five-feet high, the highest ones--and they would get all these poles stuck in the ground, just like you would put a foundation down for a house with a raised floor. Then everything would be tied to these longer bamboo poles. So they put a framework from pole to pole, and then they would lay woven bamboo--take bamboo and split it sometimes--and they would make these kind of pads like or shelves, more of a sloping shelf than anything else. They were usually in the neighborhood of six feet long. Then the sides of the buildings were usually put together with this woven cane matting or thin bamboo matting, which is pretty hard for a driving rain to penetrate. It is very adequate this way. Then the roof is usually made out of leaves off of palm trees, where they will take another piece of bamboo, and then they slip these leaves on

and tie them on, whip them on, and it is just like a big shingle. Then they start at the bottom, and they will lay one of these things--they are usually about three-and-a-half feet long--and then there'll be another one down there, and then they stagger them up, and that brings it up to a pointed roof. It sheds water real good, and it's all right as long as you don't have a real, strong wind coming through there and blows the ends up or flips them over when the tie-downs break. Then you've got a wet bed (chuckle).

Marcello: You were talking about these decks awhile ago, or platforms. They would extend, I gather, the entire length of the hut.

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: About how long would these huts be?

Brain: They would vary. Some of the huts were probably fifteen feet wide, and the longest one I was ever in was probably about eighty feet long. But most of them were shorter than that. Most of them were twenty-five feet long. The first ones that we got to, I imagine, where the platform was, we still had a roof at the foot of the platform that went out about five feet, and then out in that area we could build fires, and if you were fortunate enough to have

anything to cook, you could cook whatever you had out there. In some of the other camps, where you had openings at each end of the building, then you would have these platforms on each side, and every so far they would have a walkway that would go from one side to the other side. Usually, they were about four or five feet wide.

Marcello: Is that the more common type of hut--the latter one, the one you just described?

Brain: It depended on the area that you were in. If you were in a fairly flat area, this is what they would construct; if you were in a hilly area, you had more or less of a lean-to-type of thing. You had a complete open front, but then it would be, like I say, about five feet underneath the overhead covering.

Marcello: How much space would you normally have on one of these platforms?

Brain: On one of those platforms, we would have anywhere from three to four feet, depending on how many people was assigned to this particular area. As you got into a camp where it was a little bit more concentrated, then you had less area. But, usually, in most of the places, we had enough area where you could lay flat on your back or your stomach, and you wouldn't necessarily be shoulder-to-shoulder with either one

of your mates.

Marcello: That's also where you would keep all of your gear and anything else?

Brain: Everything you had. Everything you had. You had these little,...we call them caulking mats. They would roll up, and you would take most of your gear...when you got up in the morning, it was customary to roll everything up in this mat. And along at this time there wasn't any thievery from one another; that didn't happen until later on, when things got really bad, as the farther up they got in the jungle.

Marcello: What other buildings might there be in these kilo camps?

Brain: There would be the Japanese quarters, which was usually enclosed on all four sides. They would have little flaps that would be hinged at the top, and they could poke out. They were built up off the ground about four to five feet--some of them.

Marcello: Now you use the term Japanese. How about the Koreans?

Brain: I meant the Koreans. The Japanese engineers would have a little bit more of a plusher-type of structure to live in.

Marcello: So in one of these camps, you would have Korean guards, Japanese technicians, and probably a Japanese commandant.

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: Actually, the guards you come in contact with are Koreans?

Brain: Are Koreans. The people in charge out on the railroad, telling you where to dig and measuring out how big of a hole to dig or what tree to chop down... you got your instructions from the Japanese engineer at this time. I guess most of them were probably noncombattants.

Marcello: In one of these typical camps, how many Korean guards might there be?

Brain: There would probably be anywhere from twenty-five to thirty.

Marcello: Approximately how many prisoners would be in one of these camps?

Brain: Well, if you had twelve to fifteen guards, you would probably figure you have seven hundred to eight hundred in that camp. Of course, there was really nothing to guard. I don't know what they would guard us from, because nobody was going anyplace.

Marcello: What other buildings might there be in the camp? What would there be in terms of a cookshack or so-called hospital area or anything of that nature?

Brain: They just would designate a portion of one of these areas. When we first started off, one end of these so-called buildings would be designated as the hospital

area, and usually there was a screen put up across it where everybody couldn't see it there. Then there would be another shelter built...a lot of times we had to build them ourselves--the cookhouses. A lot of times the cooking area wouldn't even have a roof on it, so we would have to construct this. They would allow so many people to work inside the camp, say, like, one healthy man could work inside the camp for a hundred out on the railroad. They were allowed so many people to work in the cookhouse as cooks. Then, depending on the amount of troops, they were allowed to cut wood and bring the wood in, and you were allowed some water haulers.

Marcello: Those were good jobs, were they not?

Brain: They were the better jobs.

Marcello: How did you get one of those jobs? Was it just luck? Knowing somebody?

Brain: More or less. I never felt any anguish over it. I took the attitude, "Hey, look, something has got to be done. Somebody has got to do it." So if you happened to be with the whole herd of sheep, well, hey, you are out there doing your job, and you are supporting everybody else. These guys back in camp are supporting you.

Marcello: How did they cook the rice?

Brain: They had these great big cast-iron things that we called wa jongs. They looked like a wok, but without handles. What you would do, you would dig down in the ground a little bit, and then you would take mud or brick or rock, and you would make a round deal where this big wa jong would sit in. I guess they were probably four feet across, three feet across, perfectly round. Then they would build this mud up to where this thing is set up off the ground quite a ways, and then you had a slit in the front--you would leave an opening in there--where you could put in your fire. Then in the back by the wa jong, you would leave a small slit there where the smoke could get out.

You would fill these things up full of water, and then you would get your fire going in there, and when the water started boiling, you would ladel your rice there out of the sack. When the rice started cooking there real good, and it started puffing little bubbles up in there, why, then you would draw all this fire up out of there. Then you had a big, round wood deal there that went on top of it, and you would get the rice steamed that way.

Then they boiled the water the same way, but if

you happened to have an oil drum someplace, that we could get and cut the top out, you would make something very similar to this, and then you would keep a fire in there and get the water all boiled up so you could have drinking water.

Marcello: You are still continuing those same sanitary procedures in terms of dipping your mess gear, if possible?

Brain: Yes, always, always. This was something that you did for your own safety, not your buddys' safety or anything else. Of course, if we had a buddy that was sick and couldn't make roll call or chow, why, you would take his mess gear down and sterilize it, so to speak. You always tried to keep it covered where the flies couldn't get in there and crawl around on it, or later, worms.

Marcello: Now here at 25 Kilo, before we get into the so called "Speedo" Campaign, are you getting a fairly good portion of rice for each meal?

Brain: We were getting an adequate port of rice at this time.

Marcello: Comparatively speaking, I guess, would be a good way to put it.

Brain: Yes. You were getting a good portion of a GI canteen cupful of rice.

Marcello: Was there anything else in terms of your chow? Any vegetables or flavoring or anything like that?

Brain: The vegetables we got...now you have got to remember that I'm speaking now of when we got a pretty good portion, and I'm talking about when we had American cooks. If you got in a camp that was predominantly British, then we had to eat the way they were doing it. There was always a squabble. "Well, let's have two cookhouses! Let's have our own, and you have yours!" Later on, that finally prevailed. I guess we finally ended up swinging a big enough stick, and we had our own cookhouse.

At this earlier time, we got quite a bit of sweet potatoes, and with the British it's just like they say: "If you can boil it, then you can cook." They would take these sweet potatoes, wouldn't peel them, wouldn't wash them, and just take them and just chop them up--rotten ones, good ones--and just throw them in the pot. I don't know of anything that gives you a nastier taste than a rotten sweet potato. Even to this day, I don't care for sweet potatoes--just because of that. I always think, "My God, if that one happens to be a little bit tainted, and I get it in my mouth, there goes my whole dinner!"

Marcello: All of the supplies are probably being brought up

from Thanbyuzayat?

Brain: They are being brought up from Thanbyuzayat, and the transporation problem there is next to nil.

Marcello: You have this road that you talked about, which is more or less paralleling the railroad.

Brain: Yes, the old bull cart trail into Thailand.

Marcello: Of course, as you progress into the jungle with the railroad, the trains can actually come that far, can they not?

Brain: Yes, they would transport it up by the railroad cars.

Marcello: Describe what a typical workday was like here at the 25 Kilo Camp, from the time you got up in the morning until you went to bed at night. Perhaps we ought to start by talking about when you were awakened and how the Japanese or somebody went about doing it.

Brain: Well, the first thing you had was reveille in the morning.

Marcello: About what time?

Brain: About 5:00 in the morning, 4:30. It was still dark. You would get up, and you would get your ration of stew or pap, made out of just watery rice. If you were fortunate enough, you would get a tablespoon of sweet water, which was sugar dissolved in water, and that would be your breakfast, and away you would

go. You would make your muster, and the Japs would count you, maybe several times--Korean guards, I mean. If there was one man short, why, there was always a hold-up, waiting to know why one man was short, and they would have to explain that he was sick, and they would want to know why. So you were half wore out by standing there at musters in the morning, as they called tenkos. Then finally you would get everything organized, and away we would go. We would march out to the railroad right-of-way, which sometimes was maybe a half-mile, sometimes a quarter-of-a-mile, sometimes a thousand yards.

Marcello: When were the tools distributed?

Brain: We would usually pick up our tools directly after muster, and we would march down toward the Jap headquarter building or their guardhouse. Adjacent to that, there would be a shed with shovels... they had what they call a chunkel. It is like a grubbing hoe, except it's a little bit wider, and it has got a much shorter handle on it. Each man would be issued with one of these tools--a shovel or a pick or a grubbing hoe, we'll call it. Maybe I better call it a chunkel because later on somebody might get this misconstrued. Then we would be

issued baskets. Baskets were used in substitute of a wheelbarrow, which we didn't have.

We would pick up all this equipment, and then we would go to the rail site. Where there had to be a ravine filled in, then the fellows with the chunkels and the shovels would be assigned over there with the baskets. They would dig in the ground and fill the baskets up. You would run over and dump it into where this ravine was. The other fellows with picks and some of the chunkels would be working up ahead of you clearing what brush would be in the way.

This was all under directions of the Japanese soldiers or Japanese engineers. The Korean guards would mill around, and they were usually complaining about the heat. They all had little short towels that they would carry around their neck, and they'd be wiping their face and complaining about it. Once in awhile they would step in and scream at somebody, saying, "You are not doing this right," or such thing. If one of the engineers would be aware of a guard interfering in what they felt you were working properly with, why, then right away this Korean would get dressed down, and he would have a "mad" on all day long for being dressed down and

trying to show his authority where the Japanese engineering people didn't feel it was needed.

Now we would work all day long like this. We were given a quota of how much...say, if you had earthwork to move, we were supposed to run one cubic meter per man per shift. There was Dutch, Australians, New Zealanders, and British "Tommies" out there. The Americans were always the great ones for saying, "Boy, let's hurry up and get this job over, and we'll be the first ones back to the creek and take a bath, and we'll be back in the camp area."

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese early on made it clear that, as soon as you got your quota finished, you could go back.

Brain: We were given a quota to do, and for a person of my height, a cubic meter, if you take your fist and double it up and put it right on your hip... like, if you are standing in a hole, and the top of that hole hits the top of your hand there, you have got your meter deep. So it didn't take us too long to figure out these type of things. So we had an officer with us that clued us in on how to get started and what you would do. You would try to dig a hole and get a face and try to work

off of the face. You'd get your hole dug down...your square meter per man, you'd try to get that dug down. We usually would try to make it five feet wide or more, and then you would try to make it four feet deep or three feet--a meter deep, anyway--and then we would work off a face. This was a lot easier than trying to dig over here and get some dirt and over here. We found out finally that if you would take a man with a chunkel and a guy with a pick and a guy with a shovel working in the hole, then the rest of the group could be carrying dirt. Well, we found out later on that we would get what we called a "yahoo" pole, and you could put a basket out on that end and a basket on the other end, and the only time you had your actual weight of dirt was when you initially picked it up. It would have enough spring, and then if you could learn to get in this little dog trot, why, you were always balanced. We found out that we could even enlarge the basket than what we originally had.

Marcello: About how large were these baskets?

Brain: The first baskets were probably four inches deep. On the back side they were kind of a scooped-like basket, deep in the back, and then they narrowed

toward the front. It was probably about two good shovelsful of dirt. They were quite small, and it was quite difficult to really move the quantity of dirt that they wanted to. They started off quite a ways from the right-of-way to move this. Finally, one of these officers said, "No, let's get in here closer. It isn't going to make any difference. Move in closer. Don't make them haul the dirt from so far." The Japs were under a quota, too, and they would catch hell if they didn't get their quotas done. We went along there for quite a while--I would say probably two or three weeks--and we would be the first ones back to our barracks. We would get our quota done.

Well, then they finally started increasing the quota. Well, that's when really a "rub" started between us and the other troops. The way it usually worked, the Americans would get through first, the Australians would be a couple hours later, the British would come dragging in about dusk, and then maybe the Dutch would get in about midnight--that type of thing. The Dutch were terrible workers. Maybe we didn't do the right thing; I don't know. Anyway, why, they finally started raising the quotas of the amount of earth

that we needed to move because they found out the Americans would get in their amount of work. It was just our nature.

Marcello: What time would you normally get in--initially?

Brain: We were usually always back in camp by daylight. Very seldom, at this period, did we get in camp at dark.

Marcello: At this stage, I think we have to remember that you are working in fairly level ground, and you still are in fairly good shape.

Brain: Yes, we are still in pretty good shape. I was just going to mention that the terrain that we were working in was fairly flat. The earth was pretty easy to handle. But then when we got up to... what was it? I believe that 2.1 was the largest quota that was ever bestowed on us, and we pretty well had to live with that. But it did make a difference whether you were in granite, whether you were in shale, or what type of earthwork you were in. That had no consideration that it was harder to dig or that you had more rocks that you had to contend with. This didn't enter into the picture at all.

Marcello: How large might one of these cuts or fills be? Obviously, they would vary in size.

Brain: Oh, they varied. Most of the fills that we had would be approaches to a bridge. Some of the cuts that we had to make, that the railroad went through, were, Christ, thirty feet high, forty feet high--some of them.

Marcello: About how long might they be?

Brain: They would probably be anywhere up to half a mile, a mile,

Marcello: In one of these projects, it must have looked just like a giant ant hill.

Brain: Well, sometimes you felt, "My God, are we ever going to get through it?" There would be no end to it. Actually, I didn't feel that the earthwork was near as hazardous or near as strenuous as when we got to the point where we had to build the bridges and drive piling.

Well, there was one area there that we had a little problem, when we got to the area where we had to make ballast for the railroad. There was a hill there that was a cross between granite and this lava rock. They burnt all the brush off there, and then they started hand-driving holes in the sides where they put the charges to blast with. That got pretty hazardous there, especially because of the Japanese engineer we had there that would

light short fuses. And then this was the first Japanese that I saw with a cigar in his mouth most of the time. We finally called him "Short-Fuse Charlie." But he would light a fuse, and then he would yell, "All the men, look out!" Well, about that time, "BOOM," here it would go. Well, hell, here we are, all down here in the bottom, and here this stuff comes down on you like shrapnel. But I got off that detail before he blew himself up. I heard later on that he blew himself up. He had a problem with some of the Australians working with him.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned that you did not like the bridge-building details. Describe what they were like.

Brain: Well, the toughest part was getting the piling up to the area to drive it. At one time we had elephants. They brought some elephants in there that would help drag these timbers up to the area where we had to install the bridge. The elephants are a pretty balky animal. They would hook the chair around the log and then hook it up to this elephant, and the elephant would take a strain, and then he would rear his trunk up in the air and trumpet and say, "Hey, I can't pull it." Well,

they would unhook him, and here came the Japs. They would say, "All right, all you Americans, come here." Well, we would get on the chain, and away we would go--drag the chain down there--probably about twenty or thirty of us.

Then when you got to the area where you were going to drive this piling, you would dig a hole and as far down as you could. Then they would take this piling--the part that went into the ground--and they would just carve a point on it, where in this country you have got a steel point that goes on it. You would get this darn thing pushed over the end of the hole, and you would get a bunch of rope on it, and then you'd have guys with poles, and you would have a bunch of other guys to lift it up, and they would lift it up as far as they could, and then they would get the poles; and then the guys over here were pulling on the ropes, and then they'd have a few guys back here (gesture) pulling on the other side with a rope, and as soon as it got halfway up in the air, why, they were supposed to strain it back. Well, there was a lot of screaming and yelling going on with the Japs--Jap engineers, not the Korean guards. There'd be a lot of screaming

going on about this time, and it was confusing. Then once they got this thing in place...well, beforehand they would burn a hole in the top--the part that was going to be sticking up in the air. They would burn a hole in there, oh, about two inches and probably three inches or four inches deep. Well, then once they got this thing in place, then they would build a scaffolding of saplings, then they would take wire and twist it around there, and then they would twist the wire to hold the saplings together. They would get these poles going up, and it was just like some of these old oil derricks you see out here; I mean, the structure was very similar to that but not as heavy. It was just round saplings, probably the lower ones being bigger, and the farther up you got, the smaller they were. They would build a regular derrick up there.

Then they had this long pole that they'd stick into the end of this burnt end of the pile, which at first they would have these huge iron weights that they would stack up one on top of the other, and then they would put the iron pole through it, and then they would wrap a line around it. They had two men, two Japs, up at the top, and they

would wrap a line around there, and they would try to keep this iron pole steady. They would have a rope go from these weights, and they would go up through a pulley, and then they would come down. They would probably be an inch-and-a-half to two-inch ropes. Well, they wouldn't come all the way to the ground, but just about all the way to the ground, and then they had other little lines that they would tie onto it, and we called these "monkey lines." If they needed ten guys on each one of these lines, why, you would have ten of these "monkey lines" on. This line would run up through the two pulleys and down each side of the derrick, so you would have some guys on the right, some guys on the left.

Well, you would have to pull on this thing in unison, and we had different little chants that we would sing. First, we would start off just by counting in Japanese and you would say, "Ichi, nichi, san-yo!" and then you would drop it. Well, then we had some industrious people, and they figured up other little chanteys with quite abusive words toward the Japanese.

Marcello: Such as?

Brain: Oh, (laughter) I don't think we better print it.

Marcello: This is for history, you know. We have to keep this realistic (chuckle).

Brain: Well, one of them, why, they used to say, "Ichi, nichi, you sons-of-a-bitchies!"(Chuckle) Now that was one of the nicer ones. The Australians were more foul-mouthed than the Americans were, really.

But, anyway, why, then you would drive this piling, and then as the piling would go down, why, they would lower this piece of sucker rod, this pipe, is what it was. Some of them were solid; some of them were hollow. They could screw them together, and this is the way you would drive the piling, and you would just keep driving this and driving this and driving this until it got to the point it wouldn't go anymore. The Japs would say, "Ush!" or "Okay." Then everything was tore down, and you would go in and drive another one.

I wasn't out there the day that this happened, but the Australians were doing the same thing. They had Americans on one and some Dutch on another one then a couple of groups of Australians driving other pilings. Well, this one bunch...as I said before, we always had the Japanese engineers

up at the top--young people, probably apprentice engineers or something like that--and it gets pretty rickety even when everything was in cadence. But these Aussies got over there, and they saw that if one group would just be one ichi out of cadence, why, this thing would sway good. So they got this thing going, and they got this thing swaying pretty good. Here's the Japs up here, and they are squalling and yelling and telling them not to do it, stop it. (Laughter) and right about that time, the two of them got shook out of the top of this derrick, and they came down. I understand they died later on. But that ended putting the Japanese engineers up in the derricks. The prisoners had to go up there after that.

But getting back to where we had to make this ballast for this railroad, there was a huge, great, big boulder there that the Japs wanted to move out of the way because it was in the road. We would try to move the darn thing, and we couldn't move it. It was just too darn heavy for...you couldn't get enough men around it to really lift it, so we just kept rolling it. Later on, why, we had a change of Japanese people

in the area there--engineers--and they got to talking about how strong the Americans were, but the Japanese were stronger. So it took about twelve of us to lift this rock up. They said they had one Japanese who could carry it. So we lifted it up, and, of course, you put a sack on your head, put one corner up and the other...and kind of make a Mother Hubbard cupboard out of it, and then you lay the thing on your shoulder, and then they will give you a strap that you can hang onto to keep it from sliding down, and away you go. Well, they loaded this on this Jap in this fashion, and he took about four steps, and he stumbled and he fell, and that rock just squashed him--squashed him flat. It tore him all up--crushed his head and everything else. Of course, we just thought that was hilarious. We thought, "Oh, boy, this is good."

So there were some things that happened there with the Japanese that was just as bad as to the prisoner himself. Oh, we could have moved the thing, I guess, but anything to hold the show up and balk at things. I think we more or less goaded them into this thing more than anything

else.

Marcello: What was it specifically about the bridge details that you didn't like? The bridge-building details?

Brain: They weren't built sturdy. I'm still amazed today that a locomotive ever got across them, let alone taking any cars, because these darn bridges that we were building over there in Burma would sway and bend and bend and creak and groan. You know, we build a bridge here in this country, and you use cross timbers to keep them from swaying this way and swaying that way, but, no, they just did everything to keep it from swaying over the side of the hill or something. You had to crawl around like a monkey on them; you had to shinny up the side of a pole and stand up there on the top there, and then they would come up and want to put a timber down. It covered the whole top of it. Well, we didn't have sky hooks to hang on. I'm just surprised that there weren't more people hurt there. Heights never really bothered me, but I got shakey on these things.

Marcello: Of course, a lot of times I would assume that you would have to be out in the water on these bridge-

building details.

Brain: Well, yes--more so when you had a rain up in the mountains. Then you would have one of these floods that washed the darn bridge out. That was tough then because you would be up to your armpits in water.

Marcello: In making the cuts and fills, which job did you prefer? Picking? Shoveling? Using the chunkel? Hauling the dirt?

Brain: I would rather be on the "yahoo" pole. I could handle that better. But then I wasn't involved in as much of this type of work as some of the other fellows were. I got stuck back on a cattle detail. This is when we got farther up in the jungles. They would drive the cattle along, and as they would come to each encampment, why, they would dole out one or two cows, and then we'd go to the next one. Well, they started losing a bunch of cows, and then it was along about this time that it was pretty well known that I could speak Burmese, so the Japanese gave me another little wooden tag to wear with two characters in it. The two characters said, "Number Two, Burma." So I had two little tags that I had to wear.

Marcello: The second one said what?

Brain: The second little tag said, "Number Two, Burma," the characters did. I was told this.

Marcello: "Number Two, Burma?"

Brain: "Number Two, Burma," yes. This came about because I was caught talking to a Burmese lad one time, and I got knocked around pretty good for that. So, anyway, then I got taken off of working on the railroad and put on this cattle detail from Thanbyuzayat clear up past there our people were working--driving these cattle. They thought it would be real good if they had somebody there that could speak Burmese because their thinking was, "Well, he can talk to the cattle and call them back." That was a bunch of baloney. You know that (chuckle). It just don't work that way, not with that type of stock.

Marcello: Do you recall which one of the kilo camps you were assigned to when you started on your cattle herding detail?

Brain: Well, let's see. We went from the 25 Kilo Camp... to the 40 Kilo Camp?

Marcello: That could have very easily been the case.

Brain: I think it was around the 40 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Let's put it this way. Was it before the monsoon

season started?

Brain: It was just starting. We had already had one rain, but not a bad rain. But it was just at that time that I got put on that detail.

Marcello: Okay, let's describe this cattle herding detail because I think it is kind of an important part of your experiences as a prisoner-of-war. Let's assume that you started at the 40 Kilo Camp.

Brain: It was at either the 40, 41, or 42. I forget which.

Marcello: Describe again how you came to get this job.

Brain: Well, they were losing cattle, and I had been caught talking to a Burmese lad out there. Actually, I was bartering at this time. I had some clothes that belonged to another fellow, and I told him I would give him "X" amount of dollars for it, but I didn't have the money to give him now, but I would give it to him on returning, coming back in from the jungles. Because every chance I got, if I thought there was a village around, I would go out and try to make contact there--speak to the people and try to buy salt, sugar, eggs, anything I could get my hands on, and I would use these guys' clothes. Like I would tell

a guy, "Yes, I'll give you five dollars for that shirt, but I got to get the money first," and with the understanding, "Hey, if I get caught out there, you lose and I lose." Well, I would give him five dollars for the shirt, but I was getting twenty-five dollars out there for it, see, or twenty. It was the same way with trousers because the natives wanted this type of thing. They couldn't buy it themselves anymore because the Japs were confiscating everything. As time went on, I got a little bit more brazen and a little bit more brazen, and everytime I would see a Burmese, I would talk to him. I just figured, heck, that at this time the Japanese didn't care. Well, I found out they did care.

So Tojo was having a birthday or something. This one village that I had been in several times,..we had a Dutch interpreter come up there, and they wanted to go over and...the Japs wanted to buy some things from this village. This Dutch interpreter was aware of the fact that I speak Burmese, and he could speak Dutch, English, and French. Supposedly, somebody said he was a registered interpreter. So, anyway, why, I

went with them. Well, it is customary that when you go into one of these villages, you contact the head man in the village, and he will tell you what hut you can buy the goat from and what one you can buy the pig from and the chickens and the ducks. Nobody else could sell them except what he designates. Then everything was divided amongst everybody else.

So we start walking into this village--after I had already been slapped around for being caught by the Japs. Why, I get in front of the Jap, and we get into the village, so I asked one of the natives there, a woman there who had a bundle of sticks that she was carrying on top of her head for the fire...I asked her where the head man was. Well, before I could get that all out of my mouth, why, the Jap gave me a rabbit punch across the back of my neck and knocked me down on the ground, and I thought, "My Lord, what did I do wrong now?" Well, the upshot of the whole thing was that I didn't speak unless he told me to speak. So we got that thing straightened out. The interpreter told me, he says, "You tell me something, and I'll

tell him. Then you speak to the Burmese when he gives an answer."

So that worked out, and then it was right after that--about a week after that, four or five days after that--that I got called up to Japanese headquarters, and they gave me this "Number Two, Burma" sign to wear. Prior to this, they had had problems of losing cattle, so he called me up, and he gave me this tag and through the interpreter he said he was going to take one of the Australians off the cattle detail and assign me to it.

So when we got down to Thanbyuzayat, there was a young bull down there, and so I thought, "Doggone, we'll take this thing and pet it and baby it a little bit," and I said to these Aussies, "I'll go over there and get a bell." I got over and got a wooden clacker, and we tied this around its neck, and the rest of the cows would just follow him. We would just hang on to him. We had a hell of a time getting him. They didn't want us to take him because they used these bulls for their bull carts, their transportation. He was a little bit too young for this, and, you know, we palavered and lied around about it. We said

we were just going to borrow him for a little while, and nobody was going to kill him. So until they got the railroad built up there pretty close to the end there, why, I was on this detail.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned the incident where you had been talking to the Burmese boy, and you get caught and got worked over a little bit. Talk a little bit about this.

Brain: Well, there was this young lad there. I would say, to the best of my recollection, that he was probably thirteen or fourteen, right along in there. We were coming back off a working party, and I saw the little bugger duck back into the bushes. So I just stood there on the side of the road, and I yelled in Burmese, "Hey, little man, come here!" He said, no, that he was afraid of the Japanese. Anyway, I was standing there, and I said, "Where is your village?" He told me where it was, and I was asking him, "Well, do you have any salt? Do you have any sugar other there?" He was saying, "Yes, we do." I said, "Well, do you have any ducks or chickens? Can they be bought? How much?" Well, a lot of these things he didn't

know.

About that time, why, this Jap comes up, and he saw that little Burmese kid turn around and run. That's when he clobbered me. Of course, he was standing behind me, and he hit me on the back, and I fell down, and he kicked me a couple of times. It didn't break any skin, but I got a little bit of discoloration on my back there where he kicked me with that hobnailed boot. It was a Korean guard, is what it was. It wasn't Japanese. He stepped off the road there and batted me a couple of more times. I was rolling around and trying to keep away from him. I probably did more damage to myself rolling around and trying to get away from him than him actually hitting me (chuckle). That was just about the extent of that. Then after that, why, I tried to watch my "P's and Q's," and if I did go out in the jungles and try to make contact with the natives, why, I would never wear this other tag that the Jap adjutant gave me.

Marcello: In other words, this job with these cattle was a pretty good detail.

Brain: It was a beautiful detail.

Marcello: I assume that when you were on this detail, you were able to do a great deal of wheeling-and-dealing with the natives?

Brain: You could do a lot of things there because you came in contact with them all the time. We had one guard with us, and we had a hell of a time with him because he always wanted to ride this little bullock that we had. Of course, he had already had his nose pierced with the rope that...here in this country they put in a ring, while over there they put a rope through their nose and bring it back and tie it back up behind their ears. We had about a five-foot piece of small cord on this rope, and you could just walk along with him. But this Jap always wanted to ride him, and we told him, "No, you can't ride him," So finally, why, we convinced him it would be all right to put his gear on there. Of course, we carried our gear on this little bullock, too. After that we only lost one cow.

Marcello: Did the Japanese guard not have any objections to you trading with the natives and so on?

Brain: No, he didn't seem to care. Because we would always get a bottle of toddy which is...toddy is an alcohol drink that they make out of what they

call the toddy palm over there. It's not a date palm, but it has got a nut on it, very similar to a coconut. They take this sap out of these things, and they let it ferment and boil it--a regular little still--and they make a brown alcohol out of it. It will blow your head off.

Marcello: Now if I remember correctly, the Japanese were actually paying you so much a day to work on this railroad, were they not?

Brain: Supposedly, we were supposed to get...if my memory serves me right, we were supposed to get paid ten cents a day.

Marcello: Now this would be in Japanese occupation money?

Brain: Yes, Japanese occupation money, which was pretty hard to deal with the natives with. The farther back you got in the jungles, yes, they would accept it, but the Burmese were more inclined to deal with the hard currency. Even before the war, when I was living over there, if you got out in the jungles...and, of course, they dealt in rupees and annas and pice was their breakdown. Their coinage was on the metric system. If you had a paper rupee, you could only get about only half as much as you could for a silver rupee.

They were very much the same way with the Japanese currency. They would rather have the old currency that they were used to rather than the Japanese currency. So in some areas it was pretty hard to pass it off, but if you had... the best thing was the barter method to use, you know, so much salt, so much sugar, so many eggs for a shirt or this type of thing. You could get far more in value for a shirt than you could with, we'll say, fifty dollars of Japanese occupation money. We did get paid several times there. I think, if I remember correctly, I got paid three times. They said that we were only getting a portion of our money, but the bulk of it was being deposited in the Bank of Tokyo for us, so at the end of the war, when we went to Japan, why, we would have enough money that we could be self-supporting until we could find a job there. That was the gist of the line that they gave us.

Marcello: Did they ever, from time to time, set up canteens or anything in any of these camps along the railroad?

Brain: They had one at Thanbyuzayat and at the...I thought it was at the 12 kilo marker, but maybe

it was up around the 18 kilo because it seems to me that they moved a hospital camp up in there. This took place after I got off of this cattle detail.

Marcello: In may of 1943, the so-called "Speedo" phase began. In other words, the Japanese evidently were behind on the progress of the railroad, and they were going to speed things up. It just so happened that the "Speedo" phase and the monsoons came around the same time.

Brain: I got involved in that about the last two weeks before the railroad was completed. I had left the cattle detail and come back to the Fitzsimmons group, then was taken away from Fitzsimmons. There was myself and a fellow by the name of Gunnerson and three other Aussies that got put in with these trucks that they had. They had a couple of Studebakers and three old Dodges, and they had one...I can't think of the name of this British truck that they had, but I want to say Leland, but that's...it was made by Leland, but they had another name. It was a regular GI-issue truck. The Studebaker and the Dodges had a winch on it. Now this was during the monsoons, and they had trouble getting these trucks to go

through this muck and more. They would hook a winch on it and pull what they could, and then finally they decided, well, they could take one of these trucks with a winch, and then they could use three or four of their own trucks and run in convoys this way--hauling things. So you would come to a hill, and then we'd have to go out and chop this bamboo down and take wire and twist it and then put the bamboo in there and twist the wire some more and kind of make a slat affair out of the thing and lay it down so the trucks could run across this. Then we would run along and get a bamboo pole in there and roll them up and set them back up on a truck until they got to another area. Well, when they got to an area where these other trucks couldn't even get up the road this way, with these bamboo slats laying down there, why, then we would take this cable, and we would run this up the hill and then tie it to a tree. Then they would pull the Studebaker truck up, and then we would get it turned around, and then they would tie the back end of it to a tree. Then we used that to run out with line on this cable and hook to these other trucks, and then we would pull them up to

the top of the hill. It would probably take you a day to go ten or twelve miles or more.

Marcello: This is the sort of thing you are doing during the "Speedo" Campaign?

Brain: This is the sort of thing that I was doing at the time that this "Speedo" thing started up. Of course, on this detail here, why, we were getting "speedo" thrown at us all the time because, let's face it, these guys were supposed to get from Point A to Point B in "X" amount of hours, and they couldn't make it. Now this was all the Japanese. We had no Koreans here with us at this time.

Marcello: So actually, then, you were really not working on the railroad directly during the "Speedo" Campaign and the monsoon season?

Brain: That's right. Finally, they gave up on this truck thing because it was just a farce. It wasn't worth it.

Marcello: Well, that road was just impassable, was it not?

Brain: Well, it was impassable. Why, they would have been better off with a bull cart because the bull carts could go through that thing. They had these great, big wheels.

Then at that time, why, Gunnerson and I got sent back to Fitzsimmons. We ended up pretty close to them when they just walked off and left them trucks. They got where they wouldn't run. The spark plugs were all shot, and the Japs couldn't figure out why they couldn't take the spark plugs out. They would put the wire in the spark plug hole, and the darn thing should work. Of course, the fuel they got wasn't...it was a low octaine, anyway.

Then we got there to Fitzsimmons and had a couple of days of rest, and then I got sent out on a detail at night. They had these carbide lights that they were working on this cut with. So I thought it was going to be the same old thing. You just get in a set pace and stay right in it, but, my God, these guys...we had mostly Japanese, if I remember correctly, that was pushing the issue then, and, my God, they were whacking the hell out of you across the back and across your "sit down," and it was just hurry, hurry, hurry. You were just in a constant dog trot. But it was carbide lights that they had out there that we were working under then, and it seems to me that we were working about two

twelve-hour shifts, if I remember correctly. It seems to me that I would come in, and then you would see another bunch going out. They would pass you when you are out there working, and then you would get relieved.

Marcello: Describe what these guys looked like. Now again, like you mentioned, you got there about two weeks before the conclusion of the "Speedo" Campaign, so they must have been in pretty miserable shape by that time.

Brain: Well, I had heard rumors. "Boy," they said, "it's a bitch out there! It's just 'speedo, speedo, speedo!" I thought, "Well, hell, these guys that I was working with was 'speedo, speedo,' too." You know, when I was on this truck detail, there was actually no slapping or hitting...there was just mostly shoving, pushing you, so you'd work faster, that type of thing. But when we got out here, it was just...man, they were frantic! They were like a bunch of wild men. It kind of got pathetic to me. It seemed like they got to the point that it didn't make a darn which way you were moving or what you were doing--just so long as you were doing it fast. If I'm not mistaken, it seems to me that they even had

some of those Koreans doing some work--not in the area where we were but back down from us. I don't recall exactly what they were doing because, like I say, I was out there at night most of the time.

Marcello: I gather, then, that because of those jobs you had, you would have escaped most of the rigors of that "Speedo" Campaign, such as the dysentery or the tropical ulcers and things of that nature.

Brain: I had tropical ulcers; I had dysentery; I had pellagra. Now this is when I went back up on the railroad the second time--to do maintenance work. I was very fortunate. Because of the things I could procure, I usually managed to have two or three chickens a week. I got myself eggs...because of some of the things I did dealing through the black market--profiteering or whatever you want to call it. Whenever I could get around Fitzsimmons' group, why, if I could get anything at all that I thought would help this Doctor Hekking...God bless that man. If there was <u>anything</u> in the world that I thought would be of any use to the people down in the hospital, I would always see that I would manage to get down there and slip anything I could toward

these people down there.

Marcello: Okay, so if I can keep this straight, it was at the 40 Kilo Camp when you got on the cattle herding detail. Approximately how long did you remain on that detail? Again, you would have to estimate this.

Brain: I would say it was a good three months. It seemed like it was three months.

Marcello: Then from there you were working with these trucks?

Brain: Then I got involved with those trucks.

Marcello: And then at that point, you were transferred back up to the Fitzsimmons group again?

Brain: Yes, It seems to me that that was just about the tail-end of the monsoon weather. It seems to me that I wasn't up there over three weeks at the outside before the railroad was completed--when we got word that the railroad was completed.

Marcello: Okay, that would have been, then, somewhere around October, November, December of 1943?

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were working with the Fitzsimmons group that first time for about three weeks there near the completion of the railroad, and then where did you go from there?

Did you get off the road and go into Thailand?

Brain: And then from there, we went into Thailand. I'm trying to think of the name of that camp that we were in.

Marcello: Was it Kanchanaburi?

Brain: I get confused with the names because I was in three different camps in Thailand.

Marcello: You have Kanchanaburi, Tamarkan, Tamuang. Sometimes Kanchanaburi is referred to simply as Kanburi.

Brain: Kanburi, I think, was the big camp that they had. It had wooden buildings.

Marcello: Yes, Kanchanaburi was a very large camp, and I believe the bridges were at Tamarkan.

Brain: Tamarkan. Then there was another camp between the two. It was a large camp, but it was divided. One part there was Dutch and Australians and Americans, and in the other one it was damn near all British. They had a large, thick, high fence that ran between there. That was the first camp I hit when we got to Thailand. Then when I went back up on the railroad to do maintenance work...this is about the time that every once in awhile, why, a bomb would hit one of the bridges, and they would blow a hole in

the railroad.

Marcello: How long were you over there in Thailand before you went back up in the jungle again?

Brain: About a month.

Marcello: What were the conditions like there in Thailand during that month you were there?

Brain: Oh, the buildings that we were in weren't good. Actually, they weren't as good as what we had up in the jungle, but I noticed that we got a lot more greens in our stews. There seemed to be a little bit more grease in it. It seemed that we got a little bit more pork. But then, of course, again, at this time it was all Dutch doing the cooking, the Javanese Dutch, and the stews were a lot tastier, and the rice was a pretty good grade of rice. But, of course, here you are again--you have got a native of this type of cooking, and they can always enhance it. The rice was good. This is really where I learned to understand what the Dutch were saying. Before, I had never associated with the Dutch. I didn't want anything to do with them other than the Dutch doctor that we had.

Marcello: Was this kind of a rest and recuperation period here?

Brain: This is what it was, unbeknownst to me, because we had a lot of transients there. You would have a bunch of guys come in, and then pretty soon they would be gone.

I was pretty sickly at this time. I had just had my second bout of malaria. I couldn't get the type of things that Doctor Hekking has told me to get, and showed me to get, out of the jungle, so it was pretty tough for me now. There was no Atabrine... of course, we didn't know what Atabrine was until we got liberated, but there wasn't enough quinine in there. There was few herbs in there that you could get from the Dutchmen. It would help a little bit because that quinine is just like any other medication--if it isn't used, and used properly, you have got a terrific amount of side effects. I was aware of this. There for a while they would give it to you, and I would always "dummy up" that I swallowed it, and I would save it until I could get a full course, and then I would take it.

But this Doctor Hekking had showed me different things that you could get for...well, if you run a fever, there was a certain type of

a bean...it was a long,heavy bean. It was shaped like a saber. You could find it in some trees. You would take this bean, and you would take it out of this shell, and you would crack it with a rock or anyway you could, and then you would put it in, say, like a little glass container like that with a wire hoop on it like...the Aussies call it your "Billy," you know. Well, you would put these beans in there and keep the thing over the fire until it would boil about halfway down, and then you would drink it. It was just as bitter as gall. Man, it would almost make you gag. But this thing would keep your body temperature down.

There was certain leaves you could get if you had a bad cut. Why, if you would put that leaf on there, and then take another leaf like a banana-type of structured leaf, and then wrap it and keep it tight like that, but let water get into it once in awhile, why, then you could keep control of your tropical ulcers. So this doctor, if you paid attention to him and followed his instructions, why, there was a lot of things out there we could get to keep ourselves

from getting to be down too far--supplementary things.

Marcello: I think everybody had a great deal of admiration for Doctor Hekking. Evidently, he did know a great deal about jungle medicine and, of course, was able to pass his knowledge on to the other prisoners.

Brain: That's right. He was probably...this man had a knack of...you could go to him and just feel like you were ready to drop off the end of the world. This man just seemed to fix an umbrella for you and bring you back. He could work with your mind a little bit.

Marcello: You mentioned that you went back up into the jungle again. Describe how you were one of the "lucky" ones to get on a detail to go back up into the jungle.

Brain: I couldn't believe it. I would look up to the heavens and say, "What have I done wrong?" I was scared to go back out there because, like I say, I had been through the monsoons up there. I knew what it was like up there, and I didn't want to go back. If you weren't fighting bedbugs, you were fighting body lice; if you weren't fighting that, you were fighting leeches. The

leeches in the creeks weren't so bad; I could control them. But those other leeches, man, they would be on you, and they would get themselves full of blood before you knew it. You couldn't just reach down and pull them out. You had to have a fire stick or something and burn them so they would pull the horn back out of your vein. Otherwise, you would just bleed. It was just like somebody would stick a hypodermic needle in one of your veins and then unplug it.

Marcello: Well, how was it that you were assigned to go back up into the jungle again?

Brain: Well, they lined us all up out there, and they had this Dutch doctor out there, and he said, "Well, send him and him and him and him and him." It was like this. They would come down there, and they would look at you. Of course, usually, when you got into one of these rest areas, it seemed like every six or seven months, why, these Japs would always get you out there and were bending you over and and sticking that glass tube up your rear end and getting a sample and putting it in a round plastic dish with a little lid on it. The poor guys that were goosey,

that was hard on them! Oh, Jesus!

Marcello: So when you left this camp in Thailand and went back into the jungle, how did you get there? Did you go back on the rail?

Brain: We went back on the rail.

Marcello: Describe what it was like riding on that railroad that you had just helped to complete.

Brain: I never thought that I would ever ride on it. I never thought there would be a damn thing ever run over it. I thank God that I had it to ride and didn't have to walk. It wasn't too bad of a roadbed, but I just couldn't picture myself,..I had mental problems going back up there, I think. I just kept rejecting it, kept saying, "No, I'm not going back! No, I'm not going back!"

The work up there, if we thought that "Speedo" thing was,..you know, I worked at night, and that made it worse, too, than in the daytime. Of course, you could hide at night, see, where you couldn't in the daytime. We had no Koreans with us at this time when we went back up. The first camp we was in, there was no Koreans there at all.

Marcello: There must not have been very many of you.

Brain: Thank God! Well, there was about 200 of us. They were taken out of the camp that I was in and one right next door, and they were mostly British. So there was mostly Black Dutch, Australians, and this Coker and myself... and I can't think of the other kid that went back up there.

This was the time that we had some meat brought up to us, and they were in boxes. They had been packed in ginger and chili peppers, and the meat was...the juice was running out of the box, and we opened that box up, and this meat was just churning with maggots. I thought, "Oh, my God, are we going to have to eat that?" because we are kind of on our own up there this time. We didn't have any set cookhouse. So finally the English officer in charge of this group decided, "Well, we'll let the Javanese do the cooking," and they did a pretty good job of it. The Javanese would take these maggots, and they would put them on a little bamboo skewer and toast them over the fire.

Another thing that we got the second time that we went up, that I learned from some of

these dark Javanese, was that there was a slug that would get in some of these trees that were rotting off and would fall, and they looked very much like a potato bug. They were about that long (gesture), and they were white, and they had a big black head on them about the size of my fingernail.

Marcello: They were about an inch-and-a-half long, in other words, and a half-inch wide.

Brain: Yes. If you popped that big head off...the head was bigger than the rest of the body, and if you popped that head off--you would twist it; you had to twist it just right--and then there would be a whole brown string come out with it like...well, just like a brown string. Well, as long as you have got that out, then you could take those things and put them on a piece of bamboo and cook them on the wires just like you would a wiener until they popped, and then they were done. They had a taste between a chicken and strong chedder cheese, if you can imagine that. The Dutchmen ate them, seemed to like them, and I thought, "Well, hell, if they can do it, I can do it."

This is when I really put into practice what Doctor Hekking had told me to do and different things he had showed me. I think this was the time that I did screw up, and I picked the wrong leaf, and it was just like nettles. I had a little piece of this sugar to cook in there and a little bit of salt, and we were going to eat this. My Lord, it was just like the hairs in the heart of an artichoke when it got down your throat. Oh, that was terrible!

Marcello: Describe the kind of work that you were doing here now when you went back up into the jungle.

Brain: We went back up, and we was putting in supports for the bridges. Say if one of the pilings would slip a little bit, why, we would try to get it back into position, "shim" it up, and then put in these big "U" spikes that they had.

Marcello: So you were really part of a maintenance crew at this time.

Brain: We were maintenance. Then you would get that fixed, and then you would go up where maybe part of the earthwork had washed out, and you would fill in there; and you would go get new

ballast and bring it back in and try to straighten up the railroad.

It was long about this time that they started paying more attention to the railroad. There seemed to be more surveillance on it by American and British planes. Just about a week before we left, I came back down.,.I was up there for right at two-and-a-half months, two months, something like that, all total, from the time I left Thanbyuzayat in Thailand to go back up into Burma there. These planes would come down, and if they would see a lot of activity on the railroad, they would bank. I guess the reason that they would bank is so that the top turret, the side turret, the bottom turret, and the front turret could get a good sweep of the area. Well, as soon as the planes would just get by, then the Japs would run out, the guards that we had...we had some Korean guards at this time. They were brought up. Why, I don't know. But they were brought up, and they would shoot at the damn plane. Well, this went on about two or three times. Then another plane came down, biggest goddamn plane

I have ever seen in my life, and I thought, "My God, they have got it on sky hooks or something!" But, anyway, he came down through there, and that bottom turret was just blasting the whole living daylights out of the railroad. Of course, there was probably about 170 of us out there working, and as soon as we were aware that he was there, why, man, off out in the jungles we went. Well, these Japs, didn't go in too far, and just as soon as the plane got by, why, one runs back out there, and they start shooting at him. Out of the back end of that plane, that thing says, "WOOF, WOOF, WOOF, WOOF, WOOF!" That was those 1.1 shells or whatever the devil they were. It just scattered that darn ballast all over hell. It scared the hell out of those Korean guards, and we didn't see much of those Korean guards after that (chuckle). They kept to the bush quite a bit.

Marcello: So normally speaking, then, when these planes came over, your immediate instinct or reaction was to get away from that railroad?

Brain: Get away from the right-of-way. I can just imagine...you get up there a thousand feet

and look down, and that railroad going through there had to look like a sore thumb sticking out.

Marcello: What did the mere presence of the plane and so on do for your morale?

Brain: Well, I just thought, "Hot damn! They're coming! My prayers are being answered!"

Marcello: But I guess you couldn't show too much happy emotion, could you?

Brain: Oh, no, because the Japanese...they undoubtedly knew that they were on the weak end of the stick now. They knew that they were losing their punch and were going to have to withdraw because most of them...they all looked tired, and they all looked worn.

Marcello: What would their attitude be toward the prisoners in the aftermath of one of these air raids?

Brain: We didn't have too much trouble with the Japanese themselves. The Koreans got... after they had come over and strafed the railroad a little bit, why, they would get pretty brave at night--come around and throw their chest out and walk around like a bunch of banty roosters, give you a bunch of "lip

service."

Marcello: How much damage did these planes do to the railroad?

Brain: Oh, outside of shooting them up and tearing up the ballast...actually, the weather was doing more damage to the railroad, other than when they would drop a medium-sized bomb on one of the bigger bridges. See, there was just a series of small bridges. Maybe they would be 200 or 300 yards across, and then some of them would be quite deep. Maybe you would have two tiers of piling on them.

Marcello: Then I gather that you would be seeing maybe just one or two planes coming over at one time. There was really no such thing as an organized raid as such.

Brain: Not at this time, no. I didn't get involved in that until I went back down into Thailand, down at Kanburi.

Marcello: I don't want to get to that point just yet because I don't want to get out of the jungle. Awhile ago, you mentioned when you went back the second time, you also had contracted dysentery and tropical ulcers.

Brain: That's when I really had problems with my ulcers.

Marcello: Describe how you got these tropical ulcers?

Brain: Well, you would get scratched or break your skin, and the next morning...well, when you went into camp that night, your sore was all festered and had puss in it. You know, there were a lot of flies out there, and they would get in there and blow the sore. Just like I say, I was in a weaker condition than I was prior to this. We got into one area there, and we were taking the water out of the well, and we found some drowned rats in it. We got into some sugar, and we didn't boil it. We ate it and the stuff was pretty well saturated with rat urine, and I think this is the thing that probably got my malaria compounded.

Marcello: Well, talk a little bit more about these tropical ulcers. You mentioned that you got these obviously from some break in the skin, a scratch or whatever.

Brain: It would be usually a scratch. I had one on my right hand, just between my little finger and the next finger here, and that thing got quite large. You could even look down and see the tendons and the bone in it.

The way that I treated that was, I would save all of my tea leaves and everything, and I would use my tea leaves as a poultice because of the tannic acid in it. I knew that you had to keep the dead and proud flesh away, so I would go down to the creek, and I would put my hand in the creek; and they had these little fish like that were like minnows, and they would come up and eat around this. That kept my sore cleaned out and kept it from spreading larger than it did. It really went fast.

I got a few on my legs. I would go down and catch these water leeches, and they would get in there, and they would suck the puss out. Then they would throw up, and then you could use them again. But you could only use them about twice because they would die of the poison in there. Like I say, I tried to get all the tea leaves I could and make a poultice out of them and keep them on there and try to keep them wrapped. This is when my clothes started deteriorating on me. You know, I was using them for bandages.

Marcello: Were these tropical ulcers bad enough that you were able to stay off the work details?

Brain: Not on this maintenance bunch because there was so few of us. There was a lot of fellows that just...man, they would be sick one day and die the next day, especially amongst the British. They just seemed to lay themselves down and will themselves to die. Another thing...you would catch one of these Englishmen in a state like this, and you knew he was dying because they would get this familar gurgle in their throats and stuff. So the middle of the night, why, you would sneak over there and steal what clothes off of him you could so you would have something to wear the next day, because you knew he was going to die. So you would hurry up and get over there and hope you could steal his pants before he relieved himself in them.

Marcello: How could you tell when a person had lost the will to live?

Brain: There was no...it seemed like they seemed to lose the sparkle or any sparkle at all in the eyes. The eyes just went completely...no expression in the eyeball itself. They just lay there and sort of just tried not to breath--just like they were trying to make themselves die.

Marcello: What attraction did food have to these people?

Brain: None whatsoever. They didn't want any. You would sit there next to some guy, and you would reach over there and keep fanning the food to try and keep the flies off, and you would keep eating as fast as you can so you can get his and hurry up and eat his before it got cold. Along about this time, it got "dog-eat-dog," really. I would steal food from them and take to some guy that I had kind of been buddied up with, whether he was an Australian or an American. You know, he would say, "Where did you get the food?" I would say, "Dummy, you don't ask things, where did anybody get anything! Just hurry up and eat it!"

Marcello: Was there any way that you could snap these people out of the state that they were in?

Brain: Yes, by slapping them in the face and abusing them, cussing them out, and force feeding them. We'd hold their nose and pour soup down their throat, and that got pretty dangerous because they would choke, more or less drown in it, really. There was one fellow there I know that...God, I worked hard with him. I had a little funnel with an enema tube-like thing on it, and I used to poke that down his nose, get down in his throat, and

then I would ladle that soup down in there and be sure that there weren't any lumps or anything. I would give him all my broth and his, and then I would eat the solid stuff. But he was just too far gone. He was an Aussie; he was an older guy. Most of those Australians were older people. Really, I guess they shouldn't have been in a position where they would have ended up as a prisoner-of-war, but that is the way the Aussies were. They were a "gung-ho" bunch, proud people, and damn good people.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you had contracted dysentery, also.

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what dysentery is like--in your particular case.

Brain: Dysentery is when you take a drink of water, and immediately it goes to your bowels, and it puts you in a weakened state. You are sick all of the time. At least I was. You're sick in the stomach. You don't want to eat because you know what is going to happen, and you have no control over it whatsoever. When this fluid starts to leave your system, you can't hold it--you can't control it. It is there and it comes out of you.

Very much like when a person dies, a short while afterwards, why, if he has got anything in his entrails, then it starts running out of him, and this is just about the way you are. The odor is...it's got a terrible odor to it--like a death odor to it.

Marcello: When you had dysentery, approximately how many times might you be going to the latrine in a day's time?

Brain: Probably twice every hour. Of if you took a drink of water...if you were on a schedule of twice every hour, and someplace along there you took a drink of water, why, then it would be three times in that hour.

Marcello: I understand that relieving oneself under these conditions becomes very painful, too, after awhile.

Brain: It does. Your scrotum gets very very sore and inflammed. It just gets so sore that you don't even want to sit. The only thing I knew at this time to control it would be charcoal, but you had to have a wood charcoal. With a bamboo charcoal, you were wasting your time. You had to get a good, hard charcoal of wood.

Marcello: What would you do? Eat on this charcoal?

Brain: You would take it and pulverize it, and you would eat as much as you could with a spoon, and then when you couldn't eat anymore, why, then you would get a mouthful, and you would try to wash it down with water or hot tea.

Marcello: How long did you have dysentery in this form before you were able to get...

Brain: I had it about five days in this form. I had just got through having malaria, and I got so damn weak that, damn, I just couldn't move. But I knew that I had to do something, so you would get down on your hands and knees and crawl to the cookhouse, trying to get a piece of charcoal or whatever you could, and if you could get burnt rice, that seemed to help quite a bit.

Marcello: Were you buddying up with anybody at this time?

Brain: At this time, why, I had an Australian that I was buddied up with.

Marcello: How much of a help was that?

Brain: We seemed to help each other, but then when he died, well, then I didn't have anybody that I was real close to this way.

Marcello: How long were you back in the jungle and the second time altogether?

Brain: It seemed like a hundred years. Probably two-and-a-half months, something like that. Then I came back down and got back down into Kanchanaburi and got put in this larger hospital camp, and I recovered pretty good down there.

Marcello: Now were you taken off the railroad specifically because of your physical condition?

Brain: They brought all of us back because out of this 280 of us, I imagine they probably might have had a working force of maybe forty or fifty people at the most. Even the Japs were sick. The Koreans left because they got sick, and the Japanese themselves got real lackadaisical. You could see them going to the slit trench, too.

Marcello: Had the second monsoon season started yet, or hadn't we gotten into that point yet?

Brain: Yes. It was just starting when we came back out.

Marcello: So you may have been back out there sometime around April, May, or June of 1944? Somewhere in that neighborhood?

Brain: God, it seems like it might have been later than that, maybe not. Well, it was in the latter part of 1944.

Marcello: What kind of treatment did you get back in

Kanchanaburi after you got back into the hospital camp?

Brain: When we got back in Kanchanaburi, the food was just excellent that we got back there. We thought it was.

Marcello: Of course, anything would have been better than what you were getting.

Brain: We got a lot of greens. The rice was better than what we had up there before. The rice was pretty good; the fresh vegetables were good. We had onions and sweet potatoes and little potatoes, carrots, some stuff that looked something like spinach, and then we got a sugar issue. We had tea and sugar all the time. We got one hard-boiled egg a day. Because when we come out of that camp we just drug in.

Marcello: Again, did you take the railroad from the jungle back to Kanchanaburi?

Brain: Yes, we took the railroad back to Kanchanaburi. I got into pretty good shape there, after having eggs and sugar and tea. They kept us over in one area, and then after you got up where you could really mobile around good, my strength started getting built back up, so then I would get involved in different details. I got involved

with the "honey bucket" detail. The latrines they had there were fully enclosed, and they had little cubicles with trap doors, and they had a regular urinal in there. I was with another fellow, and we had this great, big barrel. It was a wooden barrel with an open top, and we would go around to these different latrines, and we would scoop this excrete out, and we would put it in one of these buckets, and the urine, and then we would take it out--two of us. We had a big pole between the darn thing. The thing stood about four feet tall and was probably four feet across the top. Then we would haul this way out in the back where they had sort of like a settling pond for this type of thing, and we would dump it out there and then come back in. When we were in what they called the working area, well, you had a cookhouse there, but if you were working in another area over here, why, then you could go over there and get a ration out of that area. So I was getting two rations every meal.

So I snapped back out of it pretty good. I had one attack of malaria there, which it wasn't too bad. I got out of it pretty damn

good. There was only about five days there that I couldn't hit the work detail.

Then it wasn't too long after I was back there...I say "too long." Gosh, it was maybe within a month that we lost quite a few people who died there.

Then they had a big bombing raid down south of us, a place that the Japs referred to as Hashimoto. It is where the railroad went down to Singapore and branched off and went back up in the jungles there. On one side of the area they had quite a number of Jap billets there, engineers and maintenance men--technicians is what they were--and they had supplies there, and in the center there they had a little round-house. They'd take about two or three of these locomotives. Then right behind there they had stores, all kinds of stuff stored in there. Across from this railroad there, from the roundhouse, they must have had two or three thousand British troops down in there. When they bombed this place, they just damn near annihilated the whole darn thing. It was at night, and it was three days later that I was sent on a working detail to go down there and try to straighten things up--pick

up the dead and get the debris out of the way. There was just any number of bodies down there. There wasn't a broken bone or a broken piece of skin on any of them, but they were dead. I assume it was the concussion that had killed these people. I don't have any idea the exact mileage that was down there, but it was something like twenty. But even when we were in the slit trenches up there at Kanchanaburi, why, it just... man, they just rattled you around in those slit trenches.

Marcello: Now when you were up at Kanchanaburi, did that area come under air raids?

Brain: Not while I was there. Then just...I would say it was probably a week or two later that I got kind of a sick feeling down there cleaning up that mess because there was British and Japs and everything. There were Japs down in the dugouts, in bomb shelters. Hey, they were down there, and we had to dig holes to find out where the door was on some of them to go down there and get them. Maybe there would be five, maybe there would be ten, maybe there would only be three, and, hey, they were dead but there were no signs of what killed them other than concussion.

I worked...we were down there three days, I think, and we got the essentials cleaned up, and then they went back up to Kanchanaburi.

While I was on that detail down there cleaning up, well, some other guy got the job on the "honey bucket" that I had, so then you just did mediocre work around there, killing weeds and this type of thing. You are starting to think, "Any day now, you are going to see American troops coming through that door." Then, like I say, it was probably a week after we got that mess cleaned up that they sent another detail down there, and I never had any contact with the people that went down there and come back up.

Then they put us back on the railroad, and we went down toward a little seacoast town down there before we got off the train, and then we went inland. We were building roads and gun emplacements. It was darn near all Australians that I was with there. I don't remember any American there in this bunch that I was with. I didn't come in contact with any American until I was brought back out of there. We were down there at...I forget this town. It was probably

forty or forty-five miles south of Kanchanaburi because we were on the train damn near all day long. Then we got off the trail...we got in there early in the morning, and we got off the train, and they started marching us back northwest. We got back up in there, and there was a couple of big barracks built back up in there, and there was a bunch of Japanese combattants up there at that time. Like I say, we started building roadways. There was an old road in there, and what we were doing, we was repairing it, or where part of it would wash out, we were putting rocks in there and tamping it down. Then we would get up, and we would build emplacements. They would bring a trail gun in there or something like that to set in there.

Marcello: For the most part, at this stage of the war, does it seem as though they are just trying to find things for you to do?

Brain: Well, not necessarily. I kind of had a feeling that we were going to be involved with them with the last stand. This was the thing that I was worried about.

Marcello: Had they kind of eased up a little bit in terms of physical harassment and things of that

sort?

Brain: Not too much. Not when we got involved with these regular soldiers up there. Of course, we were working with them, too; I mean, they were out there with grubbing hoes and stuff. They resented it a little bit that they had to work right alongside of us, but this is what the commander said, so they were doing it. It was kind of a frantic type of thing. It was hurry, hurry, hurry--"speedo" thing.

Marcello: Were you beginning to wonder what they would do to you once they did have to make that last stand or if they lost the war?

Brain: What I fully expected...on this detail here, you could kind of tell that things were a little bit more frantic, and I fully expected to be taken out and shot any day, or else we would be sacrificed in some way. You know, you heard stories of what they did with the Chinese and everything, and, hell, we didn't know if they were going to line us all up out there and that we would have to go in front of them. We had visions of this.

Marcello: While you were on these details, did you have any more contact with any natives who perhaps

might be able to inform you about the progress of the war?

Brain: No, because I was over in Thailand at that time, and I couldn't speak Thai. But all the time I was in Burma, I probably got along better than anybody over there. I'll contribute it to the fact that I could speak Burmese. We used to...when we was over in Burma, for $25 you could get a big tobacco leaf, and we would take that and chop that all up and put in in a five-gallon can full of water. Then we would get this moss off of a tree and dry it, and it was kind of a reddish-brown color. We would put this down with this water and this tobacco and put a piece of wood on the top of it, put a rock on top of it, and we would boil all this nicotine juice and tobacco juice all together, and this is the way we made our smoking tobacco.

Marcello: I understand you had to do that because otherwise it would blow the top of your head off.

Brain: We would get to where you would put sugar in it, and you would...you couldn't keep it too long because the longer you kept it, the stronger it got. Then you would take paper--any kind of paper you could get, the Bible--and you would cut

this Bible in a strip just about like that (gesture), about an inch wide, and then you would take up the top and fold it over your finger. Then you would take a razor blade... you wouldn't ever shave with these razor blades. You would use those to cut the top of the paper, and then when you got the cut in there just right, why, then you would start working it like that (gesture), kind of feathering it. Then after you got a piece about that long (gesture), why, then you would take the piece you started from and fold it between your two fingers, and then you could split it. We made our cigarette paper like this. I asked one of the Australian padres over there how he felt about the Bible being used this way, and he said he would rather it be an encyclopedia, but he said that if it went for a necessary use, then he guessed we could be excused.

Marcello: President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945. Did the Japanese inform you of his death?

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: What seemed to be their reaction in telling it to you, and what was your reaction when you

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Brain: Yes, we took the railroad back to Kanchanaburi. I got into pretty good shape there, after having eggs and sugar and tea. They kept us over in one area, and then after you got up where you could really mobile around good, my strength started getting built back up, so then I would get involved in different details. I got involved

with the "honey bucket" detail. The latrines they had there were fully enclosed, and they had little cubicles with trap doors, and they had a regular urinal in there. I was with another fellow, and we had this great, big barrel. It was a wooden barrel with an open top, and we would go around to these different latrines, and we would scoop this excrete out, and we would put it in one of these buckets, and the urine, and then we would take it out--two of us. We had a big pole between the darn thing. The thing stood about four feet tall and was probably four feet across the top. Then we would haul this way out in the back where they had sort of like a settling pond for this type of thing, and we would dump it out there and then come back in. When we were in what they called the working area, well, you had a cookhouse there, but if you were working in another area over here, why, then you could go over there and get a ration out of that area. So I was getting two rations every meal.

So I snapped back out of it pretty good. I had one attack of malaria there, which it wasn't too bad. I got out of it pretty damn

good. There was only about five days there that I couldn't hit the work detail.

Then it wasn't too long after I was back there...I say "too long." Gosh, it was maybe within a month that we lost quite a few people who died there.

Then they had a big bombing raid down south of us, a place that the Japs referred to as Hashimoto. It is where the railroad went down to Singapore and branched off and went back up in the jungles there. On one side of the area they had quite a number of Jap billets there, engineers and maintenance men--technicians is what they were--and they had supplies there, and in the center there they had a little round-house. They'd take about two or three of these locomotives. Then right behind there they had stores, all kinds of stuff stored in there. Across from this railroad there, from the roundhouse, they must have had two or three thousand British troops down in there. When they bombed this place, they just damn near annihilated the whole darn thing. It was at night, and it was three days later that I was sent on a working detail to go down there and try to straighten things up--pick

up the dead and get the debris out of the way. There was just any number of bodies down there. There wasn't a broken bone or a broken piece of skin on any of them, but they were dead. I assume it was the concussion that had killed these people. I don't have any idea the exact mileage that was down there, but it was something like twenty. But even when we were in the slit trenches up there at Kanchanaburi, why, it just... man, they just rattled you around in those slit trenches.

Marcello: Now when you were up at Kanchanaburi, did that area come under air raids?

Brain: Not while I was there. Then just...I would say it was probably a week or two later that I got kind of a sick feeling down there cleaning up that mess because there was British and Japs and everything. There were Japs down in the dugouts, in bomb shelters. Hey, they were down there, and we had to dig holes to find out where the door was on some of them to go down there and get them. Maybe there would be five, maybe there would be ten, maybe there would only be three, and, hey, they were dead but there were no signs of what killed them other than concussion.

I worked...we were down there three days, I think, and we got the essentials cleaned up, and then they went back up to Kanchanaburi.

While I was on that detail down there cleaning up, well, some other guy got the job on the "honey bucket" that I had, so then you just did mediocre work around there, killing weeds and this type of thing. You are starting to think, "Any day now, you are going to see American troops coming through that door." Then, like I say, it was probably a week after we got that mess cleaned up that they sent another detail down there, and I never had any contact with the people that went down there and come back up.

Then they put us back on the railroad, and we went down toward a little seacoast town down there before we got off the train, and then we went inland. We were building roads and gun emplacements. It was darn near all Australians that I was with there. I don't remember any American there in this bunch that I was with. I didn't come in contact with any American until I was brought back out of there. We were down there at...I forget this town. It was probably

forty or forty-five miles south of Kanchanaburi because we were on the train damn near all day long. Then we got off the trail...we got in there early in the morning, and we got off the train, and they started marching us back northwest. We got back up in there, and there was a couple of big barracks built back up in there, and there was a bunch of Japanese combattants up there at that time. Like I say, we started building roadways. There was an old road in there, and what we were doing, we was repairing it, or where part of it would wash out, we were putting rocks in there and tamping it down. Then we would get up, and we would build emplacements. They would bring a trail gun in there or something like that to set in there.

Marcello: For the most part, at this stage of the war, does it seem as though they are just trying to find things for you to do?

Brain: Well, not necessarily. I kind of had a feeling that we were going to be involved with them with the last stand. This was the thing that I was worried about.

Marcello: Had they kind of eased up a little bit in terms of physical harassment and things of that

sort?

Brain: Not too much. Not when we got involved with these regular soldiers up there. Of course, we were working with them, too; I mean, they were out there with grubbing hoes and stuff. They resented it a little bit that they had to work right alongside of us, but this is what the commander said, so they were doing it. It was kind of a frantic type of thing. It was hurry, hurry, hurry--"speedo" thing.

Marcello: Were you beginning to wonder what they would do to you once they did have to make that last stand or if they lost the war?

Brain: What I fully expected...on this detail here, you could kind of tell that things were a little bit more frantic, and I fully expected to be taken out and shot any day, or else we would be sacrificed in some way. You know, you heard stories of what they did with the Chinese and everything, and, hell, we didn't know if they were going to line us all up out there and that we would have to go in front of them. We had visions of this.

Marcello: While you were on these details, did you have any more contact with any natives who perhaps

might be able to inform you about the progress of the war?

Brain: No, because I was over in Thailand at that time, and I couldn't speak Thai. But all the time I was in Burma, I probably got along better than anybody over there. I'll contribute it to the fact that I could speak Burmese. We used to...when we was over in Burma, for $25 you could get a big tobacco leaf, and we would take that and chop that all up and put in in a five-gallon can full of water. Then we would get this moss off of a tree and dry it, and it was kind of a reddish-brown color. We would put this down with this water and this tobacco and put a piece of wood on the top of it, put a rock on top of it, and we would boil all this nicotine juice and tobacco juice all together, and this is the way we made our smoking tobacco.

Marcello: I understand you had to do that because otherwise it would blow the top of your head off.

Brain: We would get to where you would put sugar in it, and you would...you couldn't keep it too long because the longer you kept it, the stronger it got. Then you would take paper--any kind of paper you could get, the Bible--and you would cut

this Bible in a strip just about like that (gesture), about an inch wide, and then you would take up the top and fold it over your finger. Then you would take a razor blade... you wouldn't ever shave with these razor blades. You would use those to cut the top of the paper, and then when you got the cut in there just right, why, then you would start working it like that (gesture), kind of feathering it. Then after you got a piece about that long (gesture), why, then you would take the piece you started from and fold it between your two fingers, and then you could split it. We made our cigarette paper like this. I asked one of the Australian padres over there how he felt about the Bible being used this way, and he said he would rather it be an encyclopedia, but he said that if it went for a necessary use, then he guessed we could be excused.

Marcello: President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945. Did the Japanese inform you of his death?

Brain: Yes.

Marcello: What seemed to be their reaction in telling it to you, and what was your reaction when you

heard it?

Brain: I took it with mixed emotions. This one little Jap that I used to communicate with, he was... the guy caught a lot of hell from his own people. He did some dumb things, but still he was thinking the other way. He would want to know where Seattle was, where San Francisco was, where Los Angeles was, where Denver was, where New York and Washington was. Well, you would draw a map on the dirt, you know, the best as you could remember, and you would locate these things. This was after we started getting bombed. He wanted to know how far it was from here to Tokyo, and we would try to explain it to him. He would say that he didn't understand. If Japan was bombing here...which he said a plane couldn't go from Tokyo to New York. He didn't believe that. Maybe to over here, yes. But he says, "If they are bombing over here and blowing up these cities like this and killing all these people here, where are the planes coming from that are bombing us here?" I would tell him, "I don't know, George. Maybe they are coming from India." "Are there American troops in Burma?" He'd say, "I don't know. I don't understand."

I said, "I think they are in India, George." He says, "Well, when they come, can George go with you?" I said, "Well, yes, George." I said, "I don't care, but I didn't know whether they will allow it or not." But he was always saying, "It will be good when Tojo and Roosevelt-o and Churchill-o all go like that. Everybody go home. Everybody go home, go home to mommas and babies and papas and mommas. Then everything be good." I said, "You're right, George."

So you met several Japanese that were this way, too. They didn't want any part of the war. A lot of them were interested in where you came from. What did you do there? What does your mother do? Do you have any brothers? Do you have any sisters? You would run into a few like this.

Then you ran into quite a number of them that were educated here--graduates out of Stanford and Southern California. You could darn near...just as soon as these guys started talking to you, you knew that they were educated here. They could use the slang terminology that we were used to, so you know that they

weren't trained English in Japan Proper, they didn't get it from an English school.

Marcello: So again, what seemed to be their reaction when they told you about Roosevelt's death?

Brain: Well, they seemed to think they would start winning the war then. Of course, like this one incident here with this little Georgie, why, he didn't care what happened to any of them. As far as he was concerned, they all could die, and then everybody could go home.

Marcello: What was your reaction and that of the other Americans when you heard about Roosevelt's death?

Brain: I didn't know whether it was Japanese propaganda or not. At the beginning, when we got into Burma, we used to get a newspaper that was printed in Rangoon. It was the Rangoon Gazette or something like that, and it was printed in English. Now I don't know how big a circulation this publication had, but the stories they would tell in there of the heroic Japanese pilots... I don't know if it was just propaganda for us. I seem to feel it was more propaganda for the Burmese. There was a lot of Burmese that could read and write English, and they would have more of an impact if a Burmese person that could read

English would read it out of this paper and then tell it to the people. I think it would have a bigger impact with them than if it had been written in Burmese.

But such things as...they would tell about this one pilot that had run out of ammunition, so he opened the cover on his airplane, and he drew his sword out, and he flew upside down over this American bomber, and he chopped off the pilots head and the plane crashed. Another little story there was that this other pilot ran out of ammunition, but he had a bunch of rice cakes with him, and he threw this at the enemy and blinded the pilot, and the pilot crashed. I don't know whether it was in the side of a mountain or in to the ocean.

The most hilarious thing that I remember was about this Japanese pilot who, after shooting down so many planes, had his undercarriage shot away. Well, when he came into land, to save the airplane, why, he pokes his legs through the bottom of the airplane and runs along and lands the aircraft safely so they can put new wheels on it. He can go be a proud eagle again.

But this was the type of thing that was put

in the paper, and this is what makes me kind of think that their propaganda people couldn't be stupid enough to think that the average American or English speaking person would buy this type of propaganda that they were kicking out.

Marcello: Where were you when the war ended?

Brain: They had pulled us back out of building these roadways, and all of a sudden work came to a stop--just BOOM! We couldn't figure out what had happened. Nobody seemed to know. Nobody wanted to admit anything. Then the next day, the Japanese officer said, "Well, you are going to have a lot of rest, a lot of days off. There was only three Japanese there; the rest of them had left. We didn't know where they went. They went out during the night.

So this British officer, through his arrogance and everything...they would walk right up to them with their swagger stick and look them right in the eye and click their heels together and salute them. He said, "Well, is the war over?" He did it in a real obnoxious way. He said, "Is the war over?" The Japanese told him in English, he says, "No, I'm waiting

for further orders." And this British officer says, "Well, you bloody well better give me the orders when you get them, also," and he turned around and stormed off. He came back to his adjutant, and he says, "Go in there in my duffle bag and get that Union Jack out." So the orderly did, and I thought, "What the hell is going to happen now?" They go over there, and they pull down the Jap flag--this colonel and another officer and this orderly--and they run up the Union Jack. So he goes over to the Japanese officer and asked him to step out. He says, "Since you are defeated, I'll return your flag. Give me your saber. We are flying the Union Jack. This is the Queen's land. It belongs to the Crown. You are going to have to take orders from me." The Jap just dropped his head. He goes back in the shack.

The next day a brigadier comes up there. I don't know where in the hell he came from, but he comes up there and says, "All you people have got to march back down here to Phet Buri." So we marched back down there. You go through quite a large town there, and they got places all down there real close to a beach, and we were

there for about two or three days. I swapped my blanket off and got myself a bottle of that native "hooch" and proceeded to have myself a good evening because we found out that they had capitulated in that area, is what we were told.

So about two days later, why...I guess it was the next morning because I wasn't feeling too good after drinking that bottle of that "hooch." The British officer says, "The Japanese have capitulated, and we will be evacuated from this area shortly." Well, about two days later, they came in, and they said that they wanted to get all the Americans rounded up. They said, "They are making preparations now. They are moving the sick out right now to be evacuated by aircraft, and as soon as we get the sick out, why, you will be next."

Well, they got all the sick people down there, and it's Americans down there in a jeep and a little pick-up. He came down there, and he was just...this American officer was just raising hell. He wanted to know where the Americans were. He understood that there were a few Americans here. I think there was five

of us--fellows that I hadn't seen in a couple of years. I was aware of them, but the last time I had seen them was in Bicycle Camp. So they told him that they were here to pick up the Americans. The British could evacuate their own. "We're not taking these people. We want the Americans." Well, I didn't know all this was going on. I found this out later. But I had gone back down to the beach there. I went for a swim, and I was laying out there in my G-string, and they sent one of these runners down to get a hold of me. He says, "You have got to get up to headquarters right away." So I go up there in my G-string. All the rest of my gear is back up there. The American officer there said, "You get in that trailer there because I don't want you leaving the area." He said, "You guys are getting out of here."

Well, he took us back up, and there was a plane up there, an old cargo plane, and they threw us in there and left the jeep there. Well, he stayed there, too. And they flew us down there to a place where they had this runway made of metal stuff--the first time I had ever seen these metal runways. They got us down there, and

they sprayed us with DDT and took us over and gave us a shower. As we got through with these showers--the pit down in the ground with a drum overhead--they said that there was an officer up there, or a padre, a man of the cloth. I don't know which denomination he was, but anyway, he said, "Leave all your clothes up here. We want to burn them all." So, hell, we're standing...all these native women are all around the damn area. So, hell, if any of them had pants on, they took them off, and we were standing there just like the day we were born. He thought that was terrible. He said, "Oh, get down in the hole first! You don't want these women to see you!" Well, hell, you know, we had been living like this for I don't know how long, and we cared less.

We got pumped with that DDT and then took a shower, and then we walked across these planks, and they gave us some clothes and some G.I. boots to put on. Then we went over in a tent there, and they fed us and loaded us in a plane, and then we flew from this area here to Rangoon. It was raining when we got to Rangoon, and they took us out of there and put us in a ATC plane

to fly us to Calcutta.

Marcello: Now when you got to Calcutta, did they put in the 142nd General Hospital there?

Brain: Yes. We were there for thirty days.

Marcello: Is that where you really got your first square meal?

Brain: No, the first square one I got was in that tent.

Marcello: Is that right? Do you recall what you ate?

Brain: Yes, sir. We had fruit cocktail, synthetic potatoes, peeled sausage, those little sausages with the ends cut off of them, Vienna sausage... no, it wasn't Vienna sausage, but it was a wiener like a Vienna sausage. We had those and some gravy and some cookies, powdered milk--God, that was good--and coffee, good ol' American coffee! That is the first time that I was ever able to drink out of a canteen cup without burning my lips, without it bothering me. Boy, that was sure good! I never will forget that! Then when we got into Calcutta--we got in there at night--we had scrambled eggs and ham and fried potatoes and more good coffee. That officer that was in there just "went bananas." He said, "Now fellows, don't eat too much! Don't eat too

much! No, you shouldn't eat any more! If you eat too much, you are going to get sick! You are going to get sick!" Boy, we never got sick!

Marcello: I gather you guys were pretty hard to control, once they got you to Calcutta.

Brain: Well, it finally got down to the point, "Look, fellows, you are going to have to do this and this and this, so you can get out of here." Well, we all figured, "Well, hell, you have got to be there for thirty days, anyway, quarantined," so we didn't give a damn. Of course, they gave us a--at that time--a good physical, I thought. Of course, the psychiatrist had problems with us.

Marcello: Did they give you any sort of psychiatric examinations or interviews and so on?

Brain: Yes, you had about an hour and twenty minutes worth of "head shrink" there. But we weren't buying anything from him.

Marcello: What kind of questions was he asking?

Brain: Well, questions like, "Do you still like girls?" This is one thing. You may think about girls occasionally, but it didn't stick long with you. You were to interested about getting food. Booze

didn't...up to this time, it hadn't bothered us extremely. It was sure nice getting good American cigarettes. I was never a Chesterfield smoker, but they sure tasted good (chuckle). It was these things that would relate to you: "Well, what do you want to do?" Every guy there said, "Hey, I want to go home." "Well how are you feeling?" "Oh, just fine, just fine." My God, you could be sitting there sweating, and he didn't know whether you were coming down with a chill or whether it was just the humidity there. We weren't going to admit to a damn thing because we sure as heck didn't want to be--I didn't want to be held up there any longer than we had to. We all wanted them to hurry up and do things, but they got such an influx of us there that they weren't really prepared to handle us real fast right at that time.

Marcello: I guess this would have been the first time that you had seen WAC's too, would it not, that is, at Calcutta?

Brain: No, the first...well, it was a nurse on this plane out of Rangoon. When I first saw her, I thought, "What kind of a..,I thought maybe she

was half-Chinese and half-English. I thought she was a Eurasian because of the color of her. She had the yellow eyes and the yellow skin, but she talked like she was out of Brooklyn or someplace. She had that accent. I asked her, "What is the matter with you? Have you got yellow jaundice?" And she says, "No, I just came off a course of Atabrine." "Atabrine," I said, "what do you take that for?" She says, you take that when we have malaria." That was the first American, stateside, girl I had seen... or woman. But I just knew she was some kind of a half-breed because of the texture of her skin. But the accent threw me.

Marcello: When you were back in Calcutta, were you ever asked to give any depositions against certain Japanese for war crimes that they had committed?

Brain: They inquired about it--if you knew of any one Japanese that committed any actual atrocity. We only had one camp commandant there at one camp that...I was there for a short while, but he was just nuttier than a fruitcake, so you really can't say that...he was as bad on his own people as he was on the troops.

There was one incident there that he...some

natives came through there--about four women and this one man, Burmese--and they had these baskets on the top of their heads like all the women carried everything over there, and they were full of duck eggs. He wanted to know how many eggs they had and how much they wanted for them, and they told him, and he said, "Well, lay them all out here, and we will count them to be sure that there is that many there." Then they started haggling about price. They wanted 25¢ apiece for those eggs, and he said, "No, they are only worth a dime." Finally, one of our officers says, "Well, tell them twelve cents." They said, no, they had to have twenty cents for them." They finally got down to fifteen cents. Well, about this time, this Jap was getting pushed out of the argument, and he got mad, and he just went in there, and he started stomping on all those damn eggs. That was back up in Burma. That was about the second time there at the 40 Kilo Camp. I think it was. The first time we was on one side of the road, and the next time when they came back, they were on the other side of the road. That was the only guy

that I felt probably should have been dealt with, really.

Marcello: But again, he didn't really do anything in terms of crimes against the person?

Brain: No, he didn't stab anybody or anything like this, or torture them or drive bamboo underneath their fingernails and burn them like some of the stories say, or put a torniquet on their head with a couple of marbles or stones in it and twist their head. No, I never did come in contact with really any direct atrocities, so I just told them, "No." It kind of got to a point, if a guy got a beating, you know, maybe he caused it himself. Most of mine, I did. Unknowingly, I caused them. But most of the problems I got in, it was shenanigans that I pulled and got caught at--trying to steal something and get caught at it.

Marcello: Was there any particular ailment that they were worried about that you had there at Calcutta?

Brain: They seemed to be more worried about malaria than anything else. That seemed to be the main interest, that they get this malaria out of us. Of course, they undoubtedly were a

little bit concerned about how much hookworm we had or if we had any contagious disease--be sure that none of us had leprosy or anything like this--because I know they would pick skin out from underneath your fingernails and toenails and get skin samples anyplace off of you they could.

Marcello: Where were your folks living at this time?

Brain: In Long Beach, California.

Marcello: And when you finally got back to the States, did you head for Long Beach?

Brain: As soon as I got released from the Navy hospital, yes.

Marcello: To which Navy hospital were you assigned?

Brain: We were assigned to the U.S. Naval Hospital in St. Albans. We came back to Calcutta. Then we went to Karachi; from Karachi we went to Casablanca; from Casablanca we went to the Azores; from the Azores we went to New Foundland, I believe; and then we finally landed in New York, and then we got off-loaded the plane there at LaGuardia Field and was bused from there to St. Albans Hospital.

We were there for about two weeks, and then they sent us home on leave, and then we

had to report back into a naval hospital. Of course, in Long Beach there they had a naval hospital there, and I just turned in there. Then they started their procedure all over again. They were scrutinizing us pretty close and taking blood samples, stool samples, urinanalysis--trying to get rid of all the bugs we had in us.

Marcello: When you finally got home, did you have any problems adjusting to civilian life?

Brain: I didn't think I had. Maybe some people thought I was goofy. There was a lot of things that I wanted to see and do and see the changes. I tried to pick up where I left off when I went in the Navy, which you can't do. You can't go back and recapture anything. I was really interested in feeding myself. I couldn't get enough rolled oats; I couldn't get enough lettuce or milk. I could take a whole head of lettuce and just sit down with a quart of milk or half-gallon of milk, and I would eat that lettuce just like it was an apple--just a tremendous desire for lettuce for some reason. I think my mother was glad when I left. She quit cooking rolled oat

cookies, too (chuckle). But those were three main things that I just craved.

Marcello: I know some of the former prisoners said they had problems staying in one place for very long. Was this ever a problem with you?

Brain: You mean like staying someplace for a year or something like that?

Marcello: Yes, or even less than a year.

Brain: Well, no, because I was pretty much on the move when I got back. I still had a little time to do in the service. I was planning to make a career of it. When we got back, I went to put in a "chit" for aviation metalsmith's school, and I went back to Memphis, Tennessee. Just out of Memphis, Tennessee, they had the naval schools there for aviation metalsmith, aviation construction. I went back there and took a crash course. So I was back there for a little while, and then I went back out to Long Beach Naval Air Station out there. They decommissioned that place just about three months after I took my discharge. No, I didn't feel that I had to get out and wander around too much. I wanted to see the sights, see the changes, that had

taken place in the area. I couldn't believe what really happened.

Marcello: Did you or did you not make a career out of the Navy?

Brain: I did not.

Marcello: As you look back upon your tenure as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as perhaps being the key to your survival?

Brain: Probably the way I was raised in my childhood and the areas that I had lived in. This degrading situation that happened to so many of us after we got interned, why, I was aware of this happening. I had seen people that had to eat the same way we did--no pots, no pans; they got stuff ladled into their hands. I hadn't been opposed to eating rice. I liked it as a youngster because we ate a lot of it. And my upbringing and the freedom that my parents had allowed me when we were in these other countries, to get out and mingle with the people, I think, gave me a broader understanding of them; and it helped me to adjust possibly a little bit faster in prison camp, other than being impounded. The hardest thing for me, I think,

was probably the loss of my freedom to roam and wander, which I was accustomed to. Of course, when you go into the service, when you volunteer, you get into your basic training or your boot camp type of thing. You are pretty well indoctrinated there that this is one thing that you have given up; you are going to be restricted a little bit. Of course, when you are aboard ship, why, you always can't just get up and walk right off the ship whenever you want to. So you learn to be confined with a certain amount of dignity, which we had lost by being prisoners. So I think the dignity that you probably felt that you were losing was probably the biggest impact on any one of us.

I imagine it would contribute more to a guy's mental condition than anything else, other than not having the proper diet, which wears down the body physically. I feel that it has an effect on the mind, and there is no doubt about it that every darn one of us had come out of this thing with some little quirk of some kind. Maybe it comes to the surface sometimes, and maybe it don't. I know that

basically I probably had more problems feeling totally relaxed around civilians, if you want to use the word "civilians"; than ex-prisoners-of-war. I can talk more freely with these people.

There was things that happened in prison camp that I think maybe a lot of times are just as well not said, or people that were involved in them not being mentioned. I don't think it is necessary. I think most of the people feel this way that were involved there.

Marcello: I'm sure that in a situation like that, you see the very best and the very worst in people.

Brain: The best and the worst comes out of every one of you. There is things that I did over there that no way in the world would I even comprehend doing over here in this country.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Brain, this is probably a good place to end this interview.

Brain: All right, sir.

Marcello: I want to thank you very much for having participated.

Brain: Thank you. I hope that I've done some good

maybe someplace along the line.

Marcello: I'm sure that you have.