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Interview with

Seldon D. Reese

June 21, 1978

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Seldon D. Reese

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: June 21, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Seldon Reese for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. This interview is taking place on June 21, 1978, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Reese in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war with the Japanese during World War II. Actually, Mr. Reese was a survivor of the sinking of the heavy cruiser USS Houston, and after his capture by the Japanese, he subsequently spent the rest of the war in various prisoner-of-war camps throughout Southeast Asia.

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

Mr. Reese: I was born in Bronson, Texas, on June 19, 1922. My family was in Texas while Texas was still part of Mexico. As a matter of fact, we have a family cemetery that's in the Angelina National Park, and some of the

burials there are dated before Texas gained their independence from Mexico (chuckle).

Marcello: When did you join the Navy?

Reese: 1940. I can't remember the exact date, but it was in September, 1940.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the Navy?

Reese: I had wanted to belong to the Navy . . . I guess about 1929, I started wanting to join the Navy, but I never wanted to make a career out of it. I always just wanted to join for one hitch (chuckle).

Marcello: Why did you pick the Navy as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Reese: I like the uniform.

Marcello: When you joined the Navy in September, 1940, how much thought did you give to the possibility of the country eventually getting into war?

Reese: Oh, I knew it was going to get into war. I mean, England and Germany were already there, and we were practically there.

Marcello: Did you perhaps foresee a war in the Far East, however?

Reese: Oh, absolutely! As a matter of fact, I paid a yeoman twenty dollars to get me a transfer to the Far East (chuckle).

Marcello: Why did you want to go to the Far East?

Reese: I loved Asia. I still love Asia. As a matter of fact, I am a member of the Filipino community in California now; they call me a Filipino (chuckle). I am also very closely integrated with the Chinese community in Los Angeles Chinatown right now.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Reese: In San Diego.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened in boot camp that you think that we need to get as part of the record?

Reese: Yes. Well, for one thing, I had been on three national rifle teams when I was in high school, and on one of the teams I came in eighth in the nation. The only good thing that ever happened to me in boot camp was when we went to the rifle range. I am very bowlegged, and when we went to the rifle range and fired, my company commandant made the statement, "Reese over there can't march for shit, but he can shoot like a bastard." (chuckle)

Marcello: Describe the procedure by which you eventually picked up the USS Houston

Reese: I went to Pearl Harbor onto the Sicard from boot camp. The Sicard was a World War I destroyer which had been converted into a high-speed minelayer. I

didn't like Pearl Harbor very much, because the prices were too high and I was only making twenty-one dollars once a month. So I went into the yeoman's office and laid twenty dollars on his desk, and I told him, "I'll bet you twenty dollars that you can't get me transferred to the Asiatic Station." In less that twenty-four hours, I had a transfer onto the Tanager to go to Manila (chuckle).

Marcello: Was it in Manila that you picked up the USS Houston?

Reese: I stayed on the Tanager in Manila for a year-and-a-half, I guess. It was just three weeks before the war started . . . I found another fellow who was the same rate. He was on the USS Houston, and he wanted to go on a small ship, and I wanted to go on a large ship, so we both put in chits to trade ships. Just three weeks before the war started, they allowed the transfer, and he went on my ship and I went on his ship.

Marcello: The USS Houston was a rather impressive ship, was it not?

Reese: Oh, very!

Marcello: Anyway, from the pictures I've seen of it, it looks like a very, very neat ship.

Reese: It was one of the two best heavy cruisers ever built.

Marcello: What was your rate when you went aboard the USS Houston?

Reese: A seaman first class.

Marcello: Did you work mainly on the deck crew?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: That Asiatic Fleet of which the Houston was a part was a rather unique part of the Navy in itself, was it not?

Reese: Yes. We had three fleets at the time--the Atlantic Fleet, the Pacific Fleet, and Asiatic Fleet. The Asiatic Fleet was a very small fleet. We had the USS Houston, a heavy cruiser; we had the USS Marblehead, a light cruiser; we had the Langley, a seaplane tender; and we had a few four-stack destroyers and a few submarines. One submarine that we had that was kind of famous was the old Swordfish (chuckle). It had been the Squallus, and it had been sunk once before, and they lifted it up--and saved some of the men, incidentally--and recommissioned it the Swordfish, and it did a quite heroic job in the battle out there, although it was lost at sea.

Marcello: I guess by the time you went aboard the Houston, things were heating up pretty well there in the Pacific, were they not? In fact, I guess they had drawn

everybody off the China Station.

Reese: They had drawn everybody off the China Station, yes, but we were unaware that there was any particular heating up. Washington probably knew it; you know, the Japanese were in Washington talking peace and all (chuckle), and we were unaware of any heating up, but apparently there was (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you notice any change in your routine or training as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941.

Reese: The only thing I noticed in particular was my own gun batteries. When I went aboard the Houston, they were changing from a 3-inch antiaircraft gun to a 1.1-inch gun, and that was the gun crew I was on, was the 1.1-inch. I was in the Sixth Division, and the 1.1 were our guns.

Marcello: Now at that particular period, that is, prior to the actual coming of war, when you thought of an individual Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind at that time?

Reese: Another Asiatic person. To tell you the truth, I like all Asiatic people. I still do and I did then (chuckle). So I had no particular hatred for the Japanese and still don't.

Marcello: If war came between the United States and Japan, what

did you think would be the outcome? Again, I'm referring to this period prior to December 7th.

Reese: Well, I certainly knew what the outcome would be (chuckle). I mean, America had all the wealth; they had all the technology; they had all the production capacity. The outcome was obvious. As a matter of fact, I think the Japanese and the Germans were quite stupid to start the war (chuckle), particularly the Germans.

Marcello: At that time, as a young man, did you see any future war between Japan and the United States as being a very, very short one?

Reese: Yes, I did, I figured it would have been much shorter than it was.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about December 7, 1941. Do you recall where you were and what you were doing and what your reaction was when you heard about the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

Reese: We were in Iloilo in the Philippine Islands. Admiral Hart had gotten us out of Manila Bay. The admiral in Pearl Harbor may have not known it was going to happen, but Admiral Hart knew it was going to happen, so we were sitting at anchor at Iloilo.

Marcello: How long before December 7th had you more or less

moved your anchorage from Manila to Iloilo?

Reese: One day.

Marcello: Do you recall what your reaction was when you heard about the attack?

Reese: I hated to think that we were going to war, although I had been anticipating it for years . . . but it was no surprise.

Marcello: Do you recall how you heard about the war?

Reese: Yes. I had just woke up, and the guys who were already up were talking about how Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. Nobody was particularly excited; we all knew it was coming.

Marcello: I'm sure that nobody really knew the extent of the damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor.

Reese: Oh, I knew very well that the extent of the damage done at Pearl Harbor--and this is fact--was not nearly so much as the news had said it was.

Marcello: Did you know at the time, though?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: How would you have known at the time?

Reese: Because I knew what the _Arizona_ was. The _Arizona_ had been . . . I don't know if it had been decommissioned as a battleship, but it was not a battleship anymore. The _Arizona_ was an electronics laboratory. I used to

go watch movies on it when I was in Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Okay, at this point, then, a state of war existed between the United States and Japan. What did the Houston do at this particular point, then?

Reese: Just before dark we got underway, and I guess we had been underway about twenty minutes when the Japanese dropped bombs like you wouldn't believe--right where we had been at anchor. That's the first time they reported us sunk. They really thought they had sunk us there.

Marcello: Were there any other ships at that anchorage besides the Houston?

Reese: The Houston was the only one that was right there.

Marcello: I wonder what they were dropping bombs on.

Reese: Well, they knew the Houston was the ship to be feared, and their intelligence told them where it was, but they bombed after dark. Like I say, they thought they had us, but they didn't.

Marcello: So where did the Houston go from Iloilo?

Reese: From Iloilo--I think this is to the best of my memory--I think we went straight to Surabaja, Java. Then we came back to the Philippines, and we transported . . . we took a convoy out of the Philippines. The Langley was loaded down with ammunition and

explosives, and I was very excited and very nervous. We went to Tjilatjap two or three times and to Batavia a couple of times. During that time we had several air raids, but there was only one time that we actually got hit.

Marcello: And you took a pretty good hit that time, did you not?

Reese: That was the first air raid we were in, and it was the third run the planes had made. As a matter of fact, I was shaking my fist at them and laughing when they made the third run. I had begun to disrespect their bombers. They made a Christian out of me on that third run, though.

Marcello: Okay, now I gather that during this period, the Houston was mostly engaged in convoy duty of one sort or another?

Reese: Right.

Marcello; Were you working in conjunction with any other ships besides the actual transports and so on in the convoys?

Reese: The Marblehead was usually with us. Now, later on, the Boise came out, but they never went into action with us--not once. Of course, we had heard about other actions in which a bunch of the old American World War I destroyers really did some slaughtering

in the Macassar Straits. Our actions up to the Java Sea Battle were strictly air raids. Though the Java Sea Battle was far more dangerous than the air raids, the air raids were far more frightening (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe what these air raids were like.

Reese: Well, most of the fear from the air raids, really, I think, on our batteries was the fact that we couldn't look up. At least in my job I couldn't look up and see the planes. We had 5-inch .25's just above our gun cut, and when they would fire, we would feel the heat of the firing on our necks. The psychological effect was that the planes were about three feet above our heads (chuckle), and we never once saw a plane go down. Our SOC planes would take pictures of the darn planes in the water where they had went down after the attack, but the psychological effect of never once seeing one go down was terrible.

Marcello: Evidently, all during this period the Houston was extremely busy, either on convoy duty or fending off these air attacks.

Reese: True.

Marcello: The Japanese evidently had complete control of the air.

Reese: Right, and don't ever let anybody kid you, those Japanese bombers were good. As a matter of fact,

when the Exeter came out to Java to help us in the defense of the Indies, they laughed at us when we were frightened of the air raids, and they said, "Ah, when the Germans bomb, we just throw up an umbrella barrage, and we don't worry about it." After their first air raid with the Japanese, the Houston's SOC planes couldn't even come in. As a matter of fact, one time it tried to come in when we were in Tjilatjap, I believe. We might have been in Batavia. Anyway, our SOC plane tried to come in three different times, and the Exeter would open up, and we would radio them, "Hey, this isn't an enemy plane; this is the Houston's SOC plane!" He would try to come in again, and they would open up again. After the third time, he gave it up and went back.

Marcello: You mentioned that on one of these air raids, the Houston wasn't so lucky. Why don't you describe the one in which the Houston got hit and suffered some rather severe damage.

Reese: The bomb hit . . . and incidentally, I had a Marine friend that was on a machine gun up in the superstructure, and the actual bomb hit him and put a big scar on his back, but that's all. It exploded

down in the Sixth Division's--which is my division--compartment, and it knocked out our number three gun turret. After the air raid was over, I worked for about three or four hours--time was kind of indistinct at the time--carrying up bucketsful of blood and brains and arms and legs and hands and feet and so forth out of the compartment. We took up all the decking in the compartment; we chipped all the paint out; and we repainted and put in new decking. But we never did get the smell of death out of that compartment.

Marcello: You literally did carry up bucketsful of parts of bodies.

Reese: I was blood and goo from the top of my head to the bottoms of my feet when it was over. Every head in the ship had been knocked out except the chief's head; we had to wait turns to bathe after the air raid was over. By the time I got in to bathe, this goo was drying on me and pulling at the hairs on my arms and legs, and I was just having fits because it was stinging so bad.

Marcello: How many men were killed in that particular incident?

Reese: It seems to me like it was about fifty to sixty men killed and a whole bunch wounded. I remember seeing

one guy's ear sticking out like so (gesture) from blisters from the bomb flash. It was pretty bad.

Marcello: In other words, when you say his ears were sticking out "like so", you mean that they had blistered and swollen so badly that they were many times their normal size.

Reese: Many, many times. I'd say they were a good hundred times their normal size. The thing that hit me more than anything else, truly, was the next morning. The next morning I picked up a piece of debris off of the fantail, and there was a thumb laying there under the debris. It wasn't swollen; it wasn't discolored; it was just as natural as if it had been on a man's hand, and I very nearly vomited when I saw that thumb (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, what happened to the Houston next? It was hit quite severely in this particular raid. What happened at this point?

Reese: We went into Tjilatjap and buried the dead and started the clean-up of the Sixth Division's compartment.

The next air raid, we were on a convoy--and I think the fastest ship among the transports we had would do about twelve knots--but in that particular convoy, there wasn't any ship hit. The Houston circled

around and through and under and really threw up a barrage. I understand on one of the transports there was a merchant marine sailor killed from shrapnel, but that was the only real damage.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing on these convoys?

Reese: Well, that was it. We were convoying what we could out of the Philippines. Like the Langley was loaded with ammunition and high explosives and so forth.

Marcello: Now, after awhile, of course, I think that convoy duty more or less stopped, and then you were more or less stationed out of Java, were you not?

Reese: Right. It was part of President Roosevelt's promise to assist in defending what was then called the East Indies.

Marcello: At this point, I gather, you were working in conjunction with the combined Dutch, Australian, and British ships that were there?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Okay, describe some of the activity that took place during the defense of the Dutch East Indies?

Reese: Well, we were in Surabaja once, tied up to a dock, and when an air raid came, it seemed all the Dutch sailors left their ships and went into air raid shelters. We didn't; we threw up a barrage. As a matter of fact,

one Dutch officer said you couldn't even see the Houston for the smoke, and he thought it had probably been sunk, but we never received a hit. This Dutch admiral at that time said that he could take the USS Houston and defeat the entire Japanese Navy. I guess, in a way, we were about the major factor--the Houston and the Perth--in defeating the Japanese Navy.

Marcello: I guess by this time the Houston had already earned the nickname of the "The Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast."

Reese: Right. There was a fellow from the Houston named Demo that wrote a poem called the "Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast." It was really a beautiful poem, and I lost my copy, and I've continued to try to get another one and can't.

Marcello: What did it do for your morale when you learned that time after time the Japanese claimed that they had sunk the Houston?

Reese: The fact is, we were pretty proud, because it wasn't propaganda; each time they thought it was true. That's the reason for the name, "The Ghost." They thought we were dead, and we continued to come back.

Marcello: Okay, describe the Battle of the Java Sea and the

ultimate sinking of the _Houston_ in the Sunda Straits. I'll let you pick up the story.

Reese: I'll tell it the best I can remember it. Some of it may not be quite accurate. We all tell the same story, and you never hear it the same way twice. Now from my point of view, as a seaman, I didn't know about the planning the officers had been doing, so the things the men described in the _Ghost of the Java Coast_ about the planning and the going out and hunting and all of that, I had no idea about.

We engaged the enemy in the Java Sea. We had some four-stack destroyers, and I don't know how many; we had some Dutch corvettes, and I don't know how many; we had the _Houston_ and the _Marblehead_--the _Houston_ was a heavy cruiser, and the _Marblehead_ was a light cruiser; we had the _Exeter_, which was an English cruiser; we had the _Java_, which was Dutch, and the _DeRuyter_, which was also Dutch; and we had the HMAS _Perth_. Now my guns were out of action; we mainly watched for torpedoes in my gun cut. The 1.1's were useless in the battle.

Marcello: In other words, the Battle of the Java Sea was a surface battle--ship against ship.

Reese: Yes, ship against ship, and at long range so the 1.1's

were of no use whatever. Only the 8-inch guns were of any use. So we kept a lookout for torpedoes and periscopes, etc.

Marcello: By this time are you gaining a healthy respect for the Japanese Navy?

Reese: By this time I am gaining a very healthy respect for the Japanese Navy.

Now there is one thing that was put in this book that was inaccurate. We had a ensign on a range-finder right up above our gun cut, and in this book, The Ghost of the Java Coast, the man said we were at too long a range to make any hits. Well, he was watching through that range-finder, and he saw many, many hits that we made and also that the Exeter made, and he was telling us about it. Like I say, we were keeping watch, and he was watching through the range-finder, and we could talk back and forth. So we did make hits in the Java Sea. I don't know how many, but I do know we did extensive damage to the Japanese fleet.

Now one time a torpedo was coming directly at the Houston, and a Dutch corvette deliberately cut in front of it and took the torpedo to keep the Houston from getting it. Now he does tell you about that in

the book--I saw it. I saw the DeRuyter get it, and I saw the Java get it. I didn't see the Marblehead nor the Exeter. I still don't know what happened to the Exeter, and I'm still not quite sure what happened to the Marblehead. I do understand that she did make it to India.

Marcello: Those Japanese torpedoes were evidently nasty weapons.

Reese: Yes, and the way they threw them, they were hard to dodge. They didn't take any real aim . . . that was the real skill in their bombing. They didn't take any real aim; they just hit en masse. There was so many coming that it was awful hard to dodge them (chuckle). The captain on the Houston did what they said was impossible--he handled the Houston like you would handle a destroyer.

Marcello: Everybody that I have talked to had a great deal of respect for the captain of the Houston.

Reese: You know, for a destroyer, it is a normal maneuver to, say, throw the port engines full astern and the starboard engine full ahead and give it a hard left rudder and swing it around. They said you couldn't do that with a heavy cruiser, but Captain Rooks did it. The ship would lay over like so (gesture), and we would have to hang on (chuckle), but he did it

and the *Houston* did take it.

Marcello: Did the *Houston* sustain any damage in the Battle of the Java Sea?

Reese: We got one shell that was a dud and went through our candy locker and destroyed a bunch of candy.

Marcello: So up until this time, that is, between the attack at Pearl Harbor and the Battle of the Java Sea, the *Houston* had essentially sustained just two hits--one which was very serious and the other which was not very serious?

Reese: The other one was of no seriousness whatever.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens after the fighting had ceased here at the Battle of the Java Sea?

Reese: We went into Batavia, which is now Djakarta, and we took on fuel. Incidentally, I don't know if Captain Rooks had anything to do with this or not, but it seemed very strange. The *Houston* had a cat as a mascot, and the cat took off down that pier into Java like some big hound dog was after it (chuckle). You never saw a cat move so fast in your life.

We got under way at, I would say, approximately eight o'clock p.m.

Marcello: On what day?

Reese: This was the last day of February. We went into the Sunda Straits, and we must have arrived there about 11:30 p.m.

Marcello: This was still on the last day of February?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: By this time, evidently the situation was hopeless. You had to get out of there.

Reese: We had to stop the Japanese, too. The Japanese were on their way to Australia, and they could take Australia. Of that there was no doubt.

I had read some on the atomic bomb before I went in the Navy. One thing that most Americans don't seem to realize is that before World War II began, America and Britain were both far ahead of Germany on the creation of the atomic bomb. I used to get a scientific journal in high school, and an Englishman had split two atoms and an American had split one, and the Germans had been trying for years and had never split an atom at all. So I know we were ahead of the Germans on the atomic bomb before the war. But we never realized, of course, that it would come out in the war. So in our own opinion, if the Japanese took Australia the war would last a very, very, very long time, and we were the only

ones between them and Australia at that time.

Marcello: Okay, so you left Batavia and you were heading for the Sunda Straits. Pick up the story at that point.

Reese: Well, in the Sunda Straits, the HMAS Perth went in ahead of us, and they were sunk ahead of us.

Marcello: You ran into a whole Jap convoy there, did you not--transports as well as ships-of-the-line?

Reese: Well, that's right. They were going to take Australia. They had already set up their shore batteries on Java.

Marcello: Yes, at this point they were unloading to go into Java, though, were they not?

Reese: They had already unloaded and went into Java and Sumatra. In the battle, we had shore batteries firing at us as well as men-of-war. Like I say, the Perth went in ahead of us, and they were also sunk ahead of us, which was natural. It's my firm opinion that the Japanese sunk a lot of their own ships, because they were firing at us from both sides and in all directions. A miss on us was pretty prone to hit one of their own ships.

Marcello: From what I've read, some of their stray torpedoes did, in fact, sink some of their own transports that were

anchored there in the straits.

Reese: I had a Japanese officer tell me that we sunk more than thirty ships that night in the Sunda Straits. I know the next morning there was an aircraft carrier with a big red cross on the flight deck. The carrier was sunk but the flight deck was still above water. It was sunk in shallow water, and the Japanese were still using that flight deck, although the ship was sunk (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, now describe the actual sinking of the Houston and what happened at that point.

Reese: Well, my batteries did come into effect there. Four destroyers pulled up alongside of us, and we swept the decks of the destroyers clean. They did us no damage.

Marcello: In other words, the destroyers came close and put the searchlights on you, did they not?

Reese: Right. Of course, our bigger batteries sunk the ships, but on my own particular 1.1, we were really going at sweeping the decks of those destroyers. I think we swept the decks so clean, is the reason why they didn't do us any real damage.

The damage came later, and the battle was all confusion in the Sunda Straits. It was midnight, and

you couldn't see that well. I know the Houston ended up using star shells for live ammunition. There were shore batteries firing at us, because we were right between Java and Sumatra. They passed the word to abandon ship, and then we threw the liferafts over.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute here. Let's describe some of the activities that actually led to the abandoning of the ship. Evidently, by this time the Houston had taken quite a pounding.

Reese: We had. We had taken a very serious pounding. I mean, we knew that we were going down at that time. Captain Rooks was still alive at that time. The ship had done a lot of listing back and forth. I guess it was all confusion then. You were just firing with everything you had.

Marcello: Now had the Houston been hit with mainly armor-piercing and high-explosive shells rather than torpedoes?

Reese: I have no real idea. I know we got hit by one torpedo before we went down, because we had an incinerator right behind our gun cut. The torpedo hit the other side of the ship, and there was an inspection plate--a small one--on the incinerator, and it flew right across my shoulder. If it would have been six inches

farther over, it would have taken my head clean off. For me to describe the Battle of the Sunda Straits--incidentally, it was the Sundra Straits then--is very hard to do because we were firing as fast as we could. The officers knew far more about what was going on that we did on the guns, because we were just blasting away at everything that we could find to blast away at.

Marcello: I assume that for several weeks the crew aboard the Houston had not had very much rest or sleep or anything of that nature.

Reese: True. I went eight days before, during, and immediately after the sinking of the Houston that I didn't get any sleep at all.

Marcello: Okay, describe the abandoning of the ship and your trials and tribulations in the water thereafter.

Reese: Well, like I say, they sounded, "Abandon ship". Most of the liferafts and lifeboats went over the side at that time, and then Captain Rooks passed the word, "Don't abandon ship! I'm going to beach it!" This could have worked if there had been time. I mean, we were very near the beach. Then Captain Rooks got killed, and we abandoned ship. We saw we weren't going to make it to the beach, so we

abandoned ship. Most of the liferafts were far behind, and I was in the water with a rotten life-jacket on, oh, up until about ten o'clock the next morning.

Marcello: Okay, now what time did the order to abandon ship occur? In other words, what time did you get the word?

Reese: It was right about midnight . . . it might have been a little bit after; it wasn't before. It was definitely on March 1st.

Marcello: What thoughts were going through your mind when you were in the water?

Reese: Let me tell you something. First, Sandercook was our division boatswain's mate--boatswain's mate first class--and I had a great amount of respect and admiration for Sandercook. But Sandercook had been on the Yangtze River and saw the Japanese when they took over there. Well, I wanted to abandon ship with Sandercook, and I went to him and said, "Let's go, 'Sandy!'" And he said, "I'm not going to be taken prisoner-of-war!" He sat down in the gun cut with his headphones on, and I was very sorry to leave him there, but it was obvious he was not going to be taken prisoner-of-war.

So he deliberately stayed aboard ship. There has been many, many times since then that I have wished that I had sat right down there with Sandercook. I think he did the right thing.

I went back aft and climbed out on to the screw guard because I wanted to jump over the side behind the screws, and I did so. That was an awful forlorn sight seeing that ship move away from me (chuckle). In the water there, I watched them continue to pound the ship, and even after the ship was sunk--it was down--they were still pounding for thirty minutes the spot it had been in.

Marcello: Describe what the situation was like in the water?

Reese: Well, there were dead fish floating all around. Of course, there were people all around. It was a very badly shark-infested area, but there was no danger from sharks that night. They were dead, too (chuckle).

Marcello: Was there a lot of oil in the water?

Reese: There was a lot of oil in the water. When the shells would hit anywhere near, the concussion in the water would just seem like it was going to rip your chest out. Actually, the farther the ship got away from where I was at, the better that got. The next morning an onion floated by me, and I figured, "Well, maybe I

ought to eat it; that's all I got." So I picked the onion out of the water and ate it (chuckle).

Marcello: Now all this time, are you floating around with other people?

Reese: Oh, yes! There's other people all around.

Marcello: Are you conversing at all while you're in the water there all during the night?

Reese: Very little. I was very near Lieutenant Hamlin, who became our commanding officer in the prisoner-of-war camp. I know one fellow came by, and he was screaming and shouting and all that. I started to swim over to him, and Lieutenant Hamlin told me, "It's hopeless; he's hysterical! You have very little chance of saving yourself! Let him go!"

Marcello: At this stage, are you only trying to stay afloat, and that's about it?

Reese: That's it!

Marcello: How well was your rotten lifejacket holding up?

Reese: I lost it in about thirty minutes.

Marcello: Were you treading water at that point then?

Reese: Treading water, floating on my back, and swimming when I could. I was a pretty good swimmer, and I was young and extremely strong. There were some old guys, as a matter of fact, that swam longer than I did. I was in

the water eighteen hours total, and about the last two hours of that I was on a liferaft.

Marcello: In other words, after awhile one of the liferafts floated by with other people, and you were able to grab hold of it?

Reese: No. The Japanese picked a whole bunch of us up in a motor whaleboat, and then they carried us aboard a Japanese transport, and they gave us a cigarette, and they talked a while--in Japanese, of course--and then they kicked us all back over the side. That's when we did get a liferaft.

Marcello: Did the Japanese throw out the liferaft or did one of them just happen to float by?

Reese: Well, one just happened to be there, so we got on it.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens at this point? Up until this time, the Japanese simply picked you up in that whaleboat, put you aboard that transport, gave you a cigarette, and then put you back in the water again.

Reese: Right. And there was about, oh, I would say, sixteen to eighteen of us in this particular group. We kept trying to make the beach, and we'd look up one minute and we'd be just a slight distance from Java, and, boy, we just knew we were going to make Java. The next time we'd look up--there was a little lighthouse

out in the center--and we'd be just a little piece from there, and then we'd go like hell trying to get to that lighthouse; and then the next time we would look up, we were just about that close to Sumatra. It was like a giant whirlpool that we were in. We were just going very near to Java one minute, very near to the lighthouse the next minute, very near to Sumatra the next minute.

Marcello: The Japanese, I gather, really weren't paying too much attention to you?

Reese: They were paying no attention at all to the group I was in. Now they did to some of the other groups, but to the group I was in, they were paying no attention at all! After they kicked us back into the water, that was it (chuckle).

Marcello: I wonder why they kicked you back into the water again?

Reese: I have no idea. I didn't understand Japanese. They made the decision there.

Marcello: There did appear to be enough room on the ship for you?

Reese: (Chuckle) I don't know. Anyway, a native sailboat finally came out and picked us up, and we got to the beach on Java.

Marcello: In other words, you transferred from the liferaft over to the sailboat?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: It must have been a fairly large sailboat.

Reese: It was a very large sailboat and, incidently, extraordinarily fast. You wouldn't believe how fast that boat was.

Marcello: Did you get the impression that this native had perhaps been ordered out there by the Japanese, or was he simply doing this as a humanitarian gesture?

Reese: I think--it was my opinion--that he was simply doing it as a humanitarian gesture.

Marcello: Which was unusual, I guess, was it not, because the natives weren't too loyal to anybody?

Reese: At that particular time, I don't think the natives had quite made up their minds. They did not, and still do not, like the Dutch, and I think they figured the Japanese might be better. They found out later that they were wrong, but they still don't like the Dutch (chuckle).

Marcello: Now did you get anything to eat on that native sailboat?

Reese: We got some coconuts when we got to the beach.

Marcello: Did the native simply drop you off on the beach and leave?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens at that point now that you finally made the beach?

Reese: Well, we started immediately to walk inland to find the Dutch lines, because we figured there would be resistance to the Japanese invasion. We were with the entire group, of course, and Lieutenant Hamlin was trying to keep the group together. But me and one other American--he was a big Polish boy, but I can't remember his name--and two Australians had decided that we could do better going it alone, and so we got a way from the larger group, and the four of us went it alone. Incidentally, we did do it better.

Marcello: How were you dressed at this time? What did you have with you?

Reese: I was barefooted because I kicked off my shoes when I got into the water, but I had on a pair of khaki trousers and a khaki shirt.

Marcello: Was it soaked with oil and so on?

Reese: It was soaked with oil and water; it was really filthy, but it was all I had. When we got to the beach, I had my first experience with Chinese red tobacco. This native gave us a cigarette--roll your own--with Chinese red tobacco. It tastes pretty mild

as you draw it in, but when you inhale, it's like a stick of dynamite (chuckle). Boy, it's rough stuff! But for the next three years, eight months, and twenty-nine days, I smoked Chinese red tobacco (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you broke away from that main group. What did you do at that point?

Reese: Well, we found that getting food and lodging on our walk inland was much easier than the main group got. The Indonesians through most of the walk inland had not made up their minds, so they gave us food. We got lodging the first night in a mission. To this day I have no idea . . . it was a Christian mission, but I have no idea if it was Catholic, Methodist, or what. I know the chaplain was still there.

The second night, the natives in some village--I have no idea the name of the village--gave us lodging in the market place and gave us food, really good food. We woke up about midnight, and I had four knives wrapped right around my neck, and it was a native gang of bandits taking advantage of the war. They robbed us!

Marcello: What did you have that they would rob you of?

Reese: I had on a watch and a ring--I'm kind of ring-conscious (chuckle)--and some of the other fellows . . . well, I guess we all had on watches, and I don't know what the other fellows had on besides that. I didn't have any money, but I figured some of the other fellows had money. They robbed us, but we were white and that's all they did. They left a guard with us, and the little hut that we were in, they left it untouched; but they killed everybody in the village except one old man--men, women, and children alike. Now these were Javanese, not Japanese. They killed every person in the village--man, woman, and child--except one real old man that got out in the jungle and away from them. They took everything they wanted out of the village, and they burned everything else down.

Marcello: About how large was this village?

Reese: Oh, I would say about a thousand people. It's just a rough estimate. We got there and it was nearly dark, and we left the next morning right after dawn, and, of course, everything was burned down then. The old man was crying and begging us to help him, but there was nothing that we could do to help him, really.

Marcello: Did these bandits keep you under armed guard until

they had destroyed the village?

Reese: Right! Of course, we saw the flames and we heard the screaming and all that, but we were under . . . there must have been ten of the bandits that stayed in there with us and kept us under guard.

Marcello: Were you scared? That's probably a dumb question to ask.

Reese: (Laughter) Yes! We continued our walk the next morning.

Marcello: Oh! The bandits let you go.

Reese: Yes, they let us go. After they had did their vandalism and so forth, they just took out into the jungles, and that was the last we saw of them. I'm sure they let us go because we were white, and they were still a little frightened of the whites.

Marcello: You were still trying to find the Allied lines, and you had not run into any Japanese patrols or anything of that nature?

Reese: No. We were actually ahead of them. They had went apparently from a different direction or something. We were ahead of the Japanese.

That day about noon, two Javanese bicycle policemen took us prisoner, and they had about fifty or sixty other Javanese with them. They were still not taking

too many chances with the whites, so at that time they had definitely made up their minds. They took us to what amounted to a bicycle police camp in a small village. They held us there and I washed my khakis, and they gave me a sarong, and I had put the sarong on.

Marcello: Were you able to get all the oil and so on off your body?

Reese: Yes, pretty well off my body, but not out of the khakis (chuckle). I did wash the khakis as best I could. When the Japanese got there, the khakis were still drying, and I was in this sarong, so I thought, well, we were in a prison there, you know, and the Japanese got there and ordered us all out and to line up, so I didn't bother to go get my khakis because they were still drying. We got out there and they put us into trucks immediately, so I left my khakis behind, and all I had was this damn sarong.

Marcello: How many Japanese came to this village?

Reese: I would hesitate to estimate. I know we had machine guns all around us, and there were several trucks.

Marcello: Approximately how many Americans and other Allied troops were there?

Reese: Well, there were only Americans and Australians, and

at that particular place--I'm taking a very rough guess--there were about 100 to 150 men.

Marcello: And I assume that the local Javanese did not rough you up or abuse you in any way?

Reese: In no way. As a matter of fact, even after they took us prisoner, they gave us plenty of food; they were completely courteous; and they didn't attempt to rough us up in any way. They just let it be known that we were prisoners.

Marcello: So the Japanese come in. What actions do they take?

Reese: Very rough--beating, banging, and bashing. You got up in that truck, and if you can't get up in that truck in a hurry, you got a rifle butt across the skull or the back.

Marcello: Physical harassment started right away then, as far as you're concerned.

Reese: Immediately. And at that particular time, since we were already at a prison, I figured that since they had machine guns all around us, they were taking us out into the jungles away from where the natives could see us, and they were going to machine-gun us.

Marcello: Did you fully believe at this point that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Reese: Yes, I fully believed that. I just knew they were

taking us out into the jungles to kill us. And believe it or not, when I knew death was completely certain, I felt no fear whatsoever. As long as it was uncertain, I was scared to death; but when I felt that death was completely certain, I felt no fear at all (chuckle).

Marcello: In other words, you were ready to accept the inevitable.

Reese: I was ready to accept the inevitable (chuckle). But instead of killing us, they took us to a place called Serang, and they put us in a moving picture theatre.

Marcello: Describe what that moving picture theatre was like.

Reese: As a matter of fact, before they took the seats out and all, it was a very beautiful, small theatre. But we were crowded in there, and we were forced to sit all day long cross-legged, Indian fashion. They had machine guns up in the balcony trained down on us. We got one very tiny loaf of bread a day. This went on for several weeks. God, I don't remember how many or how long! It was terrible!

Marcello: What did you do while you were in that theatre?

Reese: We sat cross-legged, Indian fashion, every day. Every second day they would take us down to a stream where we could bathe, and we would bathe with human feces

floating by, but at least it made us feel a little cleaner.

I know one incident that happened to me while I was there, and I thought I was going to die over that, too. I got very sick to my stomach, and I made a dash to get outside where we had dug a latrine. I didn't ask permission--I just made the dash--because it was coming. This Japanese guard jumped right up in the door of the theatre, right in front of me, and yelled. And when he did, then I went all over him--right in his face. I thought for sure I was going to get killed there (chuckle), but I didn't. As a matter of fact, I never even saw him again (chuckle).

Marcello: Did he knock you around a little bit then?

Reese: No (laughter). He got out of my way, and then I went out and finished my job, and, like I say, I never saw him again.

Marcello: Now essentially, during this period here at Serang, it was a period of inactivity, really.

Reese: Completely. You just sat Indian fashion, cross-legged, all day long. We could lay back at night, but we were so crowded we couldn't really lie down.

Marcello: What did you get to eat besides bread?

Reese: Up until the last three or four days, bread was all.

After that the bread ran out.

Marcello: What did they give you for drinking?

Reese: Water, and very little of it because it all had to be boiled. We were so damn thirsty that we drank it hot. About the last three days, all we had was flour. We had no seasoning or anything else. We had flour and we made it up into dough balls and cooked it a little bit and ate it the way it was.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese had given you the raw flour, and you had to do your own cooking.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: How long were you here at Serang altogether?

Reese: Again, it's an estimation. I would say about six weeks.

Marcello: Now during this six-week period, what sort of military discipline is being maintained in that theatre where all of you evidently were?

Reese: It was the same discipline that they gave out to each other. If any Japanese got angry at you, he would beat the hell out of you. They would do each other that way clean from the rank of private to general. The higher rank beats the hell out of the lower rank, and they stand at attention and take the beating (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess what I was referring to was the discipline

within the theatre itself. In other words, was a military organization set up within the theatre, that is, a chain of command and so on?

Reese: No. If you did something that they didn't like, you got a rifle butt up alongside the head.

Marcello: I'm still not making myself clear. Were you obeying your own officers and so on and so forth?

Reese: Oh, no. Our own officers didn't have any more say than anybody else. They were just prisoners just like we were, and the Japanese didn't recognize the fact that they were officers at that particular time. Lieutenant Hamlin did try to talk the Japanese into better accommodations--Lieutenant Hamlin was a very fine man--but he got nowhere with it; he was just talking through his hat.

Marcello: What did you talk about during your stay here in this theatre? Obviously you had a lot of time on your hands.

Reese: We had a lot of time on our hands, but we did very little talking. As a matter of fact, I don't remember any particular conversations at all. I know we must have done some idle chatter. Of course, mainly, it was, "Three months and the war will be over." That's what we really thought.

Marcello: What did these Japanese soldiers look like in terms of

their appearance?

Reese: Like any other Asian. The only thing that I particularly noticed--incidentally, it was rather psychologically frightening--was those little split-toed tennis shoes they wore. They were black and, you know, the big toe was separated from the rest of the toes like a mitten. They were made that way for climbing trees, and it kind of reminded you of a club and hook. There was a psychological effect in those shoes. Except for that, it was like any other Asian.

Marcello: I've heard some of the prisoners comment that their uniforms and so on looked a little scruffy.

Reese: Oh, absolutely! They were very, very scruffy, but then every uniform did look that way. I went ashore in Surabaja, and to put it mildly, I got plastered, and I traded neckerchiefs with a Dutch sailor. Well, our neckerchief was made of a square yard of black silk, and the next morning I discovered his was made out of croakersack--it was black, but it was made out of croakersack. Our shoes were the finest money could buy. The Dutch shoes were part canvas and part imitation leather. The British uniforms were the same way. Actually, the Australian uniform was the nearest

to our own. Now the Scotch had a really fine uniform in their kilts; being a Scot, I particularly go for the kilts myself (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume that it must have been very hot and humid inside that theatre?

Reese: Very. Of course, it was very hot and humid in Java. Of course, Java is a very beautiful country. I don't know if you have been to Indonesia or not, but it's my opinion that it's the most beautiful country in the world. But this theatre was strictly torture. It was a torture chamber from the minute we entered it until we left it.

Marcello: Were there any certain periods when you could enter and leave the theatre, or was it simply a matter of always having to ask permission?

Reese; We asked permission to go to the latrine and the bath every second day, and that was the only time we were allowed to even get up out of our cross-legged position. We couldn't stand up; we couldn't stretch our legs out. We sat cross-legged the whole day long.

Marcello: Were you in the dark in this theatre, or did they have lights on?

Reese: Well, they had the doors open, and there was light from there.

Marcello: Generally speaking, did the health of the prisoners hold up pretty well during this six-week period at the theatre?

Reese: Yes, it did. I think one Australian got very, very sick; as a matter of fact, he passed out and fell into a latrine, and it was about six feet deep (chuckle). And I had my own little bout with the stomach, you know, but that was . . . I mean, I might have done that aboard ship. The health held up very well; I mean, we were all a very healthy bunch of kids.

Marcello: Dysentery had not set in yet?

Reese: Dysentery had not set in at that time, no. The dysentery set in in Burma.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that that theatre was pure torture. Can you give a little more detail on that?

Reese: Well, can you imagine sitting in a cross-legged position from daylight to dark without being able to get up, without being able to stick your leg out and stretch it out? I'll tell you, that's torture!

Marcello: At this point, do you see any sympathy on the part of the Japanese guards? Are there any of them that seem to show a genuine concern for the welfare of the prisoners?

Reese: I didn't really notice any effect either way. They just more or less acted, you know, like "you're here and we're

here."

Marcello: Now by this time, do you feel that they are not going to execute all of you?

Reese: Well, we began to think that they probably weren't going to kill us.

Marcello: Okay, describe the move from Serang to your next point of internment, and I assume this would be Bicycle Camp.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Okay, describe how the move took place. In other words, first of all, did they give you any prior warning that you were going to be moving?

Reese: No. Just one day they pulled up with trucks and put us in the back of the trucks, again sitting cross-legged, Indian fashion, sitting on top of each other's legs. All our legs went to sleep because the circulation was cut off, which caused a great deal of pain. And we moved.

Marcello: About how far was Bicycle Camp from Serang?

Reese: Oh, boy! A rough guess would be forty or fifty miles.

Marcello: In other words, it took you several hours to get there.

Reese: Yes, it took us two, three, or four hours.

Marcello: You had been at Serang for about a week. Is there any fear in moving now that perhaps you had gotten used

to the place a little bit?

Reese: No. We had been there more than a week. We had been there about, I think, six weeks. That's again a rough estimation. It was a long time ago.

Marcello: Did Bicycle Camp look a lot better than Serang?

Reese: It looked like heaven.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint.

Reese: From a physical standpoint, it was very beautiful. It had red tile roofs on the buildings. The buildings were made of cement blocks. They had big, wide verandas on both sides of the buildings and little cubicles on the inside. There were no bunks in them; you slept on the floor.

There was a lot of coral all around. The Australians and the Americans from the 131st Field Artillery and the Dutch that were there had already started picking up the coral to keep from cutting their feet, and they were building fences with it. We continued on that job until we had the grounds pretty well cleaned up of the coral.

It looked like heaven to us, because there was a lot of rice--and I say rice--and the 131st Field Artillery

had some money that the Japanese did not take off of them. Well, we'd go out on working parties, and each man would carry some of the money along, and we would buy food from the natives, and we would bring it in until we had enough. Then the Americans would have some kind of little special treat; that was seldom, but we had those things.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up a minute here. You're taken to Bicycle Camp. Describe what happens when they get you to Bicycle Camp. For instance, is there any sort of processing that you have to go through?

Reese: Not really. They just turned us loose in there and showed us which barracks we were going to be in.

Marcello: I guess you were a pretty scruffy-looking outfit?

Reese: Yes. Some of the fellows had had more intelligence than I had and had grabbed the clothes that they had washed, so they had their clothes. All I had was that damn sarong (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume that you had no mess gear or anything of that sort.

Reese: No, nothing of that sort.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you receive from the 131st Field Artillery when you arrived at Bicycle Camp?

Reese: A good reception, and from the Australians, too. You

know, they had some Australians there. We got a very good reception from them and the Dutch, also. I would say the reception from the prisoners was excellent.

Marcello: I guess you were a pretty pitiful-looking outfit?

Reese: I guess we were (chuckle).

Marcello: Did they share any of the things they had with you?

Reese: Oh, yes! Yes, they did share, especially the Australians.

Marcello: How about the 131st Field Artillery?

Reese: Actually, on a personal basis, the Australians were more sharing and so forth than the 131st was. Now, of course, the official money that the 131st had was spent on all of the Americans.

Marcello: What did you receive when you went into Bicycle Camp--from the Australians or the Americans--in terms of clothing and things of that sort?

Reese: An Australian gave me a mess kit . . . and we got a lot of rice, and, boy, was I ever wanting that rice; I was starving (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you get any additional clothing?

Reese: No. I wore that sarong for a long, long time before I ever got any clothing. As a matter of fact, we were in Changi before I ever got any clothing besides that

damn sarong.

Marcello: Were you still barefoot all this time?

Reese: Yes, still barefoot.

Marcello: Describe what the barracks were like.

Reese: The barracks were nice, real nice, in Bicycle Camp. It had been a bicycle police camp. See, Indonesia was patrolled by bicycle policemen. It had been a bicycle police camp, and it was very, very nice--the camp itself.

Marcello: What were the bathing and shower facilities like here?

Reese: We had good bathing and shower facilities. They were open-air, and there was a shower between each two barracks, so the shower facilities were fine.

Marcello: Was the water plentiful here?

Reese: The water was plentiful.

Marcello: I assume that all the drinking water would still have to be boiled, though.

Reese: You know, I don't remember if we boiled the drinking water in Bicycle Camp or not. I know there was boiling water at the chow line, and we always dipped our mess kits in boiling water before we got our food. We did that all the way through the prisoner-of-war camps.

Marcello: You would actually dip your mess gear in the water before you got your chow.

Reese: Just prior to the food, yes.

Marcello: How about after you were finished eating?

Reese: Well, we washed it out then, but we dipped it in the boiling water just prior to eating, because, you know, there was flies all over everything, and there were going to be germs getting into mess gear. The Australian mess gear is unlike the American mess gear. It has no top; it's just a square pan with a hook on it to hook it on your belt.

Marcello: Okay, describe what the food was like there at Bicycle Camp?

Reese: It was rice, and, like I say, we Americans did have some money from the 131st Field Artillery, and we did buy some extra food. But we would have to smuggle it in; each man would smuggle in a little bit of the food, you know, until we got enough so that we could pass it all around at some mealtime. I know, like one Australian went down one time telling the other Australians, "The Yanks are over there having peaches and cream." (chuckle).

Marcello: What were some of the things you could bring back from the outside?

Reese: Peaches, cream . . . the main thing . . . you know, we used the evaporated milk here a lot. Well, the

English and the Dutch and the Australians, they don't; they use condensed milk, sweetened--like Eagle Brand. They've got a hundred different brands of this sweetened condensed milk, and that's mainly what we would try to get because it had a lot of energy in it. It was more concentrated,etc.

Marcello: What was the quality of the rice like?

Reese: The quality of the rice in the Bicycle Camp was good. It was unpolished, which is far more vitaminized, and it was a good quality rice.

Marcello: Did you receive anything besides rice, that is, from the Japanese commissary?

Reese: A little bit of stew, but very little and very weak. We called it stew; actually it was a very thin soup.

Marcello: You mentioned the work details awhile ago. Were these voluntary?

Reese: Mainly, yes.

Marcello: A lot of times I gather that prisoners would volunteer just for something to do and to get outside, because it offered an opportunity to supplement your diet and so on.

Reese: True! As a matter of fact, in Burma and Thailand, I escaped out of the prison camp at least twice a week, and sometimes I'd go every night. I'd steal

things from the Japanese, take it out and sell it to the natives, and buy what I could. Mainly I bought tobacco. Most of the guys were buying food (chuckle). As a matter of fact, I'm very famous for that. The other guys called me "Speedy." The other guys said that while the other guys were scrounging for food, "Speedy" was scrounging for cigarettes (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, we'll come back and talk about it a little later on when we get you up in the jungle. What sort of work did you do on these work details?

Reese: One of the big jobs we used to do . . . and I don't mean hard; it wasn't hard, but it was one of the big jobs. They had a Dunlop Rubber Company there . . . the Dutch had destroyed most of what was in Java before the Japanese got there, but they hadn't done too good a job on the Dunlop Rubber Company. So we piled tires in the trucks and took them out and put them aboard ship to be carried around to the Japanese military service and things like that. It was strictly voluntary; they didn't want too many men. In other words, there wasn't that much work, so they'd say, "Just give us so many men," and whoever wanted to

go would go.

Marcello: Who would supervise these work details?

Reese: The Japanese would be in direct supervision, but at that time some of our officers had begun to take a little bit of command. They never really got what you would call officers' treatment by the Geneva Convention.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese might perhaps tell one of the officers, "Look, this is what we need to have done; get your men to do it."

Reese: Right. But the Japanese would be right there making damn sure it was done, and we would really be taking orders from the Japanese.

Marcello: How would you go about trading with the natives or buying things from the natives on these work details? Now you mentioned that the Japanese prohibited it.

Reese: Oh, absolutely! If you got caught, it was a strange thing. Sometimes they would just bring you back into camp and forget the whole thing--just like it never happened. Sometimes they'd shoot you (chuckle). Sometimes they would just give you a good beating.

I remember little "Shorty" Ingram one time. I forgot where it was, but he got out and he got a mango, and he came back in and they made him stand with a

brick in this hand and a bamboo pole in that hand and that mango in his mouth all day long. Every time one of those hands would start drifting down, he caught a rifle butt. I'll tell you, I don't know how the kid stood it. He was out in the boiling sun on top of that.

Marcello: We've been talking a little bit about the guards here . . . well, let's back up a minute and get back to the question I asked earlier. How would you go about trading with the natives? How would you carry it off without the Japanese guards seeing you and so on?

Reese: Very, very carefully. Now when we were on the working parties . . . and we didn't get out away from the party; the natives came to us. The Japanese . . . most of them were kind of inclined to look the other way. Now this is in Indonesia.

Marcello: Yes, we're talking strictly about your stay here at Bicycle Camp at this point.

Reese: The Japanese were mostly inclined to look the other way. Some of them were not, and the officers strictly were not. But mainly we were under guard of enlisted men--sergeants and corporals, etc.

Marcello: Did you have to share any of the booty with them?

Reese: No, no, I never did. Even when they knew I had it, I

never had to share it with them.

Marcello: How would you go about getting this money? You mentioned that the 131st Field Artillery came in with a substantial amount of company funds. How would you go about getting this money to spend on the outside?

Reese: The only way that you could really do it was . . . now sometimes the guys would get issued an item of clothing. Now we were in the tropics, and clothing wasn't that important, and they would take it out and sell it. Now some of us--the guttier ones--stole whatever we could from the Japanese while we were in the camp and took it out later. Now if we got caught doing that, we caught hell (chuckle).

We had a group of fellows that said, "We are going to obey the rules, and they won't kill us that way, and we'll get back home--even though we suffer a little more than you other fellows that are breaking the rules." The fact is, the ones that obeyed the rules are the ones that are still there. Now a few of us guys that did the stealing and swapping and trading, we got back home. Some of us got shot, but some of us got back home. Mainly, the guys that obeyed the rules and didn't take the chances, the great majority of them are still there, because they starved to death.

Marcello: Did you ever actually receive any of the company funds to take on the outside for buying?

Reese: I never did personally. They passed it out to different people that were going on working parties, but personally I never did.

Marcello: What did you have to trade?

Reese: In Bicycle Camp, very little. In Bicycle Camp, it really wasn't as important as it got after we got into Burma.

Marcello: This is what I figured, and this is one of the points I'm trying to bring out. To keep these things in a logical sequence, we'll talk just about Bicycle Camp here. What were the guards like at Bicycle Camp?

Reese: Not too bad. They were front line soldiers; they knew what fighting was; and they weren't all that bad of a group. The officers were a different question. They were a bad group from the beginning. But the enlisted personnel, hell, they were just soldiers doing their job like we were.

Marcello: And these were Japanese soldiers. We have to make that distinction.

Reese: Perfectly clear! They were Japanese, not Koreans.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the officers were not nearly so humane--if we can use that term--as the

enlisted personnel were.

Reese: Absolutely!

Marcello: Can you expand on this point?

Reese: Well, it was Hirohito's own decision that we got as little food as we did. I want to make that perfectly clear, and there is documented evidence in England to prove it. Premier Tojo wanted to spend a dollar-and-a-half a day to feed us. Hirohito made the decision that we would be fed on $11.80 per year.

Marcello: I would also assume that the Japanese were not going to assign any of their better officers to guard prisoners-of-war. It seems to me that they would have been the real "eight balls" of the Japanese Army.

Reese: Well, that's true with any army in any war. We did meet some officers in transport that were pretty nice people.

Marcello: What were some of the typical types of physical harassment that would be dealt out to prisoners here at Bicycle Camp?

Reese: Once in a while, a guy would get slapped around. Mainly it was with the other soldier's hand. We Americans and Australians and the Scotch, incidentally, too, figured out how to get around that a tremendous amount. While one guy was getting slapped around, he would

stand and take it. He would never let it show that he was being hurt, and everybody else around would be laughing. We would laugh like crazy: "Old 'Joe Blow' over there is getting a bashing!" That really embarrassed the Japanese. They got to where they didn't really hound the Americans and Australians and the Scotch nearly as much as the English and the Dutch. The English and the Dutch would cry around when they got bashed--that's what we called it, a bashing. And the Japanese, incidentally, would cry like hell when they got bashed, and they got far worse bashings than us guys that laughed. They also got far more of them, because the Japanese expected you to cry and so forth; and when we didn't, and when the other guys were standing around laughing, it kind of got to them. It had a helluva psychological effect on them.

Marcello: I also heard one of the worst things that could happen would be for a prisoner to fall after being hit, that they would really work the prisoner over at that time.

Reese: That was one of the worst things that could happen, true. You did your damnedest to hold your feet, and you did your damnedest to hold in any kind of a groan or anything like that. As a matter of fact, I don't think I

remember ever hearing an American or an Australian groan no matter how hard they got hit.

Marcello: Did it seem like the Japanese tried to single out the bigger men, or were they rather indiscriminate?

Reese: I think they were pretty indiscriminate. They did after awhile . . . like I say, they got to where they singled out the English and the Dutch, because they acted more like the Japanese on the bashings. They did more crying, and the guys standing around watching would have long faces and so forth. It made the Japanese feel pretty good to bash them. It made them pretty self-conscious bashing us.

Marcello: Why do you feel that the Japanese resorted to so much physical harassment in Bicycle Camp?

Reese: Well, it's their normal military discipline. A colonel beats the hell out of a major, and the major stands there at attention; a general beats the hell out of a colonel, and the colonel stands there at attention. That's their normal military discipline. In other words, they weren't treating us any different with these bashings than they did with each.

The same thing with the bowing. A lot of guys had it in their head that to bow was to belittle yourself someway or another. Well, this is not true

with the Japanese. To the Japanese you salute if you have a hat on; you bow if you do not have a hat on. A bow is a salute, that's all.

Marcello: Whom were you required to salute or bow to?

Reese: Any Japanese. And he was required to return it just as any American officer is. Incidentally, if he didn't have a hat on, he'd bow. As a matter of fact, a lot of Americans got a kick out of finding one that didn't have a hat on, and they would put a hat on and run up and salute him so that he'd bow (chuckle).

Marcello: The American officers would have to salute or bow to the lowliest Japanese private?

Reese: True.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that in some cases the bashings that the prisoners received were deserved?

Reese: That is according to the way you look at it. Now if you think that disobeying a rule causes it to be deserved, why then the answer would be yes. But the only way we lived . . . the only way us fellows got back was by disobeying the rules, so I would say no. From their point of view, maybe yes; but from our point of view, absolutely not.

Marcello: Many of the Japanese guards had nicknames. Do you recall any nicknames here at Bicycle Camp?

Reese: Not in Bicycle Camp, no.

Marcelllo: Later on down the road, some of them did have nick-names.

Reese: Later on down the road, yes. But in the Bicycle Camp, I don't remember any that acquired a nickname.

Marcello: Now by this time, that is, by the time you get to Bicycle Camp, has some sort of a military organization with discipline been established among the prisoners-of-war?

Reese: Not really. We saluted officers.

Marcello: You did salute officers?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: I was assuming that what was one of the things that probably would have been done away with in that situation.

Reese: As a matter of fact, we were kind of discriminatory on the saluting of officers. Now I always had to salute for Doctor Epstein. I figure you have probably talked to him.

Marcello: I haven't talked to him, but I've heard of him.

Reese: I wish you would talk to him. The old man is right at a hundred years old, and he lives in Oakland, and he has rheumatoid arthritis. He's an old Jew, of course, and he's a big man. He was the roughest, toughest,

meanest, most admirable and respectable old man I've ever met in my life. I loved him more than I did my own father. Dr. Epstein was a man!

Marcello: And, of course, he was to become very, very important later on, especially when you move up into the jungles.

Reese: Right! But his importance as a doctor was nullified by the lack of medicine. But that doesn't take away from the fact that he was not only a extremely fine doctor; he was even a more extremely fine man.

Marcello: Isn't it true that a certain amount of military discipline would become important to your survival? In other words, you couldn't exist as a rabble with everybody going in their own direction.

Reese: The Japanese got a big kick out of calling us a rabble for a long time. We'll come into that later.

Like I say, I was discriminatory in my saluting. The colonel in the 131st Field Artillery--I wouldn't have saluted that man if he had shot me. And he carried a gun all the way through the prisoner-of-war camps.

Marcello: This was Colonel Tharp?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: Why was that? Why did you not particularly want to salute him?

Reese: Well, we'll get into that later, too. Ensign Nelson was a very respectable young officer. He was very conceited, but in my opinion he had reason to be conceited. He was a very brave and courageous man, and he always got my salute. Lieutenant Hamlin got my salute. But some of the officers I would walk by; I wouldn't salute them for hell, and I still wouldn't.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that Colonel Tharp carried a pistol all the way through the internment. Isn't that a little bit unusual?

Reese: Yes, it's a little unusual, but he did. He had it concealed in a walking stick. It was a .22-caliber single shot. The Japanese knew he had it and laughed at the fact that he had it, because they thought of him just exactly as I did.

Marcello: What sort of news would you receive from the outside world here in Bicycle Camp?

Reese: In Bicycle Camp, the news we received was very sketchy and mostly inaccurate.

Marcello: Were there any hidden radios or anything of that nature in Bicycle Camp?

Reese: The English had some, and incidentally, at the risk of their lives, they kept them through the entire war concealed in cans. They would take a radio part and

put it into a can and put enough weight into the can to make it feel like a real can of food and seal it up. They had radios through the entire war. Incidentally, at risk of their own life, they kept British flags through the entire war, too. They were concealed someway or another, but how the hell they did it, I don't know. We didn't do any of that.

Marcello: How was the news from the outside distributed? By word-of-mouth, I assume?

Reese: By word-of-mouth.

Marcello: And I assume that you never knew where the radios were?

Reese: No.

Marcello: You probably didn't want to know where they were.

Reese: I didn't want to know. As a matter of fact, the less you knew, the less you could tell someone.

Marcello: I know one time during the internment here at Bicycle Camp, the Japanese tried to force all the prisoners to sign a non-escape pledge or a loyalty oath or whatever you wish to call it. Describe that incident.

Reese: That incident came, oh, I guess, about mid-term through our Bicycle Camp experience, maybe a little after. The Scotch, the Australians, and the Americans decided that they would not do it.

Up until about two months ago, I thought that no

American had signed that paper, because I certainly did not. But I found out about two months ago that under Colonel Tharp's advice, some of the Americans did sign the paper.

Now I was in Lieutenant Hammil's group, as distinguished from Lieutenant Hamlin. I was in his group, and none of us signed that paper. They beat and bashed us around pretty hard on that, and they cut our rations and all that. We continued to say no. Finally, they took us outside the gate of Bicycle Camp and lined us up and pointed machine guns at us and told us to sign it or die.

Lieutenant Hammil answered for us, "No!" Well, they hit him with a rifle butt, and I understand he had very serious problems later on because of that lick. It caused a growth on his brain; he was really seriously hurt. The rest of us, they just marched us back into camp, and we carried him back into camp, and that was the last I ever heard of it.

Marcello: Did the Japanese warn you as to what would happen if somebody did escape and were caught?

Reese: Oh, we knew what would happen in that case. As a matter of fact, they warned us of that, and if it had been a true escape . . . they did catch a few,

and they killed everyone of them.

Marcello: In other words, you knew that the Japanese weren't bluffing when they said they would kill you if you were caught.

Reese: If we escaped out of the camp and traded with the natives, like I say, sometimes they would kill the guy and sometimes they wouldn't. Sometimes they wouldn't even do anything to you, except just bring him back into camp.

Marcello: I assume that by this time you had to make certain adjustments. In other words, you are prisoners-of-war; but not only that, you are prisoners-of-war and your captives come from a different culture, and they have a different set of values and things of this nature. You as the captives have to make certain adjustments, obviously.

Reese: Well, to me, that wasn't as hard, I don't think, as it was to the rest of the guys; and some of the rest of the guys didn't like me because of that. I had pretty well accepted the Asiatic culture before. I like Asiatic people; I always have and I still do, and I guess I always will. As a matter of fact, I've went into dangerous places here in America since I've got out, and I've actually had Asians, without me knowing it,

following along behind me to make sure that I didn't get into too deep of trouble. If I had, whoever I got into trouble with would have been up to their assholes in Chinese (chuckle).

Marcello: Again, how did you personally cope with the people of this alien culture now that you were prisoner-of-war?

Reese: Well, like I say, not nearly as hard as the other fellows, because I knew about them. I studied their history. I know more about Japanese history than nine-tenths of the Japanese people. As a matter of fact, I had a samurai tell me not too long ago that if Americans had samurais, I would be a samurai. Incidentally, I knew more about the Japanese history than he did (chuckle). So I knew Japanese history; I know Chinese history.

Marcello: But again, what was the way in which you found it best to cope with the situation? What did you personally do in order to survive as a captive of this alien culture?

Reese: Well, I accepted their culture. Like I say, I didn't have as hard a time with this as the other fellows, because the other fellows would refer to them as "Gooks"--all Asians. Well, I never did that; I liked the Asians. I didn't refer to them as "Gooks." To me, accepting the Japanese culture wasn't nearly as hard as it was for the

other fellows.

Marcello: You talked about Colonel Tharp awhile ago . . . and I have to be very careful how I phrase this question so as not to imply that he was a collaborator. But did you see any examples of collaboration here in Bicycle Camp?

Reese: Not in Bicycle Camp. But I learned to disrespect him in Bicycle Camp, and later on he did threaten collaboration with the enemy to me. At that time, I cursed him for everything I could think of and told him that if he carried out his threat, he would certainly be tried for high treason when we got home. He did not carry out the threat.

Marcello: What did he do in Bicycle Camp that alienated you toward him?

Reese: He just acted the coward's part, that's all. And that right there was enough to throw me, because I am not a coward. He appeased the Japanese in every way possible. He signed the paper. Of course, I didn't really realize that, but knowing Colonel Tharp, that was his way. He would do just about anything to just about anybody to please the Japanese.

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

Reese: Dr. Epstein was there, of course, and we had another doctor from the 131st Field Artillery.

Marcello: Dr. Lumpkin.

Reese: Yes, Dr. Lumpkin. There were some English and Dutch doctors there, but Dr. Epstein and Dr. Lumpkin were the only ones that I knew.

Now when I came out of the water, it was a long time before I could urinate. In the theatre and Bicycle Camp, my testicles swelled up real bad, and they were still swollen when I got to Bicycle Camp. We did have a hospital hut, and they did give me some minor treatment. The medicines they had didn't do any good, really. The swelling finally went down, and that was it.

Marcello: What caused the inability to urinate and so on? Did the doctors ever mention it?

Reese: Well, Dr. Epstein was under the opinion that being in the water so long caused it. But I don't think anybody else figured out how come my testicles swelled up (chuckle).

Marcello: What did you do for recreation in Bicycle Camp?

Reese: I just wandered around from hut to hut talking with the Australians--I particularly liked them--and talking to the Dutch, especially the Indonesian Dutch. As I

said many times before, I really liked the Asiatic people. Mainly, my recreation was just wandering around, "bulling" with this group and that group. I had some very good Australian and Dutch friends, and later on I acquired some very good English friends.

Marcello: You could therefore move without any difficulty from one section to another.

Reese: Oh, yes. In Bicycle Camp we were completely free in the camp to go anywhere we wished.

Marcello: Were there any provisions made for athletics or theatrical performances or anything of that nature?

Reese: I never saw any athletics in Bicycle Camp, and there were no theatrical performances there. If there were, I didn't know about it.

Marcello: Did you have a lot of time on your hands here in Bicycle Camp?

Reese: A tremendous amount, yes. A lot of time on our hands.

Marcello: When you sat around in your bull sessions, what would usually be the major topic of the conversations?

Reese: Food and when the war would end. We incidentally lost all our inclination toward sex; all our sexual fantasies went. Our fantasies turned to food. You'd be surprised at some of the fantastic concoctions

that I thought up, and other guys brought them out the same way, so they were thinking of the same things (chuckle).

Marcello: Psychologically, I'm not sure if that was a good or bad thing.

Reese: Well, I don't know. I'm not in a position to say, really (chuckle).

Marcello: I've heard it said by some of the prisoners that they could actually imagine smelling a particular type of food cooking.

Reese: Oh, I could do that, yes. But, you know, some of the people, when they came back from the prison camps, actually carried out some of these fantasies. I did not. They flew us out to Rangoon, and I got two Spam sandwiches and a cup of coffee, and I was perfectly happy. The food fantasies were gone immediately.

Marcello: Okay, I guess it was in about late September or early October of 1942 that you would be leaving Bicycle Camp.

Reese: I went on the Dai Nichi Maru.

Marcello: I guess if you could have stayed at Bicycle Camp for the duration of the war, you might say that being a POW might not have been too bad.

Reese: That's true.

Marcello: I mean, being a prisoner-of-war is bad under any circumstances, but compared to what you were to face later on, Bicycle Camp was a pretty good place.

Reese: You know, the funny part of it is, when we got to Burma, we were actually looking forward to it. We thought it was going to be better. We just knew . . . well, here we are in a working camp, you know, so they'll feed us better, and we'll have a better life. And that's where the shit hit the fan.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you were uprooted from Bicycle Camp.

Reese: Well, we were just told we were going to move out. We went on the Dai Nichi Maru.

Marcello: Had there been rumors of your move for some days in advance or anything of that sort?

Reese: If so, I hadn't heard it.

Marcello: In other words, it was a very sudden action so far as you were concerned?

Reese: So far as I was concerned, yes.

Marcello: By this time, what sort of possessions did you gather?

Reese: I still had my sarong, and I had an Australian canteen and an Australian mess kit, and that was about the

size of it. If I had anything else, I don't remember.

Marcello: Okay, so I guess you went down to the Batavia docks, and that's where you picked up the Dai Nichi Maru.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like aboard the Dai Nichi Maru.

Reese: Conditions were pure hell aboard the Dai Nichi Maru. They don't transport men in the comfort that Americans do. Again, this was their own men as well as ours. In other words, the Dai Nichi Maru was the Dai Nichi Maru if it had Japanese aboard or if it had Americans aboard. They had the deck, and about three feet above the deck they had a shelf, and about three feet above that shelf, they had another shelf; and we got in on those shelves, and we laid down in there, and we came out when we wanted to go to the benjo, and that was about the size of it. It was hotter than holy hell, and it stunk. God, that place stunk!

Marcello: What made it stink so bad? Was it mainly the dysentery and simple body odors and so on and so forth?

Reese: Well, the dysentery hadn't really started too bad at that time. It was the body odors and just the stink of a rotten, old Japanese steamer. It was about a

hundred years old. It was a coal burner. It was just the stink of an old ship and so many bodies so close together, and it had carried those bodies many, many times before to many, many places before. It was just a stinking, rotten mess.

Marcello: I assume that you couldn't stand up in one of these holds.

Reese: Oh, no! You couldn't even sit up straight. You could half-incline, but you couldn't sit up straight.

Marcello: What was the food and water situation aboard the Dai Nichi Maru?

Reese: Terrible, terrible. We had practically no food and practically no water, just barely enough to sustain us until we got to Singapore.

Marcello: How were you fed?

Reese: In our mess kit.

Marcello: I mean, was the food simply lowered down into the hold in buckets?

Reese: Do you know that for the life of me, I can't remember. All I remember is that that ship was hell--holy hell!

Marcello: When could you get up on deck?

Reese: I don't think I got up on deck more than once the whole trip. Of course, it's not a very long trip from Batavia over to Singapore. I think I got up on

deck for a few minutes--a very few minutes.

Marcello: And was this to go to the benjo?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: How long were you on that ship altogether?

Reese: Oh, maybe two or three days. It's a very short trip.

Marcello: I gather you were now really getting a taste of what it was like to be a prisoner-of-war.

Reese: Yes! Of course, we got that in the theatre in Serang.

Marcello: That's true. Okay, so what happened when you got to Singapore?

Reese: Well, Changi Village was not bad. I know the picture "Changi Village" made it look terrible. That picture was fiction from one end to the other. There wasn't even a basis of foundation for that picture! Now the English had some Red Cross food there.

Marcello: You're referring to the movie-"Changi Village."

Reese: Yes, The English had some Red Cross food there that the Japanese had allowed them to have, but they said that since the food had been sent to the English, it was strictly meant for the English, and the Americans and the Australians got none of it.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute. Describe what Changi looked like from a physical standpoint.

Reese: It was beautiful from a physical standpoint. It was built up in the hills above Singapore. Of course, Singapore was really a hot, dirty, filthy city at that time. Changi was clean and up in the hills--it was cool--overlooking the straits between Johore Bahru and Singapore. There were monkeys all around. It was really beautiful from a physical viewpoint.

Marcello: It had been a British military camp, had it not?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Describe what your barracks were like here.

Reese: Well, they were British military barracks. They had the red tile roofs, and they were stone. They had verandas. One thing I remember, the sun at Changi Village was extremely hot, but if you got in the shade, the wind was extremely cool. It was either one way or the other.

Marcello: When we were talking about your possessions awhile ago, you did not mention whether or not you had any blankets.

Reese: I had rice bags that served as blankets.

Marcello: And were you using rice bags to carry your gear in, also--what little gear you had?

Reese: The little gear I had, yes.

Marcello: What were the shower and bathing facilities like here at Changi?

Reese: Good. And the water was good.

Marcello: Did you have free access to them?

Reese: They had one in every barracks.

Marcello: I gather that this was the camp in which relations between Americans and the British were not too good.

Reese: And the relations between the British and the Australians were the same way.

Marcello: In other words, there was a great deal of animosity between the British and the Australians.

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what caused this animosity.

Reese: Well, the English had these Red Cross goods, and they said they were sent strictly to the English and nobody else. They kept them all to theirselves. We figured that we were fighting the same war, and we deserved the Red Cross goods as well as they. I mean, you would have thought they would have given them to the Australians, but they didn't. They told the Australians that this was sent to the English: "Damn you!"

Marcello: The British ran this camp, did they not?

Reese: Yes. And everything was done on a percentage basis.

I mean, there were some 80,000 British and in the vicinity of 1,500 Americans, I think it was, and I don't know how many Australians there were but I guess about the same amount as Americans. They did everything on a percentage basis--twenty-nine Australians and one Englishman, and twenty-nine Americans and one Englishman. All the hard work.

Marcello: Describe what the work parties were like here at Changi. I assume that there were work parties.

Reese: There were work parties, but like in the Bicycle Camp, they weren't too hard. We cut out a rubber plantation and started a farm in there. We didn't finish the farm; we went on before the farm got started. The work that I did was cutting out the rubber trees.

Marcello: I gather that the Japanese were trying to make this a self-sustaining camp.

Reese: Right. That was apparently their goal.

Marcello: Describe what work was like here clearing the rubber trees and so on.

Reese: Well, it wasn't too hard; they didn't rush us too badly. We cut the trees and dug up the stumps. Digging up the stumps was pretty hard work, but they didn't rush us all that much, so it still wasn't too bad.

Marcello: And I assume that you were still in fairly good physical condition so that you could do hard labor.

Reese: I was still in great condition. Now some of the guys--a very, very few of them--started getting a little sick in Changi.

Marcello: What was the food like here in Changi?

Reese: About like Bicycle Camp. It was rice with a very, very thin soup. The English had some ducks. I know one American stole a duck from an Englishman one time, and, boy, they raised holy hell about that.

Marcello: I understand that there was a lot of theft, so far as stealing from the English.

Reese: The Americans and the Australians and the Dutch thought of nothing in the world of stealing from the English after the way they acted about the Red Cross goods.

Marcello: Also, weren't there some difficulties concerning the "King's Coconuts?"

Reese: Absolutely! And I was standing there watching that.

Marcello: Describe that incident.

Reese: This Dutchman went up this tree, and he threw down four coconuts. As a matter of fact, he gave me one of the coconuts. You don't mind me talking plain, do you?

Marcello: No, not at all.

Reese: These two English military policemen came up, and they told him, "Man, you can't steal the king's coconuts!" And he said, "Well, fuck the King and the Queen, too!" (chuckle) So he came down, and me and him run the military policemen away. Another Englishman walked up, and this Englishman asked him if he had a cigarette, and he said no; and then he pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered me a cigarette. Then the Englishman said, "You just told me you didn't have any cigarettes!" And he said, "For the English, I have nothing; for the Americans, I have everything!" (chuckle) I was right there with that "King's Coconuts" bit.

Marcello: Why was it that they were so concerned about the coconuts and so on?

Reese: Oh, I'll tell you, if it's the king's, then it's the king's. You don't dare touch the king's possessions.

Marcello: Now I don't think there was free access in this camp, was there, in terms of moving from one place to another?

Reese: There was some, but not completely so.

Marcello: In some cases, didn't you have to have passes to move from one section to another?

Reese: We stayed away, and I don't know if you needed a pass

or not, because I never attempted to go to their section. We stayed away from the English; we did not like them. Later on, I did meet some very nice Englishmen and got to be good friends with them; we got to where we understood them better. But at that particular time, this Red Cross goods had caused a high amount of animosity, and we didn't like them, and I personally stayed away from them. But we were still in close contact with the Australians and the Dutch.

Marcello: I also have heard it said that the hygiene and the cleanliness of the English had something to be desired.

Reese: Yes, definitely. That was true with the Indonesian Dutch, too. Mainly, the Englishmen were the worst.

Marceloo: By this time, I'm sure that everybody was very conscious of the importance of personal hygiene and things of this sort.

Reese: Oh, don't you believe it! Absolutely! I mean, with all the hunger, you knew disease was bound to get started. That's the reason we were looking forward to this Burma railroad, because we figured we'd get more food there.

Marcello: Did you perhaps sense a feeling of defeatism among the

British and so on? I'm referring now to maybe the common, ordinary British soldier.

Reese: Not toward the war. Now the individual, yes, they were pretty well defeated, yes. But they had as high spirits toward the outcome of the war itself as we did, and so did the Dutch. As a matter of fact, I had made the statement that no two countries could defeat the entire world, and this Dutchman said, "America could."

Marcello: What were the Japanese guards like here at Changi?

Reese: They weren't too bad. We hadn't run into Koreans yet.

Marcello: In fact, did you actually see too many Japanese guards?

Reese: We never saw too many. Mostly, the guards we saw were Sikh Indians that had turned on the British.

Marcello: Could you elaborate on the Sikhs somewhat?

Reese: The only thing that I really know about the Sikh is that their religion requires them to be homosexual. You know, Sikh to them was like Christ to us, and he was going to return as is Christ to us. But women are far too unimportant for Sikhs to be born of a woman, so Sikh is going to be born of a man, so they all go around "switchy-swapping," because each one of them wants to be the mother of the new little Sikh when he's born (chuckle).

Marcello: I understand that nobody liked the Sikhs.

Reese: Well, the Sikhs in India are about the most vicious . . . and incidentally, I've read the history of India. I'm pretty much of an historian myself (chuckle), although I don't have any degrees in it, but I've read a lot of history. The Sikhs in India are known as great fighters. They are very sneaky, but they are really highly respected as fighting men. They stay away from the Gurkhas. Now the Gurkhas are the really respectable people. Incidentally, the Gurkhas and the Maori were the only native troops in the British Army that received the same pay as the British troops and were completely integrated with the British. By that I don't mean they were integrated in British outfits, but they went to church with the British, and they went to British nightclubs and so forth. The other Indians were not allowed to do so.

Marcello: What were the hospital facilities like there at Singapore?

Reese: I don't know. I never went to the hospital there; I have no idea what the hospital facilities were there.

Marcello: Of the two camps, which one did you find more pleasant--Bicycle Camp or Changi?

Reese: Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Were you kind of eager to get out of Changi?

Reese: Well, I wouldn't . . . like I say, we were looking forward to going on to a job, because we figured when we worked more, we would be fed more.

Marcello: You weren't actually in Changi too long, were you?

Reese: No, no, we were there about three months. We wouldn't have been there that long except--according to what I heard; it was strictly rumor--that American submarines had been giving them hell. So they delayed our leaving Changi, and, as a matter of fact, we didn't leave Changi by ship. We went down through the Malayan peninsula, and I can't think of the name of the town now. It's way down on the tip of the Malayan peninsula.

Marcello: Penang, wasn't it?

Reese: Yes, Penang. We boarded the Moji Maru.

Marcello: Did you fully realize when you got to Changi that it was a transit station, so to speak, that is, that men were constantly and continually leaving Changi for some other destination?

Reese: We believed so, but we were not sure. In other words, that was a conception, but it was not to us a known fact.

Marcello: By this time, had you heard rumors of the railroad being

built?

Reese: No.

Marcello: You had not?

Reese: No.

Marcello: Okay, describe the process by which you left Changi. Again, was it a sudden move, or did you have some kind of advance notice?

Reese: No, I didn't know in advance. We went to Singapore, and we were put on a train--in freight cars. Again, we sat crossed-legged, Indian fashion--crowded in just as many as you could get into a car.

Marcello: Were these enclosed boxcars, or were they cattle cars, or what were they?

Reese: You know, they weren't completely enclosed, because I sat on the train for about two hours looking at a Chinese girl on a passenger train, and she was the most beautiful girl I ever saw in my life. I'll never forget what that girl looked like; she was Mandarin, and, oh, I wished I had been free (chuckle)!

Marcello: Okay, I gather that this was a fairly short trip on this train down to Penang. It didn't take too long.

Reese: It didn't take long at all.

Marcello: Were there any hardships on this trip?

Reese: Not on the train. And the Moji Maru was not nearly so

bad as the Dai Nichi Maru.

Marcello: Why was that?

Reese: Well, the captain, for one thing, was a really great guy. He allowed us on deck more. As a matter of fact, I talked to him personally . . . and he told us before we left Penang--he told me--that if we got to Moulmein, it would be a miracle, and he knew if he got there, he would not get out.

Marcello: How did you manage to get to talk to the captain?

Reese: He was a very talkative, friendly type of fellow. He wasn't a bad guy at all. He was a little more educated than most, and, of course, he was a sailor and he had been around the world--he knew the world. You know, most of the Japanese didn't, even their officers didn't. As a matter of fact, I've had Japanese officers tell me that they would eventually starve America out, because they had taken a majority of the rice-producing countries of the world. They just couldn't imagine anyone living on anything except a vast amount of rice.

Marcello: I assume that this Japanese captain could speak English.

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, describe what conditions were like aboard the

Moji Maru.

Reese: Well, they were bad, but they were not nearly so bad as the Dai Nichi Maru. And, of course, on the way to Moulmein we got bombed. There was two ships . . . I don't know the name of the other one, but it had Japanese and Dutch on it. The Moji Maru had English, Australians, Scotch, and Americans.

Well, it's a strange thing about the bombing. The other ship got sunk, but the four bombs that were put into it were all in the hold that the Japanese were in. There were something like thirty or forty Japanese survivors, and there were something like thirty or forty Dutch killed. We picked them all up on the Moji Maru that we could find and went on in to Moulmein.

Marcello: Let's back up here a minute. Let's talk a little more about conditions aboard the Moji Maru. What were the holds like here, that is, the holds where they kept the prisoners?

Reese: They were approximately the same as the Dai Nichi Maru, except that the shelves weren't nearly so close together, and the ship didn't stink nearly so bad. We got better rations and better treatment from the Japanese all the way around on the Moji Maru than we did on the Dai Nichi Maru.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Moji Maru?

Reese: Well, it was better than the Dai Nichi Maru, that's about all I can say.

Marcello: And did you say that you could get up on the deck more often?

Reese: We could get on the deck more often. The captain was a more intellectual man, and he knew more of what was going on.

Marcello: Okay, describe in more detail the bombing raid that took place while you were on your way from Penang to Moulmein.

Reese: Well, it was four B-24's. Like I say, they sunk the other ship that was with us--I don't know the name of it. They hit a lifeboat on the Moji Maru. They had an old field artillery piece set up on the fan-tail of the Moji Maru, and they tried to fire a shot at the planes, but the gun blew up, there was a big cloud of smoke that came up from the gun, and a bunch of machine gun ammunition went off on the bridge. One American got some shrapnel in his back. I don't think anyone else was hurt except some Japanese officers on the bridge. There was smoke piling up from the fieldpiece, and the Japanese captain showed his intelligence there again. He ordered everyone to the

starboard side that could possibly get there, which gave the ship a list. Then he gave the ship a hard right rudder, which started it going in circles in the water. The Americans in the B-24's honestly thought it was going down, too. He fooled them.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, there were four of these American B-24's?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: What thoughts or emotions did you have while you were being attacked?

Reese: Every one of the Americans were screaming, "Hit the son-of-a-bitch! Sink the bastard!" (chuckle)

Marcello: You were still down in the hold?

Reese: Still down in the hold, but I was looking up out of the hold, and I could see the planes, and I was screaming just as loud as anyone else: "Hit the son-of-a-bitch! Sink that bastard!" We wanted it to get hit and sink. I can honestly say that.

Marcello: You mentioned that when the raid had been completed that your ship did pick up the survivors?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: That must have made things even more crowded aboard.

Reese: Oh, boy, oh, boy! But it was a very short distance on in to Moulmein.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese? Did their attitude change at all toward the prisoners?

Reese: No. The captain told us that he would never get out of Moulmein, and I know that for a fact. I was on a working party that unloaded the ship of the food supplies and rations and the things that it had brought. It got underway while we were still on the docks, and they hit it while he was still inside of it.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that you move into Moulmein. What happens at this point?

Reese: They put us in a Burmese prison for a couple of days.

Marcello: What was it like there?

Reese: Hell! We got issued one quart of water a day to bathe with and one quart of very hot water to drink that had been boiled. The food was bad. But we knew then that we were in transit, and we knew that we weren't going to be there long. They had Burmese prisoners in the prison. As a matter of fact, the couple of days we were there, we watched the chain gangs leave out with chains on their legs to go to work.

Marcello: Evidently, that was a rather frightening sight for these prisoners who had evidently never seen anything

like that.

Reese: That chain gang worried me, but the one interesting point of it was that I could look right from the prison and see the old Moulmein Pagoda. Well, you know, in the American schools back when I went to school, Kipling was one of the main authors that they stressed; as a matter of fact, I could say "Mandalay" by heart. I was very interested and spent a lot of time looking at the old Moulmein Pagoda.

Marcello: I understand that some of the prisoners were put up in a leper asylum, were they not?

Reese: If they were, I didn't know it.

Marcello: Now were you held in individual cells here?

Reese: No.

Marcello: What were you in, like the prison yard itself or what?

Reese: Mainly.

Marcello: Like you say, you weren't here but just a few days?

Reese: One or two or three days--something like that.

Marcello: Where do you go from here?

Reese: Well, we went to 18 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Did you pass through Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: I was in Thanbyuzayat for a long time, but that was

later. I went to 18 Kilo first.

Marcello: But in the case of this initial move, you went directly from Moulmein to 18 Kilo without passing through Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: I don't know if we passed through there or not. We went straight to Camp 18 Kilo.

Marcello: Now by this time, I assume that you knew you were going to be building a railroad.

Reese: No, we still didn't know what we were there for until we got to Camp 18 Kilometers.

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

Reese: There were bamboo huts with thatched roofs. It was just a camp built out in the jungle. It was dusty because it was in the dry season, and dust powdered up under your feet. We worked in three-man teams. The food was a little bit better for a while at Camp 18 Kilometer.

Marcello: Now this camp had already been built when you got there?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: Probably native labor had built the camp.

Reese: I haven't the faintest notion, but I assume so.

Marcello: How big was this camp?

Reese: Oh, it wasn't all that big. I think there were three of the long huts . . . it might have been four. They tried to separate us out by race. They put the Americans and the Australians together almost right from the beginning, and the British were pretty well together, and the Dutch were pretty well together.

Marcello: Are we talking about several thousand prisoners in this camp?

Reese: Well, no . . . well, there was probably a couple of thousand maybe. I don't know.

Marcello: Describe in more detail what your living quarters were like here at 18 Kilo.

Reese: Well, they had just long slabs of bamboo that had been split--it was like a long table on each side--and each man just crawled into his own bunk from the end; and I still just had my rice bag blankets, and that was my bunk. I did get a pair of those split-toed shoes there. The Japanese issued them to me. Except for the bamboo huts, that's about all I can tell you.

Marcello: What was the food like here at 18 Kilo?

Reese: It was a little bit better for a while.

Marcello: A little bit better than what?

Reese: Than what we had got in Changi--for a very short time, and then it started dwindling off to nothing.

Marcello: What sort of food are you getting here?

Reese: Rice and the thin soup, but that was our food right through the whole prisoner-of-war camps.

Marcello: I guess at 18 Kilo, you were still close enough to civilization that you might be visited by native merchants and traders, too. Was that the case?

Reese: We always were. Even right down through the jungles, there was always natives wanting to trade. And incidentally, they were completely honest. If you made a deal with one of them, he kept that deal even if it cost him his life. If it cost him his life, then his brother would continue the deal. The Burmese in my opinion are the most civilized people on earth.

Marcello: What sort of material did you have to trade with the natives? What did you have that they wanted?

Reese: Whatever I could steal from the Japanese. If I could steal a shirt from them,I would trade it to the natives; if I could steal a bottle of quinine from them, I would trade it to the natives. Whatever I could steal from the Japanese, I traded to the natives.

Marcello: How would you gain access to Japanese goods and so on

and so forth?

Reese: Well, gaining access to the Japanese goods was the hardest part. Getting out of the camp was the easiest part. Getting back in was hard.

Marcello: Okay, let's start with the first process. First of all, how would you go about stealing from the Japanese?

Reese: Well, just any way you could get into the Japanese supplies. You got into the Japanese supplies, and you got what you could get. Whatever it was, you took it and you got out of the camp. Like I say, getting out of the camp was easy; you knew where the guards were.

Marcello: What goods were the natives particularly eager to have?

Reese: Quinine.

Marcello: This is something that you could probably steal and conceal rather easily.

Reese: Right. I didn't do too much of this in Camp 18 Kilo. In fact, I don't think I did any of it.

Marcello: Okay, we'll hold our questions on theft and the black market until later on, then. What sort of work were you doing here at 18 Kilo?

Reese: They divided us up into three-man teams, and we were making railroad cuts. Each three-man team had to dig

out a cubic meter of dirt and carry it up out of the cut each day.

Marcello: In other words, one man would pick, one man would shovel, and one man would carry.

Reese: One man would pick and shovel, and two men would carry.

Marcello: I see. How did you carry the dirt?

Reese: On what we called a"yo-yo pole." We had a rice bag tied to a bamboo pole, and the man doing the picking and shoveling would have the dirt loose when you got back down into the cut for your next load; and he would shovel it into the rice bag and the two carrying the "yo-yo pole" would carry it up on top and dump it and then come on back down for the next load.

Marcello: Why was it called a "yo-yo pole?"

Reese: We started calling it the "yo-yo pole" long before we were ever taken prisoner, because the natives . . . it used to look like a yo-yo--the way they used to do it. Incidentally, I learned to do it. They would have a really heavy load on one end of the bamboo pole and a really heavy load on the other end, and the pole was flexible. Well, they walk in such a way that their leg is stiff when the weight comes down, and when the weight bounces up, they take the next step and the leg

is stiff when it comes down again. You can carry a bucket of water, brim full--all the way to the top--on each end of that pole if you knew how to do what we called the "Java jive." (chuckle) You could carry it for a mile and never spill a drop of water.

Marcello: Now it was called a "yo-yo pole" essentially, then, because the weighted portion would be going up and down.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: In moving this dirt, there would be two men on the pole with the sack of dirt in the middle.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that each man had to move a cubic meter of dirt per day.

Reese: That was three cubic meters for each team.

Marcello: Is it not true that at that particular stage, it was too hard or too difficult to move that much dirt? In other words, didn't the Japanese later on increase the quota?

Reese: Oh, yes.

Marcello: They found out that you were getting through fairly early.

Reese: Yes, they did increase the quota, and, as a matter of fact, it ended up that there was no quota at all.

It was just working from dawn until midnight.

Marcello: In fact, I believe it was either the Dutch or the Australians who warned you that you had better take your time moving that cubic meter of dirt per man; otherwise, they would increase the quota.

Reese: Well, we all discussed that, but you know how men are--they wanted to get through.

Marcello: When would a work detail begin?

Reese: At dawn.

Marcello: Okay, you get up at dawn. Now what happens at that point?

Reese: We would get a little bit of rice and some tea. You know, I found out since then that that tea had a lot to do with that dysentery. That oolong tea is the best tea in the world, but the oolong tea has a tendency to give you diarrhea if your stomach is not in good condition. And then, of course, the diarrhea is just one step closer to dysentery.

Marcello: The Japanese fed you a lot of tea, did they not?

Reese: Yes, and it was the oolong tea--the best tea. As a matter of fact, I have a house full of oolong tea now. The Chinese bring it to me constantly.

Marcello: Okay, so you would get up at dawn and eat a little bit of breakfast. By what time would you be on the

work detail?

Reese: By daylight.

Marcello: I assume that you would work until lunch.

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, would lunch be brought out to you?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: And what would it consist of?

Reese: Rice and very thin soup.

Marcello: Did you ever receive any fish or meat or anything of this nature?

Reese: A little bit, once in a great while. Well, in Camp 18 Kilo we got it fairly frequently--the dried salt fish. It dwindled out almost completely later on.

Marcello: Normally, when would the workday end?

Reese: When you finished your three cubic meters, which would be . . . oh, it would be late afternoon.

Marcello: But we did mention that they later increased the quota.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: And then what time would you get in?

Reese: Midnight.

Marcello: Would there always be a meal for you when you got in?

Reese: Rice.

Marcello: In other words, suppose the work detail did end at

midnight and you get back into the barracks sometime around midnight or thereafter. Would the cooks be up and have a meal for you?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: This was standard procedure?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: Was there any sort of canteen or anything like that established in any of these kilo camps?

Reese: Not in the kilo camps, no. Now there were, like, in Thanbyuzayat and in Kanchanaburi and those places, but not in the kilo camps.

Marcello: Where do you pick up your Korean guards?

Reese: In the kilo camps.

Marcello: Describe what the Korean guards were like.

Reese: They were all sadists. The race as a whole is sadistic. I do my damnedest not to be a racist (chuckle), and that is the one race on earth that I just cannot accept. The Koreans are sadists, and that is it!

Marcello: Describe their activities in these various kilo camps.

Reese: Well, we had one who acquired the nickname of "Magen," which means food in Dutch, and he ate a lot. Well, "Magen" used to get his big kick . . . he'd find a herd of old skinny, dried-up cows, and he would get

him a bamboo pole, and he'd run at these cows, and he'd jam these bamboo poles up their ass; and then he'd just stand back and laugh and cackle in pure glee while that cow was trying to get that pole out. And just as soon as it would get it out, right back in again it went. He used to torture the dogs. He tortured the prisoners. He tortured anything he got his hands on. Any of the Koreans . . . all of them did it. There was not one single exception.

Marcello: When we talk about torture, what sort of treatment are we referring to?

Reese: We're talking about rifle butts and bamboo poles, just anything a Korean decided that he wanted to hurt you with. And he would do it for no reason at all--just because he wanted to. He got a special sort of glee from doing it.

Marcello: I gather that all of the guards were Koreans, and most of the engineers and so on were Japanese.

Reese: Well, now a lot of the guards were Japanese, and we would practically fight to get a Japanese guard rather than a Korean guard. Believe me, we did not want to go out with a Korean guard! The Koreans wore a star above their pocket. The Japanese said

they did not have the intelligence enough to be a soldier, so they were marked by the star above their pocket. Incidentally, they were better educated than the Japanese. They had a far better education, but the Koreans are cruel people. If I had been in that Korean War, I wouldn't have cared who it was I shot--South or North Korean (chuckle).

Marcello: What were some of the more unusual forms of punishment or torture that you saw being conducted by the Koreans?

Reese: Well, just mainly beating with bamboo poles and rifle butts. They loved to jab a guy with a bayonet with the scabbard on it so that they didn't kill him but hurt him bad enough.

Marcello: Did you ever see any Americans so angry that they were either on the verge of or actually did strike back at these guards?

Reese: No. I saw one Dutchman do that, and they killed him immediately, but I never saw an American or Australian do that.

Marcello: I assume that there were no thoughts of escape here.

Reese: Escape was impossible; you had no place to go. Now getting out of the camp and trading and getting back in was one thing, but you had no place to go as far

as escape. Some guys did try, but they ended up dead.

As a matter of fact, we had one guy whose name was Reese--like me--and he made an escape. He was a sergeant in the Air Force. He hadn't been taken with us off the Houston or with the 131st either; his plane had been downed. He made an escape, oh, I guess about a month-and-a-half before the war had ended, and nobody has ever heard of him. So it was quite apparent that the jungles got him.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that while you were here at 18 Kilo Camp that it was the dry season. All in all, the work wasn't real difficult here, because you were still on rather level terrain and so on.

Reese: True.

Marcello: You really weren't into the jungle as such?

Reese: True. Now at Camp 18 Kilo is where I came down with dysentery and malaria.

Marcello: Describe what dysentery does to a man, because that was a big killer, I gather, in these camps.

Reese: Well, it wasn't the biggest, but it was one of the biggest. These things right here were the biggest (gesture).

Marcello: The tropical ulcers?

Reese: Right. The dysentery strictly ran a very close second.

Dysentery is diarrhea, but the lining of your intestines, the lining of your stomach, comes with it--blood, mucus. It's really dreadful. It's the stage between diarrhea and cholera, and, of course, with cholera you do not live--you're dead.

Marcello: How do you figure you picked up dysentery?

Reese: (Chuckle) In those jungles we blamed flies, because there were flies all over everything. You couldn't keep them out of anything. Of course, it could come after all the guys started dying and all. It could come from just the guys around you. But flies mainly took the rap.

Marcello: I assume that the latrines were open pits?

Reese: Open pits with poles laid across. You walked out right over it, and that was it.

Marcello: How bad was your dysentery here at 18 Kilo? In other words, was it bad enough to keep you off the job?

Reese: I went from 168 pounds to ninety pounds in three days. I got hit with dysentery and malaria at the exact same time.

Marcello: How badly off did you have to be in order to not have to go on a work detail?

Reese: Well, at that time, when I went down to ninety-eight

pounds with the dysentery and the malaria, they sent me back to a hospital camp at Thanbyuzayat, and I stayed there for about three months. When I went back to work, I still had dysentery and weighed about 105 pounds, but the malaria had kind of cooled off a little bit. We didn't stay in Camp 18 Kilometer but for a few more days, and then we moved up to Camp 80 Kilometer.

Marcello: Now what sort of treatment did they give you for dysentery? Could they have done anything at 18 Kilo?

Reese: They could have done the same thing that they did at Thanbyuzayat. We had Dr. Epstein at Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: Oh, he was not at 18 Kilo?

Reese: No, he was at Thanbyuzayat, and we had an Australian doctor there who was a dysentery specialist, because he had been stationed in Singapore and Malaya for a long, long time. He had really run into a lot of dysentery. But the only real medical treatment that they had for it--and I'm very doubtful it did it any good--you would burn wood, and you'd have to eat the charcoal.

Marcello: I've also heard some of the prisoners say that it was very helpful if you could get the scrapings or the

crust off the bottom of the rice pots.

Reese: That is false. As a matter of fact, I know one boy that had dysentery and did that, and he died almost immediately. I'm almost certain that it was the scrapings off the rice pots that finished him off. He no doubt was going to die anyway, but that finished him off.

Marcello: I assume that there was quinine to treat the malaria.

Reese: Yes, we had quinine at that time. We had quinine plentiful, and the natives were really hollering for it.

Marcello: Who determined that you were sick enough to be removed from the 18 Kilo Camp back to Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: I don't know. I don't know whether Dr. Epstein determined that or the Japanese. It was evident that I was not going to work.

Marcello: I was thinking that perhaps Epstein might have made the recommendation, and the Japanese would make the final decision.

Reese: That's quite possible. It was evident that I wasn't going to work. I mean, if you go from 168 pounds to ninety-eight pounds in three days, you're not going to work.

Marcello: But it had to get that bad before they took you off the working detail?

Reese: Well, mine did. But then mine got that bad (chuckle). I went from healthy to down to like that in three days time.

Marcello: Okay, so what happened when you got back to Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: Well, it was a hospital camp, and the Australian doctor who was the dysentery specialist was really in charge of it. It was a pretty big camp. I would hesitate to estimate how many people were there, but it was known as a hospital camp.

Marcello: It was a base camp for the railroad, was it not?

Reese: Yes, but it was known as a hospital camp. All the people there were people who were sick. I stayed there for about three months. It wasn't too bad. We were constantly hungry, but we didn't have to work except to just keep up the camp itself.

Marcello: Were you laid up most of this time?

Reese: I was laid up--really laid up--for about a month-and-a-half. It was in Thanbyuzayat that I first got the beriberi and neuritis, and I've still got that .

Marcello: But like you mentioned, the treatment that you received in Thanbyuzayat for your dysentery was no better or no worse than what you received up at 18 Kilo.

Reese: No, it was charcoal; that was about the only thing they had.

Marcello: Were you still being housed in the thatched huts and so on?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: I assume that the hospital facilities overall were poor.

Reese: Practically nil. We did have quinine there; they gave me quinine for the malaria.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you contracted beriberi here.

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: As well as neuritis.

Reese: Neuritis. The two go together. You get the beriberi, and you're going to have the neuritis.

Marcello: What does the beriberi do to a man?

Reese: You swell. My feet swelled up like so (gesture).

Marcello: In other words, it's almost like a form of elephantiasis in a way.

Reese: Well, yes, except elephantiasis is permanent, and beriberi is not. The neuritis is permanent that comes from the beriberi, and I've got that bad.

Marcello: What does the neuritis do to you?

Reese: With neuritis your feet and your legs hurt. Oh, God, they hurt like crazy, because it's the nerve endings that are damaged! It causes you to have colitis, and the colitis inflames the neuritis which causes the

colitis to be worse (chuckle). It's a vicious circle.

Marcello: Do all these things come mainly from dietary deficiencies of one sort or another?

Reese: Right. The beriberi and the neuritis definitely come from diet deficiencies.

Marcello: So by the time you're back at Thanbyuzayat, you have malaria, dysentery, beriberi, neuritis, and colitis?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: What keeps a person going under these circumstances?

Reese: Dr. Epstein told us, "Don't ever tell anyone about this, because they'll either tell you you're crazy or you're a liar, because the human body cannot stand it."

Marcello: But what keeps you going under these circumstances? It seems to me that it would be so easy just to give up and say to hell with it.

Reese: Well, you know, one time later on I did that. I just gave up and said, "To hell with it!" A Marine sergeant came along, and he gave me a cussing like you wouldn't believe. I got so damn mad at him that I deliberately lived in order to get up and beat the hell out of him; and by the time I got well enough to beat the hell out of him, he had done the same damn thing I did and

died. By the time I got up and got well enough to know what was going on, I knew why he did it; and I think maybe if I had been there where he was at, I could have done the same thing and kept him from dying.

Marcello: Now were they able to cure your beriberi here at Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: The beriberi would come and go.

Marcello: Just like the malaria.

Reese: Just like the malaria. I had malaria so many times, I lost count.

Marcello: Were they able to alleviate some of the dysentery here at Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: Well, it got better. I don't know if they did it or it just got better. It was not cured, but it was much better.

Marcello: Under these circumstances, how difficult is it to sleep?

Reese: The neuritis is what kept me awake. The pain of the neuritis was terrible. Dr. Epstein . . . that's one thing he did get--he got some opium. He would mix some opium in water, and I would drink it, and that would help a little bit.

Marcello: Is the hospital here at Thanbyuzayat fairly sanitary in terms of facilities?

Reese: Oh, it wasn't nearly as bad as those in the jungle, I'll put it that way.

Marcello: Did you ever have any Red Cross inspections or anything of that nature at Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: Oh, absolutely not! We never had any Red Cross inspection anywhere.

Marcello: Did you ever run across a Colonel Nagatomo here at Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: I don't know the name, but I think you may be talking about "The Tiger."

Marcello: I've never heard him referred to as that, if in fact it is Nagatomo.

Reese: Well, I don't know.

Marcello: Who was "The Tiger?"

Reese: "The Tiger" was a very, very famous colonel.

Marcello: There at Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: He was all through the jungle . . . Thanbyuzayat . . . he went all over the area; he went from base to base. He was more or less one of the hierarchy of the railroad. He was one of the most vicious sons-of-bitches in the world, but in a way I got my revenge. In 1953, I saw pictures in Look magazine where the Chinese got "The Tiger" and what they did to him, and I'll tell you, it made me so happy to see those pictures . . .

because they had pictures of it. They stuck a pitchfork through him--right through his belly--and then they lined up in queues and walked by and spat on him while he was dying. I said, "If anybody ever deserved treatment like that, it was 'The Tiger.'" (chuckle)

Marcello: Had you actually seen "The Tiger" in operation here at Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: No, not in Thanbyuzayat I didn't, but later on I certainly did. He operated on me.

Marcello: So I assume that while you were here at Thanbyuzayat it was mainly a matter of rest and recuperation?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Okay, who determined that you were well enough to go back up into the jungle again?

Reese: The Australian doctor that was in charge at Thanbyuzayat. They were pressuring him to send men out--really pressuring him hard--and so he would pick the men that were getting better and ship them back out.

Marcello: Okay, so you evidently were one of the unlucky ones that was picked to go back into the jungle.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Where did you go from Thanbyuzayat?

Reese: I went to 18 Kilometer again, but I was only there for a few days, and then I went . . . we constructed Camp

80 Kilometer ourselves.

Marcello: Now what time of the year are we speaking about at this point?

Reese: Camp 80 Kilometer, we constructed it right at the end of the dry season.

Marcello: Okay. The "Speedo" campaign, I guess, had not quite begun yet.

Reese: It started in Camp 80 Kilometer.

Marcello: Okay, when we talk about the "Speedo" campaign, we're referring to that period when the Japanese stepped up the activities in the building of this railroad. They were behind schedule.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: And it just so happened that the "Speedo" campaign and the monsoon season coincided.

Reese: They coincided.

Marcello: Okay, which shall we talk about first--the monsoons or the "Speedo" campaign?

Reese: Well, we might as well talk about the monsoons.

Marcello: Okay.

Reese: We built Camp 80 Kilometer, and the dust was just like talcum powder. It was about that deep (gesture).

Marcello: About six to eight inches deep?

Reese: Yes. You may call this a lie, but it's not. Three days

after that camp was finished, I pulled some bamboo slats aside and bent a safety pin and caught two fish under my bunk. They were about that long (gesture), and I ate them.

Marcello: About three inches long?

Reese: Well, they weren't three inches long really, (chuckle) but I ate them.

Marcello: Do you want to describe this phenomenon?

Reese: You wouldn't believe the way the water flows. We had a river down there, and the river was about a mile wide and about an inch deep, and the banks were about a mile wide. Now the stream was about as wide as this table and about an inch deep.

Marcello: The stream itself was somewhere in the neighborhood of maybe twenty feet wide.

Reese: Yes. Two days after the rainy season started, that river was full from bank to bank, and the very shallowest point was eighteen feet deep. Now our hut . . . we kept fire watches at every door to keep wild animals out. Well, we had to get big stumps and set them to build a fire on, because the hut was two to two-and-a-half feet deep in water all the time down under the slats.

Marcello: And I assume that during the monsoon season those thatched

huts don't keep out the water.

Reese: Not that well.

Marcello: Not the ones that were constructed for you.

Reese: (Chuckle) Not the ones constructed for us.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you built this camp. Where in hell did you get the skills to construct thatched huts and so on?

Reese: Actually, you just tie them together. You stick big bamboo poles up in the ground, and you take and cut bamboo into real thin slices about so long (gesture) and soak them in water. Then you get one pole for a crosspiece, and this has been soaked in water, and you tie them together. When it dries, it's like the Indians used to use rawhide; it tightens up when it dries.

Marcello: How would you compare your huts with those that perhaps the local natives would have built?

Reese: About the same, except the locals didn't bother to put a floor in at all, and we did have our slab bunks.

Marcello: I gather everything was wet and damp during that monsoon season.

Reese: There was no damp, just wet. It rained five months solid. It never stopped raining altogether. Sometimes it would rain less hard than other times, but it never

stopped raining altogether during that five-month period.

Marcello: And work still went on?

Reese: Work still went on, and let me tell you, climbing up out of those railroad cuts, barefooted in all that mud, was just pure holy hell.

Marcello: Describe what it was like now during the "Speedo" campaign. Describe what a day was like from the time you got up until you got back to camp in the evening.

Reese: You just worked as hard as you could work. There was no rest; there was no quota. You moved . . . you just kept moving, and on the way back into camp we would run into wild pumpkin and things like that, and that's what the stew became then. All we really got issued then was rice, and very little of that. So we made what you called "jungle stew," and mainly that was wild pumpkin. And we did run into wild chili peppers and things like that, and we would pluck that on the way back to camp.

Marcello: I guess the rains and so on had washed out the roads, and the supply trucks couldn't get up to you, could they?

Reese: The supply trucks could get there. The Japanese were just not putting out the supplies. Hirohito had decided that $11.80 a year was sufficient.

Marcello: Had the bashings and so on increased, also, in an effort to get more work out of the prisoners?

Reese: Oh, yes. The bashings had increased . . . everything had increased. Like I said, the Americans and the Australians got away with less bashings that anybody else.

Marcello: How were the Japanese faring through all of this?

Reese: Much better than we, but some of them died, too. I mean, malaria is no respector of nationality.

Marcello: I assume that they were eating better than you were.

Reese: Oh, yes. They were eating far better than we were.

Marcello: Now during this "Speedo" campaign, how long would a workday last?

Reese: From before daylight until midnight.

Marcello: In other words, were you still working under quotas or was it just simply a matter of staying out there?

Reese: It was simply a matter of staying out there and hitting it. There was no quotas anymore.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing here at 80 Kilo?

Reese: We built a bridge; we built railroad cuts; and we built railroad fills; and we cleared jungles. Of course, mainly the clearing of the jungles was done by elephants. We had to cut the trees, and the elephants lifted them out of the right-of-way. The natives worked the elephants,

you know.

Marcello: What sort of tools were being provided?

Reese: Most of the shovels were being made from pieces of drums. They would take a fifty-gallon drum, and they would cut a shovel out of it, and it was just as apt to bend going into the ground as it was to go into the ground. The picks were still picks, and there was some hoes and things like that used. The hoes were made out of the steel drums the same way.

Marcello: Normally, would these be issued every morning, and then would they have to be turned in in the evening?

Reese: Right.

Marcello: What would happen if, say, you broke one of the tools or if you failed to return one of them or something of that nature?

Reese: Oh, if you had a good reason, I think they would just cut out another one.

Marcello: Normally, when did it rain during the monsoon season? In other words, what time of the day?

Reese: Constantly. Twenty-four hours a day.

Marcello: And you're out there working in this rain, and those Japanese guards have to be out there with you.

Reese: Right.

Marcello: Obviously, the progress of that railroad couldn't have

gotten too far under those circumstances.

Reese: It went (chuckle). I mean, it wouldn't be done like the Americans would do it, but it did go. I always will say the Japanese were the luckiest people in the world; the bridges that we built, if an American general walked across the son-of-a-bitch it would cave in, and the Japanese put trains across (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe the bridge building that took place here at 80 Kilo. Were you in on any of the bridge building details.

Reese: Yes, I was on the bridge building details. We used green teak. You know, green teak is as soft as butter, and it hardens up very hard after it cures. But it's as soft as butter when it's green. We used bamboo, and we had some spikes. We trimmed the ties with an adz, and we tied them together, and we nailed them together, and we spiked them together. In other words, it was just a ramshackle, jury-rigged business.

Marcello: Pile driving evidently was a very interesting process.

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: But evidently, they used a weighted pole or something like that to drive this pile.

Reese: They had a rope on a pully with a weight on it, and we would hang it right over the pile, and we would pull

back on a command; and on another command, we would turn it loose. It would fall and hit the pile.

Marcello: I understand that sometimes the Americans made up their own words for this procedure.

Reese: (Chuckle) I know they did.

Marcello: One of them I heard went something like "piss on the Japanese." Have you ever heard that one?

Reese: (Chuckle) I don't think I heard that one. One time we really fouled them up. They were making a newsreel shot, and apparently the Japanese taking the picture didn't understand English. I don't know if you've heard the Australian Army song sung in the true words. You know, in America we sing "Bless them all," but the real Australian Army song is "Fuck them all." And he was taking these pictures with the sound, you know, and we were marching by , and they told us to sing, and we started to singing, "Cheer up, my lads, fuck them all," and we would really bear down on that (chuckle). Nobody ever saw those pictures. I think after he got back to Japan, he probably got a bashing himself (chuckle).

Marcello: Were there ever any attempts to sabotage work on these bridges or on the railroad itself?

Reese: To my knowledge, no. The work itself was so slipshod, it was terrible.

Marcello: Would you also be laying track and so on?

Reese: Yes. We laid track and all, but I wasn't on the track laying crew. There was a special track laying crew coming up behind us. Now the Americans--and I don't know if anybody has ever brought this out or if anybody has ever figured it out, outside the people in Washington; I know they planned it--pulled one of the slickest stunts that anybody has ever pulled. You know the Americans can look awful stupid and be doing the damnedest things. They were constantly dropping pamphlets on us--that they were coming down from India, that they were coming right down through Burma, and for us to be sure to keep our heads down as they came through--and they would drop them on native villages, you know. The Japanese were getting men up on that Burma-India front just as fast as they could. They took them up by the thousands . . . hundreds of thousands. I figure probably half of their military forces or more was up there.

Bombers would come over and bomb that railroad and they would miss a hundred yards over yonder, and they would miss fifty yards over there, and they would miss seventy-five yards over there; and we were just cussing and storming and raising hell. "The bastards could put

a bomb in a apple barrel back home and they can't hit this damn road." This went on for three years--three solid years!

The Japanese would just be laughing at us. "You're just members of a rabble army. You're lucky because you get to learn to speak Japanese while they're not," and etc. They just laughed at the American bombers like crazy, and we was cussing and storming and raising hell at ninety-day wonders and what-have-you.

Then the Americans started island hopping, and then the Japanese started trying to bring men back down off of that India front . . . every bomb went right down the middle of the track, and when they caught a train on that line, they'd put that bomb in that smokestack every time. (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the American planes would come over and drop pamphlets, I'm sure the Japanese made every effort to see to it that you didn't get to those pamphlets.

Reese: No, as a matter of fact, they didn't. There was too many of them; they couldn't. I mean, they would drop them by the thousands, and they'd be all over the camp.

Marcello: What would happen if they caught you with one of these

pamphlets?

Reese: Nothing. I mean, after all, they were all over everything. When they'd drop them, they'd drop them.

Marcello: About how much progress per day are you making in terms of completing this railroad?

Reese: Oh, hell, I couldn't possibly give you an estimation on that. Sometimes it would go pretty fast, and sometimes it would slow up to a crawl.

Marcello: I'm sure that during the monsoon season that we were referring to here at 80 Kilo Camp that things went by rather slowly.

Reese: Well, yes, because it was so much hell carrying the dirt up out of the cuts and so on. Every bridge had three or four railroad cars at the bottom of it where part of the bridge had collapsed, and some of the train would fall over the side, and we would have to go and repair that.

Marcello: Now when did this occur? Did this occur after the road was completed?

Reese: Well, it occurred as far as the end of the rails were, because they would use the trains right to the end of the rails.

Marcello: What was your clothing situation here at 80 Kilo Camp?

Reese: I was wearing a G-string made out of my old sarong. It

had done rotted away, and I had a little G-string, that's all.

Marcello: And I assume that everybody else was in virtually the same situation.

Reese: The guys off the Houston were. Now the English, the Dutch, the Australians, and the 131st Field Artillery--most of them--were far better clothed than we were, because we lost everything when the ship went down.

Marcello: How bad did the food situation get here at 80 Kilo Camp?

Reese: Worse and worse and worse. The jungle stew was the order of the day. We had what we called "pap" for breakfast--it was a tiny little bit of rice boiled in a whole lot of water--and it just got worse and worse.

Marcello: Did you have any way to supplement your food? I'm referring to cats, dogs, snakes, or anything of that nature.

Reese: The Dutch and the English went to eating the dogs, and Dr. Lumpkin recommended that we do so; and he ate some one night to prove to us that it was perfectly good to eat, and the next day he died. I don't know of any other American that ate any dog. Now the old bandmaster and some of the members of the Houston's band ate a cat one time and we teased the pants off of them, but we never ate any dog--not the Americans nor the Australians. The

English and the Dutch did.

Marcello: Were there very many dogs and cats around in camp?

Reese: Not that many, because it didn't take the Dutch and English very long to go through them. I would not eat the dog; I would starve to death first.

Marcello: Did you ever eat snake?

Reese: Yes, we killed a python one time. There were about eighteen of us, I think, and he was fixing to kill us. He was laying on a rafter in one of our huts, and that's the way a python hunts. If you see a python on the ground, you can walk right up to him, and he won't bother you. He has no fear of you, but he won't bother you because he is not hunting. He gets up and lays along a limb or something when he's hunting. He was laying along this rafter in this hut, and this Dutchman killed him. So we skinned him and stripped him down--stripped him up like bacon--and we ate him. We used to take and pull off the chameleons' tails and make sausage out of them and eat it.

Marcello: Were the chameleons all over the barracks and so on?

Reese: All over everything. I had a pet chameleon that was about that long (gesture).

Marcello: About a foot to a foot-and-a-half long.

Reese: He used to sleep on my belly, and whenever a fly would

get on me, he'd ease over to him, and his mouth would come open . . . and you wouldn't even see his tongue, but that fly would vanish. It used to scare the crap out of me. I'd get up at night to go crap or something, you know, and this chameleon would jump up my leg and run up and sit on my shoulder. Oh, he was a real pet (chuckle).

Marcello: How long did you have him?

Reese: Well, I had him for a long time--the whole time we were in Camp 80 Kilometer and then when we were in Camp 100 Kilometer.

Marcello: Did you have any opportunities to steal any food from the Japanese here at 80 Kilometer, or were you out on the road too much tc do any of that?

Reese: I did steal quinine from them there, and while I was out on the road, I would slip around and get to the natives and sell it. They would pay a dollar a pill for it, and then I would buy food. It was Camp 80 Kilo where I started going out stealing and selling. I'd steal items of clothing and go out and sell them. I didn't worry about my G-string; it was warm.

Marcello: In other words, despite your condition and despite the constant work here, you still had time to steal and deal with the natives?

Reese: I had to! If I didn't, I was going to die like all the rest of those guys did.

Marcello: Okay, describe how this process took place, that is, your business dealings with the natives.

Reese: Well, it was mainly hand signals. Of course, some of the natives spoke English, but mainly it was hand signals.

Marcello: Now would you steal mainly at night, also?

Reese: Yes. That's about the only time you had to steal--at night. Sometimes you could deal with the natives when you were out on a working party, but most of the time you had to slip out at night.

Marcello: The Japanese didn't post very many guards in these camps?

Reese: They didn't have that many, because they knew you couldn't escape. They didn't watch you all that close. They knew there was no escape--just like you did.

Marcello: So it was fairly easy to steal things?

Reese: The stealing wasn't easy, no. You had to be awful careful--just like any thief. I mean if a guy goes to rob your house, he has to be careful. Getting out was easy; coming back in was dangerous, because you didn't know where the guards were coming back in. You knew where they were when you went out.

Marcello: Okay, so you would steal something, and then you would

sneak out of the camp. What would happen at that point?

Reese: You got together with the natives, and you bought what they had, and they bought what you had. Then you slipped back in.

Marcello: What were some of the things that they had that you wanted?

Reese: Chinese red tobacco was the main thing I wanted.

Marcello: More than food?

Reese: As much as food, at least. And mainly the thing that they had that we could buy was they had a lot of corned beef we could buy--canned corned beef. They had a few cans of Vienna sausage, but mainly it was the sweet and condensed milk. They had a lot of that.

You know something else, too? Ptomaine . . . if you ate here what we ate there, you would get ptomaine. You would die with it. We never had one case of ptomaine. I mean, we'd sit a can of food here in this tropical heat . . . we'd eat half of it and set it up there, and the next day we'd come along and eat the other half. You'd get ptomaine out of that here. We never had a case of ptomaine. I guess it was because our bodies were so damn hungry it just grabbed it before the ptomaine had a chance (chuckle).

Marcello: What would you do with this sweet and condensed milk? Would you just drink it like we drink water, or what would you do?

Reese: Yes. Now us Americans did run into some sassafras roots down in the jungles and scared the Australians slap-happy. We would make sassafras tea and put the sweet and condensed milk in it. The Australians would say, "You Yanks are going to poison yourself; you don't know what that is!" They didn't know that Texas was covered with sassafras. We knew what sassafras was (chuckle).

Marcello: Now we talk about 80 Kilo Camp, and I guess we could almost repeat what we're saying here when we talk about 100 Kilo Camp, is that correct?

Reese: Just about a repetition, only it was harder.

Marcello: Is this where most of the deaths occurred, that is, either at the 80 or the 100 Kilo Camp?

Reese: Well, most of the deaths occurred at the 80 Kilo Camp, but it was later. After we moved up to the 100 Kilo Camp, they made 80 Kilo Camp into what they called the "Death Camp."

Marcello: It was supposed to be a hospital, was it not?

Reese: No. Dr. Epstein called it a hospital, but the Japanese called it the "Death Camp." They brought us in there . . . and I was one of them. They sent me from 100 Kilo . . .

I was going back down to another camp that was all Japanese in the camp, and there was a stream there, and it was full of rocks. We were going down there, and we were going to pick the rocks up out of the stream and and put them into a truck to use for ballasting. The food there was good, because it was all Japanese, and there was only a few prisoners.

Marcello: This was down at 80 Kilo Camp?

Reese: No, it was between 100 and 80 Kilo, and it didn't have a name because it wasn't one of our normal work camps. There were only nine or ten of us prisoners there.

Well, my dysentery hit again real hard. I went in a truckload of twenty-five men down back to 80 Kilo, and the Japanese made us a little speech when they dropped us off there. They said, "You're no longer any good to us, and we have brought you here to die."

Now I was there about six months, and we were doing no work except for the burial detail and kitchen crew. The burial detail worked from dawn until after night. You'd wake up in the morning and the guy next to you would be dead, or maybe the guys on both sides of you were dead. In that six-month time, they brought in from twenty-five to forty men every day, and they never took a single man out alive. When they took us all out, they

took us all out at once, and they still had the same number of men they had when I went in there. That's how fast we died there.

Marcello: Now had Dr. Epstein come back with you to the 80 Kilo Camp?

Reese: Yes. He was there when I got there, and he left with all the rest of us.

Marcello: Describe what one of the burial details was like here?

Reese: You took all the clothing off the man--if he had any clothing--and you wrapped him in a rice bag, and you dug a hole barely deep enough to cover him up, and you threw him in and covered him up. Then you went straight to digging the next hole for the next guy.

I went to draw dinner for two of us one time--which was our rice--and I was going to draw it for me and the fellow next to me. I forget what his name was now, but he was an American off the _Houston_. He was feeling perfectly good. We just took turns going and drawing each other's meal. He was feeling pretty good when I left--nothing serious--and when I got back with the two meals, he wasn't there. I asked somebody, "Where is he?" They said, "Oh, the burial detail took him." In twenty minutes time, I'd went and got the meal and come back, and he had died and they had done taken

him away. So I sat down and ate his and my food (chuckle).

Marcello: Were careful records kept of the graves and so on?

Reese: No. No records at all were kept of my knowledge.

Marcello: Approximately how many were dying a day here at 80 Kilo?

Reese: Twenty-five to forty.

Marcello: Would there be any type of simple service or so on conducted over the graves.

Reese: No, you just threw them in and covered them up and then dug the hole for the next guy.

Marcello: How could you tell when a man gave up, that is, when he lost the will to live?

Reese: He would lie down and refuse to eat and refuse to drink, and he just started shitting on his bunk rather than going to the latrine. You knew he was going then.

Marcello: There wasn't a whole lot that you could do for these people, was there?

Reese: Well, that Marine sergeant did something for me. When he went to cussing--I'm a Scot and I've got that Scot meanness in me--I got mad enough I wanted to live to beat his brains out. Now he brought me back out of it.

Marcello: Did the 80 Kilo Camp look pretty much the same the second time you were there as it had the first time?

Reese: No. We just had one hut there that second time.

Marcello: The jungle had reclaimed the other huts already?

Reese: The jungle had reclaimed all the rest. These tropical ulcers, the fish did more good for them than anything else.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about those tropical ulcers, because, like you say, they were perhaps the biggest killer of all.

Reese: Yes, they were.

Marcello: Okay, talk about your own experience with tropical ulcers, that is, how you got it, what it did to you, and how you could treat them.

Reese: Let me tell you first about my first experience with tropical ulcers. There was a fellow named Smith from the 131st Field Artillery. The tropical ulcers had just started, and he got a little scratch on his foot, and he took his cigarette, and he burned it. He said, "I think I'm going to get me one of those tropical ulcers. They don't make you work if you have a tropical ulcer." Four days later, Dr. Epstein pulled a bandage up off his foot, and three toes came with it. There was no pain whatsoever connected with those three toes coming off. He didn't even feel it. That same morning me and sixteen other guys sat down on him. I couldn't look--don't ask me what it looked like or what Dr. Epstein did. I couldn't look; I turned my back on what was going on. I sat on

his shoulder holding with all my might while Dr. Epstein cut his leg off with a hand saw and a penknife. Believe me, for just about three or four minutes there, the seventeen of us just barely did manage to hold that man. And do you know that he lived over it!

Marcello: That's unusual, is it not? Not too many amputees really made it through this experience.

Reese: Not too many, no. As a matter of fact, Dr. Epstein--I talked to him here a few days back; I called him on the phone--didn't even realize Smith had lived through it.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that Smith did not have any pain after he contracted those ulcers. That wasn't usually the case, was it?

Reese: When gangrene set in, yes. That's why the leg was cut off. Gangrene had set in.

Marcello: What causes these ulcers to form? Now you mentioned that it would come from a scratch or something like that. I assume that dietary deficiencies meant that your body couldn't produce the antibodies to take care of the cut or scratch.

Reese: That was it. The dietary deficiencies were mainly it. Now the natives would get tropical ulcers, and it didn't

kill them. As a matter of fact, they would use soot as a treatment. They would build a fire and put a rock in it, and they would let the soot get over the rock, and then they'd take the rock and hold it up over the ulcer and hit it and knock the soot off in the tropical ulcer, and they would walk away. It wasn't a killer with them at all.

Marcello: Describe your own case of tropical ulcers.

Reese: Well, I got that in Camp 80 Kilo.

Marcello: You're referring now to a scar that you have on your right thumb.

Reese: Right. Incidentally, only the bone was sticking out when it was at its very worst.

Marcello: In other words, it had eaten away all the flesh.

Reese: Yes, and the main treatment that I had was a little stream running right behind the hut at Camp 80 Kilo when it was a "Death Camp." All of us guys that had tropical ulcers did this--we would go hang the ulcer over into the stream, and the little fish would come up and eat all the dead flesh away. They never touched live flesh at all. It never hurt at any time. You might feel a little tickle, but that was about it. When they would get through eating that dead flesh away, it would be just as clean and neat as a pin. It was just

sparkling clean, and that was the main treatment.

Marcello: Is that the only one that you got?

Reese: No. I got one on my leg, but luckily it was . . . I got it there just about two weeks before the war ended. I got to Calcutta and, believe it or not, the nurse in the hospital in Calcutta didn't even bandage it. She put some kind of powder on it, and the food cured it. I was eating in Calcutta.

Marcello: I've heard all sorts of treatments being used to combat these ulcers.

Reese: Oh, yes. We used iodoform; that was the main treatment. But iodoform could go both ways. On some guys you could put iodoform on a tropical ulcer, and it would heal up almost immediately; and other guys put the iodoform on it, and it would start eating all that much faster.

Marcello: Was there plenty of iodoform around?

Reese: No. You would pay a hundred dollars an ounce to get iodoform. Dr. Epstein had none; he had to buy it from the natives. I never had the money to buy it. Like I say, it went either way. With one guy it would heal it up, and with another guy it would make it worse. If you could get sulfanilamide--and there was a tiny amount of that around--the sulfanilamide would do it.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that in some cases they used

maggots to clean out the dead flesh.

Reese: Yes. I have heard of the guys doing that, but I've never seen it.

Marcello: In other cases, I think it was simply a matter of taking a sharpened spoon or some sort of an instrument and holding somebody down and digging it out.

Reese: I've seen Dr. Epstein clean many of them like that--hold the guy down and just do it. But the fish did a better job than that spoon without hurting.

Marcello: Now in this hospital camp back in 80 Kilo, or the "Death Camp," as you referred to it . . .

Reese: That's what the Japanese called it, and that's what it was, and that's what I will always call it. It was not a hospital camp.

Marcello: You were just sent there to await death.

Reese: We were sent there to await death, and the Japanese calmly and plainly and openly told us so.

Marcello: I'm sure there weren't very many guards at this camp.

Reese: Very few. I mean, who was able to escape?

Marcello: Who was able to do the cooking in this camp?

Reese: You know, I never did know who the cooks were in that camp, but I'm sure it was guys awaiting death just like we were. You were so sick in the damn camp that you didn't give a damn who the cooks were. I'm barely

conscious that Dr. Epstein was there, and only because he was my favorite person in the whole damn prisoner-of-war camp.

Marcello: Of all the camps, I guess 80 and 100 Kilo were the worst.

Reese: Yes. Also, Dr. Epstein did do this, he got some plasmochin and something else, and I think I'm the only one in the "Death Camp" . . . I got black water fever, and I think I'm the only one that lived over the black water fever.

Marcello: Now what is black water fever?

Reese: You piss blood. It's a complication of malaria.

Marcello: What did he manage to procure to combat this?

Reese: He got plasmochin and atabrine and quinine, and he was just pouring them into me as fast . . . I could take a bamboo stick and scrape atabrine off the palm of my hand.

Marcello: It was sweating out, in other words.

Reese: It was sweating out.

Marcello: Could you see your condition improving as time goes on, even there at 80 Kilo Camp?

Reese: No, but the Americans started looking a little better in the war, so the Japanese moved us out to the regular camp again.

Marcello: Where did you go?

Reese: I went to 100 Kilo. There, most of the guys that came from the "Death Camp" with me died in 100 Kilo after we got out of the "Death Camp." I remember one ship's cook who was a good friend of mine, whose name was Schuelke . . . , well, him and I had been out of the "Death Camp" about two weeks when he died. Most of the guys that came out of the "Death Camp" died almost immediately after we came out of it, anyway. In other words, coming out of the "Death Camp" didn't save them.

Marcello: Did you simply go from one hospital ward, so to speak, at 80 Kilo to the same sort of conditions up at 100 Kilo?

Reese: About that. At 100 Kilo you got a little better food and a little more of it.

Marcello: Why did you get fed better at 100 Kilo?

Reese: Well, it was still considered a working camp. In other words, we were no longer in the "Death Camp" awaiting death, presumably. We didn't stay in 100 Kilo but about three or four weeks, and then we went on to Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: Now when you could not work, were your rations cut?

Reese: To some extent . . . not much.

Marcello: When you are physically unable to work, do you just kind of do some of the menial tasks that you are capable of doing around the camp while everybody else is on the

parties?

Reese: Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. Now in Camp 100 Kilo, after I came out of the "Death Camp," they put me back to work. I worked one day and I was staggering and falling and slopping around in the mud. The next morning, Lieutenant Hamlin come around to my bunk, and he told me, "I don't want you to be a hero,'Speedy.'" He said, "Stay here today." Then when he reported one man short that morning, why, they gave him a bashing, so he took a bashing for me that morning. But then Lieutenant Hamlin was that type of man.

Marcello: Now you mentioned previously in the interview that you were even having less respect for Colonel Tharp at this point.

Reese: Yes, and still at that point more or less because he was a coward and gave into the Japanese so easily, where Lieutenant Hamlin would try to stand up to them. Dr. Epstein would stand up to them until they would beat him unconscious, and he would go down cursing. That old man was mean! (Chuckle) I like him!

Marcello: How would Tharp give into the Japanese?

Reese: Anything they said went--anything--and he didn't question nothing. I'm sure--I'm absolutely sure--that if they'd walked up and told him, "You cut that man's head off over

yonder," he would have walked over there and did it.

Marcello: Was he the ranking American officer?

Reese: Yes, but us guys off the Houston paid far more attention to Lieutenant Hamlin, believe me. I didn't pay any attention at all to Tharp.

Marcello: Now up onto this time, were you allowed to send any postcards or messages or anything like that to the outside world?

Reese: No, we never were. I was missing in action till the American Air Force got me back to Calcutta.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that you go from 100 Kilo to Kanchanaburi. Is there anything else we need to talk about at 100 Kilo that we haven't discussed?

Reese: Not really . . . not that I can think of.

Marcello: Okay, how did you get from 100 Kilo to Kanchanaburi?

Reese: On the train.

Marcello: Did you have any second thoughts about riding on that railroad?

Reese: Not really. I mean, we had gone past the point of second thoughts. Kanchanaburi was much better. Like I say, the Americans had begun to look better in the war, and the Japanese were beginning to get a little scared. As a matter of fact, I gained weight in Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: Now that was a huge camp, was it not?

Reese: Yes, it was a pretty big camp. We were right in the middle of a mango grove.

Marcello: In fact, don't you have several camps in this area, like Kanchanaburi and Tamarkan and Tamuang and all of those?

Reese: Well, there was Kanchanaburi and then Kanburi. Kanburi is to the Buddhists in Thailand like the Vatican is to Catholics. It's all Buddhists, but there was a prison camp right outside of Kanburi. I don't know where the others were, but I know there were other camps besides the one I was in at Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: In many cases, these were rest and recuperation camps. They had gotten everything out of you that they possibly could in that jungle.

Reese: Right, and the Americans were beginning to look better in the war, and they were beginning to want to get a little friendlier with us.

Marcello: Describe what life was like here at Kanchanaburi.

Reese: It was pretty restful, really, and that's where I had my problem with Colonel Tharp. We didn't work very hard, and the food was better. I went up to 127 pounds.

Marcello: How did you manage to do that?

Reese: Well, it was just easier living and a little better food, and the monsoons were over. The monsoons don't hit

Thailand nearly as hard as it does Burma at any rate. It was much better.

They issued me a Dutch Army coat and a pair of Dutch Army shoes at Kanchanaburi, which I immediately went out and sold. Colonel Tharp had set up his own military policemen in this camp. If you want me to, I'll use the direct words; if you don't, I'll use some "blanks."

Marcello: I want you to give it to me as candidly as you remember it.

Reese: I went out and sold the shoes and coat to buy food. When I came back in, his military policeman caught me, and he carried me up before Colonel Tharp with about a dozen other guys tht he had caught, and Colonel Tharp put all those other guys on a well-digging detail. Well, I was still pretty sick, so he looked at me up and down, and he said, "Well, I can't do nothing to you, but I'll tell you, by God, what I will do. If I catch you doing that again, I'll turn you over to the Japanese!" I told him, "You Goddamned, old motherfucking son-of-a-bitch, you turn my ass over to the Japanese if want to! But when we get back home, your ass will be tried for high treason, and don't you never Goddamn well think it won't!" He said, "You're dismissed!" From then on, my

hatred for Colonel Tharp increased bountifully.

Marcello: Why was it that he did not want you to go outside the camp to trade?

Reese: Oh, he was afraid that the Japanese would get angry or shoot me or what-have-you; he didn't know. When he threatened to turn me over to the Japanese, that is high treason!

Marcello: I assume that your quarters here were similar to those in the jungle.

Reese: They were. Another incident happened to me there, which in a way I'm proud of and in another way it didn't make a lot of difference. We had slit trenches because the Americans were bombing really to put out the railroad. We had slit trenches built around the huts. A big raid of B-29's came over bombing, and they bombed all over the town of Kanchanaburi. They just obliterated the whole works.

I was the last one to get into the slit trench, and this Japanese lieutenant came rushing up to me cussing and storming. What he was telling me was to get into that slit trench, but my Scotch came out in me, and instead of getting into that slit trench, I snapped to attention. He rushed up to where I was, and he hit me and knocked me back over into that slit trench. When he did, I climbed

right back up out of that Goddamn slit trench and snapped to attention again. He stood there with a damn little old .32-caliber pistol looking me right in the eyes the whole time he's doing it--with me standing at attention and him just about two feet in front of my nose--he's shooting at those B-29's with that little old .32-caliber pistol and looking me right in the eye. He'd take it down and he'd reload it and shoot at those B-29's with that little old .32-caliber pistol (chuckle).

After that I got a lot more respect from the Japanese on a personal basis. That wasn't nearly so brave as it might sound, because I was so damn sick and hurting so damn bad that I didn't give much of a damn if they did kill me (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit more about the food that you were getting here at Kanchanaburi. Then we'll come back and talk about these air raids, both of which are important. What sort of additional food were you getting here?

Reese: Nothing really additional . . . just more of it. Just more rice . . . more of the same thing.

Marcello: The Japanese did have a duck farm here at Kanchanaburi, didn't they?

Reese: No. No, the Buddhist priest had a duck farm there. There

was a few days there I did work as a duck herder for the old Buddhist priest. I'd herd a bunch of ducks down by the river in the morning and then herd them back at noon. Then I'd take another bunch down that afternoon and herd them back at night. I didn't even have a guard going with me on that.

Marcello: Were the ducks fair game?

Reese: Not really. The eggs were. I got a lot of eggs.

Marcello: Now do they have a canteen here at Kanchanaburi?

Reese: Yes, and they had started paying us ten cents a day then, and also they were paying us ten cents for every thousand dead flies we brought in (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess you had a lot of time on your hands to kill flies.

Reese: Right. You know, I had this one little friend--he's dead now ,and I really loved the little old kid--and his name was Arroyo. He was from the 131st Field Artillery--a little Mexican boy. He died in Falfurrias, Texas. He wouldn't kill the flies. How come they had that kid in the Army, I'll never figure out. He would start to swat a fly, and he'd say, "You know, that little fly wants to live as much as I do," and he wouldn't kill it. I'll tell you, my heart bled for him, because he wasn't mean like the rest of us, you know (chuckle). He was such a good kid.

Marcello: Who would count the thousand flies to see if there were a thousand?

Reese: They didn't; they just looked at them and estimated that it was a thousand.

Marcello: What sort of things could you purchase in the canteen?

Reese: Mainly it was a type of a native brown sugar. You could purchase Chinese red tobacco and stuff like that. It was much too high for the ten cents a day.

Marcello: Still, even at this state, although the food is better, are you still constantly hungry and constantly thinking about food?

Reese: Absolutely. Oh, and incidently, those guys that did join the Japanese service on that paper, they were drawing the same pay as the Japanese Army, you know, but they was getting charged so much for room and board and so much for this and so much for that. It added up to that they got ten cents a day just like the rest of us (chuckle).

Marcello: You mean the guys who had signed that non-escape pledge back in Bicycle Camp?

Reese: That wasn't really a non-escape pledge. If you read that pledge, you were joining the Japanese military. If they asked you to fight the Americans, you would do it! That's what you signed when you signed that paper.

Marcello: Talk a little bit about those air raids.

Reese: Well, at the time they started the island hopping, those planes quit missing. They went to putting that railroad out. In that picture, "The Bridge Over The River Kwae," nobody came in on foot and put that railroad out. A P-38 with a bomb strapped on its belly put that railroad bridge out (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume that this camp was not marked in any way as being a POW camp, although I'm sure the Allies knew that it was a POW camp.

Reese: The Allies knew it was a POW camp. It wasn't marked, but they knew it.

Marcello: Now were there bridges close by that camp that they were after or were they at Tamarkan?

Reese: The railroad was about a mile from Kanchanaburi. Their main target, of course, when they had that big bombing raid--where I pulled that stunt--was the railroad, but they did drop the bombs all over Kanchanaburi. As a matter of fact, some of them didn't go off. They were small firebombs that they were using. They were hexagon-shaped with a point and about so long (gesture). Some of them were sticking in the pavement of the streets where they didn't flare up in flames. As a matter of fact, there were just hoards of them sticking up like

that that didn't go off.

Marcello: What did these air raids do for your morale?

Reese: We loved it! We didn't even care if they killed us! That's why I was so brave standing at attention up there; I didn't care if the damn thing did kill me!

Marcello: What reactions did the Japanese have, or maybe I should say, did the bombing raids have any effect on the treatment that the Japanese showed toward you?

Reese: Absolutely! That's the reason we started getting better treatment in 100 Kilo and also in Kanchanaburi. You're damn right, it did. The Japanese weren't frightened of anything else, but, boy, were they ever frightened of that B-29! I mean, you just mentioned the word B-29, and them little bastards would start shivering (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess you really didn't know what a B-29 was when you first saw it.

Reese: No. They used to call us in and question us about the B-29. Hell, they didn't have a B-29 when the Houston was sunk. I don't think they even had a B-25 when the Houston was sunk. The B-17 was the latest thing out.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had dug slit trenches. The Japanese had no objections to the slit trenches?

Reese: No, they ordered it.

Marcello: Oh, I see. Do you still have your Korean guards?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: Are you beginning to build up some scores that you plan to settle after everything is over so far as these Korean guards are concerned?

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: At the same time are you also wondering what's going to happen to _you_ when the war is over, that is, the fear or the concern that the Japanese might kill you?

Reese: Yes, we had that fear. In Kanchanaburi, me and a Dutchman and an Englishman killed one Japanese guard.

Marcello: Why don't you describe this incident.

Reese: Well, he was wanting to trade with us himself--doing a little black marketing--and he went out supposedly on liberty, and he slipped back into camp with a basketful of trade goods. The Japanese guards in the camp did not know that he was in the camp, so they could not blame prisoners for killing him. A Dutchman furnished the knife, and him and an Englishman grabbed the Japanese's arms, and I stuck the knife in his throat, and we pushed him down the latrine, and then we had the trade goods and his money both. There was no suspicion that prisoners had anything to do with it (chuckle).

Marcello: Now this evidently happened in Kanchanaburi at night?

Reese: No, it was in the daytime, as a matter of fact.

Marcello: It was in the daytime! Where did you find a place to get rid of this guard?

Reese: In the "crapper." That's where he came in at. That was the place we went out of and came back in at, because that was the easiest place to get in and out of. It was built right at the fence, and the wall was lower there. You could get over it easier.

Marcello: Did you know that he was coming through there?

Reese: No, we didn't know he was coming. We just happened to be there, and he slipped in, and we said, "Boy, this is our chance."

Marcello: Were there ever any repercussions in terms of searches of the camp or anything of that nature?

Reese: No, because according to the official Japanese record, he was outside. He just vanished.

Marcello: If anybody had gotten blamed, it would have probably been the natives or . . .

Reese: Yes, the natives or the Koreans. The Japanese were very suicidal. I went out on two work parties where the Japanese guard that went out with us committed suicide, and we had to come back in alone.

Marcello: Was this here at Kanchanaburi?

Reese: Well, one was in Camp 100 Kilo, and one was in Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: Describe those incidents.

Reese: That's all it was to it. We were out on the working party, and the Japanese guard committed suicide, and we went back into camp. The first time we were very scared.

Marcello: You never had any ideas why they committed suicide?

Reese: They would commit suicide if an officer would give them an ass-eating. They are very suicidal, and they still are. The Japanese commit suicide by the thousands per year.

Marcello: How do they commit suicide? By what means?

Reese: In the camp there, the one guy cut his own throat. The other guy shot himself. In other words, they didn't go through the hara-kiri routine.

Marcello: I assume that the camp commandant fully understood the situation?

Reese: They fully understood, to our surprise. When we came in on that first one and told them that the guard had committed suicide, they didn't even question it. The second time we just came in and told them that the guard committed suicide, and we weren't even scared because it had happened to other working parties before, too.

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

Reese: Practically none. We did dig a moat around the camp--a

deep moat--but that was in the latter days of the camp. At first we didn't have that. We dug the slit trenches, too, but the rest of the work detail . . . they dug that well that Colonel Tharp put those guys on.

Marcello: I guess there were some parties that went out from Kanchanaburi to maintain the railroad from time to time, also.

Reese: I never did. I'm sure they probably did, though.

Marcello: How long did you remain at Kanchanaburi?

Reese: You know, I would hesitate to guess. I remained there quite a while, and then they sent me on up to Viet Nam or what was then called French Indochina. I was up there when the war ended.

Marcello: Okay, let's describe your moving from Kanchanaburi to French Indochina. In the meantime, is there anything else at Kanchanaburi that we need to talk about to get as part of the record?

Reese: Nothing that I can think of. My cussing Colonel Tharp out (chuckle) and that deal with the bombing raid (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so how did you get from Kanchanaburi to Indochina?

Reese: We went by rail, and we came to one bombed-out bridge, and there was a very strange incident that happened there. You probably won't believe this one. When we got on the train, there was four Buddhist priests watching us--what

we called "canary men" because of their yellow robes. There was no other way to Bangkok from Kanchanaburi except that railroad and by plane, and they certainly had no planes, and they did not go on that railroad.

Now we went by rail, and we came to one burned-out bridge, and we had to wade across the river it was built over to get to the other side and get on another train and go on into Bangkok. When we got off the train in Bangkok, those same four "canary men" were standing there watching us get off that train. That train hadn't been bombed. Every other train on the line had been bombed, but that train didn't get bombed.

Marcello: Where did you finally end up in Indochina?

Reese: Well, I don't know. I don't know what the name of the town was.

Marcello: Was it in northern or southern Indochina?

Reese: It was very near the Thailand border; that's all I really know.

Marcello: It wasn't Da Lat, was it?

Reese: I don't know. It was a real pretty little town; it was a beautiful little town. We went up there, and we were building those caves that the Japanese liked to fight out of so damn well.

Marcello: In other words, they were going to make a last stand there?

Reese: Yes. They thoroughly intended to fight there.

Marcello: Was there a large consignment of prisoners at this place?

Reese: Not too many. There was two barracks of us, and there was about ten Americans all told. The rest were Scotch. I had one very good Scot friend there, a fellow named MacKillup. There was some Australians, although there weren't many Australians there. They built a wooden railroad up to where we were making the caves. They built it out of two-by-fours. They had little carts that were pushed on these rails; they had little wooden wheels. We'd put our tools and everything in the carts, and we'd push up into these canyons, and we'd work on the caves all day. We weren't working that hard.

Marcello: By this time, are even the Japanese realizing that the war is lost?

Reese: Well, they're beginning to suspect. I worked up there . . . I guess it couldn't have been over ten to twenty days. They transferred Jock MacKillup and about fifteen other guys out of the camp. They was walking to some other camp--I don't know where--and they left about eight o'clock in the morning. Of course, me and Jock shook hands and said our good-byes, you know, and at noon that

day they came back and said the war is over.

Marcello: It happened that suddenly?

Reese: I said, "Oh, you're bullshitting, Jock!" "No, it's over." They were enroute and was told the war was over and for them to come back to the camp that we were in.

Marcello: What happened at that point?

Reese: Within about twenty minutes, about a dozen English flags were flying over the camp. An American finally did take some mercurochrome and stuff and build a makeshift American flag to fly over the camp. Those Englishmen had risked their lives--their very lives--to keep those flags. Within about twenty minutes, there were about a dozen of them flying over that camp.

Marcello: Did any sort of celebration insue?

Reese: Yes, and me and a buddy (name withheld at interviewee's request) got some of our revenge on the Koreans. We went in on a whole group of them, and we worked them over but good--I won't say how good--because that might be illegal, since the war was over (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's back up here a minute now. These prisoners returned to camp, and they tell you the war is over. Now I assume that the guards and so on had not disappeared. They were still there.

Reese: No, they were still there.

Marcello: But they had the guns.

Reese: Yes, they had the guns. As soon as they had told us, then the Japanese camp commandant come out and made the announcement--the British flags went up--but the Japanese still had the guns.

Marcello: What sort of reaction did you detect on the part of the Japanese when the war was over? How were they reacting?

Reese: Oh, their reaction was terrible, because they didn't think it was nearly that bad. You know, they knew it was bad, but they didn't think it was anywhere near that bad. Of course, it wouldn't have been if it weren't for the atomic bomb. Their reaction was terrible--just literally terrible.

Marcello: Did they actually say that Japan had lost the war?

Reese: Yes. They didn't get angry, as we thought they might; instead they just drooped . . . they just wilted. They called the Koreans in, and they told them, "You're no longer a part of the Japanese Army. Take off your uniforms." They issued them some old loose-fitting Chinese clothes, and they told them, "Be out of camp within twenty-four hours, or we'll kill you!" The Koreans wanted to know how they were going to get back to Korea, and they said, "Since you're no longer a part of the Japanese

Army, get back to Korea the best way you can!" The natives were standing outside the camp, and,of course, the Koreans were disarmed; the natives were standing outside the camp with every kind of weapon they could muster up, just daring the Koreans to step outside that camp.

Marcello: Had the Koreans been nasty toward the natives, too?

Reese: They had been nasty toward everybody. Do you know them bastards had the gall to come and ask us to protect them?

Marcello: What happens at that point?

Reese: Did we ever have us a laugh (chuckle). We told them, "Get lost, you sons-of-bitches!" So the Japanese put us in trucks right away--far more comfortable than before and not nearly so crowded.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute. In addition to what you just said, you did mention previously that you did take out physical retribution on these Koreans.

Reese: Me and my buddy did, and I know one Australian that did. I can't remember his name.

Marcello: What did you do?

Reese: I don't want to mention that (chuckle). We used bare hands; we didn't use any weapons. And there was far more of them than there was of us (chuckle).

Marcello: Did they show any spirit in terms of fighting back?

Reese: Oh, yes, they tried. But my buddy was an old ghetto dweller and so was I. The Japanese put us into trucks and carried us back to Bangkok.

Marcello: Did any celebrations insue there in the camp in terms of breaking out the food and so on?

Reese: One thing happened and, oh, I'm telling you, that scared the crap out of me! I'm telling you, that scared the living crap out of me! It was about four hours after we had been told the war was over, and this B-29 came over, and he dropped real low over the prison camp, and those bomb bay doors swung open. I said, "Oh, Goddamn, not now!" Then they threw food out (chuckle). I got a pack of Chesterfields; that's what I wanted (chuckle).

Marcello: So then you had a celebration, so to speak, after the B-29 left.

Reese: Yes.

Marcello: What was some of the food that was dropped? Do you recall?

Reese: Oh, it was mainly K-rations and stuff like that, you know, things that they normally carry around. He didn't have anything really special. But I'll tell you, when those bomb bay doors opened, man, you talk about scared, I was. "Not now!" (chuckle)

Marcello: How long did you remain in this camp before you were moved?

Reese: Not more than for a few hours. We remained overnight, and we left the next morning.

Marcello: Where did you go from there?

Reese: They carried us to Bangkok.

Marcello: The Japanese are driving the trucks and so on and so forth?

Reese: Yes. They are still guarding, and when we went to Bangkok, they were still guarding. So American B-25's came in the next day to get us.

Marcello: Are you harassing these Japanese in any way at all?

Reese: I'm not. As a matter of fact, we harassed only the officers and in particular, "The Tiger." I'm not really mad at the soldiers. I mean, they're just guys doing their job. I've got Japanese friends in California now--really good Japanese friends.

The next morning these American B-25's came in to pick up prisoners-of-war, so to speak, and the English pulled that old percentage basis again. They was going to carry out--I forget how many--about 200 men, so the English was going to send us out on a percentage basis--199 Englishmen and one American (chuckle). They got out there, and the man in charge of the flight said, "We

didn't come to get prisoners-of-war; we came to get Americans, so now you get your ass back to that camp and get them Americans out here!" (chuckle) They flew us to Rangoon, and that's where I had the two Spam sandwiches and lost all my real interest in food.

I went on to Calcutta, and they told us all that as soon as we got a complete medical examination, we could come home. In the meantime, I knew these Gurkha Indians, and I really liked the Gurkhas; they're a fine bunch of people. I don't know if you have met a Gurkha or not. They are very, very black and they're small. The Scots and the Gurkhas have the reputation of being the finest warriors in the world, so me being a Scot and them being Gurkhas, why, we really hit it off, you know. I had Gurkha friends there, so I didn't go in for my examination. All the other guys were going home, and I was flush with money, because they paid us part of our back pay that we had coming, you know. I was flush with money, and I was going out with these Gurkhas and having myself a ball. After I had been in Calcutta for thirty days, they came around and gave me orders to get my examination and come home (chuckle).

So they flew into Boston to an Army hospital, and then they transferred us Navy guys down to Albany, New York,

to a Navy hospital. And from there I came directly home on leave.

Marcello: Did you have any sort of problems in adjusting to civilian life once again, or living a normal life, so to speak?

Reese: Not really. Of course, I have never gotten over my stomach trouble. I've had that ever since I got out of prisoner-of-war camp. Once in a while, even now, I still get a little bit of a malaria attack. I had one about four years ago that really got bad; the doctor hospitalized me with it. The neuritis still bothers me. But adjusting mentally to being free again, well, I took my back pay and spent that on "houses and lots," and I don't regret a single minute of it, because I was making up for lost time (chuckle).

Marcello: You took your back pay and spent it on what?

Reese: "Houses and lots."

Marcello: "Houses and lots."

Reese: Yes. Whore "houses" and "lots" of alcohol (laughter).

Marcello: Oh, okay (chuckle). As you look back on your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as being the key to survival?

Reese: Always the ever present thought in my mind was that the war would be over in three months. I knew the Americans

were going to win it, and I figured that they would do it within three months. At any given time, I would say it'd be over within three months, and then when Jock MacKillup come in and told me it was over, I didn't believe him (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess in a situation such as you were in--a stress situation--for three-and-a-half years, you obviously saw the very best and the very worst coming out in human beings?

Reese: You know, me and another one of the prisoners-of-war was talking about that the other day.

Marcello: In other words, some of the guys that you thought would be real bastards turned out to be pretty nice guys and vice versa, I guess.

Reese: We all got into our own little cliques. Well, there was seven guys that was really in my little clique. There was me, Ray Saldana, Rios, Arroyo, Dr. Epstein, and another Jewish boy named Kopp. We took care of each other as best we could. The other guys were the same way. Now I was saying the other day to this guy . . . incidentally, I didn't even know him in prisoner-of-war camp. He was one of Colonel Tharp's favorite little boys, although he was off the Houston. I was saying to him the other day, "You know, we really saw the worst in people," and he

asked me, "Did we see the worst, or did we see the best?" I guess you could put that either way.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Reese, I think this is a pretty good place to end the interview. I want to thank you very much for taking time on your trip to come by and speak with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that the scholars will find your comments very valuable someday.