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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: F. H. King
(Signature)

Date: 12-12-78

Oral History Collection

Frank H. King

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: December 12, 1978

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Frank H. King for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 12, 1978, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. King in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Actually, Mr. King was a Marine aboard the cruiser USS Houston, which was sunk off the coast of Java in early 1942. He subsequently spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

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

Mr. King: Well, I was born in Shamrock, Texas, Wheeler County, on June 20, 1921.

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

Mr. King: Yes, I went to practically all my school days in Shamrock.

I dropped out of high school--about the second or third year in high school. I got to where I couldn't teach the teachers anything, so I just quit (chuckle). I didn't try anymore.

Marcello: What did you do after you got out of high school?

King: That's about the time I went into the service, in 1941.

Marcello: Did you have a job at the time you got out of high school?

King: Oh, I had some common labor jobs.

Marcello: How hard was it to find work in the Panhandle at that particular time?

King: Pretty tough. Pretty tough at that time.

Marcello: Was it still feeling the effects of the Depression?

King: You bet! You bet! Very much.

Marcello: Did economics play a part in your decision to join the service, or was this something that you had always wanted to do?

King: Oh, I would say that it had something to do with it, yes.

Marcello: Why did you select the Marine Corps as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

King: I don't know, really. I had the Navy in mind. I didn't want to be a foot soldier. I didn't know anything about the Marines, but I had a friend there that I'd run into, and he was going in to keep from being drafted. He said, "Let's go into the Marines." That's about all it took for me; I was all ready.

Marcello: Where did you actually join?

King: Well, I signed up in Oklahoma City.

Marcello: At the time that you joined the Marine Corps, how closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs and this sort of thing?

King: Oh, about like any teenager--not too close, really. So in other words, it was common knowledge that we were going to get into war. I felt this. I was only nineteen years old, I think, at the time. Well, I turned twenty when I was in boot camp. They weren't drafting anybody, I don't believe, below twenty-one at the time. I believe I am right there. I wasn't afraid of the draft; I didn't go to dodge the draft.

Marcello: Well (chuckle), you hardly dodged the draft by joining the Marine Corps.

King: I meant to keep from being drafted into the Army. That's one reason I went in. That was one of the reasons.

Marcello: Did patriotism have anything at all to do with your decision?

King: Well, it looked like we were going to have to serve sometime, and it probably played a small part, but that wasn't the main reason.

Marcello: When was it that you did enlist? Do you recall the date?

King: Yes, on June 1, 1941, when I actually enlisted.

Marcello: When you thought of the country getting into war at that time, is it safe to say that your eyes were perhaps turned more toward Europe than they were toward the Far East?

King: Yes, you bet. We didn't think the Japanese had that much. The fact is, when I was shipped overseas to the Far East, it was my opinion that it was probably the safest part of the world to be in. That just shows how mistaken you could be, though.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

King: San Diego.

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

King: Oh, I don't suppose.

Marcello: It was the normal Marine Corps boot camp?

King: It was a living hell (chuckle)!

Marcello: How long did boot camp last at that time?

King: I believe I was in boot camp at least seven weeks. It was short. Normally, it was twelve weeks. It took twelve weeks to go through boot camp. I believe we had a short deal. In other words, they crammed twelve weeks into about seven.

Marcello: That's what I was trying to find out, and that's why I asked that question. That probably is some indication of the emergency nature of the situation, perhaps.

King: They were more frightened of what might be going to happen than I was at this time. I couldn't really see it.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you eventually got aboard the cruiser USS Houston.

King: Well, after I got out of boot camp, I was put in "casual company," and they asked for volunteers to go to cook and bakers school and radio school and . . . you could volunteer for nearly anything you wanted to volunteer for. They had openings in the band and so on if you were a musician. So I said, "Well, I had better not volunteer for anything else. I volunteered for this, and I don't particularly like it." But I got put into the "casual company," and right away, like, in like two or three weeks, we were ready to be shipped overseas to the Far East. I didn't know just exactly where I was going, and I didn't know where we was going until we got out past Guam.

Marcello: Now, you were not on the Houston at this time?

King: I was on the Henderson. The Houston was the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet.

Marcello: The Henderson was just a troop transport, was it not?

King: Yes, a Navy troop transport.

Marcello: So in other words, you had not volunteered to become a sea-going Marine?

King: No, no. I didn't go to sea school. We got out past Guam a little, and they picked ten men, and I don't know how they picked them. We were just all recruits, I mean, right out of the recruit depot. They took ten men out of this shipload to go aboard the USS Houston for duty.

Marcello: Where did you pick up the Houston?

King: It was somewhere in the southern Philippine Islands. We transferred by boat--motor launch--from the Henderson to the Houston. It was about twenty days more before we went into port.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of serving aboard a cruiser? The Houston was a very pretty ship, wasn't it?

King: Yes, it was a clean, clean ship--very clean. I had good food. I really enjoyed it when I first got on it.

Marcello: What particular function did you serve after you got aboard the Houston?

King: The Marines do the interior guard duty and man half of the secondary batteries, which are antiaircraft batteries. We were supposed to man half of it, but they doubled the anti-aircraft batteries, and we just manned a fourth of it. We manned two . . . .

Marcello: Five-inch dual-purpose guns or something?

King: I guess they were 5-inch guns. I have forgotten now. My battle station was at one of these antiaircraft guns. Five-inch .25-calibers is what they were.

Marcello: What sort of activities did the Houston engage in after you went aboard? Now, you mentioned that you were at sea for several days before you actually hit port. What did you do during that time? Maybe I should back up a minute here and

ask you when you actually went aboard the Houston. Do you remember the month?

King: It would be in September.

Marcello: Of 1941?

King: Of 1941. September, 1941. I believe that's the month. I can't tell you the day, but it was on up in September. I don't know . . . we still had our interior guard duty; we always stood our guard duty. We had muster and physical drill under arms every morning. We had a few island liberties, you know, just afternoon liberties over on the islands--recreation, you know, play ball.

Marcello: For the most part, were things pretty serious by the time you went aboard the Houston?

King: Not really. I didn't think they were. You know, I didn't realize it. I didn't keep up with the current news that close and realize how serious it was.

Marcello: Was the Houston sailing with other ships at this particular time, or was it basically out there alone?

King: Not necessarily. It was more by itself. There were ships around, but in just cruising around the islands there, we were by ourselves.

Marcello: Now, do you recall very vividly the events aboard the Houston on December 7, 1941? That, of course, is when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. How did this affect the personnel

aboard the Houston?

King: Well, of course, we didn't hear about it until the next morning.

Marcello: It would have been December 8, 1941, out there.

King: I guess it would have happened during our nighttime. I'm not sure, but I believe it would. We heard about it the next morning, the following morning.

Marcello: Do you recall how you heard about it? Was it announced over the PA system?

King: I believe it was, but it came in little--oh, what do you call them--dope sheets, daily dope sheets. A news bulletin was printed each morning. It was on it, I remember.

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

King: Well, we knew we were into it. It didn't worry me; it didn't frighten me. I thought, "Well, we've got a good ship here, and we can hold our own with the best of them." I knew that; I just felt real confident.

Marcello: Now, at this time, as a twenty-year-old Marine, had you and your shipmates formed any stereotypes of a typical Japanese? In other words, when you thought of a typical Japanese at that time, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind?

King: Well (chuckle), somebody that was real short and just about

blind, you know, that couldn't see real well. Not very smart, not very intelligent.

Marcello: How long did you think this war was going to last?

King: Oh, I didn't think it would last very long, really. I thought we could take care of them just with what we had over there in the Philippines. I didn't realize or have any idea myself just how strong they were.

Marcello: It goes without saying that you had no idea as to the amount of damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor.

King: No, no. I didn't know this. That didn't bother me. The first time that I ever thought we might not ever make it back--that we might get sunk--was along about January 15th, when they sunk the Prince of Wales and the Repulse. The English had sent these two battleships out there to stop this Malayan invasion. They lasted thirty minutes, so whenever I read that . . . when I heard that over the news and read that in that news sheet, I knew that if we ever met them they would get us, that's all. It was just a matter of time. If we ever met them, we'd had it. If we didn't, well, we was lucky.

Marcello: Okay, so you hear about the news of this Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. What activities did the Houston engage in immediately thereafter? Now, according to my records, it got involved in convoy duty, is that correct?

King: Right, that's true. That's true. That's exactly what we did.

Marcello: Describe what this convoy duty consisted of and what was involved in it.

King: I don't know actually what we were convoying. We were convoying ships out of the Philippine Islands and back down toward the Dutch East Indies. As far as I know, we escorted some back down there, and then we started picking up some ships in Australia and escorting them up to the Dutch East Indies, or trying to.

Marcello: But everything seemed to be focusing on the Dutch East Indies.

King: Right. They were going to make a stand there, it looked like to me at the time.

Marcello: Now, according to the record, you actually didn't have any contact with the Japanese *per se* until February of 1942, is that correct?

King: I believe it was the 4th day of February.

Marcello: That is exactly when it was. Describe that initial contact with the Japanese, because I think it was a rather significant contact.

King: I can't remember just exactly where we were. I believe we were in the Timor Sea.

Marcello: Were you around Bali someplace?

King: Yes, in the Timor Sea. We didn't have a convoy at that time.

Marcello: Were you with any other ships, though?

King: Yes, the *Marblehead* was with us. I remember the *Marblehead*.

She got hit, too.

Marcello: I believe the Dutch DeRuyter and Tromp were with you, too.

King: They could have been, but I can't remember them. I cannot remember those other two ships. I know I was up on topside, and I believe it was either twenty-one or twenty-seven planes. They came over in waves of seven or nine.

Marcello: Now, were these high-level bombers that were coming over?

King: Yes, high-level bombers. All high-level bombers.

Marcello: Okay, describe that air raid or that attack upon those ships.

King: I couldn't believe it when I saw them coming in and they blew this air raid warning, you know. Things weren't just exactly . . . you know, we had never had an actual attack or been under fire before. We weren't exactly organized.

Marcello: Now, I assume that you were helping man one of these 5-inch .25's?

King: Actually, my battle station was to go to the magazines that day.

Marcello: Terrific (chuckle).

King: We knew which watch had the duty--gun duty. You had two gun crews; there was one up and one down. Whichever one . . . well, I didn't want to go down to the magazine. I wanted to see this action. I wanted to see some of these planes fall.

Marcello: Frankly, that's not the reason I would have wanted to stay up on deck. The last place I would want to get caught is down in the magazines, I think.

King: If the magazine gets hit, you're dead on top, too, see.

Marcello: So I assume that you were well-trained to the point where you went down to the magazine?

King: No, the first sergeant and gun captain was there . . . I was a loader, a second loader, on a gun. I said to him . . . of course, I was wanting to get permission to stay up there.

Marcello: In the meantime, are the Japanese planes overhead?

King: Yes, they are coming in. I said, "You haven't got all of your loaders here. You better let me stay up here to help load these guns." He said, "Yes, you stay. You help here." I mean, some were off down getting a drink of water or at the bathroom or something--horsing around. We were on watch all right, but you don't need ten or twelve people watching on every gun all the time. So the first sergeant happened to be up there, and I knew if I got permission from him it would be all right. See, Charley Pryor was my gun captain. Charley was a real good sergeant. We always got along real well together. But I knew if I had permission from the first sergeant, it would be okay, which it was. But I got to see all the action up there. I didn't get to see many planes fall, though. That's what disappointed me.

Marcello: Okay, describe the action as it unfolded up there.

King: Well, they came across in waves. They came in three different waves. I can't remember if it was seven to a wave or nine to

a wave. I believe it was nine. They would come over just like a flight of ducks in a "V" formation. It seemed like they had picked us out on every run. I guess we were the largest ship down there. They were after us, and I thought they were going to get us. In fact, we did get a hit.

Marcello: Evidently, there were quite a few near misses that rattled the plates and so on.

King: They nearly blew us out of the water.

Marcello: I guess even a near miss feels as though the ship is coming out of the water.

King: Oh, it does. You could see a huge wave of water come over on you--almost drown you or wash you off topside.

Marcello: What was the rate of fire of one of those 5-inch .25's? How many shells could they put out, let's say, in a minute?

King: You know, I've forgotten. I absolutely can't remember. My memory is just not good enough.

Marcello: Was it firing fixed ammunition?

King: Yes, it was fixed ammunition. Having four on each side of the ship, you could only fire four at a time. We could put up a whale of a barrage.

Marcello: How effective were you that day?

King: We were very ineffective, I thought, inasmuch as they were just out of our extreme range. Those 5-inch .25's have a limited range, and they seemed to know what our range was

and stayed just out of it.

Marcello: Now, evidently the Houston did shoot down one of these planes.

King: I believe so. I believe they got credit for one or two planes that day.

Marcello: Did you witness that Japanese plane going down?

King: No, I didn't see it.

Marcello: Do you recall when that 500-pound bomb smashed into the after turret?

King: Which bomb? Which bombing run?

Marcello: I think it was about a 500-pound bomb that smashed into turret three. Do you recall that bomb exploding aboard the Houston?

King: Oh, yes. You bet I do! It wasn't a whole lot worse . . . we had some exploding right off of the ship numerous times. Shrapnel got our gun captain and our first loader. They were hit.

Marcello: That is, on your particular gun crew?

King: That's right. That wasn't Charley Pryor. It was another gun captain.

Marcello: You were on another gun captain's crew?

King: Yes.

Marcello: Now, was this 5-inch .25-caliber located close to where that bomb exploded?

King: Well, let me put it this way. It was the after gun that was the one closest to the turret of any of the 5-inch guns. We were, I'm going to say, seventy-five feet from . . . of course, it exploded one deck below us--one deck below us.

Marcello: Could you hear a loud explosion, or was it kind of muffled because it was below?

King: Oh, it was loud. It was very loud.

Marcello: When you say that it was loud, was it earshattering?

King: Well, let me put it this way. I don't know what caused it, but the concussion . . . of course, there's quite a lot of concussion from all these 5-inch guns firing. Now, they create a lot of concussion. Whether they did or whether that did, my ears actually bled. I thought I'd probably have a lot of ear damage. I couldn't hear for a few days. But I never did have a lot of ear damage out of it.

Marcello: Were you knocked over by the concussion of that bomb exploding?

King: No, I wasn't. The gun captain was and somebody else over there. I wasn't the first loader. When they said take cover, they meant to take cover from our own shrapnel falling back on us. We were firing as straight up as we could.

Marcello: Evidently, it just literally wiped out everybody in turret three, did it not?

King: As far as I know, there weren't any survivors.

Marcello: I suppose that there was powder bags and ammunition and everything

else that was in the process of being loaded and so on there.

King: Oh, yes. They was ready to fire.

Marcello: Did you ever get a chance to look in and inspect the damage that was done in that turret?

King: Yes! You bet!

Marcello: Describe what you saw. It must have been a pretty sickening sight.

King: I didn't actually see it that day, you know, while the men were in there. But it was very sickening. The paint . . . everything was burnt out. Melted steel . . , real heavy steel was just melted and twisted. It was very gruesome.

Marcello: By this time, the reality of war had certainly struck home.

King: Oh, yes. We knew we was in it then. We got baptized that day.

Marcello: That turret was put out of action for the rest of the war.

King: Yes. I guess it was irreparable. I know it was.

Marcello: Especially since there were virtually no facilities available where it could be repaired.

King: I don't believe you could have put in dry dock and repaired it. The metal in it was ruined, you see. It was like somebody got hold of it with a cutting torch.

Marcello: I guess in a sense, then, you were fortunate that you didn't have to go in there and pull out the dead and the wounded and so on and so forth.

King: I thought so. As long as I was in the war, I never did have

that gruesome task. I never was assigned to that. Somebody had to do it, but I just never was one of them. It didn't fall to my lot to do it.

Marcello: I think it was on February 5, 1942, that the Houston then put into Tjilatjap on Java. Do you remember that?

King: Oh, yes. I can't remember whether we got in there that next day or not, though. It could have been that we got in there on the 5th.

Marcello: Did you stay in Tjilatjap very long?

King: Well, we stayed that night, and the next day we buried these boys that were killed. We sent them over to be buried. Then I believe we stayed that night a while . . . either that night or the next day we pulled out.

Marcello: I guess in that climate those bodies or remains had to be buried as quickly as possible.

King: As quickly as possible, right. We thought we might do it at sea. I don't know why. I never did know why they decided to pull in and bury them. Maybe it was because they could bring the bodies back later.

Marcello: Well, evidently, throughout the rest of February, the Houston continued the convoy duty and time from time came under more air attacks.

King: Yes.

Marcello: Evidently, you had a very good skipper aboard the Houston.

King: Yes, we all thought a lot of him.

Marcello: This is Captain Rooks.

King: Right. That's who it was.

Marcello: Did you say that you and your shipmates did have a great deal of confidence in the ability of Captain Rooks?

King: Oh, yes, we had a lot of confidence in him.

Marcello: What is also amazing is that, as the Houston was subjected to these incessant aerial attacks, it never was really receiving any hits, was it not? I guess it was getting the nickname by this time, "The Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast."

King: (Chuckle) That's where we got it. The first thing that they said . . . the Japanese first reported that they sunk it was in the Cavite Navy Yard up there the night of December 8th, when they bombed it--the Cavite Navy Yard. They did get a ship that pulled in right after we pulled out, so they thought they had got us.

Marcello: Well, I don't think it's that necessary to talk about all of those air attacks, and it would probably be unfair to ask you about them, since there was so many of them. Do you ever get used to those air attacks?

King: I never did. I might have gotten a little bit more used to them after the first one, you know, but you never get to where you like those things. I want to tell you that. You feel a little bit too helpless.

Marcello: Of course, the Japanese have complete control of the air.

King: Oh, yes. We never had any air support at all.

Marcello: Now, generally speaking, were you being attacked by high-level bombers as opposed to dive bombers and things of that nature?

King: I don't ever believe we were attacked by dive bombers.

Marcello: Throughout February, were you basically still on the 5-inch .25 crew?

King: Yes, I was, all the time.

Marcello: How much rest and sleep are you getting?

King: Well, it was very spasmodic. We would go for a long time with very little sleep, and sometimes we would sleep fairly regularly.

Marcello: From time to time in here you would also be sailing in conjunction with ships from some of the other nations, is that correct?

King: That's right.

Marcello: That probably caused all sorts of problems in terms of communications and maneuvers and things of that nature.

King: Of course, I wasn't on the bridge or anything. I don't know what problems they had with communications. I never did relish the thought of going under the Dutch command. We were under it; we had a Dutch admiral.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk then a little bit about the Battle of the Java Sea, because I guess this was what we can say was the beginning of the end for the Houston. Describe what you can

remember about the Battle of the Java Sea.

King: Well, all I can say is . . . talking about that sleep awhile ago, the last week we were afloat we just didn't get any sleep. We were going out and hunting the Japanese ships every night and standing these air raid alerts all day. So we had actually gone out, I guess, the night of the 26th and were out about all night until afternoon the next day. We started back into port, into Surabaja. We had gotten into the mine fields, and there was a PBY plane that came over and signaled. Now, we had convoyed up with these English ships and Dutch ships and Australian ships, and we had five cruisers and ten destroyers, if I remember correctly.

We turned around right there in the harbor--entrance to the harbor--and went back out. We knew they had spotted the enemy out there somewhere. It was late that night . . . well, no, it wasn't. It was that afternoon. It wasn't long right after that that we got sucked right into it.

Marcello: Supposedly, when they turned you out to sea again on the 27th--February 27th--you supposedly were going out to track Japanese transports, but it didn't turn out to be Japanese transports.

King: We met surface ships.

Marcello: Evidently, you ran into the covering force.

King: Yes, that's right. I didn't know what we were going out after, but I knew that they had spotted the enemy out there. I didn't

know just exactly what kind of ships they were.

Marcello: Now, was this action basically ship against ship, gun against gun?

King: It was ship against ship.

Marcello: This is during part of the daylight?

King: Yes, this is in daylight. But this particular day, I did go to the magazines. My lot fell to be in the magazines this day, so I went down in the magazine and sent up 5-inch ammunition. If I remember right, we were down there some three hours--approximately three hours--and when we came out, it was night or near night.

Marcello: Evidently, you had some close calls here.

King: We got two hits.

Marcello: Oh, you did have two hits that day or that night?

King: It was that day. We got two hits that day, One was a dud, and I never did know just where it went in. It went in somewhere. The other one was a 6-inch shell . . . well, it was arched over like this and hit about midships on the forecastle. Just where it went out at the waterline, it exploded and knocked a hole in the side of the ship about six or eight feet, ten feet. I don't know just how big it was. But I know they patched that hole the next day, the welders did. But it flooded some compartments up there. It didn't kill a man. Those hits didn't kill a soul.

Marcello: So this brings you up into the evening, then, of February 27th.

King: Right.

Marcello: What happened that night or that evening?

King: Okay, later that night--I don't know--somebody passed the word--this Dutch admiral--to follow him and engage the enemy. So we went back in like we were going to engage the enemy.

Marcello: This was bad news because the Japanese were extremely skillful in night action. This is probably where they wanted you.

King: Well, I don't know. They were dropping flares on us, and from where, I don't know. But they kept us . . . part of the time that night out there, we were lit up just like day! You talk about something that was kind of frightening! We were just like a sitting duck out there and all lit up. Evidently, we were out of range--firing range--for them. But they knew exactly where we were.

Now, we lost the Exeter that afternoon. We lost two or three more of the destroyers. The destroyers had to pull away from us to go and refuel. They were running out of fuel. They pulled away from us and went to refuel. Of course, the Exeter had pulled away from us. I believe we laid a smoke screen down to hide her, and she pulled out that afternoon. So that left the four cruisers--two Dutch cruisers, the HMAS Perth, and the Houston. Along about eleven or twelve o'clock that night, when it was real still, they just blew the two Dutch cruisers right out of the war. They blew them to smithereens.

Marcello: Did you actually see this?

King: I saw this. I was on topside.

Marcello: What do you remember from that action?

King: Well, it was very frightening. I knew we was going to be next. They got the lead ship, which was the DeRuyter; then the Perth was next, and the Houston, then the Java. They got the lead ship first, and about five minutes later we pulled over to go around her, and they blowed the other one up right behind us. It just lights up the whole sky. It's just a flash that lasted, oh, a minute or two. You would think it was several minutes, but it wasn't that long. It lasted a minute or two.

Marcello: Okay, so what did the Houston do at this point?

King: Well, the Houston and the Perth get underway. We're fooling along there at half-throttle, just at half-speed. So the skipper ordered us at flank speed. They go to zigzagging and just really "laying them down," you know. We were trying to get out so that they couldn't get a bearing on us. We knew those had to be torpedoes. You couldn't hear anything except the explosions, so it had to be torpedoes. We realized then that either a submarine or a destroyer was attacking us. We couldn't see the destroyers, so it almost had to be a submarine. We got out of it without a scratch. The Houston and the Perth got out of it.

Marcello: Did you head back to Surabaja at this time then?

King: No, no. I didn't know where we were headed, but we run all night pretty well at flank speed. The next morning we were fairly close to Batavia, and we pulled into Batavia the next day, the 28th. We pulled into port and tied up, patched this hole up there. We hooked up the fuel line and tried to take fuel all day. We stood an air raid alert all day. We had a few planes come over, but they weren't particularly after us, it didn't seem like. They already blew up the biggest part of that harbor.

Marcello: Were you able to get fuel there at Batavia?

King: I'm not sure whether we got any fuel there or not. We hooked up the fuel lines. They said they weren't getting much. I don't believe we did, really. We had enough to think that we could get out of there.

Marcello: Now, when you left Batavia, I assume that you were trying to make it to Australia.

King: We thought we were. That's what all the crew thought, was that we were headed for Australia.

Marcello: Okay, so describe the action as it takes place after you leave Batavia.

King: I know when we left we were trying to get out of the harbor. It was just sundown, and they had secured the air raid alert. I had gone down to take a bath and then put on clean clothes. Then I got my blanket and pillow and moved back up on the gun

and just throwed it down under the motor launch and fell asleep. I was just so exhausted, because I had been up so long.

I suppose that it was seven o'clock--like sundown. They had several tugs--two or three tugs--on the ship, and that's the way they got you in and out of the dock. But the tide was out and we were aground. They couldn't move us off of the sandbar. We weren't really stuck hard and tight, because they got us off of it. I don't know when because I was asleep.

The next thing I heard was the firing. It was approximately 11:30. I didn't look at my watch, but I knew what time it was--about 11:30. I jumped up and there we are; we are right in there among them. We started firing everything we got. The Perth did the same thing.

Marcello: Now, where were you at this time?

King: We were in the Sunda Straits. I was on the 5-inch gun at that time. I went to sleep up there, so I would be near that gun. I didn't want to have to make any extra steps. When they blew general quarters or air raid, I would be there.

Marcello: Describe the end of the Houston as best as you can remember.

King: We fired everything, as I say, that we had on the ship down to the .50-caliber machine guns.

Marcello: By this time, are you being pummeled with Japanese fire?

King: Oh, yes. They had their searchlights on us and everything.

They had us lit up with searchlights, you know. I know they tried to turn ours on them, and they never did get them on. They got them on, but they never got them on them. Why, I don't know.

But they were really pounding us. We were the last ones left. I didn't realize it, but the Perth had already gone down. She went down about fifteen minutes before we did. I think the Perth lasted about fifteen or twenty minutes, and we lasted about thirty minutes. But she had already gone down, so they were just concentrating their fire right on us. I saw several explosions aboard ship before I got off of it.

Marcello: I guess you were being hit with every caliber of shell that the Japanese had.

King: Yes.

Marcello: Evidently, the ships were that close that searchlights were used, and, like you say, even .50-caliber machine guns were used.

King: Oh, yes. It was point-blank. It wasn't any of this arching over yonder; it was just right broadside, you know.

Marcello: Describe the abandoning of the Houston then.

King: Well, all I can tell you is that it came as a surprise to me. I knew the ship was slowed down considerably in the water and was listing pretty heavy. I could see that.

Marcello: Now, was your gun crew more or less intact at this time?

King: Oh, yes, we were still intact. Charley Pryor over here was my gun captain. I never will forget. I was standing right there by him, and I saw him grab those earphones like that--we weren't firing right at the time--and he said, "Abandon ship! Abandon ship!" He threw that headset off. I just couldn't believe it to start with. You know, I said, "It don't look to me like it's sinking."

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of getting out in the water?

King: I didn't like it. I didn't like that at all.

Marcello: Were you a very good swimmer?

King: Oh, yes. I wasn't afraid of the water, but everything in the world was running through my mind--sharks, cold--and I was thirsty. There was quite a lot of concussions there that night, and they leave you real dry. They dehydrate you.

Marcello: Describe how you actually got into the water--the process by which you got in.

King: Well, there was an old boy there. He was a friend of mine, and his name was Slocum, and he didn't make it. He and I didn't have lifejackets; we never did wear our lifejackets. Why, I don't know, but it was in our way. He had got hold of a fender--a fender that you hang over for a boat to pull up alongside. It was an old kapok-filled canvas bag. He was sitting up on the splinter shield fixing to jump off. They had thrown a bunch of life rafts over.

We had decided after this initial abandon ship order, somebody said, "Ah, the skipper is going to try to get it in a little closer to the beach or something. Let's stay with it a little while longer." So Charley put the headset back on.

Marcello: In the meantime, are the Japanese still blasting away?

King: Yes, they are still blasting away. It wasn't but just a few minutes or seconds until he threw that headset off again, "This time it's abandon ship! Let's get off of the ship!" So anyway, as I was telling you, Slocum was sitting up on the splinter shield fixing to jump off, and it was way down there to the water because we were laying over the other way. I said, "Slocum, that thing won't hold you up!" I didn't have anything. He said, "Yes, it will!" I said, "No, it won't either. You just wait here, and I'll run around here and get us some lifejackets out of the lifejacket locker on the other side of the ship."

I went around there, and I found that lifejacket locker--it was dark, real dark, around there--and I run my hand down in there, and the steam was coming up through there, and I almost burnt my hand. But there was no jackets there. So I had a little old life ring that I had grabbed off the side of the splinter shield there. In case somebody fell overboard, you could throw them the lifeline. It was a lot of help;

it would keep you afloat if you could swim any at all. But there weren't any lifejackets.

I come back around there, and Slocum was gone. Everybody was gone. There was one guy there, and his name was Yarbro--a gunner's mate. I was about to starve to death for a drink of water. He was one of the few sailors that I knew his name. He was a gunner's mate, and he was in charge of these guns, you know, 4-inch guns, and maintenance and whatnot of these 4-inch guns. He was a real nice guy. He lived there in San Antonio, I believe.

I asked Yarbro, I said, "Yarbro, do you suppose we would have time to go down below to get a drink of water before we get off of this thing?" He said, "There's a bucket of water right there under that hood of that stack." He had a bucket of coffee, and a bunch of cups up there and some water. I grabbed one of them big, old, heavy coffee cups, and he did, too, and I dipped it down in that bucket of water, and I drank two of them just as fast as I could. It was pretty hot. It was almost too hot to drink--real warm--but it was satisfying, you know. I said, "Well, Yarbro, I'm going down one deck before I jump off. It's just too far to jump." It must have been twenty-five foot to the water. I went down on the boat deck and just jumped off.

Marcello: Now, were you fully clothed when you jumped off?

King: All I had on was my underwear and a pair of shorts--a T-shirt and a pair of khaki shorts. I slipped my shoes on, but I hadn't tied them. I had got used to running with these loose-tied shoes. The minute I got in the water, I let those shoes slip. I just let them slip off because I didn't want anything . . . I knew it was going to be a while in the water--an hour or so, anyway.

Marcello: You had a life ring at this time?

King: Yes, I had this little life ring.

Marcello: How was the temperature of the water?

King: Well, it wasn't bad. It wasn't cold, you know what I mean. It was cool. It's always the same temperature, I think. The wind wasn't cold, so that helped.

Marcello: Was there oil and so on in the water?

King: Oh, yes. There wasn't much where I was. I was never in a pool of it where it ever bothered me. I seen a bunch of them throwing these life rafts over, and I thought, "Well, I'll pull up to one of these life rafts." I saw some out there. They were still firing like mad at these ships. When I first got in the water, I swam pretty hard to get away from the ship, you know, because a near miss will get you. The more distance you can get between you and that ship (chuckle), the better off you'll be. So I didn't look back for some time in getting away from that ship.

Then I saw a life raft or two . . . in fact, I swam up to a life raft or two. It looked like it would be awhile before we would get to the beach. I thought, "Well, a man has a better chance of making it if he was out by hisself and not grouped up on a life raft. They may machine gun those life rafts." I kind of thought they would. So I just pulled off with two or three other guys there. I didn't know them.

Finally, we got kind of separated, and I didn't care. I just kind of drifted away from them, and I got off by myself. Well, I never did make that beach. I thought I could make that beach. I think, actually, we were swimming toward the smoke screen. Finally, the big ship listed, and it was gone. Of course, you could see land then, but it was much farther away.

Marcello: So were you in the water all that night?

King: All night. Oh, I don't know, it must have been eight or nine o'clock the next morning.

Marcello: I assume the Japanese by this time had sunk the Houston?

King: Oh, yes. But I didn't actually see it go down. I didn't see it roll over and go down, because I had gotten out of sight of the thing. It was still drifting in a forward motion, and when I went off on this side, I went aft, directly away from it.

Marcello: Are you having any trouble staying afloat on that life ring?

King: No, I'm a good swimmer. I could swim for hours. I don't know how long I could swim without anything, but I could swim a

long time.

Marcello: So you're out there drifting around that night and into the next morning.

King: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Pick up the story from that point.

King: Well, the next morning . . . when it got daylight and I finally looked around, I see all these ships. Actually, they're off to my right. I said, "Do those ships look like they are coming . . . they are underway and it looks like they're coming right towards me!" They were kind of lined up there, but I couldn't tell how many there were. You know, you're bobbing up and down in the water like a cork, and you can see part of the time when you're up, but when you go down you can't see. I thought, "Well, I know they're Japs, but maybe I'll be closer in when they come by."

Finally, the current just took me right down among them, right into this first ship. So I had full intentions of just floating on by them. But I don't know, I was so exhausted and tired . . . thirsty . . . well, I was so close that I was only eight or ten foot from the ship. I got back about halfway past this first ship, and there was a rope ladder hanging over the side. I smelled all that sewage and refuse from that ship, and it just nearly made me sick, and so I just swam two or three strokes and caught that rope ladder. I was so tired and was

resting that I wouldn't turn loose.

They had already spotted me. They were there talking and jabbering. It was a troopship, and there was thousands of troops on it. So I just climbed up that first rung and kind of sat down there on that rope ladder. Finally, they just kept jabbering, and, oh, they was really watching me. They had seen others out there, and they knew what had happened.

Marcello: Was this ship moving or was it anchored?

King: No, it was anchored. But the tide carried me right by them just like it was underway. The water was slipping by the bow of this ship just like it was underway. But I could see it, when I got up there, that it was riding on anchor. So, anyway, I sat there for ten or fifteen minutes before I went up. Finally, I just went up that ladder.

Marcello: They weren't forcing you to come up at gunpoint or anything of that nature?

King: No, they never did.

Marcello: Were they laughing at you or anything of that nature?

King: Well, they were jabbering and talking. I couldn't tell what they were saying. They was waiting for me to come on up there. I thought they was waiting for me to get off for a while (chuckle). I thought, "Ah, I'm not going to get off until I'm ready." Actually, they were waiting for me to come on up.

Marcello: So what happened then when you went up on board the troopship?

King: I went on up on top. A bunch of soldiers gathered around me. When I got over on the ship, I just sat down. I gave out, you know, so I just sat down there.

Marcello: These soldiers didn't molest you at all?

King: No, not at all. I was just a real oddity to them, you know. Finally, this one came slipping in there and had a rifle with him with a fixed bayonet. Of course, I acted like I didn't pay him no attention. Of course, I was watching him pretty close.

Directly, they kind of scattered out, and I guess the officers come up there, and they took me over about midships and sat me on some cases there--boxes or something. They tied my hands behind me. They got a little old rope and tied my hands behind me. The main thing they was interested in is what rank I was. They wanted me to be an officer. I don't know why, but they wanted me to be an officer. One came up there that could speak a little English. He questioned me, you know, about if I was an officer. I said, "No, I'm not an officer." I had never been schooled on what to do in case we got captured, except at one time I had heard that you gave them your name, your rank, and your serial number, and that was it. I think, "Well, that's all they're going to get out of me," just like I knew something. I didn't know anything to tell them, anyway (chuckle). "But that's all they'll ever get out of me."

Anyway, they kept me around there questioning me for a little while.

Marcello: Did they threaten you and anything of that nature?

King: No. They searched me, you know. I just had two pockets. That's all I had. I had a pack of cigarettes and a book of matches. I was going to dry those cigarettes out when I got back to the beach. I saved those--just part of a pack. Of course, they took those out of my pocket. They looked at my laundry marks, which was my name. See, I didn't have on anything that would show whether I would be a sergeant or a non-commissioned officer or officer or anything--no insignias at all.

But, anyway, they left me tied there. I could have got loose; they didn't tie me up very hard. I think I could have got loose, but I didn't want to. I mean, I was tired. I just wanted to sit and relax.

But I guess I was only on there for about thirty minutes, and they carried me over to the other side of the ship, and they had a gangway rigged over there. Right in front of that gangway, there was a motor launch with fifteen or twenty men they had picked up off the ship. They pushed me and told me to go down there. I went down there with those other guys. I was back with them.

They carried us over to the beach. That was in Bantam Bay.

Marcello: So what happens then when you get to the beach?

King: We got over there, and we was all starving to death for a drink of water and something to eat. We was hungry. We was starving, but water was the main thing. We sat around there for a while. They grouped us up, and they put more of us together all of the time, because they were bringing in a little group here and a little group there that they had picked up. They were kind of congregating us together there.

So after a while, like thirty or forty minutes, if I remember right, they took a bunch of us down the road. They had some 100-kilo bags of rice, and they wanted us to carry them back down this road. They made us do it.

So while we were on this trip down there, it rained. It just rained a flood. I know I got a drink of water out of a tree--this big, old, huge tree--and the water was coming out of there like a waterfall. I got under that thing and just held my hands like that (gesture) and just drank until I like to have busted.

Marcello: So in the meantime, the Japanese had not roughed you up at all?

King: No. Once or twice they cuffed me around just a little there on that ship, because they didn't think I was putting my head down so that they could look in back on that skivvy shirt there. But they didn't beat on me.

We carried this rice back down there, and it was still

raining. We got back down there, and they put us in an old atap shed. I know I laid down there on the ground and went to sleep. I was hungry, and I was sleepy.

Marcello: How long had you been carrying these sacks of rice?

King: A couple of hours, I guess, down there and back.

Marcello: Was it hard work?

King: You bet it was hard! They was very heavy--220 pounds. They didn't let us slow down.

Marcello: And you were in your bare feet?

King: Yes. We didn't have our shoes. Very few that got to the beach had shoes--just one or two. I could have kept mine with me, but I didn't dream that I would need them. I thought I could get some more where I'm going. I could get some more, but I didn't know where I was going. If I had known what was going to happen, I would have sure kept those shoes.

Marcello: Now, do they have anybody guarding you inside this atap hut?

King: Oh, yes, they had us guarded. It was just an open shed. There wasn't anybody that felt like running or trying to escape anyway, and they realized that. We were all about like a bunch of drowned rats.

Marcello: Now, had you ever heard the rumor by this time that the Japanese didn't take any prisoners?

King: Oh, yes. I figured that was it. I figured they would shoot me when I went aboard that ship. I figured they'd break your

arches with a rifle butt and then just shoot you (chuckle). That is what I really thought. I thought, "Well, everybody has got to die sometime."

Marcello: Okay, so what happens after they put you in this atap hut?

King: Well, we stayed there, and, as I say, I took a nap. I don't know . . . I could have slept thirty minutes, or I could have slept three hours. I can't tell you how long I slept, because I don't have any way of knowing. I woke up . . . the Japs come along there, and they picked twenty-one of us--twenty-one Americans. There were five Englishmen, and I don't know where we got these Englishmen. I think we picked them up on the road. All of this is kind of fuzzy to me, because I was so rundown because of loss of sleep and exhaustion. It never was just real clear, and then the shock of being captured there was quite a shock. I don't care how tough you are, you're not going to remember everything in detail on that deal.

But they put us to pulling these carts. They put seven of us on each cart. This is one that George Detre and J.O. Burge were also on.

Marcello: Now, describe what the surface of the road was like when you started there.

King: Well, we had some that were just cobblestone roads and some that was blistering, hot, runny blacktop. We were in barefeet. It was miserable. We'd pull those carts that day, the rest

of that day, all night that night.

Marcello: What was in those carts?

King: I don't really know unless it was ammunition and supplies. It was guns and ammunition, I suppose. But they were heavy. Of course, they were supposed to pull them themselves. They would occasionally help push a little bit on them going up on a steep hill or something. We'd get off on these detours, you know; we didn't go right straight across the country. I don't know how many miles we pulled those things. But I know it was that day, two full nights, and into the third day.

Marcello: Without rest?

King: Without rest! I mean, we didn't have any rest! They gave us very little food and very little water. I was starved to death the whole time.

Marcello: Did they rough you up any while you were pushing and pulling those carts?

King: No. I didn't see them really jump on anybody. I don't believe they did this while we were pulling those carts. Maybe there was one guy that they jumped on for something, but I can't remember.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Were they the short, squatty, blind, stupid people that you expected?

King: Yes . . . well, they weren't as stupid as I thought they were, but still I couldn't think anything else. Because of the way

they were doing things, I thought, "Well, heck, they still can't win the thing. There is no way that they could win. They're still stupid." That's what I thought.

Marcello: Okay, so you're pushing and pulling these carts for almost three days.

King: Yes. Then they put us in a little old place . . . we called it Rangkasbatoon. Now, the other boys, they marched them right straight to Serang, to the Serang jail, in a theater.

Marcello: That was a nasty place, I understand.

King: Very nasty. They put us in this place called Rangkasbatoon, and we picked up five Englishmen and one Dutchman, and that made twenty-seven of us.-

Marcello: Is this like a little village?

King: Yes, it is a little village. They kept us there about . . . well, I know we were in a little old . . . I don't even know what this building was made for. It was a little bitty thing. It didn't have room enough for us all to lay down.

Marcello: It was not a jail or anything like that?

King: No, this was not a jail. We had to lay like this (gesture), and the guards were really afraid that we were going to try to escape or do something.

Marcello: In other words, it was so crowded that you had to lay with your legs across one another, so to speak.

King: That's right.

Marcello: How long were you there altogether?

King: I'm trying to think how long we were at this . . . it was some time after the island had capitulated, because I know on the eighth or ninth they told us that all of Java had surrendered.

Marcello: So you couldn't have been there much more than a week or so.

King: Well, in this particular place about ten days, I'm going to say.

Marcello: What did you do while you were there?

King: We didn't do anything--just lay there in misery.

Marcello: How were you fed?

King: Very little, very lightly. They would bring us a five-gallon can--it looked like a square oil bucket--about a third full of boiled grain of some kind. We couldn't eat the stuff.

Marcello: Even as hungry as you were, you couldn't eat it?

King: No. There was no salt in it. I don't know how we ate it. I really don't know how we got by.

Marcello: By this time, is the food paramount on your mind?

King: Yes, but after you get so hungry, you get to a point where you don't really care. I don't know just how to explain it.

Marcello: What do you talk about while you're in this little room?

King: Well, everything in the world, you know.

Marcello: Are you already beginning to find out a lot about each other that you didn't know before?

King: Oh, yes. Old J.O. Burge, he was the only one there that was

married, and we would talk and tell jokes. There was some humor. Of course, there had to be. Of course, we'd mooch the guards out of anything that we could mooch them out of.

After the island capitulated, they let us get up every day and go outside. They had a little old canal there, and they let us get in there and bathe in that muddy water. They gave us water and a little bit of food.

Marcello: Is your food still basically consisting of rice?

King: Well, that's all it ever was. It was basically rice. But then we didn't even get rice. It was just old gruelly grain, you know.

Marcello: What did you do for toilet facilities and so on?

King: Well, they would let us go one at a time, sometimes two,but generally one at a time to go down there behind a bush.

Marcello: Was your health holding up pretty well at that time?

King: Well, at that time, yes. We only had one guy that got real sick with dysentery, and they isolated him. They just put him outside just under a tree, and I think they built a little *ol' lean-to over him or something. But after about ten days* or two weeks there, if I remember correctly, they moved us into a native jail.

Marcello: In the same town?

King: Actually, we were close by a town--a little village. It was in kind of a walled jail. It had cells. They gave us three

cells, and these cells were two-thirds as big as this room, and we just had all the room in the world, so we thought we had got a mansion compared to what we had. We had a toilet bucket over in one corner, and they would let us take that out and empty it every day. They gave us plenty of drinking water and a little better food.

Marcello: So you were put in a cell that was approximately twenty feet long and maybe about fifteen feet wide or something like that?

King: Yes, approximately.

Marcello: How many were there in each cell?

King: Seven in each cell. We were actually behind bars, locked up in jail. We had a big, old, wooden bench that was sloped up against one wall. About ten or twelve inches from the wall, it had a four-by-four and down at the foot about ten or twelve inches. It was about seven foot long. Then sloped toward the floor was another four-by-four. It was real slick where prisoners had laid on these boards. It was real slick. The four-by-four was the pillow and the four-by-four down below would keep you from sliding off.

But it was a lot more comfortable there than it was . . . we stayed there, and one day they came along and picked us up. If I remember correctly, we had been captured about five or six weeks. Then they carried us to Serang. We spent one night in Serang. Then they moved everybody in Serang into Batavia,

into Bicycle Camp. There was this place called Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Now, up until this time, you had really not been harassed or beaten or anything of that nature?

King: Well, I had seen a couple of the beatings, and I was one of them, and one of the other sailors there was the other.

Marcello: How did you get your beating at this place?

King: The reason I got mine, I asked one of the guards for a cigarette. I was mooching him out of a cigarette when we were out on a little old work detail. They took us out to do something. This was while we were in that little bitty room. There was another one, and I suppose that he was a sergeant or something. I wasn't even talking to him, but he comes over there and jumps on me, and he really lowered the boom on me for a little while. He's the same guy that beat up on this other guy. Nobody ever knew why he got on him. He was just a real tall, big boy, and he just got on him.

Marcello: What specifically did he do to you?

King: Well, he just slapped me. He made me stand at attention, and then he slapped me.

Marcello: How many times did he slap you?

King: Oh, fifteen or twenty times, I would say.

Marcello: Enough for you to get the message?

King: Oh, he jarred my teeth. You bet you get the message. You couldn't do anything, because he had a couple of guards standing

there with bayonets--fixed bayonets.

Marcello: Was this Japanese that hit you considerably smaller than you?

King: Oh, yes. He was shorter than I was.

Marcello: Okay, so you've been a prisoner now for approximately a month, and they put you in Bicycle Camp.

King: Well, I'm going to say a little over a month. I think it's more than a month, but I can't recall.

Marcello: Now, at this point are you still in fairly good health considering everything?

King: Yes. I hadn't gone down yet.

Marcello: Had you acquired any additional possessions by this time?

King: No, not one thing.

Marcello: So you had nothing but shirt . . . .

King: Oh, I lost my underwear. All I had was a pair of shorts (chuckle).

Marcello: You didn't even have your T-shirt any longer?

King: No, I didn't have a T-shirt.

Marcello: Of course, you had no shoes.

King: No shoes.

Marcello: And you had no mess gear or anything of that nature.

King: I'll tell you what I had. I never will forget this. While we were pulling these carts, one night . . . it was blistering in daytime . . . blistering hot in daytime and cool at night, of course. And the mosquitos were very bad. We were pulling these carts, and one night we went through a village, and they

took us in and gave us a drink of water in this native hut, As I walked out the door, I saw a . . . well, it was a shirt, but it looked more like a pajama top, When I saw it, just as I walked out that door I reached up and got it. I never did even look to see if anybody saw me, I just took a chance, and, sure enough, they didn't. All they could do is make me put it back. I took that with me.

Then the day we quit pulling the carts, I lost my underwear. We took a bath, and I washed them. I had to put my shorts back on, or I would have lost them. But I hung them underwear on this cart that I had been pulling, and we never did come back to the carts. They wouldn't let us. I didn't know they was taking us away from them. So I didn't have any underwear. I just had a pair of khaki shorts.

Marcello: Okay, describe what Bicycle Camp looks like from a physical standpoint.

King: It was a set of native Army barracks, is all it is. It's made out of concrete and tile. It is in a tropical country, and, of course, there's not any air conditioning. They're not sealed. It's never real cold, so they never seal them. They had ventilation between the roof and the walls. They had tile floors, and they had a blacktop street that went in between the barracks. Of course, they had barbed wire. They had fixed these especially for prisoners. Of course, the barracks are empty, and they

got cubicles.

Marcello: Are you the first people that come there, or were there already prisoners there?

King: The "Lost Battalion" . . . see, the 131st had moved in . . . I'm not sure. I think they moved in either the day before we got there or the day after. I can't remember. But it was just the same time. I think the day after.

Marcello: Now, let me clarify one point here, however. Is it not true that most of the Houston survivors were in there when the "Lost Battalion" did come in?

King: That's what I say. If we got in there the day before, we were all in there, or ninety-some per cent of us.

Marcello: Yes, but they didn't move all of the Houston people in there at the same time, though, did they?

King: It was within a day or two. Within a day or two, they had moved everybody from Serang.

Marcello: Oh, you all moved from Serang to Bicycle Camp?

King: Yes. We stayed one night in Serang, and then they moved that group . . . if you can establish when it was, you would know exactly . . . and that's when I moved in.

Marcello: I think the "Lost Battalion" came in after you arrived.

King: I do, too, but it was only a day or two. It was only just a day or two, because I met them when I got to Batavia. I was thinking it could have been that they were already moved in

there, but they could have moved in after us.

Marcello: I guess most of the Houston survivors were in pretty bad shape. None of you really had anything.

King: We sure were. We were just about all down sick by the time we got there.

Marcello: I gather a lot of these guys were still covered with oil and so on and so forth.

King: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Especially those that had been at Serang.

King: That's right. We had actually, I suppose, had it a little bit better where I was than the boys that were in Serang, because it was a filthy mess up there.

Marcello: You were glad that you only had to stay there one night.

King: You bet. I stayed in the prison--the jail--not in the theater.

Marcello: How did you get from Serang to Bicycle Camp?

King: They hauled us in trucks.

Marcello: Did they ever try to humiliate you anywhere along the way as they displayed you before the native population?

King: Yes, while we was pulling these carts. They would let the natives come in and hit at us and things like that, you know.

Marcello: The natives had already changed sides.

King: Oh, yes, they changed. But they changed back before it was over.

Marcello: Describe what your cubicles were like here in the barracks at Bicycle Camp.

King: Well, they were just bare open-front cubicles. They weren't rooms at all. I believe we had about four or five or six men per cubicle.

Marcello: What sort of sleeping facilities did you have?

King: We didn't have any. We didn't have a blanket or anything.

Marcello: There were no bunks or anything in these cubicles?

King: No, not a sign of a bunk.

Marcello: Are the floors concrete?

King: Well, they're either concrete or tile. I can't remember. I guess they were slick concrete.

Marcello: They didn't assign you to any particular cubicle. You just went into the barracks and picked out a cubicle.

King: They just put so many men in this barracks, and then our own people kind of got together and figured out how many would be assigned. I don't remember how many there were per cubicle, but it was at least four. I don't know . . . we were there about six months, I suppose.

Marcello: Okay, the members of the 131st Field Artillery come in very shortly after you get there. Describe what happens when you encounter the 131st Field Artillery.

King: Well, I just felt like they was some old boys from home. They were long lost buddies, you know, being all from Texas. Mostly all of them were from Texas. I never knew any of them, but I knew somebody that they knew or something like that.

Marcello: What can the 131st Field Artillery do for you?

King: Well, they did a lot for me. They did a lot for all of the sailors.

Marcello: Describe what happened here.

King: Well, the main thing is that they had been captured with all of their gear intact--full seabag, so to speak--barracks bags--bedding and all. They all had two blankets. So they had got trapped having to carry all of this stuff for--I don't know--six, eight, or ten miles on one trip, and some of them just couldn't carry it. Some of them just throwed it away along the way to lighten their pack up. When they got there they saw our needs, and they just divvied up and gave everybody . . . you know, they just kept the bare necessities for themselves, you know. Most of them just kept the bare necessities and saw that we got what was left. See, there was more of them than there was of us.

Marcello: Evidently, this was strictly a voluntary act.

King: No, they had to do it. They had a good reason, because they needed to lighten their pack in case they got on another one of these forced marches. Then we needed it, and they knew we needed it. There was no way we could pay them for it or repay them in any way.

Marcello: What did you obtain?

King: I got a blanket; I got some khaki clothing, you know.

Marcello: Did you get any underwear?

King: I'm not sure, but I think I did. I think I got some underwear. But I know I got a blanket and a mosquito bar.

Marcello: Do you recall who specifically shared with you?

King: You bet! A guy named "Snuffy" Jordan. He gave me more stuff than I wanted to carry, really. I think I gave some of it around (chuckle). I can't remember his first name, but his name was "Snuffy." He lives in Fort Worth, I guess, now. I saw him not too awful long ago.

Marcello: You do remember him vividly, and I assume that you are still eternally grateful until this day.

King: You betcha! I still tell him every time I see him that I still appreciate what he did for me. I kept that blanket all the way. I wore it out, I guess.

Marcello: I guess this is really the beginning of that very, very close camaraderie that developed between all the men who make up the Lost Battalion Association.

King: Oh, yes. This Army outfit still had some money--the officers did--and a little bit of extra food to get a little for us. Our officers--our Navy officers--that we had there, with all due respect to them, they did all they could, but they were in the same condition that we were in. They were sick; we were sick. We couldn't have stood too much more of what we had been through up there, especially those boys up there at

Serang.

Marcello: Now, do they still continue to maintain the Houston survivors in one group and the 131st Field Artillery in another group, so to speak, in terms of the barracks and this sort of thing?

King: Only in Bicycle Camp. In Bicycle Camp is where that ended. Then you were mixed up. See, the first details going out of that Bicycle Camp and leaving Java, they just mixed it up. They took all . . . I believe there was 190-some of us. There were four officers and a couple of sergeants and a couple of corporals, and the rest of them were PFC's and privates or seamen. They just mixed us up. Now, the Americans were never . . . we had to furnish so many men on each detail, the Americans did. We had to furnish our pro rata; that's the way they did it. Of course, they just took the same total right out of the Navy or off the Houston. If we had to make up 10 per cent of a detail, well, then 10 per cent of them come out of the Houston.

Marcello: But while you were there at Bicycle Camp, you were basically still intact as survivors off of the Houston or as survivors in the 131st Field Artillery?

King: Yes. You know, if we got recaptured or anything, we'd still be as a unit, so to speak. But you'll never be a unit again after you're captured and your ship goes down, see. You never can be a unit again.

Marcello: By this time, had the Japanese ever bothered to process you? In other words, had they taken your names, your ranks, your serial numbers, your addresses? Are they taking any steps to notify the Red Cross that they had captured you?

King: I don't believe they had, Ron. I could be wrong on that, but I can't remember them ever coming to me. Now, our officers, they knew everybody in camp by name,and I'm not certain but I think they gave us a number in Bicycle Camp. In other words, while I was prisoner, I had about three different numbers--prisoner-of-war numbers--prison numbers.

Marcello: So at least somewhere along the line there were records being kept.

King: They could have known . . . they could have known easily in Bicycle Camp who they had--their name, rank, and serial number.

Marcello: In other words, they could have gotten most of this information from the officers.

King: Yes, they could have, and they might have had. I don't know that they didn't.

Marcello: Now, shortly after you arrive at Bicycle Camp and the unit is intact as it will ever be, do you begin to organize among yourselves? I guess what I am saying is, do you once again restore military discipline to the extent that you obey officers, higher ranking non-coms, and things of this nature?

King: Well, I think so. I think we always had a certain amount of

respect. It was looser than it was aboard ship.

Marcello: Yes, but the formalities would no longer be there, such as saluting and the things of that nature.

King: Well, that wasn't required. The officers didn't require that, as I remember. It was very lax, very lax. They realized that we were in a "one for all and all for one" sort of deal.

Marcello: Would I assume that, however, you would still perhaps be referring to the officers as "Lieutenant So-and-So" or "Captain So-and-So" or "Mister So-and-So?"

King: Oh, yes. If there was any administration work to be done, the officers did it. They did all of the administration work. That's the reason I say I can't tell you whether they had our name, rank, serial number, but I think they did. I think they probably did.

Marcello: I assume that the officers would have also acted as the go-betweens with the Japanese. Probably the Japanese orders came to the officers, and the officers transmitted them to the enlisted men.

King: That's right. Of course, they had these little old Jap guards that patrolled and walked down through the barracks and had us all stand at attention and salute them and bow to them.

Marcello: Okay, this was going to be my next question. What adjustments do you have to make, and what were you expected to do relative to your relationship with the captors, so to speak?

King: Well, any time you saw one, you know, you had to treat him just like he was a high-ranking officer. It didn't make any difference if he was a private or what, you salute him or bow to him. If you didn't have a hat on, you had to bow. That was their custom.

Marcello: Did you ever forget to do it?

King: Oh, yes, a lot of times.

Marcello: What happened?

King: Of course, they would think you were too slow about doing it or if you didn't do it properly, and then you'd get bashed for that. One of them would stand there, or maybe both of them would get on you. They would bash you around. They was always doing that, but it was their orders to do that. We knew that.

Marcello: Now, at this point, do you try to make friends or get close to any of the Japanese guards?

King: I don't. I sure don't! There was very few people that did, if any.

Marcello: Why do you not want to get too close to the guards?

King: We don't think we're going to be over there forever.

Marcello: How long is the war going to last?

King: I figured it'd be six weeks or two months at the most, and we'd be out of there. I'm not going to be guilty of collaborating in any way with them, you know.

Marcello: You did mention just a moment ago that they wouldn't let you get close to them.

King: They didn't want you close to them. They didn't make any bones about it. When they carried us up on that railroad up there in Burma, that old colonel up there read us a statement up there, and I know you've read it. He told us that that railroad was going to be built even if it had to be built over our dead bodies.

Marcello: I assume that they considered you the scum of the earth because you had surrendered?

King: That's right. They told us we were.

Marcello: You let yourself surrender, and therefore you had disgraced yourself in their eyes.

King: Yes, they would kill theirself before they would be captured. Of course, that's a bunch of propaganda. They had schooled their people to do that, and they did have some kamikazes, we know that.

Marcello: Now, what kind of guards are we talking about here at Bicycle Camp? Are these still Japanese?

King: Yes, these are Japanese guards in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: You have not encountered your friends, the Koreans, yet.

King: No, not yet.

Marcello: Okay, generally speaking then, do these Japanese guards here in Bicycle Camp resort to very much physical punishment,

and if so, what form would the physical punishment take?

King: Well, it was mostly just the bashings. They wouldn't have to be provoked at you. Anything would provoke them.

Marcello: When you talk of a bashing, what are you referring to? I know that's a standard term that the prisoners used.

King: That is where they stand you at attention and just slap you, and if you are too tall, they have you stand on your knees and slap you or bash you around.

Marcello: From time to time would they also use gun butts or things of that nature?

King: Oh, yes! You bet! They would use those rifles on you.

Marcello: Where would they usually hit you? In the face?

King: They would try to hit you in the face, but they would hit you anywhere. They would always try to slap you. I think they thought that was more humiliating, which it was.

Marcello: Especially since they were all smaller than you.

King: Any kind of licking is humiliating. I don't know . . . I got by very good in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Well, like you said awhile ago, the key is to stay away from them. You stay away from them, and you are not going to get bashed.

King: Of course,you can't stay away from them all of the time. You're going to be confronted with them sooner or later.

Marcello: Did they come through the barracks very often?

King: Right.

Marcello: How often?

King: All during the day. Just any time during the day, they were liable to come through the barracks. Of course, you know, they would pass the word along in front of them. They knew what was going on. They knew we were passing the word.

Marcello: Do you think perhaps, in many cases, the bashings developed because of communications problems?

King: No.

Marcello: You don't think that's the case at all?

King: No. That is a way of life with those people. They ruled the same way.

Marcello: Describe how one Japanese soldier would treat another Japanese soldier.

King: Yes, well, if he's a higher rank than him and he gets mad at him or upset at him for any reason at all, he can stand him up and whip him around and kick him and do whatever he wants to. They do it, and they do it quite often.

Marcello: Suppose that early one morning you saw a Japanese captain give a Japanese lieutenant hell. Now, what would that mean to you ultimately?

King: Well, it was just awful to me, you know, if I saw it. I saw it a few times while I was there. A high rank would actually hurt him.

Marcello: But I've heard that on many occasions, if you saw this sort of thing begin up in the officer ranks, sooner or later it would get all the way down to the prisoners. Everybody had to save face, I guess.

King: Yes. They would just try to get on somebody else that caused it. Somebody caused them to get it, so it was just a chain reaction.

Marcello: You guys were the low ones on the totem pole.

King: Yes. As I say, it didn't take anything to provoke them into it. In fact, I think--I really think--that they were ordered at times to come over there and do this sort of thing. I sure do.

Marcello: What was the worst punishment that you saw here at Bicycle Camp? What was the worst thing that could happen to you? For example, I've heard several prisoners describe the punishment where the Japanese would force the person to kneel with the bamboo pole behind his knees.

King: Yes, I saw that there. Or maybe holding something up over his head, you know, until he just couldn't hold it any longer, or something like that. They had different forms of punishment, but I think the whole camp was punished in their food supplies, which was actually harder than the physical punishment they gave us.

Marcello: You mean the lack of food?

King: Yes. The lack of food and the quality of food that they gave us there was such that it was just a starvation diet. That's all there was to it.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the food here at Bicycle Camp. Now, you mentioned that the quality and quantity of the food was such that it was a starvation diet. However, we have to keep this in its proper perspective. It was going to be better here than what it was farther down the line.

King: Well, that's true. That's true.

Marcello: Describe what the food consisted of here at Bicycle Camp.

King: I worked down in the kitchen there helping, you know--cleaning the rice and cleaning the vegetables and whatnot to make the soup out of. It was rice and soup.

Marcello: What sort of vegetables would you be getting?

King: It was those tropical vegetables. There are very few of them that we'd have anything over here like them; there's just not much over here. Those were like rutabagas, turnips, or something. Our food was bad, though, in Bicycle Camp.

Now, there was some stuff we could buy if you had any money. Of course, we didn't have any money and was sick to start with. The biggest part of the Navy boys--the boys off the ship--were at a real disadvantage; I mean, we didn't get as much as some of them got. Of course, we didn't have any money.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about the procuring of food. First of all,

what would the Japanese be providing?

King: Well, they just furnished us rice and stew--you know, stuff to make stew out of. We had very little . . . no bread at all.

Marcello: How did you go about obtaining the rice and the vegetables from the Japanese? How did this process work? I thought you might know a little about this since you worked in the kitchen.

King: Actually, I can't tell you. They just had a supply truck that came in every day, as far as I know. They had some two or three kitchens in this big camp, and it just went from one to the other dividing it out. But it was meager, very meager.

Marcello: Did the Americans have much trouble learning how to cook the rice in the beginning?

King: (Chuckle) Yes and no. You got to learn this stuff pretty fast, you know; you learn this stuff pretty fast. You take with different kinds of rice, well, you got to cook it differently. You get some old rice that's got to be washed and washed and washed, and if you get it clean enough to cook, well, you got to cook it different or you're going to mess it up. You just can't make it all good.

Marcello: When you say you've got to wash it and wash it and wash it to clean it, am I to assume the Japanese were giving you whatever they didn't want?

King: Oh, I'll tell you what. We got sweepings part of the time, I

think. You bet! It was a very poor quality, and some that we got was ate up with worms. It was half worms. You had to float it to keep worms out of it, but we still cooked a lot of them.

Marcello: How long did it take you to get used to eating rice with worms in it?

King: You don't ever get used to it, no. You eat it, but you still pick those worms out of it before you eat it.

Marcello: Okay, describe the process by which the rice was cooked and then distributed to the prisoners. How did you cook the rice? What did you use?

King: We just boiled it in big cauldrons, you know. We boiled it just like you'd cook it here. We finally got to where we could steam that rice, but in the morning, why, they'd just boil it. They'd just have soupy, boiled rice, and you hoped you had salt to go in it. It was pretty tasteless without salt. We had nothing to go on it, not even salt sometimes.

Marcello: Okay, so you would then simply line up with your mess gear to get the rice?

King: Then you'd get about half or two-thirds of a canteen cup as your ration, you see, for a meal.

Marcello: Now, did you have a mess kit by this time?

King: I didn't. I got something in Batavia, and I can't remember what it was. But I didn't have a thing but part of a coconut

shell for that first six weeks.

Marcello: That is, the first six weeks you were captured?

King: Yes. I had part of a coconut shell that I'd . . . we'd gotten hold of a coconut when we cut a coconut tree down out there. I had just a sliver of bamboo for a spoon and a part of a coconut shell.

Marcello: Did you ever receive eating utensils or anything like that here in Bicycle Camp?

King: Not from the Japs--just from the Americans or Australians or something. But we got something to eat out of. I know there was one or two sailors that got hold of a porcelain-like baby pot, and they ate out of that for years--ate out of that baby pot (chuckle). I thought it was a very good mess kit, you know.

Marcello: I've heard some of the people from the "Lost Battalion" say that they were amazed at the way the sailors could take virtually any item and make it into something useful. I guess it was because a ship had to have so many skilled craftsmen, too.

King: Well, here's the thing about it. Whenever you get caught and you don't have anything but a pair of shorts, you're going to have to start somewhere; you're going to have to have something. There was a car, a little old car, there . . .

Marcello: I heard that car was literally torn apart by the time you left there.

King: There wasn't a piece left before it was over. They did something

with every piece of it; and it wasn't to run as a car anymore, either. But some of them . . . I know there was one or two that had a built-in . . . had already built mess kits out of the hub caps. I cannot remember what kind of mess kit I had.

Marcello: Was there ever a chance to get seconds on the rice at any of the meals?

King: Occasionally. Of course, it's very hard to feed several hundred men out of one kitchen, and even if you think you've got two-thirds of a cup . . . even if you knew you had a cup of rice per man, you would either run short or have a cup or two left over.

Marcello: I bet there were some very unhappy people if you ran short.

King: Oh, you better believe there was! You just didn't run short. You cut it down to where you didn't run short. Everybody got something.

Marcello: I'm sure everybody was watching the distribution of that rice like a hawk.

King: Yes, very closely.

Marcello: What did you have to drink?

King: Occasionally, we'd have tea, and that was all. We had no milk or coffee at all. You had to boil your water, so it was better to drink warm or hot tea than it would be to drink warm water. You'd never get it cold, because there's no such thing as ice.

Marcello: Now,were the members of the Houston able to share in the food that the 131st Field Artillery was purchasing on the outside,

or did they simply have their own kitchen?

King: No, no. We ate out of their kitchen. We ate right with them, right out of their kitchen.

Marcello: So am I to assume that in the early weeks here at Bicycle Camp, you would have perhaps been able to share some of the food that they were purchasing on the outside?

King: Oh, yes. If there was any extra purchase that went through the kitchen, we got our . . . we were just like one of them. They treated us just like one of them. If there were any of those as individuals that had money, well, they might could buy something extra individually; and if you were a buddy of theirs, why, you might get some of it.

Marcello: What extras were they purchasing on the outside that was put into the common pot?

King: I can't really tell you. I don't know. But I know there was some things. It's been so long ago that I can't remember.

Marcello: I always hear the prisoners talk quite a bit about eggs. Eggs seem to be an item that everybody wanted.

King: Oh, yes. It always was--all the way through. Eggs and sugar was one of the main things--protein and then that sweet taste. I tell you, I starved to death for sugar. That was the worst thing. I was hungrier for sugar than any other one thing.

Marcello: I think it's kind of ironic that today we think of eggs as being a source of cholesterol and all this kind of thing, and

for the prisoners-of-war, eggs were one of the keys to survival, I guess.

King: Oh, boy! I'm still foolish about eggs--very foolish. I love eggs, and I'm not bothered with high cholesterol, either, so I can eat them.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the work details here at Bicycle Camp. Did you participate on any of the work details outside the camp?

King: I didn't. I was so physically exhausted when I got into this camp. Of course, I built myself up some. I had a pretty sick spell there for a month or so just getting started, but I never did have to go out and work on a work detail, and I never made a detail outside the camp. I did work down at the kitchen some, as I told you.

Marcello: Well, if you worked at the kitchen, I assume that would be a rather steady job, anyway, wouldn't it?

King: Yes, we went down early every morning, and I worked . . . oh, it wasn't a heavy, heavy job, you know, but it was pretty steady.

Marcello: What did you do down in the kitchen?

King: I was just a helper. I wasn't a cook. I just helped with the vegetables, cleaned up.

Marcello: Were there any advantages to working in the kitchen?

King: Oh, yes. You'd get a little extra food. You bet! That's one of the secrets of the service. If you're not getting enough

food, go work in the kitchen . . . in the galley. You can't keep a man working there from getting a little extra. You just can't do it.

Marcello: I've heard several prisoners say that they liked to get that burnt rice that was on the bottom of the pot.

King: Well, now, that was strictly from the steamed-type rice as you and I know it. The way the Japs cook it . . . of course, the Japs throw that away. They don't eat it at all. It's very hard, you know; you've got to have good teeth to chew it. The Japs throw that away. As we come to it, I'll tell you . . . I worked in a Japanese kitchen up there, after we got the railroad built, for about a year. I learned quite a lot about their habits and the way they cooked their rice.

Marcello: Now, were the work details here at Bicycle Camp voluntary?

King: Basically, there was enough volunteers that people that wanted to go out and get the exercise . . . and they got to scrounge a little stuff on the outside. They got to do a little trading with the natives and maybe pick up this or that. You'd get to steal a little stuff, you know (chuckle). Of course, that was a challenge.

Marcello: That was the name of the game, so to speak.

King: You'd steal it for the sake of stealing it, even though you didn't need it. If you needed it, you'd sure try to steal it. But you'd steal it just to see if you could sneak it by them

and outsmart them. You might steal something that you didn't even need. You'd take a whale of a chance, you know. A lot of guys took chances by stealing stuff they didn't need.

Marcello: What would happen if you got caught stealing from the Japanese?

King: Well, you were just in bad trouble if you got caught stealing from them or get caught with any kind of . . . everything was contraband, you know. It didn't make any difference. You just weren't supposed to have that. If you were out on a working party, you just weren't supposed to bring anything back in. But everybody tried to bring something in, and did.

Marcello: Despite the punishment involved if one got caught stealing, did a lot of it still take place?

King: Oh, yes. The very next day, the very same one might get caught again. He'd get beat up and bashed around, but he might get caught again.

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

King: They weren't too bad, really. They were bad in our standards, but we had some that was worse later. Of course, before we got to Bicycle Camp, ours were so bad that they was pretty good.

Marcello: How did you bathe here at Bicycle Camp?

King: Well, just with buckets. If I remember right, we had buckets. We could have had showers there, but I can't remember. I know they had running water . . . we did have showers there.

Marcello: Did you have plenty of water, and could you take a bath pretty regularly?

King: I believe we had plenty of water in Bicycle Camp. We didn't have enough soap, but we had water. If I remember correctly, we had water in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Did the Japanese provide soap, such as it was?

King: Not very much, no. I think all the soap had to come in through either the black market or the Army officers bought it. It was very hard to come by. Soap was dear; it was hard to get. Week after week, I had baths without soap.

Marcello: Can you get relatively clean without soap?

King: Oh, you bet! You don't know how clean you can get. Of course, you get clean a lot quicker and easier with soap. It's just like . . . you don't know what you can do without until you have to. You can do without a lot of things if you have to.

Marcello: Describe what the toilet facilities were like here at Bicycle Camp.

King: Well, they were just the regular native toilets, and they had just a trough that you just sat down and straddled. The water just gushed through this thing all the time. It wasn't too bad, really.

Marcello: I guess you didn't have to dig too far down in the ground to hit water, though, did you?

King: Well, I don't know. I hadn't ever even thought about it, really. You know, I was back over there. I went right back to this Bicycle Camp this past fall.

Marcello: Bicycle Camp is still there?

King: No, now, the camp itself--where it was--is not there. There's some native army barracks still around in that vicinity which are very similar to it. But it's grown up and changed to where you can't recognize anything.

Marcello: Now, I assume that you had some idle time here at Bicycle Camp.

King: Most of my time was idle there.

Marcello: What did you do in your spare time when you and your buddies got around? I'm sure you had all sorts of bull sessions.

King: That's right, mostly bull sessions, maybe a card game or something.

Marcello: What do you talk about in the bull sessions?

King: Mostly food. When a soldier's full, he talks about sex; but when he's not full, he talks about food (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess by the time you leave Bicycle Camp, you know everybody's life history virtually.

King: Well, I know a lot of them. I've got a lot of friends. I've visited lots of those boys.

Marcello: But, I mean, I bet you know a lot about their families and relatives.

King: Oh, yes. I've gotten close to some of these boys, you know, that live fairly close. I know quite a bit about them.

Marcello: Are there any sorts of sports activities or anything there in Bicycle Camp?

King: Oh, yes. They had some activities every day. Volleyball was the main thing. We didn't have anyplace big enough for baseball. Then they had . . . see, there were quite a few Australians in this camp, and they're real physical-minded, sports-minded. They had what you call a "smoker" day or something, you know, with the boxing and maybe wrestling . . . volleyball contests.

Marcello: What sort of a relationship developed between the Americans and the Australians?

King: Well, the Americans and the Australians always had good relations. We really did. We got along with them better than any of the other Allies.

Marcello: How do you explain that?

King: There's not any question about it in my estimation. They're the nearest thing to the Americans and think more like we think than any other people in the world. There's no communication gap there. They may be a little hard to understand right at first, but after you're with them awhile, you can understand. There's no communication gap there.

Marcello: Some of the prisoners have mentioned that they found that the Australians appeared to them like Texans perhaps had been a generation before or something like that.

King: Oh, yes, that's very true. You'll still find . . . of course,

I think they're gaining on us. We always thought the Australians were just almost like the United States, except for about twenty years behind us in their times. But they're fast gaining on us. I found that out last year when I was over there.

Marcello: Now, did you have free access to the Australian compound?

King: Well, it wasn't completely free, but you could visit. I visited quite a few Australians there, but after we got to Bicycle Camp, then they was just all throwed together; I mean, there was no fences between the huts or things like that ever anymore.

Marcello: Now, at one point here at Bicycle Camp, the Japanese tried to force all the prisoners to sign a non-escape pledge. Do you remember that incident?

King: Yes. They didn't try; they <u>did</u> force us.

Marcello: Describe how that came about.

King: They just took some officers down there and beat up on them and said, "Now, you sign these. Every man in camp's going to have to sign them." So our officers came up there and said, "Go ahead and sign them. It's all right." They sat us out on the parade ground for some time and did some bashing around on the officers in front of us and whatnot, you know, and threatened everybody if they didn't sign it. In other words, you gave them permission to kill you if they caught you trying

to escape. That's what it amounted to.

Marcello: Of course, I don't think anybody had any thoughts of escaping, anyhow.

King: Well, everybody said that it was not binding and to go ahead and sign it. It's still not binding. If you sign something under force and duress, well, it's not binding.

Marcello: I think, also, we have to keep in mind that probably you really weren't going to escape--not there in Java.

King: We didn't have anyplace to go. There was no place to go on Java. You're on an island. Of course, you never lose sight of that fact that you might get an opportunity to escape sometime, somewhere.

Marcello: What was the penalty if you were caught trying to escape?

King: You'd be shot.

Marcello: Did you have any reason to doubt them?

King: I didn't have any reason to doubt them or not to doubt them. We didn't have any examples there, but we did later.

Marcello: Was it possible to get any news from the outside here in Bicycle Camp?

King: Yes. There was a radio. I thought it was hearsay for a long time, but we got news every night. (Chuckle) Of course, it was propaganda; a lot of it was nothing in the world but propaganda.

Marcello: You, I assume, knew nothing about the radio or where it was or anything of that nature.

King: Well, I didn't know where it was, but I knew within the hut where it was. If you just kind of nose around a little, you could find out. It was very secret.

Marcello: What would have happened if the Japanese had found out that a radio was there?

King: I don't know. I'm afraid there'd have been some heads to fly over that deal. You know, it could have been real bad. I don't know whether they'd put anybody, like, in a jail--solitary--or half-buried them or something there in Batavia or not. I can't remember if they ever did that to anybody.

Marcello: Now, did you mention that you got quite ill here at Bicycle Camp for one stretch?

King: Yes, soon after I got there, I just was in pretty bad shape. Most all these sailors off the Houston . . . there were very few of us in very good shape when we got there.

Marcello: What was your problem?

King: Malaria and dysentery. I don't believe I had malaria yet, but this dysentery bit really got me.

Marcello: What exactly happens when you have dysentery real bad, like you perhaps had it here in Bicycle Camp?

King: Well, you just have stomach gripes, you know, and you just are going to the bathroom all the time, like, twenty or thirty times a day. You can't pass anything but a little bit of mucus--bloody-like mucus. It's just terrific--the griping and pain.

It'll kill you, too.

Marcello: I gather that if you have dysentery, that means you also aren't able to digest your food very well. It's passing right on through.

King: Yes, it's very hard and leaves you so weak that you can't do anything.

Marcello: Was there anything that they could do for your dysentery here at Bicycle Camp?

King: Well, you could do more there than anywhere we ever were, because the doctors still had most of their supplies to doctor us with. They had medicine with them.

Marcello: What sort of treatment did you get for dysentery?

King: I can't remember; I can't really remember what they did. I know they treated me for it and kind of got me over it, you know. I can't remember what they did.

Marcello: Did they have a hospital hut here at Bicycle Camp?

King: Yes, they did. I know I stayed in it some two or three days at one time.

Marcello: Was it not too bad a place?

King: Well, it was just like these others. I'd sooner have been back down in my own hut as be in the hospital hut. I think they might have got a little extra food there.

Marcello: Generally speaking, I think everybody did pull through Bicycle Camp fairly well, did they not? In other words, things were

going to get a hell of a lot worse.

King: Oh, yes, they could, and did, really. Of course, to me, Bicycle Camp was bad. My thinking--my attitude--was such in Bicycle Camp that . . . and my physical condition was such that, you know, if you don't feel good, you can't have an optimistic attitude, if you know what I mean. So I had a real bad attitude, and I don't think I got along real well in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: But you eventually were able to shake the dysentery here in Bicycle Camp.

King: Yes, I got over it and got to exercising and doing a little work. I kind of got back on my feet.

Marcello: Eventually, you do leave Bicycle Camp. I think it was sometime in October of 1942 that they began taking contingents out of Bicycle Camp. Do you recall when you left?

King: I was in the first group that left.

Marcello: So you must have left with a contingent of mixed nationalities.

King: Right.

Marcello: My records indicate that the first group left on October 2nd. Does that sound reasonable to you? And then there was another group that went out on October 11th.

King: In that month, it sounds real familiar.

Marcello: You may have gone out on the second group on the 11th.

King: Well, it was whenever this American group went out--the first

American group went out--that I was with it. There was 192 of us, and there was a lot of speculation on what they were going to do with us and where we were going. We didn't have any idea.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever give you time to prepare for moving out of Bicycle Camp?

King: On this trip, we had everything together.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying is, did you know maybe a week or a couple days in advance that you were leaving?

King: Yes, a couple days. Not a week, I don't think.

Marcello: By this time, what had you accumulated in terms of personal possessions?

King: Oh, not too much, really. I had a mosquito bar and a blanket and maybe a shirt and a pair of pants. That's about it.

Marcello: Were you glad to leave Bicycle Camp?

King: Well, I was ready for a move. As I say, I never did get used to prison camp, but I sure didn't get used to Bicycle Camp. Now, some of them thought they had it much better there, and they probably did. I'd rather been up on that railroad myself.

Marcello: You're one of the few prisoners that I've ever heard say that.

King: Well, actually, I didn't have it maybe as hard as some of them did, but I felt better and got along a little better up there than I did in Batavia. I had gotten more used to it or hardened to it or something.

Marcello: We'll talk about that phase very shortly.

King: I'm sure that the food was better as a whole, but it was such a shock to me that it was worse, you see. It wasn't a shock to me up on the railroad. I just took it in stride up there.

Marcello: Now, did they simply march you from Bicycle Camp down to the docks at Batavia, or did you go by truck?

King: I believe we went by truck. Yes, I know we did. We went by truck.

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

King: No, I sure don't.

Marcello: There was one called the Dai Nichi Maru. I'm not sure that was the one you were on or not.

King: I believe that sounds familiar. That sounds real familiar.

Marcello: Describe what your quarters were like aboard the Dai Nichi Maru or whatever the name of this Japanese vessel was.

King: They were rather cramped, just about like sardines. We had a pretty miserable trip, really.

Marcello: Can you go into a little bit more detail on your quarters and exactly what they were like aboard this ship?

King: On this particular ship, as I remember, we were, about the first or second day, below the main deck. I can't remember, but I think we were about two decks below the main deck. They made us stay down in this hold all the time, and it was hot and

sweaty, you know.

Marcello: About how high was the space where you were staying? Could you stand up?

King: I believe I could where I was. Now, some of them couldn't. Where they were stuck back over on the edge, they couldn't stand up. I believe we could; as I remember, we could.

Marcello: Could you lie down normally to sleep and so on?

King: You could lay down all right, but you had to be against someone.

Marcello: In other words, arms and legs were tangled.

King: Yes, that's kind of the way it was.

Marcello: What was the food like aboard the Dai Nichi Maru?

King: It was just starvation rations, you know; I mean, it was just worse and worse.

Marcello: What did you get to eat here?

King: I can't remember. It was just a little bit of rice, as well as I remember--just plain rice. I don't think we even got any soup at all. Maybe one time or twice we got a little soup.

Marcello: How was this rice distributed?

King: I can't tell you. I can't remember. The details about this trip have just gotten away from me.

Marcello: Do you recall that you ate down in the hold, or did you come up on deck?

King: Yes, we did everything down in the hold, because there was so many of us. And they wouldn't let us out of there but about

two at a time to go to the benjo--or the bathroom--as we called it. I mean, there was just a steady line of them from start to finish.

Marcello: Was there very much dysentery at that time?

King: Yes, there was quite a bit, you know. There was dysentery all along, all the way through it. We never did get adjusted to this food, this diet, I'm sure.

Marcello: You may have to correct me here because I might be wrong, but is it true that when you're on starvation rations like that that you seem to have to urinate more and so on?

King: We did. Now, I don't know what the cause of that was, unless it was . . . we thought it was our diet.

Marcello: But you did notice that you had to urinate more than usual.

King: Oh, yes. Now, why, I don't know. I can't tell you.

Marcello: What did you do for water and so on?

King: We did without a whole lot of times on that ship. We just didn't get much fresh water.

Marcello: I assume the temperature was out of sight.

King: It was hot; it was hot going to Singapore. Of course, see, we weren't on that ship that long. That was the only thing good about it. Well, that wasn't good. Any time was too long, but you take from Batavia up to Singapore, it's not that long. I think it took three days and nights . . . maybe two days and nights.

Marcello: I guess this was really your first taste of what actually being a prisoner-of-war was going to be like in a sense.

King: It was just still more of it. Of course, it's been a long time ago for me.

Marcello: So you get into Singapore, and where do you go?

King: They took us out to this Changi . . . well, they called it Changi Village, but it was Changi Barracks.

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

King: Well, it was just these big, old, English army barracks. Of course, they stopped us in front of this Changi Prison; it looked like we were all going to go down to this prison. They stopped us, and, I believe, unloaded the trucks, but I won't be positive about that. I believe they unloaded us there, and, boy, that was a barren-looking prison. High gray walls were all around it, and it looked like a regular hellhole.

Marcello: I assume you wanted no parts of Changi Prison.

King: I sure didn't. They loaded us back up, though, and took us on down to an English barracks. They're empty. There was not a bit of furniture in them--beds or anything.

Marcello: So you were essentially sleeping on the floor once again.

King: Again on the floor, that's right. We didn't stay there long. I think we were there just one or two nights.

Marcello: In Changi? That's all the time you stayed there?

King: One or two nights.

Marcello: That was unusual, though, wasn't it? Didn't most of them stay there for about a month or so?

King: Well, all that bunch that went up later did, but we didn't stay there that long. We stayed there maybe three nights. It just wasn't very long at all, and then they loaded us back up and put us on another ship. I can't tell you the name of the ship that took us up to Rangoon.

Marcello: But they loaded you directly on a ship. In other words, you did not make a rail trip or anything from here.

King: No, we went right back on another ship and up to . . . that was the bad ship, right there, that I was on.

Marcello: Okay, describe what conditions were like on this particular ship.

King: Well, on this particular ship, we were put down . . . all 192 Americans were put in the hold; it was right in the bottom of the ship, and they had been hauling horses in this part of the ship. They had never even cleaned it out or anything; it was just like being in a horse barn, you know, right in the bottom of that ship. And hot! I'll tell you, it was like a furnace in there. We got up to Rangoon, and that was one of the most miserable nights that I've ever spent.

Marcello: How long did it take you to go from Singapore to Rangoon?

King: I'm going to say two days and nights, but I don't remember. You know, that time has slipped by me; I can't remember. It

could have been one day and one night, but I think it was two days and two nights.

Marcello: Were you simply on rice rations here again?

King: Yes. They'd only feed us about once a day. Maybe we might get a canteen cup of rice or two-thirds full or rice.

Marcello: Did you have an opportunity to come up on deck here any more than you did on the other ship?

King: Not any more, no. It was the same deal.

Marcello: So you get to Rangoon, Burma. What happens at that point?

King: We spend the night there tied up, and the next morning we change over to another ship. We got off of that ship and moved over to another ship. I didn't sleep a wink, I don't think, the night before. If I did, I sure just catnapped along. The mosquitoes liked to have eaten us alive!

Well, we took off again the next morning on this other ship. I know we got in a hold up toward the front, and it wasn't so crowded on this ship. We was only on there the one day from Rangoon back over to Moulmein--up a river--so it was a little smaller ship. It was cool, and I was in a hold where they had been carrying coal, so I got real black and dirty. It wore off; I don't know when, but it finally wore off. But it was cool, and I slept all that morning, I remember that.

We get on up there and unload on some barges, and go into Moulmein on barges.

Marcello: So you missed the air raid and so on to which the other prisoners were subjected.

King: That was the other group with Charley Pryor, J.O. Burge, and that group. Detre and Eddie Fung was with me. That's two that I can think of. Now, B.D. Fillmore, he was with the group that got bombed.

Marcello: So you land in Moulmein, and what happens at that point?

King: That's where they put us in that Moulmein Jail. We go in there at about . . . oh, it was way in the night, about ten, eleven or twelve o'clock at night. They march us into this prison, you know, and you can't see much because it's dark, blacked out. But we get in there, and we've got plenty of room. You could just go anywhere you want to. I know they had a few native prisoners in there wearing ball and chain. I remember that.

Marcello: I think every prisoner that went through the Moulmein Jail remembers that.

King: We only stayed there one night, I believe. It could have been two nights, but I think the next day they moved us out, and we started walking up the railroad, up to Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: How far was Thanbyuzayat from Moulmein? It must not have been too far if you walked it.

King: No, we started walking, but we didn't completely . . . we finally caught a train out there.

Marcello: I see.

King: We didn't walk all the way. We started walking up the railroad . . . see, the line was finished out to Thanbyuzayat. I can't tell you how far it is, but I got a map at home. That was the base camp for that end of the railroad, and it was always their hospital camp for that end of the railroad.

Marcello: Describe what happens now when you get to Thanbyuzayat. Is this where you're greeted by Colonel Nagatomo? Is this one of the first things that happens there?

King: Yes, that I can remember. We fall in there, and, of course, we don't know what we're up there for, but we finally figured it out. We're up there going to go to work on this railroad. He tells us, though, and that's where he reads this famous speech to us that how low we are and how decadent our race is. The Japs are going to win that war, and we're going to build that railroad for them.

Marcello: Now, I gather that this speech was widely distributed, and that's eventually how some of the prisoners ended up with copies of it.

King: He made that to everybody that went through there, see. He was the head of that branch--the colonel was--of the prisoners. He read this speech to every group that went through Thanbyuzayat. There was quite a few of us down there. I don't know how many finally did work on that end of the railroad, but there was a large number.

We stayed there two or three days in the base camp, and then we walked . . .and they could have trucked us part of the way, but then we walked out to what they called the 40 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: You bypassed the 18 Kilo Camp? Some of them stayed at 18 Kilo, but you went right out to the 40 Kilo Camp.

King: We went right out to the 40 Kilo Camp and started to work on the . . . this 192 Americans started to work doing dirt work, you know, building the railroad bed.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about life here at 40 Kilo. Describe what the 40 Kilo Camp looked like from a physical standpoint, and I assume that when we talk about one of these camps, we can talk about all of them in terms of physical appearance.

King: Yes. It was a brand-new camp. There was nothing out there but just a wagon trail of a road, really; that was about all there was to it. Of course, they had it surveyed out; the railroad was all surveyed out. I suppose the natives . . . they got native laborers to build these camps and huts--the old atap huts. There was no fence whatsoever that was around it, and it was a quarter of a mile back down here to a little creek that run all during the . . . except during the extremely dry season. But it run all the time we was there. Of course, you were never very far from a creek. It was really rough terrain.

But we didn't stay there too long. I can't tell you how

long we stayed there, but it wasn't too awful long. We went back and started working at the train station. No, we went back . . . the first time we went back, we started laying rails and ties. We went back toward Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: But you didn't go all the way back to Thanbyuzayat.

King: No, I never did go back to Thanbyuzayat, myself. I've never been back yet. Some of the boys went back there to the hospital, but I didn't go back to the hospital.

Marcello: When you went back toward Thanbyuzayat, did you go back to another camp very similar to the camp at 40 Kilo?

King: Yes, they were all built just alike.

Marcello: What were these barracks like on the inside?

King: There wasn't anything to them. They was just sheds--shed rooms, just huts with a top on it. Some of them had an aisle down the middle and bamboo shelving bunched up where you bunked on either side. Some of them just had it open on one side of the hut--just an open-front hut.

Marcello: How much space did you normally have in one of these huts?

King: Anywhere from twenty to thirty-six inches by six feet--six feet by twenty-two. It was just according to how many you had to get in there, but twenty inches was about the minimum.

Marcello: Did these platforms usually consist of split bamboo?

King: Yes, split bamboo. They were made entirely out of bamboo, except the leaves were some kind of a palm leaf folded over

a deal and pinned.

Marcello: Ultimately, did the prisoners themselves learn how to make these atap huts?

King: Oh, yes. We built some camps before it was over. Of course, now, we'd get the bamboo, like, at a bamboo lumber yard. And the atap shingles . . . they're shingles about this long and about that wide (gesture).

Marcello: The shingles are about four feet long and about a foot wide.

King: Yes, they're just leaves folded over. Once they get wet and swell up, boy, they'll turn water just like a duck's back. When they're dry, they'll shrink up and you can see daylight through them. You'd think it would rain right through there. But once it starts raining and you stop them leaks one time, that's it. They don't never leak again.

Marcello: So you mention that you go from 40 Kilo Camp to another camp between it and Thanbyúzayat.

King: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, and you mentioned that here you were actually laying rails. Describe what a typical work day was like here at this camp, whatever its kilo number was.

King: We worked night and day, see. We generally had a twelve-hour shift. Well, actually, we didn't work night and day laying rail. No, we didn't. This was later that we worked night and day.

Marcello: What time would work begin in the morning? What time would you get up in the morning?

King: We'd get up just about daylight or shortly thereafter.

Marcello: Who would roust you? Would a Japanese guard roust you out?

King: No, they told us what time to get up, so they had a deal to get us awake, you know, somebody to wake us up--a bugler or somebody.

Marcello: What happened once everybody was up? What was the next step?

King: The first thing we'd do is get something to eat--some boiled rice for breakfast, you know. It would just be boiled.

Marcello: Were you still getting about two-thirds of a canteen cup?

King: Yes, two-thirds of a canteen cup.

Marcello: Did you get anything else in your meal?

King: Generally speaking, we got nothing else for breakfast but boiled rice.

Marcello: Hot tea or water?

King: Yes, either hot tea or hot water. Generally, the cooks would try to have enough boiled water for everybody to have a canteen full of water to take to work.

Marcello: Would they have a roll call every day?

King: Oh, yes. They had a tenko--that's what they called a roll call--every night and every morning.

Marcello: Did you have to count off in Japanese?

King: Oh, yes. They taught us how to count in Japanese and made us

learn it.

Marcello: Did they have a list with everybody's name on it, or did you simply have to line up and go down and count?

King: Just line up and count off. That's what it amounted to, They'd come and check to see that everybody was there.

Marcello: I guess the prisoners were nothing more than just a bunch of white faces so far as the Japanese guards were concerned.

King: Well, up here is where we run into the Korean guards.

Marcello: Okay, at this point you get your Korean guards. We'll talk about them in a minute, but let's get back to a typical day. You have roll call; roll call is complete, and we'll assume that everybody is present and accounted for. Now, what happens at that point?

King: They start telling you how many men they want out there for the working party.

Marcello: And all this is going through the officers, I guess.

King: Yes, we still got our officers with us. They'd tell them that we got "X" number of men that are able to go to work--the officers would--and then the harassing started. It started right from the start, you know; they wanted more men to work. Of course, it wasn't that pushy and rough to start with, but as we got into that railroad, boy, it got real sticky.

Marcello: At this stage, where you're actually laying the rails, you all are still in fairly good physical condition.

King: Not too bad; not too bad. We weren't in good shape, but we didn't have the food. Let me put it this way: if we had had a good diet and just a little bit of medical supplies, we wouldn't have had any problems at all. The amount of work didn't hurt us; I mean, it wouldn't have hurt us if we'd have been in shape. But you couldn't stay in any physical shape. Even the poor bathing and sleeping quarters--you could live with that, you see; but you just can't live on a starvation diet and work. We did, but I don't know how. I still don't know how; it's still a mystery to me.

Marcello: Describe what work was like here at this point where you are laying the rails.

King: We all had to learn how to unload those rails and ties. Everybody had their job, you know.

Marcello: What was your specific job? Do you recall?

King: Mainly, I was carrying ties and laying the ties down.

Marcello: How many men would be carrying each tie?

King: They'd try to get one man on one, but those old green ties are heavy. They were all that two men . . . two of us could carry. You'd carry ties until your shoulders got so raw that you couldn't carry them anymore, and then you'd do something else--help carry rails. Most of the time we'd shoot them rails right off the end of the cars and lay it right there and then move the car up on it. You didn't have to carry them very far that way.

Marcello: I assume that all these types of supplies were coming from Thanbyuzayat.

King: Yes, they were coming from Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: By truck or by rail?

King: By rail. They'd come in on little dolly cars. The rails would be loaded first, and then the ties for that many rails would be on top. Then you'd have this little dolly on either end. When you'd unloaded that, there'd be enough men to get around those little dollies to set them off the track, and then we'd move another car up, you see. There was a dolly on each end of the rails. When you got through that evening and got them all unloaded and laid, why, you'd put these dollies back up on the track and put some kind of engine on them and pull them back.

But we didn't do this too long. We got another break--this group that I'm with. We laid rails out to about . . . I can't tell you how far out we laid those rails.

Marcello: Did you get up as far as 40 Kilo?

King: We never did move out to 40 Kilo while we were laying rails.

Marcello: So you did not lay rails as far as 40 Kilo.

King: Yes, we did, too, because we laid rails a lot farther out than we were. We got to about 26 Kilo Camp and laid on out about--I'm going to guess--around fifty kilos of rails. Then we move back again, and we start working at the station--the railroad

station.

Marcello: Now, where was it located?

King: All right, now, it followed the rails out, you see. These stations is where they'd unload these rails--a big carload of rails--and stockpile them here along the side of the road, and then car after car of ties. And all these food supplies--rice and food supplies--that we got for the whole railroad would come in on these, and we'd unload the trains, reload them back on dollies, and send them out. Then we'd reload these food supplies on trucks and send them out. So, therefore, where we were working gave us a chance to steal a little extra food.

Marcello: At this point, then, you were actually not working on the railroad, per se.

King: Well, no, we were not out there on the railroad--dirt work, bridge work--like we had been at some time. We just kind of followed on out with the stations, see, and we got on out to . . . well, we made several camps on that way. The last camp we were in was where they had the railroad completed virtually; but the last camp we were in was 114 Kilo. But we stopped at 80 or 85 Kilo Camp; we worked a station there.

Marcello: What sort of work would you be doing at these various stations?

King: We'd unload these trains that would come in there with a load of freight cars full of freight, like food supplies. They'd

have warehouses, too; we'd put them out in these warehouses and come back and load them on trucks and send them down there. It was a little better deal than out on that end of the railroad.

Marcello: So you were not making . . . well, you weren't working on the railroad, so you weren't making the cuts and fills and building the bridges and that sort of thing.

King: Now, we did that when we were at 40 Kilo Camp, and we did some of that at 25 Kilo Camp. We moved back from 45 Kilo to 25 Kilo, and we did quite a lot of it there. We worked more on that dirt than I thought we did, than I led you to believe at the first. It's coming back to me a little clearer now.

Marcello: Was making those cuts and fills fairly hard work?

King: Oh, you bet! It was nothing but hard work! Of course, you know, when we started out, we had to do so many cubic meters.

Marcello: You had to remove so many cubic meters of dirt.

King: Yes, from here to there (gesture), and they'd measure it over here (gesture). Where you got it was where they measured it. Of course,they got us up to about two-point-something meters a day per man, and that was just almost prohibitive. In some soils, it was prohibitive. You couldn't do it.

Marcello: In other words, at first, the quota was such that you were able to meet that quota and come in fairly early.

King: Right. There was times when we could do it in half a day.

But we found out right quick you don't do it that way. Just because you got a half-day's work, don't do it in half a day because they'll just add on tomorrow.

Marcello: And this was all pick-and-shovel work.

King: Every bit of it was; every bit of it was.

Marcello: Let's get back to talking about the work that you were doing at these various stations. You mentioned awhile ago that this did afford you the opportunity to steal food. Describe how the stealing of food would actually take place.

King: There was various ways that they'd do this stealing. Of course, they'd search us every time we'd come back into camp. You just couldn't afford to get caught with anything. It was all, as I say, like it was in Batavia--contraband. It didn't make any difference what you had; you weren't supposed to have it, you see.

Marcello: What were some of the things that were being stolen out of these stations?

King: Oh, I'll never forget one little guy who stole a bag of split peas--100 kilos of them--and I couldn't figure out how he was going to get them things into camp. But he just carried it down the railroad and run around the back side of the camp--they got no guards over there--and chucked it over the fence. When he goes in, he goes in scot-free, clean. He's the only one that knows where he put it, so he just goes down there in the dark and gets

it--100 kilos of split peas.

Marcello: Did you personally steal anything?

King: Oh, a few little things. I learned how (chuckle).

Marcello: What were some of the things you stole?

King: Well, anything--dried fish or anything like that. Of course, you know, some of this stuff you could eat out there--dried salt fish or something that was sun-cooked, you know. You could eat them without cooking them.

Marcello: Even though you weren't actually working on the railroad as such, you were still living in the same camps as those that were working on the railroad.

King: They were the same work camps that we'd lived in--or somebody had lived in--that did the dirt work and the bridge work. I don't know how many bridges there was, but there were several per mile--smaller ravines to cross. There were a lot of bridges on that railroad.

Marcello: I think most of the really big bridges were at the British end of the railroad, though, weren't they?

King: Well, all the big rivers we crossed were on that end.

Marcello: On which end?

King: The British end--the Thailand end. That's what you called the British end of the railroad because they were all British--from Singapore and Malaya--that went up on the Thailand end. Basically, there were Australian and Dutch on the other end.

Marcello: Approximately how many prisoners would there be in each of these kilo camps? You might have to estimate this, of course.

King: I'm going to say an average of 2,500.

Marcello: So they were fairly big camps, then.

King: Some of them were big camps. Now, some of them were bigger than that, but some of them were much smaller than that. Some of them would be maybe not over 1,000 or 1,500 men, but there would be some that were 3,000 or 4,000.

Marcello: Now, your unloading and loading would continue all day long?

King: That was an "around-the-clock" job. We had an "around-the-clock" job, a double-shift on this.

Marcello: Two twelve-hour shifts?

King: On the station job, yes, we sure did.

Marcello: Would you change shifts periodically?

King: Yes, we'd change. Sometimes you'd think you could get more at night than you could in the daytime, or you'd have less work at night--which you might. Occasionally, you'd catch up your two at night. You might, like, get through at three o'clock in the morning, and you'd get to go in. There's nothing left to load or unload, so we'd just knock off and go in. The same thing would happen in daylight, too, sometimes, so it wasn't the worst job in the world. That's one reason why I told you awhile ago that I never was as really bad off

on the railroad--much worse off--than I was in Batavia. I didn't feel like I was.

Marcello: There was a period in here--I believe it was in May of 1943--that the so-called "Speedo" campaign got started, and the "Speedo" campaign coincided with the monsoon season. Now, describe what the "Speedo" campaign meant to you and the other soldiers.

King: It just meant doubling up on our work and requiring more sick people to work, you see. They had big drives, and I actually saw them take guys that had fever--malaria fever--and that were having fever at the time and go out and work. They told us, or let it be known some way or another, that once we got this railroad finished, then we'd have a rest. We'd have time to rest if we'd just hurry up and do it now. They just about had everybody dead when they got that railroad built. Everybody was in bad shape by then.

Marcello: How did the "Speedo" campaign affect you personally? Now, here again, we have to keep in mind that you were not actually working on the railroad as such.

King: It wasn't as bad on us back at the stations as it was for the boys out there laying rails and doing the dirt work. It just wasn't near as bad, because, really, we had so much work to do, and they kept enough of us back there to do it, I guess.

Marcello: I guess in many respects your work would be very closely tied

to the progress of the railroad. Is that correct?

King: Yes, they had to have these supplies and rails and ties. That's the reason we loaded them night and day; whenever they'd come in, we'd load out enough to keep them busy.

Marcello: During the "Speedo" campaign, how did the attitude and conduct of the guards change, if it did change?

King: It changed, much to the worse.

Marcello: In what way? Describe what the guards were like here.

King: They were so fractious, you see, and wanting you to hurry up. They were being pushed, and they were being made and told what to do to us to get us to produce more work. Yes, we felt it very much, even in the stations. Boy, when they wanted something done, they wanted something done right now, you know.

Marcello: Describe how the Korean guards differed from the Japanese guards you had back in Bicycle Camp.

King: I don't know. There wasn't a whole lot of difference that I could tell. I thought they were more inhuman than the Japs were, really. I liked the Japs guarding me better than I did the Koreans.

Marcello: This seems to be the consensus of just about all the prisoners.

King: That's the way I felt about it. They were kind of a subjective nation; they were prisoners themselves.

Marcello: Until the Americans came along, they were low people on the totem pole.

King: Yes, that's right. So then they got to be over somebody, and they really lorded it over us. We thought they did a lot of things that they were not absolutely told to do.

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

King: Oh, you mean like punishment?

Marcello: Yes.

King: The main thing they would do is just bash you or make you stand at attention in front of the guardhouse for two or three days at a time. It's according to what you did.

Marcello: Did you see very many Japanese in these camps?

King: Well, not until this railroad was finished. When they started using this railroad, then we saw lots of Japanese troops going to and fro, backward and forward, up and down this railroad.

Marcello: But so far as actually working on the railroad itself was concerned, there was virtually no Japanese, except the engineers and so on.

King: Just your engineers. There wasn't a work force of Japanese people up there at all. They used all conscript labor for that, or prisoner-of-war labor. See, they had a lot of Chinese coolies and a lot of conscript Thai and Burmese labor and prisoners-of-war. I have heard the statistics on the number of people's lives that were lost on that railroad, but I can't recall now what it was. I've heard how many prisoners were lost, but I can't tell you how many that was.

Marcello: Describe how the "Speedo" campaign and the coming of the monsoon season affected the prisoners who were working out on the road. What could you observe as they came back in and so on and so forth?

King: Actually, I believe that we were laying rails when the monsoon season started--the first year we were up there. I guess we were only up there one year . . . a little over one year. We got up there in October, and I think we stayed through two Christmases on that railroad. Then in the spring, we went on into Thailand.

Marcello: How did the "Speedo" campaign affect those guys that had to go out and work on the railroad itself? Did you observe them when they would come in and so on?

King: Not a whole lot of them because I wasn't up there where they were doing that. All I knew was that they were having a heck of a time up there. They were having nothing but hell up there.

Marcello: Were you not living in the same barracks with them?

King: No, we were working at the station, you see.

Marcello: So you were not even in the same barracks.

King: I wasn't even in the same camps as they were. We were back down the line. That's the reason we had it better than they did. I still say that I had . . . I was in the right place at the right time. See, we only lost . . . out of this 190 men, we only lost about five men on that railroad.

Marcello: What was it like working in the monsoon season?

King: If you can visualize it raining steadily for forty days and forty nights, that's the way it rained. And you either put on a raincoat and try to stay dry or leave it all off and work like a drowned rat all the time.

Marcello: Were the Japanese faring any better than the prisoners in terms of food and so on?

King: Oh, yes. As far as the food was concerned, they got first shot at everything that come by or come into the camp. I wouldn't say they had it good, but they had it much better than the prisoners. We didn't get equal treatment by any means.

Marcello: How was your clothing and so on holding out by this time?

King: Well, occasionally, they would give us a clothing issue. We might get a pair of shorts or something, you know. But they didn't give us much. They didn't have much to give us. You just made do with what you had. A lot of boys just wound up with a G-string and a blanket, and that was it; and a mess kit, that was all. When they moved, they moved light. I mean this literally. They didn't have one thing but a G-string and a holey blanket. When somebody died and they had a better blanket than they did, they just swapped with them; they rolled them in their holey blanket and buried them and got their better blanket.

Marcello: How were you personally faring?

King: It seemed like I never had too much trouble, you know. I hung on to what I got and what I had.

Marcello: Did you ever get down to a G-string or not?

King: No, I never did. I always managed to have a pair of shorts.

Marcello: How about shoes? Did you have any shoes, or had you ever gotten any shoes?

King: I got some shoes in Batavia. I can't remember . . . I never was out of a pair of shoes. I didn't wear them all the time. I wore those wooden clogs, or "go-aheads," you know, and saved them shoes for if we got out on a forced march or something.

Marcello: While you're working on the railroad, how do you take care of such things as shaving?

King: Actually, you'd only shave about once a week, and generally speaking, it was somebody that was left in the camp to do the barbering. We had a barber. He'd work so many hours a day, and he'd just get around to everybody. I know later on after we got up into Thailand and got up into those camps where we didn't have to go out and work, I set me up a little old stump out there and shaved people for a nickel or a dime a head.

Marcello: I assume that you did not have a razor of your own while you were out working on the railroad.

King: No, I didn't. Now, there were quite a few boys that had razors of some kind, and there were quite a few straight razors. Well, you could always use one or get somebody to shave you

once a week.

Marcello: What did you do to compensate for a toothbrush--anything?

King: I never did brush my teeth, except with my finger. The biggest part of the time, you didn't have enough water to brush your teeth and have drinking water, too. You just had to drink about all . . . of course, in the monsoon season we had water. You know, you had to boil all your water. You didn't . . . some of the boys brushed their teeth regularly.

Marcello: I understand a lot of them would take a twig off a tree and chew it to a frazzle and use it.

King: You could do that. I guess we all did that to a certain extent.

Marcello: Up until this time, had you been able to send any word to the outside world?

King: Yes, the day or two that we were there in Singapore, they let us send a card. But this card never did make it home. I don't know what happened to it.

Marcello: What kind of a card was that?

King: It was one of those printed cards. You just filled it in--like the ones that got home.

Marcello: In other words, those printed cards were the kind that said, "My health is good, fair or poor," or something along those lines.

King: Yes. "I am working or not working for pay," and you'd check

off "yes," that you were working for pay for ten cents a day. We got to sign our name to it, and that was it.

I got to write three cards home, and every one of them was written while I'm working on that railroad. The first card came after I had been lost for nineteen months. Then the two other cards . . . now, I wrote that card . . . it took about nine or ten months to get home. The next two cards I wrote, it was on up toward the end of the railroad; they weren't written together, but they got home together. Those three cards were the only ones that got home.

Marcello: Do you have nicknames for the Japanese guards by this time?

King: Oh, yes. We had every kind of nickname in the world.

Marcello: Can you remember some of the nicknames of the guards?

King: Oh, yes. We had one we called "Cat Eyes" and one we called "Liver Lips." That's the only two I can think of just offhand. We had nicknames for nearly every one of them.

Marcello: Did they know you had nicknames for them?

King: Some of them did, and, boy, they didn't like it. Of course, they didn't have to be provoked to get on you; they'd get on you for nothing.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of "Donald Duck?"

King: Yes. Oh, yes.

Marcello: "Pretty Boy Floyd?"

King: Yes, I've heard of them. I don't think I was ever with either

one of those. I think I was with that other group.

Marcello: Obviously, when you hit the 80 and 100 Kilo Camps, this is where the monsoons began, and this is also where the "Speedo" campaign got started.

King: I never was at 100 Kilo. The 80 and 100 Kilo Camps were two camps I wasn't in.

Marcello: Did you ever have to attend any of the burial ceremonies or burial details?

King: Yes, but I told you that we only lost five Americans. I had one close friend that died in 114 Kilo Camp. I helped carry him to the grave and put him in the ground.

Marcello: What sort of a service or ceremony was held for the dead?

King: Somebody just said a prayer and a few words, and that was all.

Marcello: How was the prisoner buried?

King: Well, this one that I helped bury--the American that I helped bury--it was a real rocky grave, and they only got that . . . well, I think I was on the grave detail, too.

But I was very sick myself at that time. I had gotten that malaria fever and was in bad shape. We were all starving to death, just literally starving to death, at 114 Kilo Camp, and all of us were getting sick. I know we could dig . . . part of that grave wasn't over a foot deep, and the deepest part was about two feet. It could be slightly deeper than that. It was solid rock, and there wasn't anything we could do.

If they hadn't have gotten us out of there when they did and moved us on up into Thailand to Kanchanaburi . . . and we started getting considerably better food up there. It was so much better, we thought it was good. If it had been by our standards, it would have been very, very low; but by the standards we'd been having, it was very good.

Marcello: Now, getting back to the burial details again, would the dead be buried with any clothing on, or would all of this more or less be taken if it could be used?

King: A G-string and a holey blanket. Like I say, if they had a good blanket, somebody would invariably trade. And nobody cared, see. Nobody cared because they knew that's what would happen if they died. They didn't care because they were helping somebody out.

Marcello: Did you ever see cases where prisoners actually gave up? Now, I know this occurred out on the railroad itself, but I was wondering if, in your position, this situation happened.

King: We had some that literally gave up.

Marcello: How could you tell when they had given up?

King: They quit eating and quit trying. They wouldn't even try. But I saw this more after I got into Thailand. I saw some deaths over there after we finished the railroad.

Marcello: You mentioned that here at 114 Kilo you became ill once again. Describe your condition.

King: Well, that was the only time that I thought I might not make it. I think we buried three or four men right there in that camp, and I had this malaria and dysentery. I got plumb down and kind of got paralyzed; I couldn't get up. I thought, "By George, I might not make it!" The food was such . . . and no medical supplies. Technically, I don't think we even had a doctor with us part of the time; I know we didn't. If we did, he didn't have anything. We just had this hospital corpsman. So I got to thinking, "Well, shoot, if something don't happen, I might not make it." But I wasn't sick too long; I wasn't that bad that long. I bounced back, and soon after that we got out of there and went to Thailand.

Marcello: Were any medical supplies at all available?

King: Well, I don't think they were up there in this particular camp. In this last camp we was in, there might have been a little bit of quinine. See, that's what they combatted malaria fever with, was quinine. We had quite a lot of it when we first started on the railroad up there, but by the time we finished up and moved on up into Thailand, we were out of it.

Yes, we lost some men on over in Thailand that just kind of gave up, you know, and quit eating.

Marcello: Was there anything that you could do to snap these people out of it?

King: Very little. You could try to talk to them. There wasn't any

such thing as intravenous feeding, you know; we didn't have it. We tried to force-feed some of them, but you can't force-feed men.

Marcello: By this time, are little cliques beginning to form? When I use the term "clique," I'm not using this in a derogatory way,

King: Yes, I know what you mean. They did, right from the start. Right from the very start of the whole thing, you more or less had to be in a clique. You just couldn't go it alone. You couldn't cover enough territory. You could take three guys, or four, that, say, had three different jobs. They'd split with each other and help each other out. You'd get into this clique. I was in one. Nearly everybody was.

Marcello: Do you remember who were the members of your clique?

King: Oh, different ones. While we were on this railroad up there, another Marine named Tom McFarland and this "Pea-finger" Ingram . . . I don't know if you've heard of him.

Marcello: "Pea-finger" Ingram? No.

King: Well, he was a little sailor. He was the officers' boy. The way he got that job . . . see, our officers don't have officers' boys; but the English and Australians did. They convinced the Japs that they had to have their room boys, so that automatically gave the Americans one, too. They just took him, you see (chuckle). They just appointed him to do their laundry and run their errands.

Marcello: This was a pretty good job to have, wasn't it?

King: Oh, it was a dandy good job! He's really got the life, you see.

Marcello: And I think we have to mention here that the officers did this because it meant they could get another man off the road. It wasn't necessarily because they wanted somebody to be their servant.

King: Not necessarily. Of course, there was a two-fold purpose. They'd be foolish to turn down a servant. Actually, they were used to hiring it to be done, anyway, and this is still more or less what it meant. They didn't have to pay him, but they did. They paid him out of their rations, so to speak. The officers always got a little more than the men any place where they could.

Marcello: Was this ever resented?

King: I'm sure it was. You bet! I don't believe I did; I don't believe I resented the officers. The only thing that I ever thought . . . and I don't know . . . I really don't know. I thought that some of those "Lost Battalion" officers had a lot of money; I meant the government--the Army--had a lot of money, and they had it. And I still think they had a lot of money when they got captured. They had spent some of that money in that American kitchen I was telling you about up there at Bicycle Camp. But they never did spend near all that money,

and I thought they should have. I think they spent some of it on theirselves. But I don't know this, but . . . I do resent that. I don't ever think about it; I shouldn't say I resent it, because I don't. It don't make me one bit of difference anymore.

Marcello: But I think it is true that anything and everything possible would be done to get one more man off that railroad.

King: Oh, yes. I'll go for that, yes, sir. That's one reason they did it--another inside job for somebody.

Marcello: Like you say, any job--any job--was better than working on that railroad.

King: That's right. Any inside job was better than out there working right under those Japs.

Marcello: How far away from the actual railroad would the station be, that is, the station where you worked? Or would it be right there on the railroad?

King: It's on the railroad. The station's got to be on the railroad. As they finished the railway up . . . you see, we worked at the station at . . . I think we moved back about to 18 Kilo, and then we moved out about to 25 Kilo and then out to 35 Kilo. We just moved right up as it progressed along. I think 80 Kilo or 85 Kilo was the last camp we was in up to the . . . but, really, the railroad was kind of finished by the time we got to 114 Kilo. That was near the dividing line.

Marcello: But you would kind of always be behind the railroad, so to speak.

King: Yes, behind the front lines, so to speak. The front lines was out there where that dirt work and bridge detail was.

Marcello: And you would take these supplies out to where the railroad had progressed.

King: We didn't take them out there. We just loaded them on other vehicles, and they took them out there.

Marcello: When you say "they took them out there," do you mean the Japanese?

King: Yes, the Japs. We'd load them on other smaller dollies or into trucks, and they'd distribute them up and down the line.

Marcello: And these dollies actually operated on the railroad themselves.

King: Oh, yes. We called them dollies. I don't know what the railroad name for them is. But you know what I'm talking about--those little four-wheelers. They're kind of like a pull-trailer.

Marcello: They're kind of like those little coal cars you see in coal mines. Is that what you're kind of talking about?

King: Well, yes, they're about that size, only they're just flat, you see. The rails make the distance apart. The four wheels will carry that end of the rails, and four wheels will carry this end of the rails. When you unload the rails, you just push them together.

Marcello: I see. How would these dollies operate? How would they move?

King: You could pull them or push them with any kind of engine. They had all kinds of engines. They had some of the strangest-looking train engines you ever saw. They'd maybe have a big, old diesel truck setting on . . . it couldn't pull many cars, but it could pull a few, switching around or something.

Marcello: Did you mention that at one stage, while you were in the jungle, you were working in the Japanese kitchen?

King: That was after we got into Thailand. I worked a little over a year, or just under a year. I believe it was just under a year.

Marcello: At this stage, that is, even while you're still in the jungle, how far away is liberation?

King: I never could see it more than two or three months. I was always so optimistic that I really think that's one reason I got back.

Marcello: Were you still hearing rumors?

King: All the time. Continuously we had these rumors floating around that it just couldn't be too much longer until it would be over.

Marcello: While you were working on these stations, did you ever have very much of an opportunity to trade with the natives and so on?

King: Oh, we had more chances then than you did out working on the railroad.

Marcello: How did the bartering with the natives work?

King: I didn't do a whole lot of it, really. At that time, I didn't do a whole lot. I know we'd try to buy some of that native sugar.

Marcello: What did you have to trade with them?

King: Money (chuckle) or something. Somebody had some money or something.

Marcello: Where would you get that money?

King: We worked and they paid us. We got about ten cents a day to start with, and then they finally raised us to twenty-five cents a day. That was the privates and PFC's. Corporals and NCO's got twenty-five cents, and they got raised to thirty-five cents or something.

Marcello: When did you get paid? When was payday?

King: Once a month, I believe. We'd have a little bit of money.

Marcello: Would they allow you to trade with the natives, or would it have to be done rather secretly?

King: You weren't supposed to. That was supposed to be done through the canteen. The officers would convince them to let them buy it and let us purchase it through a canteen-type agency inside the camp. We weren't supposed to ever speak to a native. That was just a "no-no."

Marcello: Were there natives more or less all along the road?

King: Oh, yes, there were a lot of natives and a lot of native carts carrying food. Of course, a bunch of these prisoners would

get around one of these carts and steal about half of it (chuckle). You didn't have to buy it.

Marcello: What were the items that you would covet most from the natives?

King: Sugar is the main thing I liked, sugar and duck eggs. Of course, duck eggs was the only kind of eggs we had.

Marcello: Did everybody have their own little fire going and so on where you cooked your own food?

King: A lot of them cooked a little extra food when they'd get hold of a little extra rice. There was times when they had plenty of rice when it wasn't rationed, you know, so you could get a little extra rice. We'd burn some of it, scorch it, you know, and get it real black, and make coffee--rice coffee. We'd get an old skillet and about halfway burn it up and call it fried rice. If you could get hold of a little tallow or grease of some kind, or a spoonful of peanut oil or something from somebody . . . occasionally, a station. Or maybe just a little container full, see, boy, it was worth a lot of money. A spoonful of peanut oil or grease on a bowl of rice . . . you just can't believe how much flavor that will put in it (chuckle). It makes it a lot easier to eat.

I was trying to think what month we got out of the jungle.

Marcello: I know that in October of 1944, a lot of people got out of the

jungle. Was that when you got out?

King: No, I got out before then. I went up there in '42, and we got out of there in, like, January.

Marcello: January of '44?

King: Yes, in the early months of '44, I got out. I believe I was there in '43 . . . in '42 and '43 I spent Christmas up there. I think I was there a little before Christmas in '44.

Marcello: Was there any sort of a special celebration when . . .

King: I got out of there in the spring of '43. I was only up there a little over a year.

Marcello: Well, if you got out of there in the spring of '43 . . .

King: Wait a minute! I'm getting my dates mixed up here now. We get in there in '42--we go up there in the fall of '42--and we worked that fall and worked all of '43 up there. That's the way it was.

Marcello: So it would have been spring of 1944.

King: Yes.

Marcello: Do you have any special sort of a celebration or anything when a holiday such as Christmas comes along?

King: Yes, I think they gave us Christmas off. I don't think we had to work, other than just our camp duties. Now, I can't remember out there on that railroad. I'm just almost certain they gave us Christmas Day off.

Marcello: Other than that, were you kind of working seven days a week?

King: Yes. We had what they called . . , it was strictly a seven-day week. We didn't have a Sunday off. The 1st and and the 15th of the month, we'd have a rest day or a day to wash our clothes and stuff, you know, tend to the things you needed to do in camp.

Marcello: What would you do for bathing and so on--just find the closest stream?

King: Either that, or we had wells. In the dry season, the streams all dried up. In the monsoon season, you had them everywhere--water everywhere. You could catch water in jugs, or you could go to the creek. In the dry season, it was all well water; it was drawn out of the wells. Of course, in those bigger camps, it was always rationed. You just got a couple of gallons to bathe with a day; you were rationed so much a day. I've even seen it when it was just a canteen cupful a day; I mean, a canteen full of water per man per day is all they'd let you have! That's for everything--bathing, drinking, and all.

Marcello: So, obviously, then, bathing was not a top priority.

King: Not when it comes down to the nitty-gritty. You can do without that bath. You can go for days without a bath, but you can't go too long without a drink of water.

Marcello: Was it during this period that your weight got down to its lowest level?

King: I'm going to say my lowest level was about the time I was sick

there in 1943--the end of '43 and the beginning of '44--at the end of that railroad.

Marcello: How much did you weigh when you went into the service? You might have to estimate that.

King: I think I weighed 155 pounds or something like that.

Marcello: What would you estimate was your weight at its lowest?

King: About 135 pounds. But, see, I gained . . . I was weighing 175 or 180 pounds when I come out of boot camp. I gained quite a lot in boot camp. I held this weight . . . well, I weighed, like, 160 or 170 pounds when I got captured. When I got out, I weighed 135 pounds, so I pulled down pretty trim and stayed down. I was pretty slim. I wore a 28-waist britches for two or three years after I got home and married.

Marcello: Now, when was it then that you finally did get out of the jungle?

King: I think it was January of '44 or December of '43 when I got out of the jungle and went to Kanburi up there.

Marcello: Was it Kanburi you went to?

King: Yes, I went to Kanburi.

Marcello: How did you get from the jungle to Kanburi?

King: On the train.

Marcello: By that time, had the train been completed yet?

King: Yes, it was through. The railroad was finished. A lot of the boys had to go back after we went up into Thailand. They had to go back after we went up into Thailand. They had to go

back for maintenance work on the railroad, but I never did. That's when I went to work in the Japanese kitchens.

Marcello: And you got out of the jungle . . . when did you say?

King: It was either in January of '44 or the latter days of '43. It could have been in February of '44. I just can't remember when it was. If it had been twenty years ago, I could name you the day I come out.

Marcello: The reason I'm wondering is because my records indicate that the railroad wasn't finished until October of 1944.

King: No, it was finished before then. It sure was. We came out of there, and we were up . . . I sure think it was finished before then; I could be wrong, but I sure think it was.

Marcello: What sort of a trip was it over the railroad when you got out of there?

King: Well, they just loaded us up in boxcars and cattle cars; they had a whole trainload of us. I don't know . . . I think it took all day and all night to get across there.

Marcello: Did you have any hair-raising incidents?

King: Just going across this trestle-like deal that's around the edge of this mountain. I've got some real good pictures; I didn't actually go down and see it this time, but I've got some pictures that was taken this last year (1977) over there.

Marcello: Describe this part of the trip.

King: Well, it was so shaky! It was on this big trestle around the

side of this sheer rock ledge, you see, and the thing was about a mile long. It was built all out of wood. We went across it--just creeped across it--got out on it and stopped, I think, once or twice! That thing would just . . . I thought it was going to fall just as sure as the world while we was on it. We was so high that it would be like falling out of a ten-story window.

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

King: I think we got in there probably at night, and they put us in a rather large camp there. I can't even remember how many people--I would say 3,000. But right across the fence, they had another camp about the same size. It was full of Englishmen and Dutch. We had Dutch, Australians, English, and Americans.

Marcello: What were your barracks or quarters like here at Kanburi?

King: The same thing--atap and bamboo barracks. That's all we ever had over there in the tropics.

Marcello: You did mention that the food got better here?

King: Oh, yes, a lot better here--a lot better--and no forced working parties. I never made a working party while I was at the camp. I didn't have to, so I didn't go.

Marcello: I guess by this time the Japanese had gotten just about everything out of those prisoners they possibly could. They had to back off a little bit.

King: They had to back off, and they did. They backed off some. This

"Speedo" deal had pulled up, and there was enough volunteers . . . let me put it this way: my name would come up about once a week to maybe go out on a working party. Well, I'd just hire somebody to go in my place. I mean, we got twenty-five cents a day, and I'd just give him twenty-five cents right then and let him go out. Then I got the twenty-five cents at the end of the month. Besides, all I was doing was paying him to go now for me.

Marcello: Why was it that some people wanted to go out on work parties, and others wouldn't?

King: They figured they could scrounge a little, get food or something. It was interesting. I just didn't want to go. I was kind of in rackets in camp, you know. I was playing bingo and gambling and whatnot, you know, and trading a little bit.

Marcello: Okay, then, let's talk about this activity. First of all, let's talk about the food. You say the food was better here. Now, how was it better?

King: We got about all we could eat of the rice, and it was much better quality. We were right there in town. We were in the land of plenty then, you see. Actually, they could have fed us a lot better than they did.

Marcello: Did you get anything besides rice?

King: Yes, we got a lot better soup, you see. We could get a bowl of

soup to go over the rice, and you might even find a piece of meat in it occasionally. It was just a lot better quality food, and quantity, too.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had quite a few operations going here.

King: Well, I just said that I was into rackets. A bunch of us played around there. We got some Red Cross packages that didn't amount to anything, but there was some decks of playing cards that came in them that we had gotten along back there somewhere. But anyway, the Australians, they had a bingo game going--gambling, you know. You'd buy these cards and play for money. I played bingo everyday, or played poker, or something, you know.

Marcello: What were in the Red Cross packages that you got?

King: Oh, cigarettes and these playing cards. But, I tell you, they was so little . . . I never did get an individual package. Now, a few of the boys did. A few of the boys got individual packages. My folks sent one every time they had an opportunity, but I never did receive one. I'll tell you what we got at this camp from the American Red Cross.

I think I got eleven cigarettes one time--that's the way we divided them out, you see. I got eleven cigarettes; maybe a couple times I got about that many cigarettes. That's all I got. Maybe I got some little something to eat, like, canned rations of some kind, but that was it.

Marcello: How many men would have to share one of the boxes like you got?

King: Well, I don't know. It's just the way it figured out, what it figured out--so many cigarettes and so many men to a can of Spam or something that they had.

Marcello: Were you a smoker at that time?

King: Oh, yes, I smoked. Boy, I loved that tobacco!

Marcello: Did you see people actually trade food for tobacco?

King: Oh, yes. Somebody'd get a little long on food, and they'd try to trade it for some tobacco or anything.

Marcello: I guess what I was trying to say was, would they become so desperate for tobacco that they would trade their food for it?

King: No, your appetite for food is stronger than your appetite for cigarettes. Now, I can tell you that. You'll let the cigarettes alone if you can get that food.

Marcello: Was it here that you started working in the Japanese kitchen?

King: No, it was another camp. Now, I moved from that camp . . . I only stayed there about two or three months, or maybe six weeks.

Marcello: Did the guards kind of seem to back off here, also?

King: Yes, they let us kind of govern our own camp; inside the camp, they kind of let the officers govern our own camps.

Marcello: Did you ever come under any air raids here at Kanburi?

King: Not in this camp. Now, in the next camp I went to, I did.

Marcello: At Tamarkan?

King: Yes, over at Tamarkan at that bridge camp.

Marcello: Okay. You move from Kanburi over to Tamarkan. They're fairly close together, aren't they?

King: Well, I think they're five or six kilometers--four miles, maybe--apart.

Marcello: Approximately when was it that you moved to Tamarkan?

King: It was in the spring of '44. It was in the spring months, like, April.

Marcello: In terms of physical layout, was Tamarkan very similar to Kanburi?

King: Yes, the physical layout of the camp was virtually the same thing. It was a large camp; it was a 5,000-man camp.

Marcello: Was it mainly made up of British troops?

King: The thing had been shifted around and shifted around that, when I got there, it was half-full. It was kind of an "in-and-out" camp from then on; it was never completely full, but a lot of times they had a lot more than that. I stayed there almost a year; well, I'm going to say I stayed there about nine or ten months. But I went to work in the kitchen the day after I got there--in the Japanese kitchen.

Marcello: How did you get to work in the Japanese kitchen? Was it simply the luck of the draw, or what?

King: The day that we moved over there . . . the reason I got into this, I might have told you awhile ago. I never did volunteer

for anything. I never will forget. This was over there at Kanchanaburi, and we were playing bingo one afternoon. We was playing bingo there. We just got through playing bingo, and Captain Fitzsimmons come back there, and he said, "I need ten volunteers to make a little trip over to Tamarkan." Well, I knew I had some buddies that I hadn't seen since Batavia which was supposed to be over there. I don't know how come for me to do it, but I jumped up, and I said, "Put my name down! I want to go on that!" I had never been out of this camp, you see. I thought--and the way he put it to me--it was just a work detail. I thought we'd go over there after something or take something over there, and I thought that by going this late in the afternoon, we'd stay all night over there. Of course, when I jumped up there and volunteered, well, these nine more just volunteered, just bang, bang.

He said, "All right, have everything ready to go. Move out in thirty minutes." Boy, my face fell. This was the best camp I've ever been in. I said, "You didn't tell us we was going to have to move!" (Chuckle) I said, "Get my name off of that thing! Get it off of there!" The captain, he said, "No, you volunteered for it. You was the first one!" (Chuckle) He just laughed at me. He said, "You can get somebody to take your place. I'll trade out. It doesn't make me any difference who goes." I said, "Well, you led me to believe . . . ." He

said, "I told you it was a trip over to Tamarkan. I didn't tell you how long," He was honest about it, but he was just real cagey about that. So I knew there wasn't any chance to get anybody to take my place. There wasn't anybody going to volunteer to leave that camp.

We moved over there. We got over there,and they had moved every American out of the camp that day. So I didn't get to see anybody at that time.

Boy, we was laying there that night, the ten of us. Of course, I knew every one of them at the time. I can't remember all of them now; I can remember about six or eight of them now. But there was two guys . . . I mean, there was an Australian orderly that come down there, and he said, "Say, I need three Americans to work over at the Jap cookhouse."

Marcello: I wonder why he specifically needed three Americans?

King: Okay, this little Korean, now, had specified that he wanted three Americans. See, he come over and took that kitchen over. What happened, he come over there--he just come in--and took that kitchen over. He had some Australians and some Dutch in there, and he didn't like them. He wanted to try three Americans. He was picky, I'll tell you. But he was picky in a good way. He was one of the best Koreans I knew. I learned to really like this guy, you know. I mean, I had a lot of respect for him.

But, boy, listen, I wasn't fixing to volunteer for that detail. But this camp had a real hard working party out of it climbing a mountain every day--carrying supplies up on top of the mountain out there. And this was the camp that had the antiaircraft guns right across the railroad and near the bridge.

But, anyway, they got three volunteers. The boy sleeping right there beside me volunteered for it. He said, "He wants you to come over there right now. He wants to see you." So they went over there, and when they got back, well, I'm laying there. I'm sleeping right beside this guy called Pitchon. He's from up in New York City--a young kid. He was younger that I was. Ol' Pitchon come back over there, and he was frightened to death. He'd gotten over there . . . he said to me--they called me "Pinky"--"'Pinky,' they want me to cook." He said, "I can't cook! There's no way! I can't do anything right when it comes to cooking! I can't even boil water!" I said, "Well, I can't, either." He said, "Well, listen, you got to take my place! I'm afraid to go over there!" So I said, "Well, Pitchon, I'll tell you what. I'm not going to take your place." But he kept on, so I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go over there in the morning. I'll go over there and feel this deal out. But I'll tell you one thing: if he's one of them bash-happy 'artists,' or one of them screaming

idiots that is just screaming at you all the time, it's your job. You get it back. I'll be out on that hill party." He said, "Okay." He'd do anything to get me over there. So I went in his place.

Well, I went over there--the three of us went over there--and I didn't have any more sense than just duck my head and go to work, you know. It turned out great for me. This guy, he kind of took a liking to me and taught me how to cook the way they liked to cook. He taught me how to cook their soup and all their fried stuff--meats, fish. He kept one Australian, and he was the cleanest, sharpest Australian that I ever saw. He tended to his own business and didn't talk a lot. He was just the nicest fellow you'd ever want to meet. So he kept him, and just run the rest of them off. He just didn't want the rest of them in there at all.

It was real funny. After we had worked over there about two or three weeks, why, he fired these other two guys and didn't replace them, but he kept me. And I stayed there as long as he was there, and after he left, I stayed on.

Marcello: What benefits did this mean for you?

King: Well, I got anything they had that I wanted. I just got it. He caught me stealing sugar one time, or getting it. I wasn't stealing it; I was just getting it. I was just using it there for everybody in the kitchen. He had about twelve of us working

over there by that time. He caught me getting sugar out of the storehouse one time; I just went over there and got it. Of course, I made sure he wasn't looking, see. I'd just go get it, because I just took free rein of the storehouse. He made it a point to catch me. I didn't know he was even there, but he had done moved, see. He caught me. Well, he slapped me, or slapped at me. I ducked back, and he just barely did graze my face. But that's the only time he struck at me. He gave me a good lecture, you know, and told me that I was a prisoner, they was short of sugar, and I shouldn't do that.

Marcello: Did he speak any English?

King: Yes, it was "pig" English. We had been there long enough with them that, you know, we could speak a little Japanese, and they could speak a little English. We could communicate fairly well.

Marcello: This guy was a Korean?

King: He was Korean. He was some kind of a cook, I'll tell you, and just as clean as a pin. He was just as clean as you've ever seen any person.

So after he taught me how to cook, well, me and this Australian just stayed over there. We got to be pretty good buddies. He and I were the head two in that kitchen. The fact of the business is, we just run it. After he taught us what he knew, and he left . . . well, there was some colonel

found out how well he could cook, and he made him his personal cook--he made him his personal cook--and when he left, he took him with him. So he just grabbed somebody out of them lines over there to run that kitchen. They couldn't cook, and me and old Dave knew it. We took advantage of it. We knew how and they didn't, and we just done whatever we wanted to do and got by with it.

Marcello: In other words, when the Korean left, there was somebody from the Japanese ranks put in his place.

King: Yes, out of the Koreans, you see.

Marcello: Another Korean?

King: Yes, just out of the lines, just a guard. Every one of them was supposed to be able to cook, and they could. They could all cook rice, but that's all they could cook, really, and they didn't know how to cook for a big bunch. We did.

I know that one time we got in trouble over there. We got caught drinking over there one night.

Marcello: Where did you get hold of alcohol?

King: Well, at the time that I was working at the Japanese cookhouse, they moved the Japanese out of the camp, you know; the Japanese all had to move out of the camp. They moved the kitchen out of the camp and moved it right across the road.

Well, I got to trading. I was trading outside at night, see, because I was living outside. I was living across the

road from the camp. They had special huts for us over there at that kitchen while I worked over there. Well, I made a lot of money out there, but I didn't handle the booze, you see. I wouldn't bring any booze back into camp.

But we got an ol' boy over there that would. He was an Australian. We had quite a turnover in our help over there. We had, like, twelve or fourteen over there, and we was always losing some and getting some more. Well, we got this boy over there, and he would go outside and trade--he had more guts than he had sense--and he would bring that booze back in and sell it in camp. He'd make money going and make money coming.

He brings in a couple bottles a night or two before. So this group that's living over there, we had a few drinks that night. He had quite a few, and then he gets caught with a load of stuff going out.

Well, they take him down to the guardhouse,and they just whip him and beat on him for catching him going out and trading with the natives. Then they finally figure out that he was drunk, or drinking, and they whip on him some more.

They're pretty sharp, you know. They said, "Okay, you didn't drink by yourself." He finally admitted and told them where he'd gotten it and everything. They said, "Okay, you didn't drink by yourself. Who'd you drink with?" Well, at first he told them, "Nobody." But they whipped on him until he

did tell. He gave them my name and he gave them Jimmy Gillis' name.

They come down there, and the guards was drinking. Well, they couldn't smell it on us. Of course, we just had a drink. They picked up me and David Bray, this Australian. Dave and I were the two biggest guys there, and they picked us out. We knew every one of them guards; I had been cooking there long enough, and I knew them all. They took us up to the guard-house and stood us up there and beat up on us. They made us stand there the rest of the night.

The next day, why, our officers came--our officers were still in camp--and got us away from the Japs. They promised to punish us if they let them have us, so they got the three of us away from them. Of course, they weren't real hard on me and Dave. That sergeant made us stand there all night, you see. They took us over there and tried us; they had a mock trial, you see, and throwed us in the brig. They gave me two days, and gave ol' Dave five days and gave this guy that got drunk fourteen days. Well, anyway, they got me out in two days, so immediately I went to work in one of the kitchens inside the camp.

Marcello: What was this brig like?

King: Oh, it was something else, that brig was. Of course, it was guarded by all MP's, you see, but we had some other Korean guards

that would walk through that camp that I didn't know. Them buggers was bad; they was mean! If you wasn't standing on your knees any time they'd come by--night or day--boy, they'd drag you out of there and beat up on you. Of course, our MP's would tell us when they was coming, and we'd wake up and be standing on our knees. They'd drag you out, anyway.

Marcello: So they used POW's for MP's.

King: Well, yes, but that was another way of our people getting . . . you know, trying to keep them out of the camp and keep some more of our guys inside the camp. They'd just give them a camp job.

But, anyway, I go back to work and ol' Dave, he gets out of that brig in two or three days. They put him on the hardest working party they got--the Australians do. Well, we didn't realize it, but this Jap officer over there . . . the food had gone down so bad when me and him left that there was nobody to put out any food over in that Jap kitchen. This Jap officer called us back over there and reprimanded us again and told us to get back down to that kitchen and go to work. So we knew we had it made, see. We worked there until we left along in the spring of '45.

Marcello: What sort of liquor did you have?

King: It was sake, just ol' sake--homespun, I guess. I never did have enough of it to . . .

Marcello: Now, as a result of working in the kitchen, were you able to pick up some weight?

King: Oh, yes, I gained quite a little bit of weight. As I say, I don't know how low I got up on that railroad. Then before we were released in '45--in August of '45--I was back out on them work details. I was out of that kitchen, so I lost some more. I weighed 135 pounds when I got out.

Marcello: Continuing on with that kitchen detail, what time would your day start in the kitchen?

King: Well, I trained another boy to do the same thing I could do in the mornings, and every other morning I got up about four o'clock. Then every other morning I would sleep until about seven o'clock.

Marcello: What would a typical Japanese meal consist of?

King: Generally speaking, they had a certain kind of light stew in the morning with rice. They had rice three times a day; three times a day, it was steamed rice. If they could get some fresh chicken eggs--they would sometimes get a raw chicken egg--they'd break it over this hot rice and just let it cook it, or stir it up in it and eat it raw-like. They never cooked their eggs. They wouldn't eat an uncooked duck egg, but they would a raw chicken egg. Then for their noon meal, they would invariably have some kind of meat, fish, or something. It was pretty good; a lot of times, it would be fried. It was the same way for their evening meal. They always had a good

soup of some kind. I learned how to make a lot of different dishes; I've forgotten most of them anymore.

Marcello: Would you prisoners actually serve the Japanese soldiers, too?

King: No, they came to the kitchen to get it. They came to the kitchen to get it.

Marcello: In other words, they would take it in big containers or what?

King: Big containers, that's right. That's the way they took it, and then they divided it out.

Marcello: So they actually divided the food themselves.

King: You bet. We didn't have anything to do with dividing or serving it to them, per se, no, not family-style.

Marcello: The reason I asked you what the Japanese were eating was to try and get some sort of a contrast with what the prisoners were eating.

King: It was quite different. Let me tell you, it was. There was no comparison.

Marcello: Plus, I'm sure they had seasonings and so on and so forth.

King: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Who controlled the procurement of the food for the Japanese kitchen?

King: The Japanese--whoever was in charge of that kitchen. Actually, the way he controlled it . . . now, I don't know who purchased it. I guess one of these Jap officers--a sergeant went out and purchased this stuff. But he purchased everything for the Jap

kitchen and for the prisoners' kitchen. Everything came by the Jap kitchen, and this Korean that was in charge got everything that he wanted out of that before it went to the camp.

Marcello: Did the Korean in charge determine what the menu of the day would be?

King: Oh, yes. Now, like, this one that knew what he was doing did. Those that followed him . . . Dave and I figured out that menu. We had worked with the cook.

Marcello: However, were these Koreans who replaced the original one fairly reasonable? In other words, you were not subjected to any physical punishment?

King: Oh, no. They were so humble to us because they knew . . . they didn't want to lose us. They sure didn't want to lose us.

The very next camp that I went into after I left that camp . . . this camp was disbanded, see. They got to bombing this camp pretty heavy--there at that bridge. I don't know that that's the reason they disbanded it, because they moved us down the peninsula below Bangkok to a place called Phet Buri. That's where they was building this airstrip.

Marcello: Let's just back up here a minute because I'm not finished with this camp here at Tamarkan yet. You mentioned the air raids just awhile ago, and, of course, as we know, there was a very important bridge here. What was this bridge like? This was a

steel bridge, wasn't it?

King: Steel and concrete.

Marcello: And it evidently was at a strategic location.

King: Well, it was the only one crossing that river. They call it "The Bridge Over the River Kwai." It isn't over the River Kwai; it's over the Mae Klong River. The River Kwai comes into the Mae Klong River or vice versa--one runs into the other--about four miles . . . well, right downtown in Kanburi. I was back over there this past fall, see. It was just over a year ago right now.

Marcello: Do you remember those air raids?

King: You bet I remember them air raids (chuckle)!

Marcello: Okay, describe them because I think that's a pretty important part of your stay here at Tamarkan.

King: Okay. The first one we had . . . you know, it had been so long since I'd seen an Allied plane; in fact, I'd never seen an Allied bomber. This was 1945 . . . I believe it was 1945. Here are the planes coming down that river. It was along just before sundown, and we had just cleaned up after the evening meal over at the Japanese kitchen. We were between the camp and the river.

Marcello: Which means you were close to the bridge.

King: Yes, we were closer to the bridge than anybody in the camp. See, the river was running south, and the bridge comes in from the

west. The bridge crosses east and west, basically. It comes right around and turns back down the river on the other side. It's kind of down on this end, comes across, and then down. All right, the camp sits between the river and the railroad right in this curve. There was a fence here and a road here (gestures), and then on this side of the road down there was all Japanese territory.

Well, I know these planes came down . . . made one run that afternoon. They made just one bombing run at that bridge, and they hit it and knocked it out, but in about twenty-four hours they had patched it back up. They had a wooden bridge there--still had a wooden bridge--that they could detour them around and get them across that river with them trains.

Marcello: Did you actually witness the attack?

King: You bet I witnessed it! I sat there and watched it.

Marcello: How many planes came over?

King: Nineteen or twenty-one or something like that.

Marcello: What kind of planes were they?

King: Well, they had to be those B-24's.

Marcello: They were four-engine planes for sure.

King: Yes, they were up pretty high. There was a high-level raid on this afternoon. Shortly after that, they started coming pretty regular. That's what they were--twin-tailed B-24's.

Marcello: When that initial raid occurred, was there any sort of warning--

air raid siren--or anything of that nature?

King: Yes, it blew, but they were inside before it blew. The planes were inside. I know I was just cleaning up or putting the last bit of fire out or something, and everybody had gone out on the north side of the kitchen. They were coming down the river from the north and going south. I was the last one out there, and I said, "Oh, those are Jap planes." I hadn't any more than got out there and looked up, and they were right up about at this angle (gesture) and coming right down the river. Everybody was talking about what kind they were.

I said, "Look at the mighty Japanese air force." Well, really, it had been a long time since I'd seen that big a Japanese air force. I hadn't much more than said this until this anti-aircraft battery across over there--just 150 yards, maybe--opened up, boy, and just firing like mad. Well, I knew the minute they opened up . . . I knew them was Allied planes. I couldn't see them. They was so high, you couldn't see them insignias on them.

They made their bombing run, and, sure enough, they spilt one over in the camp, you see. The camp was on tenko; it was on afternoon muster, or tenko, as we called it over there. Of course, they just went wild! They just went wild--running. The Korean guards did, too.

They all just went crazy--everybody except this little cook that I was telling you about that was so clean. He was still there. He never did leave that kitchen. He never would leave that kitchen. In any of those air raids, he never would leave.

But I left. I mean, whenever that plane came over and dropped those bombs and they went on down and started making a circle, everybody took off down that river.

Marcello: But there were no trenches or anything like that dug at this point.

King: Not at that time. Boy, there was the next day, though. They dug them in the far corner of the camp. Of course, that Japanese officer--ol' blue-bearded officer down there--he said that he was going to shoot everybody . . . anybody that went through that fence again would be shot. He said nobody was going to run no more. He stayed drunk the biggest part of the time, but he meant it, though. Boy, he got him a machine gun and set it up out there in front of the guardhouse. When these planes come over--it didn't make any difference how high they was--he'd shoot that machine gun.

Marcello: Now, you said this Japanese officer was drunk half the time?

King: Yes. He was an ol' heavy-bearded . . . we called him "Bluebeard." Every one of them had a name.

Marcello: I would assume that they did not use their best officers to run

these POW camps. The good officers were out fighting, I would think.

King: I wouldn't know, Ron. I wouldn't know. These guys . . . all I know is that they do make a lot of difference between an officer and an enlisted man. They're just kind of like a god or a king or something over a peon.

Marcello: What did these air raids do for your morale?

King: Well, I think they boosted my morale. I was wanting to see them come . . . you know, I didn't want to get hit or anything, but I was glad to see them. I knew then that we were getting some action, see, and that's what I'd been praying for all these years, all these months.

Marcello: You now knew for sure that liberation was two months away (chuckle).

King: Yes, it couldn't be very far behind. We were going to win that thing, and we were going to . . . I never did figure out how we were going to get released.

Marcello: But this is your first indication that maybe the tide had turned.

King: Yes, well, we knew it had. By the time this happened, I believe we had got wind of the European situation being over. See, it was finished in '44, wasn't it?

Marcello: No, it was over in '45, too. Now, Italy capitulated in '44.

King: Well, what month was it over in '45?

Marcello: It was over in April of '45.

King: Well, anyway, we heard about it right away, and we heard about

Italy, see. We got this news, and actually I remember after we got back, I could look back and tell that I knew it was from four to six . . . our rumors were from four to six months behind. But they come true--every one of them. They was rumors, but they was true.

Marcello: With what degree of regularity did those air raids occur here at Tamarkan? In other words, would you have one a week?

King: I think so. Of course, there might be one every day for two or three days, you know. Occasionally, there'd be two planes come down there--just two stray planes just straggling off down the way.

After that first raid, the bad part about it then was that there was always some of them coming down and machine-gunning just like a fighter plane--those B-24's. That way, you could see them. Man, if you'd just hold your head up and look, you could see them.

Marcello: Did that antiaircraft battery continue to operate, or had they knocked it out?

King: They hit that antiaircraft battery; they knocked out one of those guns completely the first day. They blowed it plumb to kingdom come.

Marcello: How did the attitude of the Japanese change as a result of these attacks?

King: Well, it didn't make them any harder on us. If anything, see,

these Koreans got softer. As that war dragged on, as it wound down, they really did start trying to get on the good side of the prisoners. They was treating us, almost, on equal basis, you know--not quite, but almost.

Marcello: What was your attitude toward the Koreans?

King: Well, mine was . . . see, I never was just really mad at any of them personally. There was one or two that I sure didn't like, but I wasn't around them. It was the same way with the Japanese. There was one or two of them that I disliked very much, but I wasn't around them much, or wasn't around them at all when it was over. And the rest of them--if they let me alone, I'd sure let them alone. I've always felt that way. I don't bear any animosity at all now. In fact, I've been back over there. I've been back to Japan.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you mentioned that you didn't know how you were going to be liberated. Can you explain what you meant by that?

King: Well, I just knew they weren't going to let them take us back alive. They weren't going to give us up, because in every camp we was ever in--and more especially right there at the last--they had the machine gun nests in every corner, and the machine guns were all turned toward the camp. They weren't out of the camp; they were turned towards the camp. They always said that if they were all going to die, we was all going to die.

Marcello: Did you ever make any plans that you might put into operation

just in case the situation arose?

King: Well, you bet! We had some kind of plans, you know--emergency plans--of what you was going to do. You were going to have to try to do something; you were going to have to try to get through some of these guys to keep them from doing it. We didn't have any set plan, but we had some . . . we just talked about it, you know, what could be done. Of course, you just had to play it by ear. You couldn't plan anything; you didn't know where you was going to be.

Marcello: Was anybody hoarding any weapons or anything of that nature?

King: No, nothing more than a penknife or pocketknife.

Marcello: When I was referring to weapons, I was, of course, thinking of makeshift weapons.

King: No, not any <u>per se</u>, because it was too dangerous to get caught with something like that.

Marcello: Were you really allowed to have any writing material or anything of that nature, speaking of contraband?

King: Well, like I say, most anything you had was contraband--or that you could possibly have. You couldn't have books; you couldn't have writing material. Of course, we used everything in the world for cigarette paper, you know. If you had something, why, you could try to convince them that was for cigarette paper. You could hide stuff from them. We could smuggle it by some way or other.

Marcello: Did these planes that came in ever give any indication in one way or other that they knew that there were prisoners-of-war in that camp?

King: I didn't think so. Anytime they bombed it and come down and machine-gunned right across it, I didn't think they were honoring it at all. I thought they should not.

Marcello: You would think that, since this camp was rather large, they would have had certain operatives in the area that would have informed them.

King: They should have, but they were after them guys who were shooting back at them, see, and they was just across the fence from us. It's hard to draw a line where you can fire and can't fire--right up to a line--especially whenever you bring an ol' boy down and you can't tell what that nose-gunner or that tail-gunner or that side-gunner's going to be doing, see. The pilot may know what he wants to take them down and let them shoot at, but maybe this guy on this side can't even see the guys where he ought to be shooting. He's just shooting for the fun of it over here.

Marcello: Did you say that you were able to smuggle food out of this camp and take it back to your buddies from time to time?

King: Oh, you mean out of the Jap kitchen?

Marcello: Yes.

King: Well, I didn't have to, really. I made it a point to be the

one that got the overflow out of that kitchen. See, we had quite an overflow, and I took it back to either . . . most of the time, if I had enough, I'd take it to the kitchen that served the Americans. If I just had a little dab, you know, I'd take it down to American lines. Generally speaking, I'd try to see if anybody I knew down there in bed in the hospital . . . I'd take them something, if they could get them to eat it.

Marcello: And the Japanese had no objections to this?

King: Oh, no. This Korean gave it to me; he didn't want to throw it out. I just had enough energy at this time to want to do something like that. It seemed like this Australian that I was telling you about, he didn't care. He never did want hardly anything. He's had just one friend that he ever took anything to, but I took a lot of it up there to the American boys--all I could get.

Marcello: I guess you were a pretty popular man around that camp.

King: Well, yes, I had a lot of friends (chuckle). I still got a lot of friends. They wasn't just fair-weather friends.

Marcello: I assume it was a sad day when you were moved out of the camp.

King: Well, it was. Of course, it got to where it was a hassle. We got to feeding a lot of Japanese troops going through here, see, feeding them out of this kitchen. It got pretty tough, you know; we used up more food than we could get.

Marcello: So describe the process by which you were transferred out of that camp.

King: They just moved every American out, you see, at one time. Right there at the last, I was . . .

Marcello: Were you one of the last of the prisoners to leave?

King: I was one of the last American prisoners to leave, but they was moving everybody, so I don't know. I wasn't the last one to leave the camp. I don't know who was.

They moved us down to where they was building this airstrip at this Phet Buri camp. Some of them call it "Cashew Mountain Camp." There was a mountain over there, and they called it Cashew Mountain. It looked like a cashew, I guess. Now, there's a camp we moved into, and it had two huts in it. They was about 200-man huts--about 200 men in each hut. I think there was about 200 or 400 of us that moved in there. That was it--no kitchen, no nothing . . . no water. We moved in there and dug wells and built more huts and more kitchens. Of course, they was moving people in there every day. We built ten or twelve huts in that thing--200-man huts.

The first guys I see are some of these Korean guards that I knew back up in this other camp. Immediately, they wanted me in their kitchen. So I go over there and move into that kitchen. This was in '45, see. This is,like, in May or June of '45. I'm guessing. I'm estimating the time there, but it's not too long before that war's over. We don't work over there too long.

I know I got Griff Douglas . . . that's the camp I got him a job in, I believe--in the kitchen over there.

But, anyway, it's not too long until they kick everybody, every prisoner . . . they won't let the Japs have any more prisoners working in the kitchen for them. See, they're really doing this better. They're making the Jap guards do their own cooking, which they were supposed to be doing all the time. They just had all the help they needed when they had us.

So that put us back out digging ditches, digging dirt--working on that airstrip. The last couple months I was over there, I didn't work in the Japanese kitchen . . . maybe three months.

Marcello: Was this very tough work on this airstrip? Of course, it was tougher than working in the kitchen, I'm sure.

King: Well, it wasn't that tough working on the airstrip, but we moved again. We moved back up in the hills. I can't even tell you where it's at.

Marcello: In the meantime--and I have to ask you this question since you brought up Griff Douglas' name--where does "Mick the Yank" come into this story? I'm, of course, referring to that monkey.

King: I'm trying to think, now. This fellow Yarbro that I was telling you about that was aboard this ship--he and I got off kind of together that night--he is the guy that wound up owning him. He owned this monkey.

Marcello: "Mick the Yank" started out with a broken tail, didn't he? Didn't a Japanese guard abuse him or something?

King: Yes, I don't know where he come from. Yarbro was kind of the overseer of him--the owner. I'm trying to think which camp it was that he had him in. He had him along about the time that war was over. It was along about this time in the last days of the war.

Marcello: Evidently, "Mick the Yank" was a nasty little critter.

King: Oh, yes, he was an ornery little devil. He was always sitting up there . . . he had him on a leash most of the time; he had to. Somebody would come along with his mess kit full of stuff, and he'd jump down there and grab something and run back up there, see. Boy, you just didn't steal food off somebody that easy, you know.

Marcello: Okay, you move again to this last camp.

King: Yes, we go on up into the hills. We're helping the Japs dig into the hills up north of Bangkok somewhere. We went back through Bangkok and up there.

Marcello: How are most of these trips made? On foot or by train?

King: Most of them were by train or truck. We had a pretty good march on that last trip. When we got off that train, we had a pretty good march. I don't know just how far it was--several miles--to that last camp.

Marcello: Describe the events leading up to the end of the war and your

liberation as best you can recall them.

King: Well, see, just before I moved out of Tamarkan camp--and they disbanded--they separated the officers from the men. They decided that was the wrong thing to do--having the officers and the men in the same camp--so they separated them. That meant the sergeants and the highest NCO's in charge had to take over. Well, they did all the work anyway, the bulk of it. They took over the men in the camp and was the go-between for the Japs and the men.

We got up to this last camp where we were liberated. We're right out in the middle of a big rice paddy--just flat land--and there was an officers' camp down the road six or seven kilometers. We'd see a group of these officers . . . they was having to do a little work then. They was having to build their own camp and do their own cooking. They took all the men away--their servants and whatnot--away from them. I'm not sure, but I think maybe the colonels or above got to keep a room boy. We'd see them occasionally.

We was working about as hard as I ever had to work while I was over there--up there digging in these hills with these guys. I know we had worked about a month without a holiday, straight through. They promised us a holiday on the 15th of August. Sure enough, on the 15th of August, they gave us a holiday.

Well, we heard something big had happened. Somebody would come in off a working party, and a native had told him this. We didn't know what it was. We could just feel it; I could just feel it, that this thing was getting close. So we began to talk. Now, that's when we began to talk about how we was going to get out of this thing. We just knew the Japs wasn't going to give us up. We talked it around there--several of us--what could be done if those circumstances presented itself like that.

But, anyway, why, the next day they call out 600 men on a working party in hundred-man groups. I'm on one of them. I had learned enough Japanese . . . I couldn't understand it or speak it fluently by any stretch, but I could get the drift of the conversation. If they were soldiers, I suppose I still could tell what they was talking about.

But, anyway, we had to march about seven or eight kilometers, I guess. Of course, by the time we get out here, these 100 men are scattered up and down. The guards aren't as strict as they once were. This 100 get mixed with that 100, we was just all mixed up. You'd try to figure out which one you're in and stay with it.

We get out just to the foothills of these mountains. There had come a little ol' shower the night before. There was a sergeant . . . now, a sergeant is a pretty high rank over there.

About a two- or three-star sergeant rode up there on a bicycle and stopped this working party. This guard's up there at the head of this working party. I could tell he was one of their engineers. So, I'm in this front hundred men up there toward the front, so I just eased on up there so I could eavesdrop on what they was talking about.

I heard them talking there, and he's telling about these airplanes that have done all this bombing. That's all I could tell; I couldn't tell where or when or what, you see.

Anyway, about that time, the guards told us just to sit down. This had never happened before, so that makes you suspicious, you know, or made me suspicious. I got on over there, and I'd already got up there close enough to where I could hear everything that was going on.

This sergeant, he didn't look like such a bad character, so I spoke to him in Japanese. He spoke back. I knew he couldn't speak any English. I asked him, "What was the idea? Weren't we going to work today?" He said, "No." I said, "Why?" He said, "Too much rain." This is all in Japanese, see. Well, I knew that that was a farce. I knew that wasn't so, because we worked in the monsoon season, and a shower is not going to keep them from ever working.

You know, we sat there about an hour. There was another one who come along, too; there was a lone plane that come flying

over--an American plane--just slow. The plane's a C-47, or I assume it was a C-46 or C-47--twin-engine. Nobody fired at it or anything, see; no guns fired at him. In a little while, they said, "Turn around and go back to camp." So they turned this 600 men around, and back to camp we go--all strung out, singing.

Man, I knew in my mind that they had signed the peace treaty. This thing was over. We got back to camp, and they didn't say a word to us that day, but on the morning of the 17th, well, they come and told our sergeants that there had been a truce signed--no more fighting.

Marcello: What were your immediate thoughts or reactions?

King: Oh, I tell you, a celebration was what I was after (chuckle).

Marcello: How did you all celebrate?

King: Well, (chuckle) we stole a bunch of sake--a bunch of them did--out there, and there was a lot of drinking. (Chuckle) We kicked the fence down all around the camp.

Marcello: The Japanese did nothing?

King: Not a thing. They never said one word to us. Incidentally, this blue-bearded officer that was in charge of that camp never said a word. He kept them guards sitting right out there; I think they come out there and unloaded their guns, and they sat right out there in the guardhouse just like Buddhas. They never said a word. Those guys stole that whiskey off the truck

right in front of them; they just went out there and got that sake. There was quite a lot of celebrating going on that night.

Marcello: Did you get any more food?

King: You bet! By then, the officers, see . . . the next day, well, here come some of our officers over there. They came over there, and, of course, they go downtown, see, wherever this village is. I don't even know where it's at. They bought just all kinds of food that was available--fresh vegetables that could be cooked into a soup, and pork--the meat was basically pork--and they got us some better rice. We really had some feast there!

Marcello: Did the Japanese have very much food there, or didn't you bother with their food?

King: Well, we used some of what they had there, you know, I'm sure. But,basically, I think they bought most of it--the officers did. They went downtown and bought the bulk of it.

Marcello: Did you go outside the camp to test your new freedom?

King: No, there were too many armed soldiers all around that country. We were advised not to go out on that account. There was too many of them that might not know that there had been a truce signed. Whenever you are going through the country, well, maybe you're armed yourself, see, and you may get into a conflict there.

Marcello: They probably had orders to hang onto the guns and keep you in

those camps.

King: Well, the guards, they just sat there in the guardhouse. They never did walk post anymore; they never did get out of the guardhouse.

Marcello: What sort of a reaction did the Japanese have as a result of having lost the war?

King: Well, they just kept real quiet. They didn't say anything, or do anything. They just did nothing, except what they were told to do, you know. Like, it was just a very few days until they sent . . . I think there was about 150 Americans here in this camp, and they sent six trucks out there to pick us up and carry us into Bangkok.

Marcello: The Japanese did this?

King: Yes, but the American officers had schooled them in what to do--get out there and pick us up and get us in there, because they was going to send off the planes from Calcutta to come in there after us, which they did. Now, they told us on the morning of the 17th that it was over.

In just a period of three or four days, they got us into Bangkok. We went into some big warehouses and stayed down on the docks, near the docks, until the 29th. There is where I saw my first OSS officers. I mean, there's a young American officer, clean-cut and well-dressed and uniformed, and he stuck out like a sore thumb. I hadn't seen one in a long, long time--

in uniform.

Marcello: In the meantime, were you kind of getting a little itchy to get out of there now that you knew the war was over? Were you getting impatient?

King: Not necessarily. Our food was good; when we got into Bangkok, they started bringing us bread. I hadn't had a slice of bread in three-and-a-half years.

Marcello: That's amazing.

King: We got good bread. Of course, I still enjoyed that rice--we had rice, too.

Marcello: What else were they feeding you in Bangkok?

King: Just anything that money could buy--that they had over there. They just poured it on.

Marcello: Did you remain there in Bangkok long?

King: Until the 29th. On the day of the 29th, they sent . . . the reason I know there was 150 men was because there was twenty-five men to a plane, and they sent six planes in there.

I never will forget that morning. They passed the word there . . . now, they moved a bunch of English and Australians and Dutch in there, too. They were down there. Of course, there was a lot of stretcher patients, you know, people in the hospital who were bedfast. They passed the word here that morning to get all these stretcher patients and all the sick out to the airfield. They was going to fly them out of there--

the Americans were coming in there to get them. When these six planes . . . they knew exactly how many men they had there; these OSS boys had radio communications with them, and they'd radioed back. So they took them all out to the airstrip, and they got in about noon, I guess, or a little before. They had them all out there at just about noon, and Captain Fitzsimmons--he was one of the highest-ranking American officers--come down there, and he said, "All you Americans get ready. They came after the Americans, not the sick. They can't haul the Dutch or English or Australians out of here. They can't go where they're going. They flew these things in here specifically for Americans only." They loaded us up, and out there we go--right out of those trucks and into those C-47's. There were six of them.

Marcello: Were you bringing back with you any mementos from your stay in the prison camps?

King: Oh, yes, we had some. You know, I let mine get away--every one of them. I never did completely get home with them, I don't think. I got a little ol' note pad--book--that I carried all the way through it, and I got it back.

Marcello: Was that something that you had to keep on the sly?

King: Oh, yes. I had to hide it every time we had a search.

Marcello: What did you have in your notebook?

King: Names and addresses, just stuff that I had jotted down. A

little diary-like deal. It wasn't a diary, as such, because it didn't . . .

Marcello: So did you fly back to Calcutta?

King: Calcutta, that night.

Marcello: How long did you remain in Calcutta altogether?

King: Well, I got out of there on . . . we got out of Bangkok on the 29th of August, and I stayed in Calcutta for, like, ten days or two weeks. Then we flew over to Karachi, India, and waited three or four days on the plane there, and got to the United States on the 29th of September. It was just a month from the time I got actually liberated until I was in New York City.

Marcello: What happened in Calcutta?

King: We were put in the 142nd General Hospital and was checked out, you see. I think we all had some kind of stomach parasites, worms, or something. But the main thing all of us needed was just a little "T.L.C." [Tender Loving Care] and vitamins, you know. That was about the main thing.

Marcello: Now, did they gradually work up to giving you the full-scale diet, so to speak?

King: Oh, no. They gave it to us right off, right off. Some of the boys had to learn to eat it right, properly.

Marcello: What food did you crave the most?

King: I would say corn flakes--bowl of corn flakes with some real

sweet . . . a lot of sugar on it and lots of cream and milk--cold milk. I still love it, I really do. I never did crave bread as much as I did something sweet.

Marcello: When you got back to this country, did you have very much trouble adjusting to civilian life once again?

King: I don't think I did. Some people might think I did, but I don't think I did.

Marcello: You mentioned in one of our pre-interview conferences that when prisoners did get out, they seemed to do things to the extreme.

King: I think every one of us did. I think every one of us did. With some of them it would be one thing, and some of them another.

Marcello: Like what, for example?

King: Like drinking, you know, or smoking, just like I did. I just got continually worse. I said, "I'll never go hungry. It doesn't make any difference. I'm just not going to be hungry." But I've had to change that, because I've had to go on a diet (chuckle). I need to go on another one.

Marcello: Did you have very much trouble in getting adjusted to crowds of people and all the attention? I know some prisoners say that they were a little restless for a while.

King: Well, I don't think I did. I was a little restless, yes, but as far as having trouble getting adjusted . . . and another thing, one reason I'd say that I didn't have any trouble was

that I always knew or was close to somebody,and we'd get together and talk about it. We'd talk about our war experiences with somebody that I was over there with--some of these other buddies--and go to these reunions once a year. I never did have any animosity to speak of, and what little I had, I just got rid of it right away. It didn't bother me. As long as I don't have to put up with them and go through that . . . in other words, if I don't see them, they don't bother me. It don't bother me when I see them now.

Marcello: As you look back on your experiences as a prisoner-of-war, some thirty-plus years later, how do you explain your survival? Why was it that you came back, and others remained over there, so to speak?

King: Well, I would guess that having a strong will is the main thing, and determination. I really think that youth . . . I doubt whether any man that knew what he was getting into could go through it. If he knew beforehand what he was getting into . . . I mean, the younger you are, the less you might have any idea, see. I think my youth . . . and I was strong physically. I think your youth and determination are the main two things.

Marcello: And, also, I would assume a little bit of luck doesn't hurt, either.

King: Oh, no, certainly. Why, if you have a little luck, that's just like being . . . quite a few times up there on that railroad,

I was at the right place at the right time. Just like when I got up there in that Japanese kitchen, that had to be one of the best moves I ever volunteered for (chuckle). And I wasn't a volunteer by no stretch, you see.

Marcello: I think this is a pretty good place to end this interview. Mr. King, I want to thank you very much for having participated in this project. You said a lot of interesting and important things, and I'm sure that historians are going to find your comments very valuable someday.

King: I hope so.