N O R T H T E X A S S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y

O R A L H I S T O R Y C O L L E C T I O N

N U M B E R

5 2 8

I n t e r v i e w w i t h

G A R T H W. S L A T E

A u g u s t 1 3, 1 9 8 0

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Garth W Slate
(Signature)

Date: Aug 13-80

Oral History Collection

Garth Slate

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: August 13, 1980

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Garth Slate for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on August 13, 1980, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Slate in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. More specifically, Mr. Slate was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Regiment, 36th Division. The 36th Division was the Texas National Guard Division, and the 131st Field Artillery was detached from it and ultimately ended up in Java, where the unit was captured intact in March of 1942. This unit has subsequently become known as the "Lost Battalion."

Mr. Slate, 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.

Mr. Slate: Well, I was born in 1921 at Bagwell, Texas, and I

moved to Jacksboro when I was quite young. I stayed there until 1940, when they mobilized the National Guard.

Marcello: When did you join the Texas National Guard?

Slate: May, 1940.

Marcello: And I assume that you joined it there in Jacksboro?

Slate: Yes, in Jacksboro.

Marcello: Which battery was located in Jacksboro?

Slate: F Battery.

Marcello: What kind of a unit was that?

Slate: It was a field artillery unit.

Marcello: In other words, it was a firing battery.

Slate: Right.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the National Guard in 1940?

Slate: Most of my friends was in it already, and they had an opening, and I could get in.

Marcello: What part did the world situation, especially in Europe, play in your decision to join?

Slate: Well, things weren't going too good over there, and I figured I'd get drafted later on, anyway, and I'd rather be with a bunch that I knew than get drafted and no telling where I'd go.

Marcello: Now when you joined in 1940, what kind of training took place there in F Battery in Jacksboro? Now, again, I'm referring to the period actually before mobilization took place.

Slate: Well, we had a drill one night a week, and then in the summertime, we'd go . . . well, we went to Louisiana for two weeks.

Marcello: What kind of activities took place in the drills there in Jacksboro?

Slate: Well, ever what section you were in, they had people around that was training you--different things. I happened to be on the battery commander's detail, so I had to learn how to run all the instruments--their BC scopes, their aiming circles, and plot firing data on a plane table. And other times I had to learn all about the weapons, too. So one night maybe I'd be over with the gun crew, and the next time I'd be breaking down a machine gun, finding out what made it operate. We'd go to the firing range one time to figure out how to fire the old bolt-action 1918 Springfields.

Marcello: Now, what kind of artillery pieces did the unit have?

Slate: Had the American-type 75's.

Marcello: Was this a modification of the old French 75?

Slate: Yes, the modification made it a split trail 75. It also had the 37-millimeter that mounted on a tube that you could fire.

Marcello: That's kind of interesting to me, that is, the 37-millimeter that was mounted on the tube of that 75-millimeter. Was that an economy move?

Slate: Yes, when you was out on the firing range, rather than fire the 75's, you'd fire the 37-millimeter and get the same effect.

Marcello: And it was a lot cheaper?

Slate: And it was a lot cheaper.

Marcello: Now where did you get that split trail weapon? Did you have it when you were at Jacksboro?

Slate: No, they gave them to us when we got to San Francisco, when we was on the way overseas. We didn't have them until then. We had all the old equipment.

Marcello: When you were still in the unit back in Jacksboro, what would you estimate to be the average age of the enlisted man in the unit, officers excluded?

Slate: I would guess twenty, twenty-one.

Marcello: Well, like you mentioned, you were born in 1921, so you would have been about nineteen or twenty when you joined.

Slate: I think I was nineteen when I joined it.

Marcello: What influence did the Depression have on your decision to join the National Guard? Did it play a role?

Slate: Well, yes. There was actually nothing to do around Jacksboro, so I . . . well, I always wanted to get in the unit when I was small. They had horses there, and I used to go over, and they'd let us ride the horses. This was before they got the vehicles.

Marcello: And if nothing else, I guess you could pick up a few extra

dollars by joining the National Guard.

Slate: Yes, you got paid for your drills, and summer camps was always . . . you'd get paid after the camp. You had a bunch of money.

Marcello: Now the Texas National Guard mobilized, or was federalized, on November 25, 1940. What did mobilization mean so far as F Battery was concerned there in Jacksboro? How did it affect F Battery, and you in particular?

Slate: Well, when they mobilized us, most of them kind of liked the idea for some reason. I know I did.

Marcello: Why was that?

Slate: I don't know . . . we just kind of . . . they said they was going to send us to Brownwood, which wasn't too far from home, and we could still come back. Then we had to stay . . . I don't remember how long we stayed in Jacksboro. We lived over at the old fort because Camp Bowie wasn't finished. About the time they started Camp Bowie, it started raining.

Marcello: Do you recall when you moved from Jacksboro to Camp Bowie? I know units moved there at various times. Do you recall when you moved, or at least the month in which you moved there? Was it before or after Christmas?

Slate: It was after Christmas.

Marcello: So you possibly might have gone there in January of 1941?

Slate: Yes, January, that's what I was thinking, is January when

we moved in there.

Marcello: Now between November, when the unit mobilized, and January, when you moved to Brownwood, what did you do there in Jacksboro?

Slate: Well, we had to stay at the armory--well, that's what they called the armory then--or the old fort. Then we either slept there, or they would give us a pass to go home at night, and we'd have to come back at a certain time the next morning. But most of us stayed there. They had some kind of training every day, which was lots of marching. Then they'd split the training up just about like on our Tuesday nights, only it was a lot more of it.

Marcello: How seriously was this training being taken now that mobilization had occurred? Again, I'm referring to the attitudes of the enlisted men.

Slate: Most of them took it good. They took pride in what they was doing, so they would try to do the best they could. Before, when they'd go to camps and everything, they had competition between the batteries as to which was the best, and they always wanted to be the best, so they took pride in what they were doing.

Marcello: You mentioned this fort awhile ago. What was the name of that place? Do you recall?

Slate: Fort Richardson.

Marcello: Okay, so in January of 1941, you proceed to Camp Bowie near

Brownwood. How did you get from Jacksboro to Camp Bowie?

Slate: Well, while we was in Jacksboro, they started giving us trucks, so when they brought in more trucks, we all went down in a truck convoy.

Marcello: Describe the physical condition of Camp Bowie when you got there.

Slate: Well, the main roads were paved, but the roads going off of it into the areas that we had to go to weren't paved. The parking lots weren't paved. We had tent frames, so we had to put the tents over the tent frames. The area around the tents, more or less the battery street, was about ankle-deep in mud. We had to wear galoshes all the time because you was walking in and out of that mud all the time. It was just trying to get everything all set up and fight the mud in an area new to all of us and get ourselves situated in our tents and get our mess hall going.

Marcello: What was the climate like there at that time in terms of temperature and that sort of thing?

Slate: The best I can remember, it was kind of cool and rained a lot.

Marcello: What sort of training did F Battery undergo after it moved into Camp Bowie?

Slate: We started in on lots of lectures and continued with the type training we had been getting in your section, actually

making it better. Even up in the big parking lot, they'd get up and just simulate the . . . you'd go through the whole thing like you was going to go out and set the guns up to fire. Everybody'd be in their little areas, in their little sections. And we also had a lot of classroom work. That was just almost a daily routine. You had so much training every day and were still trying to get the area in shape.

Marcello: Was F Battery in 1st Battalion or 2nd Battalion?

Slate: The 2nd Battalion.

Marcello: You were in 2nd Battalion the whole time?

Slate: The whole time, 2nd Battalion.

Marcello: Now in the summer of 1941, the unit moved to Louisiana for the 3rd Army maneuvers, which, I guess, was perhaps the largest peacetime maneuvers that had ever been held in American history.

Slate: Right, that was supposed to have been the biggest maneuvers that they'e ever had--the most troops that they'd ever put together at one time.

Marcello: Describe what took place in those Louisiana maneuvers, at least so far as F Battery was concerned.

Slate: Well, we would pull into an area, and then they would have problems; or they'd start one of their problems, and we would be given a point to go to. So we'd usually move there at night or early in the morning or late in

the afternoon and set up for the maneuvers. We'd always move in convoy. They was always telling you about the air raids or something, and you had to pull off to the side of the road and into the ditches and all. It moved you around a lot. Then after a problem would be over with, they'd pull you into an area where you could rest and straighten back up for two or three days. They pulled in one time and gave us a little break and let us all go to Beaumont, which everybody had a wild time.

Marcello: How long did those maneuvers last?

Slate: Well, this was supposed to be, if I'm not mistaken, three weeks to a month or something. We were supposed to have been down there a month, and then before the month was out, they pulled us out of the maneuvers and sent us back to Camp Bowie. They said they was going to send us overseas--send us to the Philippines. Well, they said "overseas," and everybody figured the Philippines because that rumor got out right quick.

Marcello: Why did they specifically pull out the 2nd Battalion?

Slate: Our record was supposed to have been the best battalion down there, and they pulled out the best one, the one that had the best record. They said that was us, so that's the reason we were picked to leave.

Marcello: Now you go back to Camp Bowie, and it's also about that time, I think, that the Army was reorganized. Didn't

it go from the square divisions to the triangular divisions around that time? Are you familiar with that reorganization?

Slate: Yes. That was the reason we was pulled out . . . one of the reasons. It was pulled out to make the 36th Division a triangular division.

Marcello: Which, in fact, meant that the 36th Division was going to be a smaller, more mobile division, isn't that correct?

Slate: Right. We were supposed to go to the Philippines to form a new triangular division.

Marcello: Also, when you get back to Brownwood, is it not true that you get an unflux of additional men coming into the 2nd Battalion? I guess what I'm saying is, wasn't there a transfer that occurred around this time, whereby certain people, mainly volunteers, out of the 1st Battalion came into the 2nd Battalion?

Slate: Right. The ones that had a reason for not going overseas, a good enough reason, well, they was swapping. They'd transfer them up to the 1st Battalion, and they'd come to the 2nd Battalion. We were trading with C Battery. Each battery traded with . . . the 1st Battalion had Batteries A, B, C, and we had Batteries D, E, and F, so we was trading with C Battery. We got some of the C Battery officers, enlisted men, and then we picked up a few men that come in from other places because if there wasn't any in C Battery, they'd start looking

somewhere else for them.

Marcello: So what you're saying in effect, then, is that married enlisted personnel had an opportunity to transfer into 1st Battalion, and then also, I think, men over a particular age had the opportunity of transferring out of the battalion.

Slate: Right, over a certain age, and some of them that were married and had a good reason, they released them, let them go back home. If they needed them or if anything came up, they would recall them. I know one in particular that was never recalled. He said they must have forgot him, but he sat at home . . . well, he stayed out all the time, and when he'd ever ask a question, they said, "Well, if we need you, we'll call you," and that was it.

Marcello: In general, what was the marital status of the men in F Battery? Again, I'm referring to the enlisted men. Were most of them married or were most of them single?

Slate: Most of them were single.

Marcello: In fact, would it be almost safe to say that the overwhelming majority were single?

Slate: Right. One or two got married just before we left, but the biggest majority were all single.

Marcello: At this point, were you still figuring you were going to put in a year and then go home? I think the unit had been mobilized originally for a year.

Slate: Mobilized for one year, that's right. We figured, "Well,

we'll go down there and stay a year, and then we'll be back home." And then here comes the rumor around that they're going to ship us out, so we thought it was going to be extended for the . . . there was no rumor as to how long. It was just an extension on it.

Marcello: Now your ultimate destination at this point is code-named "PLUM."

Slate: Right.

Marcello: What kind of speculation was going around as to what "PLUM" meant?

Slate: All kinds. When we found out we was going to the West Coast, that's when everybody started figuring . . . the first thing they started figuring was the Philippines because that was what was west. Some of them said, "Oh, no, they're going to put us in Hawaii," and then it was just a rumor all the time as to where we was actually going. Everybody was just guessing, but nobody . . . of course, we weren't told for sure.

Marcello: What was your reaction to the possibility of being sent to the Philippines--you personally?

Slate: Well, for me personally, I thought it'd be lots of fun to go over there. I'd heard a lot about the Philippines, and that suited me fine. I'd just soon to go; I would like to go.

Marcello: How about the rest of the men in the unit? What was their

attitude?

Slate: Well, a lot of them that I talked to felt just about the same. Well, the attitude was, "Well, we'll get to see a different part of the world. It'll be a new experience for us."

Marcello: Well, they loaded you up on a train, and I think it was on November 11, 1941, that you either left or that you arrived in San Francisco. I'm not sure which.

Slate: I think we arrived in . . . now the way I keep it straight as to about when we arrived out there was that we was having two Thanksgivings along about then. We was there, I believe, for the second Thanksgiving. We missed the first one, but we caught the second one.

Marcello: When you got to San Francisco, you actually were bivouacked very temporarily at Angel Island.

Slate: Right, right.

Marcello: What did you do while you were there in San Francisco?

Slate: Well, there wasn't too much to do because we had no equipment, and all we was doing is waiting on transportation, or a ship, ever when they was going to send us out. We just laid around and done very little. We'd go to Frisco if you had the money to go, listen to the football games. I won a lot of money off of TCU that year because I said they was going to knock Texas out of that number one spot. So I won enough money to make a couple trips to

Frisco off of that ball game.

Marcello: Well, that was unusual, was it not? What I'm saying is, the men didn't have too much money at that time.

Slate: No, not too much.

Marcello: I don't believe you'd been paid.

Slate: No, we hadn't been paid. They gave us a partial pay, I believe, if I remember right.

Marcello: I assume this was as far away from home as you had ever been.

Slate: That's right. In fact, before that, I don't think I'd been out of the State of Texas.

Marcello: Did you know Eddie Fung at that time?

Slate: No.

Marcello: I was just wondering because he was a native of San Francisco, and, of course, now he was going back home. I thought maybe he may have shown you the sights of San Francisco.

Slate: No, I didn't know him at that time.

Marcello: On November 21, 1941, you get aboard ship, and this is the USS Republic. Describe what kind of ship the Republic was.

Slate: Well, it was an old luxury liner that had been taken from the Germans during World War I, and they had converted it into a troop transport. I don't know how many it would hold, but I know it'd hold lots of people. The bunks were all six high, hanging off of the walls. Each battery was

assigned to an area, and then you was assigned to a bunk.

Marcello: Now the 2nd Battalion was not the only group aboard that ship, isn't that correct?

Slate: That's right. There was another unit on there.

Marcello: As I recall, the 26th Brigade was on there.

Slate: Yes, the 26th Brigade and . . .

Marcello: It was the 22nd Bombardment Group, I believe.

Slate: . . . and the 22nd Bombardment Group were all on the ship.

Marcello: Describe the first leg of your journey from San Francisco to Honolulu.

Slate: Well, we got aboard ship, and I didn't like the smell. Of course, every ship's got a wild smell to it. The first meal was fish because every Friday they fed fish. Going out of Frisco, I've found out since, that's some of the roughest waters that you'll find. Everybody started getting seasick. All you could smell was fish.

I was down in this hold, and it was hot, and everybody was throwing up all over the place, so I said, "This is not for me. I'm going to go up and get fresh air." So I went up on deck and went as far forward as I could get, and I was doing all right until a reserve navy chief who had been called up--and he was riding over to Honolulu with us--got upwind of me and got sick. That made me sick. So for the next two days I was kind of whoosey. I couldn't eat anything. Everytime I'd smell the food, you'd want

to run for the side again Then I started coming out of it and started eating, and then from there on everything was good until we started getting close to Hawaii, and then we started hitting the big ground swells.

I was standing in there eating . . . they had tables that come out from the wall, and you'd go through, get your tray, and go stand up and eat. I was standing by a porthole, and one of these swells come by and hit the side of the ship, and the water from the porthole just washed everything off of this table. A little flying fish came in, too, with it. But other than getting bounced around, most of them had got over their seasickness and got their sea legs then.

On into Honolulu, everybody was watching. They wanted to see what Hawaii looked like.

Marcello: I gather that the Republic must not have been a very fast ship, even for that time, because it took you about a week to get from San Francisco to Honolulu.

Slate: That's right.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to Honolulu?

Slate: Well, we docked. It was across from the Aloha Tower. So they told us we was going to be there twenty-four hours or something like that, and they let us have four hours' shore leave, half one time and then half the other time. I had my four hours in the afternoon, so we went to town.

Of course, the first thing somebody did was went and bought a bottle, and we drank a little bit, and, shoot, they sat around everywhere and drank. It didn't make them any difference--on the curb or where.

Then it was getting close to the time we had to go back, so there was three of us--and I have tried my best to remember who--that went over and went through the Dole pineapple plant. We had been through it, and it was hot, and we were wanting water, and they'd give us all this sweet pineapple juice. The front of the building looked like a hallway, a lobby, and it looked like there was drinking fountains there. We went running over to one of them, and here come cold pineapple juice out of it. So to get a drink of water, we went outside, and there was a hose there where they watered the outside. We turned that on to get us a drink of water because that was better than that pineapple juice.

Marcello: How much money did you have while you were there in Honolulu? Again, I'm referring to you personally.

Slate: I didn't have very much, but I don't remember just how much I had. I was holding on to my money because we had a little ol' PX on there that you could buy different things in. You had to ration it out because I know I didn't have too much, but I had enough to buy toothpaste and cigarettes. I rationed it out. Of course, there

was always poker games going. They was trying to get you in the poker games to get your money, but I didn't play that game. I didn't want to lose my money (chuckle).

From Honolulu, when we left, it was just kind of a routine deal from then on. I even volunteered for watch up on the sundeck to have something to do. There wasn't too much to actually do, with that many people on a ship.

Marcello: You're somewhere close to the Gilbert Islands when you receive word of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. Do you recall what you were doing and how you received the news about the Pearl Harbor attack?

Slate: We were just across the 180th . . .

Marcello: Meridian?

Slate: . . . meridian and the equator. I remember that morning I was in the chow line and that was . . . a certain time of the day, they would always turn the news on, on the public address system, but normally they was running silent. I was in the chow line with a bunch more when it come over that--the news of hitting Pearl Harbor.

Well, most of the reaction around me said, "Well, this thing won't last long." A lot of them said, "Well, we're ready for the Japs right now." But they didn't know how unready we were. They was wanting to fire that gun that was on that ship, which I was to find out later, if we ever fired it, it've probably sunk. We just kind

of had more watches, and we noticed that they was always changing courses. They started zigzagging our courses then. It was still just kind of a routine deal, and we still wasn't getting too much information.

Marcello: Were you ever gathered together by your officers or anything of that nature and told what was happening or what was going to happen?

Slate: Yes, they told us what they knew about what was happening and that we was going into the Fiji Islands to refuel, pick up supples, and then from there we was going to Australia. But they didn't know from Australia where we was going. They said we were going into Brisbane.

Marcello: How would you describe the conduct of the officers and the reaction of the officers after the news of the Pearl Harbor attack was received?

Slate: Some of the officers, to me, seemed a little scared. Actually, I don't think they knew what to expect or what to do. Then we had some that were kind of cool and said, "We'll play it as it comes along here, as to what's going to happen to us." But some of them got worried about, "I might get killed," or "What's going to happen to me," or "What's going to happen to my family back home," and you just kind of lost a little faith in some of them.

But the men themselves stuck together close. They were always talking about what they was going to do when

they run into the Japs and what they thought might happen.

Marcello: Again, we have to keep in mind that we're talking about the twenty-year-olds.

Slate: Right. They were all "eager-beavers." They were ready to go.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese, at that time, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

Slate: Well, from the Japanese I'd seen, I figured he was a little short guy, slant-eyed, and I'd seen a lot of pictures of them with a shaved head and slouchy uniform. It was always said that they can't see too good, but I found out later they can see pretty darn good (chuckle).

Marcello: Like you mentioned, you pull into Suva in the Fiji Islands, and I don't think you stayed there very long, just long enough to pick up some fresh provisions.

Slate: Right, and we was right back out again.

Marcello: Incidentally, you are part of a convoy at this time, are you not?

Slate: Yes. We thought it was a cargo ship--I believe it was a coast-wise ship--that was holding us up, and we come to find out that we was the one that was making the convoy so slow. Instead of this old cargo ship, we was the one that couldn't get along too fast.

Marcello: What escorts did you have?

Slate: We had a cruiser, and right now I can't remember the name of it.

Marcello: I think it was the Pensacola.

Slate: The Pensacola was escorting us. We also had a vessel that had been turned into a sub chaser. At one time, it had been a private yacht, so the Navy took it over and made a sub chaser out of it. It was a slick little thing out there in the water.

Marcello: Did they set up any additional weapons or anything aboard the Republic after news of the attack was received?

Slate: Well, we pulled some of the machine guns out, but the Republic already had .50-caliber machine guns on the sun-decks. But they pulled the rifles and all out, so we got them back, which they'd been stored all before. So we had to go down in the hold and dig through all those supplies and look for them boxes of rifles. I can't remember whether we had to dig the steel helmets out or we was carrying them, but I know it came up that we was supposed to wear our steel helmets.

Marcello: Okay, on December 21, 1941, you pulled into Brisbane. Do you recall where you were bivouacked when you got to Brisbane?

Slate: Ascot Racetrack.

Marcello: How were you bivouacked? I guess what I'm saying in effect is, what were your quarters like there?

Slate: Well, they had tent frames with tents set up over them.

It was similar to Camp Bowie, I mean, as far as the tents went. They just had about the same setup there of tents--the frames with the tents over them.

Marcello: What sort of reception did you receive from the Australians when you arrived there?

Slate: When we left the ship to go to the racetrack, the Australians was--we noticed right quick--the friendliest people we'd run across in a long time. Little kids would come along just talking to you just wanting souvenirs: "Where're they taking you to so we can come by and see you?" And we'd tell them. They was just as friendly as they could be. We said, "Well, we're going to like this. We hope we stay here."

Marcello: Several of the other people that I've interviewed have mentioned that they were surprised by the fact that there were very few young men in Brisbane. Did you notice that, too?

Slate: Yes, I noticed it. Most of them were in the service. The only ones that was left around there was the older ones, and a lot of them were in the service, but they wouldn't send them overseas anywhere. They was the home guard there. They used to fight to see who was going to buy you a drink when you were around them and all. They was always referring to us as "Yanks," and we tried to tell them we was from Texas, that we wasn't from the North,

but they still referred to us as the "Yanks."

Marcello: Describe Christmas of 1941. Do you recall what you did on Christmas of 1941?

Slate: Very well. There was a corporal by the name of Bankhead, and on the 24th of December, he and I were . . . we tried to figure out . . . it cost two cents to ride a tram to town. We didn't even have the two cents because we hadn't been paid anything yet, and we was trying to figure out how we could get to town. Some Australian, a civilian, had come by . . . we had walked out of the racetrack and over to a little park and was sitting there, and he said, "They won't charge you nothing on the tram. Just get on it and ride down there. Ride to town." We said, "Well, what're we going to do when we get to town?" We didn't have any money. They said, "Oh, you don't have to worry."

We was sitting there on this bench in this park, and there was a woman at the other end of it who was walking her dog, and the dog come running up to us, and we got to playing with it, and we got to talking to the woman then. She told us that she was born and raised in the States, and she had married an Australian. At that particular time, she had a son going to Notre Dame over here. She wanted to know why we didn't go to town, and we told there that we had no money. She said, "Well, I think I can help you out. Come over to the house." It

was about three blocks over to it. She got to looking, and I don't remember why . . . she said she didn't have any Australian money there, but she gave us an American dollar bill that she had. So there was a place in the camp where we could exchange it for Australian money. So we went back.

Well, before we left there, she invited us over for Christmas dinner. She wanted to know if we could come, and we said, "Sure." So she told us she wanted us back the next day around noon . . . at two o'clock, I believe she said, for tea and crumpets. We said, "Oh, no." Tea and crumpets, we didn't know what in the world she was talking about then.

But, anyhow, we took her dollar and went over and changed it and went to town and found out we didn't even need a dime after getting in town because they . . . you'd try to buy a drink, and there was no way these Australians would let you buy it.

But the next day we was there at two o'clock. Her husband had made a trip and bought beer and whiskey for us because he said the Americans liked whiskey. We was still kind of wondering about this tea and crumpets deal. Well, up the street from them was a couple, with one of them's husband missing in the Middle East and the other one still in the Middle East, and she said, "We'll invite

them down for dinner, for just company, and we can talk." Well, about four o'clock they showed up.

In the meantime, we'd had some little snacks, and she said, "We'll eat at four o'clock." Well, they served everything in relays. They started bringing things in, and we'd eat and they'd clear the table, and here comes something else. This went on until nine o'clock that night.

Of course, there was lots of talking going on. That's when I remember these girls, and these people, too, when they started talking . . . they didn't think anything about talking about breeding horses and breeding cattle, and just the way they talked, nothing like that bothered them, which we wasn't used to it even being talked about, you know, around women and all. We learned right quick that it didn't bother them. Some of the expressions that we learned later, even before we left Australia, was something else. They'd had a different meaning than what we thought it did.

Marcello: Could you be more specific on that?

Slate: Well, just like you'd go into town or something and go to these dances. They had these dances going on a lot. I remember one night this girl had been dancing with one of the guys and had come back over to the table. He asked her if she wanted to dance again. She said, "No, I'm

all knocked up. Go jazz my sister." All it meant was that she was tired and go dance with her sister. But to us, when she said that expression, "What in the world's she talking about?"

Marcello: I also recall that some of the people have talked about their experiences with Australian mutton here in Brisbane.

Slate: Yes. The first night we was in, we started walking and going through this camp. All you could smell was mutton. Of course, we weren't big mutton eaters, and the way they cooked the mutton didn't taste too good to us, anyway. Well, one of them told me they had to import that mutton because Brisbane is a cattle area, so they imported that mutton in from somewhere else because they thought we were big mutton eaters. They had all this good beef around! But we made a meal out of what they had, which was good. We ate bread, jam, and butter, which, those were good. We just made the meal out of that. I don't know what they did to the milk, but it tasted funny. It was milk but it still had a different taste to it. We drank their milk. Of course, there was tea everywhere; you always had plenty of tea.

Marcello: Where was Ascot Racetrack located?

Slate: It was located in Brisbane. Now what part of it, I don't remember.

Marcello: I guess my question wasn't phrased very well. I am

assuming, from what you said, that it wasn't downtown.

Slate: No, it was out on the edge of town. It was a horse racetrack where they run races. Even while we was there, they worked out the horses every morning. They didn't have their big meets, but they still used it to work their horses out.

Marcello: On December 28, 1941, about a week later, you board another ship. This is the Dutch motor ship Bloemfontein, and you're on your way to Java. At the time that you boarded the Bloemfontein, did you know where you were going?

Slate: As far as I remember, I didn't. The only thing was talk that we was going to go around to Port Darwin. Then's when we found out we was going to Java.

Marcello: The Bloemfontein was a fast ship, was it not?

Slate: Right. This old Dutch captain that was on it had dodged the German torpedoes a lot of times with it, because he told us about it. I was on the watch up on the bridge. I had an airplane watch. We had four guys up on the bridge for the watch, and we used to talk to this captain some. He'd tell us little stories about dodging the Germans, and he said, "If I can see them, I know I can dodge these Japs," because going through the straits, we saw where the Japs had torpedoed one ship. They said it must have been loaded with flour because it was all over the bank.

Marcello: Did you have any submarine scares or anything while you were on the Bloemfontein?

Slate: We had one in particular that I can remember because they had to dodge the torpedoes, and that was the only one I remember. That was going up around the point, and they said that there was a Jap sub in the area. When they hollered that, I did see the torpedo coming at us, but they swung the ship. He turned it so fast. I was on the other side, and I don't know how far it missed us over there, but some of them that saw it said it wasn't too far.

Marcello: My records indicate that you got into Surabaja, Java, on January 11, 1942, so I assume, therefore, that you spent New Year's aboard the Bloemfontein.

Slate: Yes. As far as I can remember, it was kind of quiet. They did have a deal on the ship, a little ol' canteen deal that was at the back, if I'm remembering right, that we could buy stuff out of, if you had the money. But in Australia they did finally pay us just before we left.

Marcello: Who else was aboard the Bloemfontein other than the 2nd Battalion? Were there any other troops aboard?

Slate: I think we were the only ones on it.

Marcello: But somewhere along the line, didn't you pick up some of those people from the 22nd Brigade?

Slate: Yes.

Marcello: The reason I mention this is because Ben Dunn in his book,

Behind Bamboo, mentions that he was a member of the 22nd Brigade, so some of those people must have been transferred into your unit.

Slate: Yes. Well, the 22nd Brigade had dive-bombers with them that had to be assembled. They were on another ship. To the best that I can remember, another ship came to Java with them, and the dive-bombers, so they assembled them up at the port, or assembled them somewhere, and then they moved these people up with us, up where we were in Java. Then they started helping us take care of the B-17's that was in there.

Marcello: If you boarded the Bloemfontein on December 28, and you pulled into Surabaja on January 11, 1942, that must have been a fairly long voyage, unless you stopped for a while at Darwin or someplace.

Slate: Well, we stopped at Darwin, but I'm trying to remember how long we stayed there. I know we was anchored a way out; we didn't go ashore or anything. Everything was by barge to and from it. I remember we saw aircraft carriers in there and a lot of other ships, but we was all anchored a way out, and nobody got off, as far as I know. I didn't get a chance to get off and go anywhere.

Marcello: You get into Surabaja, and I guess you move almost immediately out of there, do you not?

Slate: Yes.

Marcello: Where did you go?

Slate: We went to Malang, to a Dutch airfield.

Marcello: And the airfield was actually at Singosari, wasn't it?

Slate: Singosari, yes.

Marcello: How did you get from Surabaja to Singosari?

Slate: Some of us rode a train up, and then our equipment showed up. Some took the trucks and went up. Then we had to keep making trips back down to get our supplies up there with the trucks and haul them out. A lot of it came in by rail because that's the first time we run across the Javanese, was at the railheads when they was sending the stuff up and we was going down and unloading the equipment.

Marcello: When you got to Singosari, was the 19th Bomb Group already there?

Slate: Yes, it was operating off of the airfield.

Marcello: Describe what Singosari looked like from a physical standpoint. I'm referring to your quarters and your other facilities.

Slate: Well, the quarters were all permanent-type buildings, and right in the center of it was, of course, a big parade ground, and your barracks were built kind of around it, and off to the side with the motor park where you parked your trucks and all.

I never will forget the first time I walked in the barracks. I thought I was walking into a stable because

of the way they had them built. They just had a little cubicle, just a little wall that came out, and that's where you put your bunk in there. Some of them made a remark that this looks like a stables in here, and you can put a horse in each stall. But two of us slept in each stall.

Marcello: Did you have a bunk as such, or were you on the floor?

Slate: I had a bunk. We moved all of our stuff in there. We thought we was going to be in there for a good while. We didn't know how hot things were actually getting, but after awhile we found out.

Marcello: Now all this time, you have no idea whatsoever why you're in Java.

Slate: That's right. We got the rumor, or I got the rumor, that we was up there because the 19th Bomb Group had to leave the Philippines. They didn't have a ground crew with them, so they moved us up there to be the ground crew for the 19th Bomb Group. The first thing that hit my mind is "What's an artilleryman going to do with that airplane?" But one thing they was glad to get was the tools we had with us because they had very little tools, and they needed help with the ammunititon, the bombs, and everything. Just about all they had were the crews, and they was having to do everything.

Marcello: What were you in particular doing after you arrived at

Singosari?

Slate: Well, at night I'd go over on the airfield and either load bombs on the planes or polish and clip .50-caliber ammunition. There'd always be a big line; there was always a bunch polishing ammunition. It wasn't nothing to be standing beside a pilot, a captain, or even a major, because he was standing there polishing that ammunition, too, because they just didn't have the people.

Marcello: Approximately how many B-17's were there here at Singosari? You might have to estimate this, of course.

Slate: The best I can remember, there was either ten or twelve of them there, somewhere in that rnage, because I remember when they got one new one in, a B-17E, which had the tail gun in it, all of them was happy. They were down looking at this B-17 that came in with the tail gun in it because on one of the first trips out, they shot down a bunch of Jap Zeros because they were coming up on their tail, and the Japs didn't know at that time that they had them.

Marcello: One of the things that's always interested me, and I've never really found the answer, is the question of where the bombs were coming from. In other words, who was supplying the armaments for these planes? Was it the Dutch?

Slate: That's a good question. I never even thought about where they were coming from or how they got in there, unless some ships could have left the Philippines and brought

them in. Where we'd go pick the bombs up from, to bring them over and load them on the plane, there was a pretty good supply of them. Now what that supply came from . . . it was there before we got there. But I'd never even thought about where the bombs was coming from.

Marcello: What sort of relationship developed between the Dutch and the Americans here at Singosari, or Malang?

Slate: We had a good relation with them. As far as I was concerned, it was a good relation. We'd go into town, and they'd always talk to you; or if they couldn't speak English, and you couldn't manage to communicate, they'd find somebody who could speak English to where you could sit there and talk to them. They treated us . . . even the Javanese treated me personally . . . I couldn't ask to be treated any better.

Marcello: What was there to do in Malang?

Slate: Eat and drink (chuckle). That was about it. They had some pretty good places to eat, and, of course, everybody was drinking. Every once in awhile, we'd even go to a show. They had a theater there. I was in the theater one night when a plane came over real low over the theater, and I thought they was going to break the walls down getting out of that place. I don't know whose plane it was, but . . . I didn't go to the theater anymore.

Marcello: According to my records, the first air raid occurred on

February 3, 1942. Describe what you remember from that first air raid, from beginning to end.

Slate: Well, we'd had a lot of false alarms. Everybody had picked them a spot out of camp to go to. There was two or three of us who'd go to about the same spot in this tapioca field.

Marcello: Had you dug any slit trenches or anything of that nature?

Slate: Yes, we had us a little trench out there. They had set the 75's, the guns, up to where they would fire over the airfield.

Well, we had an air raid one day, and sirens started going off.

Marcello: Was this the first air raid?

Slate: This is the first one. Everybody "set sail" from camp. Well, it was the strafers, you know, their fighter planes, that come in. About all they did was they strafed the airfield. They did make a couple of passes over some of these trenches we were in. They were actually irrigation ditches. I was on one bank, and the bullets were hitting on the other bank. We'd usually hunt for an "L" turn in it, and then you could get away from them.

Well, they strafed the field and burned up several planes. I remember distinctly that there were two of them loaded with bombs and they blowed up. It made quite a "boom." They fired the 75's over the airfield, and then

they cut the fuse short to where the shrapnel would burst, and the planes was supposed to fly into it. There was no way they was going to hit the planes.

Well, after that raid, we had several false alarms. The next one . . . do you want me to go into the next raid?

Marcello: Yes.

Slate: I don't remember how long after that that we had this next raid. Oh, once in a while, in these false alarms, we'd see a reconnaissance plane. Well, we got to where we wasn't even paying attention to them because it was just one.

But then one day, the raid came, and we kind of eased out of camp. A lot of times, we'd take off in a hurry and get in a truck and go down to "Monkey Village" or somewhere. But this day, I went out of camp, out to these trenches we usually went to, and somebody said, "Look!" And here come two formations of bombers.

Marcello: These are the first bombers that you had seen?

Slate: These were the first bombers. We thought they was going for the airfield, and the longer you laid there in that hole and looked up at them, you said, "No, they're not going for the field! Thye're coming over this way!" They dropped their bombs right where those guns were because they went right down the line. I was in line with the guns and only about 200 yards away from them. I had my head

out of my hole looking, and I could see these bombs just coming along, and I said, "I hope they run out before they get to me." That hole was just moving around all over the place, and, sure enough, they didn't get quite to where I was. Then they made another run.

We decided it was best to get plumb away from those guns, so they moved them after that--moved the guns to another place. We started going farther away from camp because they did hit the camp, and one of the bombs went through one of the sheds and through a truck, and it was loaded with Carnation milk that we hadn't got out, and stink! That burnt milk didn't leave a very good smell around there for quite some time. But after that, we had a little more respect, and when the sirens started sounding, we started leaving.

Marcello: I've heard some of the men talk about a warning system that the natives had.

Slate: Yes, I didn't mention that, but a lot of times we would be leaving camp before the sirens would ever go. On these hollow logs, the natives had their own system. You would hear those drums beating, and you knew that there was an air raid because their communication, it seemed like, was faster than the radio. Everywhere their watches were, they would start warning you. At first, we didn't know what they meant. Then some of the Dutch told us what they

meant, that that was the natives' warning system. When the natives would hear it, they was gone.

Marcello: Am I to assume that the Dutch were not providing any protection at all for this air base?

Slate: No, no protection at all. In fact, while we was there, the English came in, an English antiaircraft unit, and set their guns up on the airfield. They got strafed pretty good one time.

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that your own fieldpieces were used as a make-shift antiaircraft weapon. How did they set up those guns in order to make them antiaircraft weapons?

Slate: Well, they split the trails and dug them in and elevated them as high as they could get them. Then they would fire over the field and get their burst over the field. The reason we always figured out that we got the bombers come in and went after those guns, that night, Tokyo Rose said the Americans in Java had a new, secret antiaircraft gun. It wasn't long after that until the bombers come looking for it.

Marcello: Were you picking up the radio broadcast of Tokyo Rose there in Java?

Slate: Yes. We used to listen to her for the . . . we could get good music. We didn't care what she was saying. Of course, we figured that was just a bunch of propaganda,

anyway.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned "Monkey Village." What was "Monkey Village?"

Slate: Well, it was a little park about . . . well, it was between there and Malang. From Singosari to Malang, I guess it was about half-way. They had a little place you could eat there, and there was a swimming pool. They had little stores there, little shops, and a laundry. It was out-of-the-way, and we'd go down there because the place was loaded with monkeys. We'd go down there and feed the monkeys and kill time until the all-clear went. That's where we usually went.

I understand that the guy that was running the laundry was also a Jap agent, and that the Dutch got to him because he disappeared. He had a radio in the back of his laundry that he used to radio all this information.

Marcello: How many air raids did you have altogether there in Singosari?

Slate: Gosh, I don't remember. I don't know. They got to where they was pretty frequent.

Marcello: How long would they usually last?

Slate: Oh, not long. About an hour, an hour-and-a-half. When the planes left from over us, in our area, we wouldn't get the all-clear immediately because they'd wait until they cleared the coast before they gave the all-clear.

Sometimes we could see the planes, but they was going someplace else. They wasn't after us. So we'd always like to see them go off to the side.

But then one afternoon, late, all of a sudden they slipped in on us, coming out of nowhere--no alarm or no nothing--and they went to strafing the field--fighter planes. I believe it was late one afternoon. In fact, I'm pretty sure it was late in the afternoon because I know it caught us all in camp. With all the scrambling, you never saw the like of it. Out in the parade ground, we did have trenches dug.

Marcello: Normally, was there a particular time when these raids would occur?

Slate: Yes, around noon everyday. They used to get mad at us in the mess hall because just about the time they started feeding, the alarm would go, and everybody'd take off; or it'd go just before they was ready to feed, and everybody took off.

Marcello: Generally speaking, were most of the raids carried out by the two-engine bombers?

Slate: Right, two-engine bombers or their fighter planes. We knew that when the fighter planes started coming in there, they was pretty close because they didn't have too long a range.

Marcello: When these bombers came over, approximately how many would

there be? Again, you would have to estimate this.

Slate: The first bunch of bombers that came over us, the first group, I believe, had nine in it, and the second group had eight in it. They made two circles afterwards. Another time they bombed us, I don't remember how many was in that group. It wasn't too big a group because one bunch came over us, and the other bunch kind of went off to the side, like, two or three are going to bomb you now, and then they're going off someplace else.

Marcello: Over a period of time--and you mentioned that these raids became more or less constant--how much damage was being done to the field?

Slate: The main damage to the field was they'd destroy the planes. As far as the runways and all go, there wasn't too much damage done to them because they wasn't bombing the . . . they made one bomb run on the field, but it didn't do too much damage because the fields were grass fields. They weren't concrete runways, so they were easy to take care of. They had steel landing mats on the runways because when it was raining, and the planes got off of them, they'd sink up in that mud because it wasn't actually a modern field at all.

Marcello: Did you ever get used to those air raids?

Slate: No. I got to where I had to put up with them (chuckle). But it got to a point to where you got ready for them

everywhere you was going, whether you was going to catch a truck and head for "Monkey Village" or go out into the tapioca fields, out away from camp. We used to go out there and take milk cans or something like that and trade them to some little ol' native kid for a stalk of bananas or something. Usually, we traded them for bananas or fruit. Then that afternoon, you'd come back, and he'd made a lighter out of that can, and he wanted to sell you the lighter back. So usually most of us had one spot we'd go to. A lot of funny things happened during those air raids.

Marcello: Such as?

Slate: Well, one of the guys had him a hole dug in this ditch, and if it come a little rain or something . . . so he figured the best way he could find his hole was just run down a ditch and jump in it. Well, he run down the ditch and jumped in it, and it was full of water.

Then another time, well, one was hunting a hole somewhere to get into, and he saw this hole and jumped into it, and it was an old, native outhouse. He went to hollering for somebody to help get him out of there. I don't know how long it took him to get the smell off of him because we accused him of smelling that way for a week after that.

Normally, during the day, we'd run in from the planes,

and at night, if we wasn't working at the field, we had a club there we'd go to, or we'd go downtown. One of the guys had a pet monkey, and we used to get him drunk all the time. He would stand on the edge of the table and try to do somersaults off the back of it, and after he got so drunk that he couldn't make it, he'd hit on his back and everywhere else. Both of them would pass out, and they'd take them over and put them to bed. We'd "bat the breeze" with the English. There was Englishmen there then. Sometimes Dutch soldiers would come over. Actually, it wasn't too awful much to do, except if you wanted to go into town. If you just stayed around camp, there wasn't too much to do.

Marcello: What seemed to be the general morale of the troops at this time, that is, while the air raids and so on were occurring?

Slate: AS far as my morale, and the ones that I was around a lot, it was good, but some of the officers' morale wasn't too good, and they'd give some of them a hard time. You know, like they were wanting to take their frustration out on somebody. Well, they'd start picking on different ones, it seemed like, or they'd come up with unreasonable things and all. If you'd stay away from them, you was all right. We had a first sergeant that was a good buffer between us and the officers.

Marcello: Who was that?

Slate: Sergeant Jones, Glen Jones. He was good. I used to go to town with him a whole lot. I saw him not too long ago and reminded him of the time we went to town, and everybody decided they wanted to go somewhere else, to a little cat house off down here. Somebody said, "There's some Chinese here," and some of them said there was something else over somewhere else. They had them little three-wheel taxis, so there was about six of them that all got in a line and went down there.

I started missing everybody. I didn't know where in the world they went to. I was talking to a guy, and he took off and went somewhere else, and I couldn't find anybody. All these little taxis were still lined up out there, and nobody would pay them. So I said, "Well, shoot, I'll just go back to the cafe." It wasn't but about six or eight blocks. So I got in the first little taxi and told him to take me back to the cafe.

Well, all of them followed me, so they all got stranded down there trying to get taxis back. I had all of them. I looked back and seen this bunch following me, and I said, "Oh, no! I'm not going to pay all of them people!" So I paid the first one, ran in the side of the cafe, and I saw these others getting out. Here they come after me. I went out the front, across the

street, on down, and went to another cafe. I didn't know anything about what was going on. I wanted to get away from them.

Marcello: Who were some of the officers here at Singosari that really stand out in your mind in terms of displaying leadership qualities? We'll talk about the good ones as opposed to the bad ones.

Slate: Well, we had Captain Fillmore there. I always liked him. We had Ira Fowler, and then we had Latimore, and that's the main ones I had dealings with. Some of them, I didn't have too much dealings with. Of course, I was around where they were, but as far as dealings with me, they didn't. Some of them I just flat stayed away from as far as I could.

I didn't know too much about the officers because they was still new to us because we got a new bunch of officers when we started overseas. Ira Fowler is the one that went with us and that was down there all the time. I'd known him even before I went in the service, and he was the only one I really knew. But the other officers was all new to us, and we still didn't know what to expect out of them because things just . . . well, the first sergeant instructed us. If they had something for us to do, they would tell the first sergeant, and then he would tell us. As far as seeing the officers, we

didn't see them too much--not then.

Marcello: Now all this time that you're on Java, and during these raids and so on, are you still expecting to be evacuated fairly shortly?

Slate: Well, I was, myself, personally. When the 19th Bomb Group . . . the guys started telling us, "It's getting too hot for us here. We got to leave, move back." They said they didn't know just when they were going to move back, but they could haul all of us out if they just didn't take any supplies or anything and just fly us to Australia." I just figured, "Well, when it gets hot enough, that's the way we'll get out." Then all of a sudden, they got orders to move the 19th Bomb Group out, and that wasn't our orders to go with them.

Marcello: What did that do to your morale?

Slate: Well, they told us that we was supposed to go to the other end of the island, and the cruiser Houston would pick us up. Well, we got everything ready and started moving.

Marcello: It was about a day after the 19th Bomb Group evacuated that you actually left Singosari, too, is that correct?

Slate: Yes, we started . . . we left.

Marcello: I think the 19th Bomb Group left on February 27, and I believe you moved out on February 28 or something like that.

Slate: Something like that, because we picked up all the trucks and the equipment that the Air Force left. Most of the people were riding two to a cab, that's how many vehicles we had. In fact, I got hold of a . . . I've been trying to figure out how I managed to get hold of it, but I had a '42 Chevrolet sedan that two of us was riding in. It was shiny and we stopped by a rice paddy and put mud all over it to where it wouldn't shine so. We drove that thing for a while, and then we let somebody else have it.

One time we run across an old Bren gun carrier the English had abandoned. We got that thing to going, and we'd drive it some until one night we caught up with the convoy, and they started shooting at us--they thought we was Japs--so we abandoned that thing.

But we moved late in the afternoon, moved to our next area, and we'd pull into rubber groves or something and spend the night. We always said we was letting the reconnaissance planes see us. By the time they could get somebody to us, it was dark, so we would move on. I heard later, through questioning people in Washington and everything, that was the idea--for us to make it look like we was a big unit moving because we had all these vehicles, and there wasn't nothing in them.

Marcello: Now during this moving around the island, how much contact had you actually had with Japanese ground troops, which

had already landed?

Slate: One time we came up to a river, and they pulled us into a rubber plantation, I believe, and they was going to take the guns up and protect the Australian infantry that was along the river. But they had a bridge they wanted to blow out, so somebody had to go up and direct the fire to blow the bridge out. I don't remember the officer and the enlisted men that went up to blow the bridge out.

Marcello: Was it Stensland? Was Lieutenant Stensland the officer?

Slate: Stensland, right. Who went with him, I don't remember, but I was still back when they was doing the firing. I was still back in our area, but I could hear the firing. It wasn't too long after that until I was up there where the guns were located. There was a native who started walking across the rice dike carrying a mirror, and he was flashing that mirror with the sun, and he was spotting each one of those gun positions. Somebody opened up with a gun and shot him off of the dike out there when that one started happening. Then I'd gone on up to take supplies or something to them and came back.

At this time, some of the officers wouldn't go up there. Along about then was when we lost some respect for some officers, because he got to talking about, "What about my wife and two kids back home? If I go up there,

I'm liable to get killed." He wasn't thinking anything about the ones that was up there, and I guess he would have went up there if it hadn't been for the first sergeant. He said, "You can get in lots of trouble by forcing him to go, so just leave him alone." So that was that from then on, and they just let him alone.

Marcello: So I gather, then, that during this entire period, you're doing nothing but moving around.

Slate: Moving most of the time, is all--just moving. That was our only encounter, as far as fighting the Japs or anything.

Marcello: Did you ever fire those weapons in support of the Australians?

Slate: Yes, they was fired one time, I believe, at this bridge, but I think they then moved the Australians out, and we had to move out. Things all of a sudden started happening so fast, and so much was going on.

I was, one time during this period, watching for the Japs, and they wasn't too far from us. We was getting up on a little ol' hill as a kind of a watch, lookout. Some natives kept going in this bamboo thicket, and it was pretty good-sized. Nobody ever come out. So a couple of us--and I don't remember who went with me--we got brave enough, and we was going to go down and see what was going on in that thicket. We walked down, and he started around one side, and I started around the other, and I looked around the corner, looking around these clumps of bamboo, and a Jap

was peeking back around at me. I guess I scared him as bad as he scared me because I turned around and took off back up the hill, he went around the other way and hollered at the other one, and we both took off. But they never fired at us or nothing.

Well, it wasn't long after dark that night when we started moving. We was going to move out. We was moving slow, and a guy running up behind us and crawled up in our truck and said, "Let's get out of here! The Japs are not fifty yards over there!" He said, "I don't know how I got out of them, but they're right over close!" He was a guy that didn't care for nothing, but he was scared to death: "Let's get out of here!"

We started moving, and we was all trying to figure out the English sitting on the side of the road with their little fires going and brewing tea. Japs anywhere can see them--they got all these little fires going--but they was bound and determined they was going to stop and have that tea. We couldn't figure that out at all, so we kept moving (chuckle).

Marcello: Meanwhile, what are the Dutch doing all this time?

Slate: As far as I know, the Dutch wasn't doing anything because the Dutch capitulated on us. One time we went by a warehouse and picked up all the supplies we could get out of it, but as far as the Dutch issuing anything or seeing

that you had gasoline and all that, you started having to look for it. You'd get it the best place you could.

Marcello: I've heard that they weren't eager to do much fighting because it might cause a lot of property damage on the island.

Slate: Right. They wanted to protect their property, and they'd declare a city an open city, like they did Batavia, to where it wouldn't be destroyed. We was sitting and watching them bomb Batavia one time, and, I think, the next day or so they declared it an open city. Out of this rubber grove we could watch the planes going over, bombing the different things there, and got to see two of them shot down.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about Lieutenant Stensland. What do you know about him? He's a rather mysterious individual, isn't he?

Slate: First, I don't know where he came from, actually, and how he got with us in the first place. He just appeared. I heard all kinds of stories--he come out of the Philippines; he come out of Borneo--and where he actually came from, I never did know for sure because there'd be a story here and a story there. I even heard the story he was AWOL out of Honolulu. And I heard he came in on a ship; I heard he flew in. Some of them said he just appeared. So now how he got in there and got with us, how he got to the island, is a mystery to me and always has been.

Marcello: What happened to E Battery?

Slate: When we started the big move, E Battery went to . . . well, where'd we land?

Marcello: Surabaja?

Slate: Surabaja. They stayed down there. We made the move. Now I never did know for sure why they took E Battery back down there, but I understood that they was supposed to catch up with us later, but they never did. Some of that stuff in there as to why they did it is . . . well, I didn't know the reason, and things got to happening, and you didn't think to ask why something's happening. Some of us would get to talking as to why they sent them down there in the first place, why everybody didn't go together.

Marcello: So at this point, then, there is D Battery, F Battery, Headquarters Battery, and Service Battery, is that correct? E Battery is not with you.

Slate: Right. No, E Battery is not with us.

Marcello: On March 8, 1942, the island capitulated.

Slate: Yes.

Marcello: The Dutch were nominally in command, and they decided to give up.

Slate: Capitulate, that's right.

Marcello: Describe how you received the word and what your reaction was.

Slate: Well, when we received the word that the Dutch had capitulated, we figured, well, "That's it. How are we going to get off

this island?" Some of them had already made a run for the coast and came back and said there was no way to get off down there.

Marcello: In other words, are you saying, in effect, that once the word of capitulation came down, your officers freed you to do just about what you wanted to at this point?

Slate: Well, I don't know whether they freed them or not, but the guys did what they wanted. They just said, "Well, heck, I'm going to get off of this island," or "I'm going somewhere else," or "I'm going to the hills." They just took off. It was more or less on their own. I don't know whether somebody told them that they could do what they wanted to or not, but you was more or less on your own. It just so happens that the 8th of March happened to have been my birthday, and that was my twenty-first birthday that day.

Marcello: So how did the order of capitulation affect you personally?

Slate: Well, as several of them made the remark, "The day you became a man, the Japs took it away from you." (chuckle)

Marcello: I've also heard some of the men say that they felt kind of ashamed that the surrender order came down because they really hadn't done very much fighting.

Slate: Well, I always thought we could have done more. We could have put on a show someway, somewhere. It should have been a better show put on. There might be a lot more of them

killed or something, but at least you could have made yourself be known that you was there and that you would fight. But the way it was, we was there and we didn't do nothing.

Marcello: What was your personal reaction when you received word?

Slate: Well, my personal reaction was to start wondering what was going to happen next. We didn't know too much about the Japs, so I just tried to get things together in my mind and say, "Well, what am I going to have to put up with now?" And there wasn't no heck of a lot that you could do. There wasn't no sense in worrying about it because it wasn't going to help you, and you couldn't solve the problem. We celebrated my birthday that day that we heard that.

Marcello: How did you celebrate?

Slate: Oh, there was some bottles that turned up from here and there, and different things just started showing up. When we'd been all this moving, well, people had been buying stuff out of stores and everything, so we just had us a little party celebrating my twenty-first birthday, and we had a few drinks. Then we was in this racetrack they had moved us into, and we was just sitting around there waiting to see what was going to happen next.

Marcello: Let's back up again and discuss in a little bit more detail what happened after the actual surrender order came down.

What instructions were you given by your officers and so on relative to your weapons and your vehicles?

Slate: Well, the instructions that the Japs gave to the officers was that we were to move everything to a certain point, intact, and they would pick it up. We was on a side of a road, and we moved into this racetrack.

Marcello: This was at Garoet.

Slate: Garoet. Before we moved, though, with the vehicles . . . we didn't bother the trucks, but the rest of the stuff was . . . I guess there was a hundred rifles that went into a well that was there, and I don't know how many rounds of ammunition, because I know my rifle went in it.

That car was still with us, the one I was talking about, that I'd picked up. We didn't want some Jap officer riding around in it. They said, "Well, what are we going to do with it?" Somebody standing around out there said, "I wonder how long it'd take to burn the motor up?" We said, "We don't know, but let's find out." We drained all the oil out of it, drained the water out of it, started it up, and back in 1942 those cars had throttles on them, so we just pulled the throttle all the way out and bent it down. While the motor was running and all, we beat the glass out of it, cut up all the upholstery, stuck knives through the tires, and we thought that motor never was going to quit because it lasted a long time.

We tore up all of the cars. I think there was four. They were all "boogered" up to where they wasn't no good. But trucks, now, we didn't fool with them because we had to have some transportation. We got to get moved some way. The 75's . . . some of them told me that they got rid of the pins out of them and all, and the officers got all "bent out of shape" because we didn't keep all this stuff intact, and they didn't know what the Japs was going to do to them. Well, we didn't want to give it to them, so we could care less what happened to them over this.

But we just got rid of everything we could that might help them. I know all the instruments that this detail that I worked with and all, we dumped them in that well, and there was water in it, so I know that water didn't do them any good, if they ever dug them out. They might still be in there, for all I know.

Marcello: After the surrender order was issued, did you go immediately thereafter down to Garoet?

Slate: We went to a tea plantation.

Marcello: Was that before or after you were at the racetrack?

Slate: That was before we went to the racetrack. Then they moved us down on the racetrack.

Marcello: How long were you up at the tea plantation, altogether?

Slate: I was up there three days . . . two or three days. I don't remember.

Marcello: And what did you do while you were up there?

Slate: Nothing. We were just trying to figure out what was going to happen next.

Marcello: Had you ever heard the rumor that the Japanese didn't take prisoners?

Slate: Yes, I'd heard that, and I was discussing with some of them that if they didn't, they sure had to kill a lot of people. Singapore had fell, and we knew how many prisoners they took on Singapore. We knew then that they took prisoners, or you'd have heard that they'd killed everybody on Singapore. We had heard about the big battle in Corregidor because we had access to radios and all that. But as far as not taking prisoners, that didn't bother me that much.

Marcello: Are you still basically wondering, however, what's going to happen next?

Slate: Well, at this time, yes--just what they're going to do with us, where they're going to take us, and how long we're going to be here. Well, that was kind of running through my mind, but there was no answers. You were just having to do it a day at a time, more or less, as to what was going to happen next.

On the tea plantation, two or three days, I believe, is all I was there, and then I wound up on the racetrack.

Marcello: And all this time you still have your vehicles.

Slate: Yes, we still have the vehicles.

Marcello: And you really haven't seen any Japanese yet.

Slate: No Japs yet.

Marcello: Okay, what happens wen you get to the racetrack?

Slate: Well, they tell us that on a certain day the Japs are going to come in and pick up all the trucks, and we got to wondering how in the world them little short guys are going to drive them trucks. Boy, they was scraping lots of gears when they was leaving, but they got them away from there. Then we just sat around the racetrack. I think we had our pup tents pitched, just waiting to see what happened next.

Marcello: This racetrack is near Tjalatjap, isn't it?

Slate: Right. Now at this time, they had a lot of money in the battalion fund, so F Battery broke part of that money down to NCO's to keep, because I had 10,000 guilders. I was a kid, taking care of . . . the way they had it broke down, they gave me 10,000 guilders to keep. They figured if they split it up, well, the Japs wouldn't find a lump sum and take it away from them. So I wrapped a T-shirt I had around this money and made a pillow out of it, and that was always my pillow, was that money.

Marcello: Now to whom were you responsible? In other words, which officer had given you the money?

Slate: Oh, our captain had called us up and broke it down. Some of the battalion officers were there, too, because they had all this money, and they had broke it down as to who

they was giving it to and what to do with it. Now who actually handed me the money, I don't remember, but I got the money. I went out, and I came back, and I had this money: "What the heck am I going to do with it now?" As I said, I made a pillow out of it, and then I carried it for a good while. While we was on the racetrack, we got word that they was going to move us to Batavia and that they was going to send an advance party.

Marcello: So how long were you at the racetrack, altogether? Was it less than a week?

Slate: I believe it was less than a week before they started picking an advance party. They said it was an advance party to go ahead to get the camp ready for when the main body was moved down.

Marcello: In the meantime, you still had had no real contact with the Japanese.

Slate: In fact, at that time, I hadn't even seen a Jap. I saw one Jap officer way over by the main entrance. Somebody said, "There's a Jap officer," and we saw him standing over by the main entrance to the racetrack, and that's the only time I'd . . . the only one I'd seen.

Marcello: So you were selected for this advance party. Pick up the story at this point. In other words, where do you go and what do you do?

Slate: Well, they picked Ed Worthington and myself out of F Battery

to go, and at that time I don't know who any of the rest of them were that was picked. So when they got ready to move us, we all got together with what we was carrying with us, our bags and all, and they took us over and put us on a train. If I remember, that's the way we went--by train.

Anyway, when we got to Batavia, they put us . . . I know I rode a truck up to this Chinese school. The first impression, when I walked in, was, "Where in the world are they going to put everybody in this place?"

Marcello: How big was this Chinese school?

Slate: It was, I would say, about fifty yards square, inside. In the center of it, they had an auditorium. It had been an old school. Of course, down each side, across the back, and up the other side was rooms, and then right at the front it had a gate and two entrance ways to it.

Marcello: How many of you were there in this advance party?

Slate: To the best I can remember, there was twenty-two.

Marcello: Were you being accompanied by Japanese?

Slate: Yes, we had Japanese guards escorting us.

Marcello: How were they behaving?

Slate: They were the regular Jap troops, and the guards was treating us . . . there was no abuse. They just told you what to do, and, well, we was doing it. But as far as hurting us or any of the beatings or anything like that,

it wasn't happening at this time.

Marcello: So what did you do when you got to the Chinese school?

Slate: Well, they put us all in this one room and said, "This is your room. All Americans are in here." Well, there was some Dutch there, some English, so they had a little bit of everybody scattered out in all these rooms. We was trying to figure out, "Well, if we're down here to fix a camp, what's going on?" We didn't know. Then we stayed there, and they told us we could do our own cooking, and they set up a place for us to cook. I was trying to figure out, myself, as to what the heck we was going to do there. Well, then they started taking us out on the working parties, but we still wasn't getting any camp ready.

Marcello: You mentioned that they showed you a place where you could do your cooking. You were doing your own cooking then?

Slate: Yes, we was doing our own cooking?

Marcello: What kind of food?

Slate: Anything we could buy off the natives. We had some good guards there. The gate next to us was closed; it was a wrought-iron gate. We'd buy stuff through the fence from them. We'd go out on working parties, and there was two of us that were small. This Jap guard would take us on his bicycle up ahead and say, "Okay, you fill your bag up." We had little ditty bags with us. We'd buy what we could

there, and the other group would catch up with us on these work parties, you know, going to it or coming back. We'd switch bags, and he'd take us on up a little farther, and we'd buy what we could find. We usually figured out what to look for--canned goods or fresh vegetables or eggs or bread. At that time, a lot of things were still plentiful. So we was actually eating good. We done our own cooking. And our work that they had us doing wasn't hard. We was going out to the airport and worked some on the runways filling up the holes because they did tear the runways up. We got out there one day to go to work, and here comes a little Jap up, and he spoke good English, and he said, "We need four drivers." Well, that's the first time I found out "don't volunteer," but it turned out to be a good detail. They took the four of us to a different place, and it was where they parked the trucks.

Marcello: Who were the other three with you?

Slate: I can't remember which three went with me. I went nearly all the time, but once in a while the others would change. We'd kind of rotate in going out because everybody didn't have to go out everyday. They took us down to open sheds where the trucks was parked, and what we supposed to do is fix flats, is what they wanted the drivers for. Well, I drove two or three times, but . . . and I never did fix a flat because there was two pilots in charge of this

place, and they'd say, "Get over in the shade and just take it easy." At noon they'd go downtown or go somewhere and buy stuff for us to eat.

Marcello: These were Japanese pilots?

Slate: Yes, Japanese pilots. I met one of them, and he showed me his passport, where he had gone to Japan to visit. You know, before the war started, they wanted these Japanese to go visit their ancesters. They paid their way over there, and then they wouldn't let them leave. He had his passport with him and all of his papers and said if he ever got a chance, he was leaving. Now whether he ever got a chance or not, I don't know, because, of course, they'd come and go.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned that you were buying food. What money were you using?

Slate: Well, we had money, and I still had this 10,000 guilders. The officers that went with us had a bunch of money.

Marcello: Oh, there were some officers that were in this party of twenty-two?

Slate: Yes, we had Major Rogers and Lieutenant Schmid. I don't remember whether there was anymore officers or not. I think they was the only two. But I still carried the part of the money I had. It still wasn't pooled, so they still kept it--the ones that had it. I don't know whether any of the rest of them of the group had the money or not because

normally you didn't say anything about it because you never knew what'd happen.

Marcello: Were you told, or was it implicit, that you could buy food with this money and so on?

Slate: Yes.

Marcello: And I assume that you would have to give an accounting of all the money that was spent.

Slate: Yes, they said that if I bought food with it, I'd have to account for it when I had to turn it in, as to how much I'd spent and for what and for who. I don't remember how much I spent of this money, but I didn't spend too much. I just kept my pillow tied up tight, and actually I didn't need it.

Marcello: Were you cooking rice at this time yet?

Slate: Very little, because we was getting hold of bread and everything that we liked. We managed to get hold of it.

Marcello: So how long were you at this Chinese school altogether?

Slate: Six weeks? Two months? I don't remember how long that was. I think about two months. If I could remember when we moved into Bicycle Camp . . .

Marcello: Well, the bulk of the unit moved into Bicycle Camp on May 14.

Slate: Well, two days after that, we moved from the Chinese school over to Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: And you moved into that Chinese school maybe about two

weeks after the actual surrender took place? Does that seem about right?

Slate: That's about right.

Marcello: So, therefore, you may have been there maybe about five or six weeks, like you mentioned.

Slate: Five or six weeks, right.

Marcello: Did you move directly from the Chinese school into Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Right. Yes, they told us they had moved the rest of them into the camp and that they was going to move us over with them.

Marcello: So you escaped Tanjong Priok altogether, then.

Slate: Right. For a long time, we didn't know where they were, and then we heard about this Tanjong Priok, and we didn't know for sure until--I didn't--until we moved in with them. They had quite a rough "go" of it--the other bunch--where, as far as a prisoner goes, we'd been living a "Life of Reilly."

Marcello: In other words, you were maintaining your weight and so forth at this point yet.

Slate: Yes, we were maintaining weight and having, more or less, kind of like a picnic. You wasn't working hard; you was getting out. You still could see the Dutch; there was some around. And we were treated good because it seems as though the pilots were the elite group, and they treated you a lot better than just an ol' regular guard would, a

regular Jap.

Marcello: Now you've been a prisoner-of-war for approximately two months. What are you learning about your captors in terms of establishing any sort of a relationship with them? What are you learning about being a prisoner-of-war, especially in any relations with the Japanese?

Slate: Well, the first thing you learned, you find out what kind of temper this Jap had--whether he wanted to be friendly with you or if he was one of these types that would come up and talk to you, you make some motion, or make some remark that he happened to catch that he didn't like, and he'd just fly off the handle at you. So you played it cool, and you would just wait and see how they would act, and then you would still take caution. You didn't take anything from them for granted, or I didn't, because I flat didn't trust them.

Marcello: Are you finding that it is best to stay away from them, if possible?

Slate: Well, yes, stay as far away from them as you can, and have as little to do with them as you had to.

Marcello: While you're here at the Chinese school, are you having to bow and all that sort of thing? Has that started yet here at the Chinese school?

Slate: No, we hadn't got into that yet.

Marcello: Things are pretty informal yet here.

Slate: They're still informal, and as one Jap guard told us, they didn't know what to do with us yet. Now he just flat come out and explained that. He said the officers didn't know what was going to happen yet, and they didn't know what was going to happen. They was just supposed to watch us. They wouldn't force you to work. Shoot, our work parties out of this place was a ball. You'd work if you wanted to, or if you didn't want to, you didn't have to.

Marcello: I guess it was a good idea to go out on the working parties because of the opportunities to purchase things from the natives.

Slate: That's right, and to get out of camp. Everybody that possibly could, that wanted to, could go, and you'd go out and spend your day and come back that night, and they would . . . oh, a lot of times they would fix meals for us and send them out because they'd haul the meals out at noon. A lot of times, we actually didn't need it because we'd got enough stuff. Where I was working with the four of us--maybe sometimes there'd be more--the Japs would go get something for us to eat at noon, and they always kept something around for you to drink. There was soda pops, and there was always . . . they made tea, and you could have all of it you wanted. So actually, this bunch . . . as far as I'm concerned, I couldn't have been treated any better, but this is early (chuckle).

Marcello: Incidentally, how did those Japanese here at the Chinese

school, compare with the stereotypes that we talked about when you were back aboard the USS Republic? What did these Japanese actually look like in terms of their physical appearance?

Slate: As far as physical appearance, some of them had it pretty close. The Jap officers all dressed neater, had different-type uniforms, but the regular soldiers had those ol' baggy uniforms on and that little ol' cap, shaved heads. Most of them were slant-eyed and short, so as far as . . . they hit pretty close because I'd seen pictures of them before and all, and they didn't miss by far. One thing I noticed: they didn't nearly as many of them wear glasses as I'd presumed that they did because of their poor eyesight. We had thought that nearly all of them wore glasses, but there was very few of them wore glasses. But I wasn't far off on what I thought about them or what they was going to look like.

Now the way they would act, I learned, as things went along, and the way these people's mind worked, you had to kind of figure that out. Each individual was different. One of them would smile, and at the same time he'd knock the heck out of you. Another one would come up frowning at you, and he acted like he wanted to be friendly, but if any of them were coming up to you smiling and all, you better stand by and get ready because he's probably got some

little evil thing in the back of his mind that he's smiling about, and he's fixing to do it to you.

Marcello: Okay, now you mentioned that in May of 1942, you moved from the Chinese school into Bicycle Camp. How do you get from the Chinese school to Bicycle Camp? What was the method of transportation?

Slate: I believe we went in trucks. They loaded us up on trucks, and then they let us out at the front gate.

Marcello: Now there were actually more than twenty-two of you because you said that there were English and Dutch in this school, also.

Slate: Yes. But they just moved . . . we was just moved out.

Marcello: The twenty-two Americans?

Slate: Yes. Now different things happened at the Chinese school that was kind of interesting, especially to the English and the Dutch, and even the Japs kind of liked it.

Marcello: What happened here? You might want to mention some of these things.

Slate: Well, something came up as far as entertainment in the camp goes, so each one of them had done something as far as entertaining goes. They even had musical instruments there and all.

Marcello: I assume that the Americans were in a distinct minority at this camp.

Slate: Yes, we were, but they came up wanting us to do something, so

the only thing we could come up with . . . there wasn't too much talent among us, as far as entertainers go, so we decided to try to put 'em on a minstrel show which . . . we had some people there that actually turned out to have pretty good talent and all. Then we told the guards we could do a lot better if we had a little booze to go along with it. So we got everything together, and the Americans put them on a minstrel show there.

This Lieutenant Schmid that was with us had this bird, a cockatoo, and it was a white one, and he carried that thing for I don't know how long. I think he got it as soon as we got to Java. It sat out in the tree right close to us and hollered when he wanted down, and somebody would go let him down.

But for this minstrel show, they were trying to make something a little different in it and all, so they'd came up and found a long rope. And between the little acts, I started from one side of the stage going across, and I'd get out about five or six feet and somebody'd pull me back. Another little act would go on, I'd start out and get a little farther. I think this went on four times. On the fourth time, I went all the way across the stage. The rope reached all the way across the stage, and on the end of this rope was this bird. The Australians caught it pretty quick, some of the English were kind of slow, and the

Dutch was a little slow. Then all of a sudden they'd hit them as to what had been going on and what was happening, and they'd just roar. They thought the little show we put on for them was great.

Marcello: Do you recall the nickname of that cockatoo? I've heard of a cockatoo named "Piss Pot." Is this the same one?

Slate: Yes, that's "Piss Pot." Where he got that name, I still don't know, but "Piss Pot" went with us everywhere he went. He rode his shoulder when we was moving.

Marcello: Did Lieutenant Schmid take the cockatoo into Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Yes, the bird moved to Bicycle Camp with us.

Marcello: The Japanese had no objections to that.

Slate: No objections. Nobody said anywhere along the line, that I knew of, that he couldn't take it.

Marcello: Are there any other interesting experiences that occurred here at the Chinese school that you think we need to get as part of the record?

Slate: One instance happened with one of the guards. He came by one afternoon and said he was going to town . . . he was going somewhere, anyway. He wanted to know if we wanted him to buy us anything. He would speak English, but he would write it for you. He was told not to speak English, but he'd come in and wrote a little note, so all of us gave him money and said to bring us back some candy. Well, when he came back with the candy . . . these classrooms

had blackboards on the walls, and it still had chalk in there and the erasers and all. But he came in with this candy, and he had it in the bag and dumped it out on the table. I don't know how many of us had gave him money for the candy, but he put it out in that many piles, and he had three left over. So he walked up to the blackboard, and he pointed to each other and showed how much money they'd gave him, and he'd put it on the board. He showed how much money he had, and then he showed how many pieces of candy he got for that amount of money, and he pointed to the piles, and there was three left over. Then when we got through, he had a three, and he drawed a circle around it and said those three were his. He picked them up and walked out. But he figured the whole thing out, as to where those three pieces came from, actually, and that they were his, and he took them and left (chuckle). For some reason, everytime you get to talking about it, that'll hit my mind as to one thing in particular I remember about that place.

Marcello: Okay, you get into Bicycle Camp around May 16, 1942, assuming that you got there two days after the bulk of the men. Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint. Again, I'm referring to the barracks and the general grounds and so on.

Slate: Well, when they let us out, it had this gate across, and we

was looking through it, and they had these long huts in rows down through there on each side. That's the first time we'd run across these deals that was built out of a lot of bamboo. They were long huts, and it just looked like . . . I couldn't see but a very few people, a few milling around here and there, and it kind of looked like a deserted place. I said, "What in the world are we going to do in there?" or "What's in there?" It didn't look too good to me.

Then we walked in, and the Japs checked us in. Of course, they counted us everytime you'd turn around to make sure the same number was still there. They told us where our barracks were, and they put us back with our same group. I got back with the F Battery group, and all the rest of them went back to their groups there. A lot of them looked bad. They had been through this . . .

Marcello: Tanjong Priok?

Slate: . . . Tanjong Priok deal, and they couldn't figure out why I looked so good. Of course, I had to explain what had been happening to us, and at the same time, I saw a bunch more around there in another barracks over from us, a bunch of people that . . . I was trying to figure out where in the world they came from because even out of this battalion, you recognized faces and people. You might not know their name, but you'd recognize a whole

group. But there was a whole bunch of new faces, and that's the first time I saw the ones off of the Houston.

Marcello: Now had the other members from the field artillery already shared their belongings with the Houston survivors?

Slate: Oh, yes, they'd already started giving them clothes. Of course, we come in with a lot of--well, we did--food. Of course, this money started coming into camp, and that's where I lost my 10,000 guilders, what was left of it.

Marcello: What happened to the 10,000 guilders or what was left of it?

Slate: Well, they took it back and put it in a pool. Well, the Japs would let . . . some of the officers would go out and buy food for the camp, so they had this pool of money, and that's where the . . . now that's what I understood they was doing with it when we turned it back in. And a lot of stuff did turn up, that they would buy. Now whether they spent that much, what happened, or how much of the money they actually had, I have no idea, but I do know they did buy a lot of stuff with it.

Marcello: This company money is a rather interesting subject. Like you implied just a moment ago, I've heard all sorts of stories and rumors and hearsay and scuttlebutt as to what happened to that money. Some people have even said that the officers were using this more for their own benefit than they were for the general run of the men. What is you view toward this?

Slate: Well, I believe that they did use more of it for themselves than they used for the rest of us. They made sure they got theirs first, and then we'd get some of it. Of course, I think the reason we did get some of it was because there was too many of us who knew they had the money. They had told what was going to happen to the money later on. They could pool it, you know, when the whole group got together and decide what they was going to do with the money. It'd be used for what we had to have or what they could use it for. Now how much of the money was spent for that or how much they hoarded, kept for theirself, I don't know. They split up a bunch of it, and each officer took so much, and with the rest of it they would buy stuff for the men. Now I lost track of that money there, and where it went to, I don't know.

Marcello: But all purchases made with that money were made by the officers.

Slate: Right. As far as I know, they were, because I don't know of any of the enlisted personnel that went on one of these purchasing trips. As far as I know, there was none. The Japs would take the officers out to do it. Now if any of them ever went, I don't know who it was at all.

Marcello: Incidentally, up until this time, had the Japanese processed you in any way?

Slate: No, not that I know of.

Marcello: In other words, they didn't give you a POW number or anything of that nature?

Slate: No, I didn't have any number, and I doubt, even when I was at that Chinese school, that they even had a roster of the people that was there, the names. Now they could have been somewhere, but I doubt if they had at this school. All they had was the number of people.

Marcello: Did they do any processing at Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Yes, that's where they finally started making up rosters and card files on everybody.

Marcello: How did this occur? In other words, was each prisoner interrogated individually by the Japanese?

Slate: No, there was rosters turned in. The only time that the Japanese got us all together for anything was on the Fourth of July.

Marcello: Okay, we'll talk about that a little bit later on.

Slate: Okay.

Marcello: When they processed you, did you finally get some sort of an identification? I hear some of the people talk about a little wooden tag.

Slate: I never did get a wooden tag. As far as I know, except on the Jap rosters, I could have had a number, but as far as giving me a number to wear, for identification, I can't remember one.

Marcello: Describe what the inside of your barracks were like here

at Bicycle Camp.

Slate: Well, they had wooden floors with bamboo sides that went up, oh, about six or eight feet, and then they were divided into little cubicles. They had an entrance on . . . you could enter on the sides. There was two different . . . on each side there was two entrances coming in, and then there was a long hallway through there, and they'd put four, I believe it was, into a cubicle, or we arranged ourselves in there. I know I took bamboo and then took my shelter-half and made me a bunk, and I was on the upper level and just hoping it didn't split and fall through on the guy below you.

Marcello; Who were you sharing your cubicle with?

Slate: With a guy by the name of Robinson, and I can't remember who else was in there. I've tried that, but I can't do it because . . . the reason I know Robinson was in there, he and I started playing chess, and we used to play chess every night after supper. We'd get our chess table out, and the light in the barracks was right down the middle. We'd get our little stool and our table, and we'd get under one of the lights, and we'd sit there and play chess until "lights out."

We had several guards that used to come in there and stand there and watch us. We never could get out of them whether they were chess players or not. We knew they were

because one of us would make a bad move once in a while, and he'd stand there and shake his head and say, "No," that you moved wrong or something (chuckle), or he'd stand there and kind of make a motion that he could see something that you couldn't see, and he was wanting to tell you to make that move or something. But a couple of them was kind of interested in it.

Then there was one little mean guard we had there. The first time he come through--somebody told us he was coming--and he was on us before we knew what the heck was going on. This is when the bowings and saluting of the guards started taking place. If you was outside, covered, and walking and one of them come by, you had to bow to him. Actually, that was the same regulations that the Japs had, and we had to go by the same regulations. Well, before he looked down, he'd already screamed at us for not jumping up and bowing to him in time, and he'd slap each one of us one time. Then he looked down and saw what we was doing, and I believe he was a chess player . . . but his attitude and moods all the time, you never knew and you never took a chance. But after that, once in awhile, he'd slip in on us. He'd come in one way or another, and we'd look up, and we'd be sitting there, and these other guys'd be just holding their breath because we hadn't seen him and bowed to him. He'd walk up and . . . I've turned the

table over a couple of times jumping up, and he'd just start motioning, "No, go sit back down." So he never did bother us.

But he caught me out going to the shower one time. We had between the huts a place where you could go take a bath, and I'd come out of that one time drying my head, and I had the towel kind of across my face. He came wheeling around the corner, and so he gave me a couple of little slaps because I didn't bow to him quick enough, and he had to stop me. I actually got off light because usually he worked them over pretty good.

Marcello: You mentioned the bathing facilities just a moment ago, so let's pursue this subject further. What were the bathing facilities like here at Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Well, just between the barracks, we had a place where you could walk out and dip water out of this vat and pour over you to wash. You'd pour water over you and soap down, and then you'd pour more water over you. One of the places there had two showers, and I think I used them a few times, but rather than go through all of that, I'd just go over and take my little cup and pour the water over me.

Marcello: Was it possible to have a daily bath or shower here at Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Well, I managed to get one daily.

Marcello: How about at the Chinese school? What sort of bathing

facilities did you have there?

Slate: Well, in the center, behind the stage, they had a place in there that you could go in, and it had a kind of a shower-like deal where you could take a shower. You usually watched when it was getting thinned down and then run over and get you a bath right quick and come back. Sometimes it was heavy, so you'd just go out in front of where we were and just kind of sponge off good. It's according to what you did that day. If you'd been out and got dirty, you always managed in some way to get a bath, but on some days, with so many of them who had been out working in the dirt, it'd be after midnight before you'd swept that line out to get in there.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned soap. Were the Japanese issuing soap here? Where did it come from?

Slate: Well, we usually bought it. In some way you'd manage to get hold of soap, and on these deals when the people were out, they'd buy soap if they got a chance. Most of the time, you always had a little bit of soap around. You managed to get it one way or another.

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

Slate: Well, you had just like a regular native deal with the holes in the floor, and you would go down and go in. It wasn't like a commode. They were flush with the floor, and then you squatted down over them. They were a little ol'

regular native-type, had two foot-marks there. In fact, I guess they came from the Dutch or Europe because in France they had the same type in some places. Some places were a little more modern. They usually had a place where you'd have a commode or a place to sit, and then you'd empty it out underneath, you know, a place they'd come behind and empty it. Most of the native deals, if you was out somewhere working, they was built over a canal, and everything went down in the canal.

Marcello: Let's talk about the food here at Bicycle Camp. What kind of food were you getting?

Slate: Well, that's where we got introduced to so much rice because that's the basic deal. The basic part of your diet was rice, and then that's where the stew started coming in because they couldn't cook a steak for everybody, or something else, so that's when you started getting your rice and stew.

Marcello: And what would the stew ususally consist of?

Slate: Mostly vegetables and sometimes . . . most of the time . . . well, you usually had enough meat in it to flavor it a little bit.

Marcello: How was the rice prepared?

Slate: Usually, it was steamed. They cooked it in big . . . well, they called them wa jongs, a big, round pot that wasn't too deep. You built a fire under it, put your water in, and

when it got to going good, got steaming good, you pull the fire and let it cool down and steam the rice. Some of the rice was good, and some of it was bad. We first started out picking all the little pebbles out and all the sticks and little bugs and all of that stuff. Well, after awhile, you was getting rid of half of it, so you just forgot it and played like it was some kind of seasoning and go on, because you had to eat the rice. You couldn't say, "I don't like rice," and just push it aside.

Marcello: How much rice would you get per meal?

Slate: Well, I had a GI mess kit, and, normally, it was full. If you wanted your stew on top of that, well, they'd just dump it on top, or you . . . everybody had a cup, so you could put it in a cup. Just every which way you wanted it, well, you could get it that way. Everybody usually tried to get a hold of some kind of seasoning that they kept personally. I had me a little salt and pepper shaker. I don't know where I picked it up, but I always tried to keep salt. A lot of times I'd run out of pepper. In fact, I finally run out of pepper and couldn't get hold of any more, and what happened to my pepper shaker, I don't know. But I always managed to keep my salt shaker around.

Marcello: I gather that everybody was always looking for something to add a little flavor to that rice.

Slate: That's right. That was the main thing that was on everybody's

mind. Even starting out this time, it was food. It wasn't how quick are we going to get out, or when are they coming in after us and all, it was our food. Well, of course, some of the sailors already knew what it was to be without food. We was fortunate at the Chinese school. We had good food. The Tanjong Priok group didn't have good food because some of their rice was the sweepings off the floor, and some of them got awful sick and had others that some way managed to help them get something for them. I understand, from talking to the others, that one of the warehouses down there full of Eagle Brand milk had burned up, and you opened the can up after they had . . . these cans had been so hot and it was just like caramel. So they managed to get hold of that, and when some of them got sick, they'd feed it to them. I heard those stories from them. They had an awful rough time and worked awful hard. They said that we missed something by not being down there, and I said, "No, I didn't miss a thing."

Marcello: What would breakfast usually consist of?

Slate: Usually, a stewed rice.

Marcello: In other words, was it more watery?

Slate: More watery, and if they had it, they'd give you a little sugar-water over the top of that.

Marcello: Is this what the Dutch would refer to as "pap."

Slate: "Pap," that's right.

Marcello: And I guess it was something like cream of wheat or something along those lines?

Slate: Yes, it was cracked rice, and it was, well, just like a hot cereal, only this was rice, and it was boiled a lot more, and the rice wasn't steamed. It was boiled, and sometimes it was kind of gummy.

Marcello: Now by the time you get to Bicycle Camp, had the American cooks learned how to cook rice?

Slate: Well, they was learning. They was actually beginning to do pretty good with it. I want to say they had some people that had been in the Philippines that knew how to cook rice, that was showing them how. Of course, the Dutch was showing them how.

At Bicycle Camp, I was in the second hut. The first hut had the Headquarters Battery bunch in it, and right next to them they had some high Dutch officials that actually passed food through this fence and all to them, and they used to pass notes back and forth.

One time . . . well, I wasn't going to get into this, but officials in there, since I've been home and working in California, I met a Dutch girl that works there. Her father was one of the Dutch officials that was in this camp in Java. After about a year after the war was actually over with, he finally got back to Holland. He's retired and still alive and in Holland now. But that was

the only, well, I run across that one Dutch official, found out that we wasn't the only one at Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Was the noon and the evening meal pretty much the same?

Slate: Well, yes, normally, there wasn't any difference in them.

Marcello: What was the chance for seconds?

Slate: Sometimes. The chow hounds usually was the first in the line, and they was the first in the lines for seconds. I was small, and one go-around of that normally was all I needed. That was enough for me. Some of the bigger people, now they wanted more. In Bicycle Camp, through one way or another, you could get hold of "little goodies," as we always called them, to eat. So as far as getting enough food there, I think most people did.

Marcello: How would the procedure work in going through the chow line?

Slate: Well, you just lined up. They'd know what time they was going to feed, so you just got in the chow line--this old "hurry up and wait" business--and go through the chow line. When the cooks got it ready, then they'd feed you, dish it out.

Marcello: What sanitary precautions were taken as you went through the chow line?

Slate: Well, not too many as far as . . . they tried to keep things clean.

Marcello: I guess what I'm referring to is this: is it not true that

when you went through the chow line, you first of all had to dip your mess gear in boiling water?

Slate: Yes, right at the front of the line, they had a boiling pot of water to dip it in. That's right. Then when you got through eating, they had a place where you'd go back and wash it and dip it in hot water again.

Marcello: Was everybody realizing how important cleanliness and personal hygiene was going to be at this stage?

Slate: They were learning fast that you had to keep clean and take care of yourself.

Marcello: I guess this is where your officers could perhaps be of some help. After all, they were older than most of the enlisted personal, and I guess without orders, it's pretty hard to make a nineteen or twenty-year-old sometimes understand how important it's going to be. Is that a safe assumption?

Slate: That's a safe assumption. It didn't take long to tell that you had to stay clean. Be careful what you eat, and, for goodness sakes, don't get diarrhea, because that was bad, and everybody knew it was bad on you.

They had some medical facilities there because I had a tooth filled there. The hospital, I think, was run by the Australians and was staffed pretty good because they pulled a few operations and all. I'd walk by several times and see them working on somebody. Of course, they couldn't close the whole thing up and all, but they was usually under

a mosquito net, and you could see that they was operating on somebody for something.

But I had a tooth filled there. I had a tooth that was bad. Of course, the drill was worked by his foot, but it wasn't bad enough to where, when he was drilling, it was burning and hurt real bad. It hurt, I remember, just a little bit. It was an Australian dentist and he filled it.

Marcello: Was this a makeshift drill?

Slate: Yes. That was the only time I ever had to go down, and I decided that I'd better get it done there because if something happened and I might be somewhere else, and I'd need a tooth either to come out or that one filled, there was no place I was going to be able to get it done.

Marcello: Awhile ago we were talking about food. Would it be safe in saying that if fights occurred here at Bicycle Camp, it would occur over food as much as anything? People perhaps trying to horn in on the chow line or something like that?

Slate: That would start a fight quicker than anything, is to hoard food, steal food off of somebody else, and chisel in the line. Boy, they'd get bent out of shape in a hurry, and it didn't take long for tempers to fly. Finally, everybody got to where they would respect the chow line. Still, some of them would try to pull it once in a while, but everybody, I guess--I know I was--was beginning to see

the importance that food was going to be to us. That's when, if I had a chance to get food or something else, say, a watch or a ring, I'd take the food. The heck with the ring! I can't eat that, but I can eat that food.

Marcello: Did the officers eat in the same chow line as the enlisted men?

Slate: No, the officers had their own mess. Now what they was eating . . . well, I know they . . . from the rations they were supposed to be getting . . . these guys that cooked for them said that they was eating pretty good over there. That was at Bicycle Camp. I think they had tables, and they were served at their tables. They didn't go through any line like we did. They stayed pretty well away to their self.

Marcello: I guess the Navy officers would have come in there with their Oriental cooks, that is, whatever ones had survived the sinking of the Houston.

Slate: Yes, they're the ones that helped teach them how to cook the rice. I know of two that was helping them, and I don't know whatever happend to them from Bicycle Camp. I know one of them was a kind of a short, heavy-set one.

Marcello: What role do officers play here at Bicycle Camp? What is their function?

Slate: As far as I know, they don't have much of a function. They don't go out with the work parties.

Marcello: Do they not even go out and more or less supervise the work

parties?

Slate: The work parties that I went on, they never did. Once in a while an officer would go to get out of camp, but as far as supervising the work, the Japs supervised the work. Everywhere I worked, they told you what to do. Now some of them would take it on their own to make sure you worked, did it this way or that way. But most of the time, with my experience with the working, the Jap told you what to do. Usually, they'd put somebody in charge. They might pick the first man up here and say, "You in charge. You take the work party out."

Marcello: What kind of relationship is developing here between the officers and the enlisted men? In other words, what has happened to military formalities, such as saluting and so on?

Slate: Well, some of the officers you still respected a little bit. Some of them, the heck with them. As far as military discipline went, our discipline was with the Jap guards because they'd beat the heck out of you if you didn't bow to them and salute them or something. But with the officers, we didn't do that. You still showed a little respect, but not nearly as much as you did before.

Marcello: In other words, the military formalities had been dropped.

Slate: Right.

Marcello: And I think the officers, generally speaking, saw that that

sort of thing was necessary.

Slate: Actually, among the enlisted men, rank didn't mean too darn much, I mean, as to what you was when you was captured, well, so what? Now everybody was together. Your rank . . . the only thing it did at times, after the Japs started paying us for working, a noncom would draw just a little more than a private, but not much. They always had these rosters with your rank on it. Well, I was a corporal, which I made corporal just before we went to Louisiana. Then, of course, I went overseas, and then I was a corporal. Sometimes we'd have a private in charge. All along the line, sometimes there'd be a private in charge of us; sometimes it'd be a first sergeant.

But you learned quick--and I started learning in Bicycle Camp--as to who you could get along with the best, because we was together. Well, you had to learn that and don't get bent out of shape because a guy says something you don't like because you're going to be around him for a long time.

People started learning to help each other. I would get hold of, say, some food--I had too much. Somebody who wasn't getting hold of as much, you know, might need it, so I'd give it to them. Or we'd swap something. You was always looking for something to swap to the natives or swap to somebody for food or something to sell.

Marcello: Describe what the working parties were like here at Bicycle Camp. For example, when would you go out in the morning?

Slate: Well, they'd take you out in the mornings about eight o'clock. I went out to the airport and worked, filling in the holes on the runways. Actually, I didn't go out too many times there for some reason. I don't know why. I'd go out on a few, and they'd take you different places. One place I worked, a detail I went on, they had all the tools laying out there, and they was covering up the air raid shelters. I don't know why, but they had . . . you was downtown, so we was filling them all in. Another time I went out, and we was cleaning out a building. It had all kinds of junk and everything else in it, so we was cleaning it out, and the Jap said they was going to use it for a storeroom. Then I went out on a couple or three working parties, and I always called them "looting parties" because these Jpas was gathering up everything--refrigerators, radios, anything--and they said they was going to put it on a ship and send it to Japan. Anything that was any . . . dishes . . . just almost anything. We would take it out of these places and load it on these trucks. Well, of course, the Japs would take off with it. Where they took it to from there, I don't know, but one of them said they was going to move it all to Japan.

Marcello: What was the advantage of going out on a working party?

Slate: Well, you could get a chance to deal with the Javanese--the natives--or the Dutch. I guess they were Dutch who were still around where you could get a chance to buy something from them. A lot of times, they would give you stuff. Some of the natives would try to hold you up on the price of something, but normally it was pretty set prices on anything, or you'd deal with him and get him down as low as you could or get as much as you could out of him.

Marcello: Now would the Japanese guards allow this sort of thing to go on?

Slate: Sometimes they'd stop you, but most of the time these guards would let you. They didn't care. Sometimes one of them would come up--maybe you'd buy something--and they might take a little bit of it for themselves; but as long as they let you buy it, you didn't mind giving them a little bit of it. But they didn't bother too much of it. Normally, what they wanted to know was what you was buying.

Marcello: Did you ever have very many opportunities to steal something while you were on these working parties?

Slate: Oh, yes. Everytime I'd get a chance, I would. I got to be a pretty good thief. But sometimes that's the only way you could get it, would be to steal it. Normally, it was something you could sell. You'd run across it, and you managed to steal it and smuggle it back into camp, and, of course, then there was the deal of smuggling it back out and

finding a market for it. But if you didn't know, you could ask a few questions. Somebody would tell you, "Now get on this working party," and then somebody would tell you just where, if you went to the same area, as to where you could do your dealing and get rid of that. We always passed all this information back and forth.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever frisk you or search you when you were on these work parties?

Slate: Normally, they would search you on the way back in.

Marcello: What special methods did you have to conceal whatever you had stolen?

Slate: Well, at these work parties, they weren't as bad. You was supposed to take out everything that you had and hold in your hand. When you carried your mess gear with you, if it wasn't too big, you stuck it in the mess gear. Everybody had a little ol' hat or something, and the first thing you did was pull the lining loose, and you put it under the lining and then put the hat on. They would just come by and look at you there, so it was no real shake-down. The real shake-downs came later, but most of the time, you just went on into camp. They'd count you to make sure everybody was coming back, and you'd go on into camp.

Marcello: How difficult was the work on these work details?

Slate: The work details there weren't too bad. You could get the work done, and nobody got hurt. It didn't hurt anybody.

When we'd get to talking about it, we thought they was actually just taking us out to occupy our minds, to have something for us to do, because we didn't accomplish that much. Not at this time, we weren't.

Marcello: Were they mainly clean-up details?

Slate: Yes, clean up something. That's about all it was. It wasn't real manual labor. Most of the time it was just a job to get you out of camp, actually.

Marcello: When you came back into camp, and you were sitting around in your bull sessions, what did you talk about?

Slate: Well, normally, you'd talk about the day and what happened to you during the day, what others did on other work parties, if anybody heard any news of any kind or managed to pick up any news anywhere. And then, at Bicycle Camp, as I said earlier, this Robinson and myself used to play chess a lot at night.

Or if we wasn't doing that, I'd read everything I got hold of. There was still a few books around, and we'd pass the books around. A lot of times, a book would be tore half in two. You'd get the first half of it and read it, and you'd have to wait until somebody who'd already read the first half for you to read. You would read things.

Then you had your clothes and all. Actually, you needed to get yourself ready for the next day and just flat lay down and just relax.

Marcello: I guess by this time you know pretty much about everybody's life history, do you not?

Slate: Pretty well, especially the ones close to you. Yes, you get to finding out a lot about them, what they felt about the thing, and when they expect to get out and if they'll ever get out.

Marcello: How long are you going to be a prisoner at this time?

Slate: How long do I think?

Marcello: Yes.

Slate: Well, actually, I don't think it's going to last too long. I said, "Maybe we'll be around here a year at the most. They'll be here because I don't think the Japs can hold out that long." That was the thinking, that we won't be here too long. Then others, of course, with a different attitude and all would come up with, "Well, we'll never get out." Well, that never hit my mind because I told them from the first--and I told them all the way through--when I left going overseas, I told them, "'So long, I'll be back,' and I don't want to make myself out a liar because I'm going back." That's the attitude I kept all the time.

Marcello: I'm sure that the camp was always one big rumor mill, wasn't it?

Slate: Oh, there was more rumors than . . . you'd have a rumor start, and then before you could tell somebody else, here would come another rumor contradicting that rumor, and then

by the time the rumors got around, you couldn't recognize the first rumor. There was always something going around--somebody did this; the Allies landed here. And then by the time it got back to you again, they landed in an altogether different place. They was just, "Well, they're going to do this to us tomorrow," or something. There was always some kind of wild rumor going around. A lot of them would keep your hopes built up, and a lot of them wasn't too good. Some of them characters would come up with some crazy rumor. Of course, a lot of them would make them feel let down and all, but it got to where if some rumors popped up, it was something to try to help your morale a little bit.

Marcello: How did you get news from the outside?

Slate: Well, the Dutch were passing the news through the fence. Somebody had a radio in camp, and they would manage to listen to it.

Marcello: I think this was Jess Stanbrough, wasn't it?

Slate: Yes, he had a radio. They had to keep that a secret. Not too many people knew where it was, or when they listened to it because if somebody said something, there was too many Japs that understand English, and they'd pick it up, and then they'd start looking for it.

Marcello: How was the news distributed?

Slate: Usually by word-of-mouth. Sometimes it was written out. They'd put out little bulletins as to what was happening, and

they'd put one in each hut.

Marcello: Let's talk about the conduct of the Japanese guards here in Bicycle Camp. Describe their conduct toward the prisoners.

Slate: Well, some of the guards were kind of quiet and just walked around and looked. Then we had this little one that, I guess, because he was so small, and all the Americans . . . I guess every one of them was as big as he was. He was about the size of Eddie Fung, which is small, weighed a hundred pounds soaking wet. He went around looking for things so he could beat up on the big people. He was the one we really had to watch.

Now the area that I was in, he's the one that made his little circles through there, and you could hear him walking down these planks, these wooden platforms. You could hear him coming, and you either managed to sneak around and hide somewhere else from him or just flat meet him and bow to him and hope he liked the way you bowed because he was liable to stop you and make you bow again. Because he might not like the way I bowed, I might stand there fifteen minutes bowing to him. He would show me how to bow, so I had to bow and do it just exactly like he did.

One time he even handed me his rifle. I had to stand it down and bow just like he had to bow to the Jap officers. He spoke a little English and told me in his pidgeon English that I had to bow to him just like he had to bow to

the Jap officers, and that's the way I was going to do it. He gave me lessons several times as to how to bow, but when he was doing this, he never hit me or anything, which I was always expecting. But he did beat up on a lot of them. He gave them all fits because they'd see him coming, and they'd start passing the word: "Here he comes!"

Some of them would make the rounds and maybe not bother anybody, and then here comes another one that maybe wasn't in a good mood, and he'd gave everybody fits. So you didn't know what kind of mood they were in.

Marcello: What were some of the types of physical punishment that they would deal out to the prisoners?

Slate: Well, most of the time, if they'd catch you like that, they'd hit you in the face, slap you real hard, or hit you with their rifle butt.

Marcello: When you say they would hit you with a rufle butt, where, normally, would they hit you?

Slate: A lot of times, I've seem them hit them in the leg. A lot of times, they'd hit you in the chest with it. They'd just take it up and poke you in the chest. If you tried to dodge them, it was that much worse. You'd try to give a little bit with them and take it, and a lot of times they'd swing the thing around and hit you. I have seen guards break their stock off of their rifles hitting the people in the hips, you know. They'd swing around, going to hit you

on the leg, and they hit too hard and broke their stock off of their rifle, and then, sure enough, they'd get mad at you.

Marcello: You still have Japanese guards here at Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Right.

Marcello: Did you have those Japanese guards all the way through Bicycle Camp?

Slate: It seemed like they started changing them.

Marcello: Then do you get the Korean guards?

Slate: Then we start picking up the Korean guards.

Marcello: We'll talk about them later on, especially when we get up onto the railroads. Did you notice that physical punishment was a way of life in the Japanese Army?

Slate: Yes, because I actually saw . . . the way they was punishing us, what they was doing to us, was exactly the way they were punished. One night, I happened to have to get up and go to the benjo, which, people might not know, is a toilet, and I heard all this commotion, so I walked up to see what it was, up toward the guardhouse. Well, they had all these guards, and they'd pull them out in front of the guardhouse. This officer was walking along there, and he was "whupping" them across the shoulders with his saber, and then every once in awhile, he'd slap one of them. So they must have done something wrong.

But the lowest rank Japanese soldier is the one that caught it all because the one next up in rank from him

could beat him up; but he couldn't beat up the rank up next, so it was just passed down the line. The meaner they was treated, the meaner they was going to treat you, and that got down to that little guard. He was going to take it out on somebody, and he had us to take it out on.

Marcello: You talked about my next subject a little while ago, and let's pursue it a little bit further. On July 4, 1942, the Japanese tried to get the prisoners to sign the non-escape pledge, I guess we could call it.

Slate: Yes.

Marcello: Describe that incident.

Slate: Well, someway the rumor had got around that there was going to be a mass prisoner escape, and they figured this British general was behind all of it and that they was getting it organized as to where all the prisoners was going to take off at one time. Well, they came up with this pledge that you had to sign that you would not escape, and if you did escape, they had permission to shoot you--put you in a firing squad for just trying to escape.

Well, everybody talked it over--even talked that over with the officers and all--and nobody was going to sign it. We was just going to tell them "no." Well, here comes a bunch of guards in the camp, and they

started beating people up, and they started lining them up over in front of that table to sign that. We didn't think it was worth the paper it was written on, and the trouble they went through, but with the trouble they was giving us, we finally decided it was best to sign it, so everybody signed it. Then they threatened us with that paper from then on--that if you tried to escape, you signed a pledge that you would not try to escape, and if you did they had the right to shoot you.

Marcello: Did you think they were bluffing?

Slate: No! No, I didn't think so, but if anything ever happened and they had had to account for it, that's the first thing they would have shown. They'd have said, "Well, here they gave their permission to shoot them if they tried to escape."

Marcello: How serious was anybody thinking about escape here at Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Well, they wasn't thinking too serious because a few of the guys that took off for the mountains, you know, that were going to hide in the mountains, stay away from the Japs . . .

Marcello: Was this when the surrender first occurred?

Slate: Right. Well, they started turning in because they couldn't get medical supplies, they couldn't trust some of the natives--they was a little afraid of them--and there was just no place to go. How were they going to get off the

island? That was the biggest . . . you wasn't on a continent; you was surrounded by water, and you either had to have a boat or a plane to get off of there. So they just gave it up as a bad deal and all came in. But I thought about it and then started thinking, "Well, where in the heck am I going? Who's going to help me?" One of the biggest disadvantages of the whole thing is that you was in a country of Orientals. You were white. You stuck out like a sore thumb, and we didn't know the language well enough to bluff your way anywhere.

Marcello: I guess one of the few people that would have stood some sort of a chance on the outside would have been Eddie Fung.

Slate: Yes, that's right because he looked just like one of the natives, I mean, the way he clipped his hair like they did, put on the native clothes. He looked just like one of them.

We had another one, Fujita, and he looked a lot like them. Of course, he had to lie like a dog to them, to the Japanese, because he was Japanese himself. He looked like one with his hair clipped and everything, but he had a heck of a time convincing them that he wasn't a Japanese, or that he was an American.

Now they could get by; some of the Spanish that were with us could have got by easier.

We used to talk about trying to escape and where you could go because you was going to stand out, and you'd have

to move mainly at night or somebody would have to transport you in something.

Marcello: The Bicycle Camp did have a barbed wire fence around it, didn't it?

Slate: Yes, it had a barbed wire fence around it, and then the guards stayed at the main gate, and then they would make trips through the camp.

Marcello: Would the guards pull very many sneak inspections of the barracks?

Slate: Yes, they would catch you. I've seen them walking through late at night--just walking through the barracks when everybody was supposed to sleep.

Marcello: What items were you not supposed to have?

Slate: One of the items that that you wasn't supposed to have was anything printed. They didn't want you to have it. Of course, you could have no kind of weapon, like a gun. You could have your knife, like a mess kit knife or a little old pocketknife. They very seldom ever had anything about these. Some of them did lose them. But if you had anything printed, they had to put their censorship stamp on it.

Marcello: Are you referring to a book or something like that?

Slate: Like a book. Well, myself, I'm referring to a little Bible that was issued to me, a GI issue. The front page, I believe, in it was blank, so they put their censorship stamp there, which meant that I could keep it,

and that came from the higher headquarters. If they'd have turned the page over, they would have tore the page out because it had an American flag on it. Everytime they'd search us, go through our stuff after that, they'd find that deal in the Bible and see that censorship stamp and then turn it over. They wanted to tear that flag out, but they couldn't because that censorship was in there, and that come from a higher headquarters. So I got all the way through with my little Bible with my American flag still in it and my censorship stamp in it.

Marcello: How about writing utensils? Were you allowed to have writing utensils? Paper, pens, pencils?

Slate: Well, they'd take them away from you if they caught you, but at times I had paper and pencil, and at times I didn't have. Some of them managed to keep pencil and paper all the time, and I wished a lot of times I'd have figured out a way to keep a diary, but I was worried more about food and taking care of myself.

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

Slate: Well, all the people that was in there put on camp shows. They had some pretty good shows. I don't know where they got all the paint and everything, but they'd paint up scenery. We had some pretty good shows. The Japs let them get hold of musical instruments. In fact, I think they brought some in. They had a little ol' band

there. Then if you wasn't going to something like that, you would have to figure out something to entertain yourself, or you'd sit around and "bat the breeze" with people.

Marcello: Wasn't volleyball played here?

Slate: Yes, there was a lot of volleyball played. There was still a lot of things for sports. Well, there was volleyball, and some of them tried to play a little softball. They'd take a tennis ball and wrap it up with tape to make a ball. We got hold of some stuff . . . we used to go out once in a while and pitch washers . . .

Marcello: Do a little gambling?

Slate: A little gambling on the side. But you more or less just had to look around for some kind of entertainment.

Marcello: I understand the British were very good at putting on these stage shows and so on.

Slate: Yes, the British were good. There were some good ones. The Australians had a few good ones, but the British . . . I don't know why they had so many of them with them, but they had a bunch with them that put a . . . we had some shows that were worth people seeing anywhere; I mean, here in the States, they have people that would enjoy them because that's how good they were. Then, we'd got with the Navy and all, and they had some pretty good entertainers with them.

Marcello: I understand even the Japanese would attend these stage shows.

Slate: Oh, shoot, sometimes you'd have to fight the Japanese for a place, because, man, here they come! They loved entertainment; that's one thing they did like. At these shows, they was there just the same as you were.

Marcello: Is there anything else pursuant to Bicycle Camp that we need to talk about and that we haven't mentioned?

Slate: Well, when the rumor started floating around that we was going to be moved--I don't remember whether the rumor was Singapore or not, but I think it was--they had a place there that they had set up the records for all of the POWs. One of the guys there, Robinson, was working over there because he was our battery clerk. He said they were going to need a couple more to stay here to take care of all these records.

Well, I decided, "Shoot, they're going to move them off up there, and I don't know what's going to happen." They were planning on keeping their prisoner headquarters there, and I tried to get a job in this place, keeping those records. Somehow my application fell through, so I didn't get to stay. I went over there two or three days and worked and talked to this Jap. He spoke good English, and he said, "I'll see what I can do about getting you left here." The last day I was over there, he said, "Well, I put in the request, and if they're going to let you stay, they will tell you in the morning, at camp." Well, the

next morning, I had my bags like the rest of them--headed for a boat--and I wasn't told.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got word that you were going to leave Bicycle Camp. I think all this took place in October of 1942.

Slate: Well, first they come through and took people like mechanics, technical people, and took them and shipped them out. Then they was going to break us up in groups to ship out to Singapore. We were just told that they would do it, and then they broke it down into two hundred people to a group. Here comes the list down. They took one group out first and then the second group. I think I was in the second group. In fact, I know I was. They took this first group out and took them and put them on a ship. We stayed there awhile and just kept on the same routine that had been going on, and then they set a date for us to leave.

Marcello: Do you recall when you left?

Slate: Not the exact date.

Marcello: Approximately how long was it after the first group left? I think the first group took off on October 7.

Slate: I think, if I'm not mistaken, we left about two weeks or maybe a month later. I don't know whether it was quite that long. Maybe it was somewhere in there--three weeks later. We were put on a ship . . .

Marcello: I think that was the larger group, wasn't it, that is,

group you were with?

Slate: Yes, we were the larger group.

Marcello: What were you allowed to take with you?

Slate: Well, they issued us . . . made sure we had certain clothes to wear, and then we could take anything we could carry. That was one thing they explained--if you can't carry it, they're not going to haul it for you. They also told us we were liable to do a lot of walking, and we'd better not have anything that we can't carry because that's one of the first things that people started doing, was getting rid of stuff when they'd have to walk a long way and carry it. So the only thing I had was what I could carry in bags. The main thing I kept was my blankets, my clothes. A lot of the other stuff I just got rid of. I had my mosquito net, and I kept it. I had a raincoat, but that thing weighed too much, and it didn't get that cold out there; and if you had that raincoat on and it started raining, you started sweating and got wet, anyway. So I done away with my raincoat. I just throwed that thing away and carried just the essential things that I had to have.

Marcello: Surely you had your mess kit and your canteen and things of that nature.

Slate: Yes. Your eating utensils, you kept them. You also kept a few personal items that didn't weigh much and that you

could pack easy and stuff that the Japs wouldn't raise Cain about. If they caught you on one of these moves and searched you, they wouldn't find something you wasn't supposed to have.

Marcello: Was it kind of upsetting to leave Bicycle Camp?

Slate: Yes, it was because we'd kind of got into the routine, and we didn't know what we was going to hit. Actually, it wasn't too bad there. Leaving it, well, you'd say, "Well, what in the world am I going to hit next?" Going to Singapore . . . well, I'd heard rumors and had been told that they was moving us into a big, permanent English camp there and that they had a lot of English already that was there.

Marcello: Now at this point, the animosity hasn't really developed yet, has it, between the English and the Americans?

Slate: No, not yet. We was getting along with them all right because we hadn't . . . we'd just met a few of them, you know, different groups, and we'd get along and talk, and everything was all right. It was like the same way with the Dutch and the Australians.

Marcello: How did you get from Bicycle Camp to the docks?

Slate: Well, they put us in trucks and took us down.

Marcello: And I guess the docks were located where? Tanjong Priok?

Slate: Tanjong Priok. They put us on an old . . . I don't remember the name of the ship . . .

Marcello: Was it the Dai Nichi Maru?

Slate: Dai Nichi Maru! And it was an old freighter.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like aboard that ship.

Slate: Well, the food was cooked out on deck; the Japs cooked it for us. You lived down in a hold that'd been fixed up to transport . . . I don't know whether they ever transported--probably did--Japanese troops in it, and they also had these little platforms built, and everybody got on a little platform up in there to sleep.

Marcello: In other words, they had subdivided the hold by putting on tiers, I guess, or constructing tiers.

Slate: Tiers, right. Some people slept on these tiers, and then some just slept on the deck. Well, it was actually the boards that covered the hold, down deeper. We had a little more room, and you could stretch out a little bit, and it wasn't too bad.

This was the first time we run into a different type of food a little bit. They gave us a kind of rice and a boiled barley, but they cooked it.

The toilets were built so that they hung over the side of the ship. Everytime you went, you looked down, and there was water, and you'd hope to heck those things didn't fall off because it didn't look like they was on there too good (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, describe in a little bit more detail the conditions down in that hold. Were you located on one of those tiers,

or were you actually on the deck itself?

Slate: I was on one of the tiers and way back in the back. If I wanted out, I had to crawl over everybody to get out. It was the same way going back in--you crawled over. I think I had to crawl over four people to get back to where I was.

Marcello: Could you stand up in there?

Slate: No, there was no way. They wasn't over, I'd say, about thirty inches high. You could sit up, but as far as standing up, you couldn't. A lot of times when you was crawling, you could hit your back on the top of it.

Marcello: How did you sleep?

Slate: Oh, we slept . . . oh, you mean . . .

Marcello: In terms of laying out to sleep.

Slate: Well, you would just stretch out to sleep, but down in this hold, there was no circulation. It was still awful hot, so you'd stay there as long as you could, and then you'd get out. You always had to make a trip to the benjo.

Marcello: You could make unlimited trips to the benjo?

Slate: Yes, as long as there wasn't too many up there. If there was too many, they'd make you stand at the top. At least you was getting fresh air.

Marcello: So I assume then that there always was a steady line going to the benjo.

Slate: It's always a steady line getting out of that hold and

getting a little fresh air. During the day, you'd stretch out where you was getting more circulation, in the center of it, and maybe sleep because at night, at times, it would get hot, and you couldn't hardly stand it, especially when everybody was in there. There was no moving around to help stir up the air, so you just had to rough it out.

Marcello: With all those sweaty bodies on there, I'm sure that place must have stunk to high heaven.

Slate: Well, yes, by mixing the smell of bodies with the smell of the ship, it was pretty bad.

Marcello: I guess you're lucky that not too many people had dysentery at this time.

Slate: No, we was lucky there. Most of them was faring all right. Once in awhile somebody would get a little sick or something, but normally it was early enough that we was all still pretty healthy.

Marcello: By what procedure were you fed?

Slate: Well, you'd come out on deck with your mess gear. They'd let out so many at a time, and you'd go through the line and go back down in the hold to eat. Then they'd let you up to wash your mess gear out when you got through. Sometimes, if I remember right, there was hot water there, and sometimes there wasn't. They did have, I think, a few of the Americans that helped them with the meals, but the Japanese done the cooking.

Marcello: Had they ever given you any sort of a physical exam--and I use that term loosely--before you went aboard ship or anything?

Slate: No. They asked me how my health was--that was all--but as far as a physical examination goes, no. They didn't give no physical exam. I'm trying to remember . . . that was before they started giving us shots, but they had given us nothing. They just said, "Go!"

Marcello: Was that a comfortable or an uncomfortable trip?

Slate: Well, it wasn't exactly comfortable, and it kind of was uncomfortable because they had you crowded up so.

Marcello: Fortunately, it didn't last too long, did it?

Slate: It was a short trip. It wasn't too long.

Marcello: Did it last over four or five days?

Slate: I think it was a week that we was on there, which, time passed pretty good. Well, of course, you was worried about trying to . . . the main thing was trying to stay cool. You was beginning to get used to spending time then. One day didn't mean a whole lot to you because you're not going anywhere, anyway.

Marcello: What portion of rice did you get? Or barley or whatever they were feeding you?

Slate: Usually, they'd just fill my mess kit full, and that was it.

Marcello: As you went through the chow line, would there be the usual

screaming and yelling and so on?

Slate: Yes, to move on. When they'd start, they'd want to get rid of you in a hurry. They made sure you kept going.

Marcello: When you finally got to Singapore, were you glad to get off that ship?

Slate: Yes, I was glad to get back on land again.

Marcello: Okay, describe what happens, then, when you land in Singapore.

Slate: Well, we docked in Singapore, and we were told that they were going to move us to an English camp. We were going to have trucks to go out there. They killed time there before we finally got off, for some reason, and the only thing I've ever figured out as to why is that on the ship in front of us, which I was told later, was diplomats that they was exchanging. They was loading them on that ship in front of us, and they didn't want us out on the docks until they got all those people in it. I saw several going aboard. They looked like English, or . . . they could have been English, but they were white, and they were putting them aboard ship. We found out later, in talking, that they were exchanging the diplomats. Where they sent them to from there, I have no idea, but that's what that was for, and that was why our delay was.

Marcello: I guess it was really hot when that ship was standing still.

Slate: Oh, it was unbearable, almost! Everybody had all of their stuff ready to get off. When they said, "Let's go,"

you had to have it ready to get off. And then you just kept sitting there. And you wanted to know when: "We're here! Let's get off!"

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you do finally get off the ship?

Slate: Well, they put us on the trucks, and we start the trip to Changi.

Marcello: Were you delayed on that ship for several hours?

Slate: If I remember right, it was several hours. We was beginning to wonder if we were going to have to spend the night on it. Then after we got off and started to camp, we passed this big prison.

Marcello: This is Changi Jail, right?

Slate: Changi Jail. At first, that's where we thought we was going. Then we passed it, and then they took us to this Changi camp. They took us to a certain point and checked us into the camp. We all got out and got counted again, and then we started walking because the trucks turned around and left. The barracks that we was going to stay in, I thought we never would get to them.

Marcello: Changi Village, which, I think, is where you were now staying, was a large place, was it not?

Slate: Yes, because they still had . . . when the Japanese took Singapore, they took 115,000 English prisoners, which, most of them were still in the camp, so that was quite a large "garrison," as they always called it. They said

that the barracks that they was giving us was way off to the side. Actually, we had a good view. We was up on a hill looking out over the channel or canal that goes around it.

Marcello: Describe what your barracks were like here at Changi.

Slate: Well, we were in three-story barracks, concrete, but there was no bunks in them whatsoever. They were just bare barracks, and each story had just four walls. Everything had been taken out. So we went in, and then they assigned each person a spot on the floor, up against the walls. They said, "Now here's your spot, and here's your spot," and that's the way they figured out where we was going to sleep. My portion was where the posts were down the middle. Over in the middle, I had a spot. They said, "You can put your bedroll out here and sleep here."

Well, that's what we all did, and then everybody started looking around to make something better to sleep on than on that floor. I've tried my best to figure out where I got a canvas cot, but I managed to get me a canvas cot, and I moved that thing in, and I put my mosquito net over the canvas cot and had to tie the strings to the . . . hold it up to the walls everywhere. I set the cot in little cans of water, and we used any kind of oil you could get hold of to oil the strings that held your net up to keep the bedbugs from crawling in on you. Then they would crawl

across the ceiling and drop on you, because that place had more bedbugs than any place I ever saw in my life.

Marcello: How did you get rid of the bedbugs?

Slate: You'd put your stuff out in the sun during the day and pick them out any way you could--find them. But the sun normally would kill them. But that night, they'd be right back. By keeping your legs on the cot . . . they had some peanut oil I got hold of and put on all the strings, so I kept them out pretty well. I didn't get too awful many bites.

Marcello: What would the peanut oil do?

Slate: Well, they wouldn't cross it.

Marcello: I see.

Slate: They wouldn't cross water, but water evaporated too fast, where the oil wouldn't. But once a week, you'd make sure you had plenty of oil in there, or you checked it every day in case somebody knocked it off, spilt your oil for you, and you'd oil your strings that was holding your mosquito net about once a week. You didn't let anything touch the floor, even the mosquito net. When you let it down over you, you tucked it in to where it wouldn't . . . the main reason for that was to keep the mosquitos out, too, because they were awful bad.

Marcello: Describe the relationship that developed here between the British and the Americans.

Slate: Well, to start with, they came up and kind of wanted to be friendly, but one of the first things they let us know was that everything on the island belonged to the King and that they was protecting the King's property.

Then they come in with the ideal . . . we had heard on the way up there that we had Red Cross supplies in Singapore. So when we got there and the deal came up over the Red Cross supplies, they said our supplies had already been sent to Burma, but there was so much Cain raised about that, well, all of a sudden, they found us some.

But then things just started kind of deteriorating between us and the British because everything either belonged to the British . . . and they got out and drilled everyday, and they polished their boots everyday, and according to them, their officers was making them "soldier" everyday. Well, we just didn't go for all of that, and everything belonged to the King.

The British were living pretty good. In fact, down below us, there was some British sergeants that got hold of generators. They had a generator lights at night. Well, we didn't have any kind of lights in our barracks where we were. The English officers had a good setup, eating good food, and they had people waiting on them. I think they called them "batmen" who waited on them.

So we just got to scrounging around, and we'd go steal the officers' chickens.

Marcello: Weren't there also some problems involving the King's coconuts or something like that?

Slate: Well, the Japs was taking us over to clear out an area, and they said that they was going to make the camp self-supporting, and we was going to plant all these gardens. So they tell us to go out and clear out so much land; "Clear this out."

Well, we started cutting down the coconut trees, and the British started raising Cain because they was the King's trees: "You can't cut them down!" We said, "Well, the Japs said 'Clear this out,'" and they said, "Well, oh, no, they didn't say cut the coconut trees down!" But the Japs said, "Cut the coconut trees down," so we cut the coconut trees down, and they didn't like it. But there wasn't nothing they could do about it.

The English officers came around once in awhile to get you to . . . "Well, you're not supposed to do this, and you're not supposed to do that, because all of this belongs to the King, and we're preserving it." Well, I figured that if the King wanted to preserve it, he wouldn't have lost the place in the first, anyway. So things just didn't get along too good.

Marcello: They were also observing all of the military formalities

and so on, too, weren't they?

Slate: Right, they got out and done their close-order drill every morning, had their inspections, and they couldn't understand . . . they thought . . . the British commander in that post thought we should, too, and we didn't think we should. In fact, we didn't pay any attention to it.

Well, of course, they still had all of their . . . most of them was still in their same barracks, had their same uniforms and everything, where we had already gotten rid of most of our stuff. The old deal always comes back to our situation at Malang, trying to get our footlockers out of there, which we had to leave stored there when we left. Well, the British had all of their stuff with them, which, we'd got down to either one or two . . . about two or three changes of clothes is all we had.

Marcello: And they controlled the internal administration of that camp, too, didn't they? You didn't see Japanese guards very often inside the camp.

Slate: Very seldom we ever saw a Japanese guard at all. If you went from the portion of the camp we was in over to the hospital area, you had to get permission, and you had to pass some Sikh Indian guards. These guards would make you . . . you'd have to stop and get permission, and then you had to salute them as you went through, and then you had to do the same thing coming back. I don't think I

made that trip but twice--all I had to. I went over there one time because I heard I could buy something over there in their little old PX they had, or canteen, so I made the trip over there to buy something. But I didn't make too many trips by there. That was another place where there was no place to go. On one side of it they did have patrolled, but the English used to go to town. They'd catch a patrol that passed them, go under the fence and go on, but they'd always get back before daylight. But that was a long way. The area going to town was too far from us, so I never thought anything about going into town. I didn't know where I'd go after I got there.

Marcello: Describe what work was like here at Changi.

Slate: Well, in the mornings they'd want a work detail and take you over to clear this land out where they was going to plant this garden. Well, you actually didn't have anybody supervising it. The ones that took you over there told you what you had to do. Well, we half-way done the work of clearing it. You stood around and talked most of the time. We'd cut the trees down to agitate the English, and that was always a big thing.

Marcello: Now did the Japanese try to give you the impression that this was going to be your garden, that you were doing this for you?

Slate: Yes, we was doing it for us. That's where we was going to

raise our food, and that was the impression we got. The English gave us another impression, and we cut coconut trees down to get the heart out of the top of it. Of course, you took the heart out, and that's no more tree, anyway. But we'd cut trees down, and then we'd have to haul them off, and they wanted this big area clean. So over a period of time, we got it pretty clean.

Marcello: I remember some of the men telling me about the fun that they used to have with the vehicles without the engines in them. Do you remember those?

Slate: Oh, yes, our horseless carriages with no engines. Yes, you'd use them to haul stuff in, and somebody'd get up there and guide it, and the rest of you would push, and that was your trucks. The engines had been taken out to lighten it up, but you'd haul everything around with the . . . one guy'd get to sit up there and guide, and the rest of you'd get behind and push.

Marcello: I'm sure that could've been a real toy for twenty and twenty-one-year-olds.

Slate: Oh, yes, they had lots of fun, and lots of racing. They'd race here and race there.

Marcello: Did the British have problems understanding that kind of humor?

Slate: Yes, they couldn't understand it at all. They couldn't understand our whole attitude, actually. They said we

were too happy-go-lucky. Well, you might as well make the best of it and have a little fun along with it because, as I said before, worrying wasn't helping you a bit. So we just made a little fun out of it and went on and done part of what they wanted done.

Marcello: Who controlled the distribution of the food here at Changi?

Slate: The English! And that came up, too. We didn't think we was getting our portion of it. They kept saying, "Well, you are," but then they was dishing it out, and how could you fight them?

Marcello: In other words, they had control of the warehouse or whatever where the rice was stored?

Slate: Yes, they had the complete control of it.

Marcello: And then they would distribute the raw rice to your cooks or commissary or whatever?

Slate: Yes, to our cooks they'd make the distribution. I don't know how many days' supply they'd draw at one time, but they'd draw all of it, and they'd have to go down and get it from them.

Marcello: I've always imagined that throughout your tenure as a prisoner-of-war that the cooks would have had a great deal of pressure on them to see to it that the food was distributed in such a way that it would last until they picked up the next batch.

Slate: They were good at that--the cooks we had. They would

cook just what they had to to feed all of us and not waste anything because there was no such thing as throwing stuff out. But they would give them, say, a hundred-kilo sack of rice, say, for three meals. Well, they'd cook about a third of it this meal, a third the next meal, and that was about all they could do. For breakfast they finally got around to cooking the rice with a lot of water in it and all, and that would make more for the dinner and supper meal.

Marcello: And this would be the "pap" that we were talking about.

Slate: Yes, the "pap." And that would save rice for the next two meals. The vegetables they got for the stew, well, that had to be broke down to make sure you had enough to more or less flavor it the same for each meal.

Marcello: Like you say, it got to be quite an art.

Slate: Yes, the cooks, I'll give them credit. Most of the time, they done a good job, and they didn't have a thankful job, anyway. People would give them fits over why didn't they do this and why didn't they do that, but they didn't have it to do with.

Marcello: And I'm sure that everybody thought the cooks were eating a lot more than you guys were.

Slate: Oh, yes, they were always accused of it. But the cooks didn't weigh any more than we did or get any fatter. But, let's face it, if you're cooking stuff, you're going

to get a little bit of extra (chuckle). I know that, and the rest of them, I think, did, too.

Marcello: I understand everybody liked to get that burnt rice crust off the bottom of the pots.

Slate: Oh, yes, that was always a little treat and all. That was something hard, crisp, where everything else we was eating was all soft. I don't know why, but everybody would go by and see who could be first to get a big handful of it. We always ate that. And another thing, charcoal was good for your stomach, and I ate a lot of it that was burnt black because the doctors had told us that it was good for us, that it would help keep dysentery away. Well, I ate it, and sometimes I'd even get a piece of burnt-black wood and just eat the charcoal off of it. A lot of them said, "You can't get me to eat that," and I said, "Well, they said it's good for you, so I'm going to eat it." I give that credit a lot for keeping me from getting sick.

Marcello: What kind of food were you getting here at Changi besides the usual rice?

Salte: Well, we got a stew, and then they had some Red Cross rations that we'd get mixed with it. I was told that they took a lot of these individual packages and all, and then they'd issue this canned stuff out to different outfits. Rather than give it to an individual, they'd

issue it to the kitchens. So we got a little of it through that way, but not too much. We usually got the other run-of-the-mill stuff because they kept telling us they sent our supplies up into Burma.

Marcello: I've heard some of the men talk about the mutton that you received here on one occasion. Do you recall it?

Slate: Rotten mutton?

Marcello: Yes.

Slate: (Chuckle) Yes, we got mutton one time that I remember, and it was so raunchy and bad until I don't know if very many of them even ate it anyway. You could smell the stuff a mile away.

Marcello: Hadn't it actually been frozen sometime back in the 1930's or something like that?

Slate: Somewhere back there. It came out of a freezer plant from somewhere, and it had been in there so long until parts of it already started deteriorating. It was dry and didn't taste good.

Marcello: Do you remember Battery E coming through Changi?

Slate: Yes, they came through Changi. They had them in a different area from us. I was on one of my trips to the hospital, and I got to see a couple of the guys. They had them over in another place, and they said, "We're not going to be here long." That's the only time I . . . I knew they was coming, going through, but I didn't ever get to see

them. It was one of those deals when you was all in the same camp, but you can't get over to see the next one to see what happened to them.

Marcello: I gather that most of the people that were here at Changi didn't like the camp too much.

Slate: No.

Marcello: It was a rather dreary place or something, wasn't it? And wasn't the morale low--the British in particular?

Slate: Well, the morale was low, and the British morale was low in particular. One thing--I got to where I'd talk to a couple of them--is the way the officers were treating them and running that place, trying to keep it as a garrison. They had even court-martialled their own people for different things. They would throw them in their stockade for different things that they would do. So their morale wasn't too good. But the Scottish, now they were something else. They would come up and talk to you, and they thought the . . . again, the called us the "Yanks." They thought we were something else. They liked to come up and set around at night, and we'd talk to them. They got hold of . . . they'd bring some books up, and we'd have something to read because we wasn't doing too much. We was just doing lots of sitting around. We'd talk to them, and we got along. They'd bring stuff up. They was always bringing tea up. To show how much they had, you'd go down there,

and they had issued these people . . . they had tins of this milk to put in their tea. We didn't even know what a can of milk was along about then, but they had it. They thought we was something else, and, also, they didn't care too much for the British, and they was glad we came in there.

Marcello: Now were the Scots more willing to share what they had with you people?

Slate: Yes, they'd share more. They brought a lot of stuff up that they got hold of. They brought some stuff up because they had more of it than they knew what to do with, so they would share with us on a lot of stuff. They would tell us where stuff was if we wanted to go get it, which we'd got in then to where we was scrounging pretty well. They told us where the British officers was keeping their chickens and where we could probably go steal some of their eggs and where they kept their supplies. That was kind of hard to get to, but . . . the chickens, we could steal. If they hadn't gathered their eggs, we could steal their eggs.

Marcello: Did you go on any of those chicken-stealing expeditions?

Slate: Yes, I was out a few times at night to steal a few chickens and liked to got caught a few times, too. We stole some of the English noncoms' cream. They had them a little patio built, and they had these cans of milk setting out, and their sugarbowl and their teacups and all of that.

Well, we didn't want the cups or nothing, but we'd steal the sugar and the cream. But they finally decided that the Yanks were stealing everything, so they started moving it in on us, started hiding it, in other words. But with some of them, the way we'd come in there and were doing, and the way we was acting and all, it lifted their morale, especially the ones that was close to us.

Marcello: Well, I gather that the general run-of-the-mill English soldier had a defeatist attitude. They had been beaten so many times in the past couple years.

Slate: Yes, they did.

Marcello: I guess a lot of these guys had been at Dunkirk before they had been shipped over to the Far East.

Slate: They came right out of Dunkirk, went back to England, and then went right on to Singapore. A lot of them didn't care. There was lots of the English that were married, but their families were back in England. One of them was telling me he came out of Dunkirk, and they got him going toward Singapore so fast that he didn't even get to stop long enough to see his family.

Marcello: On January 6, 1943, you leave Singapore. Describe the send-off that you got from the Scots.

Slate: Well, when we got ready to leave, to go get on the trucks to go catch the train, here come the Scots in their dress kilts and their bagpipes. They piped us out, which, I

understand, is the highest honor they can give you. So they piped us all the way down to the trucks until we got on the trucks and left. I talked to the English later, and they said they never knew of an English outfit that the Scots ever piped out of anywhere, but he said, "They piped those Yanks out." I said, "Well, was that good or bad?" He said, "That was good because that shows what they think about you. If they hadn't have liked you, they would have never done it." So that didn't help us a whole lot with the British, either (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, so you're on trucks, and where do you go from Changi?

Slate: Well, they take us and put us on a train, and then we go to . . .

Marcello: Penang, wasn't it? George Town.

Slate: George Town.

Marcello: Same place, different name.

Slate: Same place, only . . . I think they're right next to each other or something, and that's where they took us. That trip wasn't too long.

Marcello: Describe the trip on the train.

Slate: I don't remember too much about that trip on the train.

Marcello: What were conditions like within the cars?

Slate: It seemed like we was kind of crowded.

Marcello: What kind of cars are you traveling on?

Slate: As far as I can remember, they were like cattle cars with

the open sides, I mean, the slats.

Marcello: So at least you would have had some free-flowing air.

Slate: We had flowing air and had hay on the bottom to sit on or sleep on, on the floor. They'd stop the train different places to feed us. They had feeding points. Actually, to me it was kind of an uneventful trip, except for just riding.

Marcello: Okay, so you get to George Town, and you board another ship. This is the Dai Moji Maru, I think.

Slate: Yes, the Dai Moji Maru.

Marcello: You boarded on January 11, 1943. Describe what conditions were like aboard the Dai Moji Maru. I guess what I need to have you do is compare or contrast them with what you had aboard the Dai Nichi Maru.

Slate: Well, in comparison, the second ship I'm getting on was not crowded. We've got plenty of room, and we're allowed kind of like more freedom on deck. In the hold, you got plenty of room to stretch out, and the food is not too bad. Of course, maybe sailors are cooking it. It was kind of like you was taking a cruise to start with. Things were pretty easy-going.

Marcello: And you say that you were allowed up on the open deck?

Slate: Yes. After we was underway, and when we got to a day out of Moulmein, we got bombed. There was two ships in the convoy plus a little escort. Well, I'd gone up

on deck . . . while I was in Singapore, I got hold of some saltwater soap, and they'd let you go up on deck and use one of the deck hoses to take a bath. So I was trying out my soap, and I was all soaped down, and all of a sudden, I heard this drone.

Marcello: About what time of the day is this?

Slate: It was about noon. I heard this drone of airplanes, and the sound between the American airplanes and the Japanese airplanes were different because on the American airplanes, the motors were synchronized and the Japanese weren't, and they had kind of, oh, a rumbling sound to them. You could tell that different motors wasn't synchronized to fire the same. But I heard this steady drone, and I looked up and all I could see was four motors going over me. I knew the Japanese didn't have any four-motor planes, and I could see these little black dots coming out from under that plane. And I knew, if I could stand there by the superstructure and look up, see the bombs coming from the plane, that they wasn't after us. They was after the ship behind us, which was the largest one.

Well, I grabbed the hose to get the soap off of me and all about the time the bombs started hitting the other ship. I could see one hitting the front, and all of a sudden all you could see was big, black smoke back there. The guards started getting "bent out of shape"

at me then and was wanting me back in the hold. Well, I didn't have my clothes back on, and he was trying to rush me. I didn't want in the hold (chuckle), so I was trying to kill time and trying to get the rest of the soap off of me, and he was trying to watch the plane and get me back in the hold. There was some more there he was trying to run in the hold, and they was standing there watching.

All of a sudden a plane came across us. I was looking up, and I saw the bombs coming, and I said, "Boy, them're bound for us," because they was just about far enough out. When I heard them whistling, I hit the deck, and the Jap guard hit the deck with me. The bombs hit on each side of the ship, and it was just like it raised that thing out of the water and then just dropped it back.

Marcello: So you're still broad-beamed and buck-naked at this stage (chuckle).

Slate: That's right. The thing hit, raised it up, and then just like it dropped it, and then I couldn't hardly breathe because that jarred all the dust loose on that ol' ship. Then I started getting into my clothes in a hurry because I knew that if I wound up in the water, I didn't want to be in that water naked. I wanted some clothes on. So I got my clothes on, and by that time they had brought some out of the hold. If I'm not mistaken, some had come up. I know they had because on one side of the ship a bomb

had knocked some holes in it, and they was trying to figure out what the damage was, because the pumps started working.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, didn't the little weapon on your ship fire and hit at some superstructure or something?

Slate: Yes.

Marcello: Do you recall that?

Slate: Yes, I recall it firing and hitting its superstructure, but I don't know what they was firing at, to tell you the truth, unless somebody accidentally set it off and fired it.

Marcello: Well, I think they panicked.

Slate: Panicked, yes. I know they panicked.

Marcello: And wasn't there some sort of a fire on the back end of your ship? Not a major fire, but there was a fire back there.

Slate: There was a small one because they got it out in a hurry. Then things started happening awful fast because the other ship . . . I saw it go down, and then we started circling. It wasn't too long until these Japs came running from up toward the bridge and all, and they went to hollering for us to "Come here! Come here!" So we was throwing these nets over the side, and we started picking up survivors off of it. Those survivors coming up that net, some of them, you had to go down and help up, and some of them could make it all right. One of them come up

carrying a big fish. They didn't have life jackets issued to them, but in the front of the ship, they was transporting a thousand Jap soldiers, and in the rear of it they had a thousand Dutch soldiers. Well, we picked up 950 Dutch soldiers and 50 Jap soldiers, because I understand a bomb hit in the hold that they was in, where it didn't hit in the Dutch. But some of these Dutchmen said that they didn't have a life jacket, but they found a Jap in the water that had a life jacket, so they took it. So that's the reason so many of them was coming aboard ship with us with life jackets.

Marcello: What was the attitude of the guards in the aftermath of the attack?

Slate: Well, all the time this was going on, they wasn't saying too much. They was circling, and there was an officer up on the bridge who was more or less directing, and they would point to these people because they just kept picking up survivors. In fact, I think we stayed there around six or seven hours, and we was wondering why in the heck they don't get away, get somewhere, because they might come back after us. I'll say one thing, that old Jap captain stayed right there, and this little corvette kept circling, and he did pick up some, and they brought them over and put them on our ship. But he did stay and pick up everybody that he could.

Then we started underway. Then things were crowded. If you could find a place then to even squat, draw your feet up under you and sit down to sleep, you was lucky. But we got all of the people out of the water, anyway. Then we started underway again, and then I know we was underway all night.

I had to go up to the benjo late in the night. It was pretty moonlight--it was pretty light--and we was passing through a convoy, which these planes that had bombed us had hit earlier in the day, before they had bombed us, and they had burnt nearly every one of them up--destroyed them. Some of them was still burning. Some of them was just like a silhouette of a hull; this whole superstructure was gone. I believe it was the next day that we started into the harbor at Moulmein.

Marcello: That's right. The air raid occurred on January 15, and you went into Moulmein on January 16.

Slate: Going into Moulmein, there was one of these little Jap Betty bombers that came down that river, and there was some Jap officers sitting on the boards across the hold. They were open, but the support was still there. This one Jap officer was so scared that he jumped off in the hold and broke his leg; and another one jumped off, but he didn't break his leg. Just that Jap plane coming down through there, man, they thought they had it again. Then

we went on in and docked.

Marcello: What happens when you docked in Moulmein?

Slate: Well, after they docked in Moulmein, they took us off, and we went to a native prison, right under the hill from the Moulmein Pagoda.

Marcello: Did this conjure up memories of Kipling and all that sort of thing?

Slate: Oh, yes, when we found out what it was. The first thing was that we started asking questions to each other: "Was that the pagoda that Kipling had wrote about?" and that was. It was right in sight of us. You could see almost the whole pagoda. The side of this prison that I was in, everytime I walked out of this cubicle, there it was, just staring you in the face setting out on the hill.

Marcello: What kind of an effect did it have upon you and your buddies when you were housed, so to speak, in this prison?

Slate: Well, we'd . . .

Marcello: I mean, it was a little bit different from the other camps you'd been in.

Slate: Yes, it was a lot different. You could tell it was a regular prison camp, but they didn't lock the doors on us; I mean, the doors stayed open. They said, "Well, you're not going to be here long because they're going to move you up the railroad," which, I don't remember . . . we wasn't there too long before they decided that

it was time for us to make our little walk up to the railroad, to the camp we was going to.

Marcello: My records indicate that you were here in this civilian prison for about five days.

Slate: Just about five days. That's about right.

Marcello: Now some of the people were also housed in a leprosy ward, were they not?

Slate: Right. Yes, they found out that's where they had them, was in the leprosy ward. But I happened to be on the second floor in the middle of a long tier, so I wasn't close to them.

Marcello: I think the bunks and the pillows and so on in this prison were kind of interesting, too. Do you recall them? Was it not here where the pillow was nothing than a wooden block more or less carved out so that you could fit your head or neck in it?

Slate: Yes, you had a wooden bed. The pillow was made out of wood, carved down, and then you could put your . . . well, of course, we had our blankets with us, and you could put them over this wood to keep it from being so hard, or you could turn the thing upside-down, and it was just straight. But nearly everybody had the thing turned over with the little curve. If I'm not mistaken, they had four of these bunks to a little cubicle . . . or the one I was in had four bunks--two on each side. They was supposed to have,

which they didn't have then, a little stand that they kept the people locked in there. They had a little place there for their potty, and they kept it in that. They wouldn't let them out to go to the toilet.

Marcello: Now you move from the Moulmein jail or prison up to the railhead, which is at Thanbyuzayat, isn't that correct?

Slate: That's right.

Marcello: How do you get from Moulmein to Thanbyuzayat, and how long does it take?

Slate: Well, we walked and I think it took us almost all day to get over there.

Marcello: Incidentally, while you're walking from Moulmein to Thanbyuzayat, what sort of a reception do you get from the Burmese natives?

Slate: Well, they just kind of looked you over, and some of them spoke, and some of them waved at you, and then some of them just flat ignored you.

Now along about here is where we started picking up different-type guards, if I'm not mistaken, because up on the railroad, they're going to have different-type people in the Burma, in the jungles. So we got to the railhead, and then they took us to this first camp.

Marcello: Before we get you to the first camp, don't you get some sort of a speech or orientation here at Thanbyuzayat by Colonel Nagatomo?

Slate: That's right.

Marcello: Do you recall the basics of that speech that he gave you?

Slate: The way I recall it, he was given the job to build that railroad any way he had to, and he was going to do it; and the best thing we could do was go up there and work, not give anybody any trouble, and finish it as soon as possible. That was what his orders were, and he intended to do it, regardless of who it hurt or how many of us he killed doing it. But he was going to build that railroad.

Marcello: Of course, to this day, there are copies of that speech circulating. Do you have any idea how the prisoners got hold of that speech? Evidently, it was a standard written speech that he had . . .

Slate: Given to all of . . .

Marcello: . . . given to all of the prisoners, and copies of that exist today. I was wondering if you possibly knew how one of the prisoners would have gotten hold of that speech.

Slate: The only way I know they could have gotten hold of it was because at the railhead they kept people working down there, and someway they probably had some of them working in the offices, and one of them managed to get hold of a copy of it and kept it.

Marcello: Well, now how many people did he give this speech to there at the time you heard it?

Slate: At the time I heard it, there was about six or seven

hundred of us.

Marcello: He must have had a pretty good set of lungs, then, to have given that speech.

Slate: Well, he did have a pretty good set. He stood up high, looking down at everybody, had everybody in close, and he gave his little speech.

Marcello: And he gave the speech in English?

Slate: Yes, he gave it in English, and then we got an interpretation of it from another Jap to where we would understand it, because I know I did. That was one of the things they asked us--if we understood what he was talking about. If I'm not mistaken, he had kind of an English brogue about his speech, kind of an English accent.

Marcello: Do you recall that designation for your group, or the identification of it? Were you in Group Three or Group Five?

Slate: We must have been in Group Five, yes, because we was the last group. So we was Group Five.

Marcello: And like you mentioned, you just stay at Thanbyuzayat for a short amount of time, and then they send you out for the first work camp, and these are all called "Kilo Camps," depending upon the distance from the base camp at Thanbyuzayat to the work camp.

Slate: To the work camp.

Marcello: Which was the first of the "Kilo Camps" to which you were sent?

Slate: 18 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: How did you get from Thanbyuzayat to 18 Kilo?

Slate: We walked.

Marcello: Describe the hike from Thanbyuzayat to the 18 Kilo.

Slate: Well, the road was dusty, and, of course, all of us was carrying just a little bit more than we'd like to be carrying. The front moved along pretty good, and then when you got to straggling out, the guards in the back would start giving them fits to catch up. At that time, we wasn't used to that kind of a walk. They wanted to keep us moving, and they wanted to get us there pretty fast, so we got strung out at times pretty good; but then they would slow up a little bit in the front to where you could catch up, and the ones in the back was giving fits to go faster.

That's the first place that you saw people getting rid of part of their loads. They was throwing stuff away on the side of the road because, if you're going to have to walk in that heat and that dust, it was hot enough without carrying a heavy load.

Marcello: This is the dry season, isn't it?

Slate: Yes, this is the dry season.

Marcello: Can you describe how dusty that road was?

Slate: Oh, it was just a powder, and with just you walking on it, that dust would just fly up. With all these people

walking on it, you was walking in a dust cloud, and it was hard to breathe in that stuff; and there was no wind, so it just settled right back down on top of you. If you was at the front, you was all right, but I was about in the middle, and I was right in the middle of all of the dust. It was kind of a miserable walk.

Marcello: Did you throw anything away?

Slate: There was nothing I could get to easy to throw away, the way I had it all tied up. But before I got there, I wished I could've got to about half of it and threw it away because it was getting pretty heavy. Some of them that had too big a load, and some of us was trying to help them. We finally made it into camp and just flopped, and that was it.

Marcello: Describe what 18 Kilo Camp looked like from a physical standpoint. I assume that when we talk about one of these camps, we can talk about any one of them along the railroad.

Slate: Yes, they was all built just almost identical. The 18 Kilo Camp, going out, set on the left-hand side of the road, and it set back away from the road farther than the rest of them did. There was a little hill there, and it kind of made a circle, and this camp was put right down kind of in a hole. Well, as you came up to the camp, the first thing was the guardhouse where

the Japs were. Over to the side was their kitchen and where they stayed. Then you went on in to the camp, and they had these big bamboo huts on each side. Then as you went in, they started assigning so many people per hut.

Marcello: All the time, are the Japanese and Koreans yelling and screaming?

Slate: Oh, yes, they're wanting to get you settled in a hurry and wanting to get rid of you. Then we got these Korean guards that resented being in that area in the first place, and they were wanting to get you settled. They wanted to get a count as to how many was in there, and they've got to set the kitchen up and let you get the stuff in for your kitchen and all. Then late in the afternoon, they've got to get a meal cooked. They had the supplies there so that we had our meal.

I was trying to think if there wasn't a little old stream there that we went and bathed in, because I know going over to where the water was, there was some grass . . . it looked like Johnson grass was growing, and just like at home, you walk by Johnson grass, and you'll break off a blade and chew on it or something. Well, they broke off a blade of this and was chewing on it, and it taste like lemon, so we named that stuff lemon grass because you could take those blades of grass and boil it, and you thought it tasted like lemonade. We found out it didn't

hurt us, so to get away from that old black tea or something different to drink, well, we used to pull this grass and boil it and make a lemonade. We'd let it set overnight, and it would cool down a little bit, and you'd have a cool drink, not a hot drink, in the morning.

Marcello: Describe what one of these huts looked like where you would be staying.

Slate: Well, they had, normally, an opening on each end and an opening in the middle. Down each side, there was just bamboo slats that would go back about . . . I guess it was about seven feet wide. These slats would run, well, halfway one way, and then they had the opening, and then you was assigned an area on one of these slats.

Marcello: About how large an area would you have?

Slate: You'd have three to four feet wide. That was your area.

Marcello: And about seven foot long, like you were saying.

Slate: And about seven feet long. Now that was your home as long as you was in that camp.

Marcello: In other words, you slept there, you ate there, you kept your possessions there, whatever.

Slate: Yes, you kept everything right there.

Marcello: About how long was one of these huts?

Slate: I would say about seventy-five yards long.

Marcello: So it was a big affair.

Slate: It was a big hut.

Marcello: And then these racks, so to speak, would be down each side of a middle aisle?

Slate: Right, each side of a middle aisle.

Marcello: And is it not correct that these racks were like raised platforms?

Slate: Yes, they were raised. They were about two feet off the ground. It had grass roofs on them. Around the side, up about three feet, was where they'd opened up bamboo and made a wall, but from there up to the edge of the roof was all open because of the climate over there. Sometimes you did get a little cook, but you could cover up. It wasn't actually that cold.

Marcello: On many occasions, wouldn't they put fires at both ends of these huts?

Slate: Yes, in the time of the year when it would get cooler, they'd put fires at each end of the hut, and there was also one in the middle. I know that in a lot of our huts they would put one in the middle. We had bamboo walks down between these. You walked on bamboo rather than walk on the dirt. Some of them . . . well, all of the ones in this camp did, because this is one of the . . . we moved in there, and it was one of the newer camps. I think it had just been finished, and we was the first ones in it.

I think they let us off one day. The next day after we arrived, we didn't have to go to work, and then the

next day they started describing the work to us that we was going to start doing. It wasn't far from the camp to work.

Marcello: That's a good transition, so let's talk about the work details here at 18 Kilo. Describe what a typical workday was like from the time you get up in the morning until you went to bed--here at 18 Kilo.

Slate: Well, they'd wake you up just about daylight. It was still dark, normally. They'd wake you up to where you could get out there by eight o'clock or around eight o'clock. You had to get up and eat, and then normally nearly everybody still had their canteens where they could carry water or something to drink. You got that.

They broke all the people up into thirty-man groups called kumis. So they described what kind of work we was going to do. They took us out and showed us, as well as I can remember, and said, "Now we're going to make a fill from here down so far, and there'll be a bridge put in; and up here, we're going to cut all this out, and we're going to move this dirt down to make the fill." We looked at that and as to how much of it there was, so we all made the remark, "We'll be here when the war is over with before this is finished." Then they turned around and showed us what kind of tools we was going to work with. All we had was picks, shovels, and we had,

like, old gunney sacks, tow sacks, that had a wire around each end of it to make a loop, and bamboo poles. They said, "Okay, there'll be five men on shovels, five men on picks, and twenty men will carry the dirt, two men on the pole, with the poles."

So we thought that was kind of funny. So the first day I wound up carrying with somebody else. We got to the point to where we'd try to get two guys close to the same height. Well, they showed us where to start moving the dirt from, and if I'm not mistaken, we didn't have a quota the first day or two or something, but we went to work. Of course, I guess we done what they wanted us to, but carrying this deal the first day, boy, I got in that night, and I had two sore shoulders, and so did other people.

Then we went out the next day, and I managed to get hold of a pick that day, and that wasn't quite so bad. You still had to do a lot of picking.

Marcello: Is this pick sometimes referred to as a chunkel?

Slate: Yes, sometimes a chunkel. But it looked just like an old American pick--sharp on one end and the deal at the other end. In fact, it was all American tools that we had there.

Then we started making this cut and putting the dirt down in, and then we got surprised as to how fast

it would actually go. We had seen pictures of coolies working and moving dirt this crude way, and here we were doing it, and it actually moves a lot faster than you think it does.

Marcello: About how many men are working on one of these projects?

Slate: On this particular project, everybody in camp was working on this same one.

Marcello: So it must have looked like a giant ant hill, then.

Slate: Yes, it looked like just a . . . instead of putting machinery out there, they put people and people was running every which way. About the middle of the morning, they'd give you a break. Then they'd bring chow out from camp for you at noon, and in the middle of the afternoon they'd give you a break. Then you'd get back in camp, oh, a little bit before dark.

Marcello: You were mentioning quotas awhile ago. Could you discuss that further?

Slate: Well, they wanted to increase the work on the railroad, so they started giving each group that went out . . . they started at . . . well, there was thirty men per group, so they would give you thirty cubic meters of dirt per day per man to move, and that's lots of dirt. So when you finished your quota, they would take you in--that particular group that you was in. If you finished early, you went in early.

Marcello: Would the Japanese engineer or somebody stake off the thirty cubic meters?

Slate: Yes, they always had Japanese engineers out there, and they would come by, measure it off to where you had to get to do, and then when you finished, you called and told them, so they'd come back by with their meter stick and check it to make sure you'd moved exactly what you had to move. Later on, it got to where the guards would do it--some of the guards, not all of them--and they would measure it off. Then the engineers would come by and check it. Sometime during the day while you was working, they'd come by and measure your hole to see that you wasn't going up or . . . they didn't care about you going down; they didn't want you going up.

Then they were the one that would turn you loose and tell the guards to take you back to camp. Each group had a guard with them, and that way they could send them back to camp. Some of the guards liked for you to get through early because that meant they got in early. If you didn't get through early and they got in late, they got all bent out of shape. They'd give you lots of trouble.

Marcello: When they imposed the initial quota, how long did it take to fulfill it?

Slate: Well, when they increased our quota, we had got a little

seasoned to the work then. That just meant you had to work a little faster. Now how fast you got it done depended on what kind of dirt you was in. Sometimes when you was making fills along the side of the railroad, the dirt was soft and you could move it fast; but sometimes you was cutting down a hill, and you still had to move it. The stuff was a little harder, and it would take you longer to move it. But they got to increasing the pressure on them to finish the railroad, and they made it 1.5 meters per man. You stayed out until you finished it.

Marcello: And I think they ultimately even increased the quota over 1.5 meters, did they not?

Slate: At one time it got two meters, and that's when a bunch of Dutch balked. They flat left them out there until they finished it, even if it was midnight, and they had to be right back out there the next morning. But they finally gave in and decided they were going to do it because they're going to keep them out there until they did it.

Marcello: Is it not also true that in the beginning with the quotas, the Americans in particular would finish rather early and go back into camp early, and that was another reason why the Japanese simply increased the quota? They were going to make sure that you stayed out there all day.

Slate: Right, that's one reason that we . . . of course, we figured out a way to do it easy and all, and we'd finish

early. So they decided, "Well, if they can do that much, then they can do this much," so they just kept stacking it up until we was out there all day. A lot of times we'd get back in and eat the evening meal, or supper, and it would be after dark. Anything you had to do, you had to do it in the dark, unless the little fires was going around because they didn't have any electricity out there.

Marcello: Is it not true that sometimes you would try and cheat? In other words, when the guards or the engineers weren't looking, you'd try to move the stakes back?

Slate: Yes, you could get by with it sometimes, provided you already had a big hole going, a big trench going. Well, you could cheat on that because it was kind of in and out. But now where you just went into an area and started a brand new one and you dug down from the top of the ground down, that was a different story. We always carried our own meter stick with us to where we could measure it. We'd run that stick along the bank, and we wasn't giving them one inch. At times, if you got too deep when you dug dirt down, you'd fill it in and stomp on it to make sure that's all they was getting. Just exactly what we was supposed to do, well, that's what we did.

Marcello: So in a sense, there's kind of a little game of tug-of-war going on here between the prisoners and the Japanese.

Slate: Yes, all the time, trying to see how much you could

actually get out of doing but yet not get in any trouble, not get them all mad at you.

We finished that thing, I think, in about six weeks, and we thought, "Lord, it will take years for us to do it!"

Marcello: In other words, you would stay at one of these kilo camps until a particular project was finished, most of the time.

Slate: Yes. A camp was given a certain area to do, so they kept us there until that area was finished. That's the reason we was in some camps a lot longer than the others, because of the amount of work that had to be done.

Marcello: Also, here at the 18 Kilo Camp, you were working in fairly level terrain, were you not?

Slate: Yes, the terrain was fairly level here.

Marcello: And you really weren't into the jungles yet, as such.

Slate: No, we was more or less just at the edge of them and not even the good edge of them. We still had a good ways to go to actually get into the jungle.

Marcello: I guess when you get up into the jungle then, you're going to have to have other people to cut trees and pull out stumps or blast out stumps or whatever and things of that nature.

Slate: When we got into the jungle, the right-of-way for the railroad had been cleaned, and all we was doing was coming along and making the fills and the cuts. We got into some bridge building, but not a whole lot because they had

another crew that was doing that.

But in one area we was in, there was a big bridge we had to work on then, but we didn't work too much on it because they had other groups they had trained the way they wanted the things put together, and they worked with the same Japs all the time. They'd bring us into these bridges for manual labor, you might say. We done all the moving of the piling around and ran the man-made pile drivers.

Marcello: Describe how the bridge building works on this railroad.

Slate: Well, the fills would be made up to where the bridge was going to start. The Japs would bring in these pilings and all, and they'd drive them in the ground. The way they'd drive them in the ground, they had a frame made to hold the piling up, and they had a big weight that they used for that, only it was pulleys on top and ropes coming out, and the ropes fanned out on each side, and then off of these ropes was small ropes. Then they'd put either one man or two men on each rope. Well, you'd pull the thing up and turn it loose to drive the piling. I don't know who came up with it, but they come up with a little song that you'd get to singing. You'd know when you turn loose because, if you didn't turn loose at the same time everybody else did, you got jerked up there about ten feet. So they'd all get to singing where they'd know when to pull and when to turn loose.

Marcello: Do you recall how the song went?

Slate: No, I don't remember the song.

Marcello: I understand also that didn't the Americans make up a little song in place of the Japanese words?

Slate: Yes. They had had words in Japanese. Some of them that didn't understand them didn't like them too good, but used the word "Tojo."

Marcello: And I think they also had a tune that went something like, "Piss on the Japanese," and down went the piling or something.

Slate: Yes, and when you got the "Japanese" out, that's when you was supposed to turn loose. I hit it lucky, actually. I'd wound up doing something else rather than that. That was hard work, and they got to where they would rotate those guys pretty regular because they had lots of piling to drive.

We couldn't figure out how, with their crude way, they managed to make all this stuff fit, but they had the . . . I got assigned a lot of times to pulling on these ropes to lift these pilings up, put them in place, and then they would bolt them in place. Then we'd go drag another one down. Part of the time, they had elephants that would move the pilings around. In some places they'd have elephants that would lift the pilings up, and all you had to do was just guide it in place. But not all of the jobs they had us on had the elephants to help.

Marcello: Of all of the jobs in the railroad, which one did you dislike the most?

Slate: I think the bridge building was the worst one of the whole deal.

Marcello: Why was that?

Slate: Well, for what they expected out of you and how fast they was trying to do it. And there was so many around--so many Japs around--and every one of them seemed to have a different idea.

Marcello: I guess a lot of times you would have to be working waist-deep in water, too.

Slate: Yes, you was out in the water working. I didn't care for that. You'd be out in that water for hours at a time, and they wouldn't let you out. Sometimes it was cold; sometimes it wasn't. It was just flat unpleasant work.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about camp life. I guess we have to talk about things that we normally take for granted. As time goes on, what do you do about toothbrushes and toothpaste?

Slate: Well, for toothbrushes and toothpaste, I got to the point where I used a stick, chewed it up like the old people used to dip snuff--make their little stick--and I'd use that and use soap, or just use that. It cleaned the teeth.

Marcello: Of course, I guess, given the rations you had, you weren't

getting too much food caught between your teeth anyway, were you (chuckle)?

Slate: No, you didn't have to worry about picking your teeth. But once in awhile they'd bring in little canteen supplies. You'd managed to get hold of some soap. I think most people managed to keep soap to bathe in. You didn't worry whether you had soap to wash your clothes in or not, but to bathe you always seemed to have a little bit of soap, or you'd scrounge some somewhere. As far as your heads went, they kept your hair clipped all the time, so you didn't have to worry about your hair.

Marcello: What did you do about shaving?

Slate: Well, I went eighteen months one time without shaving. I had two razor blades, and I was saving them. We had a guy in camp that had a straight razor, and he was the barber. He used to charge you a little bit for a shave when you needed it--the ones that was getting shaves. Well, I finally got a breaking-out on my neck from not shaving, and I'd get all the hair off, and then I kept shaving it after that. About once a week, I'd go over to the barber and get me a shave.

Marcello: Why did you want to keep your hair clipped?

Slate: Well, to start with, all the Japanese soldiers had their heads clipped. Well, that's one of the first things they did, was clipped our hair, so they stayed clipped

all the time. They furnished this barber his clippers and all to keep them clipped. Well, to clip your head, he didn't charge you for it. But after we got up into Burma, you would let your hair grow out. They wasn't so strict on it. But it was easier to keep. You didn't have to worry about it. If you had your head clipped, you could wash it with a wash rag and go.

Marcello: Plus, you weren't going to get any kind of vermin or critters in it if it were clipped.

Slate: Right, it was just easier to keep. It would be too hard to try to keep your head clean.

Marcello: How did you keep your razor blades sharpened?

Slate: Well, I sharpened them on my palm of my hand because our hands were all pretty tough. Several of them had--and I had--a piece of leather, so you took pretty good care, and each time you used your blade, you made sure it was good and dry, your razor was good and dry, and then you packed it away. I don't know how long I'd use one blade, but you made it last an awful long time.

Marcello: Some people also would sharpen them by rubbing them on the inside of a piece of a glass bottle, would they not? Had you ever seen that technique used?

Slate: Yes, I saw them. Yes, they'd do that. I've used the bottle; I've used a piece of leather, my hand, anything that was actually smooth that would sharpen the razor,

because there was no stones or anything that was fine enough that you could do that with.

Marcello: What do you do about amenities that we take for granted, such as tables and chairs?

Slate: Well, we used the edge of our bunks to sit on. As far as chairs go, and a table, we just didn't have them. Out where the kitchen was, there was usually tables built to put the stuff on. Once in awhile, somebody would get energetic and build a bamboo table out somewhere, but, normally, we just used the ends of our bunks as a place to sit. When you'd go to visit somebody, you sat on part of their bunk and part of somebody else's bunk or sat at the one across and talked to them, something along that line.

Marcello: When was the last time you'd had a slice of bread?

Slate: Part of the time on the road, when we was moving, before the Japs captured us, we had sliced bread. After that, a few times when we were in the Chinese school, the Japs would buy bread at noon for about four of us or so, and we would slice it up. Then after that, bread just almost disappeared.

Marcello: So you basically go without bread for about three years.

Slate: Just about. Then that's when I go on the "rice diet."

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that, of course, the barracks do not have electricity. What do you do for light in the

evenings?

Slate: Well, usually, they'd build those fires, and that was just about your light. Another thing, you learned how to get around in camp in the dark--quick. You'd know how to get, let's say, to the benjo, or if you needed water, how to get to the mess hall. And there was always a fire in the mess hall because they kept it going all the time. So you had a little light from there, but, otherwise, you just didn't have any light. Once in awhile, a great while, somebody would someway run across a candle, and you'd see a candle burning, but not too often. But most of the time, you just waited for the sun to come up to have light, or it'd be moonlight. In the dry season, at full moon, it was always just almost as bright as day. You could actually walk outside and read. So outside you didn't worry; inside it would be a little darker.

Marcello: Describe what the latrines were like. Again, when we give these general descriptions, I am assuming that this would apply to any camp, or almost any camp.

Slate: Yes, any camp you'd go to. Well, most of the latrines, when we got into camp, they weren't dug. Somebody had to go out and dig them. Then they'd get bamboo that was about, oh, four or five inches in diameter or something like that. You'd dig this trench, then you'd build frames to hold two of these poles, and then they'd put this over

this trench, and that's what you sat on. Usually, they was about six or eight inches apart. Some of them that they built, they just had one bamboo pole, and you didn't want to fall over backwards (chuckle). But some of them, they'd do a little better job, so they'd build two poles down there, and you sat down on the two of them.

Marcello: So these were basically nothing but open slit trenches.

Slate: They were just open slit trenches. When they'd fill up or get so full, you'd fill that one up and go dig another one.

Marcello: I'm sure the maggots had a field day.

Slate: Oh, all the time. We'd always try to put them on the lower side of camp to keep the smell away, but sometimes they'd get to stinking pretty good. So then they decided it was time to go fill that one up and dig another one and start from scratch again.

Marcello: How's your clothing holding out?

Slate: So far, my clothing is holding out pretty good. Most of us nearly all the time wear shorts.

Marcello: You're not down to a G-string yet.

Slate: No, I'm not down to a G-string. I got three or four pairs of shorts. Shoes are getting in bad shape. Before we left Singapore, the Japs did give us a pair of shoes--the ones that needed them. Then we got up in . . . when my shoes started getting in awful bad shape, so they was

going out and killing oxen and letting these hides dry and putting soles on our shoes because they was wearing out. But they wouldn't last too long because they wasn't tanned right, and they wouldn't stay on too good. Then I had a standard-size foot, so when they'd bring shoes in, I could usually find me a pair that would fit me. Of course, they was those old Jap shoes, and the stuff was hard, and you had to wear them a while before your feet got tough in the right spots. Well, in other words, you might have to move you callouses somewhere else. But I always managed to have a pair of shoes.

Then my clothes . . . I had a pair of khaki pants and a khaki shirt that I kept all the way through it. I never had to get into them. But when the war was over with, that's what I wore out of Saigon.

Marcello: That, to me, is an indication that you were quite an optimist.

Slate: Well, I was because I always said I was going back, and I kept myself ready to go back. I saw too many people that gave up and lay down and died, and there was no way they was going to break my morale and have me lay down and die because someway, by hook or crook, I was going back.

Marcello: And you determined that you were going to have a presentable uniform to go back in.

Slate: That's right. Well, at any time, if I would have had to

use them to wear, well, I would have done it, but as long as I could manage without doing it, I was going to.

Marcello: I think that also indicates a certain amount of pride, and like you mentioned, when people lost that pride, which, in some cases, meant giving up, they were going to die.

Slate: That's right.

Marcello: We'll talk more about that in a moment when we get up to the 80 and the 100 Kilo Camp and get into the monsoon season and the "Speedo" campaign. Were you being paid a wage here?

Slate: I think they were paying us . . . I think I was drawing 25¢ a day because I was a corporal. They got more than the rest of them, so I was getting 25¢ a day.

Marcello: When would you get paid?

Slate: I was trying to think. I think we got paid once a month.

Marcello: And what kind of money were you being paid in?

Slate: Oh, it was script that the Japanese had printed up.

Marcello: Occupation script.

Slate: Occupation script. About the only place to spend it was . . . they would bring things in, little canteen supplies, and you could buy stuff. Well, sometimes they would even bring in eggs. If you had the money, you could go buy them, or if they brought in sugar, you could go buy the sugar. If you didn't have the money, you was just out of luck. But very few of them ever ran out of their money.

They got to where they kind of watched it. They watched what they spent it for. We was getting into the point now that food, we knew, was going to be the main thing. Clothes you could care less about, but taking care of yourself and getting enough to eat was already getting to the point that it was going to be the main thing.

Marcello: Food and personal hygiene were going to be very, very important.

Slate: Very important. And some of them, you had to almost hit them between the eyes to get them to realize that.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the control of the officers wasn't nearly so great now that you were prisoners-of-war, but, nevertheless, a certain amount of military discipline was definitely going to be necessary, was it not?

Slate: Right.

Marcello: Somebody was going to have to give orders, and somebody was going to have to follow orders among the prisoners, the Japanese aside.

Slate: Right. Normally, the way we would pick who our leaders were . . . it was somebody that everybody could get along with. We could care less if he was a private or a captain, as long as everybody got along with him.

Marcello: I heard that in some of the camps, for example, like you say, the person who was the recognized leader was perhaps only a private, but somewhere along the line he had

exhibited qualities of leadership, and the men respected him, so . . .

Slate: That's right.

Marcello: . . . leadership responsibilities would almost just naturally fall to him.

Slate: Right. They'd say, "You're it. You take care of us," and they would do what he said. It wasn't the idea of the rank or what; it was whether everybody could listen to him, and they paid attention to him. The ones that were supposed to have been our leaders fizzled out, so you start looking for somebody else then.

Marcello: Were there ever any instances where prisoners tried to curry favors from the Japanese? I guess the term that we would use today would be "brown-nosing." Did you ever see any of this occurring?

Slate: Yes, it occurred some, but they was so two-faced until you really had to watch it, because this one guy found that out. Later on, he got friendly with one of the guards, and the guard would bring him stuff and all. One day he made a remark that the guard took for a different way. Well, they beat on him for eight hours over that remark.

But there was some of them that would kind of do things for the Japs for little favors. But the ones I was with, as far as "ratting" on the prisoners to get

favors from them, they didn't play that way. But now they'd do little favors for the Japanese for favors--for him--but we didn't have any of what you call the "turn-coats" that would turn you in or something. We run into some of them, but luckily they weren't Americans.

Marcello: Describe what your guards were like, and by this I'm referring to the Korean guards.

Slate: Well, when we got started in the camps, the only guards we had for the camp was at the main gate. Sometimes one would walk through, but you very seldom ever saw one in the compound. But the ones that took you out on the work details . . . the guard would take a group and go out, and he stayed there all day with you. He was supposed to stand up to where he could watch everybody, make sure everybody was working. He would give you your breaks. Some of them could care less whether you worked or not, but they had these quotas, and you knew you had to finish it. Some of them were just flat slave drivers. They was standing around you all the time hollering . . . the first word they learned how to say was, "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" And then they was after you because they wanted to go in.

Marcello: But with the coming of the Korean guards, what happens to the frequency of physical punishment?

Slate: It increases. Some of the guards were all right, and then you got others that just got a pleasure out of beating on

somebody.

Marcello: Which guards stand out in your mind? I know you had nicknames for all of them.

Slate: One interpreter we had at one time, a little later, he would come out and say, "I've got your lives in the palm of my hand." He's the one that would run the sick people out to work. He said they can go out there and sit down and break rock.

Then some of these guards would just beat on the people just for the heck of it, I think. We had all kind of nicknames for them. You knew when to try to stay away from them. When the guards was giving them so much trouble, I was at another camp doing a different detail. That was when I moved. I was nearly on my own most of the time, so I didn't have these guards that was giving these people all this trouble. They was after them, and they had little sneaky ways to work on them. But the guards in the jungles weren't near as bad as they were after we got out of the jungle.

Marcello: Were you ever beaten here in the jungle?

Slate: One time. And that was because I wasn't moving fast enough when we was going from one camp to another, and he was beating me in the back with a rifle butt. How I happened to be on the tail-end of that column, I'll never know, because I never was. I always liked to get

right in the middle. I wound up back at the back, and he was hitting me in the back with his rifle butt to "Hurry, hurry, hurry." I was pushing the guy in front of me, and he was pushing the guy in front of him, and there wasn't no hurrying it up, but about every five minutes, he'd "whup" me one. The guy on the other side . . . we was walking columns of twos, and he'd hit me, and then he'd hit him. A little while later, he'd hit me and then he'd hit him again. And we couldn't hurry that column up--no way. Everytime we'd try to tell him that, he'd hit us again.

Marcello: Do you recall the nicknames of some of the guards?

Slate: Well, we had one of them that was "Liver Lips." It seemed like we had one somewhere that we called "Little Joe" . . . no, that was later on. But what was the name of some of those other guards? I know that every one of them had a wild nickname. Some of them had pretty bad . . . but "Liver Lips" stand out in my mind. He was a big, tall Korean guy. I guess he was over six feet tall, and he always acted like to me that he was stupid. He never could understand anything, but he did understand beating the heck out of you because he caused lots of deaths. He and another one, the interpreter we had, caused lots of deaths. The interpreter had your life in the palm of his hand, and he said, "It's up to me whether you

live or die."

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

Slate: From the 18 Kilo we went to the 80 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: That was a pretty big jump, wasn't it, from 18 to 80 Kilo?

Slate: Yes, that was a big jump.

Marcello: Do you recall when this occurred? Would this have been in perhaps May of 1943, something like that?

Slate: Yes, somewhere in there.

Marcello: Let me ask you this, and maybe we can pinpoint it this way: did you get to the 80 Kilo Camp around the time that the monsoons started?

Slate: Just about the time they started.

Marcello: Okay, well, then that must have been about the time of the beginning of the so-called "Speedo" campaign, too.

Slate: Right.

Marcello: Okay, that occurred in May of 1943, early May of 1943.

Slate: Early May.

Marcello: Okay, describe what work was like during the "Speedo" campaign and with the coming of the monsoons. This is when you really know what it's like to be a prisoner-of-war. Things had been bad, but now they're going to get worse.

Slate: They're going to get worse--quick. Well, when the "Speedo" campaign came along, they was putting the pressure on them to get the railroad built. It was costing them too much.

Marcello: We have to keep in mind that the British had tried to build this railroad years before and gave it up as being impossible.

Slate: Yes. Actually, the British had cleared most of the right-of-way. They already had all the telephone lines in through there. That was built.

Now they wanted to get the railroad built, so they started this "Speedo" campaign. They started feeding us four meals a day . . . well, they started bringing in supplies, and they started feeding us four meals a day, but we was out there an average of eighteen hours a day. The guards were pushing us like mad. You'd build a fire at night to where you could see. You would eat your breakfast in camp; they brought lunch out to you; then just before dark, they brought your supper out to you; and then when you came in at night, they always had another meal for you. That meant you had about five hours to sleep, do what you had to do, and get up to eat again and be ready to go. Now they kept pushing everybody this way, and it wasn't nothing to come in at midnight.

Marcello: And what are the monsoons like?

Slate: Well, today it's dry and hot; tomorrow here comes the clouds and the rain. So it starts raining, and it just keeps raining. Then all the rivers get flooded, everything gets muddy, you got little creeks running down through

the middle of your barracks, and there's no way to get dry. In the complete monsoon season, you stay wet.

Marcello: How do you accomplish any work in the monsoon season? It would seem to me that the rains would wash out the fills as well as the bridges and so on.

Slate: Well, there was some of it. You'd start one today, and they'd wash out while you was gone, so you redone it. So they just kept going. Sometimes it would get so muddy that when you'd pour the dirt for the fills, pour it up there, there was so much water in it that it just kept washing off. They was pushing work on all the bridges to make sure they got finished. During the monsoon they was doing mostly cuts because the fills wouldn't stay in too good. Right after the monsoon season, they started levelling up the fills, but they kept at us so much on this hurry-up deal until about half of that had to be redone, anyway, because there was no way during the . . . if they'd have picked the season to do it, it'd have been a different story.

Well, long about this time, in camp, they needed a wood detail, so there was six of us volunteered to cut wood for the kitchen.

Marcello: Anything to get off that railroad, right?

Slate: Anything to get away from the railroad. So we'd cut wood for our kitchen and then supply part of the wood for the

Jap kitchen. They gave us a saw and axes, and we'd go out in the jungles to cut the wood. Well, we didn't have a guard with us, which made it good. We had a direction we went all the time to get wood. I guess they'd just thought we wasn't going anywhere because we never had a guard. The only thing we had to do was go by the guardhouse, tell them how many was going, and they'd send you on your way.

Well, during the monsoon season, the natives didn't work too much. Well, they couldn't. Their ox carts bogged down. A bunch of them moved into the camp next to us, and cholera hit the camp, and nearly all of them died. Well, they left and they left all these ox carts. Well, to get this wood into camp, we just latched on to us one of these ox carts. We'd put four on the tongue, holding it and pulling, and two pushed. So we could go out, and with that full of wood it would take care of our kitchen plus what we had to furnish for the Japs for a day. So we started rotating. Each one of us would take a day off. Five would go out and cut the wood. It was a lot easier, and we didn't have any pressure on us.

Marcello: What would the sixth man do?

Slate: Well, we was taking a day off each, you see. There was six of us, and then one'd stay in camp and five of us would go out . . .

Marcello: I'm surprised that . . .

Slate: . . . or all six'd go out. Well, we had kind of worked this around because sometimes the Japs'd ask you . . . he'd hold up one finger to mean that there was one missing. Well, you'd tell him he was sick, so that would get by that. Then most of the time you just as soon to be out in the jungles as in that camp, anyway. Going out, a few natives would be around, and we managed to get sugar off of the natives. We started picking out and finding pepper bushes, and we'd make the rounds of the pepper bushes. You could eat those little green peppers that were hot. They would make you eat that rice whether you wanted to or not, so we always came in with peppers, and we'd give them to the guys. We built us a trap, and once in awhile we'd catch a wild chicken. Well, we cooked that thing out there for ourselves because how're you going to . . . there's too many people that you'd have to split with in there, so we'd go out and do that.

While these other people were doing all this work, we was trying to help some of the sick. We would come in, go get their chow for them, get what we could off of the natives, because there was no guards around, and you could deal with the natives. Usually, they'd come right up to the edge of the thicket or something, and you'd go over by the thicket. If somebody walked up, that native would disappear

in a hurry.

But all the time we was in the jungles, this one time a guard came by while we was working out there, and he just came by and looked around and kept going, like he was out for a walk. Of course, they had Dutch wood parties out, and they also had Australian wood parties out, and everybody seemed to go in a different area. We done a lot of trading with the natives because they'd be moving along this road, and we'd trade with them as we was walking. They'd either be passing us or something.

Marcello: What would you have to trade to them?

Slate: Well, normally, it was money. You'd buy it.

Marcello: Is this where this occupation script comes in again?

Slate: Yes, because, see, the natives were paid in it, too. Also, I think the 80 Kilo is where I sold my watch. I had a gold watch, and I sold it to one of the guards . . . gold-colored or gold-filled. I sold it for eighty dollars of script money. Of course, that Jap had more of that script than he knew what to do with. He had a big box of it, and I could have told him a hundred, and he'd have gave me a hundred just as fast. Well, then I had a little money to deal with the natives.

Some of the guys in camp would come up with something, so he'd give it to you to take it out and trade it for him. We'd get it back in camp easy because all we had to do was

hide it under our wood. A lot of times, we'd go out and cut wood and work like the devil today, get a load, and stack up another load for tomorrow. So we'd go out the next day and rest all day, and when we'd get ready to come in, we'd load up our load of wood and take off.

Marcello: Again, it's that little cat-and-mouse game or tug-of-war game that we talked about awhile ago.

Slate: Yes.

Marcello: Now, of course, as the "Speedo" campaign begins, and as the monsoons come on, there was a great deal of difficulty in moving supplies from the base camp up to 80 Kilo and 100 Kilo and so on, wasn't there?

Slate: Yes, supplies got awful low there for a while because, well, the railroad wasn't going, and the road wasn't nothing but a bunch of mud, and the river was up to where you couldn't get across it. So they had to let the river go down. It was too far from, say, the Thailand end of the railroad to bring supplies to us, and they couldn't get them from the other end to us. So once in awhile, they'd get supplies to us from somewhere, but one time we run plumb out of salt in camp, and that's one thing you can't go without for very long, is salt. Of course, that food didn't have that much salt in it. You just started getting weak, so they managed to get salt in there.

Marcello: So how are your rations affected as a result of the monsoons

washing out the bridges and so on?

Slate: Well, they had to cut them down. We was getting down to about half-rations. Then this "Speedo" campaign was over, and they went to hollering about the rations because they could get them in then. Then we was told that that fourth meal we was getting was part of our rations now, so we was going to have to stay on low rations until we evened the thing out. We thought we was getting something for nothing, but then that made us start hunting for more food.

Marcello: Now is it during this period when the health of the prisoners really begins to break down?

Slate: Yes, it begins to deteriorate bad.

Marcello: I guess in your own case, it was lucky for you that you got on this wood cutting detail.

Slate: Right, because while I was on it, the wood cutting detail, I got malaria and pneumonia at the same time. Of course, I was laid up for a month before I could even go back to work, but I got down to about ninety pounds, and then just as quick as I thought I could, I started back to working. Well, that picked my appetite up, and I started eating, because I was having to force myself to eat, you know, not doing anything. I think I was off just about a month, and then I started back to work, and then I started coming back up a little. I was weak as the devil for a long time,

but it seemed like it just put a little more strength in me, and I started coming out of it again. But they told me that when I first got sick, they thought I was a goner.

Marcello: What could they do for your malaria or your pneumonia?

Slate: Well, as far as the pneumonia went, nothing. There was a few quinine tablets around, so I was given some of them. They had a bunch of quinine that all the tablets was all busted up, so they made liquid quinine out of it. I didn't like to take it, but I took it. It'd make your ears ring and taste like I-don't-know-what. But I had to have it, so I'd go over and get me a shot of liquid quinine three times a day.

Marcello: Now I am assuming, from what you just said, that you were not sick enough that you were forced to go into the so-called hospital hut in the camp.

Slate: No.

Marcello: You didn't want to go in there, I guess.

Slate: I didn't want to go in the first place.

Marcello: Why was that?

Slate: Well, the reason I stayed out of it . . . see, I wasn't on the regular work force, and if they didn't have so many men . . . I wasn't counted as a work force, so that's the way I got out of it. I wasn't in a group . . . say, thirty of them would go out here, and two's sick, well, they'd go back in and see what's wrong with the two. Well,

I wasn't in any group like that, so when the work details went out, I just kind of made myself scarce.

Marcello: What you're saying, in effect, is that each work party had a quota of men that had to be on it, and if the Japanese guard didn't have his quota, then he would go through the hospital hut.

Slate: Right.

Marcello: And it was the Japanese guard who ultimately determined who could or who could not work, regardless of what the doctor said.

Slate: Right. If they couldn't see something wrong, he couldn't see why you couldn't go to work. Well, even with their own troops, a sick man was no good to them. They'd just as soon to walk off and leave one of their own laying in a ditch as not. So if they didn't have enough or you couldn't put enough people out on a work force in a day, they'd go digging the sick people out and send them. They did finally form what they called a light duty kumi--people that was on light duty--but I think they'd go out and break rock all day, sit down and break rock.

Marcello: Did you ever get any tropical ulcers?

Slate: No, I hit it lucky. I had one little one that I got rid of in a hurry.

Marcello: How did you get rid of it?

Slate: Somebody had a little medicine that I put on it, and it

stopped it right away, just about the time it started. And I kept it bandaged up and clean because I darn sure didn't want one of those ulcers, and it went away.

Marcello: I gather those ulcers struck terror into the heart of anybody that got one.

Slate: Oh, that's the one thing they was all scared of, was ulcers, because if they got started, there wasn't just almost no way to stop them. They just had all kinds of problems. Some of them lost legs from them, and some of them carried those ulcers until they got released, before they could get the right medical treatment to get rid of them. They even came up with a deal of putting maggots in them to clean them out, and they used to--what they call--"spoon" them out--cut all that dead flesh away with a spoon until you got to the pink, and hoping it was going to grow back.

Marcello: How about dysentery? Did you manage to avoid it, also?

Slate: I managed pretty well. One time, for about two days, I had a little. I was afraid it was going to run into dysentery, but it must not have been dysentery because it lasted about two or three days, and then it was over with. I just had the "runs."

Marcello: How do you believe you were able to avoid dysentery?

Slate: For one thing I made sure that any water I drank was boiled. I kept my mess gear clean, made sure it was

always good and clean. I ate a lot of that burnt rice--that charcoal. I tried to eat some of it nearly every day. At one time, they thought I had worms. The doctor told me, "Well, I haven't got anything for it." But we used to get these ol' black cigars, native cigars, and he said, "Eat one of them cigars. It'll get rid of them worms." I ate that cigar, and I got rid of the worms, because you could tell . . . every time you had to go, there was them worms. Well, after a few days, I didn't have any more worms. So he said, "Well, you had the kind that you could get rid of easy." Some of them had them that they wasn't that easy to get rid of.

Marcello: I understand that native tobacco was so strong that it'd probably kill anything.

Slate: That "wog" tobacco? You washed it in a bucket two or three times and let it dry before you even tried to smoke it. The water would turn out black.

Marcello: It had so much nicotine in it?

Slate: I don't know what was in it, nicotine or something, but you washed it normally three times and then dried it. It was light then, and it wasn't too bad. But just straight "wog" tobacco, forget it.

Marcello: It'd blow the top of your head off, huh?

Slate: You whistle at it, and it'd walk to you (chuckle).

Marcello: Around this time, do you see men under these conditions

simply giving up? Losing all hope?

Slate: Yes, there was a few of them.

Marcello: How can you tell when a man had given up?

Slate: He'd quit eating. He'd sit on his bunk all the time, or lay in it, or we'd always say he crawled up under his mosquito net and wouldn't come out. You could take stuff over there for him to eat, and he wouldn't eat it. He'd get to talking about, "I ain't going to make it," and, "They're not coming after me," and, "I don't like that. Can't you get me something else to eat? I wished I had this or that." In their mind, I guess, they just gave up. We was trying to help them. I and a lot of the others gave them nearly all our food, but they wouldn't even eat that, wouldn't take it. We'd go get theirs for them, get hold of special things for them, and they still wouldn't eat it. They'd just crawl up in that bunk, and you couldn't get them out. When they'd do that, you might as well go over on the hill and dig a hole for them because they wasn't going to last for two or three more days, and they'd be gone. There was several of them that I tried to help through the deal that just . . . you do everything you could and get everybody else who you thought might could help you with them, but still they'd lay down and die on you.

Marcello: What were the burial details like?

Slate: Well, somebody would go over . . . they'd send a detail over to dig the grave, and then they'd wrap the body in a blanket, and usually two to four would take it over. One particular time, a guy from the Navy still had a bugle with him, so he would say a few words, or somebody and then . . . I didn't make too many of them. I didn't care too much for them. But the ones I did make, this is the way we did it. Then he would blow "Taps," and then we'd cover it up and mark the grave.

Marcello: How was the grave marked?

Slate: We always tried to carve something to put up there that would possibly stay there. Some of them had one of the dog tags on it, if they still had their dog tags, but normally they would just carve something in wood and stick it up there. For where the graveyards were, they kept a plat map as to where they were buried. I understand they went back in, and from these maps took nearly everybody out. They found them.

But if it was any way possible for me, I didn't want one of the details. They had some guys around there that didn't mind it. Most of the time, they were real close friends of mine--a lot of them--and I just as soon not to go out, actually.

So then I'd get me another one to take care of, and I'd tell him, "You know what happened to the last one I

was trying to feed and help. He died on me. What are you going to do?" "Oh, I'm going to make it! I'm going to make it!" Some of them did, and some of them didn't. The big people, well, the ones that was actually heavy, seemed to have a harder time than the little ones. I was always small, so it didn't take much to keep me going. But the rest of them, it'd take a good bit to keep them going.

Marcello: How important or what role does religion play in a situation or a circumstance like this?

Slate: Well, I guess, for each individual it plays different, but in talking with them, the main thing is not to lose faith. I guess we all prayed a lot. We'd sit around, and sometimes somebody would have a little service or something, which, in the jungles and all, we very seldom had a chance to. Well, the Japs were Buddhists, and they kind of frowned on a bunch getting together and somebody talking to them: "What are they plotting over there? What are they going to do?" So usually it was each one to their own way of thinking about it and their own way of praying.

Marcello: What do you usually pray for?

Slate: Well, myself, it was get the war over with, me to stay healthy, the sick ones to get well, and for us just generally to get out of that mess we was in.

Marcello: I know that from time to time a couple or three individuals

would form a little group or clique that would look out for one another. When I use the term "clique," I'm not using that in a derogatory or a negative sense. How important was it to have a little group like that?

Slate: To have a little group like that was very important because if . . . I might be twenty feet down in one of these huts from somebody, not knowing they was too sick; but if you got three people together, you pooled nearly everything, and you took care of each other. So if one gets sick, you got two right there, right now, to help take care of you. With three scrounging was better than one trying to scrounge by himself. So it was just better, and, of course, you branched out. Your primary thing was "we take care of these three right now; we take care of ourselves; but we will help the others." So you kind of move over, and you help them. It's taking care of each other, and then you wind up in the whole, broad picture with everybody helping take care of everybody else. Maybe somebody that I'm with gets sick, and I know somebody down here that's got something that will help him. Maybe he doesn't know that the guy's got it. So we do a little swapping; we trade something, and we get it. Or we steal it.

Marcello: Who was in your clique? Do you recall?

Slate: Well, most of the time, I was with Brown.

Marcello: This is Lawrence Brown?

Slate: Lawrence Brown, because we was all together. I was switched around some with kind of different ones. The ones I actually started out with, they all died, a lot of them did. We got separated, and then a lot of those guys died. Then I guess about the closest one I was with all the time was Brown. The others, I was close to them, but we would happen to be the closest. There was a guy by the name of . . . well, shoot, we was trying to think of his name here a while back. I just flat forgot it. A guy by the name of Robinson. We were pretty close . . . there was two Robinsons. But he was the closest one. We was the two that stayed together nearly all the time. When they'd start to pull out a bunch to send somewhere, well, here we sit. They'd pull out another bunch to go somewhere, and we'd still be together or we'd both go. That was the way we didn't get split up at different times.

Marcello: So, in effect, then, the composition of one of these small groups or cliques might vary because of various transfers and things of that nature?

Slate: Right.

Marcello: But in your particular case, you and Lawrence Brown probably were together as long as any group.

Slate: We was together, I guess, as long as any group, or anybody.

Marcello: We haven't talked about the 100 Kilo Camp, but I assume

that from the 80 Kilo, you probably went to the 100 Kilo. Is that correct?

Slate: That's correct.

Marcello: And I assume that you were also there during that very, very nasty period of the "Speedo" campaign and the monsoons.

Slate: Yes, part of that and part of the dry season. When we moved into the 100 Kilo Camp, well, it was dry, but the monsoons was not too far off. I was still working on the wood detail when we moved camp.

Marcello: So in other words, while you were in the 80 Kilo Camp, then, the monsoons had not yet hit?

Slate: We'd just finished one, see, and then we had another one coming on--every six months.

Marcello: I see, I see.

Slate: See, they moved us from the--correct me if I'm wrong--from the 80 Kilo Camp to the 100 Kilo Camp. The 100 Kilo Camp was going to become a work camp, and the 80 Kilo Camp was going to become a hospital.

Marcello: That's right.

Slate: So that's the reason we moved to the 100 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: It was also at the 100 Kilo Camp where, in August of 1943, Dr. Lunkin died. What effect did that have upon the morale of the troops?

Slate: Pretty bad. It hurt a whole bunch of them. It let them down. They said, "If a doctor can't take care of himself,

who's going to take care of us?" Well, actually, the doctor run out of medicine. There wasn't too much he could actually do, anyway. He done what he could.

There was a guy by the name of Ed Worthington, who got awful sick. He was a pretty good-sized guy. Well, I was a little scrawny outfit and all, and in good shape, so he came around looking for blood to give to the guy, give him a blood transfusion. So he happened to have the same type that I did. To see if the blood would mix, he put it in a piece of broken glass and mixed it. He still had a medical kit and all, and he set it up from me and gave him a blood transfusion. I was laying down beside him, and he had this little pump, if I remember right, and got it started and let it run out of my arm into his to give him some blood.

Marcello: Was it a rubber tube and needles, or what was he using?

Slate: Yes, a rubber tube and needles--to give the guy blood because he needed it. He's still in the States now, and he's alive. Well, I was asked why I would give up some of my blood. I said, "Well, I'm in good shape, and maybe it'll help him." As far as we could figure out, it did.

Marcello: Do you see him at the "Lost Battalion" reunions?

Slate: Anymore, he's a different story. For some reason, he's in a shell. He won't come, won't talk to nobody. He worked for civil service after he got out, and he retired

from that, so he just doesn't associate with anybody. People have been by to see him, but he won't even invite them in. I think one of them did get in his house, and he didn't stay very long. I used to be in Oklahoma, and I called him several times. He'd make some excuse for me not going to his house. So what are you going to do? Quit. I figured if he wanted to see me, he'll call me or let me know. Then I'll go see him.

Marcello: I assume that you were never sick enough to go back to the 80 Kilo Camp.

Slate: No, I managed to keep myself well enough to miss that place because they used to refer to it as the "Death Camp." If you got sick enough to get sent down there, you was gone.

Marcello: This is perhaps a very minor question, but awhile ago we were talking about the "wog" tobacco, and I wondered what you would use for cigarette paper.

Slate: Well, once in awhile, you ran across paper. Every kind of paper that would make a cigarette paper, you'd save it. Some of them smoked their Bible. One guy told me, "You know, I read the Bible three times," because everytime he'd tear a page out, he'd read . . . those small Bibles . . . he would read that page before he'd smoke it, and he smoked three Bibles. So he read the Bible three times; he read every page before he'd smoke the page.

Marcello: How did the monsoon season affect the Japanese? Or the

Koreans?

Slate: Well, the Koreans had just about as much trouble trying to stay dry as we did. Their food even got short. Some of them even got sick.

The Japanese were actually afraid of cholera. So I don't know whether we was lucky or what, but about every six months, they'd come through with a team of medics, and they'd give us a cholera shot. So we wouldn't worry too much about getting the cholera.

The main thing I was worried about getting was dysentery because there was too many of them that didn't get over that, and a tropical ulcer. I didn't want that or dysentery.

Marcello: On the basis of what you said, I'm getting the impression that you just can't afford to slip up even one time.

Slate: No, you can't.

Marcello: In other words, you have to make sure that you drink only boiled water. If you slip up one time, it could be the last time.

Slate: Could be the last time.

Marcello: You make sure that mess kit is clean . . .

Slate: Gear is clean . . .

Marcello: . . . because it's only going to take one time.

Slate: I even scrubbed mine . . . if I didn't have soap or something, I'd use sand and scrub it out and then go scald it good. At least I didn't have anything in there. I made sure it

was out, and I kept it covered all the time. I got hold of a little ol' sack, and I kept that thing covered and closed all the time. I kept my eating utensils in it, and I kept that thing covered. That's one thing I protected, and I watched the water I drank. A lot of them would wash their teeth in this regular water. I wouldn't even do that. If I didn't have any boiled water, forget the teeth. I'll wash them when I get boiled water.

Marcello: Would each individual have to boil his own water, or would there be a common barrel or whatever where water was boiled and you can draw from it?

Slate: Well, at the kitchen they kept a big pot of water boiling all the time, and they would tell you whether that water had boiled. Maybe it'd just be steaming, but they said, "We've already boiled it." And they would keep this water hot all the time, and that was strictly your drinking water.

They'd haul water out of the river, and it'd be just as clear as it could be, but you was still afraid of it. They would say, "Well, you can drink that good water. It's running water." Well, they never did convince me that running water is pure, and I wouldn't drink it. Of course, I didn't like the taste of boiled water, but I didn't want to take a chance, either.

Marcello: When did you finally get out of the jungle?

Slate: Well, after they'd laid the rail by the camp we was in, they'd come by the area we was in, and they said . . . we kept hearing that the railroad was almost complete. It was almost together. Then finally we heard that it was. So then they said they're going to move us into Thailand.

Marcello: Were you at the 100 Kilo Camp when all this took place?

Slate: At the 100 Kilo Camp. Now they came up, and they picked 200 people out of there and put us in one group, and they told us they was going to move us into Thailand, and eventually we was going to Japan. Well, they picked us up--of course, the camp was right next to the railroad--and we got on the railroad there and rode into Thailand, and they put us in this camp there.

Marcello: What was the name of the camp in Thailand?

Slate: Oh . . .

Marcello: Was it Kanchanaburi?

Slate: Kanchanaburi, because the other group of Americans was at another part of this. I was over in a smaller compound, and we were getting better rations. They was going to give us more clothes because we were going to Japan as propaganda.

Marcello: Why were they taking you 200? Did they consider you as some of the healthier ones?

Slate: Well, we were the healthiest ones.

Marcello: And when did this occur?

Slate: Oh, well, just before we left Burma. They picked this

200 there. That's one time they looked us over to make sure we were the healthiest. They didn't actually give us a physical or anything, but they had to see each one of us. So they took us up there, and we was in this camp. We couldn't believe the rations they was giving us, and then here they come in with all kinds of Dutch clothes, so you could go over and pick out your sizes out of these Dutch clothes. They wanted each one to have so many--four sets, I believe. We got shoes and hats, and we could throw away all of our jungle clothes then.

If you wanted to, you could go out on a working party. They was smoothing the ruts in the roads, is about all they was doing. You could trade with the natives; they didn't care.

In this camp, my script had got low, because in the jungles, just what they paid you was about all you could get. There wasn't too much else. I still had a twenty-dollar American bill with me, and the Thais said they would exchange it for you and give you the rate of exchange. I was kind of leery of it, and I went out late one afternoon, and this guy tied a bill around a rock and throwed it over the fence. In a few minutes, here comes a rock back over with the ticals tied around it, the right amount. They was giving five to one. So I thought, well, "I'll go get mine the next day." I said, "Is he out there everyday?"

He said, "Yeah, you can peek through the fence and see him." So I tied my twenty-dollar bill around a rock, and throwed it over the fence, and in a few minutes here come a hundred ticals back over the fence, so I had money. But they would take you out to work and pay you a little bit--if you wanted to. You didn't have to.

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

Slate: I didn't like it.

Marcello: Why?

Slate: Well, I'd already heard that they had tried to get some to Japan, and they didn't make it. See, even through the Japanese, those rumors or that stuff would get back to you. Well, we stayed there . . . what? Three months, something like that?

Marcello: What did you do while you were at Kanchanaburi?

Slate: Nothing, if you didn't want to.

Marcello: Were you eating better there?

Slate: Oh, yes, I was eating a lot better. We played a lot of cards, played a lot of mahjong.

Marcello: Now all the time that you were there at Kanchanaburi, you were more or less awaiting shipment back to Japan?

Slate: Yes, to Japan. They was waiting on a ship to take us. The other group, I managed to get to go over and see them one time, but they wasn't scheduled to go like we were. But then they moved us out of there, and we went

into Bangkok, and they put us on a barge, and we headed for Saigon.

Marcello: You went down the river by barge from Bangkok to Saigon?

Slate: Saigon.

Marcello: That must have been a rather pleasant experience.

Slate: It was quite interesting because we slept outside on top of the barges most of the way, and it was quite a trip.

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

Slate: Oh, they was bringing in . . . of course, we was still basically getting rice. We was getting more vegetables, getting more meat and more of it. All the food, overall, was better. We had better rice, better vegetables, and more of them, plus we got more meat.

Marcello: I know there was a canteen there, too, wasn't there?

Slate: Yes, we got . . .

Marcello: It was fairly well-stocked?

Slate: Yes, that canteen was well-stocked, and they even brought in some jams and stuff was brought in there. So if you could get hold of the money, the canteen had a pretty good supply in it.

Marcello: And food is still your number one priority?

Slate: Right. Everybody is still worrying about food. Clothes, you find out, you could do without, but food, you couldn't.

Marcello: Okay, so you're on this barge, and you're on your way from Bangkok to Saigon. How long were you on this barge,

altogether?

Slate: I believe it took about almost two weeks to go down.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen in Bangkok, or weren't you there very long?

Slate: I wasn't there very long. All I did was just go through there. I was in and out.

Marcello: Now all this time, that is, between Kanchanaburi and Bangkok, have you come under any Allied bombing raids?

Slate: I left before the bombing raids started. I think there'd been one, but all the bridges around there were still standing. I left before they started bombing.

Marcello: Does anything eventful happen on this barge trip from Bangkok to Saigon?

Slate: Nothing that I can remember. It was just a trip, and there was nothing eventful or anything that comes to my mind that happened on that trip.

Marcello: Are there still these 200?

Slate: Yes, they're still moving the same group.

Marcello: Are you being fed on the barge, or does the barge come in and dock at certain points?

Slate: Well, they would dock at certain points and pick up food. They must have been running these deals before--moving their own troops--because they had places along that they'd pull in, and they'd pick up the food.

Marcello: Are the guards harassing you at all?

Slate: No, no harassment or nothing. They would just make sure the number were right all the time. They'd always count you. But as far as harassments, we didn't have much.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens when you get to Saigon?

Slate: Well, we get to Saigon, and we docked close to where our camp is. So we get off the barge, go across the street, and march into our camp.

Marcello: So you're right there by the waterfront.

Slate: Yes, I'm about, I would say, a hundred yards from the waterfront.

Marcello: When would all this take place? Would April of 1944 be a . . .

Slate: April, '44, . . .

Marcello: . . . ballpark date?

Slate: That's about a ballpark date for it.

Marcello: Describe what the camp looks like here at Saigon where you're being quartered.

Slate: Well, going in the front gate, of course, on the right, there's a guard gate. Over on the left was the Japanese barracks and their headquarters. Then you go in, and then there was the huts.

Marcello: Was this a regular army camp?

Slate: I understood it to have been, at one time, a regular army camp. It was setting next to a naval headquarters,and they had had troops in there. So we was given space on these little platforms that was built, just about like the others sleep on. You was always sleeping on a hard

deal on top of a blanket, and you had your little spaces there. By the camp they had a bit, oh, kind of like a fountain, a big deal full of water, and that's what you bathed out of, and that's what you got all your water out of. The water there was better than the water back in the jungles, and you didn't have to worry near as much about that. Still, the food was the problem.

When we moved to Saigon, the French were still in control of the country, but the Japs were occupying it. We had been there . . . I don't remember just when it happened, but the Japs finally took over from the French. We hadn't been there too long. So the French had been slipping stuff to us, and then the Japs took over control of everything, like, communications, transportation. See, the French still controlled that, so they took it over. For awhile, we didn't have much contact with the French--there was still lots of French there--and we was going on lots of working details.

Marcello: What kind of details were you doing here?

Slate: Well, we was working on the docks. We unloaded ships and loaded ships; we worked at the airfield; and we went to a Dunlop rubber plant and moved stuff around. Also, they had us working on barges loading gasoline. We went out to the ammunition dump, and we would load ammunition for them to haul off, and we put the ammunition and their

bombs in the bunkers as they'd bring it in.

Marcello: So you were doing a lot of military-related work here.

Slate; In Saigon, most of it was related military work. One of the first things I got into was putting up antennas for their long-range radios, like, you put three telephone poles high, so you dug the holes for all the guy wires and put the poles up. They put the thing out in the middle of a native cemetary, and you'd be digging the holes for the guy wires, and you'd dig into one of these graves. So you kind of dug your hole around that bamboo casket in there because that dead man had to go right there, because that's where that Jap said it was going to go, so you're going to put it there, anyway. So you'd kind of go around that. Then when working on the docks, we was unloading rice. The rice was coming in 100-kilo bags. It was one man, one.

Marcello: One man, one bag.

Slate: One man, one bag, and a kilo is 220 pounds. I'm a little guy, but I still got one man, one. But you didn't have to reach down and pick it up. There was four people who would stand there and pull the bags up, and you'd run under them, pick it up, and take it. I never did have to carry them too far. You usually take them from right on the dock and into the warehouse and dump them. But I always tried to get out of those rice details. I wasn't

quite big enough to handle that. I handled my share of the rice when I caught that detail, but . . .

Marcello: While you were in Saigon and around civilization, I would assume that you had all sorts of opportunities to steal.

Slate: Steal, and black market.

Marcello: How did the black market work?

Slate: Well, we would steal stuff from the Japanese and sell it to the natives--stuff that the natives didn't have access to that the Japs had. We would steal it off the Japs and sell it to the natives. The best market place was on the airfield because usually you was a way back at the back, either moving gasoline around or something, and they had some guards out there that didn't care. About once a week, they'd throw a big feed for you. They'd bring food out for you and everything.

One time there was a native who kept on after me because he wanted some spark plugs. I asked him how many he needed, and he said, "Six." Well, I tried to rack my brain to figure out where in the hell I can find six spark plugs. Well, the Japs had a truck parked behind the shed. That's where we'd go eat, and the guards would always get off somewhere and go to sleep. Well, there was a way you could move the flaps in this shed and go out the back, so we managed to get hold of a wrench--it took two of us--and we took the spark plugs

out of this truck, and that afternoon we sold them to the natives for a hundred piasters--I think their money is the piaster--a hundred piasters apiece. So we got us $800 right there.

Then another time we was hauling this aviation gas on oxcarts. They'd take a bunch of oxcarts over there, and we'd put about four drums of gasoline on it, or three, and then they'd run a little convoy all the way around to where they wanted us to move it to. You'd go around this curve . . . these natives would pay you for that gasoline, and you'd kick a drum off and roll it off in the ditch for him. When you came back by, that gasoline would be gone.

Then one time, we liked to got in big trouble. We was putting aviation gas in this big tank where they would back their truck up to load it. Somebody came up and found a fifty-pound sack of sugar, and we dumped it in that aviation gas. That didn't do the fighter planes too good the next morning when they took off. In fact, six of them cracked up. We don't know whether our sugar in that . . . oh, it was a hundred-kilo sack of sugar that we put in about five hundred gallons of gasoline. But they caught two Japs that was sabotaging their own planes out there, too, about two or three days later, and they shot them on the side of the runway. So I don't

know whether they blamed that on the Japs, but they told us that these guys were sabotaging their own planes.

Marcello: I'm surprised that you didn't keep that sugar for your own use.

Slate: Well, we could get a hold of sugar pretty easy, and it had a little oil on it, too. That's the reason we found it in this shed, see, because it had some oil on it and nobody wanted it.

Marcello: What kinds of things were the natives most eager to have in terms of your black market activities?

Slate: Well, any kind of cloth. I used to go on a work detail out at this hospital, and kind of at the back the Japs had a hut that they'd sleep in. Well, they had six-man mosquito nets, and the bottom of it had almost a meter of blue cloth. We'd steal that blue cloth when we could. One day I needed that much blue cloth (gesture) for a native at the refinery that I needed to get to the next day. I was going to try to steal some. So two of us went in there and then . . . we could get hold of razor blades and all pretty well, and we took a razor blade while that Jap was asleep and just cut that blue cloth off the bottom of that. I put it on like a diaper under my shorts and wore it back into camp that night, hoping they wouldn't have a shake-down because I was too bulky, which they didn't have.

Working on the docks, they used to every once in a while pull a . . . you'd start into camp, and they'd pull a big shake-down because you'd be unloading all kind of supplies, and, of course, everybody got their share of it. I walked in one time, coming from the air-field, and this bunch had just come in from the dock, and there was a stack of blankets five feet high and all kinds of other stuff that they'd been unloading a ship that day. They shook them down as they come in and took all this stuff off of them.

Marcello: What would they do if they caught you stealing?

Slate: Normally, very little. Take it away from you. See, all this stuff the guards would take for theirselves. I guess some of it they might have took back over, but normally they didn't know you was stealing stuff. I had my little hat that I'd take the lining out of, and you'd get bars of soap and stuff like that, and you'd put that in there. Small stuff, you could come in with. They was building a radio to hide there in camp, and they needed a transformer. I was going out to a place, and the guy described what kind of transformer he needed, so I had to borrow a Dutch mess gear that day to put it in because the American types are flat and this was a little bigger. So I borrowed a Dutchman's mess gear and took it out that day and brought a transformer back in that night. The first thing you

would say, "I hope we don't have a shake-down tonight," which I got it back in, no shake-down. But lots of times, I had stuff on me that they didn't catch.

Marcello: In general, then, by the time you get down to Saigon, things are kind or easing up considerably over what they had been, let's say, in the jungle or some of these other places.

Slate: Yes, it got a lot easier.

Marcello: You haven't mentioned anything about bashings or anything, and I assume that they've kind of slacked off quite a bit.

Slate: Yes, they slacked off. Very seldom does anybody get bashings now. It was nothing like it was with the bunch we had in Burma and all because a lot of our guards changed. Now some of the groups had about the same guards all the time. I don't know whether we hit it lucky or what, but everywhere you worked when I was in Saigon, the guy that was running the work would come after you. He would come walking into camp for ever how many men he was taking out, and we'd go out and get in his truck, and he'd take us to work. All that guard was supposed to do was to make sure we didn't take off because he ran the job. He'd come and tell us when to take a break, he'd tell us when it was chow time, and he'd tell us when to go to camp. And the guard was just the law, so it was kind of hard to irritate somebody when he doesn't

have nothing to do but just stand around all day.

Oh, they got to where they would talk to you a lot, and a lot of the . . . well, when we was putting up the radio antenna, they had what we called them "shooting star civilians." They had one big star with four little ones that worked down from it. They were civilian engineers who worked for the Army. We used to talk to them a whole lot. He'd try to argue with us and tell us as to why Japan went to war, why they had to have all the territory they had. Some of them actually knew there was no way they could win it, but that was the only route they could go, and they had to do something. Some of them was pretty sensible and sat down and talked to you.

Marcello: Were you at Saigon when the air raids occurred there?

Slate: When we went through our fourteen hours in the trenches? Yes (chuckle).

Marcello: Why don't you describe that? I think that's a very important part of your story. Had you had air raids before that fourteen-hour raid occurred?

Slate: The only thing we had had there was, as we called it, the "River Patrol." This Liberator would just fly up the river and then turn around and go right back out. We had seen a few fighter planes come over, and we knew things was getting closer when you could see the P-38's.

Everybody fell out for the work parties that morning.

Usually, it was around eight o'clock. A little before eight, everybody got out there, and they got counted for each group. We heard this noise, and you couldn't tell whether it was bombs dropping or guns shooting or what, but it was all at the airfield. Then, for some reason, the sirens hadn't gone off yet. From our camp we could see out over where the airport was. You couldn't see the airport, but you could see, you know, above it. We saw this plane go up and see these white parachutes come out, because that plane went down. Then all of a sudden, the sirens went to going off, and then we started looking around, and that sky started filling up with planes, and they didn't have the Rising Sun on them.

Marcello: What are the Japanese doing?

Slate: Well, they're all rushing us out to the trenches because out in the middle of the rice fields we'd dug out and built up mounds for air raid shelters. They sent us out the back of the camp, out into these trenches, and, of course, the way the tide comes and goes there, you're in water, and you're sitting in those trenches in waist-deep water.

We can see them strafing and working over the airfield. They'd just start working toward the area we were in, and we see them work on the underground oil storage tanks. They were just coming along that river, and then all of a

sudden they're all over the top of us. They're firing at all these ships that's tied up to the docks.

The only thing that we hated was that the naval ships had come in, the small ones, and were all tied up along there, too. So, of course, they started shooting at the planes, and the planes started shooting back. There was one plane that made a dive at the ship, and they must have caught it just right because that plane just almost disintegrated. I guess that was the only one . . . we saw one more go down, but that's about the only one they hit.

But they tore up everything else. They even come down that dock skip-bombing into the warehouses. About noon, they must have thought it was over with because they blowed the "all-clear," and they said they was going to go into camp and they was going to feed us. We didn't hardly get in camp until they was back again. They stayed the rest of the afternoon. When the sun was going down that afternoon, we saw the last two way off at the side, leaving, and then they finally blowed the "all-clear."

Marcello: What was the reaction of the POW's as the raid was going on and in the aftermath of the raid?

Slate: Well, while it was going on, they was hollering, "Give 'em hell!" and "I hope they don't get over too close to us; we'll watch the show from here!" Most of them that

was around me and with me there was saying that was a "show," so they was watching the show.

After it was over with, we got to wondering . . . it kind of started hitting our mind a little bit. They had gun emplacements around the camp, so they switched the guns to where they was pointed in toward us, where if something happened and they wanted to wipe that camp out, well, they could have done it. So that was always working on everybody's mind, too, a little bit.

Marcello: What did those air raids do for your morale?

Slate: Oh, they boosted everybody's morale. They'd say, "Well, at least we know they're getting close." We was on the airfield before that raid, and the sirens went, and all we saw was the P-38's come over. Well, if they had P-38's . . . well, we didn't know they were P-38's, but that if a plane was that small, you know they got to have a land base somewhere, not too awful far from here.

One of the guys standing out there said, "Well, I heard about them P-38's." He was telling a Dutchman, "They don't maneuver too good." And it looked like this P-38 just run out of this cloud and just almost done a 180-degree turn just straight back into it, and that guy said, "And he can't maneuver?" That was about the only remark that was made about that (chuckle).

Then they would come over once in awhile, and sometimes

they wouldn't even blow the sirens for them. I guess they was going as to how many was coming in.

Marcello: I guess you couldn't show too much joy around those Koreans.

Slate: They had one raid one day when they had to bomb through the clouds. We never did see the planes, but we heard the bombs coming down. We was out on a work detail. Inside a residential section was all machine shops, and they looked like regular houses. They laid that thing flat one day, and they was having to bomb through the clouds at that.

One night, I was out of our camp and down by the hospital camp, and we was doing something, so they just kept us down there that night. Shoot, we'd all gone to bed--it was kind of late--and a plane came over bombing. Well, the Japs were telling us the next day it was Chinese, and they didn't know what they was doing. But it come down that river, and they hit one warehouse and missed one, and they hit too close to us over there with a bunch of empty buildings.

But after the big raid, we was worried about the guards, especially. We didn't know what they would do. That was the main thing.

Marcello: By this time, do you know you're not going back to Japan? Or is that still in the back of your mind?

Slate: Well, no, we know we're not going to Japan because they couldn't get a ship into Bangkok to pick us up, so they

thought--this is what this guard that went from Bangkok with us down there said--they thought they could get us into Saigon, and they could get a ship in there. But they couldn't even get one in there to get us out. There wasn't many ships that came all the way up to Saigon. After we got there, well, they was all fairly small. They could get up there and get out because they never would stay too long. One time a big Red Cross ship came in, stayed about two or three days and then left.

Marcello: During this period at Saigon, speaking of the Red Cross, did you ever get any individual Red Cross packages?

Slate: As far as I remember, no. Nothing came into Saigon.

Marcello: Did you ever leave Saigon after this, or were you there when the war was completed?

Slate: Oh, I made one trip up the coast. They sent a bunch of us up to move supplies from one side of the river to the other side because the bridge had beem blown out.

Marcello: I know a lot of people who were at Saigon went up to Da Lat. Did you go there, or didn't you make it that far?

Slate: Oh, yes, I went to Da Lat, and we dug the tunnels. They was tunneling out the top of this hill for . . . they're famous for their tunnels, so we was up there digging these tunnels out for them. I worked on the tunnels for a while. The one I was working on, we never did finish it. I don't know where it was supposed to go to;

it never did join anything.

Marcello: Well, Da Lat was kind of up in the mountains, was it not?

Slate: Yes, Da Lat was a French resort town, and it was pretty cold up there. You'd come in to get your bath, and they had a community bathtub that they built a fire under it, and they'd let you go down there in this big tub and take your bath. Somebody had to build a fire under it and heat the water, and then you'd go down there to take your baths. It was actually cold up there, to us, because we hadn't been used to being that cold, and it was foggy.

They kept us working on it. I worked on tunnels all the time. They carried six of us over to work on this one tunnel because there couldn't be but two of you in there at a time because there was no ventilation. In about fifteen minutes, you was out of breath; there just wasn't any air in there. So they'd send two more in there to work awhile. Then we always got scared that them darn things was going to cave in on us, but they never did.

Marcello: Did they seem to be working you pretty hard here at Da Lat?

Slate: They didn't seem to be pushing us too hard. They wasn't pushing that hard because . . . well, we wasn't working that hard, or I wasn't, over with the ones I would go with.

Marcello: By this time, were you picking up some weight again?

Slate: Yes, I'd got back up to about 110 pounds then, 115,

somewhere in that vicinity. I had picked up all my strength. I was feeling a lot better, and I was eating anything I could get my hands on.

Before we went to Da Lat, we used to go out to this oil refinery. We were putting building mounds--started about fifteen foot from the base of a tank and build up dirt to the top of it--you know, to protect it from bomb blasts. The French that were at this place had a toilet out there that the Japs had marked for us to go in. Well, there was another one backed up to this fence, and the French that was out there used to pass money through it to us all the time. You'd go in there, and he'd pass the money in. Well, a lot of the money that we'd get hold of there, we'd send it down to our hospital camp, you know, where the sick was because they let them buy stuff.

They'd bring stuff into our camp that, like, I remember one time they brought them a big crocks of jelly and stuff in. This Jap commandant come over there, washed his hands good, rolled his sleeves up above his elbow and run his hand all down in it to see that they hadn't slipped anything in it to send into camp. He said it was all right; we could have it.

But we was trading with the natives and all at Da Lat, up in that area, more freely than we could the other places.

Marcello: Do you think by this time that the Japanese are sensing that they're not winning the war?

Slate: Yes, it's beginning to show. The ones that know are beginning not to give a damn. There's nothing they can do about it, anyway. They don't push you. Now these little dummies that think that they're going to win the war--there's no way they're going to lose it--now they're still little "eager beavers," and you have to watch them. But some of them just flat let you know that they don't know how long it's going to last, but they know that the Japanese are not going to win it.

When we left Da Lat and went over to move this stuff across the railroad, we would move it at night because they had the Liberator that ran the railroads during the day and checked all the clocks between twelve and one o'clock. They shot all the clocks out, they didn't have anything else to shoot at, so they shoot the clocks.

Marcello: You mean the clocks in the railway stations?

Slate: Yes, all of them was punched between twelve and one o'clock. About the time we left Burma, they started running that railroad, and they punched all the stations that had a clock or had the little outhouses. They shot up all the little outhouses.. We found out right quick not to go to the outhouses, not when they was making the run, because they was shooting them up.

Marcello: I hadn't realized that they had been working over the railroad when you were still in the jungle.

Slate: Well, they come by once in awhile. It wasn't an everyday business like it got . . . it was getting to be where between twelve and one o'clock they was beginning to come by, but not everyday. Then when we was in Thailand, you could hear them at night, coming over and going somewhere, and then you could hear them later in the morning going back, because I've been out early in the morning, and these guys was coming over so low that you could see them sitting in the door and looking around. Lights would be on in the plane; they wasn't running blackout or anything.

We used to steal . . . across this bridge, but we was moving a lot of Jap officers' supplies, which is better than the enlisted men's supplies, but the Japs was afraid to steal it. They was always after you to steal them something. We used to steal their sake.

One night we was moving this stuff across, and in this little hut was a Japanese soldier. They was moving the soldiers, and he got sick. Well, he couldn't keep walking, so they just kicked him over to the side and went on without him. He'd been a day in that hut, anyway, with no help or nothing, so we got some food for him, got some water for him, gave him some sake. I don't know

what was wrong with him, and we were trying to figure out what to give him that'd maybe help him or something because they just ditched him. He wasn't giving us any trouble, so it wasn't costing us anything to do it. The next thing we was over there, we left a bunch of stuff for him. The next night he was gone. I don't know whether he managed to join another group or what, but he was gone.

We'd steal all this stuff and take it into camp for these guards and all and give him stuff, and then they'd call the guy that was in charge of us up and chew him out because we was stealing (chuckle). His own guards was the ones that was getting most of the stuff.

Marcello: I gather that virtually all of these bridges up in that area had been bombed out, and the trains could only come as far as the bridge, and then they would have to unload to another train on the other side. Is that the way it usually worked?

Slate: That's right. They'd go along and more or less like skip-bomb. If it was a nine-span bridge, they'd just knock out every other span. They'd throw a bomb under it, and the way they was on these concrete pilings, they'd just raise it up and just drop it down there in the water, so the bridge was actually useless. But we was always afraid of falling in that darn river at night and going down the river because the first time somebody run across

anything to drink, they opened up a case of it and set it beside the trail, and as you'd go by, you'd stash bottles of it up and down on each side (chuckle).

Marcello: Are you receiving very much official news from the outside world? Now you have evidence of what's going on as a result of these bombing raids and the damage being done to the bombers and so on.

Slate: Well, at this time, we're not, because we're away from Saigon, and the people up in this area, the only thing they're doing is staying out of where they're bombing. This railroad that was there, they bombed it pretty good. They came in and strafed it a couple of times while we was up there.

Then all of a sudden, for some reason, they quit moving these supplies across the way they were. They took part of us and sent us back to Saigon, put us on a train and sent us back. I started, then, going out on regular work details because it wasn't too long after that until the war was over with.

Well, the first thing we realized that something was happening was when they got to the point that they didn't care whether you worked or not when you went out. Then they started asking us what secret weapon the U.S. had because they dropped these bombs, and it just took all the flesh off of people, and it had burned them to

death, and it just destroyed whole towns. We had no idea what in the world they was talking about. Well, until the bombs were dropped in Japan, I don't guess anybody knew what the heck they were or what was happening. But that was when the atomic bombs had been dropped, so they were trying to figure out what in the world it was. The one that was asking me was scared to death. He said, "Reckon they're going to drop one in Saigon?" I said, "I haven't the slightest idea. I don't know." Then, you know, that rocked on a few days before the Japs decided to quit.

Marcello: Incidentally, before this happened, if I may interject this question, did you learn about Roosevelt's death?

Slate: Yes, I had.

Marcello: Was this told to you by the Japanese?

Slate: By the Japanese.

Marcello: What seemed to be their reaction, and what was your reaction?

Slate: Well, you know, we really didn't know what Roosevelt had been doing during the war and all. In fact, we was kind of surprised he was still president because actually we thought they was lying to us. A president normally stayed about two terms, and there'd been a special deal for him to go three terms. There he was--what--in his fourth term? We was kind of surprised about it. Then they told us who was president, and we wanted to know who in

the heck he was, because I don't think anybody had heard of Harry Truman. We thought it was actually just a bunch of hooey. I did.

Marcello: But did the Japanese seem rather happy that Roosevelt had died?

Slate: Yes, they said they had a . . .

Marcello: I guess this was a good omen, as far as they were concerned.

Slate: What they would say is, "No more Roosevelt," and laugh about it. But most of them didn't even know Harry Truman's name. Harry Truman's name did come up, but we still didn't know who in the heck they was talking about because I don't think he was that high in politics when we left.

Marcello: Well, this brings us up to those times right before the end of the war. Why don't we talk about how you found out that the war was over and what your reaction was to it. Now you're back in Saigon again, is that correct?

Slate: I'm back in Saigon. Now the day before they brought word into camp, I was out on a work detail going to the airport, and the French had got brave because they'd come riding by us on their bicycles and say, "La guerre finie!" So we started listening, and then we said, "Well, we'll get the word sooner or later." But we was kind of leery of what was going on. Then I think it was the next day . . . well, one thing that happened there was that this old general didn't want to give up--the general that had

command of that area.

So we didn't get the word right away, and I don't remember whether it was the next day that I heard it or the next, when one morning there was no work details. So all of a sudden they said, "We're moving." We wanted to know where in the heck they was moving, and they said, "Get everything," and here comes all the trucks. They moved us out to these French barracks and told us the war was over with.

Marcello: Was there any emotion on the part of the Japanese when they gave you this news?

Slate: Well, they sent a letter, more or less, over to us, a note stating the fact. I don't think they came over. One thing we noticed that happened, and it happened fast, was the Korean guards we had had all of a sudden changed into regular Japanese soldier guards. They took over the guard. The Koreans disappeared.

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

Slate: Well, my reaction . . . I was happy and trying to figure out what the Japs was going to do because we knew we had to play it cool and wait for the Allies to come in. We had no idea of how far they were from us. So we just sat back, and they moved us over into these French barracks, and the French moved in with us because the natives started giving the French all kind of trouble.

Me and another guy decided there one day while we was . . . we was sitting up the fence watching this guard. He was cleaning his rifle, and he opened it, cleaned out the inside, and I said, "You know, he ain't got no shells." He said, "What?" I said, "No." He opened up this little pouch that you carry shells in, and there wasn't no ammunition in there. It was just a deal to clean his rifle with. So he said, "We're going to fix that tomorrow. We're going to go to town and see what's going on." So over that fence we went the next day, and we came back with new clothes, bags of food, and then everybody started going, and that's when the French started moving in with us.

Marcello: I was going to say, you were in a sense lucky that the natives didn't mistake you for some of the French and . . .

Slate: Well, we was going down the street, and they took us different because we were dressed different. That's one of the ways they could tell us. They had surrounded this French house, and two of those guys came out and asked us if we'd go the other way. We told him we had to go that way to get back to camp, so they stopped everything and just opened up a place in that road for us to go through it. He said, "I wish you'd go on back to camp, so none of you get hurt," Then we thanked him and said goodbye.

Marcello: So you mentioned that this person advised you to go back into camp again, and you took his advice.

Slate: Well, that's where we was headed, anyway, so we took his advice and went on to camp to find out what in the heck was going on.

Well, that day this American major came into camp, and they had a jeep and a trailer with them and a radio, and they told us that as soon as they could make contact that there would be planes down to pick us up. He described the airplanes--they was the old C-47's with the sweep-back wings--and he said, "Now if you're in town and you see those coming into land, you be back to camp because they're going to start flying you out."

In the meantime, we had started going into town, moved a Filipino orchestra in camp with us that the Japs had moved out of the Philippines out there, in the Jap officers' club. They was giving all these Frenchmen so much trouble that they moved into camp with us. This major's wife lived in Saigon. So one night, it was ten of us that went with him into . . .

Marcello: This is an American major whose wife is in Saigon?

Slate: Yes, whose wife is in Saigon.

Marcello: That was rather unusual, wasn't it?

Slate: Yes, it was. We thought the same thing, but he said, "I know right exactly where to go," so we went with him. We

had weapons with us because he brought weapons in with him--.45's. So after dark, we went into town, and he said, "Now we want to watch this whole block," so we was just kind of scattered up and down the block, watching it. He goes over and knocks on a door and goes in a house. After awhile, he comes out with two people, and he introduces her as his wife, and they go back to camp with us. We all take off . . . they had suitcases with them, and back to camp we go.

Marcello: Was she an American?

Slate: That's what I'm trying to remember, if she was. I don't think she was. I think she was French, but he knew where she was--how to get from that camp straight to that house. We took her out and took her back to camp, and she stayed in camp with us.

Marcello: Was there any sort of an immediate celebration, right after you heard about the Japanese surrender and that the war was over?

Slate: Everybody was happy, but we was still feeling the Japs out.

Marcello: Did you celebrate in any way?

Slate: Oh, yes, when we found out for sure that it was over, then we really celebrated. We went into town--people did--and then they brought booze out there to us, and, man, we had all kind of booze. We had all kinds of food,

because they started bringing food in there--the Japs did--that you wouldn't believe. If you walked out the gate, they wouldn't say anything. They said they was staying there to keep the natives out. Well, we could have kept the natives out; we wasn't worried about that. But if they wanted to stay there, that was all right with us.

Shoot, we'd go into town, and they just opened the town to us. I was down by the big prison in Saigon when they opened all the doors and let everybody out of there, and all these relatives was standing around out there and everything.

I'd run into a Frenchman, and he was more native than he was French. So much was going on along about then, but there was one more with us. He said, "I've got something at my house that I've had hid for four years," and he said, "It's time to dig it out." So we went up to his house with him, and he dug up part of his floor and dug a hole in there, and he pulled out . . . he had a bunch more stuff in there, but he pulled out a bottle of Vat 69. He said, "I can't think of a better time or a better people to open this and celebrate it with," so we sat there and drank his bottle of booze. We got through with it, not used to drinking and all, and we wasn't in too good a shape. We decided we better

head back for the camp again. So we went back to camp.

Then more things started happening. Planes started coming in taking the sick out--the sickest out first.

Marcello: Are you beginning to get impatient? Now the war's been over how long by this time?

Slate: About two weeks.

Marcello: Are you getting impatient? Do you want to get out of there?

Slate: Well, not exactly. We're free and we're the ones that's not too impatient because, see, they've asked for volunteers ready to go. But we was meeting the people in town, and you was just free, and you was having a ball. You could do just about anything you wanted to. Nobody'd ... . in fact, they'd help you (chuckle). So I was free, and I wasn't going to rush things. You know, I wasn't in no rush and didn't say, "I've got to get out of here on this next plane," or say anything like that. They came up and say, "Well, we need so many for this plane," and they got the sick out first.

They brought the big group of planes in to take us all out the next day, so we throwed a big party for all the pilots and all that night. We had that band out there and, of course, had all them French and the women there for the . . . then our pilot, when we took off, as soon as we took off, he laid down in the floor and

went to sleep because he said he had a hangover and the co-pilot could take care of it. Our C-47 didn't have a cargo door on it because on the trip before that, he was flying some mules over the Hump, and they'd kicked the door off. He heard that we was down there. He happened to be a Texan. He said, "I wasn't going to stick around when they wanted people to come down to pick you up. The heck with that door! Let's go!" His automatic pilot didn't work, his radio didn't work, so he had to follow another plane. So that's the way we got into Bangkok. We went through Rangoon, and we was running out of fuel--in a storm--and the planes started landing across the runways, any way they could get on the ground. We got refueled, got us another plane, and went on to Bangkok, then.

He asked us, when we was about to run out of fuel, "Do you want to land on the ground or out in the water?" We said, "It don't make any difference. What do you think about it?" He said, "Well, I think the water's better?" We said, "Okay, if we've got to go down, let's go down in the water." He said, "I don't understand you guys." He said, "Does anything bother you?" I said, "Why should it now?" We said, "You can get this thing down, can't you?" He said, "Yeah." So he landed it, and then we went on to Bangkok. Then we changed planes

there, a Thai plane. They flew us into Calcutta.

Marcello: Is this where you really got your first square meals--in Calcutta?

Slate: Yes, that's where the 142nd General Hospital, and that's where we'd asked, "Are we supposed to be on a diet, or what do we eat, or what?" They said, "You can eat anything you want."

Marcello: All this time, what were you craving the most?

Slate: Just good, solid food. I wanted a steak, and some potatoes--stuff that we hadn't had in three-and-a-half years. I wanted a big bowl of ice cream. Well, I got that. We walked in that mess hall, the first time when we got over there and got to the hospital for the first meal, and they said, "If you don't see it here, ask us and we'll see if we've got it."

Shoot, everybody went by there and filled their plates up, and there was no way you could eat it all. Our stomachs wasn't in shape to eat that kind of a meal. So you sat there and ate a little bit, and I'd say that 80 percent of your food was still on the plate, and you was so full you couldn't hardly stand it. You just had to let your stomach build back up to that.

When I got off of the bus at the hospital, a Red Cross gal met me. In fact, she was meeting them all. She knew who was on this bus. She handed me a Coke, and

she asked me, "What's your name?" She fumbled through and handed me a letter from home. Then they showed us over, and then they took us over and got us clothes, and they paid us some money because that's the first time we'd had any American money.

Marcello: When you were out of Saigon, did you have on your set of khakis that you had been saving?

Slate: I sure did.

Marcello: How'd they fit?

Slate: A little big, but it fit. I flew out in it, and one of the first things that was asked of me when I got into Calcutta was where in the heck did I get that uniform. Some of the rest of them wanted to know where I got it, too. Actually, I'd kept it wrapped up, and I was using it for a pillow most of the time. Of course, it kind of had some creases that was a little dirty and all that, but I wore it out, and I also had a hat, an overseas cap, that was stuck in there. I had on some old . . . I was trying to think of . . . oh, I'd got a hold of some sandals or something, and I was wearing these as shoes. I throwed them Jap shoes away, and when I was in Saigon, I'd got hold of some sandals. Of course, I didn't have regulation shoes on, but I could care less, or a regulation belt. I don't think I even had a belt on. I don't remember.

Marcello: I guess when you got to Calcutta, you saw your first WAC's, too, did you not?

Slate: Yes, we got a good ride with one of them. Man, she was wheeling that bus all over that place, and that's the first time that we knew that they had WAC's.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you saw these WAC's?

Slate: "Well, what's going on? When did they get them?"

Marcello: Are these the first white women that you'd seen, too?

Slate: Well, we saw . . .

Marcello: Except for the French?

Slate: The Americans, well, we saw some in Bangkok. They were with the Red Cross. In Rangoon, we saw some nurses. In fact, there was a nurse that got on the plane in Rangoon with us. There was a couple of the guys that sat her down when we took off and said, "There's nobody needs a nurse." They sat her down and said, "Now start talking. We don't care what you say, just talk."

Marcello: Were you given physical examinations and so on here at the 142nd General Hospital?

Slate: Yes, we were all given physicals to see we had anything that needed immediate treatment. Well, I was lucky--I didn't. If they could catch us, they'd run all these tests on us because they was having trouble keeping up with us. They took us over and got us some clothes, paid us, and then they made the mistake of telling us

how to get to town. Then we'd go out and catch a cab and go to town, and if you got in the wrong place, the MP's would bring you back. Then you'd go out the back gate, out of the back of the hospital, catch a cab, and beat the MP's back to town (chuckle).

Marcello: Are you at the point where you're not really that eager to take orders from anybody?

Slate: Where? In Calcutta?

Marcello: Yes.

Slate: Yes, we're at the point here, that we . . . in fact, we're not taking orders from very many people.

Marcello: You'd been yelled and screamed at and kicked and hit for three-and-a-half years, and I assume you were not about to take orders from anybody.

Slate: That's right. We wasn't taking . . . they got to the point quick to ask us to do something. When they'd ask you, you would do it, or you'd tell them when you would do it, but they learned right quick not to come out with all these orders. "You do this now," and "You better do this," and "You've got to do that," and "Oh, you got to do this," went out the window.

Another thing happened to me while I was in Calcutta. I went over to the mess hall one morning to eat, and I got my tray and sat down. There was two or three of us. I looked over, and I said, "Japs!" They looked like . . .

well, they were Japs, but they were American Japanese. They all had those kind of like a Thompson sub-machine gun slung over their shoulder, had hand grenades on them, and they were eating, but they had all this stuff on them, and, man, they was ready for battle.. So I walked over and asked them what was going on. They said, well, they heard that there was still some prisoners in Java and said, "We don't know what's going to happen." They said, "We're going after them, one way or another we're getting them, and we'll take either one." We asked them then if they were Japanese, and he said, "Yeah," They had a heck of a time going to that part of the country because they had some awful good friends out there that was prisoners of the Japs that were Americans, and they didn't like what had happened. Commandos is what they were.

So they left and told us, "Goodbye! Happy landing!" Sure enough, they went down and picked up some and brought them back in. They said they didn't have a bit of trouble. I never did see the crew anymore, but I saw the ones that they picked up.

Marcello: While you were at Calcutta, did you ever give any depositions for war crimes against any of the Japanese or Koreans that you had encountered?

Slate: Yes, they had people there interrogating us. They was wanting names. All you had to do with a lot of them was

just give descriptions.

Marcello: I guess you didn't know the names of most of those guards, did you?

Slate: No, and they said, "Well, we know from the nicknames." You know, back when I told you about the interpreter that gave us so much trouble in Burma, well, he was caught, or they had got him somewhere in Rangoon, and he was tried and executed. Now that's what I always understood.

This one Jap told me--I got to where I could speak a pretty good mix of English and Japanese together with some of them--as to why they took the Korean guards off. He said they was afraid for them. They had to get them out because they were afraid of what we would do to them. Well, some Australians was after some of them, and they caught them in Saigon trying to . . . they recognized one of them with a big scar on the back of his neck in native clothes. They found him, and they said, "Well, he ain't going back to Korea." Don't ask me what they done to him because I don't know. But they just said, "He's not going back," because they claimed that he had killed two or three Australians. He was one that I hated to go on a work detail with. He usually picked the Australians to take out. We all knew his reputation.

Now this other one that went out with us, they used to take the fuzz out of the inside of bamboo and put it

in his tea when he was filling up his canteen. Well, you know what that fuzz out of bamboo does to your stomach, because he was always having stomach problems. They almost got him before the war was over with that way. They had him sick. He had lost a lot of weight.

I said, "Somebody else will take care of the guards. I'm not going to bother them or look for them." But I told them everything that I could, and nearly everything I told, they had already heard about it. It was just somebody that happened to be off from the rest of them that would come up with something new that they hadn't already found out..

Marcello: When you get back to the United States, did you have to spend any additional time in any hospitals?

Slate: No. I went through Holleran General Hospital in Staten Island and took another physical. I stayed there approximately two weeks, and then they sent me to Fort Sam Houston. I picked up orders right after I got there for a thirty-day convalescent leave.

I went home and then reported in to Hot Springs, Arkansas, for two weeks at the Arlington Hotel, I believe, the big hotel. I spent two weeks there. We all had a ball there, I guess. I know I did. Then I left there with another convalescent leave and reported into Camp Fannin at Tyler to be processed out.

In the meantime one of the guys that was ahead of me coming back to the States, Lawrence Brown, had got on recruiting duty in Fort Worth, and he said, "Well, why don't you get on recruiting duty here in Fort Worth. See if you can get on it?" Roy Morrow was with me, and we started through the process of getting discharged. Then I got up one morning, and I was already late for processing, and they was giving me a hard time, and I said, "Let's just go re-enlist." Roy said, "Okay, let's just go up to the recruiting office, and we'll re-enlist." We found out we could get on recruiting duty, so we re-enlisted. They got a tentative approval of it. Dallas accepted us, so we left there on another thirty days, but we had to report into Fort Sam Houston. Then they had to get approval through Washington for our assignment. Well, with the request with a four-star general's name on it, we got the request. So we was assigned there to the Dallas recruiting district over in Fort Worth. I stayed there until 1949.

Then from there I was transferred to . . . the Fourth Army Recreation Center was open at Fort Crockett in Galveston. I went down there and stayed until they closed it.

That's the first time I got transferred to Fort Hood. I had to stay in Fort Hood a year because they had

to stay with the troops three years before you could go back on recruiting duty. Then I applied for recruiting duty and went to Beaumont. I spent two years in Beaumont. Then I was transferred back to Fort Hood again. This time back in there, I got orders and I was shipped to France, and I spent almost three years over there.

I came back to Brooke General Hospital. They sent me back out of France as a TB patient, which I didn't have. I tried to tell them I had scars on my lungs. They put me through all kinds of stuff in Brooke General.

Marcello: Were these scars on your lungs from you bout with pneumonia?

Slate: Yes. Then I left Brooke General, and I was assigned back to Fort Hood again. Everytime I turned around, I was back in Fort Hood. Then we went on maneuvers, and the unit I was in, after the maneuvers was over, was left in Fort Polk. They re-opened it.

My enlistment was up, so I wanted to get to Fort Chafee, Arkansas. So I had to go to Alexandria, Louisiana, re-enlist for Fort Chafee, Arkansas, and I got assigned there. Then they started closing the school up, so they transferred me back to Fort Hood again.

I was assigned to the Second Missile Command. It was an experiemental unit. I was assigned to it and stayed almost two years, and then they transferred the unit to Fort Carson, Colorado. I tried to get out of it

several times. Anybody that was in there had a clearance, so they didn't want to turn you loose.

So my twenty years was up. When I had nineteen years and six months in, I put in for retirement. Then when my twenty years rolled around, which happened . . . the twenty years was on the twenty-seventh of the month, but they retire you on the last day of the month, so that throwed me twenty years and three days retiring, so I retired.

Marcello: So you actually never were out of the service at all from the time that you entered in 1940?

Slate: No, I never was out.

Marcello: As you look back upon your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, Mr. Slate, what do you see as being the key to your survival? In other words, why did you come back and others didn't?

Slate: Well, the main thing the Japs tried on a lot of us was trying to break our morale. They couldn't do it. We just flat didn't give up. You took care of yourself, and there just wasn't no "give up" to it: "I'm going back." That's what was in my mind all the time. I guess that's the reason I'm back now, because I guess a few times I could have just flat gave up, but I just couldn't see it. Especially when I caught the pneumonia and the malaria and all at that time, I could have laid down there and died just as easy as anything, but I just couldn't see

me doing that. I had some of them encouraging me to get up and let's go, and I said, "I'm getting up, and here we go." I never had anymore thoughts of it after that.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Slate, that exhausts my list of questions. Is there anything else that you would like to add before we close this interview? I still have plenty of tape left, and I was wondering if there is anything concerning some of the subjects that we've previously talked about that perhaps we haven't covered.

Slate: You know, I thought of them awhile ago, and now I can't even think of them--the things that happened at different times. Oh, when I was in Kanchanaburi the water situation at the camp was bad. So there was some of us who decided we'd dig a well. So we went just outside of camp, digging this well. We'd put the deal on top, and then we'd bring the dirt up with a bucket and all. We finally hit the water and all, and the Japs was furnishing us with the posts for the shoring, and the darn thing caved in on us. We never did get too much water out of it, but it's a wonder it hadn't caved in before because we didn't shore it up until we got down in the water. There are at least two, maybe three, of us that might not be here for that darn well caving in on us.

Marcello: How deep was it?

Slate: It was about twenty feet deep. You'd go down a rope ladder

into it.

Marcello: Was there simply not enough water in the camp in Kanchanaburi?

Slate: No, there wasn't enough water, and they had to haul it in. The Japs that was there, they was wanting a well dug, trying to get more water.

There at Kanchanaburi, there was a Dutchman that I'd seen back in the jungles at different times that was carrying a violin with him . . . busted. Then when we got into Kanchanaburi, here that Dutchman was in that camp, and he was still carrying that same busted violin. I got to questioning about the thing, as to whether he could even play it or not. So he just kind of laughed and went on about it and didn't say nothing. But musical instruments had showed up in this camp, and he was out there one night, and he started fiddling with that violin.. He'd play almost anything you wanted, because somebody'd popped up, "'Chicken in the Straw,' do you know that?" Man, he played it. We come to find out . . . I'd tried to find his name, I wanted to remember it, but he was rated, at the time he was captured, as one of the world's ten greatest violinists. That violin he was carrying and was protecting so was a Stradivarius. He said, "I can get it fixed," and that's the reason he carried that thing around and protected it so.

Another guy that was there was also a Dutchman. You

know, I told you back earlier about in Bicycle Camp about playing a lot of chess. There was a Dutchman there, and they was always out sitting out playing chess and all. They had a little deal going there one afternoon. They was wanting ten chess players. So he played ten of us at one time and beat all ten of us. At one time, he was the Mid-European chess champion. We started running across some of those people.

A big, tall Dutchman came through there waking us up and telling us that breakfast was ready the first morning in there--a big, tall, baldheaded Dutchman hollering, "You damn Texans, get up! Breakfast is ready! Time to eat!" We tried to figure out where in the world he learned his English and learned talking about Texans. He said, "If you'd have worked in Sumatra with Texas crews as long as I have, you'd know how to talk like them."

So there was some interesting people that we ran across up there. After that, we got separated from everybody again, and we went off in your little groups. I can't think of anything else.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Slate, I want to thank you very much for having participated in our project.

Slate: Well, I enjoyed it very much.

Marcello: You have a real sense of history, and I'm sure that historians and scholars will find your comments most valuable and

informative when they use them to study this subject.