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Interview with
JOHN W. WISECUP
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Place of Interview: Weatherford, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

John Wisecup

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date of Interview: July 28, 1987

Place of Interview: Weatherford, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing John Wisecup for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 28, 1987, in Weatherford, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Wisecup in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. More specifically, he was a survivor of the sinking of the USS Houston in the Sunda Straits in March, 1942.

Mr. Wisecup, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born--that sort of thing.

Mr. Wisecup: Okay. I was born on May 15, 1919, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Dr. Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education.

Mr. Wisecup: I didn't finish high school. I had three years of high school.

Dr. Marcello: When did you enter the service?

Mr. Wisecup: In November, 1939.

Dr. Marcello: And why did you decided to go in the service?

Mr. Wisecup: Well, at that time I was on the West Coast in a CCC camp.

I only had maybe four or five months to go, and I would have to get out. At that time jobs were very scarce. At that time there was no threat of war in 1939 when I went in, and at that time the draft hadn't started yet. There was rumor of a draft starting up--war and all that. I figured, well, I'd try to get in the best outfit. I thought it was the best outfit.

Marcello: So it was mainly economics, then, that determined your decision to enter the service.

Wisecup: True, very true.

Marcello: And I'm assuming that you joined the Marine Corps there on the West Coast.

Wisecup: Yes, in Sacramento.

Marcello: Why did you decide to go into the Marine Corps?

Wisecup: I don't know. The Army was easy to get into; you know, it was a snap to get into. I don't know what you'd call it-- just a case of trying to get into the best outfit you could.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Wisecup: San Diego.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you eventually got aboard the USS Houston. How did that come about?

Wisecup: Well, I had been stationed at Mare Island, and I was supposed to go in a draft to the 4th Marines at Shanghai. This would have been in August of 1940, I guess it was. Anyhow, I rode the Chaumont out. They had two transports at that time.

They had the Augusta and the Chaumont. The Chaumont was in, so I met it out there. Instead of going to the 4th Marines, en route out there I got in a few beefs and battles and fights, and the top kick decided that as punishment...I think they needed three Marines for the Augusta. She was the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. He said, "Well, I'm going to send you. I'm going to put you in a draft for the Augusta." I told him, "Hey, man, I'm supposed to go the 4th Marines, Shanghai," which was choice duty. Everybody wanted to go there. He said, "No, I've been getting all this beef, and you're a hard case. I'm going to send you over there." So that's what he did. But the Augusta was only out there...I was only on a month or so when the Houston came out to relieve her. I was then transferred to the Houston.

Marcello: By the time you had left Mare Island, had you undergone some training as a seagoing Marine?

Wisecup: No. Well, they had this sea school there at San Diego, but I didn't go to that. But about half your Marines that went seagoing didn't go through that. In boot camp itself, you get training for seaboard duty, anyhow. But that sea school thing is a spit-and-shine thing, you know, and it's not necessary, that is, as far as training to go aboard ship. Some of the guys are going to tell you, "Well, they take only the choice." What they did is, they picked the biggest guys that looked good and all that stuff. If they didn't

want to go, they didn't have to. They weren't drafted into that. That might sound like sour grapes, but it's not so. I didn't volunteer for it. I never did want to be a seagoing Marine. I had no desire to be on a ship.

Now what do you want to know? All the trouble I got in--the beefs (laughter)?

Marcello: (Chuckle) Well, I don't think it's necessary to go into that background at this point yet, I guess. Let me ask you this. As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941--and, of course, I'm referring to the Pearl Harbor attack--how did conditions and attitudes aboard the Houston gradually change? Could you detect any change in the Houston's routine?

Wisecup: It changed. But they didn't get uptight like you figured they would. There was a definite change, but I don't think anybody was prepared for war or even considered it. The brass did. They knew what was going on. But your average enlisted man, I don't think, knew too much about that stuff. There was a change ashore, too. In the Philippines you could feel it and all that stuff.

Marcello: In what way?

Wisecup: Oh, all the way around. You had a lot of Chinese there--merchants and the hotels were run by them--and everyplace we went, you know, they were talking war all the time. You'd hear this in the bars and in the joints and everything. But the average G.I. at that time didn't pay no attention

to that. Young kids, you know how they are. You're interested in other things (chuckle). Really! But there was a change.

Marcello: Well, since you brought up the subject, let's pursue it a little bit further. In some off-the-record comments by one of your buddies, Marvin Robinson, I gather that you created some sort of legend for yourself aboard the USS Houston during that period while you were aboard.

Wisecup: Yes, by getting in trouble, that's all (laughter).

Marcello: Do you care to elaborate on that at all?

Wisecup: Yes, I'm proud of it (laughter)! In fact, I've spent time since I've been back trying to get records of all my court-martial and stuff, and they don't have it all, believe it or not.

One incident...well, the first time I got in trouble... actually, how I got to the China Station was by getting in trouble. At Mare Island...I might as well tell you the whole works. Back at San Diego, I only had been out of boot camp for about a month-and-a-half. I was playing ball. They had a ball club there, and they really went for sports and jockstraps. Like I told you, I played some minor league ball. So I was playing ball there, and me and another guy decided to take a little jaunt down into Mexico and ride a few of the freights around. We were gone about three weeks. Then we came back and turned ourselves in. So I did two months in the brig for this. That's how I got

transferred down to San Diego.

Now this is funny. You ain't going to believe this, but jockstrapping was something else in those days. The Marine Corps and the Army and all had a lot of rivalry, and they ran their ball clubs just like professional outfits. They'd call over to Quantico, for example, and say, "Have you got a pitcher over there? We need a pitcher. We need two. Who do you got?" "Well, So-and-so just got out of the brig, and we'll transfer him over there." Well, it just so happened that I got out of the brig, and they needed a pitcher up at Mare Island. They sent me up there in the old SS Vega.

Marcello: The SS Vega?

Wisecup: Vega. She was a supply ship. It took about a week to get up there. I got up there...now, mind you, I ain't getting no salary because when I went over the hill and took off, the guys stole all my uniforms and everything. See, you're only making \$21 a month, and you got to pay for these. So I ain't getting no salary, and I got to pay...I think my fine was \$30, and I was only making \$21 a month. Plus, I had over a hundred dollars worth of uniforms to pay for. So all I'm getting is about \$10...I didn't get but about five dollars worth of chit books a month. But when I got down to Mare Island, I got to playing ball. We had a good ball club. We used to go all over the Bay Area and play semi-pro teams. So you managed to come up with a little money here and there,

a few dollars here and there. You had plenty to drink, although I didn't have any money.

But we was stationed...right next to us at Mare Island was a big naval prison called "84." It's still there. It's similar to Portsmouth on the East Coast. The guys were doing time for maybe a year to three, and then they're going to be kicked when they get out. Now this place would rival Alcatraz. The guys picked to be guards and chasers...we called them "chasers"...it was actually a naval prison, but it was run by the Marine Corps. They would pick the worst, hard-case guys to be a chaser there--a real sadist. They'd beat the guys up and everything--for no reason--in there. Oh, it was hell. Well, the guys on duty at Mare Island--the other guys--had no use for them. Any chaser, his name was dirt. If we met them ashore, we beat them up.

So I got involved with one of these and liked to beat him to death--ashore. I came back...now this was when the season was almost over. It was September. But I was well-liked there. The old colonel there, Colonel Thompson, crazy about baseball, and I'm getting along all right. I almost got all my fine paid, and I paid for my clothes. But I got in this trouble, and I could have got a general court-martial for it and ended up in "84."

Actually, I went up before the Old Man, and he said, "What's this about So-and-so?" I said, "Oh, I was just

drinking a little bit ashore." He said, "You must have been drinking pretty good. They brought the guy in. His arm's in a sling; his head is all bandaged up; he's got a broken jaw; some of his teeth are gone." I said, "Oh, you know, I was loaded." So they dismissed the guy. He says, "You know, they want your blood at '84,' John." I says, "Yes, sir." He says, "You know, if I give you a general court-martial, you're going to do your time right over here." He says, "You know what's going to happen?" I says, "Yes, sir." He says, "All right, the Chaumont is out there, and I'm going to cut orders for you." This actually happened. Now this is how good you could get by with jockstrapping. He said, "I'm going to cut orders. Go pack your gear and get aboard the Chaumont and stay on until it leaves!" That's how I came to the Far East (laughter)! That's not a lie.

Anyhow, this never went in the record. I had no court-martial. It wasn't even a "deck," what we called a "deck"--deck court-martial. I got away with it.

But then on the "Augie," on the first liberty I pulled, I was over leave, so I got a deck court-martial for that and ten days on bread and water. On the fifth day, the Houston came alongside. Well, the "Augie" is going to the States, and I thought, "I got it made! I'm in the brig!" (Laughter) They fooled me. They transferred me from one brig to the other (laughter). That's the way I reported. I came up...

you had no air conditioning those days, so when you were in the brig you were strictly in your shorts. So the master-at-arms says, "John, pack your sea bag." They put a chaser with me, and I got my sea bag. He says, "Go ahead. You go to the other brig on the other ship.

So I walked up the gangway and reported to the officer-of-the-deck. I said, "Sir, Private Wisecup reporting for duty. Where's the brig?" (laughter) So my first five days on the Houston were in the brig.

Marcello: At that time, was the Houston pretty much a spit-and-polish ship?

Wisecup: Yes, but nothing like the Augusta. Oh, Christ, man! Those were China Marines, and they had all tailor-made stuff-- no G.I. issue. Man, the first time I walked up the gangway, I looked at them guys, and I said, "Holy Christ!" Charley Pryor can tell you. They were sharp. Well, "Chesty" Puller had been the commanding officer. He had just gotten off. When they came from Shanghai, "Chesty" got off. And they were sharp. They were real Old China Hands, too; they were salty as hell.

I'll tell you who they had on there. They had a guy we used to call "Peg Leg" Ames. If you check your history, you will find that this guy almost started a war. He was ashore in Shanghai with two other Marines, a guy named Craig and the other guy named Manning. Two Jap officers

were coming down, and they didn't salute them. So the Japs demanded a salute, which is what you're supposed to do. So they get in an argument, and they almost beat him to death. But they end up in the Jap guardhouse. It was an international incident; it was in headlines (chuckle)! Well, they transferred the other two. One of them went to Guam, and I don't know where the other one went. "Peg Leg" Ames was still on there. I think he went back to the States.

They had quite a few old-timers on there. They had some real colorful characters on there, but they were sharp. I'll tell you this right now. The Houston looked like a bunch of boots--honest to God--compared to those guys. Which they were, most of them, except your NCOs. But the other kids were fresh out of boot camp--most of them.

Marcello: After all of your brig time had been fulfilled and so on, what was your function aboard the Houston? What was your battle station, for instance?

Wisecup: I was on gun seven. First, I was in .50-caliber machine guns, up in the foretop, mainmast. Then they needed bigger guys down there to handle those shells, so they got all the biggest ones down there that they could to work on gun seven. I think those shells weighed about sixty-five or seventy pounds, and when you get a real run of them in an hour, it's real heavy.

Marcello: So this was one of broadside guns?

- Wisecup: Yes. They were up on the flight deck, just aft of the catapult. You had two on each side. That was your main anti-aircraft batteries.
- Marcello: Oh, so these were not broadside guns. These were anti-aircraft guns?
- Wisecup: Anti-aircraft guns mostly. Well, they could have used them for broadsides, too, but their main function was anti-aircraft. That's what kept us from getting sunk for as long as we did, was those damned guns right there.
- Marcello: Where were you when you received word about the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?
- Wisecup: We were downtown at Iloilo. Wait a minute. Let me make sure. It was either Iloilo or Cebu. But it was down south at one of those towns. I think it was Iloilo.
- Marcello: I think it was Iloilo, too.
- Wisecup: Anyhow, we were tied up alongside the dock. That's where we were when we got the news.
- Marcello: Okay, how did you get the news, and what was your reaction?
- Wisecup: Amazement! I can't say we were scared. We said, "Christ, man, these guys can't do that!" We didn't know that they'd sunk the goddamned whole fleet there, either. We figured we were going to get some help out there.
- Marcello: So what happens, then, when the word about Pearl Harbor is received? What procedures did you follow?
- Wisecup: Well, they readied her for action. They got everything--you

know, your magazines--ready to go; your 8-inch guns were all ready. It was general quarters, just like you were ready to go.

Marcello: Now the Houston doesn't stay at Iloilo, however, does it? It moves out pretty quickly.

Wisecup: Correct. We moved out and brought a convoy down south. The convoy met us at sea. I can't remember the ships. The Langley and, I think, the Pecos, which was an oiler...I can't give you the definite names of those ships, but there were quite a few. I know the Langley was with us. She was the old converted aircraft carrier--the original aircraft carrier.

Marcello: I think for quite a while during that period, from December until February, the Houston was on convoy duty, was it not?

Wisecup: From what?

Marcello: From about December until February?

Wisecup: From the time that the war started, yes. We were on convoy duty that first time we got bombed. We were coming out of Darwin, and we were bringing four ships. We were supposed to go to Timor. I think that's the first time we got it.

Marcello: Okay, according to the record, I believe the first air attack occurred on February 25, 1941. Describe what you can remember from that first attack.

Wisecup: Which one is this? Is this the one when the Marblehead was with us?

Marcello: I think you were basically on convoy duty at that time.

Wisecup: Between Darwin and...

Marcello: In fact, you were in Surabaya Harbor when that took place.

Wisecup: The first one?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: The first time they came over--the first time bombers came over--we were assembled out of Surabaya. They were getting a fleet together to go up and make a strike. We were all in anchor, and they flew over coming into Surabaya. I remember I was in a magazine. I'll never forget. I'm down there about four decks down, and every one of them hatches is dogged down over you, so you have got to wait until somebody opens it up to get out. So they phoned down to stand by. I forget how many plnes was coming over.

Christ, what a place to be (laughter)! I'm down there sweating, and we're all getting ready to throw those shells in there, see. But they didn't come back; they went over us. That's the way the Nips was. They could have sunk the whole goddamned thing, and it would have been over with, right there. They'd have had us. But that's the way they thought. American planes would have got us. But the Japs went on by us. That was the first time.

Marcello: Evidently, they came back the next day--the 26th.

Wisecup: And got us in the harbor.

Marcello: Once more, you were in the harbor. That's correct.

Wisecup: Yes. But this was a different raid. This first time, like

I'm telling you, we weren't in no harbor. We were outside of Surabaya. Then we came in the next day.

Marcello: February 27 is an important day. That's when you were attacked, and you lost turret three. Describe that day in as much detail as you can remember.

Wisecup: All right. I was on gun seven. That's when the Marblehead was with us. The only thing that saved us that day was the Old Man's maneuvering. The last planes to come over was out of formation, and that's the one that hit us. This one was not a minute twenty to thirty seconds or half a minute behind, and this one's way out, and she dropped one and got us.

Marcello: Describe that.

Wisecup: Shit, it ain't all that clear; I can't remember that much. I was on gun seven, which is on your port side (left-hand side). She hit just aft of us. Believe or not, as close as it was, you didn't feel that much there because we had all that concussion going with the firing. And the Old Man's maneuvering the ship, too.

One thing stands in my mind. After that turret was hit ...they had had her loaded, and they had powder all ready to fire. What they were going to do...they weren't going to fire at the planes; they were going to skip-fire out broadside. If somebody came in with torpedo boats, they was going to shoot aft. The turret was pointed directly aft.

While they were working at pulling these guys out of there-- they had that many guys crowding down there trying to help them get them out of there--them goddamned things went off. She went off. When that goddamned turret went off--all three, BANG--we thought we were being bombed again. I never will forget that.

Marcello: Now was this powder in the bags?

Wisecup: I think so. I wasn't in the turrets, but that's the way they used to have it.

Marcello: In the aftermath of that disaster there at turret three, what did it look like when you had a chance to check out the damage?

Wisecup: Well, what impressed me is that they had a guy killed on the after mast. You know what the after mast looks like. You've got your foretops. Well, this guy was at a Lewis gun, as far as I can remember; and I don't know whether this is true or not, but they say that when the bomb came down, before it detonated, it hit him and killed him. I don't know how true this is. But I do know that they hauled him and somebody else away in my blanket, because I used to sleep in a blanket up on top. All of us did. It took me about a week to get that damned blanket back. Anyhow, this turret--the after turret--looked like a hunk of cheese--like swiss cheese--and although you had about an inch of armor around that damned thing, the bomb just went right through. Well, we were lucky

that that whole after end didn't go because the magazine was down below. We had forty-eight guys killed, but, God knows, there must have been over a hundred guys wounded bad in that thing.

Marcello: And that turret was never put back in operation again?

Wisecup: Oh, no, no. That was it. She was finished.

Marcello: I'm assuming that's because there were really no repair facilities close by.

Wisecup: Nothing. We had nothing. Ordinarily, we'd have gone back to Pearl.

Marcello: Okay, from February 26 until it finally went down, which was on February 28, I guess the Houston was under constant attack all the time, was it not?

Wisecup: Not every day. Christ, I can't remember just how many times we got hit. I remember that time with the Marblehead. What impresses me most...I never will forget that Marblehead. I thought she was gone, man, the way the smoke was going up. She was going in circles, and her steering gear was all knocked out.

But then the next one I think we got was between Timor and Darwin. We were bringing them poor guys up. It was some outfit off the West Coast--Washington--that was activated. What do you call them? It was a National Guard outfit. We brought them from Darwin. The second day out we got hit, so we turned back and brought them back. One guy

was killed on there. We saved their ass--there ain't no doubt about that--if we hadn't have been there circling them because their slowest ship went six or seven knots. They'd have got us the next day there. Anyhow, we brought them back to Darwin.

Marcello: Well, of course, gradually what's happening is that the Japanese are whittling away at the fleet and eventually sinking all those ships.

Wisecup: Yes.

Marcello: Then, of course, this brings us, I think, to the night of February 28, I guess it is.

Wisecup: After the Java Sea battle?

Marcello: That's correct, after the Java Sea battle. Then, of course, the Houston is trying to make its way out through the Sundra Strait and getting back to Australia. Describe what happened that night.

Wisecup: Well, I don't know. General quarters sounded...it was well before midnight or right near it, somewhere around there.

Marcello: About 11:00, I think, or something like that.

Wisecup: Well, nobody expected it because we figured it was all clear. That was the word all over the ship. The word was that we weren't going to Australia, but we were going to go around the Tjilatjap. That's what I heard. Anyhow, everybody figured...nobody really was at ease, though; I'm going to tell you that right now. I think nine out of ten of us

figured out what was going to happen because we knew where they were (chuckle) and what they had. But that night, the first thing I remember is that I heard the Perth firing, I think, before we ever went to GQ. Naturally, I ran for the gun. But all we had left by this time was a few star shells. It's not too goddamned clear, but there was a lot of smoke and crap up there. I remember working on the gun and helping load and all this stuff, and then we get the order to abandon ship.

Marcello: In the meantime, those ships are closing pretty fast, aren't they?

Wisecup: They're right on us, yes. At one point there, the "tin cans" got so close to us on the port side...you've got a splinter shield. The gun comes down like this (gesture) and lays almost horizontal like that because, actually, you ain't built for a broadside. Well, they got so goddamned close that when they got under two hundred yards, you couldn't train on them. That's how close them son-of-a-bitches were. You'd hit the top of their stacks. But what was happening ...we had these l.l's. We had one forward up there and one here (gesture), and you had another one over there (gesture). There were at least four of them. At one point they got so close that we couldn't train on them, and those l.l's was getting them. They'd rake that topside, and you could hear them yelling over there. You could see them faces. You could

hear the guys on the bridge hollering because they were that close when they hit them.

I'll never forget the searchlights on them. They'd get them searchlights on us, and you'd hear them hollering from the bridge, "Get them goddamned searchlights!" Then BLLLJUP! Somebody would get them with a .50-caliber, or they'd go after them with the 1.1. But, actually, on our guns they got so goddamned close that we couldn't train on them. Then what we was firing was goddamned star shells.

Marcello: It was almost like a old-time sea fight.

Wisecup: Movie, yes. It was that close. I mean, any way you looked, there's goddamned something to fire at.

Marcello: And I'm sure it must have been complete chaos.

Wisecup: It was. Everybody will tell you something different. For one thing, everybody was beat down to parade rest. They had no sleep for months. When I got out in the water, it was predominant in my mind to get ashore, crawl out in the jungle, and go to sleep (laughter). That's all I could think of! I didn't know it was going to take me three days to do that. But goddamnit, that's all I could think: "I'm going to get to the beach, so I can lay down and go to sleep in peace!" (laughter)

Marcello: The Houston is being hit with everything the Japanese have.

Wisecup: Well, they gave us two abandon ship orders. We were dead in the water, like. The first one came, and then it was rescinded, and we went back. Then a few minutes later, they

gave it to us again.

Marcello: Describe what happens and how you get into the water.

Wisecup: Okay. I went back aft. There was a guy named Kendrick. I can't remember if Kendrick was on our gun or not, but he was in front of mine. I knew him pretty well. So he walked back aft. By this time she's listing a little, and she's settling in the water; so you just had to walk over the side maybe three feet, and you're in it.

What impressed me more than anything is the guys taking off their shoes. I still remember this. I did it, too. You took your shoes off, took off your socks, and put your shoes together in the ditch (there's a little ditch that runs around the side). Nearly everybody did this. Some of them was smart enough to keep their shoes on.

Then I stood there, and I was getting ready to go over, right near the after screw. Kendrick says, "I'm going to go see if I can get a jacket, John." I says, "We better get off here, man! They're hitting us real hard." He says, "No, I can't swim all that good." I said, "Well, I can't either, goddamnit, but to hell with it! We'd better get off of this son-of-a-bitch!" He says, "I'm going to go over to the starboard hangar and see if I can get me a life jacket." Well, there wasn't enough life jackets on there to go around, anyhow; there was only about half. So I waited maybe...it seemed like about five minutes. It couldn't have been that

long. Maybe it was two or three minutes." Well, he ain't coming back.

So I went over the side, and I went over feet first. I was right near that screw. I remember I could hear it going "chung, chung, chung." But I come up and start swimming. I must have swam about fifteen or twenty minutes before I got on a raft.

Marcello: Did you have on the rest of your clothing, or did you strip to your skivvies?

Wisecup: I had my shorts on, and I think I had a skivvy shirt. That was it.

Marcello: What was the temperature of the water like?

Wisecup: Warm. It was just like if you'd been sitting in a hot tub when it was cooled off just before you want to heat it up again, you know. It felt good.

Marcello: In the meantime, are the Japanese still pummeling the ship?

Wisecup: Yes! Yes, they moved in.

Marcello: What did it feel like when that ship got hit, and you were in the water?

Wisecup: You could feel it. I wasn't near enough, but some of the guys almost had their guts blowed out. Some of them did, I know, when the torpedoes were hitting the side. But I was lucky. I know some of them passed me by about like fish after I got maybe a couple hundred yards away from the ship. There's a little swell, like that (gesture).

Marcello: You were within sight of land, were you not?

Wisecup: I couldn't see it, not that time of the night.

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you got on a raft.

Wisecup: A raft, yes.

Marcello: Was it a very large one?

Wisecup: Yes, it was one of the big rafts. There must have been about fifty guys on it. It was so loaded that she had maybe about an inch of freeboard.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens at that point then?

Wisecup: Well, I just hung on there. It must have been about twenty minutes before I got to that. I never will forget it. I never was a hell of a swimmer, although coming down from the bayous. I swam but I never was a guy that went in for swimming much. I never did care for it that much. But I did that night.

Before I got to the raft, I'm paddling around out there. I never will forget it. I wanted to take a little rest, and there was this sailor up ahead of me, and he had a jacket on. I never will forget. I swam up alongside him and said, "How are you doing?" He mumbled something. I put my hand on the jacket, and, Christ, he let out a scream! He was in shock, you know. "Don't drown me!" I said, "Okay! Okay!" Then I took off. There were a lot of guys like that. You know, they'd been blown clean off the deck.

Then I went on, and there were searchlights all over the

place. I never will forget. I thought sure they were going to machine gun us. They were shooting around, but they didn't shoot at us.

Everytime a swell would come up, I'd see this raft, and I finally made it to that one. I stayed on that one for three days. During that night, about an hour later, a transport nearly ran us down. The only thing that saved us was that the bow had a bone in her teeth, and that threw us off. But she was low in the water, and she was a transport. I never will forget the Nips hanging over the side. When they seen us, man, they were throwing potatoes--anything they could get--at us. They were cursing: "Beigero! Kodo!" Holy shit (chuckle)! But, anyhow, we missed it; it threw us out of the way.

Marcello: And you say you were on that raft for three days?

Wisecup: Three days. She drifted way out. In the morning, oh, Christ, you'd have had to be a good swimmer to make it. Some of the guys tried to make it to the beach. You had such a tide current in there; it's really, really high in there. Many a guy drowned trying to get out.

Marcello: So in the meantime, you obviously have no food or water?

Wisecup: Nothing, for three days.

Marcello: Okay, describe the initial capture. What happens?

Wisecup: All right. When I got to the beach...

Marcello: Oh, the raft eventually does get in to the beach?

Wisecup: Yes, we finally got it to the beach on the third day. There was a corporal on it named "Rocky," who had been a company

clerk--Rochford, he's from Nebraska--and a guy named Bert Page, a PFC. He's from Texas here somewhere, a Marine. Those were two Marines. There was a sailor, and I can't remember that boy's name. But the four of us decided to take off in the jungle and get away from the main crowd, and we took off. We were in the jungle about three days.

But then coming up the road one night...I remember one time during the first night, we...let me tell you this. This is funny. It might be boring, but, anyhow, we came to a rice paddy, and we're all dying of thirst. We came up to this rice paddy, and it's getting dark. They got a little hut there with a couple of carabao in it, and it looked like there was a well. There was a hole in the ground with water, and it looked fresh. So we drink in this (chuckle). During the course of the night, some of the natives came in, and they had potatoes, and we sat around and roasted a few potatoes and were eating them. And the mosquitoes are biting us.

So the next morning, I told "Rocky," "I wonder if that goddamned thing is really a well." He said, "I don't know." About this time the women and the guys that work in the goddamned field started coming in, and we found out what that was. It was a shithouse (laughter)! They squatted over it.

Here's another funny thing. After these three days in the water, we came up to a bridge across the river. The river

maybe was about a hundred yards wide. The bridge was blown, but the piling were all around. So we jumped in, and we crossed over--me and the other two guys, Page and the "swabbie" (I can't think of his name). So we go from pile to pile swimming, and we suddenly hear hollering. There's "Rocky" standing there. We said, "What's the matter with you?" He says, "I can't swim!" I said, "You stupid bastard, all you got to do is go from pile to pile!" "No, I'll drown!" I said, "You was in the water three days, and you're worrying about drowning here?" So we had to go get him (laughter).

But we were three days like that. The second day, we were walking down a railroad, and I never will forget. They had a little railroad station. We were sitting in there, and the natives started hollering at us. We looked, and it looked like a fighter plane coming down the right-of-way. You could see him about a quarter-of-a-mile away, just coming; he was real low. So we ran out there to the jungle.

But the next day, we ran right into a Japanese patrol, and they picked us up.

Marcello: Okay, describe what happens at that point.

Wisecup: Well, they didn't clout us around or nothing. They had a pickup, a stake-body truck, and there was some Perth sailors in it, and there was also some American sailors. There was a big sailor, a big Chinese from Hong Kong. I think his name was Ah Chie, and he was the biggest one we had on the ship--a

cook. Okay, so we're in the goddamned truck. They finally got us on it, and we wonder what they're going to do with us. They're hauling us down the road.

Marcello: In the meantime, they haven't searched you or anything?

Wisecup: Yes, they shook us down.

Marcello: Did they loot you in any way?

Wisecup: Yes, anything. I had some money, but they didn't even bother with it. But if you had a ring or a watch, it was gone.

But, anyhow, let me tell you this story. To show you how stupid some people are, we're in this truck, and this "swabbie" says to Ah Chie, who was from Hong Kong, "Ah Chie, I hear Hong Kong fell." Ah Chie says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Hong Kong fall." The "swabbie" said, "You must be worried about your wife." He says, "Why worry about my wife? I worry about me right now!" (laughter) Like he was some kind of idiot, you know!

Marcello: Okay, so you're in this stake-bed truck. Where do you go?

Wisecup: They took us to a village, and I think the name of it was Pandeglang. There's one on the other side of Sumatra with a name similar to that. But it starts with a "P." It's something like Pandeglang or something like that. We were there quite a few weeks, but I don't remember exactly how long. They brought guys in from time to time. The cells they put us in had big shelves on there. They'd have about twelve of us to each cell. We weren't too crowded there.

Marcello: Was this like a jail?

Wisecup: Yes, a big compound. They had a wall around it. We were thereabout four or five weeks--I don't know--or maybe a month. Then they hauled us in by stake-body trucks to Batavia.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up a minute and talk about that month or however long it was that you were here in this local jail. What kind of treatment did you receive at the hands of the Japanese?

Wisecup: Well, we didn't get clouted around, but we were questioned. They got our serial numbers and ages and our ratings and stuff like that. We ate twice a day--the regular fare like you get when you're in prison there--fish and rice and stuff like that. But I don't know of anybody who got beat up there.

Marcello: Were you sent on any work details?

Wisecup: No, no. We were just held there. They had Perth sailors and Houston personnel, and that's all. Finally, they moved us to Batavia, and it took about a day-and-a-half by stake-body truck. It rained on us all the way, and we liked to froze to death. They put us in a civilian prison there with the real "cons." I can't remember the name of that. But, anyhow, I think it's the same one Otto Schwarz and them guys was in. I still don't know the name of that prison. But we were in there--oh, Christ--several weeks. From time to time more

Houston people come in. We were two to a cell there.

While we were there, they made some publicity movies to take back to Japan, I guess. They had us play some soccer with the Dutch, and they had cameras and took movies. Then they moved us to Bicycle Camp--I don't know--maybe three weeks later.

Marcello: Okay, now up until this point, I'm assuming that you really haven't been harassed very much.

Wisecup: You got kicked around a little. Then when we got into this regular civilian prison, we got kicked around.

Marcello: Describe what happened in that prison. In other words, how did they harass you there?

Wisecup: Well, in there they had us two to a cell, and they used to let us out about two hours a day, I think. Then at night, for some reason, they'd unlock the door, and you had to come out, and they'd count you. We didn't know nothing about this counting: ichi, ni, san. If you didn't count just right, they started kicking and clouting you around. That was the first real clubbing around I got, was there. Previous to that, you got kicked a little, but you expected it. What the hell. But when you got in there, you knew you was in a military prison.

Marcello: In the meantime, have you been able to scrounge any additional clothing?

Wisecup: No. I think, as far as I can remember, when I got there, all I had was my skivvy drawers and a skivvy shirt. I might

not even have had my skivvy shirt. But we got Dutch pants there, blue ones like the prisoners wore, as far as I can remember, because when I got to Bicycle Camp, I remember I still had them. No shoes. I didn't get any shoes.

I'll tell you one thing I never will forget. When they marched us from there to Bicycle Camp, it took about a day. It was out on the edge of town somewhere. Did you see the the movie "The Sand Pebbles?"

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: Do you remember the scene when all the shit hit the fan and that lieutenant went ashore and brought that squad of men in. Do you remember? They were supposed to march back. He's got this clean white uniform that the natives on the second floor are dumping shit on? Well, that's what happened to us (chuckle). On the way over there, the Nips march us down these narrow streets, and the natives are hollering at us. They're hollering, "Mik-mik," which means "fuck you" or something, and they throw these buckets of crap down on us from the second deck. I never will forget that. Then we finally got to Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: So by this time, the loyalty of the natives has turned.

Wisecup: It ain't turned because it ain't never been for us in the first place, you know. They never did like Dutch. If the Japanese would have cooperated with them and treated them better...but they didn't. They treated them natives terrible

there.

Marcello: Okay, so at this point, you are the only Americans at Bicycle Camp because 131st Field Artillery hasn't arrived yet.

Wisecup: That's right. They haven't come in yet. And the main group from Serang and all that, Charley Pryor and that bunch, hadn't come in yet. We were there about a week, I think, before they came in.

Marcello: And about how many Houston people were there at that time?

Wisecup: Geez, I'm trying to remember. Maybe forty. Just the group off our raft and a few other guys who had swam ashore were there. I remember "Goldie" Pistole, who had been fleet light heavyweight champ. I had boxed him one time, but I'm using that term loosely (chuckle). Anyhow, he came in there, and a few others. But we were separated from the main group.

Marcello: Do you have any officers with you in that original group?

Wisecup: We had a guy named Ross, Lieutenant Ross. He was the first man to die in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Okay, now how do you go about organizing yourselves once you get into Bicycle Camp and before the 131st Field Artillery comes in?

Wisecup: You mean before our outfit, too?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: We weren't. We more or less mingled in with the Aussies, as far as I can remember, because there weren't that many

of us. We stayed in a group, but there was no organization. Ross didn't...he looked like...Christ, he gave up a long time ago. This guy was an overaged lieutenant. He was in his thirties and was a very moody-type of guy.

Marcello: Okay, take me on a tour of Bicycle Camp. Suppose you and I were going in the front gate of Bicycle Camp. What would we see? Take me on a tour.

Wisecup: I think on the left-hand side, as you went in the gate, would be the guardhouse. Then as you walked on down, you had barracks on the left, and you had barracks on the right. As far as I can remember, the Aussies were on the left, and when they first brought us in, they put us on the right. At that time there were no Australians on our side. You had this road running down the middle. As far as I know, all the time we were there, the diggers [Australians] were on the left-hand side.

Marcello: Was it a macadam road? Was it a hard-top road, or was it a dirt road?

Wisecup: It was macadam going in.

Marcello: Okay, now take me inside one of the barracks. What would the barracks look like on the inside?

Wisecup: We had a porch running the length of them. Maybe they were a hundred yards long. I don't know; I can't remember. In the middle of this porch, you had a couple of pipes and faucets. Later on, we made showers. "Gunner" McCone got some gear and made showers and closed that in. Geez, this is

hard to remember. But I know they had doors going along that veranda. You'd go inside, and they had booths, and usually we had maybe five, six guys to a booth.

Marcello: Approximately how large in terms of square feet would one of those booths or cubicles be?

Wisecup: About a quarter the size of this room--one-fourth.

Marcello: Okay. We can't see that on the tape. What do you think that might be in square feet?

Wisecup: How many feet?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: I would say roughly...it might of been completely square. It might of been about ten-by-eight, something like that. But you could get five guys in there, and you could rig your bunks.

Marcello: When you initially were assigned to those cubicles, were you sleeping on the floor?

Wisecup: Yes. Then we made bunks and stuff. Some of the guys slept outside.

Marcello: How do you go about gathering gear? When you went into the water, all you had on was a T-shirt and a pair of shorts. You have no mess gear. You don't have anything of that nature. How do you improvise?

Wisecup: Okay, what you do is, you find old tin cans and stuff like that. Old peach tins and stuff like that was the first mess kit I had. I made a spoon out of an old bamboo stick. Some

of the guys made chopsticks, stuff like that. For cups and stuff, the best thing was to get an old bottle, you know, a beer bottle or something, and get a string and put around it and set the string on fire; and then you can break it square and then rub it on the cement and make it smooth to where you don't cut yourself. That was your best drinking utensil. Later on, I got hold of a Dutch mess kit, and I kept that all during the war. I brought it home with me, but I lost it. You used anything--any kind of gear you could pick up. You slept on sacks. Old rubber tires, you made them into shoes. Hell, I never had no shoes. I think I finally... just before I left Batavia, I got hold of a pair of Aussie shoes. I had one pair of shoes all the time I was prisoner, and that was it.

Marcello: And up until the time that you got that pair of shoes, were you going barefooted?

Wisecup: Yes. Having come from Louisiana and run around barefooted when I was a kid, I was kind of acclimated, you know. I got around there pretty good.

Marcello: Once everybody from the Houston gets into Bicycle Camp, then how do you go about getting organized?

Wisecup: Well, you had officers there. Of course, our top brass, they already took them away and sent them to Japan right off the bat. I forget who our senior officer was there. But, anyhow, they organized just like aboard ship. They held roster.

You used to have musters and everything for different stuff. They even had a court-martial or two in there before we left.

Marcello: In other words, there is a semblance of military discipline that's being carried out.

Wisecup: Right. Yes, after we got in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: How necessary is something like that when you're in that situation?

Wisecup: It helps if you got the brass with you, if you're going to take your part, you know. The British always had them, and everybody always had them. That was our main trouble, like, with Crayton Gordon and that other bunch when we went up to Hintok. We had no brass with us. We were strictly under the Japanese and the British. We got no help nowhere.

Marcello: Can you be more specific? In other words, what function would the officers play in a situation like here at Bicycle Camp. Let's start there.

Wisecup: Well, they're the go-between. They go up and they can try, see. They can go up before the Japanese--whoever is in charge of the camp--commandant or whoever--and they'll take the part of the men. They'll go up there and try to get some improvements such as you're going to be allowed anyhow; I mean, it's up to them. I'm not saying you're going to get it. But if you got your brass, you got a chance; if you don't, you're strictly on your own, which mostly a prisoner is, anyhow.

Being a prisoner is a case of survival. There ain't too many people who are going to help you; you've got to help yourself. You don't go around thieving off another, but you still got to take care of you. You know what I mean? The guys that died...I don't know. I guess they expected somebody to take care of them--most of them. Well, you had to be lucky, too.

But the brass definitely helped. I always had this argument, and a lot of guys get mad at me when I say it. The officer had it harder than the enlisted guy because he's right in the middle. If something went wrong, whether it was his responsibility or not, he got the shit kicked out of him first, see.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about the coming of the 131st Field Artillery. Describe their coming into camp.

Wisecup: Oh, boy, that was a great day!

Marcello: Why was that?

Wisecup: They brought in all kinds of goodies--clothes, food. They had "gobs" of rations. It was just terrific, man. It was almost like when the war ended--when them guys came in. They had money to buy rations and food. They shared what they had with us. It was terrific because the Houston people didn't have nothing. We were in rags, man.

Marcello: Did you manage to get anything from any of the guys from the 131st?

Wisecup: Oh, I think they helped with food and tobacco and stuff like that.

Marcello: But you did not get any clothing or anything of that nature?

Wisecup: No, I never did get no clothing. But quite a few of the guys did. They got complete outfits. But as far as food, our rations improved because they bought stuff outside and brought it in, and we went through the same cookhouse.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about food, since you brought up the subject, and I'm referring to the food here at Bicycle Camp. First of all, how many meals a day did you get?

Wisecup: Three.

Marcello: What would the fare consist of?

Wisecup: Jesus Christ, I forget. It was rice, basically. In the morning you'd get what we'd call "pap." I think that after the 131st got there, we had...I knew we always had potatoes, new potatoes, and them little Irish potatoes, and we'd have some kind of meat or something. They had canned stuff. You ate pretty good there for a while.

Marcello: What was the quality of the rice like?

Wisecup: Well, they always gave you the poorest quality, which was... if you got the red rice...we didn't know it at the time, but it was more nutritious for you. A lot of times we got it with the hulls unpolished. Some of the guys complained, but actually you were better off getting that than you were with the white rice because it was more nutritious.

Marcello: When you went through the chow line, what quantity of rice would you receive?

Wisecup: Oh, you'd get about a cupful--about like that.

Marcello: Would it be the equivalent of a canteen cup?

Wisecup: No, it wouldn't be that much.

Marcello: Okay. How about vegetables or greens or anything of that nature?

Wisecup: Yes, the vegetables were good there in Java. We got potatoes --a lot of Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes--and greens of various sorts, carrots, and stuff like that.

Marcello: So, comparatively speaking, that is, compared to what you would be receiving later, the food wasn't too bad there at Bicycle Camp.

Wisecup: No, it was good.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the Japanese here at Bicycle Camp. By this time I assume the front line troops have moved on, and you have rear echelon personnel in charge.

Wisecup: Yes.

Marcello: Do you have Koreans at this stage in Bicycle Camp?

Wisecup: I don't remember. I don't think they had them yet. I think it was later. We got them in Malaya.

Marcello: Okay, what are you learning...what have you learned about the Japanese at this point, that is, by the time you get into Bicycle Camp? What are you learning about how to act as a prisoner-of-war?

Wisecup: Well, you learn the value of trying to stay out of trouble and staying away from them as far as possible. They didn't bother us that much there. Once in a while there'd be a foray down through the barracks at night, and they'd clout people indiscriminately. They always had one or two guys that would bash you. That was their delight--to go down there and start raising a bunch of hell. But in Batavia itself, I'm sure we had to sign that...they wanted us to sign that "no escape" thing, but it wasn't too bad a "go." While that was on, until we signed the goddamned thing, they gave us a hell of a time. They cut the chow down and beat the shit out of everybody; you couldn't go outside or nothing; they cut out the working parties for a while, and when you did go on one, they gave you nothing but a bad time.

Marcello: What military courtesies did you have to extend to the Japanese?

Wisecup: We had to bow to them.

Marcello: Was that hard to do in the beginning?

Wisecup: Yes, it was. You got used to it after a while. When you looked around, you seen them bowing to one another. So you got used to it. It was hard at first.

Marcello: What were the normal or usual kinds of punishment that the Japanese would deal out to the prisoners for infractions?

Wisecup: Well, usually a severe beating and kicking, stomping--what have you. Sometimes they'd make you kneel...if they'd find

you bringing stuff in, they'd make you kneel in front of the guardhouse sometimes all day and all night--various things like that.

Marcello: When you say they'd make you kneel in front of the guardhouse, could you be more specific?

Wisecup: Yes. You'd get down on your hands and knees, and you had to stay there. Don't move. If you move they'd clout you.

Marcello: Is this where they'd put the stick behind your knees and made you kneel on them?

Wisecup: They did that sometimes, and sometimes they'd just let you kneel. It was bad enough just kneeling.

Marcello: Would it be accurate to say that in most cases--not always, but in most cases--that prisoners received a bashing because they had broken some rule? Regardless of how idiotic the rule may have been, they had broken it.

Wisecup: It may have been, looking back on it. But it was according to the personality of the Nip. You've got to understand that these people are...even back home in the States in that time, you had a different way. Like, if you worked as a longshoreman and...I hate to get off the subject, but just to compare. You had a different...this is forty years ago, and it was a different ball game. If you worked on a job longshoring most of your longshoremen bosses got that job because they were tough. If you got out of line, didn't do your work, they'd knock the shit out of you.

Well, the Japs did that. They did it in their service from the top on down. When a guy got out of line, they didn't bawl him out. You had to stand at attention, and they belted the piss out of him. Officers did it to one another, so they did it to us, only more so.

I seen him change the watch one night. I'm looking out the window there in Batavia, and there used to be a guard walk there. He relieved late. I got the gist of it, and they were cursing one another. So he went back to the guard-house--the guy who'd been a little late--and then directly here he comes with five guys. And they kicked that guy until he was almost dead, and he still had to stand his watch. Comparatively speaking, we were getting the same treatment (chuckle). It was tough in the Japanese Army, let me tell you.

Marcello: What kind of power did a sergeant have in the Japanese Army?

Wisecup: Oh, Jesus, I don't know. Pretty good. A lot more than ours have. Most of the sergeants and NCOs had a hell of a lot more time in. They were old-timers. You know, they'd been fighting a war up there in Manchuria and China. You had guys with seven and eight years of combat duty. They were hard cases. Actually, though, you got better treatment off of those people than you did off of these culls later on, you know, like the Koreans and the others. You know, when we went to Malaya and all, actually your regular POW

guards were people that they didn't want anyplace else. They were a disgrace. They didn't want them. Do you know what I mean? And the Korean was nothing but mud, anyhow. He's still considered nothing but mud in Japan.

Marcello: We'll talk about those guys later, so let's hold our comments about those for a moment. You mentioned something else awhile ago relative to the guards. You said it was a good idea to stay as far away from them as possible. Why was that?

Wisecup: Make yourself inconspicuous. It was very hard for me to do (chuckle). I got more than my share of clouts just because I was a big guy. They still don't like a big man in Japan--you know what I mean--even to this day. It's not like it was, but they got that inferiority complex about a tall guy.

Marcello: Are you saying, in effect, that they seemed to single out the tall guys at Bicycle Camp?

Wisecup: They did; they did. Well, not only at Bicycle Camp but anyplace. After a while, hell, a bashing didn't mean nothing to you. Christ, it was a way of life. You got used to that. We had one guy--Faulk. He's dead now. Faulk couldn't fight, but he would. And this guy had the record for getting hit. He used to come in, and they'd say, "Well, how many times did Faulk get bashed today?" It looked like he just liked it. I don't think he liked to get hit, but he was just proving how tough he was. Christ, he used to get belted around more

than anybody I've ever seen in my life. You probably heard about him before. He died up here in Oklahoma in a farm accident. A tractor overturned.

Marcello: Yes, it's one of those ironic things. He came through all that prison-of-war experience and died when a tractor overturned on him.

Wisecup: Yes. A lot people get killed like that on them damned farms.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the work details here at Bicycle Camp. How were they set up?

Wisecup: Well, if they had enough men there, most of the guys wanted to get on them so they could get out there and hustle something to eat or get into some kind of black market activity. You could get cigarettes or something like that.

In the early days there at Batavia, I got dysentery, and I got it real bad. Jesus, I must of went down to around 145 pounds.

Marcello: What was your weight at the time when you entered the service or when you were aboard ship?

Wisecup: About 172 or 175 pounds--something like that.

Marcello: Okay, continue with your story.

Wisecup: I got dysentery and damn near died of it. Oh, man, I was in bad shape! For the type of dysentery I had--bacilliary first and then I got amoebic with it--you needed a drug called emetine at that time that would knock it out. They didn't have it there. So I got down to where I was crapping about

fifteen or twenty times a day. I couldn't go on the working parties, and I couldn't eat hardly. This was really something for me because all my life I'd had a terrific appetite. When I got that stuff, gee!

But I had that all the way until we went to Singapore. At Singapore, the second time I went in the hospital I got emetine. They had a limited supply. It knocked it out of me, and I never did have that type of dysentery again, although I was bothered with it often, but nothing like that. This stuff is just like a knife in your guts, and you're passing blood. You get anemic. You puke--it comes up all over.

So I didn't do a hell of a lot of going on too damned many working parties. When I did go, I used to go out there to get the chow, but, man, the smell of any kind of chow made me sick. Boy, this was something to me because I always had a terrific appetite. But when we did get to Singapore, and I got that emetine treatment, I got over it, and I never had that again.

Marcello: In other words, they were not able to improvise anything at all there at Bicycle Camp?

Wisecup: What do you mean? For treatment?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: Nothing for that. They gave me all kinds of the usual stuff--charcoal and water, rice soup, salts--and none of that cured

it. Christ, I was a walking wreck. People wouldn't even come near me. After I was over in that "alleged" hospital ward-- there was a gang of us over there (Aussies and all)--two or three came over, and they never come back again. I could see them looking at me: "Jesus! This son-of-a-bitch is going to die!" You know, I looked that bad. My skin's hanging down, you know. I'd always been a healthy, strong guy.

Marcello: At that stage, were you afraid you were going to die?

Wisecup: No. I don't know. You get to where, like, it's easy to die, and you ain't going to hurt no more. Because I was hurting, let me tell you (chuckle). And I'd never been sick in my life, see. Man, I'll tell you, in just walking around and going to the toilet, you never made it. It would run down your legs, blood all over the place, all over your clothes. The flies are eating you up. At night you're laying there, and your belly is killing you. Then you go out to the "head," and nothing comes out but blood.

Then you'd lay down there, and you're just like in a fog, like you're going off in a trance, like somebody gave you a shot in the arm like you're going to get operated on. You're just peaceful. A couple of times I thought I was gone. But then something would tell you, "To hell with this, man." You know, you could die easy. I believe I could have died easily.

But I was a selfish son-of-a-bitch. I wanted back and

get a drink and get a girl, play some more ball, get in some fights. This was in my mind! Some guys will tell you all kind of things. But this was (laughter) in my mind. But you could die easy, and it ain't hard. To some of the guys, it was release because they were in such pain, especially the guys with the tropical ulcers.

Marcello: Of course, all that sort of thing comes later on for the most part, does it not--the ulcers and those things?

Wisecup: Oh, I got them later, yes.

Marcello: What do you do with your spare time here at Bicycle Camp? I guess in your case you were feeling sorry for yourself and so on, given the condition you were in.

Wisecup: Well, after I get in and out of there and they give me this so-called treatment, I drew some cartoons and stuff like that. I used to get paper and stuff. I was always an agitator. I would like go and stir up some kind of controversy and trouble (chuckle). I used to do a lot of cartoons and hang them up and around.

Boy, I never will forget them days, man. I couldn't eat. Maybe one time a day I'd get something down me, and it'd come right up. I'd puke just at the smell of anything.

Before we left there...you heard of Doctor Hekking. Well, I don't know if it was Doctor Hekking, but it was one of the Dutch doctors. So they had the first draft--"Robby" [Marvin Robinson] was on it and all--going to Singapore.

So I'm half-dead, anyway, and the doctor told me, "Look, it's a five- or six-day trip over there, and it's going to be hell. But if I were you, I'd try to make it because they may have emetine or some other drug. If you stay here, you're going to die because we don't have anything to treat you." And that's why I decided not to stay behind in Batavia. I made that trip, and it turned out okay.

Marcello: Okay, let me ask you a few more questions relative to Bicycle Camp. You mentioned your talent as a cartoonist. Of course, I've heard from other people that you had a talent as a cartoonist.

Wisecup: It wasn't no talent. It was just something I enjoyed. I'm always ribbing people, you know, and stuff like that.

Marcello: Where did you get access to pencil and paper and that sort of thing?

Wisecup: Oh, you could always get it around camp. The Nips would give you paper and pencils to draw pictures. You could get it off of them. Or you could get...at that time there were old ledgers and stuff like that readily available. That's the only thing they had there, not regular art material. I used to come up with some old crayons. Sometimes I'd find them. In Batavia, at Bicycle Camp, when the Dutch Army was there, I think they'd had an elementary school for kids, and I got some old chalk and stuff. Anything kind of paper I'd get, I'd draw on.

Marcello: Did you ever do any caricatures of the Japanese?

Wisecup: No. No, I didn't want to raise any hell with them. They used to walk through the barracks. We didn't want any trouble. I was warned on that.

Marcello: Did you decorate the walls of the barracks or anything of that nature?

Wisecup: Yes, I did all that.

Marcello: What kind of things would you put on there?

Wisecup: I put on quite a few drawings of the ship and its sinking, you know, the way it looked to me. There was another artist in there, a guy named McManus, but "Mac" was never one who could do any original work. He could copy, do portraits and stuff like that. But when it came to thinking up a cartoon...like, I used to like to sit and conjure something up and just put it down. "Mac" couldn't do that. He had to work from a model or something--terrific work. He's still at it, I think. But I was the only one there that did any cartoons. That's why they were so popular, because nobody else did them. That's why.

Marcello: Well, I was going to ask you this and...

Wisecup: Let's drink another beer.

Marcello: Okay (chuckle).

Wisecup: Go ahead. I'm listening. [He heads toward the refrigerator for a Coors.]

Marcello: What, in your opinion, did those cartoons do for the morale

of you and your buddies?

Wisecup: I don't know. Most of them liked them. They used to look forward to them.

Marcello: I guess it was a diversion from what was going on.

Wisecup: Yes, yes.

Marcello: When guys sat around in their bull sessions, what did they talk about?

Wisecup: Food (laughter). We never talked about women; we talked about food! God, you'd be surprised at recipes! Guys would remember things that they ate twenty years previous. You know, it's hard to explain to anybody. When we came back guys would say, "Man, I'll bet you thought about women. What did you think about? What you were going to do when you came home?" I says, "No, all you thought about was food." Man, you'd think about hamburgers you ate. You could describe how they were cooked.

Marcello: I guess in a situation like that, too, where you have a certain amount of idle time, you very quickly learn about everybody's background and family history.

Wisecup: Pretty much, yes. At that time, you knew everybody's story. They'd tell it over and over and over. I've forgotten most of it, but mostly you talked about food and stuff like that. You also talked about drinking, liquor, smokes (chuckle).

Tobacco was a great, great thing. Tobacco killed your appetite. I never had smoked heavily--maybe one or two--

because I did a lot of boxing and playing ball, and I tried to stay in halfway decent shape. But when I got to be a prisoner, if you get up in the morning and you get hold of a cigarette along with your "pap," it'll kill your appetite, especially that strong "wog" tobacco. You roll it up in a piece of newspaper and take a deep draw on it, and it'd almost knock you down, you know, and it'd sort of dull your appetite (laughter). Really! I'm telling you!

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about "pap." For the record, that is, for somebody who reads this interview, what is "pap?"

Wisecup: It's your rice boiled to a mushy consistency. In some cases they'll take and put it in a mortar and pestle and grind it up, see, just almost like you're going to make grits. Same thing. Then it's boiled to a mushy consistency.

Marcello: And that was a breakfast recipe?

Wisecup: Yes. One time I never will forget in the later years, just before the war ended at Singapore. I got hold of a tube of Ipana toothpaste someplace, and I used to put a little daub of that on my "pap," and it was really good (laughter)! No kidding, man! Look, I hoarded that. It must have lasted me ten days! And the other guys would say, "Come on! Give me some!" I'd say, "No way!" I used to carry it around with me (laughter).

Marcello: Now that's a new one. I never heard of that.

Wisecup: You never heard of that?

Marcello: I've heard of guys putting Eagle Brand milk on rice, and I've heard of them putting those hot red peppers on rice, but I've never heard of anybody putting toothpaste on rice.

Wisecup: Here's something in Singapore. I'm getting ahead of the story. You had plenty of peppers--little, round, black peppers. Peppercorns, we called them. I used to get them and grind them up to where they were just like dust, and I'd put that in water. When I ate, I'd mix that all up and drink that along with that. That'd fill you up. It burnt your stomach so bad you wasn't hungry no more (chuckle). I'm telling you, man!

Marcello: But you actually put toothpaste on your rice?

Wisecup: I did! And there was other guys...hell, you seen vaseline or something like this used. You'd get it, and you'd fry your rice in this. You craved grease, for one thing, because you never did get it. Palm oil over there...oh, Jesus, that was at a premium--that red palm oil. Actually, if you could get a good bowl of rice and pour just the raw palm oil on top--it's used for cooking--it was delicious!

Marcello: I guess you were looking for anything to flavor that rice.

Wisecup: Grease, yes.

Marcello: Well, getting back to Bicycle Camp again--and this is something you mentioned previously, too, but I want to follow up and get some specifics on it--on July 4, 1942, they came around with that non-escape pledge or loyalty oath

or whatever you want to call it. Give me the details of how that whole episode transpired.

Wisecup: Well, it was all of them. All of the prison camps in the Far East--Singapore, too--had to sign it. They wanted you to sign it. Of course, at that time we figured we'd be traitors if we did it. It, in effect, stated, "You will not escape. You will not, in the event of escape, take up arms against the Japanese Imperial Forces" and so on. "It'll never happen. I ain't going to sign it." Finally, the officers got us together. We ain't going to get nothing to eat. I forget but it must have been a week. They're clouting and bashing us, and we ain't going on no working parties. Everybody's hungry.

The officers said, "Look here, we're prisoners of war, and this is under duress. It ain't going to count. Sign it." Well, there ain't a one of us who didn't think we were traitors. All during the war, I thought of that. I said, "Jesus Christ!" Really, people were different in those days. Now people don't think that way, but we believed actually that we were selling our country down the road for signing such a thing. But now you look back, and you say, "No, hell, you have to do it, for Christ's sake! You don't tell them people what you're going to do!" So we signed it. But even after I was liberated in Calcutta, it was on my mind. Now some of the guys have got copies of it, you know,

and it's a joke. Now, if a guy was a prisoner, he wouldn't even consider it five minutes. But that's the way people thought in those days.

Marcello: Did you have any nicknames for any of the Japanese guards here at Bicycle Camp?

Wisecup: Oh, yes, yes. One of them was "The Basher." "Basher" is a limey name for somebody who goes around punching up on people. We had the "Brown Bomber" because he looked like Joe Louis. We had names like that.

Marcello: Describe what the latrine facilities were like here at Bicycle Camp.

Wisecup: In Bicycle Camp you had booths, and as far as I can remember, they had a partition running down the middle; and it was like a ditch with some kind of a...it wasn't concrete. It was some kind of ceramics. The ditch would have been about a foot deep, and water ran through this. You squatted over this. You wiped your ass with water; you didn't use no paper. All over Java they did that. They used water, you know. We used to call it "Java, the land of liquid toilet paper." That was it, yes.

Marcello: What were the opportunities to take baths or showers or whatever?

Wisecup: Yes, you could bathe there. They had plenty of fresh running water. McCone got hold of some plumbing material and set up the first shower. On that porch I was telling

you about, they had pipes running up in the faucet. Well, we used to go take a douche there--just get under there like that and wash off. So ol' "Gunner" got the pipes together, and he put connections up there and made a makeshift shower. The Aussies were even coming to visit us, and they didn't care that much about bathing. You know how the Yanks are. They want to bathe everyday, twice a day. The "diggers" weren't like that.

Marcello: I guess what was especially helpful in Bicycle Camp was that there were a bunch of sailors there because they could improvise. A ship like the Houston had people with all kinds of skills on it.

Wisecup: Yes. You had mechanics; you had musicians; you had carpenters, electricians. But McCone was a Marine, and Marines ain't taught none of that. At that time, they didn't learn none of that. But he was good. This guy could make anything; he could improvise.

Marcello: Is this the guy that sometimes is called "Pack Rat?"

Wisecup: That's him.

Marcello: How did he get the name "Pack Rat?"

Wisecup: Because when he went out on a working party and then came back, that's what he'd look like. He'd pick up old tires; he'd pick up old pipes. Anything the Nips would let him come through the gates with, he'd bring back. Then he'd used these things. He'd make shoes; he'd make "go-aheads."

You know, I get a kick out of this. We always call those slippers made out of tires "Charlie shoes" because the Viet Cong used them. But they didn't have them first. We had them first. We made them in the prison camps out of tires. "Gunner" made them there, and so did some of the other guys. Man, tires were at a premium, if you'd get hold of them.

When we went aboard this transport, I never will forget. You had a gangway straight up like that (gesture) at Tanjong Priok. The "Gunner" had two tires; he had a gang of pipe; he had a couple of sacks over his back. Man, he had some gear. The "Gunner" was really loaded. And the ship would have...I think they would have been losing weight if he got aboard with all that stuff. So the Nips were even laughing. No kidding! They seldom laughed, but they did this time. They're making him take a little bit off and shuck some of it down, so some of the other guys took part of it. "Gunner" was handy; he could build anything. And I understand he's still at it.

Marcello: This, I think, brings us up to this point where you leave Bicycle Camp. Let me ask you this. Did you have any forewarning that you would be leaving?

Wisecup: Yes. There was a rumor--oh, Christ, I don't remember exactly how--several days before we left. It was very strong that we were going to go to Singapore. We knew we weren't going to stay there forever.

Marcello: And you mentioned that you left with the first group.

Wisecup: As far as I can remember, yes. I left with "Robby," "Gunner," and that bunch. You could check and find out.

Marcello: According to the record, that first group, which was led by Captain Fitzsimmons, went out on October 7, 1942.

Wisecup: That would be about right.

Marcello: Okay, what gear did you take with you when you left? What had you accumulated by this time?

Wisecup: I think I had a sack with my blanket; I still had them blue pants from that prison over there. I got hold of a pair...I don't know whether they were Australian shoes or limey, but they were tan hightops with a real thick sole. They were old and scuffed and beat up, but they were the first shoes I had. I didn't wear them everyday because I was kind of nursing them (chuckle). I had them, and that's about all I can remember.

Marcello: Now you say you did have a mess gear by this time?

Wisecup: No, not yet. I got that later on. I got that when we went over to Singapore.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that you got into that first group because you thought you might be able to get some medication for your dysentery.

Wisecup: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, describe what conditions were like aboard that ship. And we're referring to the Dai Nichi Maru.

Wisecup: That was it?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: Well, they put us down in the hold, all the way down in the bottom. You had these shelves which were, as far as I can remember, about four feet high. In the middle you might've had about twenty feet square, and then your shelves went up. We were in the double-bottom all the way down there --that group that I was with. We had a ladder going up. They crowded us down in there.

Marcello: How much room did you have per person?

Wisecup: We were packed right against one another.

Marcello: Are you saying, in effect, that they had, in essence, partitioned the hold into these various tiers or platforms?

Wisecup: Let me show you. You got a piece of paper there?
I can show you a rough sketch. Of course, we were in worse shape than a lot of guys. I wasn't the only one who had dysentery. Man, you were rolling in everybody's crap down there.

Marcello: What was the temperature like?

Wisecup: Oh, Jesus Christ, it was over a hundred degrees down there! You're in the tropics, and the water is hot, too. It was a five-day trip. At night they'd put out the sea anchors because they was afraid of submarines, so they wouldn't go and get underway. She was a coal-burner. It took five days to get over there, but it seemed like about two weeks.

Marcello: How did they feed you, and what did they feed you?

Wisecup: Twice a day we had rice. I don't know...sometimes you had had a little fish with it.

Marcello: Did they serve you up on deck, or was it lowered down in pails?

Wisecup: You had to get up on deck and get in line.

Marcello: How often could you get up on deck?

Wisecup: You was only supposed to go up on deck to eat and to go to the "head." Then you had to line up to get to that. Me, I didn't even get up there because it was running out of me. I wasn't the only one. Gosh, you were rolling in your own crap.

Marcello: What did you do for water?

Wisecup: We got it on deck, and then you tried to have some kind of container or bottle to bring it back down. We stood in line all day to get that damned water.

Marcello: Okay, you get to Singapore. Then what happens at that stage?

Wisecup: When I got to Singapore, I never will forget. They had a long gangway. I had a hell of a time getting up topside. But I managed to get up topside, and I managed to get down that gangway. The limeys had some trucks and sort of make-shift ambulances, and there was a bunch of us that went in them. I know I made it to the ambulance, got in there, but I was covered with crap. I remember being dizzy, just like

somebody beat me over the head before I could get there. I was sick. Anyhow, they brought us out to the hospital area. I can't remember exactly, but I believe it was Selarang. I'm not sure. Our regular bunch, the guys that were okay, went down to Roberts Barracks. I think it was Roberts Hospital, they called it. Anyhow, I don't know. I can't remember. But it was quite a distance from where we were staying. I was in there for about two weeks.

Marcello: Describe the kind of treatment you received there.

Wisecup: Well, when I first went in, they gave me practically the same treatment we had over there in Batavia because they had a minimum of drugs there. I never will forget. When I went in that hospital, coming off that ship I was on, they had mostly Dutch, and the English didn't care whether the Dutch lived or not. They just didn't give a damn. They had no use for them.

I was in there about two weeks, and I got out and improved a little bit. I could eat a little. I went on back to Roberts, and about ten days later I'm back up in there again. While I was up there, then I got seven shots of that emetine --one a day--and that knocked it out. I started feeling like a human, and I could eat again.

Marcello: I'm sure that must've done wonders for your morale.

Wisecup: Oh, Christ, you don't know, man! I'll tell you, it was just like being born again. I thought I was finished. I

thought, "Christ, I'll never be able to eat a square meal." Them shots did wonders, man. The guy who was in charge of the ward--the MO (they call them medical officers)--was a Captain King, and he had been at Dunkirk. I think he was partial to the Yanks. He was an old Indian Army officer. There was Fowler--I'll never forget Fowler--and the sailor that had been on the same raft with me; and there was one other Yank up there, but I can't remember his name. We was always kidding around, and King used to get a big charge out of us. Whether or not he did that because he liked the Americans or not, I don't know. But the word was...the orderlies told me, "Man, look, we ain't got that goddamned much emetine, and we ain't going to give none to those goddamned Dutchman." So I don't know about this; maybe this is just talk. But I know that if I hadn't have got them goddamned shots, I was a gone son-of-a-bitch, man.

Marcello: I gather that Changi was a pretty big camp, and the British more or less ran the camp internally.

Wisecup: They did.

Marcello: Describe the relationship that developed between the British and the Americans there at Changi.

Wisecup: They didn't get along worth a damn (chuckle). They gave our group up there all the shitty work. While they were there, they got the maximum of work out of the Americans.

Marcello: What kind of work were the Americans doing?

Wisecup: They were clearing off rubber trees and stuff like that, which was later on converted to a garden; and they were hauling heavy stuff. The British assigned the Yanks all kinds of heavy work.

Marcello: Did you go on these work details when you were at Changi?

Wisecup: Just a few. Like I say, I was in and out of the hospital until that second time. Then I was in good shape, and then I was okay. I got in such good shape that they had me...we were on the fourth deck, and they used to bring one container of rice and another container of...I forget what it was. But them bastards were heavy. They weighed about fifty pounds apiece. So after I got improved, after I got them seven shots, three or four days later I was running up and down and stuff. So they got me to help the mess orderly. I used to be able to carry both of them up them four flights of steps, so I was getting back in shape fast. By the time we went up-country, I was in top form, I think.

Marcello: What kind of food were you getting there at Changi?

Wisecup: Rice. In the hospital ward the limeys had some sort of a beef--black stuff made out of...it had a very strong...a lot of beef, and it was very nutritious. You used to get that, and we'd make a soup out of it; and then you get a little fish or something like that. It was not a hell of a lot, but it was enough to keep you going.

Marcello: I do know that in some of those barracks there at Changi,

there were some problems with bedbugs. Do you recall that?

Wisecup: Oh, Christ, yes! They had them all over. They never bothered me because I never had no bunk. But anybody that got a bunk (chuckle)...I usually had an old sack. I acquired an old blanket that I kept until the war ended there. I used to put that in an ant bed or something like that, and they'd take care of them. But anybody trying to sleep in a bunk, you had to clean that bunk every day.

Marcello: How long were you at Changi altogether?

Wisecup: Before we went up-country...well, you said November?

Marcello: October. You left in October to go to Singapore.

Wisecup: Singapore, okay. All right, I left there...I guess it was May. It may have been March, April, somewhere there. H Force was the last batch that went up-country.

Marcello: Okay, describe your leaving Changi. How did that come about?

Wisecup: Well, they got us together, and they just absorbed the Americans into H Force. They put us on trucks, took us down to Singapore, and loaded us on these boxcars. I forget how many there were in each of those little European cars, but there wasn't enough room to lay down. You had to stand up. Man, if you'd fell down on that floor, you'd strangle to death. That was almost five days of standing up all the way to Banpong. But coming back was different; we didn't have as many people (chuckle).

Marcello: So you went in those railroad cars from Singapore to Banpong?

Wisecup: Singapore to Banpong, yes.

Marcello: Okay, describe that trip in more detail. You mentioned that you're packed in.

Wisecup: Yes. They gave us a couple of tubs of rice and fish, and that lasted us a day. The next day we stopped somewhere up the road, and they got another ration for us. We ate about once a day on that thing. We had a hell of a time getting water. When they'd stop someplace, you'd go up and try to get it out of the engine, you know, out of the tender. I don't remember it too clear. I know we were packed in. It was like we were in a haze all the way up until we got to Banpong.

Marcello: Okay, what happens then when you get to Banpong?

Wisecup: Well, then we started marching. We got our group together. It was six hundred. I can't remember the name of the British officer who was in charge, but he was an Argyll and a hell of a nice guy. I can't remember his name. But he was a senior officer--the only officer, I think, we had to go up with.

Marcello: Now you have been separated from most of the Americans.

Wisecup: The main group, yes. There is just thirteen of us.

Marcello: What kind of a feeling did that give you to be separated from the rest of the Americans?

Wisecup: Geez, I don't know. I don't even remember. By this time you're just living day to day. You know what I mean? Christ, you're just thinking like the rest of them--not as Americans

anymore, but as a prisoner. You think like the rest of them regardless of who they are. You've all got the same thing on your mind--where is the next meal coming from (chuckle) and how is it going to be in the next camp.

Marcello: Who were some of the Americans that were with you?

Wisecup: Crayton Gordon, Ben Keith, Ray Robinson, who lives over in Fort Worth, "Doc" Morrow, who's up in Wichita Falls...let's see...thirteen of us went up.

Marcello: Well, I don't think it's necessary that you name all of them, but that at least gives the reader some sort of an idea about who else was there.

Wisecup: Yes, there was only thirteen.

Marcello: What happens when you get to Banpong? You unload at Banpong. What happens at that time?

Wisecup: We were there overnight, and then they got that six-hundred ...well, they had more than that. Our group started up... we walked...I think it was ten days.

Marcello: Describe this march because this is maybe not as bad as the Bataan Death March but it was nothing to brag about.

Wisecup: We didn't lose that many men. What we lost on that railroad made that death march look like a picnic. But on the march up, I'll tell you what was bad about it--not with the Americans but with all these others. Most of these limeys and other guys were culls, anyhow; they were sick people. We lost quite a few going up, and they just left them in the

jungle.

Marcello: And you say this was a ten-day march?

Wisecup: Just about. It was ninety-six miles. I looked on the map and figured it out--Hintok to Banpong. It may have been more than that because in those days there was no railroads. I'm following the old route--the highway now from Banpong to Kanchanaburi and then on up to Hintok. On the map it shows ninety-six miles. It comes out about ninety-six miles. What made it hard was that you had to carry all this gear. We carried tents, which we shouldn't have even brought, anyhow, because the bastards leaked like sieves. We were carrying that and all the cooking gear and all this shit. Plus, some of the guys carried a whole gang of gear which they had to discard on the way.

Marcello: Describe the conduct of the guards.

Wisecup: Well, you had to keep going. Now what we did was march at night because it was so hot, see. We'd wait until sundown, and we'd start. We'd march all night until daybreak. We'd take breaks about every hour, I think, for maybe five minutes. The guys in the rear were kicked and punched and beat. If they didn't make it, they had to fall out, and that was it. You just left them there. I don't know how many we left. I couldn't give you an accurate number of the guys there, but we must have lost quite a few. But we lost none of the Americans, although some of them did get sick en route. But

the hell of it was, when we got to the goddamned Hintok, we didn't even get a day's rest to put them camps up. We went to work right away, and it started raining the day we got there!

Marcello: Was this road that you were on dirt, or did it have a hard top?

Wisecup: Dirt, dirt. All the way.

Marcello: What kind of a reception did you get from the local natives on this route?

Wisecup: Oh, they were trying to sell us stuff, that's all.

Marcello: And you're in Thailand, is that correct?

Wisecup: That's right.

Marcello: Okay, you get to Hintok. You must have gotten there about the time the monsoons started.

Wisecup: They'd just started. It rained a little bit every day; it was just beginning. But we got our tents up and all that stuff and got the place ready. And then after we did that, oh, Jesus, it started coming down!

Marcello: Describe what it was like to work in the monsoons. In other words, first of all, just describe the monsoons themselves.

Wisecup: It rains constantly. You're wet all the time. Your tent is wet; your bunk is wet; your clothes are wet; your feet's wet. You're falling down; you're slipping. You're muddy; you're dirty. You've got body lice that you can't get rid of, and you've got bamboo lice (you've heard about them, of

course). My fondest...I'm not going to say fondest because that's wrong (chuckle). The strongest memory I can remember is guys sitting around a fire that's smoking, because it's raining, and they're trying to keep that fire going at night because they can't sleep. They're scratching and fighting them bugs. Everybody had them. Nobody got no sleep, and you're in the mud constantly.

After that cholera hit and the guys started getting dysentery right away, nobody made it to the latrine. They just walked outside of the tent, if they could make it, and they crapped there. In the morning, the camp area looked like a pigpen. It looked like where the ducks had been. One guy's job was to cover that up. All day long, he brought ashes around, covering up them droppings. It was filthy. The Nips, when they came down to call out a working party, would never come in the camp. They stood outside and hollered down because it was that filthy in there.

Marcello: You mentioned that this camp consisted of tents.

Wisecup: Well, yes. They were old and just the regular British Army type of tent.

Marcello: Now that's kind of different compared to those working on the other end of the railroad where they had the atap huts.

Wisecup: Huts, yes. The huts were better.

Marcello: How many people would be in each one of these tents?

Wisecup: About twenty.

Marcello: And were all of the Americans together?

Wisecup: Yes, we stayed together pretty good. We didn't have to-- and sometimes, you know, you'd get off--but we stayed together pretty good.

Marcello: Okay, now I assume that by the time you got to Hintok, not only had the monsoons begun, but the so-called "Speedo" period began when they were behind on the railroad.

Wisecup: Okay, describe, first of all, the disposition of the Japanese once that "Speedo" period started.

Wisecup: Well, belligerent. Well, you know, they got the hell kicked out of them if they didn't produce. They had a dateline for that stuff to go through, and they worked you over real bad up there. There's plenty of guys that got almost beat to death up there. Gordon, when his shoulder went out of place, instead of helping him, they beat the hell out of him. Guys was falling off of the damned...when we first put those up-rights for the bridge up, we had guys fall and get hurt. Quite a few guys fell off of it; it was pretty high.

Marcello: Where do you run into the Korean guards first?

Wisecup: There.

Marcello: Okay, describe what the Koreans were like.

Wisecup: Oh, Christ, they were "on the muscle" all the time. The Koreans were like slaves, anyhow, and the ones you had up there were the bottom of the barrel.

Marcello: How did their treatment of the prisoners compare with that

dealt out by the Japanese?

Wisecup: Oh, hell, they were much harder, much tougher, a whole lot crueler.

Marcello: Can you give me some specifics?

Wisecup: Let me give you one specific. We used to have working parties that would go from Hintok to the river to pick up supplies two or three times a week. We'd have an officer in charge. We had a British officer one time that I never will forget. Well, there was another camp down from us where they had quite a few British. We'd only have one guard with us. Nobody's going to escape; there ain't no place to go, anyhow, in the jungle. He'd lag along behind us, or he'd go way ahead. So the British officer is with us--about six of us. Halfway there he told me, "Look, I'm going to piss off, mate, and go down there and see some of my friends at this other camp. When you come back, I'll meet you at such-and-such a time halfway here." There was like a cutting in the jungle, and this would be about the halfway mark. It was about four miles into the jungle between the river where we were going to get the supplies. I said, "Okay."

We're going down to the river, and we were loading up to come back, and the Korean started to ask us where the officer was. I said, "Oh, benjo!" In other words I said that he had to stop to take a crap. The Korean asked if he was sick, and I said that he was. So that satisfied him.

So we get up to the cut, and we're walking slow to give him a chance to get up there, and he wasn't there. So that Korean started raising hell and wants to know where he is. I said, "Well, he stopped here somewhere." Directly, here he comes. So the Korean starts asking where he was. Well, this stupid bastard, instead of using a little couth and saying he was out in the jungle sick, you know, and had to take a crap and all, he told him where he went. Man, that guy beat him to pieces. This was a big Korean; he weighed about 165 or 170 pounds. We were all in poor shape.

But we had no use for the limeys, anyhow. This was three Americans on this party. We didn't particularly like this officer. This shows you how callous you get when you're a prisoner. He beat that guy and kicked him, and we just stood back there and looked at him. As I can recall, there was no emotion whatsoever. It just shows you how you get when you're a prisoner. The guy asked for it in the first damn place. He was snotty. I often thought of that, you know, how you get under those conditions. But that's the worst beating I've ever seen. Oh, man, he beat him up.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the Koreans would even be cruel to animals and things like that.

Wisecup: Anything! Anything! They're like that even now. I've got a lot of dealings with them in Japan. I went over there a lot on a merchant ship, and the Japanese ain't even in it with

Koreans. They are just a vindictive, mean race of people. They are raised up hard; they're hard on one another. They don't spank their kids; they hit them on the head (laughter).

But this was just one example. When a Korean worked you over, he did his best to do you in. The first thing they do is kick you in the shins where you got the ulcers--the first place, man.

Marcello: Describe the kind of work that you were doing here at Hintock during the "Speedo" period.

Wisecup: Well, when we first got there, we had to lay the groundwork for the bridge. We had to do the drilling. We'd drill out holes and blast so they could put the piling down. That's with the first job I had--Gordon and Stevens and I.

Marcello: Who did the drilling and the blasting?

Wisecup: They did the blasting, but we did the drilling.

Marcello: Okay, describe the bridge building process here at Hintok.

Wisecup: Well, first, we had to get this foundation down. You got bedrock down there, and we'd drill out this place where they could put the original piling down and your cement and what-have-you. When we got that down, you had crews in the jungle --I worked up in there, too--and they cut down the green teak and hauled it down there. You'd just hook up there almost like in a harness and pull it out of the jungle. Then it was cut to size down there, which we did all with all hand tools. At that time, we had no mechanical stuff

at all. Our winches were all hand-operated pulleys. All this was hoisted up by hand-operated pulleys. I never will forget.

Marcello: Describe the pile driving.

Wisecup: There was no pile driving because there was no water. I was going to tell you one funny thing. We had this winch--an old hand winch just like you got on a ship, except we called them "donkey engines" and they were run by steam. You've got one guy on this side and one on the other; you've got your cable and you've got your log. Your timber would have been about twenty feet long. They hoisted it up to the second stage out there. Me and another guy worked all day on this. And they had a Nip up on the top (a Korean), and everytime we would hoist one up--every second or third one--he didn't like the way we'd hoist it. So he'd come all the way down that ladder, walk over, take a couple of punches at us, and then go back up there (chuckle). I used to tell him, "Here he comes, mate." He'd say, "He'll be out of gas by the time he gets here. Don't worry." (laughter) He would, too. He'd be all out of breath. He'd yell and then he'd go back up there.

Marcello: Describe what kind of a bridge you were building here at Hintok. You had told me this off the record, but let's get this on the record.

Wisecup: Come here and let me show you.

Marcello: Okay. What you are going to describe to me now is something that you're drawing on a pad. Go ahead and describe what you're drawing.

Wisecup: Okay. Here's the top of your bridge here. You ain't got no tracks up here yet. Say this is the top. This is the cutting. This is Hell Fire Pass. This is where the Australians had drilled through the side of the mountains about eight or nine hundred yards.

Marcello: Is this called Hell Fire Pass?

Wisecup: Yes. This is Hintok Bridge. It's about a quarter-of-a-mile long. Okay, you'd take these timbers like this (gesture), and they would be maybe sixty to seventy feet high.

Marcello: And they're extending from the bottom of the bridge down to the ground below.

Wisecup: Here's your ground. This is bedrock. This is what we drilled out--these holes--to put these piles in. What you had was actually two sets. You had a log here and a log here, and they were attached to this one here (gestures).

Marcello: In other words, halfway up you had more timbers to act as bracing.

Wisecup: Right. That's right. Here's the way she looked (gestures).

Marcello: So we've got two tiers, in essence, right now.

Wisecup: Right. And here you got these, too--braces this way and braces that way (gesture).

Marcello: And you have diagonal braces, also.

Wisecup: Right. All this is green teak. Then your road bed is up here (gesture). It ran at an angle. It was in a circle, crossed this low spot, and there's another mountain over here (gesture). This is where the Aussies worked, and this was Hell Fire Pass over here (gestures). We built this bridge like that. You've got mountains around there full of this green timber, which we cut and hauled down.

Marcello: Are you actually building this bridge around the mountain?

Wisecup: No, it's between these two. It's in a gully.

Marcello: I see. Okay, it's in a gully.

Wisecup: Actually, we would call it a trestle back here.

Marcello: And how long did it take you to construct that?

Wisecup: Well, we got up there in--when--May? We were finished in October, November--somewhere around there--and went back to Kanchanaburi. I worked a little on the Kvae River bridge after we got to Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: And this would be 1943.

Wisecup: Yes. I think we finished in about five months.

Marcello: So you spent the lot of time working on that bridge.

Wisecup: Well, part of it. I didn't work the whole time. I got them ulcers on my feet and legs, and then I got beriberi and couldn't really walk that seven miles out there. So they put me on light duty burying these guys that were dying of cholera. We were burying about fifteen, sixteen, seventeen a day. We dug one big hole and put them all in

there. It was me and another guy. His hand was almost rotted off with an ulcer. I never will forget that. The two of us were doing this.

Then just about three weeks before they were slacking off on the bridge, they came and got me again, and I went out there because there was only about thirty guys able to work by now. When I got out there at first, because I couldn't walk they had me cutting wood and making tea. Everybody drank tea all day.

These guys didn't know how to use an ax up there. By this time, they're putting these braces in the side, and the Nips want them squared off. They want them hewed square. Now these limeys, most of them, ain't never seen an ax except some headman in a movie cutting off somebody's head. So they're trying to square these things off, and they don't put no notch in. They come down on a log like that (gesture), and the axes glance off and hit them in the shins and damn near cut them off. That happened to three or four of them.

One of them Nips came up, and I'm making the tea. He kicked me in the leg, grunts, and gives me the ax. He figures he's going to have some fun with me, I guess. So he tells me he wants this squared away. I've done this before. I notched it, and he's watching. I notched it, and then I squared it on one side. I notched the other side and hewed it. I did that to two, and he said, "Yasumi! Yasumi!"

He goes and gets me a cup of tea and gives me a cigarette, because I was the only one who knew how to do this. The rest of them were killing themselves (laughter). Finally, he brings the sergeant to show him me doing this, see. That's the easiest job I had that last three weeks on that bridge.

Marcello: Let me back up here because you said some things that I wanted to get some more specifics on. Normally, what kind of a workday would one be putting in on this bridge, assuming that he were healthy?

Wisecup: That you're working on a bridge?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: Okay, for your regular workday, you get up before daylight, and you get your chow. When you ate, they gave you enough for breakfast, and they gave you enough--allegedly--for your meal out there. But it never was enough.

Marcello: What would chow consist of here?

Wisecup: Rice, salted and dried fish, some kind of dried seaweed.

Marcello: How much are you getting?

Wisecup: Not a hell of a lot. You tried to get your whole mess kit full. I had a Dutch mess kit that was about that big (gesture). I tried to get that full, but it was usually half-full.

Marcello: In other words, the Dutch mess kit was maybe about the size of a G.I. canteen cup?

Wisecup: Yes. Maybe a little bit bigger. But you never got it full. Usually, you'd eat the whole bastard for breakfast. Then

you were hungry (chuckle). Anyhow, it's dark, and by the time you got out there to the bridge, it's daylight.

Marcello: And you mentioned a moment ago that the bridge is about seven miles from the camp.

Wisecup: Almost.

Marcello: Is there a road going from the camp out to the bridge?

Wisecup: A path-like.

Marcello: You mentioned this off the record, but let's get it on the record. Why was it that they put the camp so far away from the bridge?

Wisecup: Because they had running water in that area. That was the nearest spot. There was none by the bridge. See, they had to have water for the camp facilities. That's the closest fresh water they had running. They used it for bathing, cooking, and everything else. It was a creek running down.

Marcello: Okay, how long would you stay out on the job then?

Wisecup: We'd stay until dark. Sometimes it was way after dark. Christ, you put in...from the time you got up in the morning, which is about 4:30, 5:00, and you got back at night, it'd be 6:00 or 7:00, something like that. Of course, there was a shorter way you could go, but you had to climb straight up--over the mountains. We used to take this path around it.

Marcello: Obviously, from what you said awhile ago, this is where the

health of the prisoners began to break down. You mentioned that in your case, among other things, you got tropical ulcers. Describe how you got them.

Wisecup: How I got them?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: Well, the first one I got...my shoes gave out about the second week I'm up there. Okay, so I'm working barefooted, which I'm used to. Anyhow, you're working down there and swinging the maul; and you got your bits, and you twist them like that (gesture). Well, the top of the bits, when you're hitting them, they get barbed.

Marcello: This is interesting. So when you were mentioning drilling awhile ago, this is hand drilling that you're doing.

Wisecup: That's right. I'll show you. We had three drills. You had a short one which you started with, which was about a foot long. Then you had one about two feet, and then you had one about three feet. Anyhow, they'd be barbed like this at the top after being hit. We also had a star drill. Here's your hole (gesture). One guy would squat down here and twist it, and then you'd pour a little water in. We'd have a bamboo container of water, and we'd pour it in to keep the dust from flying as you're twisting. Then you're swinging the maul up there.

The way I got my first ulcer was from rocks and chips flying around out here. The Nips never did say nothing about

when they'd fire the hole like they do on a construction site. They'd just shoot. So some of it flew over and hit me in the leg.

Marcello: This is when they blasted?

Wisecup: Yes. So it knocked the hide off of this leg. That started that one. I thought that it was going to heal up. But up in the jungle, nothing heals up that fast. Even now, it won't--if you go up there now. It's just so hot and festering. That started the one on the leg.

Then I told you about working on this winch. I'm working out there one day, and I got beriberi by now. My legs are about this big around (gesture).

Marcello: In other words, it swelled up.

Wisecup: Yes. With beriberi you got water, you know. So I got a blister on the top of my foot because you got a lot of water in your leg and in your feet. My legs and feet were like that (gesture), and then a blister popped up on my foot. Well, I popped the blister, and I took some grease off of the winch to put on top of it. That was the beginning of that son-of-a-bitch. Later on, I used to put mud on it everyday. That's the best thing to put on them. I'd put mud on it and cover it. Then at the end of the day, I'd pull the mud off and clean it. That was the first way I got them.

Marcello: Okay, now describe what those tropical ulcers were like.

Wisecup: Well, them bastards, once they get started...I seen guys... within a week's time, Christ, they can cover six or eight inches on your shin and expose the shin. It'd be gone that quick. I was lucky.

Marcello: So it's actually decayed flesh.

Wisecup: That's what it is. You could smell it. It rots. Then the maggots will get in them, too. You got to watch the flies, you know. They lay eggs on there, and the maggots hatch.

Marcello: Some people actually put maggots on those things, did they not, to clean them out?

Wisecup: Yes, but that was under medical supervision when you had a fairly decent camp up there, like, where they had your doctors, you know, where they could watch it, because you got to take them off right away. The maggot will go in and get behind the bone, if you don't watch it. I've seen guys die with that. Geez, boy, that would stink. Jesus Christ, it smelled terrible!

Marcello: And, of course, there's a lot of pain, too.

Wisecup: Oh, yes, they're painful.

Marcello: What happens if you just inadvertently knock one of those ulcers against something hard, a hard surface?

Wisecup: Right away, that's where the Nips kicked you--right in them goddamned ulcers. I was lucky. I had them, but this one here never got no bigger...

Marcello: You're pointing to one on your ankle.

Wisecup: No, this one here. That's a scar. It never got any bigger than that, but my leg was puffed up this way (gesture). I was lucky. This is a scar (gesture). Then I got other scars over here, small ones, and I got them all over my feet (gestures). But these went clean to the bone. I was lucky. I got out of the jungle and got down to Kanchanaburi. It took a year for them bastards to heal up. I was back in Changi before they healed.

Marcello: When you initially got them, how did you go about trying to treat them?

Wisecup: Well, the only thing you could do is cover them with mud during the day, and at night you could sometimes make a solution of hot water and salt and pour on it. You never had any bandages or nothing to put on the son-of-a-bitches, so you'd have to doctor them the best you could. We had no medical treatment up there.

Marcello: Did you have any medical people where you were?

Wisecup: Yes, but they had nothing to work with.

Marcello: In other words, I'm gathering that the medical people at Hintok did not use the sharpened spoon to dig out that dead flesh.

Wisecup: Not until we got to Kanchanaburi. I helped on that. I was in the hospital ward. I used to help haul them out there between the huts, and that's where they did it--me

and another guy named "Paddy" Grubb. I never will forget it. They'd give them chloroform, scrape them out. They'd have a bucket there to scrape that stuff into.

You know, I can still smell them huts. When you first go in, it's overpowering. Maybe a hundred guys have ulcers rotting away. But after you're in there a day or two, you become calloused to it, and you don't pay no attention. You sit down and eat your chow, and it don't even bother you. You know who died, and you'd get his chow. That's how you get after a while. But now, if I smelled something like that, it would make me deathly sick. But I was lucky with them ulcers, I'm going to tell you. I was lucky.

Marcello: I'm sure that they probably struck terror in your heart when you got them, because you knew what they could do.

Wisecup: No. I don't know. You just didn't dwell on things like that. You were so busy trying to get something to eat and thinking about a cigarette and rest. You was worn out all the time. You couldn't sleep at night when you got back to camp because the damned rain was coming in. And you were scratching the lice. You never had time to worry. Now some guys did, and they didn't last too long. I seen guys die when they had nothing wrong with them. I swear.

Marcello: Are you referring to people who gave up?

Wisecup: They just gave up.

Marcello: How could you tell when a person had given up?

Wisecup: Hell, he wouldn't eat. They just flat-ass had no interest in nothing no more. They'd tell you, "I'm finished. I'm gone." Well, you didn't worry about him. That was his business.

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

Wisecup: Slap them around or something like that. Make fun of them. That was the best way, to ridicule the guy.

Marcello: Try and get him angry?

Wisecup: Oh, Christ, yes. Curse him, call him all kinds of names. That's the best way. Really, it's the old Prussian system, you know. Really, it works. If anything's going to work, that will do it. What you got to do is make a guy mad. As long as he's feeling sorry for himself, he's dead. He's finished. Well, it's the same way in everyday life. When you start feeling sorry for yourself, you've had it. You see them at the bar everyday, right? Some guys go to enjoy themselves; the other guy goes to grieve. Well, up there, of course, you still had to be lucky. Don't get me wrong. I don't care how strong you was or what you did, you had to have luck. Because cholera hit anybody, and you're dead in about two days. You'd dehydrate, is what happened.

Marcello: You mentioned that you also had beriberi here at this camp.

Wisecup: Yes, my legs was like that (gesture).

Marcello: In other words, you had the wet beriberi, is that correct?

Wisecup: Yes. That's what make the ulcers; they won't heal. Nothing

heals when you got beriberi.

Marcello: Is there anything you can do to get rid of it?

Wisecup: Not while you're up there, because you ain't getting the right food. You're getting rice, but you're not getting enough vegetables and greens to go with it to combat that water.

Marcello: You mentioned cholera here. Describe the cholera epidemic that you had at Hintok.

Wisecup: Well, it hit about--I don't know--three weeks after we got there. The first cholera case, I helped carry him off. The Aussies...he was up working on Hell Fire Pass. Around 2:00 in the afternoon, they came down and said, "Does one of you guys want to help carry a sick Aussie back?" I said, "I'll do it." So I get over there, and I think there was six of us. Two would spell the others. We went right up over the mountain, and this guy was groaning and puking and shitting--just water. That's the one that started it.

Then it hit us, and we started losing about sixteen, seventeen guys a day or something like that. I mean, boy, they were all over. We'd find them laying out there outside the tents. So me and this other guy had to pick them up. They got me at first. After my legs got bad and I couldn't get out there, they put me on that. At first we made individual graves, and then there were so many of them that we just couldn't keep up with it.

There was a little Irishman out of Dublin--very religious--and I never will forget that. "Hey, 'Paddy,'" I said, "we can't make individual graves." He said, "What are you going to do, lad?" I said, "Just dig one big hole. It'll take us all morning to dig a hole about ten feet square, and we'll throw them in there." And he was religious. He says, "Oh, mate, that's sacrilegious." I said, "Yeah, but we ain't going to be able to do it!" So he finally agreed that we'd do that, and then we'd throw them in there.

I never will forget one rainy morning. They got these bamboo shoots that grow up overnight. And here we are. I'm barefooted, and "Paddy" had some shoes. The path out into the jungle was about six, seven, eight inches deep of mud, and I'm walking along, you know. I'm in the front; "Paddy" is in the back. We don't have the "stiff" head first; we got him with his feet toward me (chuckle). I ain't got no ass left in my britches, and I'm walking along, and I'm miserable, and the lice are eating me, and his feet kept hitting me (chuckle). I never will forget. Jesus Christ, I start cursing. I never will forget this. I never will forget this to the end of my days. I stopped and turned around, grabbed hold of the stretcher, and threw the whole bunch into the jungle. I said, "Leave that son-of-a-bitch over there!" So "Paddy" says, "John!" I said, "What!" He says, "We can't do that, lad. No good will come of it."

He says, "You can't blaspheme the dead." I says, "Goddamnit, he's out of the son-of-a-bitch! Leave that bastard laying over there!" In a few minutes, I cooled down and went and got him. I can remember that just so plain--them cold feet hitting me in the ass. I was thinking, "Look at him!" He's out of it! He ain't got to put up with this shit no more!" Now this is how you get.

Marcello: When you bury them, you bury them naked, I assume, because somebody else can use the clothing, if they had any.

Wisecup: Well, we used what clothing was worth taking off of them. Usually, they were stripped before we got to them (chuckle).

Marcello: At this stage, I'm going to turn over the tape. [Tape turned over] What kind of records were being kept for these people who had died?

Wisecup: As far as I'm concerned, I think the British were...even under those conditions, I think they were keeping some kind of records.

Marcello: Were there any kind of graveside services or anything of that nature?

Wisecup: No. We had no time for that.

Marcello: I would assume, given the condition you were in, it was pretty hard to dig a grave.

Wisecup: I was real strong. I was hurt, but I was still strong. I didn't have dysentery anymore, and I could still eat like a horse, whenever I got anything. When we'd go on these

working parties down to the river, we used to get some dried fish. It looked like shark. This was for the Nips. It was about this long (gesture).

Marcello: About three feet long?

Wisecup: Yes, and they had a thick skin, just grey skin like a shark. The meat was oily, but it was beautiful! Sometimes I'd eat it raw. But we would bring this back in sacks. Well, en route through the jungle, we would stash some of it under logs. Then the next day we'd sneak back, or at night, and get it. By this time the maggots had gotten to it. Then we'd get back to camp, build a big fire, and you'd beat the damned fish, and maggots would fly like salt and snow. Then we'd boil it up and eat it. It was oily, but, Jesus, that was good (chuckle). I could eat anything.

But I was still strong. As long as you didn't have dysentery or that stuff...and malaria, I didn't get it. Luckily, all the time I was there, I never got malaria. I didn't get malaria until I got back to Changi, of all places.

Marcello: I guess that under these circumstances, you have to be careful all the time. In other words, you can't let up on your guard, not even once. For instance, you've got to boil all the water. Take one sip of unboiled water and...

Wisecup: You're finished.

Marcello: ...you're finished. If you get a nick in your leg, you'd better take care of it the best you can.

Wisecup: Yes, the best you can.

Marcello: In other words, you're living on the edge all the time.

Wisecup: That's right. One scratch...even now, you know, if you go up in that jungle during the rainy season...well, in the heat, see, all kind of germs multiply.

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that I want to follow up on because another prisoner mentioned the same thing. It may have occurred here, or maybe it occurred up in Kanchanaburi when you were up there. You mentioned that sometimes when people died, you wouldn't report their death right away because you could get their chow.

Wisecup: You could get their chow, yes. We'd do it all the time. Sometimes you wouldn't let them know for a couple of days because you couldn't smell them in that ward because of all that rotten flesh from ulcers and stench from dysentery. You never noticed the dead guys.

Marcello: Where does this take place?

Wisecup: In Kanchanaburi we did that--me and "Paddy" Grubb. He was a Britisher, and he'd been in the Argyll Regiment. He's living in New Zealand now.

Marcello: But, again, it shows you how calloused you get.

Wisecup: You've got to eat (chuckle). But under these conditions... you know, you look back now, and you think about what a foul place that was. Holy Christ! There was only two of us taking care of about seventy or eighty ulcer cases in there.

Now what you did, you had your urine bottles; we had them made out of sections of bamboo. Also, you had your shit pan made out of cut bamboo. We had to help them--hold them up. One guy had ulcers on his buttocks, so the maggots would get into it. Well, they got all the way in and around. They had to operate on him, and they cut off half of this poor bastard's buttocks. You could see all the ligaments and everything. Well, he had to lay on his belly. Well, it got gangrenous. We used to hold that bastard up to take a crap, you know. Man, he died horribly. That poor son-of-a-bitch! I never will forget that. Boy, let me tell you, that's a hard way to go, with them ulcers. There ain't no worse way. Just before you die, two or three days before, that gangrene affects your mind and everything else, you know.

Marcello: I'm assuming that people went to the sickbay to die. You wanted to stay out of there.

Wisecup: Yes, if you went in there, you was finished. In Hintok there was no sickbay, but you had a tent where you put people who was sick. Usually, when they went in there, that was it. Crayton Gordon was in there.

Marcello: Suppose the Japanese didn't have a quota for their work details. How did they make up the difference?

Wisecup: Well, they wouldn't come down into that camp unless they absolutely had to; and if they couldn't make up the quota,

they'd start beating on people. They'd beat on the sergeant and what-have-you that was in charge, and they'd come down there and drag somebody out of there, sick or not. They had to have them. But only under those conditions would they come into that camp.

Marcello: What happened to the rations of the people who were too sick to go on the job?

Wisecup: Well, the people who were sick didn't get any rations. That was understood. If you didn't work, you didn't eat.

Marcello: So in other words, what that meant was...

Wisecup: The people that got sick...if somebody didn't bring them food...if you didn't have somebody to bring you food, you were in trouble. And there's very little that they got. I'm going to tell you that right now. They had to go around scrounging. If the guy was so sick that he couldn't get out of that hut, he was in bad shape.

Marcello: You mentioned way back at the beginning of the interview how you had to look out for number one, and I suppose that to a great extent that's true. But is it not true that once you get up under these circumstances, on many occasions you did have two or three people who would kind of buddy together and share things and look out for one another?

Wisecup: Yes, to a certain extent.

Marcello: How important was that sort of a system or organization?

Wisecup: Well, I look back now and say, "Well, some guys are loners."

There's always somebody like that. We all stuck together. I wouldn't say we were real tight. That group that we had up there at Hintok had no officer, like I told you, and we had no senior NCO. We had nothing. We stuck together pretty good, and we helped one another fairly well. If there was any trouble or anything, we all ganged together. Nobody beat up on an American or anything like that.

Marcello: There's something else that I'd like to have your comments on. I've heard it said that on occasion a person who had given up and died was looked on with disgust. In other words, the feeling sometimes was, "Well, he took the easy way out, and now we've got to take up the slack. We have to do his work, too."

Wisecup: I never thought of that. Like I was telling you, when somebody would do that, sort of given up, we'd start cursing them and giving them a bad time. But what you just said, as far as looking down on him...like me, when I threw that guy out in the weeds, I didn't look down on him. I just thought, "Hell, he's out of it. He's lucky." That's how I felt when those things would happen. But I don't think we looked down on anybody that gave up. I look back now, and I can say that. Like, Dupler quit. And there was three or four up there, Joe Lusk was another. They were some of the biggest, strongest guys. They should have never died. There's no way to explain it--why they did this. They just

lost the will to live, you know. Me, I don't know. I was always an optimist to some extent. I always looked at it like: "Well, things are going to get better." It never has, but...(laughter)

No, really, I believe it's something you're born with. It's there regardless of what the conditions are. We had them on the ship before we were sunk. You had these kind of guys that you didn't want to talk to. I got away from them! They'd say, "Man, we can't make it out of this." I'd walk away from these kinds of people; I didn't even want to hear this. Oh, I knew it was true, probably, but, still, I didn't want to hear it.

But what you were talking about, as far as despising anybody out there, I don't think it came to that. You were so goddamned preoccupied with getting something to eat and surviving that you didn't think about these things. As far as sticking together, we must have stuck pretty good up there because we were the only Americans. Christ, there were six hundred originally of all these different nationalities, mostly British. You can't say we were buddy-buddy or anything like that, but we helped out pretty good.

Marcello: The thirteen Americans who went into Hintok, how many came out once the bridge was finished?

Wisecup: Three died. That's all. And the last one died at Kanchanaburi, I think. One died in Hintok, and the other one died

at Tarsau on the way down. The other kid died...we tried like a son-of-a-bitch to keep him going. But I can't remember their names now. Gordon would know them. He knows all of that.

Marcello: Well, I think they're in the roster, too. I think it indicates where they died.

Wisecup: They are listed there, yes.

Marcello: What was the state of your clothing here at Hintok?

Wisecup: Oh, Christ, rotting off.

Marcello: Are you down to a G-string?

Wisecup: No, I didn't get to a G-string. I still had them old khakis with a hole in the ass. I had no shoes, no shirt.

Marcello: You mentioned the hole in the butt. I guess I didn't catch that story earlier in the interview.

Wisecup: Yes, that's when I was carrying that guy, you know, and his cold feet kept hitting me in the tail. I'm carrying him down there, and I'm stepping on these bamboo shoots and getting bloody. And them cold feet! I should have had him around with his head there. Goddamn (laughter)!

Marcello: Did the Japanese pay you any wages?

Wisecup: Yes. But as I remember, we didn't get it up there. I think we got it at Kanchanaburi. I forget how much it was.

Marcello: What opportunities were there to trade with natives and so on here at Hintok?

Wisecup: At the river, some of the guys did. I never did.

Marcello: Did you have any ways of supplementing your food? You mentioned stealing the shark meat and things like that. Was it mainly a matter of stealing?

Wisecup: Yes, that's the only way--stealing off the Nips whatever they had up there. There wasn't nothing else. At the river, some of the guys got down there and worked some black market activity. I don't know. They got tobacco and different things. Hintok was the pits. There just wasn't no way to make it up there. You just wanted to get it over with and get the hell out of there.

Marcello: How long were you there altogether?

Wisecup: I'm trying to remember. We went up there in May and left there in October or something like that.

Marcello: And then did you go from there to Kanchanaburi?

Wisecup: Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: How did you get from one camp to another?

Wisecup: Well, we went down to Tarsau. We went someplace down the river. We went to the same place where we used to get the supplies on the river, and we loaded onto some barges. But we were down there about two weeks waiting for them things. Then they brought us to some little place where the railroad ran next to the river. They put us on there, and we went to Tarsau. We stayed overnight in Tarsau, and the next day they put us on these flatcars--regular the flatcars--and it took a day-and-a-half or something like that to get to

Kanchanaburi--in the rain.

Marcello: Like you pointed out, things were not so crowded this time.

Wisecup: No, they weren't. We had plenty of room. All we had to do is keep from worrying about falling off in that flatcar.

Marcello: Okay, Kanchanaburi must have looked like a great place compared to where you'd come from.

Wisecup: It did. Oh, it looked like the big city.

Marcello: Okay, describe what Kanchanaburi was like from a physical standpoint.

Wisecup: Well, the size and all of it...Christ, I don't know. Geez, I don't know how many men were in there. There were not a hell of a lot of Americans. It was just us that came down at that time. I've heard it estimated all the way from 7,000 to ten. I've seen pictures of the damned place. It had the regular atap huts, and each was about a hundred yards long. They were right next to the railroad. They had a Tamil camp next to it. You had your two Kwaie River bridges not far from there. They asked for people to work on there. They came in and got the fittest. I worked down there a few days. I guess I got about three weeks on that Kwaie River bridge. Then mainly I worked after that in the ulcer ward. They had me hauling them in and out to get operated on.

Marcello: Okay, let me just follow up on a couple of your comments. Describe what the atap huts were like on the inside.

Wisecup: You had your walkway down the middle--say about six feet

wide--and then you had sloping bamboo shelves. You had mats on them, if you were lucky. You could get hold of them regular bamboo mats.

Marcello: And these bamboo shelves or platforms were where you slept?

Wisecup: Yes.

Marcello: About how much room would each person have?

Wisecup: Oh, you had about six inches or something like that.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were working on the bridges. Describe what kind of bridges we're talking about.

Wisecup: You mean there?

Marcello: Yes.

Wisecup: We had two. There were two Kwae River bridges. The one I worked on was the regular one like you see, you know, in those pictures. Anyhow, we was getting in on the last end of it. I don't know if Gordon...I think Gordon worked on it, too. Anyhow, when we first got there, we got the "walking wounded" to go out there because they were finishing up. That was a real "speedo" job. Boy, those Nips would knock the shit out of you. They already had the rails and all up on it.

Marcello: Which bridge was there first? The concrete and steel one or the bamboo one?

Wisecup: The other one that...it didn't even have any uprights. Let me see, I got a picture of it. We did not pour any of that concrete--the one I was working on there, the railroad bridge.

You already had your concrete and all that up, so we get in on the last part where they were putting up the braces and side stays. They were bringing in ties--they called them "sleepers"--and stuff. But they were in a hurry to finish it. Boy, they were really tough on us. You had to be careful. You'd get the hell kicked out of you quick over there.

Marcello: So the bamboo bridge was there first, and then the concrete and steel one was the second one?

Wisecup: As far as I know, yes. We got in on the end of all of that. They were winding down. When we left Hintok, they already had trains going over there. I never will forget the first train that went across it. I thought, "That bastard's going to fall down!" (laughter)

Marcello: So you actually traveled across that bridge that you built?

Wisecup: No, we went down to the river, and we never went across that one.

Marcello: I'm assuming that they could not have worked the prisoners too hard for too long here at Kanchanaburi because they'd gotten just about everything out of those guys that they possibly could have.

Wisecup: Almost.

Marcello: So is there a certain amount of rest and recuperation that takes place here?

Wisecup: Well, a lot of guys weren't working there because you had

mostly the sick, who were waiting transportation back down south, see. Like you said, most everybody was whipped when they got there. But, like, me and "Paddy" Grubb and Gordon and them guys, we were the walking wounded, and they could still get a little work out of us. And they got that. They'd come around there and want a certain amount of guys to go out--stuff like that. They did have quite a bit of what we would call "rest" there. They used to have lectures. Some of the guys would give lectures. We had a guy that had climbed Mount Everest with Sir So-and-so. What's his name? The first guy...

Marcello: Hillery?

Wisecup: Hillery, yes. We had a guy that had been with him--one of the officers. Another guy had spent many years in Afghanistan, and he'd also been up fighting on the Northwest Frontier. There was some real interesting lectures and stuff that used to go on in there. When I was in the hospital ward especially, they'd come in and have these for the guys, you know, and I got to listen to them. I wish I'd had a tape recorder. One of the officers had been one of your top polo players--one of the top three. You know, some of these guys had really been around. It's something you can remember, something worthwhile listening to.

Marcello: What was the food situation like here at Kanchanaburi?

Wisecup: Well, it was a hell of a lot better than at Hintok. We

could get around and hustle up something to eat because they had a black market going in there. See, the Thais were coming in and out. We went out on working parties, you know, burial working parties and stuff. You could always hustle up some duck eggs.

Marcello: What did you have to trade?

Wisecup: Well, in there we were getting anything...like, some of the officers had jewelry, watches; somebody had a fountain pen. Ronson lighters were good trading material. One trading thing was flint for lighters. Well, we used to go cut barbed wire with a wire cutter--the same size as a flint--and sell them. They didn't have a lighter with them to try it on (laughter), so we'd trade that. All kinds of deals. If you had a newspaper, it was barter material. You'd make cigarette papers out of it--make fifty and sell them, trade them, you know. All kind of things that ain't worth a goddamn now was worth plenty then--a watch, a ring, any kind of jewelry. Some of the guys hung onto stuff that'll last, you know. You'd be surprised at the stuff that turns up at camp like when guys were coming down out of the jungle. Like I told you, a guy with us had them bagpipes, and he carried them all the way up to Hintok and brought them out. Another guy had a set of boxing gloves that he brought up there. He had trained fighters, and he had been a fighter. When we get back to Changi, we used to work out with them. He was

a Scotchman, a guy out of a Scotch regiment. You wonder how guys could hold on to that up in that goddamned place, but they did it. Some of the guys come out with complete diaries. Look at Ben Dunn. Well, I don't think Ben Dunn was ever in a situation like Hintok, but he did keep all of his notes.

Oh, on the black market thing, there was so many things that you could hustle, but rings, watches, and fountain pens were valuable. The Parker fountain pens had gold in them, I think. You would go out on working parties, and you'd get that stuff off somebody and go out there and get a bigger price than they got. The first thing you do when a guy had something, you'd say, "Well, what's on it? In other words, "How much do you want for it?" He says, "Well, I want fifteen dollars." Well, you tried to "jew" him, so you'd say, "Look, man, I ain't going to be able to get no more than ten dollars for this." Well, outside you might sell it for thirty, see (chuckle). We did that sort of thing.

Marcello: And then you would perhaps use that money to buy food or whatever.

Wisecup: Anything. Tobacco mostly or sugar and things like that, which was available in that neck of the woods. Fruit and things like that.

Marcello: You mentioned tobacco. Describe that so called "wog" tobacco.

Wisecup: We had all kinds of "wog," but the best was from Java. It was red. It had all kind of names.

Marcello: Describe the worst.

Wisecup: "Wogweed." They called it "Turk's Beard." "Granny's Armpit" (laughter) is what the Aussies used to call it. Listen, that stuff was...man, that would kill your appetite and probably could kill you (laughter)! You know what was at a premium? It was a Japanese paper. I think it was the Japan Times. It was made out of rice paper, and occasionally you could get a hold of a sheet of it. If you could get a hold of that, you had money. You'd cut that up and sell it for cigarette paper. Any kind of paper was used for cigarette paper, but you were going first class when you had the Japan Times (laughter)! No kidding, man.

Marcello: You mentioned previously in the interview that one of your tasks here at Kanchanaburi was to take care of the people in the sick hut. Describe how you got this job.

Wisecup: I don't know. They just came around. First, when I got up in there, they had us working on the bridge. Then I had a day off, I think, and I was trying to get some extra rations around there. "Paddy" Grubb, a British Columbian, came over, and he had been working in there. He liked Americans. He'd been on the international police force in Shanghai. So he says, "Do you want to work in here? You

get a little extra chow now and then." He didn't tell me how I'd get that extra chow, but I found out later. When somebody died, you got their chow. So I says, "Yeah." So I went inthere, and that's how I got in there.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like inside that sick hut.

Wisecup: Oh, terrible, man! It was all these guys down with leg ulcers. Some of them had their shin bones exposed; some of them had them on their arms. Some of them were fly-blown and full of maggots. We used to come and pick the maggots out everyday and couldn't get them all because they'd get back of the bone.

Every day or so they'd amputate somebody's leg or cut off an arm. We used to carry them outside. The operating table was between the huts, in the open. They were on just a stretcher on some boxes, and they'd chloroform the guy. We'd stand and hold him until he went out. Then they'd scrape these leg ulcers or cut off the leg or whatever they had to do, and then we'd haul him back in.

We used to take care of them, you know, bring their chow, try to clean them up. We never gave nobody a bath because there wasn't no water. The only way you got a bath in there was when it rained. Everybody went outside and got in the rain.

Marcello: What were the chances of an amputee surviving?

Wisecup: Some of them did, believe it or not, but it wasn't too good.

- Marcello: What kinds of instruments did they have to perform the amputations?
- Wisecup: Very primitive. I think they had scalpels and all that stuff. But as far as sawing the bone, they didn't have that regular surgical stuff. They used a regular hacksaw blade in most cases. Sometimes the chloroform that they used was very...it just didn't do the job right. Guys would still be half-awake. We'd have to hold them down when they'd come out of it. That is painful, too.
- Marcello: By this time, what is your own condition like?
- Wisecup: I was improving. My leg...the beriberi went down while I was there.
- Marcello: Was this because you had access to the duck eggs and things of that nature?
- Wisecup: I think so, yes. The ulcers weren't healing, but they weren't getting any bigger. They stayed. It took over a year for them mostly to heal. I'm still without shoes. They got some Red Cross supplies in there--American Red Cross supplies --but they didn't give them out to the Yanks. They gave them out to the British.
- Marcello: Up until this time had you been able to either send any mail or receive any mail?
- Wisecup: No, not until I got back to Changi. I think at Siam Road I sent some mail.
- Marcello: Now I do know that while some of the prisoners were at

Kanchanaburi, there were some air raids. Were you there when any of those took place?

Wisecup: No, not that I know of. They didn't come until later. This is the latter part of 1943. I don't think there were any raids yet.

Marcello: Do you have any way of knowing what's going on in the outside, especially in terms of the progress of the war?

Wisecup: Somebody had a radio, I think. They may have had two up there. They carried them up-country, and they carried them back down; and we used to get bits of news here and there. But by the time it got to you, it was either blown up out of proportion or watered down or what-have-you, according to the guy who told you.

Marcello: Incidentally, are you living within a certain timespan? In other words, I've heard some people say that they lived maybe three months at a time. In three more months, they were going to be free and this sort of thing.

Wisecup: I didn't do that. I didn't do that, but most of the guys did. They thought in those terms: "Well, so-and-so and so-and-so." It never got to me like that; I didn't think that way. I was too simple, I guess (chuckle).

Marcello: I also know that there were contingents taken out of this camp that were sent to Japan. What were your feelings at that time about going to Japan if that eventuality arose?

Wisecup: I don't think that when we were there they took any. I think

it was later on because I don't remember hearing anything while I was in Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: What were your thoughts about going to Japan?

Wisecup: Definitely not. I didn't want to go.

Marcello: Why was that?

Wisecup: Oh, man, you didn't have a chance to get up there. You know, we knew that much. We knew that a lot of ships were getting sunk. But while I was at Kanchanaburi, I never heard anything on that. It came later, I think.

Marcello: When was it that you left that camp?

Wisecup: It would have been in November.

Marcello: Of 1943?

Wisecup: In 1943. It might have been early December. We got up to Siam Road a few days before Christmas, sometime before Christmas.

Marcello: So in other words, you really weren't in Kanchanaburi too long.

Wisecup: No, not long.

Marcello: How did you get from there down to Changi again?

Wisecup: Train, the same way we come up. Only from Kanchanaburi to Banpong, we rode the flatcars. Then when we got down there, they stuck us back in them "tin cans" again, but they weren't crowded like before. It was a picnic going back down (chuckle) compared to coming up.

Marcello: So where do they put you when you get back down to Changi?

Wisecup: We don't go to Changi. We go to Siam Road.

Marcello: How far is that from Changi?

Wisecup: As far as I can tell, it's by the water plant. It's by these...let me see...it'd be on the northwest, I think. Well, the whole island ain't too big. I would say it was maybe five miles from Changi, I believe. Maybe it was a little more.

Marcello: What kind of work were you doing once you got there?

Wisecup: Well, they took us into town. They used to haul us into town, and the first job I had was loading boxcars with tin ingots. I'd unload them and put them on ships. Then they had a garden party out next to the sewage plant there, and we used to work in there. Those are the two jobs I had.

Marcello: How strenuous or easy was the work?

Wisecup: Oh, it wasn't all that hard. The garden parties was nothing; but when you were out there unloading them tin ingots, they were about eighty-five or ninety pounds, so they'd get pretty heavy.

Marcello: Had the pressure from the guards kind of eased off a little bit, though?

Wisecup: Yes, it ain't bad--not bad at all. Maybe it looked easy compared to Hintok.

Marcello: Are the Americans still together?

Wisecup: Yes. In fact, we had that bunch that went off on the truck maintenance group. They came in--Joe Bush, Fowler, all of

those. We met them. They got back to Siam Road first. They were all in good shape; they had ate pretty good up there.

Marcello: Describe what your living quarters were like here at Siam Road.

Wisecup: At Siam Road they had us in what had been an old garage. It was a tin hut--maybe this height (gesture)--with corrugated iron sloping down.

Marcello: In other words, maybe it was five feet high?

Wisecup: No, a little bit higher.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Wisecup: It had been a truck shed.

Marcello: It was about eight to ten feet high.

Wisecup: Every bit of that. It'd be twice this long (gesture).

Marcello: About thirty feet long.

Wisecup: Yes. We had one corner of it, and we had some Australians in the other corner. We had plenty of room there and plenty of water.

Marcello: How about bunks and things of that nature?

Wisecup: We made our own. You made your own stuff from whatever you could hustle up.

Marcello: What was the food like here?

Wisecup: Pretty good compared, you know, with what it would have been up-country. We start getting...we get quite a bit of rice, soybeans, fish--stuff like that.

Marcello: While you were here, did any air raids occur?

Wisecup: No, I can't remember any. That was not until we got back to Changi. That would have been in 1944--probably early in 1944 sometime.

Marcello: When you go back to Changi, where do they put you?

Wisecup: First, we went inside the jail. I don't know what deck we was on, but it was the regular cell block. Then I got on the detail that worked in the boiler room for the galley. They had a big boiler room down there. They took me, Ira Fowler, and, I think, Ray Robinson and another American. We were cutting wood for the fire in that boiler down there for the stoves over there. They had a huge galley in there, and we were on that party.

In fact, we had quarters over the boiler room. There were a couple of cells up there for us. That wasn't a bad setup. We were right next to the galley where we could get a little extra to eat. Then we stayed there...I don't know how many months that was, but finally they gave us a hut out in back of the prison. We had our own hut. The MPs were in one side of the hut; they had a partition. It was a regular atap hut with a wooden floor and all. It was pretty nice. They had bunks in it. We were on the left-hand side. This shack is mentioned in King Rat that James Clavell wrote about.

Marcello: Why is that? Why is it mentioned?

Wisecup: Well, that's where the Americans stayed. It was based about

...actually, the guy who...Corporal King in there is a composite of three people he wrote about. He says Corporal King, but actually it was three people he wrote that about. Actually, the book is based on a guy named Eddie MacArthur. Eddie MacArthur was a merchant seaman. He came into Changi before we went up-country. He had been on a merchant ship sunk in the south Atlantic by a German raider. German raiders sank about seven or eight down there, and they had a whole gang of prisoners, and they had to unload them somewhere. They couldn't get back past Britain. They couldn't get up that way, and they couldn't get to Germany, so they brought them to Singapore.

He came in there, and I never will forget. When he came in there all he had was a pair of dungarees, and that's all. He bummed some cigarettes off me, and then I went up-country. When I came back down, he's running the camp. He used to go through the wire.

Actually, the story was mainly about him, but it is a composite. It was three guys: Bob Martin, who was a boatswain off the Houston; Eddie MacArthur; and a guy named Carpenter. It's built around these three. You can see it in there. If you was there, you'd see it. If you've ever read the book or seen the picture, it shows this guy King. He had this locker--a footlocker--and in it he had cooking utensils, eggs, and all this. I got to watch that a couple

of times, and he'd give me a cigarette. He was in that hut. All three of them were in that hut. But these guys never left Changi; they stayed there.

Marcello: Were all of the Americans still together in this hut where you were staying?

Wisecup: That's right. I think we had two or three staying inside the prison, and they were carpenters. I think it was Frank Ficklin and a guy named Stewart. I think that's all. But the rest of us were living in that hut.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had a brief stay in Changi Jail.

Wisecup: I did about two weeks in there for stealing rice.

Marcello: For what?

Wisecup: For stealing rice on a working party.

Marcello: Do you want to describe this incident?

Wisecup: Yes. Hell, yes. They had this garden working party, and this was about four months before the war ended. I had never been on this working party, but I got on it. In the morning, when you went out, you had to go into the galley. You had about a gallon tin can that had holes in it. It was perforated. You'd get chips. We used to put chips in that, and we'd set that afire. We'd bring it out to the garden party, and we'd light up the fire out there and cook. So I didn't know nothing about this.

I'm on this garden party about two weeks, and one of the guys got sick, so they asked me to come in and chop wood.

So I'm chopping wood about two days. The cook, was a limey who had about twenty years in the army, and there was an American seaman who we used to call "Li'l Abner." His name was Powell. So they came and said, "Hey, John, do you want to eat some more rice tonight?" I said, "Definitely." He said, "We're going to have a cook-up." I says, "All right." He says, "But you've got to bring the rice in." I said, "What are you talking about?" He says, "Well, we've been bringing in about a quarter of a pound of rice every night, about two cups of it." I said, "Well, how are you getting it in?" Everybody was stealing it. You never had enough to eat on them working parties. I said, "How are you getting it in?" He said, "You see the chip can?" I says, "Yeah." He says, "We put it in the bottom of the chip can in a sock. We put the chips on the top. You got to bring the chips in." So I'm thinking about it. He says, "You're bringing it in, and we'll all go up and cook-up at night." I says, "How long have you been doing this?" He says, "Ever since we've been here." These bastards have been out there about a year. I used to wonder why they were so fat (chuckle)! I said, "Okay, I'll do it."

The second day we did it, they caught us. They knew that these two guys were responsible. When they had me up to talk to me, the major says, "I know that you're not responsible, but I know that you're in on this with somebody

else." I said, "No, no, no." He says, "One man can't eat all that rice." I said, "You want to bet?" I says, "Give me the rice, and I'll cook it, and I'll show you. He says, "Don't give me that. You're protecting two people." I says, "No, I ain't." So, anyhow, there's no trial or nothing, and I went up and I did the ten days. This sergeant especially was scared to death I was going to say something. This would have went on his record, and he would have been court-martialed when the war was over.

These guys had been doing this for over a year. But they weren't selling it; they were eating it. The two days that we had this feast, all it was was rice. We went up there, and we used to make charcoal stoves. You went in the little cell. It was supposed to be for one man. You could go in there, and you could close the door, and you'd set the stove on there with your rice, and you'd fan that. It didn't take long to cook it up. Well, if you got a couple of cups of rice, you had plenty. Well, all we could put on it was salt and pepper. We'd sit down there and eat it--just get full, you know.

Marcello: How did you get caught?

Wisecup: Going through the gate. You had your MPs that would shake us down. Somebody must have told them that we was in there.

Marcello: When you say your MPs and so on, are you referring to the British?

Wisecup: Yes. They had their own police inside the jail. They had their own brig--just like there was no war going on.

Marcello: Those British are something else!

Wisecup: And the worse part, they were the worst of the lot, see! These officers were the most rotten.

Marcello: So after you were caught, you were brought before British officers?

Wisecup: Right. I was tried by them.

Marcello: What was it like being place in Changi Jail then? In other words, were you on a certain prisoner's rations and this sort of thing?

Wisecup: Yes. They had an isolation cell. They had a regular cell block up on the top of the jail, and that's where I was. They had regular cells up there. I was up there, I think, twelve days.

While I was over there, fighter planes come over and strafed Changi. I never will forget--the second day I was there. You know these twin fuselage jobs?

Marcello: Yes, the P-38.

Wisecup: So we knew that the goddamned war was getting close to an end. I'm about half-dead. No kidding! I was hungry up there. They didn't give me much. So you could go down and work in the wood yard. I used to go down and cut wood every day--split logs. So I'm down there, and somebody says, "Man, lay down!" And, you know, WOOOSH! We look up, and,

Christ, here they come--about four of them. They ain't no more than about a hundred feet high, and they buzzed us. They didn't do no firing; they just came over past our area. I said, "Boy, it ain't going to be long."

When I got out of there...let me tell you this story. Okay, I get out. I do my time. I come out. When I had gone in, the merchant seaman, I had given him...I had about fifteen cigarettes, "wog" cigarettes, that I had in a pack, and I had them wrapped up. I said, "Hey, keep these for me for when I come out." He says, "Okay, John, you're a good man. You kept your mouth shut." I said, "Okay." So when I get out, I looked him up and said, "Where's my cigarettes?" He says, "John...." I said, "I know you smoked them, didn't you, you rotten bastard!" (laughter) I said, "Oh, man, you're all heart, ain't you?" But the guy, the limey, he was scared because he knew they were laying for him, and he would have got kicked out of the army and probably done time afterward.

But the ironic part of it is that the officers were the worst of the lot, see. Here you are, getting what? Half a pound of rice to go cook up so you can get your belly full. They were buying all kinds of stuff on the black market. But they had their own police force in there. In other words, the Nips let them run it just like peacetime inside.

Marcello: As long as there were no problems inside, the Japanese were

satisfied.

Wisecup: That's right; that's it.

Marcello: You mentioned these four P-38s coming over. What did that do for your morale?

Wisecup: Terrific. Just like a shot in the arm. We knew it was almost over.

Marcello: What kind of a reaction would you get from the Japanese when this sort of thing occurred?

Wisecup: Well, they were plenty worried. I tell you what. When I got out of there, they got us on working parties digging tunnels. Outside on the other side, going toward Changi, they had about ten Welshmen. These guys had all been miners. So when I got out, they said, "Look, you're kind of run down. Why don't you come with us on this working party? They feed pretty good." They had a lot of fruit trees around this place, and they had these dorian trees, these great, big, round damned things. And they used to cook-up every day; the Nips would let them cook-up. But they were digging tunnels for the officers and troops to take cover in back underneath the house. Then all kinds of fortifications were being built. I worked on that until the war was over.

Marcello: Was this mainly pick-and-shovel-type work?

Wisecup: Yes, pick-and-shovel.

Marcello: Were there any large air raids that occurred here in this area while you were there?

Wisecup: Not in Changi. That last year, the last six or seven months, the B-29s kept coming over, but they weren't hitting us. They were hitting Keppel Harbor there over at the shipyards. We could hear them--Christ--twenty minutes before they got to us! For fifteen minutes you could hear RRRROAR! You could hear them coming.

Marcello: What was the Japanese reaction when they saw the B-29s?

Wisecup: They weren't happy; you could see they were worried. They showed it. But we started worrying, too, as to what they're going to do with us, but you threw it off in the back of your mind. You're so goddamned tired and hungry and disgusted that...I don't know...it didn't worry you that much. You knew that it was in the cards for them to do you in if there was an invasion. But I don't know. I don't think anybody was really worried about it. We were just glad the thing was about to be over. You could see it coming.

Marcello: Okay, describe the end. How did you know when the war was over?

Wisecup: Well, they got this rumor that it was over. Oh, Christ, they used to get all kinds of news in there. The Australians would come up with the wildest, and you could never believe them. The first news I got of it was when a sergeant came up, and he said, "Yanks, it's going to be over pretty quick." We said, "Well, what's up?" He says, "Well, the Yanks have got a bomb that one plane can hold, and it'll blow a whole

city off the map." We said, "Oh, man, get out of here!" You know, we didn't believe it.

So a couple of days later came the news that they'd dropped it. I remember I was on a working party--out in a garden party. I got out there, and the rumor was that the plane was going to come down to Singapore and give them the word to surrender, that they already agreed to it up there. They'd dropped these bombs, and they wanted them to surrender. The plane was going to be white, and I think there was going to be a green cross on it. There ain't nobody paying no attention to this.

Sure enough, one came over. We were working there, and I looked up, and I saw that son-of-a-bitch. Then around camp, they start...hell, within a week's time I think before ...well, anyhow, by the time they had the signing of the peace treaty, they rigged up loudspeakers and everything to where we could hear the whole damned thing--Truman's speech from the States, all this crap. But it came on gradually. First, it was a rumor, you know.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese never made an official announcement?

Wisecup: Never.

Marcello: What happened to the Japanese once the word comes down that the war is over?

Wisecup: Well, what happened is that they kept us behind barbed wire.

Marcello: "They" meaning the Japanese?

Wisecup: Yes, until there was quite a few military parachuted in there. You had your Associated Press guys parachuted in there; you had some Australian groups come in there. They got real lax, but we were still behind barbed wire.

Marcello: And the Japanese still had the guns?

Wisecup: Yes, and they had them until we left.

Marcello: What kind of celebrations took place once the word came down that the war was over?

Wisecup: We didn't have no celebrations. What they did, they let us have more rice, soybeans, and stuff like that, and we were cooking up on our own. Fires are going all night long, and guys are eating all night long. You just sit up there and eat and eat and eat, that's all. There were no celebrations.

Marcello: Then once you get the word that the war is over, is it safe to say that you get a little eager or anxious or antsy as to when they're going to come in and get you out of here?

Wisecup: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, describe what happened?

Wisecup: Well, I don't know. It was just about three or four days afterwards that these trucks come in. The guards were still there, but they weren't armed or anything like that. They still didn't have a large contingent of British troops. The word was that Mountbatten had all these landing forces outside, and they had landed; but they marched from Singapore, where

they landed, just like they were coming in on an invasion. They covered a certain amount of ground...and it was twenty miles. We left before they got there. They came in and got the Americans. There were two trucks that came in, and they wanted the Yanks. They figured it was a whole gang. They had two planes--I think it was C-47s--to haul us out of there--regular cargo planes. We only needed one because there was only forty of us, I think, or something like that.

Marcello: At this point, did the thought of taking out revenge against any of these guards cross your mind?

Wisecup: Not at that point.

Marcello: Were these the same guards that you had up in the jungle, or were these different ones?

Wisecup: No, they were altogether different at Changi.

Marcello: Okay, so the trucks come in to pick you up, and they take you out to the airport.

Wisecup: That's it.

Marcello: What happens at that stage?

Wisecup: We got on the planes and left.

Marcello: And where did you go?

Wisecup: We went to Calcutta.

Marcello: Okay, is this where you received your first square meal?

Wisecup: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what you got.

Wisecup: I can't hardly remember. I ate so much. Well, on the plane

going over, they...it was me and Willie Robinson, who is now a preacher preaching the word of the Lord and fighting the Devil. He was the biggest thief you ever saw in your life. He's in Jamaica now. Me and "Robby" were on the plane, you know, and she's been up about an hour. We got to checking out everything. They had a little galley between the cargo space where we are and the pilots. We get up there, and we look in there, and, Christ, they got all kind of goodies. And they had a couple boxes of Butterfingers. I never will forget this. We got into them, and, Jesus Christ, I must have ate fifteen of them son-of-a-bitches!

Finally, we go in the back and sit down. We figure we're going to get in trouble; we've still got that prison complex. It's cold, you know, and we got a couple of blankets around us. The girl comes back, and she's got C-rations and all this stuff...K-rations.

Then the guy comes in and gives us these cans of stuff, and we ain't never seen that before. So, anyhow, he comes back, and he's got this first-aid kit; and he opens it, and he sits down. I got to thinking, "What the hell has he got that for?" As soon as we opened those cans of K-rations, I knew what he was doing. We were cutting our hands opening those cans.

Me and "Red" Shields--this guy I was telling you about--when we get to Calcutta, him and I had stashed a whole gang

of these C-rations all over us. They ride us out to the goddamned place, and we figure they're going to take everything away from us. We get in there, and they give us beds with mosquito nets and everything, and he's next to me. So we are taking these C-rations out, and we're sticking them underneath the mattress to hide them, see.

So directly we hear somebody say, "What are you guys doing? Go on down to the kitchen! They're feeding! Go on down to the mess hall! What are you doing that for?" So we go down there, and, Christ, they had ham and eggs, steaks, everything. I never will forget. We must have ate for two hours. I don't remember anybody getting sick. We just ate. That was the highlight right there--just sitting down for that meal.

Marcello: Now, was this at the 142nd General Hospital?

Wisecup: I think so.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that by this time you guys weren't in the mood to take too many orders?

Wisecup: That's right. I'll give you one example. They wanted us to wear shoes, so most of us run around barefooted. I think the second or third day I was out between the huts, and somebody had got hold of a baseball glove, and we were throwing a ball. A nurse came out, and she said, "You've got to put shoes on." I said, "Why?" She says, "Because you're going to catch all kind of diseases. Besides, a

white man loses face out here being barefooted." I said, "No kidding!" (laughter) I'm laughing, and she says, "Why are you laughing? You can catch all kinds of things here like that." I said, "Yeah, I guess so."

Marcello: This brings up another interesting point. These were the first women you had seen in some time.

Wisecup: Women, yes. They didn't look real (chuckle) because we'd been out there so long, you know. I don't know. You didn't pay that much attention to it, and you were in a rundown state, anyhow. Of course, you built up pretty quick. The first liberty I got was in about a week, and I was back up to about 150 pounds. I still had malaria, and I wasn't feeling too damned good. They brought in hillbilly bands and played music for us and all. I think I was only there about three weeks when they sent Howard Charles and I...we went on a plane and flew back to Washington, D.C., I think, after about three weeks. By the time I got to Washington, D.C., I was up to about 165 pounds--mostly stomach.

Marcello: At any time during this period after your liberation, were you given any kind of psychological or psychiatric tests to see what kind of mental shape you guys were in?

Wisecup: Not one, not one. They gave us a physical, but no psychiatric stuff. They do that now, but they didn't then.

I never will forget, you know. When I was there, they were going to send me home. I told the doc, "I got to

go home right now?" He said, "Yes, the best thing for you is to get back with your family." I said, "Look, I ain't been back there in six years." What I really felt is that I didn't want them to see me the way I looked, you know. And he said, "No, that's the best thing for you." I said, "Look, man, I'd rather stay out here for a while." He says, "Well, that's not for you to say. We're going to send you back." So there I was. I said, "I don't want them to see me like this." That was uppermost in your mind right then-- how terrible you looked and how you were going to look to them.

Marcello: Where did they send you from Calcutta?

Wisecup: We went to Washington, D.C., and they sent Charles and I over to 8th and I Streets, which was Marine Corps headquarters. There they treated us like real psycho cases. They didn't put us in the hospital. What they did was put a corporal to stay with us at all times. We had to get our uniforms and gear--stuff like that.

Now we were given the choice of going into the hospital or going on a leave. So both of us had been in the hospital in Calcutta, and we didn't want to go to no hospital. They said, "Well, if you don't go on leave, you're going to have to go back to duty--right here at 8th and I." This is the Marine Corps, and they ain't got no heart at all. I said, "Man, I don't want to go to duty here! That's the last place

in the world, 8th and I. That's spit-and-shine! I ain't ready for it! I said, "Well, I'll go on leave, and you can transfer me to the nearest post to New Orleans," which was Bellechasse, Louisiana, across the river. It was an ammunition depot.

But I never will forget while we were there. They kept this Marine chaser on us for about three days. First day I said, "Hey, why are you following us around?" He said, "Well, you guys ain't responsible." He says, "I'm told to stay with you. You guys are Asiatic." (laughter) Bartz looked at me, and he says, "No kidding!" But after the second day, they saw that we were okay. We got complete uniforms--got all of this stuff. I think we were there about a week. He went one way, and I went the other. I went on back to New Orleans.

But I never will forget that I wanted to get all my back pay, which wasn't much over \$2,000. It was private's pay. But, anyhow, the old topkick told me, "I ain't going to give it all to you!" I said, "Why? Look, man, I want my money." So the Marine Corps in all it's generosity had made me a Pfc after six-and-a-half years, you know, and a war behind me. He says, "There ain't no Pfc that's got any right going ashore with \$2,000." (laughter) I said, "Okay." You know, he was right, too, because I would have blew it, man.

But the Navy treated their people terrific. I understand

that every man on the Houston was made chief--from the lowest seaman. I'm not positive, but I think they did. Otto Schwarz, who had only...Christ, when he came on the Houston, he only had about four months in. He was right out of boot camp. But he was made a chief.

Joe Bush told me when we were at Siam Road, "You know something, John. When we get out of here, do you know what's going to happen?" I said, "What's going to happen?" He said, "Well, they're going to make me a chief as soon as I get back, and also all these other guys." I said, "Yeah, they probably will. The Navy is hard up." So he says, "They'll give me a stripe. I'll have one down and one up." Sure enough, that's what happened.

Marcello: Did you get out of the Marine Corps after your initial enlistment was up, or did you stay in?

Wisecup: No, my time was up while I was in prison camp. When I got out, I had a little over six years and two months. No, I went back to duty. I got three months leave, and in January I went back to duty at Belle Chasse. I was going to reenlist, and I got over there, and I got to seeing how it ain't changed. They made me corporal while I was over there. So the day they made me corporal, I'm up on the second deck in our squad room, and somebody said, "John, go down and get the mail."

Let me tell you why I didn't reenlist. I said, "Okay."

So I go down and get the mail, and this kid's that's got a year-and-a-half in the Marines Corps (one stripe). He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want the mail." He said, "Well, you got to be an NCO." I said, "I am. I just made it today." He said, "Well, you ain't got no stripes up." I said, "Look, give me that mail." He said, "No." So I reached over, and I grabbed him, and I said, "Give me the goddamned mail!" So he did.

I go back up to the squad room, and I ain't there five minutes, and they got me down in front of the sergeant major. He said, "What's this deal?" I said, "Look, I got over six years in the Marine Corps. I don't want no kid talking to me like that." He said, "Well, you didn't have your stripes up." I said, "Oh, hell! Christ, there ain't nothing changed!" So, anyhow, I told him, "Give me my time. Let me get out."

So a couple of days later, he called me up and said, "You still want to get out?" I said, "That's right." So the topkick says, "What are you going to do when you get out? You don't know how to make a living! You've been in the Marine Corps over six years!" I said, "That's right. But I've got all kinds of experience. I've got railroad experience, and I can work in the mines." He says, "You'll be digging ditches." I said, "Maybe so. But I'm going out." (chuckle) That's what did it, though--right there. I said,

"Oh, man, I've got enough of this."

Marcello: Did you have any problems adjusting to civilian life once you got out?

Wisecup: Yes, I did. I still do (laughter)! Yes, I think we all did. You had a period of exuberance and then a sort of a pall comes on you. I don't know. Nothing seems right for the next six months or something. But for four or five months, nothing could make you mad. But after that, gee whiz, I had trouble. I think everybody had the same thing. I'm not sure. But I did. You know, I've been on so many different jobs in my life. I'm sixty-eight. I bet you I've had...oh, Christ. As long as I've stayed with one...I stayed a merchant seaman for seventeen years.

Marcello: For the record, and since you're unique in this sense, you now reside in Japan. How did that come about?

Wisecup: Well, I was sailing over there on the ships, and I liked the Orient. I always did. If I was going to stay anyplace, I figured, well, that was the best. It's the only place in the Orient where people don't put their arm on you and try to bum money off of you or anything like that. In fact, it's probably the only place in the world. It's clean. They have beautiful women, and I like the Japanese women. Of all the women in the Orient, I think they're the best.

Marcello: And for the record, you have a Japanese wife.

Wisecup: Oh, yes, definitely. There ain't no doubt about that. That's

my third wife. But if I'd have had her originally, I might have amounted to something. Maybe today I'd have four or five hundred dollars in the bank (laughter)! No, really, I love Japan. Today it's nothing like it was twenty-five or thirty years ago. I got over there after the really good times. I got over there just before the depreciation of the dollar, when it went from 360 down to 300 yen. But I still like it, but my wife wants to come back here. Really, what I think it is, though, is that I don't think she's thinking about herself; I think she's thinking about me. She figures I'd like it better back here. That's the way they are. But I got a good wife, really.

Marcello: Maybe that's a pretty good place to end this interview. Mr. Wisecup, I want to thank you very much for having spoken with me. You've said a lot of important and interesting things, and I'm sure...

Wisecup: Interesting, anyhow, I hope (laughter)! I haven't covered it up any. It's all authentic!

Marcello: I'm sure that the students and scholars will find your comments most valuable.

Wisecup: Yes, I bet you they will (laughter)!

A P P E N D I C E S

1. Letter from Wisecup to Interviewer
2. Letter from former POW Norman Stevens to Wisecup
3. Poem composed by Wisecup
4. Extract from unpublished master's thesis by Frances G. Peadon, "Survival in Japanese Prison Camps," Texas Christian University, 1967.

3480 Salisbury Dr.
Dallas, TX
Ph. 358-5095

Hello Doc.

I should be returning to the "Smuggly Isles" sometime after the 19th of August. Thanks you for the time and patience involved - recording the recollections of a survivor. Damn few heroes I came out of those camps and I don't claim to be one -.

One thing I did learn - a human can adjust to any circumstance - and survive - means and a whole lot of luck is all it takes.

Thanks again
Sincerely

John Williams

Not a seedier of letters
but a "Fox East Bury".

P.S.

If the first draft gets by the censor
you can send it to my Japan address.
#42 NAKAODAI, NAKA KO, YOKOHAMA, JAPAN

Norman Stevens
1323, 19th, St
Woodward & Lothrop
73801

Dear John

I received your letter today 7-14-81 was pleased to hear from you at long last. I have recalled different things concerning you while I was in the POW's and recall vividly working with you at times on the ~~planes~~^{blowers} & chisel drilling holes.

You were the best man with that sled I have ever saw and you swore every breath you took while swinging it. I can grin about it now but it was damn grim then wasn't it. Hope we can get together sometime and talk over those days. I also remember the Madi Gras in New Orleans as you mentioned.

I remember the places on your legs & your feet which turned to tropical ulcers which had several also and that we both came up with same remedy which was lacking any kind of medication to plaster a piece of wet paper over the wound and then apply ~~and~~ mud over the top. This did not cure them but I think it may keep them from attaining the size that we often

Hello Marcello! SEPT 5, 1981

Been working on this
Odyssey of Futility
and despair for years -
research - an Odyssey
of futility and despair -
story and the writing!
any way - that Ancient
Mariner was not too bad
off - we would have etc
that albatross!!
Wise E,

"SAGA OF BAMBOO JACK" OR "REFLECTIONS OF

BAMBOO JACK THEY CALLED HIM
NEVER KNEW JUST WHY
IF ONE GOOD DRINK WOULD START HIM IN
I SIGNALLED I WOULD BUY.

AN ANCIENT
"RED NECK."

OR

I WAS SLOUCHING AT THE BAR NOW
WITH A DRY DISCOURAGED LOOK.
THE ROUND WAS SERVED AND WITH A BOW
I GRASPED MY HAND AND SHOOK.

"THROUGH A SHOT
GLASS — DIMLY."

BAMBOO DOWNED HIS DRINK THEN TURNED AGAIN
AND STARTED WITH THIS STORY.
"I'LL SPIN A YARN.. IT MAY SOUND TAME,
BUT IN IT THERE'S NO GLORY."

HE STARVED AND ROTTED 'NEATH THE JAP
AND SCOWED BENEATH HIS BLUSTER.
JUST TAKE A PEEK AT ASIA'S MAP.
IT SHOWS THE SPOT THERE BUSTER!

HE BUILT A RAILROAD, MADE IT RUN
FROM THAILAND INTO BURMA,
HE CARTED CROSS TIES BY THE TON
AND CURSED MORE THAN A MURMER.

FROM SINGAPORE UP COUNTRY BOUND
A FREIGHT TRAIN CLEARED THE STATION
IN THAILAND AT BANPONG TOWN
IT'S FINAL DESTINATION.

THE HEAVY FREIGHT DISCHARGED 600 HUNDRED MEN.
THEY MARCHED INTO THE JUNGLE.
FOUR HUNDRED N'ER CAME OUT AGAIN.
A CRUEL AND SENSELESS BUNGLE.

(IT WAS A CRUEL AND SENSELESS
BUNGLE BECAUSE 3/4 OF THE
MEN WERE HOSPITAL CASES —
FIT MEN SPENT THE WAR
IN CHANGI.

AUSTRALIAN, DUTCH, YANK AND MALAY,
THE PRISONERS OF EACH NATION.
THEY SLOGGED ON THROUGH THE HEAT EACH DAY..
POLYGLOT FORMATION.

THE BUZZARDS WATCHED FROM DIZZY HEIGHTS
WITH CRISLY FASCINATION
THE SICKLY FALL BACK OUT OF SIGHT
IN SPITE OF OUR EXHORTATIONS.

A WEEK LONG MARCH, 100 MILES
WE REACHED CAMP HINTOK HOLLOW.
WE WATCHED OUR TENTS THEN WITH CRUEL SMILES
OUR CAPTORS BADE US FOLLOW.

A BRIEF RESPITE IN OUR NEW CAMP
WE MARCHED OUT TO CONSTRUCTION.
A TRESTLE 'CROSS A SWAMP SO DAMP
COULD END WITH OUR DESTRUCTION.

~~HEAVY TEAK LOGS FILLED MID JUNGLE HILLS
SAWED THAN HEWED TO SIZE~~

WE TUGG'ED THE TEAK LOGS O'ER THE CRAIGS
IN HARNESS LIKE THE OX.
EXCRETION RUNNING DOWN OUR LEGS
THE STENCH AS STRONG AS POX.

GREAT TIMBERS FELLED MID JUNGLE HILLS
WE SAWED THEN HEWED TO SIZE.
DESPITE THE BLIGHT OF SWAMPLAND ILLS
THAT STRUCTURE DID ARISE.

PERSUASION WAS A "SLOPEHEAD'S" KICK.
BAH-GERO!..KURRAH!, PASSWORDS.
BEATINGS, BASHING OF THE SICK
WERE WATCHED BY HUNGRY DEATHBIRDS.

I CURSED THE DAY THAT I WAS BORN
YES, I FORGOT TO PRAY.
BUT OUT TO WORK EACH RAINY MORN"
WE WERE LIVING ANYWAY.

HARD AND CALLOUS MAN BECAME
A FRIEND?...A FRIEND NO LONGER.
THE NICITIES?NONE DID REMAIN
OUR TRIBULATIONS STRONGER.

SEAWEED, SALT FISH AND COLORED RICE
FOR THESE YOU'D SLAY YOUR KIN.
SAVATION WAS THE BITTER PRICE
FOR WE BELEAGURED MEN.

(COLD RED RICE)

WE DINED ON DOGS AND CATS OP MICE,
THESE ON A LUCKY DAY.
FOOD WAS BOUGHT AT ANY PRICE
THERE WAS THE HELL TO PAY.

WE SLEEP ON THE GROUND ROLLED IN A SACK
MALARIA WRACKED OUR BONES.
HOME SWEET HOME WAS A BAMBOO WRACK.
LOLLABY?YOUR? NEIGHBOR'S GROANS.

YOU'D DREAM OF HOME YOU MAY SURMISE
AND STATESIDE WHEN IT'S DONE?
BUT HOME WAS A DISTANT PARADISE
BEYOND THE DIM HORIZON.

HINTOK CAMP!FILTH RIDDEN HOLE!
OUR TENTS AND BEDS WERE ROTTEN
THE LICE AND RAIN DESTROYED OUR SOUL
MEN DIED FORLORN, FORGOTTEN!

A BYGONE

NO PEST HOUSE FROM AN ANCIENT AGE
COULD MATCH IT'S STENCH AND SQUALOR.
THE JUNGLE HELD US LIKE A CAGE
AND ONLY DEATH COULD FOLLOW.

MOSQUITOS, FLIES AND LICE DID VEX
THE STARVING, SICK AND DYING.
THIS PALSIED LOT OF FEVERED WRECKS
SOON FAILED..LONG GONE PAST TRYING.

~~NO JAP DARED ENTER THIS FOUL PLACE,~~
~~STOOD UP WIND-NUMBED IN WONDER.~~



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
U.S. NAVAL JOINT SERVICES ACTIVITY
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TELEX:
2427125 SANTEL J

23

Mosquitos, flies and lice did vex
The starving, sick and dying.
This palsied lot of fevered wrecks
Soon failed..long gone past trying.

24

No Jap dared enter this foul place
Stood up wind, numbed in wonder
Then shouted down from quite a space.
The working parties number.

25

Cholera came and took it's toll
We dug the graves 'til midnite.
That mighty railroad had to run
We toiled at night by torchlight.

26

Communal graves their final rest
Dank trenches wide and deep
One pondered was it not the best
Too take this final sleep.

27

NO GRAVESTONES THERE TO TESTIFY
"WHO, WHEN OR WHERE?" THEIR PASSING.
UNKNOWN, UNMARKED NOW THERE THEY LIE
IN SILENCE EVERLASTING.

28

THE HINTOK TRESTLES FINISHED
THE WORD IS "PACK AND LEAVE!"
OUR RANKS ARE NOW DIMINISHED
BUT THERE'S NO TIME TO GRIEVE.

29

WE STAGGERED OFF FROM HINTOCK HILL
IT'S STENCH I SMELL TO DAY.
THOUGH FOUR DECADES IT'S WITH ME STILL
IT WILL NOT PASS AWAY.

30

WE LEAVE IT FASTER THAN WE CAME
NO NEED TO STRIKE OUR TENT
WE'RE USED TO SLEEPING IN THE RAIN.
THIS MOVE IS HEAVEN SENT.

31

WE LEAVE BEHIND THOSE TATTERED TENTS
ADRIP WITH MONSOON SLIME.
WE ARE A GROUP OF BATTERED GENTS
AS WE CRAWL OFF THIS LAST TIME.

32

WE SHANT FORGET FOUR HUNDRED SOULS
NOW SILENT 'NEATH THE CLAY.
CUT DOWN IN YOUTH FROM EARTHLY GOALS
IT WAS NOT PLANNED THAT WAY.

34

THE MONKEYS CHATTERED SHRILL FAREWELL
AS WE SCALED "CHOLERA LADDER,"
OUR GOODBYES TO THIS JUNGLE HELL
WOULD NOT MAKE US SADDER.

} CALLED
} CHOLERA
} LADDER BECAUSE
} YOUR HANDS GOT

35

WE WAITED NOW AT RIVER SIDE
TWO WEEKS OF LICE AND MOULD.
THEN PACKED ABOARD FOR THIS LAST RIDE
LIKE RICE SACKS IN THE HOLD.

SLIMY AND
INVARIABLE YOU
WIDEN YOUR MOUTH

35)

AT TARSO NOW A BRIEF DELAY
NEXT FLATCARS IN THE RAIN
TWO KANCHANBURI ONE NIGHT AND DAY
WAS GOOD TO SEE AGAIN.

AGAIN HERE IN THIS "BIG REST CAMP".
"MORE WORKER'S" IS THE CRY
SO NOW WE HAVE TO DIG AND TAMP
AT THE "BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI".

37)

THIS JOB IS ALSO "SPEEDO"
BUT THE RAILS ARE NOW IN USE.
WE SOON WILL GET THE WORD TO GO
WITH A FEW MORE DAYS ABUSE.

38)

THAT "DEATH RAILWAY" IS ROLLING NOW.
OUR LABOR HERE IS DONE
LONG MONTHS AGO I DID AVOW
THIS DAY WOULD NEVER COME.

39)

ONCE MORE ENROUTE TO SINGAPORE
TO SVME ROAD THEN CHANGI
"NEATH LEAKY TENTS WE'LL CHILL NO MORE
WHEN DRY. "SOFT" DECKS ARE HANDY.

40)

WE'LL N'ER FORGET THOSE LONELY GRAVES
WE FILLED WITH STRICKEN DEAD.
DEMISE UNWORTHY OF MERE SLAVES.
THIS WE RECALL WITH DREAD.

41)

THEY LIE ASLEEP MID JUNGLE GLOOM
THEIR ONLY SIN WAS LOSING.
THAT YOUTH WAS WASTED MUCH TOO SOON.
THIS END WAS NOT THEIR CHOOSING.

42)

A PART OF US WE LEFT BACK THERE
DEEP IN THE JUNGLE'S MIST.
IT MAY APPEAR WE DO NOT CARE.
WE'VE CROSSED IT OFF OUR LIST?

43)

OUR CALLOUS, JOCCULAR FACADE
DOES TAKE A BIT OF STRAIN
AS THROUGH THIS WEARY LIFE WE PLED
WITH MEMORIES OF PAST PAIN.

44)

"SAY ONE MORE ROUND I'LL TELL YOU MORE
BEFORE MY EYES GET TEARY,
OUR FINAL DAYS AT SINGAPORE
PERHAPS YOU'RE GROWING WEARY?"

45)

I BOUGHT A ROUND AND LET HIM RAVE,
HE'S MADDER THAN A HATTER!
THIS GUY HAS GONE TOO FAR TO SAVE
IT REALLY DOES'NT MATTER.

46)

SAID I "YOU"VE LIVED THROUGH TRIALS LIKE THESE
THE STATES MUST BE A "BREEZE".
YOU'D NEVER EVER GO AMISS
IN THIS GREAT LAND OF EASE?"

47)

HE MUMBLED, MUTTERED "SAY NO MORE..
I THANK YOU FOR THE DRINK!"
THEN TURNED AND STUMBLED THROUGH THE DOOR
AND LEFT ME THERE TO THINK.

NOT INTENDED +

BE MELODRAMATIC

DOT THIS IS THE
WAY IT HAPPEN

POT TO
LYRICS -

BEEN WORKING
ON THIS SINCE T
LEFT HINTOCK -

will FINISH
IT IN A

FEW YEARS!

Now that it is
all over and
past —
some people
forget what
a lovely bastard
you were — and
say nice
things —

the U.S.S. Houston, was too ill when the prisoners left Hintock to make the trip back to Kanburi. It was a sad parting when the men had to leave him at their first stop on the return journey, where he at last escaped prison life, not in the way he had constantly planned at Hintock but by death. Survivors do not like to remember that they had to leave even one American in Thailand's jungle to join the thousands of graceless corpses buried in unmarked graves.⁵⁷

A marine off the U.S.S. Houston, John Wisecup from New Orleans was the thirteenth man—and what a man. "He would raise hell and bitch, but he was a war-horse," Gordon admiringly recollected.⁵⁸ Standing well over six feet tall, broad shouldered, and physically strong, he excelled in sports, especially baseball. Stricken with beriberi, his large feet and long legs looked like they were ready to burst. He worked barefooted as his shoes had long since fallen apart. His discomforts, however, did not keep him from entertaining the men with his comical cartoons. Although many facts were forgotten, mem can describe in detail many of these drawings which poked fun at the hardships of prison

⁵⁷Gordon Interview, January 2, 1966, February 7, 1966; Robinson Interview; Bush Diary, September (day unknown), 1943; Wisecup to Gordon, March 27, 1966.

⁵⁸Gordon Interview, February 7, 1966.

life and especially at the Japanese, Australians, and British. A merchant marine officer, Dennis Roland of New York, remembered him as a "great guy, a man's man," who was unaffected by the "toughest sledding." Wallowing in self-pity was almost impossible with Wisecup near. Although surrounded by dying men, he still maintained his exceptional sense of humor. As he later thought about his survival, he said, "I used to think it was because I was a rugged, mean, no good son-of-a-bitch, but that was vanity—it just wasn't my time to go. I can still smell that ulcer hut."⁵⁹

With the railroad trestle completed, the Japanese took their wreckages of humanity back to Kanburi. This time the prisoners were unable to walk, so they were loaded on barges which floated down the Khwae Noi River to Tarsao. There, Gordon and Robinson carried Roszelle to a hut. He begged them not to leave him, but they had no alternative. From Tarsao, the prisoners rode a truck whose wheels were adapted to ride the railroad track. They were anxious to get to the hospital at Kanburi, where they might receive food

THIS IS TRUE!
→

I like
that quote.