

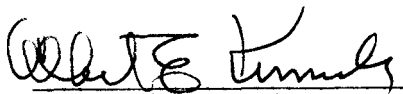
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Interview with  
ALBERT E. KENNEDY  
April 15, 1987

Place of Interview: Arlington, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Albert Kennedy

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello      Date of Interview: April 15, 1987

Place of Interview: Arlington, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Albert Kennedy for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 15, 1987, in Arlington, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Kennedy in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. More specifically, Mr. Kennedy was a survivor of the sinking of the USS Houston.

Mr. Kennedy, to begin this interview, just kind of very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education.

Mr. Kennedy: I was born in East Prairie, Missouri, on July 15, 1921. We lived there until 1937. Then we moved to Edna, Texas, and I finished high school there. Then I joined the Navy in Houston on December 8, 1939.

Dr. Marcello: Did you say you were born in East Prairie, Missouri?

Mr. Kennedy: Right.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you decide to join the Navy in 1939?

Mr. Kennedy: I graduated from high school in 1939. I wanted to go to

college. So I was working at a Western Auto store there for \$2.00 a day, and I knew I'd never save enough money to go to college, so I decided to join the Navy. I had visions of maybe making the U.S. Naval Academy through the Navy, but that didn't work out, either.

Marcello: You said that you actually joined in Houston. Was there any significance to that?

Kennedy: That was the nearest...that was the local recruiting station.

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

Kennedy: Well, I went through the Naval Training Station in San Diego, and from there I went to the USS Pennsylvania. That was around 1940. During the fall of 1940, they put out a fleet letter asking for volunteers for the USS Houston, to go to the Asiatic Station. I applied for that and was accepted, and I got on the Houston at Pearl Harbor in 1940.

Marcello: Why did you volunteer for duty on the Houston in order to go to the Asiatic Station?

Kennedy: Two reasons. One, I wasn't getting along with the chief petty officer in charge of my division, and the other was a romantic thought of being in China and all the things I'd heard about the Asiatic Fleet.

Marcello: I'm assuming from what you said, then, the fact that you were living in Texas had nothing to do with your going aboard the Houston.

Kennedy: No, not really. No.

Marcello: It is true, however, is it not, that there were quite a few Texans aboard the Houston?

Kennedy: Yes, there were. I don't know if that was by accident or just because people wanted to be on the ship because they were from Texas.

Marcello: It is also true, is it not, that President Roosevelt used the Houston from time to time for vacations and things of that nature?

Kennedy: That's true. But that was considerably before my time.

Marcello: What was your rating aboard the Houston?

Kennedy: When the ship went down, I was a fireman first class. As of March 1, however, there was a group of us being promoted to machinist's mate second class. I was in the engine room. However, that information never got off the ship, so I didn't get that promotion.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about those days immediately prior to December 7, 1941, which, of course, was the day that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, and as it was clear that conditions between Japan and the United States were deteriorating, what changes could you detect, even in your position, as a member of the Houston?

Kennedy: We all knew, obviously, from the news reports and from the scuttlebutt that was going around that we probably were going to get into military action, that war was going to be declared,

but, of course, we didn't know. But we were doing a lot more training. We were going out of Manila and stayed out for two weeks--down to the southern Philippines for training. Then we came back into Manila for the weekend and went back out again. Sometimes we stayed in a week to reprovision. Then we'd go back out again for different exercises. We also visited several of the ports, like, Puerto Princesa, Iliolo, and Cebu during those times. Those were our liberty ports. Then we'd go back to the southern Philippines for more exercises.

Marcello: So the Houston was more or less on a prewar footing at that time.

Kennedy: . Very definitely, yes. I think Admiral Hart did a good job, because when war was declared he had the fleet scattered pretty well. I don't think there was more than one major ship at one place.

Marcello: Where was the Houston located when news came of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

Kennedy: We were at the city of Iloilo. I think that's on the island of Iloilo. I'm not sure. We had liberty the night before. I remember that. I was on liberty on the night before the day that war was declared. There was that relaxation, so we didn't know for sure the date, I guess. But I remember that we got liberty.

Marcello: Describe how you heard the news of the Japanese attack at

Pearl Harbor and what your reaction was when you heard it.

Kennedy: I came up for breakfast, and everything was real quiet.

One of the first class petty officers came by and told us that war had been declared. I was rather shocked, and by that time I think they had gone to battle alert.

Marcello: This would've been on December 8, Philippines time, was it not?

Kennedy : Right.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard about the fact that the country was now at war?

Kennedy: Kind of stunned, I think. But I guess you start wondering what this is going to mean for us at this point, and how soon can we expect to see military action, what it would be like, and so on. As a country boy from South Texas, I wasn't used to that type of thing, so I really didn't know what to expect.

Marcello: How long did you think this war was going to last?

Kennedy: Well, we were optimistic. Everybody thought that it wouldn't last long and that it couldn't harm us too much. But it didn't take long to crush that idea.

Marcello: Okay, so what is the next move that the Houston makes?

It was at Iloilo when you received the word. What happens at that point?

Kennedy: I think we stayed there that day. I think we stayed primarily to pick up an admiral who was coming down from Manila to join us. See, we were in the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. I'm

not sure whether that was Hart or Glassford. I'm not for sure. But, anyway, we stayed there most of the day and maybe into the next day. I know we had our scout planes up, and we were at general quarters most all the time.

Then we picked up a convoy coming out of Cavite that we were taking south. I remember there was a little disappointment there--feeling that we were moving away from the war instead of into it. Everybody finally realized, I guess, that they knew what they were doing.

Marcello: What I have been able to gather, there is that period from the time of the Pearl Harbor attack until the early part of February when you really were not engaged in any action. Is that correct?

Kennedy: I'm not sure it was in February. I'm not that good on dates. The first action that I remember--and it wasn't really an action--occurred when I was on watch sometime during the night. I don't know whether I had the late watch or the early watch, but my job was in the engine room, running auxiliary pumps. When battle stations was sounded, my job was to get under a bilge plate down in the bilges and open a large valve. To this day I don't know what that valve was supposed to do.

But I remember what happened on this particular occasion. Evidently, they sighted a ship or something and sounded battle stations. This was about a week after war was declared. I



split my britches from one end to the other, I remember. That's the reason I remember that. I tried in a hurry to get down there and get that valve opened or closed, I'm not sure.

Then we went on to Balikpapan in Borneo, and then we went on to Surabaya. From there we went on convoy duty. But I think it was January when we saw some action. It could have been February. I guess it was February.

Marcello: Well, the date that sticks out in my mind is February 4, 1942. I think this is when you were with the Marblehead and a couple of Dutch cruisers. This was when you ran into fifty-four Japanese planes. Of course, this is when the Houston got hit. Describe what you remember from that action.

Kennedy: I was in the after engine room repair. Our job was to make any repairs in that area concerning any damage that was done. Plus, if the after engine room had trouble and anybody that was hurt down there, we acted as their relief, also; we would go down and take over in the after engine room. I didn't know... we got hit just aft of us, and a bunch of people were killed just as close as from here to the street out there--thirty or forty feet from where we were.

Marcello: Describe...

Kennedy: But I didn't hear the explosion. I don't remember hearing the explosion. I remember going back there, and water was

above the ankles. I imagine this was from flooding in the area. There was a lot of bodies laying around. I remember noticing...I had never seen anybody hit with shrapnel before, and they had blue marks where it went in. I remember that one guy I knew very well was laying there with blue marks where the shrapnel had hit him all over. Of course, he was dead. There was quite a few dead.

I remember walking back out of there. The officer in charge of the unit was there, too, and we talked a minute about it, and then I went back to my battle station from there.

Marcello: Is it not true that that bomb hit the after turret?

Kennedy: No, it did not hit the after turret.

Marcello: It did not?

Kennedy: No. It hit the after tripod--mast tripod--and came down the leg that came aft and exploded just adjacent to the after turret next to the window where the officer in charge of the turret was. There wasn't any of him or his telephone talker left, I don't think. The bomb would have exploded six feet from him.

Marcello: But it did put that area out of action.

Kennedy: Oh, yes, the after turret was put out of action, and a lot of people were killed in the turret. Fortunately, they flooded it in time to keep an explosion from happening, which would have blown the rear-end of that thing off, I

imagine, if that after turret had gone.

As far as our end of it, our repair party just being there close to it, there wasn't much we could do because all the damage was done above. There wasn't any side damage. We had to stay where we were. Some of our guys helped them, I think.

Marcello: At this stage how would you describe the morale of the crew aboard the Houston?

Kennedy: The morale of the crew was good. Everybody, I'm sure, was nervous. We really didn't like it, but our ship was doing a good job, as far as fighting off the bombers. Of course, people in my position weren't really in a position to know what they were really trying to do. The admiral didn't call us up and ask us (chuckle). We were very proud of what the Houston was doing, especially our antiaircraft people. They did a good job. The captain did a good job of staying away from the bombs.

Marcello: And this was Captain Rooks. Is that correct?

Kennedy: That's true; that's true. He was much admired by the crew.

Marcello: I'm assuming that there was no way that you could get that after turret repaired either in Surabaya or perhaps any other place nearby.

Kennedy: No, it was too far gone. There would've been no way. It would've taken a major naval yard repair job, which there wasn't any in that part of the country that could be used,

anyway. We'd lost one-third of our ship-to-ship armament-- of our major armament, anyway--at that point. Quite a bit of our crew were gone.

I guess the first job after that was to get...we went to Tjilatjap and buried the people that were killed. At that point, Admiral Hart came aboard, and I remember watching him and Captain Rooks looking over the ship. They were in the process of deciding, I guess, whether the ship should be pulled out of action or left there. Of course, it was decided that we should be left there, that we should stay there. As far as our own personal safety is concerned, that could've gone either way. If our ship had go back to the States, we would've been split up on other ships and probably would've lost quite a few, anyway.

Marcello: During the next couple weeks, you were in and out of action and in and out of port doing this, that, and the other. What kind of a respect, if that's a good word to use, were you gaining relative to the Japanese?

Kennedy: I'm not sure. The Japanese were coming on down. There's no question about that. They were getting closer and closer. I remember talking to one lady on Java--an elderly native lady. Really, she wasn't a Dutch person. She spoke perfect English, and she was telling me then that the Japs would take Java. I didn't believe that at the time, but she said it wouldn't take long. She probably knew more about it

than I did. And they did.

But as far as the next few weeks was concerned, we were concerned about our safety. I remember pulling into northwestern Australia. I think that it was Thursday Island where we picked up a convoy to take up to Timor. It was a new cruiser that brought that convoy up from Sydney. I don't even remember the name of it, but it had radar and the whole bit. We had one-third of our main armament gone and no radar. We took the convoy back into battle, and they went on back to Sydney. That caused quite a bit of reaction among the crew: "Why in the hell didn't they stay there and we go back?" Because we could have used Sydney about that time, I think.

Marcello: I'm assuming that during this period, the crew was not getting very much rest or sleep and things like that.

Kennedy: No, no, no, not at all. There wasn't much leave at all because there wasn't anyplace to make any leaves. We had some leaves in Surabaya and a little bit in Tjilatjap. We got ashore in Darwin one time. The rest of the time we were aboard ship. We were getting tired. People were getting nervous and worn out physically and mentally.

Marcello: Let me ask you this, and this is perhaps a question that you weren't in a position to answer. I'll ask you, anyhow. What problems were presented in having to work with British, Dutch, and Australian ships as a part of this unified command?

Kennedy: Of course, I was in no position at that point to know that.

I know that we had some Dutch people aboard our ship. We had some of our communications people who were traded back and forth. There was some talk about those people being here and our people being over there. But I wasn't aware. I wasn't in a position to be aware. Of course, I have read all that stuff that happened since the war about what the problems were, but at that time I didn't know. My job was to get that ...to do my job in the engine room and be up there for after engine room repair. I wasn't privy to all that information.

Marcello: As you mentioned a moment ago, the Japanese were sweeping south, coming out of Malaya and Singapore. They hit the East Indies with full force. The Houston, of course, went down during the Battle of the Sunda Straits, which, I think, was the night of February 27.

Kennedy: Twenty-eighth.

Marcello: Twenty-eighth?

Kennedy: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what you remember from the action on that day in the Java Sea.

Kennedy: I remember that day we left Batavia, which, I guess, is Djakarta now.

Marcello: The Houston had been heavily engaged in the Battle of the Java Sea. It was sunk in the Sunda Straits, actually.

Kennedy: It's a fine line there. It's right at the mouth of the Sunda Straits. It was in the process of going in the Sunda

Straits. That might even be considered the Java Sea, but it sunk, anyway (chuckle).

I remember that day we pulled into Batavia. I was on the topside. I saw the American plane come in that I've seen quite a bit written about--our plane that flew in from Surabaya. I never saw any shooting going on at that point. But I was on the topside some that day, and we were getting oil and whatever.

We pulled out of there, of course, at night. That afternoon, I was visiting a friend of mine from Victoria, Texas, by the name of Robert Kalinowski. He brought up some stuff from down below--some cans of peanut brittle and stuff--that he had salvaged from the chief storeroom that had been hit by a shell sometime during the previous engagement. We were sitting around eating peanut butter and talking about going home. We slept out on the deck that night. When I think back about it, we were sleeping out on a hard teakwood deck with only one blanket and a pillow. If I did that today, it'd kill me.

But about midnight the general alarm went off, and that's the last I saw Robert until we got into Batavia. Then we went, of course, to our battle stations, and we were getting all kinds of battle reports from that point.

Marcello: It was during this period that you were finally trying to get out of there and get to Australia, isn't that correct?

Kennedy: That's right. It was our opinion that from here we were going to Pearl. We'd been assured that it was a clear shot through there, and Robert and I were already planning everything we were going to do. That was shattered, of course, by General Quarters about midnight.

Marcello: And you evidently had run into the whole invasion fleet.

Kennedy: That's right. From what they tell me, that's true. I went to the engine room, and we kept getting battle reports. Of course, we could hear the shells hit all through the thing, and we're getting reports, too. I remember two jobs that I had to do that really stand out in my mind. When the after engine room got hit, we were on the deck above it, and the floor got hot. Joe Gans and I had the job of cutting the steam off from the after fire room to the after engine room. Those valves are big and hard to turn. We had to use a big spanner to get them turned off. We finally got them turned off.

Before that, there was a shaft--airshaft--that came up from the after part of the after engine room and went out on deck. I guess they used that to pull air in for ventilation. There was a ladder coming from the engine room up to this landing, and there was a heavy grate over this. It was very heavy. It was probably four inches thick with air holes or openings through it. Personally, I think it was something designed to stop a bomb or something from going in the



engine room. I'm not sure that it would've, but that was the purpose of it.

We heard some guy yelling, "Let me out!" We recognized his voice, and the other guy and I were trying to get him out. The "dogs" or the handles on the hatch got so hot we couldn't handle them. Then we didn't hear him anymore. I think a lot of people in that engine room died from the steam. They got hit by a torpedo, I guess. So a lot of people were killed from that. That stands out because I recognized the guy's voice, but we couldn't do anything to get him out.

After that we got put on the job of feeding the elevators that had carried the five-inch shells up from the magazines to the topside.

Then they passed the word to abandon ship. At that point I didn't have a life jacket. Then I found a real skinny life jacket, but it wasn't much. I went upstairs to the deck the first time they passed the word to abandon ship, and then they called it off, and I came back down.

My first job at that point was to find me another life jacket, so I did. I gave mine to a little Chinese fellow that I've never seen since then.

Then I went back to working on the shell deck. About that time, they lost power, so they had no way of getting anything up after that. When they passed the word again to abandon ship, I started up the ladder, and a shell--a shell,

I'm sure--exploded right at the top and threw me back down the ladder. I'm sure some people got killed on that. I went on up, and I didn't hang around much after that because I jumped off the ship.

Marcello: When you went into the water, were you fully clothed?

Kennedy: Yes. I had on my blue jeans, shirt.

Marcello: How about shoes?

Kennedy: Yes, I had shoes on. Of course, I had my life jacket. I remember making myself into a little ball when I hit the water, and I thought I'd never come up. But I did. After that I was swimming around, and there was a lot of shells exploding all around. You could see them out in the distance firing. We had, I believe, one searchlight still on at that time, and they were hitting the ship, and some of the shells were hitting the water and bouncing. A lot of people were yelling and screaming--some of those that didn't have life jackets, I'm sure.

Marcello: Let me ask you a few questions at this point. What did it feel like when one of those Japanese torpedoes slammed into the ship?

Kennedy: Well, the torpedoes and the shells hitting the water and exploding would shake you up a little bit. You could feel it in your stomach--a kind of vibration.

Marcello: They were using some powerful torpedoes, were they not?

Kennedy: I think so; I don't know. I don't know if one torpedo is

any more powerful than another one, really. But they were hitting the ship. I know that. A lot of shells were hitting the ship. It was laying there just dead in the water, and it wasn't any big problem to hit it, I don't guess, from their range.

Marcello: Was the abandon ship procedure done in a fairly orderly fashion?

Kennedy: Oh, yes. There was no panic, really. The people were talking and taking their time. They wasn't in any big rush. I didn't see anybody rushing, that I can remember. I know that when I got up on deck the second time, people were jumping over the side. That was the order, so that's what I did. I'm glad that I did at the time.

Marcello: Is it not true that at one point the Japanese ships were so close that they were turning their searchlights on the Houston and raking the deck with machine gun fire?

Kennedy: I didn't see any of that. It could've been, but I don't recall seeing any of that.

Marcello: Okay, so you're now in the water, and there are shells and so on exploding around you; people are yelling and screaming. What happens at that point?

Kennedy: I made it to a raft. I found a board. I didn't really need it, but I used that to kind of guide me along, and then I got to a raft. It was loaded. In fact, I couldn't get on it, so I just held on to one of the ropes on the side. There was

a lot of people hanging all around the raft, and there were a lot of people in the raft. They were taking on anybody they could. I think that's the one that had a man on there with a broken leg. I heard his name at the time, but I don't remember who he was. I stayed on that raft, and I ran into a friend of mine, a guy by the name of Moore, from Marshall, Texas. I talked to him a little bit, and I remember kidding him. Moore just got him a sharkskin suit in Manila, and I remember asking him if he shouldn't have brought it along because it might've helped him. He didn't think that was very funny. I never saw him again after that. Later in the night, myself and another fellow--I don't remember his name--decided there was too many people on the raft, and we both had our life jackets, so we started swimming.

Marcello: You really weren't too far from shore, were you?

Kennedy: No. We couldn't see the shore, but we could see the mountains --the hills or mountains or whatever you want to call them-- in the distance. Of course, it was night. You could just see the silhouettes. We were trying to go in that direction.

Later that night, I got on another raft; it was also full. I knew one of the guys there from my division. I can't remember his name. I talked to him awhile, and then we left that raft. I don't know if I left with the same person or by myself. I don't remember.

Then I swam from there, and later--toward morning--I got

on another raft. I was on that raft at daybreak. We stayed on that raft, and we floated through a fleet of Japanese merchant ships. I remember looking up at them. I saw one of our people climbing up a rope ladder to get on one of those ships. It had evidently already been unloaded because they were running very high in the water. We floated there among those ships for an hour or two.

Marcello: And I assume they initially ignored you for the most part?

Kennedy: For the most part, yes. We didn't know what to expect.

Finally--it must have been 10:00, although I didn't have a watch--a landing boat came out. It circled us with its machine guns on us. Then an officer aboard the raft stood up, and he said, "Well, I'll take it first." He figured they were going to machine-gun us. Then they came up and motioned that they were going to tow us.

Well, I started swimming. I didn't get very far, and I finally decided, "This is stupid. Where am I going to go?" So I swam back to the raft. By that time I had shucked my trousers, and I just had my shorts. I took my shoes off so I could swim better. I shucked my life jacket, too, because by this time it was waterlogged.

Marcello: So at this point, then, you're in a T-shirt and your skivvies?

Kennedy: Skivvies, yes. No shoes.

Marcello: No shoes, no blue jeans?

Kennedy: No. Then I got on board the raft, and they started pulling it

toward the beach. It was so loaded that they couldn't pull it, because when they started to pull it, it would sink. So they put us all aboard the landing barge, gave us cigarettes, took us onto the beach.

Marcello: I'm assuming that they were not harassing you in any way at this point.

Kennedy: No, no, not at all. They took us onto the beach, and next thing they did was lined us all up and looked us over. This officer looking us over spoke perfect English. He was a graduate of U.C.L.A. To this day I think that's the reason we're alive today. He was in charge of that landing fleet and saw us out there and brought us in. As far as the other two rafts I was on during the night, nothing was ever heard of either one of them. I'm sure they were machine-gunned. I'm not sure, but I think they were. I think that we're alive probably because of that Japanese officer.

Marcello: Were these army personnel?

Kennedy: Army, yes. Time becomes fuzzy. I remember we worked all that day unloading the barges, stacking the stuff up. They were feeding us this Japanese hardtack. That's what we had to eat.

Marcello: You were mentioning a moment ago that you were lined up. What happened at that point? What did they do as a result of lining you up?

Kennedy: I don't remember. I think we were in two rows maybe. I remember they got a big kick out of one of the fellows who had

two big tatoos on his nipples--"sweet" and "sour" (chuckle). This officer was getting a big kick out of that. I remember he was talking to me--how tough we thought we were. I said something like, "You better believe that we're tough." He laughed. Nobody got hit. They were friendly. They weren't mean. They put us to work.

Marcello: Were these front line troops to your knowledge?

Kennedy: I'm sure they were; I'm sure they were. We worked, I believe, that day. I remember that night we spread out palm leaves or banana leaves to sleep on. We stayed there that night and worked the next day unloading barges. It was either that day or the following day that we started marching.

Marcello: So at this stage, you had not really been harassed at all by the Japanese.

Kennedy: No, not at all. Either the next day or the following day, they marched us into Serang over a blacktop road. I was barefooted. The guards here were friendly.

Marcello: Describe the march.

Kennedy: It was rough, and my feet nearly got blistered. We were pulling little carts. I believe it was their gear on the carts. It sure wasn't ours because we didn't have any (chuckle). We marched all day long that day to Serang. It seemed like it was one day.

Marcello: Approximately how far was that? You would have to estimate that, of course.

Kennedy: I would have to estimate that to be twenty miles, I guess-- maybe fifteen, twenty miles. I'm sure we had to go from early morning until after dark that night.

Marcello: During this march from the beach to Serang, what was the reaction of the natives along the way?

Kennedy: Since we were with the Japanese, I don't remember anything one way or the other, really, whether they were friendly or not friendly because we were really protected. I have to be honest and say I don't remember any reaction one way or the other from the natives along the way.

Marcello: By the time you got to Serang, what was the condition of your feet?

Kennedy: Blistered. Blistered. We were hungry. There was a little Japanese guard who was probably about my age, which was nineteen at the time. We talked, of course, in sign language. When we left, he turned us over to some other people to go into the camp.

At first they took us to a big place where they were interrogating us, and that was the first time I saw the officers. They had them all there sitting at a table.

I'm getting ahead of myself. This little Japanese guard made me take two sacks of hardtack. They had it in little bags, and he made me take them. When I acted like I didn't want them, he forced them on me, like, he knew damned well I was going to need them, you know.



We marched into this building, and there were three or four Dutchmen laying outside. To this day I don't know if they were dead or just asleep. I walked in, and that was the first time I got involved with the Japanese to an extent. There was a little Dutchman there sitting at the door. They had various Dutch people there--talking to them. They had this one guy sitting there with his arms tied and looking at the light. It was focussed on his face--making him look into the light. I made some comment to him, and the Japanese who were doing it hit me.

Marcello: Whom did you make the comment to?

Kennedy: To the Dutchman, which was stupid (chuckle). But he knocked the hell out of me, and that was all there was to it. Later, I shut up and got back in line and didn't say anymore.

Marcello: How did he hit you? What did he strike you with?

Kennedy: Just an open hand, I think, and he yelled some loud Japanese expression. I'm not sure what it was, but it scared me. I noticed the officers in there all were very quiet. They were all sitting at this table, and I'm sure they were being interrogated by the Japanese.

Marcello: Is this a theater?

Kennedy: No, this is the building separate from the theater. We were taken there first, and then we went to the Serang jail. I don't remember going there, but that's where we went. All of us who were there were put in a cell. I guess it was

sixteen or eighteen feet wide and about thirty or forty feet long with sloping concrete slabs that sloped to the center. It had a pathway maybe four feet wide down the center. We were very crowded, and sleeping on this concrete was pretty bad. There again, that hardtack that I had saved sure came in handy.

Marcello: So you had not been fed at all from the time you left the beach.

Kennedy: They fed us some hardtack on the way--Japanese hardtack. They looked like dog food. They were about as big as your thumb. It was like little hard bread or something.

Marcello: Almost like some sort of a biscuit?

Kennedy: Yes, yes. Right. It was very dense. We ate some of that along the way. I remember that in the jail we were fed rice, but it was very, very bad. I remember it being cooked so thick and so stiff that you could pick up--what was on the plate--on the side of it and lift it all up. It stuck together--kind of gooey. None of us liked it, of course, and some of the guys weren't going to eat it. I remember Charlie Pryor was next to me, and he wouldn't eat it, so I ate his rice. About the third day he said, "The hell with you! You've been eating my rice, but I'm going to eat it myself from now on." He ate his own rice, and he ate some of that hardtack that I had left. I was rationing that hardtack out--two or three a day or four or five a day,

something like that. The "john" was a bucket up in front; the stink was terrible. After about the fifth day we got to get out and take a bath, but we still had oil all over us, so it didn't do much good. We didn't have any soap. We must have been there six weeks.

Marcello: What did you do during that period that you were here at the Serang jail?

Kennedy: Not a lot, except sit there in the jail.

Marcello: What'd you talk about?

Kennedy: Food. Food primarily. And the situation on how we'd got there.

Marcello: I'm sure you must've talked about who had made it and who hadn't.

Kennedy: Who was missing and who we'd seen on the rafts and who we'd seen killed and so on and so forth. Your mind gets kind of blank on those things. I remember they let us out to take a bath out of the well that was in the quadrangle or the center of the prison. As I said, it didn't do a lot of good, but at least it cooled you off a little bit. The food was terrible.

One guy in particular--I don't remember his name--thought he had a venereal disease after about the week there because he was getting some discharge. He was at the gate trying to tell the guard that he had a venereal disease. He had his penis out in his hand trying to show him, and the guard was laughing. He was calling all his friends over. We finally made him sit down and shut up because he was embarrassing

the whole group. We had our pride yet, anyway (chuckle). Fortunately, he didn't have a venereal disease. I don't know what his problem was.

You found that in the face of danger, you made some pretty good friendships. I didn't know Charlie Pryor before that time, but he and I are real good friends today. A guy by the name of Dethloff from Saint Louis...I also met Ranger, who was in that unit. I don't remember the rest of them. But those three in particular, I remember, were in that group.

Then we moved to another cell which was a little bigger and a little cleaner. This was later on--maybe a week before we left. At that point we managed somehow to buy stuff from the natives--a little bit. I remember selling my class ring--high school class ring--for about \$4 or \$5, and I used that to buy bananas for everybody. Of course, they put us on trucks and took us into Batavia.

Marcello: Okay, let me back up a minute and ask you a few more questions. During this approximate six weeks--six-week period--here at Serang, did you go on any work details at all?

Kennedy: No, no work. I don't remember getting outside the prison at all.

Marcello: How did you make contact with the natives?

Kennedy: That I'm not clear on. This is toward the end. I think that was through the Japanese maybe allowing a native to come in. That's how that had to happen. Now the people in the theater,

I think, weren't actually in jail, so to speak, and I think they had a little bit more access to the natives that we did. But I believe that was by a native coming in, and we would give him our money. He'd bring bananas in, and we'd give him our money. I sold him the ring, and I don't remember exactly how much I got, but it was enough to buy bananas for everybody.

Marcello: Once again, I'll ask a question that I asked earlier. How much harassment took place here at the Serang jail?

Kennedy: Not a lot, not a lot. Of course, we were inside a confined jail cell, so we weren't exposed to harassment as if we would've been outside. I think that might've made the difference. Here again, I think we still had Japanese guards. The Koreans hadn't arrived on the scene at this point. I don't remember any harassment. At least I wasn't beaten up, and I don't remember anybody else being beaten up.

Marcello: So you were basically inside these cells, and there was no courtyard or anything where you could move around.

Kennedy: There was a courtyard out front, and we got out two or three times to take a bath. That was about it. We weren't out to exercise or anything like that. However, I think this was after we had been there a couple weeks.

Marcello: By the time you left Serang, had you been able to get all of that oil off your body, or most of it?

Kennedy: I think so. I think so. A lot of it just rubbed off. We didn't have any soap, as I remember, so we did our best to

get it off.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you still have just your skivvies and a T-shirt?

Kennedy: That's it. That's all I had.

Marcello: At this early stage, can you see certain men within the jail more or less assuming leadership roles? Did those qualities come to the forefront at this point yet?

Kennedy: No, I don't think so--not at this point. Militarily, Charlie Pryor was a...I don't think Charlie was a sergeant...he may have been. But we kind of looked to the guys who had the higher rates, I guess, as opposed to somebody who was a seaman second class. But I don't remember that being necessary. If somebody got out of line, usually it was the group that told him to shut up and act like a man rather than a kid. Of course, there was a lot of concern as to what was going to happen to us at that point. There was a lot of discussion about that--what was next and what could we expect. The unknown at that point was pretty heavy because we hadn't ever been in anything like this before, and hadn't imagined anything like this before.

Marcello: Are rumors floating around at this time?

Kennedy: I'm sure they were, but I don't remember what they were. I'm sure there were rumors as to where we were going and how long the war was going to last and where the Americans were; but I honestly don't remember any of them.

Marcello: How long did you think the war was going to last at this time?

Kennedy: Oh, I figured about six months, and we'd whip them (chuckle). You know, we had a lot of faith in our navy and our country at that point. I guess we did all the way through (I should put it that way). I guess through the whole deal the end was always six months away, you know. If you miss this six months, well, it would be the next six months and so on. You always lived on the hope that it wouldn't be too long.

Marcello: During this period--and I'm still referring to the period at the Serang jail--what are you learning about being a prisoner-of-war? In other words, what are you beginning to realize that you have to do in order to get through this? You really haven't been harassed at this point yet, and you're still not sure how long the war's going to last. What kind of an education are you beginning to receive about being a prisoner-of-war?

Kennedy: Keep your mouth shut, and do what you're told. That was pretty well it, because you realized it doesn't do you a lot of good to do otherwise. I think the secret of survival in the whole thing is to make the best of the existing situation and try to improve it where you could. As you go along in this thing and you got to where you were really harassed--and I'm getting ahead of myself--for sure, you realize that the best policy is to keep your mouth shut, keep a low profile,

and do what you're told inasmuch as you can.

Marcello: We'll obviously talk more about this later, but I think it is true that, as ridiculous as some of their rules may have been, if you broke them--deliberately or otherwise--you paid the price.

Kennedy: That's right. You can belittle them among yourselves, but just go ahead and obey them and get it over with.

Marcello: You mentioned that you moved from Serang into Batavia, and I'm assuming that you go into Bicycle Camp. Describe the move from Serang to Bicycle Camp.

Kennedy: We were in a flat-bed truck with sides. I guess you would call it a stake-bed truck. It was an army transportation vehicle---truck. They weren't too crowded, as I remember. I remember thinking that the scenery was beautiful on the drive from there. It was hot as heck. I remember the Japanese drinking some beer. They probably weren't supposed to. I remember he gave about half a bottle of beer to me and somebody else--I don't remember who it was--and we each got about a sip out of it. Anyway, I remember how good it tasted. It was Dutch beer. The trip took most of the day. Then we came to Bicycle Camp in Batavia. It looked good because there were barracks, and it was clean. There were places to take a bath, and it had toilets. There was a chow line where we could get food. It was, like, a 300 percent improvement over what we'd been used to.



Marcello: Okay, take me on a tour of Bicycle Camp at this point. Suppose we arrive at the front gate. Give me a physical description of Bicycle Camp.

Kennedy: You came through the front gate, and the guardhouse was on the left as you came in. The Japanese guardhouses are funny. There was a sergeant or corporal, and they have chairs or benches, and all the guards on duty sit on those benches facing the front. Everytime you went in or out, you had to stop and bow at those people. If you didn't, you got the hell beat out of you. Anyway, going in there, the guardhouse was on the left. It was a well-constructed Dutch Army base--army installation, barracks--with a wide street going in, and then there were long barracks setting perpendicular to this road as you went back. We were assigned to the second one on the right going in. Of course, it hadn't any bunks. It had a flat concrete floor. There were some partitions, too. We were all hungry. The Australians were already there. Also, there were some Dutch. Primarily, there were Australians, I think, there. They had a chow line and cooks and a mess hall set up, and they fed us. I remember a big problem was that I had nothing to eat the food in--absolutely nothing. I found a tin can and cleaned it up the best I could, and I found a piece of wood that I kind of fashioned into a spoon. I was able to eat with that for a few days. Of course, I still had my shorts and my shirt, which were getting very rank by this time, I'm sure.

People had various kinds of mess kits they came up with.

Marcello: Describe some of the mess kits.

Kennedy: I know Kocher, from Wisconsin, a friend of mine, found a potty jar, you know, one of these small...in fact, what it was was a piss pot (chuckle). He cleaned that up and carried it around with him. That was his mess kit. I don't remember what I finally...I know I got something better than that. I think I got an Army mess kit after the soldiers got there, so I got a better deal.

Marcello: It seems to me that some people used hubcaps and things like that.

Kennedy: Yes, yes, hubcaps and just anything flat that had a depression in it. That food was good. That was good. We had tea, of course.

Marcello: What kind of food were you initially getting here?

Kennedy: Rice and a little vegetables and tea.

Marcello: What was the quality of the rice like?

Kennedy: There it was good. It was good. It was better because they knew what they were doing with it--the cooks cooking it. I'm sure the war hadn't devastated the countryside at that point, so they could get good rice. There were some Dutch officers next door to us. There was a fence between us and them. After we were there a while, we did some trading with these people, and we got some food and stuff from them.

Marcello: At this stage are most of the Houston personnel reunited?

Kennedy: Everybody that was in Serang was there. That's all we had. Later, small groups came in that had been somewhere else.

Marcello: But the bulk of the Houston people had been at Serang, either in the jail or in the theater. Is that correct?

Kennedy: That's correct. There was a group of, I think, about fifteen that came in from another place and maybe another smaller group. But we were there for a good long while. The thing got pretty well organized.

Marcello: When did your officers come in? Around the same time?

Kennedy: I honestly don't remember. I remember that they were there... oh, wait a minute. They were in Serang with us because they were in a cell just down from us because I remember seeing them there. They had to come in with us, yes.

Marcello: And are they essentially the people that get you organized?

Kennedy: Yes. They were in charge. They got us organized to the best that they were allowed to.

Marcello: In Bicycle Camp are they in the same barracks with you, in a particular section of that barracks, or are they off to themselves?

Kennedy: No, I think they were off to themselves. I think they were on back to the left. I think they had their own barracks back there.

Marcello: What semblance of military discipline is being carried out at this early stage? I'm talking about even before that period when the field artillery people came in.

Kennedy: I think the chief petty officers that were in there assumed some control over the situation, and of course, we had our officers there, too. We had to have a count-off every morning. I think one of the officers handled at least getting us together and so on and so forth. I don't remember any correction or discipline problems that they had to handle. I'm sure there must have been some.

The first problem we had to do was that we had to build us some beds. We had to scrounge around and get stuff to build bunks with. Some of them got real fancy. They found some stuff and fixed some bunks.

Marcello: How about you?

Kennedy: I had a pretty good one. I had four pieces of bamboo, and, I think, some gunnysacks or something that I wound around and made a bunk that was fairly good. I think I was on the bottom, and there was two above me.

Marcello: Like you mentioned awhile ago, these barracks were subdivided into cubicles that essentially had one side open.

Kennedy: The front side was open.

Marcello: Do you recall who you were bunking with at that time?

Kennedy: Yes. I was with J.P. Gore, Bernard Kocher, Frank Rhodes, and myself. There were four of us. I remember that everytime a Japanese guard came by...we were not allowed to sleep during the day--that's for sure. Everytime a Japanese guard came by, you had to stand up and stand at attention until he passed

through and bow to him and all this. So we set up a system of warning so that if a Japanese guard was seen approaching, everybody was alert. Anybody that was sleeping had to get up and look like they were awake, anyway.

I remember Rhodes one time...he had the top bunk. Somebody forgot to notify him that the guard was there, and he had to be very quiet because the guard couldn't see the top bunk. But he was up there, anyway, so that protected him.

Among the guys there was one artist with us that did some drawings on the wall, I remember. Jack Feliz was in my division, and he drew a map of the whole world on the wall. He did pretty good, too. Everything was in its proper place.

Marcello: So during that early period, you had a lot of idle time.

Kennedy: Lot of idle time. And we had classes, too. Some of the Australians were university professors, and I remember attending a course in math and something else, too. But it was something to do, and the guys were very good.

Marcello: So these kinds of things were organized very early in your stay here at Bicycle Camp?

Kennedy: At Bicycle Camp, yes. They had volleyball, boxing, and things like this that the officers got us involved in. That's when we first started having our work parties, too.

Marcello: Before we get to that point, let's bring the artillery people into your story.

Kennedy: I remember looking up that day, and I saw these people marching

in. They came marching in with their full packs. Their noncoms were up in front marching them in. I thought, "Who in the hell are these people?" And they put them in the barracks around us. As soon as they got settled in, we went over. They had all their clothes and everything, and we had nothing. I ran into a guy from my hometown down in Edna, Texas, and he was in Headquarters Battery. I can't remember his name, but he gave me a blanket, shoes, and some clothes. He split his stuff with me, which I'm very grateful for.

Marcello: What kind of clothing did you get?

Kennedy: Army khakis from him.

Marcello: Like a shirt and trousers?

Kennedy: Shirt and trousers. I don't remember if there were any underwear or not, but I got some shoes and some socks and a blanket. I was very lucky, and I felt very good.

Marcello: Do you recall whether or not this sharing was done voluntarily?

Kennedy: Some of it was, but I think the sergeants in charge had something to do with it, instructing them: "Hey, let's help these guys out." Maybe their officers, too, said, "Let's split our gear with them." I think they had a lot of money, too--a helluva lot of money--that they kept all the way through, and I'm not too sure that they didn't take some of it home with them. But that's not my affair. They were very good to us; they helped us out. Me being from Texas and those guys being from around here helped out, too. And finding this guy from

my hometown helped a lot.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that at this point you really get organized.

Kennedy: Oh, yes. At this point we get organized. We get work parties. Work parties were assigned, and we worked at Tandjong Priok-- the docks. We were rolling oil drums, cleaning up the place, and stuff like that.

Marcello: Once you get organized, talk about the chain of command that developed. For instance, I'm assuming that the orders originated with a camp commandant, perhaps.

Kennedy: The Japanese, yes--how many people they expected. Then people were assigned. We actually were not so much assigned because we were anxious to get out at that point. The work wasn't that hard, and we got out of the camp to see people and see what the city was like and go to the docks and work. There was a lot of stealing and pilfering going on, too.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you had one of your own officers who served more or less as a liaison between the Japanese and the prisoners.

Kennedy: Yes, I'm sure we did, but I'm not sure who that was at that point. I imagine it was one of the captains in the Army or maybe one of the lieutenants in our group who was in charge.

Marcello: Would he then, in turn, gather you all together in the morning and say, "Okay, we need so many men for this work party and so many men for this work party," and then would you kind of volunteer?

Kennedy: I don't think he did. I think somebody else did that.

Somebody under him that did that.

Marcello: One of your petty officers or one of the noncoms?

Kennedy: One of the noncoms would say, "We need so many people."  
I'm not sure of that, but I'm assuming that's what happened because we ended up with so many people going out each time. They'd try to split that up and rotate it around. I don't think they had everybody going out.

Marcello: There were always enough volunteers to fill the quotas.

Kennedy: I think so at that point. There were plenty of volunteers because I don't remember the work being that hard. It was nice to get out as opposed to being confined in there. I don't remember too many bashings either at that point, either. I remember one time a guy was trying to sell his watch to one of the Japanese, and he was telling the Japanese that it was waterproof. The Japanese also said his was waterproof, so Tony stuck his watch in a bucket of water, and the Japanese wouldn't stick his in the water (chuckle). I remember things like that. They were very frank. As far as they could be, they were friendly, I guess.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about one of these work parties.  
What time would reveille occur?

Kennedy: Probably daybreak, I suspect--somewhere like that--and we usually had some breakfast in the camp.

Marcello: How were you broken up? Would this be done by the Japanese?

Kennedy: Honestly, I don't remember. I've got to say I don't remember.



I imagine it was our own people that woke us up.

Marcello: Okay, then what would be the next step?

Kennedy: Breakfast. We'd go eat breakfast...wash up, too. We had water; we had a place to wash up there. Then we'd get some breakfast and line up and get on the truck. They'd count you--they would stand you up and count you--to be sure how many they were taking out. We'd get on the truck and go out to work. You were always being counted. We soon learned to count in Japanese. That was the way you had to count, and if you missed it, you got slapped around. So that's a pretty good incentive to learn to count in Japanese. During the day you'd be counted. As I remember, you'd be counted when you got there if and when you started back; at lunchtime you'd be counted and counted when you got back in. You were forever being counted because, I guess, the little guard that was in charge was responsible for getting that many people back.

Marcello: Did all this counting get to be a real chore after a while, or does it simply become...

Kennedy: Routine...

Marcello: ...so much a part of your routine that it doesn't bother you?

Kennedy: Routine. The typical situation was that when you're going to be counted, everybody started lining up on the back row, and finally the front row gets filled up because they're the ones that have to count off (chuckle). We'd be four deep.

- Marcello: What would breakfast consist of at Bicycle Camp?
- Kennedy: I think it was rice and some soup probably. I don't remember it being much else. All the way through it was pretty well the same, except it got a lot skinnier as we got further in.
- Marcello: Okay, so you were taken out on the work detail. Again, describe the kinds of jobs that you might be doing on a work detail.
- Kennedy: I'll describe the ones I can remember. I remember going to Tandjong Priok and rolling oil drums--moving them from one place to the other and stacking them. Now that got to be pretty hard work because you've got to remember that Batavia is right on the equator or very close to it. It was very hot and humid. The work was hard at the docks, and we'd all be sweaty and get blisters and so forth. I remember doing some work at a park. I'm not sure what we were doing--digging bomb shelters or something. We were doing some kind of excavation work in one of the parks there.
- Marcello: I gather the Japanese were already beginning to loot the island.
- Kennedy: To what?
- Marcello: To loot the island.
- Kennedy: Oh, I'm sure they were. I'm sure they were. They were getting as much of that stuff off the docks as they could. They were trying to raise some of the ships that were in the

harbor. Whether they wanted to salvage the ships or clear the harbor, I'm not sure which. I remember one ship had a lot of booze in it, and the guys were stealing some of that and selling it to the Dutch officers for guilders. That's about the only kind of work party that I can recall.

Marcello: Where would you take lunch?

Kennedy: I knew that question was coming, and I don't remember. I believe we brought it along with us. I really do. We lined up for lunch, or either they brought it out. Possibly they brought it out, and we took our utensils or whatever we had along with us, and our water bottle. I'm not sure where I got my water bottle, but I ended up with a water bottle--I know that. They'd bring it out, and we'd eat. Then they'd take it back, and we'd work in the afternoon and eat when we got back to camp.

Marcello: I'm assuming that the meal in the evening would consist of...

Kennedy: About the same thing.

Marcello: About the same thing?

Kennedy: Yes. Our diet wasn't very varied. In Batavia we had as much as we wanted possibly. Maybe not as much, but sufficient, anyway, because, again, the economy of the place was such that it was available for us.

Marcello: When you came back into camp, would they search you?

Kennedy: I think the searches were on a periodical basis and on a selective basis. Maybe they'd just check this guy and this

guy. Once in a while, they'd search everybody. If they caught somebody with something, then everybody else would be searched. There was some punishment dealt out to people who were caught with this, that, or the other coming into camp.

Marcello: What would happen to them?

Kennedy: Usually, they get slapped around, and a lot of times, I think, they were sat down with a bamboo pole behind their legs. This turns off the circulation to your legs after an hour or so. I remember one or two, and I'm sure there were many more than that.

Also, I remember the mess procedures. I remember the chow lines at Batavia. One of the rules, which I always thought was the silliest rule I ever heard of, was that if there was any food left, you were allowed to go back for seconds. But you had to eat all the food that was given to you before you could go back and get in line. So people would eat as fast as they could to get back in line, and that was really foolish because people were scarfing their food down to get back in line for what we used to call seconds or "backups," as the Australians called it. This was very foolish. I remember one guy wouldn't eat rice. One Army man would not eat rice, and he starved to death-- flat starved to death.

Marcello: There in Bicycle Camp?

Kennedy: Yes. Which was kind of foolish. I think he must've had a mental problem, too. I think that's one man we lost there, and I believe we lost an officer there from wounds that he received. Ross, I believe, or somebody like that died there.

I also remember having to be inoculated when we were getting ready to be moved. They inoculated us for cholera and all the other various things. There was very much a shortage of needles, and these needles got awful dull. I remember that.

Marcello: During your stay in Bicycle Camp, were you ever processed at all? In other words, were they beginning to keep any records relative to the prisoners?

Kennedy: I'm sure they were, but I wasn't aware that they were. I'm sure our officers were probably keeping track of things the best they could.

I think it was in Bicycle Camp where we had to sign a statement that we wouldn't escape. I believe that came about in Bicycle Camp, and there was a lot of talk about what would happen to us if we didn't sign it. Finally, we decided--I think at the influence of our officers--to go ahead and sign it because it was being done under duress, anyway, and it wouldn't make a lot of difference one way or the other. So we went ahead and signed the damned thing. I believe that happened in Bicycle Camp.

Also, I think, in Bicycle Camp we had to fill out some forms that indicated--they were rather simple forms--that

indicated what our background was, what our occupation had been in the Navy and before the Navy. I put down "student." I was a student because I went straight out of high school into the Navy. The ones that put down a background with a technical nature--like a machinist or whatever--were sent to Japan. The other guys--the common guys--ultimately went on to Burma.

Marcello: At that early stage, what was your thoughts relative to going back to Japan?

Kennedy: I'm not sure that we discussed it a lot. There was some talk of it, I believe, at that time, but I didn't know that much about Japan and I didn't know where else we were going, so I'm sure I didn't really have a preference at that point in time, not knowing enough about it. But I don't think I would've objected to going to Japan. I'm getting ahead of myself there.

Marcello: We were talking about the food a moment ago, and there was something else I wanted to ask you about. How important was hygiene and cleanliness going to be even at this point?

Kennedy: Very important, very important. I think you realized that you had to stay clean. Well, it's kind of instilled in the Navy, anyway--I'm sure it was the same way in the Army--that cleanliness is very important. We have water available there to take baths, and everybody stayed fairly clean. They kept their clothes clean and washed. We were able to

get some soap at that point coming in. Everybody stayed fairly clean and kept themselves in good shape. There were some barbers around that did some hair cutting and this type of stuff. I did some of that later on, myself.

Marcello: Is it not true that when you went through the chow line, you would initially--even before you got food--have to dip your mess gear in boiling water? Do you recall that?

Kennedy: I think that came later on because that was primarily brought about by the possibility of cholera. I believe that was later on.

Marcello: Or dysentery, too.

Kennedy: Dysentery, too, yes. Of course, we hadn't been affected with that too much at this time. Yes, dysentery and cholera was what we were worried about, but I don't remember exactly when that started. Probably when we started getting sick is when they started that.

Marcello: Awhile ago you had mentioned that the Army people had brought in battalion funds. How were those battalion funds used here in Bicycle Camp to your knowledge?

Kennedy: To my knowledge I don't think they were used at all. I don't remember anything of those being used to an extent at that point. In fact, I wasn't privy to this information all the way through, other than rumors that some of the people had quite a bit of money (some of the noncoms). I heard it later--I'm really getting ahead of myself--that these funds

were split up between the officers and the noncoms and sewed into their bags and their clothing and all this type of stuff so they could use it. I don't remember it being dispensed to any of us. I'm sure it was. I think it was used to buy medicine and things like that as we went along, but I wasn't aware that it was being done.

Marcello: I was going to ask you whether or not any of this battalion money was used, let's say, to buy extra food on the outside or anything like that.

Kennedy: I think possibly it was, but I'm not sure whether it was done in Batavia or not. Possibly so. The food was very good there, really, and that money could've been the source of some of it.

Marcello: I'm assuming that even though you would go out on work details here at Bicycle Camp, you did have a certain amount of idle or leisure time.

Kennedy: Oh, yes. They organized a volleyball team. The Australians would play the Americans, and it got to be quite a competitive situation. We would always beat the Aussies because they weren't that up on volleyball. But they came along real well. Their tall boys came out. We always beat them, but their games were very close. They'd win once in a while, too. And they organized boxing. We had some boxing teams. The Americans usually won most of that because they had more experience. In fact, we had one Golden Glover there from



Illinois by the name of Pistole. He was very good. Some other guys were real good at it, too, and they boxed. I guess the equipment--boxing gloves and stuff like that--came in with the Army people. They probably had their own recreational stuff that they brought along.

Marcello: Did the Japanese seem to encourage this sort of thing?

Kennedy: They didn't discourage it. I didn't see them breaking any of it up. I'm sure they encouraged it to keep us busy and out of their hair.

Marcello: When you sat around in bull sessions, what did you talk about?

Kennedy: Mostly about when the war was going to be over, food. Sometime it was girls; but the longer we stayed there, the less they became a topic.

Marcello: What foods were you craving at that time?

Kennedy: Oh, gosh! Ice cream sodas and banana splits and steaks. Just anything. Hamburgers or whatever. Being a farm boy, mostly, I guess it was stuff that would come from a farm. I was twenty-one years old before I knew they served anything in a restaurant except chili and hamburgers. So mine wasn't exotic, I'm sure.

Marcello: I guess you learned a lot of family backgrounds and things like that.

Kennedy: Oh, yes. You learn more about people in a condition like that than you would otherwise because you talk about it in more detail. You learn their family, where they were from, their

brothers and sisters, and what their father did for a living. One friend of mine said his dad graduated from Ohio State. It was years later I learned that it was Ohio State Prison, not the University. You're right. We talked about a lot of things--our girlfriends and what they'd want to do. Some of the discussions got rather trivial after a while--not big things but little things we did. Sometimes you heard these stories more than once (chuckle).

Marcello: Early on in your experience--and this would perhaps especially apply to the Houston people, since you had so little--did most of you become scroungers and scavengers, looking for any object or material that might be put to some use?

Kennedy: Yes, and you saved stuff, too. I wish I had a better memory. I think sometimes you should hypnotize people to get them to talk; you get out these hidden things. I remember I came up with a spoon, a mess kit. Of course, I got shoes and clothes and stuff like that. Anything you thought you might need, like, a piéce of string or a wire or an extra pair of shoes or whatever, you saved that stuff. I came up with a pack somewhere, and I think that it was an Australian pack. For the life of me, I don't know where I got it. But you saved little things, and some of that stuff you carried all the way through. I got a needle and thread somewhere that I kept. Looking back, I had a razor, and I learned how to sharpen razor blades, too. Take a broken bottle, and you can

sharpen a razor blade pretty well. I used the same blades for many years there.

Marcello: In other words, you would probably take the concave side of the bottle...

Kennedy: ...rub the blade back and forth, and you could sharpen a blade to where you could shave with it. You saved needle and thread. You learned to patch your own clothes. As the war went on, I did some rather major overhauls and stuff like that, but that's another story.

Marcello: I have to ask you about this because it was amazing to me. There evidently was an abandoned car somewhere in Bicycle Camp, and before you guys left, the car almost virtually disappeared. Somebody was always scrounging or taking some part off of this car. Do you remember that?

Kennedy: I'm sorry. I don't remember that at all. I draw a complete blank on that. I don't remember. If there were things there where anything could be used, you were sure that it was taken one way or the other.

We got to be good thieves--very good thieves. The longer the war went on, the better thieves we got to be. I'm surprised that some of them didn't use that talent later on (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the relationship--if that's a good word to use--that developed here between the enlisted personnel and the guards. Do you have Japanese guards at

Bicycle Camp, or is this where you encounter the Koreans?

Kennedy: I think we started getting the Koreans at this point. I believe that's true.

Marcello: Describe what those Korean guards were like.

Kennedy: Some of them were terrible, and, of course, we put names on them.

Marcello: What were some of the names?

Kennedy: I don't remember. As we went into the jungle, names became more prevalent than they were back in Bicycle Camp. I don't remember putting any names on them in Bicycle Camp. I'm sure there were some, but I don't remember.

Marcello: One that stands out to me is the "Brown Bomber." Do you remember him?

Kennedy: Yes, yes. I remember another thing, if I might digress a little bit. I can remember the funny things more--what little funny things there were. In Bicycle Camp the "ultimatum" came down--for lack of a better word--that everybody had to get a haircut. We had a camp commander that shaved his head every day, and he said that anybody that had hair longer than him was in for a beating. We had some boys that had some real pretty hair, and it really tore them up to have their head shaved or cut that small. From then on, until we got in the jungle, we had to keep our hair cut real short. I guess, looking back on it, it was probably a good thing because at least it taught us some cleanliness, anyway. We

had one guy that had black curly hair, and it liked to broke his heart to have his head shaved. I remember that.

Marcello: Describe what set those Korean guards apart.

Kennedy: Mostly, I think, the Korean guards had to prove themselves. They were subservient to the Japanese, and I think they felt that they had to show the Japanese that they could handle the prisoners the way they should be handled. As a result, they got too cruel at times. We had some in Batavia that were pretty bad.

Marcello: Describe some of the things that they did.

Kennedy: Mostly, it was standing people up and beating them up and also taking people down to the guardhouse where they had to sit for a long time on bamboo poles and things like that. Those were the two main things they'd do. They'd beat them up with their hands or with bamboo poles or their rifle butts. But that got progressively worse as the war went on. This was our first encounter with that type of thing.

Marcello: How did the Japanese compare or contrast physically with the Koreans?

Kennedy: Not a lot. You could see some Koreans that were larger than the Japanese, but for the major portion of them, it was difficult to tell them apart. I think there were some distinguishing things on their uniform, but just looking at the individual, the Koreans and Japanese looked an awful lot alike.

- Marcello: So there was not too much difference relative to their size.
- Kennedy: Except some of the Koreans were larger. I think maybe the people from North Korea were maybe a little larger. I think that was the case, but I don't know that for sure. They had something to prove, I guess, that they were doing a good job.
- Marcello: What was the attitude of the Japanese toward the Koreans?
- Kennedy: The attitude of the Japanese toward the Koreans...they treated them rather roughly--harshly--at times. Of course, you saw that throughout the Japanese Army. At least I did. You'd see a captain stand a lieutenant up and slap him around, and this went on down. The further it got down, the worse it got, I think. Just like in our Army, I guess, if the captain tells the sergeant something, by the time it gets down to the private, it's pretty strict. Their discipline was different from ours. They believed in physical discipline, and I'm sure the Japanese really let the Korean have it if they stepped out of line.
- Marcello: So everybody had to save face, I guess.
- Kennedy: Everybody has to save face. That's a good way to put it. And by the time the Koreans took it out on us, it was pretty bad. But on the other side of the coin, I ran into some pretty good Koreans.
- Marcello: Here at Bicycle Camp?
- Kennedy: Not at Bicycle Camp. Later on, I ran into some.

- Marcello: I've read some things about Japanese sergeants or noncoms, and they must've been pretty tough guys.
- Kennedy: They had to be. They had to be to get to be a Japanese noncom, I suspect. They had to prove their worth and their ability to handle a job. I think they were pretty rough.
- Marcello: Did they seem to run the camps?
- Kennedy: Yes, they had quite a bit of authority. Later on, I became more aware of this, but there'd be one officer in charge of the camp, and then the rest were sergeants and so on down the line. I'm thinking back as to whether there was any layer of authority among the Koreans. I don't think there was.
- Marcello: They were strictly guard personnel, period.
- Kennedy: You're right. I don't think there was a sergeant or a hancho of any kind that was a Korean. I think they were strictly guards. There was probably a Japanese hancho there, too-- a sergeant or corporal probably.
- Marcello: Do you ever make an effort to get close to any of these guards, or do you stay away from them as much as possible?
- Kennedy: Well, in the beginning you tried to get close to them. You soon learned that that was an error, that you don't do that, especially if they spoke English. We always ran into some who spoke English, and we would talk to them. Before you knew it, you got in trouble. You'd say something you shouldn't say, and you'd find out that that's what he was trying to get

you to do. So you avoided that. As you went along, you kept your distance and didn't talk to them anymore than you had to. You didn't try to be friends with them. There were a few exceptions. I ran into a couple that were pretty good to me throughout that time. But then you did it with reservations. It was just a matter of survival. You learned pretty soon to keep a low profile and don't call attention to yourself under any conditions.

Marcello: Describe the military courtesies that you as a prisoner had to extend to either the Japanese or the Korean military.

Kennedy: When they approached you, you had to bow to them, and they'd bow back.

Marcello: If you had a hat on, did you salute rather than bow, or did you take off the hat and bow?

Kennedy: I think you took your hat off and bowed.

Marcello: And this would occur either inside or outside?

Kennedy: Inside or outside, that's for sure. Again, you avoided that. If you saw one coming, you went the other way.

Marcello: There's nothing different in that than in the American military where you have to salute an officer.

Kennedy: Just get out of the way, yes.

Marcello: Was it humiliating in the beginning to have to bow?

Kennedy: Very much so. I think it was all the way through. I always resented that; I always resented that. That little son-of-bitch! I didn't want to bow to him, but I had to (chuckle).



- Marcello: But it's really a way of life in Japan.
- Kennedy: It's a way of life, and you soon learn. After you see a Japanese beat up another Japanese, you soon learn that that's their way of discipline, too. It doesn't make it any easier, but you soon learn that that's the way they do it.
- Marcello: Did they ever make it known to you their disgust for the fact that you had allowed to become prisoners?
- Kennedy: There was some of that. They looked down on us because we became prisoners, and evidently in their army it's something that's disgraceful to do. This was told to us by their officers in speeches and once in a while by one of the people that was over us.
- Marcello: Awhile ago you made reference to that non-escape pledge that all of you had to sign, and that occurred, I believe, on July 4, 1942. Can you remember any of the details of how that came up?
- Kennedy: If that was in 1942, we weren't in Bicycle Camp. Yes, we were in Bicycle Camp. That's right. No, I don't other than that it was talked about for two days. People were saying they weren't going to sign it, probably myself included. But I think finally the officer in charge came down and said that rather than get yourself blown up on this thing or get yourself shot, go ahead and sign it because this stuff doesn't mean a danged thing, anyway.
- Marcello: I gather that the officers were pretty eager to have you

sign this because...

Kennedy: Probably so...

Marcello: ...weren't they being kicked around a little bit?

Kennedy: Probably so. I don't remember exactly, but I imagine they were. The pressure was being put on them by the man in charge of the camp--camp commandant--to get this done. I'm sure he would go to any extremes to get it done because his neck was on the line, so to speak.

Marcello: What kind of a relationship was developing between the enlisted prisoners and the officer prisoners at Bicycle Camp?

Kennedy: It depended on the officer, really. Of course, our relationships at this point were primarily with the Navy officers. Some of them we didn't respect at all--one or two I can remember, without calling any names--and some we did respect. We had some good officers.

Marcello: How would an officer get your respect under these circumstances?

Kennedy: By showing some guts, I guess, and looking out for us, and showing that he was a good, strong person that had our interests at heart as far as he could and not giving in, not going under real quick to the Japanese. We had one in particular that I had no respect for at all. I really think he had a problem--a little bit of a mental problem, as I get older and think back on it. He would do silly things and embarrass you. That's the word I was looking for--he'd embarrass you. I

think as long as they didn't embarrass you and did what you expected an officer to do, they'd get your respect. I remember we had one fellow from Memphis, Tennessee, by the name of Smith, who was very good. He really stood up and took some beatings for us. The Army had the same thing. They had some good ones and some that weren't so good.

Marcello: What actually was the function that would be performed by the officers?

Kennedy: What was their function at Bicycle Camp? Probably just as it would be in any other camp, compound, or military base. They'd just supervise the daily routine of the camp--to keep everything in order; do the minor things that they had to do; get a record on each individual person; see that we behaved ourselves as far as we could; do the things that we had to do; and obey their orders, really. Of course, they were getting orders, too, from the Japanese: do this, do that, and not to do this.

Marcello: Would you have an American who would supervise you on work details?

Kennedy: I think there was a sergeant in charge or a corporal or something--either a sailor or soldier--that worked under the guards. At least he could at least interpret his orders for what we were supposed to do.

Marcello: So on the job it would be a noncom who would be more or less standing between you and the guards.

Kennedy: Right. He was a cushion between us and the guards, and I wouldn't want that job. I had that job a few times, and I didn't like it.

Marcello: What made it so difficult?

Kennedy: You were responsible for everything that happened. You were the first one that got the hell beat out of you if something went wrong. I didn't like being put in that position. As I said earlier, we were supposed to be promoted the day after the ship was sunk--a bunch of us. When they asked me for my rank, I put it down as machinist's mate second class because I was told that's what I was. Some of the guys just put themselves down as fireman first class. They put me on the record as a machinist's mate second class, so this caused me to have to be in charge of some parties at times. I was always wishing, "What did I open my mouth for?" I should've said I was a fireman first class, and then I'd have been a helluva lot better off. There was another thing about it. It put me on a kumi or work party with the older people, and I think that had me working harder, because I was one of the younger people on the work party. Some of the older fellows couldn't work too hard.

Marcello: At this stage, is it important that two or three or four guys join together and pool their resources?

Kennedy: Yes. Oh, yes. We did that in larger groups in the beginning. As I said, four or five guys in Batavia were in this one cubicle.

We did that. We helped each other. If one guy had sugar or this, that, or the other, we split it or helped each other out. As we went on, it was usually one guy. My best friend was Jack Burge. He and I were together all the time. We were in the same shift all the way through, so we stayed together and helped each other out all the time. But in the beginning, it was a different group.

Marcello: I have heard some of the prisoners remark that one man alone, especially later on, was going to have a tough time surviving.

Kennedy: That's right. Somebody had to look out for you, really. You didn't realize it so much maybe then, but it was important.

Marcello: We'll talk more about that later on, of course, but you're already seeing its importance here at Bicycle Camp. What kind of news were you receiving from the outside here at Bicycle Camp? I'm referring mainly to the course of the war and things like that.

Kennedy: We had a radio. Alderman was a chief radioman, and he put together a radio. He had it up in the attic of his barracks, and every night he would go up there and turn it on and listen to it. He could've been shot for that; he would've been shot for that. So we had some news coming in. I think he was forced to destroy that later on; he got rid of it. But for most of the six months we were in Batavia, we were getting word-of-mouth news, anyway. It wasn't good news back in those days, either. That's for sure.

Marcello: How would the news be passed around?

Kennedy: Word-of-mouth. Nothing was printed or anything like that.

Marcello: I know that in the case of the Army guys, they also had a radio, and the news would be deliberately withheld for several days after an event had occurred, so that in case word did get out, the Japanese wouldn't suspect the presence of a radio.

Kennedy: I'm not sure that our people did that or not. They might have. He was pretty sharp. I used to work with him on board the Houston. I was trying to get to be a radioman, and he was a good friend of mine, and I used to go down and practice taking Morse code and typing and stuff like that. I never did do it, but I practiced it. He was sure pretty sharp. He died later on.

Marcello: You mentioned that discovery of the radio would've meant death to whomever possessed it. What did the Japanese tell you relative to escape?

Kennedy: At that point, I don't think it was quite spelled out--at least we didn't believe it--that we would be shot if we tried to escape. I don't think anybody tried to escape in Batavia. We knew there would be serious consequences if we were caught. There really wasn't anyplace to go.

Marcello: The natives weren't too friendly at this point, were they?

Kennedy: That's right; that's right. They weren't too friendly. There were some Dutch people there, of course, mostly wives

and quite a few civilians. But most of the Dutch people--men--were in the Dutch Army, and they were all rounded up and put in POW camps. The rest of them were natives, and they weren't really too friendly, so there wasn't anyplace to go.

Marcello: What kind of contact did you have with the Dutch civilians when you were on work parties?

Kennedy: In Batavia, very little. We had contact with the Dutch Army people that were just across the fence. We used to go over there and talk to those people. I don't remember having any contact with the Dutch in Batavia. Here again, I was the type of guy that didn't try for a lot of contact. You know, why do it? You're going to get yourself in trouble if you get caught, and so I didn't do much of that.

Marcello: What sort of medical facilities were available here at Bicycle Camp.

Kennedy: Not bad, not bad. Of course, everything is relative. It was a lot better there than it was in later years. We had medicine. I remember I got my first and only case of tonsillitis in Bicycle Camp, and they had medicine for me. I got a shot, and they sprayed my throat with some purple stuff. I remember that. Then it went away in a few days. That was the only time I was sick there. But they did have a hospital set up and a couple of doctors.

Marcello: So the sickbay was not necessarily a place to be avoided as was the case later on.

- Kennedy: That's right; that's right. It was kind of considered like it would be normally in a military deal. It wasn't so bad out of the hospital, either, you know, relatively speaking.
- Marcello: As you look back and compare all the places that you were during your time as a prisoner-of-war, had you been able to stay at Bicycle Camp under those same circumstances all the way through, it would not've been too bad.
- Kennedy: That's right. I know one guy that did. He stayed there all through the war. He was the yeoman keeping the records of the POWs. There were quite a few there. Later on, there were quite a few prisoners who stayed in Java--not in our group but in other groups. But he lives in California now. He got a pretty good deal. He worked for the Japanese as a yeoman, primarily keeping records on all the Americans--keeping records on all the POWs. He had it pretty good. He stayed right there in Bicycle Camp through the whole war.
- Marcello: In October, 1942, the first groups began to leave Bicycle Camp. They left at various times.
- Kennedy: Did they?
- Marcello: I think one of the first groups out was the Fitzsimmons group. Then I think it was followed by some others later on. Do you remember when you left Bicycle Camp?
- Kennedy: I left with Captain Fowler's group. We left after Fitzsimmons. We were the next group after Fitzsimmons--the next large group. I don't remember the date.



Marcello: Let me ask you this. What was your reaction upon learning that you would be leaving Bicycle Camp? In other words, were you kind of in a routine there and you hated to leave? Did you think the next place might be better?

Kennedy: I'm not sure we knew where we were going, to begin with, so there was some doubt. I think we didn't know how good it was there because probably we thought we were going to something better. So we probably looked forward to it. I'm not sure that we knew we were going to Singapore. We might've known toward the last. I'm sure it was a strong rumor where we were going.

Marcello: What were you allowed to take with you?

Kennedy: I think I took pretty well what I had. Of course, I didn't have a lot (chuckle). Unless they wanted to give me something else to take with me, you know.

Marcello: Earlier in the interview, you mentioned something about shots. Is this when you received those shots?

Kennedy: I believe it was before we went to Singapore that we got shots. I remember one captain on duty--this one was the aviation officer--and he was giving the shots. I think they were for the plague or something. He would just get the arm and kind of throw the needle in--you know, the shot. Those needles were dull. I remember that. Yes, it was before we left Bicycle Camp we got the shots for all the different diseases.

Marcello: Okay, you are marched or transported at least down to the docks.

Kennedy: Loaded aboard a Japanese ship.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of the ship?

Kennedy: No, I don't.

Marcello: Was this one the Dai Nichi Maru?

Kennedy: Yes, it was the Dai Nichi Maru. That's right.

Marcello: Describe what the interior of the Dai Nichi Maru was like.

Kennedy: Well, it was in layers--platforms in the hold--about three feet in height.

Marcello: In other words, at one time there had been maybe a huge hold, and they had subdivided it with these tiers or platforms.

Kennedy: Yes, platforms. We were in there very tight. You could hardly turn over.

Marcello: Could you stand up?

Kennedy: No, you couldn't stand up. You could sit up, but that was about all. And it was hot. There again, we were right on the equator, and it was hot. This is when our food really started going down. That was bad because they had to cook it aboard ship, and the ship was loaded; they didn't have enough room to cook a lot of food. It took about--I don't know--three or four days to get to Singapore.

Marcello: What type of food were you getting?

Kennedy: Oh, rice and still the same stuff, but skimpy. The bathroom facilities were terrible, as I can remember them, because they

didn't have, obviously, enough bathroom facilities. I think they built some things that hung over the side, and you could sit there. But you weren't allowed much time, either. I don't think we ever had a bath while we were on that run. It was hot, miserable, and terrible really.

Marcello: I'm sure that with all that human cargo down there, it must have stunk to high heaven, too.

Kennedy: I think stink isn't the word for it (chuckle). It was bad, really bad. Of course, I think you tend to get used to things like that after a while. If today I was put back in that situation, it would probably be appalling. You're right. It smelled terrible. There were a few people sick at that time, but not many. That's surprising. I remember I read a book on that trip, but I don't remember the name of that book.

Marcello: So at least there was light.

Kennedy: There was some light, and we got up on the topside quite a bit, too, because the war had progressed to the point where they were concerned about the Allies' submarine fleet and surface ships and stuff like that. I remember sitting up topside some and reading.

Marcello: What were you fed?

Kennedy: Rice.

Marcello: And how were you fed?

Kennedy: I think in groups we went up to eat.

Marcello: So you actually went up on the deck to eat?

Kennedy: Yes. I think it was either that or they had an open space down in the hold possibly, because we had to have an area in which to eat. You'd have to get in line and get it and go sit down somewhere to eat and get out of the way so the rest of them could be fed.

Marcello: Is it not true that when you were aboard the Dai Nichi Maru, you had to sit with your legs apart, and somebody would actually be sitting between them? Was it that tight?

Kennedy: No, I don't think so. It wasn't that tight. It was fairly close. You couldn't lay down without being awful close to somebody, and I think you could sit down all right. I think every person possibly had a square yard or something like that to sit in--close to that. Some of the later ones were tighter.

Marcello: What did you do about water?

Kennedy: We had to go up topside and get water in your canteen. You had to make it stretch.

Marcello: Okay, you get aboard the Dai Nichi Maru, and you leave Java. Where do you go?

Kennedy: Ultimately, to Singapore. But I remember skirting the island of...I think there's an island up on the coast of Sumatra, and we went between Sumatra and the island, I believe. Then we went on to Singapore. I remember landing in Singapore on the docks and seeing all the Chinese. There were Chinese women in

the work parties. That's the first time I had seen that, I think. They were all dressed the same--those coolie uniforms --and were unloading the ships and stuff. I remember the ride into the camp in Singapore and seeing all the Chinese and all the natives and all the squalor that they live in. It was pretty bad.

Marcello: Okay, so you...

Kennedy: The trip from Java to Singapore, as I remember, was rather uneventful other than being terribly miserable and hot.

Marcello: What happens when you land in Singapore?

Kennedy: Well, we were marched down on the dock, loaded on trucks, and driven to Changi Prison. Of course, we had the usual count-offs and all this stuff and being sure they had everybody. We got everybody off the ship, but I don't think we did any work on the ship, unloading or anything. I think it was strictly a prison transfer.

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

Kennedy: Changi was an old English Army barracks. We lived in a stucco-type barracks. It had very high ceilings. It was very cool because they had big doors on both sides. I would imagine that back in the English days it was probably a comfortable place to live. There were a lot of Englishmen there, a lot of Australians--a lot of people. The only thing I remember about the barracks is that there was a lot of spider webs up above. One thing the English in the tropics

would never do was to clean those out because they trap flies. It was kind of a rule of thumb that they didn't do it. There the English were telling us about how nice the place was before the war, when they all had servants taking care of them and all this kind of stuff.

It was strictly under British control. We were supposed to salute all the officers, which we promptly refused to do, and it got a lot of people in trouble. One guy got put in the brig for not saluting an English officer, and that caused a mutiny, really.

Marcello: Do you remember anything else that developed here relative to the relations between the British and the Americans?

Kennedy: Yes. They got Red Cross parcels, and we had to put up a battle before we got any. They said that ours had been sent on up the road, and these were for the English. But they came from the United States, so that caused quite a bit of a problem--a few fist fights, I think. Finally, we got a partial Red Cross package. We got a partial Red Cross package, I believe, there. That was our first one.

Marcello: Do you recall what was in the parcel?

Kennedy: It seems like our old friend, the cigarettes was there. There was some small cans of stuff, I think. There was some cheese, a little candy, and, I believe, some Spam.

Marcello: How about some powdered milk? Usually, they had some powdered milk.

Kennedy: Yes, there was some powdered milk in there, too. We split that up, I think--half of one per person or something like that.

But the English were living pretty well there. I think we really resented the English at that point in time for giving up Singapore the way they did.

Marcello: I think there was bad blood between the English and the Americans almost all the way through, isn't that correct?

Kennedy: Yes, there was.

Marcello: I'm sure that you would have individual English friends and things of that nature.

Kennedy: Yes, I had a few individual English friends, but overall we didn't like them. They lost more people percentage-wise than others--them and the Dutch--because of their hygiene. They didn't take care of themselves. They were a "filthy lot." That's what the Aussies would say. The Americans and the Australians got along better--famously, really.

Marcello: How do you think that relationship developed, or why that close relationship?

Kennedy: I think the colonial part had something to do with it, and the fact that we were frontiersmen, I guess, was another word to put to it. We were both used to hard work and were the more individualistic types. The Australians, like the Americans, were hard-working people who would look after their own. We tended to be drawn to each other. We still are,

I think, really. I've got some good friends. I've been back over there once. They're good people. We tended to group up against the Dutch and the English.

Marcello: I know that when one group went through Changi, they had some problems relative to the king's coconuts. Do you remember that incident?

Kennedy: Oh, yes, I was involved.

Marcello: Describe that.

Kennedy: They cut down coconut trees, and I think they nearly got put in jail over it because the English were very put out because we destroyed some of the king's coconut trees. This was something they didn't do. Well, we cut down some of them for some reason. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was to get the coconuts, I guess (chuckle). But that really caused a hassle.

Marcello: I understand English officers in some cases had chickens and dogs and all sorts of things.

Kennedy: Oh, yes. They also still had their batmen working for them. A batman was somebody that took care of them--cleaned their clothes, cooked their meals, and all this. They still had some of those. They were trying to live like they had before the war, which, again, we resented.

Marcello: What kind of work parties or work details went on in Changi?

Kennedy: At least on the ones I was on, we were clearing out coconut groves for gardens--completely clearing them out and making



gardens. I think those gardens...they continued them after we left, and those were pretty used throughout the war. The POWs operated those vegetable gardens and fed themselves there and probably fed some of the Japanese, too. That's what we were doing primarily, as I remember it--clearing out the coconut trees and clearing the land to make gardens.

Marcello: How difficult or easy was this work?

Kennedy: It was hard because, again, the weather was hot, but I don't remember it really being that bad.

Marcello: Were there strictly Americans doing this, or were all nationalities involved?

Kennedy: I think all nationalities were doing this. Of course, we were in our own groups, but I'm sure the others were doing it, too. Here again, I think the Americans and the Australians were used to hard work, and I think that kind of stuff was more of an outing for them than possibly some of the other nationalities. It was a way to get out of the camp.

Marcello: What sort of food were you getting here at Changi?

Kennedy: At Changi the food was on a par with Batavia. Of course, there were more prisoners there and more to feed. But, again, it was better organized, too, because they had hundreds of thousands of people there to take care of. That's an awful lot of people.

Marcello: Did you ever run across any of the Sikh guards?

Kennedy: Yes, a few. I didn't have personal contacts, but I saw them

around. There were Gurkhas, too. There were a few Gurkhas there.

Marcello: What was the general attitude toward those Sikh guards?

Kennedy: As far as a country boy from Texas, I looked at them in wonderment, really, you know. That's something I hadn't seen before. I didn't understand them or what they were trying to do. I don't know if it was the Sikh guards, but one group had their prayer blankets. I saw that in one camp. Everyday those guys would get out there--even if there was only one guy there--and they'd have a prayer blanket and pray toward Mecca, I guess. This was something to me. Being a Baptist from Texas, I didn't quite understand it (chuckle). But they had all nationalities in the British Army, and they were all there.

Marcello: How long were you at Changi altogether?

Kennedy: I don't know if I was there over Christmas or not. I don't think so. I get my dates mixed up.

Marcello: I knew most groups left Bicycle Camp in October of 1942, and then in January some started for Burma.

Kennedy: That's right. We were there over Christmas and left in January, because in February we got into a bomb attack up there. We were there over Christmas, and I don't remember much about Christmas there, either. I don't think there was much. We stayed there over Christmas and went up early in the new year.

Marcello: Describe where you went after you left Changi.

Kennedy: In Changi...

Marcello: Is this where you got on the trains?

Kennedy: Yes. They took us down to the train station--I don't remember if we rode or marched--and we got on a train and went to Penang.

Marcello: Penang.

Kennedy: Penang. This was a couple-day trip, I guess. I know it was very hot. This was my first railroad ride with the Japanese.

Marcello: Describe what the railroad ride was like.

Kennedy: Japanese rail cars are about half as big as the American cars, if they're that. They packed us in there like sardines, really. There you really didn't have room to sit down hardly. If you did you had to pull your knees up so the guy next to you could sit down. In a lot of cases, you'd sit with a guy right between your legs in the front and so on all the way through. The food was atrocious; we had very little water. That was a rough journey.

Marcello: Were these enclosed boxcars?

Kennedy: No, the door would usually be open about six inches, and usually the Japanese guard sat there, so you didn't have access to the outside at all. Maybe at night we'd stop for a little bit, and people could get out, but not many of us. The people who had to take a leak had to do it out the front door, you know. It was very bad.

Marcello: I guess if anybody had dysentery, it was really terrible.

Kennedy: The place would stink, yes. That's for sure. And I'm not sure that it didn't. We were on that one day or two. I guess it was two days. We arrived at Penang during the night, and at that point we didn't know where in the hell we were going, I'll assure you, because we landed up there in the dark. We did not know where we were going, and I remember that very definitely. We were a little concerned as to where we would be going because nobody had told us at this point.

Marcello: At Penang, then, you get on another Japanese transport.

Kennedy: Another ship.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of it?

Kennedy: No, I don't.

Marcello: I believe it was the Dai Moji Maru.

Kennedy: Yes. Maru must mean ship in Japanese, I guess. That was a very eventful trip.

Marcello: Describe, first of all, what the interior of the Dai Moji Maru was like.

Kennedy: Very similar to the previous ship. Probably a little more crowded. The Americans had the two holds in the forward part of the ship, I believe, and the Dutch had the two holds in the back. Maybe the Australians were also back there. We were very crowded. From where I sat on that one, I could see out a little better. I must've been toward the front or something. But it was our second boat ride, anyway. This time we were getting to be "old salts" at this.

Marcello: Was the food any different here than it had been on the Dai Nichi Maru?

Kennedy: No better. It was maybe a little worse, if anything.

Marcello: How about movement up onto the upper deck?

Kennedy: You were allowed to go up there a little bit. We could get up there some. I think--if I remember right--we kind of did it in shifts so that everybody'd get a chance to get up there. We had some good officers. Our officers by that time had kind of settled down, and they did a good job.

Marcello: It was of course, on this trip that you get caught in the air attack.

Kennedy: Yes, that's when the Americans caught us.

Marcello: Describe, in as much detail as you can remember, that incident.

Kennedy: Well, I remember a few things about that. I remember we got the report that the Americans were up there. I think Smith was the one that told us who were down below. We had--what--two ships and one little tugboat. It was really more a tugboat than a corvette. It was very small, and he was chugging along ahead of us. It was a very slow trip, too. They kept straddling us, you know. Ensign Smith would stand at the top and tell us where the ship was and where the planes were. Hell, they weren't too high, either, and he'd tell us when they dropped a bomb and tell us when to take cover. He'd say, "Relax! They're circling. They're not going to be dropping any bombs for a while." And he'd tell us, "Well,

here they come," and he'd be watching. "Okay, they've released their bombs." By that time you could hear it whistle (chuckle). Then you could hear the explosion, and the would shake. They had some very close hits.

I remember I had a Chinese boy there with me, there was Kreken, who was a Catholic, and there was a Baptist and myself; and everybody was praying, you know. I remember thinking at the time, you know, the Catholic boy had his rosary and the Chinese boy was praying to Buddha, and I was wondering, "Who's right?" (chuckle). Fortunately, no Americans got killed. I think we lost two or three people on the ship from near misses--not our people, but the Dutch.

Marcello: You mentioned these people who were evidently praying. What was the reaction of the rest of the people down in the hold?

Kennedy: Scared as hell. Very scared because we were just there. If the bomb would've hit in that hold, we'd have all been killed, really. It did do that on the other ship. It dropped in the hold full of Japanese over there and sunk that ship. But we were really glad to see them pull off, I'll tell you. When you think of it--and we thought about it at the time--hell, they couldn't keep from sinking us because there was no antiaircraft fire. I think they did have a little pop gun on the front, and they shot it and shot part of the mast off the ship, and that stopped that. I don't think they knew how in the hell to use it.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that the ship that had the Japanese personnel on it--and I believe some Dutch personnel on it--was hit and actually sunk. Now what happened to the survivors?

Kennedy: We and the little tugboat picked them up--the ones that we could get to. We got them all, I guess. As far as I know, they were alive. I saw one guy bring a fish up and swim back with it. That's one Dutchman that I knew, by the way. I don't remember his name now. He came dragging a fish that he picked up that the bomb killed. Everybody was looking for food in those days. I don't remember exactly...I know the tugboat picked a lot of them up and brought them up beside the ship, and they then got aboard, and the tug went and picked up more. They were hanging on to stuff. I don't know how many Dutchmen they lost, but quite a few, I guess.

Marcello: I guess they lost quite a few Japanese personnel, too, did they not?

Kennedy: More Japanese, yes, because the bomb, I believe, landed in the hold.

Marcello: This must've made your ship even more crowded.

Kennedy: Oh, yes, it was very crowded. Of course, we were only one day out, I believe, at that point. We were anxious to get off that damned ship, I'll tell you.

Marcello: Did the attitude of the Japanese change any as a result of that air attack? In other words, were they more surly than before, or could you not tell any difference?

Kennedy: I couldn't tell any difference, not really. I imagine they were just as shook up on that raid as we were, if not moreso. I've often wondered...I think that's one golden opportunity we missed--not taking over that ship. That's the closest to freedom we ever were.

Marcello: Were there very many guards aboard the ship?

Kennedy: Not many, not many. We could've taken that ship without any trouble. But we were a long way to freedom from there. Of course, we had naval officers there, and whether we could've got any cooperation from the crew--from the engine room crew--and all that...of course, it wasn't planned, either. If we would've known...probably if we would've known a day ahead of time--what was going to happen--then it could've been planned and probably would've been. But just on the spur of the moment like that, nobody took charge, I guess.

Marcello: Okay, you land in Moulmein, Burma, on January 16, 1943. What happened at that point?

Kennedy: Everybody got off that ship as fast as they could. I remember that. We were taken to an Old English or Burmese prison, I guess. There was a big gold pagoda right by it. I remember that--a great, big golden pagoda. There was some hanging scaffolds there, too.

Marcello: That must've made you feel good (chuckle).

Kennedy: They must have been there from the old English days. The next day they organized a work party to go back and unload



that ship. That's one that I worked real hard in avoiding, and I succeeded in avoiding it because I wasn't anxious at all to get back on that ship.

The next thing is that I was on a burial party to bury a Dutchman that had been killed. There were twelve of us, I guess. We went through a Catholic school, I guess. Not being Catholic, I don't know the correct terminology, but there was a lot of nuns there--Burmese nuns, or student nuns. We buried this guy, and then they allowed us to take a bath. They had a big, open concrete deal. They gave us towels. It was run by the French--a French priest.

Marcello: Were you accompanied by a Japanese guard?

Kennedy: Yes. Oh, yes.

Marcello: And he had no objections to this?

Kennedy: He let us go ahead and do it. And all these girls that were nuns stood around and peeked at us while we were taking a bath (chuckle) and giggled. I don't know whether that hurt our pride or what. But we took a bath for the first time. I don't know whether we had anything to eat or not, but I think we did. But we had a clean towel and a wash rag and clean water and soap to take a bath with out of this big trough. I felt worry for the Dutchman, but I was glad to get on the burial party (chuckle).

Marcello: That's one of those little things that always stands out in your mind, I guess.

Kennedy: That's right. That was a nice work party--if there is such a thing. That, I'll remember. There weren't too many like that. But the Moulein prison wasn't big, not like you think of a prison with big concrete walls. [Tape runs out].

Marcello: Before the tape ran out, which I didn't catch, you were talking a little bit more about the Moulmein jail. Do you remember what you were going to say?

Kennedy: I don't remember how far I got. As I said, it wasn't a big concrete enclosure. It had fences and so on. It was fairly comfortable. I don't remember a lot about it.

Marcello: Did you have regular bunks, or did you have to sleep on a concrete slab?

Kennedy: I think we slept on a concrete slab because I don't think there were bunks there. It might've been platforms, which was the tendency or the normal thing over there.

Marcello: I'm assuming that other than...

Kennedy: The thing that impressed me most about that was a big pagoda. I'll never forget that. It was beautiful.

Marcello: I believe, in fact, this may have been the pagoda that Kipling wrote about.

Kennedy: Yes, "the old Moulmein Pagoda looking eastward to the sea" or something like that. I thought of that, too, when I was there.

Marcello: I think you stayed there for about five days.

Kennedy: Yes. Not long, anyway.

Marcello: And then...

Kennedy: Also, I remember the Buddhist monks--long, yellow robes--going around begging all the time. You're familiar with those. They were all over the place. I hadn't seen anything like that, but there were lots of them there. They had their shaved heads and yellow robes.

Marcello: You leave there, and your next destination, as I recall, was Thanbyuzayat.

Kennedy: I don't remember Thanbyuzayat. I think we just passed through Thanbyuzayat. We went to 18 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: How did you get from Moulmein to the 18 Kilo Camp?

Kennedy: We had to go on trucks. I don't think we marched. I think we went on trucks. But I can't be sure.

Marcello: Did you maybe go as far as Thanbyuzayat and then march from there to 18 Kilo?

Kennedy: Yes, we could've, because I remember 18 Kilo real well. I don't remember Thanbyuzayat. I've got a blank on that completely.

Marcello: Let me just throw this out to you in case we can pick up on something at Thanbyuzayat. Do you remember a speech that was given there to the prisoners by Colonel Nagatomo?

Kennedy: No, I don't.

Marcello: Okay. So you go to 18 Kilo. Describe what 18 Kilo looked like from a physical standpoint. I suspect that when you talk about one of these kilo camps, we can talk about all of them.

Kennedy: We were at 18 Kilo during the dry season, and it was off to the left of the railroad beds, you know, the cuts for the road bed for the railroad. I don't think they had laid any rails at that point. It was dusty. There was a hill behind it, and there was a spring up there. We were talking about the possibility of running a bamboo pipeline down there. We could've if we'd been there long enough, I think. That fell on deaf ears, and we had to carry our water from up there. That's what the problem was. I know this was quite a problem for cooking. There was no creek there. We had to carry water from that spring up there. It was very dusty, and we were working on the cuts and so on there. We didn't stay there too long, by the way.

Marcello: What would one of the huts or barracks look like there?

Kennedy: The huts, again, were all the same. They were made of bamboo lashed together with usually two platforms.

Marcello: In other words, one extending from each wall?

Kennedy: Yes. The barracks is just open down the center with platforms on each side made of bamboo slats tied together. It was sloping a little bit to the inside, I believe--just a little bit. You could enter sometimes through the back, and you could enter through the front. In colder weather we'd have a fire in the center for warmth.

Marcello: How much space did you have on one of those platforms?

Kennedy: Oh, about thirty inches wide and then, of course, the length.

Marcello: About how long were they?

Kennedy: Oh, eight feet, I guess--about eight feet.

Marcello: That space, which was thirty inches wide and eight feet long, was, in essence, your home.

Kennedy: That was your home. You had to put everything you had there. I believe we had little grass mats maybe to lay on, and we had a blanket and mosquito net. I can't remember where in the hell we got those mosquito nets, but somewhere along the line we were issued mosquito nets. I don't know where.

Marcello: How large would one of these camp be?

Kennedy: Well, this camp...

Marcello: You'd probably have to estimate that.

Kennedy: I'd have to estimate, but in terms of people there were probably...I don't remember if there were any English or Australians or Dutch there. I don't think so. I think it was all Americans at that camp. Maybe there were 600 people or 500 people.

Marcello: About how many guards would there be?

Kennedy: Twenty or thirty.

Marcello: And would most of these be Koreans?

Kennedy: Yes. At this point they were Koreans, for sure. I think there was a Japanese officer in charge of the camp, and the rest of them were Koreans.

Marcello: I assume there would probably be a Japanese noncom or two over these Koreans.

Kennedy: Yes. There was also an interpreter.

Marcello: And did you also have some engineer personnel?

Kennedy: They were there, somewhere around the camp. I'm assuming they had their own barracks there somewhere. Yes, they had to have the engineers. There was quite a conflict sometimes between the Koreans and the engineers.

Marcello: Could you elaborate on that?

Kennedy: Well, especially toward the end, the engineers wanted to get that railroad built, and they kept enlarging the quota and pushing the prisoners harder and harder. In some cases the Koreans sided with us and said, "No, this is as far as it can go. They've got to get in and get some rest." There was some conflict there. I guess it was more of an authority conflict than anything else. I suspect the Koreans felt that the engineers were there to supervise the building of the railroad, and their job was to take care of the prisoners. I think there was some conflict in that regard between the two groups.

Marcello: What kind of quarters would the Japanese and Koreans have?

Kennedy: I don't ever remember being in there, but I'm sure they were much better than ours. They were, of course, built the same way, but I think they were enclosed a little better for comfort. They had better food, for sure. The cleanliness was better.

Marcello: What other structures might there be in one of these kilo camps?

Kennedy: Nothing else.

Marcello: How about a cook shack?

Kennedy: Oh, yes, a cook shack where they did the cooking. And I think the Japanese had their own cook shack, too, and we had ours.

Marcello: Would each camp have an area or section designated as a sickbay?

Kennedy: Yes. You would have one barracks, usually, as the sickbay, if you could call it that. The further we got into the jungle, the more people that were in it. The cook shack had usually three or four of what we called wajons, which was a round container made of cast iron and was recessed. It held about ten gallons, I guess.

Marcello: Those were used to cook the rice in?

Kennedy: To cook the rice in, yes. We had some half-barrels to make tea and some other half-barrels to cook whatever other stuff we had. Those were moved by carriers out to the chow line, and the cooks would serve the food to the POWs as they came by. They would save the rice that stuck to the bottom of the wajon and give that out, too. Although it was usually black, it didn't taste too bad.

Marcello: In fact, I gather that later on it was used as one of the cures for dysentery, too.

Kennedy: Yes. I was fortunate. I had dysentery a couple of times, but in most cases I cured mine by just taking charcoal out

of the fire and eating it. That cured it; that stopped it. Charcoal absorbs a lot of gas. I didn't know it at the time, but that was what somebody told me, and I tried it, and it did.

Marcello: Where would the equipment be stored that was to be used on the railroad? Would it be in that camp, too?

Kennedy: Yes, it would be in the camp. It was mostly shovels, picks, sacks, and bamboo poles that we used.

Marcello: Okay, take me through a day's work on the railroad at one of these camps like 18 Kilo, and this is before we get up into the rainy seasons and the "Speedo" and all that. Take me through a typical day from the time you get up.

Kennedy: You get up in the morning and have breakfast, and they lined you up. Well, they assigned us to kumis by that time. I guess there must have been twenty-five or thirty people to a kumi. Somebody was in charge--an officer was in charge--of each kumi. We lined up and counted, and then we'd march out to the site. I believe at that point we were probably assigned a cubic meter of dirt to move per person per day.

Marcello: Would this be marked off by the Japanese?

Kennedy: Oh, yes, the Japanese would count you and mark it off: "You go here. This is what you do today." We'd have a bamboo pole with a sack on it, and somebody would shovel the dirt in a sack, and you'd carry it out and dump it and come back and get another load--all day long. That's what you did. Of course, at the 18 Kilo camp it wasn't too rocky; it was more soil than rock.



- Marcello: What kind of physical shape were you in here at 18 Kilo?
- Kennedy: Not too bad. We were skinny, but malnutrition hadn't set in at this point. Our food was probably a little better, too, because we were closer in to the source of the supply, not too far from Thanbyuzayat, which was the source of supply for that end of the railroad.
- Marcello: So you would possibly have one man picking, one man shoveling, and perhaps two men dumping the dirt?
- Kennedy: Yes, and probably one was out there spreading it at the other end, too. You'd get a little rest every once in a while, but you had to keep your eye on how much work you had to do, too, to get it finished. That was the officer's job--to kind of watch that. That was a sweaty job, and you had to be careful that you kind of limited the amount you did because the more you did the more you would be assigned later on.
- Marcello: In the beginning, what happened when you had completed your assigned amount of work?
- Kennedy: Usually, we went in, but that didn't last long. If you completed it too early, the next day you'd have one-and-a-quarter meters instead of one meter to do. So you had to be careful along those lines.
- I remember one thing there where we were digging, and somebody ran into a root...what is the word for it? We have it over here. We make tea out of it.
- Marcello: Ginseng?

Kennedy: No, not ginseng. Sassafras! Sassafras! They had sassafras trees over there--little bushes. We'd dig that out, and, of course, sassafras tea boiled in water with a little sugar in it is very good. Everybody was real happy. We discovered that in one of these cuts, and we made some sassafras tea from it. But that was unusual that they would have that over there and here, too.

Marcello: You were mentioning cuts. You were making either a cut or a fill?

Kennedy: A lot of the times, you carried the dirt from the cut to the fill, yes.

Marcello: About how large would one of these cuts or fills be?

Kennedy: At that point, you know, you'd run into some maybe ten to fifteen feet, twenty feet, deep because it was flat, rolling country there. We didn't get into the big ones until later when we got in the mountains. That's where we hit the big ones.

Marcello: What was the size of some of the big ones?

Kennedy: Some of them were, you know, a hundred feet, really. I'm guessing.

Marcello: A hundred feet deep?

Kennedy: Deep, yes. They'd vary in length, depending on the size of the hill that you were going through. You got into rocks there, too, where you'd have to blast and carry the rocks out, which was much harder. Of course, you had two things

working against you. The longer you stayed in there, the worse your health got and the harder the work got. Then add the rainy season to that, and it compounded it very much so.

Marcello: What time would you usually get back into camp here at 18 Kilo?

Kennedy: It was still daylight in most cases, as I remember, in 18 Kilo. It was the dry season, too, so I'm sure you would have daylight longer than you would in the rainy season because of the clouds.

Marcello: Would you take your noon meal out at the work site?

Kennedy: Out at the work site, yes.

Marcello: And what would it consist of?

Kennedy: Rice and a little bit of soup and tea. I'm not sure we had tea at noon; I'll take that back. Probably it was just water that we took out with us. It would be a little difficult to carry tea out there.

Marcello: At this stage, does all water have to be boiled?

Kennedy: Yes, we're into that stage now where dysentery and so on is setting in. Somewhere along here, we started boiling all of our water that we drink and also boiling the water that we stuck our mess kit in along with our eating utensils before we ate. We didn't eat anything unless the dish had been immersed in boiling water at this stage of the game. I'm sure that saved a lot of lives, too.

Marcello: What would the evening meal consist of?

Kennedy: All meals were the same (chuckle). There was no variety.

We ate what was available.

Marcello: When you went through the chow line, how much would you get here at 18 Kilo? You mentioned that at this time you had an Army mess kit?

Kennedy: Yes. It was the same one that I carried all the way through. The Army mess kit certainly wasn't full. Maybe it was half-full of rice with a little soup at the other end. That's about what it was for each meal. Back at the camp we would have tea, but out at the work site we would have water.

Marcello: What would you do with the time left over?

Kennedy: What time left over?

Marcello: After you took the evening meal.

Kennedy: At 18 Kilo?

Marcello: Yes.

Kennedy: Resting mostly and cleaning up our clothes and whatever we had to do, maybe some talking. But there were no games or anything like that. There was no recreational activity for sure.

Marcello: At one of these camps, there surely were no barbed wire fences and so on around them.

Kennedy: No.

Marcello: Why not?

Kennedy: (Chuckle) Well, there was no place to go, to begin with. Nobody wanted to get eaten up by a tiger out there--that's for sure--because we were in the jungle by this time. There

was really no place to go. It would have been silly. Some of the Aussies and English tried it and were killed for it.

Marcello: Is it also not true that the Japanese had placed a bounty on the heads of everybody who escaped?

Kennedy: I'm sure they had. I don't know that for a fact, but I'm sure they had. I've read a lot of articles since that time, and some of them got turned in by the Burmese when they were trying to escape. But 18 Kilo was a rather uneventful camp, other than that the work was hard; and there was not much to do other than work.

Marcello: You mentioned the stream awhile ago. Were you allowed to bathe and so on in it?

Kennedy: Well, there wasn't a stream at 18 Kilo. As I remember, all we had was a spring up in the mountains that we carried water down from. I'm sure there must have been a stream there somewhere because we were there probably two months, I guess, maybe three.

Marcello: How was your clothing holding out at this point?

Kennedy: I did a lot of patching. But it was not too bad at this point. That came later, when it really got bad.

Marcello: Somewhere along the line, the Japanese decided that you guys ought to be paid for your work. Do you remember where that started?

Kennedy: About here. About here. What was it? Was it 20¢ a day or 30¢ a day? One of the two.

Marcello: What form would the wages take? In other words, was it occupation money or...

Kennedy: Oh, yes, occupation money for sure. It was Burmese script.

Marcello: And where could you spend it or use it?

Kennedy: You couldn't. Once in a while you'd get to buy eggs from the natives or something like that, and I remember buying sugar that came in little kilo packages--real brown, dark sugar. This came in handy to put over the rice. It was unrefined--that's for damned sure--and probably dirty.

Marcello: You guys were looking for anything to flavor that rice.

Kennedy: Anything to eat!

Marcello: And especially to flavor that rice.

Kennedy: That's right. Otherwise, it was plain. Yes, you're right--anything to flavor it.

Marcello: I remember back in Bicycle Camp guys were always looking for Eagle Brand milk.

Kennedy: Yes. I was telling my wife about that the other night. That's one of those things I still like, you know, because if you could get a can of Eagle...in Singapore, too, we used to get that. You'd get a can of Eagle Brand milk, and you could put a little bit over the rice, and that was really good. There was still a little of that around at this point, but you didn't find much of that in the jungle (chuckle).

Marcello: How did the dealings with the natives progress? In other words, did the Japanese allow the natives to come into the

camp and trade with you, or did all this have to be done on the sly?

Kennedy: I suspect that in Burma it was pretty well open.

Marcello: Well, it would almost have to be that way if they were paying you.

Kennedy: You had to have somewhere to spend the money. It wasn't very much. Nobody saved a lot of money, that's for sure (chuckle). I remember one time saving up to buy...eggs were the big thing over there. You could buy eggs occasionally. And I'd saved up to buy some eggs. I bought a couple of eggs, I remember, and they were both just as rotten as they could be. I remember that was really a blow (chuckle). You couldn't take them back for credit (chuckle).

Marcello: These were duck eggs?

Kennedy: Yes, I'm sure. The duck eggs and the sugar was about the only thing... and the tobacco. God, they had some tobacco over there--that was back in my smoking days--and you could wash it two or three times, and each time it would just be black coming out of it, and it was still so damned strong you could hardly smoke it! Cigarette papers were something else. I think some of them even got to the point they were using the Bible to tear up the pages for cigarette paper (chuckle). But it was bad. I think the paper was the worst part of smoking because you used that real thick piece of paper that you were rolling this junk up in. That's stupid,

you know.

Marcello: That tobacco that your referring to, I think, was usually called "wog" tobacco.

Kennedy: Yes, "wog" tobacco. It would come in a big chunk. You'd wash it and wash it, and then it would still bite, you know. It would really bite your tongue. It's a wonder that that hadn't killed us.

Marcello: Now while you were on these work parties, what would the guards be doing?

Kennedy: Standing there watching you, mostly. Standing kind of up above so he could get a view of everything. If you were going too slow, he would start yelling at you and hitting at you. They kept the work going, is what they did, and they were responsible to see that nobody ran off.

Marcello: What did they bring with them to the job? In other words, did they go out there with a gun or a club or what?

Kennedy: They kept a rifle--a rifle for sure--and in some cases a walking stick that they used for a club. That was about it. They also carried their canteen. I guess they had their lunch delivered to them, too.

Marcello: In the railroad construction, what would you say was the best job to have? Whether we are talking about on the road itself or in camp or whatever, what would you have considered to be the best job?

Kennedy: The cook. He got to eat a little bit more, and you weren't



out there working quite as hard. You could kind of set your own pace. You had a bunch of people to cook for and try to make something out of what you had, which was rather exasperating, I'm sure, at times.

Marcello: So the cooks were a little fatter than the average POW.

Kennedy: Yes, they were healthier than the rest of them. It was just natural, you know. Everybody envied the cooks and sometimes resented them, too. But somebody had to cook. Somebody had to do the "dirty work" (chuckle).

Marcello: We have to realize that not everybody was out on that railroad. It took a certain percentage of the troops to maintain that camp.

Kennedy: Right. We had medical people. We had two...in our group we had two Navy pharmacist's mates, and the Army had a couple that took care of the sick people. We had two doctors for a while until we lost one. We had the cooks, and I'm sure there were some clerks that took care of the paperwork and officers that stayed in to kind of maintain things.

Marcello: And I would think you'd need a wood cutting detail and things like that, too, would you not?

Kennedy: Yes, people who cut wood for fires. The staff, so to speak. Later on, we had burial parties to bury people.

Marcello: I also understand that the American officers, in an effort to get as many people off that road as possible, would insist on having their own batmen. Do you remember that?

Kennedy: I remember that. Yes, they had some that took care of the officers and kind of cooked for them and stuff like that. They got away with it, too, for a long while. I'm not sure they got away with it all the way through or not. I was never lucky enough to get that job.

Marcello: And what would be the worst job, so far as you were concerned?

Kennedy: Working out on the railroad.

Marcello: Any particular job on the railroad?

Kennedy: Well, I guess the worst job on the railroad was when we got into rocks. We had to carry those damned rocks out of those cuts and dump them. They got heavy, and if one got away from you, it could hurt you; and if you got a scratch on your leg over there, you had an ulcer. The worst job would be out on the line.

Marcello: So what you're saying is there was no good job out on the line.

Kennedy: No, there was not a good job out on there. One day you might have it a little easier than the next day, depending on where you were working. That's for sure. We're still in 18 Kilo?

Marcello: Yes.

Kennedy: Okay. But 18 Kilo, by and large, compared to the rest of the railroad, wasn't bad.

Marcello: Where do you go from 18 Kilo?

Kennedy: We went from 18 Kilo to...

- Marcello: Some went all the way up 85 Kilo and then dropped back again.
- Kennedy: I was thinking we went to 65 Kilo, then 85 Kilo, then back to 80 Kilo, then to 105 Kilo, and then back to 100 Kilo.
- Marcello: In May, 1943, is when all hell breaks loose. You're moving farther on up into the jungle and farther away from the base camp where you get your supplies. The Japanese were evidently behind schedule on the progress of the railroad, and the monsoons hit. Now do you recall where you possibly were when all these things took place?
- Kennedy: I think we were up to...I've got to get 65 Kilo clear in my mind. We might have marched all the way to 85 Kilo.
- Marcello: It seems like most people were at 85 Kilo or 100 Kilo or 105 Kilo--somewhere in there.
- Kennedy: We were at 85 Kilo, I believe, at that point. Then we were back to 80 Kilo. I know I was in the monsoon season at 100 Kilo, too, for sure.
- Marcello: Yes, all through there--this particular period. At about 80 Kilo on up to 105 Kilo, maybe, was where most people were when all this took place.
- Kennedy: Yes, that's right.
- Marcello: First of all, describe what the so-called "Speedo" period meant.
- Kennedy: Well, that's when they were trying to speed up everything, and they increased our quota each day maybe a cubic meter-and-a-half to two and on up from there, that depending on what

the cut was. So it meant working from daylight until dark and sometimes after dark each day. Even in some places they worked by light. They used lights and worked at night.

Marcello: What was the longest that you worked for a stretch during this period?

Kennedy: Oh, I think about sixteen hours for probably in a couple of week-long sessions.

Marcello: You worked sixteen hour days for several weeks?

Kennedy: Yes. Well, maybe more than two. And this would mean leaving the camp before daylight and getting back after dark. During that time, you were never dry. Your bed is wet, and you're wet, and you really never get dry during that time.

Marcello: Describe what it's like to be caught in those monsoons.

Kennedy: It's just an ever-steady downpour--solid downpour--of rain all the time. Mud is up to your knees sometimes. The rocks are slippery and stuff like that. It's miserable. This is where we lost so many people.

Marcello: How does the disposition of the guards change?

Kennedy: It gets bad too. They're under pressure to increase production. They're doing it every way they can, and they've got less to do it with because people are getting sick. You'd work beside a guy one day, and he'd die that night. That happened a lot of times.

Marcello: Where does the term "Speedo" come from?

Kennedy: I guess it's a take-off on the word "speed."

Marcello: Is this something that the guards would yell?

Kennedy: Yes. They knew speed meant to hurry up, and I guess that's their version of it. They did a lot of things to speed you up, that's for sure. I think I went through two monsoon seasons over there. I could be wrong, but I think that after 18 Kilo we ran into one; and there was a certain dry spell when we were working on bridges up there, and then it got muddy again. So I must have gone through two during that time.

Marcello: What happens to the rations during this period?

Kennedy: Well, the rations during this period...the farther you got away from base camp, the worse they were. They had no refrigeration to begin with. Once in a while we'd get meat. They were carabao that were slaughtered down at Thanbyuzayat and put in boxes and cut into strips and brought up there. It would be green by the time it got there. At first we didn't eat it, but before it was over with, we were eating it once it got up there. We'd mix that with water and make a beef soup out of it to put with the rice.

Marcello: Now did a road parallel the railroad?

Kennedy: Pretty well, pretty well. That was another problem on food because they'd get washed out; they just couldn't physically get through.

Most of our deaths over there were really malnutrition because your body didn't have the wherewithal to withstand

anything that came along. It was the basic cause of most of the deaths even though ulcers or beriberi or diarrhea or whatever was listed as the cause. Most of it came because of the fact that your body wasn't strong enough to stand up.

Marcello: Can you describe how the rations were cut? For instance, you mentioned a moment ago that when you were at 18 Kilo, you might get a half of a mess kit of rice and some stew.

Kennedy: Let me put it this way. I think that by the time we got into 100 Kilo, our rations were down to about half.

Marcello: At least by half?

Kennedy: At least by half. We were just barely getting enough to survive on--if you can call it surviving. Some of them didn't survive.

That brings up another interesting point. The bigger the person was--in frame, in size--the more likely we were to lose him. In fact, we had very few big people who came through.

Marcello: Was this because the body needed more nourishment?

Kennedy: Yes, it needed more nourishment to handle it, so they started to suffer more than the little guys. A little guy, being wiry, didn't eat a lot, as opposed to a big guy who had to have more food to sustain him. We lost a lot of big guys that just couldn't handle it.

Marcello: You brought up this subject, and let me just pursue it from a different angle. I've also heard it said that the Japanese seemed to like to single out these big guys more than the little

guys because it kind of gave them a sense of superiority or something. Did you ever notice that?

Kennedy: Yes, I did. There was some of that. But I think the main reason we lost them is the fact that they didn't get enough food, really.

Marcello: Okay, you were talking about some of the results of this malnutrition. Did you have dysentery?

Kennedy: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what dysentery was like.

Kennedy: Dysentery meant a very bad gut-ache and going to the bathroom about every fifteen minutes. When you got out there, all you would pass was a mucous-type stuff. It burned your bottom very much. You didn't have much toilet paper either; that's another factor. In fact, you had none. They usually made a slit trench with some bamboo over it, and you had to stand on the bamboo. You lost your dignity after a while, too. There was so many people out there lining up to get into these slit trenches. You went downhill fast. The charcoal saved me there. I ate charcoal until I got rid of it.

I also had some cuts on my legs that fortunately healed up. I think my salvation was that I was raised on the farm, was used to hard work, and I was in fairly good physical condition when we started. And I'm not a big person.

Marcello: How about malaria? Did you have malaria?

Kennedy: Yes. I didn't get malaria until after I got out of the jungle.

Marcello: You must have been one of the exceptions in that case.

Kennedy: Yes. I didn't get malaria until after I got out of the jungle. I had some indications of beriberi but not much. Mostly, I had ulcers and dysentery, is what I had.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about those tropical ulcers. First of all, how would one get a tropical ulcer?

Kennedy: Just from any break in the skin. Usually, it was on your feet and legs, which is where you're more likely to get something like this. I've seen some on their arms, but mostly they were on the feet and legs. These would get started with a little fester and keep getting bigger and bigger and bigger until finally there...it was not unusual to see a person's shinbone completely exposed to these things. When they got in that shape, it was either take the leg off...if they took the leg off, there was 99 percent odds that they wouldn't have survived, anyway. So those were pretty well a death sentence if you got those.

Marcello: What remedies were used to try and heal these tropical ulcers?

Kennedy: Oh, all kinds. We didn't have any medicine. Peeing on your ulcer, which sometimes people did.

Marcello: I never heard that particular remedy.

Kennedy: Yes, they were thinking that the uric acid would help. Maybe it did. I don't know. I saw a lot of people do it. Also, toward the end of the war I got into Saigon, and the Dutch doctors were doing a lot of scraping--sharpening a spoon to



razor sharp and just digging all that stuff out. It took two or three people to hold the guy while they did it. I seem to remember getting hold of some bismuth powder over there somewhere that they used. I think they had some of that that they'd sprinkle in there. I don't know whether it did any good or not. Not many people survived with ulcers. I had a few, and I got through with it.

Marcello: How did you cure yours?

Kennedy: Just keeping them clean, really.

Marcello: Is this a matter of using hot water and rags or whatever?

Kennedy: Yes, hot water and rags and keeping on whatever little bandage I had. I think, again, physical condition had something to do with it.

Marcello: How large did your ulcers get?

Kennedy: Oh, the biggest one I had was about the size of a half-dollar.

Marcello: And how many did you have?

Kennedy: I had two on one leg. One on this side (gesture) and one in the back. That's scary!

Marcello: Is it safe to say that they just struck terror in your heart?

Kennedy: Yes, they did. I had another case, too. We were talking about the kitchens awhile ago. I worked in the kitchen at 100 Kilo for about a month. They needed a tea boiler, and I knew some of the guys who worked there. We lost one of the guys, and I cooked tea for a while. Later on, I cooked rice for a couple of weeks. It was in the roughest time,

and I'm grateful for that because it helped me.

But remember we had a ration of coffee--the first ration of coffee we had in the jungle--and as tea cooker, I got to make the coffee. It was the middle of the rainy season.

Marcello: I'll bet everybody and their brother could smell that coffee.

Kennedy: They could. And let me finish my story. The mud was ankle-deep around the kitchen. We made this big half-barrel of coffee. "Dusty" Slavens got on the back--he was helping me that day--and I was on the front. I got just about to where you want to set it down, and both feet went out from under me. I dumped that coffee right down my back. We saved about half of it. I rolled into the ditch. It scalded me from here (gesture) down to my waist.

Marcello: From your neck to your waste?

Kennedy: Yes. It scalded me. I went to the hospital deal. Al Kopp was there, and he put some stuff on me. I went back that afternoon to work. They needed me there, so I went on back. I started sweating, and I sweated under those blisters--just a big pouch of water on all of them. They broke, and I knew I was gone because I knew that was going to be a big ulcer. But I think that because of the salt in the sweat, they peeled off without a blemish, and I didn't get an infection. But I think it was the fact that I went back to the kitchen to help out, and I sweated so much while I was in there that the salt in it was what cured them. Those

guys were a little bit pissed off about their coffee (chuckle).

Marcello: I was going to say, did you feel bad about spilling the coffee? (chuckle)

Kennedy: I did! And "Dusty" Slavens was telling me later--he was handing it out--that he was giving them half-rations. He said some of them were a little upset that they didn't get their full ration, but he explained to all of them what happened, and they took it all right. But I think that ended my tour in the kitchen.

Marcello: You mentioned that you also had a touch of beriberi.

Kennedy: Yes, that was a swelling in the foot. That might have had something to do with me getting into the kitchen, come to think of it, but it didn't last long. It went away.

Marcello: What is beriberi like?

Kennedy: It causes your foot to swell. I've seen some cases that just looked like big balloons all over.

Marcello: In other words, that would have been the wet beriberi?

Kennedy: Yes.

Marcello: Is this where you could push your finger in, and the puncture or perforation would stay there for a long time?

Kennedy: It would stay there, yes. It's an eerie thing, really. When you got beriberi that bad, you were gone--there was no question about it--because that's a dietary thing, and they weren't getting anything to help it.

Marcello: Now we talked about you having dysentery and beriberi and

the tropical ulcers. Did you at any period here have all three at the same time?

Kennedy: I had the ulcers and the dysentery at the same time--for sure. That was at 100 Kilo. I had one guy next to me from Iowa who had dysentery and got appendicitis. He didn't last very long. Again, he was a big guy--a great, big guy.

Marcello: You have all these sicknesses--and I'm saying "you" in a collective sense--so it has to be getting harder and harder to get people out on that railroad. Now what do the Japanese do?

Kennedy: If I remember right, they kind of had a quota system, and they would only allow so many people to be sick. If you exceeded that, they picked the best ones and sent them out to work. Of course, the officers were trying to keep that from happening. If you were sick and had to go, they tried to work it where you got the easiest jobs. The other guys kind of helped look out for them, too, the best they could. But if you were sick and you were over the quota and you weren't the sickest one there, you went out to work.

Marcello: In other words, they came through the sickbay and selected people.

Kennedy: Selected people on their own: "You, you, and you--go to work!" Some of them were really not able to go to work. Well, the ones they picked weren't able to go to work because you didn't get in the sickbay until you were very

badly sick.

Marcello: What, theoretically, happened to the rations of those who were in the sickbay and weren't out on the job?

Kennedy: I think at one time...well, I know that they cut the rations. They put out rations only for the ones that were well and maybe a half-ration or a third-ration for the ones that were sick.

Marcello: Which, in essence, meant that you guys got less.

Kennedy: Yes, we got less because we were going to take care of the sick people. That's for sure, yes.

Marcello: I understand that when you get up here into the 80 Kilo and 85 Kilo and 100 Kilo camps, that people didn't want to go to the sickbay.

Kennedy: No. We didn't get anybody out of it. Very few people came out of that sickbay. It was just a place to go to die, is what it amounted to, because they had no medicine or anything else to give them. It was a place to segregate them.

We had cholera. Was it at 100 Kilo where we had the cholera? Yes, we had a session of cholera there. We lost one of our doctors and a few people. I don't know how many. I don't know why it didn't sweep through the camp like it did in some of them, but it didn't.

Marcello: Dr. Lumpkin, who was one of your doctors, died in August of 1943. Do you recall his death?

Kennedy: Yes. That was at 100 Kilo Camp. Yes, I remember when he

died, very definitely.

Marcello: What kind of effect did that have upon your morale?

Kennedy: It had a very bad morale effect because we had Dr. Epstein left. I always liked Dr. Epstein, but I don't think he was the best doctor around. He was an old-time Navy man. He did his best, but that wasn't much. Of course, he didn't have a hell of a lot to work with. Lumpkin had a little more imagination, I think, and could do more. It was terrible to lose him.

Marcello: But I guess the general attitude is, "If the doctor can't make it, what hope is there for us?"

Kennedy: Yes, that's right: "If he can't make it, what chance do we have?" But, you know, the old optimism was still there: "We're going to make it out of here."

Marcello: Okay. Let me follow that up with another question. Did you see examples or cases of people who gave up?

Kennedy: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: How could you tell when somebody had given up?

Kennedy: Well, they would just quit eating their food, quit trying. They didn't take care of themselves. You could tell when they had given up and wasn't trying anymore. Usually, that happened when they got to the hospital because they could see people dying right and left all the time.

Marcello: Was there any way that you could snap them out of this lethargy?

Kennedy: You could try, you know--tell them how soon it was going to

be over and that things were going to get better and all of this. But sometimes I think things got so bad that dying seemed the better of the two. I think that had a lot to do with some of this.

Marcello: Let me just follow that up. I've heard it said that an attitude of contempt could develop toward those people who had given up, the idea being "this guy's taking the easy way out."

Kennedy: I hadn't heard that before. I guess it could happen. I'm not aware of it happening.

Marcello: Also, I've heard that there was some resentment because for every dead person that meant that those who were alive had more work to do.

Kennedy: That's right, too. There again, I don't know of that happening. You were sorry for those people. We were losing six, eight, ten a day there for a while. I buried a lot of them.

Marcello: Describe what a burial detail was like. How would it take place?

Kennedy: There was a Japanese guard and about four or five people to carry a guy out there in a blanket. In some cases the hole would already be dug, and sometimes you'd have to dig it and just put him in there with the blanket wrapped around him and cover him up. Usually, they had somebody who had some religious background that would go along and handle the service.

It was very brief and to the point.

Marcello: Were there ever any "Taps" or anything like that?

Kennedy: I think so. I think so, in some cases.

Marcello: Were these burial locations recorded?

Kennedy: Usually, they were adjacent to the camp. The 100 Kilo Camp was across the riverbed on the other side. That's where I was involved in most of the burials, was in the 100 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Were those sites usually...

Kennedy: Just an open clearing.

Marcello: ...recorded or anything like that?

Kennedy: I think so. I think some of the people in the office had the graveyard marked out and So-in-in-so was in "XZ6" or "AB," you know, a grid-type thing.

Marcello: I understand that in most cases any possessions, such as clothing that the dead had had, were simply distributed among those who were still alive.

Kennedy: Yes. Usually, the people who were living around them or living with them took them. "Quaty" Gordon tells a story about that Scotsman who died next to him, and he stole his blanket (chuckle)! I don't remember ever doing anything like that, but I'm sure it went on.

Marcello: Earlier in the interview, we had been talking about the importance of two or three or four individuals banding together to look out for one another. How important was that under the circumstances that you are describing here?



Kennedy: The more that we got into this thing, the more important it was. J.O. and I used to look out for each other.

Marcello: This is J.O. Burge?

Kennedy: Yes. He and I were best friends, and still are. We'd help each other along. We usually were on the same work party. Sometimes we weren't. I know that during the short time I worked in the kitchen, I used to bring him a little extra food. I remember that he got left at the 18 Kilo Camp when he was sick. I think one day I looked up at 100 Kilo Camp, and here came one guard and J. O. coming down the railroad track. J.O. had sold everything except his shorts and his pith helmet. I don't know where he got that damned pith helmet, but that's all he had, and his mess kit (chuckle). So I gave him some of my stuff.

Later, in Saigon, I got sent up to Da Lat for about six weeks. I came back, and I didn't have anything; but he had accumulated a bunch of bananas, so he split those with me and gave me some money that he had. So we kind of looked after each other all along. Yes, that was very important, for morale purposes as well as the food and stuff, clothing.

Marcello: What was your lowest point during this period, do you recall?

Kennedy: My lowest point had to be 100 Kilo Camp because of the monsoons there, and I was losing a lot of friends. The food was terrible, and the work was hard.

Marcello: Is this where you had your ulcer or your dysentery?

Kennedy: Yes, I had my ulcer and the dysentery there, too. That had to be my lowest point. I'm sure that was most people's lowest point at that time.

Marcello: What keeps you going under those circumstances?

Kennedy: "If this damned job is going to get completed, we'll get to a better camp, and the war will be over." And the thoughts of people at home, really, had a lot to do with it, too. You had your family and everybody.

Marcello: Do you recall the establishment of a so-called hospital camp back at 80 Kilo?

Kennedy: Yes. I don't remember when that was established. I think that was put there...we were in 80 Kilo first, and then we went to 85, right? Or was it 85 Kilo and then we went to 80 Kilo?

Marcello: I think it may have been 85 Kilo and then back down to 80 Kilo.

Kennedy: Okay, 80 Kilo. From 100 Kilo Camp, we sent people back to 80 Kilo. When they got real bad sick, we sent them down there. Some of those people survived there, I guess. Charlie Pryor was down there. But they had to be awful sick to go down there.

Marcello: That was almost a death camp, was it not?

Kennedy: Yes, it was. Charlie developed into the preacher down there. I think he handled all the burial parties down there. But,

yes, it was a terrible place. I didn't get there other than being there before it became a hospital camp, and then we moved on to 105 Kilo. Then they used to send them down.

Marcello: Describe the conduct of the Korean guards during this "Speedo" period.

Kennedy: This is real bad. A lot of people really got beaten up, myself included a couple of times, during this period.

Marcello: Describe your own beatings first.

Kennedy: In one case it was by an engineer. He said something to me, and I called him a son-of-a-bitch, and he could understand English (chuckle). He had a club, and he just beat the hell out of me. The other case was a case of missing my number when counting off, you know. You could say seven in Japanese two ways. I was number eight in line. The guy that was number six said seven in the wrong way, and I just stood there. I just had a blank. And I got the hell beat out of me over that. That was a guy by the name of Russell. I see him every year when I go to the reunion, and I'm always reminding him of that, too. But in those two cases, I got slapped around pretty good. Those are the two worst ones. I've been hit a few times. Other than that, I didn't get stood at attention for hours or anything like that.

Marcello: When you say that you got the hell beat out of you on those two occasions, can you be a little more specific? What kind of blows would these be and for how long?

Kennedy: In my case, it wasn't too long. He just hit me four or five times with a club and with his fist in the other case maybe six or seven times. You'd just have to stand there and take it. You want to knock the hell out of them, but you can't. I think that's the worst part of it--the frustration of not being able to strike back.

Marcello: I've heard said that in some cases these guards could work themselves up into such a frenzy that they would actually almost even foam.

Kennedy: I've seen that happen. Not foam, but I've seen them work themselves up into a frenzy all down the railroad and also in other places, too. I never could understand what the reason for that was or why they would do that.

Marcello: Then I've also heard it said that once they would get this out of their system, so to speak, they may come back an hour later and give the beaten person a cigarette or something like that. Have you ever seen that sort of thing happen?

Kennedy: No, I haven't. I hadn't seen that happen. I don't know of that happening.

Marcello: Up until this time, that is, up to and including this "Speedo" period, had you ever sent or received any letters or cards?

Kennedy: At 80 Kilo Camp, we were given...two things happened that I can remember at 80 Kilo Camp. We were given an opportunity

to mail a card home. You know, you just wrote your name and checked blanks or checked squares. "I am well" or "I am not well" or "I'm working" or "I'm happy" and so on. I mailed one home. J. O. didn't. The reason he and some of the other guys didn't is that we were losing a lot of people, and they didn't want to get their folks' hopes up. They'd get a card from him and think, "Well, he's all right." Then two days later, he dies. So they thought that that would be the wrong thing to do. But I guess I was more optimistic than that. I mailed one home. In fact, I got to mail two or three home. I've still got them here somewhere. And I got a letter back from my sister in the middle of 1945. It wasn't up to date; it was a year-and-a-half old, I think, when I got it, or a year old at least. It had been in transit that long. I got a couple of other small notes after that.

Marcello: What did they do for your morale?

Kennedy: It helped a lot! I'll tell you!

Marcello: How many times do you think you read those?

Kennedy: Oh, I've still got them here (chuckle)! I read them a lot of times. But that was in 1945 before I got those. But you had to work that day to mail a card. If you weren't working, you didn't mail a card.

Also, the other thing was that we saw the Japanese version of Pearl Harbor. They brought a projector in and a screen, and we all got to watch the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor.

That was at 80 Kilo Camp. I think they used a lot of that in making a movie after the war.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you saw it?

Kennedy: Well, it was the first movie I'd seen in a long time, so it had something positive going for it (chuckle). I was sorry, I guess, to see that happen because I'd spent time in Pearl Harbor. You hated to see it happen, and you hated to see those bastards bragging about it, really, is what it was. It didn't help your morale a lot.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any of the Japanese guards talk about how they had bombed San Francisco and Washington and that sort of thing?

Kennedy: Oh, yes, yes. They were always bombing all over. They were always winning big battles. We'd get an English newspaper occasionally in Burma--put up in English by somebody over there--always describing the battles that they had won and how they had won those battles. But those battles were always closer and closer to us (chuckle). You could read between the lines in that extent.

Marcello: Do you remember any of the games that the prisoners played with the guards when they would get into this business about Washington being bombed and San Francisco being bombed?

Kennedy: Not really.

Marcello: Do you remember them asking the guards if Decatur had been bombed, and the guards would say it had been?

Kennedy: Yes, I remember that (chuckle). They'd always bring up some place that was really ridiculous, and, sure, they bombed that, too (chuckle).

This was the point in time when you didn't want to get too friendly with any of the guards--right in here because this is the time that you'd get in trouble.

I mentioned that I worked in the cookhouse about a month there. It was during the monsoons and raining hard. My first job in the morning--I had to get up at four o'clock in the morning--was to get up and build fires under the cook pots. We kept one little fire going. I'm not too sure that we didn't have to stay up all night to keep that fire going. I think maybe I did. I was building this fire and bent over, you know, trying to get the fire built up. All of a sudden I heard this grunt, and I looked up, and there was the blackest native that I'd ever seen standing over me. They were not even supposed to be in the camp. His fire had gone out for their barracks, I guess, and he was coming over to get some fire. I gave him some rice and some fire, and he took on off. But that really scared me. You know, you're in the middle of the jungle not expecting anybody. He grunted and I looked up, and there this guy stood. He was skin and bones.

Marcello: So you would have conscripted native laborers in camps adjacent to yours?

Kennedy: He must have been adjacent somewhere. I don't remember them

being right next to us. He might've been with a group out in the woods--I don't know--but he was there in a G-string. That's all he had on.

Marcello: But they would not be working with you on your particular projects?

Kennedy: No. You'd see them occasionally, or they'd pass in a group or something like this. They really had it bad, too. This poor guy was in bad shape. I gave him some fire and stole some rice and let him have it.

Marcello: What kind of a toll did these conditions take upon the Japanese and the Koreans?

Kennedy: They lost some, that's for sure--not from beriberi so much as ulcers. And accidents. I know they lost a couple from a dynamite explosion close to one camp. They were in the rocks then, and they had to blast. This one guy was going back to check and see why one hadn't gone off, and it did go off. They had a big ceremony for him and all that--a funeral.

Marcello: Did you have any way of supplementing your diet, that is, by running down any wild critters or cats, dogs, anything of that nature?

Kennedy: When we were there at first, we used to kill a few caribao and butcher them. As you go on into the jungle, those got less and less. They had some pretty good rustlers, too. We had a butcher by the name of Jones. His job was as a cook



and a butcher. We had a Jewish boy named Parish, and Jones would always kosher the beef so that Parish could eat it, you know. Big joke! (chuckle)

Marcello: I've got to relate a Jack Burge story, and see if you can confirm it.

Kennedy: All right.

Marcello: He recalls that in the camps you would encounter large rats.

Kennedy: I've got to say that I don't remember any rats (chuckle).

Marcello: Now wait a minute! The plot thickens! Also, he mentioned that from time to time these rats would actually eat the calluses from off the bottoms of your feet. Do you remember that?

Kennedy: Let me put it this way. J.O. bunked next to me in all cases, and in no cases did a rat ever eat a callus off my foot (chuckle).

Marcello: I just had to get that into the story.

Kennedy: (Chuckle) Yes! I'm not saying that it didn't happen, but that never happened to me.

Kennedy: I can remember on one occasion when we killed one big snake, and I don't think I ate any of it. Maybe I ate a bite. But they did cook it. They broke its back as it was going across the railroad track and brought it in and skinned it and cooked it. I guess I ate a little of it. I wasn't particularly involved in it, but I remember it very definitely. Only one case, though.

- Marcello: When you were on the road, did you do just about every kind of job that there was to do there?
- Kennedy: Yes. I can remember driving piles to build the bridges.
- Marcello: Let's talk about the bridge building because I think that's a work of art.
- Kennedy: The parts I can remember mostly involves small bridges, and we had to drive the piles for those things. They had a big pile driver or weight there, you know, a steel thing, and places to tie ropes on and pulleys. You'd have all these pulleys up here (gesture) with the ropes coming through them, and three or four guys would get on each one. Maybe fifty guys altogether would be doing this.
- Marcello: So you would kind of build a scaffolding, I guess, around the pile itself?
- Kennedy: Yes, a deal up above it so that with the pulleys you could pull this rope. They'd go by counts, you know. You'd count and everybody would pull the rope up. Then everybody would turn loose and let it drop. They kind of developed a sing-sing way of doing this thing. One old fellow that worked with us resented that. He thought that was too much like a coolie--that sing-sing--and he'd get mad everytime they'd start doing it. But that's the way we did that.

We carried a lot of teakwood logs in to build these bridges with, too. In some cases we had elephants to pull them. In some cases we'd have to carry the damned things.

Maybe there'd be twenty or forty people on this thing with poles running under it with two people on each end. It looked like a centipede, you know, all the way back with these legs. If you didn't go over smooth ground, it could be really a problem. A lot of people got hurt--their backs and legs--because you'd suddenly get all the weight on this thing. But this teakwood's a very heavy, dense log, and it was difficult, I'm sure. They last a long time. But we did a lot of that.

Marcello: As you look back, is it an amazing feat to you, that is, the building of this railroad?

Kennedy: It's an amazing feat in that they have that...it's amazing that they would spend that many lives to do something like this. And it's amazing that they didn't have sense enough to know that once they built a railroad, the Americans were going to blow it out, anyway. You'd think they would try to figure some other way to do it. Of course, their shipping was cut off by that time, too, coming around through Singapore, as they proved when they bombed our ship. But they spent a lot of lives and a lot of time on that thing. I don't think they had many a train run over it, really.

Marcello: What role does religion play in a situation like this?

Kennedy: Quite a bit, I think. I'm sure there were a lot of prayers said. I know I said a lot. Not too many were said outward. Do you know what I'm saying? We didn't have organized church

services until we got into Thailand. We had none in the jungle. A few prayers were said when we buried people. But there were a lot of individual prayers said, I'm sure, or you said them for other people. So to that extent it had a lot to say about your faith in coming back and accepting what you had.

Marcello: What did you pray for?

Kennedy: Mostly for other people and for yourself, that you'd get out of this thing alive, that people would get well, and that people at home would be all right.

Marcello: Okay, by January of 1944, the railroad would have been completed.

Kennedy: In 1944, that's correct.

Marcello: Describe how you get out of the jungle and off the railroad.

Kennedy: We were in 100 Kilo Camp at that time. We had gone up to 105 Kilo and had come back to 100 Kilo. We finished up at 100 Kilo. That 100 Kilo was a rough camp. We were there during the monsoons and also after the monsoons, and that's where we came out. It was in the dry season when we came out. I remember that during the wet season a lot of Japanese came through. This was before the railroad was finished. These were young soldiers pulling World War I caissons through that mud. It took a lot of persistence and the sergeant yelling at them all the time when they came through. I remember one day we carried them some water, and the sergeant made the

soldiers give us cigarettes. They had it rough, too, you know. Hell, they were mud from one end to the other pulling those caissons through there, going into Burma.

But back to your question, they pulled in the train up there at the camp, and we got aboard with all our belongings and headed out. We were glad to get the hell out of there, and we kind of had a little celebration to get away from that damned camp because we were told we were going into Thailand to a hospital camp and things like that.

Marcello: So you're going over there over the railroad you just built?

Kennedy: No, not that we had built. We were on the Burma side, and we went out on the Thailand side. I remember in the night going over a very, very tall bridge, and that was scary because the train was rocking back and forth from side to side and barely inching across this. We finally made it across. I'm sure it was a bridge that the POWs had built over there. Then we stopped up in Thailand, and they took us out on a work party to help unload a bunch of stuff, rails and so on. It was pretty uneventful until we got into Thailand, and they put us in the hospital camp.

Marcello: I guess you probably had more room on the train going out of there than what you did on any of the trains before.

Kennedy: For sure, for sure. Yes, we had much more room. Of course, people weren't in very good shape. We had a lot of sick people, too, who came out of there. I was in pretty good

shape. Well, actually, I was not in pretty good shape, but compared to the others, a group of us were in reasonable shape. There was a group of them less healthy and some very sick. We went into this hospital camp in Thailand. The food was better, and it was cleaner, and everybody improved some there.

Marcello: Do you know the name of that camp? Was it Kanchanaburi?

Kennedy: Yes, that's what it was. We had a lot of mango trees in that camp.

Marcello: What is the significance of the mango trees?

Kennedy: Because we ate some of the mangos (chuckle). That was the significance, plus good shade. They make good shade trees.

And they had all nationalities in that camp, too. That's where I saw the Indian, I guess, praying to Buddha every morning.

Marcello: That was a pretty big camp, was it not?

Kennedy: It was a pretty big camp, and it was clean camp. We had work parties going out of there but doing minor details, you know, not real hard work. Mostly it was cleaning up around the camp and stuff like that.

Marcello: How did the food improve?

Kennedy: By quantity and quality, both.

Marcello: Can you describe the quality of food?

Kennedy: We got more rice and more meat and more vegetables there. It was just better all-around food. We were over the worst

part, as far as food was concerned. From here on, it doesn't get worse, anyway, and it's better. And the Thais were good to us. They would slip us money every once in a while.

I got assigned to one of the craziest jobs I ever had. The Japanese insisted that we have guards on the inside of the camp to keep our people from trading with the outside. Well, we didn't want to do it. Finally, I was detailed to be a guard. And this is where I met a Korean. They also had Korean guards on the inside that would watch us (chuckle). And we developed a game. He would try to sneak up on me at night without me catching him, and we went through all kinds of shenanigans there, and it got to be a game between the two of us. Every night he would try to figure out some way because I was supposed to catch him before he got up on me. Only he never did get me (chuckle). He told me I was a good soldier, because he tried every way he could to get up to me. I remember one night he was sneaking up, and I got down flat on the ground where I could blend in with the skyline, and I caught him that way. He thought that was a good one (chuckle). But, anyway, that was my job there for about a month, and nothing ever happened other than that I hated to guard our own people. Actually, my guarding was really lax.

Marcello: Was trading rather rampant here?

Kennedy: Oh, sure it was. If somebody was trading, I always managed to be somewhere else because they did some trading with

the natives--cloth and stuff like that.

Marcello: Cloth?

Kennedy: Yes. That became more important because we just didn't have any. Everybody by this time had sold the bottom off of their mosquito net and stuff like this.

Marcello: When you say it became important, it became important to the natives to get the cloth.

Kennedy: That's right, because they didn't have any. And it became important to us because we needed whatever we could get by trading it. The Japanese had a big mosquito net that covered the platoon, I guess, of people. It had about eighteen inches of cloth around the bottom of it, and that ripped off pretty easy (chuckle). A lot of that went on. A guy could get good at it. They could wrap that stuff around and get them back in camp. Of course, some of them got the hell beat out of them in getting caught.

Marcello: Did they pick up some weight here?

Kennedy: A little bit. I got down, I guess, to about 140 pounds one time. I guess that when I got out of camp, I gained about five pounds. We were still working pretty hard toward the end. But we did pick up a little weight there.

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

Kennedy: About 165 pounds.

Marcello: And you got down to about what?

Kennedy: About 140.



Marcello: So you really didn't lose a whole lot of proportionate body weight?

Kennedy: No, no. I didn't get down to 120 or 110 pounds like some of them did.

Marcello: There were also a couple of bridges here at Kanchanaburi or at Tamarkan, one or the other.

Kennedy: Tamarkan, I believe, is where the bridges were. I was in that camp, too, and we moved from that one to the other one. I think they were getting us ready to go on to other places when we moved to there.

Marcello: Were you there when any of the air raids took place?

Kennedy: No, the air raids took place shortly after I left there, but I worked around that bridge a lot. We went down there to get stuff, and we even went swimming down there one day. But I know of the bridge. I've seen it several times...a lot of times. That was a big camp, also--a very big camp. All nationalities.

Marcello: Do you remember any sort of a ceremony that took place whenever the railroad was finished?

Kennedy: No, I don't. I know I was on a burial party there, so we lost some people there too. I was telling you about the old fellow that used to get unhappy with us when we had the sing-sing stuff going on when we were building the bridges. He died there. A lot of the people that died there did so mostly as a result of the condition they got in and didn't recover from during their time in the jungle, really.

Marcello: Did you have some spare time here at Kanchanaburi?

Kennedy: A little bit, yes. I think there were so many there that they didn't have work for all of them, really, is what it amounted to.

Marcello: Was there ever any entertainment in any of these camps--stage shows or anything like that--ever put together?

Kennedy: We had some shows we put together in Saigon, and I think we had a few there in Thailand, but I don't remember...I was never involved in any of them. Yes, I think at that big camp in Thailand the Aussies had a kind of a troupe they put together--pretty entertaining. Some of them were pretty ingenious, too--the things they could do with what they had. We had some good talent. We had one Marine that could sing very well, and the Aussies had a few like that, too, that put on some pretty good shows.

Marcello: Were those sorts of things fairly well-attended?

Kennedy: Oh, yes. You went to anything like that that you could because it was different than what you were used to, for sure.

Marcello: One of the former prisoners remarked in his interview that to some extent, idleness could be detrimental because it gave you time to think about your condition and all that sort of thing. But if you had something to keep you busy, whether it was work or something else, a lot of times that was helpful.

Kennedy: I guess so, but I never thought of it in that way. I was usually fairly busy, you know. Your clothes are falling off of you, and you had to sew that kind of stuff back together. You had little details around the camp. But I kind of enjoyed getting to rest, I think. I'd never thought of it in those terms.

Marcello: Either in the jungle or here in Thailand, how much of a problem was theft among the prisoners, that is, one prisoner stealing from another? Was that ever a problem?

Kennedy: No, it was not a problem. I think it happened occasionally.

Marcello: How would such a person be dealt with if he were caught?

Kennedy: Pretty severely by the other people, really. Not necessarily physically but, you know, by isolating him and so on and so forth, which would probably be worse than physical abuse. But there was not a lot of that. People didn't have a hell of a lot to steal, to begin with, and people just didn't do it. But we stole a lot from the Japanese.

Marcello: What would you steal from the Japanese? Just anything?

Kennedy: Anything (chuckle). I'm getting ahead of the story, but we made a trip from Saigon up to Da Lat and then up north, and I forget the name of the place. It was up on the coast of French Indochina (Vietnam now), and all the bridges were blown out up through there. Trains would only run from one bridge to the other, and then you'd have to walk across this bridge or ford the damned river or something. The Japanese were doing this, too. In one case we went on a train that

had a bunch of Japanese troops on it. They pulled in under this tunnel for the night, and we flat stole those troops blind. We really cleaned them out--rice and candy and cigarettes. We stole a lot from those people. They were asleep (chuckle). In another case, we had to ferry a bunch of Japanese across a bridge--carry their stuff. They didn't get all the stuff they took across that bridge, I assure you. Guys got very good at it--like regular professional thieves.

Marcello: I have also surmised that on a lot of occasions you stole things that you really didn't perhaps have any use for, but it gave you a psychological lift in that you could put something over on the Japanese.

Kennedy: That you could do it. The best case of theft I ever saw was done by "Gunner" McCone. We were working on a barracks in Saigon--building a barracks. The people we were building it for were a bunch of Japanese soldiers that had just got in from the Philippines, and they were not used to prisoners-of-war. They were fairly friendly, and we were working away. One Japanese had a bundle of Filipino currency in his coat pocket, and he hung it up with the money in it. That was the wrong thing to do. "Gunner" McCone got it. It must have been two or three hundred dollars of rolled bills about two inches thick. He missed it and called a kempei in, which a kempi is what you call...

Marcello: Secret police.

Kennedy: Secret police, yes. They lined us all up, and they searched us. Nobody had it. They made us take all of our clothes off, searched all of our clothes. Nobody had it. They searched all over the place. "Gunner" McCone walked out with that money (chuckle). While he took his clothes off, he dug a little hole under his foot and put his foot over it and stood there on it while they searched his clothes (chuckle). He got it back in his pocket and walked out of there with it. Everybody was mad at him because he wouldn't split the money then with everybody else after putting him through all that stuff. They were about to whip "Gunner" McCone over that (chuckle).

Marcello: How long were you at Kanchanaburi altogether?

Kennedy: That's the last one in Thailand?

Marcello: Yes.

Kennedy: Maybe two months at the most.

Marcello: And where did you go from there?

Kennedy: Saigon.

Marcello: How did you get from Kanchanaburi to Saigon?

Kennedy: We rode a rail car to Phnom Penh and a barge from Phnom Penh to Saigon.

Marcello: Was it a pleasant barge trip down to Saigon?

Kennedy: Not too bad. One thing I remember about it is we marched through Phnom Penh. It was a beautiful, wide boulevard and

all. We marched right down through the middle of town in going out to get on the barge.

Marcello: Typical French architecture, I guess.

Kennedy: Yes, pretty nice. The natives were friendly, and it wasn't bad at all. We got on the barge and rode it all the way down to the mouth of the river and rounded the gulf a little bit and went up the Saigon River to Saigon. We went up to the docks and got off there, and right across the docks was the camp that we stayed in the rest of the war, except for a side trip up to Da Lat.

Marcello: What kind of barracks did you have here in Saigon?

Kennedy: Saigon was a double-decked barracks with a tile roof--a French Army-type barracks. It was one block right off the docks, small camp. It had had English and Dutch and Australians and Americans. Here again, the Australians and Americans ganged up against everybody else. It had one kitchen. The Dutch cooked for everybody.

It was hard work. We worked at the airport building barricades--big dirt banks, like a "U"-shaped thing, where they put the plane in there to hide the plane and protect it.

Marcello: Revetments, I think, they call them.

Kennedy: Revetments is what I'm trying to say. We did a lot of work out there. We stole a lot of stuff out there and brought it back to camp. We also did a lot of work on the ships, too, working as the stevedores, unloading ships and unloading sampans.

That was hard work because, you know, two people would lift a 220-pound bag of rice on your back, and you'd have to carry it up the slope to get it on the ship or off the ship. That was very hard work. We'd steal stuff there, and then the guys would take it out to the airport the next day and sell it. J.O. Burge would take it out. I'd steal it on the dock, and he'd take it out and sell it.

Marcello: What are some of the things you would steal?

Kennedy: Cloth, primarily. And on occasion, cigarettes. Sometimes food. Mostly, it was cloth and cigarettes. We got caught in a big air raid in Saigon.

Marcello: Describe the air raid.

Kennedy: Well, it was the day we were going to work out at the airport. We were all lined up in the morning--the whole camp--for count. We hear this buzzing sound, and we look out over the airport, and it looked like a bunch of bees out there just circling and diving in. We immediately went to...we had dug slit trenches out in the rice paddies in the back. It had been raining, and those slit trenches were built up, not down, like revetments only smaller, and they were full of muddy water. We went out there to those, and then they started bombing the docks, which was right there by our camp. Here we are, in the water up to here (gesture) in these revetments.

Marcello: You're in water virtually up to your necks.

Kennedy: Yes, up to your neck, for sure. Then a couple of times they started to strafe us, and that's when you went under the water

(chuckle). They shot one plane down right over the top of our heads. He crashed out there. He turned his bomb loose right after they shot his tail off. He crashed out there in the dock area, I think, somewhere. But they cleaned out every ship in the river, and they got every plane at the airport. I don't think they lost over one or two planes. It was Halsey's group out in the gulf there that came in.

Marcello: What did that do for your morale?

Kennedy: A lot. It did a lot.

Marcello: By this time, did you know that the tide of the war has turned?

Kennedy: Oh, sure. We're getting good reports all along then that the things are coming in pretty good.

Marcello: Had you seen any evidence of planes and so on before this?

Kennedy: We were bombed when we first got to Saigon. The second night we were there we were bombed, but it was just a lone plane. He dropped a bomb about a hundred yards from our encampment. I remember that because that's when I had malaria so bad. I was real sick to where I couldn't even get out of my bed.

We'd have bombers come over once in a while strafing the docks--big bombers. They'd come right down the river and strafe the docks. As soon as they'd get over the camp, they'd turn their guns off; and as soon as they'd pass over the camp, they'd turn them back on. So we knew that they knew we were there.



We'd ride trucks out to the airport each morning, and all the French gals would wave at us, and the little kids, too. We'd go out and work all day long on different things at the airport. Sometimes we planted a lot of plants out there to help camouflage the place. It didn't do any good; they got them all, anyway. But that was a better time. Food was a lot better there, too.

Marcello: How did the reaction of the Japanese change after that large raid that you talked about?

Kennedy: Different ones reacted in different ways. Some of the Koreans, I think, were rougher on us. We made pretty good friends with some of the Japanese out at the airport. We worked with them out there, and I think they knew it was all over because they were pretty friendly to us. They did what they had to do to get their work done. The kempei were around watching.

J. O. and I one time had a detail to go across town with one Japanese guard to bring a steamroller back. Neither one of us knew shit about a steam engine or that type of thing. We burned it up on the way back. We didn't do it on purpose. We didn't know what the hell we were doing, and we didn't have the right valves turned on, I think. I think that guard caught hell for that because they were working on that thing for a long time after that. They didn't say anything to us about it.

Marcello: But the harassment has eased off a little bit.

Kennedy: Eased off a little bit, yes. There was still people getting beat up, but not as bad. Another hospital camp was set up, and some of the guys got sent up there. But the French were pretty good at getting medicine in to us.

Marcello: You mentioned that the food was better here, and I assume that in part it was because you were now close to civilization.

Kennedy: That's right; that's right. We were out there in Saigon, and the food was available, and the French saw to it that we got food. I remember one Christmas there when they got a bunch of turkeys in to us. They had all Dutch cooks, and they screwed it up real good, you know. They made a native dish out of it, I think. They used the meat to make a native dish. All the Americans were pissed off because they didn't get turkey and dressing (chuckle).

Then we went to Da Lat, and Da Lat was a French resort up in the mountains. They had a cog railroad going up to this thing. Our job up there was digging tunnels up on the tops of the mountains up there for their last stand--that type of deal. The work was pretty hard there, but it wasn't such a bad place. We also had to dig a moat around our camp and build fences so we couldn't get out. I think they were planning then, at that point, that the war was going to be over, and these were last stand-type things that they were digging.

We went from there up north to...I don't remember the name of the place, but it was on the coast. They put us in a school, and our job there was cleaning up a bridge that had been bombed out--trying to save the lumber and this type of stuff. It wasn't such a bad place, and the work wasn't too bad, either, there.

From there we came on back down to Saigon and got bombed at a lot and shot at a lot by the Americans because they were hitting that railroad with seaplanes and bombers all the time. They bombed out most of the bridges, and it would be a matter of traveling at night from one tunnel to another. I remember one night we had to carry our stuff for--I don't know--miles and miles, it seemed--on bamboo poles--two of us you know. We'd carry stuff in between them. I remember that the guy behind me would go to sleep--actually go to sleep--walking. The guy in front would lead, you know, and pull him along. That happened more than once. But it was good to get back on Saigon, anyway, and out of that mess.

Marcello: You know that the war is probably going to be over in the not too distant future. I'm sure you don't know when. Do you get a little anxious at this point, that is, do you in essence wonder when this damned thing is going to be over?

Kennedy: You do. You get different opinions. I remember talking to a couple of Aussies out on the work party one day, and they said, "Do you really think this war is going to be over anytime

soon?" I said, "I sure do. I think it's going to be over shortly." They'd say "No, I think it's got years to go yet." They really thought that it would be that long. But the Japanese built machine gun emplacements all around the camp.

Marcello: This is on in Saigon?

Kennedy: Yes. And I'm sure in my own mind, and based on some of the things I've heard since then, that if the Americans hadn't used the atomic bomb, they would have shot us. I really think they would have.

Marcello: Were you making any plans for such a contingency? Not that you could do very much, but did you think about that sort of thing?

Kennedy: Yes, we thought about where would the safest place be, how in the hell you could get out of there and that sort of thing. But there wasn't much of a way to get out of there.

Marcello: Did this camp have any sort of a fence or anything like that around it?

Kennedy: Yes, it had a fence all the way around it.

Marcello: Barbed wire?

Kennedy: Barbed wire. In some places it was wood, but mostly it was barbed wire. The part facing the road was wood, so you could see through it.

Marcello: Did any sort of a black market ever develop here in Saigon, that is, between the prisoners and the people on the outside?

Kennedy: Yes, it did. We would steal stuff--both ways. We'd steal it

off the ships and then take it to the airport and sell it to the natives. Sometimes the engineers that were there would help you negotiate, you know, the price you were going to get for it, try to get you the best price. Also, sometimes you'd steal materials there at the airport and take it somewhere else and sell it. Mostly the stuff that you stole was stuff you could sell for food.

In a couple of cases, the guards made girls available. I never did avail myself to any of that because, by gosh, there was no medicine around, you know. If a guy picked up something, it would kill him, you know. Some of the damned fools did partake. I figured I could wait until after I got back (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you ever receive any more Red Cross parcels since that one you had gotten way back in Changi?

Kennedy: I got a fourth of a Red Cross package up in Da Lat, and I think I got a parcel somewhere in Thailand, but I don't remember in which camp. Over all, I probably in total received not quite a whole Red Cross parcel in three-and-a-half years.

Marcello: When you received a parcel, did you eat it as an individual, or did several of you put together what you had?

Kennedy: We shared; we shared. I remember one case where there was a little jar of preserves of some kind, and we spread that around, and that lasted a good while. Cigarettes were stale, I remember that.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us up to those days just before the surrender. Why don't we go into some detail on the end of the war and how it came about in your particular case?

Kennedy: We were at the camp in Saigon, on the river there, on the docks. We had received a rumor that the war was over two or three times. They'd dropped some big bomb, and the war was over. There was an anti-aircraft emplacement about a mile from our camp that we used to do some work on, and one day a B-29 flew over dropping leaflets. He couldn't have been over 5,000...oh, less than that...2,000 or 3,000 feet high, dropping leaflets all over the place. That damned anti-aircraft gun cut off on him. He got away, all right; they got some pretty close to him. But I remember I heard the automobiles--they sounded like staff cars--racing out there to that anti-aircraft operation to cut him off, I think, because they'd probably already received the emperor's message to cease and desist. But, anyway, from there we got these leaflets telling us that the war was over. Then they moved us to a new camp.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you received those leaflets?

Kennedy: I was damned happy! I was real happy that it was over. I just wanted to go home at that point: "How do we get out of here?" But these leaflets were saying, "You're still in Japanese hands! Behave yourself," so to speak, "because you'll be out soon, so don't do anything rash." In so many

words, that's what they said.

Then they moved us to this new camp, issued us the first issue of clothing that we'd had in years, and the food improved. We started sneaking out of camp there. They had moved all our Korean guards out, and new Japanese guards came in.

Marcello: The Koreans are gone?

Kennedy: The Koreans are gone.

Marcello: Now were some of these Korean guards people that you had had all the time?

Kennedy: Oh, yes, all the way through, all the way through.

Marcello: Were you holding any grudges?

Kennedy: I was so damned happy to get out, really, that I didn't hold any...I ran into one of them, and he took off when he saw me. But I didn't make any effort to do anything. I was glad to get out. I was ready to let bygones be bygones and get out of that place.

Marcello: When you first heard or read the pamphlet, which, in essence, said that the war was over, what did you do that evening? Were there any celebrations or anything like that?

Kennedy: I think everybody was kind of stunned, really. I don't think we had much to celebrate. There was a lot of talking, you know, "When I get out [I'm going to do this and that]." Everybody was real happy. We had nothing much to celebrate with.

Marcello: I am assuming that these Japanese guards must have been fairly lax if guys were going in and out of camp.

Kennedy: Yes, yes, they were. Well, they didn't do that until we moved to this new camp. At this new camp, you could sneak out, and the Japanese guard would just turn his back and let you go. He wasn't interested in saying anything to you, or he might even wave to you and let you go on because they weren't trying to stop you.

After we had been there a couple of days, the Americans flew in. I guess it was the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] at that time. The British and the Americans came in the same day. The Americans landed their DC-3s on the runway at Tan Son Nhut Airport. The British flew over and parachuted on Tan Son Nhut Airport the same day. Several of the British got hurt real bad; several were killed in that landing because they fell on these old burned out planes and things like that. We always thought that was kind of silly for them to do that.

The Americans set up at a hotel downtown, and in a building next to the hotel, up on the roof, they set up a big radio transmitter. They asked for volunteers to go downtown to Saigon to help them, so I volunteered. I was given a submachine gun--the first one I'd ever seen--and was put on guard duty at the radio station one night. I remember that. The next day McKelvey and I were with a young Frenchman who could speak English, and he was showing us around



Saigon. That's when the revolution started.

Marcello: I was going to say that that could be pretty dangerous to be in Saigon.

Kennedy: We nearly didn't make it back. The fact that we could speak a little Japanese to these people--to let them know we were Americans--finally enabled us to get through the lines and get to the hotel.

Marcello: Well, describe this incident.

Kennedy: We were about ten or twelve blocks from the hotel, and all the shooting started. They were parading all day. They'd been parading--about six different groups--those loyal to the king, the old king of Vietnam, I guess, or whatever he was; the Communists; those siding with the French; and two or three other splinter groups. They were all parading separately.

Something keyed it, but I don't know what it was. I've heard that somebody threw a champagne bottle out of an upstairs window in the middle of them, but I don't know whether that was true or not. But they started shooting, and it was dangerous. It really was. The three of us finally made it through. In fact, I guess all of our people got through; I don't know of anybody who had gotten killed. But it scared the hell out of us. We had guns stuck in our stomachs two or three times until we got through to the hotel.

The OSS colonel that was in charge got hold of a Japanese

general that was in Saigon and told him in no uncertain terms to protect the hotel, so they threw a ring of Japanese soldiers around it to protect us. The natives were firing at the hotel, and everybody stayed below window level for a while. So, you know, you're thinking, "My God! I got through this whole thing, and now you're going to get it!" But that settled down.

Marcello: Now up until this time, that is, once the Americans had come in, did you get any really square meals yet?

Kennedy: Our food was good. I have trouble remembering how many days after the surrender...see, a lot of things happened. A group of us went to a Chinese restaurant there one day, and ol' "Mud" Brumbaugh from up in Nebraska, who was a sergeant...we didn't have any money. We ate a big meal, and "Mud" signed for it--"So-and-so Brumbaugh, U.S. Army"--you know, and that chinaman was giving him a fit because he didn't want to accept that. "Mud" didn't have any money either, but we had already eaten the food. I've often wondered if he got paid for that or not. The French descended on the Army base after the war was over, too.

Marcello: For protection?

Kennedy: I guess so. There was a lot of "hanky-panky" going on out there, I think, but everybody was having a good time.

Marcello: Describe how you finally got out of Saigon.

Kennedy: At that time I was still staying at the hotel downtown,

working with those guys, and they brought us back to camp, and then they took us out to Tan Son Nhut Airport in the early morning and put us aboard these DC-3s. The crew of this plane, I believe, had been drunk for three days because we didn't get the door put in the back. It was laying out in the plane along with the guy that was in charge of the cabin. He was drunk, and we had to carry him aboard. We took off and got up to about 4,000 or 5,000 feet, I guess. Maybe it wasn't not that high. This was the first time we'd been on a damned plane, too. The pilot decided he was going to buzz the Japanese barracks, so he turned that thing over on its side, and we must have missed that barracks...people layed down on top of the barracks because we were so close. Here again, I thought, "We've gone through all this shit, and here this idiot is going to crash us." I think J.O. Burge was with me. We finally got up over the Himalaya Mountains there, and we hit a big storm. We finally got into Bangkok and stayed a few hours there and then flew that same plane into Rangoon. There we got on a bigger plane and went to Calcutta. We spent about two weeks at a hospital camp.

Marcello: What happened in Calcutta? Is this where you went to the 142nd General Hospital?

Kennedy: Yes.

Marcello: What kind of treatment did you receive in Calcutta?

Kennedy: Very good, very good. They issued us khakis and good clothes

for a change and gave us some tests and so on there in the hospital. The tests weren't very thorough, as I remember. We ate a lot of food and went on liberty in Calcutta. They paid me \$500. I remember that. We just did a lot of things. There I saw my first American movie since being captured. It was an outside movie. Back in those days, they used to have the short subjects before they had the movie. They had a band play. It was Spike Jones. I thought, "What in the hell has happened to American music?" (laughter) They were beating on dishpans and all that crap, and I thought, "Good God!" I don't even remember the name of the movie, but I remember Spike Jones.

Marcello: I understand that you guys were a rather unruly lot by the time you got to Calcutta.

Kennedy: Probably so, probably so. There was not much discipline left in the group.

Marcello: Is it accurate to say that you guys had taken about as many orders as you were going to take for some time?

Kennedy: I think so; I think so. We ran into some trouble in terms of discipline. It was good to see a lot of the guys, you know, the ones that had been separated. I remember that Rhodes that had TB [tuberculosis], and they left him in Singapore.

Marcello: What did you talk about when you got together?

Kennedy: Oh, just where we'd been, what we were going to do when we

got home, and all that kind of stuff. They had a gym there and a swimming pool, I think, and we availed ourselves to all those. Not that we were good in a gym, but, you know, we at least tried.

Marcello: Did you regain all of your weight?

Kennedy: Some of it in there, yes. By the time I got back to Washington, D.C., I was pretty close to where my original weight was.

Marcello: It doesn't take too long to put it back on again.

Kennedy: No. I was still dark. One of the things my folks noticed about me was how dark I was. Being out in the sun without a shirt all these years, I got a sunburn, you know, a tan on top of a tan.

Marcello: Did you run into any of the American WACs in Calcutta.

Kennedy: I saw them, but not socially or anything.

Marcello: I guess my question was going to be, what was your reaction when you saw women in uniform?

Kennedy: The first one that I saw was a nurse on the plane that picked us up in Rangoon. It was a four-motor job, and it had a nurse. She was a southerner--had a southern accent, a blonde. Of course, she could have been the ugliest one around, and I guess we'd have thought she was beautiful. But I remember her. After we got on the plane, she said, "Any of y'all want any sandwiches?" Oh, God, you know, everybody nearly fainted, and two or three guys got "sick." Hell, they weren't sick (laughter). But it was a pleasant flight. It really was.

Well, they were all pleasant coming back.

Marcello: What kind of food did you want once you got back to Calcutta?

Kennedy: I don't remember. Hell, anything that was out there, we would eat. I wanted nothing special (chuckle). That was a pleasant time.

Marcello: Okay, so from Calcutta do you eventually make your way back to the States?

Kennedy: Well, we flew on one plane from Calcutta to New Delhi and to Karachi. We stayed overnight at Karachi and then flew on across the Arabian peninsula into Cairo, from Cairo into Algiers, from there to Casablanca and to the Azores, and then back to the States and landed in Washington, D.C. We ended up in the naval base there, the Washington Naval Station in Washington, D.C. They kept us two days and paid us some money--\$500 again, I think--and issued me ninety days leave. They didn't even issue me a new uniform. I still had the khakis that they'd given me in Calcutta. I went downtown and bought two Navy uniforms to go home in. Compare that with the guys that came back from the Vietnam situation. But there was too many coming back and too many things happening all at once, I think. They should have kept us there in the hospital for a while, I think, to get us acclimated.

Marcello: So they really didn't give you any sort of a thorough examination, either physical or psychiatric?

Kennedy: The only ones we got was what little we got in Calcutta,

and that was minor. I think they should have kept us two or three weeks, anyway, to get us acclimated. You know, we hadn't even seen a white woman in five years, and a lot of guys went astray, I'm sure, and did some foolish things. They just turned you loose. In the mental state that you're in, they should have kept us for a while.

I got on a train and came to Saint Louis, and then I took another train on down to southeast Missouri, where my folks had moved by that time. It was good to get home. It really was. My kid sisters, I didn't recognize them.

Marcello: Had you ever been given any sort of psychiatric tests or anything at all?

Kennedy: No, no. Not that I can remember.

Marcello: How about giving any depositions relative to war crimes? Did you ever give any?

Kennedy: Somewhere down the road, I did that, and I think that happened back in Washington, D.C. But that was not too much.

Marcello: Did you really know the names of any of those Japanese or Koreans that you had come across?

Kennedy: No, only nicknames that we had put on them. We didn't know their names. Some people can remember things like that, but I never could.

Marcello: Can you remember any of the nicknames of any of those guards now?

Kennedy: Oh, "Liverlips," I can remember him. He was a great, big

guy with big lips. "Snake," I think, was one. I can't remember the rest of them.

Marcello: There was one called the "Brown Bomber." Everybody remembers the "Brown Bomber."

Kennedy: Yes. We had an interpreter, but I forget what we called him. He was a wimpy little guy. He couldn't speak very good English, either.

Marcello: What was the outstanding characteristic of the "Brown Bomber?"

Kennedy: Just mean. He was mean. I think he looked for somebody to beat up on all the time.

Marcello: I understand he was pretty fair. He didn't play any favorites in giving out physical punishment.

Kennedy: No, he abused everybody, including the officers, too. But, anyway, I got back, and then my brother came home. I didn't have any trade or anything, and I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "Well, they got a thing they call the G.I. Bill, and I'm going to the University of Missouri." I said, "I think I'll go with you." I said, "What are you going to study?" He said, "I'm going to study electrical engineering," so I said, "Well, that's what I'll take." I took that one semester...that's really career planning, you know (chuckle). I stayed one semester at that, and I couldn't quite cut the electrical part of it and some of the others. I was doing real well in chemistry--about second in my class, really--and then I went into agronomy, which is agricultural engineering.



I lasted one semester in that--too many field crops--and I wasn't really settled down yet. I had to take one semester to go back and take high school courses because of being out of school that long. I shifted over to chemical engineering, and I finished up in that. I got a degree in chemical engineering and moved back to Texas.

Marcello: I'm assuming from what you've said, then, that you really didn't have any real problems adjusting once you got back.

Kennedy: I had nerve problems more than anything else. I'm very nervous. And I have a little leftover from beriberi--minor--and I had a few attacks of malaria after I got back. I also had a back problem. I hurt my back in Saigon. I was putting up communications towers--these are great, big, tall radio towers--and we had to do a lot of lifting and carrying these winches around. I got hurt pretty bad with my back there, and I still have that to contend with. But other than that and nerves, that's about it. I was above average compared to the rest of them, I think.

Marcello: But I guess what I'm saying is, you really didn't have any problems adjusting to civilian life mainly because it seems like you got into something right away.

Kennedy: Yes.

Marcello: You had a little trouble scholastically until you got straightened out (chuckle).

Kennedy: Yes, and then I had some trouble adjusting to civilian life,

too, a little bit. At that point I had few social graces and things like this, you know.

Marcello: Again, I guess this was from living around men for so long.

Kennedy: That's right--living away from the social things.

Marcello: Most men have remarked, for instance, about how sorry their language was.

Kennedy: Yes. Mine wasn't that bad, I don't think. I remember one time I was about to blow my nose without using a handkerchief. I caught myself and thought, "Hell, you don't do that!" When I was out in the jungle, you just blew your nose, you know.

Marcello: That's right.

Kennedy: That's an example of some of the things I'm talking about. It takes a little time to get back on the civilized track, and that was the biggest problem.

Marcello: As you look back upon your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, considering what you had been through, how did you make it? What do you see as being the keys to your personal survival?

Kennedy: The fact that I was used to hard work and was fairly healthy; the fact that I was small; the fact that I did what I was told and kept a low profile, really. And a lot of luck.

Marcello: That last point is interesting, "a lot of luck." Can you explain what you mean?

Kennedy: Well, I didn't get sent to Japan and get sunk on a ship, for one thing. They didn't drop the bomb on the same ship I

was on on the way from Penang on up to Moulmein. This type of thing, you know.

Marcello: I was thinking, also, about the fact that your ulcer didn't develop into anything bigger.

Kennedy: Right, right. That scalding I got didn't turn into ulcers--this, that and the other. Just a lot of things turned out to be sheer luck. I think that life is a lot of luck, anyway, you know. You go down to a "Y" in the road, and you take the right one; and you don't get in the wreck you would have had if you'd taken the left one. So life's a lot of luck, anyway. In a case like that, where you're exposed to a lot of danger, it becomes more and more a factor.

Marcello: I also think that, given that situation when you were up in the jungle relative to the monsoons and the "Speedo" period and so on, you can't slip up once. You make one mistake, and it could be your last.

Kennedy: Yes, that's true. You could hurt your leg, or you could... there were just a lot of things you could do. Even getting off the Houston was luck. There was--what--260--some of us out of 1,100 that got off of that ship. That's a lot of luck, too.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Kennedy, that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. You said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that this material is going to be quite valuable when students and researchers get a chance

to read it.

Kennedy: I'm looking forward to reading it, myself!