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Interview with  
WELDON O. WESTERN  
February 16, 1987

Place of Interview: Saginaw, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: *Weldon Western*  
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Weldon O. Western

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello      Date of Interview: February 16, 1987

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Weldon Western for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 16, 1987, in Saginaw, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Western in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. More specifically, Mr. Western was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, of the 36th Division, which was the Texas National Guard. Mr. Western was a member of Service Battery in that unit.

Mr. Western, 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--things of that nature.

Mr. Western: I was born on March 30, 1914, in Chico, Wise County, Texas.

Dr. Marcello: Did you go to school there in Chico?

Mr. Western: No, sir. I attended grade school--a community grade school--in Lone Star community and finished the seventh grade there,

at which time I went on, then, to Alvord High School and graduated from Alvord High School in May of 1934.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got into the Army. I think you told me before we started the tape that you were actually drafted, initially, into the service.

Western: Yes, sir. I registered for the draft in November of 1940, I believe, when they mobilized the National Guard. My order number was twenty-six, which put me pretty close to having a cinch on being drafted in the first call. The first call came on January 27, 1941, at which time I was drafted. I got my physical examination at Dallas and was inducted in the service and sent to Camp Bowie, Brownwood, Texas, for my basic training.

Marcello: So at that time, you were not a member of the 36th Division. You were simply a draftee.

Western: That's right. I was a draftee. I was in the infantry-- Company D, 142nd Infantry. I was in the 4th Platoon. I got my basic training there. We had thirteen weeks of basic training at that time. When that thirteen weeks of basic training was completed, why, we had our May Day parade; and after the May Day parade, we went on maneuvers for about a week.

We came back from that maneuver, and I went to see one of my friends in the 2nd Battalion, Service Battery--Ardel Redwine. We were talking, and I told him I didn't think

much of that infantry, that I wish I'd gotten in the field artillery. He said, "Well, you could still get in the field artillery." He said, "Well, what do you do?" I told him I was a mechanic and that I could be a mechanic. He took me to his first sergeant, and the first sergeant interviewed me. Then the first sergeant called the motor officer, and the motor officer came down and interviewed me and told me to go back to my unit and put in for a transfer to 2nd Battalion, Service Battery, 131st Field Artillery. That must have been some time about the 10th of June, I imagine, in 1941 that I put in for the transfer. In about three days, my company commander called me in and told me that I was no longer a member of that outfit, that I was moved to 2nd Battalion, Service Battery, 131st Field Artillery.

Marcello: At that time, had the 2nd Battalion been detached from the 36th Division yet?

Western: No, sir. We were still in the 36th Division. We were part of the 36th Division until about the 1st of November, 1941, and then we were detached and given this APO number, PLUM, San Francisco, California.

Marcello: Had the unit gone on those Louisiana maneuvers yet when you transferred?

Western: No, sir, they had not gone on the Louisiana maneuvers. We got our orders to detach after the Louisiana maneuvers.

Marcello: So you actually did participate in those Louisiana maneuvers.

Western: No, sir, I did not. Somehow or another, I got a strep throat, and they put me in the hospital about two or three days before the maneuvers, and they wouldn't let me out to go. I was on a rear detachment and did stockade guard duty about three days a week all the time they were gone. I had to guard the prisoners that were in the stockade.

Marcello: So you were not on those Louisiana maneuvers. When they returned from those maneuvers, then did you move back over into Service Battery?

Western: Yes, sir. I was never detached from Service Battery. I was just left there, and I was still a member of the Service Battery.

Marcello: Between that time that the unit returned from Louisiana and when it left to go to San Francisco, what kind of activities were going on there?

Western: Well, they were changing people around. Different people were transferring out, and they were taking people in from different outfits. We were working on our trucks and getting those ready to go. But we couldn't do all of that ourselves, so the other batteries pitched in and helped service the trucks and process them to get ready to go and help them load on. They gave us about, I guess, a three- or four-day pass-- a three-day pass--before we shipped out.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Why was it--and it was during this period--that the 2nd Battalion was detached from the 36th

Division?

Western: Well, it had something to do with the Louisiana maneuvers. They had become one of the elite groups of the 36th Division while they were in the maneuvers. For that reason, why, they were going to make...the 36th Division at that time was a square division. All other divisions were triangular divisions. It took breaking us off to make a triangular division out of the 36th Division. So that is the primary reason. Then besides that, I suppose that they needed us in the Philippines, which we later learned that's where PLUM was.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago that during this period, men were transferring out, and new men were coming in. Is this when the married men and the men over a certain age had the option of getting out of the unit?

Western: Yes, sir. That was when they had the option. Most anybody could have gotten out of the unit, I believe, if they wanted to, at that time.

Marcello: What was the age that they had established?

Western: I think it was thirty-eight, I believe, is what they had established that you could get out.

Marcello: Where were the replacements coming from for those who had transferred out of the unit?

Western: From the different units of the field artillery units there.

Marcello: As I recall, all of them were coming out of the 1st Battalion-- A, B, and C Batteries.

Western: That's right. They were coming out of the 1st Battalion.

Marcello: Like you mentioned awhile ago, you were drafted, and now you were part of this National Guard unit. Let me ask you this. Did you already know some of these people in the 131st Field Artillery?

Western: Oh, yes, sir, I knew a bunch of the boys. From Decatur I knew Ardel Redwine, T.B. Lumsden, Mark Summers, and J.L. Summers. There were quite a few of them that I knew.

Marcello: That must have been kind of comforting to be in a unit with people you knew.

Western: Yes, sir. It was a little more relaxing to be with people that you knew than it was to be with total strangers. I hoped to get acquainted again.

Marcello: Okay, so you received the orders that you are to leave for San Francisco, and the ultimate destination was known as PLUM. What was the rumor going around as to what PLUM meant or stood for?

Western: We didn't really know where we were going. Some people said, "Plum to hell, I guess." That's about the way it was (chuckle). We didn't really know at that time what it was because we'd never had any orders to ship out or anything like that.

Marcello: Okay, so you board a train--is that correct--around November 11, 1941, for San Francisco?



Western: Yes, sir, that's right.

Marcello: Describe that train trip. Did anything eventful happen on it?

Western: That train trip was unbelievable. That engineer...I don't know if he had ever pulled a train before. It was a Pullman. We had Pullmans that we rode in--Pullman cars we rode in. They had them fixed up. If you were standing up and he hit the brake or he started out from someplace, you would not be ten feet from where you were because he would flat stand you on your head.

We went through all the way non-stop to Winslow, Arizona. I don't remember just how long it took us. I believe it was about two days and a half through there. We stopped there, and so we decided we'd get us a little bottle of wine or something. Me and Elmer Toalson was one of the guys I worked with. We got a fifth of wine, and we were having a few drinks along, but neither one of us was really a heavy drinker. We were just having a little bit there to kind of break the monotony. Here comes along Jess Webb and Tom Biggs. They were guys that I worked with, also. They said, "Western, we don't like the way you're getting along." So they took this gallon jug, and they held my head back, and they poured that booze--that wine--down me. When I raised up, I was just about passed out. It's a wonder they didn't kill me, but they didn't. And you talk

about drunk! I was so drunk! That was about 11:00, I guess. I was drunk all that day and all that night, and the next morning about 3:00, they woke me up for K.P. Everytime I'd take a drink of water, I'd get dizzy again, and my head would feel like it was about a foot out, you know. Boy, I'm telling you, that was the last time I got drunk on that trip (laughter)! I never have been a drunkard since, either. That broke me forever to drink.

Marcello: What happened when you got to San Francisco?

Western: Well, they sent us to a...they called it Angel Island, but I don't think that was really the name that we had for it. It was a place of debarkation, I suppose. I don't even know where it is now; I didn't know then, for sure. We stayed there about, I guess, three or four days. We had our 1941 Thanksgiving dinner there. One day we had to pull K.P., and it took just about a whole battalion to pull K.P. in this mess hall there. They fed for twenty-four hours a day. They never slowed down. Everytime one group went out, why, we had to clean and mop that mess hall, and then the next one came in. In fact, we were cleaning the mess hall all the time during that time. It was a huge mess hall. We went to work about 4:00 in the morning, and we didn't finish until 11:00 that night. That sure was a long day.

Marcello: While you were here at Angel Island, did you actually go through some additional processing, that is, in terms of

getting shots and things of that nature?

Western: I don't think we got anymore shots there. We got some on the ship after we started out. We got some shots then. We had to have typhus and some other shot on the ship. We got those. I don't think we got any there.

Marcello: Now I gather from what you said just a moment ago that there were a lot of personnel either entering Angel Island or leaving Angel Island.

Western: Yes, sir.

Marcello: And I believe some of those coming into Angel Island had been coming from the Philippines. Is that correct?

Western: I believe so, yes, sir.

Marcello: What were they telling you about what was going on over there or what to expect?

Western: They didn't tell us much about that. There wasn't much talking. It was all kind of hush-hush. They didn't tell us much about what was going on. We didn't learn much from them.

Marcello: Now on November 21, 1941, you go aboard the USAT Republic. And the first leg of your trip was to Honolulu. Describe the trip from San Francisco to Honolulu aboard the Republic.

Western: We got on the ship, and we went out under the Golden Gate Bridge. We got out into the land swells. I imagine it was about...I don't know...just about 1:00 or 2:00, I guess, when we got into the land swells. In a little while, well,

people had already started getting seasick.

My buddy, Lester Fassio, and I were up on the top deck. He had been on a ship before someplace. I think he had gone to Alaska on a ship. He said, "Now stay out of that hold as much as you can. If you go down there, you'll get sick." We stayed out on the deck. Along about mid-afternoon, why, he told me, "Get in the canteen line and get us some sardines and some crackers." So I went in the canteen line and got us some sardines and crackers and a carton of cigarettes. We both smoked at the time. We sat out on the deck and ate our sardines and crackers, and the other guys went down to the chow hall when they piped down chow that afternoon and ate greasy pork chops and tomato sauce. I'm telling you, there was some sick people on that ship! I never saw the likes. Well, Lester and I didn't get sick. We made it through without getting sick. We stayed up on deck until about as long as they'd let us stay up there. Finally, the Marines, who were in charge of the ship, ran us down about 11:00. We had to stay in the hold the rest of the night.

The next morning, I got up and went to the latrine. I wanted to clean up a little. The vomit and everything was about shoe-mouth deep all over that floor. When the boat would lunge this way, why, that stuff would go over here, and then it would come back that way (gestures).

I managed to get in there and get cleaned up a little bit.

Then I went on down to the breakfast. We were getting our breakfast, and an ol' boy had his tray. It was sitting out here in front of him, and he had it all loaded up, and the ship went this way--lunged to the left--and when that tray passed him, why, he just filled it up with vomit. We managed to get through breakfast without getting sick.

All the rest of the time, we made it okay. We never did get sick. But I'll tell you, there was people...A.W. Lasiter, who was in Headquarters Battery, was from up home. He was sick even after we left Pearl Harbor. After we left there, he was still sick. I finally went down in the hold where he was and got him to drink some black coffee and eat some crackers, and he started getting better after that. But he was in bad shape.

Marcello: I don't think you stayed in Honolulu too long, but I do know that some of the men got a little bit of shore leave. Were you able to go ashore?

Western: Yes, sir. I believe we left the ship about before sundown. It was about 4:00 or 5:00. I don't really know the time there. Lester and I went to town. We were going to get us something to eat in town and look the place over a little. We got out a little ways from the ship, and there was barricades all in the road and everything. Everything was barricaded. We walked up, I guess, about half-a-mile into

town--edge of town--looking off from the docks. We were looking for a place to find something to eat.

Just about the time we thought we had found something, why, here came a truck with MPs on it, and they picked us up, and they hauled us back to the ship. So we never did get into a place to eat or anything. They picked us and hauled us back to the ship. There were a few other guys that they'd picked up. We finally asked them what was going on. It was kind of like the military always is. You knew something was going on, but you couldn't find out a damn thing that was happening.

So they had them all back on the ship by midnight. They had caught all those guys and put them back on the ship. I think we left one guy there. After we got back there, they told us that we were going to move out. The whole harbor was lined with all kinds of ships. There were battleships, and there were aircraft carriers and everything else in there. They told us that we were moving out. I believe it was about 3:00 in the morning when everybody weighed anchor and pulled out of there.

Marcello: That was on November 28, I believe.

Western: Yes, that was on November 28.

Marcello: You were part of a convoy when you left Honolulu, weren't you?

Western: Yes, sir. We had a destroyer or a cruiser with us. That

was about all we had with us. We went on out toward...I believe it was toward Wake or Midway out there. When we were out there about close to Wake or Midway, why, that is when the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Describe how you heard the news about the attack at Pearl Harbor.

Western: First, I suppose that it was delivered by cable or something to the ship, you know. They had some way of getting contact. Then the ship's captain announced it over the public address system and told us that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor at a certain time, you know, and that a state of war existed between the United States and Japan. Then after that, why, we had to get some weapons up out of the hold--some field artillery pieces up out of the hold--and set them on the deck and make a little more like an Army to defend our ship. Those guns were manned, then, twenty-four hours a day from that time on until we got unloaded in Brisbane, Australia.

Marcello: What was the reaction of you and your buddies when you heard about the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor?

Western: Well, one of my buddies told me, "You know, we ought to get some ribbons out of this." I said, "I'm not so much worried about ribbons as I am my ass." (laughter) I said, "I'd rather get it out." There was all kinds of talk that we didn't think the war would last long, you know, that the Japanese didn't have anything. It would be over in six

months. We figured, well, it was just a short skirmish, and we'd be home in no time, and it'd all be over.

Marcello: How were the officers reacting?

Western: Well, they became a little more tightened down and a little more military than what they were. I don't know. I kind of believe they were excited, but they didn't let the excitement brush off on the men. Some of the officers were pretty young, and a lot of the men were pretty young.

Marcello: If you had to estimate the average age of the people in Service Battery, which is where you were, what would you say was the average age?

Western: I would say from eighteen to twenty-three.

Marcello: So you were a little bit older than these other men.

Western: I was twenty-six. I was twenty-five or twenty-six.

Marcello: Did you know Frank Fujita at that time?

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

Marcello: I'm assuming that he was unique. There couldn't have been too many Japanese-Americans who were captured by the Japanese during World War II.

Western: No. I don't really think I met him until we were captured because we worked as a different group, and they were always some other place than what I was.

Marcello: Okay, so you are shifted from the Philippines to Brisbane, Australia. I think along the way you did stop in the Fiji Islands for a short period of time.



Western: Yes. We stopped in the Fiji Islands and took on water and fuel. We weren't there for a long time. I imagine we were there maybe fourteen or sixteen hours getting water and fuel, and then from there, why, we headed on out to Australia. I think the Perth joined us somewhere along there. That was an Australian destroyer, I believe.

Marcello: Did you get off the ship in the Fijis?

Western: No, sir, we did not. We didn't get off the ship.

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you get into Brisbane? I think you get there about December 21, 1941.

Western: That's right--December 21. We got in there and unloaded off the ship. The Australians were very friendly. They took us out to this racetrack--Ascot Racetrack, I believe. It was already set up for us. Evidently, they knew we were coming in there. They had wooden platforms and had kit covers over them, and we stayed in there. It was summertime right at that time. We stayed at this place and ate and everything right there at the racetrack. The Australians would take us...we'd go to town, and, boy, I mean, they'd really treat us good! They treated us like royal families--like royal people, I suppose. They'd take us and show us around. You couldn't buy yourself a drink or anybody else. The Australians always did that.

I stayed in town until about 11:00 that night. I got ready to go back to camp, and a young Australian on a

motorcycle said, "Where are you going, Yank?" I said, "I'm going back to camp. I was waiting for a ride." He said, "Well, get on here, and I'll take you back." He gave me a ride on that motorcycle back to the Ascot Racetrack.

Marcello: I've heard a lot of the men say that there weren't too many men their age in Australia at that time.

Western: There were very few men from about, I'd say, eighteen to thirty-five or forty. Most of the people were either old or young. They were already in the service somewhere. Most of the people were old or young.

Marcello: I understand you didn't really undergo any training or anything there in Brisbane, did you?

Western: No, sir, we didn't undergo any training. We were just loafing around and killing time until they got our stuff loaded onto this Dutch ship, the Bloemfontein.

Marcello: Now when you went aboard the Bloemfontein, which occurred on December 28, 1941, did you know at that point where you were going or what you would be doing?

Western: No, sir, we did not. We thought we were still going to the Philippines. In fact, we thought we were headed for the Philippines when we got on that ship. But after we got out to sea...I don't know if this is right...maybe the officers knew or something. I don't know. But they said that after we got out to sea, the ship's captain opened his orders, and they found out that we were going to Java, Netherlands

East Indies. And that is where we went from there.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened on that trip from Brisbane to the East Indies?

Western: No, sir. It was a nice ship. We just lived on deck first one place then another around there and all that. Everything was about normal on there, as far as I could tell.

Marcello: That's a pretty fast ship, wasn't it?

Western: It seemed to be an awful fast ship. It didn't take us long to get over there. I don't remember. Well, I do, too. I remember we landed in Surabaya, Java, on January 11, 1941.

Marcello: What happens when you landed in Surabaya?

Western: There was an air raid on at the time that we got in to Surabaya. We had to wait until the air raid was over before we got to the dock and got ready to start unloading. We were out in the harbor while that air raid was on.

Marcello: So you go from Surabaya, then, to Camp Singosari, which was near the town of Malang. Is that correct?

Western: That's right. Yes, sir.

Marcello: How'd you get from Surabaya to Singosari?

Western: We unloaded our trucks and drove our trucks out there.

Marcello: What happens when you get to Singosari?

Western: After cleaning the place up--it took us about two or three days to get cleaned up and all of that--we didn't know for sure what we were going to do. There was an airport close--an airfield--and the officers got together, and the colonel

at that airfield was Colonel Eubank, who later became General Eubank. They got together, and he didn't have any ground crew. The Dutch had been servicing his planes and all, and he didn't have any ground crew. So Colonel Tharp arranged it so that our men would be servicing his aircraft and getting them ready to make these bombing flights. At that time we didn't have too many. There were some planes that he had flown there from the Philippines. They had already evacuated the Philippines. They'd go on bombing missions almost around-the-clock when we were there because the Japanese were already around Bali and Borneo and Sumatra. They were everywhere out there. He was going on bombing missions there.

The artillery then took up defensive positions around the airport. They set up posts for each fieldpiece of ours-- 75-millimeter cannons--and made them where they could fire at the aircraft coming over.

It wasn't too long after we got there before the Japanese paid us a visit with seaplanes. I mean, they came right in, and they really laced us around. There wasn't too much damage from that raid.

Marcello: Let me back up a minute before we get to that point, Mr. Western.

Western: Okay.

Marcello: Now the 19th Bomb Group was already there when your unit

arrived.

Western: Yes, they were.

Marcello: What portion of the unit, would you say, actually served as ground crew for those planes?

Western: About half of them, I believe, served as ground crew.

Marcello: As a member of Service Battery, did you participate in that activity?

Western: No, sir, I did not. I was still helping maintain the trucks to keep them going. I suppose I did participate in it, but I was doing my job as a mechanic in the motor pool.

Marcello: Describe what your quarters were like there at Singosari.

Western: They were big barracks with tile floors and tile roofs, and they were really nice. It was a really nice outfit where we were--really nice buildings. That's about all I know about it.

Marcello: Did you manage to get any time off so that you could go into Malang?

Western: We'd go to Malang at night and have time off. We went up there a time or two at night. Elmer Toalson and I went up there and ate dinner one night and had coffee and ran around a little in town. The rainy season was starting in, and you had to be careful or you'd get wet before you got too far (chuckle).

Marcello: You mentioned the rainy season. Is it not true that that field there at Singosari was strictly a grass or a dirt field?

Western: Yes, sir, I believe it was. It was a grass field.

Marcello: You mentioned that the first air raid occurred on February 3, 1942. Give me some of the details of that raid.

Western: I don't know just how many planes took part in it, but there were several. There was one over us most of the time. It seemed like they were concentrating mostly on the airfield, is where they were, but, you know, they'd always make circles and scare the heck out of us, I'll tell you that for sure. We tried to keep them off with machine gun fire. We had machine guns. We had a bunch of those twin .50-calibers that we had mounted onto the back of our trucks. We kept them from getting down and strafing us maybe with that. There wasn't too much danger of them getting shot down, I don't believe.

Marcello: Did they seem to be concentrating mainly on the field itself?

Western: Yes, sir. I believe those pursuit planes were mainly on the field itself.

Marcello: So you don't remember any bombing, then, during that first raid.

Western: There wasn't any bombing, I don't believe, during the first raid. I think they just strafed us the first time.

Marcello: Describe what your feelings or reactions were when all this was taking place.

Western: I don't believe you could describe that. It scared the socks

off of me, I'll tell you that for sure. You just really didn't know what to do, you know. It was the first time you were under fire and all that.

Marcello: What were you specifically doing during the raid?

Western: I had been working on a truck, and when the planes started coming over, I think I just hit a ditch. I think that's where I was, was in a ditch, at the time. I didn't even have my rifle with me when they hit.

Marcello: Now with what frequency did these air raids occur thereafter?

Western: The siren would go off almost every day. They would have a raid someplace. But I believe it was a week or so longer before we actually had a bombing of the airport. Then they bombed the airport and bombed us and bombed our gun positions and everything.

Marcello: Describe that raid.

Western: I was with the maintenance truck at that time. They had been moved about a mile from the base, you know, from where it was. Since I was down there, why, I had dug foxholes for a lot of guys, you know, in the maintenance section. They had one of the French 75-millimeters sitting about half-a-mile from me. There must have been about nine or ten bombers that came over. They came over, and everybody got in there, and we got them in their foxholes and all. Biggs's place I hadn't got fixed very good, and Edison's place wasn't fixed very good. Edison was one of the mechanics that worked there with us. I don't remember what his name was right now.

Anyway, they made their first run and got pretty close to us. They dropped bombs fairly close to us.

Edison said to me, "Western, this hole's not deep enough. I'm going to come and get in the hole with you." I said, "Okay." I had a pretty good one because, naturally, I made myself the biggest one and the best one. Being in the infantry, I knew what they was supposed to be. He came over and got in the hole with me.

About the time he did, they made another run on us. We heard this noise that sounded like a dive-bomber coming down. I said, "Get low! They're going to strafe us!" About that time, why, this 500-pounder hit about twenty feet from us. That liked to shook us out of that hole. Whenever the air raid was over, we went out there, and there was a hole in the rice paddy about the size of this house and about fifteen feet deep. The water had already got about a foot-and-a-half deep in it. But that was about the closest they got to me right there. But, boy, they really got close that time.

Marcello: From that point on, then, did the raids occur with more frequency?

Western: No, sir. They had more siren alarms, but we didn't see any more planes. As far as I know, I don't think we had any more bombing raids there. But I wasn't there too long because this...there was another airport at Tjilatjap.



Marcello: Were you moved to that airport?

Western: Yes, sir. They were vacuating that airport. I don't remember the date or anything, but they were evacuating that airport, and they had left some vehicles down there. They left a 1942 Ford and a 1942 Chevy and a 1942 Buick. I think there were four vehicles. Lieutenant Schmid, a motor officer, and "Red" Ritchie, and Brodie Miller...no, it wasn't Miller. It was an Indian boy. I don't really know. We went down there to get these vehicles. While we were getting these vehicles, why, the...I don't know if they already had orders to go to Buitenzorg or what, but, anyway, while we were getting these vehicles, the other part of the 131st, except E Battery, moved to Buitenzorg.

Marcello: So in other words, you didn't know anything about the fact that the 19th Bomb Group had evacuated or that the Japanese had landed.

Western: No, sir, we didn't because we were going down there to get these vehicles. But we did meet our battery back at Buitenzorg in a rubber plantation. I don't know. It was sometime during that time around there. I imagine it would be along about the 1st or 2nd of March, somewhere along there, of 1942.

Marcello: How did you know where to meet your unit?

Western: I don't know how Lieutenant Schmid managed to get in touch with them and find out where to meet them, because they were at Singosari when we left there.

Marcello: Did you have all of your gear and so on with you when you left Singosari to go down to Tjilatjap?

Western: I had most of my clothing, but I did not have my valuables with me. They were in my footlocker. I had a bunch of stuff in my footlocker. I had quite a few of my clothes with me, yes, sir.

Marcello: Did your footlocker catch up with you when you got to Buitenzorg?

Western: I never saw it again. They stored them in a warehouse there someplace. That was the last time we saw them. We never did see them anymore.

Marcello: Did you have your mess gear and things like that with you at this point?

Western: Yes, sir, I did. I had my mess gear and my canteen and everything...my gas mask and all that...my rifle and all that stuff with me.

Marcello: I'm sure that you had no idea, really, what the seriousness of the situation was at this point.

Western: Oh, no, I had no idea.

Marcello: So what does the unit do?

Western: Well, we are in this rubber plantation, and the guns are out in front of us. We don't know how far. I don't have any idea how far. All I did was to stay there with the maintenance truck and take care of the little things, little problems, that rose up and everything. To begin with, we couldn't hear the guns at all. They were far enough away that we weren't

hearing too much of the guns. In the distance you might hear them once in a while if the wind was right.

As the time moved on, the guns started getting closer to us. The artillery pieces started getting closer to us. We started seeing a few more...well, there was a British tank that came into the place where we were, and there was a plane that came over. He had British markings, but we never did believe that he was British. We thought it was a Jap flying that thing. There was all sorts of activity going on there. We were ready to start shooting if something came in. If they broke through and came down to where we were, we were ready to start shooting until we could get out of there.

Marcello: Now the unit, I gather, was moving around constantly during this period.

Western: Yes, sir, they were.

Marcello: Did there seem to be any rhyme or reason to the moving?

Western: I believe that there was. The only thing that they would do is that they would stay at a certain place until they figured that retreat was necessary. They'd retreat back and bring their guns back. We didn't have a heck of a lot to fight them with. I never did see this 1,200 Australians that they claimed was there. But they claimed there was 1,200 Australian infantry up there that the artillery was supporting. I don't know if it was so or not, but I was told that there was between 150,000 and 200,000 Japanese. Those 1,200

Australians were not going to hold that many Japanese long.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that up until the time of the capitulation that you hadn't really seen a Japanese.

Western: That's absolutely right. I had not seen a Japanese. They kept them back from us.

Marcello: On March 8, 1942, word comes down that the island has capitulated. How did you get the word?

Western: Our commanding officer called us together and told us that we had to lay down our arms, that the Dutch army had capitulated and that the Dutch governor-general had commanded us to lay down our arms. Therefore, we had to quit fighting. We stayed there and waited for orders from the Japanese. But we still hadn't seen any Japanese. When we finally got ordered to move out, well, we moved out to a tea plantation.

Marcello: Let me ask you a couple of questions at this point. What was your reaction when you heard that you were going to be surrendering?

Western: Boy, I figured that our goose was cooked. I figured that was all of it for us. I figured that they'd kill us. I didn't know what would happen.

Marcello: Why did you have the impression that the Japanese would kill you?

Western: I don't know. I just figured that that was their way of doing it, that's all. I just figured that they wouldn't have any use for prisoners-of-war, that they'd get rid of

us because we'd be holding them up.

Marcello: What did you do relative to your weapons and your trucks and all that sort of thing?

Western: I don't know what other people told you. All I did was what I was told and left things intact. The new cars that we got in Tjilatjap--the Ford, the Chevrolet, and the Buick --we drained the oil out of them, and we pulled the throttle on them, and we ran them until they froze up. We rendered those useless. The weapons, we just left them. We took them right on with us to the place. I think that's what the Japanese told us to do--take everything to this tea plantation and wait for their arrival. That's what we did.

Marcello: So you don't remember stopping off briefly at another race-track before you went to the tea plantation? You remember going simply directly to the tea plantation.

Western: Yes, I do. I think that's where I went--just to the tea plantation. I might be wrong.

Marcello: What happens when you get to the tea plantation? What do you do there?

Western: Well, we just parked all the trucks and lived normally. We had our own food and everything, and the cooks did their cooking, and we did our eating and everything. We just lived normally within restricted limits, you know. We didn't go out anywhere, but we stayed around there until the Japanese finally came in. I don't know what day it was.

I don't remember. It was quite a while. I imagine it was maybe toward the last of March when they came in. They already told us to stack our weapons in the street, and we stacked them up there and everything. They came in, and they took our weapons, our trucks, and our food. They took every damn thing but our clothes and all that. Then when they pulled out, they left some guards, and these guards were brutal bastards. I mean, they were brutal.

Marcello: Already at the tea plantation?

Western: Yes.

Marcello: Describe their conduct.

Western: They'd bellow out at you, you know, in Japanese and make you fall in. We had to fall in in formation. They started us out marching, and we marched for about...I don't know. It was four or five miles to a railhead. They marched us out there. While they were marching, if a guy fell behind, well, they'd hit him with a bamboo pole, a rifle butt, or anything. I didn't have much trouble. I probably had more weight than most of the guys, and I wasn't as heavy. I weighed about 130 pounds, I guess, and I had about two-thirds of my Army gear with me since I'd come from Tjilatjap down there. I was carrying that. At this airport, I'd managed to get me an old Air Force flight bag instead of my barracks bag. I had all my clothes and my cigarettes and first one thing and another in that old flight bag. It had

two handles on it, and I threw it up over my shoulder and was carrying it. There were guys that wasn't too good marchers. They were falling behind. I kind of felt sorry for them. There wasn't anything I could do, but I felt sorry for them because they didn't know how to march or anything. I made it fine. I made it right on up to the railhead.

Marcello: So you marched from the tea plantation to the railhead.

Western: Yes.

Marcello: About how far was that?

Western: I would say it was about five or six miles, but I don't know for sure how far it was. Boy, they were mean! I mean, those son-of-a-guns, if you slowed down, would beat the tar out of you!

Marcello: Were these still Japanese troops?

Western: Yes, sir. They were the first ones we had seen--right there. That's the first time we had seen troops--when they came in to get our trucks.

Marcello: Do you remember whether or not they were combat troops or whether they were rear echelon troops at this point?

Western: I really couldn't distinguish which they were, but I would say that they were combat troops.

Marcello: How large were they? Or how small were they?

Western: Well, they were smaller than we were. I would say most of them were about five feet tall, I imagine, and they

weighed about 130 pounds or something like that. There were a few of them that were a little taller.

Marcello: What did they look like in terms of their uniforms and things of that nature?

Western: Well, they looked kind of sloppy to me. They didn't look like real soldiers. They didn't look very sharp to me.

Marcello: So what happens when you get to the railhead?

Western: I don't remember just how long it was, but we waited for this train. The train gets there, and they load us onto these small cars (a lot smaller than what we have here). They'd load about sixty to eighty men on there. You were just standing up. They'd beat you at the door and make you keep getting men on there--keep getting the men on there. You can hardly stand up. I don't know how many men we had on there, but, boy, it was crowded!

Marcello: In the meantime, what was the reaction of the natives?

Western: Well, they'd just stand off and look. That's about all they'd do. They'd just stand off and look, you know. They don't really know what's going on. They'd just kind of stand off and look.

Marcello: So what happens at this point, then? You're now packed onto this train.

Western: They finally get the train started and take us on down to ...I believe it was at the edge of Batavia, but we landed in some kind of old native camp. It was Tanjong Priok.



That was already fixed up with barbed wire, and it was filthy and all of that stuff. It just so happened that was on my birthday in 1942 that I landed behind the barbed wire. That's the day I went behind barbed wire.

Marcello: What day was that?

Western: March 30, 1942, when I went behind barbed wire. I thought that was a heck of a way to celebrate a birthday. The first meal we got was a dirty rice and cucumber stew. I couldn't go that. I didn't eat for three days. It was three days before I could eat that. I decided that since I was going to be a prisoner-of-war, and since I couldn't live without eating, and since I wouldn't be a prisoner-of-war long, I just went ahead, and I got some of that dirty rice, and I finally managed to eat it.

But they didn't feed us the kind of rice you buy in the store. They fed us the sweepings out of the warehouses where the rats had dumped the rice out on the floor. They gave us that. It had the rocks, it had the dirt, and it had everything in it that you wouldn't want to eat.

Marcello: What else did it have in it besides the rocks and the dirt?

Western: It had some worms that were about an inch long--white worms. To begin with, we picked them out; but after we got used to them, we saved the damn things because it was a meat ration (chuckle).

Marcello: Did your cooks have problems cooking that rice at first?

Western: Oh, yes. They didn't know anything about cooking rice. They had some awful gummy rice at first. I don't know how they learned.

Marcello: What else did you have in addition to rice there?

Western: It was mostly cucumber stew. That was about what it amounted to. I didn't see them fixing it, but it tasted like danged cucumbers to me. I don't know what it was, but, anyway, it wasn't a very good vegetable that they had with it.

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that I want to pick up on. I think you mentioned that you were not going to be a prisoner-of-war long at this point.

Western: Yes. I didn't figure I was going to be a prisoner-of-war long, but I didn't figure I could do without food until I got out.

Marcello: How long did you think you were going to be a prisoner?

Western: I figured six months or something like that, that we might be out of there in six months.

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

Western: That was horrible. I slept on the porch. On the inside, why, it was a tile floor--a filthy tile floor; dirty, filthy tile floor. It was broken in places. It had a tile roof. Most of the buildings over there did have tile roofs. And the roof leaked. It was a real old, dilapidated building.

I slept out on the porch, but that wasn't a real good

place to be because this Jap guard walked right by where I was. He'd come by there, and he'd holler, "Ki-o-tsuke!" And I didn't know what he meant. He wanted me to salute him. I didn't salute, and he'd beat the tar out of me. Every danged time he passed there, he'd beat the tar out of me. It didn't take me long to find out what that Ki-o-tsuke meant. He wanted me to salute him when he passed by there. He passed by there every fifteen minutes, and you had to salute him everytime he passed by. I got tired of getting beat, so I started saluting him. Either that or I'd get away from there when I saw him coming.

Marcello: My records indicate that you were in Tanjong Priok for about a month-and-a-half. It seems that you went in there at the end of March, and I believe you go to Bicycle Camp about the middle of May.

Western: That sounds about right to me. That's about the way I recollect it.

Marcello: During that period of time, Mr. Western, what are you learning about being a prisoner-of-war? What kind of an education were you receiving relative to how you have to act as a prisoner-of-war.

Western: I learned, for one thing, that you couldn't let your pride ,,,you had to lose your pride. You could not lose your temper. You had to forget that you had a temper because when anybody hauls off and hits you, you're about ready to

hit him back. Well, you had to learn that you could not do that. If you did, they'd kill you. They'd jump right in the middle of your stomach, kick you, and beat you to death. Also, you had to try to understand then and to do as you were told. That was about all I learned.

Marcello: How about learning bits and pieces of the Japanese language? Did you figure out pretty fast that it was necessary to do that?

Western: Yes. I learned to understand those important words. I learned what work was. Work was sogyo, and salute was ki-o-tsuke, and rest was yasumi. I learned those words pretty good.

Marcello: You mentioned something else a moment ago relative to your education as a prisoner-of-war that I want to pick up on. You mentioned that you learned pretty soon to stay away from those guys.

Western: Yes, sir. That was the main thing. You learned to stay away from them as much as possible. Only be around them when you had to.

Marcello: What sort of a psychological effect--if I may call it that--did being behind barbed wire have?

Western: Well, it was rather confining. You just couldn't do anything, and it was so unusual that you wasn't used to doing that. It was hard to take.

Marcello: You're prisoners-of war now, and you're confined in this

camp at Tanjong Priok. What kind of military discipline is being maintained and carried out at this point? I'm speaking now of the military discipline within your unit.

Western: Within the unit? We still had military discipline. We still had our roll call. Yes, we had roll call and all of that and everything. We still had respect for officers and all that, and respect for NCOs. As far as I was concerned, the Japanese were in charge, but our superiors were still in charge as far as I was concerned. They were taking orders from the Japanese and passing them on to us at that time.

Marcello: So the chain-of-command remained intact within the unit.

Western: Yes, it remained intact.

Marcello: How important was that going to be?

Western: I think it kept the morale of the people up. I think it would have gone down more if it wasn't there.

Marcello: What are you learning at this point about the importance of cleanliness and hygiene and things like that?

Western: It was strictly up to you, and you had to do it. If you didn't, why, you was going to get in trouble. We had to keep our mess gear clean and keep our area clean around there. If we didn't, why, it would be bad for us. We learned that pretty quick.

Marcello: You mentioned the mess gear. Is it not true that before you went through the chow line and actually received your food, you had to dip your gear in boiling water?

- Western: Yes, sir, we did at that time.
- Marcello: What kind of activities took place here at Tanjong Priok relative to work parties and things of that nature?
- Western: There was very little. I wished a lot of times that I could have gotten on a working party and gone out, but they only took a few men out. They'd just take a very few men out from Tanjong Priok, and the rest of us were left right in there. All we could do is smoke cigarettes and play cards and feel sorry for ourselves. We did plenty of that.
- Marcello: What did you talk about?
- Western: We talked about when we was going to get out of there and how long we was going to have to put up with that crap (chuckle). We had it underestimated quite a bit.
- Marcello: Now you still have Japanese guards at this point.
- Western: Oh, yes. You bet.
- Marcello: Assuming that you eat all of your food, are you getting some pretty square meals here?
- Western: No, sir, we sure don't. We don't get very many square meals.
- Marcello: In other words, the quantity or the amount of food has already been cut rather drastically.
- Western: Yes. You don't have as much as what maybe you might eat or you would eat. I think, maybe, you could have gotten all the rice you wanted, but you didn't want too much of that

damned dirty rice. I ate about what I had to have to maintain me, and that's about all I ate. I wasn't too fond of that danged stuff.

Marcello: Around May 14, 1942, you move from Tanjong Priok to Bicycle Camp, which is in Batavia. How did you get from Tanjong Priok to Bicycle Camp?

Western: I believe we rode a train part of the way down there and went right into Batavia somewhere, and then we walked from there on to Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Take me on a tour of Bicycle Camp. Suppose you and I were walking in the front gate of Bicycle Camp in May of 1942. Take me on a tour of the camp. Describe it for me.

Western: We were assigned to a barracks not too far from the entrance. It was a nice barracks. It had been, I believe, a Dutch camp. It was clean and well-kept and everything. It had running water, and you had showers where you could take a shower. All told, it was a really heavenly place compared to Tanjong Priok. We didn't have a place to take baths down there. But in this camp, you could take a bath and all that. We were given places to sleep and all that in there. It was really nice.

Marcello: Some people have described the insides of those barracks as being divided into cubicles. Do you remember that?

Western: Yes, they were divided into cubicles. I believe they were about four-man cubicles, so they wasn't very small. They

were nearly as big as this room, I believe.

Marcello: So we're talking about a cubicle that might be about, maybe, ten-by-ten or twelve-by-twelve.

Western: Ten-by-ten or something like that.

Marcello: And I assume you slept on the floor.

Western: Yes. We did for a while. I did for a while, but they had some clothesline poles out, and I managed to get me some clothesline poles and put them together and make me a frame from my shelter half; and I put my shelter half on that, and I slept on my shelter half on those poles. I had me a pretty good bed fixed up there.

Marcello: Do you recall who you were buddying up with at that time in your cubicle?

Western: No, I sure don't. I don't recall. I guess that's just been too long. I don't know who was in there with me.

Marcello: What other kinds of buildings were there inside Bicycle Camp?

Western: Well, there was a clothes wash rack, I believe--a place where they would wash clothes. Then I think there was a hospital, too--something like a hospital. It wasn't a hospital. Well, they had made a kind of infirmary out of it, you know, and all that, but I think it was an infirmary. There were kitchens--places where they cooked. We had our kitchen. The officers lived on farther to our left or farther, I thought, west, but I wouldn't be sure which is west or south. I wouldn't



know. But I thought they lived farther west. They lived down there separate from us. We had our chow hall. The officers had our payroll. I don't know if we're that far along.

Marcello: Let me just hold off on that. Where were the Japanese located in this camp?

Western: They were back out to the southeast from us. That's where they were. I thought they would be to the southeast from us in some barracks over there.

Marcello: Were there very many of them?

Western: I would say there was about seventy-five. I believe there was that many there about that time--something like that. Might have been fifty or seventy-five.

Marcello: Now up until this point, had you been processed in any way relative to records and things of that nature, or were you given any kind of an identification badge or card or anything like that?

Western: I don't believe we had up until that time. I don't much think so. I think that took place a little bit later. They decided that they wanted us to sign...I don't remember just what they called this document they wanted us to sign. We were to pledge that we wouldn't escape or something like that or sign some kind of a document. We held out on that, and we wouldn't sign it. They got pretty mean. They beat us around and kicked us around and kicked the officers around.

Finally, the officers told us, "You just go ahead and sign it. It don't amount to anything, anyway. You're under harassment." They said, "When you're harassed, they can't hold you responsible for it." So we went ahead and signed it. I don't know what it said. I couldn't read Japanese. I don't know just what that agreement said (chuckle). I never did see one after we were liberated.

Marcello: We'll come back and talk about that in a minute. When you got into Bicycle Camp, were the Houston survivors already there?

Western: Yes, they were already there--the survivors off the Houston.

Marcello: Describe what they looked like. Describe their condition.

Western: Well, they were in pretty bad shape. They didn't have very many clothes or anything because they had been dumped off out there. Some of them were in pretty bad shape otherwise. Physically, they were in good shape. They were just about destitute, as far as clothing was concerned.

Marcello: So what did your guys do relative to sharing with them?

Western: We gave them clothing. If we had something that they could wear, why, we gave them clothing.

Marcello: I guess a lot of those guys didn't even have mess gear or anything like that.

Western: They didn't have anything. They didn't have mess gear. They didn't have anything at all. We managed to find them something, you know, to eat out of. They got straightened out.

Marcello: Were they integrated into the Army unit relative to the chain-of-command and things of that nature?

Western: Yes, they were.

Marcello: How about housing? Did they live with you guys, or were they in separate quarters?

Western: They lived in separate quarters at that time.

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

Western: Well, the food was pretty good because--I mentioned this before--the officers had our payroll, and they used that to buy extra food. And the Japanese would condone them buying that food, so they'd go out and buy extra food. We had a lot better food than we had at Tanjong Priok. It was mostly pretty good for a long time there. We had pretty good food.

Marcello: Can you be specific as to what kind of food you were receiving there?

Western: Well, we got corned beef, and we got strawberry jam, and we got, I believe, sweetened condensed milk. I think we got some of that. We got coffee and tea. We had pretty good food. But we still had to have our major meal with rice, you know. We still had our rice. You had to have your rice with that. We got a little bread. They didn't have too much. Once in a while...I really think that they had a bakery, and they baked the bread there in camp. I'm not sure. But we had some bread. Occasionally, you'd get a loaf of bread.

Marcello: When you went through the chow line, how much rice would you receive?

Western: You could get all the rice you wanted. You'd get a big ladle of rice. I don't know, just exactly how much you could say, but you got plenty of rice. You got plenty of rice.

Marcello: Were you always looking for something to flavor that rice?

Western: You bet. Anything to flavor that rice with, even if it wasn't anything but a peanut.

Marcello: What was the quality of rice like here at Bicycle Camp as compared to what it had been at Tanjong Priok?

Western: The rice we got at Bicycle Camp was much better quality than what we had been getting.

Marcello: Once you went through the chow line and you had received your food, where would you eat it?

Western: We'd just sit down out on the outside someplace there--outside the barracks there and eat it. There wasn't any stools or anything. You had to do your own. You either had to stand up or sit down. Maybe you'd sit down like that and eat it--ever which way you wanted. If you wanted to eat standing up, you could eat standing up. But there wasn't really any mess hall for us to eat in or anything like that.

Marcello: Describe what the work details were like here at Bicycle Camp.

Western: Well, you would have a work detail about, I would say, three

or four days a week. They had quite a few men there, and there'd be some days that you'd be off. You'd work maybe four days and be off a day or something like that.

When we went out on these working details, there was oil scattered all over in different places, you know, scattered out. We would go out in these places, and they'd want this oil stacked in certain places. They'd make us roll those oil drums up to this place where they were, and there'd be two men stacking those oil drums--full oil drums. Two men would be stacking them four high. We'd have to roll them up there, and then these two men would stack them up there. If you got hold of a flat one, you had trouble because if you got slowed down on rolling that barrel, that Jap was going to beat the hell out of you. A lot of times you'd get one of those flat ones, and if it had been raining--it rained a lot--that dirt would be kind of soft, or it might be sand; and a flat drum was kind of hard to roll. It's like rolling a flat wheel.

We were rolling drums one day, and we had a Mexican boy or Spanish boy. We called him "Pancho." I don't remember his last name. But, anyhow, he was stacking the drums, and he was wearing gloves. He caught his finger, and right like that it cut that finger off him.

Marcello: About an inch off the top of his index finger.

Western: Just right off the end of it there. Pulled it off. He pulled

his glove off, and I took his glove, and he took a handkerchief and wrapped it around his finger. It was bleeding pretty bad and all. They didn't take him in. He had to stay there. After he kind of got settled down, I said, "'Pancho,' what are you going to do with this finger?" He said, "I'm going to keep it." I cut it out of the glove with my knife. There was that much of it left out there (gesture). It got his whole nail and all. He took it and wrapped it in his handkerchief and took it in. That was about, oh, I guess, 11:00 in the day. We didn't go in until 5:00 that night. He went in at 5:00 that night, Captain Lumpkin, our doctor, sewed that piece of finger back on there. It was black for a while. In about three weeks, it started growing back, and he grew that dangd finger back on there after carrying it all day in his pocket (chuckle). I know I cut it out of that glove. I know it was off.

Marcello: What were some of the advantages of going out on work details?

Western: The Japs would come through there, and if they didn't like what you was doing, they'd wail the tar out of you. For one thing, you stayed out of the way of the Japs by going on work parties. Also, you were getting exercise and all that kind of stuff, which we weren't getting too much of. We wanted to go out and work.

Marcello: What opportunities were there to steal things on the work details?

Western: It was pretty good there. I wasn't really stealing things at that time. In fact, I was a little bit afraid to try. I think some people did manage to steal a few things.

Marcello: Would they search you before you came back into camp?

Western: Yes. They always searched you before you came back into camp.

Marcello: What kind of rules were the Japanese laying down relative to the prisoners at this time? Maybe I'm not being clear. What sort of conduct or rituals did you have to perform relative to them? Suppose you encounter a Japanese.

Western: We'd still have to salute him and all that. It didn't make any difference if he was one of your guards or somebody else. You had to salute him and all that. I still tried to stay away from them as much as I could because I didn't like to salute them.

Also, they were curious about what you had. If you had any jewelry or anything like that, well, they started confiscating that along about that time.

Marcello: Who would confiscate it? Just any Japanese who happened to come along?

Western: They'd come into camp and barter with you--try to buy it or something. If they didn't like the price that you asked for it, they'd either whip the tar out of you. If they wanted it real bad, they'd whip the tar out of you and take it, anyway. I had a pocket watch that I bought there in Java. It was an expensive pocket watch, but I didn't pay much for it.

One of them took a liking to it. I told him how much I'd want for it. I think I wanted about sixty guilders or something like that. He beat the shit out of me and took it, anyway (chuckle).

Marcello: When did you have to bow?

Western: Anytime you met a Japanese, you had to bow.

Marcello: Inside or outside?

Western: Inside or outside. If you were inside, you always hollered, "Ki-o-tsuke!" whenever you saw one of them coming, and everybody bowed to them about the same time or as he got to you. If you didn't, why, he would about knock you down or something.

Marcello: Was this hard to take at first?

Western: You bet! It was very degrading to have to bow to a Japanese.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that one had to lose one's pride in a situation like this.

Western: That's right. You had to lose your pride. That was just part of it. If you hadn't done that--if you didn't bow to him--he would beat you up.

Marcello: What were the usual or standard forms of punishment that the Japanese would use at this time?

Western: Usually, they'd stand you up and slap you around in front of the other people. Or they'd kick you. And it had been known that they hit a few people with rifle butts and such like. Quite a few of them would hit people with rifle butts.



- Marcello: What were some of the most extreme forms of punishment you saw?
- Western: Well, at this time, for almost nothing they'd slap you around and beat you. It wasn't anything uncommon for them to use a rifle butt or a bamboo pole on someone. It was unmerciful whenever they did that.
- Marcello: What kind of punishment did you observe being given out within the Japanese ranks?
- Western: About the same thing. They didn't have a discipline of honor. They had a discipline of fear. Each Japanese feared his superior. If you were a private in the Japanese Army and you did something wrong and the next guy saw you, why, he beat you up. Then if somebody saw this guy that beat him up doing wrong, he'd beat him up. That went all the way through the ranks. That I learned as I went. That was their form of discipline in the Japanese Army--a discipline of fear. They feared their superior.
- Marcello: What kind of power did a Japanese sergeant have as compared to the power of an American sergeant or a sergeant in your unit?
- Western: He had as much power, I'd say, as a captain in the American Army because, boy, he was a wheel; I mean, he really carried some authority.
- Marcello: You had no trouble telling who a sergeant was?
- Western: No, sir. You knew who a sergeant was. Whenever he came in,

why, everybody had respect for him. Even the Japanese. They all respected him.

Marcello: Do you encounter any Korean guards at this point yet?

Western: I don't think so. At that time, it was hard for me to tell them from the Japanese because they were wearing a Japanese uniform. The only thing is that they were just a little larger than the Japanese.

Marcello: You do remember Korean guards coming into this camp, though.

Western: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe what the Korean guards were like.

Western: Well, when they came in, why, they were really more brutal than the Japanese because I think they feared the Japanese. So they were going to do the job, and they were going to do it right because they were afraid that the Japs would do them in if they didn't.

Marcello: So they were lower than the lowest ranking Japanese soldier.

Western: Oh, yes, they were.

Marcello: But not quite as low as you.

Western: (Chuckle) No, there wasn't anyone as low as we were--not there at that time.

Marcello: Do you have nicknames for any of the guards?

Western: Well, at that time we didn't.

Marcello: You mentioned that there was a document that the Japanese eventually forced you to sign. My records seem to indicate--like you pointed out--that this was a pledge or a promise

that you would not escape. This occurred on July 4, 1942.

Give me the details of that.

Western: They came in with this thing that they wanted us to sign. We figured that we would be doing wrong to sign that we wouldn't escape because that wasn't right to have to do that. We just wasn't going to sign it. They came in there, and they started beating people up and first one thing and another and all that. Then these officers got together, and they told us to go ahead and sign it. Under duress you could sign it, and it wouldn't amount to anything, anyway, so we went ahead and signed it. But like I said before, we really didn't know what we signed. It was just an agreement that we wouldn't escape, is the way they explained it to us. I don't figure that would have kept anybody from escaping if we'd ever had the opportunity.

Marcello: You brought up this subject, and let me pursue it. What talk was there among you and your buddies relative to escape?

Western: Maybe we should have looked at it different, but it looked to us impossible. We were always in an impossible situation. You had the native population and you out there among them. You would have to be with the natives unless you had a place with the Dutch. Most of the Dutch were dark, too. You'd stick out like a sore thumb if you escaped there.

Marcello: What threats did the Japanese make if one did attempt to escape and were caught?

Western: That they would kill him and about ten others for escaping.  
If they didn't catch him, they'd kill about ten others.

Marcello: Did you think they were bluffing?

Western: No. I didn't ever believe that they were bluffing. You  
couldn't ever underestimate the Japanese.

Marcello: All the time that you're a prisoner-of-war from day one, do  
you very quickly come to the realization that they've got  
your life in the palm of their hand?

Western: Yes, sir. I realized that right on the start, that I was in  
their hand, that I had to do what they said and when they  
said it.

Marcello: We were talking about food awhile ago. Let me ask you another  
question here. In some of the interviews, I have heard  
accusations that the officers seemed to be living and eating  
a little bit better than the enlisted men. What do you know  
about that?

Western: Well, I am of the same thinking, that they were eating much  
better than what we were. They were spending our money and  
eating food a lot better than what we were eating. That went  
on all the time that we were there. I don't know how much  
of that went on at other places, but all the time we were in  
Java, it went on that way.

Marcello: What kind of problems or resentment did this cause?

Western: I would say that it lowered the respect of our men for their  
superiors. That started the division between the officers and

the men. It started the breakdown right there.

Marcello: For my own information, let me ask you this. This is a question that comes all the way up to the present time. Do you have very many officers that attend the "Lost Battalion" reunions?

Western: I couldn't say about that because I haven't attended too many "Lost Battalion" reunions myself. I stayed in the service, and I was gone a lot of the time. I guess that I just kind of got away from it or something. I don't go to many reunions. I guess I've been to about five since they've been having it.

Marcello: What function do the officers play in prison camp? What is their role? What do they do?

Western: At that time they didn't do anything. They just stayed in their little place, and they lived just about separately from us. We didn't hardly ever see one of them. They lived up there; they ate up there. We hardly ever saw one of them except the doctor or something like that. It's damned seldom that we ever saw an officer. The sergeants were down there with us, but we didn't see any officers. They lived pretty well to themselves up there.

Marcello: What people among the enlisted ranks--I'm referring mainly to your sergeants and so on--seemed to be coming to the forefront as leaders? Do you see this sort of thing developing among the enlisted ranks?

Western: Yes. I don't believe I can answer that question. I don't

believe I can.

Marcello: How about on work details? Did the officers play any role on work details?

Western: At that time they did not. They didn't go out to work at all. The officers didn't go out to work. The Japanese said that an American officer didn't work, and they wasn't going to make them work.

Marcello: So essentially, then, when you went on a work detail, perhaps one of your noncoms was the go-between between the Japanese and the other workers.

Western: Yes. Usually, the man who was superior in the group was the man that was in charge.

Marcello: What did you do in your leisure time here at Bicycle Camp?

Western: I cut hair. I cut the guys' hair. I kept their hair cut.

Marcello: How'd you get that job?

Western: Well, I had gone to a barber's school a little. I never had finished. But I went to a barber's school in the late 1930's, along about 1936 or 1937. But I didn't finish barber school. I took me some barber tools with me. I got them from my uncle, and I took them with me overseas, and I started cutting their hair. I cut hair nearly every day over there. I think I managed to get some tools. Captain Taylor got me some barber tools. I had tools at Singosari, and I left them in my footlocker. I lost all those. But he got me some tools there. I cut hair nearly

every day while I was in there. If I wasn't working, I cut hair.

Marcello: Now let me ask you this. Was this simply one of your functions, or was it a way for you to make extra money, or how did that work?

Western: It was a way for me to make extra money. The guys had money then. They'd pay me 40¢ or 50¢ for a haircut. That helped out. I could buy extra food if I could get to where I could buy something.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how you would go about buying extra food.

Western: Well, you'd have to get in touch with somebody in there. About all you could buy was cigarettes. You couldn't buy any food. If you could get out and buy cigarettes, well, you could buy cigarettes with it there. I don't think I ever bought any extra food with it there. It proved all right farther on down the line.

Marcello: What do you know about any secret radios or anything like that here at Bicycle Camp?

Western: I knew they existed, but I didn't know where they were, and I didn't know who had them. But I knew that we were getting information from somewhere.

Marcello: How did you personally receive the information?

Western: It was usually handed down from a superior--some sergeant or something like that. They'd say, "Here's the scoop."

And you'd get the scoop. He claimed it was the straight dope. We didn't know for sure where he was getting it. He told us that that was the straight dope.

Marcello: I guess at that time the news wasn't too good, anyhow.

Western: No, there wasn't any really good news.

Marcello: Describe what your bathing facilities were like here at Bicycle Camp.

Western: I believe it was hydrants or something, I believe, that you could take a shower. It wasn't a real good shower, but you could kind of take that.

Marcello: Could you take a daily shower? A daily bath?

Western: Yes. If I remember right, you could.

Marcello: Did you have any hot water?

Western: I think it was all cold water. I don't think there was any hot water. But you could take a bath every day, I believe.

Marcello: How about your sanitary facilities? Latrines and things like that?

Western: Yes, they had latrines.

Marcello: Were these the Dutch-type with running water going through them?

Western: Yes, the running water went through, and it ran right into somewhere else. There's no telling where it ran. Yes, that's the type they were.

Marcello: How clean were these latrines?

Western: They were kept pretty clean. We kept them pretty clean.



Our part of it was pretty clean. I don't imagine that ditch was very clean that was running through there.

Marcello: During this stay at Bicycle Camp, what was the most frequent topic of conversation when you got around those bull sessions?

Western: When we were going to get out of this thing, and where the Allies were and all that kind of stuff. When we were going to get out and how long we was going to be prisoners and such as that.

Marcello: Which is most important at this time--food or women?

Western: Food was more important than sex, yes. Food was more important than sex then. You were more interested in food than anything else.

Marcello: Do you sit around and talk about food all the time?

Western: Yes. You'd talk about food and how good food had been and what you were missing.

Marcello: What kind of food at this point were you thinking about most?

Western: About the steaks and the chicken and such as that, you know.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that pretty soon in a situation like that, the thought of food does become the most important thought?

Western: I believe that it would dominate anything else. I think that food is more important than anything.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how was the health of the men holding up here at Bicycle Camp?

Western: The health of the men was holding up good. There wasn't too many sick people there. They were all in good shape.

I think we had one boy, Nixon, in the Service Battery...I think he had appendicitis. They operated on him right there. Dr. Lumpkin operated on him, and in three weeks he was ready to go back to work. There wasn't too many sick men.

Marcello: What kind of contact did you have with other nationalities here at Bicycle Camp? There were other nationalities here, weren't there?

Western: There wasn't much of a contact anywhere. If you went out on a work party, well, you didn't get in contact with a Dutch or native. They kept you away from those. You didn't have much of a chance to talk to anybody or say anything to anybody. If you were close enough to wave, you could wave if you didn't get caught at it. If you got caught, well, you'd get the tar wailed out of you because you weren't supposed to do any such things as that out there.

Marcello: There's something else that has come up, and I want to ask you about this. You mentioned these beatings and so on that would be given. Would it be accurate to say that in a great many instances, the prisoners got these beatings because they were not obeying the rules regardless of how ridiculous the rules were and so on?

Western: Yes, I would say that. Most all of them were the fact that they didn't obey the Japanese, or they didn't know what the Japanese were trying to tell them. They would get you for stupidity about it as much as they did for neglect. If you

were too stupid to know what they were telling you, then they were going to get you.

Marcello: What sort of items were you forbidden to have by the Japanese? Other than firearms, of course. For instance, you mentioned awhile ago that you actually used a pocketknife to cut the Mexican's glove. Obviously, you were allowed to have a pocketknife.

Western: Yes, sir. I don't really know when they confiscated the pocketknife, but I guess they did because I didn't wind up with it. At that time you could have a pocketknife, a screwdriver. We took those Australian florins, you know, and beat them like this and made rings out of them. I did that sometimes and just made rings out of those.

Marcello: What was that Australian florin? Was that a coin?

Western: Yes. I'd take those Australian coins and beat them and make them flat and then cut the middle out of them and make a ring out of them. I did some of those. We had ball peen hammers and screwdrivers and first one thing and another in there. I don't know how come they let us have them. I think we even had a hacksaw. I believe that's how I cut my railings for my bed.

Marcello: Were there any kinds of sports or activities of that nature here at Bicycle Camp?

Western: They let them have a volleyball team, I believe. Yes, there was a volleyball team there. They played volleyball out there.

That's about all that they had, was this volleyball team.

Marcello: How did you personally spend your spare time?

Western: If I wasn't cutting hair, well, some way we'd get hold of some sugar and make some candy or something. What I didn't eat I sold to somebody else.

Marcello: Where'd you get the ingredients to make candy?

Western: I don't know how I managed to get it. I've forgotten how I get it, but I could make candy somehow. We'd get that sweet cream from somewhere and make it.

Marcello: What kind of candy did you make?

Western: It was some kind of a brittle, I think, or something like that.

Marcello: I know that the first contingent left Bicycle Camp in early October of 1942. I think the Fitzsimmons group was the first group to leave. Do you recall when you left and if you were a part of that group that Captain Fitzsimmons took out?

Western: No, I was not in the Fitzsimmons group. I believe it was in November when I went to Singapore. There was about 400 men they shipped out at that time.

Marcello: Did they give you any notice as to when you would be leaving? I'm referring to the Japanese when I say "they."

Western: Yes. We knew that we were going to be leaving soon, and they made us have all of our hair cut off and everything and get ready to go. That's about all I knew about it.

Marcello: At least, I guess, you knew that you would be moving out since

the other group had already left.

Western: We knew that we would be moving out. We didn't have too much notice of the fact. But they did make us all have our hair cut off and all that. You figured then you was going on some kind of a ship or something.

Marcello: I do know that at one point in Bicycle Camp, they did ship all of the specialists to Japan. How did you manage to get out of that group?

Western: Well, how I managed to get out of that group, I believe, was when they gave us a card stating what our vocations and our qualifications were. We talked a lot about this before we decided what we would tell them. Lester and I told them that we were students. That way that got me off the specialist list. Had I told them that I was a mechanic, I would have been on that ship going to Japan. But I didn't tell them that. I told them that I was a student.

Marcello: I assume from what you said that you wanted no part of going to Japan.

Western: I didn't. I didn't have any desire to go to Japan whatever.

Marcello: When you did leave Bicycle Camp, what kind of gear did you take with you?

Western: I just took what I had. That wasn't too much. Probably, after giving the sailors that clothing, I might have had two uniforms or something like that with maybe a little underwear and a few socks.

Marcello: Was it upsetting to leave Bicycle Camp, or did it not make any difference to you?

Western: It didn't make much difference to me. I figured, well, since I was a prisoner-of-war, I might as well just bear it out whichever way wherever I was. One place was as good as another. It was just time spent.

Marcello: Did you know where you were going at that point?

Western: No, I didn't have any idea. I didn't know that I wasn't going to Japan at that time. Really, I didn't.

Marcello: Do you recall what the name of the ship was that you went aboard?

Western: The Dai Nichi Maru.

Marcello: That one seemed to ply that area on a regular basis, that is, between Java and Singapore.

Western: Yes.

Marcello: Take me aboard the Dai Nichi Maru. Take me through the whole process of getting you aboard and into whatever quarters they had assigned you.

Western: We got to the docks, and it was just like driving a bunch of cattle. That's about the way they drove us on there. That's how they handled things. They'd just drive you on like a bunch of cattle. As far as quarters they had for you, there wasn't too damn much quarters. We were living on top of the deck at that place, you know. We didn't have anyplace to go, and we were pretty crowded. There was one little

hold or place that we slept, I believe. It was about two decks down. I'm not sure. It might have been two decks down. It might have just been one. It was crowded. You didn't have room to lie down. If you slept, you had to kind of sleep sitting up. It was pretty crowded and filthy. Its musty smell was awful. I didn't stay down there too much except when I had to. They made us stay down there some.

Marcello: I gather that what they had done--and correct me if I'm wrong--is that they had actually subdivided that hold. Did they build platforms in that hold so that they could get more people in there?

Western: Yes, that's what it was. It was kind of decked, you know. That's what it was.

Marcello: How much room was there between those platforms? What was the height?

Western: I would say it wasn't more than four feet, I don't believe.

Marcello: So a man couldn't stand up.

Western: No, you couldn't stand up in there completely.

Marcello: Did you say that you could, if you wanted to, get up on deck?

Western: You could part of the time during the day. You couldn't stay up there at night, but you could get up during the day.

Marcello: What were conditions like down in that hold?

Western: Well, it was hot and stuffy, and it had a musty smell and all that. That was about all. It was stifling, really.

It was pretty bad.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard that ship?

Western: It was lousy. I think we just about had plain rice on there. I don't think we had anything but just about plain rice.

Marcello: And how did they go about feeding you?

Western: They'd bring a bowl of rice...I think I'm mistaken. I don't think we got on the deck there. I think they fed us down in that hold. I just got off the beam there. They fed us down in that hold, and they brought us water down in that hold. If you didn't have water in your canteen, why, you had to drink out of a pan or something that they brought down there for you to drink out of.

Marcello: I think you're correct. In fact, I believe the only time you could really go up on deck is when you had to go to the restroom.

Western: Had to go to the benjo. That's it. I had to figure that out there. But when you had to go to the benjo, why, they'd let you go out there, and you could get up on deck then. That was the only time you got on deck.

Marcello: The benjo must have been a terrifying experience, too.

Western: Yes. All it was was just a little shack built on the side on the deck, and it opened right into the ocean. If you'd have fell through, you'd have been in bad shape. You'd need a life preserver (chuckle). That would've been something.



That might have been a way to get out of there.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you really knew what being a prisoner-of-war was like now.

Western: I had already realized what it was. You were their prisoner, and you had to do as they said.

Marcello: How long were you aboard the Dai Nichi Maru?

Western: I believe about six days. I'm not sure. I don't really remember, but I believe it was about six days. They took us from Java to Singapore.

Marcello: What happens when you get to Singapore?

Western: When we got off the ship, I believe they put us into trucks. I'm not sure. I think they put us onto trucks and hauled us into Changi Prison--back out on the end of Changi Prison. Like I say, I forget directions, but it seemed like it'd be the north end on there. They put us in some old English barracks. They were pretty good barracks, but you wasn't going to get too much sleep in there. We slept on the floor.

The first night I was there, I put my bed down on the floor, and I woke up itching all over. I didn't know what it was. I thought the mosquitoes was awful bad or something. But the next day, I raised up my barracks bag, and there was half a gallon of bedbugs under that barracks bag. They was all full, so I knew what was eating me up then. That was the worst place for bedbugs I've ever seen in my life.

The food there was pretty lousy. The English was in

control of everything there, or seemed to be. I don't think that they gave us the same rations that they were eating.

Marcello: What kind of food were you getting?

Western: We had rice, and there wasn't anything...curry, I believe... curry powder. I don't think we were getting very much vegetables. There wasn't too much vegetables there. That's about all we were getting. Very poor food.

Marcello: You mentioned the bedbugs a moment ago. Did you have any way of getting rid of them?

Western: The only way was to pour hot water on them if you had time to make the hot water and could get the hot water. That'd be the only way you could get rid of them. We just had to kind of put up with them.

I always will remember old "Quaty" Gordon. I don't know if he told you this when you interviewed him or not. He had him a bed that he had up in the barracks there. After about two days, he threw that bed out the window. That thing was covered up with bugs. It was made out of wood. It was just covered up with bugs. He threw that thing out. Ask him about that bed he had in Singapore (chuckle). He threw that thing out the window.

Marcello: You mentioned the British awhile ago. Talk a little bit about the relations that developed between the Americans and the British here in Changi.

Western: It was very bad. We didn't have too much to do with them.

They were, as I say, in charge of everything. They were even in charge of the working parties when we went out on working parties. The guards would come around and first one thing then another. What we were doing, we were digging out a rubber plantation. I think it might have been one that wasn't very good. We were digging out this rubber plantation and getting ready to make gardens so that they could grow some more vegetables there for the prisoners and the other people that were stranded there. The English seemed to be even in charge of that.

Marcello: Did you have any way of supplementing your food here at Changi?

Western: No, there wasn't any ways of doing that, I don't think, because we didn't know the angles or the ropes too well there.

Marcello: I do know that with at least one group of Americans, there were some problems involving the "king's coconuts." Do you recall that?

Western: Yes, I remember that. I don't remember who the guys were, but they were cutting down a coconut tree to get coconuts. The Englishman came up and said that that was the king's tree. One of the Americans said, "Fuck the king!" Then they had trouble. Anyway, they whipped the Englishman and took the coconuts, anyway. Then the next day, why, they called them in and the Englishman tried to identify the guys. He never did. I think one of them might have been ol' John Hensley. I'm not sure. I think one of them might have been John

Hensley. But the Englishman never did identify them, and they got away with it.

Marcello: I also understand that the British officers insisted that they be saluted, which had been stopped among the Americans. Is that not correct?

Western: Yes, that's right. We didn't have much to do with the British officers. We didn't ever go for that, either. We treated them just like we did our own officers.

There was one incident that Dempsey Key got involved in. I don't know just how it took place. Anyway, he hollered and told that Englishman to put on his hat, that there might be a shitbird or something like that (chuckle) flying over. He didn't like that. They got ol' Colonel Tharp on the mat about that.

Marcello: How long were you in Changi altogether?

Western: Actually, I don't remember. I believe we were there about six months. From three to six months.

Marcello: And during most of that time, you were working on the rubber plantation?

Western: Yes. That was the only time that you went out of the barracks. Nearly every day you worked on the rubber plantation, digging out that stuff for the English's garden.

Marcello: Was it only Americans that were working on this project, or were there other nationalities as well?

Western: Well, where I was it was only Americans. But I believe they

had the Dutch and whoever happened to be in Singapore at the time working at different places.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that the English were possibly withholding Red Cross supplies. Did you ever hear of that story?

Western: That is the thing...we thought that they were selling some Red Cross food to their officers in the exchange up there. But we couldn't go up there and buy it, ourselves. They were selling that stuff there for the officers, is what we thought that they were doing. After we got out of there, I heard that there had been a whole shipload of Red Cross food dropped off there. We didn't get any of it. As far as I know, there wasn't anyone that got any of it.

Marcello: Did you ever run across Battery E after you got into Changi?

Western: No, sir, I never did.

Marcello: So you never saw them again after they were separated there in Java.

Western: They were left there at Surabaja. I never did see them anymore. I never did know what became of them until after the war.

Marcello: So do you know approximately when you left Changi? Might it be, perhaps, sometime in January of 1943?

Western: I believe it's something like that. I think we got to Moulmein, Burma, about January 13, 1943.

Marcello: Describe what happens once you leave Changi.

Western: This time we got on the Dai Moji Maru.

Marcello: How do you get to the Dai Moji Maru? In other words, do you pick it up right there at Singapore, or did you get it up at Penang? Do you recall?

Western: I don't recall. I believe that they took us in Japanese trucks to wherever it was. We didn't have to do any walking to get there.

Marcello: And you were not on any train, then, I gather.

Western: If we were, I don't recall. I don't recall. I don't believe we were on a train.

Marcello: Describe what the Dai Moji Maru was like. Take me aboard that ship.

Western: It was kind of a scroungy ship, really. It didn't have the platforms built in the hold, but they put us down in the hold on the ship. Most of the time, we were confined to that hold in the ship, but we were out on the deck sometimes. We could stay up on the deck, but we couldn't sleep up there. We had to stay in the hold. We had a little more freedom there than we did on the other ship because there wasn't as many people on this ship. I imagine there might have been 300 or 400 of us on there--I don't know--or something like that.

Marcello: Were you part of a convoy, or were you out there by yourself?

Western: There was another Japanese ship and a cruiser or something. I don't know. There was another transport that had Dutch prisoners on it.

- Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Dai Moji Maru?
- Western: It wasn't too good, but it wasn't any worse than Changi, I didn't think, because Changi didn't have good food, either.
- Marcello: Did anything eventful happen on this portion of the trip, that is, between Singapore or Penang and Moulmein?
- Western: Oh, you bet!
- Marcello: Describe what happens.
- Western: It was about 2:00 one day. My buddy and I, Lester Fassio, were sitting on deck, and we saw three little specks up in the sky. We figured out that they were aircraft. It wasn't but a little bit until they came back and made a run on us. By that time, I believe that the Japs had already gotten us down in the hold. I think we got back down in the hold. Those airplanes made a run on that bunch of ships. They sank the ship that had the Dutch on it. They got three near misses on our ship. Then there was a gun that blew up. A Japanese gun killed the Japanese crew and some Australians on our ship. When the plane made his reconnaissance, it looked like our ship was on fire from the air. They never did come back and bomb us anymore. They got too far out just a little while after reconnaissance was over. But things was a little wild there for a while on that ship.
- Marcello: Describe the scene down in the hold.
- Western: I guess everybody was just scared to death, practically.

There wasn't too much that you could do about it because the guys were up there with machine guns over us, so you just had to stay there and sweat it out. If they had jumped over the side, I guess we could have jumped over then, but otherwise, well, we were pretty well trapped.

Marcello: How long did this situation last?

Western: I would say for forty-five minutes to an hour.

Marcello: As a result of those near misses, was the hold where you were staying affected in any way?

Western: I think that we did have a leak in that the ship was leaning to the side some. But we were not far from Moulmein, and we made it to Moulmein without any further mishap.

Marcello: What happened to all those Dutch on that other ship?

Western: There was about 1,000 to 1,200 Dutchmen on that ship that sank and about 500 Japanese. Some 963 of the Dutchmen made it to our ship. One of the Dutchman brought his ol' house cat with him. That was something unusual. Out of the 500 Japs, there wasn't but about forty or fifty who survived. Now whether the Dutch drowned those Japs or whether they tried to stay with the ship and save the ship and drowned, I don't know. But I just suspect that the Dutchmen did a few of those Japs in in coming across there.

Marcello: That must have really crowded things up aboard your ship.

Western: Yes, it made it really crowded.

Marcello: What was the attitude of the Japanese in the aftermath of



this attack?

Western: They were a little more brutal and a little more strict and everything. They were real hard on us after that until we got off the ship.

Marxwillo: So you get into Moulmein, Burma, sometime in January, 1943-- maybe around January 16. How does that sound?

Western: That's probably better than the 13th.

Marcello: I believe that the attack by those B-24s took place on January 15, and it was the next day that you pulled into Moulmein.

Western: Yes, we got into Moulmein the next day after.

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

What happens when you get into Moulmein?

Western: Well, they get us off, and it's not far to the Moulmein Jail or something. I always thought it might have been a leper colony. I think it was a deserted leper colony that we went in. But, anyway, they called it the Moulmein Jail. We went in there and stayed there for about, I guess, six days or something like that. The living conditions wasn't too good at that place. I was kind of glad to get out of there until I found out where I went. After I found out where I went, that jail was a good place.

Marcello: So the Japanese more or less leave you alone there in that jail.

Western: Yes, they left us alone. They must have been guarding... well, it had a rock wall around it or a concrete wall or

something around it. I guess they guarded outside. You hardly ever saw one in there.

Marcello: So it had been a civilian jail, probably, at one time.

Western: Yes, I think it had been a civilian jail.

Marcello: Were you housed in cells?

Western: No, we were just inside. You could go where you wanted to in there, but you couldn't go out. There wasn't any going out.

Marcello: So you move eventually from Moulmein to Thanbyuzayat. How do you get from Moulmein to Thanbyuzayat?

Western: I believe we walked. How'd the other guys say we went?

Marcello: I don't remember. By this time, do you know what you're going to be doing?

Western: No, we still don't know for sure. We just know we're in there, and it's just a different country, and that's all.

Marcello: Now Thanbyuzayat, as we know, was the base camp for the Burma end of the railroad. It was also, I guess, the railhead. When you get to Thanbyuzayat, do you remember a Colonel Nagatomo?

Western: I certainly do.

Marcello: Describe him and what he does at this point.

Western: Actually, I was too far from him to get a description of him personally, but I know what he told us. He said, "Gentlemen, you are prisoners-of-war." He said, "You are my guests." He said, "This railroad is going to be built,

and it will be built if it's over your dead body." That's about the impression he left with me. That's exactly what he said, that it would be built if it was over our dead bodies.

Marcello: Was he giving you this information in English, or was it going through a translator?

Western: It was being translated. He was telling us. As far as I know, there was an interpreter.

Marcello: Did the speech make any impression on you at that time?

Western: Well, it didn't make a whole lot at that time, no.

Marcello: I assume you only stayed at Thanbyuzayat for a brief period of time.

Western: I don't think we stayed there but about until the next day. Then I think we moved on up to the 18 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: So your first stay is 18 Kilo. How do you get from Thanbyuzayat to 18 Kilo?

Western: I believe that we went by truck to 18 Kilo.

Marcello: Take me on a tour of 18 Kilo. What would we see if we went into 18 Kilo? I'm assuming that almost all of these camps on the railroad were pretty much the same.

Western: They were. There were long bamboo huts. They were pretty wide. They had an aisle down the middle where there wasn't anything. But they had bamboo floors on the side. Everything was built out of bamboo. They had what we called an atap roof. It was a palm leaf roof, I suppose you'd call it.

I guess they'd be 100 feet, or they'd be more than 100 feet long. Some of them would be 200 feet long there at that place where you could sleep. In some places they'd have them divided with a hall out in the middle, you know. You'd sleep on the side here, but you could walk down through the middle. There'd be about six feet down through the middle where you could walk.

Marcello: You mentioned these bamboo floors. Are these the platforms where you slept, or where these bamboo floors actually right smack on the ground?

Western: Oh, no, they were bamboo platforms in there where you slept. They would be, I imagine, mostly three feet high.

Marcello: How much room did each person have on one of those platforms?

Western: I would imagine you didn't have over eighteen or twenty inches. I would say that was about what it was.

Marcello: And that was to be your home for an indefinite period of time.

Western: For an indefinite period of time; however long it took to finish that part of the railroad until you moved to the next one.

Marcello: What other buildings might there be in one of these camps?

Western: They had a little shack out that they called the benjo. It was just an open slit trench with a bamboo shack built over it. Then we had a cook shack where the kitchens were set up, and they cooked the rice and the cucumbers and whatever they gave you to eat.

Marcello: What Japanese buildings might there be in one of these camps?

Western: Well, there was a Japanese barracks, and there was a Japanese guardhouse. That's about all there were. They had a mess hall, also. They had a place to cook their food. They had a barracks and a mess hall, and they had their latrine and all that. It'd be about the same.

Marcello: Who took care of their mess hall and so on? Were the prisoners assigned to their mess hall as well?

Western: I think that there might be one or two prisoners that would be assigned there, but not very many. Sometimes there would be one or two guys working in the Japanese kitchen.

Marcello: Describe for me how the work was organized here at 18 Kilo.

Western: Well, they got us all together, and they got us into kumis. The kumi was a work group. There were usually from thirty to fifty men according to rank (usually according to rank). They'd get the privates in one group, corporals in one group, the sergeants in one group. If there was more, they'd put them in different groups. But they'd go usually according to rank.

Marcello: So in other words, there would be a mixture of sergeants, corporals, and privates in a kumi?

Western: No.

Marcello: In other words, a kumi would be either all privates, all sergeants, or all corporals.

Western: Right.

Marcello: I see.

Western: They were divided according to rank. An officer was assigned to each kumi to go out with that kumi, but the officer was not required to work.

Marcello: What was his function?

Western: He was only a negotiator--a mediator--between the men and the Jap, and that's all. They gave us picks and shovels, and then they gave us a bamboo pole and a rice bag with wires tied to each of the four corners. You had to put this pole through there, and two men carried that rice bag. This rice bag was 160 kilos, which was a 220 pound bag of rice. It made a good-sized bag. Then with the poles, it was something like a wheelbarrow full of dirt. But two men had to carry that.

Marcello: So essentially, would you have one man picking, one man shoveling, and two men carrying?

Western: That's right.

Marcello: What would you do with this dirt?

Western: We had to carry it either to build a levee, or we had to carry it out of a cut to make the levee even. When we were in 18 Kilo, on our first day's work we started out, and they gave us one-and-a-half meters of dirt per man to move each day. Well, the men were in good shape and all of that. They started out, and they would get this done pretty quick and too early. I told them, "Let's take our time doing this.

If you don't, we're going to be moving more dirt." But they didn't listen. There got to be kumi competition of who could move it the fastest, and they'd be moving it and getting in by 2:00, which was all right for the time being. But it didn't last.

The next thing you know, we were moving two meters of dirt. It took them a longer time to do that. Each day you were moving this dirt, you had a water boiler, you had an officer that was with you, and you had that Japanese guard that was with you. A Japanese guard was with each kumi. They were assigned dirt, but they wasn't moving it. That was dirt that the men was assigned to move before they went in. So it got a little harder. Then before long...it was still dry weather then. When the rainy season got there, well, it was pretty difficult to move that dirt.

Marcello: When you were here at 18 Kilo, this was fairly level land, wasn't it?

Western: Oh, yes, it was pretty level.

Marcello: And you're still in pretty good shape...

Western: Yes.

Marcello: ...compared to what you would be later on.

Western: Oh, yes, that's right.

Marcello: This would probably vary, but how many men, approximately, would be working on one of these cuts or fills at any one time?

Western: There'd be maybe 200 men working at different places along there.

Marcello: Some of these cuts and fills were pretty large, weren't they?

Western: They were large, deep, and long.

Marcello: I've heard some of them described as being as long as a football field on occasions.

Western: Yes, they were that long or longer. They ranged from about, I'd say, three to sixteen feet deep--from three to sixteen feet deep. It was easy when it was shallow and you had to get the dirt out. But when you'd go to loading that...had you never failed...I was a dirt carrier. I wasn't a dirt digger. I figured, well, I could carry that dirt easier than I could do that digging. I wasn't a dirt digger. I carried dirt. We'd have to get that stuff up that fourteen feet. Now that is rough. And you have to get that up there if it's raining or if it's not. A lot of times you fall down while your getting it out. That would make a day's work rough.

Marcello: Now here at 18 Kilo, when did the workday start?

Western: Well, we didn't have a way to tell time, but I believe that it started between 7:00 and 8:00.

Marcello: Well, obviously, it would finish at various times, depending on when you got your work done.

Western: Yes, depending on when you got through. They'd let you go in when you got through.



Marcello: This is something I think we need to clarify, too. It seems to me that on the railroad, you would have different categories of captors. You would have the engineers, who were Japanese.

Western: Right.

Marcello: You would have the guards, who, I'm assuming, were Koreans for the most part.

Western: That's right.

Marcello: And then would you have some Japanese administrative personnel in these camps, too?

Western: Well, I guess you had them, but they wasn't out on the job. Usually, the engineer was out on the job.

Marcello: How were they in terms of their conduct and so on?

Western: They were pretty good. They wasn't too bad.

Marcello: How about the Korean guards on the project?

Western: The Korean guards were mean.

Marcello: Even out on the working details?

Western: Oh, yes, they were bad. This is when we started naming them. We had them named "Liver Lips"...

Marcello: The "Brown Bomber."

Western: ..."Brown Bomber" and "Baby Face." Boy, I don't know. We had all kinds of names for them.

Marcello: Who would normally be running one of these kilo camps? Would it be a Japanese sergeant, perhaps?

Western: I believe that a Japanese officer was running the camp, but you didn't see him too often. The sergeant, I think, did

most of the work.

Marcello: He was the actual nuts-and-bolts man.

Western: Yes, he was the actual runner. But I believe there was an officer that was there with them.

Marcello: In one of these kilo camps, approximately how many Japanese and Koreans might there be?

Western: I imagine it would be from fifty to 125.

Marcello: Also, do we have to keep in mind that not all the prisoners would be working the railroad? In other words, there were a certain number of prisoners that would have to be in camp to keep everything running smoothly there. Is that correct?

Western: It was. Whenever the business was pretty strong working on the railroad and before people started getting sick, practically all our men, except what officers that wasn't assigned to a kumi and the people that stayed in to do the cooking and the doctor and the medics (usually, there wouldn't be but one medic with a doctor), would all be out working.

Marcello: And I guess you'd have wood cutting details and people like that in camp, would you not?

Western: I think the cooks did that because they never let us railroad workers fool with that. It was kind of like a beehive. They had them where they took care of their own stuff, you know. The cooks took care of the kitchen, and that included the wood cutting; and we took care of the other part outside.

Marcello: In your opinion, which was the choicest job to have on the

railroad, and which was the least desirable to have on the railroad? What in your opinion would have been the best job?

Western: I believe carrying that dirt was the best job. I know it was the best job for me. But there were not any good jobs. They were all bad.

Marcello: Maybe my question wasn't a good one, and let me be more specific. Working in the cook shack was a pretty good job, wasn't it?

Western: Well, I don't know. I would have hated to put up with the harassment that they had to put up with the Japanese people coming in there. If they had something the Japanese liked, well, they'd beat up everybody or get what they wanted, you know. I don't know. I think that I'd have rather worked outside.

Marcello: Did the cooks seem to be a little fatter than everybody else?

Western: No, I don't think so. They might have been a little healthier than everybody else. I think that they were pretty fair with us. I don't think that they knocked down on us a whole lot.

Marcello: Getting back to the officers again. Do you think that the officers did have a valid function out on that railroad? In other words, was it important what they were doing, that is, in standing between you and the Japanese?

Western: Well, I think it was in the case of them that did their job. I think that they were a whole lot of help. I know the lieutenant that was with us was Lieutenant Ilo Hard. He was with

us, and he would stand up and argue with that Jap that was assigning the meters and be sure that we were getting the proper amount of meters that we were supposed to. He would also get down and help do his work even though he knew the Jap was going to beat the heck out of him. He got beat nearly every day for that. I'd say that the officers that did their job were respected. Now there was some of them that went out, and all they did was just go out there, and the men had to move the dirt for him, you know. The kumicho --our kumi officer--that I had, I'd say that he helped us a lot. He stuck his neck out several times during the day for us.

Marcello: Normally, under what circumstances would one of these Korean guards get on your case out on a work detail? What would set him off?

Western: If he thinks you're goofing off or something, why, he'd get on you quick for that. If you made a mistake or something, like, maybe the bag would break or the pole would break, why, he'd want to get on you for that. They were kind of unreasonable. They were very unreasonable.

Marcello: I've heard some of the former prisoners say that the Koreans were unusually cruel. In other words, several of the guys have mentioned cases where they would deliberately torture animals and things like that--jab them with a bayonet and so on. Did you see Koreans do any of that sort of thing?

Western: No, I really didn't, but I don't doubt that it did happen because they were unnecessarily cruel. Personally, I did not see that at all.

Marcello: Did you have any other kind of assistance on this railroad, that is, dynamite or machinery or elephants or anything like that?

Western: They had some elephants, and the engineers did use dynamite when they started breaking the ballast for the road. We had one bunch of engineers that blew themselves up out there. I guess they set off a charge too close to them, but they sure did. They blew themselves up.

Marcello: So this railroad was almost entirely built then with hand labor.

Western: It was built by hand labor--our hand labor. We built that railway. Then we lay the ties and put the rails down and beat the ballast. We also built those bridges by hand, too.

Marcello: Now at this stage, are you working seven days a week yet?

Western: Yes, we're working seven days a week.

Marcello: How long did you remain at the 18 Kilo camp?

Western: I believe that we were there about three months.

Marcello: Do you recall where you moved from there?

Western: I believe we moved to two camps from there. We moved to 30 Kilo, and then we moved to 35 Kilo. Then we moved back to 30 Kilo and stayed at 30 Kilo for another few weeks. We stayed there awhile, and then when we moved from 30 Kilo the

second time, we went all the way to 80 Kilo.

Marcello: Now all these camps are prepared for you. Isn't that correct?

Western: They were all prepared. I think people had been living there before because we always had head lice and such like when we got there. So I guess there had been people--natives--living there before. Probably Burmese natives or something were staying there.

Marcello: Yes, we have to keep in mind that they used a bunch of native labor in building that railroad.

Western: Native labor built all that stuff as they went through there, I'm sure.

Marcello: When you were out on those work details, how were you fed? Was the food brought out to you? How'd that work? Were you given so much to take out before you left camp?

Western: It was brought out to us. We'd eat there. Usually, it was just rice and stuff for dinner.

Marcello: Was there a road that paralleled the building of the railroad more or less?

Western: Yes, there was a truck road that went through there, but it wasn't always very good. It wasn't a highway. It was just a dirt road.

Marcello: You mentioned bridge building awhile ago. Describe how a bridge was built.

Western: I didn't build but one, I think. They had bridge builder teams, but I got in on one of them. They cut the pilings

that they put the bridge on out of the jungle there and got them up there with elephants or however they could. We always said the elephants did the light work, and we had to do the heavy work. But we'd get those pilings set up.

Then they had this tower that they built--kind of like an oil derrick--out of bamboo poles. It had this big, heavy weight that hooked onto a rope and a pulley. You put a bunch of men on each rope, and you pulled that thing back and turned it loose. There was a Jap up on that tower guiding that weight so it would hit the top of that pole everytime. You drove that pole into that ground for about ten or twelve feet, I guess, or something like that--anyway, until that engineer said it was far enough. Whenever he says it was far enough, why, you quit and started on another one. We pounded on one for three days, and we never did drive it an inch. He finally gave up and said that was deep enough and sawed it off (chuckle).

Now the people that really built those bridges--some of them--worked from 8:00 in the morning until 2:00 at night building those bridges because they weren't getting along as fast as they thought they ought to. Most of the time, it would take us...after we got in there, we didn't start moving these heavy loads until we got to 100 Kilo Camp. When we started that, we didn't get in sometimes until after dark, and there were crews that got in at 1:00 or 2:00 after

finishing their work.

Marcello: Some of those bridges were two and three tiers high, too, were they not?

Western: Yes, they were. They sure were. I don't know how they stood up with what they built them out of, but they did.

Marcello: Now in May, 1943, a couple of things happened. The Japanese don't think that the course of the railroad is progressing fast enough, and at about the same time monsoon season is starting.

Western: Right.

Marcello: What we're talking about now is that period that was known as "Speedo." Where were you when all that broke loose?

Western: I believe we were at 100 Kilo Camp when that broke loose.

Marcello: Describe how the work routine changed at that point.

Western: Okay. The mount of dirt was increased to two-and-one-half cubic meters per man each day. Of course, you had to move that before you came in, and there'd be eight meters of that. As I said once before, they also assigned an officer, a Japanese guard, and the water boiler. The men were not as strong then as they were and were working under adverse conditions. It would take you from ten to twenty hours to move that dirt. It all depended on how far you had to carry it. If you was making a fill, you had to carry it up on a higher ramp. Sometimes, if you was making a fill, it was hard to get dirt close enough. You'd have to carry it for a longer



distance to pour it on that fill. But it didn't make any difference. That hole where you dug it out was measured before you ever went home. They measured that. If it was, like, an inch short of being deep enough, why, you dug that inch out before you went in.

Marcello: How does the attitude of the guards change?

Western: They were more belligerent and more determined and more brutal. They'd get on you quicker for nothing. The Japs had been on them, I guess, because the railroad wasn't doing like it should.

Marcello: Describe what it was like working in the monsoons while all this was going on.

Western: You never were dry. You were wet all the time. When you went back to the barracks, chances were that where you slept was leaking. It was usually a continuous drip all the time in the rain.

Marcello: The answer is probably obvious to my next question, but I'll ask it, anyhow. How did the monsoons affect the work on the railroad?

Western: Well, the way I see it, it didn't affect the progress of the railroad as much as it affected us. All it did was make it harder on us. It made it harder on us because it was harder to do our work than it would have been if it hadn't been raining.

Marcello: Well, I guess what I'm saying is this. You're building the road, and the rains come. I'm sure that it must be washing

in some of those fills and so on.

Western: Oh, yes, it was doing that. We had to go back and fill up some of it and redo some of it.

Marcello: And I'm also assuming that when you're trying to carry this dirt, half of it must be water.

Western: Yes, it's wet stuff.

Marcello: Now what happens to your food while the "Speedo" and the monsoons are taking place?

Western: Well, as the work gets harder and the rain gets worse, the food gets less. Less and less our food got. By that time, there were a lot of guys getting sick from dysentery and malaria and first one thing and another.

Marcello: Talk a little bit about the food. How was the quantity of the food cut?

Western: It was cut to about a third of what it had been. It was cut down on the rice, and we didn't get as much vegetables. About all we were getting is some kind of a citron from...I don't know where it was coming from, but we were getting a little bit of citron and cucumbers. That was about all we were getting with the rice--all you had to flavor it with. It was impossible to supplement then. There wasn't anything to buy or anything that you could get in Burma there.

Marcello: What would your breakfast consist of during the "Speedo" period?

Western: We'd get boiled rice. That's all it was--boiled rice.

Marcello: And where you might have been getting a healthy scoop of rice before, now you were getting about a third of a scoop.

Western: That's right. Yes, about a third of a scoop. That's about right.

Marcello: How about lunch?

Western: Well, you'd get about a scoop of hoiled rice and just a little ladle (a tablespoon) maybe of whatever you had to go over it. It was some kind of cucumber stew or something. It might as well have been water, I imagine, for all the good it was, but it moistened it up a little.

Marcello: Then how about your supper?

Western: It was about the same as the dinner. There wasn't too much difference.

Marcello: And, of course, you didn't have supper until you got back into camp, whenever that would be.

Western: No matter when you got through with your work, that's when you had supper--when you got back to camp.

Marcello: And is it true that the cooks always had supper ready for you?

Western: They did. They did have something for you to eat when you came in. There'd be someone there to have something for you to eat.

Marcello: What was the longest stretch of consecutive hours that you worked on that railroad, do you recall, during the "Speedo" season?

Western: About twenty hours.

Marcello: A twenty-hour stretch.

Western: Yes, twenty hours. That happened a lot of times--twenty hours. There was guys that worked more than that.

Marcello: Which means you would have at most four hours rest. Not even that long, really.

Western: That's right. About four hours, yes.

Marcello: Like you mentioned, everything seemed to happen at one time. The monsoons start; they try to speed up work on the railroad; and your rations our cut. Now the rations are cut because of the monsoons. Is that correct?

Western: That's right, because I believe they couldn't get them in there. I think that's why we had short rations. They didn't have a way of getting them in there.

Marcello: Everything had to come from Thanbyuzayat.

Western: Yes.

Marcello: Like you mentioned awhile ago, you have all kinds of diseases and other physical problems occurring. I'm sure almost everybody and his brother had malaria.

Western: That's right. They had it.

Marcello: Except you.

Western: Me and one other guy, I think, but that's all. About 98 percent of them did. I'll say that.

Marcello: How do you believe that you were lucky enough not to get malaria?

Western: I don't really know. I think the fact is, when they started giving us this quinine at 18 Kilo, the guys were throwing it away. Instead of throwing it away, I said, "Just give it to me." I'd keep it. It wasn't raining then. It was still dry. I'd take one of those whenever or however much I was supposed to take it. I've forgotten how much. But I'd take that like I was supposed to every day. I took it probably more than they did. I believe, if they had taken what they was given, there wouldn't have been so many of them that had it.

Marcello: Why did they want to throw it away?

Western: I don't know. They just didn't want to take it.

Marcello: Did it taste bad?

Western: I didn't see anything wrong with it. They just didn't want to take it.

Marcello: You also mentioned, Mr. Western, during our lunch break that it seemed like the younger ones had more problems surviving than the older ones. Do you want to explain a little bit about what you meant?

Western: The logic behind that is that a man is not fully developed until he is about twenty-six years old. These men were young. They were from eighteen to twenty-one or something like that, and they wasn't fully developed. Perhaps, where I could exist on the amount of food I was getting, well, they wasn't fully developed; and when they wasn't getting any more than

that, well, they started going down. It started working against them. I believe that's why the older people made it better than the younger ones did.

Marcello: Do you also think perhaps that the older personnel realized much more clearly the value of hygiene and cleanliness and things of that nature?

Western: Yes, I do. I believe that. I know that I was always very careful to sterilize my mess gear before and after I ate. That would make a lot of difference in the fact of getting dysentery and such like.

Marcello: And all water had to be boiled.

Western: That's right--all water. You didn't drink any water that wasn't boiled. It had to be boiled anytime you used it.

Marcello: Is it true that under these circumstances you can't slip up once.

Western: That's right.

Marcello: If you slip up but one time, you're likely to be a goner.

Western: That's right.

Marcello: In other words, if you just one time don't boil your water, it can be fatal.

Western: That's right. That can be all it takes. I believe that that's what happened to our doctor. We could buy some kind of sugar that was in little flat cakes. It had to be boiled. But he put it in his canteen cup, and the temptation was so great that he took a bite of that, and he got dysentary or

cholera from it. That's what caused his problems.

Marcello: This is Dr. Lumpkin.

Western: Yes.

Marcello: Dysentery was a big killer, wasn't it?

Western: It was, yes.

Marcello: Did you get any dysentery?

Western: I had what they call amoebic dysentery, but not the other kind of dysentery. I didn't have that kind. I did get it, and I didn't get it cured up until sometime in 1946, after I got home.

Marcello: Were there any home remedies or home cures that one could use here to stop dysentery?

Western: They fed them charcoal, and that helped. Yes, they could feed them charcoal. But that was about all we had to do for them, is charcoal and plenty of water.

Marcello: When we say charcoal, are we referring to the burnt rice in the bottom of the containers or just plain wood charcoal?

Western: Well, either one would work. I think the plain wood charcoal perhaps was better. You know, you'd granulate it and mash it flat and use it that way. I think it was better. But the burnt rice helped.

Marcello: I guess those of us who weren't there can't fathom what dysentery is like. All of us probably had diarrhea at one time, and we think it's pretty bad, but, of course, it's absolutely nothing compared to dysentery.

Western: Yes. You have worse cramps, and you go to the bathroom more often. You just go to the bathroom so much that you...as I say, I never had dysentery, but I know other guys that did. They just went to the latrine so often until they were passing blood, you know. They'd even pass the lining of their stomach out. That's how bad it was. It was just so bad that then they'd start bleeding internally, and I suppose that's what caused them to die.

Marcello: How about tropical ulcers?

Western: Tropical ulcers were real bad. It seemed as though people could just get a scratch from that bamboo; and during the rainy season when the rations were low and the work was hard, they'd get a tropical ulcer. I saw a lot of guys with the bone in their legs showing from that. When it started, it was proud flesh. There wasn't anything that would cure it. It would just keep going. The treatment they used--that the doctor used--they'd take maggots and wash the maggots and put them in there and let them eat that proud flesh out. A lot of guys got well from it, and a lot of guys died because they didn't have enough strength to come back. It seemed like they'd get that tropical ulcer, they'd get malaria, and then the next thing you know they'd get dysentery, and then they were just down so weak that they couldn't survive. It would just kill them.

Marcello: How about beriberi?



Western: Well beriberi was a pretty common thing. I guess nearly everybody had that. You'd just kind of swell up. I saw people die from it. It looked like a balloon, you know. They'd just start swelling up, and just their whole system would turn to water, it looked like. That's what it was. But you could punch your leg there, and it would leave a hole. Everybody, I guess, had some of it. But some people had it worse than others. There wasn't anything...I guess we didn't have anything to do for that.

Marcello: Did you ever get any tropical ulcers?

Western: No, I didn't. I was very lucky. I went through the chow line one morning. For some reason or other I got up early, and I didn't have my shoes tied...or if I had shoes. I don't remember. Maybe I didn't. I don't know. Anyway, the cook poured a whole bunch of hot rice on my foot, and it made a big blister there. I figured I'd get a tropical ulcer from that; but, by golly, it healed up, and I didn't.

Then later on, when we was putting down the rails, everybody was picking up this rail, and all of a sudden they turned it loose. My thumb went over and caught in the groove of one rail, and the ball caught it in the other--that thumb--and mashed it flat. It mashed the nail off of it. I didn't get a tropical ulcer from that. I thought I would. I thought I'd lose my hand, but I didn't.

Marcello: I guess those tropical ulcers really struck fear into the hearts of anybody that got one.

Western: They did. They were something, I'm telling you. You didn't have to do a whole lot to get one. You'd just have that little scratch, and you didn't have enough of what it takes to heal it up, and it would just start rotting out.

Marcello: I understand they stink, too.

Western: Oh, yes, they did. There was a boy that was working with me. His name was Winchester, from Tennessee. He was working in the group where I was. We were out working one day, and he had a tropical ulcer on his foot. One of his toes dropped off while we were right there working. It just ate the toe right off.

Marcello: Now during this "Speedo" period, if one were so sick that he couldn't go out on the road, what happened to his rations? Theoretically, what happened to his rations?

Western: They cut it down almost to nothing. They'd have this blitz on these sick men. They'd get him out, and the doctor didn't tell them who was well enough to go to work. Nobody didn't tell them that. If you looked like you was able to work, they didn't care how much temperature you had or how sick you were. You went out and worked, and you had to stay out there all day and work. I believe that that increased our death rate a lot because of the fact that they did work those sick men like that. That kept them from recuperating as much as they could. Besides that, it broke their morale down to where they just were disgusted, and they didn't give a damn

whether they lived or not. I think that had a lot to do with it.

Marcello: So in other words, that Japanese guard or whomever was assigned a quota, and, by God, he was going to have this quota out on that road.

Western: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Now when we say that the rations of the sick were cut, how was this done? In other words, did the Japanese know how many people were working, and therefore so much rice would be allotted to the cooks for that many working people? In other words, how would they prevent a man who was laid up and sick from getting his full ration of rice?

Western: I think they cut us all, is what I think. They cut the rations according to the amount of sick people you had, is the way they cut the rations. You didn't have the food for everybody. That don't mean that the guy didn't get his rations. He got probably as much as we did.

Marcello: But everybody got a little bit less.

Western: Everybody got less. I think that's the way it worked.

Marcello: I understand not too many people wanted to go in that sick hut or whatever you call it.

Western: No, they didn't want to go there. When you went there, the next place was the graveyard, usually. That's what they figured. When they got there, then they could control what that man got. They had no medical care, anyway. You may as

well be somewhere else as to be there. You didn't have any more medicine there than you had any other place.

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that I want to follow up on. Some men gave up, didn't they?

Western: That's right.

Marcello: How could you tell when a man had given up?

Western: Well, he just didn't have any determination, and he didn't have any will power or anything. You could tell that he didn't give a dang. He was just flat disgusted and didn't care what happened.

Marcello: A lot of times, I understand, they wouldn't eat.

Western: We had guys that wouldn't eat, yes.

Marcello: Was there anything that you could do to snap them out of this state of mind?

Western: Well, it was a possibility that you could talk to them and get them out of it if you had time. But the trouble was, you didn't have time. You were too busy working or looking after yourself. You just couldn't do it, that's all.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that the attitude of some people was one of disgust for those who had given up and died. In other words, that meant that that person had taken the easy way out, in a sense, and it also meant that that simply increased the amount of work that everybody else had to do. In other words, I've heard it said that there wasn't a whole lot of sympathy ultimately for those who had given up and died.

Western: No, I never did feel that way about it. I figured, well, if a man could take it, that was good; but if he couldn't, well, there wasn't anything he could do about it. I didn't look at it that way.

Marcello: I also understand that in some cases--in fact, in a great many cases--two or three or four guys would get together as a little clique or a little group that would look out for one another, and this was kind of important for survival. Did you find that to be the case, too?

Western: It was very important, but we couldn't do that in Burma. That didn't take place where we were now. Later on, it did; but not now.

Marcello: Did you ever have to go on any of the burial details?

Western: No, I never did.

Marcello: I understand that during this period, they were a constant thing.

Western: Oh, yes. They had guys that stayed in camp that didn't do anything else but dig graves. That was all they did.

Marcello: I've heard it said that they would usually have to simply... well, what might they do? Just cover the person in a rice sack or something because the clothing--what little clothing they had--could be used by somebody else.

Western: Yes, that's what they did. They'd just cover them with a rice bag or something like that. In other words, we didn't go to any of the funerals. They didn't let us off for that

or anything. The burial crew took care of the whole thing.

I don't know just exactly what went on there.

Marcello: In looking through that "Lost Battalion" roster, it seems to me that the vast majority of the people you lost died here at either 80 Kilo or the 100 Kilo Camp.

Western: That's right.

Marcello: Somewhere in that area.

Western: That's right. That was our Waterloo--right in there.

Marcello: Most of them seemed to have died from either the dysentery or tropical ulcers...

Western: Right.

Marcello: ...or a combination of everything else.

Western: Right, yes.

Marcello: I do know that the Japanese had established a "hospital camp" back at 80 Kilo.

Western: Yes.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you never had to go back there.

Western: I never went to 80 Kilo.

Marcello: And I assume you never did want to go back there.

Western: No, I never did. I don't think anybody really wanted to go back there.

Marcello: I understand that was really just a death camp.

Western: It was. That was what it was. My neighbor down here, A.W. Lasiter...he's passed on now. He died, I guess, four years ago. He went there. He had a tropical ulcer on his shoulder.

He had one back there. He went there. He stayed there.

He said it was rough down there. I never was there.

Marcello: Were there any opportunities to do any trading or anything with the natives? Even for such things as tobacco or that sugar that you mentioned awhile ago? Anything like that?

Western: Yes, there was a possibility. We had a bunch of people that they selected at various times to go out in the jungle and pick some sort of a weed or vine or something for foods. It happened that my buddy Fassio and I were on one of these deals one time. We went out and bought some cigars. They were little green cigars, and I guess they had a clove in them or something, and I don't know what else. No telling. They wasn't fit to smoke.

But, anyhow, we traded for some of those cigars out there, and we got caught. Whenever we got back to camp, well, they took our greens and everything to the cookhouse, and then they put us in a little formation out there and made us sit down on our haunches like this (gesture) for about two hours. Then they came back, and the Korean guard made us get up, and they opened ranks, and he'd go down and hit us and knock us down. Everytime that he went down the line, he'd knock us down, and then he'd go down another line and knock them down. There was about ten of us. He whipped the whole bunch. Then after that, why, he made us start hitting each other, and if you wasn't hitting each other, why, he'd hit you. So the ol'

guy who was hitting me wasn't pulling his punches. He almost was about to kill me. I told him, "If you don't pull your punches, I'm going to lower the boom on you." He started pulling his punches. We made it through that. That was the only time I got caught--trading for those ol' green cigars. They wasn't too plentiful, but that guard got us that time.

Marcello: Now did the Japanese pay you so much to work on the railroad?

Western: Yes, they paid us in occupation money--10¢ a day--for working on the road.

Marcello: Then could you use that money to trade with the natives?

Western: You couldn't legally. You could if you didn't get caught, like I did (chuckle). That was all right. There wasn't much you could buy with the money because there wasn't anything that they had.

Marcello: By this time, how was your clothing holding out?

Western: I was down to one pair of shorts and a T-shirt, I think, then. I think my shoes were worn out, and I was going barefooted.

Marcello: I understand that during that monsoon season, nothing stays dry.

Western: That's right.

Marcello: Everything is wet all the time.

Western: That's right. There wasn't anything dry. I had some salt that I was trying to keep in my musette bag. I was trying to keep it. And that stuff turned to water. It vaporized. It beat all I ever saw.



- Marcello: At this point, are you living from day-to-day? Do you feel that rescue or liberation is going to be anytime now? Have you time to think about that sort of thing.
- Western: I believe that by that time I had realized it was going to be a while before we were liberated, and we were just living from day-to-day waiting for it to happen. I think that's the way it was.
- Marcello: You mentioned this beating awhile ago that you got in trading with the natives for those cigars. Was this the worst one that you had gotten--the worst beating and punishment?
- Western: Yes, that was the worst one that I had gotten up until that time. That was pretty bad.
- Marcello: Now I guess it's October of 1944 when the railroad is finally finished. When did you get out of the jungle?
- Western: Well, when the railroad was finally finished, we must have moved out of the jungle pretty soon after that. It wasn't too long. We moved into Kanchanaburi, Thailand. That was across the Bridge on the River Kwae. We rode out across the Bridge on the River Kwae. It was just a little ways from the River Kwae, is where this Kanchanaburi camp was in Thailand.
- Marcello: How did you get from the jungle to Kanchanaburi?
- Western: We rode the train out. On the railway that we built, we rode out of there.
- Marcello: Describe what that train ride was like.

Western: Well, it was kind of rough. We got up there where that bridge was, and a train had gone over. We didn't know how it managed to get over into the river, but we figured maybe ours might be next going across there. But we made it.

Marcello: Describe what Kanchanaburi looked like from a physical standpoint. Again, take me on a tour through Kanchanaburi.

Western: It was a camp that looked like it had been probably an army camp. I don't believe the Japanese built it. But it was similar to the other camps with the roof and all, but I think, if I remember right, it had a wooden deck, and we could sleep on a wooden deck instead of those knotty bamboo poles. And it was in a mango grove. It was a pretty good place.

There I think the food was much better. We had better food. It seemed like that we had more of it, and we had more vegetables. There was a possibility that you could trade outside when you got outside.

But there wasn't too much going on there. You had small working parties that would go out and work on roads and first one thing and another.

This is where Lester Fassio and I started really dealing and trying to help each other. There were a bunch of Dutch prisoners-of-war there from Sumatra and Java and first one place and another that had lots of that Dutch money with them. Well, we found out that we could get five for one by

trading Dutch money for that Thai money. So I'd go around and buy this money off of those Dutch officers and first one thing and another. We'd get a bunch of it, and we'd throw it over the fence. And you could trust those natives there. They wouldn't screw you out of your money. You could just throw it over the fence. If you'd throw them 500, well, they'd give you five for one of it and throw it back over the fence. We'd do that and get money ahead. They had a party that would go out and buy stuff, and we could send out and get stuff with it that way. We didn't get to go outside, ourselves. We'd get eggs and stuff like that. We started eating those eggs instead of that rice, and that was helping us get our strength back. We did pretty well there.

Marcello: So everything eased up quite a bit once you got to Kanchanaburi. The workload has eased up; the harassment's probably eased up; and you don't have those monsoons.

Western: That's right. It was a whole lot better.

Marcello: You're closer to civilization, too. So, like you pointed out, you have more access to food.

Western: Yes.

Marcello: What kind of work were you specifically doing here at Kanchanaburi?

Western: It was mostly just light work. You'd go out and repair a hole in the road or something like that. I don't think that

any of it was necessary. They just had us doing it for something for us to do. There wasn't a whole lot of work going on there.

Marcello: Where are the bridges located? Are they at Kanchanaburi, or are they at Tamarkan? The two camps were fairly close, were they not?

Western: Maybe they were at Tamarkan. Yes, yes, they were at Tamarkan.

Marcello: Did any air raids occur while you were here at Kanchanaburi?

Western: I think we had one one night. I think we had an air raid alert, but there wasn't many of them there.

Marcello: What did something like that do for your morale?

Western: It helped us a lot. We knew there was somebody up there closer to us.

Marcello: What did you do with most of your time here at Kanchanaburi?

Western: We just piddled around mostly. There wasn't anything else to do. We just kind of rested up and piddled around--gaining strength and first one thing and another.

Marcello: Now from time to time, some groups would be leaving Kanchanaburi, and they were making up parties to go to Japan.

Western: That's right.

Marcello: What was your attitude at this time relative to going to Japan?

Western: I still didn't want to go to Japan. I didn't want to get on that ocean again--not after getting bombed like we did in the early part of the war. I knew darn well that getting

out there now would be bad.

Marcello: Besides, I guess you had about as many Japanese there in Thailand as you thought you could handle.

Western: (Chuckle) Yes, I had about all of them I cared anything about there. But I never did want to go to Japan.

Marcello: I know that at one point, there was a ceremony around this time commemorating the completion of that railroad and so on. Did you know anything about that, or were you present at that ceremony?

Western: I went to that ceremony.

Marcello: Describe what it was like. I don't think anybody has ever told me about it.

Western: They built this plaque. They had this plaque, you know. You might call it a monument. I don't know what it was. They wanted all the people to go. I don't know how come I went, but I went. They made us a big speech and told us about it, that that was in honor of all the people that died on the railroad, you know--the Japanese and the Dutch and the Australians and the English and the Americans and all the people that died on it. It was a pretty big "to-do" for them. That's about all I could tell you about it. I was pretty far from it.

Marcello: What was your attitude about having to attend something like that? In other words, did it seem just like another form of hypocrisy relative to the Japanese?

Western: Yes, that's really what it seemed like. I wasn't really too much in favor of it, but they wanted us to go, and I decided to go. Not only just for that, I went to honor the people that we had lost there. That was more or less to pay respect to those. I didn't really give a damn about the ones they lost. It was just to pay respect to the ones we lost.

Marcello: Up until this time, had you received any Red Cross parcels at all?

Western: No, sir, we hadn't received anything.

Marcello: Had you either sent or received any mail at this point?

Western: I believe that we had sent a letter sometime along there. All it was was a form card that we had mailed out, and it said, "I am working for pay." I think that's what it was, but I don't remember. I think that was somewhere in Burma. I'm not sure. It was just after we started in Burma, I think. They didn't tell where it was or anything.

Marcello: Did your folks receive any of that mail?

Western: Yes, they did. They got one card or something from me. Or two cards. Something like that.

Marcello: Did you ever see any Red Cross representatives inspect any of these camps?

Western: No, I don't think it existed over there.

Marcello: How long did you remain at Kanchanaburi altogether?

Western: I think we left there...let's see. This is 1944, isn't it?

Marcello: This would be into 1944. The road was finished sometime in October of 1943.

Western: I think we left there before December of 1944 and went to Saigon, French Indochina.

Marcello: So you were in Kanchanaburi for close to a year.

Western: Yes, somewhere along there. Maybe we left earlier than that. I think I was in Saigon for eleven months. Somewhere along this place I got lost in there. I don't know at just what time we moved or how long we were in there.

Marcello: I know a bunch of people moved down into Saigon as early as April of 1944. Do you think it was later?

Western: I moved with most of them. I moved when the first bunch left out of there. That's when I moved. Evidently, I got fouled up there.

Marcello: How did you get from Kanchanaburi to Saigon?

Western: We rode a train. It was April when I left there because I left with all these other fellows. We went by rail.

Marcello: Did you think at that time that you might have been headed for Japan?

Western: Yes, I thought maybe we were going to be making up another shipping party, is what I figured.

Marcello: Was this more or less an uneventful railroad trip from Kanchanaburi to Saigon?

Western: We had a few air raids. We had to stop a few times for air raids. We never did see any planes, but we did stop a few

times for air raids. It wasn't so uneventful. It was very crowded. I think it lasted about three or four days. They didn't give us but danged little water. You didn't have much water. But my buddy and I--Lester and I--figured out that this old steam engine that they had pulling that train was leaking. Whenever the danged train would stop, why, one of us would run up there and fill our canteen if the Jap didn't whip us. That way we could manage to have a little water to keep us alive. But the water problem was the main problem there, and people getting malaria. We had people still getting malaria from down in Burma. They were in bad trouble. They didn't have much place to lie down because the train was so crowded. That's how we managed to get our water--from that leak on that steam engine. We went through Laos, and, I believe, Cambodia down to Saigon. It was in Cambodia, I guess, where we got on a barge and went to...I guess that would be the Mekong Delta that we crossed there. But we got on this barge and rode down there across that and on into Saigon. We didn't have far to walk. We got onto a French Indochina train, and we rode that into Saigon. We didn't have far to walk, when we got into Saigon, to the camp to where we went. That was just off the docks from the warehouse area there. It was a pretty good camp.

Marcello: Let me back up and talk a little bit about that barge trip. Were you part of an international group here? In other words,



were there other nationalities besides Americans?

Western: No, Americans were all that was with us.

Marcello: This was strictly Americans.

Western: Yes, this was strictly Americans. Like you say, we all left there together. I was just mixed up as to when it was.

Marcello: Okay, so you're in Saigon, and you mentioned that these were pretty good quarters. Describe what they were like.

Western: They were some kind of French barracks, but it wasn't, I guess, a regular French barracks. Maybe it had been a prison at some time. It had a rock wall around it, or a concrete wall around it, except in front, and I think it was wood. They had a wooden wall in front there. The barracks were, I guess, sixty feet long or maybe longer. They had had a deck put in for where people could sleep up above. I think there were two decks there. There was one about three feet off the floor and then one on up a little higher. I slept up on the top deck. They were pretty good barracks. They gave us all new mosquito nets and everything. About eight or ten people would sleep under one of those big Japanese mosquito nets. We ate pretty good there.

Marcello: How was it that you ate pretty good there? Why was that? In other words, were the Japanese providing a lot of food, or were there opportunities to trade and steal here?

Western: Well, the opportunities got better to trade and steal.

Marcello: Can you describe what you mean?

Western: Yes. These mosquito nets had bottoms on them, you know,

and you could take that bottom off and carry it out and sell it to the natives for \$5 a meter.

Marcello: In other words, this was cloth.

Western: Yes, it was cloth. You could sell that to the natives, and then you could buy food with the proceeds, so that's what we did. That's when Lester and I--and then we had another buddy off the Houston there, Philip Martwick--started doing our outside trading. More or less, we started in Thailand, but when we got to Saigon, we got into it right. We'd steal anything from the Japanese that we could and sell it for money and then buy what food we could. We had bananas, and we had eggs. They let that stuff come in there. They'd buy that stuff. You could send out for it. We didn't have to buy that stuff on the black market, but we'd have to buy them through the BX or somehow.

Marcello: In other words, they established a canteen here.

Western: Yes. If you had the money, you could buy it. We managed to do that.

Marcello: I understand the natives were especially after cloth. You mentioned awhile ago the bottoms of the mosquito nettings. Cloth was evidently a scarce and valuable commodity.

Western: It was a very scarce and valuable commodity. Besides that, Japs would issue us T-shirts and those Dutch army jackets. They had a bunch of those. They'd issue us those. We'd wear them out and sell them to the natives while we were out

there and get money for that. We'd rather have money than clothes. We were used to going without clothes. If we had money, we could buy something to eat with it. We did that.

Philip Martwick, the guy I mentioned awhile ago, was working on a work party at the Dunlop power storage. It had black cloth over the windows to darken it to keep the light. He stole all of that off of there and sold it to the natives but for one window. He didn't go on the work party the next day, and a Marine stole the other piece of it and got caught. They beat the tar out of him. But Martwick didn't get caught.

Anything you could buy there, we bought to eat. We bought it. Now you couldn't buy any kind of meat hardly, but you could get bananas and eggs. The only trouble with eggs is that most of them were duck eggs, and they tasted like fish. But if you had been without food as long as we had been, that fish taste didn't bother you much.

Marcello: And most of this food, like you say, was purchased through the canteen?

Western: Yes.

Marcello: Who ran the canteen?

Western: I never did know for sure. I think the Americans had something to do with it, and the Dutch. The Americans and Dutch, I think, ran the canteen. We had Americans, Dutch, and there was some English and some Australians.

Marcello: So in other words, what you would do is, you would steal whatever you could, and this you would sell to the natives when you were out on a job or something. And then with the money, you would buy things at the canteen.

Western: Right.

Marcello: So the dealings with the natives on the outside had to be done on the sly.

Western: Oh, yes! If you got caught doing that, they'd whale the tar out of you. You didn't want to get caught. They'd carry this stuff out in a G-string or something like that, but they got to where they'd shake us down. We'd use bottomless canteens. We used everything. We had an inside informer that was telling off on us or something. They'd know where to check, and they'd check you. They'd always figure out where it was.

Marcello: You mentioned the bottomless canteens. Explain what you mean by that.

Western: Okay. The English or the Australians--I don't know which it was--had a large canteen. It was about this wide (gesture) and about eight or ten inches high.

Marcello: It was about six or seven inches wide and about eight or ten inches high.

Western: About eight or ten inches high. You'd cut the bottom out of that, and you'd stick your material up in there that you had to sell. Well, that worked good until they found out about

it. But when they found out about it, somebody got a good whipping, too. They carried it out that way. And we'd bring sugar in sometimes in our canteens, but they got wise to that. You'd find sugar or syrup or something and pour it in your canteen and bring it in, but you didn't get by with that but a time or two until somebody wised up. The next time they'd shake down your dern canteen as you came in and catch you and whale the tar out of you.

Marcello: What sort of things would you steal from the Japanese?

Western: We'd steal material, you know, like that cloth. Maybe we'd be unloading barges. If there'd be something to come in on a barge, some kind of foodstuff or something like that, why, you could steal that from them. It wasn't very often that we got to handle canned food. A few times we got to handle canned food. We'd hide out some of it on the docks, and then the next day or two, well, we'd bring it into camp. If it was edible, why, we turned it into food right then (chuckle). We didn't wait. We didn't try to sell that. But anything that was edible, we brought to camp and ate. It wasn't too often that you could do that. You could steal soy sauce and a few other things that they had a lot of there.

But on this dock deal, the warehouses and everything, the only way you could get anything in there was by barge because it was evidently too shallow for ships. There wasn't

anything but a light ship that could come in there. They'd bring these barges of rice up there and make us unload those. As I said one time before, when I was carrying that empty rice bag with that dirt in it, it was a 220-pound bag (160 kilos). Well, they had bargeloads of that stuff to come in there. They put two men in that barge to hand those up to you. At that time I weighed about 110 pounds.

Marcello: They'd stick one of those on your back.

Western: They'd put one on my back, and I'd carry it, I guess, about a hundred yards. With a 220-pound bag of rice, I could feel the bones in my leg bending. Luckily, they didn't break. You'd have to carry that all day long.

Then there in Saigon, they'd send you out at night to build a blast wall around one of those big oil tanks. You went to work and stayed until 11:00 after that. That was a pretty dadgummed long day's work. It was pretty hard carrying that rice all day and then carrying that dirt at night up on that ramp.

Marcello: So they were working you pretty hard there in Saigon.

Western: They were working us pretty hard.

Marcello: Incidentally, are your guards accompanying you all the way along the line, or are you picking up new guards?

Western: No, it'd be the same guards. They'd be stationed...there'd be one down here at the warehouse and one at the barge and one in between you and the barge. There'd be three guards

between the barge or where you were going. You didn't get much of a chance to goof off.

Marcello: What evidence do you have that the war is perhaps turning? In other words, do you know that the end is coming?

Western: I'll tell you a good one one that--what evidence I had. It was about May of 1945. We woke up one morning...we had already had one air raid in Saigon before this. We had one about January of 1945, I believe. It was high-level bombers. They came over. They didn't drop any bombs on Saigon at all, but we were alerted, and we figured they was going to bomb. But they didn't. We had seen a few planes flying around, but the Japs were still in charge.

But about May of 1945, early one morning, just about daylight, there was some dive-bombers that came in there. There was about ten of them to start with. They hit the airport. They got us out in a rice paddy out there--laying down in a rice paddy. We had some of those open death trap air raid shelters out there, you know--built like a tank with a levee. You could get about twenty men inside there. I call those "death traps." Anyway, we were out there. They got us out there. The dive-bombers started bombing that airport out there. Everytime one of the Jap planes would come off, why, they'd take him down. That raid lasted about twelve or fourteen hours. There were planes over there continuously for about that long--those dive-bombers.

Along late in the afternoon, there were two planes that made a dive on a ship out in the harbor out there. I couldn't tell what it was. I believe it was a destroyer. Anyway, one of them got hit, and he took off and went down that way (gesture), and his buddy didn't drop his bomb but came toward us. There was a 3.7-inch antiaircraft gun just a little ways from us. It had been put there by the French, but the Japs were using it. There were two gun emplacements right close together. Well, this plane came out over us. I don't believe he was a hundred feet high. I mean, he was real low. They were shooting that 3.7 over us, and that shrapnel was falling all around out there. That ol' boy barrel-rolled that plane and threw a bomb right between those two guns and put them both out of action. He went on and covered his buddy for a parachute landing.

That's how I wound up with that belt I told you about while we was eating lunch. The next day, Lester traded for that belt out on the working party somewhere. But we never did see the pilot. I guess he was killed. We knew that the war was getting close to being over.

Marcello: What did that do to your morale?

Western: It really built it up, I'll tell you.

Marcello: What did you talk about that night?

Western: (Chuckle) "We're going to be out of here before long." That was it. "Looks like the handwriting's on the wall."



- Marcello: What was the attitude of the Japanese in the aftermath of something like this?
- Western: They had learned to take defeat a little better. They took it kind of in stride. They wasn't as brutal over it as they were before or anything.
- Marcello: But I guess you couldn't show too much emotion and happiness.
- Western: No, we couldn't show too much enthusiasm over it. We had to kind of hold it under our hats. But it took them down. They destroyed 102 first-line airplanes.
- Marcello: Evidently, they just wrecked that harbor, too.
- Western: And they took seventy-six ships between Saigon and Cape St. Jacques that they sank that day. That was a turning point in that part of the war right there. They really did clean it up, boy; I mean, it started winding it up a lot. They sank seventy-six ships and destroyed 102 aircraft.
- It wasn't long until this blast wall we were building around that big tank down there...the airplanes ended that job for us. There was a high-level bomber--B-17 or B-29--that came over and dropped one bomb right down through the middle of that danged thing. I guess it was a delayed action bomb. It went all the way through it and turned the bottom right up to the top of that. It went all the way through it--right in the middle.
- Marcello: Since you knew that the Allies were winning and that the war might soon be over, did you worry about what the Japanese would do to you in case they lost?

Western: You bet! I was afraid that we would get caught between an invading army and the Japanese Army; that we would be between the Japanese and the Americans; and that we would be unarmed but be getting fire from both sides. That's what I figured is the way it would happen. As it was, it didn't happen that way.

Marcello: Where were you when the war was over? Were you here in Saigon?

Western: I was still in Saigon--right at the same camp there on the docks where we went from Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. From the time you get out of the jungle until this point that we're now discussing, had you been picking up some weight and so on?

Western: Yes, I had been. In Saigon, I had gotten in pretty good health, I think. I wasn't in too bad a shape.

Marcello: Okay, I think maybe this brings us to the point where we can talk about the surrender. I'll let you pick up the story and talk about those events leading up to the end of the war.

Western: It was about the middle of August, I guess, when the work parties starting letting up and everything. Now they never told us the war was over or anything, but the air raids stopped, you know. We weren't having air raids. We had been having one every once in a while. There was a B-25 that would come over nearly every day--right over our camp--

pretty low, but he never did fire on the camp. I guess he might have known where we were. But after this there was not too much activity. They'd cut down on the working parties and all that kind of stuff, but we were still going out until about three days before they announced that the war was over. When we really found out that it was over, why, we just went to bed one night, and when we woke up the next morning, we had, I guess, merchant marine guards instead of Japanese. All the Japanese soldiers were gone, and we had these guys in white uniforms guarding us then.

Marcello: Now were these Korean guards that you had before? Were they still Korean guards?

Western: Yes, most of them were Korean.

Marcello: Tell me how they made the announcement that the war was over. Did they gather you together?

Western: I don't think the Japanese ever told us that the war was over. I don't believe they did. There was a plane that came over and dropped pamphlets and told us to stay where we were, that the war was over and that they would be after us soon.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you received this news?

Western: It would just be hard to say—how happy you were to learn that you had made it, you know, up until then.

After this happened, why, we decided that we would like to go up to Saigon and have us a meal. Lester Fassio and Martwick and I, and, I think, Rochford, a Marine, went up to

Saigon. We couldn't find anything much to eat. We found an old crab, and we bought an old crab and ate him.

Marcello: So in other words, there was no problem in getting out of the camp at this point.

Western: We slipped out. We had known that they might have objected, so we slipped out.

Marcello: So the Japanese still have the guns and so on.

Western: Yes, they still have the guns. We thought they did. While we were up there in Saigon, why, this Vietnam revolution broke out. There you are--right there. It broke out right there at the embassy, and we were just a little way from the embassy. I suppose that might have been what it was. I don't know.

Anyway, we decided, well, maybe we better go back. It was about dark. We started back to the barracks. The street was Rue McMahon. It came right by the docks. We started back down there, and we got right about halfway, and the natives stopped us. Armed natives stopped us.

Marcello: I guess they thought you were French.

Western: They thought we were French and were going to whale the tar out of us or do something. I don't know what they would have done with us. We told them on, that we belonged in that prison camp down there, that we were going to that prison camp. Finally, one could speak English, and he knew what we were saying. He said, "If you belong in the prison

camp, you go down there, and you stay there." He said, "If you don't, you'll get hurt out here." He said, "You get in that prison camp and don't you leave there anymore." He said, "You're going to get hurt out here." So they let us go.

We got back in that prison camp, and we never left there anymore. Then in a few days, why, Captain Fitzsimmons came in late in the afternoon, and he told us the war was over and that we were going home the next day. We would fly out the next morning.

Marcello: Did that happen?

Western: Yes, we did.

Marcello: What did you take with you when you left the next day?

Western: I took my canteen and my New Testament and something else. When I got to India...I don't know how I kept my canteen and New Testament. They threw all my other stuff away while I was taking a shower and changing clothes (chuckle). But I got my New Testament that I carried all the way through the war, and I got my canteen.

Marcello: I think it's interesting that you still have your New Testament because several of the people told me they used to use that thin paper as cigarette wrapping.

Western: I feared The Maker too much for that. Let me get that and show it to you [leaves room].

Marcello: Let me just ask you a couple of things about this New Testament,

Mr. Western. You showed it to me just a moment ago, and on the inside of it, there's some sort of a Japanese stamp. Explain why that stamp is in there.

Western: That was their stamp of approval, that it had been approved, and if some other guard shook me down and found this Testament, they would know that it had already been approved, and they wouldn't have to take it.

Marcello: Am I to assume, therefore, that there were certain kinds of printed materials that you couldn't have?

Western: Absolutely. Yes, there were. They wouldn't allow any kind of printed material that they didn't want you to have. It would be any book or something like that.

Marcello: I'm sure you could have no newspapers.

Western: No area newspapers or anything like that. They wouldn't let you have it. But being printed material, they put that stamp of approval on it so that it could be kept in my person.

Marcello: I also detect that there are maybe as many as five or six or seven pages that seem to have been torn out. Did you do that? Why is it that those pages are missing?

Western: Those pages had dates of different times that I moved from one place to another on them, and the Japanese didn't want me to have that, so they removed those pages themselves before putting their stamp on it.

Marcello: How often, do you imagine, the Japanese inspected this book?

Western: I imagine they'd have these shakedowns about two or three

times a year. They'd shake you down to see what you had.

They was always looking for something.

Marcello: As I quickly page through your New Testament, I see a lot of passages that seem to be marked in one way or another. What is the purpose of that?

Western: To me they seemed to be very enlightening or very valuable information, and I just marked them that way so that I could use them as a reference or something. And they were comforting. I used them as a reference.

Marcello: Did you read this New Testament pretty faithfully while you were a prisoner?

Western: I did. I read it fourteen times from cover-to-cover while I was a prisoner-of-war.

Marcello: What role does religion play in a situation such as you found yourself in for three-and-a-half to four years?

Western: Well, it gives you a deep inner faith or something that you have to hold onto. It seems as though you're not alone if you have faith in God. That's one of the reasons that, I think, maybe I made it. I always had faith in my country and faith in God. I stayed to that--held onto it. I knew sooner or later that somebody was going to come and get me if I could survive until that.

Marcello: This seems like an appropriate marking in here. It certainly would apply to this "Lost Battalion" group since their return. I'm reading this; I'm quoting this. This is St. John

14:34: "A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another. As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." That seems to apply very closely to the people in the "Lost Battalion."

Western: That applies very much, yes. That applies very much to that group.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you leave Saigon the day after Captain Fitzsimmons made the announcement. Describe your leaving.

Western: The Japanese parked trucks out in front, and we went out and loaded on the trucks, and they hauled us up to the airport. There was about four C-47s. I believe that they were C-47s. We loaded about twenty-two people to a plane. They all took off at the same time for Rangoon, Burma. We landed at Rangoon and refueled. Then from there we went to Calcutta.

Now our present ordeal wasn't completely over. We started out from Rangoon and got out over the ocean, and one engine cut out on the plane that I was one on. It looked for quite a while that we were going to have to ditch in the ocean. We finally landed at a deserted air base. After we landed there, why, the plane had a mechanic on it, and the mechanic got out and fixed the plane. I flew in on the plane that he fixed--the same plane. I think maybe some of them stayed there, and another plane came and picked them up. I went in on the same plane that he fixed there on the deserted airstrip. I don't know what was wrong with it or anything.



But, anyway, we got into Calcutta late in the afternoon. The first thing they did, they picked us up in an ambulance and brought us up to the place. Then they took us to a place where we could take a shower. They had us pull all of our clothes off and hang them up on the outside there. They gave us new clothes on the other side. We took a shower. First, they sprayed us, and then we took a shower. We put on our new uniform, and, boy, we really felt good. I mean, I felt good to have on an American uniform again after having wearing that junk I had been wearing after four years. I really thought I was something, having on an American uniform. We stayed there in Calcutta at the 142nd General Hospital for a few days. Then one day they told us that we could ship out, that we were going to the United States, so we got on a plane.

Marcello: Describe the first really square meal you received.

Western: Now that was something. That afternoon, after we got through the shower and everything, well, they took us up to the chow hall and fed us. Boy, they had all kinds of food there. We hadn't been used to that. We just took about an ordinary helping of it. We could have eaten it all, I guess, but we just took about an ordinary helping of it because they warned us that if we ate too much, we might get food intoxication, and that might not be good for us. They told us to kind of take it easy, so that's what we did.

I really enjoyed that American meal.

Marcello: What did you get?

Western: I think we had salisbury steak that night and mashed potatoes and peas, I believe, and tea and coffee or whatever you wanted to drink. Then we had all the fruit juice we could drink. That was the main thing. They wanted us to drink that fruit juice.

Marcello: Is this also perhaps the first time you had sat down at a table with chairs for some time?

Western: That was the first time I had sat down at a table in almost four years, I suppose. Yes, almost four years. That was the first time. That was really something, too.

Marcello: What did you think of the WACs when you saw them?

Western: I didn't know hardly what to think about that. I thought, "Well, I'll be damned!" I didn't know that we had gotten down to where we had to have women in the Army. But I found out later that we had all kinds of women in the Army at that time.

Marcello: Is it perhaps accurate to say that by this time, that is, since liberation, that you guys weren't in the mood to take too many orders from anybody?

Western: That's for sure (chuckle). We wasn't in any mood to take orders from anybody. But we didn't have to. It seemed like they wasn't as strict then as they were at the beginning of the war. It didn't seem like that the military was as strict.

Marcello: So I gather, then, that you didn't really stay in Calcutta too long.

Western: No. I think about four days is how long we stayed there.

Marcello: Now during that time did they give you any sort of psychological examinations or anything like that to see if you guys still had all your marbles?

Western: No, I don't think so. They didn't bother us.

Marcello: So what happens at that point? So you get on a plane in Calcutta...

Western: We got on a plane in Calcutta, and we went from Calcutta to Delhi and then Karachi. Then we went to Cairo, Egypt; Tripoli, Libya; Casablanca; Santa Maria, Azores; Hammon Air Force Base, Newfoundland; Washington, D.C.

Marcello: Now when you got to Washington, were you sent to Walter Reed?

Western: Walter Reed General Hospital.

Marcello: What happened there?

Western: They took us in and assigned us to wards and gave us a pass... well, we had chow and everything. We got there about 4:00, I suppose, and they just got us signed in and told us that we could go out anytime we wanted to. All we had to do was sign the roster, you know, and indicate where we went. I went downtown that night bowling, I think, and to somewhere else. When I came back...I never had been in that hospital before...I didn't drink. I was by myself. I came into the hospital, and I walked for about four hours before I found

where I lived. I thought for sure I hadn't made it all right. I thought I cracked up. But I walked about four hours before I found where I was supposed to be. I finally found it and went to bed and spent that night.

Then the next day we got up, and they started the few tests on us and first one thing and another. We had dental appointments. They fixed our teeth and everything. We were there about, I guess, about a week getting checked over and everything. While we were there, we saw the psychiatrists and everything. They asked us a bunch of questions. Then after they finished, why, he said, "Well, it looks like you made it in pretty good shape." He congratulated me on having stood it as good as good as I could and as good as I had.

Then they shipped us to San Antonio. What do you call it? It was a place of debarkation there. I don't know just what the name of it was now. Anyway, we went there. I had a brother in Europe. He was going to Texas A&M whenever I went overseas. I didn't know that he was alive, and he danged sure didn't know that I was. He had been fighting in the Air Force in Europe. I got in there, I guess, 5:00 or something in the afternoon. It wasn't dark, but it was in October. So at 5:00 it wouldn't have been dark. I was standing in the chow line, and all of a sudden somebody come up and hit me on the back. I turned around, and he said, "Goddamn! If it ain't my brother!" My brother had been in

Europe, and I'd been in the South Pacific, and we met there in San Antonio. He went on home the next day. But I had to stay there a couple of days before I could go. Then I went home from there.

Marcello: Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Western: That's one reason why I stayed in the service. I didn't have to adjust to civilian life (chuckle).

Marcello: How shortly thereafter did you rejoin the service?

Western: Well, I didn't get out of the service right then. I think I had 120 days of recuperation leave and such like. During that time I got sick and had to go to Tarrant Field out here to the hospital. I stayed in the hospital a week. That's when they found out I had amoebic dysentery. They gave me a treatment for that and extended my leave.

Then when my leave was up, I went to Camp Fannin to be discharged. I got examined for a discharge and all. I'll tell you this now, but I couldn't tell the doctors this before I went into that prison camp. Before I went into the service, when I was twelve years old, I was pole vaulting, and I made a bad landing with an old stopper fish cork in my pocket. It made a hernia up here on my right side. While I was in that prison camp working, I had lost weight, and that hernia bothered me all the time. I'm a little ahead of myself now.

When I was at Camp Bowie, I made sick call with that

because it was bothering me down there when we was walking in the infantry. There was thirty- and forty-mile hikes, and it bothered me. I made sick call with it. This Major chewed me out good and told me that--I guess I can say this on there; you can cut it out if you don't like it--"Private, you wouldn't know a hernia from your ass. What you need is more walking." I said, "Well, if that's it, major, I think, by God, I can do it." I went ahead, and I went overseas with this hernia.

While we was at 80 Kilo Camp, it started bothering me, and Captain Lumpkin found it and wrote it on my medical record. When the war was over, I knew the medic that was in charge, Sergeant Rogers, and I told him that I wanted that part of my medical record. I got that part of my medical record, and I went down to Camp Fannin to get examined for discharge.

They examined me, and they didn't find it. So they called me up and told me to sign my discharge. I told them no, that I wouldn't sign a discharge. This lieutenant came up and said, "Sergeant, you have to sign the discharge." I told him, "Lieutenant, I don't have to do a damn thing! I have already done it!" I said, "Before I went in the service, I had a hernia. I made sick call and told this major I had a hernia, and I wanted to get it fixed. I didn't want to just 'goldbrick' out of the service. I just wanted to

get it fixed." I said, "I worked in that prison camp for four years with this hernia." I said, "I have gone as far as I'm going." I said, "You'll fix it here before I sign a discharge." He said, "Well, he didn't find it." I pulled out that paper, and I said, "No, but this fellow did!" I said, "Call me another doctor down here." He called another doctor down there, and they examined me and sent me to Camp Fannin and operated on me and kept me in the hospital thirty days. And that extended my leave.

I got out of the service on May 23, 1946. When I got out of the service, my wife was in the hospital with infectious hepatitis at Fort Hood. I'd been out about four days, and her doctor called me in and told me, "We're going to have to release your wife from the hospital." He said, "It's going to cost you a lot of money to keep her in the hospital. And if you move her in the condition she's in, she's probably going to die." He said, "The best thing you can do, young man, is to go somewhere and reenlist in the service right away. That way we can keep her here and treat her. We know what's wrong with her, and we can take care of her." I said, "Well, I guess in that case I don't have much choice." So I went and reenlisted in the Air Force. After the first hitch, I just decided to stay.

Marcello: And you spent how many years in the Air Force?

Western: I spent seventeen years in the Air Force and five in the Army.

Marcello: Just for the record, you mentioned off the tape that you met your wife in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Western: That's right.

Marcello: When did that take place?

Western: That was in November, 1945. It was about the first of November, 1945. Maybe it was the nineteenth of November. We got married the twenty-eight of November, 1945. It was a pretty short romance (chuckle).

Marcello: Mr. Western, as you look back on your experiences as a POW, what do you see as being the key to your survival? I'm sure you must have thought about that many times.

Western: Well, I believe it was the fact that I had a good buddy, Lester Fassio, and between his and my ingenuity we figured out how to beat these people and get extra food. That had something to do with it. But still, you cannot make me believe that a man controls all of his destiny. I believe God controls as much of man's destiny as he does himself. I don't think you have much control over that. But I do believe helping each other helped me.

Marcello: Well, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for your time and certainly for the information you gave us.

Western: Well, I want to thank you, and I hope that I wasn't too much trouble. I don't know how I did compared to what the other guys did.



Marcello: You were no trouble at all. I'm sure that what you said is going to be important and significant for the historians and students who read this.

Oral History Collection

Weldon O. Western

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello                      Date of Interview: February 18, 1987

Place of Interview: Saginaw, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Weldon Western for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 18, 1987, in Saginaw, Texas. In this particular interview I'm continuing the discussions with Mr. Western relative to his experiences as a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Western was a member of the 131st Field Artillery, 2nd Battalion.

What we're going to do in this interview, Mr. Western, is just pick up on some odds-and-ends from the interview that we did the last time concerning your experiences as a POW. Let's talk a little bit more about that "Speedo" period because I think there are some things that you wanted to add.

Mr. Western: In this "Speedo" period, when more men had become sick and the food rations had been cut and the work had been increased, it was constantly raining. Some said it rained 216 inches while we were in Burma while we were building this railroad. I don't doubt that at all because we stayed wet most of the time. Besides our rations being decreased, they had increased our work to two-and-a-half cubic meters of dirt a day.

It always took us from twelve to fourteen hours to move this before we went back to camp. Besides that, the sick men that we had in camp...we weren't the only ones that was working because they would "blitz" these sick men out. Any man that could walk, I don't care if he had a tropical ulcer on his leg or what, if he could walk, they sent him out and assigned so much work for him. If a person wasn't able to work, some sick man had to move that dirt before they went in. Besides giving a man no chance to recuperate, well, it broke down their morale more, and it was real hard on the sick men.

As far as this group that was building the railroad--the people that were going out to do the work--we worked as much as from three to six weeks continuously, seven days a week, with never having a day off. I mean, you didn't have a day off for anything. That was pretty rough.

Marcello: And what kind of days were you putting in in terms of the hours you were out there?

Western: Fourteen to sixteen hours per day is what we were doing.

Marcello: What was the longest you ever worked on one consecutive stretch?

Western: I believe about twenty hours. We got some bad dirt to move one day, and it took us about twenty hours to get it out. You didn't get any time off the next day. They sent you right back out to work at the same time early in the morning.

Marcello: You mentioned that the sick would also in many cases be forced to go out on the road. Is it not true that a lot of times they would have them breaking rock for ballast? They'd be lying there by the road breaking rock and so on.

Western: Yes, sir. They had them doing things that were unbelievable.

Marcello: What keeps you going in a circumstance like that?

Western: There's nothing in the world to keep you going but just the determination to survive. I believe that's all that keeps you going. In my case, why, after working this six weeks without a day off, I'd come in and if a guy needed a haircut or something, I'd have him sit there and listen to his story. They were horrible stories, you know. You could tell that they were awful disgusted and all that. I always tried to encourage the man, and I never let him know that I had about the same damned opinion he did (chuckle). I just tried to encourage him as much as I could, having been a little older than most of the guys, anyway. I figured, well, any little encouragement that you could give him might help him. Everytime that I got one of those guys and cut his hair, I'd give him a little pep talk at the end of the thing and maybe keep his head up a little better.

Marcello: Do you recall what your lowest point was, that is, you personally?

Western: I believe right there at 100 Kilo was about as low as you can get. You just didn't know.

Marcello: Did the thought of "packing it in" ever cross your mind?

Western: No. I was determined, but I was afraid at times that I wasn't going to make it until we got relieved of the situation.

Marcello: In one sense, I guess you were lucky in that you never got any of those tropical ulcers nor that you never really got dysentery.

Western: In fact, I didn't get malaria, and didn't get tropical ulcers. I was real lucky--real lucky.

Marcello: Is it not true that that 100 Kilo Camp was also situated in a bad location?

Western: It was. It was kind of in a swamp, I believe, way off. There was water running all around it. We even had water running under the tiers in places where we were sleeping...the platforms where we were sleeping. We had water running under that.

Marcello: Did you have any way of supplementing your diet during that "Speedo" period?

Western: No, sir. You had to eat what they gave you. That was the only thing you could do.

Marcello: Did you ever have a chance to eat any dogs, cats, snakes, or anything like that?

Western: I didn't eat any snake that I know of, but one of the kumis there killed a snake out on the work party, and they ate the snake and fed it to the sick men. One time I came in from work, and Captain Wright, who slept not too far from me,

asked me, "Would you like to have some meat and beans?" The beans were full of weevils, and I knew that, but I figured the meat would be pretty good. So I told him, "Yes, sir, I'll have 'em." So I ate the meat and beans. Then I found out the next day that the Dutchmen had killed a dog. The reason Captain Wright gave that to me is that he didn't want to eat it himself, but he knew that if I didn't know it, it wouldn't hurt me. So he gave that to me, and I'm sure it was dog. That's the only dog I ate that I know of. But I did know guys that ate rats and cats and first one thing then another. They were eating cats before we left Java. But there wasn't any cats in Burma. They didn't eat cats there.

Marcello: You really didn't come too close to any towns and civilization and so on in Burma, did you?

Western: No, sir. No, we weren't close to anything. We were strictly in the jungle. When we came into civilization again is when we went into Thailand to that Camp Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: How did you substitute for a toothbrush or something like that?

Western: I had a toothbrush, and I believe that at times the Japanese did give us a toothbrush. It would be of bamboo or something like that. Along toward the last, we got to where we didn't have anything. They didn't give us anything. We didn't have anything. I think they did give us some toothbrushes.

Marcello: I've heard some of the boys say that they would break a branch

off a tree--a green branch--and they would chew the end of it and use it.

Western: We'd done that.

Marcello: During this "Speedo" period, what was the state of your clothing?

Western: I think I still had a pair of green Dutch shorts that I wore out to work. There was a lot of people working in G-strings then. And these green shorts wasn't in too good a shape, I'll tell you. They were about dilapidated.

Marcello: Did you have shoes at this point, or were they gone?

Western: I didn't have any shoes then. Those English shoes that we got, that somebody gave us, didn't fit me. They wouldn't fit at all. I never did find a pair of them that fit me. There was a lot of people barefooted, though.

Marcello: Being out in the jungle like that, did you run across very many wild critters such as tigers and things of that nature?

Western: We never did see any. I'm sure that they were close because sometimes you could be close enough that you could smell where they had been staying. But we never did see any. If we had seen one, we would have probably caught him and ate him (chuckle).

Marcello: During that "Speedo" period, what was perhaps the most compassionate thing you ever witnessed, that is, in terms of one ol' boy who was really bad off but helping somebody who was perhaps even worse off.

Western: Well, I've seen them feed their buddies, and I've seen them

carry them to the toilet, and I've seen them do just about everything.

Marcello: One of the things that I'm curious about--and I haven't done enough studying to make any conclusions--is that it seems to me that it's probably a good thing when one is in a situation like that to have people around you who are from the same area or from the same hometown. Do you think that was probably true?

Western: I don't think that was so much true. I think maybe it might have depended on the man. If a man had been sociable and nice, I don't think it made much difference in there because I think the people realized that where you was from didn't make a heck of a lot of difference. You just needed help, and you needed help as bad as anybody.

Marcello: During the "Speedo" period, what was happening to the Japanese and Koreans? Were they suffering at all?

Western: I don't believe that they were fed much danged better than we were, to tell you the truth. I wasn't eating their chow. I don't know. But I don't believe that they were fed much better than we were. I figured if they could have gotten food in there to them, well, they would have given us a little more of it. But I think they were short, also.

Marcello: When Dr. Lumpkin died, what did that do for the morale of the troops?

Western: It dropped to the bottom right then because he was the man



that took care of the sick people and the mediator between the Japs and the sick people. Whenever he died, well, it was a big letdown for everybody. There's no doubt about it that he was a good man--a wonderful man. As a man and as a doctor, he was a very outstanding doctor. He was well above average. He did have compassion and understanding, also, and he used it.

Marcello: What knowledge do you have of the work of either Dr. Hekking or Doctor Bloemsma? Do you remember either of those people?

Western: I didn't have anything to do with either one of them. I don't believe I ever met either of them. When Dr. Lumpkin passed away, the doctor that took his place in our outfit was Dr. Epstein. He was a Navy doctor.

Marcello: He was an old man, wasn't he?

Western: He was old.

Marcello: I assume that he did not get the same sort of confidence from the men as Dr. Lumpkin had had.

Western: He couldn't fill Dr. Lumpkin's shoes. Let's just put it that way. I'm sure that he did his best, and maybe he did as good as Dr. Lumpkin would have done if he'd have been in his place at that time. But who knows?

Marcello: What does it feel like to be really hungry, such as was the case during that "Speedo" period? I think I have at times said that I was hungry, but then there's being hungry and there's being hungry.

- Western: It seems like that all the time your stomach kind of cramps, and you slightly have indigestion because if there's nothing in there, well, everything keeps trying to work, you know, and there's nothing for it to work on. It's pretty bad--real bad.
- Marcello: Do you think about food even more here than what you did when you were in Bicycle Camp?
- Western: Yes, I guess I did.
- Marcello: What would happen to the Japanese when any of their personnel got sick or injured or anything?
- Western: I wasn't around them when that happened. I don't really know. They lived in one place, and we lived in another, and I just didn't see it happen.
- Marcello: This is changing the subject quite a bit, but were there ever any attempts made to sabotage the work on that railroad?
- Western: I don't believe there was. As far as I know, there wasn't, because we didn't figure they'd ever build it, anyway. But I don't believe that there was any. As far as I know, there wasn't.
- Marcello: You say that you didn't figure they would ever build that road. What made you think that?
- Western: I just didn't. I didn't figure it would ever be built because the English had already given it up as a hopeless deal. Then the Japs came in there, and they built it over our dead bodies just like they said they would.

Marcello: With hand tools.

Western: That's right. There's one thing about building this railroad that I never understood. If you had a fill--and the fills were in the valleys--and there'd be a hill on each side of that valley, but I never did see other people take the dirt from this hill here and the dirt from this hill and fill that valley (gestures). We had to take that dirt from out to the side of the road and fill that valley; whereas they could have filled that, and we wouldn't have had to carry that dirt fourteen feet or fifteen feet high out of that cut there. As it was, we was carrying it up on a ramp twenty feet high and carrying it out of a cut fourteen or twenty feet deep. It didn't make sense to me that they would waste that much dirt and have to move it around and then have to hunt for it out there in the other places.

Marcello: I guess there were a lot of things the Japanese did that didn't seem very logical, weren't there?

Western: That's right. Yes, there's a lot of things they did that didn't seem logical.

Marcello: It's been a little over forty years since you've been a prisoner-of-war. How often do you think about those experiences?

Western: I guess everytime the going gets rough, you think about it, you know. If the going gets rough, well, you think about how much worse it could be. You can sure compare things

now with that. That's about how I would do it. If you think about how bad off you are now, why, just think about how bad off you have been.

Marcello: Does a day go by when you don't think of something in that prisoner-of-war experience in one way or another?

Western: I doubt it very seriously whether a day goes by. Sometime during the day, you'll think about something that happened or something that went on there that you remember.

Marcello: I've also heard it said even during those tough times such as you experienced during the "Speedo" period, that in some cases there would still be a sense of humor.

Western: Yes, that's right. There would be. There'd still be something that would be humorous.

Marcello: I understand the Japanese could never understand that.

Western: No, they didn't go for that much. They wanted you to be serious.

Marcello: What is your attitude toward Japanese today?

Western: It has changed very much since the 1940s when I was first liberated and all that. As I kind of look at it now, they had a job to do just the same as we did. Those boys that were there didn't want to fight that war any worse than we did, I don't think, but they were only doing what their leaders told them to do. And that's what we were doing. Now I don't really hate the Japs, but I wouldn't want to live with them or something like that. I don't know if I

could ever trust them or not.

Marcello: Well, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview.

Once again, I want to thank you for your comments, and we'll certainly add this to the other things that you had to say relative to the prisoner-of-war experience.

Western: You're welcome. I think that'll make you a better story.