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Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Houston T. Wright
(Signature)

Date: Aug 15, 1978

Oral History Collection

Houston Tom Wright ("Slug")

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas Date: August 15, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Houston Tom ("Slug") Wright for North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on August 15, 1978, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Wright in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a member of the "Lost Battalion," which was a unit captured virtually intact on Java in March of 1942 by the Japanese. The proper name for the "Lost Battalion" is the 131st Field Artillery, 2nd Battalion. Mr. Wright was captured on Java and subsequently spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

"Slug," to begin this interview, just very briefly tell me a little bit about yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Wright: My name is Houston Tom Wright. I was born in Floresville, Wilson County, Texas in 1915. My father was high sheriff of the county when I was born. My mother was Mary Ann

Brown of Floresville. I was born in the county square, in the jail, my father being sheriff. When I was a boy, this town was rural like many other towns in Texas, and the people used to come to town to do their shopping on a Saturday and had their mules tied right behind the county court house. So I got to see the country from the time of the buggy and the wagons until the day of going to the moon.

Marcello: How did you eventually get into the Texas National Guard?

Wright: Well, that's an unusual story, because I was working for Standard Oil Company out in Arizona. I came to Texas, and they had this Selective Service deal. Because I had two brothers in World War One, I decided to volunteer, and I wanted to get into the same regiment as they were in World War One. That's the way . . . at first, of course, I went to Fort Sam Houston, and then I went to Brownwood where the 131st Field Artillery had already mobilized.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't immediately get into the 131st Field Artillery.

Wright: No, I joined the Jacksboro group that was already there, but only about two months after they got there.

Marcello: When did you join the National Guard then?

Wright: Well, I never joined the National Guard.

Marcello: I see.

Wright: I was one of the Selective Service groups that had volunteered

for the Selective Service.

Marcello: How did this process work? In other words, how did you eventually get into the 131st Field Artillery?

Wright: Well, that's unusual because one of the Battery F corporals was at the reception center, and he was my drill instructor in basic training. His name was Brown. I had told him one time that I would like to get into the 131st Field Artillery because of my two brothers. So he said, "I can help you do that," and he did and got me in to Battery F, 131st Field Artillery. Captain Files was the captain, but he didn't go overseas with us. He's from Jacksboro.

Marcello: So you actually went into the 36th Division after it had been federalized. Is that correct?

Wright: Yes, that's right--in January.

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

Wright: Oh, very close, very close. This was the time of Roosevelt and Italy, which had stabbed its neighbor, France, in the back, and all of that sort of thing. There was a great uproar in this country to stay out of the war and so forth, but we all knew and sympathized with the problems of the British and the French.

Marcello: When you thought of the country getting into war at that particular date, is it safe to assume that your eyes were

turned more toward Europe than toward the Far East?

Wright: Yes. As a matter of fact, when we finally did go toward the Pacific, I had a very good friend with the Standard Oil Company that had spent all of World War One in the Philippines, and he never saw a shot fired. Naturally, we thought we were going away from the war, not toward it.

Marcello: You mentioned that you ultimately ended up in Battery F. What sort of battery was Battery F? Was it a firing battery, or did it have some other function?

Wright: Yes, it was a field artillery battery with 75-millimeter French rifles. The people in it were unique, I thought, because they were my type of people. I wasn't readily accepted because of the fact that I had been out of the state for some time with Standard Oil; and I had glasses on and everything and looked more-or-less like a bank clerk. I wasn't at first one of them; I had to prove myself.

Marcello: What do you mean when you say that they were your type of people? Will you explain that?

Wright: Well, they were ranch boys, and, of course, I had lived in Marfa and Fort Stockton as a young fellow. Also, I was raised in a Texas Ranger camp, and Rangers are a wonderful group of men. These fellows were from the ranches and so forth, and that's the reason I said they were my type of people. But I don't think they trusted me at first, like I

said; I had to prove myself.

Marcello: Now, at the time that you joined, had the 131st Field Artillery been detached from the 36th Division? It was around that time that the 36th Division went from the rectangular to the triangular division, and I was wondering if the 131st Field Artillery had been detached by that time.

Wright: No, I was with them prior to the change, and I remember that well, too. I was on the maneuvers and the whole works. In fact, it was just a matter of about probably two months from the time they mobilized until I was with them.

Marcello: Did you make the Louisiana maneuvers with them?

Wright: Yes, I did.

Marcello: What took place over there in Louisiana?

Wright: Well, most of it was a wait on the side of the road and so forth, but I had a very interesting experience in Louisiana. I was what they called horizontal control officer, which was the forward liaison, and I was with a young lieutenant by the name of Thompson. I never will forget the time that Patton was on the side of road, and so Thompson wanted to tell the general that he would be glad to have us render fire for him. So I told the lieutenant--I was his age--at that time, "Well, lieutenant, I don't think I would volunteer that." He went ahead and General Patton really chewed him out, and I got in on that.

Then at one time at "Four Corners," I saw Lieutenant Colonel Eisenhower; I saw General Burkhead; I saw General Krueger. I saw about five generals, and Eisenhower was one of the lowest grades of the whole group. I had some real experiences as a young fellow in Louisiana.

Marcello: Where did you say you saw those generals?

Wright: You mean Eisenhower and the other generals?

Marcello: Yes.

Wright: They had what they called the "Taxicab Army." All of these officers were observing the maneuvers, and they were at this place called "Four Corners," and they were congregated there. It was a forest in Louisiana. Those were the two incidents that come out in my mind on that maneuver.

Marcello: What sort of training did you undergo at Camp Bowie?

Wright: Well, at first I was on Luther Prunty's gun, and he was my sergeant. But then, because of the fact that they needed to train a number of people, they sent me to signal school or radio school, and that like to drove me out of my mind because you had to take code all afternoon.

Then after that they sent me to this horizontal control school, which was where you measured the density of the air, wind velocity, and so forth, you know, and you used meteorological methods and so forth to determine your best gun firing positions and so forth. That was one of the last jobs that I had there

in Camp Bowie. Of course, the radio wasn't used in Java, and I was used in . . . well, I was in supply, too, at one time to help us pack to get ready to go overseas. They utilized me because I could use a typewriter and so forth.

Marcello: Now, it was sometime in this period that the unit found out that it was a part of something called "Operation PLUM," or its destination was designated as "PLUM." What was the speculation or scuttlebutt going around as to what "PLUM" represented? Do you recall?

Wright: Yes, I do, especially in the battery getting our equipment all packed and ready to send overseas. We figured "P" was for the Philippines, "L" for Luzon, "U" for something else, and "M" for Manila. We had it all figured out that we were going to the Philippines. Of course, the one thing that drove me out of my mind was that at first we were going to be a 105-millimeter howitzer group, and then we had to set up this nomenclature for that--all of the equipment for that. It seems like at the last minute that broke down, and we had to change to 75-millimeter split-trail battery, so we had to change to the whole thing again. So I was in the middle of that.

Marcello: Did they ever tell you why the 131st Field Artillery was detached from the 36th Division during that reorganization? Why was it that it was the 131st rather than some other outfit?

Wright: Well, for one thing, believe it or not . . . I told you that we had an outstanding group of men. I think that we showed in the maneuvers that we were capable of doing that type of job. We were going to be the nucleus of a new type of division, like you mentioned before. Krueger had seen us, and I even believe he asked for us. I'm sure guessing at this point, but I think he asked for us.

Marcello: Krueger had seen you in Louisiana?

Wright: Yes. He, of course, went to the Philippines and was under MacArthur, but he was going to start a new triangular division over there.

Marcello: So I guess you went by train from Camp Bowie to San Francisco.

Wright: Yes. That was a very interesting time, because we left Camp Bowie on November 11th at eleven o'clock in the morning, and it was the same hour and time of our armistice from World War I. I had worked--I think I had mentioned--for Standard Oil Company, and I never will forget the battery captain, Captain Wright--no relation of mine. He said they needed some gasoline--some white gas--and I said I'd be able to get it for him if he could send a telegram to the Standard Oil distributor. So when we pulled into Holbrook, Arizona, there was that old Standard Oil distributor that I knew very well with twenty gallons of white gas, and he gave it to us. So I remember that.

Then we went on across the Arizona desert, and then we turned off and went up to San Francisco. I never will forget, too, Eddie Fung's--our only Chinese boy--sister met us at the train in Bakersfield. She was married to a red-headed Irishman and had just beautiful kids. We went on into San Francisco and unloaded.

These Texas boys, including myself, got sick on the boat out to Fort McDowell, which is right in San Francisco Bay. I was determined that wasn't going to happen to me, and I was going to get myself some seasick medicine. So there we were in Fort McDowell or Angel Island, as it is also known--a beautiful spot right out in the bay.

Marcello: I guess this is as far away from home as most of those Texas boys had ever been. You, of course, were probably an exception.

Wright: Yes, I had been in San Francisco twice at the World's Fair and then, of course, in Los Angeles, too. I felt like I was an old pro and knew San Francisco, and so the boys wanted to go with me because I was an old hand, and I could take them around San Francisco.

Marcello: I thought that maybe you would use Eddie Fung as your guide in San Francisco.

Wright: No, that's a strange thing. Now, of course, I do think that Eddie went home to see his folks, you know. I think that other boys had been there, but we kind of all got around the

"Lion's Den" in Chinatown;that was our kind of headquarters down there. We had a good time.

Marcello: Okay, so you embark from San Francisco or Angel Island aboard the USS Republic. What kind of a ship was the Republic?

Wright: Well, it was quite a ship. In fact, I just saw it here two months ago as a model in Newport News, Virginia. It was originally known as the Wilhelm von der Grosse, which is a German ship that the British got, and we got it from the British. I can't think of the shipbuilding firm at Newport News that completely revamped it. It wasn't in too good a shape when we got aboard it. I think its top speed was probably eight or nine knots. For me, it was a very bad passage to Hawaii. I had bought these seasick pills, and it said on the label, "Keep in dry place." Then when I was aboard ship and already seasick, I opened it and it said, "Take two pills before embarkation." Of course, I was already seasick, so I was seasick all the way to Hawaii. So I had a miserable trip.

Marcello: So those ground swells right outside San Francisco Harbor got to you.

Wright: They sure did. I wasn't the only one. There was a number of others aboard from F Battery that was in the same fix I was in.

Marcello: Did you have to take a lot of teasing from the sailors aboard?

Wright: No, we were more or less to ourselves. They didn't give me

too bad a time, because some of them didn't feel any better than I did. I lived on Ritz crackers and Dole pineapple juice, I believe it was. I was drinking and eating.

Marcello: Okay, now the Republic did stop very briefly in Honolulu. Did you get a chance to go ashore?

Wright: Yes, I did, and it was quite a time, too. I had very little money; I had spent it all, like the rest of the fellows, in San Francisco. So I walked all the way from Pier Nineteen, which was the pier where the big Dole pineapple plant is, and I passed the Aloha Tower and walked that whole trip into Honolulu and then all the way out to Waikiki through the University of Hawaii grounds. Then after seeing Waikiki, I turned around and walked back. Part of the way I was given a ride. I wasn't alone, but for the life of me I can't remember who I was with now after all of these years.

Marcello: You actually didn't have too much time to spend in Honolulu, did you?

Wright: No, we only got in there one day and left the next, if I remember right.

Marcello: You didn't have but about four hours shore leave or something like that.

Wright: I had from probably about two o'clock until midnight. But I never will forget that at the end of the tour I run into some boys that wanted to go see some prostitutes, and I went

with them. I didn't have any money, but I went with them. I went up in a waiting room, and while I was up in this room, a girl walked out, and it was a girl that I knew in Corpus Christi, Texas. I was shocked because she was in the same church I was in and had belonged to the B.Y.U. and everything. So she was shocked, of course, to see me and begged me never to tell that I had seen her. After she got off duty, she went with me. We talked and she bought me a flower lei. So when I got back aboard the ship, all of those guys thought that she and I had had an affair, which we really didn't have (chuckle). They would never believe me that I hadn't. But I never told on her either, you know.

Marcello: Did you notice a tenseness in the air when you were there in Hawaii?

Wright: Yes, I did. In fact, we had a blackout when we were there. We saw streets that were sandbagged. Also, when we came into Hawaii, Honolulu, we were met with planes that flew over, and so it looked like a war-like situation. This is the thing that I couldn't understand--how Hawaii was attacked without anybody knowing about it.

Marcello: Did you ever think very much about those things at the time, or did they simply seem a little unusual to you and you left it at that?

Wright: I said, "I wonder what the heck the score is?" Somebody said,

"Well, they're having maneuvers." So I said, "Well, that's it. They're having maneuvers." I didn't think any more about that until Pearl Harbor was bombed. But one of the things, too, that I heard from Sam Milner, who is a historian that had gone into this, he said . . . we, of course, were on a Great Circle Route, and he claims that we were forty-five nautical miles from the Japanese fleet. Now, I've always wondered, but I've never been able to talk to anybody to authenticate that.

Marcello: I very much doubt that, because that Japanese fleet that hit Pearl Harbor came way far north.

Wright: Well, that's what I thought, too, because I knew we were on the Great Circle Route from Hawaii to Wake and the Philippines, but I didn't think we were that far north. We did lose some planes, though, off of the Pensacola. There were three planes shot down.

Marcello: Okay, now when you leave Honolulu, you are at that time part of a convoy.

Wright: Right.

Marcello: What were some of the ships in the convoy?

Wright: Well, of course, the Bloemfontein was there. We were on the Republic, but the Bloemfontein was in the convoy with us.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

Wright: Yes, it was in the convoy, but we didn't get on it until later.

But then there was a ship that belonged to Vanderbilt that had been made into a minesweeper or an attack ship. I believe there was the Henderson . . . or was it the Chaumont? I don't know, but it was one of those troop transports. There were quite a few, but I can't think of them. Of course, the Pensacola was the main one, because I remember it had a false wake, and they had a bow on the back where they could pick up the planes from there. I can remember that very well.

Marcello: Okay, after you leave Honolulu, of course, Pearl Harbor was attacked. Do you recall what you were doing and how you received the news about the Pearl Harbor disaster?

Wright: Yes, as a matter of fact, I can. I think I was playing cards with somebody, and it came over the loud-speaker that it was attacked. Boy, we went into the darnedest maneuvers and brought guns out of the hold and everything! Roosevelt's speech was delivered over the public address system, and we heard his complete speech. Then our captain, "Hud" Wright, came on deck and gave us a talk, and he was very emotional about the whole thing. In fact, we felt pretty disillusioned, you know, to be in such a weakened position, with no Navy and because of Pearl Harbor and being this far out to sea, you know.

Marcello: Did you have any idea how badly Pearl Harbor had been hit?

Wright: Well, I had sensed we were in pretty bad shape. I don't think I really knew how bad it was till we got to Java,

because I don't think . . . I know we were getting certain information, but we weren't allowed to broadcast. We were a silent deal all the way to Fiji and on to Australia.

Marcello: In other words, you were maintaining radio silence?

Wright: Radio silence, that's right.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that certain steps were taken aboard the Republic shortly after you learned of the attack at Pearl Harbor. What steps were taken aboard the Republic?

Wright: Well, for one thing, we had details working down in the hold bringing the guns topside.

Marcello: These were your French guns?

Wright: No, not French. These were American guns--split trails--and they were lashed to the deck. So we were kind of a floating arsenal, but with 75-millimeter guns, of course, you didn't have the range. I was assigned to a starboard forward machine gun--it had motorcycle grips on it--and I slept at that gun. That was my position, and I slept there. So then down in the hold, I know that some of the boys raided some of the packages that were going to Japan down in the hold of the Republic. They took some of the presents down there. So they were very exciting times.

Marcello: In other words, these were Christmas presents destined for Japan?

Wright: Yes, they were Christmas presents to Japan, and the fellows

felt like it was kind of a retaliatory deal because that they stabbed us in the back, and they could take their Christmas stuff because they knew they would never get there, anyway.

Marcello: What was the scuttlebutt and rumors on the ship after word was learned about Pearl Harbor?

Wright: We were going everywhere. We really didn't know where we were going, but we couldn't understand when we got to Suva, Fiji, exactly where we were going. One group said we were going to . . . oh, I can't remember the islands now . . . Samoa. Oh, yes, American Samoa. They were going to unload us there. When we went right by Samoa and we got into Brisbane, then we thought we would be staying right there in Brisbane.

Marcello: Well, the ship did take kind of a zigzag course from then on, did it not?

Wright: Oh, it did. When we went across the equator, of course, we got the hell beat out of us. Then we went across the International Date Line, and we got the "Golden Dragon" for that. We did zigzag all over the Pacific,

Marcello: Now, up until this time, I assume that you had met very few Japanese in your life. When you thought of a typical Japanese, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Wright: Well,I had met a few. I was in a little different position than the other fellows. A lot of the fellows had the idea that they had very weak eyes--they had to wear bottle-glasses--and that they wouldn't be able to shoot you because they had such bad eyesight. There were all kinds of rumors like that.

Also, it was the same way with their planes. They were supposed to be lousy planes made out of bamboo, and they wouldn't be maneuverable. Of course, we had a Norden bombsight, and so we could hit anything. They supposedly had only one bombsight, and all the other planes had to follow it and drop bombs at the same time. We found out how erroneous that was. They were great little fighters and tenacious as they can be, and their equipment was excellent and in many cases could out-maneuver our P-40's and so forth.

Marcello: Is it safe to assume that most of the people in the unit foresaw a very short war in which the United States would make short work of the Japanese?

Wright: I think we thought that in the beginning. I think we felt this somewhere between Hawaii and Australia, but a little later on we started changing our minds in a hurry.

Marcello: Okay, so you do ultimately end up in Brisbane after a very short stop in the Fijis. I guess you just stopped in the Fijis to take on fresh supplies, and that was about it?

Wright: Right, and they gave us food, too, and, of course, they

brought the band on. I'm sure the other fellows told you the same story about the men wearing zigzaggy skirts and being barefooted and speaking in a British accent. Of course, we're used to talking to our colored people who have a drawl like we have, and to hear that crisp British accent was very unusual for the Texas boys.

Marcello: I'm sure that must have brought all sorts of comments.

Wright: Oh, it sure did. They couldn't get used to that (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so you pull into Brisbane about December 21, 1941. What happened at that point?

Wright: Well, of course, we had to unload fuel before we got up the river.

Marcello: It's very shallow, is it not?

Wright: Right. When we got into Brisbane, they marched us--we were very proud to march and to get off that Republic, which we had been on for a month--and we walked through the streets with guns slung. We went to Ascott Race Track. I was lucky enough to get liberty the first night I was there. Again, I was still broke, no money.

Marcello: Nobody had been paid at this point, had they?

Wright: No, no people had been paid at all. However, I had a buddy by the name of Willie Feagle, and he did have a little money, so he invited me to go with him. We got on the tram, as they call it, and we had our Australian money, and we went down

into Brisbane. On Christmas Eve, we meant some men down there, and they just took us over and insisted about ten o'clock that we go home. In this country, if we would have stayed out until ten o'clock and our wives didn't know where we were and we would bring home a couple of Australians, we'd get murdered by our wives, you know. But their wives over there was glad to see us and just treated us like we were at home. They insisted that this be our home away from home. I never received such a reception in my life, and neither did the other men. We thoroughly enjoyed our little Australian shore leave.

Marcello: Did you ever get used to eating mutton?

Wright: No, I never was a mutton eater. Of course, the only thing that I can brag on with the Australians is their bread, butter, and jam. That was outstanding. But I can't say that I was too crazy about plum pudding or mutton or any of that. Of course, the boys enjoyed the Australian beer, too, as well; they liked that very much.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of the men say that they really didn't see too many men their own age. I guess they were all off fighting.

Wright: This is unique. The Australian young and old went to war, and there were very few men in Brisbane when we were there. In fact, the men were very, very popular with the Australian girls. Especially when you would go to a nightclub, they

would line up to dance with the Americans, and they thoroughly enjoyed us being there.

Marcello: Did you do anything in the way of training while you were there at the Ascott Race Track?

Wright: No, there was no training done at all, as far as I was concerned. All we did was sleep and rest up and so forth. Of course, we were there only for a short time before we left for Java.

Marcello: When was it you left for Java? Do you recall the date?

Wright: Well, I know it was just the last part of December, but before the first of January. I remember I spent . . . my birthday is on January 4th, and we were in the Gulf of Carpentaria off of Thursday Island when we saw . . . they didn't torpedo us, but they sunk a liberty ship up there at the same time. It was bound to have been right at the end of December.

Marcello: Now, at this time, you were aboard the Bloemfontein?

Wright: We were aboard the Bloemfontein, which was a terrific little ship, but we were down in the hold. F Battery was down at the bottom, and it was hot. Of course, everybody wanted to sleep on the deck . . . up on topside. It rained. Going up through this Great Barrier Reef is the most magnificent country I have ever seen in my life. Those islands are lush, and you just wished that you could get off on one of those islands and spend the rest of your life there. But this is the thing that you see from a distance. You really don't

know how it is there, but it looks like a paradise, you know, from a distance.

Marcello: You mentioned the submarine scare awhile ago. Did you actually witness any of this activity yourself?

Wright: Yes, I saw this ship. It was my birthday, the 4th of January, and I was up in the bow of the ship, and I saw this liberty ship get hit. I saw this big puff of white . . . it looked like white smoke. I found out later it was tapioca flour. When that torpedo went through that ship, it hit this tapioca flour, and it went right up. I think they saved . . . I don't think there were very many casualties on this liberty ship, because there was so many ships in there. This submarine, of course, got away, but, boy, it was putting torpedoes all over the place before it took out! But that ship was the only one they hit.

Marcello: Did the Bloemfontein itself stop to pick up survivors, or did you keep going?

Wright: No, we were that far away from it that other ships got to them first and were better equipped to pick them up than we were.

Marcello: I guess that was your first real taste of what war was all about.

Wright: That's right. Certainly, we were all nervous after seeing that, but we felt more assured because of the other ships that were around us. Now, this is where we came out of the Great Barrier Reef into the Gulf of Carpentaria and then into Darwin.

You know, we stayed for about four days there and didn't know what was going on. We didn't know if we were going to unload or what we were going to do.

Marcello: Did you stay aboard the ship the whole time you were there at Darwin?

Wright: Yes. No one got off. I do think the Dutch captain and some of the other officers might have gotten off, but I don't really remember at this time.

Marcello: I bet there was a lot of bitching and griping at that point while everybody had to remain aboard the ship there at Darwin. As you mentioned, it is hot and humid in that area of the world.

Wright: Right. And the thing is, the only soda pop we had on this thing was some ginger ale, and I never liked ginger ale. There wasn't a coke and not a beer. We were on British cigarettes . . . and so the fellows weren't comfortable with their surroundings, you know.

Marcello: Okay, so you finally pull into Surabaja, Java. Pick up the story at that point.

Wright: What a port! That Surabaja was just like, you know, a star in a jeweled crown. I tell you, being at sea as long as we had and coming into this place, it is a beautiful port. Of course, they off-loaded us after we had been there a little while. They put us on trains for this trip up to

Malang and Singosari. It was a beautiful trip through a garden countryside. It was just like seeing a circus going on with the people being the way they were--beautiful people. Heck, we thought we were in paradise. It was beautiful country.

Marcello: Now, your destination was Malang, and actually you were stationed at the airport at Singosari.

Wright: Yes, the airport at Singosari. It was a tank camp that never had tanks. The tanks were to be brought, but they never arrived. So this camp was strictly a tank camp. However, the air base was right across from where we were at. That was unusual, too, because this is the first time we had ever seen any bamboo airplanes. They had planes that were made out of bamboo so that the Japanese would come across and bomb these imitation airplanes and not bother their Hudson bombers they had over there. Too, we were getting used to the hay-stuffed mattresses that we had been introduced to in Australia at Ascott. We had the same thing here at Java, and we were sleeping on floors where we had been used to sleeping on cots and beds. Particularly out on our maneuvers, we would get off the ground, you know, and make our own hammocks.

Marcello: Well, describe what your quarters were like here at Singosari.

Wright: Well, they were stalls, really, and they were tiled. They were open-aired in the ceiling.

I never will forget that we had a rash of thievery to start off with, and everybody was distrusting each other, and it ends up that there was a family of monkeys coming down while we were outside and grabbing pipes and tobacco and anything that was loose and taking them up into the ceiling. Of course, we felt more assured when we found out it wasn't our own fellow-soldiers that was taking everything that wasn't nailed down.

We ate fairly good. We were able to go on the open market. We had chicken and little bitty potatoes. We were used to bigger potatoes. But everything was tasty. There was lots of fruit. The fare was very good.

But this is one place that no one got liberty on until they knew their manual-of-arms. Well, of course, I had been going to radio school and didn't know how, and so I had to go through all of that before they would give a pass to town.

Marcello: Where did you take your liberty? In Malang?

Wright: In Malang.

Marcello: What was there to do in Malang?

Wright: Well, I'll tell you, mostly sightseeing.The Dutch beer was very good and so forth. They had all types of Indonesian foods that I had been first introduced to at the World's Fair in San Francisco. They had bird's nest soup, and they had million-dollar salad, which is made from the palm tree.

So I highly recommended it to other fellows that had never eaten Indonesian food, so they became fans, too.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get from the native Javanese at this time?

Wright: Very good. A beautiful reception from the Javanese people.

Marcello: So far as they were concerned, the Japanese were not winning the war yet.

Wright: No, no. It turned around later. I'm sure there was some fifth column activity. In fact, one of the things . . . we had these clouds and so forth, and we never thought the Japanese would even find us. I didn't know that they built the airport, so they knew it very well.

Marcello: Okay, when was it the first air raid occurred?

Wright: Well, if I remember right, it was in February. I think it was around the 11th of February.

Marcello: Now, prior to this air raid, had you taken any preventative measures? In other words, did you set up your guns, or did you dig slit trenches or anything of that nature?

Wright: No, I think we did none of those things because of the water table in that country. As far as going down, you would hit water within a very short period of time.

But we certainly did some maneuvering after they started bombing us. You know, they hit the camp, and they hit the field. We used to take our trucks out on these roads that

were completely covered with trees, and we'd disperse. That's what we would do when they were overhead.

Marcello: Go into a little bit more detail on this first air raid. What sort of warning did you have?

Wright: Well, of course, when they hit the coast, they have a native setup, and they were getting these . . . it sounded almost like something that happened in Africa, where they were hitting logs or something like that. You had that type of sounding--a native sounding. Then the Dutch had a setup, and the British had a setup.

One thing that I'm sure the other fellows remember is that it seemed like every time we had an air raid, the British that were there would start up these BSA motorcycles that they got there--we called them"Popping Johnnies"--and you never heard such a noise in your life as they created. When you heard those going, there was plenty of noise going on. Of course, we set up our guns, too, and were firing shells.

Marcello: Now, had those guns been set up by the time the first air raid occurred?

Wright: I don't remember, but I doubt it. I don't think so.

Marcello: As I recall, they had to dig trenches for those guns,however, did they not, to elevate them?

Wright: That's right. That's absolutely right. To get the elevation, they had to dig down in there, so they could get them up.

We were surprised the Japanese could do as much damage. They would come down and hit us with a 20-millimeter cannon that we didn't know anything about. Of course, we had .50-caliber machine guns, and we thought that was big; but when they started peppering us with 20-millimeter stuff, that was really something else.

Marcello: Now, was this done by the strafing planes--probably Zeros or something like that?

Wright: Yes, and those bombers tore us up. Of course, we found out that they were accurate, and then their planes came right down over the trees. Of course, we were trying to take them down. With my old Springfield rifle, I was trying to lead them like you would a duck in flight and have them fly into it, but I wasn't too successful. We did shoot some planes down. I think the fellows probably told you we got, I think, two.

Marcello: This must have been a real boost for the morale?

Wright: Yes, especially seeing that smoke going down. That helped us out a little bit.

Marcello: What did it feel like to come under that first air attack?

Wright: Well, my baptism of fire . . . for some reason or another, I didn't mind the bombs as much as I did the machine guns. Later in my tour, I was more afraid then than I was at Singosari. For some reason or other, I had a philosophy at

Singosari that nothing was going to happen to me, that we were in good shape. I wasn't that afraid at that particular time. My baptism came a little later.

Marcello: Now, at the time you arrived at Singosari, I guess the remnants from the 19th Bomb Group were already there, were they not?

Wright: They were already there, and then we became their helpers.

Marcello: Did they inform you as to how bleak the situation had been in the Philippines?

Wright: Oh, yes. In fact, we were amused with the lack of military bearing that the Army Air Corps had. They were pretty sloppy individuals. They brought coke machines; they moved them into the best hotels. They lived first class. They had to have help, so they recruited us. We became their mechanics and so forth.

In fact, I never will forget when they gave me a bunch of Javanese people and told me to go out and take some superchargers off a plane that had crashed. These boys had come in from the States, and they weren't used to these airports, and they destroyed a number of planes by overshooting the field. Well, anyway, it took me four days with my crew to get the supercharger off. This chief mechanic, first sergeant, wanted to know where in the hell I had been. I told him, "Well, hell, it took me two days to get the scaffolds made, and with those doggone people, I did most of the work!"

They stood by and watched me work. I didn't know how to use bamboo like I did later in the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. Anyway, he told me that it took twenty minutes to take this part of the motor off, and that really destroyed me. I didn't like that idea at all (chuckle).

Marcello: Now, you mentioned somewhat earlier in our interview, but let's go over it once again. What was the normal procedure when one of these air raids occurred? What would you do?

Wright: Disperse, and particularly at the airport. I had learned that you never volunteer for anything. My eyes were never terrific, and I never wanted to drive in a blackout, so I told them I couldn't drive a truck. But they found out in an air raid that I was a pretty good truck driver, because the first guy that could get in the truck, by golly, he'd pick up the rest and take off. He found out that I could drive a truck very well under those conditions. We'd take off of that field and get out of the way, because that's where the Japanese were going to hit first, was that field. So we dispersed, you know, left the scene, so to speak.

Marcello: Did you put up very much resistance? Now, you did mention that you did fire at these planes with your 75's, and I assume that you probably had rigged up machine guns that had been salvaged from the destroyed airplanes.

Wright: That's absolutely right. In fact, I did none of those

things; other fellows were on the guns. But you're right; we set up those machine guns on the trucks, and when they come over, we'd give them everything we had.

Marcello: Did the Japanese seem to develop a healthy respect for the resistance being put up by the unit, or did they more or less just bomb this field with impunity?

Wright: They came in and did their thing whenever they wanted to, and we couldn't do too much about it. It was the same way with the B-17's. They had a very rough time, too, in getting off. So they just more or less came in whenever they wanted to.

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

Wright: Yes. In fact, I hate to say so, but I got fairly used to them. The one raid that really scared me was when I broke my glasses, and I didn't have an extra pair. I first had to go to a Dutch hospital and get a prescription. They didn't make glasses; they gave me the prescription, and then I had to go down in Malang. The optometrist or whatever he was in Java wasn't there, so I decided to have a beer since I had the day off to get these glasses fixed.

So all of a sudden, Malang started blowing up out there. Boy, I never saw such smoke, fumes, and all in all my life, and I was really worried! Not because of me, but because of my buddies. So while I was there, doggone if they didn't come over and start bombing Malang. Well, they got trenches

built in Malang, but they were above ground with a lot of timber over them.

I never will forget that right down the street from where I am, a bomb hit a bomb shelter, and there was a lot of people in there. Oh, my gosh, what a mess! I could hear the people crying and screaming and everything like that. I went down there to try to pull some of this timber off . . . and these are made . . . oh, they're at least twelve-by-twelve. They were huge timbers.

Then here comes one of our trucks down the street . . . a guy by the name of Floyd Lamb . . . I never will forget him; he's a character if there ever was one. I haven't seen him in years. I wish he would have been at our little convention, but I haven't seen him. Anyway, he showed up and he has a winch on the front of it, and we tied on to it, and we pulled the timbers off, and we started getting these people out.

One of the first things that happened was this woman that come up and started trying to kiss me and trying to hug me and everything like that. Then we found out that he got my name and got Lamb's name . . . and this guy was the Chinese consul, you know, from Chiang Kai-shek. So they tried to give us the Chinese medal, but our American government never got the . . . if they did, I don't know about it. We've

always talked about that: "Well, we got a medal, but we never got it from that deal."

Marcello: So in other words, the American government probably never received the official word about it.

Wright: That's right. They had to approve everything, if you remember, at that time. But when I got back out to Singosari, that was a mess. Boy, I missed out on a bombing raid that wouldn't quit! I never did get my glasses. You know, I went all through prison camp with homemade frames made out of tin cans. They used to say, "Old 'Slug' Wright looks like he's got two black eyes all of the time." Because, you know, the tin would rub around my eyes. I'd always have to get me a tinsmith to make me another set of frames. Three-and-a-half years! I'm blind as a bat; I needed them.

Marcello: I hope we remember to talk about this later on, because I would be interested in knowing how you finally did get your other lens.

Wright: Well, I'll tell you about it. It happened in New York.

Marcello: In New York?

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't get new lens until the war was over?

Wright: I never got a new lens until I got to New York. They took pictures of me and gave me a brand new set of frames, and

they kept my old frames. Of course, I had to have my lens, but I didn't get lens until later on.

Marcello: Okay, I would assume that by this time, that is, after all of these raids, that Singosari was pretty well useless from a military standpoint?

Wright: Yes, it was in bad shape--bad shape.

Marcello: Now, it was in late February that the 19th Bomb Group pulled out.

Wright: Right, and there I could have left Java, because I was given an order to get aboard the plane by that same sergeant I told you about before. You know, something . . . I told him I couldn't. He told me what was out there; I knew what was out there. I knew we were in bad shape, but I don't know . . . I could not be one to leave a sinking ship--my buddies. How would I face anybody later on? It would look like I deserted. I was part of the field artillery. If I had been a member of the Air Force, I would have had no compunction of doing my job and getting aboard the plane and leaving. But I couldn't leave them.

Marcello: What did this do to the morale of the unit when the 19th Bomb Group pulled out?

Wright: It wasn't good. My group was told to get ready. You see, when we went overseas, I took all kinds of . . . I took cameras; I took scrapbooks of my family. I just felt like we were

going completely away. I lost my dad's commission, you know, as a captain in the Texas Rangers, in the scrapbook. All of that was left behind when we headed toward Buitenzorg at the other end of the island. That was where I knew we were coming down to reality. I knew it. I felt it in my bones that something big was going to happen.

Marcello: Did most of the other people realize the desperate nature of the situation or the hopelessness of the situation?

Wright: I think they did, I think, if you talk to the boys, you'll find it the same way throughout, that they felt in their bones that a lot of us were going to be killed and that we would be lucky to get out with our lives. I really do.

Marcello: But I guess not too many people would say those things vocally.

Wright: No, I don't think that we even said it to each other. I think it was a gut feeling that we felt. The thing is this in particular. When we left Singosari, we first went into Malang and spent the night. Then the Dutch women came out and gave all of us tea and coffee and cookies and treated us beautifully, too, by the way, while we were there.

Then on the road, we saw the feeling of the Dutch people. They did not have the will to fight. When we saw their feelings, then I think we felt that we were sold out. I can't say anything about the Dutch women. Without a doubt, they're the most courageous people I have ever run into in

my life; and I'm sure it was the same with the Dutch men, because maybe a great deal of them felt the same way. But I'm talking about the Dutch Army in particular. They didn't seem like they had the will to fight.

Marcello: You could actually detect this?

Wright: Yes, I could. Besides that, we were going toward Batavia or Bandung, and it seemed like the others were coming our way. We saw such inadequate equipment, I mean, little ponies and bicycles and things like that. Of course, on an island where you have so many rice paddy fields and plantations, it is a very difficult island to protect. The fortifications were not what they should be. It was a hell of a place to have a battle.

Marcello: What made you say awhile ago that the Dutch women showed you a great deal of courage?

Wright: I don't know, but it seemed to me that I really didn't get on too familiar a basis. But there was one family in particular that I had metin Malang, and the wife was the dominant member of that family. She was a lady! She had all kinds of strength, and her husband didn't seem like he had the same type of strength that she did. With other people that I ran into, it seemed like the same way. Later on, after I was captured, which I'll go into later . . . I'll go into that in a stronger way.

Marcello: Okay, so you leave Singosari, and you're heading toward Batavia or Bandung.

Wright: Right.

Marcello: What is the purpose of the move? What are you trying to do?

Wright: We don't really know what the purpose of the move is, really. In fact, to this day, I know that we were supposed to assist. I was the radio operator and was never allowed to set up a network with our own radio. We could lay lines and communicate by telephone, you know. We had a road map that a service station would be ashamed of. That's what we had to use. In no way could we use it for artillery. I don't know if they didn't trust us or if our communication was bad or what. But our maps were bad.

Marcello; Did you ever stop long enough to set up your guns?

Wright: Well, not along the way. Many times the traffic was so awful that you'd be lucky to make a few miles, and then you'd stop. The British were in these convoys, too, and hell, they'll stop right in the middle of the road and have their cup of tea. I don't care what's going on; they're not going to miss tea. We just kept on going.

Marcello: Okay, during all of this moving about, do you ever have any contact with the Japanese?

Wright: Not until we got to or close to Buitenzorg is when we got into action, where I was with the four guns that was set up

in a Dutchman's yard. But before we get to that, I would like to tell you about an incident that happened. They picked myself and a young fellow by the name of Ed Garner that was in communication as well. I was with Major Rogers, and he had four guns. First, he took them into an area, and all I can remember is that it was early one morning, and we were at a place called the "Chinese store." They went across a little bridge, and they left Garner and I off, because when they had gone over this bridge, they had broken this down. So we got busy cutting down coconut trees and building up this bridge again. They came back because it was an awful position to fire for them. They weren't going to use that.

I never will forget that after they came out of this area, snipers were giving us a bad time down there at that store. The guns had already pulled out, and they were up the road. So I saw two Japanese running across the road down there. I'm the luckiest guy you ever saw, because they didn't see me and my gun--a Springfield rifle--was setting over here (gesture). I never had a reflex action before; I don't even remember doing it. But I went over there and got the gun, and I shot both of them.

Garner was scared to death, and he grabbed his gun, and I said, "Let's get the hell out of here before we get killed!"

I figured if they're there, then there is a vanguard of more coming out of there. So we got out of there and just got on the back of the truck and pulled out, and then that's when we went to the Dutchman's front yard.

This was a real nice place that the Dutchman had. There was nobody there; they had gone. So we put our guns in there. Of course, you know Eddie Fung and Lieutenant Stensland. Now, they were forward liaison, and they were up on the river where there was a bridge. Also, there were a bunch of Australians up there, and they were getting the hell shot out of them. I can't remember this Australian colonel's name, but he was demanding fire from us. But we had no maps to speak of or anything. So I was on the telephone. So Eddie and Stensland were calling back fire, and it was one of these deals where you shot over and then brought it back, you know. You've probably heard this same story before.

Marcello: That's all right. Go ahead and tell it.

Wright: Well, anyway, we were firing on them for, oh, quite a while, and then here come the Japanese dive bombers over us. So our group got in their trucks and pulled out and went back to a rubber plantation and left me with that dadgummed dead telephone, and I couldn't get Eddie or Stensland on the doggone telephone. So the Australians started coming up that road, and, boy, they were beat up and shot and everything

else! I was scared to death, so I was going to go with them, and they said, "Hell, if I were in our position, I'd go across the paddy field!"

I never will forget that that is where I lost my Springfield rifle. I thought I was going along in water that was no more than eight or ten inches deep, you know, sloshing through there to get over on another road. All of a sudden . . . oh, I had cigarettes--I had Dutch cigarettes--and I had some corned beef and ammunition and everything else, and I hit that doggone place, and I went down. Of course, with all that weight on me, I was lucky to get rid of the gun and everything. So when I came out of it, I lost my steel helmet, and I lost my Springfield rifle. I did hang on to my ditty bag, but those cigarettes were a soaken mess. I was a discouraged dadgummed soldier. I wasn't very happy about this war at all, because I didn't know where my group was, and I didn't know from nothing. Then I run into some other fellows, and they said, "Your outfit is gone. They're not in that rubber plantation anymore."

You talk about a lonesome guy! I'm the most lonesome person you have ever seen in your life. I'm halfway around the world; I don't know where my people are; I don't have anybody to tell me or give me an order or nothing. Boy,that was a lonesome son-of-a-gun, but I finally got back with them

after running into Limeys . . . I was hungry.

At one time, I stopped at this place, and I asked for some help, and they turned on me. They brought out bolo knives . . . oh, I forgot. I got another gun out of an English bren gun carrier, you know. So I turned and put the gun on them. I'm not that type of person . . . I'm really . . . in fact, some of the guys, I think I told you, when I first came in my outfit, thought I was . . . not sissified;that isn't the right deal. But they thought I was a bank clerk or something. But I had to be a little rough, and then they gave me something to eat. I threatened to kill the whole outfit. I was mad and damned near crying, you know. So they did fix me up.

A general picked me up. He had white flags on the fenders and everything else, and that's when I found out that the islands had capitulated.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you found out that the island had capitulated?

Wright: Oh, brother! Well, I felt that the Japanese would kill us all.

Marcello: Was this the rumor that was going around?

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: That is,that they took no prisoners?

Wright: That they would decapitate the whole outfit. But when I got

together with the others on this race track . . .

Marcello: How did you eventually get back with the other people? You mentioned that this general picked you up.

Wright: Well, the general took me in. When he took me in, the Japanese didn't touch me; they beat the hell out of him.

Marcello: Now, was this a British general?

Wright: No, no, it was an American.

Marcello: An American general?

Wright: He was out of brigade headquarters. I can't remember the number of the brigade headquarters, but they were on Java. But they weren't with us, you know. I think they were in Bandung or somewhere, and I don't think there were too many of them.

Marcello: So did you go with this general directly to this race track at Garoet? Is that where it was?

Wright: Yes, yes, Garoet. When I got there, the Japanese paid no attention to me whatsoever, and, boy, I went down there and joined my group! I'll tell you who else came in while I was there--Eddie Fung came in. A Chinese family brought him in. Where he had got with them, I haven't the least idea; but I know they wanted to keep him. They claimed that they could have or keep him out of the whole deal, but he wouldn't stay with them. He came back.

Marcello: I guess you at least felt a little better now that you were

with your own people once again,

Wright: Yes, yes, I did. Then we stayed there for a very short time. Then we went up into the hills,

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever search you or frisk you or loot you or harass you in any way at this point?

Wright: While we were at this race course, I never will forget when the Japanese told us to turn in all of our armament. But I understand that they had already gotten rid of the breechblocks and had blown up the guns, so we had very little to turn in. However, I guess we were loaded with .50-caliber ammunition . . . no, no, I'm wrong. It wasn't .50-caliber ammunition. It was .30-caliber ball ammunition that fits in a Thompson submachine gun and a .45 automatic pistol. That's what we were loaded with. The Japanese had nothing that that would fit, so I was on the detail--and I can't remember who the lieutenant was--to take this ammunition down and surrender it to the Japanese. I never will forget that when we got down to surrender this ammunition, I thought they would kill us.

Marcello: Why was that?

Wright: Because that's all we had to surrender, was this deal. However, the Japanese come around, and they looked at my shoes. That wouldn't fit them, and that's what saved me. Otherwise, they would have took the shoes off of my feet, but I got such

a long narrow foot that not a one of them could wear my shoes. But they looked us over very carefully, and they didn't do a doggone thing to us.

Marcello: Now, all during this time, that is, while you are here at the Garoet race course, you were not roughed up at all?

Wright: No, no. In fact, we went to the hills.

Marcello: Is this when you were sent to the tea plantation?

Wright: Yes, yes.

Marcello: I wonder why they sent you up on that tea plantation?

Wright: I think they wanted to get rid of us--I really do. I think that they had too many problems on their hands. They didn't want anything to do with us at that time. They didn't have anybody to . . . I think the people we contacted were front line troops.

Marcello: In other words, they had not had time yet to set up their prisoner-of-war establishments, so to speak?

Wright: That's right.

Marcello: They perhaps were overwhelmed by the number of people that surrendered.

Wright: I think so. They had more than they could handle.

Marcello: I think we have to keep in mind that the Japanese didn't surrender.

Wright: No, that's right.

Marcello: I'm sure that many of those Japanese officers and so on

expected you people to fight to the last man.

Wright: We would have if it wouldn't have been such a hopeless situation. If the Dutch had had the will to fight, which they didn't, and if we would have had the ammunition to fight and a place to fight . . . you know, this is one of the sad situations. We didn't have a place to fight, except a Dutchman's front yard. When you think of the way we were trained in Louisiana, you'd think that we had a place to fight. But we had no place to fight. I was willing to fight, but what? I didn't have a thing to fight with. So when we went up into that tea plantation and we looked down and didn't even see a Japanese, we formulated all kinds of ideas of what would be the thing to do.

Marcello: I'm sure there was a lot of cheap talk about heading up into the hills and conducting guerrilla warfare and all this sort of thing.

Wright: Oh, yes. I think the rest of these fellows might have felt a little bit like I did when I was by myself. There were other men as well that were out for a long time, and the Japanese had a bounty on their head that they would kill them and anybody that was hiding them. If they didn't show up, naturally they were running around trying to get them in.

Marcello: As you have mentioned, the natives by this time were loyal mainly to the Japanese.

. . . they knew that the Japanese were number one, and we're number two. Before that we were number one, and they were number two. But then, boy, they didn't want you in a village. They would kill you. You know, like, when I told you about the knife. But up in this tea plantation, there were some desperate feelings up there, but at the same time the guys were gambling . . . money meant nothing to them. We had a little canned goods at that time, so we weren't doing bad up there at all.

Marcello: Well, you still had company funds, too, for one thing.

Wright: Yes, that's right. We had quite a bit of money. In fact, while I was up there, I was in on a detail to bury some money, and we buried it. For years I thought it remained there, but I found out much, much later that . . .in fact, this historian told me that it was dug up. It went to Batavia with us. There was a number of people who wanted to burn it, but they said, "Well, no, we won't burn it because maybe we can use it." It was used to a big extent.

Marcello: It's amazing that anybody wanted to bury that money to begin with, because it was to be of some use to you later on.

Wright: Well, they was afraid that the Japanese would do a search and utilize it. That was the feeling, but we were able some way to get that into Batavia.

Marcello: So you really spent a period of inactivity here at the tea

plantation.

Wright: Right, doing practically nothing but worrying.

Marcello: Did you speculate that perhaps help was right over the horizon, that the Navy was going to come and rescue you?

Wright: Oh, yes. We didn't know that the Houston and the Perth was sunk in the Sunda Straits. In fact, I thought that they were supposed to pick us up at Tjilatjap. That's the reason I wanted to go to Tjilatjap--to be picked up by the Houston. That's where I wanted to go. Of course, down in that area, there was nothing moving. Everything was sunk except Japanese warships.

Marcello: Now, at this time, is military discipline and so on still being maintained?

Wright: To a certain extent. It was a relaxed deal. There was nobody telling the officers to go to hell or anything like that. If they were put on a detail, they did what they was supposed to do. I don't think that at any time I ever saw the men not do what they was supposed to do.

Marcello: Probably some of the more formal aspects of military etiquette were dropped, such as saluting and things of that nature.

Wright: Oh, they were. In fact, we thought that was all over, as far as military discipline was concerned, other than a cooperative type of deal. Certainly, we didn't know we would have to salute the Japanese. We found that out that it was a serious

breach of etiquette if we didn't.

Marcello: Okay, where do you go from the tea plantation?

Wright: Well, from the tea plantation, we were ordered down along the railroad, and we spent several days down along the railroad track. This is our first taste of Japanese discipline. The Japanese used to make tours of duty, and guys were giving them a bunch of trouble, scratching like they were a bunch of monkeys and everything like that.

Finally, we were rounded up and told to get into line. The Japanese come down the line and just beat the hell out of everybody that was standing and gave us a bunch of Japanese words and all of this stuff, which was cussing. They cussed us all out and told us from then on we would salute them if we were covered; and if we were uncovered, we would bow to them. They showed us just exactly how we would do it. We didn't like it a bit, but we did it.

Marcello: So at first, the prisoners were actually making fun of these Japanese soldiers?

Wright: Right, we were very unruly. Texans didn't like them and they showed it, and the Japanese knew of our contempt for them. So they did what they had to do. I can see why they had to do it, now that it's all over with. They had to do it; otherwise, we would have taken over.

Marcello: I gather that they were kind of scruffy-looking so far as

military bearing was concerned. Their uniforms weren't exactly too neat or anything.

Wright: They had patches on patches, but they were tough people. That, I'll have to admit.

Marcello: Now, when they lined you up and beat you, what form did this beating take?

Wright: Well, for one thing, they would come in with you, and they may hit you with a hand, or they may hit you with a butt of the rifle, or they might kick you right in your groin or any number of things that they would do. They would let you know, by golly, that you'd been hit when they hit you.

Marcello: Okay, now,I assume at this point you board the train, and you're on your way to Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Right. This is the most disillusioning part of the whole trip because the people showed their contempt for us on this rough road. I got hit with a rock, and it knocked the hell out of me. Here I thought I was over there defending these people, and my compassion was for them. Then they turned on us . . . well, I can understand at this date how they felt, but I didn't feel too kindly toward them because of their attitude toward us.

I'll tell you how scared I was. When we got out at this station in Batavia, we were going to walk to a place called Tanjong Priok. They pulled out every tenth man, and the man

right next to me was the tenth man. The rumor went that they were going to kill every tenth man. Boy, I never felt so bad in my life about my compadre who was standing right next to me! I felt like being in the famous drawing of the white beans to see who was going to get killed.

Marcello: What did they do with every tenth man?

Wright: Actually, it was for details--work. I had quite a bit of luggage, and the rest of the fellows had quite a bit, too. We had barracks bags that had been left in trucks back in Garoet. You know, I lost my gun, as you know, and all of that, but I got my stuff back. I had to unload half of it on the way to Tanjong Priok; it was just impossible because the rope was just cutting right through my shoulder. But I did have a lot of British cigarettes and some canned goods and so forth, but they didn't last too long at Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: Now, did the Japanese try to humilitate you in front of the native population and so on?

Wright: Yes. I had a detail that happened to me right after I got to Tanjong Priok, but it was godsent. It wasn't right immediately, but within a few days anybody that had a full uniform that was good and clean and a good-looking pair of shoes and a overseas cap . . . they took us down in the streets of Batavia and had us sweep the streets down there. Boy, I tell you, while I was down there, the Japanese did let us

guys do a little buying. Most of them just bought what they could eat down there, but I bought a gunny sack full of food. They told me, "'Slug,' you'll never get that stuff in! You're buying that for the Japanese! They'll take it away from you soon as you get in camp!" Well, we already had a lot of sick men and no food. The Japanese had not furnished one grain of rice or anything up until that time. All we had been getting inside the camp was a little tea; that's all we had been getting.

But when we drove into the camp that night, do you know the Japanese didn't search us? I got off of the truck with those two sacks of food . . . and I had quite a bit of money by that time. I gave one bag to Captain Lumpkin, our doctor, for the sick, and then I kept the other one. There was a whole bunch of us boys like B.D. Fillmore and "Corky" Clay and Solomon and Joe Clay, and we all ate that food. Every time we opened a can of sweetened cream, we measured each spoon. So we lived off of that for some time.

Marcello: Let's back up here a minute, so we can keep these things in some sort of a sequence. Now, where did you go from the tea plantation?

Wright: Oh, from the tea plantation, we went down to the bottom of the hill there--this is at Gareot--back at the railroad.

Marcello: Back down to Gareot to the railroad? Now, from Gareot where

did you go?

Wright: We went into Batavia.

Marcello: To Tanjong Priok.

Wright: Well, Tanjong Priok is a seaport which is right there at Batavia.

Marcello: So then you didn't go right from Gareot to Bicycle Camp. You stopped off at Tanjong Priok?

Wright: No, no, we stopped off at Tanjong Priok. We were there for some time and that camp was a bad camp. For one thing, we had a lot of men in a very small area.

Marcello: Well, describe what Tanjong Priok looked like from a physical standpoint in terms of your barracks and quarters and so on.

Wright: It was a barracks-deal,butit was very primitive barracks, very old barracks. They had toilets there with a pump-type of deal, because this here is almost like Holland--almost below sea level. The pumps were broke, and none of this apparatus worked. So this was the part that was bad, because the guys started getting sick in this camp. We worked on the docks from this camp. This is also where I told you we went in to sweep the streets in Batavia. This is the seaport for Batavia.

Marcello: Okay, describe what your barracks were like here at Tanjong Priok. What were your quarters like?

Wright: Well, I'll tell you, the barracks were very small and primitive

with tile roofs and very narrow, you know. But I don't seem to remember stalls being in this particular area like it was in the airy, clean place like Singosari.

When I got in there, I didn't have a place to sleep. I took a door down off of one of the doors--who needed a door, anyway, in a barracks--and slung it up where the cookhouse was. We didn't have anything to cook, so there was no fires built there. There were a lot of little places for charcoal braziers, you know, which were tile-covered. So I had my bunk . . . I had a very good bunk. That door served beautiful out there, so that's where I slept.

Marcello: What sort of gear did you go into Tanjong Priok with?

Wright: Well, in Tanjong Priok I had a couple of blankets and a couple of pairs of shoes; I had some uniforms and some underwear; and I had a pillow that I had been dragging all the way through. A man without a good kapok pillow . . . oh, when I left the States, my dad had raided a gambling house one time, and he had a craps layout, and so I had that. It was oilcloth on the backside, so I packed all my stuff in that so it wouldn't get wet and everything. I had some souvenirs that I had bought in Australia like kangaroo wallets and everything that I was going to take home and things like that. So I had a lot of stuff with me. But I had thrown other gear that I had into the river.

Marcello: I assume that you also had a mess kit and a shaving gear and that sort of thing.

Wright: Oh, I had all of that--mess gear and all of that. I was in good shape then.

Marcello: Now, awhile ago you mentioned when you did go out on the street cleaning detail from Tanjong Priok, you were able to buy things, and you also mentioned that you had a good deal of money. How was it that you had a good deal of money?

Wright: Well, it seems to me that I had three or four hundred guilders, you know. I had got paid in the meantime, and I had quite a bit of back pay coming and so forth, so I had quite a bit of money.

Marcello: Did most of the other people have this much money, also?

Wright: Well, I'm a character. Except for when I left San Francisco . . . I don't gamble my money; I wasn't a gambler. I would gamble to see who washed pots or something like that, but as far as other things was concerned, I lived very well on the money I had for some time.

Marcello: Now, did you mention that while you were at Tanjong Priok, the Japanese were not providing any rice or any other type of food?

Wright: No. I know that my first sickness was constipation. I went nine days without going to the toilet. I'll tell you, I told

Lumpkin about my problem, but it was just from no intake of food. The only thing I had going into me was tea. I had no energy to speak of. I was laying up there until I made that trip downtown and got a little food into my stomach.

Marcello: Now, were most of the work details here voluntary?

Wright: No, you were assigned to the detail, and nearly all of that was on the docks.

Marcello: Were there enough details to go around, or did you just work sporadically?

Wright: I did very little work on the dock at Tanjong Priok, because, boy, I was feeling rotten!

Marcello: Did you say that you did not get any food until you got on that detail sweeping streets?

Wright: That's right.

Marcello: What sort of food did you buy?

Wright: Well, I remember very well I bought coffee, I bought sugar, I bought sweetened cream--there was a lot of this Eagle Brand sweetened cream--I bought some bread, little bitty loaves of bread. In fact, I had an officer offer me fifty guilders for one little old loaf of bread. I wouldn't sell it.

Marcello: You still don't seem to be buying any staples.

Wright: Well, it was practically impossible . . . you know, the native people eat, like, rice and curry and things like that, so outside of the bread . . . I do think I got some canned corned

beef; I think I got two cans of that. I really can't remember. I came in with a whole sack full of stuff. But isn't it funny that after all of these years I can't remember all of the things that I got. I do remember the sugar; I do remember the coffee and the sweetened cream. But some of the things I can't remember.

Marcello: You did mention that when you brought this food back into camp, you did share it with your buddies?

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: Were you already beginning to form little cliques at this early date? Now, when I talk about cliques, I'm not talking about anything in a negative sense.

Wright: Yes, that's true. We had this, like, B.D. Fillmore and I had been attached. We used to talk philosophy at Camp Bowie. Then I met "Corky" Clay, and we were friends all through this experience when we were together. Sometimes we were separated later on, but we were always friends, especially in the early days of being a prisoner-of-war.

Marcello: This is more or less one of the keys to survival, wasn't it?

Wright: Right!

Marcello: That is, having a group of friends who would look out for one another.

Wright: Right. I hate to go into this, but I will. There was a "dog-eat-dog" attitude there in the very beginning. Some people

had a tendency to be like a dog with a bone. He didn't want anybody else to have what he had; he didn't want to share at all. But I knew that if we were to survive, we had to change our attitudes. In fact, it got more so later on--that the importance of togetherness would come through.

Marcello: Now, did the Japanese harass you very much here at Tanjong Priok?

Wright: Well, there was a certain amount of stealing,and there was a certain amount of harassment. But I believe that the harassment really came more so at Bicycle Camp than it did at Tanjong Priok. They didn't come through the camp and beat people.

Marcello: What were your shower and bathing facilities like there at Tanjong Priok?

Wright: Nil. Nothing. It was very, very bad. There was very little water.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what sort of water supply you had there.

Wright: Well, you see, the Dutch had two classes of water. They have what they called water for drinking and other water. You'd better stay off of that other water, because you can't drink the stuff. The water we had had to be boiled, especially there at Tanjong Priok. That's a very bad area.

Marcello: Are those people beginning to lose weight at this point?

Wright: Very much so. You'd see guys . . . just like myself, I really dropped the weight at Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: Were any of the company funds being used to buy food at this time?

Wright: No. In fact, one of the resentments toward the officers started at Tanjong Priok. They had more money than we did. They stayed on the other end of the hut, and I think that some of them had guilty feelings . . . they no longer have them now, because a lot of them, you know, are just a part of us. There is no ill feelings. But at that particular time, they felt that they'd better keep what they had. They didn't feel a responsibility toward us. It was every man for himself. Outside of Captain Lumpkin . . . wait a minute! I'm going to make an exception. There was another young man that would come down and check up on us, and his name was Jimmy Lattimore. He was at this convention [Lost Battalion Association]. He was right there, and he presented the colors on the flag. I made a remark, "If there ever was a man that should have gotten that honor, he should have gotten it." He was a beautiful person the whole entire time he was a prisoner-of-war. I could never remember him being anything but a beautiful humanitarian. He was an officer and a gentleman in my book. Yes, he did come down and check on us. Our captain, I'm sorry to say--"Hud" Wright--never

came down, never checked up on us,

Marcello: How long were you at Tanjong Priok altogether?

Wright: I wish I could tell you, outside of knowing that it was sometime in March or April, When we left there, I can't even tell you,

Marcello: Was it more than . . . it must have been no more than a month then,

Wright; Probably not, It was probably only about a month that we were there, because the sailors were already at Bicycle Camp when we got there,

Marcello; Did you have a chance to steal anything when you went on the work details?

Wright; No, not at Tanjong Priok. I never stole anything. I know that some of the fellows . . . I don't know, but they probably did, I beg your pardon! I did go on some details at Tanjong Priok. I did unload some barges and so forth there. You know, it's been so many years ago that I have blocked some things out of my mind. But now I remember I did go on some details.

Marcello: Were you worked very hard on these details here?

Wright: Yes, it was mostly unloading and lifting things. Later on, I was on some ammunition details that were hard work, carrying those shells off. That's when the fellows were diving for liquor that was thrown in the ocean, and some of those fellows

got into some real bad trouble getting that liquor and trying to sell it to the Dutch, The Japs caught them.

Marcello: Now, is this after you got into Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Yes, this was later.

Marcello: Okay, let's get you into Bicycle Camp. Now, you mentioned that you were in Tanjong Priok for about a month. From there you go into Bicycle Camp, and this must be about April, 1942?

Wright: Right.

Marcello: Okay, how did you get from Tanjong Priok to Bicycle Camp?

Wright: I believe it was by truck. I believe so; I can't recall. It's hazy, really. But I believe we were trucked over there. I was also able to take my barracks bag--it was put aboard--and I got it over at Bicycle Camp. I didn't have to carry it.

Marcello: How about your door?

Wright: No, I didn't get to take my door. But when we got into Bicycle Camp, I got me a very good place to sleep. I slept on the porch--on the back porch in the officers' compound. It was right across from me. I could look right over there and see what they were eating.

Marcello: I guess Bicycle Camp was a pretty nice place in comparison to Tanjong Priok?

Wright: It was. It was a family camp, really. The family and the soldiers had their own cubicles and everything. Then they had a restroom, you know, where the women and the kids used,

and that's what we used. Then they had had showers. The guys could go over there and wash their clothes and everything. The trees were beautiful. It was a gorgeous camp. We--the soldiers--had this one, and then the Navy and the Marines had the one right across the way.

By the way, I want to say something that is very complimentary to our group, and it was brought up at this convention. There was no orders for us to share with the sailors and the Marines; it was strictly voluntary. It was a beautiful thing.

Marcello: I guess that Houston outfit was a scruffy-looking bunch when you came into camp.

Wright: They were naked! They were naked! I can tell you that they had no shoes, no nothing. They had absolutely nothing! Our men went over and put clothes on their backs. Boy, they came over and helped us build beds; they were the most resourceful people you have ever seen in your life. They came into that camp with everything under the sun that they could get their hands on. It was a combination that won't quit. I'll tell you, it was beautiful!

I had, as I told you, 9½ AAA shoes, and I never thought there would be anybody in that outfit that could wear them. I found a man that couldn't believe it. He didn't even come around looking to see if anybody had shoes that would fit him, because he knew it was impossible. I found him, and I

fixed him up.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that they helped you build bunks and all of that sort of thing. I guess a cruiser is more or less like a floating city. There are specialists on there that can do a little bit of everything.

Wright: They could, too. Also, here in Bicycle Camp is where we first had a little problem with the officers. We had a Sergeant Major Shaw that was a wonderful guy, and he would check . . . and the officers had Chinese cooks, and they had money and they were able to buy on the outside. They were eating pretty good, so there was quite a bit of grumbling going on.

So when I was out on the work detail, they had an election in prison camp, and when I got in that night, I heard about this election, and I said, "Well, who did you guys elect? Why didn't you have the election after the detail come in? I wanted to vote!" They said, "Well, 'Slug,' something had to be done, so we did it and we got news for you. You're in charge. You're the one that will go and represent us to the officers and get money from them."

Marcello: Now, were the officers using company funds to buy food, or were they using personal funds?

Wright: No, sir, they were using money that we had--that I told you that was buried up at the plantation. It wasn't company funds. That is a different situation. This money was used to buy

automobiles . . . especially for stuff to be sent to the Philippines. We were buying stuff that was outfitting ships that were supposed to go to the Philippines.

Marcello: But this was government money that they were using?

Wright: This was government money, that's right. So Major Rogers--God love him--was the one that came to my assistance when I talked to him. He talked to the colonel, and he gave me 5,000 guilders. I had a man by the name of Jack Feliz, and I had a fellow by the name of Nickel, who was a sailor, and I had a fellow by the name of Schram, who was my bookkeeper. Now, remember, every time a fellow went out to work on a detail, I would give him five guilders, and when he got in, he had to account for the five guilders. He would either give me the five guilders back, or he would give me the food that he bought with the five guilders. Then I had to watch the food. It went to a concrete basement underneath the officers' quarters, and it was put down there, and I had to sleep down there to guard the stuff, because, heck, especially the Australians, they're the best thieves you have ever saw in your life. The Americans wouldn't steal off of me, but I had to guard it from the Australians. So then I had to watch it all the way through the cookhouse to make sure that it went into the chow. So what we had was a little milk to put on the rice in the morning. Then we were able to buy

some beans and things like that. Then when we run out of the money, I would hit them up for another 5,000 guilders.

Marcello: Why was it that the officers didn't do this from the very beginning?

Wright: They should have; they should have done it. We shouldn't have had to complain; we shouldn't have had to raise hell. They should have done it on their own. However, they did take part of the money and give it to the sailors. They gave them some money, which they were able to use on themselves, and they still had a lot of money left.

Marcello: Now, were you buying food for the entire unit or just your particular battery?

Wright: No, sir, for all of the sailors, Marines, and soldiers--all of the enlisted men. They had their own mess.

Marcello: How far would 5,000 guilders go?

Wright: Not too far because sweetened cream was running about a guilder, you know, for a can. We didn't get too much coffee. We tried to make that money go as far as we could.

Marcello: I assume that you wanted to buy staples more than anything else.

Wright: Right. That's right. We were able to get hold of some different types of beans, and we ate those. But let's face it, when you went through the chow line, you didn't get a hefty deal, but it was so much better than what we had had. All we had

was some clear soup, practically.

Marcello: Everybody keeps talking about the sweet cream . . . the sweet cream . . . sweet cream. Why was that so important? Why did that stand out in everybody's mind?

Wright: I think that the nourishment from sweet cream is something that you remember more than anything else. I think that is something that you identify with. It was sweet and it was tasty, whereas rice is pretty bland. But, also, we got chili peppers over there, too. Of course, I've always liked a little curry, a little chili, or something like that. This was good, too.

But this deal lasted until the service battery . . .Captain Clark Taylor was here at this particular convention, and he took over, and I went out of business. But then the men stole that stuff out of storage. There was no security. It went like wildfire.

Marcello: Why is it that you had to give up your responsibilities?

Wright: He felt that that was his function and that this was his responsibility as service officer, so he took it over. In fact, we had . . . I'm not unhappy with him anymore. But at one time, he told me that I hadn't given him proper receipts, and he wanted a complete new set of receipts. I told him, "Sir, I can't do it; I gave you the receipts." I felt he was having a problem covering the money. So I went to Jimmy

Lattimore--the little officer I told you about--and he got Captain Fowler, and they went to see Captain Clark Taylor, and they told him they thought he had better look through his things again and make sure that he wasn't asking me for a duplicate set of receipts. He was going to have me court-martialed.

Marcello: How long did this money last?

Wright: Well, if you remember, we were only on Java . . . say, this was April, we left within about a very short period of time.

Marcello: It was in October, wasn't it?

Wright: Then we left for Singapore. When we left for Singapore, we were able to take a little corned beef and a few things like that with us, but that was all.

Marcello: What sort of food did the Japanese provide for the prisoners here at Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Not very much. Just a few vegetables and some rice. It was a very poor diet. If we hadn't had that supplementary food, we would have been in very bad shape.

Marcello: What was the quality of the rice that the Japanese were providing?

Wright: Well, really, that rice in the beginning . . . let's go to Tanjong Priok again for that rice. When we did get a little, it was sweepings off the floor. It was wormy and had rocks more than anything else. You had to be very, very careful when eating the rice. It was broken rice; it wasn't anything

else. But later on, the rice became a better quality that we got, and it was fairly tasty. It was called gray rice. The best rice I ever tasted was later, and that was the red rice. That was the best.

Marcello: Did your cooks have very much of a problem learning how to cook that rice?

Wright: Yes. It was awful. It was the darnedest gummy mess that you ever saw in your life until they finally got the technique. Of course, we always wanted them to wash the rice to get the crud out of it and everything, and later we met a Dutchman by the name of Hekking that insisted that it should not be washed. We didn't like eating it that way in the beginning, but he was right. He claimed it would wash all of the vitamins out.

Marcello: Did you have to learn how to cook that rice on your own, or did you have some help from the Dutch or the Japanese?

Wright: No, actually, I had nothing to do with the cooking of it--just making sure that the food that I had bought got to the men. But it got better as time goes on, because the boys were interested enough that they tried techniques that seemed to work. These cooking vats that we used were called a Y-john, and they looked like an old World War One steel helmet upside down but a much larger deal. They used to use a gallon of rice, boil it up, and then take the coals out; and then they

had some boards and some gunny sacks over it, and they'd let it set there until it absorbed all of the water. Then you got a nice crust underneath, and then your rice was very tasty.

Marcello: Okay, so when you go through the chow line, what does your meal consist of? I'm sure it was a rather monotonous thing.

Wright: You're talking, say, Bicycle Camp?

Marcello: Yes, we're strictly talking about Bicycle Camp.

Wright: Okay, now you would probably have a cup of tea or maybe coffee. In a lot of cases, the coffee was made out of the base of where the rice husk was, and that was boiled up. You got some pumpkin or some vegetables like that. It wasn't tasty at all. Sometimes you got a little meat in your diet, but that's what you got.

Marcello: How much rice did you get?

Wright: You got a good canteen cup of rice. Nearly all the fellows would go to what they called the "back-up" if there was any left. They would run right around and get in line and eat while they were going through. Believe it or not, that's the worst thing they could do, because it takes a lot of vitamin B_1 to burn up that rice, and they were doing themselves an injustice to eat too much rice. They got these nice little rice bellies on them, but very little meat up here (gesture), just a nice, little belly.

Marcello: Are you constantly hungry even while you're here in Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Yes, pretty much so--pretty much so. You're generally hungry. But on details . . . there was a lot of details, and the fellows always liked to go on details in this particular camp, because they would go to the airdrome and roll barrels and everything. The Japanese would let them do a little business with the natives, and there was always some fingers of bananas to be had. Then they would have fried bananas out there, and they would get some of that. There was always things, so it helped fill their gut out a little bit with some of the things they could get from the natives.

I know I went on all types of details and met some very fascinating people. I never will forget this Dunlop place that had gotten all of this paint. The Japanese couldn't read the Dutch writing on the paint cans, so our job was to take the lid off, dip down in the paint, and put a little paint color on top of the can and reseal it. Of course, you couldn't smoke in there--and I smoked cigarettes in those days--and I would go outside. I never will forget this cute little girl who drove up to the fence where I was smoking this cigarette, and she said, "Are you an Englishman?" I said, "No, I'm an American." "Oh!" She liked that very much that I was an American. So she asked me if I had any money, and I said, "Oh,

yes, I have some money," I said, "Do you need some money?" I thought she needed some money. She said, "No, I don't need any money, but I would like to give you some money." I said, "No, you need it for yourself," She said, "No, I want to give you some money." So she gave me, oh, I think, twenty guilders. So she said, "Oh, you be here tomorrow?" I said, "Yes, I'll be here tomorrow." She says, "You come tomorrow; I come tomorrow."

So the next day she came, and she had some bananas, some cigarettes. She had all kinds of things, so she gave it to me. I said, "Now, wait a minute! You need this for yourself!" She said she was living with a Japanese officer, so she had plenty.

I gave her a bad time. I said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" Then she told me the cold facts of life. She said, "Did you surrender to the Japanese? You're not dead." I said, "That's right. I surrendered. I'm alive." She said, "I'm alive, too. I surrendered just like you did. I'm alive." She said, "I'm not happy about the situation, but I'm alive." I felt so ashamed of myself I couldn't see straight, and then I apologized to her for what I had said.

Marcello: I gather that people did volunteer to go out on the work details here at Bicycle Camp.

Wright: Yes, they did, because they wanted to help their poor gut out

a little bit.

Marcello: I don't think any of these work details were really that taxing, were they?

Wright: No, they weren't that bad. However, there were some things that happened when you went through the streets of Batavia that really tore us apart. In fact, the Dutch women would insist on giving us the "V" sign and cheering us on, and the Japanese would stop the truck and get out and beat those women to the ground and knock them off of bicycles. That tore us apart. This is where we would beg, "Please don't give us a 'V' sign!" We knew what would happen to them. But they continued to do it.

That's the reason I said earlier in the story that the bravery of the Dutch women was something that I couldn't understand. They would try to feed you. Most of them were in . . . they would take a block of houses, and they would surround it with barbed wire and had guards, you know, on this block, and these women all lived together in this area. However, they were allowed out to do a little shopping and everything. Then they would try to sneak us something to eat. That's the reason I say the bravery of the Dutch women was something I admired.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about the Japanese guards at this point. Describe their treatment toward the prisoners.

Wright: Well, it wasn't good, either. You know, the thing is, the guards in Batavia were pretty brutal, and they were the same way within the camp. They would come down through the camp, and if you didn't salute them properly or if you didn't have the proper attitude, they would beat the hell out of you. So we kind of had a reign of terror in the camp and then outside the camp. Most of the time, though, they would go right through the camp, unless they saw something that they didn't like, and then they would come in.

Marcello: I guess the best policy was to steer clear of those guards as much as possible?

Wright: That's right, exactly. But, of course, out on the work details we did all kinds of things that hurt the Japanese. In particular, at this airdrome where all of these drums were being, you know, pushed around, we would set them down and knock the cap so it would leak gasoline, and they would blow up. There was all kinds of problems there.

Then there was the Englishman that got a whole ship in the harbor of Batavia blown up, too. He was a demolition expert. The fuses were separate from the bombs; none of those bombs were fused. But some way, he knew how to do it. He told me, he says, "Watch the waterfront." And it went. So there was quite a bit of sabotage going on.

Marcello: Now, did you mention that while you were here at Tanjong Priok,

you went on a detail lugging ammunition?

Wright: Yes, yes. There was a lot of ammunition that was being carted by the Americans, and we protested this. In fact, we had a sitdown strike, and the Japanese leveled a machine gun on us, and we decided to go back to work because he was going to shoot the whole deal. I'm sure that somebody else told you about that same deal.

Marcello: No, I never heard about that.

Wright: You never heard about that?

Marcello: No.

Wright: Well, yes, it happened. They put a machine gun on us. They said, "You go back to work, or we'll kill you!" So we finally decided to get off of our backsides and start working.

Marcello: Now, was this one of the more taxing details you were on here at Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Yes, probably. Oh, they had other things with Japanese rope around them. There were other things besides ammunition that they brought ashore. There was all kinds of different details, but they weren't that bad. The railroad was much worse.

Marcello: Awhile ago, we were talking about the conduct of the Japanese guards, so let's get back to that subject once again. What were the usual forms of punishment that they would deal out here in Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Well, the worst thing . . . say, for instance, a guy got caught

with some liquor--bringing it in. They'd stand him at attention, and a number of our boys had to stand down in front of the guardhouse at attention until they keeled over. Some of them were down there for I don't know how long. Then they got beat up, too. But that standing at attention is probably as cruel a deal as they could give us.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned an incident that occurred here at Bicycle Camp during which there had been some liquor stolen or something of that nature.

Wright: It had been taken from down at the ship "go-down" at the ship terminal--you know, where the Dutch had dumped fine liquor right off of the pier into the water. The guys found it, and then they started diving for it. Then they would sneak it into the camp and sell it to the Dutch, who had their compound right in back of ours, and they were loaded with money. Hell, of course, they liked their liquor, so our fellows would sneak it into camp and sell it to them, and they would get caught with it.

Marcello: I gather that you didn't take part in any of this?

Wright: No, I wasn't in on any of that, but I saw it happen.

Marcello: Does it take a certain amount of effort to adjust to this alien culture? In other words, you are now prisoners of the Japanese. They were Orientals; you were Occidentals. You had come from different cultural backgrounds. Obviously, there were going to

be some difficulties in adjusting, whether it involved bowing or other forms of etiquette or whatever it might be.

Wright: You certainly hit the nail on the head. The Japanese that I had run into in California were agricultural people. They were simple people, and they were kind people. So, naturally, when I run into the military Japanese and found out what . . . I couldn't believe that they were this brutal. You know, their attitude was that we were worse than the dirt underneath their feet. Certainly, we just couldn't understand their brutality. Not only were they brutal to us, they were brutal up and down the military structure in their own outfits.

Marcello: Physical punishment was a way of life in the Japanese Army.

Wright: Corporal punishment . . . being beat up right on the spot was used by their people to each other and also to us. Finally, they told us that we were under their military direction, and that was the way it was going to be.

Marcello: Everybody down the line had to save face. In other words, a corporal would beat a private . . .

Wright: . . . the private would beat up the Americans.

Marcello: That's correct.

Wright: Right. He had no one else to beat up.

Marcello: At the same time, I assume that the Japanese believed that you had disgraced yourselves in that you had surrendered. A good Japanese soldier would not have surrendered. He would have

died in battle.

Wright: That's absolutely right. Then I'm sure if you heard about the famous . . .

Marcello: Non-escape pledge?

Wright: The non-escape pledge.

Marcello: Talk about that. I'm glad you mentioned it, because I was going to bring up the subject.

Wright: Well, I never thought such an instrument would be handed to us to sign. Of course, we refused to sign it. Whoever heard of a soldier not wanting to escape? It was unthinkable.

But I'll tell you what changed my mind, and I'm sure in talking to the other fellows that you would find out the same thing from them. We didn't want our officers killed. Now, some of them weren't too kind to us, but I still . . . and the rest of my buddies would not allow officers to be taken out and murdered. That's what the Japanese said that they were going to do. They were going to kill them if we didn't sign this pledge.

Then we were told that our signature on that piece of paper did not mean a thing in the world.

Marcello: Your officers told you this?

Wright: Yes, that it wasn't binding. So my buddy and I signed each other's name to it. So I didn't sign mine, and he didn't sign his. But it didn't mean anything. It was a subterfuge.

Marcello: Now, let me ask you this. Up until this time, had you been processed at all? In other words, did they take your name, your rank, your serial number, and did they give you a POW identification number or anything of that nature?

Wright: I think they . . .

Marcello: Were they keeping any records on you guys?

Wright: I don't think they were keeping any records, period. But I do think at one time or another . . . I think I had three numbers during the time I was a prisoner-of-war, but I don't think I had one at Bicycle Camp. They did get a name, but if they ever find that name, it won't be my signature on it. But I can't remember us being processed.

Marcello: So in effect, you were literally a "Lost Battalion."

Wright: Right, we were. Oh, there's one thing I do remember. They made a number of searches through there. When I was in charge of the supplies in this officers' quarters, one of the guys came out, and he gave me a .45-caliber automatic, and I stuck it up in the drain pipe and put a gunny sack up in there so that it would be hidden. So that I wouldn't even be close to this drain pipe, I went over and sat on the woodpile. When the search was over, the Australians came out and took three Mills bombs right out from under where I was sitting. That was behind some bamboo deal.

Marcello: What sort of bombs?

Wright: Mills bombs. We used the hand grenade and the Australians used what they called a Mills bomb which is their type of hand grenade. There was three of them right underneath me. Of course, there was radios in camp.

Marcello: Did you know anything about the radios?

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: Describe the activities concerning the radio.

Wright: You know, it's been so long ago that I can't remember . . . I do know that one radio was in a hospital canteen deal, but there was another one besides that. But this one had water in the top, and there was a radio in the bottom.

Marcello: Did you ever actually see the radio?

Wright: No, no, I never saw it.

Marcello: You probably didn't want to see it, either.

Wright: No, no, I didn't. That was a death deal.

Marcello: How was word or news from the outside distributed?

Wright: Well, of course, there were any number of people slipping in messages. But we got very little information in Java.

Marcello: At that stage, everything would have been bad news, anyway.

Wright: Everything was bad then. I did hear later on about the Battle of Midway and about that landing in the Solomons and things like that. I heard it but really you didn't know whether a lot of that was true or not.

Marcello: What were your shower and bathing facilities like here at Bicycle

Camp?

Wright: Oh, they were good, they were really good. Generally, we'd go over to what they called a "tong." I think that was named by the sailors. We would go over there and get water out of the "tong" and pour it on ourselves and wash.

Then, also, I think you know that we had a theater in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Well, let's talk about the shower and bathing facilities here. Did you actually have showers as such?

Wright: Oh, I can't remember any showers. I think it was just around the "tong" where you poured water on yourself.

Marcello: Was there plenty of water here in Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Yes, there was different water supplies. They had water for drinking and water for bathing.

Marcello: About how often would you be able to take a bath? Could you take one daily?

Wright: Oh, listen, I took a bath every day. Whenever there is water available, I'm right in there. Water was available and I would take a bath, and the rest of the fellows did, too. You have to do this in the tropics.

Marcello: I assume that by this time you are becoming very conscious of the importance of personal hygiene as well as group hygiene.

Wright: We certainly were. In fact, we had individuals in our outfit that didn't care too much for a bath that often, but they either

bathed or they were bathed.

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

Wright: We had a hospital, and we had Doctor Lumpkin from the 131st Field Artillery. We had "Butch" Burroughs from the Navy, and we had Doctor Epstein from the Navy, and we had some corpsman.

Marcello: Did they have very much medicine?

Wright: No, they had very little medicine, but, see, we came back from it--from Tanjong Priok. Then as soon as we got a little something in our stomach, we started getting a little better. Now, we had people off of the Houston . . . some of those people were in pretty bad shape, so they needed medical attention. But the soldiers began getting much better than they were.

Marcello: What did you do for recreation here at Bicycle Camp?

Wright: Oh, there was volleyball . . . there were all kinds of things going on. From that standpoint, this was like what we got into later on and like where we had been. It was very good. Some of the fellows were into arts and crafts, and they were taking lessons. They had different people in the camp that would be instructors. I had my group, you know, that was looking after the food and everything. So everybody was into something, and that part was all right.

Marcello: You did mention awhile ago that there were theatrical performances here?

Wright: Yes, and I never will forget that some guy had fixed up a deal.

It was a cigarette with smoke going up into the air and it said, "Women in a fog, light up a 'wog.'" A "wog" was known as a cigarette, like a Chesterfield or a Camel. The English was very, very good at putting on skits and so forth, and they had a lot of entertaining there. It was very good for us . . . music. It was real nice.

Marcello: Well, I guess in a camp that size, like we mentioned awhile ago, that there are all sorts of specialists and people with varied talents?

Wright: That's right. They were very good at it, too.

Marcello: Was there a lot of intermingling among the different nationalities?

Wright: Not a lot. Mostly, the Americans hung together; the Australians hung together. But there were different Australians that would come down and talk to us. Just like Rivett, who wrote Behind Bamboo, he had been the "Voice of Singapore," and he was quite good at lecturing, and he would come down and talk to us. I made several talks to the Australians about the Texas Rangers. They were all interested in Hollywood, and I had been to Hollywood and went through the motion picture studios and had met a number of movie stars. Of course, the Texans used to give me a bad time. They used to tell the Australians, "That son-of-a-gun is not even a Texan. His dad was never the captain of the Texas Rangers. He's just a big liar." You know, they'd give me a bad time, you know, try to cut me down (chuckle). So

you know, there was a lot of joking going through.

Marcello: For the record, Rivett was the author of the book Behind Bamboo.

Wright: Behind Bamboo, right. He was the "Voice of Singapore." But he was never a soldier. A uniform was put on him to protect his life from the Japanese.

Marcello: Is there anything else we need to talk about concerning your experiences here at Bicycle Camp?

Wright: I think we have just about covered it up to the time when the detail . . . I was in the first detail to go to Singapore and into Burma that was called out. That wasn't voluntary.

Marcello: Now, this was in October of 1942.

Wright: Right.

Marcello: How did this process take place? You mentioned that you were not a volunteer.

Wright: I don't know. I was told that I was leaving for two weeks. That was how long I was supposed to be gone.

Marcello: Now, did they just suddenly tell you that you were to leave, or did they say you were going to leave in so many days?

Wright: They said that we were going to leave in so many days, and the word that came down to us was not to take much stuff because we were only going to be gone for two weeks. So a lot of my things, I didn't take; I left them with this fellow Garner that I mentioned earlier in the talk. I left with blankets and my pillow and my mess gear and so forth, but a limited

amount of clothes because I didn't feel that I would need that much because in two weeks we were coming back.

Marcello: Was it a rather unsettling experience to have to pull up stakes and leave? You had probably fallen into a routine by this time.

Wright: Yes, it was because we had it pretty "cushy," as we said, in Bicycle Bamp. But I knew when we went aboard this ship at the docks there, it seemed to me that we were going farther. I didn't know how we would get back in two weeks.

Marcello: Was this a relatively large group that made this trip?

Wright: Two hundred soldiers. And we went right down in the bottom of the hold.

Marcello: Do you recall what the name of this ship was?

Wright: No, I don't.

Marcello: What were the conditions like aboard that ship?

Wright: It was bad! I'll tell you that it was a stinkin' son-of-a-gun, especially down in the hold because they had been hauling rice down in there. It was damp, and a lot of that rice had gotten out of those sacks, and it smelled like fermented . . . no, beer couldn't possibly smell like that. But it was so bad that you could cut the air down in that hold, and we weren't moving. Later on, they did put some wind socks in there. We were crowded.

Marcello: What did they put in there?

Wright: They had a wind sock, and they got a little air in there. But remember, it was just that big and round (gesture) for all those little holds down there.

That trip to Singapore was so bad! We got into a typhoon. First it was windy . . . I was seasick in between San Francisco and Hawaii that I told you about, but that was nothing. If I could have got to the rail, I would have thrown myself overboard. I was never so miserable in all of my life as I was aboard that damn ship. It was a Maru ship . . . Celebes Maru or something. I can't remember. It was too many years ago. But that was one awful trip.

Marcello: Was everybody else sick, too?

Wright: I'm sure that they were. It was terrible.

Marcello: How did they feed you on that ship?

Wright: We had very, very little to eat going to Singapore. They had some green mutton there on that deal that was absolutely . . . it was floating around on top of the soup.

Marcello: Now, this was over in Singapore that you had the green mutton?

Wright: No, aboard the ship.

Marcello: Aboard the ship.

Wright: Yes, we got a little there, and it seems like that the only thing we did see was a little rice and green mutton. You may be right. I may have made a mistake in this mutton, but I don't remember anything but the green mutton and rice. I thought

it was here, but it might be later on, too.

Marcello: How did they feed you? In other words, did you come up on deck or was it lowered down in the hold?

Wright: They lowered it down.

Marcello: Then would it be distributed down there by the prisoners?

Wright: By us. It seemed like it was in these British pots. They were kind of oval-shaped deals . . . steel deals. It looked like a clothes kettle.

Marcello: Was discipline being maintained fairly well when that food was distributed?

Wright: Yes, it wasn't too bad. Actually, we weren't fighting, that I remember, down there. Captain Fitzsimmons was our number one officer down there, and he was in the hold with us. So the discipline was pretty good.

Marcello: Oh, this was the group known as the "Fitzsimmons bunch?"

Wright: Yes, this was the first group that went--200 Americans.

Marcello: I assume that it must have been hot down in that hold, too?

Wright: It was. You could almost cut the air physically, the way it stunk down there. It was awful.

Marcello: I guess you were fortunate that dysentery had not become epidemic yet.

Wright: There was some with us, but I'm not sure it was here or between Singapore and Rangoon. Now, in one of the places there was some dysentery, but I'm not sure which one. I hate to admit it, but there was one area that I tried to black out of my mind.

It was tht bad! I have a very good memory, but I can see right now, coming back to it, that my memory is kind of flaky in this area.

Marcello: Were you crowded on that ship?

Wright: Oh, were we! There wasn't even room to turn over unless somebody else did it with you. It was that bad! You know, we were right down in the bottom of the hold. If you talk to anybody from Jacksboro, you'll probably get the same feeling from them.

Marcello: Is it true that the hold was so small that you couldn't physically stand up straight in it?

Wright: That's another thing. It seemed to me that most of these Texans had to walk stooped over to get where they were going, you know. It was a very low hold. They had some Australians right up above us, and they weren't much better off, but they were at least on wood. They weren't on this damp rice that we were on down there.

Marcello: Were you allowed to go up on deck at all?

Wright: Yes, we were. They had a continous line, and you used the benjo or latrine, which went over the side of the ship. If you can imagine sitting on the side of a ship in a storm, you know, that is a pretty pitiful situation, I'll tell you.

The first typhoon that I was ever in was in this damn deal, and I was a sick son-of-a-gun. At one time the Japanese took

to cover, and I laid out on deck--rain and all--because there was no place to lay down--wetter than a drowned cat and sick to my death. I'll tell you, I'm not overdramatizing it one bit. I just felt like life is not worth it, going through this effort.

Marcello: It was mainly seasickness?

Wright: Mostly seasickness, yes.

Marcello: In the meantime, how are your glasses holding out?

Wright: Well, the glasses were the same all through. As long as there was a tinsmith, and he could fashion . . . that's another thing that is uncomfortable. I can't ever remember in the whole time I was a prisoner-of-war being comfortable as far as my nose is concerned, because I had no bridge on my nose. Later, I will tell you a story about getting it broken by the Japanese. But when my nose was in good shape, it was uncomfortable. Later, I hope you'll remind me, and I'll tell you about getting the hell kicked out of me and my chest caved in. Then it was impossible; I couldn't see a damn thing.

Marcello: So at this stage, that is, the point that you are on the ship, you still have glasses with only one lens in, or did you have both?

Wright: I had both lenses . . . now part of my frame was the original frame. But it had broken, and I was never able to get it fixed. But the other parts of the damn thing were tin, especially in

here in part of my back deal was from the old frames. It was a combination, and it wasn't 100 per cent.

Marcello: I'm sorry. I guess I misunderstood you earlier when you were talking about that. It was your frames that had been broken, not your lens?

Wright: Not the lens. The lens were all right, but they needed changing bad, You know, the Dutch military hospital there in Malang said my glasses needed changing.

Marcello: What do you talk about on that ship? Are there any conversations?

Wright: I'll guarantee you, the majority of the conversations through all of the prison camps were about food and home.

Marcello: Even in the midst of this typhoon, food was still the principal subject?

Wright: I don't think there was too much talking when the guys were that sick. But as soon as we got out of the storm . . . there was always somebody that was going to tell you about a good meal that they had at this time or another, and we needed that like a hole in the head. We'd yell him off for bringing it up. But it was generally food that we talked about; very seldom about women.

Marcello: I'm sure that when you got into these sessions concerning food, you dreamed up all sorts of exotic menus and so on that you were going to sample when you became free men again.

Wright: Right. Well, we always thought right over the horizon we were

going to get a decent meal, too. I did get one decent meal in Singapore.

Marcello: At this stage, how long do you think you're going to be prisoners?

Wright: Well, I'll tell you, I thought possibly that the Americans should be able to come back and wrap the thing up within a couple of years' time.

Marcello: Oh, you even did believe that it was going to take a couple years?

Wright: Oh, yes, I thought it was going to take that long, but I felt that we would be able to snap right back. Because I didn't think that the Japs or Japan could hold out that long. I really didn't.

Marcello: Most of your buddies, however, thought the war was going to be must shorter than that.

Wright: Some of them said six months! I know some of them said six months, but I thought it would be longer than that.

Marcello: I'm sure that there was always rumors floating around as to when you were going to be freed. In other words, the American fleet was right over the horizon, and somebody had gotten the word, so to speak.

Wright: Right. In fact, I thought we were going to be freed after we got into Singapore. First, before we got in there, they wouldn't let us up on top deck until we got in. I guess they thought that

maybe we might see something that we shouldn't. When I got in, one of the things that I saw when I took a look out was the Gripsholm, the Swedish ship with the red cross on the side and this big green strip around and everything like that. Then the rumors really did fly. They said, "By golly, they're going to repatriate us with some Japanese." We thought we were going to get out.

Marcello: That must have been a great letdown when the release didn't occur.

Wright: Well, we almost thought . . . especially when a bunch of Japanese corpsmen came aboard the ship in Singapore and started poking this barbed wire up our behinds and putting it on microscope slides. We all felt that they wanted to make sure we were in good shape before we mingled with the crew of the Gripsholm and everything. So we just knew that they were going to repatriate us.

Marcello: Now, you say they poked barbed wire up your behinds. Surely you're exaggerating to some extent.

Wright: No, it wasn't barbed wire. I'm sorry. It was just a loop of wire, you know, that they took a culture to see what we had.

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you get to Singapore?

Wright: Well, Singapore was a very fascinating place after we were allowed out on deck to see the Chinese women carrying all of the timbers and everything that they were. Also, they off-loaded

us, and we went up into Changi, which is this British prison. We went by the famous Changi Prison, which was full of women.

Marcello: When you went by the Changi Jail, you went by the Changi Village, actually, didn't you?

Wright: That's right. We went into these barracks that were inside Changi. We were kind of disillusioned with the British there, because they were very much in command. We had controlled our own destiny, and they were the ones that said what we would do. They put us on details pushing these trucks with no engines, even though you always had a driver. You pushed these vehicles all over the camp. We got all of those lousy details, so the comradeship that you think we would have between Allies turned to hate between the Americans and the British.

Marcello: You actually didn't see too many Japanese in this camp, did you?

Wright: No, no, no, we didn't. It was run internally by the British.

Marcello: I gather a lot of the guards were the Sikhs, the Indians.

Wright: Yes, yes, the Indian Sikhs. That's right. We started with just 200 men. We had some people that came out and started being leaders, like Jimmy Gee from Dallas. Even though I think his rank was private or PFC or something like that, he developed as one of the leaders. Of course, Captain Fitzsimmons was our boss, and Jimmy Lattimore was in charge of the kitchen, and Stensland . . . I can't remember him too much in Singapore, but later on he became a real help to us.

Marcello: This Lieutenant Stensland that you mentioned is a mystery man of sorts, isn't he?

Wright: He wasn't to me. He was regular Army, a West Point man, and he had plenty of savvy up here (points to his head). But he is kind of a mystery man, now that you mention it. But his talents developed as we went along, and he was a real help to us in Java.

Marcello: Is he the one who nobody ever knew where he came from?

Wright: That's right; that's right. We did respect him, but the officers wouldn't give him any . . .the higher-up officers wouldn't give him any authority. They made him the athletic officer. But, hell, he was the bravest one we had in Java.

Marcello: Now, why do you say that he was one of the bravest ones you had in Java?

Wright: Because of some of the things that this man did, particularly back in Java. I saw him out on a detail when a Japanese was harassing people, and he went up and took his gun away from him and beat the hell out of him. I thought he was a dead man. He came out of it, because that Japanese was afraid to go to his superiors and say that an American beat him up. He was lucky as the dickens, and that wasn't the only time that he walked right into a situation and told the Japanese what they could do and walked away from it. If it would have been me, they would have killed me, but old Stensland was the type of

man that had more courage and guts than anybody that I have ever seen . . . unless it's that little "chink," my friend Eddie Fung, who's the equal, too.

I saw a Japanese want his cigarette lighter. I can't think of the name of it, but,anyway, the Japanese wanted it, and he wouldn't give it to him. And he was getting Eddie down, trying to kill him, and I was begging Eddie to give him the lighter, and he never gave that cigarette lighter to that guy. So he just has courage like you never seen in your life.

Marcello: Now, we were talking about Singapore and the fact that the British ran this camp. As you mentioned, this is where the relations between the Americans and the British really degenerated. What was it about the British that caused this resentment to develop?

Wright: Well, I think the main thing is this: that we had gone to the British aid through the years, World War One and World War Two, and they treated us like a poor colonist, and I think that bitterness came out. Certainly, we had given them so much, and when they were in a position to share, we thought they ought to share it.

Marcello: I understand they held a monopoly on the Red Cross supplies that came in here at Changi.

Wright: That came in on the Gripsholm that I mentioned. There was all kinds of uniforms; there was all kinds of food that came in,

shoes. They told us that we would get ours when we got up the road. That's when we first found out we were going up to the railroad. That's where ours were, they said. Of course, it wasn't true. We got very little in Singapore. However, I did work on a dock, and a Chinese brought me a complete dinner . . . noodles. I told you that I did get one good meal while I was in Singapore, and that was it.

But I want to say something nice about the Argyles and the Highlanders that were in Singapore. Those fellows admired the Americans, and we were the only ones that they piped out. They piped us out of Changi.

Marcello: How was it that this close relationship developed between the Americans and the Scots?

Wright: I don't know, except they're our kind of people. That's a strange deal, that small island. It's got so many people. They call themselves Welsh; they call themselves Scots; they call themselves Irish. But it seems like the Americans turned their hatred on a very small group of people that call themselves English, you know. But we loved the Scotch, and they loved us. Also, we liked the Australians, too. The Americans and Australians were good friends. The New Zealanders and the Americans were not . . . they didn't dislike each other, but it wasn't the same; it was a little different.

Marcello: There was an incident here at one time or another involving the

so-called "king's coconuts." Do you remember that incident when the Americans were evidently helping themselves to the coconuts and the British tried to put a stop to this practice?

Wright: Yes, that was some Navy boys that went after that. You're right. I think they were going to court-martial them. But that was the second group. That wasn't the first group. That was the second group. They were there longer than we were.

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

Wright: Well, mostly we dug some latrines with an auger on the side of the hill. I went on down to where they were loading the ships--"go-downs." It's been so many years that I forget what it was.

I would like to tell you about an incident that happened down there. I was working on this detail, and we had taken a mess kit, and it had some sloppy rice--wet rice--and a few little particles of vegetables in there. So there was a German ship down there, and this big, good-looking German walked up to where we were working and with perfect English asked us what we were eating. One of the boys opened his lid up on his mess kit and said, "This is what we were eating." He took the mess kit and looked at it, and he threw it over--not the mess kit but the slop that was in there off--the side of the dock. Of course, this old boy lost his lunch--that was it. So he was pretty damn unhappy about this German taking his lunch away from him. So the German in turn said, "Wait, I'll

be right back."

He went back aboard his ship, and, hell, he brought back a box with all kinds of food in it. That was the tastiest food that I have ever eaten. There was some sausage and some jam and some hardtack . . . and I forget what was in there. But right then we would have become German prisoners-of-war so fast it wasn't even funny, if they would have taken us, you know.

Marcello: Was this a German military man or a merchant sailor?

Wright: He was Navy. He was in the German Navy. He called those Japs a rotten little bastard, you know. Then a Jap came running up there, you know, and tried to take this food away from us, and that German just pushed that Jap right over to the side. Boy, we were ready to quit the Japs right there and become Germans.

Marcello: Did you mention that you also managed to get a gourmet meal here in Singapore?

Wright: Yes, that was a Chinaman. He couldn't speak English worth a darn, and told me to come with him. Goddang! I said, "Wow, I can't come with you!" He went like this (gesture).

Marcello: He motioned with his hand that he wanted to feed you?

Wright: Yes. So I went with him, and, boy, I'll tell you, he had it. If you have ever eaten pork noodles, and you're that hungry . . . oh, by the way, this was before that other chow, you

know, the German incident. This is before that. So I had pork noodles; I had some pieces of chicken. Oh, gosh, that was the most wonderful meal in my life, I'll tell you. You know something, though, it caused me to go to the toilet like you've never seen before--eating all of that pork noodles. It was like taking castor oil.

Then another thing I got into on the docks down there is the first time I ever met a "Black Dragon." Now, have you ever heard of the Black Dragon Society?

Marcello: Yes.

Wright: Okay. One of the Australians had some Cadsbury chocolate bars, and he had quite a bit of it. I said, "Where did you get it?" He said, "In the warehouse down there." He had a whole big box of it. So I went in the "go-down," you know, and it was fairly dark in there, and I went over and found the boxes open. I reached down in there and got some chocolate, and here a goddamn Jap came in the door. He knew there was somebody in there, and I was afraid he would start shooting.

So about that time, here comes another guy right in behind, and I don't know who he is. But this Japanese saw him, and he's got a sword on him and an armband. He's a "Black Dragon." A "Black Dragon" can kill you right on the damn spot.

That was the luckiest break in my life, because this other Jap was scared that this "Black Dragon" would think that he and I

are in there to get the chocolate, I presume. I don't know; I'm just presuming. But, anyway, the Japanese guard told me to keep my mouth shut, and I sure the hell did. The "Black Dragon" left, and the Japanese left me alone. Boy, you don't ever understand their thinking. But, goddang, I got out of there . . . I would have taken more chocolate, but what I had in my hands was enough. I really got the heck out of there. Now, that was my second experience with the "Black Dragon." I had seen one once before, and I had seen him beat the hell out of a Japanese guard. But that was my second experience with one.

Marcello: So on your work details here at Singapore, you did manage to get down to the docks and do some work there.

Wright: That's right. I didn't do too much down there, but that was my experiences down there. I thought those were pretty good experiences, so I told you about them.

Marcello: It was down there at the docks where you did meet that Chinaman--where you got that meal.

Wright: Yes, yes. Red Cross . . . that could mean two things: Christian or Red Cross.

Marcello: In other words, he did have an insignia on the front of his . . .

Wright: No.

Marcello: Oh, he just made a sign of a cross.

Wright: So he was either a Christian or Red Cross, I don't know which.

Marcello: How did he get you aside to give you a meal?

Wright: The thing is, we were pretty loose working on the "go-down," as you know. They didn't have that many Japanese guarding us. They had us working on different things. There was no way we could get away, because they had back-up Japanese patrolling. But they didn't pay that much attention.

Marcello: Where did he take you for that meal?

Wright: He took me down a ramp, and he had the stuff in a basket.

Marcello: You were never missed back on the work detail?

Wright: No. Oh, I forgot to tell you that he gave me some cigarettes, too. Evidently, he had done this before.

Marcello: Did you eat fast, or did you take your time and savor the meal?

Wright: I have to admit I savored it. No way was I going to cram that down my throat. Rice isn't that hard to get down, and the noodles wasn't either; but at the same time there was some chicken, and I can't remember what else was in there. But there was about four or five little dishes in there, you know, not together. It wasn't like I generally got--slop--but this was very good.

Marcello: Now, you did mention on one of your other work details here at Singapore, you were pushing around these motorless vehicles.

Wright: Well, these vehicles were used to go get rice, and we would go get wood and different things that we needed. We pushed those doggone things all over Changi.

Marcello: The motors had been removed?

Wright: Yes, there was no motors. We always had to have a driver. That was the lucky guy that just sat up there and drove, and then we'd push him.

Marcello: You were probably like a bunch of little kids with these things at times, were you not?

Wright: Oh, there was one good thing. Once in a while you would get on a hill, and everybody would climb aboard, you know, with the rice and ride down to the bottom of the hill, and then you pushed again.

Marcello: Did they have breaks and so on?

Wright: Yes,they had brakes and everything. They had tires, and everything was in good shape, except no engine.

Marcello: Did you have access from one compound to another here at Changi?

Wright: We intermingled somewhat, I mean, like with the Scotch and so forth.

But the officers had chickens and all kinds of things up there, and they had them wired. You know, they had chicken coops and everything. My group did some stealing but not like the second group that came up later on. I heard their stories, too. They really got into the chicken coops, because they weren't crazy about the British, either. I don't think we left too good a taste in their mouths, because we fought with them . . . and I don't mean physically. I mean, a British officer would tangle with us, and the Americans wouldn't back

up an inch. They would tell them what they thought of them, so there wasn't too much love lost between us.

Marcello: What were your barracks like here at Changi?

Wright: Really, the barracks were pretty nice. There were some of them that were three stories high, you know. They all had plumbing, but there was no way to get water up to those places. So if you wanted to use the toilet upstairs, all you had to do is carry a bucket of water up there and use the facility and then dump the water in. So there was a lot of that done. They put it in the bathtub, and then they dumped it in. Some of those quarters were used by the sergeants and NCO's that lived in Changi, like the 7th Coast Artillery and 11th Coast Artillery--British.

Marcello: So you did have adequate bathing facilities here at Changi?

Wright: Well, yes. I would say that . . . of course, it was a matter of hauling water, but you could get some water. There we had water, you know.

Marcello: Now, what food was provided to you by the Japanese or the British here at Changi?

Wright: Well, there was, of course, rice. I remember that Jimmy Lattimore was in charge of this rice. They would have to put it in a bathtub. That was our container. We had nothing when we moved in there. What we got, we had to beg, borrow, or steal. We got very little from the British in the way of food and so

forth. We had a rough time in Singapore; we really did. We weren't much better than we were back at Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: I gather you were pretty glad to leave Changi?

Wright: We were glad to leave Singapore, but we didn't know what we were getting into.

Marcello: Fortunately, you weren't in Singapore too long.

Wright: No, no, a very short period of time.

Marcello: Was it a matter of months?

Wright: No, it wasn't that long. It was a matter of weeks--a couple of weeks.

Marcello: Okay, so do you know that Singapore is strictly a transit station, so to speak?

Wright: We knew we were going someplace from there, but we did not know we were going to Burma. At least I didn't. The rest of them may have known, but I didn't know it.

Marcello: Okay, describe leaving Changi and getting to your ultimate destination in Burma.

Wright: Well, I told you about the Scotch piping us out, which is a very impressive ceremony and a very heart-rendering deal because we liked the Scotch and really appreciated that. Then we got aboard the ship.

Marcello: Did you get aboard the ship right there at Singapore?

Wright: Yes. Some of them went up and left from Penang or other areas, but we left from Singapore. On the other trip, we were in a

typhoon, but on this one we weren't. But we were equally crowded aboard this deal.

Water was . . . well, I'll tell you, we got no water whatsoever. Then about the fourth or fifth day, my tongue was so big in my mouth . . . the only place that you could get any water was from a steam pipe. I used my mess kit to put underneath the pipe where there was a joint, and a little water would trickle down in there. Then every time I got a chance to go to the restroom, I would stop by and see if there was water in the mess kit, and then I would drain that.

But the Japanese said that you couldn't do this. Goddang, I did it anyway, and I got caught. This Japanese beat me up. He beat me up pretty bad.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up here a minute now. You're put aboard this ship. Once more, I assume that you are down in the hold.

Wright: We're right back in the hold again, like we were before--the same facilities over the side of the ship. We're not in a typhoon, but we are in some hell of a hot weather and no water.

Marcello: Is it down in the hold where you are collecting this water dripping off of the steam pipe?

Wright: No, it's up on the deck when we were going to the latrine.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how this Japanese caught you.

Wright: These were quartermaster Japanese, by the way, that are our guards. So he beat me up, as I said. Then I never thought that he would

expect me to go right back out there and get my mess kit and everything. He caught me again. He got me down, and he beat me so bad. My nose was broken. And, damn, I just saved my glasses from being broke, you know, because I grabbed at them. I always would. If a Japanese went after me, I always would grab them off of my face, because they slapped the hell out of you and your glasses would go this way or that. Then I would be blind the rest of the time. He caved in my chest and threw me--threw me--down in the hold, you know.

Marcello: About how far or how much of a fall is that?

Wright: Well, I hit the first deal, which is about seven or eight feet. So the guys down there said, "Oh, 'Slug' is so damn beat up!" We were able to get two five-gallon tins of water a day, and a guy . . . we called him "Pack Rat" McCone, and he had two five-gallon cans that he had everything in the world in. We had these cans lowered, and they said, "Now, we're going to let old 'Slug' have some water. He's going to get first in line because, hell, he's so beat up and everything." But that went to sick first. And, by the way, we had some real sick people.

Marcello: So all the Japanese provided was two five-gallon tins of water per day.

Wright: Tins of water. That's right. Anyway, I got in line and I got my cup, and that damn quartermaster Jap saw me, and he said,

"You don't get any water." So when we got into Rangoon, boy, I was so damn thirsty it wasn't even funny. I got a little water there, and then they put us on another ship, and there was no water there until we got to Moulmein, Burma, and that was up the Salween.

They marched us from there to this town. That's the first I saw the Burmese women crying. See, the British had had Moulmein before, and evidently the Burmese liked them; and when we came through, the women actually cried. They took us to the famous Moulmein Prison right next . . . just like in the "Road to Mandalay," there's the Moulmein Pagoda.

Marcello: Now, let's back up a minute. We're going too fast here.

Wright: All right, but that's the last water I got. The first water that I got was there in that jail.

Marcello: Okay, approximately how long did you go before you got water?

Wright: I can't really say. This is another area that I have kind of blanked out,and, also, I was so sore from being beat and having no attention whatsoever, even though there was a Dutch doctor . . . there was two Dutch doctors--Doctor Blumsma and Doctor Hekking--but there wasn't anything they could do for me because I was so damn beat up. I can't remember just how long it was from the time I got beat up and until we got into Rangoon. But I did find out where we were, because there was a sailor, and he said, "I know where we are." I said, "Where

are we?" He said, "We're in Rangoon, Burma." His name was Donald Brain. I said, "How do you know?" He said, "I used to live here." I said, "You lived here?" He said, "Well, up the river." He says, "I've been here any number of times. My dad was an oilman, so when I was a boy, I lived right here in Rangoon." That's when I found out where we were.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up to that beating again. I'm getting back to that beating one more time. Did you have any broken bones other than broken nose?

Wright: My cartilage in my nose was broken. My chest was caved in on one side more than it is the other, and it will always be that way.

Marcello: In other words, you have permanent injuries now from your beatings,

Wright: Oh, yes, sure.

Marcello: But you didn't have any broken ribs or anything?

Wright: Yes, well, I'm sure they were, but they healed.

Marcello: Did you ever have any medical attention at all for your broken nose?

Wright: No. I formed my nose back with my hands. I held it.

Marcello: How long did you have to hold it?

Wright: Oh, well, goddang, I really can't tell you now. But I just had to form it back with my hands. The inside of the thing is all screwed up, but I never would let them operate on it since

the war because a surgeon told me that it would probably cause me more problems than it's worth. So I just live with it.

Marcello: I assume that you had all sorts of problems breathing from that point on.

Wright: I sure have. I have a lot of trouble. In fact, I never got any money until the last four months. The whole time I never took a pension.

Marcello: This must have been one of the low points of your tenure as a prisoner-of-war, even though those things, of course, are very bad farther on up the road.

Wright: Yes. At first, I don't think there is anything worse than being thirsty, unless it's being seasick.

Marcello: What did it feel like to have this powerful thirst?

Wright: You dream crazy dreams in kind of a hazy, passed-out type of a deal, and you think of meadows and flowing fountains and spring water. You torture yourself. You get hallucinations; that's the only thing I could say. You're just like on the twilight of death, and you just wish you could go over the edge or something and be in heaven or something. That's what you think about.

Marcello: How does this powerful thirst affect you physically?

Wright: Oh, it drains you. My tongue was so thick that I could hardly breathe, and with a broken nose, you're gasping. It's . . .

I mean, it's just a pitiful piece of flesh that is still some way still hanging together.

Marcello: The Japanese are controlling the distribution of the water, so you can't get any.

Wright: Right. For some reason or other, they didn't prepare very well for this number of people. As hot as it is, certainly for 200 men that little dab of water is ridiculous, and you don't get that much out of rice. Besides that, I couldn't eat any rice, anyway. You know, this is the sad thing. In the beginning I could, but after I got beat up, I couldn't eat anything. But I was dying for water.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, the Japanese would actually dip out the water for the prisoners . . . or how did that work? Or did they simply supervise the distribution of the water?

Wright: No, they allowed us to take the water. I mean, we got that water for us. Our own people handled the water. They handled it that the sickest got water first--not a lot but a little. But with 200 people . . . everybody is just as thirsty as you are. You're no better than they are.

Marcello: They didn't consider you sick enough to have some water?

Wright: They did but then the Jap caught me.

Marcello: But that was only one time. How about the other time water was lowered down?

Wright: It was just like I said, I can't remember getting any water

after that. The first water I really remember after this whole thing is in Moulmein Prison when I borrowed a number three peach can and went down. I don't even remember getting a drop of water until then.

Marcello: Okay, so you finally land in Moulmein, Burma. I assume that you just stopped very briefly in that Rangoon?

Wright: That's right. We got in there and left . . . but we went on another ship.

Marcello: Oh, you got off of that ship and got on another ship?

Wright: We got off of that ship and got on another one. I don't remember why, but then we went down the Irrawaddy and then up the Salween River, which is over quite a way.

Marcello: Were you able to walk from one ship to the other?

Wright: Yes, yes, I was. I was very glad to do it, thinking that conditions would be better on the other ship.

Marcello: You couldn't get any water on this transfer?

Wright: You know, I might have got water, but if I did I don't remember it. It is a blank spot.

Marcello: Why was it that the Japanese didn't want you to drink any of that water dripping from the steam pipes?

Wright: I don't know except a rule was a rule, I guess. You can't understand their mentality. You would think that if they were short of water, they wouldn't mind us using steam pipe water, you know.

Marcello: Okay, so you get into Moulmein, and this is where you run into these Burmese civilians?

Wright: Yes. That was in getting to the prison, yes.

Marcello: You're going from the ship to the prison?

Wright: That's right, and I remember them very well. Some of them in perfect English were saying, "You poor things," and so forth. That was the first human sympathy that I had heard from someone . . . certainly not from the Japanese. We didn't sympathize with each other. But somebody else saying "You poor thing! Those terrible people--what they have done to you," it made you feel like, well, there are some people someplace . . . now, we are getting into a country that really cares about us. We fount out later on that they were in as bad a shape as we were.

Marcello: Did they try to slip you any food or anything of that nature?

Wright: Yes, they did. Yes, they did. As we were going through, they tried to slip us food. But I don't remember anything that night. Now, we didn't get into the Moulmein Prison until that night. But I do remember we got some when we left the Moulmein Prison going out to the railhead, you know, which is called Thanbyuzayat. We got a little something from the people from alongside the road there--I remember that--but not that night. I don't think the guards would let them give us anything that night.

Marcello: Where did you finally get your first water?

Wright: They had a well inside the prison, and generally all of the guys

were so tired they flopped out. I remember that I got that peach can and got it down in the well--but you can't drink that water until it was boiled--and I got it boiled and then trying to drink that hot water with my tongue and lips and everything, I didn't think it would ever cool down. Finally, I went into a place that I didn't know . . . I'm sure you heard this before, because there was other people in there as well. I slept in a leper ward the first night I was in there. They had a sign, but I didn't see it because it was dark. But when I got out the next morning and saw it was a leper ward, I wondered if I was going to get leprosy. But evidently, it had been a long time since they were in there.

Marcello: Where did you get your peach can?

Wright: I don't have the least idea. I borrowed it from somebody that let me use it. Well, I don't know if it was a peach can. I would say it was like a number three can. It might have had almost anything in there, because it had been used over a fire before. It had a little bale on it, and I got a string and put it down in the well and got water and pulled it out.

Marcello: Is it always easy to find materials to build a fire and so on?

Wright: Well, inside this jail . . . in fact, somebody else started that fire beside me. But in most cases we'd find some scraps of wood and so forth. But somebody else started that fire. I just got in on it. When somebody started a fire, anybody that would

come along would get in on it. That's the way it worked.

Marcello: It's amazing how you were still able to have combustible materials and so on. I'm referring to matches and things of that nature.

Wright: There were lighters. Believe it or not, they were still working. They would steal gasoline and put it in there. There was lighters still working years after being in prison camp. But lights were at a premium. In fact, later on we would take a can and punch a bunch of holes in it and have charcoal in it and from one camp to another you kept the fire going. It was precious.

Marcello: I assume that you were only in this jail a matter of a day or so.

Wright: That's right. But the thing that I will always remember about Moulmein Jail is that pagoda that was right next door. You know, in Kipling's poem, "The wind is in the palm trees and the mission bells . . . ." This pagoda had pieces of glass tied to wires that came off of this deal, and the wind came up in a particular time in the morning--about four or five o'clock in the morning--and as the wind came through here, it made the most weird sound, and the dogs in the town would start howling. You never heard such a din in all of your life as those dogs howling with the wind and the tinkling of the bells and whistling through this deal. It was a beautiful pagoda. It had real gold leaf on the pagoda. It was really

something to see. But that was our experience. We had deaths at Moulmein, too. A guy died. I don't think he was an American soldier. It was one of the Australians or somebody that died there.

Marcello: Did that number three can of water quench your thirst at least temporarily?

Wright: Oh, yes. I got some nourishment there, too. Now, somewhere, somebody got hold of some concentrated soup stock, and it was dried. I never will forget that they gave me a little of it. That was the most delicious-tasting . . . of course, it probably wasn't really in normal life, but it was to me. I was able to get a little of it into me, and it gave me a little strength that I needed.

Marcello: Now, did that water make the swelling of your tongue go down almost right away?

Wright: Oh, yes. I became a human being very shortly. I was still in bad shape, and I was in bad shape all the way to Thanbyuzayat and all of the way out. But I was able to do some walking; I had to. I had to walk.

Marcello: Okay, so you leave Moulmein, and your next step is Thanbyuzayat.

Wright: The next one is Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: In the meantime, your nose is broken; your chest is caved in; and you think you have leprosy.

Wright: Yes, that's right. I'm not too happy about my new home.

Marcello: How do you get from Moulmein to Thanbyuzayat?

Wright: I know we walked a great deal of the way, but it seems to me that we loaded on a train. Outside of Moulmein, we got on a train and went into Thanbyuzayat, which was called the railhead. That's where it all started from.

Marcello: Was this a relative short trip?

Wright: Yes, it wasn't too far. I guess it couldn't have been in mileage over fifteen or twenty miles from Moulmein to Thanbyuzayat. I think in kilos it was larger. It isn't really that far, but it seemed like a long way.

Marcello: Okay, so I gather that when you get to Thanbyuzayat, one of the first people that you run into is Colonel Nagatomo, who gives you a speech.

Wright: Yes,he does. First, of course, the English . . . this is where we meet the English, you know, and they're in charge of this deal, too. There are a number of Australians there as well, and they're pretty nice--the Australians.

But Nagatomo got us out there, and he gave us this famous speech that we were the rabble of the decayed democracy; that our leaders had got us into this awful fix; that he doesn't hate us but we have to pay for it. So we got to keep smiling through this whole business. I'm sure you have heard of this speech. You may have read it, because they have copies of this famous Nagatomo speech.

Marcello: I never have figured out how they got the copies of that speech.

Wright: I haven't either. Really, I have seen it from someplace. I wasn't near as interested in the speech when it was given as I was later on when I read what they said, because he gave it through an interpreter. Then we stayed there for a little while, and then we went to the famous 40 Kilo.

Marcello: You went right up to the 40 Kilo.

Wright: It was the end of the line, they called it.

Marcello: Why did you call it the "famous 40 Kilo?"

Wright: Well, I'll tell you, because we got out in the virgin jungle. We were the farthest group out on this side of the railroad. Of course, we didn't know it at the time, but there was another group working from the other side, and our job was to put up an embankment . . . in this country, generally, when we lay rails, we lay as we go along; but they knew the monsoon season was coming, and so they wanted this embankment to be put up and sodded with grass, so when the monsoons came, it wouldn't wash all of this out. They wanted that first, and then the rail crew would come in later on. So the 40 Kilo was almost our undoing.

Marcello: Now, was this camp already made or constructed for you when you got there?

Wright: I think it was. I think somebody else had done it, maybe the

Burmese or something. I think there was a rudiment of a camp there.

Marcello: What were your quarters like at 40 Kilo?

Wright: Well, it was open. But it was atap-type, you know, over the side. It seemed like even though the water was boiled and everything else, there was a hell of a lot of flies out there, and, boy, people started coming down with dysentery and started getting sick almost immediately. The work was hard.

Marcello: Do you have open-pit latrines there?

Wright: Yes, it was open latrines and flies like you've never seen before. We weren't the only ones there; they had English there and Dutch there and Australians there as well as we were.

Marcello: How did you sleep or where did you sleep in this camp?

Wright: You slept five to a bay, they called it there. You had approximately twenty-four inches, just about, per man, and you slept right together, and you had five to a bay. That's where these poles came down through the deal. It was split bamboo laying across.

Okay, when I first got in . . . I was pretty tired at night when I come in from work, so I would sack out. The only place you could bathe was a little creek that run down through there, and we had running water down there. I came down with dysentery after I got there. I was working on the railroad, too.

One of my first experiences I think I should tell, because

I think it's funny. We were laying there one night, and I felt something going over me, and I thought somebody had thrown a leg or something over me, and I reached down and said, "Get your doggone leg off of me!" It didn't work like that. It was a python. It was a long son-of-a-gun. So I jumped up and yelled, "Snake!!" Boy, I'll tell you, it sounded like a machine gun going off, because of those guys hitting that bamboo. So he had climbed up in the top atap, you know, in the cross pieces up there.

A Dutchman heard that we had a python up there. He said, "Don't let him get away! Don't let him get away!" Well, hell, I didn't want nothing to do with the son-of-a-gun, and so he reached up there and got hold of the python's tail and pulled the son-of-a-gun down, and he had a machete, and he said, "I'll show you how to do it! I'll show you!" He cut this snake's head off. Then he takes the knife and cuts a ridge all around, and then at the same time he's pulling this snake-deal, and it's just like taking a woman's hose off. He took the snake's skin completely off. He's got entrails inside of him, a ribcage and everything; and he's got an animal in him. The gastric juices of those pythons are so strong that I got a little of it on my skin, and it took the pigment right out of my skin.

So one of the guys had made a skillet out of a fender of

a Chevrolet, and so they had grease , you know, fat, from this python, so we fried that sucker up and had it for breakfast. It was good eating. So that was one experience there at the 40 Kilo.

Marcello: Do you always have fires going at each end of the barracks to keep animals and all sorts of critters out?

Wright: Yes. I got a story to tell you about the fire, too! I had dysentery, I think I told you. I got dysentery and it was bacillary dysentery and this high motions, and I am going like a son-of-a-gun and feeling bad again. So we had a fire, too.

Marcello: You call these "high motions?"

Wright: I had lots of going to the latrine. So we put a fire up there because, you know, those damn Limeys were crapping on the trail going up there, and you would step in it. Them doggone son-of-a-guns!

Marcello: You're barefooted, anyhow.

Wright: Yes, you're barefooted, anyway, so we had a fire up there, too. So I was up there relieving myself, and a damn tiger . . . I saw his eyes that big (gesture) looking into the fire. I'll tell you, when he passed by that fire, I guess he smelled me because that would drive him off more than a gun. But he passed me like a freight train going by--he was that long. You know something, that's the best cure in the world for dysentery. I was so damn scared, boy, I didn't go back outside that night,

you know.

Marcello: I've heard of people getting the crap scared out of them, but in that case it didn't.

Wright: That's right. This is where we got our famous Doctor Hekking. I'm sure that you have heard of other fellows speak of him. But Jimmy Lattimore and Captain Fitzsimmons traded the Japanese two wristwatches--Jimmy Lattimore's watch and one that Fitzsimmons had--and we got Dr. Hekking. Before that, all we had was an Australian dietician, and he didn't know for nothing. But we got him, and he was the one that really started all kinds of things to help us out.

Marcello; Now, do you mean that you bribed this Japanese officer to have Hekking transferred into your camp?

Wright: That's right. Now, he was in a Dutch camp with a lot of doctors; he and Bloemsa and a number of other Dutchmen were all in one camp. They had more doctors than they needed.

Marcello: In 40 Kilo or in some other camps?

Wright: No, no, in a different camp down the road.

Marcello: How did they find out that he was down there?

Wright: Well, we knew he was on the ship, but I don't think that we asked the Japanese for a particular doctor. We told them that we needed a doctor, and Dr. Hekking--I found out later--volunteered to come out and help the Australians and the Americans and so forth. He was a real man. He wanted to help us.

Marcello: What were some of the remedies that he came up with to cope with these tropical diseases in spite of a lack of medicine?

Wright: Well, I can tell you quite a bit about it, because later on I became his medical orderly along with a guy by the name of "Torpedo" Hanley. Anyway, some of them . . . say, for instance, on dysentery, he used ground-up charcoal, and he used a type of clay to absorb some of the mucus. First, he would want to know which dysentery you had, whether it would be amoebic or bacillary. Then he had some lousy creosote tablets, but they weren't worth a darn; that's about all he had there. Then later, for ulcers, when a man hurt himself and got an ulcer, he used the scalpel method where he dug out the ulcer; and he used a tea poultice to clean it up. He used also gasoline like you would for alcohol. They used leaves and the latex around the leaves to cover it--to keep the flies from blowing it and so forth. So he used all kinds of methods: gasoline for alcohol; kapok for cotton; leaves for bandages; and latex to make it stick on.

Marcello: As an adhesive, so to speak.

Wright: Yes, as an adhesive. He used all kinds of stuff. He was the first man that I ever heard of that treated a man as a unit. Now, he claimed that man had to be cured two ways: the body is only a small part of it; the mind is important as well.

So he cured the mind and the body together. He was using psychosomatic medicine before I ever heard of anybody else ever using it. Also, he was using the mold from a palmetto in lieu of . . . we found out later that mold was penicillin. Well, he was using that, and he said his grandmother used it years before that, you know, on ulcers.

Marcello: He was using the mold from a palmetto?

Wright: Yes, which is like a grapefruit or a citrus fruit. The Indonesians called them "silver dimes," you know. Where they got that "silver dime" from . . . in this country, we used to call two nickels a dime. I never knew that they called dimes anything over in the Orient, but that's what they called them--"silver dimes."

Marcello: It was Hekking that also devised a method of scraping out that rotten flesh that you mentioned awhile ago with the sharpened spoon.

Wright: Yes, we called it the scalpel method, and the anesthetic is where the doctor yells louder than the patient. Not at this time, because I was a dead loss, as we said, but later on I became his medical orderly.

Marcello: How did you pick up dysentery?

Wright: I don't know. Really, I don't know. I just started getting high motions after everything else that I had gone through. Then Dr. Hekking sent me from the 40 Kilo to Thanbyuzayat,

where they had what they called the "Death Ward" down there. The reason why they called it the "Death Ward" is because people went in there, and they come out dead.

Marcello: In other words, your dysentery was bad enough at 40 Kilo that you were sent back to Thanbyuzayat?

Wright: Yes. There were a few others that went back before I did . . . like, Kenney went back, and we had a Marine by the name of Lloyd Willey that went blind in Singapore, and he . . . well, he wasn't completely blind. You could be standing there, and he would see an outline, but he couldn't recognize you.

Marcello: What sort of food were you getting here at 40 Kilo?

Wright: It was very poor--very poor food.

Marcello: What did it consist of?

Wright: A little rice and a little pumpkin and a little melon--it looked like a watermelon. They gave you quite a bit of that, but there wasn't no food value to it. So between dysentery and everything else, hell, we were going downhill bad and in a hurry. In fact, I went first, but later on they moved that whole group out of that camp to another camp closer down.

Marcello: Talk about the work detail that you went on here at 40 Kilo.

Wright: Well, I didn't work on the railroad too long there, but it was all . . . they would give you so much dirt to move, and you had to do it before you come in. It was hard work because

your materials that you had to work with was very poor. You had to move that stuff out of the side of the railroad up onto the banks. It was long, hard hours of work.

Marcello: So you must have been making a fill here, so to speak, is that correct?

Wright: No, you cut the dirt from the sides, and you . . . yes, it was a fill. You put it up on an embankment.

Marcello: You're either making cuts or making fills.

Wright: Yes, cuts and fills. We worked on these all the way through.

Marcello: As you mentioned, this was all done in a very primitive manner.

Wright: Right.

Marcello: Pick-and-shovel work.

Wright: Yes, right. Right, it was very hard work. That's where . . . you mentioned this Stensland, Roy Stensland or "Bull" Stensland. This man had engineering know-how.

Marcello: Did he come in handy here at 40 Kilo here again?

Wright: Yes. He was with us, and, of course, he helped us with the Japanese guards, because he would tell them what to do. Not like the Bridge Over the River Kwai, where the colonel was dying to build it, but in a different way. He was . . . I mean, in helping us perform our tasks without dying, well, he helped us tremendously.

Marcello: About how long did you personally work on that particular section of the railroad?

Wright: I can't remember how long I worked, but it wasn't that long. I don't think it was over . . . it was a wonder I got out there and worked one day. I would have worked longer, but I was in very sorry condition.

Marcello: What time would you start that detail?

Wright: Oh, we would start before sunup in the morning, and we would get back, by golly, just about nightfall.

Marcello: Now, when you first started that detail, were you able to fulfill your quota in record time, so to speak?

Wright: No, we never were that good. Now, some individuals were, but as a whole, we were always in trouble from the very beginning. I didn't work that much on the railroad, but the guys died like flies on that.

Marcello: Now, who determined when a man was sick enough that he should not go out on a work detail?

Wright: Dr. Hekking. You went before Dr. Hekking, and he said that you shouldn't go out. Then you could stay there. But the Japanese came along, and if they didn't have their quota of men out on the outfit, they took you whether you were sick or not. In fact, many times Dr. Hekking got the hell beat out of him, and other doctors as well, because they tried to keep the sick men in, because they knew what it was doing to them.

Marcello: In other words, the ultimate decision as to whether or not you

would work was made by an ignorant Japanese or Korean guard who had no knowledge of medicine whatsoever?

Wright: No medical background whatsoever, that's right.

Marcello: By this time, that is, by the time you get to the 40 Kilo Camp, do you have the Korean guards?

Wright: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Describe the Korean guards.

Wright: Well, the difference, . . actually, the Korean was much more brutal than the Japanese. Why, he was . . . one time a Korean told me. He said that the Russians and the Japanese were fighting each other. Okay, so he was a pawn in the whole deal. He had nothing to do with that damn thing. But, anyway, the Japanese won, and America went and stuck their nose in it, and then they ended up under the Japanese. They claimed that the Japanese were brutal to them. All right, they feel in part that it was our fault that they got into this mess, and, of course, the Russo-Japanese war happened many, many years ago. But, anyway, we got it in the neck because of something that happened before they were ever born. It was our fault, so we had been getting it ever since. Now, we're friends of them. But I swear that the Korean was worse than the Japanese.

Marcello: How did their treatment of the prisoners differ from that of the Japanese guards?

Wright: They would storm through and just indiscriminately beat up people. They didn't have any compassion . . . well, I wouldn't say that the Japanese had that much compassion for us either, but it seemed like they went out of their way to give us a bad time.

Marcello: This is the Koreans?

Wright: That's right.

Marcello: What were some of the things that they would do to the prisoners?

Wright: Well, in particular, out on details, if they didn't think a man was moving fast enough, they beat him up with a bamboo pole and gave him more work to do than he could do. They were just that way all the way through.

Marcello: Who are you chumming with at this particular time?

Wright: Well, at the 40 Kilo Camp, I can't remember that I was chumming with anybody. Of course, my group was . . . well, there was a number from Jack County that I was very close to. Then, too, there were a number of them from C Battery that had come over to F Battery, and I was good friends with them. But mostly it was within our own battery. There were other people there as well. These 200 men were made up of D, F, Headquarters, Service, but mostly E Battery. Of course, all of E Battery had been on the end of the island. That's a complete different story. But in Thanbyuzayat, I got to be friends with

Australians and Americans as well down there.

Marcello: What keeps you going at this stage?

Wright: Well, I'll tell you, I was just kind of wandering there at 40 Kilo. I never will forget one time when I went through sick call with Dr. Hekking. He told me something that I already knew--that I stunk, I needed a bath, and that I ought to go take a bath.

Marcello: Were you beginning to give up at this point?

Wright: Yes, I was very down. It was a long way from the camp down to this creek. So I took his advice, and I started walking down, and I'd lay on the side of the road, you know--a trail was what it was, no road--because the cooks had to go down there for water, and they had to "yo-ho" the water back on a pole in a fifty-five-gallon drum that was cut off.

So I don't know how many times I laid down going down there, but I got down there. I got in the creek . . . and I was skin and bones, you know. So it refreshed me. But, hell, by the time I got back to camp, I had had to lay down on the road, you know, and the dust got on me and everything. So I was dirty when I got back, but it was clean dirt (chuckle).

Marcello: You smelled better,anyway.

Wright: Yes. Doc Hekking did a number of things there at 40 Kilo before he sent me down to the base camp at Thanbyuzayat. He used to get these guys to argue with each other, and he said

it was good for them.

Marcello: In other words, he would get guys to argue who otherwise were about to give up.

Wright: Yes, they were just laying there. In fact, I seen some guys that would just barely have enough strength to hit the other guy a little bit, and then the other would hit him back. He used to say that it helped pepped them up--kept them stimulated, in other words.

Marcello: I assume that you did not come down with any tropical ulcers here at 40 Kilo.

Wright: Yes, I did, too, but not big ones. Like I said, my biggest ulcer wasn't that big (gesture), but Dr. Hekking got hold of it.

Marcello: In other words, it was about as big as your thumbnail?

Wright: Yes, about as big as my thumbnail, so he got it. But we did have some people that had got them that big . . . like osteomyelitis. Like, Glen Self had osteomyelitis, a bone disease, and he had to be operated on. I got many, many tales on men like that.

Marcello: Did you see men use the method where they put maggots into thse tropical ulcers to eat out the dead flesh?

Wright: No, our group didn't do that. However, I did see where the guys would go in the creek, and these little minnows would eat the diseased flesh. But Hekking was unique. With his

attention, we were so much better off than the other group that was right in the same area that we were.

Marcello: That must have been a tremendous physical and psychological burden upon Hekking, also.

Wright: If you talk to the men as you go along, you'll never find one--at least I never found one--that said one little bad thing against Dr. Hekking. In fact, so many men have said, "Without Dr. Hekking I would have died. He saved my life." I can say that not once; but I can say it many times that he saved me.

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

Wright: Well, we did have a few that did give up. The strangest thing is that some of the men that gave up were the men that were in the beginning the strongest. We had a Marine first sergeant by the name of H.H. Dupler, one of the finest people. It still today hurts me that a man of his stature and everything and brains and everything . . . the Japanese beat him up in front of his own troops, and he "packed in." He must have gone a little Oriental like we all do, because I don't think any of us are the same. We'll never be the same because of our experience. Certainly, I think Dupler lost face. That's an old Japanese expression but he did--he lost face right there and "packed in."

Marcello: How could you tell when a man had given up? What were the signs

or the symptoms?

Wright: No fight. Insult him and he would take it. You know, it's easy as hell to die, but it's hard to live. It really is; it's really hard. A man can give up and go very quickly. Without the will to live, without that spark, you lost it.

Marcello: I understand they refused to eat, also.

Wright: That's right. Dupler refused to eat. I weighed eighty-some-odd pounds at one time, and Dupler weighed less than I did, and he was a man that, I'm sure, was 190 to 200 pounds.

Marcello: What was your top weight?

Wright: In prison camp?

Marcello: No.

Wright: In the eighties.

Marcello: No, what was your normal weight?

Wright: Oh, I went into the service at 139 pounds, and I got down in my eighties.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned that you got so sick here at 40 Kilo Camp that Hekking did send you back to Thanbyuzayat once again.

Wright: He sent me down to Thanbyuzayat, and they put me into the "Death Ward," and I got a wonderful Dutch doctor down there by the name of Dr. Stein. Believe it or not, he is a contemporary of Dr. Hekking's and a friend of his;and I told him Dr. Hekking was my doctor, and he told me what a fine man he was, and we were lucky to have him. But the only thing, I was never

. . . here I am--depressed again, very depressed. As a nature, I am a very happy-go-lucky man, and I see the bright side of everything. But I get inside this hut, and they got these mosquito nets which we were lucky to have, and then the bottom of the thing would be of a blue material. It was dark as heck and had very little air circulating through there. This ward is loaded with very, very sick men, all with dysentery.

Marcello: It must have smelled great.

Wright: Oh, the stink was something awful! The food . . . what you got was what the Dutch called "pap." It's like broken rice with a few little pieces of vegetables in it, but it was a gummy substance. The worse thing was that there was nobody around you who feels like talking, and they're depressed.

You're so weak. When I got down and couldn't get to the latrine, that's when I got scared! I got scared to death! I am pooping on myself, and it's running down my leg. I was begging for something to clean myself up with, because I can't live like that. The mental depression that you go through when you have dysentery is as bad on your mind as it is on your bowels. My anus turned wrong side out because it lost its elasticity, and I couldn't control it or tighten it up to stop the flow. This is depressing, and it stinks, and I am a miserable human being and I am going to die. But

I am trying to live.

Marcello: This dysentery just makes you so weak that you can't do anything. You can't move.

Wright: That's right, but I had . . . I wish to God I could tell you his name; I wish to God I knew where he lived. There was an Australian, and they called him "Blue," and he had red hair. He came in there and talked to me, and he said, "Yank, what you need is something . . .some 'tucker' in your belly." I said, "I sure do." He said, "I'm going to sneak you in something to eat."

Marcello: Now, was this Australian in fairly good health?

Wright: He was skinny as hell with this scrawny red hair, and they called him "Blue." I couldn't tell you his name. But, anyway, without anybody knowing it, he brought in some fried pumpkin, some tomatoes, and something else. I don't know what it was, but it was all fried up . . . oh, little fried rice is what it was. I ate that and I felt better; I got a little strength. So then he come by, and I said, "Boy, that did the trick! That helped me out like you never saw before!" He said, "If I could get you out of here, I could cure you." That's what this little Australian told me. He said, "I'll bring you some more." So he did--he brought in some more. But why he come in that place with all that stink and everything and all of these . . . and most of them were Dutch in there, and no

Americans that I can remember . . .just me.

Marcello: I wonder why he singled you out?

Wright: I don't know. He liked Yanks, he said. Well, anyway, he got me a little more to eat and everything. Then Dr. Stein came by, and I lied to him. He asked me, "How are you doing, 'Sloop?'" He called me "Sloop" instead of "Slug." He called me "Sloop" because he never could understand this "Slug" deal. I was named after this Bob Burns deal, not a worm, and this Dutchman couldn't understand why a nice guy like me would be called after a worm.

Well, anyway, I told him I was better. He said, "You get better, and I'll transfer you out of here. How many motions have you had?" I said, "I am barely going! I'm barely going!" Like hell! I'd been going like a son-of-a-gun.

Marcello: Why did you lie to him?

Wright: I wanted to get out of there. I thought I might have a fighting chance if I could get out of that place. I felt that if I didn't get out of there, I was going to die in there.

Marcello: Besides, you had thought about what"Blue"had told you?

Wright: Yes,what he told me. He said if I got out of there, he'd get me well. I got out of there. They discharged me. I got out of there, and he took me over, and he got me two rice sacks between a pole, and where the two rice sacks came together, he left open. I got a bath and I got cleaned up good and

everything, but I was still going. But, by golly, I started getting better.

Marcello: In other words, you were lying on these rice sacks and defecating right through this hole.

Wright: Right through the hole, you know. Then they had ashes over there, and they were throwing the ashes on it and then burying it. Old "Blue" was doing all of the work. Hell, I couldn't get around. He had to carry me from the hospital.

But from then on, I started getting my strength back. By golly, one beautiful thing about bacillary dysentery . . . it's not like amoebic. You either die or you start getting better. With amoebic dysentery, it goes into your liver, and if you don't get proper medical care for it, you have it for the rest of your life. Some of the boys are still suffering.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I started getting a little stronger, and then an old Australian gave me a job. There is all kinds of rackets inside this prison camp, and he put me over . . . he had some coconut oil, and he had some rice bars. We would deep-fry these rice bars and then bring it up and then put a sugar coating around it, and then I sold them things for twenty cents apiece. He paid me a dollar a day. Do you know what a dollar a day is good for? Two eggs! I ate two eggs a day while working for that Australian. I

started coming out of it. I never was strong, but from going from death's doorstep . , . and, boy, I was there! I couldn't walk very good.

Oh, another thing I had was beriberi. You get that from dysentery, you know. I had beriberi bad, so my legs . . . I had dry beriberi that my balls--excuse the expression--got awfully big, you know, almost the size of a grapefruit. But I started coming out of it. When they bombed Thanbyuzayat, Colonel Fisher had seen me one day selling these candy bars. They had a little money that they would use to buy the sick some eggs. So I had been buying my own eggs, like I told you. He saw me--he knew me--and he said, "'Slug,' how are you doing?" I told him, "I'm getting there." He knew how bad of shape I was in. He said, "Who's your doctor?" I said, "Dr. Stein." He said, "I want you to give Dr. Stein my compliments and tell him I want to put you on three eggs a day." Do you know what three eggs a day are? That is the most <u>wonderful</u> thing that can ever happen to a human being.

So what they did, since I was out of that sick ward . . . and I was out of the sack over there by "Blue." I was in a regular ward now, but I was on bamboo. I could maneuver around. The day they brought in my three eggs, we had a bombing raid. Do you know where one of the bombs hit? My bunk! I lost everything I had except my glasses and mess kit--every

damn thing I had. From then on, all I had was a gunny sack, G-string, a Chevrolet hubcap, and I had a spoon made out of coconut. That's all I owned in this world. Just think, I almost got three eggs a day. That really would have been . . . but I was in better shape. With that bombing, we had to evacuate this camp.

Marcello: Now, where did you get the eggs?

Wright: Well, what happened, every officer got paid a wage from the Japanese. The enlisted men didn't. Any man that worked on the railroad was supposed to get that, but very seldom, if ever, did we ever get paid. The wage was twenty-five cents a day when they got it, but they didn't get it often. Officers were supposed to get the same amount of pay that a Japanese officer got, but the Japanese deducted room and board from this amount of money. The money that they did get, they were assessed so much money that went into a fund that was used to buy a few little things for the sick, like eggs and things like that. In Thanbyuzayat they used it for eggs.

Marcello: Again, where did you buy the eggs? Was it from native traders?

Wright: Believe it or not, they had somewhat of a commissary. I mean, this fund was able to go out on the market and get stuff. Now, we had . . . not a commissary. I shouldn't say that; that isn't the right word for it. But there was a little village right outside of Thanbyuzayat where they went for water--they

had a well--and there were all kinds of curry powders and everything else, so the guys used to buy it down there when they went out on details.

Marcello: The Japanese allowed this to happen?

Wright: They allowed a certain amount of that to happen. The guys would trade, say, a razor or something that they owned for money, so that's where some of the money came from.

Marcello: How would you eat these eggs? In other words, would you hard-boil them?

Wright: Hard-boil them and put them on rice. The only eggs I got--I didn't get any of the free eggs--I got for working for this Australian selling this "camouflaged rice," is what I used to call it.

Marcello: It's ironic, in a way, when I think about it. You know, today many doctors say that you shouldn't eat so many eggs because of all the cholesterol, and the eggs are the things that perhaps brought you through this whole mess.

Wright: Yes. Protein is something that you just have to have. One lucky thing that we did get . . . if we could get the semi-polished rice, you could survive. If we got the polished rice, you would die because there is not enough vitamin B_1 in it.

Marcello: How many air raids did you come under here at Thanbyuzayat?

Wright: Well, I'll tell you about one experience that I had now. They

were bombing the railroad, and so, as weak as I was, I got outside this hut and I dug myself a slit trench, which was about four feet deep and about two feet wide. I did a good job. A lot of the guys wouldn't do nothing, but I did it. But this day that they really bombed the hell out of us, I was on the other side of the camp. But there was an ammunition dump down there, and when the planes started coming over, I wanted to get away from the ammunition dump, but I can't maneuver that fast. In fact, I couldn't step across a gully that high (gesture). I had to put one foot down, and then I couldn't . . . so I started moving from that other place all the way across the camp.

Okay, I got over there, and you know my slit trench that I dug? It was loaded! I can't even get in my own slit trench! So I was up there abusing the heck out of these guys. I said, "You sons-of-bitches, make room for me! I dug that damn thing!" I'm really scared. That's also in that book, Behind Bamboo. So anyway, I couldn't get in it.

So I started off, and a damn bomb hit and I hit the deck. If this would have been a concussion bomb, I mean, if it would have exploded when it hit the surface of the ground, I would be dead. I wouldn't be standing here. But that thing went down.

Marcello: It was a delayed-action bomb?

Wright: Yes. Then when it went off, it came up like a "V". But that

didn't do that poor old chest of mine and all of this other business that I had . . . I couldn't hear. It seems like I am always at the wrong place at the wrong time. I should have stayed out there by the ammunition dump. Anyway, I was so scared, and it's hard to tell you how scared I was. I told you I wasn't scared in Java, and I wasn't. But I was sure in the hell scared in these bombing raids.

Marcello: I would assume that the bombing raids over Thanbyuzayat were being carried out by more planes and bigger planes dropping more bombs and bigger bombs.

Wright: They were. That's right. Those Liberators, they used to come down low and just strafe. I didn't like those .50-caliber machine guns. You move out on this side of the tree, and it seems like you'd have to keep going because they would get you on the tail gunner, you know. But at Thanbyuzayat it seemed like they were hitting all over the place with bombs.

Marcello: How frequently would these raids occur?

Wright: Pretty often. In fact, it was so bad in Thanbyuzayat that we built a big red cross. The Japanese finally allowed us to build . . .take red sand and make this big red cross. You know something? They came over and put a bomb right in the middle of that damn thing. They didn't believe them. Later, I talked to some of the Air Force people, and they didn't know who we were. As far as they were concerned, we were natives.

We had no clothes; we were brown as we could be. We looked just like natives. It wasn't their fault, but they bombed the hell out of us.

Marcello: Would these raids occur several times a week?

Wright: Yes, yes. In fact, one time they came over, and they dropped out chandeliers--what I call a chandelier--light flares on parachutes, and then they really bombed the heck out of us.

We had an American by the name of Kenney that I had volunteered to help any time I could. He was paralyzed. He had beriberi so bad, and he couldn't speak. They dropped a bomb, and it shook him up so bad that when his bunk fell, he said, "Goddamn son-of-a-bitch!" That was the first word he said for over a year. I had run into him at this reunion, and that son-of-a-gun is this big (gesture), and he's got a fat face. This guy is fine, and he said, "'Slug,' I want you to meet my wife and tell her all about me." I said, "Kenney, it's hard for me to believe you're alive!" It wasn't me that saved him, though. It was Charlie Pryor that massaged him and kept him going. But it must have been something psychological, too, as well as the beriberi. When he got that shock, he started getting well after that.

Marcello: Are the Japanese putting up any resistance to these air raids?

Wright: No, only some Bofor guns that they stole from the English when they surrendered in Burma and so forth. But there's not one

Japanese aircraft, so there's when I knew things started looking better. All our planes were going over. They were coming out of India.

Marcello: As frightful as those air raids were, I guess they must have been a morale booster, then, to you?

Wright: Yes, they were. In fact, they damn near got us in trouble. Down from Thanbyuzayat, it wasn't too far from the coast. Of course, Lord Mountbatten was in charge of that operation, and one time he came in there and shelled the coast on a moonlight night. It was an old saying by the British that when they get a good moonlight night and shell the coast, they were getting ready for an invasion. They were ready to go down there and meet them! It's a good thing we didn't because they shoved off after shelling the damn coast. We were going to take the Japanese on. I mean, we could get ourselves in real serious trouble.

Marcello: You're probably getting a little itchy now. You must be thinking that the war might be soon over.

Wright: Yes, but it wasn't. After the bombing at Thanbyuzayat, we had the famous "Death Walk" of our own. You heard of the one in the Philippines, but we had one out of Thanbyuzayat that would make that other one look silly because we had already been prisoners-of-war a long time. This is strictly a hospital camp; everybody there is sick. If they are not sick,

they are supposed to go back to the railroad with the exception of medical orderlies and doctors. When the Japanese told us that we were going to move, and that they didn't have the facilities to take us and that we would walk out of there, that's when I don't know how many people died. Because I walked out with this Rivett that wrote Behind Bamboo and carried his stuff out of that camp, and he was in worse shape that I was. He tells about that "Death Walk" out of Thanbyuzayat. I think he does an excellent job at it, but it sure didn't do me any good.

Marcello: What was the Japanese reaction after one of these air raids would occur? Did they take out their retribution on the prisoners?

Wright: Yes, they did. In fact, I don't know who could get out of that camp faster--the Japanese or us. They used to act like they were chasing us, but they didn't hinder our speed in getting out of there at all. They were just as anxious to get out of the camp as we were, because they knew that they was going to bomb,

Marcello: Did they seem to be nastier towards the prisoners as a result of these raids?

Wright: When the raids were over, they were so nasty! Boy, I'll tell you, they were nasty! They didn't treat us any nicer because of our planes bombing them. Their officers must have told them some beautiful lies, that's all I can say. If I was a

Japanese soldier, I would have wanted to know, "Where are our airplanes?" In fact, I used to needle the hell out of these Koreans, you know. I would say in Japanese, "There's a lot of airplanes going over! American airplanes! Where are the Japanese airplanes?" "No, no, none." I'd say, "What happened?" Oh, they didn't like that at all. But you couldn't do too much needling, you know (chuckle). They couldn't take it.

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that you are forced to march out of this camp.

Wright: Right.

Marcello: It's evacuated.

Wright: Right.

Marcello: Why don't you describe this march.

Wright: Well, this march was pitiful. Actually, the first march we made was only about eight kilos, approximately five miles, and that isn't too far. But we were sick.

Marcello: But you still have some remnants of dysentery; you have beriberi; your chest, I'm sure, is still hurting you; your nose is still pushed in, so to speak. You're in a hell of a shape, even though you're not as bad as you were.

Wright: My dysentery is not as bad as my ability to walk. Now, my trouble is this beriberi that I got. That is where my problem is. This is the biggest problem that I got facing me, and I

can only make short steps.

Marcello: In other words, again, this is because your testicles were swollen to the point where you could only take these short steps.

Wright: My legs were in terrible shape. Energy I don't have, and how we made it to the 8 Kilo Camp is beyond me. But one thing that saved me was the tastiest drink that I ever had. We talked about this sweetened cream earlier in our interview. He pulled out a can of sweetened cream, and he split it between myself, himself, and another Australian.

Marcello: Who is "he?"

Wright: This was Rivett, who wrote Behind Bamboo. By the way, he's got that in his story, too. It's documented in his story. That was probably the tastiest thing that I had, and I don't know why but that one-third of a can of sweetened cream really gave me a lift.

But that trip--that walk--was dreadful to me more for what I saw. You know, if a man has any feelings at all, he'll have it for somebody else other than himself. When I see somebody that is going to die on you . . . . and it was needless for him to die. All he needs is a helping hand, and I can't give it to him. You just feel so damn helpless. Man's inhumanity to man is terrible! The Japanese . . . it didn't have to happen to these people. It was

almost like they were getting even with us for being bombed.

Marcello: Are the Japanese being brutal on this march?

Wright: No. I can't say they went around beating up people, because they weren't moving fast enough. That they did, I understand, on the famous Bataan Death March. But they were hurrying us, but they knew they would kill them in that 8 Kilo march. It killed them by the droves. They had no business . . . they should have been put in a truck or something and moved, you know. They could have done it easy, but they weren't going to waste the gasoline on a bunch of good-for-nothing POW's.

Marcello: I'm sure that they probably didn't have too many people guarding you. It wouldn't have taken that many.

Wright: No, there weren't that many guards along. But some of the British and Australians seems to have a little rejuvenation from getting out and doing the walk. In some way, they got the internal strength to do it.

Marcello: What happened to people who dropped by the wayside?

Wright: They left them there dead. What happened to them, I don't know. Some of them died right away, and some of them were laying there. Now, I would have hoped that they could have got some natives with some carts or something to bring them along. Some of those people, I don't know what happened to

them, what happened to their bodies, or anything. Later on, some of the stronger men from up the camp . . . the Japanese brought them down there to the railhead and had them working in the yards, and they told me that a lot of those guys had been buried down there in a cemetery in Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: How did you manage to make it?

Wright: I made it all the way to 8 Kilo, and I stayed there for little while, and then I was returned to the Fitzsimmons group,where Captain Fitzsimmons then sent me down to work with Doctor Hekking, and "Torpedo" Hanley. The first job they gave me down there was cleaning up the patients and getting underneath the slats. It wasn't that hard of a job.

Marcello: Okay, let's just stop here for a minute. How long did it take you to go from Thanbyuzayat to the 8 Kilo Camp?

Wright: From Thanbyuzayat to 8 Kilo Camp took all one day. That was that five-mile deal there.

Marcello: How long did you remain at 8 Kilo?

Wright: I wasn't down there but two or three days, and then I got a ride from there--I didn't have to walk--to the 26 or 36 Kilo. I can't remember which one of those camps it was, because I was in such bad shape that I can't remember all of the details. But I did get a ride.

Marcello: When you got to 8 Kilo, did you simply flop down for two days,

so to speak?

Wright: I didn't maneuver too much, but I had to move around a little bit most of the time I was there because there was no camp . . . I mean, this is just a place; I mean, this was just a place that we call 8 Kilo. There was no shelter or anything, you know. You laid just out in the grass and so forth.

Marcello: What gear do you have with you by this time?

Wright: I didn't have any gear except a hubcap, a gunny sack, a G-string, and that's all. In fact, the rest of the time I was in prison camp, all I owned is glasses, G-strings, a hubcap, and that's all I owned.

Marcello: Okay, so you were at 8 Kilo for a couple of days, and then you moved up to either the 26th or the 36th Kilo Camp, where you rejoin Dr. Hekking.

Wright: That's right. Like I said, Captain Fitzsimmons couldn't use me out on the road, and so he sent me down to work with Hekking. I stayed down there and helped serve the men their meals. But I really wasn't a medical orderly at that time. I was more of a helper. I mean, I just cleaned up men. Somebody had to do it, and I didn't mind doing it. Then "Torpedo" Hanley got moved out, and then when he moved out, then I helped Doc.

Marcello: Now, was 36 Kilo a working camp as such? Were there working

parties going out and working on the railroad?

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: That's interesting because you started out on 40 Kilo.

Wright: I started at 40 Kilo and then came back two camps. My group . . .I don't know how many times they were moved along the railroad doing railroad work.

Marcello: Now,the second group came in and started at 18 Kilo, didn't it?

Wright: That's right. They came in and we were that close together, and we didn't see each other--that close. They had some terrible times, but we didn't see them.

Marcello: Now, by the time you're here at 36 or 26 Kilo, has the so-called "Speedo" campaign begun?

Wright: Yes. Oh, yes!

Marcello: It has been started.

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: You were in this in the monsoons, too?

Wright: That's right.

Marcello: What was it like during the monsoons season?

Wright: Well, I'll tell you, I have seen guys get up that had blankets, and one would get on each end and squeeze out the blankets and get back in under the blankets.

I had seen water come down like you couldn't believe. In the dry season, it was so dry you could dig down forty

or fifty feet and couldn't hit water; and if you did, it would be just a little handful of muddy water down there. Then in the monsoon season, there was just so damn much water, like 300 inches. Now, 300 inches of water just doesn't seem possible, like, down here in Texas where you would not get that kind of rainfall.

You have raging rivers. I never will forget one detail that I did go on about this time. They had me working on . . . this was much later. They had me working on this detail carrying stuff across this river. An Australian and I were working together. I lost my footing--there was water on my glasses and everything else--and I fell off of this doggone bridge into this roaring torrent of water. The luckiest damn thing . . . I don't even remember what happened until something hit me in the stomach. I hit a sandbar that was downstream a ways. I was able to pull myself out of this current; otherwise, I would have drowned. I worked myself up and that Australian was yelling, "'Slug,' you dirty bastard! Where are you?" I said, "I'm coming!" He said, "Where have you been?" I told him that I fell off. He says, "The Japanese are raising hell because I'm not carrying something." I said, "You know where I've been?" He said, "No." I said, "I went off into the dang river and damn near drowned, and here you're up here yelling!"

We had some terrible experiences like that. But now that I look back on them, I think they're kind of amusing. But at the time it wasn't at all (chuckle).

Marcello: So everything is wet during the monsoon season?

Wright: Oh, you are just wet to the bone. Your feet and your hands is just like staying in the water for a couple of days. It was just wrinkled, you know, and then fungus gets in there, and you get all kinds of athlete's feet. You're trying to help these people out, and it was a sad situation, it really was.

Marcello: How did this "Speedo" campaign affect things?

Wright: Well, of course, the Japanese worked these poor son-of-a-guns . . . I wasn't on the railroad, but I was doctoring them with Dr. Hekking. It was pitiful. They would come in at night, and, of course, they didn't want to go back out on the railroad, so they'd come down and see Doc, and Doc would try to keep the worst ones in. Then the Japanese would come down and raise hell and beat up Doc Hekking. They'd come in, and then if they didn't have enough out, then they would go right through the ward and take them right out of the sickbay. Many times, too, I looked so bad, and Doc would have a real sick guy that looked good, that Doc would use me and take me in front of the guards and say, "This poor son-of-a-gun is sick, and he can't make it." He would put on an act,

by golly, and they would say, "Get out of the way!" We would save one guy from going out, and I was the guinea pig. They used to use me for things like that.

Marcello: Did you first mention that at first you were doing clean-up work here in the hospital hut?

Wright: Right. Then I graduated from this, after Hanley left, to be Doc's assistant. So when they had sick call, Doc would tell me . . . we had different kinds of salves. Say, for instance, he'd use beef tallow and a little acetylsalicylic acid for athlete's feet. Then he got some sake and then he got some iodine crystals, and he made up iodine, and so we'd paint with that. One time we would use iodine, and the next time we would use acetylsalicylic acid. So that did some good.

Then Fitzsimmons later . . . someway he got me some sulfapyridine, MB-693, and he gave it to me because . . . Fitzsimmons got it from a Chinese, and he paid for it. I don't know how he paid for it. But he didn't give it to Doc . It isn't that he didn't trust Doc, but Doc saw no distinction against anybody. He would give anything we had to anybody. But we felt a little more close to the Americans. Since it was American money, he would give it to me. Then when Doc needed it, I acted like I had to go get it, and then I would turn it over to Doc. But Doc used a pill of MB-693

very carefully and would shave just a little bit on, say, an ulcer.

Another thing that he did, he would swap medicine with the Japanese. I don't know whether I should tell this or not, but I'll tell it anyway. That he made a mold from a MB-693 tablet, and he cast--I don't know how many--pills that were made out of rice flour and plaster of Paris, and he used to trade that for other medicines. In particular, the Japanese would get venereal diseases, and they couldn't go to their own doctors. They would come to Doctor Hekking, and so he would say, "Okay, I'll fix you up, but you have to give some medicine." So he would give them some sulfapyridine, and we would get quinine and other things that we needed. So it was phony.

Marcello: I was going to say that this stuff didn't cure their venereal disease, did it?

Wright: No, no. The poor son-of-a-guns, it didn't help them a damn bit (chuckle). But we had to do things like that. In fact, I told his son about some of these things that we did. I sponsored his boy. I brought him to this country after the war because I loved Doc so much. I told him about it, and he was madder than the dickens at his own daddy. The boy should have understood, but he didn't (chuckle).

Marcello: Were you getting better physically while you were here with

Hekking?

Wright: Yes, believe or not. They used to call me a dadgummed dead loss, because I couldn't work on the railroad. But I worked for Doc, and I survived and I thank the Doc for keeping me. I also thank Fitzsimmons and the rest of them for letting me stay with the Doc, because I think otherwise, if they would have had me out on the railroad, I wouldn't have had made it.

Marcello: At the time that you went to the camp with Hekking, was beriberi your biggest problem?

Wright: Beriberi was my biggest problem.

Marcello: How did he go about curing it?

Wright: Well, I'll tell you, one of the things that he did was make yeast, and he made it out of pumpkin. He had some big old bamboo deals, and he fermented this stuff. It was awful-tasting stuff, but if you drank enough of it, you would get drunker than a coot; it was almost like beer, you know. But, hell, I would take a couple of big slugs of that . . . another thing that he did was . . . he made a cake.

Oh, one thing that I haven't told you. I used to go on sick call with Doc at the kam pongs. That was strictly illegal. We weren't supposed to go out of camp, and if you got caught, boy, it was your neck! At first I was scared to death of the jungle, but with Doc's help I learned to like

the jungle. He would pick green chilis, wild chilis, and we would pick all kinds of leaves. In fact, sometimes I thought I was a cow because I ate so doggone many weeds. But rice and weeds are very good. He'd show me all the different types of weeds to eat.

We'd go down to these kam pongs, and we would have a regular line-up of native people. They would come, and a lot of them . . . he would have to uncurl their eyes, and underneath there they would have some little ulcers under there, and he used to clean those up and everything. He had a little ointment made out of zinc oxide and a little cow fat, beef tallow, and he would put that underneath their eyes. Hell, then they would give us presents. They would give us all kinds of things that we would take back for the sick.

I have done so many things with this man that it's hard for me in this interview . . . it would be impossible to tell you the autopsies we would do. It was strictly illegal. The Japanese would make Doc put down phony things that the men died of, and we would do an autopsy and see that the man's gut was so ulcerated that he starved to death because there was no food getting into his intestines. So I have done all of those things.

Marcello: How would you conduct those autopsies?

Wright: They had to be done at night by candlelight. Not necessarily candles, they used to have a little petroleum that we would dip off of the water and put it in a jar with water, and then there was a part that was a wick and this made a real good light. We did all of these things.

Marcello: What sort of medical records were being kept, or death records, for that matter?

Wright: I understand that there was a record being kept. Every time an American died, the Japanese would make Doc put it down as a phony deal. It was never malnutrition, naturally. It was always a heart attack or some phony deal. They wouldn't allow anything to be attributed to malnutrition, and most of our deaths were directly or indirectly caused by that. Starvation is what it amounted to.

Marcello: But was Hekking himself keeping any accurate records?

Wright: In his mind. I do think that he did write some things down, and I remember later on that he lost every piece of paper that he had. They took it away, except they allowed him to keep his medical or doctor's certificate. Other than that, they took every scrap of paper, because he had my address and he lost that. He told me that there was no way he could communicate with me because he had lost everything later.

Marcello: Did you ever go on any of the burial details?

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what they were like.

Wright: Well, I can tell you. Mattfeld, a fellow from Oakland, California, died at Three Pagodas Pass--114 Kilo--and I remember that when we left him overnight, he got a lot of body fluid in him. He busted on the way to the burial deal, and his body fluid run right down the bamboo right all along my shoulder. So we buried him.

Everybody that we buried, we put a wood cross above them. If he was Army, we would put USA, and then we put his rank and his serial number and his name. After the war, I ran into a priest that was on the burial detail that dug up the five men that we had, and he told me that we did a lousy job, that we just barely got them underneath the surface of the ground. And it was true. That was awfully hard dirt--hard pan--that we were digging in, and, besides that, after working all day long, then to try to dig a grave is pretty rough.

There never was a draft to bury any Americans. There was always men that would do it; whereas in the British deal, they had to make the men bury their dead. I can say that for Americans. We buried our own and took care of them.

Dr. Hekking lost very few men. I don't know if you know that or not. Compared to the rest, he never lost an amputee. Not one of us had a leg amputated. He never lost one from a

tropical ulcer. He did lose a guy to tuberculosis, a fellow by the name of Simpson.

Marcello: I gather that it was kind of bad to have to go through an amputation, because most people didn't live after they had an amputation.

Wright: That's absolutely right. For some reason or another, the Australians . . . their only cure for some of the tropical ulcers and so forth was cutting off the limb. The shock and everything and the poor condition of the body just killed them. So Dr. Hekking had a philosophy that you use his method, and he used the dry method. He never went for things like soap or things like that for ulcers. It was strictly the dry approach, where you used the scrape method and then the salve deal and then the cleaning of it and then keeping it clean, keeping flies off of it and everything. Then you'd get something into the man's body to get enough tissue to close up that ulcer. That is the hardest part of the whole thing, is closing the sore after you get the disease out.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about work during the "Speedo" campaign. I'm sure that must have been a pitiful sight, seeing those guys go out on that detail in the morning in the rain--wet, sick--and then coming back at all hours of the night.

Wright: It was. It was terrible. In fact, finally they started sending me out on a few of the details because the Japanese . . . when a man hurt himself on a job, they wouldn't let him come in. So they gave me a Red Cross band--that I couldn't wear on my arm because there was no way to attach it--so I put it on my G-string, and I went out on the job. But I didn't have to do any work. All I had to do is walk up and down among the men.

So one day I was out, and the Japanese started yelling for a medical orderly--doctor--so I went down to see what he was yelling about. I got down there, and he told me to get into this boxcar. Well, I looked in the boxcar, and I heard somebody moaning in there; and it was a woman in there and she was pregnant and she was in labor. I mean, she was in labor and this was a filthy dadgummed coal car that they had been handling charcoal--sacks of charcoal--and it was dirty in there.

So I yelled at the guys, and I said, "Hey, some of you guys bring me some grass," So they cut some grass and threw it in the door. I got it and got the woman on the door and everything, and I could tell she needed medical help--not me. She needed medical help.

So I told the Japanese guard to go get the doctor. He said, "No! You!" I said, "No! No good! No good!" I said,

"I'm number ten! The number one doctor, get him!" I was frantic, you know. Because I could see that this gal needed help like nobody's business. That son-of-a-gun wouldn't do anything for me, and here I was in there with this gal, and she's in labor. I mean to tell you, she was. The poor thing looked like hell, so I yelled again for some help. They brought me down a Japanese bucket made out of wood, and they also had some so-called tea. It was so weak it wasn't even funny. I got a little piece of burlap, and I started cleaning her up because she had been laying around on that floor and getting all dirtied up.

You know something, she started having that baby. Golly, I liked to have had a fit. Here we had a damn cord and everything and no way to cut it. I yelled again, I said, "Somebody got a knife?" No, they didn't have a knife. One of them said, "Bite it in two, 'Slug!' That's what the animals do!" I went back, and I bit that son-of-a-gun in two (chuckle). That's the only way I could do it. I tied her up, by golly. I wondered what they always did with the sheet and the hot water that they always had in the movies, you know. So, by golly, I cleaned that baby up with the dadgummed tea and the burlap, you know (chuckle). But, you know, one of the things I always thought was that a baby had to be pulled up by its feet and given a whack to get it crying. That thing looked

like a big rat, by golly, coming out of there and crying like nobody's business.

I had no more than got that baby in its mother's arms and everything, and here comes a Japanese down the railroad track with an old woman, and I was never so grateful in my whole life. I was wrung out like a doggone . . . I was really glad to see them come down.

So that's my experiences on the railroad. I was glad to get back into camp. I told him, "I sure missed you today! I could have used you!" He said, "Now, see, you just remember that. That's what a woman goes through for every child that is born."

Marcello: Now, what camp was this where this occurred? Was it along the railroad?

Wright: The rails were already laid here, and this woman was in this boxcar. But I can't tell you what camp it is.

Marcello: I wonder why she was in this boxcar?

Wright: I don't know. I don't have the least idea how she got there, where that other woman came from, or a thing, because this is desolate Burma. This wasn't in Thailand. This was Burma. That's my story, but I can't give you the kilo number.

Marcello: By this time, do you hold the Japanese and the Koreans in a great deal of contempt?

Wright: Yes, I do. I think that there is no way that people could be

that dumb. You see, the Japanese wouldn't even let the Koreans drive a truck. We had Americans driving trucks, but the Korean was telling the Americans what to do. In fact, many of the times, if you had a flat, the Korean would beat up the American because he should have seen the nail in the road, and he should have stopped and gone around the nail. Now, that is what you call real dumb when anybody is that dumb. And they were. They were just coolie class people that were ruling us. If they would have had any intelligence or anything like that, I think they would have had a little compassion.

Marcello: Do you recall where you move from 26 or 36 Kilo?

Wright: Well, from 36 Kilo we made a fairly big jump to the 114 Kilo, which is also known as Three Pagodas Pass. This is another camp where I had a malaria problem.

Marcello: Okay, so you did manage to skip the infamous 80 and 100 Kilo Camps?

Wright: Yes . . . I don't remember . . . I think the other group was at 80 Kilo. Yes, I know it was. That wasn't my group that was there. That was the other group. That was Colonel Tharp's group and the other officers. The biggest group of Americans were at those camps.

Marcello: What sort of work had been done here at the 26 or 36 Kilo Camps? Cuts and fills again?

Wright: Yes, right.

Marcello: I don't think there was too much bridge building at the American and Australian end of that railroad, was there?

Wright: No, not like it was on the other end. They built some bridges but not big bridges like the other group on the other end did.

Marcello: Now, by the time you get up to the 114 Kilo Camp, has the monsoon season subsided as well as the "Speedo" campaign?

Wright: Right, and one of the things I remember is that I was cold at the 114 Kilo Camp--bitterly cold. It was cold up there. We were divided in this camp. Now, Dr. Hekking was up at the top up there, and I had a small hospital down at a lower level. This is one place where he was real sick. He couldn't get up the hill real well himself. I was real sick there, too.

Now, this is where I lost "Swede" Ecklund. I lost him there. I did everything in the world to keep him alive. This is one thing that I will say for Fitzsimmons--he did everything to keep old "Swede" alive, too. This man turned from a man that didn't seem like he cared too much early, like in Java--and then he got real involved. I can't say anything but fine things about Captain Fitzsimmons, especially along the jungle. They put him out on the railroad digging--himself--right along with the men. Boy, he come in very

weary, you know, so he got some compassion for his men that he never had before.

Marcello: Now, if the 114 Kilo Camp was located at Three Pagodas Pass, that was near the end of the line, wasn't it?

Wright: Yes, that was the end of our line.

Marcello: What sort of work was done there at 114 Kilo?

Wright: I was so involved inside camp that I wasn't on details outside. But there was a lot of loading and things like that up there.

Marcello: In other words, had the railroad itself been pretty much completed by then?

Wright: Yes, it had been completed, and then they had the nailing of the "Golden Spike" and so forth. The people had come out of the hill country and with their wives and harems and so forth. Tojo was supposed to have been there, but I didn't see him.

Marcello: Did you attend that ceremony at Three Pagodas Pass?

Wright: No, I only saw it from a distance. I wasn't that close. I was a distance from it.

Marcello: What do you remember about that ceremony?

Wright: I do remember seeing these people . . . I always thought . . . when I saw Barnum and Bailey Circus and saw the women with the rings around their necks, I thought they was all from Africa. I didn't know they came from Burma as well.

They had rings around their necks, too. Not these stretched necks like they had in Africa. An old saying goes that the reason that they had these rings around their necks . . . their husbands chain them to keep them from running off with the Chinese merchants. Whether that was true . . . they used to come through from the time of Genghis Khan and way back in Marco Polo's day. Whether that is true or not, I don't know.

Marcello: Didn't the Japanese hold some sort of a memorial here to all of the prisoners that had given their lives for the building of the railroad? What hypocrisy!

Wright: Yes, they did. Then they even put up a little deal above the cemetery and everything like that. It was terrible. It was terrible to think, after all of the men that died on that railroad, that they would do that, but they did.

Marcello: How long did you stay here at 114 Kilo?

Wright: There again, I can't give you a time deal, but it seems like we went by monsoons and things like that. I really can't say how long we were there before we moved to Kanburi.

Marcello: Did you say that you came down with malaria here at 114 Kilo?

Wright: Actually, I had it before that, but I had it very bad there. In fact, I had three different types of malaria altogether. the whole time I was a prisoner-of-war. But mostly I took care . . . even when I was sick, I took care of the sick there

because there was nobody else to do it. I had a "thunder" deal . . . it was a five-gallon can with a toilet seat on top, and it was hand-made. The guys would use it, and they would yell for me. "Hey, 'Slug,' clean that damn place up! It's getting stinky around here!" So I would pull myself together and try to get that stuff out. I would feed them and clean them up the best I could. But it was the dead loss looking after the dead loss. I had nobody else to look after them because . . . Hekking had a little help up on the top side. He had Charlie Campbell, who is a corporal, and he was up there and he would help Doc. He wasn't a medical orderly, either. Neither one of us had any experience, really. It was one American looking after another one. So I lost some men there. Thank the Lord that Doc got a little better. I had a whole flatcar for my sick on stretchers. They let me have it.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had malaria here. Were you able to obtain quinine?

Wright: I had some quinine that Doc fixed me up with. One thing about Doc Hekking, he never believed in prophylactic quinine. He felt that it was a dead loss. You needed the resistance. When you did get into trouble, you take the quinine, and it did you some good. If you took it like the British wanted to take it--prophylactically--and to keep from getting it,

that isn't the way it worked. I think Dr. Hekking's system worked much better than theirs. They used to call him a witch doctor, but his methods worked, and their modern methods --so-called--did not work in the jungles. It might have worked in England or Australia or someplace, but it didn't work in the jungle. Of course, they still called him a witch doctor, though.

Marcello: Okay, so do you move from 114 Kilo Camp to Kanburi?

Wright: Right. I want to tell you an experience that happened to me between 114 Kilo and Kanburi. We stopped at a place on the side of the road, and the Japanese let us off, and they put us to work on a train that had come in from Burma. It was loaded with soldiers that had got into battle and were wounded, and they were really shot up. Okay, I had got a a hand of bananas, and, boy, I couldn't wait. Then I had a bamboo with water in it; it must have held at least a gallon or a gallon-and-a-half. I was walking by this freight car, and I heard moaning and groaning and everything, and I looked in there. It was loaded with these Japanese amputees and beat-up soldiers.

There was a Japanese woman--nurse--in this boxcar, and she said in perfect English, "Do you have anything to eat or any water?" Well, I had both. Then she asked me, "Are you English?" "No, I'm an American." "Oh, American!" She says, "These

men haven't had anything to eat and nothing to drink." I almost said, "Big deal! Neither have we!" But I didn't. I hadn't talked to a woman, especially a woman that could speak English . . . by the way, she wasn't pretty or anything like that. She was a nice-looking lady and everything like that. So I says, "Oh, 'Slug,' you son-of-a-bitch!" So I handed her the bamboo, and I gave her my damn bananas. This woman was an opera singer, and she sang--now, goddang, if I can't remember what she sang, I'm going to cut my throat--"Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," and beautiful! I stood there and bawled like a baby. I didn't dare tell my fellow POW's what had happened, because they would be ashamed of me. But there is one time in my life that I am not ashamed of what I did. That was the enemy, but I just couldn't do to them what they had done to me. But I bawled like a baby.

Marcello: I assume that you did go from 114 Kilo to Kanburi by train?

Wright: Yes, all the way. Another thing I must say, from then, when we got to Kanburi and unloaded and got to camp, the first meal was like dining at the Savoy in Hollywood as far as I am concerned. Of course, the meal wasn't that great; but at the same time, there was eggs and all kinds of things to be had.

I never will forget the old Doc Hekking, who had invited me in, and he had--and where he got it from, I don't know--a

number of sardine-type deep-fried fish, and on top of rice and an egg; oh, that was nothing like you ever ate before. So we set up a hospital there, and I was like king of the mountain.

Marcello: Kanburi was more or less a rest camp, in a way, wasn't it? This is not to say that there wasn't working parties going out of there because there were.

Wright: There were working parties, but it was so much better, and we worked at all different places. I mean, not we, because I didn't go on that many outside details. But I did go on some because I wanted to go. But neverthless, there was headquarters; there was shops where they worked on trades. The same as the Bridge Over the River Kwai was there, which we called the Tamarkan Bridge, which was between Tamarkan and Kanburi, you know.

This camp was a beautiful camp compared to anything that we had ever been in, but the British said it was an awful camp. I can't understand their philosophy, but maybe it was bad when they were there. I don't know. But when we were there, it wasn't a bad camp. It was a pretty good camp.

Marcello: Did the food get better, generally speaking, throughout your stay the whole time at Kanburi?

Wright: It got better at that particular time. At other times, in other camps that I was in, it wasn't good. But it was never as

bad as it was on the railroad, but it wasn't as great as it was in Kanburi.

There was a number of things that happened in Kanburi that made our lives more pleasant. For one thing, the Japanese weren't as strict on us. Some of our group got moved down or over to Saigon. All kinds of things happened. Some of them got moved to Japan. But I would say that the worst of it was over at Kanburi, and I thought I had a slight chance of making it there.

Marcello: It couldn't get any worse.

Wright: No, it couldn't. It had to be better. My physical being got better at Kanburi, even though we had cholera there and bubonic plague there. They were isolated cases, and we were able to do something about it.

Marcello: I guess cholera struck fear in the hearts of everybody.

Wright: Oh, God, I was in one camp where I saw cholera, and it was awful.

Marcello: When did you see it? Back up on the railroad?

Wright: Back up toward 114 Kilo. They sent me off to a camp, and I can't remember where it was, but it was a cholera camp. Dr. Hekking didn't want me to go, but he had to send me. I had to go, and I stayed there for three days, and all I did was rake dead people off on the stretchers and dump them in a fire and burn them up.

Marcello: Were these mainly British?

Wright: They were all British. There wasn't an American in that whole camp. They ended up shooting the ones that were left. A British major took the gun away from a Japanese that was just doing a lousy job and shot his own men. I guess he had himself court-martialed when the war was over and he came out of it.

Marcello: Did you actually witness this shooting?

Wright: Yes, I saw it from a distance, not that close.

Marcello: I guess it was one of those things that you really didn't want to see that close.

Wright: No. In fact, until you mentioned cholera, I had blanked that out of my mind. My wife says I got a wonderful memory--and I have--but there are some things that may never surface again. I think we have a habit of burying them. Until tonight, I hadn't thought about it in I don't know how many years. I think I blanked it out.

Marcello: I assume that you were pretty happy to get out of that camp as quickly as possible.

Wright: Oh, you bet! I was very glad to get back to Doc. But there was another time that I wanted to go to another volunteer deal, and that was a woman's camp that was having trouble. But Doc wouldn't let me go. He said, "You're single! You have no business being in a camp like that! For one thing,

I want you to be a virgin for your wife." (Chuckle) He told me, "I don't want you in a place like that, because those women may do all kinds of terrible things to my Tommy!" He said, "You're not going." But I always wanted to go (chuckle).

Marcello: What sort of a woman's camp was this?

Wright: I never got there, but they had a lot of sickness and no doctors . . . well, I guess they had a doctor, but he was sick. That was the way it was, and they needed a doctor and a medical orderly. Doc went. When he got back, he said, "You didn't miss a thing. I'm glad you didn't go."

Marcello: You say that bubonic plague also broke out in Kanburi while you were there?

Wright: Yes, we had a Scotchman by the name of "Jock," and he was sleeping very close to me. He complained and when I went over, it looked like he had taken a chicken net and dipped it in potash and permanganate, because he had these splotches all over his body, you know. When I called Doc, he said, "Isolate this whole deal. Isolate it." So I went out and put bamboo posts and a string and a sign that you couldn't come in. We buried poor old "Jock," and we stayed there, but nobody else got it. Here I had put my hands on him and everything else. That was bubonic plague; that wasn't cholera. Cholera was at another camp.

Marcello: Now, I understand there was a lot of trading with the natives in this camp. It was rather easy to get out of camp.

Wright: Yes, yes, right. There was a lot of trading in Thailand. The Thai people are beautiful people, just wonderful people. They're honest people. If you have something that you want to sell, and if the Thai wouldn't have the money to buy it off of you, you'd tell him to sell it and bring you the money. He would bring you the whole amount of money, but he would expect a cut. But he would give you the whole money back.

Marcello: Did you actually do any trading with the Thais yourself?

Wright: I did very little trading with the Thais, but the fellows told me and I believe them. I think they told me the truth.

Marcello: Could you feel yourself getting stronger and healthier here at this camp?

Wright: Absolutely! Absolutely! I never was bad like I was in the jungle. I didn't weigh much, but, I mean, my steps got better. It's a good thing they were because I made a hell of a walk after that up north. It's a good thing my legs were better, because I never would have made it. But I stayed in Kanburi with Doc until finally the medical deal was changed around and they moved the officers all around. Finally, they moved me out of this camp with some other "dead losses" to a place

called . . .

Marcello: You're still referring to yourself as a "dead loss?"

Wright: Oh, yes, because I was more or less still looking after some of the sick. But all of the officers were to stay in Kanburi, and they moved the others to different places for work. They sent me down to a place where they had mangoes, and this was called Tamuang. Myself and a guy by the name of Scarbrough and I don't know who else got out there, and so this British doctor tried to put us all on heavy duty.

Marcello: Now, Tamuang is not too far from Kanburi, is it?

Wright: No, it's not too far. It's down the river. I wouldn't say it was over ten or twelve kilos.

Marcello: Did you walk there?

Wright: I think I went down by boat, but I'm not sure. I think I walked so far, and then I got aboard a boat with a bunch of wood on it and went down the river.

Marcello: Were you ever at Kanburi when any of the air raids occurred there?

Wright: Oh, yes! Oh, sure!

Marcello: I think we need to talk about that.

Wright: They hit the yards and everything. It looked like those bombs were coming right at you. They hit right there at the railroad yards.

I got into all kinds of deals . . . did anybody ever

tell you about . . . I mentioned the number three peach can earlier in the deal when I was . . . well, one time at Kanburi, I was watching these bombs come down, you know, and then I saw something else coming. Boy, I thought sure as hell, by golly, it was a bomb. A damn gallon can hit the ground. I looked up and I saw it out there. It was about, oh, I would say, about fifty yards from where I was. When the bombers went on, I went over there and picked it up. It was a peach can. The syrup was still cold in there and clean. I reached my finger in there and tasted that syrup in there . . . and cold. My friends,American airmen, flying right over, by golly, threw the damn peach can out of the damn plane after they had ate all the damn peaches. That's how close I was to America--tasting that peach syrup.

But, boy, that can came in handy. I made me a bail for that can, and I was in high heaven with that gallon peach can. . . . and they ate them (chuckle).

Marcello: By this time, I'm sure that you had become a scavenger like every other prisoner.

Wright: Anything I could eat or anything that I could use . . . I can't remember, but it doesn't seem like my accumulation was too much. I think I did have a pair of britches by this time that were British--a pair of shorts or something like that.

I believe I did at that particular time, because it seems to me that later on that I was wearing a pair of shorts. But now I can't even remember where I got them from. So I was out of the G-string for the time being. I went back in them later on. At the end of the war, I was wearing a G-string again. But this is what I was wearing then.

Marcello: Were these air raids here at Kanburi greater in intensity than they were at Thanbyuzayat?

Wright: Yes, they were. I don't know if any of the fellows ever explained to you that Kanburi is a focal point, and they have a big smoke stack there where they made paper, and that was a beautiful spot for our bombers coming across and going . . . they went from Dum Dum Field in India all the way to hit that deal and then turned and went to Saigon. They was bombing the oil refineries and things like that in Saigon, and this was their turning deal. They would always toss off a few there to kind of keep us stimulated.

Marcello: I'm sure that this, again, did wonders for your morale.

Wright: Yes, it did. Because we used to root for them. I'll tell you, we used to say, "Go get them! I hope, by golly, that you get a bunch of them!" They did.

From then on,the raids got bigger and bigger. Bigger planes, too. I never saw such planes. They were so high up that you could hardly see them. You could see the trails

from them easier than you could see the planes. Those were B-29's that they were using then. Then they had Mosquito bombers coming over, too, but they were British, I guess.

Marcello: Again, what was the Japanese reaction when these raids took place?

Wright: They weren't too happy about that. Of course, I never ran into them that close. But I'll tell you one story, too, that happened at Kanburi that I think is worth telling. I had a Red Cross manual up in the jungle that a British medical orderly had given to me. In there it had the Geneva Convention. They took that REP manual away from me up in the jungle, and they put my serial number . . . I mean, not serial number. We all had a dog tag, a Japanese dog tag. Mine was 1777, not 1776; 1777 was what it was. Well, anyway, they took that book away from me. I never thought I would see it again. It had all about the Geneva Convention and how a soldier should act and how a doctor should act and the whole works in there.

Okay, so the Japanese called me in to headquarters at Kanburi, and I had no idea what they wanted to talk to me about. I got in there, and there was a smiling Japanese officer and an interpreter, and this guy was, by golly, of high rank. He was very nice, very nice. I sat down. He said, "I want to talk to you." He asked me some questions, and I answered him

directly. He said, "What do you think about the war?" I said, "What do you mean, what do I think about the war?" He said, "Who's going to win the war?" I said, "We're going to win the war." "Oh, you are? How come you think you are going to win the war?" I said, "Well, the planes flying over all the time are all ours. No Nippon planes." So he said, "So,you think the Americans are going to win the war?" I said, "Yes, we're going to win it."

So then he went into another question. He said, "What do you think about the Americans sinking our Red Cross ship?" I said, "Yes, it's true. We sank several of your Red Cross ships, but you know what you had in those Red Cross ships? You had ammunition." He said, "How do you know we had ammunition?"" I said, "Down in Java, we unloaded them. They had ammunition aboard them." He was asking me some questions, and I was answering his questions, right?

So we got into this thing further along, and he got sore. He led me up and down the alley, and he just beat the goddanged tar out of me, and then he got the book out, and he started asking me about the Geneva Convention. I backed up the Geneva Convention. He beat me up for saying that I agreed with the Geneva Convention. So when I got out of there, I was (chuckle) one terrible mess.

So the colonel of this camp was a Dutchman. So anyway,

this colonel got me in there, and he gave me a cross-examination of what caused me to get beat up. Oh, by the way, they gave me my book back when I was through with this deal. I told him exactly what happened. He says, "'Slug,' you should never tell them that." I wondered why in the hell this guy was being so nice to me and asking me these questions. I was just as forthright as I could be, and then I get the hell beat out of myself. So I learned to keep my mouth shut (chuckle).

I didn't ever give them the time of day from then on. If they asked me anything, I would just get out of their way, you know (chuckle). That was probably what they felt. They wanted to get my opinion and see if I knew anything.

Marcello: I gather that the Americans did know that this was a POW camp.

Wright: They might have known because they didn't hit us . . . they hit all around us,you know.

Marcello: I guess they bombed quite a bit up there at Tamarkan where the bridge was.

Wright: Yes, yes. They hit that bridge to beat the band.

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that you moved from Kanburi down to Tamuang.

Wright: Right.

Marcello: Waht sort of camp is Tamuang?

Wright: Well, Tamuang was a beautiful camp with all of these mango

trees and everything--a very clean camp and everything. It was run very well. But they had a brickyard right outside the camp where POW's went over to bake bricks. That job, I didn't mind.

The only thing was that I got into trouble with this British officer who tried to put all of my gang . . . even the ones with this very thin tissue of skin over these ulcers. All you have to do is barely hit that thing, and we're right back to scratch. So I told this British officer respectfully that Scarbrough and these men should not be put out to work, because they could damage these ulcers. Why not give them an inside camp job? He got me for insubordination . . .first, he told me to stand at attention while I spoke to him. After trying to be very nice in talking to him and he treated me that way, I probably said a few things that I shouldn't have. I cussed him out and called him a son-of-a-bitch. So then he had me thrown in jail inside the prison camp.

Then the word got back to Dr. Hekking that his old buddy, "Slug" Wright,was in trouble. Some way, Fitzsimmons got him over there, but before he got there they had my court-martial. I had an Australian for my attorney, and he sprung me. He got me out of it. But I was madder than hell because of having to go through that deal. After all,

I wasn't a British subject in the first place. And cussing a damn English doctor didn't hurt my feelings at all.

But then Dr. Hekking came over. He took over, and not only did he have the Americans to start with, but the first thing you know, everybody in camp was lined up to come and see Dr. Hekking. That British major went to the Japanese and had Dr. Hekking shanghaied. He had him taken out of that camp and sent out of there. So that's where I lost him. That's where I lost Doc.

But as far as the camp is concerned, I stayed there for quite a while and worked in the brickyard, where I met a Canadian who married a Thai, and he spoke beautiful Thai. His name was Freddie Fox. Of course, I haven't seen him since the war, but I had a good life in that brickyard with Freddie.

Marcello: So you were no longer a hospital orderly, so to speak?

Wright: No, no. I was only looking after them. From then on, I wasn't an orderly.

Marcello: You were well enough to work in this brickyard?

Wright: Yes. It wasn't heavy work. All you had to do is lift four bricks off of a forming table and take them out where we sun-dried them, and then we put them in a kiln. So that is the only work that I had to do there, and that wasn't hard work.

Marcello: Were there very many Americans in this camp?

Wright: Not too many. Not too many. I wouldn't say there was over twenty-five.

Marcello: Did you get along any better with this British major thereafter, or did he simply make life miserable for you in this place?

Wright: No, I stayed completely away from him. Scarbrough and the others, all they had to do is sweep up a few leaves in the camp after Dr. Hekking left. They never went back to sick call. They stayed away from it.

Marcello: I was wondering if the British major tried to take out any additional retribution on you?

Wright: No, I stayed completely away from him. Listen, after that Australian got through with him, he knew he had been had.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were put in a stockade, so to speak, here.

Wright: You mean when I was inside the prison camp?

Marcello: When you were court-martialed.

Wright: I was in what they called "close arrest." It was kind of a cage. But at the same time, I wasn't on bread and water or anything like that because there was no bread. But I was incarcerated for several days until they had my court-martial. The Australian was pleased and proud to defend me. He did a good job, too.

Marcello: How did he get you off?

Wright: Well, it was easy as pie for one thing. I'm not a British subject. I wasn't subject to his deal. I was subject to Japanese rules and regulations, period. The British rules and regulations only counted to the British subjects, not to the Americans,for godsake. After all, we won it one time, and we didn't want to have to do it all over again. He did a beautiful job. I wish I had his speech on tape. He loved doing it.

Marcello: How were you eating here at Tamuang?

Wright: It was pretty good. It wasn't great or anything like that, but it was nourishing--what we got. We got a little better . . . we got some greens and things like that. That was the main thing.

Marcello: Were there still plenty of eggs and things of that nature?

Wright: Yes. I worked out in the brickyard with this Canadian, and he spoke Thai beautiful. We did all kinds of trading and everything. In fact, his father-in-law come to see him while we were at the brickyard, and he brought all kinds of food down there. Hell, by golly, he would set up a credit deal with the natives, and any time we needed anything, all we had to do was get it.

The funniest thing about this Feddie Fox's Thai wife was that she asked him to marry her, not him. He didn't ask her; she asked him. He was with the circus before World War II,

and he was a rope and a whip trick artist. She was going to Rockefeller University in Bangkok, and that's where he met her. She proposed . . . and she got out of the country. She was down in Singapore and got to India. I'm sure they got together when World War II was over, but I've never heard from them since.

Marcello: Now, he evidently was a civilian internee?

Wright: He was a civilian that joined the British 7th Coast Artillery in Singapore and was captured, but he got his wife out to India. He was a Canadian, that's what he was. Freddie was a Canadian.

Marcello: So I guess you did live pretty well, then, there at Tamuang.

Wright: Yes, I lived pretty good in that brickyard because we had cigarettes and . . . gee whiz, those Thais couldn't do enough for Freddie, and I was his friend. So we did very well.

Marcello: How long would you estimate that you remained there in Tamuang?

Wright: Altogether it couldn't have possibly been over three or four months. I'm guessing, you know. Then from there we went to Bangkok, and I went by rail. But when I got to Bangkok, the bombing was so bad that they took us out of the railroad yard and took us right into the city of Bangkok--right downtown. These are sophisticated people--these Thais. The women have curly hair and lipstick and powder, and it's not like the natives out in the hills, I mean, you know, where

I was in Burma and everything. These are sophisticated people, and to have to relieve yourself in front of them in the streets . . . that was barbaric, and I was never so embarrassed in all of my life. The way I had to sleep . . . I slept in the doorway, on the sidewalk, and in the streets. The Japanese think nothing of that.

Marcello: How long did this last?

Wright: Several days. Then they moved us by barge, and I went to a place where they were building tunnels in a mountain, and it had a wooden railroad. Have you ever talked to any of the other fellows that had worked in the tunnels? This is out of Bangkok, and I worked there until it looked like we was really going to get it. I wanted to get out of there, because I knew I was going to get killed in one of those tunnels. The camp was built in rice paddies. We had to drain it and dig big ditches to collect the water and everything. I stayed there just long enough to volunteer to get out of there.

Four Americans and myself left with the Japanese Air Force, and we went north by walking. This is where, I told you before, it's a good thing that I got myself in shape, because I walked all the way across on foot--going north toward Chiang Mai. We ate by my begging. We had an American beggar; we had an Australian beggar; we had a Dutch

beggar. I was the American beggar, and my procedure was that I took a knapsack, and I would go into a little village. Always, the Chinese are the ones that run things. So I go to them, and I first want to pay them--not with money, because I didn't have any money. I wanted to write them a check. I would tell them, "America is going to win the war. When the war is over, the Americans will pay you. I want to get some drugs. I need some food. Do you want to fix me up?" In a lot of cases they were very happy to; and in some cases, they didn't even want the check. Other times they got belligerent, and they wanted me out of the place. Then that's when I had to get rough. I had to tell them, "Okay, when war finished, we come back and cut your throat. That's the way it is." So in most cases, they gave me some stuff (chuckle). Now, when I got back--I was by myself--no Japanese guards. When I got back, the Japanese always went through, and they'd take what they wanted. Then we got the rest.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up here a minute. You're working on these tunnels outside Bangkok. What sort of tunnels were these?

Wright: These were ammunition tunnels and gun emplacement tunnels.

Marcello: You mentioned a wooden railroad here?

Wright: Yes. You see, when you're fooling around with powder, which I didn't fool around with it . . . but we had to dig the

tunnel first, but the Japanese wanted no metal. They wanted all wood. The wheels and everything was made out of wood.

Marcello: In other words, there was nothing that could make sparks.

Wright: That's right. I never will forget the first time I went on a detail when we first started digging. This Japanese bowed to this mountain, and he apologized to the mountain that we were going to have to dig, but he hoped that the mountain would be kind to us. They went through this rigamarol, and we had to do it every morning before we ever started. Of course, they would bow to Hirohito, too. That was the kind of deal that went on and the same thing with this mountain. They had to bow and pray to this mountain before we could dig.

But what scared me was no timbers inside the tunnel. I didn't like that one bit. I didn't believe in volunteering, but this is one time I volunteered.

Marcello: There was just four of you that volunteered?

Wright: There was myself, a fellow by the name of "Ardie" Mabe, a man by the name of Feuchack, Sherrill, and that's it. That was the whole group.

Marcello: These were all Americans?

Wright: All Americans. I know Sherril is alive. Feuchack is dead. I think "Ardie" Mabe is alive. We went north.

Marcello: How did you go north?

Wright: We walked.

Marcello: Okay, you walked. About how far did you walk?

Wright: The Jap Air Force had no trucks, and they didn't have supplies for themselves, so they ate what we could scrounge.

Marcello: Oh, you were being accompanied by members of the Japanese Air Force?

Wright: Yes, yes, yes. They had no trucks.

Marcello: So they were walking, too?

Wright: They were walking, too--right alongside of us.

Marcello: They allowed the four of you to do begging and so on.

Wright: Yes, we were official beggars. We had deaths, and sometimes we had hard times getting the Christians buried in Buddhist cemeteries.

Marcello: Now, wait a minute. You say you had deaths. There were just four Americans there, right?

Wright: No, these weren't Americans that died. These were other people as well. There were more than us.

Marcello: I thought that there was just four of you that volunteered.

Wright: Oh, that was just Americans. No, no, we had Australians and Dutch . . . I don't remember . . . English. I think they were there. Yes, I think they had some English, too.

Marcello: How long a march was this?

Wright: A long way. I can't tell you . . . we went first to a place

called Lat Buri. That is an old capitol of Thailand, up towards Chiang Mai. Then after we left this place, we went farther, way up. It took us a long time. Of course, we was slow walking. I remember in Lat Buri they had a bunch of old temples. I'm not a student of archaeology, but they're akin to what I've seen in Mayan, and Aztec, and also Egyptian. It really is. But the stone is much softer and has weathered. But it's like Angkor Wat; it's beautiful stuff. In fact, I spent the night in one of those temples. Of course, all through Thailand you find a lot of pagodas.

But we went on north, and we built an airfield. We built an airfield up there. Then the Air Force in the Vietnamese deal used it, too, the same field.

Marcello: It is in Thailand?

Wright: It's in Thailand.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing on this airstrip?

Wright: I started off doing some labor, but . . . oh, by the way, my friend Freddie Fox was up there, too--the Canadian that I told you about. We had so many men dropping from heat exhaustion out in the open on this airdrome. We were digging on the sides just like the railroad and building a runway. So Freddie talked the Japanese into putting water in fifty-five-gallon drums around the airport, and I was in charge of this. I had two men per drum, and then I went around and

supervised.

Freddie and I did black market on the side, whenever we could talk to the Thais and get food and everything, just about like we did back at the brick factory.

Marcello: Now, what would you do with these drums that you set around?

Wright: They would have water, and we would chop wood and boil the water. Then men were able to get water from all over the airdrome, you know, because they were dropping from heat exhaustion. So I was the man in charge; I was the number one tea man. Actually, it wasn't tea. Once in a while we would get a little rice deal and put it in there and color it up a little bit, but it wasn't really tea. The Limeys call everything tea, you know--stop for a few minutes and then have tea.

Marcello: I gather that this working on the airfied wasn't too pleasant a job.

Wright: No, it wasn't. It was hard work and out in the open, but it wasn't nearly as bad as the jungle, you know, on that railroad. The sickness wasn't anything like that. Besides that, the food that we did get up there was better. Now, we had a lot of what they called kan kong. Now, it is a vine, and it has leaves on it. But believe it or not, it's a little bit like spinach, you know. If you had a little salt and pepper and a little grease on it, it would be great.

But with just a little salt, it's still not bad--if you can get a little touch of salt on it. So we ate a lot of that, and every once in a while we'd get a little meat. So it was great, especially since I didn't have to work too hard.

I ate snakes and I did business with the Thai people. You know, I told you about how we ate that python. Oh, hell, we ate snakes all over the place up there.

But one time this place was in trouble--a Japanese plane. He thought we had this field in pretty good shape, and then we all waved him to come on in, you know, and he did. He tore that plane from one end to the other. You know, on that plane there was desks and chairs and chicken coops like you never saw before. It was loaded with chickens, and, of course, we broke the chicken coops open even though some of them were closed . . . some of them were broke open. Those chickens started running in every direction across that airport. Do you know something? It's a funny thing, but we didn't catch a single one of those chickens in front of the Japanese. But a lot of them bit the dust, and we wrung their necks and threw them in the brush. The Japanese had us running, and they said, "How come you didn't catch the chickens?" "Well, we don't know what happened to them." Then you know something? We boiled . . . we dipped them in one of my water deals and picked those chickens. I'll tell you, we were

eating chickens all over that airdrome, and those Japanese never got wise.

Then we used the scrap from this plane, like the plexiglass . . . boy, we made all kinds of things from that and also from the aluminum. We even got ammunition out of this plane, and some of the guys fashioned bombs in case the Americans dropped in. We could help them with these home-made bombs that we had. So we had all kinds of ingenuity.

Marcello: Evidently Japanese surveillance was rather lax here at this airfield?

Wright: Yes.

Marcello: By this time, has defeatism set in a little bit?

Wright: They knew they were in trouble; they really did. Especially the air force, they knew better than the infantry that they were in trouble.

Marcello: Did you mention here that you did do a great deal of trading with the natives?

Wright: Yes, I did. In fact, at this particular time, some of our planes would fly over and drop leaflets, but I couldn't read the damn things because they was in Thai. But I recognized one thing. They had an elephant on one side, and they had an American flag on the other and then a bunch of dadgummed . . . Freddie couldn't read Thai. He could speak Thai, but he couldn't read or write Thai. So he and I went down to

the village, and in there do you know what it said? They're going to drop paratroopers and bomb the place on August 15th, and so that all Thai people that didn't want to get blamed for being collaborators with the Japanese were to move out.

Well, the Japanese read that, because they saw these pamphlets, too. They knew what the hell was going on, so they told us when we found out what this said . , . we got back into camp, and the Japanese told us that they were sorry, but they were going to have to shoot us. They knew darn well if the Americans come in, then they were going to have to shoot us. But the atomic bomb was dropped and stopped this whole operation. So anybody that says the atomic bomb was a bad deal, it might have been a bad deal for Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but it certainly wasn't a bad deal for the guys--the Americans and myself--that was up there at that place. That saved our lives.

Of course, they didn't shoot us. In fact, the Japs got drunk, and a Japanese gave his gun to this man over in the cookhouse. He came over and told me, he said, "I've got a Jap over here drunk, and he wanted to give me his gun." I said, "Give him that damn gun back before you get yourself in trouble!" I said, "Something is cooking!" So the next morning, when we fell out . . . I fell out with my people--

you know, my tea men--and nobody come to take us out. I waited and I waited and I waited, and finally a drunk Jap came out there--Korean, is what he was . . . no, no, this was a Jap that I had up there, not Korean. It was a Korean that I had down at the end. This is a real Jap. He came out and he apologized, he said, "Take the day off." So they don't give you a day off period, so we knew something was up. So then we were chin, chin, chinning, and talking that the war was finished. So then I got together with Feuchack, and I said, "Let's get the hell out of here! Let's leave!"

Marcello: But you really didn't know the war was over yet?

Wright: I didn't know for sure that the war was finished. In fact, I left this camp before the war was finished, and it was a damn good thing that I did. I left the camp with nobody because they were afraid to go with me. They were afraid the Japanese were drinking and afraid they would shoot. I was getting stir crazy in that place. So I left the camp, and as soon as I got outside of that gate--nobody touched me--here comes Sherrill, Feuchack, and "Ardie," and we all went together.

We went down to a place where the truck was. So we got aboard a rice truck, and here come two Japanese guards right along, and they never said, "Give us the time of day."

They climbed up on the same truck. We drove down to the railroad, and we went into a Chinese tea room, had tea and cake, and we paid for it because we still had some money.

Then a train whistled down at the station, and we run down and got aboard a boxcar, and here come those two same Japanese and got on in the same boxcar. We never spoke to them, and they didn't speak to me. We went all the way to Lat Buri, got off of the train at Lat Buri, and there a guy from Rising Sun Insurance Company that we had met down there . . . by the way, we went into a hotel, and we had some liquor and drank. It was a Thai hotel, and we drank to the emperor of Thailand. Boy, we were living it up like nobody's business. So the insurance man said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll take you to Bangkok with us." That's where we said we wanted to go. We thought we would go back home on a ship.

Marcello: Now, was this insurance man Japanese?

Wright: Yes. He was in uniform, but he told me that he was the president of the Rising Sun Insurance Company of Tokyo and that he wanted to do business with Americans. He was real nice.

Marcello: You still don't know that the war is over.

Wright: No, we don't. It's not officially over, but we knew from this man there that they were negotiating . . .somebody was

negotiating for a settlement of the war and that two big bombs had been dropped. We didn't know that they were atomic bombs. But some huge bombs had been dropped in Japan, and they were trying to settle the war. So then they took big, nice chairs out of this hotel and put them in the back of this truck, and we rolled out of that Lat Buri with chickens . . . we lived good there. It was all free. We bought the first drinks, and after that the people come out of the place in droves and treated us nice. They took us to Bangkok and threw us back into prison camp. First, before we got into downtown Bangkok, they took us to Kempei Tai headquarters, which is their Gestapo. Then from there they took us and threw us back into prison camp.

Marcello: Now, when you say, "they," are you referring to these two Japanese guards or whom?

Wright: No, the Japanese guards stayed with us all the way to Lat Buri. Now, at Lat Buri, we never saw those two guards again. In fact, when we went into that hotel and we told them we were Americans . . . we bought a drink. I paid money for them. Then the manager of the hotel come along, and he said that nothing was too good for us. Anything in the house was ours. We ate and sat down, and all of these Japanese officers were moving out of the hotel. The Thai had demanded that they leave. Can you imagine that? So they knew something

was wrong. They evicted them.

When we got down to Kempei headquarters, we didn't know what kind of trouble we were in, because we thought . . . what we wanted to do is take over a hotel for the Americans. We figured the war was ending, and we wanted to get a "cushy" hotel, because we thought we would be there a month before any ships come in to pick us up. We wanted to live first class,you know. But we got taken to a "go-down" where, believe it or not, a lot of Americans were there.

Marcello: Well, what happened when you were in this Kempei headquarters?

Wright: All we did is to get interrogated, and I did most of the talking.

Marcello: What were they asking you?

Wright: They were asking us what did we think we were doing--coming out and leaving where we supposed to be. We were supposed to stay right where we were. They asked what did we think we were doing. We could have got killed. The Japanese soldiers were very upset. It's a wonder that they didn't kill us. Now that I get to thinking about it, it's a wonder they didn't. We got away with it, but the Kempei Tai says, "You're not a free man. You're still a prisoner-of-war. You'll still abide by all our rules. So you go back into prison camp."

That's when they took us out and dumped us at the "go-down"

in Bangkok. We didn't know the OSS was staying at the emperor's palace and operating out of there for some time. They got our colonel, Colonel Tharp. They had him out there at OSS headquarters. We stayed there and did pretty good and had plenty to eat at this warehouse.

Then one day an old boy came in with a pair of coveralls on with a red beard, and he must have been sixty years old--a little younger than I am now. He said, "Well, are you guys ready to go home?" One of the British said, "Well, who are you?" He said, "Well, I'm an American." He says, "You have Americans here, haven't you?" He said, "Yes, we have a bunch of them. One of them is standing right over there." He said, "Hey, 'Slug,' there's a guy over here that says he's an American." So I walked over, and he had no rank, no nothing. I said, "Who are you?" I didn't know whether to say "sir" or what. He said, "Well, I could be a major or lieutenant-colonel or anything I want to be." I said, "This guy is full of malaria; he's got to be sick." He said, "Well, are you ready to go home? Can you get your Americans together? Are you ready to leave?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you have a roster?" I said, "No."

Marcello: You still haven't heard official word that the war is over?

Wright: No, it wasn't over. This man is an OSS man, and he was a Princeton professor of languages. He came in with a group

of Thais. He had got the word by radio from Calcutta to get the American group together and get us to an airfield that they had mentioned. We got together, and he had the trucks. Where he got those trucks, I don't know. We drove right out to the airfield, and we were in Rangoon and Calcutta that day.

Marcello: How many Americans were there that went out?

Wright: At this particular camp, there was, oh, I guess, about six or seven truckloads. I don't know, but there's a lot of them that you're going to talk to.

Marcello: What are your feelings at this point?

Wright: I was never so happy in my cotton-pickin' life to think that I lived to come through this business, and my country, by golly, thinks so much of me that even though the war is not even officially over, they have people there from the underground to take us out. They took us out to the airdrome, and they had some B-26 bombers and C-47's, and these were all manned by OSS troops. Of course, I didn't know what an OSS was.

They took us and turned us over to the regular Army unit in Rangoon, and that's where we changed planes. This is something that I could never believe . . . the first Camel cigarette . . . I was a smoker, but I didn't smoke very much. But they gave me a Camel cigarette, and, you know, I smoked

it and I didn't even know I smoked it. I had to get some of the native tobacco . . . it was just like weaning. I couldn't smoke it. In Rangoon, I got some Maxwell House coffee, beautifully brewed and everything, and do you know that the native charcoal water tasted better to me? I had to go through a terrible reprocess.

Marcello: What sort of official processing did you go through?

Wright: Well, when I got to Dum Dum Field in Calcutta, they had women soldiers. They had so many ambulances there that I had my own ambulance--just me and one gal--and I sat up in front with her because I wasn't on my back. She drove through that town through those damn carabao until she scared me to death. I wished I was back in prison camp, she scared me so bad (chuckle). Then they deloused me and then comes the tough part.

I had a debriefing by a lieutenant-colonel who was an attorney, and he wanted to know about atrocities. When I told him some of the things that we had done against the Japanese, he threatened me that if I ever told it, he would have me court-martialed. We did some terrible things to those people, and I'm not going to tell you some of the things I did. But I did some terrible things. I killed some people in prison camp. We poisoned them--not with poison but with bamboo arrows. I better shut up. Anyway, that's

the end of that. But some of the other guys did some terrible things, too, as well. They were trying to get the Japanese, and we were, too. But mine was selective, and I'm sure the others did, too. We did not go out indiscriminately to do anything bad. We had to do something bad to people that were bad to us. You know, we had to live, to survive. Especially the quartermaster Japs were terrible. A new one had to be better than the old one, you know what I mean? So they went through this, and I told them exactly what happened.

It was the same way medically. I tried to help some of the other fellows, too, because of Dr. Hekking, you know. So we were debriefed. I was back in this country on September 11th. The war didn't end until about September 1st or 2nd, right about in there, but we were already out.

Marcello: Do you recall what your first good American meal was?

Wright: Yes. We were allowed to eat officers' mess in Calcutta at the 142nd General Hospital. I remember that this was a late night type of deal, probably about eight o'clock at night. They had fresh salad, and I remember that more than I do anything else because I hadn't had any lettuce or tomatoes or green onions or anything like that in so many years. That was the thing that impressed me most. The meat and the bread and other things, I don't remember. But I do remember

the fresh salad, and I do remember the milk. I do remember being smart, because the old Dutch doctor had told me to take it easy on the gut. A lot of the guys were going to have real bad trouble when they start on a solid diet. So I stayed on a semi-diet until I got my . . . I was lucky that I did. The only real bad thing that I had was that this mind up here gave me some trouble. I don't mean bad, but I had a hard time getting used to a woman's voice. I had to clean up my language; it was very, very bad. I had malaria very, very bad. I had this recurring, but the doctor told me what to do--take NAB and liver extract injections. I did that and I cured my malaria within about ten months' time.

But my hard part was to keep going, and I got $6,700, and I went into business. I became mayor and became city councilman for fourteen years. Because of the fact that you're held back, when you want to get out . . . I did things I never thought were possible. I was never a public speaker or anything, and I still am not. But when you represent your city and people re-elect you for office time and time again, you must be doing something right. I build a community from 8,000 to 75,000. I built a hospital. I built all kinds of things that I put my heart into. I think that I did a pretty good job.Now that I'm retired, I can look back

and say, "Through adversity, I learned something. I learned some honest values. I think I did some good."

Marcello: Where is this community?

Wright: Oceanside, California. It's between San Diego and Los Angeles.

Marcello: As you look back upon your tenure as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as being your key to survival?

Wright: Well, I think I've been lucky. I don't think I could have survived without help. The help that I had was mainly Dr. Hekking--let me give him credit again--and this group of men that I was in, basically from Jacksboro and Decatur and the area which you're in. These are tenacious people, and we all went through it together and together we made it. If we hadn't been together, I don't think we would have had made it. We have a friendship and a comradeship that I don't think you can find anywhere in the world, and I love them, every damn one of them. Like I started out to say, they're my kind of people--those boys from the hill country and Jacksboro and that area.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Wright, I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk to me. Your facility for remembering detail was outstanding, and I'm sure that the scholars will find your comments very valuable when they use them to study World War II.

Wright: Well, I sure hope they will, too. Thank you.