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Interview with

Marvin E. Tilghman

September 6, 1978

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Marvin E. Tilghman
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Marvin Tilghman

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas   Date: September 6, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Marvin Tilghman for the North Texas State Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 6, 1978, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Tilghman in order to get his reminiscenses and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Tilghman was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, 36th Division. Mr. Tilghman and the entire 2nd Battalion was captured intact on the Island of Java in March of 1942 and subsequently spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. Collectively, this group of which Mr. Tilghman was a part was known as the "Lost Battalion."

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

Tilghman: I was born on September 5, 1917. Yesterday was my birthday. I was born over in Parker County just north of Weatherford. I moved to Jack County when--I believe my dad said--I was six weeks old. I was raised west of Jacksboro.

Marcello: I assume that you took all of your schooling there in Jacksboro?

Tilghman: Yes, sir, I graduated from high school in Jacksboro in June of 1936.

Marcello: When did you enter the National Guard?

Tilghman: I got in soon after I got out of high school. That was a way of making a little money then, so a lot of us got in the National Guard just because some of our friends did. That way we got started with an Army career, I guess.

Marcello: The reason that you've just given for entering the National Guard is more or less a standard one that I've heard from other people, also. It was a matter of economics in a great many cases.

Tilghman: Back in those times, a dollar was worth a lot more then. I don't remember what we did get for pay each time we drilled. It wasn't much, but it went a lot further than it does now.

Marcello: What was the unemployment situation around Jacksboro at that time? After all, this was still in the midst of the Depression.

Tilghman: Right. Right after I got out of high school, I went to work for an undertaker in Jacksboro and did various jobs--drive an ambulance, keep the equipment clean. Each time you had

a funeral, someone would have to go to the cemetery and set up the tent and things. That was part of my job. Of course, I didn't make very much money then, anyway, but the National Guard deal helped have a little more spending money. After I got out . . . I didn't have a car until I got out of high school, and I bought an old car, a '31 model Ford coupe, I think at that time. That's the way I got started in transportation.

Marcello: I also gather that many people considered the National Guard a type of social organization at that time. In other words, it was a place to meet your friends, and you could look forward to summer camp and things of that nature.

Tilghman: That's true. That's the way I looked at it. In other words, we drilled once a week or so at night usually, and we'd go on weekend training camps.

Every once in a while something would come up, and they would call us to go somewhere. I remember one incident that kind of impressed me was when the President came to Fort Worth one time. I believe it was in '36 or '37, and I believe it was President Roosevelt. I don't remember which President it was. Anyway, we were called down there to help patrol the streets. They'd just station us along the streets for the motorcades when they came by. Of course, it was something to be . . . we didn't have ammunition, but we had our guns.

We wore pistols then. For a high school kid or just out of high school, it was kind of impressive to be where you could see the President and things like that.

Marcello: What sort of a unit was this there in Jacksboro?

Tilghman: We had a field artillery unit. We had French 75-millimeter cannons at that time.

Marcello: In other words, this was a firing battery here in Jacksboro?

Tilghman: Yes, it was a firing battery.

Marcello: Which battery was it?

Tilghman: F Battery.

Marcello: And was it made up primarily of people from the Jacksboro area at the time that you entered?

Tilghman: Yes, sir, just local area and county--Jacksboro and Jack County people.

Marcello: Approximately how large was this battery?

Tilghman: When we mobilized we had sixty-five, I believe it was, from Jacksboro and Jack County, and we went to Camp Bowie.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the mobilization of the unit. I think this mobilization occurred in November of 1940.

Tilghman: November 25, 1940, yes, sir.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being mobilized? Did the seriousness of the situation have an impact on you and your buddies?

Tilghman: At that time I don't think the seriousness of the world situation

ever entered into it. I mean, we thought we'd just go for a year. That's what the original setup was for. We thought we'd just go for a year maybe, and then it would be over with. I don't believe the seriousness of it ever hit. At least it didn't hit me. I didn't realize how serious it could be.

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

Tilghman: Well, I very seldom . . . of course, I think I was twenty-two at that time when we mobilized, and I didn't pay that much attention to the news or things like that. Once in a while you'd read about it. I'm sure I read it in the papers, but as far as letting it register in my mind, it didn't bother me. I was interested in having a good time and running and playing like everybody else was at that age.

Marcello: So this was more or less the general attitude of the rest of your buddies then?

Tilghman: I feel like it was. Yes, sir, it sure was.

Marcello: What did mobilization imply? In other words, what changes occurred within the unit after it was mobilized on November 25th?

Tilghman: I think it kind of began to make the people more serious. We had men from all walks of life--college students, business people in town, truck drivers. All of us came together. Our commander was a used car salesman named Lonnie Files. He

was a real fine fellow, and everyone just loved him. He got this organization going, and I don't think you would find a better firing battery in the whole 36th Division than our unit was.

Marcello: When you mobilized, did that mean that you were then undergoing training on a daily basis, or just how did it affect the unit?

Tilghman: We trained every day--each unit. I was a truck driver when we were mobilized, and we worked on equipment on our trucks to keep them in good shape, polished them and everything. Later on, of course, we had to camouflage that paint. Each unit, the gun crews, the wire section . . . we didn't have radios then. They'd just lay telephone lines, and we had a telephone. Each unit would practice. We'd set up the guns and have firing practice or simulate firing practice. We started doing daily training . . . guard duty . . . we had guard duty. When we mobilized, our armory was the old hospital building--what is now Fort Richardson, which is a state park.

Marcello: Fort Richardson?

Tilghman: Yes, sir. It is a state park now. This is where we trained until we were transferred to Camp Bowie. It was an old Army post when the soldiers fought the Indians back in the early days of the country. Each day we had a program we went through--drilling. Some of the time they would let some of

them go home and stay at night. Some of the married people would go home and stay with their families. Most of us that weren't married stayed at the post there--at the fort.

Marcello: Did they simply set up a type of barracks there in the hospital building for you to stay overnight?

Tilghman: Yes. It was a big two-story building. Each section kind of stayed together. The drivers sort of stayed in one part of the building, and each other crew did the same thing.

Marcello: How did the mobilization affect you economically? Were you making more money in the National Guard than you had been in civilian life or vice versa?

Tilghman: I believe so, yes. At the time we mobilized, I was working for the Texaco Company, driving a gasoline truck. I think a couple of dollars a day would have been the high pay for that. After we started this mobilization, I believe we made more money. We were making more money then.

Marcello: Of course, you're getting free room and board, too.

Tilghman: Right, and clothing.

Marcello: You mentioned that somewhat after mobilization occurred the unit had moved on to Camp Bowie. When did this take place?

Tilghman: I believe this took place in January or the early part of the year. I'm not specific on the date. It seems like it was in January.

Marcello: Of 1941?

Tilghman: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What was involved in the move to Camp Bowie?

Tilghman: While we were at Fort Richardson, our section of truck drivers . . . they called us all over the state to move to Brownwood units like the infantry that didn't have trucks. We made one trip up to Canyon up in West Texas, and we went to Mexia and moved an infantry unit from down there. We would take all of our trucks, and the motor officer would take the command car, and we would go and load those people up and move them to Brownwood.

Marcello: In other words, they were taking the entire 36th Division to Brownwood.

Tilghman: Yes, sir, that's right. After we got them all moved down there, then we moved our unit down there, too. I believe this was on around close to the 15th of January. I'm not sure on that date.

Marcello: So what happens when you get to Brownwood? The camp wasn't completely finished yet, was it?

Tilghman: Oh, no, it wasn't finished. There were pyramid tents set up; mud was about knee-deep to a giraffe; and it was just something else down there. Trucks would get stuck all the time, and it was just a muddy mess for a long time until we finally got the camp fixed up with walks and streets paved and things.

Marcello: What sort of training did the unit undergo after it got to Camp Bowie?

Tilghman: We had training each day, and, of course, we always had guard duty. That was part of the Army. Nearly every day the drivers would all work on the equipment, and we were getting new equipment all the time, better equipment.

The gun crews would . . . we had a park where we kept all the vehicles and the guns, too, in a parking area. They would go to the guns and fire simulated problems that the officers would work out for them. Once in a while, maybe every week sometime, we'd go out on the firing range out in the area close to camp and practice. They had a little 37-millimeter cannon that they would mount on the tube of the 75-millimeter. It didn't cost so much to shoot it, and they would practice with those little 37-millimeter guns.

There were a lot of drills, a lot of close order drills. We learned to march, or tried to, like the infantry. We didn't march very much, and we were lucky to have the trucks.

Marcello: Were things becoming a little bit more serious by this time?

Tilghman: I kind of believe it was because of the German situation. We knew that the Germans were fighting, and along about the middle of the year I think we began to kind of realize that something might happen.

Marcello: You've mentioned something that maybe I need to pursue just

a little bit farther. You mentioned the Germans. Am I to assume that if you thought of the country getting into war, your eyes were turned more toward Europe than they were toward the Far East?

Tilghman: At that time, they were as far as we were concerned. I never did think about the Japanese until after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Sometime during this period while you were at Camp Bowie--I believe it was in the summer of 1941--you went on the Louisiana maneuvers.

Tilghman: Right. We sure did.

Marcello: Describe what happened there.

Tilghman: I had made one camp, I believe, down in Louisiana earlier before we mobilized. Of course, being a truck driver, that's my side of it. I would be more interested in moving. We had some four-wheel drive trucks, and I drove one of them--a GMC. In the meantime, after we got to Brownwood, we got all new trucks that were six-wheel drive GMC's.

We got down to Louisiana, and the mud was something else down there. You'd just walk across that ground, and it would shake; and if you'd get off of the gravel road, your truck would bog down to the axles or deeper. It was hard to move in that area down there.

Marcello: Evidently, the unit made a pretty good record for itself there in those Louisiana maneuvers that summer.

Tilghman: We sure did. We had one of the best firing records of any unit in the whole Army, I guess. I think that's the reason we got chosen to go to PLUM, wherever that was. We did have a real good unit, and F Battery was one of the best in the whole outfit, I think.

Marcello: From Louisiana then you returned to Camp Bowie.

Tilghman: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Now, it was sometime after your return that the Army underwent a reorganization from the square divisions to the triangular division.

Tilghman: Yes, sir, that's right.

Marcello: Are you familiar with that reorganization and how it affected your unit?

Tilghman: I didn't pay that much attention to it really at the time. I know that it did have some changes.

Marcello: It was a result of this organization that the 2nd Battalion was loped off.

Tilghman: Right. It was left out of it--I understood that--and I guess that's how we got chosen to be by ourselves.

Marcello: It was also around this time, was it not, that you got some new people into the unit?

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: Didn't the married men have an option of getting out of the unit?

Tilghman: They sure did . . . , or over a certain age. We were getting selectees or people from the draft coming in all this time. A lot of these people . . . like you mentioned, "Slug" Wright. He was one of them that came to our unit after we got to Brownwood. It was filled up with draftees. I think our quota then was maybe 105 personnel. I'm not sure, but it was right around 100. We went from sixty-five on up to this number.

Marcello: By this time, did you know that you were a part of Operation PLUM?

Tilghman: We didn't know that until just awhile . . . well, maybe the latter part of the summer, I guess, was when we knew this.

Marcello: Why were the married men and the men over a certain age given the option of getting out of the unit?

Tilghman: I never did know for sure. I guess they just wanted to give them an opportunity to stay at home, and maybe if we did get into conflict, it would be better to have younger people, I presume.

Marcello: And, I assume that by that time the "powers-that-be" did know that they were going to send you overseas. Perhaps that's the reason they gave those people the option of getting out.

Tilghman: I'm sure that's right; I believe that's right.

Marcello: Okay, as you mentioned, you are a part of Operation PLUM, and you leave Camp Bowie on November 11, 1941.

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: What was the scuttlebutt going around as to what PLUM represented?

Tilghman: We didn't know for sure. We had a pretty good idea it would be probably the Philippines. I don't know where we would get that idea, but possibly that's what most of us figured.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of going to the Philippines?

Tilghman: I didn't particularly care for it. I'd never been overseas or been out of the country hardly at all. I'd never been out of Texas very often. I wasn't really too enthused about it. That troop train was something else that morning when we marched from the battery area over to the depot where the train was. Then we started thinking when we started getting on those trains. I'd come home the night before, and I got a speeding ticket coming home that night, too. The highway patrolman told me I was going to have to go see the provost marshall the next morning. I told him I'd be happy to go but that next morning I was going to be on a troop train headed west. I never did have to go, and I don't know what happened to it. Anyway, that was water under the bridge.

Marcello: What sort of a trip was it from Bowie over to San Francisco on this train?

Tilghman: Oh, everybody was just sitting around moping; some of them were playing cards; some of them had brought some beer along, I guess. There were just different ways of passing the time.

We were always looking at the country and the scenery. Country boys like us hadn't seen that kind of stuff before. It was quite a trip. It was something to see all right.

Marcello: When you got to San Francisco, did you get a chance to check out the town?

Tilghman: We got liberty. We were sent to Fort McDowell, I believe, on Angel Island. We were allowed to go to town. I went one time. One time was enough for me after I got downtown and got back. A big town was something that I didn't need, I felt like. While we were there, we all had . . . I didn't . . . I was a sergeant. I'd made sergeant. From the time we left home until we started overseas, I made buck sergeant. N.C.O.'s didn't pull KP, but they had to have someone to work KP to feed all that bunch.

Marcello: Okay, so you leave San Francisco aboard the USS Republic.

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: What sort of a ship was the Republic?

Tilghman: We thought it was as big as a mountain when we first got on it. It was an old Army transport, and it was big. That was the biggest ship that I'd ever seen, I guess, when we got on it. It kind of looked like it was beat up--old and everything. It was real slow. When we got going, it didn't move very fast.

Marcello: It left San Francisco on November 11, 1941.

Tilghman: Right, November 11th. A lot of things happened to us on the 11th, it seemed like. November 11th was the day we left there.

Marcello: Did you get seasick?

Tilghman: Yes, sir. About the time we got out . . . I guess I got sick before we left the sight of land. We went under the Golden Gate Bridge, and those ground swells had the old ship rocking. I believe the day we left was Friday, and that's the day the Navy feeds cabbage and something else. That cabbage odor was all over the ship, and that made us more sick than anything else, I guess. It didn't take me too long to get over it. I wasn't sick but just a day or two. I got over it all right, and I never was sick anymore. We'd ridden on ships on two or three different times, and it never did make me sick anymore. That one time was enough!

I was fortunate to have the upper bunk. They had four bunks in tiers of four. If you were down below and somebody got sick up above you, you might get a bath. It is kind of funny in a way, but I felt sorry for those old boys that were so sick. It wasn't very funny.

Marcello: I gather that you were not alone. There were quite a few of your buddies that were also sick.

Tilghman: Nearly everyone did. There were a few that didn't get sick, but most everyone did.

Marcello: You did manage to stop at Honolulu for a short time.

Tilghman: Yes, sir. We were allowed liberty, I think, four hours in the afternoon and four hours at night. Part of us went in the afternoon, and part of us went at night. I went in the afternoon.

Marcello: What did you do when you went on liberty in Honolulu?

Tilghman: Oh, we walked around and gawked and looked at everything--sightseeing. I remember one thing. We went to a pineapple processing plant, I guess. You see water fountains in some places. Well, the best I remember, they had a fountain there, but it had pineapple juice in it! That was kind of impressive to us, naturally.

Marcello: Did you have very much money at that point?

Tilghman: Not much. We had gotten paid before we left Brownwood--sometime before, I think. Of course, a lot of the boys would spend the money as fast as they would get it. I don't remember. I had money to spend but not a great lot.

Marcello: I guess most of them had probably blown it in San Francisco.

Tilghman: Right. A lot of them did.

Marcello: Did you notice any tenseness in the air while you were on leave there in Honolulu?

Tilghman: I didn't in Honolulu itself. I've heard later that it was kind of on pins and needles, but I didn't notice it while we were there. We weren't there that long to really . . .

and I don't know if we'd have had enough sense to have picked it up or not, had we been there longer.

Marcello: So you get back on board the Republic, and you are out of Honolulu when you receive word of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Tilghman: That's right. I think we were south or southwest of Pearl Harbor. I believe it was nine slow transports and one cruiser.

Marcello: The Pensacola.

Tilghman: The Pensacola was with us. We kind of went along in formation until this Sunday morning that the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. Then they sounded general quarters. Of course, they told us they would do that and have drills every once in awhile, but this turned out to be the real thing when they sounded general quarters. They got on the bullhorn or something . . . and told us.

We had a formation at a certain place on the ship each time when we'd fall out, and our C.O. got up in front of us, and he told us what had happened. He cried and he said we didn't have a chance. That kind of ruined him as far as most of our people were concerned. We didn't think that that was a very good way for a commanding officer to act.

Marcello: Was this Colonel Tharp?

Tilghman: No, sir, this was Captain Wright. Colonel Tharp was the battalion commander. Each unit had a captain that was in

charge of the unit. Our captain was named Wright. He lives out around Lubbock now, but he never comes to any of our meetings.

Marcello: By this time, are you beginning to realize the seriousness of the situation?

Tilghman: We had, yes, sir. We sure had. When we found out what the Japs had done at Pearl Harbor, I was scared. I know most everybody else was.

Marcello: I guess you really did not know, however, just how badly Pearl Harbor had been hit. All you knew was that it had been hit.

Tilghman: We knew that it had been bombed, but we didn't know how bad. We didn't know where they came from, and we didn't know if they might find us out there. We knew if they did we'd be sitting ducks out there with one cruiser to try to protect us.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the men or what was the scuttlebutt going around after you received word of the Pearl Harbor attack?

Tilghman: That kind of changed some of us. We didn't think we would go to the Philippines then. I don't know when we heard that they had bombed the Philippines, but all kinds of rumors flew then after that. We never knew what to expect next.

Marcello: Did you know Frank Fujita at that time?

Tilghman: Not personally, or not well. I knew him. I'd seen him on

the ship. We hadn't gotten to know each unit that well yet.

Marcello: I was just wondering if he had perhaps come in for any kidding or anything after the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

Tilghman: He did later. I know that. After the Japs bombed them, I'm sure in his unit he got plenty of it.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese at that point, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind? You'd probably never even seen a Japanese before.

Tilghman: I'd never seen them. I always thought they'd be small people, maybe slant-eyed like a Chinese. We didn't really know what to expect. I didn't.

Marcello: Were you expecting a relatively short war? You said that you were perhaps scared, but nevertheless were you still expecting this war to be rather short?

Tilghman: Right. I thought it would be over in six months, a little longer. I didn't think that it would take that long, really.

Marcello: What changes did the *Republic* undergo as a result of the declaration of war? You mentioned that you were called to general quarters and so on.

Tilghman: Yes. The ship was blacked out at night, we had curtains over the windows and doors, and we started having guard duty on the ship. I believe we had an old 3-inch gun on the back, and some of our gun crews manned those things. We had machine

guns on the top deck, the sun deck, and we manned those guns all the rest of the way on the trip.

Marcello: You do stop very briefly in the Fiji Islands. I think that was to pick up fresh provisions or something of that nature.

Tilghman: Provisions. I don't remember if we got any fuel there or not, but we just stopped for a while there, yes, sir.

Marcello: Am I to assume that you did not get off the ship there?

Tilghman: No. There may have been some of the officers that got off, but none of the enlisted men that I know of got off.

Marcello: I assume that at this point the Republic and the rest of the convoy more or less took a zigzag course, did they not?

Tilghman: They'd go so long in one direction, and they'd just zigzag back and forth all the rest of the way across there.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that when the unit had been mustered to be told about the attack at Pearl Harbor, your C.O. broke the news in a rather discouraging manner. Did this more or less change the attitude of the people toward him from here all the way on through?

Tilghman: I felt like it did. We had our first sergeant, and most of the rest of the officers were all right. I think the men kind of didn't appreciate the way this one fellow acted and took the news. We all knew that we were in it, and there wasn't anything we could do about it. I didn't feel like that was

the way that a leader should be. We were going to have to make the best of it, and I knew that that wasn't any way to do it.

Marcello: At this time--and you would have to estimate this--what was the approximate age of the people in your unit?

Tilghman: I'd say we had a few that I doubt if they were eighteen maybe, up to twenty-five or something like that. I was twenty-two or twenty-three.

Marcello: That perhaps made you one of the older people in the unit, actually.

Tilghman: There were several that were maybe a little older than I was. I think I was one of the oldest in the group.

Marcello: So you are diverted to Brisbane, Australia.

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: When did you hit Brisbane? Do you remember?

Tilghman: It was the latter part of December, before Christmas.

Marcello: About December 21st? Does that sound right?

Tilghman: That sounds about right, yes, sir.

Marcello: Evidently, that was an interesting trip going up the river to Brisbane.

Tilghman: It was. Before we got to Australia, out quite a way, we had general quarters one day, and we saw the cruiser take off, and we didn't know what to expect. It turned out to be one of the Australian cruisers coming out to meet us, which was

good to learn because we didn't want any of the Japs to come down that way.

We then got into the mouth of the river, and we had to wait. The best I remember, we waited for some time until the tide came in. The old ship dragged bottom going up as far as we went, and we had to wait until the tide came in to get on up to the dock area. I know it looked like we were just riding on top of the ground nearly--the river was so low--and we finally got up to the dock area and got unloaded.

Marcello: What happened after you got unloaded? In other words, where did you go?

Tilghman: They took us to a racetrack, Ascott racetrack. We had little individual tents. I believe there were maybe four or six places in each tent. We stayed in those tents.

Marcello: Did the unit undergo any sort of training or anything here at Brisbane?

Tilghman: I don't recall training any there. We didn't stay there that long. I think we just more or less rested after the ship ride. We got liberty. We got to go to town and meet some of the Australian people.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you get from the Australians?

Tilghman: Oh, they were very friendly. In fact, they turned out to be some of the best people we'd ever met. The civilians were just wonderful, and it was the same way with the soldiers.

They were all real friendly. They were always wanting to help you and show you a good time.

Marcello: By this time, had you gotten paid?

Tilghman: We may have gotten a partial pay, but I'm not sure. I know the money was getting pretty low along about then.

Marcello: Some of your buddies have mentioned that one of the things that struck them about Brisbane was the fact that there were not very many men there that were your age.

Tilghman: That's right. They were all in Africa. Most of the soldiers were all overseas in Africa and some in Singapore and other places around the world, I guess. There weren't too many men.

Marcello: Did you get an invitation to an Australian home for Christmas dinner?

Tilghman: I didn't. Some of them did, but I didn't. I stayed at the racetrack.

Marcello: I guess this is one of your first experiences with mutton here in Australia.

Tilghman: Right, it sure was (chuckle). It wasn't very good, and I still don't like mutton. It was a good change from what the food had been on the ship.

Marcello: When do you leave Brisbane?

Tilghman: It seems like it was about two or three days after Christmas. I'm not sure. We got orders to load up, and we got on a

Dutch ship this time. The _Republic_ was still there. There was a rumor that went around there while we were there--off the ship--that they might keep us on that _Republic_ as gun crews to man the guns on the ship. Some of those old boys wanted to do that, and I didn't particularly like it myself. I'm not a sailor, and like to keep one foot on the ground. Anyway, it wound up that we didn't. We loaded on this Dutch ship from there--the _Bloemfontein_.

Marcello: Did they tell you that you would be going to Java?

Tilghman: I believe so.

Marcello: Did they tell you why you were going to Java?

Tilghman: No, not that I recall. It was just to help that Dutch, was what we figured.

Marcello: This was a fairly fast ship, was it not?

Tilghman: Yes, sir, it was real fast. I don't remember if it went twenty knots or how fast it was going, but it moved real good.

Marcello: Do you recall the submarine scare that some people mention while you were on the _Bloemfontein_?

Tilghman: Yes, sir. I was on watch one night when we had one of those. I believe this was after we went from Brisbane up around the coast of Australia and stopped in Darwin and stayed there two or three days. We anchored in the harbor. I don't remember how long. Then from Darwin we went on north to Java, and that's when we had the submarine scare.

Marcello: Describe this submarine scare.

Tilghman: I believe there were several destroyers that escorted us up through these straits. I was on guard duty one night, and we knew that there were submarines in the area. When the ship would go through the water, it had phosphorus or something in the water, and it would just light up, and you could see light. You could see the wake of the torpedo, and we saw one this particular night. It missed the ship, but you could see where it made the line through the water. The ship would take evasive action, of course, and we were lucky not to get hit. It was kind of scary, because along about this time we began to realize how dangerous it was getting.

Marcello: So you land at Surabaja, Java.

Tilghman: Yes.

Marcello: I assume this was not a very long trip from Brisbane over to Surabaja.

Tilghman: It didn't take long. I don't recall how many days, but it was pretty fast.

Marcello: What happens when you get to Surabaja?

Tilghman: Well, we unloaded off of the ship and rode a train, little old dinky train. The cars weren't as big as this room is long. They were little old open cars on the train, and they were small. We loaded on this railroad train. We went to

Malang, which was up off the coast. I don't remember how many miles it was--thirty or forty miles, I believe. It was an air base. That's where we went--to this air base. It was just outside of Malang.

Marcello: Do you recall what the name of the air base was?

Tilghman: Oh, let's see . . .

Marcello: I'm testing your memory here. Singosari.

Tilghman: Singosari, that's right. I remember it now. After you mentioned it, I remembered the name.

Marcello: Describe what Singosari looked like from a physical standpoint.

Tilghman: It was a Dutch camp--Dutch air base. It had several big hangars there, and the buildings were made out of mortar and tile. They had a tile roof on them and no windows; they didn't have windows in the thing. Just a roof would overhang out over the building. A lot of times it's rainy there, too, so it gets pretty cool at night. It wasn't near as good of a camp as what we had. Even the tent camps were better than that, I thought. Gravel streets . . . some of them were paved. It was a pretty good-sized camp, and it was clean. They kept it in good shape.

Marcello: Were there Dutch personnel in this camp when you arrived?

Tilghman: I don't recall if there were any in the camp or not. There might have been.

Marcello: What did the unit do when it got to Singosari, that is,

after it initially got there?

Tilghman: When we got there and set up camp, the 19th Bomb Group had flown some of their B-17's down to this air base from the Philippines when they had to move out of there. Old Colonel Eubanks didn't have any ground crew. All they had was the flight crews that came with them--crew chief and gunners. They needed some help real bad to service those planes, and a lot of our men did this and worked on the planes--serviced them. Under the direction of the crew chief, they even went as far as to change some of the engines out of some of them after we got new engines in from . . . I think some of them were shipped in from the States or flown in or something.

Marcello: Were they bringing back news as to what was happening in the Philippines?

Tilghman: Oh, yes. They'd make bombing runs and raid different places, and they could pretty well keep you abreast of what was going on.

Marcello: Of course, just the fact that the 19th Bomb Group was in Java would have been an indication that things weren't going too well in the Philippines.

Tilghman: That's true. That's very true. Those planes would come in off of a mission shot up real bad. Some of them would have holes blown in them and would be flying on one or two engines. You knew then that things weren't very good.

Marcello: Nevertheless, were you convinced that fairly shortly the Navy would be coming in to take you off Java?

Tilghman: We thought this would happen. We didn't think they'd leave us up there. We had set up guns around the camp--our 75's. By this time,we had split-trail American 75's then. We'd take those .50-caliber machine guns out of some of those planes that were wrecked and set them up around the camp. I had one right across the fence from our mess hall. When I went overseas, I was not motor sergeant anymore. I think I was ammunition sergeant at that time. We set the machine guns up around camp. The 75's, we had them set out in a little grove of trees out away from the camp a ways. We thought we might could use them maybe as antiaircraft guns, and we did later when we had some bombing raids.

Marcello: At this early point, however, you had not yet dug the ditches for those guns so that you could elevate them?

Tilghman: Right. That's true. We had our machine guns set up, because we probably figured that they were going to start bombing some of these days. We later dug trenches and mounted the .50-calibers, and we had trenches around the 75's, too. We had some air raid shelters dug, too, but they were not far enough away from camp. Most of us wanted to get farther away so the air raid alarm would go.

Marcello: In the meantime, were you able to get any leave into Malang?

Tilghman: We could go to town once in a while at night. Everything was supposed to be dark and blacked out, but it wasn't. It was always dirty--the town was--and the natives didn't look clean. Some people went and enjoyed it, I guess, but I didn't go too often.

Marcello: What sort of an attitude did the natives have toward the Americans at this time?

Tilghman: Oh, they were friendly.

Marcello: In other words, they thought you guys were still winning?

Tilghman: Yes. As it turned out, they were just friends with the people that were in charge. When the Japs came later, they were friends to them.

Marcello: I know that some of the people in the unit were very impressed by the tremendous numbers of people they saw in such a small area. Did this impress you?

Tilghman: Yes, it did. We found out later that this was one of the most thickly populated areas in the whole world at that time. There were just people everywhere.

Marcello: What was there to do in Malang?

Tilghman: Nothing. They had a little old sidewalk cafe that you could drink coffee or beer or whatever. They had pastries and things, but we kind of hesitated to eat in those kinds of places because you never knew how clean they were. Some did eat. I did sometimes and had no ill effects, so I guess it

was all right.

Marcello: Shortly after you got to Singosari, you experienced your first Japanese air raid. Describe this incident.

Tilghman: I think we weren't expecting it, naturally. A bunch of us were in the barracks. The barracks that I was in was right close to the kitchen. The best I remember, it was close to lunchtime. The planes hit without any warning; we didn't have an air raid alarm or anything, the way I remember it. We got under the beds or on the floor until the first wave went over.

Then we got out of there as soon as they left. This machine gun that we had set up was just over the fence there. We got in this pit, and, of course, the planes were so high you couldn't hit them with a .50-caliber anyway.

When they came back over, you could lay there and look up at them; and you could see the bomb bays open, and you could follow the bombs all the way down, It looked like every one of them was going to come down right on top of you. We were fortunate that none hit close. They hit the kitchen right there close to us and shook things up pretty good and hit some of the other buildings. It seemed like the ground was just kind of popping together; that trench was just shaking all over when we were in it. It was pretty scary.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if you were scared.

Tilghman: Yes! Definitely so (chuckle). They say you never hear the bomb that comes down and hits you. You could hear those things coming down, and they make a terrific whistling noise when they come down. It was something else.

Marcello: At this particular time, that is, during this raid, was it strictly high-level bombers or was there some strafing, too?

Tilghman: I believe there may have been some strafing--fighter planes there, too. I'm not sure.

Marcello: How long did the raid last? I'm sure it seemed like an eternity to you.

Tilghman: It seemed like an eternity, but I don't think it lasted over ten minutes or so . . . fifteen.

I know some of the people took to the hills, took to the bushes. We had one sergeant that was an R.O.T.C. man before we went overseas. He was real hard and tough while we were training before we came overseas, but he took off for the hills and didn't come back for four or five days after that raid. That kind of deflated his ego, so far as some of the people were concerned. They didn't see that kind of action for somebody as tough as he was supposed to be. You see that kind of stuff going on all the time, I'm sure.

Marcello: What changes occur as a result of this first raid? You mentioned that the air raid shelters or trenches that you had prepared weren't exactly that good.

Tilghman: No, they weren't. I don't remember if this first raid was the one where the bombs hit close to the gun crew or not. We had another one . . . one of the raids at one time . . . they were using those 75's and had them dug in and had the trail lowered so that they could shoot up pretty high. They cut that high explosive fuse to where it would explode up there. They used them for antiaircraft guns, and--I don't know--they may have kept the planes up higher or something. I know we heard over the radio the next day that we were using new antiaircraft guns in Java against their planes. Of course, that was right. They hadn't ever been used for antiaircraft guns before, but they worked at that time. We didn't shoot any planes down, I don't think, but it may have kept them up higher.

Marcello: With what regularity did these air raids occur?

Tilghman: You never knew. It seemed like they'd come in pretty close to noon nearly every day.

Marcello: It was an everyday occurrence.

Tilghman: It seemed to me like it was. They came more often than was good. They may not have come every day. I left camp pretty soon after that. I didn't exactly leave camp. They had people moving ammunition from the port of Surabaja up to the base. We unloaded a lot of our 75-millimeter ammunition. I drove a truck for about two or three weeks, hauling supplies

from up at the port.

Marcello: So did you miss some of the air raids there in Malang?

Tilghman: I missed some that they had there in Malang. We'd see planes there on the road. I had a built-in air raid alarm in my truck. I'd gotten ahold of a pet monkey--one of those little old brown monkeys. Those things have real sensitive ears, I guess, because when they'd hear an airplane, boy, they'd start chomping and cutting up and chattering. You needed to get off the road then. I'd pull off under a tree, and you could hear the planes coming in a minute. We didn't ever get strafed or anything on the road, but I always thought it was kind of funny that that little monkey could be so sensitive and let you know something.

Marcello: How did you get hold of that monkey?

Tilghman: I think I got it from one of the natives. You could trade them out of anything they had. I think that's the way I got it--I traded for it.

Marcello: Had Surabaja been hit very much by any of the air attacks?

Tilghman: They had some there, yes. The Dutch had some P-40's up there at the base outside of Surabaja. Of course, they didn't fly them very much. I don't know if they just didn't want to or didn't have the nerve or what. We had a few pilots that came in there from somewhere, maybe from the Philippines probably, and they flew some of them.

One time--it was kind of interesting--I heard the tale, but I don't know if it's true or not. They only had so many pilots, and they had one more plane than they had pilots. Each day when the pilots would take the planes up, this other plane would go, too. They finally found out that it was an old sergeant flying that other plane there. I don't know whatever happened, whether they ever made him a lieutenant or not. They should have because if he had nerve enough to go and fight them, he should have had his wings.

Marcello: Did you say that as a result of the air raids, the trenches and so on were dug farther away from the camp, and deeper?

Tilghman: Right. When the air raid alarm would go, it seemed like you had a tendency to go a little farther every time. We didn't stay around close to the camp; we moved ours. It was too close to the camp to take chances, and we knew we weren't going to hit any of those high-flying bombers, anyway. The fighter planes strafed the place a time or two, and we could have probably hit them. I don't know if we ever did or not.

Marcello: I've heard some of your buddies say that it was more frightening to come under those strafing attacks than it was to come under those high-level bombings.

Tilghman: It is. To me it was. It demoralized you good. Something like that is hard to imagine what it's really like.

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

Tilghman: I don't think so. I didn't (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume that the Japanese were primarily interested in knocking out those bombers, and that's why they were attacking this base.

Tilghman: That's what I presumed, because they didn't tear up anything very much, except that they'd shoot the fighter planes up, and they'd bomb the camp a little bit. I don't know if they ever hit any of the hangars or not. Of course, they probably had ideas of using them later on. The camp wasn't torn up all that much, and I'm sure they used it later on.

Marcello: How about the airstrip itself?

Tilghman: As far as I know, it wasn't damaged that much. It may have had some holes knocked in it, but they could be patched fairly easily.

Marcello: In other words, the raids by the American bombers continued despite the attacks of the Japanese planes?

Tilghman: They kept flying, yes, sir, until just a few days before the Japs landed on the island. They kept flying all that time--when they could get their planes together and get them going.

Marcello: When was it that the 19th Bomb Group evacuated? Do you recall?

Tilghman: The date I don't know. I know at the time we had gotten orders to go to the west end of the island, up at Buitenzorg. I believe that was where we were going. I was sergeant-of-the-guard that day, and I know that when the planes were leaving, one

of the colonels there told me that if I would go with them, I sure could go. I didn't have sense enough to go. I guess I should have, but I didn't. I stayed there, and they flew all the planes out.

Marcello: What did this do for the morale of the troops when they saw that the 19th Bomb Group was getting out and they were having to stay?

Tilghman: Of course, we wanted to go, but we heard the rumor that we were going to be picked up by a ship up at Buitenzorg or on the south coast of Java, anyway. When we started up the west coast, that's what we thought--maybe we would get on the ship up there and get taken out.

Marcello: In other words, you moved out of Malang very shortly after the Japanese landed?

Tilghman: Right . . .well, let's see. No, I believe we moved out of there before the Japs landed and started up toward the west end of the island. I believe that's right. I think we moved out before, because we got up there on the west end or middle of the island, and then I believe the Japs landed up there. Then that's when we had some Australian troops there with us--infantry--and the English had some antiaircraft guns.

Marcello: What did you do when you got up there on the western end of the island?

Tilghman: We went into position up there along the river or back from

the river a little ways. I don't know if the Japs had already landed there. About that time I think they had, probably. We had the Australian infantry out in front of us, and we set our guns up back there. That's where they did all the firing that they did against the Japs up there.

Marcello: What were you personally doing while the unit moved up to the west end of the island?

Tilghman: I was the ammunition sergeant, and we were hauling ammunition in trucks. We had trucks that moved ammunition up to the guns.

Marcello: Was the unit still intact at this time, or had one of the units moved down toward Surabaja?

Tilghman: E Battery stayed behind. They stayed back, and I think they went up to Surabaja at that time. What they did from there on out, I don't know.

Marcello: I gather that after you moved up there to the western end of the island, you didn't stay in one place very long. Weren't you constantly moving around?

Tilghman: Moving nearly all the time. We set up there on the river and fired for a while. The Japs had so many, and they kept infiltrating our area with snipers, so we started moving back, pulled back out and moved back farther.

Sometime along about this time was when the Dutch cut all of our supplies. We went up there in the hills there

for a while, and there wasn't anything we could do. That's when the colonel finally decided to capitulate.

Marcello: You mentioned that the Dutch cut off your supplies. What was the explanation for this?

Tilghman: I didn't ever hear one. I don't know why they did it. I don't guess they were trying to impress the Japanese. I just don't know. It didn't look right to me for them to do something like that.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the Dutch didn't put up too much resistance, because they realized the hopelessness of the situation, and they were hoping the Japanese wouldn't treat them too badly after the island was overrun.

Tilghman: Right. I think that's true. They didn't want to tear up the country, maybe. That may have been the case.

Marcello: In other words, the Dutch were hoping that it would be business as usual, so to speak, even though the Japanese did conquer the island?

Tilghman: I think that's the big reason right there why they did what they did. They weren't very good fighters,anyway. They had a lot of native troops in with their white troops, and they just weren't that good. We had some English troops with us, and they had a company or two of Sikh Indians, and they were very good soldiers, night fighters. The Australian infantry was some of the best you'll ever find.

Marcello: As you mentioned awhile ago, you were doing quite a bit of moving around during this period, and I've heard it said that you were moving so much in order to give the Japanese the impression that there were a lot more troops on the island than there actually were. Have you ever heard of that?

Tilghman: I've heard that. That could be the reason that we were moving so much. They didn't really know how many troops were there. We kept them from crossing the river where they landed there. I know they had to back up and come around. Our battalion of field artillery and the Australians kept them from crossing there. They did get across later, but they had to come around, I think. I feel like that's probably the reason we did move so much.

Marcello: Up until the time of the capitulation, had you actually seen any Japanese troops?

Tilghman: No. We knew they were in the area when those infiltrators came through there, because we were on guard duty all the time, and you'd hear somebody shooting every once in a while. There was no doubt that they were in there close to where we were.

Marcello: I think it was on March 9, 1942, that the surrender occurred. Does that date stick in your mind?

Tilghman: I believe it was March 8th, wasn't it?

Marcello: March 8th, okay.

Tilghman: I believe that's the day.

Marcello: Do you recall how you received the word of the surrender and what the reaction was of you and your buddies?

Tilghman: We were at a tea plantation up in the mountains and had all the equipment parked around a bunch of those big trees. They came with the word that we'd surrendered. We didn't want to turn over all our equipment to them. Some of the books that you've read, I'm sure, said that we turned over all our equipment, but we didn't do it. We drained the oil out of most of our equipment, but we kept some trucks to move on. We drained the oil and water out of them and started the motor and let them run until they'd throw a rod. We had some new cars, like, '42 model Chevrolet staff cars and command cars and jeeps and things that we didn't need to use, and we destroyed them. I think they took the firing pins out of the cannons, out of the 75's, and threw them away. It was the same way with our guns. They didn't get too much good use out of what we left.

Marcello: How were you informed that the surrender had occurred?

Tilghman: Our officers told us. I don't know how they got the word unless the Dutch courier and some of those people came and told them. I'm not sure how they got the word. We went from this tea plantation . . . they told us to assemble

at another racetrack.

Marcello: At Garoet?

Tilghman: Garoet, yes, that's the one. We had rice paddies all around it, I remember. We went by truck to that place.

That's the time when money was flying all around. I know one friend of mine from Decatur had a hundred-dollar bill, and he lit a match to that hundred-dollar bill and lit a cigarette with it. R.N. Gregg did that. He said later he wished he'd had that hundred-dollar bill lots of times before he got out of there.

Marcello: What was your personal reaction when you heard that the surrender had occurred? What thoughts went through your mind?

Tilghman: Really, I didn't know what to think. We still thought that it wouldn't take long to get it over with. That was my personal opinion. I'm sure a lot of other people felt that way, too.

Marcello: Were you scared as to what your fate might be?

Tilghman: Right. You couldn't tell. We'd heard rumors of massacres and things like that. I was scared; I was worried. I really didn't know what to expect.

Marcello: Had you heard the rumors that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Tilghman: Right. We'd heard that rumor, too. We never knew what to expect when they came up. It was just a situation that was

really rough, because we didn't know.

Marcello: I've also heard some of your buddies say that they kind of felt ashamed that the unit had surrendered.

Tilghman: Well, I did. Even though we still knew that it was hopeless, you didn't want to do something like that. Some of the people even took off for the hills.

Marcello: Did that thought ever cross your mind?

Tilghman: It did, but I got to thinking that a white man stands out over there in that country like a sore thumb, and I didn't feel like I'd have a chance to survive or do anything, anyway. I figured I'd just stay with the rest of them and take my chances.

Marcello: By this time, the attitude of the natives, I'm sure, had changed, also.

Tilghman: They had. They'd gotten to where you weren't their friends anymore, and they were more friendly to the Japanese. You could see a change in them--a marked difference.

Marcello: Also, I guess there's a certain security in numbers. In other words, if you take off for the hills, you're going to probably be alone or with only two or three guys. As long as you stay here with the unit, there is a certain amount of security.

Tilghman: That's true. It just seemed to me like it would be better to stay with the group, and that's why I did. Some of them

did go, but they came back eventually. It didn't take long for them to come back.

Marcello: Up until this point, you still have not seen a Japanese soldier.

Tilghman: We still hadn't seen any and didn't know what to expect. While we were there at this second racetrack, we were just sitting waiting for them. They had the battalion payroll there, and I know we had a lot of poker games playing with that money.

Marcello: In other words, you had received a payday sometime around the capitulation?

Tilghman: I don't know if we got a payday, but the payroll was there, and I don't know how come we were with it. We didn't figure money was going to be worth a darn, so I know we had some poker games with some of the payroll money.

Marcello: That battalion payroll was going to become important later on when you moved into Bicycle Camp.

Tilghman: Right. Finally, we turned it all back in and got it all back together, and it stayed in a fund where we could buy stuff with it. Later on, it proved out that we did use it for that.

Marcello: How did you manage to get hold of the payroll to begin with?

Tilghman: I don't recall that part of it. I just remember some of the poker games we had.

Marcello: How long were you here at Garoet altogether?

Tilghman: I would say maybe a day or two. I don't think we stayed there very long.

Marcello: Did you meet any Japanese here?

Tilghman: Finally, some came later.

Marcello: Just a few?

Tilghman: There weren't very many. The best I remember, there were two or three officers maybe and one or two enlisted men. I don't remember, but I know there weren't a whole big bunch like we probably expected.

Marcello: I assume that they completely ignored you and were conferring with your officers.

Tilghman: Right. As best I remember, that's what they did.

Marcello: Were you kind of curious?

Tilghman: Yes, we were, or I was.

Marcello: Where do you go from Garoet?

Tilghman: I guess they made arrangements with the officers to tell us where to go. If I'm not mistaken, they brought some guards in then, and I believe we went by train part of the way to Batavia.

Marcello: Now, you mentioned awhile ago that you were up at the tea plantation when you got word of the surrender.

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: Did you ever return to that tea plantation at all after the surrender?

Tilghman: I don't believe so. I don't think I did. I don't remember it if I did.

Marcello: You mentioned that you did get on a train here at Garoet, and you went into Batavia?

Tilghman: I believe we did go by train to Batavia.

Marcello: You did not go directly to Bicycle Camp when you got to Batavia, did you? Didn't most of you go to Tanjong Priok first of all?

Tilghman: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: This was down on the docks. In fact, it was the port city for Batavia.

Tilghman: Right. That's right. We didn't stay there very long, I don't think, until they moved us.

Marcello: A month or so?

Tilghman: Something like that.

Marcello: Describe what Tanjong Priok looked like. Can you remember it?

Tilghman: All I remember is a bunch of old buildings--dirty and rat-infested--and not much of a camp. I know we thought that it was going to be a hellhole by the way it looked. It never was very good. The food wasn't good.

Marcello: Describe what the food was like.

Tilghman: Oh, a little bit of rice and watery soup was about all they had. Some kind of melons and very few vegetables. That's something

we didn't get very much of--vegetables--at all.

Marcello: Is this your first experience with the wormy rice and so on?

Tilghman: Yes, that's my first experience with it.

Marcello: Describe this.

Tilghman: Most of the rice that we got was always dirty. A lot of it . . . if we got white rice, we were lucky. But most of it was brownish, and I guess it still had the husk on it. We found out later that this was better for us than some of the others because it had more vitamins in it or something. It had worms and bugs in it. You couldn't clean them out. Even if you tried, you couldn't ever get them cleaned out good enough to eat, so you just have to shut your eyes and go on.

Marcello: I've heard some of the guys say that they waited until dark to eat their rice.

Tilghman: That's true. We had to eat after dark a lot of times, and that helped a whole lot, I'm sure.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing here at Tanjong Priok?

Tilghman: Oh, we worked around the docks unloading barges, gasoline drums, and different kinds of supplies. We'd always steal.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if theft had already started at that time.

Tilghman: Any time you could see something . . . and, of course, we were getting hungry already, and if you would see something to eat, you would always try to steal it or get enough to

eat, anyway. We all were getting to where we could be pretty good thieves.

Marcello: How tough was the work that you were doing here at the docks?

Tilghman: Pretty hard. You'd wrestle those oil drums, and it's not easy. I had done some of this prior to going in the service when working for the Texaco Company, but handling those fifty-five-gallon drums--they're heavy--is pretty hard to handle.

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

Tilghman: We were assigned most of the time. Our first sergeant would keep a duty roster and would assign the workers.

Marcello: Describe what your quarters were like here at Tanjong Priok.

Tilghman: Most of us had saved a blanket or two, and a flat surface was about all we had to sleep on. I don't believe this camp had anything. We just slept on the floor, I think. I had two blankets and a mosquito net. I'd use one to cover up with and one to sleep on. The mosquitoes were always bad in the whole country because there was so much water there, and that made it a lot worse.

Marcello: Who was cooking the rice here?

Tilghman: I don't recall if some of our people had started cooking it or not. I presume they did, but I don't know.

Marcello: Were there other nationalities in this camp besides the

Americans?

Tilghman: I believe there were some Dutch and maybe some Australians, too. I'm not sure. I don't have very much memory of that camp, particularly, there.

Marcello: Are there very many Japanese at this camp?

Tilghman: I believe there were. I believe there were quite a few around. They may not have been directly in our camp, but they were there close.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't have that close a contact that they would be harassing you.

Tilghman: No, just the guards that would come around in the camp. Sometimes they would just patrol around in the camp individually, and they were all the time doing that.

Marcello: Was there any sort of a fence or barrier around this camp?

Tilghman: It seems like I remember that they had either a tile, a rock, or a stucco fence around it. I don't know if this is the one I'm thinking about or not. I just can't remember that well in that particular one.

Marcello: I would assume that at this time most everybody in the unit was in pretty good shape yet.

Tilghman: Yes, still. We hadn't gotten sick, and we hadn't run down that much yet.

Marcello: I believe it is sometime in May of 1942 that they move you into Bicycle Camp.

Tilghman: I don't know the date, but that's where we went next.

Marcello: Bicycle Camp, I gather, was not too far from Tanjong Priok.

Tilghman: I don't believe it was. I don't recall. We marched over there, walked over there.

Marcello: While you were marching from Tanjong Priok to Bicycle Camp, did the Japanese attempt to humiliate you at all before the local population?

Tilghman: Oh, they'd always do that.

Marcello: Describe this march over to Bicycle Camp.

Tilghman: They wouldn't let the Dutch people . . . if they caught them waving or speaking to you, they'd throw a fit. Usually, they'd punish them pretty good--kick them or hit them. They were all the time beating on us. I guess that's what they'd do to show their superiority, probably. I don't know . . . they all the time just seemed to want people to think that they were so much better than everybody else.

Marcello: What sort of gear did you have when you entered Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: I had one of these little flight bags then. I carried my blankets and mosquito net, my mess gear, a suit of extra clothes--khakis--and just various things that I carried. I also had a little knapsack bag that the Army issued us where I kept my toilet goods, toothbrush, and stuff . . . razors and whatnot.

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

First of all, there was barbed wire around this camp, wasn't there?

Tilghman: There was barbed wire around it. It was big barracks with tile roofs, and, again, it was similar to the one at the air base at Malang. We slept in little cubicles, and I believe there were two in each cubicle, maybe. Again, I think we slept on the floor. I don't believe we had any platforms or anything, as I remember.

Marcello: Who was your bunkmate here? Do you recall?

Tilghman: I don't remember in this particular camp who my bunkmate was there. Later on, I do, but I don't remember in this one. We were just kind of getting started in this thing, and you were shuffling and trying to get along with everybody.

Marcello: Describe what the food was like here at Bicycle Camp.

Tilghman: It was a little better than at the other place, it seemed like. It had cooks here. I believe this Bicycle Camp was the first place where we saw the sailors. I believe that's where they were when we first camp in there. I think they had a kitchen set up where people cooked. Our own people were doing the cooking.

Marcello: Did they have some problems at first learning how to cook this rice?

Tilghman: I'm sure they did. Of course, that would be a lot different from what our mess sergeant or the Navy's people would have

been used to--how to cook it. It had a big, old, round . . . they called them Y-johns--pot. It was kind of a dished-out metal deal that they cooked that rice in. They steamed it some way and let it set for a little bit. It was pretty good. For rice, it wasn't bad (chuckle).

Marcello: Was this rice better than the rice you had at Tanjong Priok?

Tilghman: I think it was a little better, the best I remember. The food was just a little better. We had a few vegetables to make stew out of, what they called stew, but still no meat hardly at all.

Marcello: How much would you get to eat? What quantity would you get?

Tilghman: I imagine we'd usually get a ladle of rice, what would be a pretty good-sized cupful of rice, and maybe a little cup of this stew, liquid. We had some kind of tea or coffee they'd make out of . . . they'd brown this rice. They could make kind of a drink out of that, and it had a little taste to it, but it didn't taste like coffee or tea. If you were lucky enough to have tea or coffee . . . sometimes you could steal or buy a little bit, and then you were lucky to have it.

Marcello: Was there such a thing as getting seconds here at Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: Sometimes there may be a few. A lot of times, when you'd get through eating first, you'd go line up again. That's always your "chow hounds," they called them, that would do that. All of us would if they had any food left. Usually,

they might have a little left to go around part of the way.

Marcello: Would you basically get the same food every meal?

Tilghman: Just about the same thing every time.

Marcello: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner?

Tilghman: Right, about that same soup and rice.

Marcello: While we're on the subject of food, we might as well continue. It is at this point, that is, while you were in Bicycle Camp, that company funds were used to purchase additional food.

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: How did this procedure work? Do you recall?

Tilghman: We had one of our boys drive a truck that hauled the Nip supplies, the Jap supplies. Sometimes I believe they'd let one of our officers go with them and buy some of the stuff for our kitchen, and they'd buy what vegetables or eggs that they could get. I don't remember if it was this time or not, but we had what you called a canteen where you could buy maybe an egg or something like that, which would help, to eat. Money was used mainly to buy stuff for the kitchen. That's what it was used for.

Marcello: Is it not also true that if men were going out on details, they could obtain some of this company money to buy food and bring it back in for the common kitchen, also?

Tilghman: Yes, if you were working on a work party. Sometimes some of the Jap guards were not quite so bad as others, and they'd

let you buy. Some of them wouldn't; some of them were real harsh. Once in a while you'd run across one that was good or a little better than the others, and he wouldn't care--if you would buy him something.

Marcello: I hear all sorts of conflicting stories about these company funds. Can you elaborate on this somewhat? In other words, I've heard it said that maybe only the officers were getting the benefits of these company funds.

Tilghman: Sometimes we thought maybe they might be getting the best part of it. The officers' mess might be a little better, and what they were getting might be a little better than what we got. I don't know. I couldn't say, because I didn't see any of it. I don't know. I don't think it would be right if they did, since we were all in this together. I don't know. They might have . . . they might have gotten a little better deal than we did.

Marcello: Even here at Bicycle Camp, are you still more or less constantly hungry?

Tilghman: Yes, that's on your mind all the time--food.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that this was a common subject in any of your bull sessions and idle talk?

Tilghman: That's true. We were always talking about what we were going to eat when we got back home--steak or drink a glass of milk or something like that. Some of the people would try to throw

us food or cigarettes or something out on the working parties. It was kind of pitiful. They'd try to help you, and then they'd get caught and get beaten for it. I know they were just trying to help us, but still it was dangerous to do that.

Marcello: I would assume that that talk about food could have been pure torture at times.

Tilghman: Looking back on it, it would be. If you're going to think about it, you know it's going to make you hungry. We did that, though. That's what we talked about a lot of times--food and cars or automobiles. That was a large topic--what we were going to drive when we got back home and this and that.

There was a little Dutch girl that rode a bicycle around when we'd go to work on these working parties out at this camp, Bicycle Camp. She was a little blond-headed girl, and I imagine she was twelve or thirteen years old. She was always throwing cigarettes to the boys or something like that. I quit smoking about the day after we got captured, because I knew it was going to be some time before we were going to be able to get cigarettes. I think I had about a carton, and I gave them away, and I haven't smoked cigarettes. A lot of fellows did smoke, and this little girl would throw cigarettes, and she'd get in trouble a lot of times later.

I had a lot of letters from this girl after the war was over. She'd grown up. It turned out that she'd spent a lot of time in an internment camp with the Dutch people there.

While we were at Bicycle Camp, we had some time when we wouldn't work. I made a model of the cruiser Houston about this big (gesture) out of teakwood.

Marcello: About a yard long?

Tilghman: About eighteen inches or so. I carved it out of teak. One of the Navy people there had drawn a picture of it, and I used that for a pattern. It was pretty complete with everything on it. This boy that drove the grocery truck into camp took it out of camp with him one day. I made a box and put it around it, and he took it out of camp for me and gave it to this little Dutch girl. They allowed him a little more freedom, I guess, than some of them. He got it to her some way, and she kept it.

After the war I got letters from her. She was an airline hostess for KLM Dutch Airlines in Australia, and she still had this ship. Of course, I would have given anything for it. I wrote to her for several years, and she finally found somebody that was coming over here that she trusted to bring it. As it turned out, they didn't deliver it. I guess they kept it or something, but, anyway,I never did get it.

Marcello: Let's back up and talk a little bit more about this Dutch girl.

You mentioned that you would see her when you went out on work parties.

Tilghman: She would ride a bicycle up and down the streets along where we were marching while going to work.

Marcello: How would the work parties take place here at Bicycle Camp? First, were they voluntary, or were you assigned to them?

Tilghman: No, we were still assigned. The first sergeant kept a duty roster all the time, and he would assign us. Of course, a lot of people would volunteer. If you didn't want to go, some of the ones that weren't going might trade with you and go for you.

Marcello: I guess it broke the monotony to get out on those work parties, did it not?

Tilghman: Right. Now, this early, we weren't in such bad shape physically. The work was hard, but it was something to do to help pass the time away.

Marcello: What did you do on these work parties?

Tilghman: Still the same--moving supplies for those people. We'd work--some of us--on the docks unloading ships, moving gasoline, and digging trenches, air raid shelters, and things like that.

Marcello: Can you think of any specific instances of theft in which you were involved here on the docks?

Tilghman: Yes. We unloaded some sacks of sugar several times, and we could always manage to get a hole in those sacks of sugar

and maybe get some in your canteen or in your canteen cup and put your canteen back in it and get it into camp. Any kind of food we'd find and that we could steal . . . like, salt or sugar was good because it would help flavor the rice.

Marcello: What were the guards like on these work details?

Tilghman: To start with, they weren't all that bad. They were tough, and they did a lot of griping at you. If you didn't do just right, they'd hit you with a rifle and kick you or hit you with a fist. It just gradually got worse, it seemed like. It got where they'd come around the camp and go through the barracks. You had to get up and salute all of them. It didn't matter if it was a private or any of them. If you had your hat off, you had to bow; and if you didn't do it just right to suit them, they were likely to knock you down as not, or try to. That built their ego up, I guess, if they could hit a big man or somebody bigger than they were. The guards on the work parties were pretty tough most of the time . . . awful strict.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't find too many of them who would deliberately ignore the theft was taking place?

Tilghman: No.

Marcello: If they caught you . . .

Tilghman: It would be hard. It would be rough if they caught you.

Marcello: Let's get back to this little Dutch girl again. Do you have

any idea why she would be so friendly toward these American troops?

Tilghman: I never did figure it out. I don't know. I think her dad was a soldier, and that might have had something to do with it. Her whole family was interned there later. I just don't know why she would go out of her way to try to help us. She was just a real friendly little girl and always trying to help. She'd always wave and holler at you. It kind of helped your morale to see somebody that was friendly to you.

Marcello: Did it get to the point where when you went on work parties that you were kind of looking for her?

Tilghman: I'd always keep an eye out watching for that bicycle.

Marcello: How did you manage to get to meet her?

Tilghman: I never did meet her personally. After I made that ship, this boy that drove the truck had talked to her or met her some way. He told me that he could get it to her, but I never did get to talk to her.

Marcello: Why did he take the model out to give to this little Dutch girl?

Tilghman: I had hopes that maybe she could keep it for me until after the war was over. That's what I had hoped for.

Marcello: In other words, you were not taking it out in gratitude for what she had done or as a way of obtaining additional food or anything.

Tilghman: No, not really, I didn't.

Marcello: Let's get back and talk a little bit more about the Japanese guards. Does the harassment begin here at Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: That's where it first started, I think. They'd come through the barracks. Any time out in the area inside camp, if you were out there and they walked by, they were possibly liable to stop you and whack you over the head just for nothing. If they saw you throw something down on the ground, they'd get you for littering and make you pick it up, like, a cigarette or something. They would just kind of look for something to beat you up about.

Marcello: What did they look like in terms of appearance?

Tilghman: They weren't neat. Their uniforms were little old . . . oh, they looked like toy soldiers to me. They weren't clean-shaven or anything, and sometimes they would have a beard. Some of the soldiers that came off the front were really better than some of the others. I think they were more seasoned and more used to being where it was rough, and they might be a little better, maybe, than the others.

Marcello: I guess, therefore, that after you had become more settled there at Bicycle Camp, that the front line troops had moved on, and you simply had garrison troops or rear echelon troops at this time.

Tilghman: Right. We started getting a lot of those, and the Korean

soldiers started guarding us somewhere along in there.

Marcello: We'll talk more about the Korean guards later, of course. I guess it probably would be safe to say that the Japanese were not going to put the "cream" of their army, so to speak, on guard duty.

Tilghman: Right. This is true.

Marcello: The good Japanese soldiers were out on the front lines getting shot at.

Tilghman: That's right. I figure these were the misfits in their army, maybe, or some that hadn't been trained that much to fight.

Marcello: I assume the same thing would be true of the Japanese commandants in these camps. The good officers were going to be out fighting.

Tilghman: They were being used somewhere good. I just don't feel like the ones that we had were that good.

Marcello: What sort of rules and regulations did the Japanese lay down, so far as the conduct of the prisoners was concerned, here at Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: We'd have a roll call at reveille every morning and at night. We'd have a certain time to eat, have an exercise period, work period. When we'd have to go to work, I don't know what time it was, but it seemed like it was awful early sometimes to me. When we'd come in, we'd have a little time to maybe relax and rest. We had some time when we could play volleyball

and a little bit of time for sports, not a whole lot. I guess they probably tried to run it similar to what they run their army and navy. I don't know.

Marcello: Who took roll? Was it the Japanese, or did your own people take roll?

Tilghman: We'd call the roll and report to . . . or we'd line up, and they'd have a man come and count us. That's usually the way they'd do it. They started making us count off in Japanese. Of course, we didn't know much Japanese along this early. They'd line us up in fours, and then we'd have to count off in Japanese, and our number had to tally with what they had as to how many should be there.

Marcello: What were some of the usual forms of punishment that the Japanese guards would inflict upon the prisoners?

Tilghman: They would make you stand at attention and not move any way--just stand stiff as a board. They could make you squat down and put a bamboo pole behind your knees and make you squat down. Then they tied your hands up over your head. I've never been that unfortunate.

Marcello: When you say,"they would tie your hands up over your head," what do you mean?

Tilghman: Just high where you could just barely keep your weight on the floor.

Marcello: In other words, for the most part, it was the slapping and

the hitting with fists and gun butts and things of that nature?

Tilghman: Right. That's the roughest way they'd do it.

Marcello: I understand they were always yelling and shouting.

Tilghman: Oh, yes. They liked to throw their voice.

Marcello: Did you observe, however, that physical punishment was a way of life in the Japanese Army, also?

Tilghman: Yes. From the high-ups on down, they could strike and beat up somebody that was under them, and it would go all the way to the poor old buck private, and he didn't have anybody to jump on.

Marcello: I gather that if you found out that some Japanese officer had caught hell for something, eventually it was going to work its way all the way down to you.

Tilghman: It would come down through the chain, that's right. They always passed it on.

Marcello: Everybody had to save face.

Tilghman: They sure did. They were great people to try to save face, it seemed like to me.

Marcello: Can you elaborate on this?

Tilghman: Any time that anything would happen that would make them look bad, they would always try to cover it up and try to do something to change it and make them look good. They always said they were number one; they were always trying to make you think that they were the best at everything.

Marcello: And at that stage, they were number one.

Tilghman: They were at that time, as far as we were concerned. That's right.

Marcello: What sort of respects or courtesies did you have to pay toward the guards?

Tilghman: We had to stand at attention and salute them every time they'd come around. It didn't matter if they came by a dozen times. I don't think the officers . . .sometimes you'd run onto one that would like to talk. I don't think their superiors particularly went for that. Of course, we could talk to them a lot, anyway, when they were off by theirselves. I imagine their army would be very strict on everything they do. They just had to be, the way they showed it.

Marcello: I gather that you did not want to get too close to any of these guards. It was best to stay away from them.

Tilghman: No, stay away from them as best you could. That's the way it seemed to me. We didn't have anything to do with them unless we just had to.

Marcello: In other words, you were taking a chance if you tried to be friendly with them, because they could turn at any time.

Tilghman: You never knew when they were going to turn. You may be laughing and talking to one of them, and then they might just turn around and knock the fire out of you.

Marcello: Did you ever personally get hit here at Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: I don't believe I did here in Bicycle Camp. Like you said, I tried to stay away from them.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that upon your arrival in Bicycle Camp, the sailors off the Houston were already there. Describe their condition when you came into camp.

Tilghman: They were a bunch of people that didn't have any clothes, you might say (chuckle). They were just wearing every kind of uniform that they could get. Of course, when they got off that ship, they were lucky to get off and didn't have time to bring anything with them. They were all still in pretty good shape physically at this time, I believe. Some of them were sick, and maybe some of them were wounded when they got off the ship. They were pretty well about the same as we were, I think. We had more clothes than they did, and that's where we tried to share some with them.

Marcello: To your knowledge, was this a rather wholehearted effort? In other words, did you find that most people in your unit did share with the people off the Houston?

Tilghman: I think most of them did. There were probably a few of them that didn't, but I think most of them did. We had a few that were pretty well self-centered. They were looking out for self, and that was it. Most of them were pretty generous in sharing with them.

Marcello: I guess in a stress situation, such as you were in here, you

did see the very best and the very worst come out in people.

Tilghman: That's right. That sure would bring it out.

Marcello: Some of the people that you thought would not amount to a damn thing turned out to be pretty good people, and some of the people that you thought would be good people turned out to be really bastards, so to speak.

Tilghman: They were the worst. You're right. We had some of that . . . a lot of it. People that I didn't ever think would be my friends turned out to be the best friends I ever had.

Marcello: By this time, that is, while you're here in Bicycle Camp, are little cliques beginning to form? When I use the term clique, I'm not using this in a derogatory sense. Do two or three or four people more or less become very close and look out for one another?

Tilghman: That's true; that's true. I believe F Battery was closer than any other unit. Most all of our boys were just real close together. We had groups within our battery that maybe hung out together or bunked together and things like that, but the original bunch of sixty-four, sixty-five boys from Jacksboro--the unit as a whole--I believe they were closer together than any other unit. We only lost eight out of that sixty-five.

Marcello: Through this whole prisoner-of-war experience?

Tilghman: Through this whole prisoner-of-war experience. I feel like that was part of it, was becasue they were so close and everybody

tried to take care of each other and tried to help each other. I believe that's the reason that we only lost that many.

Marcello: Does it take a certain amount of effort to adjust to this alien culture that has suddenly confronted you? In other words, here you are, a West Texas boy, and suddenly you are a prisoner-of-war of a culture that's entirely different from anything that you've ever experienced back in Jacksboro. It seems to me that it would take a tremendous amount of adjusting.

Tilghman: I feel like it did. It was altogether different--a whole different life. Everything was different. We were just trying to survive, and I never expected or never hoped that we'd ever run into anything like that. It was so, so much different.

Marcello: At this point in Bicycle Camp, is military discipline still being maintained within the unit, so far as obeying your officers and non-coms and things of this sort?

Tilghman: I feel like it was. When they'd tell us something or tell us to do something, we tried to do it. The enlisted people, privates and those under the rank of sergeant, tried to do what we suggested or what we were told to do. Of course, the sergeant on down had to work the same as the privates, but I don't recall the officers having to work. They'd go out in charge of working parties, but enlisted people would work.

Marcello: I guess orders went from the Japanese to your officers to the non-coms and then down to the other personnel, is this correct?

Tilghman: Well, it went from the officers to our first sergeant. Below that, we had a group that the sergeants usually worked in. They kept us kind of segregated. Not segregated, but we worked in a different group, and sometimes the sergeants worked together and maybe the corporals or something like that. We did the same work as anybody else. We weren't shown any preference. The sergeants worked, too. At this time we did. Later on it got different.

Marcello: Was there ever any resentment over the fact that officers weren't working?

Tilghman: I don't feel like there was in our particular group. The Englishmen and some of the other people might have. We recognized the fact that the officers were in charge and would be in charge of our own unit, so that's the way I felt about it.

Marcello: I've heard that a lot of times the officers actually got more beatings than the enlisted personnel simply because they were the go-betweens.

Tilghman: They would stand up for the men, and I've seen that happen a lot of times. The Japs would try to jump on some of the boys, and the officers would take up for them and try to get

them not to or try to intervene, and sometimes they'd get a beating for it, too.

Marcello: There was an incident here at Bicycle Camp when the Japanese tried to get all of the prisoners to sign a non-escape pledge. Describe this incident.

Tilghman: I don't remember too much about what all did happen. I know they had this deal, and they didn't sign it for a long time. I believe finally the officers thought it might be best to go ahead and sign it, even though if you signed it under duress or something, it wouldn't matter, anyway. I believe we all signed it, anyway. It got pretty rough for a while.

Marcello: You mentioned that initially this document was not signed.

Tilghman: I don't believe it was at first. It seems to me like they finally decided that since we signed it under pressure, it wouldn't matter, anyway. It wouldn't hold any weight.

Marcello: You mentioned that things got rough after you initially refused to sign it. Can you elaborate on this?

Tilghman: Oh, yes. That's when the beatings would get good. They'd get real rough on you and beat you up when they'd come around. It seemed like about the time you'd get settled down, they'd come back through and do a bunch of beating. I don't think they ever beat on the same one twice. I don't know how they knew that, but they'd just really work you over.

Marcello: Did they ever threaten to kill any of you if you hadn't signed this document or anything of that nature? Did they carry out this bluff, so to speak?

Tilghman: I'm not sure if they did or not. It seems like they might have threatened to kill some of the officers if they didn't sign it. I don't know . . . they may not have. I'm not sure. I know they were pretty urgent that we did sign it, though. They wanted us to sign it. I guess they thought that if we signed it, we wouldn't escape. That wouldn't have made any difference, had we had the chance to get away after we signed it, I'm sure.

Marcello: What thought were you giving to escape at this particular time?

Tilghman: I hadn't given it much thought because I felt like the white man would be "out-of-pocket" out running around somewhere. Of course, here there were Dutch people out sometimes--some of them were out. Being on an island, I didn't think there would have been anyplace you could go. I didn't give it much thought, myself.

Marcello: Did you hear a lot of idle talk about it in the bull sessions?

Tilghman: Oh, yes. Someone was always talking about somebody getting away or trying to get away or something.

Marcello: Talk is cheap, I guess.

Tilghman: Talk is cheap. That's right.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever threaten you as to what would happen if

you did try to escape and were caught?

Tilghman: They always told us that anybody that tried to escape would be shot.

Marcello: Did you believe them?

Tilghman: I kind of believed them. I don't know if they ever shot anyone or not. I've heard they did--some Australians or English people that tried to escape. As far as I know, none of the Americans were shot.

Marcello: I assume that there were not attempts by the Americans to escape.

Tilghman: Not this early yet. I don't think so.

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

Tilghman: Not very good. We had some water all right where we could bathe, but the best I remember, we just had running water, and you could just pour it over you and get wet; and if you had soap, you could rinse it off.

Marcello: In other words, were there spigots in intervals around the camp, rather than showers as we know them?

Tilghman: There were none that I know of--no showers here. We had places where you could bathe. Their restrooms were completely different from what ours are--no commodes or anything like that on them. They were just slit trenches with water running through them . . . paved with concrete. Some of the camps

had kind of a concrete tub with water in it, and some of them had water running out the spigots. I don't remember any showers being here.

Marcello: Did you have relatively easy access to water?

Tilghman: In this camp, yes.

Marcello: How about the hospital facilities? What were they like?

Tilghman: No medicine.

Marcello: Even here at Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: We had very little medicine. Our doctor was still alive. We had two doctors--one Navy doctor and our battalion doctor.

Marcello: I guess there wasn't too much illness here at Bicycle Camp.

Tilghman: Not yet. There wasn't all that much. People were getting sick maybe with a little malaria or a little fever or something, but it wasn't that bad yet.

Marcello: What did you do for recreation?

Tilghman: Played volleyball, cards, and checkers. People made checker boards. Some of the sailors made a Mah Jong game. That's a Chinese game, I understand. I played it some. There were a few chess boards around, and some of them played chess. Mainly, I think volleyball was about as much that we could play.

Marcello: Were there ever any theatrical performances of that sort?

Tilghman: Yes, they had some of those. I don't recall if we had any in this camp or not, but I believe we had some concerts, music. There were a few musical instruments around. One bugler,

I know, had a trumpet, but I don't know if there were any other musical instruments or not. We had some plays put on sometimes, and they'd sing songs and things like that.

Marcello: I assume that at this time they weren't working you too hard, so you perhaps would have been able to participate in recreational activities in the evenings.

Tilghman: Oh, yes. More now, that's right. We had the work that was hard, but it wasn't all that long. The hours weren't as long as they were later, and work wasn't really that hard yet. It was hard, but it wasn't where we still weren't able to have some recreation.

Marcello: What sort of news were you getting from the outside?

Tilghman: Oh, not much, not much.

Marcello: Of course, at this stage everything you were getting was bad.

Tilghman: Everything was bad. The Japs all the time were telling us that they'd bombed San Francisco and New York and those places.

Marcello: Jacksboro, too?

Tilghman: Yes, they'd already bombed Jacksboro. Anywhere else you mentioned, they'd already bombed that, too. Of course, we didn't think they had, but you never know.

Marcello: Were there any secret radios in the camp?

Tilghman: I don't know when we got one, but I know we had one later, and there might have been one in this camp. I'm not sure, but I believe there was. We'd get a little news, but, like you

said, it wasn't very good most of the time now.

Marcello: By this time, are all the prisoners already becoming scavengers, so to speak? In other words, a piece of string, a piece of metal, would be collected because it might be of some future use later on down the line?

Tilghman: Yes, that's true. Some of the boys . . . I know we had one we called "Packrat." I imagine you've heard of him. He'd pick up everything he'd get hold of, and everybody else was getting to be that way. You'd save every little piece of paper, anything that you'd think might come in handy later on.

Marcello: I understand that the sailors off the <u>Houston</u> were very good at making things and converting objects into useful tools and things of that nature, mainly because of the skills that they had had while aboard ship.

Tilghman: Right. They were that way. A lot of them were real good.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with other nationalities here at Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: Let's see. I've forgotten if they had any English or Australians. It seems like there were some Australians there, and maybe some Dutch. It turned out that the Australians were the best. It didn't take us long to learn that they were the best ones to associate with. I don't believe there were any Dutch in this camp.

Marcello: I guess it was in October of 1942 that they decided to move you out of Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: Do you remember the preliminaries to this move? In other words, did they give you advance warning that you were going to move or anything of this nature?

Tilghman: Before I left, they had already sent one group on ahead of us. I was in one of the last groups to leave Java. They'd already sent one on to . . . we didn't know where. We thought it was going to Burma. We knew a little while ahead of time when we were going to go. Some of the people that weren't well and weren't able to go, they stayed behind. Most of our bunch that were still there went.

Marcello: What sort of preparations did you make for this trip?

Tilghman: We just took what we could take and what we thought we would need. We tried to get a little bit of food or something ahead of time to take along with us, because we didn't know. We knew we'd probably ride a ship, and that didn't set very well because we didn't really know what to expect.

Marcello: I assume that neither the Japanese nor anybody else told you where you were going or what you would be doing.

Tilghman: No, just that we were going and to be ready to go--and we did.

Marcello: Was it kind of unsettling to leave Bicycle Camp? After all, I'm sure that by this time you had settled into some sort of

a routine.

Tilghman: Yes. We kind of dreaded to leave--I did--because I knew it could get worse. Of course, it could have gotten better. We weren't in such bad shape there now, and I hated to leave, really.

Marcello: As you look back on your stay in Bicycle Camp, is it safe to say that had you been able to remain there for the duration of the war, things might not have been too bad?

Tilghman: It might not have been as bad as it was. It wouldn't have been--I know--as bad as it was later on.

Marcello: Being a prisoner-of-war is not a good situation under any circumstances.

Tilghman: If we had been able to continue getting even the type of food we were getting and the work hadn't been any harder than what it was, I think we would have probably been a lot better off to have stayed there.

Marcello: Describe what happens at this point.

Tilghman: When we got orders to leave, some of the officers went with us, and some of them had already gone on with this other group. That's when we loaded on the first Japanese ship that we'd ridden. They put us down in the hold, down below decks, and it was crowded in there. There wasn't enough room to really stretch out and lay down. They'd packed all they could get in there. We went from there to Singapore.

Marcello: Was this ship the Dai Nichi Maru?

Tilghman: I believe that's right. I'm not sure, but I believe that's the one.

Marcello: Can you further elaborate upon conditions aboard the ship? You mentioned, of course, that you were very crowded in there.

Tilghman: There was no restroom facilities, very little water. They had a little old lean-to placed up on deck where you could go to the bathroom. I think it was built out over the edge of the ship. Water was scarce. I don't think they allowed us but about a cup of water a day. It wasn't much. As hot as it was . . . this was pretty close to the equator, and it was awful hot.

Marcello: Dysentery hadn't really hit at this time yet, had it?

Tilghman: Not really.

Marcello: That was a break.

Tilghman: That was a break, yes. It was so hot and crowded that you couldn't rest and you couldn't sleep. You were just lucky it didn't take all that long to get from Batavia up to Singapore.

Marcello: How did they feed you aboard the ship?

Tilghman: Not very good. We'd still get that little bit of rice, and sometimes we'd get a little soup or dried fish.

Marcello: Was it lowered down into the hold, or did you go up on deck to get it?

Tilghman: I believe we only got to go up on deck to go the restroom, and

that wasn't very much.

Marcello: How was the food distributed in these crowded conditions? It would almost seem as though discipline would perhaps break down.

Tilghman: It wasn't good. I think we just had to pass it around or pass individual pans around or the mess kits around to get them full and get food in them. That again has been so long, and I don't really remember too much about that part of it.

Marcello: I guess this was really your first taste of how grim life as a prisoner-of-war was going to be.

Tilghman: Right. It sure was. That was the worst part of it that we'd had so far--on that ship.

Marcello: Were you able to stand up down in that hold?

Tilghman: You could stand up, and we'd all try to take turns standing close to the steps going up where you could get up and get a little fresh air.

Marcello: But they normally did not allow you up on deck at all?

Tilghman: Not any length of time. Just to go to the restroom.

Marcello: Could you go to the restroom at any time you wanted, or were there specific times, or how did that work?

Tilghman: I don't remember if we got to go just a certain period of time or not. I think we were only allowed to go during a certain period of time.

Marcello: I guess the reason I'm asking that question is that, since going

to the restroom did offer a chance to get up on deck, people might be going all the time.

Tilghman: Right. I don't remember, but I don't think they allowed us to do that all the time.

Marcello: Did you have the foresight to fill your canteen with water before you left?

Tilghman: Yes. I had water in it before I left, but it didn't last all that time. We finally got a little bit, but not very much, on the trip.

Marcello: So you land in Singapore, and they sent you to Changi Village.

Tilghman: Right.

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

Tilghman: It looked like a real good place to be for a while. It had big, white barracks, and it seemed like the buildings were two- or three-story. I don't remember exactly. They were nice, clean rooms. Of course, here we didn't have beds to sleep on, either. But by this time we were used to sleeping on the floor. It was a nice place to be.

Marcello: This was a huge camp, was it not?

Tilghman: Right. It was a big camp. It sure was.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that when you first got there, you thought it was going to be a pretty nice camp. You evidently changed your mind somewhere along the line.

Tilghman: Well, it wasn't as good as we thought. The facilities weren't

all that good. We didn't work very much while we were here. We didn't stay here too long, the best I remember. The sanitation part of it wasn't kept like the English had kept it before. It was getting to be a pretty big problem--the sanitation, the bath situation, sewers and all. It was running down. It wasn't going to be good very long. The food wasn't all that much better here than it was anywhere else. It was just usually about the same as what they fed us all the time.

Marcello: Was it worse than in Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: No, I don't believe it was. The best I remember, it was about the same or maybe a little better. A few vegetables, but it wasn't all that much better than any other place.

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

Tilghman: Right. They thought they did (chuckle).

Marcello: Would you like to elaborate on that?

Tilghman: They seemed to think it was still theirs, and they tried to let us believe that. They didn't want us to be tearing anything up. I know one of our sergeants had a fight with one of the Englishmen, because they had cut the top out of one of those palm trees. There is a heart in the middle of that that is good to eat--kind of like a turnip--and it tastes real good. They cut down one of those trees and got that pith out of the middle of it to eat, and those English people didn't like

that a bit. One of our sergeants and one of their fellows had a fight over that.

They wanted you to not bother anything; they wanted to leave it like it was. It looked kind of funny to us, in that they were POW's the same as we were. The Japs were the ones that were supposed to be in charge.

Marcello: Do you remember any of the controversy involving the so-called "king's coconuts?"

Tilghman: Other than that coconut tree, that's the only one that I recall--when we cut the coconut tree down and got the part out of it to eat.

Marcello: I understand that the English officers had chickens and ducks and things of that nature, and these were considered fair game so far as the Americans were concerned.

Tilghman: I've heard that. I didn't see any of them, but I've heard that some of them disappeared while we were there.

Marcello: What did you do while you were here at Changi?

Tilghman: I don't think we had any working parties to my knowledge. We didn't stay there very long. I think it was just kind of an in-and-out stop. We stayed there for a while and just kind of rested and laid around.

Marcello: Did you stay there for as long as a month? Were you there that long?

Tilghman: I don't really believe we stayed that long.

Marcello: In other words, I do know that a vegetable garden had been started here, and a lot of the people were clearing the trees off a rubber plantation. Did you participate in any of that work?

Tilghman: I don't think I did any of that, no. Some of them did probably start a garden. It seems like I do remember that. We didn't stay that long to where it would do all that much good, I don't think.

Marcello: Is this where most of you began to develop your dislike for the British?

Tilghman: Yes, that was the start of it, right there. It seemed to me they thought they were better than anybody else. Their attitude there was what turned me against them, I think.

Marcello: This evidently was not true of the Scots that were there.

Tilghman: No, the Scots were different than the English, it seemed to me like. They were good people, too.

Marcello: Were you in the group that was piped out of Changi by the Scots?

Tilghman: No, I don't recall that. I do remember the band. They had one of their kilted bands there. I've heard them play, but when we left I don't remember them piping us out.

Marcello: I gather that most of the prisoners were kind of happy to get out of Changi.

Tilghman: I was.

Marcello: What made it so bad, so far as you were concerned?

Tilghman: I guess by this time I was just kind of tired, laying around, I was just wanting to get on to where we were going, mainly. If I'd know what was ahead, I probably wouldn't have.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of prisoners say that the sanitary and hygiene habits of the British were just something to be desired.

Tilghman: Right. That's true. They were just a weakly-looking bunch of people to me. They didn't look as healthy as the Australians or the Scots, either one. They were just a different kind of people altogether to me.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the morale of the British troops was relatively low here, too.

Tilghman: I bet that's true.

Marcello: Incidentally, how soon was the war going to be over at this point?

Tilghman: Well, we still didn't think it was going to take long. I mean, we just figured that it would take awhile to regroup after Pearl Harbor, and then they'd just push them all back to Japan. That's what I thought, but I had a lot of other thoughts coming.

Marcello: When you got to Changi, did you know that you were only going to be there temporarily?

Tilghman: I didn't suspect we'd stay there long. I didn't know, because there wasn't any of our other people there that had left ahead of us. I figured we'd probably wind up somewhere where

they were, maybe.

Marcello: Okay, pick up the story at this point, How do you leave Changi and when do you leave?

Tilghman: When we left, I'm not sure of the date. It was in either the latter part of 1942 or the early part of 1943. We went by train from Singapore. We went up the Malaya Peninsula part of the way--up to Penang.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened on this train trip?

Tilghman: Not that I recall on the train trip. After we got to Penang, then we got on another one of the Japanese transports and started on farther north. We had two ships. One had most of the Japanese soldiers on it, and one had some Japanese and Dutch and Americans on it. We had an old--what we called--corvette, an old Japanese boat of some kind, a little warship. On this trip we got bombed by our own people.

Marcello: First of all, describe what conditions were like aboard the ship.

Tilghman: It was about similar to that first ship we rode on. It was very crowded, and we had to stay down below decks all the time. The conditions were practically about the same. I don't believe it could have been much worse. We were just stacked in below decks. I don't remember how deep. It seemed like we were in the first hold below the deck. I know we didn't have room to stretch out. We just had to kind of sit or hunker

down. We were all crowded up. It was still very hot.

Marcello: Was water a problem on this ship?

Tilghman: Water was still a problem on this one, too, yes, sir. The restroom facilities were about the same. That seemed to be a general way they have their ships rigged up. Their part of the ship is always the same as ours, though. They don't travel any better than we do, I don't think.

Marcello: While you're down in the hold under these circumstances, what do you talk about?

Tilghman: Oh, different things. We still talk about food and what we're going to do when we get back home, wondering how the people are that left earlier ahead of us.

Marcello: I guess by this time you know virtually everything about everybody else, do you not?

Tilghman: We're getting to that point, yes, sir. Everybody is getting a lot closer together, and we know more about each other. For a long time, the people in D Battery or Service Battery or Headquarters Battery, we didn't know them too well. After we get in these conditions, after we've been in prison camp this long, we're getting to know them because everybody is thrown in together. We're not still organized by units anymore. Everybody gets to know each other better.

Marcello: You mentioned that while you're out of Penang and on your way to Moulmein, Burma, that this little convoy comes under an

air attack?

Tilghman: That's right.

Marcello: Describe in as much detail as you can remember what happened.

Tilghman: It seems to me like it was about midday one day when we heard these planes . . . , heard the motors. Of course, they made all of us stay down below decks, but we did hear them coming over. They dropped bombs one time when they went over. I don't know if it was the first time over or not that they hit the ship that had all the Japanese soldiers on it.

Marcello: And there were Dutchmen on that ship, too, weren't there?

Tilghman: There were Dutchmen on that ship, too, and the ship sank. They made another run, and they hit on both sides of our ship. The bomb hit on both sides of the ship. Some of the shrapnel tore into this ship and hit the bridge and maybe part of the rear of the ship. I don't know . . . it seemed like they had an old gun sitting on the back of the ship. It didn't sink it, but it sure did shake it around in the water.

We were just about as far as you could see from land, that you could still see the row of mountains on the distant horizon. It would have been a long swim if we'd had to swim ashore.

Marcello: Now, could you see how close to shore you were at that particular time, that is, while the raid was going on?

Tilghman: We had seen it when we'd gone topside to the restroom. We

could tell how we'd been staying about that distance away from the coast. We knew pretty close to how far it was.

Marcello: Was there any panic down in the hold of the ship after you were straddled by the bombs?

Tilghman: Everybody was scared.

Marcello: I was wondering if all of a sudden there might have been a rush for the open hatch while you were down there.

Tilghman: Some of them tried and wanted to get out on topside, and the guards wouldn't let them. They were always guarding at the top, and they wouldn't let them get out there, the best I remember. We didn't want to be down underneath there when that ship sank, that's for sure.

Marcello: Were you scared?

Tilghman: You bet! I sure was! Luckily the planes left after they missed our ship on both sides, and they went on their way. This ship that we were on stayed around and helped pick up survivors out off the other ships--some of the Japs and some of the Dutch people. They picked up all they could, and then we finally went on into Moulmein.

Marcello: In the meantime, had the attitude of the Japanese changed any as a result of these raids?

Tilghman: They seemed like after something like that they'd always get a little rougher. They'd really take their spite out on us for it.

Marcello: I assume that your ship must have been extremely crowded.

Tilghman: It was, after we picked up all of those people. It was crowded beforehand, but after we picked up all of those, they were standing around on the decks and sitting and just laying everywhere all over the ship.

Marcello: At this time, how was your own physical condition holding up?

Tilghman: I was still in pretty good shape. When I went in, I guess I was in real good shape. I didn't smoke, and I was in good shape physically. I was still holding up pretty good. I always tried to eat what I could get. If you didn't eat, you were going to get weaker. I tried to eat all I could get, anyway, all the time.

Marcello: So you pull into Moulmein, Burma. Pick up the story at that point. Where do you go from there?

Tilghman: From there they unloaded us, and we went to what I'd call an old jail. I think it was a prison. We stayed there for a while and kind of recuperated and rested a little bit. We didn't stay there very long. They moved us on out and took us to 18 Kilo Camp to start on the railroad.

Marcello: Did you pass through Thanbyuzayat at all, or did you bypass Thanbyuzayat?

Tilghman: We hadn't been there yet, I don't believe. I don't recall that. I thought that was up on the other end of the railroad.

Marcello: No, Thanbyuzayat was the first base camp at the beginning

of the railroad.

Tilghman: Yes, yes, that's right. I believe we went there first, and then we went on out on to the 18 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: When you passed through Thanbyuzayat, were you given any sort of an orientation or anything of that nature by the Japanese? In other words, did the commandant give you a speech?

Tilghman: Yes, he gave us a speech. He stood up on the box and told us that the railroad had to be built, and it would be built over our dead bodies and all that stuff. We had a big formation, had everybody fall out, and he talked to us for I don't know how long.

Marcello: This was Colonel Nagatomo?

Tilghman: Nagatomo, right. He was the man in charge of the whole railroad project, I think.

Marcello: How did this speech take place? In other words, did he give it to you in English, or was he speaking in Japanese and then having an interpreter?

Tilghman: I believe he had an interpreter, the best I remember. I don't think he could speak English. He may have spoken in English a little bit, but I believe they did have an interpreter there.

Marcello: So you mentioned that you spent just a very short time at Moulmein and a very short time here at Thanbyuzayat--just a matter of a couple of days.

Tilghman: Not long, I don't think, the best I remember.

Marcello: Then you move out to the 18 Kilo Camp?

Tilghman: 18 Kilo.

Marcello: Describe what 18 Kilo looked like from a physical standpoint.

Tilghman: There was dust everywhere, and, of course, we had long left the pavement. Dust just filtered up everywhere you walked--powdery dust. The buildings were these old . . . made out of bamboo with atap roofs. They usually made a long building, maybe fifty yards long, and on each side it had a hall down the middle. Each side had a little raised area of bamboo that we would sleep on. It was about the length of a normal person, maybe six foot or maybe six-and-a-half feet long. This was made out of split bamboo that was laid down and tied flat. It had a little bit of flexibility to it, where it wasn't quite as hard as a concrete wall or something. That way each man had about a two-and-a-half-foot place to sleep. You kept all your gear and everything there on that. We had an open place along the back wall where air could get in, but it was still awfully hot in there. Most of the time it was hot, and during the rainy season it was cool. When we first got there it was dry, hot weather.

Marcello: How large are most of these camps?

Tilghman: Most of them had anywhere from, I'd say, four or five to fifteen or twenty of those buildings . . . different buildings.

Marcello: And what other sorts of buildings are there in this camp besides the actual barracks where you were housed?

Tilghman: They had the barracks, and they'd have maybe one that they'd call a kitchen. It wouldn't be quite that big. It would be just a small building. Then they'd have the Japanese quarters and the guard quarters off to one side. They'd have one of the buildings they'd use for a hospital building and maybe one building where they'd keep their supplies.

Marcello: If we describe one of these camps, I gather we're more or less describing all of them while you're working on the railroad.

Tilghman: Most of them are similar, yes, sir. They vary in size, but most all of them will be similar to that.

Marcello: Are there different nationalities in this camp?

Tilghman: I believe so, yes, sir. I believe there are some Dutch and some Australians and Americans. Maybe there were some English, but I don't remember.

Marcello: Let's describe what a typical day was like here at the 18 Kilo Camp from the time you get up until you came in in the evening when the work was done.

Tilghman: We'd get up, it seemed like, before daylight. We'd have a bugler blow the bugle. We'd eat in the dark and eat what little rice . . . what they had to eat for us was rice and soup or something. Then we fall out to go to work.

That's when the railroad was just starting along here,

and we were building the initial roadbed for it, is what we were doing. Part of it would be making a little cut through a little hill; part of it would be filling in to make the roadbed level.

When we first started out, they would assign us a cubic meter . . . I think a meter is thirty-nine inches. They would assign us to move--to dig out of this hill--a cubic meter of dirt per man and move it down here somewhere else to put it on the fill or somewhere. We worked on that until we got through, and then we could go to camp.

We kind of fouled ourselves up on that. I think we started doing this, and we'd get through early. Then they got to where they'd tack on more work. We finally got it up as high as two meters a day that they'd have us moving, maybe more than that even. That's pretty hard to do if you have to carry that dirt very far.

We'd have to dig that dirt out, and we didn't have much of a way to move it. We'd have a burlap bag or a straw bag with a string and a rope tied on each corner. Then we'd run a bamboo pole through these loops, and there would be a man on each end of it to carry it. We'd have somebody to dig and somebody to shovel. Sometime--I don't remember if we had it all the time--we got hold of a bunch of American shovels and picks, and that made the chore a little bit easier to

handle the dirt with.

Marcello: You mentioned that you got hold of some American picks and shovels. What had you been using before that?

Tilghman: I think we first started out with some of their equipment, which wasn't as good as ours. I don't know where ours came from. I imagine they picked them up somewhere--some of the stuff--out of the Philippines or somewhere. Anyway, we used our shovels a lot--most of the way--through the railroad then.

We made these fills, and part of the crews would be working . . . I think most of our work was making the cuts and fills. Then they had another group behind that was making the ties and putting the ties on the railroad and laying the rails. Along here, I think all we were doing was digging and making the fills.

Marcello: When they boosted the quota up to two cubic meters, did that mean that you were coming in after dark then?

Tilghman: That made us come in later, yes, sir. Most of the time it was after dark.

Marcello: At this stage, you were all in pretty good shape, though, were you not?

Tilghman: We were in pretty good shape. The malaria and the ulcers and things hadn't started taking a toll yet.

Marcello: When you were on the work details, what role did the Japanese guards play? By this time, I guess you have Korean guards,

do you not?

Tilghman: I believe we did have Korean guards then. We worked for what they called an engineer. The Japanese were the overseers; they told us what we had to do. The guards would just stand off to the side and just were there. The engineers were Japanese, and they're the ones that told us what to do.

Marcello: Did the guards even harass you out on the work details?

Tilghman: Sometimes they would. Most of the times it was the engineers that would do the cain-raising or hell-raising. If it didn't go to suit him, he'd throw his voice and maybe bat somebody over the head with his fist or something.

Marcello: Now, here again, what were the meals like?

Tilghman: That same rice and soup. It was rice and dried fish or something. Sometimes we'd get a little dried fish, and it looked like a little minnow. It would be dried fish, but mostly it was just rice and soup.

Marcello: When you were out on the job, was lunch served out on the job?

Tilghman: It was brought out to us, yes, sir. Some of the people that worked in the kitchen . . . they had a special detail that would carry the food out. I had this job later on up the road, but we'll get to that after a little bit. Here at 18 Kilo they'd have people bring it out. You've seen our wooden barrels that we've got here. They'd have them cut in half or maybe a metal barrel that was cut in half, and

we'd carry the rice out in that and carry the soup out in it, too.

Marcello: In other words, it was the same monotonous meal for all three meals of the day.

Tilghman: All three meals, yes, sir. It was about the same. You didn't have very much to look forward to--much change, anyway.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the Korean guards that you encountered here on the railroad. I guess they were bad enough here at 18 Kilo, but I suspect that they were worse all the way through.

Tilghman: They seemed to.

Marcello: How did the Korean guards differ from the Japanese guards that you'd had in Bicycle Camp?

Tilghman: The way I look at it, they're the type of people that the Japanese didn't trust. They didn't put them out on the front line to fight; they were just more or less occupational troops. Give them a little authority, and then I think they just liked to show their authority, and they did. They didn't mind at all bashing you around. We had special names for all of them that we could come up with--had a bunch of them.

Marcello: What were some of the nicknames that you had for these Korean guards?

Tilghman: I don't remember if they were all here, but some of these were here. We had one great, big, old Korean guard--I guess he

was about six foot tall--and we called him "Boofhead."
He was a big, old, dark-complected Korean.

Marcello: Did you have "Liver Lips" here?

Tilghman: "Liver Lips" was farther on up the road. I think he was maybe at 100 Kilo or 80 Kilo.

Marcello: Wasn't there another one called the "Brown Bomber?"

Tilghman: The "Brown Bomber" was a little bitty fellow that was just real dark, and he made more racket than three of them. He'd just come through the barracks, and it seemed like he was trying to intimidate you. He'd come through with a bamboo pole just whacking at the walls and making a racket. He just enjoyed stopping and beating you down.

Marcello: Do you actually remember these people for what they did farther on up the road?

Tilghman: Yes. They got worse as they went.

Marcello: Okay, we'll talk about them later on as we get up the road. What were the toilet facilities and bathing facilities like here at the 18 Kilo Camp?

Tilghman: The toilet facilities, we just had to keep a slit trench dug and cover it up when it would get partially filled. The bathing facilities were practically nothing. If there was a stream by close where you could bathe, you were lucky to have a way to bathe. If we were out on the railroad working, when we'd come in sometimes we'd get to take a bath if we'd

come by a creek or stream, something like that. There were no lakes or anything like that around. Just little streams was about all they had.

Marcello: I guess, when you come back off these work details here at 18 Kilo, there was virtually no time for recreation.

Tilghman: No. Recreation was a thing of the past here. When we came in from there, we were ready to lay down and rest. Sometimes I've seen some of them go to bed and not even eat. They'd just be so tired.

Marcello: Is it true that you normally would keep fires going all night at each end of the barracks?

Tilghman: Usually, that's right; that's true. We'd have a guard. Sometimes some of our people that weren't able to work but still weren't too sick would have a fire guard and keep the fire burning.

Marcello: What was the idea of having the fires going all the time?

Tilghman: I think sometimes they might have done this to keep some of the wild animals scared off. This country was where white people had not been before, and there were a lot of wild animals like tigers and different snakes . . . wild animals. It wasn't anything to see big snakes out in these jungles. There were cats there, too, big cats, and we saw some later on up the road.

At one camp, I remember . . . I don't remember exactly

which camp it was, but some of the boys found a little tiger cat out on the work party and brought it to camp. The next morning they found that old mama cat's tracks around in the camp, so they got rid of that little kitten. They didn't keep it around very long.

Marcello: You were working during the dry season here at 18 Kilo?

Tilghman: Yes, it was dry still when we first got there. It seemed like the rainy season started in June or somewhere along in there. Time didn't mean all that much, but I know there was about six months of rainy season, and then it was the dry season. It was still dry when we first got there. On up through the 18 Kilo Camp--when we were building most of that part of the railroad--it was dry.

Marcello: Where do you go from the 18 Kilo Camp?

Tilghman: I think we went from the 18 . . . I believe we went all the way to the 80 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: By the time you get to the 80 Kilo Camp, is this when things really begin to get bad?

Tilghman: It starts getting bad here. Well, it already is bad.

Marcello: Is it not true that this is where we get the so-called "Speedo" campaign and the monsoon season coming together?

Tilghman: All together.

Marcello: Describe what the monsoon season was like.

Tilghman: It is just about a rainy season all day. I mean, it just

rained nearly all the time. Everything would just be so muddy and so wet that you can't stay dry, and the buildings get to where they won't keep you dry. The roof leaks. It is miserable. It is cold at night.

You try to work. Of course, by this time most of us had about worn out all of our shoes, and you had to work barefooted and with shorts. If you are lucky to have shorts or a G-string or whatever to wear, you were lucky. But you stayed cold most of the time.

The monsoon season was the most uncomfortable part of the time. I'd rather work in the heat than that wet, muddy weather. You couldn't move the dirt like you should in the rain. You could dig out in the cuts all right, but you'd start making those fills and the dirt wouldn't stay. It would wash out. There was always a lot of water running.

Marcello: At the same time that the monsoon season starts, the Japanese initiated the "Speedo" campaign because they were behind schedule.

Tilghman: They were behind schedule on the railroad, and they were trying to catch up. We started doing double time on everything, and they assigned us more work to do.

Marcello: What time would a day start during the "Speedo" campaign?

Tilghman: Oh, at daylight at least. Then we'd go until late at night. Sometimes it'd be eleven or twelve o'clock by the time we'd

get into camp. We might have to walk four or five miles or farther before we'd get to where we were working.

Marcello: By the time you reach the 80 Kilo Camp, you were definitely back in the jungle.

Tilghman: Right, and the people began to get sick then, too. Malaria had been catching up with them. Scurvy, lack of vitamins, all started catching up with us. Of course, the malaria made the people just deathly sick. I guess I was one of the very few fortunate ones in that I didn't get sick very much. I had malaria some, but I didn't have but one little tropical ulcer all this time. The jungle in the monsoon season is the bad time for those ulcers, too. You'd skin your finger or your hand or arm or leg, and it seemed like it would just rot out. Those ulcers would get so bad.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about the work details, and then we'll come back and talk about the various illnesses and injuries and so on. With the coming of the "Speedo" campaign, did the brutality of the guards increase?

Tilghman: Yes. They started pushing us harder, and, of course, you can only go so much and do so much. But they were still trying to force you and speed you up. The beatings and the harsh treatment just kept going and getting worse It was as bad as it could be.

Marcello: Is this where you especially have the unpleasant and vivid memories of the "Brown Bomber" and "Liver Lips" and so on and

so forth?

Tilghman: That's right.

Marcello: What made these individuals so bad and stand out in your mind?

Tilghman: I don't know. Some of the guards weren't that way. I don't know why these few were just so mean or what. They just seemed like they got a kick out of being rough on us. Some of the others were just calm, meek little fellows that acted like they had a job to do, and they were just there doing it and trying to get by as well as we were. But some few of them were not that way. They seemed like they took a delight in beating you up.

Marcello: What were some of the things these Korean guards would do here?

Tilghman: They would just beat you up with a bamboo pole or hit you with a rifle butt or kick you. At the least little provocation . . . sometimes you didn't even have to do anything. If you slipped and fell down or something, they'd just throw a fit.

Even the engineers got to where they were doing more of this. They were getting rough, too, along about this time. I'm sure their superiors were hard on them, and they were just pushing us that much harder.

Marcello: Now, here again, how was the food situation at this time?

Tilghman: Of course, during the monsoon season it was harder to get the

food up through that wet country. It got kind of short sometimes. The rice was still not good. We very seldom got what we called good rice. It would be dirty and have weevils and worms, and we would just have to do the best we could with it. We had very few vegetables or anything to put in it. The food was just not that good to give us enough vitamins and what we needed. We would just stay run down. If you missed a meal there, you were just that far behind. That's why a lot of people got sick. They didn't want to eat, and it would just make it harder on them. They wouldn't eat, and they'd get weaker, and some of them died.

Marcello: By this time, are you resorting to trying to supplement your diet with cats, dogs, snakes, and things of that nature?

Tilghman: That's true. I didn't eat any that I know of, but I know there were dogs and cats that some of the people ate . . . snakes. I ate some snake one time. On one of the working parties we killed a big python. We didn't kill it; the Jap guard finally shot him four or five times and finally killed it. It was about . . . I imagine it was ten or twelve inches across--a big snake. We cut it up into chunks and carried it back to camp and cooked it. It wasn't bad. It had quite a bit of meat on it. The ribs were as big as your little finger, and it had a lot of meat on it. We ate that, but

that's about the only snake that I ate.

I've even seen even the Japanese catch a little snake and kill it, stick a stick through it, roast it, and then sit there and eat it. I couldn't do that. I got hungry, but I never did get that hungry.

Marcello: Were you able to steal from the Japanese here at 80 Kilo?

Tilghman: Sometimes you could steal something that they might have or that their supply room would have. Sometimes you'd find some good rice, or sometimes they'd have some sugar, and we might have a chance to get some of it.

Marcello: Do you have any opportunities to trade with the natives along the railroad?

Tilghman: Sometimes you would. They had what we called sugar, brown sugar. It was made out of cane, I guess. It looked kind of like it was in cakes of sugar. Sometimes we'd trade and get some of that from them. They paid us fifteen or twenty cents a day of their money, which wasn't very much, and we could spend a little of it if we caught somebody like that that would sell it to us, or if the Japs didn't care. Sometimes we'd have to slip around, and once in a while you'd find a guard that wouldn't care if we bought a little of it. We'd get to trade with them a little bit.

Marcello: I guess by the time you get up there to the 80 Kilo Camp, like you mentioned awhile ago, supply trucks sometimes couldn't

get through because the road would be washed out?

Tilghman: That's right. That wet country bogged them down so much. They got hold of some of the G.I. trucks somewhere, those six-wheel drive trucks. Even they wouldn't get up through that very good; they'd have trouble getting them through. Either ox carts or elephants or something would bring the supplies in. It was hard to get through that wet country.

Marcello: Awhile ago we were talking about the work on the railroad, and I mentioned the fact that you were back in the jungles by this time. Did that mean that, first of all, you had to clear the jungle before you made the cuts and so on?

Tilghman: We had to get the timber off of it, cut it down, and get it to where you could start digging the rights-of-way. They used elephants a lot for moving that timber around after we cut the trees down. They could tie a chain onto it, and that elephant would pull it or push it with his head or trunk and move the timber that way. They used elephants a lot in building some of the bridges, handling that timber. They moved it around with elephants, kind of like a bulldozer, you know.

Marcello: I assume that native labor would be handling the elephants.

Tilghman: They did sometimes. Once in awhile you'd see a Japanese soldier doing it, but most of the time it was natives.

Marcello: Did you ever participate on any of the bridge-building details

here at either the 80 or 100 Kilo Camp?

Tilghman: I believe it was the 80 Kilo that I worked with an elephant for a while. I didn't run him. One of the Japanese engineers was running it. We would have a crew cutting the trees out in the timber, and the elephant would drag the timber up to the bridges.

I had a pretty easy job along about then. It was my job to tie the chain onto the log and then taking it off when we got up to the bridge and then going back and getting some more. That's about the only bridge-building that I did, was helping move the timber.

Marcello: Evidently, that was a rather primitive procedure in building those bridges.

Tilghman: It sure was. We worked on both sides of the bridges a lot of times on the railroad, and we could see how they were doing it. Driving those pilings and everything was awful hard to do. We worked on both sides of the bridge we built over the River Kwai, and we built the railroad up to the bridge. Building that bridge was a big chore, I imagine, because it was a pretty good-sized bridge. I know it was hard to build it and brace it enough to where it would be substantial enough to hold a train.

Marcello: Here again, we're talking about hand labor for just about everything.

Tilghman: That's right.

Marcello: Even the pile driving was done in a very primitive fashion.

Tilghman: We had a rope tied to a big weight, and the POW's would pull that rope out and then drop it--just turn it loose and drop it, pull it out and drop it. That is very slow labor to drive those piles.

Marcello: Like you mentioned awhile ago, it was here at 80 Kilo Camp that the health of the prisoners began to break down.

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: Then, of course, it continued right up to 100 Kilo Camp.

Tilghman: Right on through, yes, sir. Here at the 80 Kilo Camp we started losing a bunch of people, too. A lot of Americans died and were buried there. I worked for a while in the kitchen . . . I didn't work in the kitchen, but I carried food from the kitchen out to the work party at noon.

Marcello: This was at the 80 Kilo Camp?

Tilghman: I believe it was at the 80 and the 100, too.

Marcello: How did you manage to get that job? Lucky?

Tilghman: I guess. Doing that, you were always able to get hold of a little more food. A friend of mine that lives at Jacksboro now, John Hensley, we had this detail for quite a while. We would steal all the food we could get and take it to the barracks and feed some of our other boys that were there. I heard one of them comment not too long ago that if it hadn't been for

old John and I, he wouldn't be here, because we kept making him eat.

Marcello: When you say that you stole it out of the kitchen, was this out of the American kitchen?

Tilghman: No, the Jap kitchen.

Marcello: Was this just the raw rice or what?

Tilghman: Raw rice. We'd get the rice and anything else we could get hold of and then cook it. If there was any leftovers in our kitchen, of course, they'd give it to us, too. We didn't steal from our kitchen; it was from the Jap kitchen.

Marcello: What would you do there in addition to carrying out the food? Obviously, this would only occur at a certain time during the day.

Tilghman: Most of the time we'd work around the kitchen, or we had the burial detail, too, to help them bury the people that died. We had grave digging, and we'd have to help bury the people that died. They died pretty fast there for a while.

Marcello: Okay, I think this is a portion of your experiences that we need to get in a certain amount of detail. Here at 80 Kilo and 100 Kilo, what seemed to be the big killer? Obviously, you have the overwork and the starvation and so on and so forth. That's where it all begins.

Tilghman: That starts it. I think that malaria and the tropical ulcers and . . . of course, malnutrition and starvation was the main

one. I think the ulcers and the malaria were a lot of the cause of it.

Marcello: Describe what these tropical ulcers were like. You mentioned them very briefly awhile ago.

Tilghman: To start with, you might get a little scratch on the back of your hand or on your leg or shin or something. Of course, in the monsoon season it is always worse. It would just get festered up and stay red and get bigger and bigger and bigger. I've seen them as big as a small saucer.

Marcello: In other words, the skin is rotting, is it not?

Tilghman: Right. It just rots out. It covers your whole leg. We had no medicine--very little at all, if any. I believe it was in the 80 Kilo Camp that our doctor died. Dr. Lumpkin died at this camp. We had another doctor, and then we had a Dutch doctor, Dr. Hekking, who lives in Holland now. He's been over to see us several times since then. He had a process of taking a sharp-edged knife and cutting the dead flesh out of these places. I know that hurt; it is bound to have. They get that out and keep soaking them with warm water. They have gone as far as to put maggots on those things and let them eat that stuff out. That's a crude way of doing things, but it worked. Some of them are here today because they had that done to them.

Marcello: There was no problem finding maggots.

Tilghman: Oh, no. There were plenty there. I just feel like there was just no way to treat them, and a lot of times they had to amputate the leg with no anesthetic or anything like that.

Marcello: Amputees didn't stand much of a chance of coming through.

Tilghman: No, they sure didn't. We had one or two that made it--two boys from Bridgeport that made it. Both of them lost their legs at about the knee, but they were fortunate.

No surgery had any anesthetic whatsoever. I had a carbuncle or something right over the tail-end of my spine, right down at the bottom. It had to be lanced open, and there was no anesthetic. Somebody sat on your legs and arms and held you, and that's all they could do. It was quite a bit of pain, but I guess it could have been worse.

Marcello: When did you get this carbuncle?

Tilghman: I believe it was in 80 Kilo Camp, I believe. It was at the end of the wet season, monsoon season, about the time it was over.

Marcello: Did it lay you up for any length of time?

Tilghman: For a while. But I was out going again before too long.

Marcello: Describe what the operation was like.

Tilghman: Oh, Lord! They just laid me down on my stomach, spread-eagled, and held my legs. The doctor, I guess, just took a knife and cut it open. That's all I know. I don't know what happened then, because it sure did hurt. I was fortunate that

it healed up, and it didn't make a big ulcer. It didn't take too long.

Marcello: You mentioned previously that you did have an ulcer on one of your fingers.

Tilghman: Yes, I had a little ulcer on one hand, and I had a small one on my leg, and they healed up for some reason.

Marcello: How did you manage to heal them? Was there any process or procedure that you followed?

Tilghman: Nothing different from anybody else. I don't know why I healed better than anybody else, but it didn't take long to heal.

Marcello: What did you do to help the healing process along?

Tilghman: I used warm water and soaked it and kept it as clean as I could. That's about all you could do.

Marcello: When you get one of those tropical ulcers, after you know what they can do, do you panic?

Tilghman: Well, it scares you. It sure does. I was working with one of these boys at Bridgeport that got a sliver of rock in his knee, and it got infected. That's when he later lost his leg later. At the time he didn't think anything about it--just a little nick. He was wearing shorts, and that didn't protect it. It just cut into his leg a little bit and got to growing and just kept getting bigger. I don't know . . . I didn't do anything any different from anybody else--just tried to keep

it as clean as I could.

Marcello: You mentioned tropical ulcers and malaria as being the big killers. How about dysentery?

Tilghman: That was one of the bad ones, too, no doubt about that. It was very easy to get dysentery with no sanitation at all to keep things clean. It just spreads awful easily.

Marcello: Did you get dysentery?

Tilghman: No, I was lucky enough not to get it.

Marcello: Was there any cure that they had for dysentery?

Tilghman: Well, I don't know of any. I don't know how they treated it. We didn't have any medicine, and I don't know what they would do.

Marcello: Do you remember the eating of charcoal and things of that sort?

Tilghman: Yes. That might have been the way they treated it, but I'm not sure. I didn't ever have it, so I don't know what they did. The malaria, we'd just have to hope we'd get a little quinine. Of course, the tropical ulcers, we'd just have to treat them the best way we could.

Marcello: What were the hospital facilities like here at the 80 or 100 Kilo Camp?

Tilghman: I don't see that they're any different from the regular barracks, to me. They just had the building there with people laying on the raised elevations there. As far as the equipment, the doctor might have a little bit of his own personal equipment,

maybe, that he kept all the way through, like, a scalpel or something. I don't know if any of them had scalpels or not. I know some of them had a knife or maybe a saw that they had to use to amputate the bone or cut the bones with. They didn't have equipment and no medicine at all, hardly. I don't see that they're much different from the regular barracks, just a place where the sick were all kept.

Marcello: Just about all the former prisoners that I've talked to said that the last thing they wanted was to have to go to that hospital.

Tilghman: That's right.

Marcello: What made it so bad?

Tilghman: The Japs didn't think anything about it, because a sick man wasn't any good to them. They didn't try to help the hospital any. You just felt like if you ever got in a hospital that that would just be all of it. I certainly sure didn't want to go myself, because there was nobody there hardly to take care of you when you're sick. The sick had to try to take care of the sick. They wouldn't let well people stay down there and help them. There was just the doctor maybe, but that's all, and he couldn't do it all.

Marcello: How was it determined when a man was sick enough to stay off a work detail?

Tilghman: They started out trying to let our doctors say if our personnel

was too sick to go or not. Sometimes, if they didn't have enough people to go to work, they'd go back through and pick some themselves that maybe didn't look sick to them or didn't look as sick as some of the others. They'd make some of them go out and work.

Marcello: In other words, they had a certain quota that they expected to have out on the work details at all times.

Tilghman: That's right.

Marcello: And they were going to meet that quota whatever way it took them.

Tilghman: That's right. Sometimes that's why they'd come back and pick some of the ones that were sick. They were too sick actually to work, but they'd come in and get some more.

Marcello: In other words, the doctor might initially keep men off a work detail, but ultimately it was the Japanese guard who determined who could and who could not work.

Tilghman: That's right. They'd come in and pick some more.

Marcello: Would it be a Japanese or a Korean or either one?

Tilghman: Normally, it would probably be a sergeant, a Japanese sergeant.

Marcello: But nevertheless it would be a man who was completely ignorant of medicine. He wouldn't know a sick man from a well man.

Tilghman: That's right. He wouldn't be a doctor.

Marcello: In other words, a man could have malaria but still could be sent on a work detail because physically he looked okay.

Tilghman: A lot of them were sent like that. They were too sick to work. Some of them with 104- or 105-degree fever would have to go out there and try to work.

Marcello: Did you ever see cases of a man who simply gave up?

Tilghman: Yes.

Marcello: Describe this process. In other words, how could you tell when a man had given up, and what could you do to perhaps bring him around?

Tilghman: Well, for the one or two that I've seen, there wasn't anything we could do. We tried. We tried to make them eat; we tried to talk them into eating. We tried to take care of them as best we could. There were one or two of them that just wouldn't do it, and they quit.

We had one or two . . . I remember one sergeant that slept next to me. He wanted to live just as well as anybody. He tried. He just worked real hard at it. He would eat all he could get. He tried as faithfully as anybody could hope to. Yet, he was just too sick to live, so he died.

This one other boy that I was talking about just wouldn't eat. He wouldn't do anything. He wouldn't take care of himself; he wouldn't try to take care of his ulcers. He just got worse and died.

A whole lot of it depended upon the individual himself. That's what it amounted to, no matter how hard we tried to

get them to help themselves. The ones of us that were not sick or were well enough to try to take care of the others always tried to help them, but some of them wouldn't listen.

Marcello: You mentioned that you did participate on some burial details here at 80 and 100 Kilo Camps.

Tilghman: That's right.

Marcello: Describe how the burial details would take place.

Tilghman: We had a grave digging detail. I didn't help dig the graves, but they would dig the graves about three-and-a-half or four feet deep. Of course, there were no caskets or anything. We just had straw mats that we would try to wrap the body in, and then we'd lower it into the grave. We always had someone that would say a prayer for them and blow taps. We had a bugler that would blow taps. That was about as good a burial as we could give them under the circumstances. We always put a cross up--a wooden cross--with their name on it. We had a fellow that was a bugler, and he was the one that would help make the crosses and help engrave the name on the wood.

Marcello: Evidently, that became a full-time job here at 80 and 100 Kilo.

Tilghman: It did. It was so busy because so many people were dying. The Dutch and the English were awful. They were weak, and they died a lot more than our people did.

Marcello: Does it mainly get back to sanitation and that will to live that you talked about a while ago?

Tilghman: I think that's 100 per cent of it right there. You have to have the will to live first, but the sanitation was a problem for all of us, of course. You had to just fight it and do the best you could.

Marcello: What measures did you take, so far as sanitation was concerned?

Tilghman: One of the main things was not to drink just any water you could find. You had to try to boil your water that you did drink. We always kept water boiled at the kitchen for people to fill their canteens with. We always tried to keep a hot, boiling pot of water to wash your eating gear in. That always helped to try to keep down any disease or dysentery, I guess you'd say.

Marcello: Is it not true that you would even dip your mess gear in the boiling water before you actually were served your food, too?

Tilghman: Right. That's true. That way, it would kill any germs that were there. Of course, the food would have already been boiled or hot, I mean, the rice would have to be boiled and everything. That should kill any disease that might be in it.

Marcello: I also understand that the cooks would serve the food, no matter how late the work parties came in at night.

Tilghman: Right. They always had it ready for us when they came in--what little they had. They were good about working. Of course, they had to do it; it was their job. They knew if they didn't

do that, they would be out on the railroad working. The kitchen wasn't a bad place to work. Partially, you could stay dry; you had a roof over your head. The conditions weren't that good, but they weren't that bad, either.

Marcello: By the time that you get to the 80 or 100 Kilo Camp, how is your equipment situation in terms of clothing and things of that nature?

Tilghman: Getting worn out. My clothes, I had a pair of shorts or two. My shoes were gone. Outside of that, I didn't have much. I still had my mosquito net and two blankets, and I still had that one suit of khakis that I'd saved. I didn't wear them, so I had my khaki pants and shirt. I saved them all the way through. I don't know why, but I did.

Marcello: Were you able to accumulate any other possession along the way?

Tilghman: No, I didn't. I managed to hold onto what I had. The Japs did take away our . . . you know, the Army gives you a little New Testament when you first go into the Army. They took these away from us. I believe this happened back in Bicycle Camp. They put their stamp on it and then gave them back later. We didn't get anything new, though, that I know of.

Marcello: In a situation of this nature, do men become more religious?

Tilghman: I think some did. I didn't belong to any church. I was

raised in a Christian home, but I didn't belong to a church until after I came back. All the time I knew that the Good Lord was looking after me. I knew he was taking care of me, because I've been in too many close calls to know that he wasn't. Some of the boys . . . I think it kind of changed their outlook to see that they'd survived so much of the hardships.

Marcello: Did you receive any beatings personally here at 80 or 100 Kilo?

Tilghman: I did at 100 Kilo. I believe it was 100 Kilo where I got one or two pretty good ones. That's where I got hit in the back with a rifle butt.

Marcello: Describe this incident.

Tilghman: Oh, we were working out on the railroad this one time, and I got a rifle butt in the back.

Marcello: Oh, you were back out on the railroad?

Tilghman: I went back out on the railroad later on. I was working with this boy that cut his knee on the rock. We were breaking ballast, and something happened. I didn't know I did anything, but I guess I may have stopped for a minute or two. This guard happened to walk up, and he hit me right in the back below the belt with a rifle butt a couple of times and slapped me around a little bit.

My back bothers me yet; I still have problems with it. Arthritis has gotten hold of it now, too, but I imagine that

helped to do it. I've gotten slapped around several times like that, but that was the hardest, I guess, that I've ever gotten hit.

Marcello: Did you ever see any prisoners become so frustrated at these beatings that they tried to retaliate or strike back or anything of that nature?

Tilghman: Later on, I did--once or twice after we'd gotten out of the jungle.

Marcello: How do you live in a situation like this? That is, do you live from day to day? Month to month?

Tilghman: I think day to day, really. You just take it as it comes and try to get through it. I read my New Testament an awful lot when I had time at night, or in the evening late. I read the thing through three times, I believe it was, during that year-and-a-half. I think that had a whole lot to do with just being able to take what they dished out to us.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago that you were eventually sent back out on the railroad again. Why was that? Was there simply a need for additional manpower?

Tilghman: Yes,for more men out on the road, I think. After I worked on the kitchen detail for a good while--not long before we left the railroad or right before we left the jungles--that's when we were finishing up the railroad. They needed to get more done, I guess, and I was one of the well ones, so I

went back out on the railroad.

Marcello: How much weight were men losing at this time?

Tilghman: I lost about forty or forty-five pounds, I think, mostly. I went down to about 130 pounds, I guess. I think I weighed about 170 pounds when I went in. The lowest I got there in the jungles was about 130 pounds or something like that.

Marcello: Were you ever subjected to any air raids while you were working the railroad? I know that later on, after people got up into Kanchanaburi and Tamarkan, air raids occurred. I was wondering if any of them occurred here in the jungle.

Tilghman: I didn't see any planes while we were down in the jungle. I don't think so--not any raids.

Marcello: Which of the two camps was worst, 100 or 80 Kilo? Or was it six of one and half a dozen of the other?

Tilghman: About the same, I would say. Eighty Kilo was so bad in the monsoon season, and I think we got out of 100 Kilo before the monsoon season really hit up there. The work was harder either way. Like you said, both of them were six of one and a half-dozen of the other.

Marcello: I assume that the work would have appeared to have been harder at the 100 Kilo Camp, because you were getting weaker and weaker all the time.

Tilghman: Right. That's true. All the ailment and the sicknesses got to catching up with us, and I imagine it gets harder to do.

Marcello: Dr. Lumpkin died during this period. What effect did that have upon the morale of the prisoners?

Tilghman: I think that hurt. A lot of people would think that maybe if the doctor died . . . they knew he would be taking care of himself. So if he died, they just wondered what kind of a chance they had to live or survive. It made it harder, I'm sure. I worried after he died, because I didn't know if these other doctors would take care of us as well as he was trying to.

Marcello: Evidently, the Dutch doctor, Hekking, knew quite a bit about jungle medicine, if we can put it that way.

Tilghman: Right. He sure did, and that saved a lot of our people, too--he and another Dutch doctor named Bloemsma. Some of his jungle methods paid off with some of the boys on those ulcers and things,I feel sure.

Marcello: Where did you go from the 100 Kilo Camp?

Tilghman: I think that's when we left the jungles and went on into Thailand.

Marcello: This must have been up into October of 1943 then.

Tilghman: It was the latter part, yes, sir.

Marcello: It goes without saying that you were glad to get the hell out of that jungle.

Tilghman: (Chuckle) You bet! We sure were, even though we were riding the train out of there.

You mentioned air raids. I believe that while we were on the way out of the jungles . . . I believe we didn't get caught in a raid, but the plane came through flying down the railroad after we left the jungles and were going into Thailand. We were off the train at the time and didn't get bombed.

Marcello: I gather, from what you said just a little while ago, that you had a certain amount of fear and trepidation about traveling across that railroad that you had just completed.

Tilghman: Well, it wasn't a safe feeling. I mean, it wasn't a good railroad. It wasn't straight like ours;the rails were crooked, and you didn't know when those trains were going to stay on it or not. It wasn't all that good a railroad. I still haven't figured out yet why they built it, because I don't think they ever got that much use out of it.

Marcello: I've heard that there were even attempts made by some of the groups to try and sabotage that railroad.

Tilghman: Right. I wouldn't doubt it a bit.

Marcello: You know, most of us have heard of the movie, The Bridge Over the River Kwai, and one of the points that comes across in that movie is that officer trying to instill in his men a sense of accomplishment for having built that railroad or that bridge. Did you ever have any sense of accomplishment?

Tilghman: No,I didn't. That was an Englishman for you, though. That

movie was a good movie, but it wasn't all authentic. One part of it, building the bridge, was all right. Later on, the bridge was blown up all right, but by bombers, not by a crew that walked in there like the movie showed.

Marcello: The actual bridge on the River Kwai was steel and concrete, wasn't it?

Tilghman: Later, it was. Of course, we didn't build a bridge down there in the jungles out of steel.

Marcello: Actually, most of the bridge-building was done at the British end of the road, was it not?

Tilghman: That's right. That's rough country up there--rivers and things.

Marcello: Up until this time, that is, by the time you had left the jungle, had you been able to send or receive any mail at all?

Tilghman: We were able to write those little printed cards; I mean, write them, but we could mark out something or leave it in and sign your name. I had written one every time we had the opportunity to, but I'd never gotten anything from home.

Marcello: By the little cards, you're referring to that postcard that would say something to the effect that, "My health is (a) good, (b) fair, (c) poor."

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: I suppose, if you didn't mark "good," the card didn't get through.

Tilghman: That's probably right. It had one sentence on it, I believe: "I'm working for money," or something like that that made them think that you were doing all right.

Marcello: Up to this point, was there anything funny that happened that you think we need to get as part of the record?

Tilghman: Something odd happened. I'll call it odd. When I was in Singapore, I lost my pocketknife sometime while I was there. The odd part about it was, while we were at 100 Kilo Camp, one day out on the railroad, I found this same knife that I'd lost in Singapore. I thought it was kind of odd that I'd gone that far and found the same knife that I'd lost-- this pocketknife that I'd carried, partly concealed, most of the time. It was rather funny that I found that knife-- the same knife that I'd lost.

Marcello: How did you find it?

Tilghman: I just looked down one day out on the working party, and there it was, laying on the ground on the side of the railroad. I guess someone else had found it and lost it up there, probably. It was just kind of a coincidence that I'd go 500 or 1,000 miles and find the same knife that I'd lost.

Marcello: Were you allowed to keep articles of that type?

Tilghman: Not a knife, really. I had managed to keep it in my possession by hiding it or just keeping it around. I didn't really have any use for it. I didn't have any plans on using it, anyway.

I had just kept it in my possession.

Marcello: Incidentally, what did you do in terms of shaving and haircuts?

Tilghman: We had a fellow that used to do our barber work. He had a pair of scissors and a straight razor. He could keep our hair cut and trimmed all right. Most of us had those G.I.-issue razors and blades, and we found a way we could keep them sharp by using a glass. We'd take that razor blade and work it around inside that glass.

Marcello: In other words, you would take a broken piece of glass and more or less strop that blade on the concave side of the curved glass, so to speak.

Tilghman: That's right. It would sharpen it to some extent. A lot of times a lot of the fellows grew beards. I didn't grow one but one time. I didn't particularly like it. It was too hot in hot weather and too hard to keep clean, so I tried to keep mine cut off the best I could.

Marcello: My thought would be that a beard or long hair would provide a haven for all sorts of critters and so on.

Tilghman: We had plenty of those, too--lice, bedbugs, and things like that. We had a lot of them.

Marcello: How did you get rid of things like that?

Tilghman: You'd just have to pick them off, if you could find them. You'd see people sitting around a lot of times with their

shorts turned wrong side out, and they were going through all the seams trying to pick them out. They'd come back. Those old buildings that we stayed in--those old bamboo buildings--were infested with them anyway--bedbugs, ticks, or lice. It was awful hard to keep them out. You just had to keep picking. But they'd bite you, and you'd know they were there.

Marcello: Were rats ever a problem in any of these camps?

Tilghman: There were some, but they never were too big of a problem.

Marcello: I've heard one man mention that rats, in at least one of the camps, actually gnawed the callouses off the bottom of his feet. Have you ever heard of anything of this nature?

Tilghman: I heard something about that. I've never seen one that close or that big. They'd usually run, but if somebody was asleep or maybe sick and laying there, I can see where they might do that. I don't know. Every once in a while we'd have snakes in the barracks. The pythons would crawl around up in the rafters of the building.

Marcello: I assume they were fair game.

Tilghman: Yes, they were. That's right. That was a good way to get rid of them--eat them.

Marcello: What did you do in terms of soap, toothbrushes, and things of that sort while you were in the jungle?

Tilghman: Well, we were lucky if we could hold onto our toothbrush

that long. Toothpaste, we had none. You could use water and your brush, and that would help some. As far as soap, once in awhile they'd issue some kind of soap, but it wasn't good like our soap. It wouldn't be the good soap, but it would help clean a little bit. What we had, we tried to hang onto and save as much as we could. I don't think any of it lasted that whole three-and-a-half years, though. That would be too long.

Marcello: What were some of the means of substituting for toothbrushes?

Tilghman: Maybe a little soft green limb. You'd chew on the end of it to get it soft. You could use that, or some people would use their finger and rub their gums and teeth good. That was the only thing they could do, I guess.

Marcello: All this time, did you see any Japanese combat troops going up and down that road?

Tilghman: Yes. We could see them every once in awhile. When we first got to Singapore, when we started north, we could see troopships loaded with soldiers. Sometimes we'd meet . . . like, when we were going up the Malaya Peninsula on the railroad, we'd see troops on trains moving south. Coming through the railroad, as we were building it, we didn't see very many troops moving that way. Of course, the railroad wasn't hardly finished all the time that we were in there, so we didn't see very many up there, other than the ones that were working up there.

Marcello: Where do you go after you leave the jungle?

Tilghman: We went to Thailand. Kanchanaburi is the name of the camp. It is over there close to the river.

Marcello: Describe what Kanchanaburi looked like from a physical standpoint.

Tilghman: It was quite a larger camp than what we'd been in the past, because I guess more troops and more people were there. I don't know . . . I imagine it had fifteen or twenty large buildings in it, or maybe more. They were all similar to what we'd been used to in the past, but more of them and bigger. The best I remember, it was pretty close to this River Kwai that wound on down through the country there.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to Kanchanaburi?

Tilghman: This was more kind of a recuperation period, I guess. We didn't do much work. About the only labor we had to do there was to have some people every day come and take supplies . . . we had a mountain, a tall hill, right close to the camp that the Japs had the antiaircraft guns on. Some of our people would help carry supplies up that mountain to the Jap troops. We'd get to go down to the river and bathe nearly every day. They'd let us do that. As far as actual work, we didn't do much around this camp.

Marcello: I guess they probably had gotten about all they could get out of you there in the jungle.

Tilghman: That's right. They'd gotten just about all. Of course, when we came out, there were still some back down on the railroad doing minor work--odd jobs, repair work.

Marcello: At this point, is most of the unit still relatively intact yet?

Tilghman: Most of it, except what were sick and left back in the hospital camps. Most of our group was still pretty well intact, except for the ones that had died.

Marcello: What was the food situation like at Kanchanaburi?

Tilghman: It was a little better. The rice was still about the same. It might have been a little better. We had a few more vegetables, and sometimes they'd allow us to have a little meat, not much.

Marcello: Was there a canteen here at Kanchanaburi, or was there any opportunity to do more trading with the natives?

Tilghman: We could buy eggs and sugar--a few items--that might be available.

Marcello: How about with the local natives? Did you have very much contact with them?

Tilghman: Not a whole lot. When we'd go down to the river to go swimming, we might be close to some of them. They still kept us pretty well-guarded. They didn't let us get too close to them.

Marcello: Did you have your usual musters and things of that nature here

at Kanchanaburi?

Tilghman: We still have our count or roll call, yes,sir.

Marcello: What were the guards like here?

Tilghman: A little better, maybe, if it could be said. They didn't harass quite as much as they had in the past, I don't believe.

Marcello: I guess the pressure was off of them to some extent, too.

Tilghman: Right. It could have been that, because since the railroad was supposed to be finished, they'd eased up on them, maybe. It was easier and better on us there than it had been.

Marcello: Did you still have those Korean guards?

Tilghman: Yes, we kept Koreans nearly all the way through . . . not maybe the same ones. If one of the bad ones were gone, we probably got another one in his place. There was probably another one coming along.

Marcello: Were you more or less keeping score, so to speak? In other words, when the war was over, were you ready to take out some revenge on some of these Korean guards?

Tilghman: We would have, I think, if we could have got the chance. I know some of the boys would have. Whether I would or not, I don't know. It just kind of remains to be seen. I don't know if I would have or not, really.

Marcello: Were you at Kanchanaburi when some of the air raids occurred?

Tilghman: No, I left there prior to that time.

Marcello: You must not have been at Kanchanaburi too long.

Tilghman: We didn't stay there very long.

Marcello: Was it a matter of a month, or was it more than that.

Tilghman: Probably not over a month, I don't think. They came up with the idea of getting the ones that were well or in the best physical shape, and they were going to send them on to Japan. I was in that group.

Marcello: What happens at this point then? You are at Kanchanaburi for about a month--just enough to get a little rest, you might say. Then, like you mentioned awhile ago, I assume your health was fairly good, considering everything and comparatively speaking.

Tilghman: Right. They picked the ones that were in the best physical shape, and they were going to transport them to Japan. We left this place at Kanchanaburi on the train. I don't know exactly how we went. We went down through part of Thailand and into Cambodia.

We wound up in Phnom Penh on the river. We rode the train down there, and at Phom Penh we got on a little river boat, maybe fifty or sixty feet long. I don't think all of us got on one boat, surely. I don't think the boat was that large.

Anyway, we wound down that river on into Saigon, French Indochina, at that time. They got us that far at this period of time. When we got there, they put us in a camp. We

came in by the river, and the dock area had big warehouses built around it by the French. There was a street then right behind those, and just across that street was our camp. It may have been an army camp of some kind for the French.

It wasn't a real good camp; it wasn't a bad camp. It had mortar buildings with a tile roof on them. Of course, anything in that area didn't have windows. They just had the openings and shutters to keep out the rain. The sanitation facilities in this camp were not the worst in the world. They weren't bad, but they weren't good, either. We had a little outhouse with a place where you could squat down. They kept a big bucket underneath that, and someone would usually empty that every once in awhile. We had a big cement trough with water running in it all the time and a cement area around it where we could bathe. The camp had plenty of water, and the food was a little better at this camp when we first got to Saigon.

Marcello: You're around civilization here, and I would assume that maybe the food would have been a little bit better.

Tilghman: Right. The French people were there. We'd see a lot of white people, French, which we hadn't seen in a long time. The French people were friendly. They would wave at us and talk to us, if they had a chance.

Marcello: Did you have bunks here?

Tilghman: No, these barracks were similar to ones we had. They had a raised area that we slept on. We still had our blankets and mosquito netting.

Marcello: Approximately how many people are we talking about here in Saigon?

Tilghman: I think about 100 or 150 were in the group that I was in.

Marcello: These were of a mixed nationality?

Tilghman: Most of them were Americans, I believe. There were some English and some Australian, but most of them were Americans. There might have been more than that. There might have been 200. I've forgotten the exact number.

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

Tilghman: Well, being this close to the dock area, we'd unload the supply ships that would come in there. Some of us worked at a big oil refinery out from the town a little way. Some of us worked out there moving gasoline drums, filling them and storing them out there for them. I was fortunate to work out at a big air base out of Saigon, which later on we used in the Vietnam War. I worked out there for six or eight months.

Marcello: What did you do out there?

Tilghman: This is one of the times when they didn't take any officers with us. One officer went, I think, first, and then they

sent him back. That only left non-coms or NCO's. I went out in charge of working parties a lot of times. I worked for a Japanese sergeant out at this base. We would store the gasoline in the drums; we would move it around for them.

I got to be, if you could call it so, a pretty good buddy of the Jap sergeant. Of course, by that time we could all speak Japanese pretty well.

Marcello: Describe the relationship that you developed with this Japanese sergeant.

Tilghman: The only thing that I could see, he was just a little bit more friendly with us. He didn't care really what we did, as long as we didn't get him in trouble. We could buy from the natives, which made it better for us. We worked, but as long as we didn't cross up to get him fouled up, we were all right, and we got by pretty good.

Some of the boys . . . I know we used to put dirt in the gasoline barrels. I know that didn't help the airplanes any when they flew. It might not have hurt them, but it didn't help for sure. We'd do that.

We'd work on runways and maybe help patch holes in them . . . not bomb holes because they hadn't started bombing yet. We'd smooth them up. We made some air raid shelters out of dirt and different things. I worked out there for about six or eight months after we got there.

Marcello: Generally speaking, I gather that was not nearly so tough as having been back in the jungles. Of course, nothing would have been as bad as the jungles.

Tilghman: No. If you could say so, this was quite a bit better than back on the railroad.

Marcello: And I gather that you were eating better.

Tilghman: The food was better. There was a lot of farming area around there, and we could buy vegetables. Like I said, we could still do some trading or buying out on the working parties. A friend of mine and I got in a kind of a business of buying old clothes and selling them to the natives, and we'd make a little money that way. We'd buy food.

Marcello: Where did you buy the clothing?

Tilghman: We'd buy it from some of the natives or some of the Dutchmen that were around in different places--just old shorts and things like that. They'd buy anything. Those natives would buy anything that you had, if you wanted to sell it. That way we could have extra food to eat and sugar and stuff like that . . . canned milk. That would help supplement what we were getting from them. They gave us a few more vegetables and some meat.

Marcello: In other words, you would normally buy the clothing from one native or group of natives and then sell them to another group of natives?

Tilghman: If some of our people . . . the POW's might have an extra pair of shorts or something that they'd want to sell. We could buy it from them and then take it outside and sell it.

Marcello: Did the Japanese allow you to do this?

Tilghman: They didn't know about it; it was kind of undercover. We got to where we could camouflage things pretty good. By that time, we pretty well knew the ropes. They were real dumb people, as far as searching you or something. You could have something right out in plain sight, and they couldn't find it. If you tried to hide something, they would pretty well come up with it. We could usually hide the stuff or take it out maybe under your arm, and they'd never bother you.

Marcello: Did they normally shake you down when you returned from a working party?

Tilghman: Sometimes they would, and sometimes they wouldn't. We never knew when they were going to.

I remember one story somebody told. I didn't see it happen, but somebody got some canned sweet cream--milk--and they brought it in. The boy had three or four cans of it, and when they started to have the shake-down, he just sat it down on the ground and stood on it. The Japs looked all around and didn't find anything, and they went on. He picked it up and took it on into camp. They were real dumb

in some ways; in some ways they were smart.

Marcello: Where were you living? Were you living down at the dock area, even though you worked at the airport?

Tilghman: Right. They carried us out there in trucks each morning. Our camp was right there across the street from the dock area.

Marcello: Do you find that most of the guards are easing up in terms of their harassment by this time?

Tilghman: They weren't quite as bad as they were. There were still a few--one or two of them--that were kind of "horsey," and they got pretty mean every once in awhile. As a whole, I'd say most of them were a little better here.

Marcello: I was wondering if they were easing up in terms of harassment or if you were getting so used to it that you really didn't seem to care any longer.

Tilghman: That might have been part of it all right. I know we were getting used to it more so. They were getting kicked a little bit in other places. We knew that. This old Jap sergeant, I'd talk to him a lot. Finally, he got to telling me along about May or June of '45 . . . he said that it wasn't going to be long until the war was over. He told me they were getting pushed around pretty good. He even told me when MacArthur landed back in the Philippines. So we knew pretty well that things were going our way, and we'd see some of our

planes pretty regular, too.

Marcello: Were any air raids here at this airport while you were working at it?

Tilghman: A few.

Marcello: Describe them.

Tilghman: When they first started, they would send some of the high-level bombers in there--B-24's, I guess they were. This base where we worked was mostly a fighter plane base at that time. The Japs had fighter planes out there. Every time an air raid alarm would go, these fighters would take off. The bombers would go over, and they would go up and shoot at them, contest them a little bit.

I guess our people got tired of it, and one day while we were out there working, an air raid alarm went off, and all these Jap fighters took off. About the time they got up to where the bombers were, they brought fifteen P-38's with them that day, and they shot every plane down that they sent up there; or they went to another base--one--because didn't any of them come back to our base where we were. I know they shot a bunch of them down, because we saw them.

Marcello: Did these bombers tear up the base quite a bit?

Tilghman: They didn't bomb the base. They were bombing over on the river. They had an ammunition depot over there or something, but we never did see it. They had an ammunition depot that

they bombed, and then they bombed some out at the refinery where we had worked.

Marcello: What did these air raids do for your morale?

Tilghman: Oh, they helped a whole lot. The Jap fighters wouldn't go up much anymore after that. Finally, some of them would come back in there, but when the air raid alarm would go off, they'd get out in the brush. They didn't want to go up and fight anymore.

Marcello: Were you able to watch this aerial dogfight?

Tilghman: Oh, yes. We had a ringside seat. It was real interesting.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese following one of these air raids?

Tilghman: Some of them didn't like it. Some of them would get pretty "horsey," or they tried to. Some of them would be mad, naturally, and they'd try to find some way to get even with you or something like that.

Along about this same time, or right soon after that, maybe in May or June, the Navy bombed the harbor there one day with dive-bombers. They came in early one morning--about the time when we were having roll call in the morning. They hit the air base with fighters out there where we worked. They shot that up real good with the fighter planes and didn't let any of the planes get off the ground. About the time they got through, here come the dive-bombers, and they stayed there

all day.

Out at the back of our camp they let us build some shelters. We went from our roll call formation, and they took us to the shelters. We sat out there and watched that air show all day. They dive-bombed those things, and I think they sunk every ship in the harbor. There was about . . . I don't know how many were there. We didn't go back to the harbor for a day or two; they didn't take us down there to work. They sunk every ship that was in the harbor that day while they were there. I think they left about dark, or soon before that they quit. I don't know how many dive-bombers they had there, but it was quite a show to see.

We saw two of our planes get shot down that day. One was hit. I read an article in the Literary Digest after I got home, and this old boy that got hit . . . the wing man was talking him back in the carrier. He couldn't see; he got blinded. A shell hit the canopy or something, and his wing man talked him back to the carrier and got him back down on the carrier. He got hit over Saigon, and I know that's the one we saw get hit. It was something to see.

Marcello: I guess, in a sense, it's lucky that you didn't get aboard a ship that was going back to Japan.

Tilghman: We got our orders one day to load on the ship the next morning. The next morning came, and they told us it had been postponed,

that we wouldn't be going. Then we heard by the grapevine or something that submarines had sunk a bunch of ships down at the mouth of the river, so we never did get any more orders to load up. Thank goodness! We didn't want to go like that, anyway. We didn't want to go on a ship. We didn't want to go anyway, period, but we never did get the orders to go anymore.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that you are perhaps kind of marking time at this point? You're pretty sure that you're not going to die, that is, in terms of starvation or dysentery or tropical ulcers or anything like that. You might get caught in an air raid, or the Japanese might decide to kill all of you.

Tilghman: Right. I think that's the general opinion. I felt like we might have it made then, unless something unusual happened. I'd made it that far and had made it through that much. My health was good, and everybody else that was here with us was in pretty good shape.

Marcello: Were you perhaps picking up a little bit of weight here in Saigon?

Tilghman: I believe so. I think I did. I'm not positive, but I know I was in better shape than I had been.

Marcello: Were you getting more of a variety of food here or just more of the same?

Tilghman: More vegetables to go with the rice, and a little meat. You'd get a little water buffalo once in awhile. You had more meat that way. I believe the food was better here.

Marcello: In other words, again, the Japanese were supplying the raw food, and then your cooks would cook it.

Tilghman: Cook it, yes. I believe while we were here in Saigon, this was the first time that we ever got a partial Red Cross package.

Marcello: Oh, describe this.

Tilghman: We had seen the Japs smoking a lot of our American cigarettes, and we knew they were probably coming from Red Cross packages because we never had gotten any. One day they brought us in . . . some came to camp. I think they had enough that each person got maybe a half a package, which was pretty good. It had milk and candy and some canned stuff. It was real good. That's the only time we ever got anything from Red Cross . . . a few cigarettes.

Marcello: What did you do with the cigarettes?

Tilghman: I gave mine to one of my buddies. I didn't smoke, so I gave them to them. Along about now we were seeing our own planes come in a lot. They'd come over maybe on patrol, or they'd just fly over and check. Every once in awhile a B-24 would come over and strafe a little bit. They wouldn't bomb, but they would just machine-gun things around. By this,

we knew that things were getting pretty well in our favor, or they wouldn't be able to do like they were doing.

Marcello: In your bull sessions and in your conversations, are you sometimes cognizant of the fact that they might kill you if they did lose the war?

Tilghman: Oh, yes. What made us think this around this camp on the dock area, we built pill boxes. They made us build pill boxes. Instead of having the opening for the gun turrets pointing out away from the camp, they had them pointing toward the camp. That made us thing that if they ever had a landing around there or something like that, they might just machine-gun the whole camp. We didn't know.

One night we heard a bunch of shooting around in town, and we didn't know whether somebody had landed somewhere or what, around close to where we were. We came to find out that it was some French. They had some Foreign Legionnaires there, and some of them got crossways or had some kind of trouble. It never did happen that way, so we never did get shot.

We were very much aware that those gun turrets were pointed toward us instead of away from the camp, like, to defend us. They weren't there to defend us, I don't think.

Marcello: Were you making any contingency plans in case this event occurred? Were you thinking about what you might possibly

do to prevent being murdered?

Tilghman: We thought about that, of course . . . or I did. You'd always look for someplace to get--some low place or somewhere you could get under something to keep from getting shot. Still, if they did that, we didn't know what would happen. We'd just try to stay alive, I guess. That would be the only thing that we could do.

We had a hospital camp here, too, down the street from the camp that we were in, back toward town about a half a mile. There was what they called a hospital camp that some of the people stayed in.

One Air Force lieutenant was in there. He was there when we got there, but I don't know where he came from. He was in this camp, and he went under the fence one night and got out. He got through all right, but the Japs sure did "throw a shoe" when that all happened, because they made it hard on us for a week or two. Then they finally said that they got him--captured him--and shot him. Later, after the war was over, we found out that he made it out up through China and got out. The French underground helped him, I think, or somebody did.

Marcello: Was there a lot of movement inside and outside the camp by the prisoners? I am referring to clandestine movement. In other words, at night would prisoners go out of camp to trade

with the natives and things of that nature?

Tilghman: I never did see it, if it did. I've heard those rumors, but I never did see anything like that. I don't know. To my knowledge, I never did know of any of it.

Marcello: I assume that the compound where you were held did have a fence of some sort around it.

Tilghman: It had a fence around it, and it had guards around it, too.

Marcello: Were you here at Saigon when the war ended?

Tilghman: Yes.

Marcello: I think this probably brings us up to that period of time when we can talk about the end of the war. Let me ask you this question before we get to that point, however. Had you ever heard about Franklin Roosevelt's death?

Tilghman: Yes. One of the Japs told us one time that Roosevelt was finished, that he had died.

Marcello: Did this have any impact upon the prisoners?

Tilghman: We didn't know what effect it might have upon the war. Of course, with a change in leaders like that during the war, it might cause problems. We didn't really figure it would cause that much difference to where it would affect the outcome of the war. You would hate to lose a President all right, but we didn't think it would change the outcome of the war.

Marcello: For some of you, I guess Roosevelt was the only President that

you ever really knew.

Tilghman: Right. I remember when President Hoover was in back in the late 1920's.

Marcello: I guess everybody was trying to forget him, though (chuckle).

Tilghman: Yes, that's right. While we were in Saigon, though, we went up the coast and worked for a while, too. I mean, before the war was over, we went up that way and worked about a couple of months.

Marcello: Do you recall where you went?

Tilghman: Yes, we went up the coast to Nha Trang. At the end of the Vietnamese war, that was the big Ranger base. We went up there and went from there up to a mountain resort, Da Lat, and stayed up there for a couple of months, I guess.

Marcello: I've heard other people talk about Da Lat. Did you go up there by train?

Tilghman: Yes.

Marcello: Was it a rather uneventful trip?

Tilghman: Right. We didn't have any problems going up. The train going up that mountain . . . I guess maybe it was a cog railroad . . . pretty steep. We worked up there for all this time digging tunnels in those mountains. I never did figure out why, what they were for. After later years, I found out that those people tunneled underground like moles or rats. I thought about all of us digging all of those tunnels for them

up there. Those mountains are just honeycombed where we dug holes in those mountains there.

Marcello: Do you think that perhaps they were planning to make a last stand up in there or something?

Tilghman: Could possibly have. This resort had a real cool climate, nice homes, and you could tell this was where the rich people used to go, I guess, when they went on vacation or something.

Marcello: Approximately how many of you did they transport up to Da Lat?

Tilghman: I would imagine we had probably close to a hundred people there. We worked there awhile, and then we worked over on the railroad part-time, transferring stuff from one side of a bridge to the other. It had been blown out.

When we were going back to Saigon is when we had some close calls with some of the old boys that would fly down the railroad.

Marcello: We'll talk about that in a minute, but let's talk a little bit more about Da Lat. What sort of work were you personally doing here at Da Lat?

Tilghman: I was digging in those tunnels.

Marcello: Was this all hand work again? Pick-and-shovel work?

Tilghman: Pick-and-shovel, yes. Then shoring it up to keep it from caving in. It was pick-and-shovel, and we carried our dirt out.

Marcello: Was this hard work, in that you were hurried and they wanted it done as quickly as possible, or was it done at rather leisurely or steady pace?

Tilghman: We worked steady. They didn't "rush-rush" like they did while we were down there trying to finish the railroad. We worked pretty steady, and it was hard work to do. But the food was still pretty good up here. It was better than what we'd been used to back in the past--rice and better vegetables and things.

Marcello: Was the food about the same as what it had been in Saigon?

Tilghman: About the same, yes.

Marcello: Where were they housing you?

Tilghman: I thought it might have been an old school or something--a building of some sort. They had dug some kind of moat around the building. It didn't have water in it, but it was deep-walled. The walls were straight up and down. That was supposed to keep us in there, I guess. I believe it must have been some old kind of a school building.

Marcello: Did you have very many guards up there in this camp at Da Lat?

Tilghman: About the normal amount, I think--not too many. I guess they must have known we weren't going very far, because they never did guard us with a big bunch of guards. They might send two or three guards along with forty or fifty men to work.

Marcello: Did you ever have very much contact with the natives while

you were on this project, and, if so, were they informing you as to the progress of the war?

Tilghman: We could talk to them sometimes, but I don't know if they knew much about the war or not.

Marcello: They'd probably tell you whatever they thought you wanted to hear.

Tilghman: Right. That's probably right.

Marcello: You mentioned this is a rather eventful train trip from Da Lat back down to Saigon. Why don't you describe it?

Tilghman: We were riding in open cars, like what I would call a gravel car that they use to haul gravel on the railroad now. You could see out all right. We'd stop every once in awhile during the day and get off the train. I don't know if they had some kind of warning system that would tell them that maybe a plane was coming or not, but we'd get off the train and get out in the brush or out in the timber away from the railroad.

Directly, here comes one of those four-engine Navy bombers down the railroad, and it strafed everything as it went through. They'd just fly right down on the deck.

They did that two or three times on the trip back down. We knew then--and nearly all the soldiers kept telling us--that the war was only going to be a little more, that it wouldn't be long before it would be over.

Marcello: Do you still have Korean guards, or do you have Japanese guards now?

Tilghman: We still have some Koreans.

Marcello: You were mentioning that in a great many cases that the bridges were bombed out, and they just couldn't keep them repaired fast enough.

Tilghman: Right. They'd be bombed out, and we had to move supplies from one side of the bridge to the other and load it on another train over on the other side.

Marcello: I would assume that all of this time that you were working around supplies or loading supplies . . . that was pretty good duty.

Tilghman: Yes, it was. You could always find something to steal that you could eat. That's what we always looked forward to. It got to where it didn't bother us at all to steal something from them, anyway.

Marcello: Even at this stage, is food the thing that is still most constantly on your mind, that is, in addition to when the war is going to be over?

Tilghman: Right. That's the main thing. We were always talking about what we were going to eat when we got home.

Marcello: So you get back down to Saigon again, and I think we're getting pretty close to the end of the war, are we not?

Tilghman: Right. We sure are.

Marcello: Describe the events leading up to your eventual liberation.

Tilghman: When we got back to Saigon, they put us in another camp this time--a big French Foreign Legion camp, over kind of in town and back over in the residential area. They had big, three-story barracks, nice buildings with water and sanitation and all. It had a good place to bathe and everything. It was a whole lot better--something we hadn't had. Of course, we still didn't have beds to sleep on, but we didn't mind that too much. The food was still good here.

This camp is where we stayed for . . . it wasn't long, because when we got back down there, it wasn't long until the war was over. We knew then that things were just about over.

One day the planes came over and started dropping leaflets about the war being over. Of course, some of the Japs fired on those planes. The next day, I believe it was, is when the planes came in and landed out at the air base. One of our captains that had gone over with us and was put in another camp earlier came in with the OSS people to make arrangements to get us out.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute now. Are you saying, in effect, that the first concrete evidence that you had of the war being over was when that plane dropped those leaflets?

Tilghman: Yes. We knew it was really over, because some of the Japs

had told us that we had dropped one bomb on one town, and the town was finished. They told us when they dropped the big bomb (atomic bomb).

Marcello: What did the pamphlets say that were dropped out of this plane?

Tilghman: I believe this was the one that said . . . I wanted to keep one of them. I never did get to. It just told us that the war was over, and they'd been making arrangements to get us out or something to that effect.

Marcello: What took place at that point? Was there any sort of a celebration?

Tilghman: That's when we started having parties.

Marcello: You'd better describe this, because I'm sure it's an important part of the story.

Tilghman: Oh, we started having fun then. Of course, the Japs didn't know what to do, and along about this time was when most of our Korean guards vanished. They left. We didn't have any guards then.

As I told you, this captain came in with those people to help make arrangements to get us out. Then we got to go to town. He let us go to town if we wanted to. We'd still come back and stay at camp at nighttime or later on at night.

Marcello: What did you do in town?

Tilghman: Oh, we got to go to town and visit, buy food, eat, visit

with people. There were some French people that invited us to their home, and we ate dinner one evening with them.

That's the day that the Vietnamese war started, because that's when the natives had an uprising that day in town and started shooting and ransacking the town and killing the people. Anybody that was white, they didn't like.

Marcello: How were you dressed?

Tilghman: I had my G.I. khakis on that I had saved (chuckle). If they knew you were an American, they wouldn't bother you, but you had to prove to them that you were an American before they would turn you loose.

Marcello: Let's go into this story in a little bit more detail. You mentioned that you go into town. Is there anything specifically that you are looking for when you go into town?

Tilghman: Just to get out, I think, that was the main thing for me. I just wanted to get out to where I could walk around and feel like I'd be free, maybe. I wanted to visit and get something to eat and see people. The people that took us home with them had a good meal fixed for us, we ate it, and then all this trouble started.

Marcello: In other words, were you having dinner in the home of these French people when this fracas broke out?

Tilghman: Right. About dark, I thought we might ought to get back to camp, or try to. These people that came in with this captain

had their headquarters in a hotel downtown. This was about five or six blocks from this house where the French people lived in. I took off walking down there, and it was about dark. You'd meet natives riding around in trucks with guns and everything. I had my G.I. clothes on, and they never did bother me, but I never did know when they were going to.

I got back down to the hotel, and then I caught one of the trucks going back to camp and went back to camp that night. I didn't get out anymore until we got ready to leave camp to go home.

Marcello: Describe the process that occurred when you were ready to leave for home.

Tilghman: They wanted to get all of the sick and the people that weren't well out first. I'd been driving the supply truck part of the time to town to get supplies, and I drove the truck with all the sick people out to the planes that morning. When we got out there and got them all loaded, this old colonel that came down with them told me that there was room for one more if I wanted to go.

I left that truck setting there and crawled in and came on out with them. I left everything I had back at the camp--my blankets and canteen and everything. R.N. Gregg from Decatur brought all my stuff out the next day. But I wasn't going to take any chances. When I had the chance to get out, I came on out. That was my birthday, too, September 5th.

I won't ever forget that. That's the day we left Saigon and went to Calcutta.

Marcello: This is a pretty appropriate time to have made this interview, then.

Tilghman: Yes, it is. Yesterday being the fifth, yesterday was my birthday.

Marcello: Do you ever think about September 5th in later years?

Tilghman: Every birthday I look back and think what happened on that day, September 5, 1945. That's when I got out. I guess that was the best birthday present I've ever had.

Marcello: Where did you go from Saigon?

Tilghman: We flew back up through Burma, stopped at Rangoon and refueled there, and then went on to Calcutta.

Marcello: Where do you get your first good American meal?

Tilghman: In Calcutta.

Marcello: Do you remember what you had to eat?

Tilghman: They told us we could have anything we wanted. I believe they had some steak, potatoes . . . and milk was one thing we wanted more than anything else, it seemed like. Of course, a good steak and milk. We had just about anything we wanted to eat there.

Marcello: Did you have any trouble handling that good, wholesome food again?

Tilghman: No, not really. I didn't. Everything worked out all right.

Marcello: Incidentally, at any time during your tenure as a prisoner-of-war, were the Japanese keeping any records? In other words, did they process you in any way, assign you a number?

Tilghman: Oh, yes, we had a number. We had a number in nearly every camp we were in--a different number. I know when we were in Batavia we had a number, and when we got up into the jungle up in Burma, we had a number. I've still got all my numbers that I had during that period of time. I've got four or five different numbers, I think.

Marcello: Which particular group was yours up in the jungle while you were working on the railroad?

Tilghman: Group Five.

Marcello: Group Five?

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: I assume that they tried to process you out of Calcutta and back into civilian life as quickly as possible?

Tilghman: Yes. They called our group the "Project J" group.

Marcello: "J" group?

Tilghman: "Project J." We had priority over anybody coming home. I know one time they bumped a general and other high officers off the plane to let us come home. Of course, it made them mad--they couldn't understand it--but that's the way it was. We had high priority coming home.

Marcello: How shortly thereafter were you able to get back to Jacksboro?

Tilghman: We stayed in the 142nd General Hospital there in Calcutta about a week or a week-and-a-half. Then they flew us out of there, and we came across Karachi, and we came across Persia into Cairo, Egypt; we went to Wheelis over in Tripoli and came on to Casablanca; we went to the Azores, Bermuda, and then to Washington, D.C. I got home, I think . . . it was September when I got out, and we got home sometime after the first of November.

Marcello: About 1945?

Tilghman: Right.

Marcello: Was there very much of an adjustment involved in getting back into civilian life again?

Tilghman: Well, it was different. It was quite a bit different, I thought. Of course,having been gone that long and your family not knowing if you were dead or alive, that made a lot of difference. I had planned to get married before I left and decided I'd wait. When I got back, this girl had already married, and I guess I'm better off that she had been (chuckle). Anyway, the way it wound up, I'm glad it happened the way it did.

Marcello: I've heard it said by a lot of the prisoners that they had trouble staying in one place when they came home.

Tilghman: Yes, I did. I wasn't still very long. I kept on the move and kept going. I got out of the Army in April of 1946, and I

sat around for a good while before I started doing anything. It took a little adjusting. It was quite a change to come back, after being tied down for that long and then suddenly you're free. It is a good feeling, but it was kind of hard to get used to.

Marcello: As you look back upon your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as being the key to your survival?

Tilghman: I was in good physical condition when we went in there, and, of course, a lot of other people were, too. But I think the cooperation and everybody sticking together was the main reason that most of us got back. I feel like that helped me get back. I was lucky in not being sick very much, but I think everybody working together is the main thing that got us back. That and the Good Lord.

Marcello: Mr. Tilghman, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having participated. Your ability to remember was outstanding, and I'm sure that scholars will find your comments quite valuable when they use them to write about this particular portion of World War II.

Tilghman: A lot of the things I did remember are kind of vague, but thirty years makes quite a difference.