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Interview with
Kelly Bramlett
November 2, 1976

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Kelly B. Bramlett
(Signature)

Date: 11-2-76

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Oral History Collection

Kelly B. Bramlett

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas Date: November 2, 1976

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Kelly B. Bramlett for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 2, 1976, in Fort Worth, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Bramlett in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a Japanese prisoner-of-war during World War II. Mr. Bramlett was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, sometimes known as the "Lost Battalion." This particular unit was captured on the Island of Java and subsequently spent the rest of the war in various POW camps throughout Asia.

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

Mr. Bramlett: Well, I was born in Wise County, about three miles southwest of Decatur, on April 20, 1922. I was raised

around Wise County--in that vicinity around Decatur.

I went in the National Guard in 1939.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the National Guard?

Bramlett: Oh, it was just the thing. Some of my friends were in it. It was something to do, you know, for young people around there.

Marcello: I've been told, and I've read, that the National Guard at that particular time was almost like some sort of fraternal organization or a social club. Is that true?

Bramlett: Well, more or less, yes. Most of the guys in it were friends, you know. Of course, you had certain duties to perform. You had to train and do certain things, but I'd say most of the guys that belonged joined because of their friends were in there, you know. Most of us got a chance to get away for the summer and go to camp, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: What sort of a unit was this Decatur unit? In other words, what was its particular function?

Bramlett: Well, we were Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, of the Field Artillery, and mostly it was communications and fire direction, you know, for the firing batteries.

Marcello: What was your particular function within this unit?

Bramlett: Well, it was in the telephone section as a lineman, laying lines for telephone wires, you know.

Marcello: Describe the sort of training that would be undertaken by

the unit when it would go for summer duty and things of that nature.

Bramlett: Well, of course, the first I went on was in Louisiana in 1940. Most of the time we spent digging trucks out of mudholes, but, you know, it was just war games. We would lay all this wire out to the firing batteries and maybe get it laid and have to pick it up and move on somewhere else, you know. It was just like you were fighting a war except that you didn't have referees, you know. They would pick you up and tag you and say, "You're wounded or you're dead," or something like that, you know.

Marcello: Would you describe. . . did you ever have anything comparable to the boot camp as we think of it in modern terms, or basic training as such?

Bramlett: No, I didn't. I don't think any of the National Guard boys did. Now we got a little more close order drill and things after we mobilized and went to Camp Bowie, but not like the basic training, you know, that the boys that came in after that got.

Marcello: What sort of meetings and so on would you have during the week when you were back home in Decatur or near Decatur?

Bramlett: Well, we'd usually have. . . I forget now. It seems like it was on Wednesday night, and once a week we'd go down, and we'd have to get out our switchboards, and we'd have

an instructor, you know, that. . . well, you'd have certain little problems--might string some wire out and set your phones in this big armory, you know--just little exercises like that, you know. And you had certain assignments to do.

Marcello: How seriously was this training being taken at that time?

Bramlett: Well, not very seriously by most of us. You know, I didn't realize that we were near war, actually, until they got me on that boat when we left the States (chuckle).

Marcello: That was going to be one of the questions that I was going to ask somewhere down the line. Just how closely were you keeping abreast of current events, and did you ever think that the country would ultimately be getting into war?

Bramlett: Well, I thought about it possibly with Germany, but I never dreamed of Japan jumping on us like that, you know. I don't know. Japan seemed so far off and so small that I just never dreamed we'd be in war with Japan until we got out in California, and it kind of dawned on us that we were headed in that direction and got to hearing a little more about what was going on, you know. That's when I really realized how close it was.

Marcello: Let's just back up a minute here. You mentioned that at one point in 1940, the unit had gone on maneuvers in Louisiana. Now I think it was on November of 1940 that the unit was at Camp Bowie, isn't that correct?

Bramlett: We mobilized in November, and we went to Camp Bowie January the 11th in '41.

Marcello: Okay, what does that mean when you say that you mobilized in November of 1940?

Bramlett: Well, they federalized us. Then we had to report for duty every day. We were actually in the regular Army then.

Marcello: Okay, describe what sort of a routine you underwent here at Camp Bowie between November of 1940 and January of 1941.

Bramlett: Oh, that was still at Decatur.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Bramlett: We didn't go to Camp Bowie. . . they didn't have that ready for us until January of '41.

Marcello: I see.

Bramlett: Well, really we didn't do much. We couldn't do much. We had a little close order drill, you know, and a few little class sessions and things like that. But there wasn't really much we could do.

Marcello: Did you ever have very much training in the use of weaponry and things of that nature?

Bramlett: Not really. About the only weapons. . . well, we had the old .45-caliber pistols, you know--automatics--and the Browning automatics. They didn't issue us any rifles. Being a headquarters battery and then an artillery unit, we never got any until we got to Australia. Then we got hold of some old rifles.

Marcello: Now I gather that by the time you got to Camp Bowie, the entire unit was together.

Bramlett: Yes, all but a few Selective Service inductees, you know. They brought in--they called them Selective Service, you know--they brought in enough to bring it up to what they called wartime strength. I think we got about thirty more men for that battery, you know.

Marcello: Now when was the unit detached from the 36th Division?

Bramlett: Oh, we left Camp Bowie November the 11th, '41, and went to San Francisco. We stayed there until we got on the boat, I think, the 21st of November.

Marcello: In other words, it was in November of 1941 when you were officially detached from the rest of the 36th Division.

Bramlett: That's right. Yes.

Marcello: Why was that done?

Bramlett: Well, we never knew (chuckle), really. All we knew that our destination was PLUM, and, of course, we had various definitions for that--"PLUM to here and there and back," you know (chuckle). But we never really knew what our destinations was or why we were picked or sent. Or I never knew. Some people may, but I don't.

Marcello: Now I've heard it said that this was part of a reorganizational move on the part of the Army. I've heard it said that the Army went from square divisions to triangular divisions,

and in making that move, the unit that was to become later known as the "Lost Battalion" was lopped off at this particular time.

Bramlett: Well, that's possible. Like I say, I really don't know. I've often wondered, "Why us?" you know (chuckle). But what they did was take some of the married guys and transferred them up to 1st Battalion; some of the guys were sent down from 1st Battalion to 2nd Battalion, you know. They were both really made up of both battalions in the 131st Field Artillery.

Marcello: But in other words, in your particular group they made sure that there were all unmarried men in that unit.

Bramlett: Mostly, yes. If the married men didn't want to go, they didn't have to, you know. He had the choice of . . . you know, he can stay home, which some of them thought was a bad choice, but then I think it wasn't (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, now as you mentioned, this was a part of an operation which went by the code name "PLUM." Ultimately, I think, your destination originally was to be the Philippine Islands. Did you know it at the time?

Bramlett: No. Of course, we all suspected that was where we were going, you know. But I didn't know, and I don't know if anyone did. If any of the officers knew, they never said.

Marcello: I'm sure there were all sorts of rumors going around as to where you were going.

- Bramlett: Oh, there were, yes. But right after we got to the Hawaiian Islands and left there, of course, we all decided that it was bound to be the Philippines, you know, because we were going in that general direction.
- Marcello: Okay, so you get to San Francisco, and this is where you pick up your transportation that's to take you wherever you're going to go. I think you were aboard the USS Republic.
- Bramlett: That's right, yes.
- Marcello: Describe what the Republic was like.
- Bramlett: Well, it was a . . . I don't know what size ship it was. It was a large ship. It was an old one. About twelve knots was top speed for it. It was . . . I don't know. . . it was kind of hectic in a way. We run short of a lot of things. After we left Hawaii, you know, well, we didn't go on to the Philippines. We had to go back down to Australia, and we run out of a lot of things. It was a long, hard, old, rough ride on that old Republic (chuckle). It was so slow.
- Marcello: Did you get seasick?
- Bramlett: Well, I didn't . . . not really. I felt a little bad, but I stayed on deck that first day. Some of the guys went down and lay down in their bunk, you know, and a lot of them really got sick. But I didn't get. . . I got to feeling a little bad, but I never got really sick.
- Marcello: How long of a stopover did you have in the Hawaiian Islands?

- Bramlett: Oh, I think we were only there. . . it seems to me like twenty-four hours--not long. They gave us four hours shore leave.
- Marcello: What did you do when you went on shore leave?
- Bramlett: Well, I didn't do anything really--walked downtown and walked back. We was broke. We hadn't been paid in a long time (laughter). We didn't have any money, so there wasn't much you could do.
- Marcello: During that short stay in Honolulu, did you see any evidence of war preparations or anything of that nature?
- Bramlett: I saw those ships in Pearl Harbor sitting over there, but, you know, that's about all. I guess they were still sitting there on the 7th of December. Apparently they were.
- Marcello: Okay, so you only stayed in the Hawaiian Islands very shortly. Then you were on your way once again, presumably to the Philippine Islands. Now sometime after you left Honolulu, you received word that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I want you to pick up the story at this time. What were you doing and what was your reaction when you heard about the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?
- Bramlett: Oh, well, when we heard it, why, the ship didn't change course. In fact, we just sailed in circles out there for a day, you know, or two days. We picked up a cruiser--the Pensacola--and another transport joined us there, and it

seems to me like there was a destroyer. But then we took off to the south and went to the Fiji Islands. Of course, you know, everybody had different opinions. Some of them said, "Why, this is a snap. Six months and this will all be over," you know. "Japan can't last over six months!"
(chuckle)

Marcello: In other words, you had no idea as to what damage had been done to Pearl Harbor.

Bramlett: Oh, none at all. No, we didn't know and didn't know what had happened to the Philippines or anywhere, you know.

Marcello: At this particular point, when you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Bramlett: You mean before our capture (chuckle)?

Marcello: Yes, I'm speaking now of that period when you were on the ship and after you had heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Bramlett: Well, right at that time I really didn't have much opinion on them because I'd really never thought about them a whole lot, you know. But later on, you know, they got to telling you this and that--we had propaganda just like everyone else--and they got to be pretty frightful little people, you know. Of course, we learned later it was true (chuckle).

Marcello: In a physical sense, how would you envision the Japanese?

Bramlett: Well, I thought they were small. I really thought they were smaller than they were. But outside of that--other than they were Asiatic--I didn't have any opinion of them. I didn't know anything about them. I really didn't care up until then.

Marcello: Did most of the boys seem to have a sense of superiority toward the Japanese? In other words, if there came a real showdown between the Americans and the Japanese, that the Americans would have no trouble in whipping the Japanese.

Bramlett: Sure. At first we did, sure. Of course, we didn't know what we had out there and what we didn't have. We found out we didn't have a lot that we thought we had (chuckle).

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you stopped off in the Fiji Islands.

Bramlett: Well, only for fueling and take on some supplies. We didn't go ashore there.

Marcello: How long did you stop over at the Fiji Islands?

Bramlett: Well, we stopped one day. I think we got in there one morning, and I think we left that night sometime. I'm not sure. We had one fellow that had died, and we left him there. But outside of taking on fuel and supplies, we didn't stay but. . . I think it was less than a day.

Marcello: Okay, now you are a part of a convoy, and I guess it was around this time that they decided to . . . well, actually, I guess before this, they had decided to divert your course to Brisbane, Australia.

- Bramlett: Well, yes, that came when we were doing that circling.
I think that's what we were waiting on--for them to decide where we were to go. Yes, we landed in Brisbane. . . it seems like it was the 21st of December.
- Marcello: That's correct--December 21, 1941.
- Bramlett: Some of these dates get a little fuzzy, but I remember we spent Christmas there.
- Marcello: What did you do when you got to Brisbane?
- Bramlett: Well, of course, we got off of the ship and went to this racetrack and pitched tents, you know, and stayed there. We'd go downtown and look around, you know. The people were real nice to us. We really enjoyed it. We had a real good time there as far as being that far away from home as you could have, you know.
- Marcello: What sort of training did you do during that period when you were here at the racetrack?
- Bramlett: Well, I can't recollect (laughter) doing any training. Mostly just. . . well, of course, some of them had guard duty, you know. We had to post guards down at the dock where stuff was that they'd unloaded off the ships--our supplies and equipment. And we had guard duty around camp, and KP duty and things like that, but that's about all we did. We didn't do any training there, really.
- Marcello: You mentioned that you spent Christmas in Brisbane. Can you recall what your particular Christmas was like?

Bramlett: Yes. We spent it with an elderly Australian couple. This friend of mine and I--we went out walking that morning-- just walking down the street--and they came by and asked us if we'd go out and have dinner with them. We told them, "Sure!" We knew we were going to have mutton at the camp, you know (chuckle), so we took them up on it and went out, and we stayed that day and went back the next day and spent the day with them. They were a real nice old couple, and they just treated us wonderful, you know.

Marcello: I assume you didn't have mutton.

Bramlett: No, we didn't. We had. . . I'm not sure. I think it was fowl of some kind. It wasn't a turkey. I'm not sure just what it was, but it wasn't mutton anyway (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume that the Texas boys had a little bit of trouble getting used to that Australian mutton.

Bramlett: Yes, that was pretty bad. I never got used to it, really. I sure didn't like that.

Marcello: Do you recall the name of the racetrack at which you were staying?

Bramlett: Yes, Ascot Racetrack.

Marcello: I'm just throwing some of these little things in to test your memory, and evidently you have a pretty good memory on some of these things.

Bramlett: Well, some of the things. That's one of the more pleasant things. I remember that (chuckle).

Marcello: That's an interesting point you brought up. I'm sure that there is a tendency among most of the prisoners-of-war to remember the pleasant and try to forget the unpleasant things.

Bramlett: Yes, that's true, I think. Of course, when you get together occasionally, you know, you'll get to reminiscing, you know, and the old things will come back up. But some of them will come up like that that I haven't thought of in years.

Marcello: Okay, I believe you left Brisbane on January 11, 1941, and you were on your way to Java. Now at the time that you left Brisbane, did you know, or were you told, that you were on your way to Java?

Bramlett: No, but I believe those dates are. . . on January 11th, we landed in Java. We left Brisbane. . . now what date I couldn't say for sure, but the 11th of January is the day I remember getting to Java.

Marcello: Okay, that could be right, and that's what my notes indicated.

Bramlett: Well, we were discussing dates and things, and some of us have varied notions about it, but now it's my recollection that it was January the 11th. No, we suspected that we were going there because we were on a Dutch ship.

Marcello: Do you remember the name of that Dutch ship?

Bramlett: Yes, the Bloemfontein. The natives on the ship were from Java, you know, the crew, so we suspected that where we were going.

Marcello: What sort of a trip did you have from Brisbane over to Surabaya, Java, which is where you were ultimately going to land? What sort of a trip did you have?

Bramlett: Well, it was a . . . I think we got torpedoed at a time or two (chuckle), they say. I didn't know anything about it. I know we done a lot of zigzagging, but I didn't know we were that close. I was sick a lot of that trip. I came down with some kind of fever and never knew what it was. But there was about three days there that I was so sick I didn't know where we were going and could care less, you know.

Marcello: Were you bedridden during this period?

Bramlett: Well, for a day or two, I was, yes.

Marcello: Had you recovered fairly well by the time you got to Surabaya?

Bramlett: Yes, really I had. I never did know just exactly what it was. One of the doctors. . . later I was talking to him about it, and he seemed to think that might have rheumatic fever. I came up with rhuematoid arthritis later, so he thought that possibly could have been what I had.

Marcello: Okay, what did Surabaya look like?

Bramlett: Well, really, I don't remember very much about Surabaya. About all I remember seeing was the docks, and then they put us on. . . it seems to me like it was a train. Now that gets a little fuzzy there. After that we transferred

around and traveled so many different ways. We went up to Malang, I believe. I don't remember much about Surabaya, really.

Marcello: How long did you remain at Surabaya?

Bramlett: Well, I think we got in there one day and left that night. I know we got into Malang at night. I think we were there maybe in the afternoon, and as soon as we got transportation out, we left that night.

Marcello: What sort of a place was Malang?

Bramlett: Oh, it was small--a nice little town. I don't know what the population was, but it was. . . the downtown part was nice. Of course, the outskirts of it was natives and just grass and bamboo huts and things (chuckle), you know, but the Dutch part of it was pretty.

Marcello: Now you were not actually in Malang as such. Weren't you at an air base close to Malang?

Bramlett: Yes. Singosari, I believe, was the name of that. Is that right?

Marcello: It could be.

Bramlett: Yes, I think so.

Marcello: What was that air base like? Describe what it was like from a physical standpoint.

Bramlett: Well, we had good barracks. They were brick barracks, but we didn't have any furniture in them when we got there.

There were no beds--just a little straw and a sack to put it in, you know, They only had a few B-17's. The base was right next to our camp there.

Marcello: Now by the time you got there, had those bomb groups from the Philippines already arrived?

Bramlett: Oh, yes. Yes, they were there.

Marcello: These were the 6th, 7th, and 19th Bomb Groups, as I recall --what was left of those particular bomb groups.

Bramlett: Yes. The old airport was a dirt runway, you know, and we lost a lot of planes just overshooting the field, you know. They'd just slide off and crack up.

Marcello: Now what exactly was the function of your particular unit when you arrived here at this airport?

Bramlett: Well, we served as ground crew mostly, you know, servicing the planes and loading them with bombs and just doing general work and repairing. We got to repairing some of the planes, you know.

Marcello: What were you particularly doing?

Bramlett: Well, I was, like I say, in communications. They put me to operating the switchboard there, and then I operated a machine gun out on the edge of camp, you know. We'd set up there.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you receive from the Dutch and the native Javanese during this particular period?

Bramlett: Well, the Dutch . . . I don't know. They never were too friendly. I don't think they really thought we ought to have any business there. I don't think we did either, really, but I guess. . . the natives. . . they're just like all natives. You know Asiatics--if they found out you had a dollar, they wanted it (laughter). But generally speaking, the natives were more friendly than the Dutch to us, you know.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the Dutch actually didn't want any resistance put up on the island because they were afraid that it would mean the destruction of their property and perhaps even the confiscation of their property when the Japanese came. In other words, it seems that perhaps the Dutch felt that if the Japanese did conquer the islands, that it would still be just business as usual. Had you ever heard this said?

Bramlett: Yes. Well, I got that impression, you know. I've heard . . . we've heard people talk about it. I really think that's the way they felt. You know, in Indochina--the Vichy French--it happened that way, you know. These people that were sympathizers of the Nazis and the Japanese, well, they went on and weren't interned and lived in their homes and carried on their business. I think that's more or less what the Dutch had in mind.

Marcello: Did you ever have a chance to get off the base very often and go into Malang?

Bramlett: Oh, yes. I think, usually. . . they let us go in in groups. They never let very many go in. It wasn't a very big town, you know, and they'd let you go in groups. Usually maybe twice a week you could go in town for four or five hours, you know.

Marcello: Now at this time--and I'm referring to that period before the first air raid actually took place--had the full realization of war dawned upon you?

Bramlett: Yes, really it had to me because I talked to some of those . . . like I say, before the air raid, after we got to the base there, I talked to some of those boys from the Philippines, you know--the Air Force. You listened to some of those boys' stories, and you realized (chuckle) that there really was a war, you know. Of course, the planes would come in all shot up; some would leave and wouldn't come in. So if you really thought about it, you'd know that it was pretty serious business then.

Marcello: How long did you think you would be on Java?

Bramlett: Well, I really didn't have any idea, you know. At that point, why, we were pretty well . . . you're hearing two sides, you know. We'd get this Japanese propaganda, and then we'd get our side of it, and you didn't know. . . I

really didn't know how long we'd be there. I figured we'd move on sooner or later.

Marcello: Were you fully expecting the United States Navy to come in and take care of the Japanese and get you off the island or anything of this nature?

Bramlett: Well, after they landed there, we thought that we might possibly be evacuated.

Marcello: When you say "after they landed there," you are, of course, referring to the Japanese landing.

Bramlett: Yes, yes, the Japanese. We didn't know at this time that the cruiser--the Houston--and the Australian cruiser had been sunk, see, during the landing.

Marcello: I guess during this whole period, you just had no idea as to how serious the situation was.

Bramlett: Well, not really, no. As far as our side of it, we didn't realize that we didn't have as much stuff out there as we did, you know. We thought we were a lot better off.

Marcello: And you still probably didn't know the full extent of the damage at Pearl Harbor.

Bramlett: No.

Marcello: You probably did know, however, that the Philippines had fallen or was soon about to fall.

Bramlett: Well, yes, yes. Like I say, we talked to these boys in the 19th Bomb Group there. We began to get an idea of what

things was from them, you know, because they were flying out every day. We knew this large convoy was coming down before it ever got anywheres near us because they'd tell us about it, you know. That was their mission--to bomb that convoy.

Marcello: Okay, now on February 5, 1942, the first Japanese air raid occurred. Describe that first air raid.

Bramlett: Oh, well (chuckle), that was. . . the siren went, you know --the warning--and it wasn't long until here they came. Oh, I thought they were real shiny, you know. That was the first planes I'd ever saw up that high, you know, in a formation. I thought, "Golly, if all those drop bombs, they're just gonna flatten everything around here!" Of course, we'd all scattered and got out in ditches and places away from camp. Well, when the bombs dropped, I thought, "Well, they've demolished the whole camp!" When it was over and we got up and went out, why, there wasn't that much damage, you know.

Marcello: What sort of resistance was the base putting up against these bombers?

Bramlett: Well, not any that time. We didn't have any antiaircraft during that first raid. If the Dutch had any, they didn't use it (chuckle). But the next time . . .

Marcello: Do you recall how scared you were during this first raid?

Bramlett: Oh, yes, I sure do (chuckle). Everyone was scared, you know. But the next time we were bombed, we used our artillery guns for antiaircraft.

Marcello: How did this take place?

Bramlett: Well, it doesn't. . . we dug holes, you know, for the tail pieces to where they can get the tails down and elevate the barrel way up, you know. Of course, you'd still have to fire at a pretty good angle. But catching them coming in over the mountains, why, you could throw up some bursts, you know, and it'd kind of. . . it couldn't do much damage with them, but it kind of made them think, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: Now you were actually using the old French .75's weren't you?

Bramlett: Old French .75's, yes.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you had the gun situated in such a way that you might possibly be able to catch these Japanese planes when they came across the mountains. I assume they came from the same direction every day?

Bramlett: Well, not usually. I mean not every day. But, you know, we could train the guns on what. . . I don't know. I never was too familiar with those guns because I never did work on any of them, you know. But usually they came in from the north or the northeast, you know. We had them trained to where they could pretty well cover that area, you know.

Marcello: How often did these raids occur?

Bramlett: Well, I don't know. They got pretty regular there for a while. Even those Zeros got to coming in pretty regular.

Marcello: What would they do--strafe?

Bramlett: Oh, yes, they'd come down and strafe, you know. We took a lot of the old planes that had cracked up--our B-17's--we took the machine guns off and mounted them around camp and around the air base, you know, because we didn't have any machine guns when we went over there.

Marcello: Did the Japanese more or less conduct these raids with a certain amount of impunity? In other words, did they seem to show a lack of respect for the defenses and so on that were being put up by this base?

Bramlett: (Chuckle) Yes, I don't think they worried too much about the defenses there (chuckle). They wasn't that good.

Marcello: What did you find worse--the high-level bombers or the Zeros when they strafed?

Bramlett: Well, I dreaded the high-level bombers worse. I mean, the Zero, he kind of got down there where you could see him, you know. Of course, if you happened to be in the wrong place at the right time, why, it was just as bad as if he'd been a bomber. But you could more or less. . .they usually strafed planes, or if they saw some machine gun fire over

here, they'd strafe over there, you know. They didn't strafe the camp a whole lot.

Marcello: As the attacks continued, what sort of a toll in terms of damage was being taken?

Bramlett: Well, they lost a lot. . . they had a lot of damage on the air base there. They lost several planes, you know. One time they caught them. . . we'd just loaded them with bombs and had serviced them up and were fixing to leave, you know, and they came in and got . . . I don't remember just how many. . . but about half the planes we had, I remember. I don't know how many was there at that time, but they got quite a few of them that day.

Marcello: Do you ever get used to these air raids?

Bramlett: No, I don't think so. I don't think anybody ever would (chuckle).

Marcello: After awhile, did you have to move out of your barracks and out into trenches and so on and so forth?

Bramlett: Well, no. We stayed in the barracks. Now they did bomb the barracks once and destroyed some of them, but we stayed in the barracks all the time we were there. They never bombed at night; it was always in the daytime.

Marcello: Okay, now on February 27, 1942, the bomb groups--what was left of them--took off for Australia. What sort of an effect did this have upon the morale of those of you left behind?

Bramlett: Well, it was pretty bad. We couldn't understand why we couldn't be evacuated to Australia. I don't know. . . everybody thought we could have been, really. I think some of the Air Force guys said, "Well, we could fly you in the bombers down there, but we couldn't take any equipment. It'd just be the men--a few at a time." But anyway, that didn't happen. I understand we were put under Dutch command about that time, you know.

Marcello: What sort of rationale was given for you remaining on the island? In other words, what were you supposed to be doing?

Bramlett: Well, we were supposed to defend the island. I don't know how they thought we would, but I guess that was. . . they didn't tell you much. I really don't think our officers knew too much about what we were to do.

Marcello: Okay, so what did you do during this period now? After the bomb groups left, you really had no further usefulness so far as servicing any of the planes was concerned. Did you just stay there at the air base anyhow?

Bramlett: Well, the best I remember, we did. Of course, this was . . . what did you say? The 27th when the Air Force left?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: Well, we started. . . and, of course, the Japanese landed on the 1st, and we started and went up the island and

met them up at a little town--Buitenzorg, I believe.

Marcello: Now when was it the Japanese landed?

Bramlett: I understand it was March the 1st.

Marcello: Okay, describe what took place at this point, then, after the Japanese finally do land on the island.

Bramlett: Well, we were on this convoy, you know, and went up to . . . we left one battery there, and I understand that they went to Surabaja for something--to establish defenses down there or something. I don't know what. But anyway, we went on to the east end of the island or up that direction and. . . I don't know. We met the Dutch going the other way and English going the other way, but we were still going east. We couldn't understand that. So anyway, we got up this river, and some Australian troops were there. They were on one side of the river, and the Japs were on the other. Well, we set up our artillery behind them. The best I recollect, we were there about four or five days before they got around behind us. We had to move out, and we went on down to Bandung or along in there somewhere. That's when the Dutch capitulated, so that's when our officers decided we'd surrender, too, there.

Marcello: Okay, so the surrender actually took place in a formal sense on March 9, 1942.

Bramlett: Well, I always said March 8th. Some of them say March 9th.

Marcello: Okay, describe what your reaction was when you heard that the unit was about to surrender.

Bramlett: (Chuckle) Well, I don't know. This friend of mine and I, we decided we were going to try to get over the mountains there to the coast and see if we could pick up a boat. We didn't know that. . . we got us a truck and started that way, and we didn't know that about 200 other guys had got trucks and started that way, too--English and Americans and whatnot (chuckle)--and they had this road blocked. Somebody had turned a truck over up there, and we couldn't go any farther, so we got out and walked to the top of this mountain to a tea plantation. We stayed up there a couple of days. This Dutch family. . . them ladies was pretty nice, you know. They let us stay out there behind their tea shed, we called it. But after the officers came up there, they ordered us back down. But we were a long ways from the coast yet--farther than we thought.

Marcello: How many of you were there at this tea plantation?

Bramlett: Well, I don't remember. There was quite a bunch up there --different people. But I only remember this one fellow that was with me--one close friend of mine, you know. He's the only one that I can remember of our bunch that was there--Dempsey Key. So there was quite a few up there, but I really don't know who all they were.

Marcello: In other words, you were all up there in an unauthorized sense.

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, you had not been ordered up there by your officers or anything of that nature.

Bramlett: No. No, we hadn't (chuckle). After they told us that we'd surrendered the island, you know, and we were surrendering, well, we decided we wanted to go on, you know.

Marcello: I've heard some of the prisoners express the fact that they were ashamed over the fact that Americans had surrendered.

Bramlett: Well, there was that shame, yes. I think everyone. . . most of them, anyway, was ashamed of the fact that we'd had to surrender. But, of course, you know, after you thought about it and found out what the situation was, there really wasn't anything else you could do at that time, I don't guess. Because we'd run out of ammunition, which we had very little of to start with.

Marcello: Had you really put up very much resistance against the Japanese?

Bramlett: Well, yes, there for those four or five days, we did, you know. But like I say. . . let's see. . . I think there was about. . . between 1,000 and 1,500 Australians and 500 or 600 of us, and I understand they landed 60,000 on the island (chuckle), so there wasn't much resistance you could put up, you know.

Marcello: Okay, so what happened when you left the tea plantation?

Bramlett: Well, we went back down to. . . I forgot the name of the little town. . . Garoet or somewhere along there.

Marcello: There is a town named Garoet.

Bramlett: I think that's where the surrender took place. We stayed there and just camped on the side of the road for several days.

Marcello: Now during this period, did you come into contact with the Japanese yet?

Bramlett: Only just to see them drive by, you know. They didn't . . . our officers would go into town and talk, you know, and then they'd come back out. But they didn't come out there where we were at.

Marcello: Now by this time, I assume that you were disarmed and so on.

Bramlett: Yes. Of course, when we started into Batavia, though, when they took us in and put us on the train, we saw lots of Japs after that.

Marcello: What were some of the rumors going around immediately after the surrender had come about? What did you think your fate was going to be?

Bramlett: Well, really, we didn't have any idea what our fate was going to be. But, you know, again everyone thought, "Oh, well, it won't be but just a matter of a few months until

they'll release us," you know. "Our troops will be in and get us out," you know. We didn't think it was going to last that long.

Marcello: Okay, describe your first contact with Japanese now.

Bramlett: Well, I guess they was on that train. They was always doing a lot of hollering, you know, and no one knew what they was saying. But we soon learned. . . after a few bashings, you learned (chuckle) to remember what they said and remember what it meant. But they took us on into Batavia, and we went to . . . Tanjong Priok, I believe--the first camp. That was a lousy place.

Marcello: Okay, let's just back up and talk a little bit more about this initial contact with the Japanese. What did they look like?

Bramlett: Well, they just looked small, you know. They didn't look like soldiers to me. Most of them had the little sneaker tennis shoes, you know, and the wrapped leggings and the little baggy pants and little caps (chuckle). They didn't look like soldiers to us.

Marcello: I've heard it said that they were kind of a scruffy-looking outfit.

Bramlett: Well, they were, really. At the best, they were clean. They wasn't neat. Their uniforms were all sloppy, you know--even their officers. Well, you know, I just didn't

think. . . couldn't see how they'd got as far as they'd got, you know.

Marcello: Now during this initial contact, had the physical punishment begun yet?

Bramlett: Well, now I think there were a few got bashed around a little on that train ride, but it really didn't get started until we got into Tanjong Priok, you know. The longer it went, the worse it got.

Marcello: Did they loot you at all during this initial contact?

Bramlett: No, not of personal belongings, they didn't. Now it wasn't long until they had a shakedown, you know, in the barracks there--in the old huts. They took a lot of things. Of course, we were pretty good at hiding things, you know. We wound up keeping a lot of things, too (chuckle). But they never took things like watches and things like that.

Marcello: You were dealing with front line troops here at this time, were you not?

Bramlett: Yes. There in Java, we were.

Marcello: Okay, so you mention that they transported you into Tanjong Priok. What did you do there?

Bramlett: Well, we went on work parties. We worked on the docks in the rubber. . . well, I worked down in the Dunlop Rubber Warehouse there. They were shipping out all these tires and everything they could get a hold of to Japan, you know.

They were transporting it out to the docks and loading it on ships. They were just looting the island, really --everything they could find. I don't know. I guess they needed it back there (chuckle). But I don't remember just how long we stayed there at Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: Was this very strenuous work?

Bramlett: Well, not right there it wasn't. They didn't really work us very hard there. Now when we got on up to Bicycle Camp, we got on some of this rice detail. Now that was strenuous. There was 100-kilo bags of rice they'd set up there for you to carry on your shoulders. That was pretty tough (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, we'll talk about that in a minute, but let's stay here at Tanjong Priok a minute. Where were you staying? Were you at another racetrack?

Bramlett: No, it was some kind of an old camp. It had barbed wire all around it and all through it. Really, that Tanjong Priok is pretty dim to me. I don't remember a whole lot that happened there.

Marcello: Now was the entire unit still together here at Tanjong Priok?

Bramlett: Yes, all but Battery E, which was left down at Surabaya.

Marcello: I assume you didn't stay here anymore than a couple of days or a week or so. You weren't here very long, were you?

Bramlett: We were there. . . it seems to me like a week or two--
something like that. I know that. . .

Marcello: And generally speaking, did the Japanese let you alone
here?

Bramlett: Well, yes. They didn't come into camp and bother us much.

Marcello: Were these work details voluntary, or were you assigned to
them?

Bramlett: Well, you know, they'd just tell our officers how many men
they wanted, and they'd come out and get them, you know--
at that point.

Marcello: Okay, so in May of 1942 you're transported to Bicycle Camp.

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, now how did it get the name Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: I don't really know, unless it was the name the natives
probably put on it. I think. . . you know, they had bicycle
brigades, and I think they had a lot of places for parking
their bicycles around there. I think that was once a
. . . a bicycle brigade probably occupied that camp. That
was just my opinion, but I don't really know.

Marcello: Well, this is the story that I have heard, and I wasn't
sure whether it was the case or not. Describe what Bicycle
Camp looked like from a physical standpoint.

Bramlett: Oh, that's a long time ago (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's start with the perimeter. Did it have a barbed wire
fence, or what sort of an enclosure was around the perimeter?

Bramlett: Yes, it had barbed wire fence, I think. I know it had barbed wire. They had verandas on these barracks, you know, and they put barbed wire around the verandas, you know. The front part of the compound. . . that was out in the parade ground along with the Japanese guardhouses, and that wasn't enclosed in wire, but the rest of the camp was, the best I can remember. They'd put this wire around any of these barracks that were on the outer edge of the perimeter, you know. They'd put wire around the verandas. Oh, I don't know. It's been a long time (chuckle).

Marcello: How large a camp was this in terms of the numbers of people there?

Bramlett: Well, I was just trying to think. There were quite a few of us. I'd say between 2,000 and 3,000.

Marcello: Were there all sorts of nationalities here?

Bramlett: Yes, there were Australians, English, Dutch, I think. . . I think we had some Dutch. . . and Americans. And it even had some Indians soldiers--English-Indian troops, you know.

Marcello: Did they segregate the various nationalities?

Bramlett: Well, yes, they were in different barracks, you know, but you could all visit among each other. It had one main street out there--Company Street, you know--that was open, and you could go around to different places.

Marcello: Describe what your particular living quarters were like here at Bicycle Camp.

Bramlett: Well, I happened to be out on the veranda, I call it, with the wire on . . . you know, the posts on the edge of the roof. . . they had that all fenced in with wire. We had double-deck bunks we'd built and put out there. That's where I stayed with a group of guys.

Marcello: What sort of belongings did you have at this particular time?

Bramlett: Well, we still had most all of our GI clothes and. . . you know.

Marcello: How about your mess kit and canteen?

Bramlett: Yes, we still had that at that point. Most everything that was our GI issue we still had. They hadn't took any of it. Of course, we had our blankets and things.

Marcello: What were the bathing facilities like here at this camp?

Bramlett: Bicycle Camp?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: Well, they were about the best we had anywhere.

Marcello: What were they like?

Bramlett: Showers--we had regular showers. It had been an old Army camp, you know, and they had . . . the latrine and restroom was out separate from the barracks, and it had showers in it. It was pretty decent. Most of those Dutch

toilets over there didn't have comodes (chuckle). They had little steps to step on and squat over the hole. They had the buckets underneath, you know--a lot of them did. I'm not sure whether Bicycle Camp had it or not.

Marcello: How often were you able to take baths here at Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: Well, as I remember, anytime you could get out there and wanted to, you know. Soap was a problem. We never had enough soap. If you had any, you were lucky.

Marcello: What was the food like here at Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: Well, now the Japanese issue wasn't much, but we had some money--in fact, our last month's payroll, you know. They didn't pay us, but they had the money. Then they'd let us keep it. I don't understand why they did that. But they'd let us buy food with it.

Marcello: Now when you say they let "you" keep it, you're referring to the officers.

Bramlett: To the officers that had it, yes.

Marcello: And the officers were allowed by the Japanese to use this money to buy food from the natives outside the camp?

Bramlett: Yes. Well, the natives would bring it in, or you could . . . the best I remember, one guy would come in, and you'd order it, you know. Then what he could get he'd bring in, and then you'd pay him for it, you know.

Marcello: There were some rumors going around, as I recall, that the officers seemed to be living a little bit better than the

enlisted men at this particular point. Would you care to comment on that?

Bramlett: (Chuckle) I'll just comment to the fact that they're not rumors--they did.

Marcello: Would you care to elaborate on that point?

Bramlett: Well, of course, we could sit on this little walk that went out to the bathroom, and their compound was right there. They were fenced in in a different enclosure and had a different barracks, and they had a table out there where they ate. All we had to do was walk by and see what they were eating. Of course, we had one master sergeant, Jack Shaw, that sat out there and took notes every day of what they had to eat and what we had to eat. He was, if I recollect right, was court-martialed there (chuckle) and busted to private, they said.

Marcello: For having done this?

Bramlett: Yes, that and a few other things, you know. Of course, he was just for the men.

Marcello: What sort of rations were you getting here?

Bramlett: Well, we were getting rice and. . . well, a few little vegetables, you know. We was able. . . about the only thing we got that was bought was beans. We bought a lot of pinto beans, and we got that. That was extra, you know.

Marcello: About how long did this company money last?

Bramlett: Oh, well, I don't know what happened to it after we left Java, but, you know, if there was any left, why, I don't know where it ever went to.

Marcello: Now despite the fact that the officers were apparently living better than the enlisted men, was discipline still being maintained? In other words, was there still the usual chain of command and so on and so forth?

Bramlett: Well, on the surface, I guess there was. But, you know, some of the officers we liked and respected, and some we didn't. It depended mostly on who it came from (chuckle). But, you know, they didn't bother us, and we didn't bother them, so it wasn't very effective (chuckle).

Marcello: How often did you get fed?

Bramlett: Well, as it worked, usually three times a day, you know--such as it was.

Marcello: Did the meal usually consist of rice?

Bramlett: Well, that was the basic thing. They had a few. . . I don't know what kind of vegetables they put in--some kind of old melon which was tasteless and, I think, useless.

Marcello: How about meat?

Bramlett: Seldom ever did we get meat. Once in awhile they'd bring in maybe a . . . I don't ever remember them bringing in a whole carcass or anything. It was usually just the rib-cage with a little meat on it, you know. They'd make stew

out of it or soup. I don't ever remember getting just a portion of meat. The serving is always in a stew, you know.

Marcello: Did it take you awhile to get used to eating that rice?

Bramlett: Yes, it took awhile. Of course, the rice we first got was a lot better than what we got later.

Marcello: Who was cooking the rice?

Bramlett: Well, our own fellows. Most of the guys that were, you know, cooks in the Army, they did the cooking. They didn't know how to cook it, and they made a mess out of the first few batches (chuckle), but they soon learned.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese would issue the rice, and then your own cooks would do the actual cooking and distributing of the rice.

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: How much rice would you get for lunch, let's say?

Bramlett: Well, at first you usually got all you wanted. You didn't really like it or care for it anyway, you know, and we were still pretty healthy, you know. You didn't eat as much as you probably should have or needed. But I don't remember. . . they had it proportioned out so much a man, you know--so many kilograms per man. But I don't recollect just how much it amounted to. I know I got all of it I wanted. I didn't care for it at first (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the Japanese. What sort of treatment did the Japanese engage in here at this particular camp?

Bramlett: Bicycle Camp?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: Well, they were pretty decent. These were Japanese guards, and, like again, I think they were front line troops, you know. They treated us fairly nice. You always had some bad ones in every bunch, you know, I mean, worse than the others. Some were worse than others. But I don't remember too much mistreatment there at Bicycle Camp. Now I know it did happen in some cases.

Marcello: Were you ever punched or hit or kicked or anything here at Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: No, no. I made it all the way to Burma before I got that.

Marcello: What was the key to not getting punched or hit or anything?

Bramlett: Well, my key was staying away from them as much as possible (chuckle) and avoiding them and trying not to attract their attention, you know. That's the only thing I ever tried to do. Of course, some guys--I don't know--they seemed to pick on the bigger guys, and I wasn't a very large guy, you know. The bigger they were, the better they liked to bash him (chuckle).

Marcello: What sort of physical punishment would they usually engage in?

Bramlett: Well, they liked to slap you, you know, on the face. A lot of times, they'd take you and bash you around awhile, and then they'd make you get down on your knees and put a bamboo pole, maybe two inches in diameter, you know, and bend your knees and make you sit back on it for an hour or two or three at a time.

Marcello: What sort of an effect would that have?

Bramlett: That was terribly painful! Eventually, when you tried to get up, you couldn't, you know. Your knees just locked there. It was real painful. I got that once (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume that would occur later on.

Bramlett: Yes, mine did. Yes.

Marcello: We'll talk about that when we get to that particular point. Wasn't it also during this period that the Japanese insisted that everybody sign a particular document that they wouldn't try to escape?

Bramlett: Yes. There was something like that there. I was reading a little bit in that book there (gesture). I'd forgotten about it. I don't remember ever signing one. I remember they told us to and we refused to. Fillmore says we did in his book, but I don't remember signing it. Maybe some of us did and some didn't. I don't know. But whatever, you know, it was . . . if I had have signed it, I would have just considered it meaningless anyway because if I'd got an

opportunity and thought I could, I'd have left. But most of the time, there wasn't anyplace to go.

Marcello: This brings up an interesting point. Were there ever any escape attempts here at Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: No, not that I know of.

Marcello: Why was that? I think you've in part answered the question, but elaborate a little bit.

Bramlett: Well, you know, there was Japs all around; there was no place to go. I don't know where you would have went or how we'd have started to get out of there, you know. The Dutch --most of them were interned, and I wouldn't have know whom to contact. A white man there is very obvious, you know (chuckle). You don't go far, and those natives would have turned you in. At that time, they were for the Japanese.

Marcello: They were for whoever was winning.

Bramlett: Yes. You know, I've always said that the Asiatic people --the way they were them days--if anybody would offer them anything, they'd take it because it was better than what they had, they thought. I mean, they always thought it couldn't be any worse. So as far as escaping there. . . of course, everybody thought about it and talked about it, but there just really wasn't any chance of getting out of there.

Marcello: What sort of warnings did the Japanese issue in the event that somebody would escape?

Bramlett: Oh, you'd be shot immediately (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you doubt their word?

Bramlett: No, I didn't doubt it! I figured they would. Really, I never. . . I know one fellow, and he did escape, but that was way later. And they never caught him. But I don't know of anybody that escaped--that got out--that they did not catch. I really don't know. . . this one is the only one I ever knew of that ever left.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing while you were here at Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: Well, again, we worked on the docks and different things around. They had. . . some of them was going down there and digging a canal, you know. I got lucky there. One morning there was a little old Japanese sergeant who came in and got sixteen of us. He took us. . . just cut us off the end of a work party that was fixing to go out and put us in a truck and took us down to the Dunlop Rubber Warehouse. We worked for him down there, and he was . . . we come to find out after a couple of days that he was raised in Los Angeles--born and raised there and was a Japanese citizen, you know. But he'd went back. . . his dad worked for the World Bank or something there. Anyway, they'd called him home and drafted him into the Army. But he turned out to be real nice, you know. He'd take us out in the truck and hide us out (chuckle) in the park or

somewhere, you know, and let us buy food off the natives. And he was always buying stuff for us. But that only lasted about two weeks (chuckle), and I don't know what happened to him. He left.

Marcello: What did you do after that two-week period was up?

Bramlett: Well, I worked around on the docks mostly.

Marcello: How would you describe this work in terms of physical activity and things of that nature?

Bramlett: Well, it was hard. I mean, that's where we first got into the rice carrying deal.

Marcello: Describe this.

Bramlett: Well, you know (chuckle), a 100-kilo bag. . . that's over 200 pounds, isn't it? At first they'd take four men and set it up on your shoulders in the back of your neck, you know, You were supposed to carry it. Now those little natives could carry it, but it was hard for us. We couldn't balance it. Boy, a lot of us went down under it, you know, until we learned how. Finally, we got to where we could do it, but at first, man, they'd just go to the ground under those big bags of rice. But that was hard work, I'll tell you (chuckle).

Marcello: About how long a day would you put in here?

Bramlett: Well, usually there, it hadn't gotten to the point that they really put in long hours. We'd work about ten hours

a day, I'd say--nine or ten. Maybe you'd finish some-time at four or five o'clock in the afternoon, and they'd take you in. Sometimes they'd just take you out and set you down somewhere to keep from going in that early, you know. But most of the time it was usually around ten hours a day.

Marcello: What sort of recreational activity was available here at Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: Well, we had a little . . . I think there was some volleyball playing there, and they'd rigged up some basketball nets if we had any free time, you know. Then they gave us every tenth day off. They stayed with it there, you know. But that was spent by people playing, you know, and doing their laundry and just different things. We had a little time for recreation--not much. I played cards mostly. I didn't need much active recreation; I got plenty of that every day (chuckle).

Marcello: Would this card playing take the form of gambling and this sort of thing?

Bramlett: Well, sometimes I'd gamble a little, but a lot of times it was just Hearts or, you know, Double Sol or something like that. Once in a while . . . there was always a poker game going on. You could get in one if you wanted to (chuckle).

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

Bramlett: Well, we still had a few medical supplies, you know. It was pretty good. But we didn't have much sickness there. We was still all in pretty good health, you know, and were kind of living on our reserves, I guess. We wasn't getting that good a food, but it was better than we got later, you know.

Marcello: I've heard it said that if you had stayed at Bicycle Camp under those conditions, being a prisoner-of-war for the duration would not have been too bad.

Bramlett: No, it wouldn't have. It wouldn't have been real bad. If we'd stayed right under those conditions, it wouldn't have been that terribly bad. It would have been long, you know, but it wouldn't have been rough.

Marcello: Now at this period, did you still think that your tenure as a prisoner-of-war would be a very brief one?

Bramlett: Oh, yes, we still thought it would be pretty short (chuckle).

Marcello: In other words, what sort of rumors did you hear about the American fleet being right over the horizon or something like that?

Bramlett: Oh, yes. All the time you'd hear this, you know. We used to have a game. We'd start a little rumor, you know, and then watch it. Then when it got back to you, why, you wouldn't recognize it from what you started, you know

(chuckle). But we had a radio for a while there.

Marcello: You might describe this. It sounds interesting.

Bramlett: (Chuckle) Well, I was trying to think of the man's name that had it. He was a radio technician. I know every-time we'd move or have a shake-down, he'd disassemble it and scatter the parts out all over the camp, you know, and everybody had a certain one they had to hide, you know.

Marcello: Now did you actually ever see the radio?

Bramlett: Oh, yes. Yes, I saw it. I've listened to it. He set it up and operated it there--just occasionally, not very often.

Marcello: How would the news be distributed?

Bramlett: Well, little bulletins. Everyone that got one was to destroy it, you know, as soon as he read it. We were divided into what they called a "kumi," you know, which was fifty men, and you'd get one. One guy was supposed to read it and destroy it and then tell the other guys about it. You'd always burn the little paper you got, you know.

Marcello: Now were you receiving Allied news, or was this all Japanese propaganda or what?

Bramlett: Well, most of it was Japanese propaganda. Now "Tokyo Rose" was on there a lot (chuckle). But occasionally we'd pick up something from Australia--not very often. It wasn't

that strong. I guess everything had to be just right. But we could get something from Australia every once in awhile. So most of the time that was disheartening too, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you usually think about in your spare time during this particular period--when you sat around in your bull sessions and so on?

Bramlett: In Bicycle Camp?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: Oh, well, your thoughts still went back home, you know, and to your girl friends or your wives and what you were going to do when you got back and things like that. But, you know, later on that changed (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, now in October or else near the end of September of 1942, the unit was moved out of Bicycle Camp. Describe this move. First of all, what were your thoughts when you heard that you were going to be leaving?

Bramlett: Well, you know, we wondered where we were going. There was all kinds of rumors about it, you know.

Marcello: Is it kind of upsetting to leave? In other words, you'd been there for several months, and you must have been falling into some sort of a routine. Now all the sudden, that's upset.

Bramlett: Yes, it was. We were all kind of downhearted about it because, like you say, we realized, too, that it wasn't

half bad as a prisoner-of-war there at Bicycle Camp. It could be a lot worse. We hated to leave. I had two real good friends that stayed there. They were on the sick list. I know the night before we left, we discussed it. They wanted me to stay with them, you know. I thought, "Well, I'll make sick call." During the night, I changed my mind and decided I wouldn't. Later both of the boys were sunk on a Japanese ship near the Philippines, so I guess I made a good decision there. Yes, we were disappointed. We didn't want to leave there.

Marcello: Before we leave the Bicycle Camp, there's something that I forgot to bring up. This seems to be a good. . . well, the only time I can put it in the record and keep this in some sort of chronological order. After you had arrived at the Bicycle Camp, the survivors off the USS Houston came in. Describe what that outfit looked like when they came into camp.

Bramlett: They were there when we got there.

Marcello: They were?

Bramlett: Yes. They were there when we got there. Well, you know, we knew they were POW's, but we didn't know what nationalities because they were in all kinds of dress. A lot of them got off with shorts, and they didn't have anything, you know. But I know we was standing in formation out

there, and they was all looking at us through this barbed wire, you know. I don't know. Most of us were just watching them and decided. . . we couldn't hear them talking, but we all finally decided they must be Americans. They just looked and acted like Americans, you know.

Marcello: Were they dirty and grimy and things of this nature or what?

Bramlett: Well, of course, no. They had cleaned up, but they didn't have any clothes or anything left, you know. Some of them were bruised up and battered up, you know. No, of course, they had gotten cleaned up by the time we got there. But they were in the camp when we got there.

Marcello: Did you share with them? In other words, you probably had more clothing and so on than they did.

Bramlett: Yes, we did. Most of them looked like Army GI in a few days. They found someone that had an extra pair of pants their size, you know, and at that particular time, like I say, we thought, "Well, this is not going to last long. We can share with them." But it soon wound down to where all of our clothes was gone.

Marcello: Did the two groups blend together pretty well and get along quite well?

Bramlett: Oh, yes, yes. They did. You never heard. . . I don't remember ever hearing anyone, you know, having any conflict

because of Army or Navy or Marine Corps. That just didn't enter your mind anymore. Of course, now before that--and after that--it might have (chuckle), but not there.

Marcello: Okay, let's get back up to the time that you left the Bicycle Camp. Describe the circumstances under which you left. What sort of transportation did you take and this sort of thing?

Bramlett: Well, they put us on an old ship, but I can't remember the name. Well, we went on one there later that was named Dai Nichi Maru--was one of them's name.

Marcello: I think that was the one that you left Changi Prison Camp on.

Bramlett: It probably was. I can't remember the name of that old ship. Anyway, they put us down in this hold and really packed us in. It was rough from there up to Singapore.

Marcello: Is this when you really got some taste of what being a prisoner-of-war was all about?

Bramlett: Yes, we began to realize. . . it got rough and was likely to get rougher.

Marcello: Okay, describe this trip now from Java over to Singapore, which is where you were being sent.

Bramlett: Well, most of the time, we were stuck down in that hold, and, like I say, there wasn't room to lay down. You would just sit and leaned on someone. Hot--it was just like an

oven in there, you know. They let you go up in groups, and you'd get so much water and your rice. If you had to go. . . they had these old bath things built over the edge of the ship, and you could go up if you had to use the bathroom, you know. But most of the time they kept us down in that old hot, stinking hold, which was terrible. But I don't remember. It seems like I was only on there about four or five, maybe six, days. But that's about all I can remember, is that hot, stinking hold they kept us in all the time.

Marcello: Now I gather that up to this point you had lost very, very few men.

Bramlett: Well, we hadn't lost any other than the ones we lost down there at camp, you know--a few. I say a few. Some of them. . . there was two or three that transferred over to the Air Force. One of them was shot down, or two of them. Then one guy we had was accidentally shot by one of our guys. We had one or two wounded. I don't know. But we hadn't lost any in the POW camp up to that point that I knew of.

Marcello: Okay, so you land in Singapore, and you're sent to Changi Prison Camp.

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: Now describe what Changi Prison Camp was like.

Bramlett: Well, Changi was clean--big, open barracks, you know, which was English Army barracks. The one I stayed in was high up on a hill. The work wasn't too rough there, but the food wasn't good. We didn't have as much to eat.

Marcello: Describe what the food was like.

Bramlett: Well, mostly rice and a few of those old melons, you know, for the stew, and that was about it--and a short ration of rice. I mean, that's the first place I remember not getting all the rice I wanted (chuckle). Occasionally, they'd throw in an old piece of mutton they'd confiscated off of the English. I guess the Japs wouldn't eat it either. I didn't like it either. They'd throw that in, too, every once in awhile--throw it in the stew, you know. To me that just messed it up, really. But we were on short rations there. But the work wasn't bad.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do here at Changi?

Bramlett: Well, we cleared the big rubber plantation down there. They cleared out a lot of rubber trees--just cut them out.

Marcello: Were they going to plant gardens in there or what?

Bramlett: I understand that was their idea. They was going to plant a big garden there. Of course, we left before they ever got a garden there. I don't know (chuckle).

Marcello: Now what were the Japanese guards like here at Changi?

Bramlett: Well, they weren't too bad again. They weren't that bad. In fact, if you stayed up in the barracks or around that compound, you might not see one all day, you know. They didn't come through the barracks and bother with us. Of course, we was out there, and we couldn't go anywhere. It was a peninsula, I mean. . . what do you call it?

Marcello: A moat or something?

Bramlett: Yes. Well, it was between the Malayan Peninsula and the Island of Singapore. You see it out there. . . well, you couldn't swim that. There were guards all around the other side, so they didn't bother us much there.

Marcello: Did you say that the quarters here at Changi were comparable to those at Bicycle Camp?

Bramlett: Yes, I'd say they were. They were, the best I can remember, two-story brick buildings, you know.

Marcello: But they were fairly habitable?

Bramlett: Yes. Oh, yes. They were clean. If you'd keep them clean, they were nice, you know. Of course, you didn't have any bunks or anything.

Marcello: Now this was a much bigger camp than Bicycle Camp, was it not?

Bramlett: Oh, Lord, yes! It was big and scattered out more, you know. They had really "country-clubbed" that thing--the English had. Of course, I understood they had these

coastal guns around the Island of Singapore. You probably heard about those. I understood that's where the guys that operated those had lived in these barracks. They were, you know, scattered out closer to these guns. But they were pretty nice as far as living quarters.

Marcello: I've heard it said, though, that Changi was a rather unhappy place. Evidently the morale of the British here was extremely low.

Bramlett: Yes, it was. We didn't get along with the British there. I don't think. . . well, we never got along with the British, really.

Marcello: What was the problem here at Changi with the British?

Bramlett: Well (chuckle), I really don't know. We agitated them a lot. And I know they had. . . one incident, I think, set off in a big feud. They had some chickens down there, and some of these Yanks stole them. I don't know who they was (chuckle), but someone had chicken for dinner. Then the feud was really on, you know. They'd try and get the Japs involved in it--the English would, you know. I don't know. I didn't have much to do with the English hardly ever.

Marcello: I've heard it said that discipline was rather weak among the British at this point. The enlisted men really weren't obeying their officers and so on.

- Bramlett: Well, no, I'm sure they wasn't, but there again, you know, like I say, I didn't have anything to do with them and didn't contact any of them and didn't know any of them. But I'm sure they wasn't. . . as far as obeying their officers, I don't think they were there.
- Marcello: I've also heard it said that personal hygiene of the British was relatively bad here, also.
- Bramlett: Yes, well, I thought it was relatively bad everywhere I saw them. I never saw a place. . . well, of course, we were in camp with some on up the road, and their personal hygiene was always (chuckle) bad in my opinion.
- Marcello: I guess by this time everybody--at least the Americans--are realizing that personal hygiene is going to be one of the keys to getting you through this thing.
- Bramlett: Well, of course, yes, we realized it. Of course, you know, in our Army that's taught to you, you know. Most of the guys. . . well, I don't think there's any nationality in the world, as far as personal hygiene goes, that's any cleaner than the American people--not any that I've saw. So yes, we all realized that, you know. Of course, that got to be a problem, too, because water got scarce and soap got scarce. In fact, there wasn't any soap, no toothbrushes, no toothpaste, or anything like that, you know.
- Marcello: Of course, this becomes more of a problem after you get up into Burma and begin working on the railroad.

Bramlett: Oh, yes. Sure.

Marcello: I gather that most of the people were not too sad to leave Changi Prison Camp.

Bramlett: Not too sad. Of course, we didn't know what we were going to, but at that point, you know, it was. . .

Marcello: You were only at Changi for a couple months.

Bramlett: Yes, I think it was probably two months. Maybe a little over.

Marcello: Is there anything else that we need to talk about at Changi before we move on?

Bramlett: Well, not anything that comes to mind. It was, like I say, kind of dull there. They didn't work us that hard, really. The food wasn't that good, but still not much happened there.

Marcello: Okay, so you get aboard another ship eventually. I believe you took a short train trip up to George Town. . .

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: . . . and then you took another transport ship. This was the Dai Nichi Maru.

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, describe the train trip on the Dai Nichi Maru from George Town up to Moulmein in Burma.

Bramlett: You want the train trip?

Marcello: Okay, let's start from the train trip.

- Bramlett: Well, the best I can remember, that was just part of one day and one night. We arrived at George Town at night. We boarded this old ship, the best I remember, at night. Of course, that was. . . we were pretty crowded but not as we were on that other one. I don't remember a whole lot about it. I remember we got bombed on this trip by our planes.
- Marcello: Okay, you might describe that because I think it is one of the important incidents here on the trip.
- Bramlett: Yes. Well, I was down. . . of course, there we were allowed to go on deck, you know, during the day. At this particular time, I was down there with that Sergeant Jack Shaw we were talking about earlier. Somehow I got nominated as the barber in the bunch (chuckle). Somebody had accumulated some old hand clippers. Anyway, I had him down there in the hold, and the hatch covers were off, and I was cutting his hair. We kept hearing this noise, you know, and Jack says, "That sounds like planes." I said, "Oh, yeah, that's probably Japs." I looked up and they weren't. They were right over us. At that high altitude on a clear day, you can see those bombs and count them as they come out (laughter). I said, "Whoa, boy! Jack, they're not Japs! Here they come!" You could hear them, you know.

Of course, we never got out of the hold. Some of the guys were on deck, and they saw all this. They made two or three passes, and they sunk one of the ships that had Dutch prisoners on it and some Japanese troops. They got a near-miss--they called it--on this old tub we was on. I understand the ammunition on the back. . . it had an old gun back there that blew up and killed some of the Jap gun crew and some Australians that were on the back of the ship.

Marcello: Well, describe what it felt like when you experienced this near-miss.

Bramlett: Well, you know, the old boat just shook and the dirt flew (chuckle)--the old thing. But there was a little bit of joy there, you know, and a lot of fear in wondering what was going to happen and thinking, "Well, you hate to get it from your own people, but you're glad to see them out, too," you know. Of course, it was all over pretty quick, but it seemed like a long time while it was happening.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese?

Bramlett: Well, they were kind of shook up about it, you know. Of course, everybody was excited. We were trying to get the Dutch and the Jap survivors out of the water, and they put them on our boat, you know. Of course, it was kind of hectic around there then, sure enough, because we were really crowded.

Marcello: It's almost surprising that the Japanese stopped to pick up those Dutch survivors, but I gather there were a lot of Japanese in the water, too.

Bramlett: Yes, there were. There was quite a few Japanese in the water. My understanding was they lost a lot of Japanese on that ship, and they lost 200 or 300 Dutch prisoners. They went on one end of the ship, and the Japanese troops were on the other end. But that was just information we picked up here and there, you know.

Marcello: Okay, so you landed at Moulmein, Burma, in January of 1943. I think the date was January 17, 1943. Sometime around there you landed in Moulmein. Oh, at this point there's a question I need to bring up. Somewhere along the line, part of the unit was lopped off and sent to Japan. Isn't that true?

Bramlett: Oh, yes, at Singapore. Yes, I think about seventy or seventy-five of them--supposedly technicians, you know --they took to Japan. Thurman Rhine was one of them-- that you was talking about.

Marcello: Okay, let's pick up the story again when you landed at Moulmein. What did you do when you landed?

Bramlett: Well, they put us in an old native prison with old cell blocks, you know, and rock walls. Lord, it was a dirty, filthy place (chuckle). There's when we found out what our food was going to be like. It was pretty bad there.

Marcello: What was it like?

Bramlett: Well, all we got was a little rice, you know, and dirty rice at that, you know. I think there we got our first --as I recollect--introduction to dried fish--little dried fish. We called them "white bait." Where they picked up that name, I don't know. But they were pretty hard to take, and we didn't eat them for a long time. It seems like we didn't stay there long--three or four days.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how long you actually stayed at this prison camp.

Bramlett: I think three or four days at the most. Then they took us out by truck to the 18 Kilo Camp, they called it.

Marcello: Okay, they took you out to the 18 Kilo Camp, and this was at Thambyuzayat. Is that correct?

Bramlett: Yes, Thambyuzayat.

Marcello: Do you remember a speech that you were given by a Japanese colonial here at Thanbyuzayat as you were about ready to begin work on this railroad?

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: Just describe the speech.

Bramlett: Well, I couldn't. . . man, it was a rambling thing. It's in that book over there (gesture). It was just a rambling thing, you know. You would do this for the Japanese Army, and they would protect you (chuckle). He finally wound up

telling us, I think, that they was going to complete that railroad if it was over the POW's dead bodies-- that we were going to build that railroad. I don't recollect a whole lot about the speech or what it acutally said.

Marcello: Thanbyuzayat was kind of a base camp, was it not?

Bramlett: Well, it was the first. . . now that was the base camp-- Thanbyuzayat--but 18 Kilo was the first work camp we went into. It was right out of Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: And these camps were so-named according to how far back in the jungle they progressed.

Bramlett: Well, I think Thanbyuzayat, like you say, was a base camp. I think 18 Kilo was eighteen kilos from there, see--eighteen kilometers. Then so on down the line. But 18 Kilo was the first work camp where we actually did any railroad work.

Marcello: Okay, now describe what 18 Kilo Camp looked like from a physical standpoint.

Bramlett: Oh, it was a desolate place. Old straw huts--bamboo huts, you know--long things--that's what we lived in. Dusty-- it was the dry season. At this place we hadn't gotten into the jungle, so there wasn't any trees, to speak of, around it. It was a dirty, hot, dry place. It had the well they'd dug in the center of the place, and it was dry (chuckle).

We had to walk about two miles to get any water out of a little creek and to bathe. They worked us pretty hard there, but usually you had a set amount of hours to work every day there.

Marcello: What was the nature of the work?

Bramlett: Well, we were digging the dirt and building fills, you know, in the low places and cutting any high place. You had to cut and level the railroad bed. You did this with pick and shovel and "yo-yo poles," we called them.

Marcello: What are the "yo-yo poles?"

Bramlett: Well, that's a bamboo pole about, oh, six feet long and about two or three inches around. You take a . . . we used rice bags a lot of times. We'd tie a wire on each corner, you know, and then slip the pole through there and carry the dirt on them. Two men would carry dirt on this. There'd be a certain amount of men digging and a certain amount of men carrying the dirt, you know.

Marcello: Why were they called "yo-yo poles?"

Bramlett: I don't know. That's a name we tagged on them (chuckle). I don't know. Because it was kind of a yo-yo up and down that hill, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: How long would the average workday be here at this camp?

Bramlett: Well, it started off usually about twelve hours a day, you know. It gradually increased.

Marcello: Now at the time you hit the 18 Kilo Camp, were most of you still in fairly good shape physically?

Bramlett: Physically, yes. Most of us were.

Marcello: Had any of the tropical diseases set in yet? I'm referring primarily to malaria.

Bramlett: No, I don't think so. Now there was a lot of dysentery. We had a lot of dysentery there. But I don't recollect . . . there might have been a few cases of malaria, but I think that mainly started when the rainy season started later.

Marcello: What do you do for dysentery?

Bramlett: Well, we didn't have anything. You go on what they call "pap"--soft rice diet, you know. They'd boil the rice --real soupy. That's about all you could eat. That doctor, he had you eating charcoal--burn wood and eat the charcoal. Or burn rice and eat that--anything burnt, you know. That's about all we really had to do for it. Whether it did any good or not, I don't know.

Marcello: Is this where you had your first encounter with the Korean guards?

Bramlett: Yes! You bet!

Marcello: Describe what those Korean guards were like. I think all of you have memories of those Korean guards, and they aren't fond memories.

Bramlett: I sure do! I got my first bashing there at 18 Kilo.

Marcello: Okay, describe this.

Bramlett: This little guard we called "Makon." I don't remember who tacked it on him or why. That's some word. . .I'm not sure. It's not Japanese. It's some native word over there for eating or food or something. Anyway, he was always eating something, you know. Anyway, we were out working on this fill this day, and I had to go to use the bathroom. So, you know, you'd ask the guard, and he'd say, "Yeah, go off over here in the bushes," you know, beside the dump. Well, I left and I came back, and they'd changed guards. "Makon" had come on. So he looked around and saw me coming up that dump. He didn't ask where I'd been or why. He just hauled off and hit me with that rifle and knocked me back down.

Marcello: Where did he hit you?

Bramlett: He hit me right on the back of the shoulder (chuckle). I started back up, and he come down and knocked me back down (chuckle). Then he got a bamboo pole and stuck that bayonet in my face and made me put that pole between my knees and sit there for about an hour. That's the first bashing I got and nearly the last one. I only really got one more (chuckle).

Marcello: I understand those Korean guards were especially bad.

Bramlett: They were. They were terribly. . . I don't know. The only thing I could remember--only thing I could think

of--was that they were trying to get even with us for the way they were treated. You know, probably they'd been treated that way all their life. Later we come to that conclusion.

Marcello: Well, you know, I gather that physical punishment was actually a way of life in the Japanese Army. In other words, I'm sure you saw instances of sergeants beating on corporals and corporals beating on privates and so on.

Bramlett: It was, yes, sure. All the time, you know. This was their punishment, you know. Yes, I saw that happen a lot, and I couldn't understand that, you know.

Marcello: And, of course, I gather that the Japanese privates would have the Koreans, and the only people the Koreans had were the Americans.

Bramlett: That was us, yes (chuckle). I think that's the way it really worked out.

Marcello: Also, it seems to me that there might have been a communications problem here. In other words, you're dealing with guards who are relatively uneducated, and on top of that, there's a language barrier. One of the only ways that they can make their desires known is by giving you a good bash with a rifle butt or something of that nature.

Bramlett: Yes. Well, you know, I often thought they probably were told to do that. But I always said they didn't have to

enjoy it so darn much, you know (chuckle). If they didn't want to do it, they didn't have to enjoy it.

Marcello: What were some of the favorite punishments that these Koreans would deal out?

Bramlett: Well, you know, they liked to slap a man in the face if they could. They'd slap you right in the face. They seemed to get a big bang out of that for some reason or another--and especially a big guy, you know. I remember one instance where they tried to slap this fellow, and he was too tall. They couldn't reach him to hit him in the face, so they got on some steps and made him walk up in front of them. Things like that, you know. But they used the pole a lot under the knees, you know. They used the bamboo poles to "whup" you with, too, if it occurred to them and one was handy.

Marcello: I've heard it said that one of the worst things that could happen would be to get hit and fall on the ground.

Bramlett: Oh, yes! You didn't want to fall if there was anyway to avoid it. Really, you know, the best thing to do was--we thought--to not even let them know that they even hurt, you know--just stand there. But I think that only irritated them more (chuckle). I think if you'd let on like it hurt a little, they might have quit a little quicker maybe. I don't know.

- Marcello: I've also heard it said that after awhile the prisoners would learn how to roll with the punch.
- Bramlett: Oh, yes. You do that--if you know it's coming. But they were pretty good at sneaking one in on you (chuckle).
- Marcello: Okay, what was the quality of the food like here at the 18 Kilo Camp?
- Bramlett: Well, it was just rice and a few of those greens, you know, and a little of that dried fish is about all we got there.
- Marcello: How was it in terms of quality?
- Bramlett: Well, it was fair. Not as good as it was back at Bicycle, but better than it had been in Singapore--I mean more of it.
- Marcello: Oh, you were getting more of it here at 18 Kilo Camp?
- Bramlett: At 18 Kilo we were getting quite a bit--enough, you know, to get by with. The only thing they did, if you stayed in camp sick, you only got half ration--there at 18.
- Marcello: How sick would you have to be in order to go to the hospital or the infirmary or whatever they had there?
- Bramlett: Well, at that point, if the doctor said you were sick. . . we didn't have that much sickness up until then. If the doctor said you were sick, well, they went along with it, you know. There wasn't ever much said about it at the 18 Kilo.
- Marcello: I gather that there is no fence or anything around this camp.

Bramlett: No, none of the camps in general had any fence.

Marcello: At the same time, there's really no thought of escaping.

Bramlett: There's no place you could go. We knew where we were at and how far it was to where (chuckle), you know. There was really no chance of getting away there. You could have left.

Marcello: I guess on one side you had the jungles, and on the other side you had the ocean.

Bramlett: That's right. You had to swim a 1,000 miles or walk 700 miles through the jungle (chuckle), so, you know, really there wasn't much place to go.

Marcello: Now when you were out working on this railroad--and you mentioned that here at the 18 Kilo Camp you were making cuts and fills--were you being supervised by Japanese engineers or technicians or anything of this nature?

Bramlett: Yes, they had Japanese engineers. We hardly ever had any dealings with them, you know. They would tell the guards what to do. They usually had what they called a "hancho" --a Jap sergeant out in charge of the party, you know. They would tell him, and then he would tell the guards and our officers, and they'd tell us what they wanted done, you know. Most of the time those little sergeants could speak English well enough. . . most of the Japanese knew enough English to get by on. They wouldn't let you know they did, but they knew it.

Marcello: Were you learning very much Japanese in the meantime?

Bramlett: Well, I learned some. I learned to understand a lot more than I could speak. I mean, a lot of words I knew their meaning, but I couldn't put them into a sentence, you know, or anything. We could listen to them talk and pick up a pretty good drift of what they were talking about. But we had to learn to count in Japanese and the Japanese commands and things like that, you know.

Marcello: I assume that you had a roll call every morning.

Bramlett: Oh, yes--every morning. Well, we didn't have roll call. When we come in every evening, they counted us as we come in the guardhouse, you know. They had a roll call every morning, and you'd just count off in Japanese out there.

Marcello: What part did the American officers play in the building of this railroad? In other words, what are they doing?

Bramlett: Well, they didn't do anything but go out on work parties and just sit out there, you know. They didn't work.

Marcello: Did they act as a type of liaison between the Japanese and the enlisted POW's or anything of this nature?

Bramlett: Yes, that was mainly what they did. Some of them were pretty good at it, and some of them weren't.

Marcello: Was there very much resentment among the enlisted men over the fact that officers weren't working?

Bramlett: No, really, I don't think so. I didn't think that an officer should. . . I mean, you know, he was an officer

after all. I don't think he should have had to work.

That part I didn't resent. Now a lot of things they did I did resent, but I didn't feel bad because they didn't have to work. I'm glad they didn't (chuckle). I'm glad somebody didn't have to work.

Marcello: (Chuckle) I gather at this time that the natives were already following the camps in order to do trading and that sort of thing.

Bramlett: Oh, yes, some of them did, you know. Yes.

Marcello: Describe the trade between the prisoners and the natives. How would it take place, and what would you trade?

Bramlett: (Chuckle) Well, you'd trade anything you could get, and a lot of times it was Japanese mosquito nets (chuckle) or whatever you could steal off of them, you know.

Marcello: Okay, well, let's just back up here a minute then. Maybe first of all I should ask how you got the material and the goods with which to trade to the natives.

Bramlett: Well, we accumulated a lot of it back in Java, you know --working on the docks.

Marcello: In other words, you stole things off the docks?

Bramlett: Stole it off of them, sure. You know, those mosquito nets. . . they had the big five-man nets, and they had about a half a yard of blue broadcloth on the bottom. Well, they had a lot of them that didn't have blue broadcloth

on them, you know (chuckle), because material--any kind of material--was a premium over there. The natives just couldn't get it, and they'd trade anything for a piece of cloth, you know, to make clothes out of. We'd trade for a few eggs and that old brown sugar and a little of that strong tobacco that we called "wog" tobacco, you know. That's about the limit of what you could get, you know. It was very limited. Once in a while we'd get fruit of some kind, you know.

Marcello: What were you able to steal when you were in these various work camps along the railroad?

Bramlett: Not much in Burma. There wasn't much there you could get (chuckle).

Marcello: In other words, most of what you had to trade had been carried with you from either Java or Changi.

Bramlett: Yes. Now later on, we got to where we stole a little from them over farther on in the jungle, but not at 18 Kilo (chuckle).

Marcello: Do you think the Japanese really know what's going on?

Bramlett: Yes. . . well, I think. . . yes, they knew, but they either couldn't catch us or they didn't want to. I don't know.

Marcello: I've often thought that, well, maybe if they allowed you to steal these things, that meant that was all the less that they would have to supply you later on.

Bramlett: Well, a lot of them, I know, didn't want us to steal. Now, you know, they didn't want you to tear up those mosquito nets and (chuckle). . . the sugar--I know they didn't want you to steal that stuff. But I think some of the guards knew, but they didn't. . . you know, some of them. . . they were human. They had a little sympathy for you. I don't think they reported a lot of stuff that they knew about. Now if some of the officers or the non-coms had have knew it, there would have been hell to pay, in other words, you know. But I think a lot of the guards let things go like that. But it got to be kind of a contest to see who could steal more (chuckle). But there wasn't stealed at 18 Kilo and in Burma--not a whole lot.

Marcello: Do you still have the radio?

Bramlett: What?

Marcello: Is the radio still in operation at this point?

Bramlett: Oh, at 18 Kilo?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: Now we carried it. . . they disassembled it and scattered the parts out, and we carried it to Singapore, and he assembled it. But I'm not sure. . . there was some in Burma now, but I don't think it was the one we had. I think it went on to Japan. I believe that fellow went to Japan that had that one in Batavia or in Java.

Marcello: Well, that would almost be logical since you mentioned that they were taking the technicians to Japan.

Bramlett: Yes. Yes, I think that's what happened to it. But I know some of the English had one, or an Australian had one in Burma. I know we'd get word back, you know, from people that'd go back and forth. We had some people that delivered supplies back and forth to the camps, you know.

Marcello: Did you ever get any word from the outside through the natives?

Bramlett: No, not really. We used to get some. . . well, later on. I'll tell you about that later. On up the country, you know, we'd get word, but not from the native people.

Marcello: What about Red Cross parcels? Are you getting any Red Cross parcels at this time yet?

Bramlett: No. We hadn't heard of them (chuckle).

Marcello: How about mail? Are you receiving any mail, or are you allowed to send any mail yet? This is at 18 Kilo Camp now.

Bramlett: No, I don't remember sending one there. Now I think on down at the next camp is the first one I remember sending.

Marcello: How long were you at 18 Kilo Camp altogether?

Bramlett: That's hard to say. Time didn't mean a whole lot, you know what I mean? Three months. . . two or three months, it seemed like.

Marcello: Now by this time we are into 1943, are we not?

Bramlett: Yes, yes.

Marcello: I think you arrived in Thanbyuzayat sometime around the 27th of January of 1943.

Bramlett: Somewhere along in there, yes.

Marcello: Okay, where did you move from the 18 Kilo Camp?

Bramlett: We moved down. . . 55 Kilo, I believe. Now I was noticing in that book that he's got some things there that don't conform to my recollections, but it was down in there somewhere. We didn't stay there long, I know. Then we went to 80 Kilo. Eighty Kilo was the next camp we stayed any length of time.

Marcello: Okay, describe the work at the 80 Kilo Camp.

Bramlett: Well, it was building. . . we built some bridges there. It was getting on into the jungle now. We were in the jungle. We built some smaller bridges out of wood and drove the pile, you know. We had some elephants that was handling the big timbers there. It was a little interesting, you know, to watch all that. Then we had some cuts and fills to build there.

Marcello: Now by the time you reached the 80 Kilo Camp, the so-called "Speedo" campaign has begun, is that correct?

Bramlett: Yes. Yes, it had--in earnest.

Marcello: Describe what the "Speedo" campaign meant and what it was like.

Bramlett: Well, of course, first of all, that's where we began to get sick. That's where the malaria hit us.

Marcello: The "Speedo" campaign, I think, began around May of 1943.

Bramlett: Yes, somewhere along in there. Well, you know, that meant "hurry up" or "do more," you know. Then they went off . . . that twelve-hour day bit didn't last long. They finally went out there, and they assigned you so much to do a day--like two kilometers of dirt to dig, you know, to move per man. Well, you would have. . . well, it didn't start off with two, but that's what it wound up as, or more. They'd say, "Well, you've got fifty men in this "Kumi," so twenty-five dig and twenty-five carry." Well, that's a hundred kilos to dig and move in a day. That's pretty hard. You know, they'd say, "Now 'Speedo!' Get through with this, and you go home early." All right, we were dumb enough that we thought it might work for a while. We dug it out there, and you'd get through at two or three o'clock in the afternoon. Well, the first time they take you home, but the next day you went, and you had a little more to do--a little more and then a little more.

Marcello: In other words, they simply kept increasing the quota.

Bramlett: Sure! Every day.

Marcello: Now is the term "Speedo" a Japanese term? Or is it combination . . . I guess we could say a "bastard" word the Japanese

used to indicate that they wanted you to hurry up.

Bramlett: Yes, I think so. They knew "speed" was fast, you know, and that's what they wanted--faster. They didn't say faster--"speedo." But that's where it all started there, and I assume that's where they got it. I think they're the ones that originated the thing. Like I say, most of them knew a little English.

Marcello: How long would the average day last here?

Bramlett: Well, it got up to fourteen, sometimes sixteen hours a day. I have worked as high as eighteen hours a day. We got into that rainy season there. It slowed down considerable --mud knee-deep.

Marcello: Describe what that rainy season is like.

Bramlett: Oh, it's just a blanket of rain for six months, it seemed to me like (chuckle). For about five months, I think, it rained constantly just day and night. You couldn't go anywhere. The mud went from ankle-deep to knee-deep. Everything was wet--clothing, what you had; your bed--and it stayed wet. At that time all of our shoes had wore out, you know, and everybody was barefooted.

Marcello: I'm sure everything rots very quickly in that jungle.

Bramlett: Oh, yes. All of our clothes were gone there. All of our blankets even rotted, and some of the guys, you know, had cut them up and made clothes out of them, you know.

The Japs issued some little old thin cotton blankets. It'd get cool at night, you know, and damp. You'd have to build fire even and get up and get warm every once in awhile, you know, to be half comfortable. That's when it really got rough--at 80 Kilo. It started getting rough; it got a lot rougher (chuckle).

Marcello: Are you down to wearing G-strings at this point?

Bramlett: No, I think most of us still had a few clothes, but most of us had cut the legs off of the pants to patch them with, you know. Then that's the first camp. . . I had malaria there and dysentery. I got to weighing about ninety pounds there.

Marcello: What was your normal weight?

Bramlett: About 160 pounds when I went over there.

Marcello: Well, you had lost roughly 40 per cent of your body weight.

Bramlett: Yes, at 80 Kilo. Well, I had dysentery, and then malaria hit me at the same time, you know, and I just went down. I don't know. I was kind of in a coma, it seems like, for five or six days. I didn't remember anything and didn't eat anything.

Marcello: Were you sick enough to stay off the work details?

Bramlett: Yes. I don't know how they would have got me out there (chuckle).

Marcello: Who was determining who was sick enough to stay off work details at the 80 Kilo Camp?

Bramlett: Well, at that time our doctors were. There's where we began to get a lot of sickness, and that's where the Japs would come in usually after the parties had went out, you know. They'd make the sick fall out. Them that could walk would come out, and they would go by and say, "Well, you go! You go!" They called it light duty at first (chuckle). You'd go out there, and maybe you sit there, and they'd . . . they had these rocks that they'd maybe blasted out of a cut, you know. They'd give you a hammer, and you'd sit there and break them up and make this ballast rock for the railroad--which was pretty hard work (chuckle). Using a four-pound hammer even sitting down was hard work, you know. It eventually got to where they'd come and run you out anyway, you know. I mean, they'd just give you a quota. "You're gonna turn out so many men today whether they're sick or not!" It got to the point where everybody that could walk went because if you stayed in they was going to come in and kick you out and beat the hell out of you anyway. So you just went (chuckle).

Marcello: By the time you reached the 80 Kilo Camp, what are the medical facilities like here?

Bramlett: Well, we run out of medicine. We didn't have any medicine. We still had our doctor, of course, at that time. Quinine is about all they'd give us. That's the only thing.

Marcello: Are the Japanese suffering as much in some cases as the prisoners are?

Bramlett: Oh, no. I never saw a sick Jap (chuckle) all the time I was over there. If they was sick, they didn't let us see them.

But quinine's the only medicine I ever saw. We got a little sulfathiazole powder from somewhere there. I think it was stolen or smuggled in somehow. But, you know, you used it on those ulcers, but it didn't last long.

Marcello: I would assume that there was a lot of repetition in the work here. You would make a cut, and the rains would come, and I assume it would fill back up again and so on.

Bramlett: Well, no. A lot of times. . . well, it wasn't that hard a rain. You'd be surprised. That old ground's kind of like a sponge. It just keeps absorbing it, and it's just muddy, muddy. I don't know. Of course, the cuts were made through the mountains, and then the fills were filled in the low places. But I hardly ever saw any water standing around. It seemed to go somewhere.

Marcello: Was there anything you could do to sabotage the work on this railroad?

Bramlett: Oh, I don't know what it would have been--not in those fills. Now those bridges. . . we tried a few things (chuckle). But there wasn't much. . . they had mostly the

Japanese building those. We didn't do a whole lot of work on the bridges, you know. They had these natives and Japanese that built the bridges. But I don't know how you'd sabotage a fill--with a pick and shovel, I mean (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that it was here at the 80 Kilo Camp that you had your first experiences with the work elephants.

Bramlett: Yes, that's where I first saw them working there, was at 80 Kilo. They used those. . . we drove pile there was about the only thing we did on the bridge.

Marcello: Evidently, that was an interesting procedure that was used to drive the pilings on these bridges. How were the pile-drivers constructed?

Bramlett: Well, they had a big tower here, you know, with a pulley, and they had a big weight. The best I remember, it came down some kind of a guide. It was set at the top of this pile, you know, and you'd pull it up with this rope and turn it loose. You know, I saw in movies where that they used to drive piles in this country the same way way back.

Marcello: In other words, a group of prisoners would get hold of this rope and in effect lift the pile on this pulley. Then at a given command you would let go?

Bramlett: That's right. Let go, yes. That's the way they drove the piles. The logs had been hewed to a point, you know.

They'd use these elephants. They were pretty large, you know, and they'd use these elephants to maneuver them around in place and get them up there. They'd build this scaffold. Oh, it was a slow job, you know (chuckle). It'd take a long time to drive those piles. That's about all we did on the bridge work. I don't think they wanted us messing around with the rest of it.

Marcello: You know, when I hear these prisoners describe how this railroad was built, it's almost surprising to me how the Japanese were able to stay in the war three and half years. Evidently, all the equipment they were using was just so primitive.

Bramlett: Yes, it was. It was all dilapidated. (Chuckle) We used to . . . you know, I don't know if I ever saw a surveying instrument over there. I've seen a lot of them using a crossed piece of bamboo, you know, or something. I don't know how they did it. I don't know how they had us do it. Yes, all we had was a pick and shovel, and their old saws, you know, were the old straight-handle kind that you cut on the back-pull, you know. I'll never forget those. They just didn't have any equipment. I don't know. But I guess if you take enough people. . . somebody said now they knew how the pyramids were constructed, and the China Wall, you know (chuckle). Get enough men and you could do anything.

Marcello: I guess for the record we should say that the British had evidently attempted to build a similar railroad years before and had given up the project because it was too costly--both in terms of money and in terms of human life.

Bramlett: Yes, they had. In fact, at 18 Kilo they had started building a fill there, you know, and went on down. I think they had surveyed it and started it, and they had given up on it. They didn't think it was worth the effort.

Marcello: But the Japanese had a lot of prisoners to work with.

Bramlett: Oh, yes, they had a lot of hands (chuckle). They wasn't very fond of us, anyway, I don't think.

Marcello: Now by the time you get to the 80 Kilo Camp, were you beginning to have problems with the tropical ulcers?

Bramlett: Well, they started there, yes.

Marcello: Describe what they were like.

Bramlett: Oh, Lord, that was. . . you could just get a little scratch. Today . . . now you take that place (points to finger). I stuck that to a sanding wheel the other day (chuckle).

Marcello: You're referring to a spot on your finger?

Bramlett: Yes, on my hand there. That scratch tomorrow could cover that from knuckle to knuckle there. In two or three days it would be plumb to the bone. The flesh would just rot and sluff off, just keep getting bigger and bigger, you

know. We didn't have anything to treat them with, and no one knew how to treat them anyway.

Marcello: Were they painful?

Bramlett: Yes, they were painful! I was fortunate. I only had one of my . . . I think I had one right there (points to leg).

Marcello: On your leg?

Bramlett: Yes, it went down deep. It didn't spread; it went down. I packed it with salt. I had a little salt at that time. I did that about twice, and it healed up. So I was one of the fortunate few.

Marcello: I've heard it said that in some cases, they would simply hold some person down and use a sharp spoon and dig out that dead flesh.

Bramlett: Oh, yes, scrape them out, yes. I saw that done. In fact, I've helped hold them. And I saw one case where. . . I think it was the. . . I don't know who it was. A Dutch doctor or somebody used live maggots and put them in there and put a bandage over it and left them in there until they'd eat all this rotten flesh out and then take them out. I saw that used. In fact, that seemed to be about as good a thing as you could do, too, and less painful. But there just wasn't really no cure. I think if the good Lord intended for you to get over one of them, you got over it. Otherwise, it just ate you up.

Marcello: By the time you get to the 80 Kilo Camp, I assume the death rate now begins to continue to climb.

Bramlett: Yes, that's where I think we lost our first man, is at 80 Kilo.

Marcello: How many men are you losing a day. This, of course, would vary.

Bramlett: At 80 Kilo?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: We lost very few--maybe two or three there.

Marcello: I guess the 100 Kilo Camp is really the bad one.

Bramlett: 100 Kilo is where we get into that, yes.

Marcello: How long do you stay at the 80 Kilo Camp altogether?

Bramlett: Oh, seems to me like a couple of months.

Marcello: And I assume that by the time you reached 100 Kilo Camp, the monsoons are still continuing, and obviously the "Speedo" campaign is still on.

Bramlett: Oh, yes, that's where it really picks up. Yes, that was bad. The monsoon is really right in the worst part when we got to 100 Kilo.

Marcello: And I assume here at the 100 Kilo, you're doing basically the same kind of work that you were doing at the 80 Kilo Camp--only you're still weaker.

Bramlett: Oh, yes, getting weaker all the time and more sick people, you know. They don't cut the work down just because you

had some sick people, you know (chuckle). You just do more. But that's where we really started losing the guys. They really started falling out there.

Marcello: I guess by this time you can see instances where somebody is simply giving up and waiting to die.

Bramlett: Oh, yes. A lot of them did.

Marcello: Describe what this was like when you could tell that somebody had given up.

Bramlett: Well, you could usually tell. You know, when a guy first gets sick, usually you could go by and talk to him, and he was kind of jolly, you know. You could joke with him and he'd laugh. Then one day you go by, and he don't laugh, you know. He don't joke with you anymore; he's just dead serious. From then on, why, he's just downhill, you know. Of course, I think a lot of them died just because they gave up. I think maybe if they'd hung on, they could have made it, but there wasn't much to hang on for there at that time, you know.

Marcello: I assume that another one of the symptoms of giving up was when the person would not eat his food.

Bramlett: Well, yes--that, too. Yes, you could take him food, and if he didn't eat, why, you could tell. I know we had one fellow there--Sergeant Hall--and he was sick for a long time. In fact, I think he was the first dysentery patient

we had. They took it in 18 Kilo, and he never really got over it. He died there at 100 Kilo. Of course, he tried. He really fought to live for a long time, but when he finally gave up, he just quit eating. You could say something to him, and he'd just look at you, you know--wouldn't answer you. I guess he just fought so long to live that he just finally decided it wasn't worth the effort.

Marcello: What were the burial details like here? How would you go about caring for the dead and so on?

Bramlett: Well, usually we'd have either those old straw mats, you know, that the natives would weave out of this bamboo. We'd get hold of some of that and wrap them in that and tie it around them. Then we'd just dig a hole and bury them and put a . . . of course, they always had a prayer, you know, and Taps if the guy wasn't down sick that played the bugle, you know. Usually, he was a Navy guy--old Bandy. I just remember he was a chubby fellow, you know, at first. You would bury them and put a wood marker on them--mark the graves, you know.

Marcello: Are these graves carefully marked and are records being kept and so on by the officers and this sort of thing?

Bramlett: Yes, they did keep records, We marked them with hardwood, you know--teak wood--that is a native wood there, and it

usually don't rot like most things does in the jungle there, you know. So I think possibly. . . and they had everything marked out, you know, where these graves were in different camps. I think possibly that they could have located them all. If the fellow had a dog tag, we tacked his dog tag on this cross, you know.

Marcello: I've heard it said that on some occasions, when one of the prisoners would die, that his clothing and so on and so forth would all be taken because it could be used by somebody else.

Bramlett: Oh, yes. You didn't throw it away, you know. His personal effects--some of the officers kept, you know. But his clothing, well, somebody used it because some people didn't have any, you know, and usually it was his friend.

Marcello: In a situation like this, that is, the situation that you encountered at the 80 Kilo then at the 100 Kilo Camp, do you find one becoming more religious?

Bramlett: Well, yes. I think most guys did, I mean, in a way. They became more aware of Christianity, you know. Of course, a lot of them, you know, were young guys and hadn't thought about it. But I think at that point they became more aware. You'd see guys sitting around reading their little testaments, you know, which most everyone had. They'd break them out along about there (chuckle). I think it kind of. . .more so there than it had before.

Marcello: Now I assume that by the time you'd get to the 100 Kilo Camp, the monsoons and so on have become so great that even the native traders can't follow you at this point.

Bramlett: No, we seldom ever see a native up there.

Marcello: And at the same time, I would assume that the Japanese supply trucks and so on couldn't reach those camps.

Bramlett: Not very. . . a lot of times they didn't make it. That's when we went on real short rations there, you know. Lord, I don't know. There was one time there that they claimed the bridge had washed out down below there, you know, in the river. It was several days, and we run plumb out of rice (chuckle), and it was getting pretty serious, but they finally got some in. I think they claimed they'd ferried it across the river on some barges, you know, and got a little up there. But it sure got short, I'll tell you!

Marcello: Do you ever have any ways of supplementing your diet? In other words, dogs, cats, snakes, anything of that nature. And if so, you might describe some of these methods.

Bramlett: (Chuckle) Yes. Well, I didn't eat any dogs; some of the people did there. The Dutch. . . a dog better not come through camp, or a cat, or they'd get him, or even a rat (chuckle). But I did eat snake--python. I got on the wood party there--cutting wood for the kitchen, you know.

Marcello: This was at the 100 Kilo Camp?

Bramlett: Yes. We had this ox cart, and we'd go out. First they'd send guard out with us, and then they quit doing that. Five of us would go out and cut this wood and bring it into the kitchen. We got to setting us up some little figure-four traps. There was some jungle chickens out there--wild chickens. We'd sneak a little rice out there and bait them traps, and we caught several. Then we'd cook them outside. We'd sneak the stuff out and cook them out in the jungle, you know. We knew better than to try to bring them back in (chuckle)! We did that a few times. But that's about all we got--and the snakes. Like I say, the Dutch eat dogs, and some of the English did, but I don't believe I could have got that hungry.

Marcello: Did you hesitate about even eating a python? Or by this time are you so hungry that. . .

Bramlett: No, no, not really. You know, we killed him out on the work detail. The Jap shot him, you know, and we chopped him up with shovels. That meat was so pink and looked so good, you know. Well, we took that thing in (chuckle) and cooked him. We didn't have any salt (chuckle) or anything. We just baked it, you know, in a little old mud oven we'd built. It was pretty tasty. I wouldn't want to eat it now, but (chuckle) at that point, why, I'd have ate a lot of things.

Marcello: During all this time, do you find any evidence of collaboration? In other words, are there any Americans who are cooperating with the Japanese in order to get special favors and things of this nature?

Bramlett: Well, yes, but I wouldn't want to say who they was, you know. There was some of that, but, you know. . .

Marcello: Was it a rare thing?

Bramlett: Yes. Well, I'll tell you, really, that the rougher it got, the worse it got. I mean, you know, I guess a fellow gets hungry enough and scared enough that he'll do a lot of things that he wouldn't normally do. For that reason, I wouldn't name any names on that. It did happen but not in great numbers. There was just a few cases.

Marcello: From all that we've said, I gather, then, that the 100 Kilo Camp was the worst place of all.

Bramlett: It was. Yes, it was the worst place of all. I helped bury eighteen people there one morning. It wasn't anything to bury eight or ten or twelve, you know, a day.

Marcello: Were they put in mass graves, or were there individual graves?

Bramlett: No, they were in individual graves. We made individual graves for them.

Marcello: I assume it wasn't too hard to dig in that ground.

Bramlett: No (chuckle), not there. It was mud, you know. A lot of times there would be as much as maybe four or five inches

of water in the bottom of the grave by the time you got the body in there, you know. So it wasn't that hard to dig.

Marcello: Now somewhere along the line here, doesn't an outbreak of cholera occur?

Bramlett: Yes, down below us, I understand. Now if we had any cholera there, I didn't know of it. We thought. . . now when we lost our Doctor Lumpkin and Lieutenant Hampton and. . . well, at that point Jack Shaw died, but he didn't die from dysentery. We thought maybe that was cholera because there was several boys that died right quick, you know, real fast. But they say it was dysentery. Of course, you're always scared of cholera because you hear of it and knew it was down the road, you know. But it got into an English POW camp down there and wiped out a bunch of them, I think.

Marcello: You mentioned Doctor Lumpkin awhile ago. He was the doctor for the outfit, and he died in August of 1943. What sort of an effect did that have upon the morale of the troops.

Bramlett: Well, it was pretty demoralizing, I'll tell you. He was well thought of, you know. Like I say, he didn't have any medicine, so there wasn't a whole lot he could do. But he kept the morale up, you know. He was a real fine man. That had more to do with it than anything, you know. I mean, I think that giving up . . . a lot of that took

place after the doctor died. A lot of them gave up after he died. We didn't have so much of that up to that point.

Marcello: In other words, he didn't have very much medicine to work with, but still the fact that he died had this psychological effect.

Bramlett: Yes, that's the case. It sure did with us because everybody . . . you know, like I say, he was just one fine doctor and one fine man.

Marcello: Now somewhere along the line, the Japanese establish a hospital camp. I'm using that term loosely, of course. Was it back at the 80 Kilo Camp? Did you perchance get back to the hospital camp?

Bramlett: No, I never went. But I carried a man. . . a friend of mine over at Bridgeport. . . I don't know. . . did you ever interview Bert Jones?

Marcello: No.

Bramlett: Well, he lost a leg there. I carried him out from 100 Kilo and put him on a truck to go to 80 Kilo. I didn't know what had happened to him until I saw him in Thailand, and he'd lost. . . they took his leg off. That's the only two amputees we had that was done there at 80 Kilo that survived, so I hear that it wasn't really a hospital camp. Fillmore's book said they didn't even have a doctor. But they had an Australian colonel because I know he took two boys' legs off over here and they survived.

Marcello: I heard that the 80 Kilo Camp was really a . . . oh, I don't know what term we could use. But evidently, the people they sent back to the 80 Kilo Camp weren't expected to recover.

Bramlett: No, they were sent down there to die.

Marcello: This is what I heard.

Bramlett: Yes, we knew that. Evidently, this colonel was just a good surgeon, you know. Because we had a Navy doctor that come into 100 Kilo after Lumpkin died, and I know he done five or six or seven amputations, and every one of them died. So this Australian had something down there (chuckle) going for him because there was quite a few of his that survived it.

Marcello: Now in the working parties here, is there a mixture of Americans and Dutch and Australians and so on?

Bramlett: Well, usually not working together. They usually worked in separate "Kumis," you know. They didn't mix us up. Now we had Australians who lived in one end of one of our huts there, mainly because they didn't want them to stay over there with the English. They couldn't get along with them (chuckle).

Marcello: Evidently nobody could get along with the English?

Bramlett: I don't think so. We liked the Australians. Now they were fine people.

Marcello: Why was that? Why was there such an affinity for the Australians?

Bramlett: I don't know. You know, I got the impression when I was in Australia and after I met these guys. . . I just got the feeling, "Well, they're kind of like this country was fifty years before that," you know. They're just a young country and kind of a pioneer breed, you know. We all, you know, admired them. They were good soldiers, and they were just fine. If they were friends, they were good friends. You could depend on them. Now I couldn't depend on the limeys.

Marcello: I gather, then, that these kilo camps were relatively large.

Bramlett: Yes, pretty good-sized. I couldn't tell you the numbers in any one of them, but I'd say there was between 700 and 1,000 people there or maybe more than that. I don't know.

Marcello: Now for the most part, weren't these camps already constructed when you moved into them?

Bramlett: Yes. Natives had built them.

Marcello: I gathered they were so flimsy that it didn't take very long to build these camps.

Bramlett: Oh, no. They could take a bunch of those natives, and they'd throw them up, you know. They were just made out of bamboo poles, and it's all bamboo. The roof's bamboo leaves. They split the bamboo and make the decking in there for your bed.

Marcello: What sort of beds did you have in those huts?

Bramlett: They'd just take a bamboo pole and they split it, you know. This one place they split it all the way down, and the rest of the places they'd just leave it in places, you know, and flatten it and tie it down, you know. You'd throw a blanket on it, and that was your bed (chuckle).

Marcello: In other words, are you sleeping on a platform more or less?

Bramlett: Yes. Yes, it's a platform. The aisle is dirt, you know, and underneath it's dirt. They have these little platforms on each side, you know, and you got a space about, oh, thirty inches wide per man (chuckle). That was your living quarters. You got everything you had right there in that thirty-inch-wide space.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit, then, about the way in which a prisoner would cope with this situation. We've already talked about the food and so on. What do you do for toothbrushes and toothpaste and things of that nature?

Bramlett: Well, we didn't have any--no toothbrushes.

Marcello: Do you find any substitutes?

Bramlett: Well, you know, a lot of us would find some kind of a bush. You know, you can chew a little green limb. You know, we used to . . . I don't know whether you remember, but a lot of the old-timers used to dip snuff, and they

had this little stick they'd chew and dip it in their snuff and hold it in their mouth. Well, you could use that. If you'd chew on it long enough, you know, it would get real fuzzy and soft, and you could clean your teeth. I've used any kind of soap that you could happen to get a hold of, which was seldom ever. I guess I went six months without bathing with soap--just plain water--because you couldn't get any, you know. So consequently, our teeth suffered. Sanitation got to be a real problem because you just didn't have anything to clean anything with.

Marcello: How would you compensate for shaving utensils?

Bramlett: Well, like I told you awhile ago, I got elected to be barber of that outfit. We didn't have a razor, so I took one of the GI mess gear knives, which are pretty good steel, and honed it up. Somebody had a hone. And I was going to make a razor, and I shaved some people with it. Now it was pretty tough (chuckle), but I did.

Marcello: I understand a lot of people would take a broken bottle and use the concave side of the bottle as a type of honing device. Isn't that correct?

Bramlett: Oh, yes. We did that on the old blades, yes--the few blades we had. But you know, after that monsoon season started, everything rusted and eat it up. Really, a lot of guys used just those old hand clippers I had--just

clipped their whiskers off occasionally, you know. Some of them let them grow; some would just take a pair of scissors and chop them off (chuckle). It got to be a problem. Like I say, I could shave with that old knife, but a fellow with a tough beard couldn't (chuckle).

Marcello: At this stage, I'm going to turn over the tape.

Bramlett: Okay.

Marcello: (Turns over the tape.) Were lice and other vermin a problem?

Bramlett: Lice?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: Oh, there were plenty of them. We had a lot of lice.

Marcello: How do you rid of them?

Bramlett: About the only way you could get rid of them was to somehow remove all the hair on your body. But then they was in your clothes and your bedding, so you just learned to live with them mostly (chuckle). So there really wasn't much way to get rid of them.

Marcello: How about rats and things like that? I don't know why rats would want to be around these barracks, since you didn't have anything that they could eat anyhow.

Bramlett: No, they didn't stay long, or they would have gotten ate. Somebody would have ate them if they'd stayed around (chuckle) and if they could catch them. But no, we weren't bothered with rats very much.

Marcello: Now by this time, by the time you got to the 100 Kilo Camp, are you down to G-strings and this sort of thing?

Bramlett: Yes, most of us are. A lot of us are. No shoes. I think I had maybe a pair of khaki shorts left with patches in places around on it. You know, we'd cut the legs off. We'd use anything to patch them old things and tie them together. I didn't like those G-strings much. Them Japs--that's all they'd issue, you know. As far as they was concerned, that's all you needed.

Marcello: Did you ever see any Japanese show any compassion toward the prisoners? Or did any Koreans show any sympathy or pity?

Bramlett: No, I don't believe I ever did see that. Only that sergeant back in Batavia that I mentioned. I think he was really in sympathy with us. But the rest of them, if they'd showed any compassion, I'd have been awfully suspicious of them. You know, by that time we got to know them pretty well, No, I never saw one. I know some of the guys thought they'd get on friendly terms with them, you know, and thought they were friends, and then they'd wind up beating the socks off of them some morning or something.

Marcello: Did you ever see any of the prisoners get so angry at the Japanese that they would actually go berserk and attack the Japanese?

Bramlett: Well, I saw that a time or two.

Marcello: Describe some of these instances.

Bramlett: Well, that comes later on down the line (chuckle), if you want to get into that later.

Marcello: Well, let's just talk about it here.

Bramlett: Well, I never saw that in Burma, but I did on down in Indochina or Vietnam where we was at later. I saw a guard hit one of the guys--he was a Navy guy--and I can't even remember his name. They hit him in the back with a rifle butt. He just turned around and got the guard by the shirt and slung him around and hit him and knocked him in the river off of the dock. You know, that was a funny thing. He lost his rifle. We thought, "Well, boy, that old boy will shoot him." But there wasn't a word said to him about it. We went in that evening, and that guard was standing there, and one of the officers had beat the devil out of him. But there never was a word mentioned. But that incident happened the day after a big air raid there by our planes, and they destroyed about everything in Saigon. So, you know, things were changing then.

But that's really . . . one time I heard of a boy that slapped one of the guards back, and they come very near to beating him to death. But I didn't see that incident; I just heard of it. I know it was true, but I didn't see it.

Marcello: Okay, now, finally, in November of 1943, the railroad is finished. Now by this time, I assume, the monsoons had stopped?

Bramlett: Yes, it's back dry again and hot.

Marcello: Where were you at the time that the railroad was completed? Were you still at the 100 Kilo Camp or had you moved on?

Bramlett: No, I moved up to the 105 Kilo.

Marcello: Were things a little bit better?

Bramlett: Not really. As far as food or anything, it wasn't better. The work was a little lighter. We had finished the railroad, and we stayed there for a while and cut wood for these trains. They burned wood, you know. Of course, that wasn't as hard a work, and with the monsoon season being over, why, we had less ulcers. But as far as medical supplies and food. . . we weren't getting. . . maybe not as good sometimes. But like I say, it was better in a lot of ways because the work wasn't so hard and the rains had stopped. But I didn't stay at the 105 Kilo too long. I don't remember.

Marcello: As you look back on that railroad, how would you rate it in terms of quality? Was it a good railroad?

Bramlett: Not very good (chuckle). I don't really see how they ever got a train over it. It was a pretty poor excuse, but I understand it's still in operation. Of course, I'm sure they've improved it a lot. They'd have had to.

Marcello: Would you have wanted to have. . . maybe I should put it this way. Did you ever have the opportunity to ride over that railroad?

Bramlett: We rode from 105 Kilo out to . . . I can't remember that camp in Thailand now.

Marcello: Was it Kanchanburi?

Bramlett: Yes, Kanchanburi. We went over the bridges there--Bridge on the River Khwae. The reason I remember some of those grades is because we had to get out and help the train up the hill (chuckle), so I don't see what good it was going to do them very much. It was a pretty short train.

Marcello: Did you perchance take part in the ceremony commemorating the completion of that bridge? I think it was held at a place called Three Pagodas Pass.

Bramlett: Yes, I heard about that. No, I didn't attend. Of course, the English built that bridge, see. That was their . . . well, I think there were a few Americans--the Merchant Marines and maybe an Air Force personnel or two who had got shot down or something. No, I wouldn't have wanted to took part in that ceremony.

Marcello: I think that is the feeling of a great many people who worked on that railroad.

Bramlett: I don't even want to go back to that country. In the first place, there's too many bad memories; in the second

place, I wouldn't have walked across that bridge with a Jap because it would have been too tempting to push him off (chuckle), especially if he'd been one of the guards. I mean, you know, I don't have any bad feelings toward the Japanese public, but any of those guards that are still living or any of those people that was involved in that, I do have bad feelings for, and I always will have.

Marcello: In terms of the Japanese guards, do you think it would be safe to say that these were kind of the "eight balls" of the Japanese Army? It seems to me they wouldn't put good soldiers on duty of this nature. A good soldier, it seems to me, would be out fighting the Americans or something.

Bramlett: True. Now like I say, back in Java, I think those were the crack troops. That's the reason we were treated better by them. I think they were a better class of people, in other words. But after we got on into Burma, I think they . . . well, like the Koreans, they didn't use them in combat. I think any Japanese that was there was just a cull, you know, you might say, that they wouldn't have put in the combat unit. Yes, I think that's true--that we got kind of the scum of the bunch up there (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, I'm sure the same thing would be true of the officers. Why would you have a good officer as a prison commandant?

Bramlett: Yes. Why put him in there? It's bad duty so give it to old Joe over there. He flubbed up. You know, that's the way, I think, every Army operates. Of course, I'm sure that they had some of their best engineers in there and things like that (chuckle), but as far as the officers go, I'm sure that they were there for punishment.

Marcello: Now in the actual building of the railroad, that is, up until November of 1943, had there been any air raids?

Bramlett: Air raids?

Marcello: Yes.

Bramlett: No.

Marcello: They would occur afterward?

Bramlett: Yes. There was a reconnaissance plane over every day, though, practically every day. I mean, after the monsoon season was over. We could hear him; we'd never see him.

Marcello: But up until this time, you really have no idea about how the war is progressing.

Bramlett: Not really, no. Like I say, there was supposed to be a radio down the railroad. I don't know whether it was the English or who was supposed to have had it, but we would get this word through these guys that worked on these trucks that delivered supplies down there and back. Some of it was pretty good. I guess some of it was pretty accurate because later we found out that it was. Of course, some of it was probably propaganda, and you don't know.

Marcello: I gather you moved from the 105 Kilo Camp to this huge prison camp at Kanchanaburi.

Bramlett: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what that camp looked like from a physical standpoint.

Bramlett: Well, like you say, it was huge. It was on the bank of a river there--I remember that. I only stayed there a couple of weeks. There wasn't. . . as far as work. . . I don't remember working any there, other than maybe go out for a small detail, you know, do a little bit of. . . maybe they wanted to dig an air raid shelter or something, you know. The food was a lot better. It wasn't good, but it was more of it and better, you know. You know, it was just bamboo huts just like we'd been living in, but they were newer and in better shape. You could get a few more things. I think we even got soap and stuff there, you know. Like I say, I only stayed a couple or three weeks, and then we went on into Vietnam, they called it.

Marcello: Now during the time that you were at Kanchanaburi, did any of the air raids occur?

Bramlett: No. No, that happened after we left.

Marcello: For some reason I get the impression that Kanchanaburi was a type of rest and recuperation camp.

Bramlett: I think it was, and a kind of regrouping.

Marcello: Even the Japanese knew, I think, that they had pushed you probably to the extremes of your limits in the building of that railroad.

Bramlett: Oh, yes, sure. Well, I'm sure too at that point that they were beginning to see that things wasn't going all that good for them, so treatment got a little better from there on. To us, it did. Now I don't know about the rest of the guys, you know, at other places. But to us, it got a little better from that point on. Really, after we got up on into Saigon, it wasn't that bad.

Marcello: This may be a stupid question to ask, but I'll ask it anyhow at this stage. Did you feel any sense of accomplishment in that you had been able to build that railroad?

Bramlett: Hell, no! I didn't (chuckle)! I wouldn't have accomplished it if it had been left up to me, you know. I mean, it was just. . . no, I didn't. . . there wasn't any pride in my part of that darned thing. I'd left too many good friends back there. I don't see how anybody could be proud of the thing.

Marcello: Okay, so where did you go from Kanchanaburi?

Bramlett: Saigon.

Marcello: Right into the city of Saigon?

Bramlett: Yes. I went on a train. We stopped, I think, a day in Bangkok. We didn't get out of the rail or the switch

yards there. We went right into Saigon, and we were camped just about a block off of the docks.

Marcello: What sort of a camp was this here at Saigon?

Bramlett: Well, it was a pretty nice. . . pretty good camp. It was French barracks. The French natives. . . you know, they'd had the Vietnamese in their army, and I'm sure it was the native barracks. But it had concrete floors and, you know, board. . . it was built kind of like the old bamboo huts, only there was lumber in there, you know, that was smooth. You could kind of pad it up, and you could keep the floors clean. We had plenty of water, and we could get a hold of some soap. That's when the stealing and wheeling-and-dealing really got going there in Saigon.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about this. Now you mention that you were working on the docks, which is always an excellent place for thieves and so on. Describe what sort of work you were doing on the docks, and then we'll get into the theft and so on that was taking place.

Bramlett: Well, usually, it was just. . . they'd unload ships there, you know--supplies. They'd just set them on the dock, and then we'd move them into the warehouse, you know--different things--and put them in place in there, you know. They got in a lot of sugar and gasoline and stuff

like that. That's mainly what it was--unloading ships or moving the supplies into the warehouse off of the docks. You know, you'd spot this stuff, and it was always pretty easy for somebody to start a commotion down at the other end of one of them warehouses. Four or five guys (chuckle) could carry out a lot of stuff, you know, when they got that guard out of the way. So we got us a pretty good racket going there.

Marcello: How did you carry the stuff out? In other words, by this time do you have clothing again so that you were able to conceal this contraband?

Bramlett: Yes. Well, yes, you had shorts. They'd issued some French uniforms--shorts, you know. A lot of the guys took their canteens and cut the bottoms out and made a false bottom in it. You'd be surprised what you can improvise, you know. They'd get a hold of a little lead and solder somehow and use a little electric wiring and solder a false bottom up in there, you know. They'd carry sugar and stuff in the bottom of that and have a little water in the top, you know. A lot of times the guards would screw the top off and look in it. I've carried soap in in my . . . I got some shoes there and put a bar of soap under each heel of my shoe and walked in with it. We stripped that cloth off a mosquito net

and wrapped it around you and pulled your shorts up (chuckle) and took a chance. If they didn't make you drop your shorts, well, you made it (chuckle).

Marcello: You were stealing the bottoms off of mosquito nets.

Bramlett: Oh, yes. That was valuable stuff all the time we was over there. We made a lot of our clothes out of it, you know. We'd dye it. You can make dye out of different things, you know. Of course, it was all dark blue, and you had to change the color of it someway. Some of the guys. . . they got to making clothes and dyeing it out of it, you know. But you could trade it to them natives. They'd trade you anything for it.

Marcello: What were some of the things that you would especially want from the natives?

Bramlett: Oh, anything--food. Any kind of food or tobacco. Those were the main items.

Marcello: Were you getting mostly tropical fruits and things of that nature?

Bramlett: Well, yes, and you'd get eggs. You could get. . . even up in Saigon you could get salt and sugar, you know. Like I say, things got a lot better. Of course, we had some guys that were still sick. We'd just sell stuff out there, you know, to the natives. We'd bring the money in and put a lot of it in the hospital fund we had there. They'd let us

buy. . . a guy would come in every week and buy it--just for the hospital. Well, we kept the money, you know, for supplies for the sick. That big airport they had there, we worked on that there. The party that worked out there, they'd do the selling, and the ones that worked on the dock would do the stealing (chuckle).

Marcello: But you were working on the docks most of the time?

Bramlett: Yes, I worked on the docks most of the time. I went to the airport a few times, but most of the time I was down on the dock.

Marcello: I would assume that all of the prisoners were real scavengers. In other words, anything that you would find lying around, you would pick up because you were never sure how you could use it or when you would use it or for what purpose.

Bramlett: That's true. You know, I'm still a whole lot that way (chuckle). My wife gets mad at me. I've got an old basement down there crammed full of stuff. I'll go down there and throw it all out, you know, and back the truck up there, and I'm going to haul all this junk off. I'll start out, and I'll have it all back in the basement before I get a load on, you know. But I think that's where it came from. I don't throw things away now, and you sure didn't then--anything. Sometime it would have a use, you know. Yes, you got to be good scavengers, good thieves, and connivers.

Marcello: Were you ever able to commit any acts of sabotage here in Saigon?

Bramlett: Oh, well, we did. . . like in the gasoline, we did a lot of that. We'd loosen the bunghole on the gas, you know, or intentionally knock a little hole in the barrel, you know. Yes, we done a lot of that kind of stuff. We was loading a barge one day, and we loaded the back end of it with sugar--one of those big river barges. Then they throwed a partition up there and run some gasoline in the front of it--drums of gasoline. Well, about the first three barrels we rolled in there, we loosened the bung on and then covered it up. I guess all the sugar got gasoline in it (chuckle). Things like that. Yes, you would do things like that if you got an opportunity, you know.

Marcello: Was there anything the Japanese would ever do to retaliate?

Bramlett: Well, not really because, you know, I don't think they could really prove what happened to it, you know. Of course, a lot of those times, some of those bungs would just loosen up, you know, theirselves. If they'd ever caught you, now they would have punished you. We busted some drums out there one day intentionally, but we claimed it was an accident. A whole bunch of us got the devil beat out of us (chuckle).

Marcello: Now do you still have your same guards at this time? Are they accompanying you all the way through?

Bramlett: No. No, we didn't have them. We have a different bunch in Saigon--mostly Japanese again.

Marcello: How were these guards in Saigon?

Bramlett: They weren't bad. Most of them were pretty good fellows, I mean, as far as Japanese guards went (chuckle). After Burma, we thought they was danged good fellows, you know. Yes, they weren't too bad. We had a few. Of course, you'll find that in any country--people that were pretty bad. As a whole, we got along pretty good there.

Marcello: Now do you experience any air raids here in Saigon?

Bramlett: Oh, yes.

Marcello: You might describe these air raids.

Bramlett: Well, the first one we had was. . . I don't remember the day, but they came in early one morning. We were standing in roll call, you know. They were dive bombers from the Navy. We saw them. They started on the airport out there. They hit that airport, and I don't think they got, oh, a half a dozen of their fighters off the ground, you know. The rest of them, they destroyed on the ground. They blew up the refinery; they blew up the docks (chuckle). I think there were eleven ships in the dock down there at the river, and they got nearly all of them. They got their big ammunition dump. They hit targets all around us, but they knew where we were at. They just kept us in that

mudhole out there all day. But they knew where our camp was at that point, I'm sure, because, you know, they had a lot of French that were still free there. They were supposed to be Vichy French, but they weren't really. I mean, they were. . . maybe they were to begin with, but they'd changed. They were doing a lot of things for us. They slipped us in a lot of news, and I'm sure they'd notified the Allies where we were at and where the camp was, you know, But that was one heck of a raid. It lasted all day.

Marcello: What did that do for your morale?

Bramlett: Oh, man, it boosted it way up there. We thought any day they'd be there, you know.

Marcello: I guess this was your first real evidence that the tide of the war had changed.

Bramlett: Well, yes. I think. . . well, we'd saw a lot of ships come in there with holes, you know, a lot of damage to them. We knew they were doing a lot better, you know, that things were picking up, but that really brought it home to us.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese toward prisoners in the aftermath of these air raids?

Bramlett: They got better. Surprisingly, they did. I mean, as you say, I think they saw the writing on the wall, you

know. They did--they picked up--because I think they thought they might have to answer to some of this stuff later, you know. They did get a lot better. From that day on, I think it really got a lot better for us.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever mark your compound in any way so as to indicate that there were prisoners of war there?

Bramlett: Oh, never. No, never. They never did that. They never would mark a ship we was on (chuckle).

Marcello: Did the thought of being bombed ever enter your mind?

Bramlett: Oh, yes. Yes, we thought about it. Of course, I hadn't thought about it a whole lot until they bombed us on that old ship going up to Burma, you know. But after that, we thought about it a lot, you know.

Marcello: How much fear did you have of being sent back to Japan?

Bramlett: After the war?

Marcello: No, even during the war. You know, let's say, leaving Saigon and going back to Japan.

Bramlett: Well, we was always afraid they would send us to Japan. You know, there was fear there. I didn't want to go to Japan; I don't think any of us did. I think they had plans to send us at one time. Originally, when we went there, I think that was their intention, you know--send us to Japan. I think things got so bad, you know--it got to deteriorating so bad for them--that they decided

not to. Of course, like I say, we didn't do all that much work in Saigon. It was just light. You might go out for four or five hours. They'd carry you down to the docks, and they might not have but three or four hours work to do, you know. Then you'd go back to camp.

Marcello: Now in this camp, is there a fence around it or anything of that nature?

Bramlett: Oh, yes, there's a fence around it--barbed wire fence.

Marcello: But I assume this is a pretty small camp.

Bramlett: Well, it is, yes. There wasn't too many of us that went there. I'm not sure. There were a few Australians and Dutch and a few English. But the majority was Americans. And we (chuckle) kind of ruled that camp (chuckle), you know--us and the Australians. You know, they always sided with us. But it was mostly Americans. There was very few. . . I think there was only fifty Australians, fifty or sixty English, and a few Dutch--I don't know--not many.

Marcello: Just awhile ago you mentioned that you did have some contact with the Vinchy French. Would you talk about this a little bit?

Bramlett: Well, some of the people did. I didn't actually have any contact with them, but I know some of the boys contacted them through some of these Vietnamese that were, you know. . . I don't think they ever talked actually to the

Frenchmen in person. But these natives, you know, were friendly with them and would relay messages. I know one time they got a note asking us--they brought it into camp--asking us what we needed in the way of medical supplies or food or anything they could do, you know. They might have some connections and could get some in. I know they did. They sent in some medicine through the French Red Cross. And they sent in on Christmas two or three dressed hogs--the first pork we'd had (chuckle) since we left the States. Incidentally, in Saigon we got the first Red Cross packages we ever saw.

Marcello: Okay, describe the Red Cross packages, first of all, in terms of what they meant to you for your survival and then describe the contents in those packages.

Bramlett: Well, if we'd gotten any of them, it would have meant a lot. But I don't have any idea how many that came in. Now this is the only ship I saw marked; it was marked with a big cross. It was a hospital ship, I think. It might have been an International Red Cross ship. We could see it in the docks from camp. But we didn't get to unload these supplies. We knew they were there because you know, you get word. But we didn't know how many or what it was.

A few days later, they announced that we was going

to issue Red Cross packages. Well, we got in there and there was a little box, oh, about fourteen inches square and about six inches high. We could see them up there, you know. They had them stacked up there in front of the compound. We thought, "Well, everybody gets one of them, boy!" We knew they had cigarettes in them--American cigarettes--and all this junk. Finally, they got around to issuing them. We figured it up, and they had one for every ten men. So that's the way it wound up--the first issue on them. Later on, there was another ship that come in, and I think we got one for every two men. But they had powdered milk and canned bacon and eggs, you know, and cigarettes and chocolate bars. . . oh, I think a can of corned beef. Oh, I don't remember--several little tins of items, you know. Cigarettes was the main thing at that point because, like I say, our food was getting a little better up there, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you finally get the toothpaste and toothbrushes at this time?

Bramlett: Yes, there was some toothpaste and toothbrushes in there. That's true. But what are you going to do with one for every ten men that first time (laughter)?

Marcello: I wouldn't want to be the number ten guy to use that toothbrush!

Bramlett: (Laughter) I wouldn't either! Of course, in Saigon now you could deal for stuff like that through the natives. We began to get toothbrushes and some kind of toothpaste. It wasn't very good, but it was something. Like I say, we had soap, and we could brush them with soap if nothing else, you know.

Marcello: Now by this time, you had been allowed to send any mail, or are you able to receive any mail?

Bramlett: Well, now we got some mail in Saigon, and it was a year old (chuckle). It was a little older. I think it was seventeen months old, I figured up, from the time it was wrote until I got it. Now we wrote some cards. Now the first cards we wrote in Burma. I think it was at about 18 Kilo or 80 Kilo. Well, it got home--that was in '43-- and my folks got that just before Christmas, they said, in '44. Then another one I wrote in Burma somewhere up there around 100 or 105 Kilo. I came home and went to the post office in October of '45. . . I went to the post office and got it. It was there. You know, it just took it that long to get there. So they didn't hear from us much.

Marcello: Now these were the little cards that I refer to as the "multiple choice" cards. In other words, you would say "My health is good; fair; poor," and if you didn't underline "good" it wouldn't get home.

- Bramlett: It wouldn't go. No, that's true (chuckle). They would tell you. But you knew that; you didn't have to be told. Yes, that was the only correspondence we got to send, you know.
- Marcello: I'm sure that the mail that you received, although it was a year late, was still quite a morale booster.
- Bramlett: Oh, it was, yes. Of course, it was censored; a lot of it was cut out. But still just good to know that all that stuff them guards told us wasn't true, you know. They was always telling us they'd destroyed New York and San Francisco. If you asked them, "Decatur?" They say, "Yes, Decatur's gone, too," you know. Just to find out that that wasn't true helped a whole lot (chuckle). But yes, even though it was a year and a half old, it was nice to get it.
- Marcello: What was the thing that was most constantly on your mind during your tenure as a prisoner-of-war?
- Bramlett: Food (chuckle), I think. Yes, I think so--food.
- Marcello: Well, I think that this is the answer that just about every former POW gives, but I just wanted to get your reaction anyhow.
- Bramlett: Well, of course, I think it was food and medicine, of course. That was the serious thing. But if you sat down and started a bull session, it was food. An old sailor boy came up with an old recipe book, and you used to get

an audience just sitting around reading those recipes at night (chuckle). Everybody was drooling, you know, and he was describing this stuff. Yes, I think food was the main thing on everybody's mind.

Marcello: What specific food did you most crave while you were a prisoner-of-war?

Bramlett: Oh, I think a T-bone steak about as big as that mirror hanging on that wall (gesture) would have been about the main thing I thought of. You know, I could just see one lapping over the platter (chuckle)--just enormous. I think I craved meat because we didn't get any of it. I think meat was the main thing that everybody thought about.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the imaginations of these prisoners would become so vivid that they could actually smell--or imagine they could smell--a particular type of food cooking in the camp.

Bramlett: Yes, sure! Yes, you could (chuckle). If you wanted to think about it hard enough, I think you could imagine anything. Yes, I think so. I don't recollect ever. . . I probably have, but I don't remember thinking about it. Yes, I imagine you could because I could get to thinking about it, and, boy, I could almost taste that big steak, you know. But the funny part about it was that when I

got into Calcutta and they asked you what you wanted to eat the first meal, I ordered a big steak. They brought it out there, and I bet I didn't eat two ounces of it. I couldn't hold the thing; I just couldn't handle it (chuckle). But anyway, it was good.

Marcello: Getting back to those Red Cross parcels, when you did receive your portion, did you eat everything at once, or did you kind of ration it out?

Bramlett: Oh, no, I think we rationed it out. Of course, that's a little rich, you know--that stuff in there--from what we'd been used to. I think if you'd tried to eat it all (chuckle), it would have made you sick. But usually, there's a lot of trading that went on. A lot of guys that didn't smoke wound up with all the food, and the other guys that smoked wound up with the cigarettes.

Marcello: I've heard this said in numerous instances, and to me it's incredible that people would trade food for cigarettes, given your dire need for food.

Bramlett: Well, at that point, now remember food wasn't that scarce. Now back in Burma, I wouldn't have traded. . . oh, I don't imagine I would have traded a scoop of rice for a case of cigarettes. But in Saigon, it was a little different. You was getting a little better food, like I say, and we could buy a lot of stuff outside. We could buy eggs, fruit.

Marcello: Are you making friends with any of the Japanese guards here in Saigon? In other words, are you getting to be on speaking terms with them or anything?

Bramlett: I never did. I avoided that. I didn't want to . . . I figured the less I could have to do with them, the less trouble we was going to have. I never did fool with them. I saw one or two cases where the guy got friendly and regretted it later. But I just never did want to be friendly with them. I was always courteous when they was around, you know. I wasn't going to ask for a beating. But I tried to avoid them. Some of the guys got a little friendly, but that was their business (chuckle). That wasn't me.

Marcello: Now were you in Saigon when the war ended?

Bramlett: No. We were way up the coast. I called that little old town Thai Hoa, but they didn't pronounce it that way.

Marcello: How long before the end of the war did you go up to this camp?

Bramlett: Well, first we went to Da Lat in Indochina; that was a big French resort up there in the mountains. We dug tunnels up there for about two months or three. Then they brought us back and took us up to this little camp. I believe we were there three or four months before the war ended. That's where we were at when the war ended.

Marcello: Well, let's describe your duties here at Da Lat. What sort of work were you doing?

Bramlett: Digging tunnels. It's up in the mountainous country, you know, and they were digging tunnels all under that country up there.

Marcello: Now did the work increase here?

Bramlett: Well, it wasn't too bad. They wasn't rushing you or anything, you know. They didn't have a certain amount of work to do. You worked a certain amount of hours a day, you know. And the food was pretty good, but the clothes we had. . . the climate was pretty cool up there, you know, and with the clothes we had, we got pretty chilly. Some of the guys. . . a lot of them come down with colds and was sick a lot, you know. They finally took us out of there. I think the natives were doing a better job digging them tunnels than we were anyway.

Marcello: How did you get from Saigon to Da Lat?

Bramlett: Train.

Marcello: Was this a rather uneventful train trip, or were there any incidents that happened along the way that you think we need to get as a part of the record?

Bramlett: Well, from Saigon to Da Lat, it was uneventful. We came back . . . see, this railroad goes up the coast, and then you turn and go inland to Da Lat. We came back out to the coast and then went north again. That was. . . well, everytime we had to come to a bridge or where there was a bridge, we had to walk across and pick up another train on the other side.

Marcello: Because all the bridges were bombed out?

Bramlett: Yes, they had blowed all the bridges out up there. That was just, I think, south of Hanoi and down in there, you know. That's what we were supposed to be doing there at Thai Hoa, I call it--working on this bridge. We didn't do any work hardly. We'd do it at night; one of our planes would come over the next day and drop a bomb on the bridge (chuckle); and we'd go back out at night. I think they just had us there to have something to do.

Marcello: What were these tunnels for at Da Lat?

Bramlett: Well, I really don't know. I assume that they probably figured that if there were an invasion, you know, they could . . . there were a lot of nice homes up there and larger buildings, and they figured they could . . . they were connecting them all under these houses and these buildings, you know. But that's the only reason I could see for it.

Marcello: How long a day were you putting in here building these tunnels at Da Lat?

Bramlett: Oh, probably ten hours or something like that.

Marcello: So the workday had increased over what it had been in Saigon.

Bramlett: Yes, it did. They intended to do so much work there, you know.

Marcello: Did the food get scarce again?

Bramlett: Well, there wasn't as much of it, I don't think. But we had more. . . they issued more of a variety, but there wasn't

as much rice. I think we even got eggs issued up there, which was the first time I ever saw a Japanese issue an egg (chuckle). But they'd issued some eggs up there, you know.

Marcello: Have the Japanese guards by this time eased up in terms of physical punishment and so on?

Bramlett: Oh, yes. That. . . from Saigon. . . well, like I say, I think even after we came out of the jungle that they eased up. I think that when we got up in Saigon, we got an altogether different type of guards. Then, too, the war was changing, and I think that had a lot to do with it. Yes, they got . . . they made a lot of friendly gestures, you know. They got a little friendlier and acted a little nicer. I think the war was changing, and that's what brought that on.

Marcello: Incidentally, are you gathering some scores that you're going to settle after the war?

Bramlett: Oh, you think about it, you know, but after it was over and after you got out of there, you forgot all that. You know, we talked about, "Well, I'll re-enlist here and get stationed in Japan, and, boy, we'll really get even!" But they wasn't about to send us to Japan right then (chuckle). In the first place, some of the boys went later that stayed in the service, you know. I don't think they sent any of them over there for

maybe ten years after that. Maybe they let some of them go. You know, they said it was pretty nice over there. They had the upper hand there. I don't think they took anything out on them (chuckle).

Marcello: How about your attitude toward the Japanese guards? In other words, was there a feeling that, "As soon as this war's over, I'm going to get this guy!"

Bramlett: Yes, some in particular, if I'd have got an opportunity, I would have got him (chuckle)! You know, they were all . . . the ones that we had in Burma were all gone, you know--the mean ones. We didn't see them anymore (chuckle). Like you say, after the war's over and after we . . . well, they brought us back down to Saigon, and we stayed in there. On September 6th, they came in there and flew us out. We were there about a week or ten days, you know--about a week, I guess--before they took us out.

Marcello: Okay, let's just back up here a minute and describe the days now leading up to the surrender of Japan and your ultimate liberation. Describe what you were doing and how you received the word of the Japanese surrender. I'm sure that's probably vivid on your mind.

Bramlett: Oh, yes, I won't ever forget that! You know, we had learned to understand a lot of that Japanese--a lot more than we could speak--or I had anyway. But we were out on this bridge

there at Thai Hoa that night, oh, about midnight, I guess, working on this old bridge, just piddling around there. One of the sergeants came out from camp and was telling these guards about this atomic bomb. I don't think they had surrendered at that point, but they had dropped the first atomic bomb. He was telling them, you know, about it exploding (chuckle) and just, boy, how bad it was. The way we understood, they couldn't figure anything like that, you know, and they wondered if it just kept exploding how long it would take for it to get on down there, you know, or how they was going to stop it. But then a couple of days later, why, they come and told us that the war was ended.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard that the war was over?

Bramlett: Well, of course, I was happy and could hardly believe it, really. Then we got orders in, you know, that we were to . . . of course, all that Vietnam war was starting then, you know. The Japanese were to keep the peace there, and we were to move back to Saigon and stay in this certain camp until they evacuated us.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese were still keeping their weapons and so on and so forth?

Bramlett: Yes. And they were to keep guards, you know. Of course, those Vietnamese, they didn't like white people then. They didn't like the French people, and any white was. . .

Marcello: In other words, the Vietnamese expected that once the Japanese had been ousted, then they were going to receive their independence.

Bramlett: Yes, that's what they wanted, you know.

Marcello: The last thing they wanted was the French to come back.

Bramlett: That's right. They didn't want any white people in there, really. The Communist Vietnamese--I think was really what started it.

Marcello: So are you accompanied back down to Saigon by these Japanese guards again?

Bramlett: Yes, the same bunch went back with us.

Marcello: And are you still restricted in your movement?

Bramlett: Well, yes. I mean, of course, we knew that we could go if we wanted to, because they wasn't going to shoot you. We found that out right quick. We'd do about what we wanted. But we knew what was going on there, you know, and we didn't venture out much. We just wanted to get back to that place they was going to take us home from.

Marcello: You're going by train again, I gather.

Bramlett: Yes, we're back on the train. We done a lot of drinking. We bought a lot of booze off of them natives and had a few parties along the road on that train (chuckle) and off to the side of the road, you know.

Marcello: Meanwhile, are the Japanese keeping clear?

Bramlett: Oh, yes, they're staying way back, you know--more to keep the natives out than to keep us in. That's what it was really about. You know, some of the natives are going to come in anyway, or we'd go out and get them. If we'd see one that had something we wanted, we'd just go out and get them, you know. If we didn't want to meet that train schedule--wasn't ready to leave--we didn't leave (chuckle). So we kind of done what we wanted to do, but still we realized that they were supposed to be there. If I remember right, we didn't have an officer up there with us. I think a tech sergeant was the highest ranking guy. Lawrence Brown, I think, was in charge of that camp up there.

Marcello: So anyway, what happens when you get to Saigon now?

Bramlett: Well, you know, we're still in camp, you know, and the guards is all around like they've always been. But we wasn't supposed to go out of camp, but a lot of us did. Another guy and I went out and went down in the French section and collected some pretty clothes and a lot of booze and some food (chuckle) and came back into camp.

Marcello: Is it safe to venture out on the street in Saigon?

Bramlett: Well, it wasn't really safe, but we did (chuckle). But right after that, a lot of French people moved into our camp, because it really got bad out there. Lord, they were killing French right and left, or any white people. It didn't matter, you know. If you were white, you were French to them, I guess.

But a lot of the French people just moved into camp with us and just camped out there on the parade ground, you know, just bunked right out there. Of course, women and children . . . we moved out and gave them the lower section of one of the barracks there. We had a big dance in there. A band moved in there, and we had a big party in there one night (chuckle) and danced. But it was getting pretty rough outside.

Marcello: Did you have any close calls yourself with the native Vietnamese during this period?

Bramlett: No. No, we were real lucky. We just went to town like everybody, you know, and went off walking down the street. Of course, these French people would ask you your nationality. If they found out you were American, they wanted to talk then, you know.

But there were incidents, but it really hadn't gotten that bad down at Saigon. It was mostly up north where it started, you know. But it did come. It was getting pretty bad there when we left.

I think we were there--I don't know--several days before they finally came after us.

Marcello: Describe your first meeting now with the Americans.

Bramlett: Well, the pilots came in there one evening late, and we were leaving the next morning. We had another big party that night, you know. Of course, you could get all the booze you wanted

in camp, you know, or any kind of food you could order. These natives would bring it in, you know--merchants. We had a big party. Then. . . I don't know how many planes even now come into get us, but I know we left out at six o'clock the next morning. The pilot we had was from San Antonio, and he toured us around over Saigon. Then when we got up to crossing Burma, he took us down the railroad we'd built, you know--flew us down it quite a ways. Then we changed planes in Rangoon, I believe.

Marcello: In the meantime, how was your weight picking up?

Bramlett: Well, it picked up. I imagine I probably weighed about 130 pounds then. I know when I got home, I weighed about 140. Of course, I spent three weeks in India.

Marcello: What sort of medical treatments did you receive when you got to India? I gather that's where your first stop was--Calcutta.

Bramlett: Yes, in Calcutta.

Marcello: What did they do for you here in Calcutta?

Bramlett: Well, you know they ran all kinds of tests on us. Actually, I was in pretty good shape outside of malaria. Now I had amoebic dysentery, which is. . . the way I understood it, it was a lower intestinal disease. It was kind of ulcers. I don't know how. . . but anyway, they got that on my record that that's what I had. Well, outside of that, they didn't treat me for anything. They just gave me an atrabine for malaria, you know, and gave us a pass and turned us loose (chuckle).

Marcello: How did they feed you? In other words, was there a prescribed diet that you followed here?

Bramlett: No. First, you'd go in to order what you wanted, and the cooks would cook it. But then after a couple of days, they got to where you'd eat what they had. Lots of times we'd eat downtown. We found a good restaurant down there that had good shrimp, steaks, and things. We didn't want to bother to go back to the hospital. We was having too much fun downtown (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you kind of have a chip on your shoulder at this time? In other words, was there an attitude of, "By God, I've been through a lot, and nobody's going to give me any orders to do anything!"

Bramlett: Well, in a way, yes, I guess. They kind of went along with us there. On our passes there in India, they put a "LPW" up in the corner, you know. Of course, they was having a hard time keeping these boys out of restricted areas, you know. A lot of Calcutta was restricted. They wouldn't bother us. You could go down and do anything you wanted to. They'd pick you up and see your pass, and they'd just turn you loose. They'd warn you, you know, about what could happen to you in that part of town.

Marcello: Now what was this "LPW" that you were referring to?

Bramlett: "Liberated Prisoner-of-War," see. That was kind of a . . . I guess they put it on there, so they'd kind of be lenient

with them, you know--wouldn't throw them back in the jug somewhere. Because that might really make one of us mad to throw us in jail, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: When you get back to the States, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Bramlett: Well, really, I think everybody did. Of course, I didn't get out for a year after I got back; I stayed in the hospital, in and out, down there at San Antonio. But some of the boys did. In fact, we had one old boy that wasn't home but a week until he shot himself up there at Wichita Falls, you know. A lot of them came home, and girlfriends was gone; or some of them were even married and their wives had remarried; and first one thing and then another. A lot of them had problems, but I don't think I did so much because I stayed in . . . I stayed on leave a lot of that year, you know, at home, but I was in and out. I think it helped me a whole lot more than if I'd have just got right out when I first came home.

Marcello: As you look back on your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as having been a key to your survival? How did you personally make it?

Bramlett: Well, I think being young and healthy to start with was the main thing--was one thing. Well, I just figured the good Lord didn't intend for me to die there because I don't know of anything I did that the others didn't do, you know, except

just being healthy to start with, and young. Of course, some of the other guys were young and healthy, too, and they didn't make it. So you just got to give the man upstairs credit, I guess.

Marcello: I have one final question, and this is something that has always bothered me as I've conducted these interviews. I wonder how this interview would have been different had I conducted it in 1946 as opposed to 1976. Obviously, you would have know more of the finer details in 1946, but how else would it have differed?

Bramlett: Well, I imagine there'd have been a lot of hatred there and a lot of. . . not, you know, for the Japanese people. Like I say, I don't hate the Japanese people, but I don't have any use for them guards. Some of them--if they're still alive--I could hate awful easy, especially the men that was connected with all that. But like I say, I'm sure that a lot of them was obeying orders, but they didn't have to enjoy it so damned much! But I imagine that would have been the main difference. Of course, like you say, I would have remembered a lot more details. I probably wouldn't have even given you an interview then, to tell you the truth about it. I was very reluctant this time, but under the circumstances, you know, I think it is a good thing.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Bramlett, I guess it's a good thing, then, that I did wait until 1976 to conduct this interview. I want to

thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very important things, and you've gone into a great deal of detail. I'm sure that historians will find this material very valuable when they write about this particular phase of World War II.

Bramlett: Well, I hope it does somebody some good. I mean, I hope they get something out of it, anyway.