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Interview with

LUTHER PRUNTY

October 20, 1986

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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Luther G. Prunty
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Luther Prunty

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello   Date of Interview: October 20, 1986

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Luther Prunty for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on October 20, 1986, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Prunty in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war during World War II. More specifically, Mr. Prunty was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, of the 36th Division. He was captured on the island of Java in March of 1942 and subsequently spent the rest of the war in various Japanese prisoner-of-war camps throughout Asia.

Mr. Prunty, 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.

Mr. Prunty: I was born on January 11, 1912, in Jack County, at a little place called Cundiff. It's twelve miles northeast of Jacksboro. The school at Cundiff only went to the ninth grade, and after finishing there, I went into Jacksboro to finish school. That was during the Depression, and things were pretty tight, and jobs were scarce. So while I was going to high school,

after football practice, I joined the National Guard. It would meet once a week for drill, and they paid you a dollar. A dollar went a good, long way. As a matter of fact, I was renting a house in Jacksboro for $17 a month, a three-bedroom house. A family acquaintance were living in Jacksboro, so they moved in the house with me, and his wife did the cooking and the laundry. It was just a family.

Marcello: So are you saying in effect, then, that it was an economic reason that influenced your decision to join the Texas National Guard?

Prunty: Right, definitely so. Of course, each summer you got to go on a two-week camp. Jack County being a rural county, young people didn't have many places to go. Actually, it was a vacation to go to National Guard camp. Most of the time we went to Palacios or down on the coast or to Camp Bullis in San Antonio for our camp and maneuvers. Then, of course, Fort Sam Houston was there in San Antonio at that time, too. It was brand-new. I was very lucky in 1936. I got sick out on the range, and they flew me into a hospital at Fort "Sam" and operated on me for appendicitis. That was when they put you on a board and strapped you down, and you stayed there. I believe I stayed on that board for fourteen days from appendicitis. Things are such now that you get up the next day.

Marcello: How old were you when you entered the National Guard? Do you recall?

Prunty: Oh, I guess I was about sixteen. That was the horse-drawn artillery then, too. We used horses.

Marcello: Refresh my memory. What particular unit was located in Jacksboro?

Prunty: F Battery, 131st Field Artillery, 36th Division.

Marcello: And that was a firing battery, isn't that correct?

Prunty: Yes. Actually, we had old French 75's (75-millimeter) and the caissons, and they were pulled by horses. Then later on, in the early 1930's (1933), we got trucks. We mobilized the division. At that time we made the longest field march of any Army or National Guard in the United States. We gathered at Abilene, Texas, and maneuvered from Abilene to Camp Bullis, San Antonio, in one day. That was terrific! I guess it must be 150 to 200 miles (chuckle).

Marcello: Now as one gets up into 1939, 1940...well, let's say 1940. Did your training change any in the unit there at Jacksboro?

Prunty: Definitely so. Definitely so. We were mobilized into federal service in November, 1940. At that time we started bringing in...of course, we weren't near at full strength at that time, but we started bringing in numbers of boys around the county that came in voluntarily and joined when they knew there was a draft coming. They'd rather come in and join before the draft. Of course, being federalized, we did start a basic training. Of course, we had had some training, certainly, in our close-order drills and so forth.

The non-commissioned officers and commisssioned that were there formed a nucleus for the training of the unit.

Marcello: Are you saying, in effect, that once mobilization had occurred on November 25, 1940, that you stayed in and around Jacksboro for a short period of time?

Prunty: Yes. We lived and stayed at Fort Richardson, the old frontier fort. We stayed there until after the first of the year. As a matter of fact, Camp Bowie at Brownwood was being built. They completed a place for the 131st to stay, and we moved from Fort Richardson to Brownwood, Camp Bowie, on January 11, 1941.

Marcello: While you were at Fort Richardson, and before you moved to Camp Bowie, what kind of training and so on went on there?

Prunty: Most of our training was close-order drill. That is really something, to take a boy out from behind the mules and a plow and try to get him to keep step in formation. It's really something else. It gets to be pretty hard work. Of course, we had conditioning--our exercise--and then our road trips or marching trips. We went through some action on our guns, all right, practice runs. We didn't do any firing because the people that were on the gun crews had most already been through the firing exercises. That's what we did at our camp each year, was practice our firing.

Marcello: What was your specific function in the unit at the time of mobilization?

Prunty: At the time of mobilization, I was a sergeant--just a buck

sergeant. Before we went to Camp Bowie, I was made chief of section, that is, chief of one of the gun sections. There wasn't any change in rank or money. I was getting $36 a month, but that was pretty good pay. Later on, in Bowie, they did raise us to $95 a month.

Marcello: Doing some quick calculating here, I'm assuming that you were around twenty-eight when the unit mobilized.

Prunty: I was twenty-eight.

Marcello: That would have made you one of the older people in the unit.

Prunty: Yes, I was. There was two of us that joined the National Guard together. Actually, there was three. We were in high school...well, the whole football team just went over and joined the National Guard. Other units were the same way. Later on, some of the college football people out of Lubbock, Texas Tech, played football during the National Guard camp.

Marcello: What would you estimate to have been the average age of the guys who were in the unit at the time of mobilization?

Prunty: Possibly twenty. There were three of us, though, that were older. We were all sergeants. The Army had been sending out correspondence courses. When you finished those, the 1040's and 1020's, I believe...anyway, I had finished the 1040's, and so had one of the other boys. The other one had finished both series, and he was promoted to second

lieutenant upon completion of that. That was after we moved to Camp Bowie.

Marcello: Were you married at this time?

Prunty: No.

Marcello: Generally speaking, is it not true that just about all the other enlisted personnel were not married either?

Prunty: There weren't any of them, not in our unit. Probably in going overseas, there was a couple of them who married just the week before (chuckle). Some of the older personnel--the first sergeant--were married. Then the commissioned officers were married--all but the one that had come in at the same time I did.

I was given a chance to get out of the unit.

Marcello: Now this was after you went to Camp Bowie.

Prunty: At mobilization, yes, when we started overseas. I was given a chance to get out and a weekend to think about it. The other two fellows that I'd gone in with in high school... we drove back to Jacksboro and talked about it over the weekend, and one of them said, "Well, I'll go if you'll go." So we decided that we'd just go. It was just a "Roosevelt Tour" anyway (chuckle). The fighting was over in Europe. We were sure we were going to the Philippines--just having a little tour.

Marcello: Is that what they referred to that as--the "Roosevelt Tour?"

Prunty: Yes, that's what the battalion referred to it as just starting off.

Marcello: Let me pick up on this for a moment. Who was eligible to transfer once it was known you were going overseas?

Prunty: The commissioned officers all had to be transferred. They transferred all those. They had no choice. Anyone, I believe, that was married was transferred. Of course, there was cases of brothers being in the unit, and they let them decide which one of them would transfer out. Which none of them did. There were twins who went.

Marcello: So as a married person, you had an option of transferring, or among brothers there would be an option for one of them to transfer...

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: ...if they wanted to do it.

Prunty: That's right. Anyone over the age of twenty-six, I believe, could transfer.

Marcello: And, of course, that's where you would have qualified.

Prunty: That's right, yes.

Marcello: What happened once you got to Camp Bowie? What kind of training did the unit undergo there?

Prunty: Of course, they were in a hurry to get a place for us to stay; and there was just quite a bit of rain, and it was a mud hole. We had tents to stay in, and we spent about the first week of just establishing a camp where we could stay, of course. From reveille to retreat, we worked on our living quarters, getting things in shape. We built dirt sidewalks.

We raised a portion for walks in front of our tents. Of course, we did throw some gravel around the mess hall and orderly tent.

At one time it had been a wooded area, and they had burned--and were still burning--a lot of timber. Someone got the idea that wood ashes would make a good sidewalk. We put that on there and packed it down, and it looked real nice and real firm. That night it came a rain, and the first time you stepped on it you went completely over your shoes (chuckle). It just was nothing.

Marcello: Is this where you really took basic training as we would perhaps know it today?

Prunty: Possibly. We didn't do a whole lot of close-order drill at Brownwood, but that is where we really started our basics on the gun. Of course, the mechanics and truck drivers and so forth were in training all the time after we once got our camp set up and going.

Marcello: At this stage am I to assume that all of you were just thinking in terms of being mobilized for a year?

Prunty: That's right. In a year we'd be back at home. We were down there to have a good time. And we did. We really did.

Marcello: In the summer of 1941, the division went to Louisiana to participate in maneuvers.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Describe what took place there.

Prunty: At that time of year, it was beginning the early part of the hurricane season, and you might say it was their monsoon season (chuckle).

Marcello: This was a taste of what was to come.

Prunty: It really got us ready for a lot of things. In sleeping in shelter tents, pup tents, trying to move from one point to another, and getting your guns in place when it was mud completely...I wish I had brought some pictures that I have of that, wherein there'd be maybe forty people grabbing hold of a gun and a truck trying to get them out of the mud and literally lift them out. Of course, the truck had winches on them, but time and time again you could put a winch line around a pine tree that was fifty feet high and start up, and you'd bring the tree to you instead of taking the truck out (chuckle). It was really, really something else, but it undoubtedly was real good training.

Marcello: Those were massive maneuvers, too. The whole 3rd Army was involved, I believe.

Prunty: Well, we had two armies. We had the 2nd and 3rd Armies there. I know we were a combat team with the 142nd Infantry and the 7th Armored. General Patton, of course, was a colonel then, and he stayed right with us on this "blowing and going."

Marcello: How long did those maneuvers last?

Prunty: Oh, goodness! You forget in time, but it seems to me like

it was approximately two months--with a little critique inserted there. We had three days off, I believe.

Marcello: It was also about this time that an Army reorganization took place. Isn't this when the Army switched from the square to the triangular divisions?

Prunty: That was the thing that happened. We'd had a little contest, of course, with our firing batteries, and the 131st had won as the best firing battalion out of the 61st Brigade. In this reorganization, of course, they told us we were headed for Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to train recruits, which we had got in a number of recruits while we were at Brownwood. As a matter of fact, we had one sergeant that we sent to Dodd Field in San Antonio to take some extra training, and then he was placed at camp headquarters, where the Selective Service people were coming in for basic training of Selective Service, that is, close-order drill. In doing that, he was our man to hand-pick people to come to F Battery. As a matter of fact, he had been sergeant major of the Tarleton State ROTC. He hand-picked us a bunch of good men--I mean, good men.

Marcello: Let me get this straight. The 2nd Battalion originally consisted of D,E, and F Batteries.

Prunty: Right, and also Service and Headquarters.

Marcello: Okay. You were going to be getting new people in from A,B, and C Batteries. Is that correct?

Prunty: That's what we did. They decided to transfer...people that transferred out of the 2nd Battalion would be replaced by people from the lst Battalion. We did get a few volunteers from the 133rd. Most of them were volunteers that came from the lst Battalion down to the 2nd Battalion. At that time, we really thought that we were going to Fort Sill for the training of people coming in there.

Marcello: Most of these transfers were West Texas boys, too, were they not?

Prunty: Yes. The 36th Division, of course, was made up of people from Texas, but the artillery was mostly West Texas.

Marcello: Where was D Battery located?

Prunty: Wichita Falls.

Marcello: And E Battery?

Prunty: Abilene.

Marcello: And F Battery was in...

Prunty: Jacksboro. That was the three firing batteries. Then Headquarters was at Decatur, and Service was out of Lubbock.

Marcello: And then there was a small medical detachment, too, was there not?

Prunty: Yes. I think there was six. Actually, they were out of Plainview, I believe.

Marcello: About the time that you get back from Louisiana, and around the time that the reorganization takes place, you find out that you're going overseas, and your destination is PLUM.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: What were the rumors going around as to what PLUM meant?

Prunty: There were all kinds of rumors. As I say, that was where the "Roosevelt Tour" started. But it was somewhere overseas, of which everybody pretty well knew that it was the Philippines because, actually, we owned the Philippines. There were people stationed in the Philippines, also some at Schofield in Hawaii, but we were well-satisfied that this "Roosevelt Tour" was going to be the Philippine Islands.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you found that you'd be going overseas and probably be going to the Philippines?

Prunty: Oh, very favorable! You bet! There wasn't anybody wanting to transfer out other than, of course, the married ones, because they wanted to make that tour, you see. This is still a bunch of country boys that had never been anywhere, and they'd been in these little camps for the National Guard as a vacation. This was going to be a year-long vacation. Goodness, we'd see parts of the world that we'd read about!

Marcello: You leave Camp Bowie sometime around November 11, 1941.

Prunty: Right. We boarded a train on November 11, and there's things that happened along there that we don't need to put on this record (laughter).

Marcello: How long did that trip last?

Prunty: Oh, goodness! About a week. One of the sergeants that I was buddying with from Jacksboro was a real good poker player.

Of course, we didn't get paid before we left, so what money we did have we kind of added to through his poker playing --sitting on some of the cards and so forth. All in all, a very good trip other than stopping at Needles, Arizona, and getting out and having to do close-order drills in woolens. We were in our winter uniforms. Goodness!

Marcello: So you're basically killing time on that train trip over to San Francisco.

Prunty: Right. We went into San Francisco at...I can't even think of the name of the old fort now.

Marcello: McDowell, wasn't it?

Prunty: Yes, McDowell. They put us on board water boats from there, and actually we went toward Alcatraz but went on around it and went on over to Angel Island, the embarkation point for people going overseas where we're heading. We took our shots and so forth. We stayed there a week.

Marcello: You brought up something, and I want to pursue this because it may play a part in the story later on. You mentioned that while you were on Angel Island, you received shots.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: Do you recall what kind of shots you received there?

Prunty: Oh, I believe for yellow fever, tetanus, typhoid. I don't remember just what others, but we received a bunch of them.

Marcello: Had you received any shots before that, that is, maybe when you were at Camp Bowie or even before you left Jacksboro?

Prunty: Yes, we had had some shots prior to that but not en masse like this was. Everybody lined up and went through. Those that fell down were carried on through. They got their shots anyway (chuckle).

Marcello: So you were well fortified in that sense when you went overseas.

Prunty: Yes, we really were. They were looking after us, I'm sure, because of the difference in the climate between the United States and the Philippines.

Marcello: How long did you stay there at Angel Island?

Prunty: Oh, approximately a week.

Marcello: And what were you doing while you were there, other than getting shots?

Prunty: That was it. That was it. We were getting shots, and they were working on our records. We were being detached from the 36th Division and on our way to form a new division, so we had all of our records, all of our paperwork. Everything was with us. Well, they had to get all of that worked over before we shipped out and then get all the shots. Then when that was done, we were ready to pull out on a "fantastic" ship, the USS Republic, an old German ship captured in World War I. It had a top speed of nine knots.

Marcello: Describe the first portion of that voyage from San Francisco to Honolulu.

Prunty: Well, we went on board, and it was on a Friday. The Navy

has fish on Fridays, always, and that day they had cabbage with it; and it was boiled cabbage, and the odor coming from the mess hall was really terrific. We went into the ship and were assigned to our rooms. That didn't take over an hour or so, and then they started to get underway.

Well, the oil odor from the ship's engines, the exhaust, plus the odor from the galley was almost unbearable. Before we got out from under the Golden Gate Bridge, they were sick (chuckle). I mean, they were seasick people. Just outside the Golden Gate Bridge, of course, are some of the highest swells there are in the Pacific, so that fell most everybody.

Marcello: How about you?

Prunty: No, I was lucky--very lucky. It was a sight to behold. You could go down in the hold to a room where there was drinking fountains. Everything was full and running over. They had big G.I. cans, and they were getting pretty full. The odor was terrific. Actually, as a chief of section, I had a little authority. I would certainly use it to get back on deck into the fresh air (laughter). I slept on deck that night.

Marcello: There were a bunch of troops on the Republic, were there not?

Prunty: Yes, the battalion plus the 26th Brigade. They were also headed for the same place.

Marcello: Where were they from? Do you know?

Prunty: No, I don't. I don't know where they were from. I believe

that they were possibly from around San Francisco. I'm not sure. I know we were meeting people that were coming back from overseas, that had finished their tour of duty and were coming back, and they were always kidding us about what suckers we were.

Marcello: Your first stop was in Honolulu, and it took you about a week to get there, I think.

Prunty: Yes, it did.

Marcello: What did you do there? Did you manage to get shore leave?

Prunty: Yes. They let us have shore leave in two-hour intervals. One of the sergeants that was the same age as me went ashore with me. He had always held it against me for saying I'd go if he would, so he went, too (chuckle). He had took sick as we got to the Golden Gate Bridge. I bet the man lost twenty pounds of weight between San Francisco and Hawaii. When we got there and docked, he hadn't eaten a bite, and he got up and went ashore. He was just feeling fine. He got a good meal, and everything was fine. When our time was up, and we were back on board, he went back to bed again (chuckle).

Marcello: Had you been paid yet?

Prunty: No, no, no. No, we didn't receive pay until...we got a partial pay in Java.

Marcello: Okay, you leave Honolulu.

Prunty: While at Honolulu we picked up some American 75-millimeter

guns and some 37-millimeters, but we forgot to pick up ammunition. Consequently, when we were ready, we didn't have anything but a few rounds of shrapnel. We had no high-explosive ammunition. We didn't have any 37-millimeter ammunition for the antiaircraft-type thing. But we did pick up the American split-trail 75-millimeter guns, which none of us was familiar with, so we had to go into some training on those.

Marcello: When you left Honolulu, you were part of a convoy, were you not?

Prunty: Right. The Navy was replacing some people, and we had with us, I believe, the Chaumont and the Pensacola, which was a light cruiser. Then there was the Republic, and there was two or three more little ol' freighters that I don't recall. We were in a convoy until we crossed the equator. When we crossed the equator, we held initiations. I'd been through a lot of belt lines and initiations of different things, but that was the roughest one that I ever went through. I guess some of the enlisted personnel possibly decided that maybe the noncoms needed working over a little in excess or something, but I really got it (chuckle).

Marcello: It's around this time that you heard about the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Describe what you were doing and how you got the word and

what your reaction was once you heard about it.

Prunty: I don't remember exactly where I was when I got the word, but I know they fell everybody in formation and gave us the word. At that time there was a few commissioned officers, more-or-less, that kind of broke down a little, but the enlisted men as a whole was ready. I've never seen higher morale and haven't since. When that announcement was made, they were ready for them to bring them on, and we'd whip them single-handed.

Marcello: How long was this war going to last?

Prunty: Just until we could get there. It was going to be over in a <u>very</u> short time.

Marcello: At this time, did you perhaps know Frank Fujita yet?

Prunty: No, I didn't know Frank at that time. We were at the camp in Java before I knew Frank.

Marcello: I understand he became the butt of some jokes and several other stuff after this occurred.

Prunty: I'm sure he did. I don't know why, but they didn't let the noncommissioned officers fraternize with the enlisted personnel as much. Of course, I knew all the E Battery sergeants, but I didn't know Frank at that time.

Marcello: What actions did the convoy take once the word had been passed down that the country was at war?

Prunty: I really don't know. Of course, they had the cruiser of the only warship that they had, and it led the way in. Of course,

they had the battalion on board the USS Republic to man the guns. I believe we had one 4-inch on the fantail and two 3-inch. There was two 3-inch on the forward part, and then, of course, they mounted some .30-caliber machine guns (chuckle). We stood watch, is about the only thing. We pulled into the Fiji Islands after that.

Marcello: You didn't stay there very long, did you?

Prunty: No, no. We just atayed there long enough to refuel, take on freshwater, and have the king's men come down and play "Sherman's March Through Georgia" to a bunch of Texas, and they threw everything that was loose at him (chuckle). Of course, they didn't know what the heck was wrong with us. That was really a scream. When that band started up, they threw canteens and anything that was loose at the band. Of course, we were still fighting the Civil War when we weren't fighting one another (chuckle)--the infantry against the artillery and the engineers and so forth.

Marcello: From the Fijis you, of course, change your course and head toward Brisbane.

Prunty: Right. Actually, we had gone around and around out there to my way of thinking. I didn't know, of course. Just a short time out of the Fijis, we were met by a convoy of the United States fleet--what was left of them--the USS Houston and the Marblehead, I believe. Anyway, they sounded General Quarters, and we were just about ready to go into action.

As a matter of fact, we got ready to go into action and were going to welcome the action because we'd sink every darn one of them (chuckle). As it turned out, it was our cruisers, and they were convoying us on in. We had found out at that time, then, that we couldn't get into the Philippines. We couldn't even get to Midway and Guam, so that's when they took us on into Australia.

Marcello: You get into Brisbane on December 21, 1941. What do you do after you land in Brisbane?

Prunty: Well, of course, they had a tug take us up the river, and when we docked, we were unloaded and taken to the Ascot Racetrack. It's now in a nice area in Brisbane, Australia. Being one of the older ones and a noncommissioned officer, that's where I drew my first duty that I didn't want, but it was a direct order.

Marcello: What duty was that?

Prunty: That was MP duty. I got acquainted with the Australians in that manner. I was able to pick my people for the Military Police to go with me. I took twelve and went to the police station in Brisbane. They set us up, and then we were assigned out on duty with their police in sections where they thought there might be some trouble or where some people might go, and they did.

Of course, I came up during prohibition, and there was no such thing as prohibition in Australia. As a matter of

fact, their police station had one of the finest bars that I'd ever seen, and all of them were wanting to buy you a drink. "Goodness, no! We're on duty." Oh well, that didn't make any difference in particular to the Australians, but we resisted that.

Later on, there were some things that did take place. We were called out, and they had to call out the noncommissioned officers on that one because it was too big to handle. There was a place that was, I'd say, two acres, and it was fenced with this sheet iron, and it was a nightclub inside. Well, all of them had got inside that could get inside--Australians and Americans. Of course, there were American sailors, and there was the Army; and it was really a mess. Those that were outside were trying to tear the place apart. You can imagine someone with something beating on that iron. There must have been 2,000 people around that, beating on the iron. That was really something else. I decided right then and there that there'd be no more police duty for me.

Marcello: What sort of a reception did you generally receive from the Australian civilians?

Prunty: Wonderful. Of course, we were broke. We had spent what money we had in the ship's store. We had not been paid. We had wonderful relations with the Australians. As a matter of fact, there were families that came out to the camp and took as many of the boys home with them as they could for

Christmas dinner. At Christmas there just wasn't anybody there in camp. I had to stay because I had to go back on duty. I requested relief but didn't get any.

Marcello: I guess there was an absence of males your age in Australia at that time.

Prunty: Right. There was. It was older people that were there. As a matter of fact, the Australians, goodness, they had gone in the army at fifteen or sixteen. There just wasn't... it was kids or older men in Australia at that time. The Australian people were very, very hospitable.

Marcello: You really didn't do anything there of a military nature, did you?

Prunty: No, we didn't. Actually, they unloaded the guns and other equipment from the Bloemfontein. We were going to set up a reception center for troops that would be coming in following us. As far as I know, we were the first troops to ever land or to be south of the equator in wartime. There wasn't anyone else there when we arrived.

At that time we got orders, then, to board a Dutch ship to go up to Java. The 19th Bomb Group had been run out of Clark Field in the Philippines, and we were the only American troops between there and the United States. Of course, Hawaii had been put out of commission--Schofield. They put us aboard the Bloemfontein, and then they gave orders for us to disembark and go ahead with our reception center. The

colonel said we were just to stay on board until the next morning. Well, the next morning we were going up the Barrier Reef (chuckle) The Dutch ship took off.

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

Prunty: It was a very modern ship and had about a top speed of better than forty knots. It wasn't a very large ship, but just the battalion and the 26th Brigade was all of it. That's where we were initiated on the International Date Line--on it. We were fired on a couple of times by Japanese submarines which, luckily, it missed or the captain outmaneuvered them or something. Anyway, we didn't get hit.

That is a most beautiful cruise. If anybody wants to take a cruise--one that's beautiful--I'd say take one from Port Darwin--and certainly don't stop at Port Darwin (chuckle) --up through the Timor Sea to Java. That Timor Sea is just like a mirror. The phosphorous in the water, especially at night, makes it just look like a Christmas tree.

Marcello: Your destination on this part of your voyage is Surabaja in Java.

Prunty: That's where we docked, yes. From there we were loaded on a train and taken to Malang, which was up in the mountains, a very beautiful little city. From Malang--oh, I don't know--it was about six miles up to an airfield called Singosari.

Marcello: This was a Dutch airfield, was it not?

Prunty: Yes, and it was a fighter field. It wasn't a bomber field. But the Americans had decided to use that as a bomber field. It had a dirt strip.

Marcello: Is this where you met the 19th Bomb Group?

Prutny: Yes, at Singosari.

Marcello: Were they there when you came, or did they arrive after you?

Prunty: Well, there were some of them there. There were a few planes there when we arrived. Of course, there was others trying to get in all the time. They were trying to bring in other people, and did get some. They got two old B-24s in from the States with new pilots on them, and, of course, they had never set down on a dirt strip. Of course, it rains every day--at the same time every day.

Marcello: What was to be your function once you got there?

Prunty: Only thing I knew of at that time was that we were just going to be settled there for troops coming in and reception. Then, of course, immediately after we got there, the 19th Bomb Group didn't have any ground crew at all, and Colonel Eubanks asked if he could have some personnel to use for gassing planes and loading ammunition and getting the planes ready to go out again. Of course, our mechanics had never been mechanics on an airplane, but, actually, it was gasoline motors, so they went to work on that. Then after many hours of flight training, they'd remove that motor and put in a new motor. We had some of those coming in.

Then other planes would come in with a pilot that wasn't trained for that kind of stuff, and he would hit that wet dirt and slide completely off and wreck the plane at the other end of the field. I don't really know, but I'd say this strip was from 3,000 to 4,000 feet. Being dirt, when you came in and set down, you had to set it down immediately and stay off the brake, or you'd sure wreck it. And those wrecked planes, they took the motors out of those and put into the others. We'd also patch up the ones that came in shot up and so forth.

Marcello: Did any of the men ever go out on bombing missions?

Prunty: Yes. As a matter of fact, the first casualty that we had was out of F Battery. They went on a mission, and they didn't make it back. Then we had a number of boys who transferred to the Air Force as replacements. They were flying old B-17s, and then they got some B-18s in, and then they got a couple of B-18Ds. They had tail guns in them. We always got quite a kick out of that. The Japanese Zeros had never been behind one of them. They could always get behind an old B-17 and then completely eat it up because they didn't have...well, they had wing guns or wing turrets. But those tail guns really put a stop on some things.

Marcello: What were you personally doing once you got to Singosari?

Prunty: Actually, that was another one of those orders I got. I took over as provost-sergeant on the island of Java. That

was another one of those jobs that you don't like but have to do. But we made the best of it.

Marcello: What exactly would you be doing?

Prunty: Policing the American troops. Actually, we'd send a couple of trucks each evening into town and let them blow off a little steam, but it was certainly my job to see that there wasn't too much steam that got underway. I had to get them loaded on those trucks and get them back to camp at curfew.

Marcello: They would be going into Malang?

Prunty: Yes. And there wasn't a thing on earth to do in Malang but drink some beer. There was a couple of real nice cafes, a picture show. The biggest thing they did was to ride in these rickshaws--riding around the streets in those things. They had a bicycle with a little buggy on the back of it where two people could get in. This native driver would drive the bicycle with a buggy on the back. That was really a novelty.

The thing of it was, we had got a partial pay then and just had money running out our ears. I think the exchange was about 16 to 1 then. We didn't have anyplace to put the money. So as we used to in the United States, if you got a taxi and if you didn't ride it two blocks, you paid the fare. Well, their fare over there was 25¢, Dutch money, anywhere in the city. It got to where, by the way, if you weren't riding but a block or two, it was 10¢, Dutch money,

and that was only about 2¢ or 3¢. We'd get in those little rickshaw buggies and take off, and they might not go a block until they'd seen somebody they wanted to talk to or seen something they wanted to look at, and they'd stop and get out and give him a quarter. Goodness, he was making money fast. It got to where they wouldn't pick up the Dutch people at all. Many a time I'd have to make the G.I.s get out of a taxi and let a Dutch woman that had a bunch of groceries get in, and the native didn't want to do it at all. But you could threaten him a little, and he'd get in line.

Another thing was going out and dealing with one of those old natives on the street that might make 2¢ or 3¢ a day as his total wage. Maybe he brought in some papayas or some little something in to sell, maybe a dozen duck eggs, or just two duck eggs. I've seen many of them come in with a duck egg in each hand. By the way, they'd just have on an old sarong, and it was dirty and torn. It was fine if you could buy him a sarong, but they weren't allowed in those nice cafes because they didn't have the money to be in there. The boys would just get one, by golly, and they'd take him in and set him down at the table and order for him. That made him...I've seen them just cry and take on and beg. They thought we were going to try to do something to them. The language barrier, though, was such that they

couldn't tell him that they just wanted to feed him because he looked hungry. We finally found out, though, after we got a bunch of little books of Malay...and there's only twenty-eight words in the Malay vocabulary. That really wasn't hard to learn, but it's the expression that you put on the word as to how it means. But we finally found out that those people didn't like beefsteak. We could buy them the best beefsteak there was over there, and they didn't like it; but you could buy him an old dried fish, and he was your friend for life. Just rice and a dried fish, and he was with you.

Marcello: What sort of a relationship developed between the Americans and the Dutch there at Singosari?

Prunty: Not very good because of this money thing. Between the natives, the Javanese, and the Americans it was fine. Everything was just fine--you bet--because of the economic part of it. I had good relations with the Dutch there, but you could understand their feelings. They had been used to the way they were doing it, and they weren't particularly affluent. For instance, if they wanted to go somewhere, there wasn't any way they could go unless they walked because the natives would not pick them up in their little motorcycle taxis and bicycle taxis and those poor old rickshaws, because they could wait just a few minutes and there'd be a G.I. come along, and he'd pay him twice as much as they

would to take them clear across town.

Marcello: So the G.I.s were upsetting the local economy.

Prunty: Completely, yes. We certainly did. We had some talks about that, but it continued on the same way.

Marcello: What did you do with your artillery pieces?

Prunty: Of course, we placed the artillery pieces in gun emplacements, and, of course, when our first bombing raid came, we opened fire. They were low enough down that we did get a hit on them with shrapnel.

Marcello: Give me the details on that first bombing raid, which, I think, occurred around February 3, 1942. Is that down pretty close?

Prunty: Yes, it was in February, but I sure couldn't tell you the day. They came in, and, by golly, by this time we had gotten some more of this propaganda that we'd had ever since we was in. We'd been told that if the Japanese came into the war, there wouldn't be anything to it because those planes they flew were made out of bamboo and were slow-flying and just wouldn't stand anything. But we got to thinking after Pearl Harbor, by golly, that there must be something to it. Then the 19th boys gave us some ideas as to what was happening. Then when they came in and bombed us the first time, we knew because they were firing point blank, by the way, with .50-caliber machine guns and .30-caliber machine guns. You could see the tracers just go up to them and turn

and go around, it looked like. Of course, it was an optical illusion, I'm sure. Then, of course, a Zero in a dive has a wind shield around that will turn a bullet. From a .30-caliber, it doggone sure will.

Marcello: So what kind of warning did you receive?

Prunty: Oh, it was a siren. It was almost immediately after we got the warning, because they were there, too.

Marcello: And these were mainly Zeros that came in?

Prunty: Yes. They came in first. Then I believe it was three or four bombers that came in. We knew they had to be pretty close for a bomber to get there because they were two-motor bombers. We knew that they couldn't compete with the B-17s, B-18s, and B-24s that we had for range. We knew they had to be getting somewhere pretty close.

But it was on their first run that they hit the airfield, and then when we opened up on them, they came back and made another run. They didn't only hit the airfield. They hit the camp, and they also hit the gun emplacements. That's where one gun was completely...the recoil system was shot out.

The other boys on the number four gun...we had dug slit trenches right by our guns, and it hit close enough to bury them in their slit trench. We were just getting Sparkman dug out, and they came over again. Lightning don't strike twice in the same place, but bombs fall in the same

place because it covered him up again (chuckle). That time it broke his back. That was the only casualty that we had there, that is, while on the gun crews. We took him to the hospital. He was out at sea months later, and I believe he was drowned at sea when his POW ship was torpedoed. They were trying to get out to Japan.

Marcello: What were your thoughts or emotions while you were subjected to this first air attack?

Prunty: That first air attack didn't bother us so bad, but when it became evident that those planes weren't falling out of the air like ducks, then there had to be something wrong. On the next run, by golly, you hunted for cover. I never shall forget one of the Navy boys. He was off a submarine, and he was a Jack County boy. He heard where we were after he'd got over there. He met one of the boys down at Surabaja that he knew, that was down there getting supplies. He'd come home with him. He had leave. He just came up to Singosari with him, and we had that while he was there, and he was in a white uniform. You think about it now, and it was real funny. He rubbed mud on himself (chuckle), and two other boys were rubbing mud on him because he stood out. He wasn't camouflaged. There were some things that happened, then, in the next raid that it really got bad. Nerves got pretty taut.

Marcello: About how often did these raids occur?

Prunty: They started, then, about two a week, but then they got to coming every other day. Then at the last, they were coming every day.

Marcello: By the time those air raids had run their course, what kind of damage had been done to the field?

Prunty: Actually, the field hadn't been damaged so bad. We had emplacements with dummy planes in them, and they had really worked on those. They had got some of the planes on the field, all right, but the runways weren't so bad that what we couldn't repair them between the time they left and the time they came back again. We landed planes on them all the time.

Marcello: Incidentally, were you ever told why you were sent to Java?

Prunty: No, I never was. I didn't know. I wasn't "in the know" that much, but we sort of thought we were Shanghaied from Australia up to Java by the Dutch. I'm sure that's not right because I think our government went ahead and sent us because we kept up a propaganda run all the time. The guns that we didn't have ammunition for, we were pulling those from one end of that island to the other. There was a truck convoy going all the time from Bandung back down to Surabaja and from Batavia. It was strictly propaganda. Sometimes you'd have trucks full of men; at other times you wouldn't have a soul in there but the driver, and he'd have a tarp down.

Marcello: Did this occur even before you had evacuated Singosari?

Prunty: Yes. That propaganda stuff was going on while we were there at Singosari. After we left Singosari, we were in action in just a short time, so we didn't have any more of that just driving around.

Marcello: On January 27, 1942, the 19th Bomb Group evacuated.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: What was the reaction of you and your buddies when you found out that they would be leaving?

Prunty: There again, I wasn't very closely connected back at the battery. I'd come in and sleep and get up, and by noon I'd have to be back into Malang to receive people coming in and so forth, and then I didn't get back until late. But the general consensus of it was that we'd be leaving just any time. Of course, with anything like that, there's always rumors. Some of them get wild, too. They were offers given to transfer. There was a bunch of them that wanted to transfer, but they were turned down. The battalion headquarters turned that down. Then there was actually an offer made to take us off the island--leave our equipment and take us off the island--but that was also turned down by Allied headquarters.

Marcello: At this point is morale still pretty high?

Prunty: Yes. Oh, yes. Of course, just a few days after they took off, we stacked our belongings, our footlockers and so forth, and E Battery was left to take them into storage as

a rear guard.

Marcello: The Japanese evidently landed on February 28, 1942, at night. Then, I believe, the next day--next morning--you evacuated Singosari.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: And is this when you, in essence, stacked your personal belongings and all that sort of thing?

Prunty: That's right. We went up the island then.

Marcello: You're separated from E Battery.

Prunty: Yes, right. E Battery went back to Surabaja, and we went up the island to Bandung. We didn't go all the way into Tjilatjap or Batavia.

Marcello: What were you doing once you left Singosari?

Prunty: We were moving up in support of the Australians, who had two companies of infantry. There was the 2nd/2nd Machine Gunners, and they had some engineers. It was all rifle personnel. We moved up in support of them. I've even forgot the names of the little ol' towns.

Marcello: But you were constanly on the move, were you not?

Prunty: Yes. We would ride on up. Oh, I can't think of the town where we went into action.

Marcello: So you actually did have contact with Japanese troops.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what took place.

Prunty: Well, the Australians and the forward observers were up

ahead. We went into a gun emplacement, and they called for fire. I didn't see any of the Japanese at that time. We fired for adjustment with just four guns. Then after we got our adjustments, they called for "fire for effect." We fired for, I guess, thirty to thirty-five minutes, and that was putting rounds through pretty fast. They called for a cease fire on it then. We had stopped their advance at that time. There was a bridge that we had blown out. We had stopped their advance there.

Then we had our second "go" at it. By the way, they had gone down the river and were crossing again. They called for "fire for effect." Then they called for us to fall back to another point, and it was right at night at that time. I lost all sense of direction then because I was pretty tired, and when I got in the truck, I went to sleep.

Marcello: I'm sure that there must have been chaos and confusion all during this period.

Prunty: Oh, yes, there was quite a bit. Actually, as far as our gun crews were concerned, as a matter of fact, when we first opened up, when we first started firing, you would have thought it was a bunch of Comanche Indians in the picture show, the way they were taking on. They were ready. Then there's the misinformation that you get and so forth.

Anyway, we hooked up and took off again on another problem and went into a rubber plantation. They fed us at

this rubber plantation. While we were there, we got orders to just camouflage there in that rubber orchard. There must probably have been fifty or a hundred acres of just rubber trees, and, of course, they were real thick foliage. We pulled in there and stayed there all day.

Marcello: In the meantime, did the Japanese have control of the air?

Prunty: Yes, complete control. We had some fighter planes at Bandung, but they were never uncrated. They were still on the railroad cars.

After we left the rubber plantation, then we...I don't remember whether it was that same day or the next day that they told us that the Dutch were capitulating the island.

Marcello: This occurred on March 8, 1942, I believe.

Prunty: Actually, that was the official date, I believe. I think we got the word on March 7, that they were going to do that and that we would be on our own. We were ready to go into engagement with them some more, and, of course, there were some of those rumors that the *Houston* and the *Perth* would be in to take us off the island, and all we needed to do was fight our way to the coast, which we were prepared to do.

Marcello: So your immediate reaction, then, was really to the effect that the surrender wouldn't bother you too much since you'd be getting off the island.

Prunty: Yes. We were going to get away from there. But then the next day, at about 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning, the high

command, the Allied command, and a Colonel Searle, who was the highest ranking American of the Allied forces, told us to lay our arms down. We were told that we shouldn't go anywhere unless individually. Some of the boys tried to go ahead, and they took staff cars and jeeps and so forth and tried to make it to the coast. They did get to the coast, but there wasn't anywhere to go when they got there. I didn't. I stayed with the unit.

That's another thing I remember. This sergeant who died last year, he and I talked about it and said, "Well, now look, we've got a responsibility to a bunch of these kids that we brought." So we stayed with the unit. We dismantled our guns and disabled our guns to where they couldn't be fired. The old recoil mechanism on the 75-millimeters were under pressure, so all we did was,we took the firing pins cut and threw them away and then depressurized our recoil mechanism. There's no way you could use them. You had to go into ordnance repair to repressure those. There wasn't no way they could be used again. We burned some automobiles. We tested our trucks to see which one would run the longest without oil in them and so forth. You know, the Chevrolet will just run longer (chuckle). It really did.

Marcello: Run longer than a Ford, perhaps?

Prunty: Yes. We had one Ford, and the rest of them were Dodges.

That Chevrolet will run longer than the Ford or the Dodge. The Ford went first, then the Dodge, then the Chevrolet.

Marcello: What was your immediate reaction when you heard that you would be surrendering?

Prunty: Well, of course, there again, you didn't know what to think. We had heard these rumors of the way prisoners-of-war were treated, which we really didn't know. We were sure that all of our belongings would be taken away from us, that any money that we had would absolutely be no good. We didn't know. Hell, we thought perhaps some of us would be executed. There's a lot of thought that go along with that, and a whole lot of rumors go along with that. But then you get thinking about it, and there was a chance that they would obey the Geneva Convention, that there was provisions made for prisoners-of-war; that we weren't, actually, completely disgraced by surrendering because it had just been swept out from under us, that we had done all we could. There actually wasn't anybody particularly afraid of dying. Well, I might say that there might have been an officer or two that showed a few signs of being a little afraid, but otherwise, as far as the men were concerned, it was very orderly. They just decided to accept whatever fate brought.

Marcello: Were the orders given by the officers that you were to destroy the equipment and so on, or did you just simply do it on your own?

Prunty: No, we did that on our own.

Marcello: I'm assuming that the orders they received from the Dutch through the Japanese were that all equipment was to remain intact.

Prunty: We were to turn over all the equipment in good order. Well, as far as it looked, it was in good order, but it was not in working order. The trucks, for instance, were in good order, other than they had the motor burned out of them.

Marcello: How about your small arms?

Prunty: We buried them. There was money buried. Some would light a cigar or a cigarette with a $100 bill--no problem. They told us that we could keep our mess gear and our blanket, our clothing, personal items. I kept a little ol' .32-caliber pistol for a long, long time.

The thing of it is, when the Japanese took over, they didn't search us. I didn't know what I was going to get for it. Actually, it didn't belong to me. It belonged to my gunner corporal, and he didn't know what to do with it. It wasn't Army issue. It was a little old Smith and Wesson .38. I kept it a long time.

Marcello: You had it even after you went into POW camp.

Prunty: Yes. I left it there at Bicycle Camp because they were shaking us down then.

Marcello: Describe your first meeting or encounter with the Japanese now that the surrender had occurred.

Prunty: From this racetrack where we had left our equipment as instructed...

Marcello: You went to another racetrack, and this was at Garoet, I think. Isn't that correct?

Prunty: I don't remember the name of it, but it was a racetrack in central Java. From there we moved up to a tea plantation and stayed up there a week or so.

Marcello: How long were you at the racetrack?

Prunty: Oh, only maybe a week.

Marcello: Did you see very many Japanese while you were there?

Prunty: No, not many. We left the tea plantation then. We went down on the side of a road in a sort of a park. That's where I first saw any of the Japanese. They were Japanese front line troops.

Marcello: Describe what they looked like.

Prunty: Well, I was so shocked when I saw them when they came back. They were friendly. They wanted to talk. They wanted to talk to the G.I. They didn't want to talk to the officers. They wanted to talk to the soldiers. What they wanted to talk about was home. They were homesick as the dickens, themselves. They were just real nice fellows. They were real clean-cut. I'd say they were all in the neighborhood of six feet tall, possibly 170 to 180 pounds. We had always been told--through propaganda--that they were real small of stature and wore horn-rimmed glasses and so forth.

Not so. There wasn't a one of those that had on glasses (chuckle), and all of them were big, good speciman of men. They weren't dark; they were lighter complected. They were just athletic-looking. They were just a good speciman of men and certainly were very polite and just wanted to stop and talk. They wanted to get acquainted with us. They never seen an American.

Marcello: So at this point, then, I guess you thought that being a prisoner-of-war might not be too bad.

Prunty: That's about the way we thought: "It's not going to be as bad as we thought it was." That soon changed, I might say. Not with the front line troops, though. Everytime we were in contact with the Japanese fighting troops, it was the same thing. They were very, very nice people.

Marcello: Let's back up for a minute. You mentioned that you spent about a week at a tea plantation. I'm assuming that you still had vehicles to take you from the racetrack up to this tea plantation.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: What'd you do while you were at the tea plantation?

Prunty: Just not anything. Exercise, of course. We held calisthenics. That was about the extent of it. We were just waiting to see what was going to happen.

Marcello: At this stage is military discipline and so forth still being maintained?

Prunty: Oh, you bet. Yes, sir. It was, very much so.

Marcello: Who was your battery commander, incidentally?

Prunty: Huddleston Wright. I know that in the other interviews you've heard of Captain Wright.

Marcello: You mentioned you're at this tea plantation for a short period of time, and I'm assuming that you don't have any Japanese there.

Prunty: No, no Japanese there at all. As a matter of fact, they had come in on this racetrack. The tea plantation was just on the mountain from the racetrack. The Japanese had come in on the racetrack, and that's where they were operating from. They had us up some two miles, I guess, high in the mountains at a beautiful mansion. It was just really with a view that's just unimaginable.

Marcello: I understand that climate-wise and so on, it was fairly nice, too.

Prunty: Oh, yes. Java is just a little miniature garden all over--all that I've seen. They irrigate the mountains clear to the top. I've never figured out how they get the water up there, but they do.

Marcello: So what happens at that point, that is, after you leave the tea plantation?

Prunty: We moved down on the side of the road for a few days. Then the Japanese were trying to drive some of the American trucks, and it was unbelievable to them that any American could just

get in a truck or a car and drive it. They wanted us to show them how to use the gears. They'd get those trucks, by the way, in a low gear, and away they'd go. It was just unbelievable to them, and yet it was also unbelievable to them that there wasn't any more of us than what there were, that there just had to be some more people somewhere. That was, of course, the interrogation that went on. Not with the enlisted men. They didn't interrogate on enlisted man.

After just a few days at the foot of the mountain, they brought their trucks and took us to a nearby railway station. We were put on a train there. We didn't know where we were headed, but actually they took us into Batavia. The change in the population of Java had taken place. Prior to this, the native population had really been friendly with the American G.I., and they'd rather that the Dutch were just not there. That changed immediately. The Dutch were real friendly to us, but the native population was bad.

Marcello: Can you give me some examples?

Prunty: Yes. For instance, when we was going through Bandung, crowds gathered along the tracks and threw rocks and rotten vegetables and anything else they could throw at the train. Of course, some of our guys, not thinking much about it, when we pulled in there and stopped, it was sort of like the Fiji Islanders playing "Sherman's March Through Georgia" to these Texas boys. They all had windows open to talk to

the natives. Of course, we had got to where we could converse a little in Malay. For some of them it was to their sorrow because they got hit with first one thing and then another.

Marcello: Do you have any Japanese on this train?

Prunty: If we do, they are the engineer, because there wasn't anybody in back with the troops. They took us on into a railroad station in Tanjong Priok.

Marcello: Tanjong Priok?

Prunty: Tanjong Priok. That's one of the places that I went back to see three years ago. I went over there. Actually, the place hasn't changed much except that that's the first time that we got acquainted with the Korean guards and the Japanese noncoms in charge. They're the occupation Army.

Marcello: How did you get from the rail station to the camp itself?

Prunty: Well, from the rail station, we walked.

Marcello: How far was it?

Prunty: Hell, it must have been a hundred miles (chuckle). WHEW! That was before we learned about this hiking in full gear. There was many, many loads that was dumped into the bayou (chuckle) as we went along, and everytime you did, you got a whipping for it.

Marcello: Is this where you came in contact with your first physical punishment?

Prunty: Yes, there at the railroad station was the first time.

We had been in charge of the military discipline, and the officers and the noncommissioned officers were still in charge.

When we arrived there, they told us that they wanted to count. Of course, we fell out in sections like we always had and dressed up and counted off. Well, that was fine for the officer that had told us in the first place that they wanted to count. Everything was just fine. Of course, we reported to our first sergeant, and the first sergeant reported to the battery commander, and he in turn reported to this officer, which was perfectly all right. Everything just went fine.

Then there was another little, ol'...he was a three-star or whatever that is in Japanese. He was noncommissioned. He decided that he needed to count, too. Well, he wanted us to count in Japanese. There wasn't any way that we could do that (chuckle). Dang it, he made all the section chiefs get in the ranks, and the commissioned officers had to fall in. He wanted a count, but there was no way. We didn't know anything about counting in Japanese.

He told somebody to count, and they didn't count, and that's when they started doing a little fisticuff work. It was pretty bad. It was the first time in my life that I ever had a man slap me, and I didn't try to cut his throat. I had always been raised, by golly, that...we had some pretty

rough times out in the country, by golly. Some boys would come in from another community somewhere, and we just got together, and you learned how to take care of yourself. That was the hardest thing in the world. I just didn't think I could stand it at all.

Marcello: I've heard several other people make the same comment, especially when in this case most of these guards were much smaller than you guys were.

Prunty: Oh, yes. This was the occupation army. They were little. It was just awfully hard to take. And then to have to stand there, and none of them could get the same count. I bet we stood in that railroad station three hours. One would count, and then the other would count. Then they decided, well, no, that we couldn't count in their language, and they couldn't understand this counting in ours, so they'd just have to count them all theirself. One would count, and there'd be another come along counting right behind him, and they'd get the wrong number. They wouldn't get the same answer. Oh, we had a time of it there.

Marcello: So you finally get to Tanjong Priok. Take me on a tour of this camp as you remember it at that time.

Prunty: Well, it was just an open field, near a sandy area covered with marsh grass. It was close to the coast there. We probably weren't half a mile inland. It was very flat on a sea plain. There was some old barracks of stone that they were putting us into, and there was a barbed wire fence

stretched around this. It was not a very substantial fence but just a few wires stretched up. There was an old, partially falling-down building that they put our kitchen into. The sanitary facilities were just nil.

Marcello: Can you describe what they were like? Or what they weren't like?

Prunty: At Tanjong Priok, like all of Java, there was just a slit trench--a ditch--some twelve or fourteen inches deep and six inches wide, and there was water running through. Well, these ditches were there, but there wasn't any water running through them. Consequently, we had to dig garbage pits and slit trenches for a latrine and so forth. That was pretty bad. The water table is close there. You couldn't dig a hole very deep without it being water. The facilities was... well, it was just bad and crowded, too.

They started some work parties out of this, and at that same time we started trying to clear the place up if we was going to have to live there. In cleaning up in this old, partially falling-down building, we were digging in, and we found a bunch of cheese that, I guess, would be all right, but to us it had been there too long. Of course, I understand that the way they buried cheese and so forth, the worms would get in it, and it just makes it better. Well, at that time, of course, we were still used to American food, which we ran out of there and had to start trying to improvise on

rice and so forth, so that cheese was worse than any Limburger cheese there ever was. To a bunch of people that had never been used to eating of stuff of that nature, well, it was just unclean. Consequently, that's when the dysentery and other diseases started hitting.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute and talk just a little bit more about the physical part of this camp. What were your living quarters like?

Prunty: They were just stone buildings, and some of them had raised portions on the floor for your bed. It did shelter you from the rain. It had a tile roof. There was some electricity. At least there had been. I know we made a coffee pot out of...we took a bucket of water and took two wires and put it in there for an element and connected it. By golly, we made one pot of coffee that was sure all right, but by the time we got around to making a second one, it blew a fuse (chuckle). We had all the camp down on us and all the Japanese and all the Koreans. They was all hunting for whatever it was that blew the fuses in the camp. Consequently, they didn't find out because we had already had our baptism down at the railroad depot, and we took care of things like that.

But it was in that camp that I personally...after we'd been there about a week, I made a sick call one morning. We still had a doctor at that time--Dr. Lumpkin. I'd known

him even back in the National Guard camp days. I made a sick call, and there was, I guess, twenty-five or thirty lined up. He didn't have any medicines. He was just sitting there on a sidewalk listening to their story. I think he had some quinine and two or three different things at that time.

Anyway, he came to me, and he said, "Prunty, what are you doing here?" "I just really don't feel good, by the way." He said, "Dysentery?" I said, "No. As a matter of fact, I'm constipated." He said, "How long has it been since you had a bowel movement?" I said, "Oh, about three days." He said, "What are you bragging about? It's been over a week since I've had one!" (chuckle) He said, "Wait a minute here. You're feeling bad?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Come a little closer here. I want to see this." I had broken out. He said, "That's the first time I've seen that in years. Yeah, there's no doubt about it." He put his finger on one of the bumps and rolled it around. He says, "No doubt about it. That's the first time I've seen that since I got out of medical school." He said, "Go back and get on your bunk, and I won't let you go out on a working party."

Marcello: He never told you what it was?

Prunty: No. So I walked back out there. They wanted to know how I made out--what was wrong. "Well, I don't know. He just said it was the first time he had seen it since medical school."

Ol' John Hensley said, "Man, that looks like shingles." By golly, if you get shingles it'll kill you. If they go around, it'll kill you. They got me a little bit excited. They got my attention on it, and two or three of them were talking about shingles, and I had heard those old wives' tales myself.

So back down there I went. He looked up at me and said, "What are you doing back down here?" I told him. I said, "By golly, is that shingles?" He said, "It sure is. That's exactly what it is." I said, "They tell me if that goes all the way around, it'll kill you." He said, "That's right. It'll darn sure do it." By then I was really tore up, but I went on back. I said, "Yeah, he said it was shingles." They all really started giving me a hard time.

But in about an hour, he came up there, and he sat down, and he said, "Now, Prunty, goddarnit, I've got all I can do, so when I tell you to do something, that's what you do. I intended for you to come back up here and lay down and behave yourself. That's shingles. If they go all the way around you, they kill you; but they won't ever go all the way around. They may get awful close, but they'll never go all the way around." That's the last time the doctor got to treat me. Of course, just a few days after that, they moved us into Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: At Tanjong Priok were there any other nationalities other

than the Americans?

Prunty: There was a few Dutch. They didn't stay there but just two or three days, the best I remember. But there were a few Dutch they brought in. Then as we were moving out, they were moving in some Australians and possibly some more Dutch.

Marcello: Who was providing the rations in this camp?

Prunty: As far as I know, the Japanese were issuing rations, but we had to go out and carry them in.

Marcello: And what did those rations mainly consist of?

Prunty: Rice and Chinese cabbage. We had money. Some of it was from our mess supplies, our battery fund. There was other money that was brought in by, for instance, Lieutenant Stensland, who had come in with a lot of money. Where it came from, of course, there's always rumors, but I never knew. It didn't bother me that much because I didn't have anyplace to spend the money, anyway. We all kind of got over the first diarrhea, dysentery, or whatever from the flies and so forth.

When they took us uptown to Bicycle Camp, we had shed a lot of gear, all right, but when we got in there and were just getting settled, and they started bringing in other Americans--the Navy--we wished a lot then that we had gone ahead and hung on to a lot of gear that we threw away because they could certainly use it. They got ashore without anything.

Marcello: Let's back up a little bit before we get to that point. Describe the quality of the rice that you received here at Tanjong Priok.

Prunty: Well, of course, it was the first rice that we had been issued, and it was terrible. It contained not only dirt but worms, bugs. When you cooked it...I don't know what you call them, but we see them here in the United States, here in Texas, in wood. They're kind of jointed-looking, and they'll eat into wood, and they've got a red head. They're a white worm with a red head. The first number of days there, it got to where you sat and picked those worms out. But it finally wore on. It didn't get to me until later on that I'd have the worms look out for themselves (chuckle). There was also weevils. And that cheese...I bit into a piece of cheese and had half a worm. It wasn't very appetizing (chuckle).

Marcello: One ol' boy told me he used to eat his rice in the dark because that way he couldn't see the worms and the other critters in it (chuckle).

Prunty: After we got up into the jungle, you didn't pay any attention to that sort of thing. You just ate.

Marcello: Well, here at Tanjong Priok, were you getting three meals a day?

Prunty: No, two meals. That was adequate for the kind of meals we were getting. That's where we first had a little weight loss.

Marcello: I'm going to turn over the tape at this stage [tape turned over]. Did the cooks have a very hard time learning how to prepare that rice at first?

Prunty: Certainly. They had no idea how to go about cooking rice. They didn't have anything to cook it in in the first place, I don't think. Of course, they had a big, ol' dish that looked like a disc off of a plow and about three times as big. It didn't have any hole in the center. I don't know what the official name of it was. We called it a "wajon." That's what they cooked that rice in. Of course, either it would be just mush or it would be burned, one. But they finally got to where they learned how to pull their fire and cook the rice. But there at Priok they didn't learn while they was there. They were in the process of learning (chuckle), all right.

Priok was terrible. It was terrible. Of course, being the first camp of that nature, certainly it would have been, I suppose.

Marcello: It was a real shock, I guess.

Prunty: It was definitely a shock.

Marcello: I guess this is where you first began to realize what it was going to be like to be a prisoner-of-war.

Prunty: Right. Our work wasn't so hard there at Priok.

Marcello: Describe what the work details were like there.

Prunty: The work details going out from Priok went to the docks

and rolled drums of gasoline around. There wasn't anybody hurrying anybody. It was just sort of a job to do. That soon came to a halt.

Marcello: Were these work details voluntary there?

Prunty: Yes, the work details were voluntary. The first sergeant generally assigned people to go out unless somebody wanted to volunteer to get out of camp.

Marcello: Did people volunteer to go on those details?

Prunty: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Quite regularly?

Prunty: Yes. Of course, after we got away from Priok, you just didn't go out unless you wanted to because there was always somebody that wanted to go out.

Marcello: Why was that?

Prunty: Well, they could buy stuff and trade with the natives. I said "natives." The Dutch people--women and children--would always be giving them something or make themselves available for them to buy something.

Marcello: My records indicate that you went into Tanjong Priok on March 31, 1942, and you left on May 14, 1942. Does that seem about right or does that seem like it might be too long, so far as you're concerned?

Prunty: I just don't really remember. It was such a shock that it seemed like we was there a year, but we were there just for a short period of time.

Marcello: Let us assume that my times and dates are correct. What are you learning here about being a prisoner-of-war?

Prunty: The big thing, I think, that we were learning was the fact that we definitely weren't under our government, weren't under our command. We were learning Oriental discipline, which we hated very much to admit that we were doing, but it had to be that way.

Marcello: Can you elaborate on what you mean when you say you had to submit to Oriental discipline?

Prunty: Well, the discipline in their army, of course, allows a buck-private, if he out-rates or if he fit in a little longer than the next man, to literally beat the thunder out of him, and there's not anything the other guy can do about it. He just has to take it and try to do better the next time or tell him he will, anyway.

Marcello: So are you saying, in essence, then, that that kind of physical punishment goes right on down the line and that you guys are at the bottom of the totem pole?

Prunty: Right. You better believe it--from the officers to the noncommissioned officers and each one in line. That's the way they do their discipline.

Marcello: Where do the Koreans fit in?

Prunty: The Koreans are under all Japanese. They're right...well, I started to say they were right next to us, but they're not. The native is in there between us and the Koreans. The

Korean was on the low end of the totem pole, as far as the Japanese were concerned. They just didn't think much of the Koreans at all. Consequently, they've put them down to where the Koreans could boss the natives around, all right, and beat them up. There wasn't any of the natives to ever beat on the Americans, I don't think, but the Koreans certainly did.

They're sadists--the Koreans. Later up in the jungle, I saw a kind of a bamboo pen made, and they had a pig in it. The pig had been brought up for rations. They took sharpened bamboo sticks and punched the pig to hear him squeal. They were standing all around and having a ball. There's not a thing on earth but to hear that pig squeal.

Marcello: What were some of the favorite forms of punishment that the Koreans used at this stage? I've still got you in Tanjong Priok, here?

Prunty: Well, at Tanjong Priok I didn't see any punishment that I remember other than the slapping.

Marcello: Which is more a form of humiliation that physical pain.

Prunty: Right. Later on, it was different.

Marcello: What kind of rules and regulations are the Japanese laying out for the prisoners here at Tanjong Priok? What are you supposed to do in their presence, for instance?

Prunty: For instance, if one of them comes in, you must bow, and that was another form of humiliation to us. If you salute

him, that was certainly understandable to their officers, especially. We knew military discipline. But this bowing ...you must bow, and you must bow in the proper manner or be beat up.

Marcello: When did you bow, and when did you salute?

Prunty: You saluted an officer if you were in rank. But if you met one of the guards or an officer or if he came into your barrack, then you would bow to him. If you met him on the outside, you would bow rather than salute.

Marcello: What else are you learning about how to survive as a prisoner-of-war at this early stage?

Prunty: Well, it was just helping one another.

Marcello: Can you expand on that?

Prunty: Well, no, because we had about everything at Tanjong Priok that we particularly needed other than food. There's always somebody trying to give you some food there, all right. Of course, that's where sickness started, and they was trying to help out in that way.

Marcello: Let's get back to those guards again. I've heard it said that you were also learning this early that it was best just to stay as far away from them as you could--have as little contact with them as you could.

Prunty: Well, that is certainly true. In Priok I didn't have that much contact with them. That comes much later, as far as I was concerned.

Marcello: How about the learning of the language? Are you realizing its importance as early as Priok?

Prunty: Well, certainly, you knew it was, but no one was trying to because you didn't want to be accused of fraternizing with the enemy because it was going to be over next month. It was just a short while, and it would be all over with. You were busy thinking up the ways you were going to talk to someone or the way you would treat them.

Marcello: On May 14, 1942, you are moved from Tanjong Priok to Bicycle Camp. Where was Bicycle Camp located?

Prunty: It was located in the city of Batavia, what they called... well, goodness, I've even forgotten what they call it now. Of course, their history don't go back past 1947 (chuckle). Anyway, it was a Dutch military camp.

Marcello: How did you get from Tanjong Priok to Bicycle Camp?

Prunty: Some of us walked, some of us went by truck.

Marcello: Was it very far?

Prunty: I'd say six or seven miles.

Marcello: Did you have any forewarning that you would be leaving?

Prunty: None. They just told us to fall out with our full gear and that we were moving. The sick people and so forth and some of the baggage was taken by truck. They used those little three-wheel jobs for the sick, but the other people walked.

Marcello: Everybody's in fairly good health at this time.

Prunty: Yes, we were in excellent health other than what sickness we'd had there at Priok.

Marcello: We're approaching Bicycle Camp. Take me on a tour of Bicycle Camp as you remember it at that time. We're approaching the entrance.

Prunty: Bicycle Camp was just a long boulevard. It had a fence on one side and buildings on the other, and it was much like a college campus. The streets were real narrow, however. If a street was eight feet wide, well, that was real wide.

Marcello: Paved or unpaved?

Prunty: Paved with tile. The buildings were of tile. Those buildings were, of course, built in long wings. Some, oh, I'd say, were fourteen feet wide. The wing would be fourteen feet and anywhere from 150 to 200 feet long.

Marcello: Single-story?

Prunty: Single-story. There'd be little cubicles just about six feet wide on either side of the hall, and in those cubicles there was supposed to be two people, but they put four in there.

Marcello: Describe what those cubicles were like on the inside.

Prunty: They were cement, and the outside wall would be tile. The two inside walls was concrete. They were about six-and-a-half to seven feet high, and then it was open at the top.

Marcello: So you had semi-privacy, I guess we could say.

Prunty: Yes, that's right, with the front opening out to the hallway.

Of course, there was nothing in there. You slept on the concrete floor, was where your bunk was.

Marcello: What kind of gear did you have with you at this point?

Prunty: At that time, I think I had three G.I. blankets and a shelter half. I had just about all of my G.I. issue. I had three, maybe four, uniforms. I did throw my overcoat away.

Marcello: You didn't think you'd have any use for it, huh?

Prunty: And I got worked on a little bit for that.

Marcello: What were you carrying your gear in?

Prunty: In your pack. You rolled it in the shelter half and buckled your pack over it. Of course, you had a place for your mess gear and your canteen and so forth.

Marcello: Who was in the cubicle with you?

Prunty: In the cubicle with me was Ed Worthington and Herbert Lucas and, I believe, Glen Bowen. There were four of us in there.

Marcello: Were you assigned to that cubicle, or did you just kind of peel off with people that you wanted to stay with?

Prunty: No, they just sent you here, here, and here as we was marched in. Of course, we traded around some, all right.

Marcello: Who did the initial assigning? The Japanese or your officers?

Prunty: The Japanese. They just marched us in in rank and then just cut off four here and here and right on up the way.

Marcello: What other buildings were in this camp?

Prunty: There was some open-type buildings where they had the mess

hall, where they did the cooking. Of course, they had those "wajons." That's the way the Dutch and the natives cooked, too. They lined those up. There were fire pits for them to set on and so forth. Of course, you formed a line and went by, and you were issued your food.

Marcello: Where did the Japanese stay? What were their quarters like?

Prunty: Well, their quarters was at the entrance, right out at the street. That was where the guardhouse was, and they kept some twenty guards there. The rest of them stayed downtown at the hotel. The occupation army stayed in the hotels there in Batavia.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the Japanese noncoms, that is, their sergeants, had just a tremendous amount of power in these camps.

Prunty: Oh, goodness, yes! A sergeant was almost an emperor. Sometimes there'd be two sergeants to a camp, but he would be the one in charge. They would have an officer that would be the commandant, but he didn't take any...he'd call the sergeant over and "eat him out" pretty good and maybe work him over a little, then send him back to do the same thing to the rest of the troops and then to the prisoners.

Marcello: Approximately how many prisoners were there in Bicycle Camp? That's probably an unfair question, but take a guess at it.

Prunty: There was around 400 of the artillery, and they brought in some 500 or better Navy personnel. Then there was a big

contingent of Dutch troops. They numbered, I'd say, several thousand.

Marcello: How about British and Australians?

Prunty: No, we didn't have British or Australians. There may have been a few. I know we had one Australian that came in and turned himself in as an American. Of course, he stood out like a sore thumb, you know. His accent just would give him away in a minute. It didn't give him away to the Japanese, so we didn't care about that. It was perfectly all right.

Marcello: At this point had the Japanese yet taken any steps to process you, that is, to keep any records, at least, concerning who they had?

Prunty: They started at Bicycle Camp. That's where they called for everybody that...they wanted specialists. Well, we didn't know what kind of specialists they were looking for, and, of course, we had always been told we could give them our name, rank, and serial number. And that's what we did. That got a little out of hand when you wouldn't give them anything but your name, rank, and serial number. Then the officers told us to go ahead and tell them what we did before we went in the Army, where we were from and so forth.

Marcello: Was all this kind of record processing done through your officers, or was this done directly with the Japanese?

Prunty: That part was done with our officers. That's when they took the officers out. The officers wouldn't give them any information, either, and they took them out. Of course, they

told the troops that the officers would be annihilated if we weren't forthcoming with the information. None came so they brought one of two of the officers back and worked them over pretty good in front of the guardhouse so we could see it. They told us to go ahead and give them what information, like, where we was from, what we did.

The funny thing to us was that a truck driver or a school bus driver, something like that, was a specialist. They absolutely didn't believe that anybody could drive a car. That just was unheard of. We soon caught on to that, so there wasn't anybody that could type after the first two or three (chuckle). They separated them out. Bookkeepers, anything like that, they shipped them to Japan.

Marcello: At this stage, I'm assuming that most of your guys did not want to go to Japan.

Prunty: No, we would rather just stay where we were.

Marcello: Did they ever give you any sort of an identification tag or card or...

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: ...anything of that nature?

Prunty: About every week they'd give us a new one, a different one.

Marcello: What would it be? A card?

Prunty: Oh, it would be something in Japanese with a number on it. I think some of the boys still have some of their tags that we were given.

Marcello: It was kind of like...not really like our metal dog tags, but...

Prunty: It was just a wooden number more to identify you, that you were an American and which branch you were in. They had begun to separate people out. The first group was Branch Two, I believe. They took one or two sergeants, I believe, with that group. All the rest were privates, first-class privates. We had no idea where they was going, but they moved them out as a work party. Then Branch Three followed them.

Marcello: Now this is after you've gone up into the jungle, isn't that correct? You're on your way to...

Prunty: I know that the branches was made there at Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Oh, is that right?

Prunty: That's where they first separated them out. Of course, later on, when we got up in the jungle, Branch Two and Branch Three was right together, but they wouldn't let us talk to one another.

Marcello: We were talking about the physical outlay of the camp awhile ago. Is it not true, also, that the various nationalities were segregated?

Prunty: Yes. Yes, they were. That's the reason, if there were any English or Australians there to speak of, I don't know it. They did have the Americans separated from the Dutch. They sure didn't want us talking through the fence to one another.

Marcello: When you arrived in Bicycle Camp. were the *Houston* survivors already there, or did they come after you?

Prunty: There was some of them there, but they brought the bigger part of them in after I got there.

Marcello: You hinted at their condition awhile ago, but describe in detail what you remember about their condition.

Prunty: Well, their condition was such that they just didn't have anything. Some of them got ashore with a pair of skivvy shorts on; and some of them didn't have anything; and others, maybe, would have a pair of pants. None of them had a shirt, and certainly none of them had blankets or anything like that, other than what the native population had given them. That's when we tried to fit everybody.

Marcello: Was this sharing done voluntarily?

Prunty: Yes. Of course, on the USS *Houston*, a good part of them was from Texas. That was a little ironic. As a matter of fact, there was some of them that knew one another. There was some of them that I didn't know. As a matter of fact, a Marine, Marvin Robinson, came over and sat down and was talking. I had met him, but I didn't remember him. But we knew mutual friends, and I remembered meeting him at one of my friend's house. It was stuff like that.

Marcello: The field artillery guys and the *Houston* people were in separate barracks, were they not?

Prunty: Right. They separated them.

Marcello: But there was a unified command.

Prunty: Right. When they started separating them out into branches, though, they mixed them.

Marcello: Who was the overall commander of the American group?

Prunty: It was Blucher Tharp. He was our commanding officer at Camp Bowie.

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

Prunty: At Bicycle Camp the food was fixed up to be real good. The people had learned to cook their rice. The Americans had quite a bit of money, and the Japanese command there said it would be perfectly all right if we wanted to buy rations. That was just fine. Consequently, we bought from the market. They'd send out the mess sergeants from the kitchen with a mess officer, and they'd go out and buy food and bring it into camp. It got a little tiresome eating the same stuff all the time, especially with a rice base, but all in all, we had excellent food at Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: What were some of the things you were eating to supplement the rice?

Prunty: Goodness, to go out on working parties, you could buy just about anything and bring it into camp. Of course, we had lots of peanuts, coconuts, bananas, all kinds of fruit. Bicycle Camp was just...if all prisoner-of-war camps had been like that, everything would've been just fine. Of course, it was all volunteer work.

Marcello: Let's talk about the food a little bit more, and then we'll talk about the work. How many meals did you get here per day?

Prunty: At Bicycle Camp we had three meals most of the time. Some of them was light but substantial.

Marcello: What would breakfast usually consist of?

Prunty: Scrambled eggs, bacon, and, of course, rice flour bread. We fared real well.

Marcello: How about lunch and dinner?

Prunty: Lunch would be fairly light--a little fish or rice, maybe some vegetables. At dinner we'd have a pretty heavy meal, that is, vegetables, rice, and meat. We got beef or water buffalo and pork.

Marcello: What were the chances of getting seconds?

Prunty: Well, at Bicycle Camp it was pretty good if you wanted seconds. That was the good time. That was the Cadillac of all the camps.

Marcello: Did the company money ever cause any kinds of problems or rumors?

Prunty: Well, more than rumors. I won't go into that.

Marcello: You don't want to tell me about that.

Prunty: No, I don't. It's been brought out. One fellow even published it in his book, but anything about the Americans is better left alone.

Marcello: You hinted at this several times before, and let me follow up

on what you said. I almost get the feeling that there's a gap, to some extent, developing between the officers and the enlisted men.

Prunty: Well, that will always happen. It always does if you're in the United States Army. Certainly, you take a civilian army--much as we'd been, with as little Army life as we had--and reverse the command, there was a little feeling there that maybe the officers didn't have as...well, they knew they didn't have as much authority as they once had, even though it was exercised some. Of course, that caused some difficulties which still exist.

Marcello: I guess I didn't phrase my question properly. What I seem to be detecting is that perhaps you were losing some respect from some of your officers. Some of them, perhaps, were not behaving the way one thought officers should behave. You don't have to give me names. You can just answer in general terms.

Prunty: Yes, that is definitely so. It got to a pretty bad situation.

Marcello: On the other hand, is it not true that you find some of the enlisted men who are exhibiting the qualities of real leadership? This situation is bringing out the leadership qualifications of those people.

Prunty: Certainly. That's quite true. When the enlisted men start coming to the noncommissioned officers or to one or two in the enlisted ranks and give them their stories and asking

them what they should do and so forth, oh, yes, you begin to see that develop.

Marcello: Despite whatever difficulties there were between officers and enlisted personnel, how important will military discipline be so far as survival in the long run? When I talk about military discipline, I'm referring to obeying orders and things of that nature.

Prunty: Well, I think there was a breakdown there. It got to where military discipline didn't enter into it at all when the going really got rough. Your discipline was done on a friendship basis, not on a military basis, and a respect basis.

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

Prunty: Well, the work details were very pleasant. You didn't have to work so hard. We were still more-or-less influenced by the front line troops of the Japanese. Even though we did have Korean guards there and the occupation army, the Japanese Army controlled that, too. They was scared to death of the front line troops, and they were the gentlemen.

Marcello: Describe how a typical day took place here at Bicycle Camp from the time you get up in the morning until lights out at night.

Prunty: Well, there were two or three different ways to look at that. If you wanted to go out on a working party, then certainly you got up, and then you fell out much in military fashion,

and then you were taken out by the Japanese guards.

Marcello: What time was reveille?

Prunty: You know, that's something that has got away from me, because it wasn't particularly early.

Marcello: Did you get counted every morning?

Prunty: Oh, yes. You were counted before you left camp, and then you were counted as you came back in, and you were counted on the job. Everybody wanted that count, and you soon learned to count in Japanese.

Marcello: So the work details here were voluntary.

Prunty: Yes. If you didn't want to go out on a work party, all you had to do was say, "Well, I don't care about going out today," and there'd be somebody ready to go. It was voluntary because the work wasn't that hard. They didn't do a whole lot of work, and they got to do a lot of plundering around. As a matter of fact, the Navy equipped itself, clothing-wise and otherwise, a lot out on work parties.

Marcello: Is it safe to say even at this early stage, all the POWs were becoming scavengers?

Prunty: Right. They had sort of learned their lesson, that they were going to have to look out for themselves because the Japanese Army was not going to look after them.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that you tried to pick and choose a work detail in accordance with who the guard was. Pretty soon the guards got quite a reputation.

Prunty: Oh, yes, they each had a reputation. As a matter of fact, the "Brown Bomber" came about there at Bicycle Camp (chuckle).

Marcello: Nobody wanted on his work details.

Prunty: No one wanted to be around him, as a matter of fact.

Marcello: Describe what the"Brown Bomber"was like.

Prunty: Well, he was a little, short, dark-complected Japanese. He was rather heavy. Well, he was a sadist. He just liked to come outside and then run inside in front of a cubicle right quick. If every one of you didn't jump up and bow to him right at that second, why, he'd beat the devil out of the whole bunch.

Another thing that they never could understand about the Americans was somebody getting the dickens beat out of him in front of the guardhouse or in the barracks or wherever for something that didn't amount to a dang, and there was always somebody ridiculing him about it. Everybody was laughing about it. He was getting the dickens beat out of him, and everybody was standing around and laughing at him about it. They just didn't understand that at all.

This "Brown Bomber"...and this ol' boy, Wehring, stuttered a little bit when he got excited, especially. When the "Brown Bomber"...when they was coming through, the word "air raid" would be passed, and, of course, everybody would be on the alert. Well, it didn't take them long to find out what "air raid" meant. The "Brown Bomber" would

come in the hut, and he'd holler, "Air raid!" And he could say it in English. Wehring was a pretty tall fellow, a little over six feet--a pretty good-sized fellow. He didn't bow just right for the "Brown Bomber," so he was just fussing and trying to slap him. Wehring just backed up, by golly, and was standing up straight, and he couldn't hit him (chuckle). He finally got him a little box thing and stood on it and slapped ol' Ben. One of the other boys said, "Ben!" He got stuttering and said, "W-w-what do you want?" He said, "He wants you to bow!" (laughter) He straightened back up, and he said, "Bow? Bow, hell! I'm already bowing." But there was funny things like that going on a lot.

Marcello: Who were some of the other guards who had nicknames?

Prunty: Oh, there was one they called "R.I."

Marcello: "R.I.?"

Prunty: Yes. He was a big...and ol' "Bluebeard," that was an officer. That was on up in the jungle.

Marcello: How did "R.I." get his nickname?

Prunty: His name was Arai.

Marcello: Oh, probably his last name was A-r-a-i--Arai.

Prunty: Yes. Anyway, he imagined himself as a boxer. By golly, he just knew that that was his calling.

Marcello: Did the kinds of punishment change here at Bicycle Camp, or was it still mainly slapping?

Prunty: It was mostly slapping, unless...now at the guardhouse, of

course, if you got caught with some...there was some who got caught coming in with some liquor. For that punishment you had to stand in front of the guardhouse at attention or hold your arms out or stand on one foot or something like that. The worst--about the worst--you could get, by golly, was to kneel down, and they put a bamboo behind your knees. You sat there like that. That was killing. That was torture.

Marcello: How or for what reason would that form of torture be inflicted?

Prunty: For stealing, them catching you stealing something. That had started there, by golly. There was lots of stuff that got by the Japanese,especially if you were standing in ranks being counted off and they're searching you as you go down. Stuff can be passed from one to the other just right on, and be passed right back past them. Once in a while they'd catch you like that, and when they did, well, of course, that was some punishment to be had.

Marcello: I'm not saying that it's right what the Japanese were doing, but at the same time is it accurate to say that a lot of those punishments were done because you had broken their rules?

Prunty: They were in the wrong. Yes, the prisoners were wrong, and that's the reason it was funny to a lot of the rest of them. It was funny to see them whipping stuff around, all right, but when they got caught and got the dickens beat out of them, by the way, then you could laugh about that. They

could laugh about it after it was over. A bunch of that stuff was done just to see if we couldn't get by with it. There wasn't any of them particularly in need that got whippings for bringing stuff into camp.

Marcello: In other words, it was almost good for morale to have been able to put something over the Japanese.

Prunty: Oh, yes, definitely so. It was fairly easy to do. Just like later on, when we'd get in need to steal from the Japanese, they just, by golly, didn't know what was going on and who was doing it. But when they did finally catch somebody, it went awfully bad.

Marcello: Did you go out on work parties here?

Prunty: I went out on two work parties all the time I was in Batavia.

Marcello: What did you normally do with your time?

Prunty: Oh, I played bridge. I fooled around camp there. I'd read. We had a little library established there that was pretty good.

Marcello: What did most of you guys usually talk about when you sat around in bull sessions?

Prunty: At that time it was mostly about what we were going to do when we got out. Just normal conversations.

Marcello: What do you learn about people in a situation like this?

Prunty: Oh, a lot. As it goes on, when the going gets rough, is when you really get to know them--not only them but their

folks and their ancestors before them and everybody in their community. That's when you really learn about people. To me I think that's a reason that this bunch [Lost Battalion Association] is as close as they are, the fact that they already know everything about one another. They know about their folks, about their wants, their likes, their dislikes. There's just not anything else like this group. I'm just as close to everyone of these as I am my brother. I think I know them just that well.

Marcello: Does the topic usually get around to food at this stage of the game?

Prunty: At Bicycle Camp, no. There wasn't enough hunger there to get to that at all. But now, believe me, when you get hungry, then you'll see somebody...if they've got a book that they're keeping a diary on, it's not a diary anymore--it's recipes.

Marcello: I've seen several of those, and you're absolutely correct. Is it safe to say that here at Bicycle Camp that women are more a topic of conversation than food?

Prunty: There was some women conversation at Bicycle Camp, yes, but not a great deal. It was more or less getting acquainted, the Army and the Navy renewing acquaintances and so forth.

Marcello: You mentioned playing bridge and reading. Were there any other activities that people participated in here at Bicycle Camp?

Prunty: Oh, yes. We had volleyball, especially, and we had boxing. We didn't have enough room for baseball there, but there was quite a bit of activity of that nature. There was some dominoes.

Marcello: Were there any stage shows or anything of that nature put on here?

Prunty: Not at Bicycle Camp, no.

Marcello: How much talk--I'm sure most of it was idle talk--was given to the possibility of escaping?

Prunty: At Bicycle Camp I don't remember any. I don't remember any escapes.

Marcello: Did you ever hear much talk of people thinking they might try it?

Prunty: Well, we talked to the Navy boys about that. Of course, they had been on Java--the Navy--and there wasn't anywhere to go. We learned that the hard way just through capitulation that there wasn't anywhere you could go. With a few vehicles, you could have got from one end of the island to the other, all right, but there wasn't any way for you to get off the island. You knew that. So if you stay together, you're going to fare better.

Marcello: What did the Japanese say would happen if somebody did attempt to escape and were caught?

Prunty: Not at that time. Later on, they told us, by the way, that if you were caught outside the fence, you would be annihilated.

Most of that came in Thailand because there was chances of escape after we got there. And some did.

Marcello: On July 4, 1942, the Japanese made an effort to get all of the prisoners to sign a non-escape pledge or a loyalty oath--whatever you want to call it.

Prunty: That was there at Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Give me all the details that you remember from that.

Prunty: I can't remember other than that we just flatly refused. There again, they was going to kill all the officers and all the noncoms. They marched all the officers out of camp, and lined up the noncoms to get them ready to march out of camp.

Marcello: That would have included you.

Prunty: Yes. I was lined up ready to march out. But then they decided they'd give us another chance, and, consequently, nothing was ever done. They brought the officers back. We never signed any.

Marcello: There was never any pledge signed?

Prunty: I never...not that I know of. Some of the officers may have. I don't know.

Marcello: What do you know about Jess Stambrough and his short-wave radio?

Prunty: Well, I knew Jess had one, and we did try to keep it down a whole lot. I think everybody--all the Americans--knew that he had it. Of course, they kept the actual news down

to where it would run about a week late and started it out as a rumor. There were too many people knowing too much, and if the other side starts getting suspicious that you're getting too much information from somewhere...there was a lot of stuff the Japanese did to try to find it. But to me their intelligence wasn't up to what they was trying to do--trying to break morale. That was especially after we got up into the jungle.

Marcello: In other words, they would be feeding you all this propaganda, like you say, to break your morale.

Prunty: I'm not sure but what they were getting that propaganda from their people and believed it.

Marcello: Another interesting character...well, before I get to that point, let me ask you some more about that radio. How was the news circulated that Stambrough was receiving?

Prunty: Captain Parker was helping Stambrough with that. That was received, and part of it got out in a bridge game just like, I guess, there's gossip that goes on in bridge games all the time now (chuckle). Most of it was then put out as a rumor. Of course, they just tried to do that once a week.

Marcello: In other words, the news was distributed by word-of-mouth.

Prunty: Yes. Oh, yes!

Marcello: There's another person that I've heard of from time to time, and you've mentioned him on one occasion--Lieutenant Roy

Stensland. He was kind of a mystery person, in a way, wasn't he?

Prunty: "Stens" was a character. A complete mystery. No one knew where he came from. Actually, he was from San Antonio, and he was from Montgomery, Alabama. He had the accent to be from either one.

Marcello: But he was not a member of the unit.

Prunty: No, and not a member of the 26th Brigade.

Marcello: Where'd you pick him up?

Prunty: He came to us at Singosari--in the airfield at Singosari. He didn't come in on a plane. He just walked into camp--loaded with money.

Marcello: I understand he didn't take too much static from the Japanese.

Prunty: Well, I'll say that Stensland wasn't afraid of the Japanese at all. Concerning their discipline, he could care less. We can go back farther than that. He didn't care particularly what the American officers' discipline was, either. Consequently, Stensland was the best thing they had going up in the jungle. He was a pug--a rough street fighter--and he'd get drunk, and it didn't make any difference whether it was an officer or an enlisted man. They'd just have a little fight. Him and "Pinky" Oliver...I don't know..."Pinky" may have died before you started this--Garth Oliver--but they'd get drunk and really pull one off. Of

course, he wasn't under the officers' command. There wasn't a whole lot they could do about him, and Stensland didn't give a dang if they did.

But then after he got in prison, he was the same way with the Japanese. If he'd see something that he didn't like, by golly, he'd tell them about it. If they was beating up on somebody that was sick and couldn't take it, well, he'd just stop it. If they wanted to beat on him, all right. He'd just take the beating.

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

Prunty: At Bicycle Camp it was very good. We had showers.

Marcello: And could you take a shower most anytime that you wanted to?

Prunty: Yes. We weren't restricted to that.

Marcello: What did you do for such things as soap and toothpaste and articles like that?

Prunty: We still had that at that time. After that was gone, you just didn't have any (chuckle).

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

Prunty: At Bicycle Camp they were the best that the Dutch afforded. They were in a latrine building, and the trench was running with water. That was definitely the "Land of Liquid Toilet Paper."

Marcello: Okay, I think it's in October of 1942 that the first groups began to leave Bicycle Camp. Is that correct?

Prunty: Along about that time, it was Branch Two. That was all of

the privates and the seamen and just a few noncommissioned officers.

Marcello: Is this the group that's originally referred to as the Fitzsimmons group?

Prunty: Fitzsimmons group, yes. Captain Fitzsimmons.

Marcello: They left first.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: I assume that you were not a part of that group.

Prunty: No. No, I wasn't.

Marcello: When did you leave Bicycle Camp?

Prunty: The 11th of November. It was about that time. The way I remember is that so durn many things happened to me on the eleventh--everything.

Marcello: What was your initial reaction to leaving Bicycle Camp?

Prunty: I hated to leave there because we thought we was going back to Priok, that it would be real bad. And that's where they took us.

Marcello: Oh, you went back to Tanjong Priok.

Prunty: We went back to Priok, but we just stayed there overnight.

Marcello: Did they give you any warning that you would be leaving?

Prunty: Very little. The first group that left, we knew a week ahead of time and made preparations for them. We fitted them out as best as we could with everything. But the last group--Group Three--we just all went, except two or three that was working as clerks and two or three that was sick. They

left Harrelson there, I believe, in command of that group.

Marcello: So you were only in Tanjong Priok for one night?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: What did you take with you when you left?

Prunty: Well, I took a bedroll and mess gear, and a change of clothes.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you found out you were going back to Tanjong Priok?

Prunty: Oh, man alive! We didn't know it until we got there, you know. We stopped there and, Lordy mercy, things really looked bleak.

Marcello: Did it look better or worse than what it was like when you left?

Prunty: There's no way that it can get better. I remembered that rotten cheese and the rice with worms and so forth. It just really looked bad.

The next morning they loaded us on the ships and ran us into the holds. Of course, it was just so crowded that you had to sit with the person in front of you between your legs. You put one leg on either side, by the way, and sat down. Then up about five feet there were bunks built along in the hold of those ships. They loaded everybody up there that they could get there. Of course, it was better than staying at Priok, we thought, but after a short while at sea in those crowded conditions--body heat, odor, stale air--it gets pretty bad.

Marcello: Did you know where you were going?

Prunty: No.

Marcello: Do you know the name of the ship that you were on?

Prunty: Dai Nichi Maru. It had been used for hauling livestock where we were kept, and it hadn't been too well cleaned out.

Marcello: So you mentioned that they put you down in the hold of this ship.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: And it was here, like you say, where you were sitting back to belly with your legs straddling the person in front of you. It was that close.

Prunty: Right, right.

Marcello: I don't quite understand what you meant by these other ones in bunks or whatever.

Prunty: Well, they were on platforms out from the wall, and then there was a chain from the bulkhead down to that to hold it up. They might have been a little wider than this table.

Marcello: In other words, they were maybe five feet wide?

Prunty: Possibly five feet wide.

Marcello: But they really weren't bunks. They were simply extra platforms for people to sit on.

Prunty: Right, to sit on or lay down on. The second day out, I got real sick in the hold. Well, I thought, "That's the end of it for me." I had kidney stones. I didn't know what the devil was wrong. I mean, it was bad! Ira Fowler,

Captain Fowler...Ira had done a lot of good for the boys up through the whole ordeal. He was the adjutant, and he worked with the Japanese. He worked real well with them. There was an American-educated Japanese that worked with him. They went together and understood each other, and they worked together real well. Ira told them that they just had to get me out of that hold and up somewhere, and they did.

They brought me up on deck, and the Japanese doctor or a witchdoctor or...anyway, he had me to strip down to my waist, and he took a little scalpel and just cut the skin over that kidney where I was hurting so bad. He cut the skin over there and took a pill on some kind and stuck it under the edge of that skin and struck a match to it and burned it out. He had a little "mumbo jumbo" to say while it was going on. You know, that got easy, by golly, and by the time we got into Singapore, I didn't ever know I'd had it. It sounds bad, but it's the honest truth, so help me.

Marcello: To your knowledge you never passed that kidney stone.

Prunty: No. I don't know what it was. It wasn't acupuncture. He burned a little pill of the thing and said a bunch of voodoo over it, so help me. Later on, I had kidney stones again while I was in H Block at Singapore. They took me into the hospital there in Sinagpore and did a urethroscope operation without anesthetic, which was pretty bad. The

third day after I got out of the hospital, they started us on a trip again. We started up to the jungle.

Marcello: How long were you on that ship altogether?

Prunty: From Java up to Singapore, I don't know--three or four days.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were down in the hold. Where were all the latrine facilities and so on?

Prunty: There wasn't any. They had a honey bucket that they passed, and someone up on deck drew it up and tossed it overboard. If you take three or four hundred men in a situation like that, the well is drawing pretty fast (chuckle).

Marcello: What kind of food did you get on that short voyage?

Prunty: On that voyage? Rice alone. Just cooked rice and not a lot of that.

Marcello: Was it passed down into the hold?

Prunty: Yes, it was passed down into the hold and rationed out.

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

Prunty: Well, they loaded us on trucks and took us out to the jail and stopped in front of this old Singapore prison--the old Changi Prison. Then they took us on over where the English troops had been, and they put the Americans in H Block. They were lettered. Each barracks was lettered. It was two stories, and they housed all the Americans in that one--H Block. We had quite some funny times happen there.

Marcello: Let me ask you this before we get to that, and I do want to talk about that. Who was in your group at this point from

2nd Battalion? You mentioned, for instance, that most of the enlisted personnel, such as the privates and the corporals and the seamen from the Houston, had gone with the Fitzsimmons group. Who was in your group?

Prunty: All the rest of them, that is, with the exception of a few that was left behind.

Marcello: Would this have been a smaller group than the first group that went out?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: I was thinking that it would be since there would have been fewer noncom personnel and so on.

Prunty: Anything above a seaman first class...well, a seaman first class is the same thing as our noncoms, so they were with us. We had a few corporals.

Marcello: Was it kind of disheartening or disconcerting when you were separated from some of your friends back in Bicycle Camp?

Prunty: Well, yes. But you took it as a matter of fact because we'd be out next month anyway (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that H Block here at Changi, and before we proceed any further, you mentioned that you had another kidney stone attack here.

Prunty: Yes. That was right at the last of our stay at Changi.

Marcello: About how long were you at Changi altogether?

Prunty: Let's see. We got in there in November, and we stayed till the 1st of January.

Marcello: Did you catch up with any of your other buddies who left with the Fitzsimmons bunch?

Prunty: No, we didn't. Well, there were some of them there, but they were sick, and they were left there as well.

There were more incidents with the British at Singapore than anywhere else. The British had still held on to strict military discipline within the prison camp. By that time, the Americans had sort of reverted back to frontier behavior or something. Anyway, they didn't go along with it and didn't particularly get along with the British, anyway. The Australians and the Americans there, I know, gave the British nightmares.

For instance, there was a little village, Changi Village, where the English officers were staying, and the boys stole their chickens. Of course, the English officers had their batmen with them, and they raised chickens and had a little garden and so forth. These people were still waiting on them as servants. Well, the Americans stole their chickens pretty quick, and they raided their gardens. They even tore down some of their buildings to use for firewood. There wasn't any wood, and we needed wood to cook with. I know that about a week after we got there, we tore down a building and cut as much of it into firewood as we could.

Then another bunch of them had stolen some firewood from the English. They'd push a railroad car out on the island,

out past the gun emplacements, and get trees out there and cut them up and bring them in the railroad car. Some of the boys that got a load or two of wood that was already cut. Well, goodness, here comes the English sergeant major inspecting. By the way, he knew who stole it. He came right to the American barrack the first thing, and Fowler met him. "There are not any of our boys doing anything like that at all. You're welcome to search." As Fowler went through the kitchen, he saw one of the boys opening an oven door or shutting an oven door, and they had all this wood stacked in this big wood stove. There was two of those, and they had one of them stacked full of two-by-fours (the stuff from a building), and the other one was stacked full of wood that they'd stolen. He got him off past that to go on and inspect another part of the building, and when he came back to inspect the kitchen, Fowler almost fell over because the ol' boy walked over and opened the oven door. There wasn't a thing in there (chuckle). As soon as they got past, they took the stuff out, by the way, and put it where he'd already looked.

They had us working--this was an English idea--for a garden. They could garden.

Marcello: Is this where you were clearing trees and stuff from a rubber plantation?

Prunty: Yes, right. That's where the English really raised hell.

We cut some coconut trees to get the tops of them, by the way, and that belonged to the king, and we were cutting the king's coconut trees. All heck broke loose, but we went ahead and ate it, anyway.

Marcello: In other words, they didn't want you to cut down or to use the king's coconuts.

Prunty: That's right. That was where we were always getting into trouble. Of course, I understand why they gave us the hardest jobs, by the way, because they knew we wasn't going to be there long, or didn't figure we would. They had to issue the tools out each morning, and they did that once or twice, by the way, and they'd give us a bunch of tools that was impossible to work with and then raise the dickens if we didn't come up with the quota.

This one morning the tools was lined up, and John Hensley was in charge of the work party. He said, "We want to get these tools right here." The sergeant major said, "Oh, no, no, no, no. These are not yours. Yours are over here." Hensley said, "These will do us just fine." "No," he said, "these are the English tools." He said, "These are the American tools right here." Then he just pushed him back. This English lieutenant ran up and said, "I say, you just can't do this! This is the way it's going to be done!" Well, John's a hot-tempered fellow, anyway. Everybody knew how he was. He didn't say a word, but he sucker-punched

that Englishman. Gawd dang! He just laid every bit of it on him that he could. Of course, he just went down like a sack of potatoes. The British started running out there, and all the picks were being knocked off the handles. It almost caused a riot. We got that stopped, though. It wasn't but just a few days, and we were transferred out of camp to go up-country.

Marcello: I understand they had a lot of trouble with bedbugs here at this camp, too.

Prunty: Oh, goodness! There was bedbugs everywhere! Worthington and I bunked together all the way up through there, after we shared our blankets and so forth with the Navy. We had two blankets--a blanket each--and we'd sleep together, by the way. We'd sleep on one blanket and cover with the other. We each had a shelter half. We'd put one under us, and he had a shelter half that he could put over us. While there at Singapore, I went out on a little mission one night; and I wasn't caught, but I was caught. There was a Chinese gentleman who helped me out in a ox cart. He spread a blanket over me, by golly, and went past the guards back in. He got me back into camp, and I still got that blanket. Of course, then I had two blankets and him one. We fared very well, then, with our shelter halfs, as far as that was concerned.

Marcello: You mentioned that you went out on a little mission.

Prunty: Sometimes you just have to get out and see what's going on in other places (chuckle). That happens in Singapore or Burma or Thailand.

Marcello: Was it easier to get out of camp than to get back in?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: How did you get out? Did you just simply go under the fence or what?

Prunty: Go under the fence and walk out. Well, actually, at Changi there wasn't any fence. Of course, you knew there wasn't anywhere...you couldn't escape. That wasn't what you had in mind. Later on, you went out for different reasons altogether.

Marcello: And you got back into this camp in an ox cart with a cover over you.

Prunty: He threw a blanket over me. I'm sure that I'd have wound up in Changi Prison with the old stone walls, but I didn't.

Marcello: Were there any problems with...we're getting back to those bedbugs again. How'd you get rid of them here at Changi?

Prunty: By the way, we didn't. They were still there when we left (chuckle). But as I was going to say, Worthington and I moved out of the room. We would sleep on the concrete floor, and we moved out onto a little porch, a little veranda, outside. I felt something bit me, and, by golly, it was stinging. God dern! I woke him up, and I said, "Are ants biting you?" He said, "No." He mashed one about

that time, and he said, "Oh, hell, it's a bedbug!" And honest to goodness, there was a trail of those things--like harvester ants have trails--and, by golly, it looked like it was three inches wide, coming out of the house to our bunk. We got up and stomped bedbugs and shook our blanket and so forth. They're not bad to stay in a wool blanket. Bedbugs or lice, either one, don't like wool, and you could shake your blanket, by the way, and pretty well get them. However, we doused them in hot water, too, by golly, before we left there to get as many out as we could. But bedbugs will not lay their eggs in a woolen blanket.

Marcello: I know some of the prisoners also had problems with the British here relative to Red Cross supplies. How about your group?

Prunty: Our group never got any. We heard there was Red Cross supplies there, but if there were, we didn't get any.

Marcello: Were you there when Battery E passed through?

Prunty: No.

Marcello: It's seems to me that it was here at Changi that the Americans also took notice of how little the British seemed to care about hygiene and cleanliness. Did you notice that?

Prunty: Yes, sure. Goodness, a limey is just like that! I say limey; I mean Englishman. Goodness, yes! Well, at that

time they didn't have any in their homes in England. They didn't have bathrooms. After we got back, I had one good English friend, and we started sending him stuff. He finally wrote us a letter and said, "Don't send me anymore. I can't afford it." We sent him a refrigerator. He said, "Don't send anymore. I can't afford it." He had to pay more tax on that when it got there than it cost us to send it.

Marcello: You mentioned this rubber plantation and clearing the brush and the trees and so on. As a noncom, are you out there working on this?

Prunty: Yes, sir. The noncoms went right on to work. In Java we didn't, other than on occasional working parties or something like that.

Marcello: Now this was evidently daily work here.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: Under whose supervision?

Prunty: British. That's what really got things going.

Marcello: How would you describe this work in terms of its ruggedness and so on?

Prunty: Well, it was just manual labor. As a matter of fact, I did some of it as a kid at home--dig a tree out from the roots or pull stumps. We had a little stump puller at home that we used a horse to. The stump pullers there didn't use horses; they used people. We cleared that and spaded the

ground and laid it off in rows and planted a garden.

Marcello: Was there actually planting done while you were there?

Prunty: Yes. We left before we got to harvest any of it.

Marcello: Okay, you left in early January of 1943. Where'd you go?

Prunty: Well, they put us on those little, narrow gauge railways--little boxcars--and that's when they really stacked people in together. I think they really stacked us together. You couldn't lay down. If you did, somebody else had to stand up while you lay down a while. That went on. We did that. We cooperated with one another. We went to Penang, near George Town, and we went on board a ship there.

Marcello: Do you remember the name of it?

Prunty: Let's see. It was another maru.

Marcello: Was this the Dai Moji Maru?

Prunty: Moji Maru. That's right. We boarded that and left on January 11. Another birthday passed.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like on the Dai Moji Maru.

Prunty: They were not quite as bad as they were on the Dai Nichi. However, they were pretty bad. The hold was much bigger on this one, and there was more fresh air could get in. They had a wind scoop on it. They had a latrine up on deck that hung out over the water. I was about half-afraid to go into it, but they did let us out. Then they fed us up on deck, and you went back to the hold.

Marcello: So you had certain designated times when you could go out

on deck to use the latrine.

Prunty: Right. They had a gun emplacement up forward on their bridge and one on the aft manned by the Japanese. There was a little corvette that was leading this convoy. There was two of these. All of the Americans were on one, and the Dutch and Japanese were on the other. A few Japanese were on the one we were on. They were manning the guns and so forth, and they had guards on there. Again, I lose length of time, but it was on this trip that the B-24s came over.

Marcello: This was on January 15, 1943. Describe this incident.

Prunty: Well, I happened to be out on deck when they first came over. On their first run, they hit the ship that the Dutch and Japanese were on, and it started going down.

Marcello: How many B-24s were involved with this attack?

Prunty: Three, I believe. Two of them went on, and one pealed off and came back and made another run, and we got a near miss. As a matter of fact, it got the superstructure on ours and got a near miss off the port side just above water-line. Ooh! There was a gaping hole in it.

Marcello: In the meantime, what are the Japanese doing?

Prunty: Part of them, by the way, was out of it. It blasted the heck out of some of them. Their gun—their foreward gun—

misfired, and it got that gun crew that was up there with it. I went back into the hold.

Marcello: Why'd you do that? I think I'd want to stay outside.

Prunty: Well, from the stories that I had heard...I went back after my canteen, and when I'd got down in the hold, Captain Fowler was down in the hold, and he had an air mattress. He was really blowing on it (chuckle). I told Ira, "If we get that thing off of here, I'd like to hitchhike a ride." He said, "All right." And I started gathering up canteens, and I got seven GI canteens of water and screwed the tops off of them and screwed the chains together.

Marcello: You're going to make you a life raft.

Prunty: Of course, those canteens float. We were busy at that.

Marcello: Whose canteens did you get?

Prunty: Well, everybody's that was in sight (laughter). They'd left them. By the time he got his mattress blowed up, and I got the canteens tied together, they'd started running them back into the hold, and we both got out again. I could see that other ship. Oh, it was a quarter-of-a-mile from us, I guess, and it was going down. Over half of it was already under the water, and it was standing almost perpendicular. Finally, she just slid on out of sight. People was swimming in the water, and they started bringing

them aboard there. Then this was a Japanese friend...I say friend. He was the adjutant of that group that worked with Fowler. He was aboard there, and he let Ira and I stay out and watch. They were picking those people up, and they brought on one Dutchman, and there was a damn house cat sitting on his head when they brought him aboard, by the way. He had a cat. Consequently, they didn't get off with anything other than just what they had on. A lot of them pulled their clothing off when they hit the water. But there was relatively very few people lost on that. The Japanese told me that one of the bombs hit in the hold with them, and there wasn't any of them that got out. There was a few Japanese...I don't know how many Japanese there were on that, but there were, I guess, ten or fifteen that got on the ship with us, and they lost three of the Dutch out of that. That was doubly hard on rations and your water as well as room, and I didn't have to go back in the hold anymore. I could stay up on deck.

Marcello: Did they furnish you with water, or did you have to load up before you left?

Prunty: Well, you loaded up before you left, and then they had some water that you could fill up a canteen with, but you were rationed on it.

Marcello: Now, of course, most of the time, I'm assuming you boiled your water.

Prunty: Well, after we got to the jungle, we boiled it all the time, but there we hadn't.

Marcello: I guess you had no choice aboard that ship. You had to take what they gave you. Is it safe to say that you were scared when those planes came over (chuckle)?

Prunty: You better believe it! It's not even "safe." I'll tell anybody I was scared (chuckle)!

Marcello: Is it also safe to say that you weren't necessarily taking up for the good guys?

Prunty: (Chuckle) The next day--or was it late that afternoon--there was another air raid scare to come up, by the way, and some Australians jumped overboard. They went over.

Marcello: Did the attitude of the Japanese change any as a result of this air raid?

Prunty: They were very congenial on board the boat. That changed immediately there.

And that was where we lost one chance...of course, the boat was crippled, but we could have easily took it over. We was already in the Indian Ocean. Of course, it would have took several days, but we had enough fuel to get to India. That was the chance we missed there.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that conditions were better, if that's a good term to use, aboard the _Dai Moji Maru_ than they had been aboard the _Dai Nichi Maru_?

Prunty: Yes, much, much better even though we stopped and picked up

all the people off the other boat. Of course, we went into Moulmein, Burma, and pulled into Moulmein, and we were taken to a jail, a native jail, there in Moulmein at a leper colony.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you found out you were put into what had formerly been a leper colony?

Prunty: Well, there wasn't much you could do about it. You just took things as they came because it was definitely going to be over next month [facetious comment].

Marcello: You're still living from month-to-month.

Prunty: Yes. As time went on, you got to living from week-to-week and down to day-to-day. "They'll be here tomorrow."

Marcello: Describe what your housing was like here in this leper colony.

Prunty: It was just a long barracks, and it had raised portions in there for a bunk. There were places for leg irons and places for arms. They strapped them in at night.

Marcello: There were leg irons in there?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: Ball-and-chain?

Prunty: In cement. I was one of the lucky ones, I guess. There again, Ed and I got out on the veranda and made our bed outside.

Marcello: Did the Japanese provide food?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: Rice again?

Prunty: Rice. It wasn't so very far from there to a Japanese headquarters camp wherein all rations came into Moulmein and

then out to Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: Okay, you're only in Moulmein for perhaps five days.

Prunty: Four or five days.

Marcello: And then what happens?

Prunty: We were loaded on trucks and taken out to start work on the railroads there. Our first camp was 18 Kilo.

Marcello: On your way to 18 Kilo, you passed through Thanbuyzayat. Is that correct?

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: And I believe this was around January 27, 1943.

Prunty: I don't remember just what the date was, but we passed through that hospital camp, base camp, and went on out to the 18 Kilo. That was where we were assigned huts or barracks--the Americans, the Dutch, Australians and so forth.

Marcello: Before we get you to the 18 Kilo camp, let me ask you a couple of questions about Thanbyuzayat. Do you remember running into a Colonel Nagatomo here in Thanbyuzayat?

Prunty: Well, I would have liked to have ran over him (chuckle). That's where Colonel Nagatomo gave us his speech.

Marcello: Give me the gist of that speech.

Prunty: Well, he got up on the little high ground there, and he hit himself a time or two with a riding crop.

Marcello: On the side of his boot or something?

Prunty: Yes. He told us what lowdown people we were, that we were the remnants of a defeated army, and we'd never see our

homeland again; but if we worked diligently for the Japanese, they'd feed us, and they'd take care of us. They sure would. But if we didn't, it didn't make any difference, anyway, because we was going to build that railroad if it was built over the dead bodies of every one of us. Of course, he was the madman.

Marcello: Was he speaking in English, or did this all eventually come through an interpreter?

Prunty: No, he was speaking in English.

Marcello: I've often wondered how...well, let me back up. I've photocopied a copy of that speech. Where did people pick it up?

Prunty: Well, that was given to us. Each group got a copy of that to go by. That was the rules and regulations laid down by the man himself. He was the Lord Almighty.

Marcello: Well, he was setting himself up for future war crimes trials and so on, wasn't he (chuckle)?

Prunty: He and "Bluebeard" were the ones that were really something else.

Marcello: I'm assuming that you just kind of passed through Thanbyuzayat after having been given that speech.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Did you mention awhile ago that you were actually a part of what was called Branch Three.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: You go out to the 18 Kilo Camp, and for the benefit of those who listen to this tape or read the transcript later on, that meant that this camp was eighteen kilometers from the base camp. Is that correct?

Prunty: From Thanbyuzayat.

Marcello: We're going into the 18 Kilo Camp. Give me a physical description of what we would see as we went into it.

Prunty: Well, you would see some bamboo huts made completely of bamboo and atap leaves. They were some ten feet tall. There'd be an aisle through the center, and on either side of that aisle, there was split bamboo laid as a deck.

Marcello: About how high off the floor would the deck be?

Prunty: About thirty inches off the floor. Then it was about eighteen inches from the outside walls to the atap roof. It had an air space all around. Those buildings were possibly forty feet long and possibly eighteen feet wide.

Marcello: How much space would you have on that deck? Approximately how much space would each man have?

Prunty: A meter wide.

Marcello: In other words, you...

Prunty: Meter wide and two meters long.

Marcello: You slept there, you possibly ate there, and you had all your posessions there.

Prunty: Everything was there.

Marcello: That was your home.

Prunty: That was it.

Marcello: And in that sense, when we describe the barracks here at the 18 Kilo Camp, this could apply to any of the other camps down the line. It was pretty standard.

Prunty: Same standard thing all the way.

Marcello: And these had been made in advance for you?

Prunty: Yes, by the natives.

Marcello: What other buildings would be in the camp?

Prunty: There would be a cook shack.

Marcello: Open-air?

Prunty: Open-air with long rows of "wajons," which you carried with you from then on. Then there would be a guardhouse which would be a little barracks much the same as they had at other camps for the Japanese guards to sleep in. Then there was a small guardhouse with a little porch out front where the guards sat and watched as you go by.

Marcello: Would there be any sort of an administrative building or whatever, or was everything carried out of the guardhouse?

Prunty: Everything was carried right out of the guardhouse there at the 18 Kilo.

Marcello: Now let me ask you this. About how many prisoners would be in one of these camps? I'm asking for another estimation, of course.

Prunty: Probably 600.

Marcello: And approximately how many guards might there be?

Prunty: Not over twelve or fifteen.

Marcello: Was there any kind of barracade or whatever around this camp?

Prunty: None. It was just open territory. Just bamboo.

Marcello: When you say there was maybe a dozen guards, are those guards alone, or does that also include the Japanese engineer personnel?

Prunty: Well, the Japanese engineers were across the road in another hut.

Marcello: The guards that you were speaking of were probably Koreans.

Prunty: They were Korean, yes. The engineers were Japanese.

Marcello: Normally, would there be a Japanese sergeant who would be the head hancho?

Prunty: Yes. He was in charge of the guards. And you just have to give the Japanese engineers the credit for credit that was due. When you could take a hollow bamboo and look through it and figure your grade and elevation of a railroad going through--when we went through mountains taller than anything in the state of Texas--it's just unbelieveable. We went across rivers, streams. It was unbelievable when they told us that we were building this railroad. They laid out some picks and grubbing hoes--what we called grubbing hoes--some shovels, bamboo sacks, and baskets.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the working parties. When did work begin at the 18 Kilo camp?

Prunty: The next morning after we arrived at the 18 Kilo camp, they took us out on the line, and the engineers gave us one meter per man.

Marcello: One meter of dirt per man.

Prunty: Yes, a cubic meter.

Marcello: At this point you're on pretty level ground, are you not?

Prunty: We're on level ground, and the ground is sort of a sandy, loam-type land. Of course, it's within ten or fifteen feet of the railroad bed itself. That's where they laid it off, and they gave us one meter per man per day.

Marcello: Now let me ask you this. How were these working parties organized? It seems to me I've heard it said there was a _han_ and there was a _kumi_.

Prunty: _Kumi_, right. Your _kumi_ consisted of twelve men, and you worked together--there some of them digging and some of them loading and some of them carrying the dirt.

Marcello: And a _kumi_ would usually be headed by a _kumicho_. Is that correct?

Prunty: Yes. He was the _hancho_ of the _kumi_.

Marcello: What would be the function of the twelve men within that _kumi_?

Prunty: They would have to move twelve cubic meters of dirt from where they were assigned to dig the dirt to the railroad bed and put it on the railroad bed, which seems almost impossible that they could think about going through the

mountains and jungle. But things was going to be over next month, anyway [facetious remark].

Marcello: Again, you have these twelve men within this kumi. What would be the functions of these men? What would they be doing specifically?

Prunty: Well, part of them would be digging dirt, part of them would be shoveling dirt into the baskets or bags to carry, and the others would be carrying that. Of course, it took some learning on our part of how to handle it. You could take a rice bag and put a couple of bamboo poles, one on either side, through the corners of it and run through there and then lay it on the ground and shovel dirt on that; and then two men would pick it up and carry it on their shoulders, one behind the other, and dump it. To start out with, by golly, we was all in pretty good shape, feeling good, and we could get rid of our meter of dirt in a matter of two or three hours and be on our way back to camp to take a bath. There was a stream of water we could bathe in.

Marcello: So you would be finished before noon.

Prunty: Oh, yes. We were working against ourselves and didn't know it.

Marcello: How would this length be measured off? In other words, who did the measuring?

Prunty: The Japanese engineers would use another bamboo pole.

Marcello: In other words, he had a meter stick or something like that, and he would measure off what would be the equivalent of the twelve meters of dirt in this case.

Prunty: Right. Of course, we more-or-less played.

Marcello: What time would you usually go out to work in the morning?

Prunty: Possibly 7:30, after the sun was up. Of course, we'd get through a little after lunch. As I say, we was working against ourselves and didn't know it because it wasn't long until they went to a meter-and-a-half per man and then to two and then on up to three, which is impossible but you can always stay until daylight to get it.

But it was there at 18 Kilo, when we was first starting out, that we'd never seen anything like these critters. They were scorpions. Oh, they was huge! They'd be six, eight, ten inches long--big, huge, black scorpions. Of course, we knew that they were the shape of a scorpion, but they were huge. We was always fooling with them.

One day we dug in around a little ol' clump of bamboo, and there was some snakes about twelve or fourteen inches long. We was talking about it and what they were, but they didn't have blunt heads like a poisonous snake, either. Charlie Pryor had a pair of gloves that he had got somewhere --there's no telling where--and he reached down and got him a snake. He held him by his head, and me and Charlie was looking at him to see if he had fangs. The natives came

along to see what was doing, and they broke and run. I mean, they really took off. There was one who came walking back up there pretty close--and they was always pretty skittish, these Burmese natives--and told us not to do that. He pointed to the sun. It would come up, go down; but tomorrow it wouldn't ever come up. That was a poisonous snake. We finally found out, then,when we got to camp and were talking with the Dutch about it, that it was a krait. I'd never heard of a krait. I didn't have any idea what they looked like. Charlie didn't, either. None of the rest of us did. But he was holding a dern krait in his hand. If it had been a cobra, of course, we would have took off. But they're not near as poisonous as a dern krait. We learned a lot of the jungle.

Marcello: So, like you mentioned, the Japanese kept increasing the number of meters of dirt that you had to move.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: I've also heard from time to time that when the Japanese engineers or guards weren't looking, you guys would run out there and pull that meter stick or whatever it was and bring it back a few meters. Is that correct?

Prunty: There was always ways of doing things. You have to do this because of the fact that the longer we stayed up there... of course, the rations we were getting wasn't so adequate, and you just wasn't in as good of shape.

Marcello: Here at 18 Kilo are you rejoined with any of your other buddies, or are they still up ahead of you someplace?

Prunty: No, they're on up ahead of us.

Marcello: In fact, I believe the Fitzsimmons group was up at the 26th Kilo. I believe that's where they started.

Prunty: It was 26 or 40 Kilo. They were on up ahead of us. We'd seen the signs of them and so forth, and once in a great while one work party would run in to another. The Japanese or Korean guards would really have a fit trying to get them separated then.

Marcello: This is the dry season. Is that correct?

Prunty: Right. We finished a section of the railroad bed there at 18 Kilo. That's where we would have to walk possibly five kilos out. They then moved us to the 80 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: You went all the way from the 18 to the 80 Kilo Camp. How long were you at the 18 Kilo Camp.

Prunty: I don't know. We weren't there as long as we were at the other camps in building the same amount of railroad because we was in good shape and we really moved it along.

Marcello: In comparison to all the other stops that you would eventually make along the railroad, how was the food here at the 18 Kilo?

Prunty: It was better because it was closer to the base camp.

Marcello: Am I to assume that there was some sort of a road that more or less parallels the building of this railroad?

Prunty: Well, you could call it a road or a cow path or whatever. It was just a way to get up through there.

Marcello: It was the means of transportation up through there.

Prunty: That's right--ox carts. The Japanese had some old Chevrolet trucks that one would get up through there once in a while. If they didn't go, the prisoners would push it.

Marcello: Would the Burmese or civilian or native laborers be in the same location as you guys?

Prunty: No.

Marcello: They would be working some other place.

Prunty: Yes, they'd be somewhere else.

Marcello: Nevertheless, it must have looked like an anthill with 600, 700, 800 people running around.

Prunty: It was. It was chaos.

Marcello: Meanwhile, what are the guards doing when you're on one of these work details?

Prunty: They're just standing around.

Marcello: Harassing prisoners or just loafing?

Prunty: If they thought somebody was playing off a little or something, yes. That got worse later. At 18 Kilo we didn't have a bad time there.

Marcello: Who would be in charge of a kumi?

Prunty: Well, whoever you chose to be head of your kumi there.

Marcello: But I'm assuming that person would be working just like everybody else.

Prunty: Yes, definitely so. He was just a spokesman.

Marcello: And if anything went wrong, he was probably the one who gets belted (chuckle).

Prunty: He was the one who caught hell, right.

Marcello: At this point, how is your clothing holding out? Of course, I'm asking you that for a specific reason.

Prunty: My clothing was still real good. I had started out there in Bicycle Camp...I guess I gave away the shoes I was wearing and kept a new pair that I had. I was a little selfish there. I kept a new pair of shoes. They was shined (chuckle). G.I. shoes are pretty good if you'll take care of them. At that time, I was doing quite all right clothes-wise. You didn't wear a shirt out to work, anyway. That was the dry season.

Marcello: Here at 18 Kilo, are you taking your noon meal out on the job?

Prunty: No. We came back in for our meal at 18 Kilo.

Marcello: And then you went back out on the job again, assuming you hadn't finished.

Prunty: Right. Most of the time, the Americans just stayed out there until they finished, and then they came in.

Marcello: For the most part, here at 18 Kilo are you making a fill--doing fill work...

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: ...as opposed to a cut? You would make the cut when you

came to the mountain.

Prunty: It was mostly fairly level ground, and you were making a fill.

Marcello: Somewhere along the line, the Japanese began to pay you, don't they? Where does that start?

Prunty: Oh, goodness, I don't remember. That may have started at 18 Kilo. I know they did at 80 Kilo, but we didn't stay at 80 Kilo but just a short while. Then they moved us up to the 85 Kilo and then moved us back to 80 Kilo, and we didn't stay there but just two or three days. Then we went to the 100 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: You have an excellent memory on these things because that is the order in which they took place. You moved from the 18 Kilo up to the 85 Kilo, like you mentioned, and according to my records, you only stayed there about three weeks. Does that sound right?

Prunty: A short time.

Marcello: Did anything change, so far as the routine was concerned, when you got up to the 85 Kilo? This would be around March 15, 1943, or sometime in that neck of the woods.

Prunty: We still hadn't got into the real rainy season.

Marcello: That's right. What was the terrain like at the 85 Kilo?

Prunty: It was a hilly, rough country. There, part of us started working on bridges--driving piling.

Marcello: I'm going to let this tape run to the end and put on a new one.

Marcello: This is Ron Marcello continuing the oral history interview with Luther Prunty. This is a continuation of the first tape, and it is also being done on October 20, 1986.

Mr. Prunty, when the tape stopped the last time, you were talking about having moved to the 85 Kilo Camp, and you mentioned that there you were driving pile.

Prunty: That's correct.

Marcello: You've got to describe the Japanese method of driving pile (chuckle).

Prunty: (Chuckle) Well, for the first thing, they were using wooden piling. We'd go out into the forest there. The timber in Burma is some of the most beautiful in the world. It's virgin timeber, and you could just pick out almost any size that you wanted--length and so forth. We'd cut those teakwood trees and hew them out.

Marcello: Were you using axes to cut them or saws?

Prunty: Saws. The old crosscut saws. We'd saw it down, and we did have some poleaxes to trim them and so forth. Then they were dragged to the site by elephants. We used elephants to do all that type of stuff. The Japanese would often say, "One elephant, two men," that two men could do as much as one elephant. They would drag them there, and we would dig a hole where the engineers had laid out for piling. We'd dig a hole a couple of feet deep.

Marcello: This would be like the approach to a stream of something

along those lines.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: About how long was one of these pilings?

Prunty: Well, it depended on what the elevation was.

Marcello: Sure.

Prunty: You'd build a scaffold where you needed to drive pilings. They'd drive a row of pilings across the railroad bed. Where you needed two rows of pilings, you'd build a scaffold between those. Then you'd dig the hole, and you'd pull the piling into place. The scaffold that was built...then you would raise your piling up and set it end-wise into the hole and have ropes to pull it up over this scaffold. We'd get it in place, and they had an old-type cap. I've seen piling caps like that a long time ago. They'd put a cap up the pole, and then the hammer was a weight that they had on a pulley up above the scaffold. You'd tie a rope on that and get it off out to the side, and you'd pull the hammer to the top, and you drop it and hit the cap on the piling and drive it into the ground. That was done by men pulling on the rope, and you'd have, say, an eighteen-inch pull out on the end of your rope, which would give about a four-foot drop on your weight to the cap. As you come on down, of course, it was a larger drop.

Marcello: In other words,you would pull it out, and then on a given signal you would let go of the rope and let it drop.

Prunty: You sang a song. There'd be a man on either side of the rope, and you would hold your hand inside of one of his hands, and you'd have, well, up to about eight or ten people on this rope to pull. I don't know. I've forgotten now, but most of the time it was a <u>kumi</u> that would be driving the piling. You'd sing this little song that the engineers had figured out. You pulled and turned loose in the same rhythm. And it worked, by golly. It seemed impossible, but it worked. That's the way those pilings were driven.

You couldn't play off on that. That was one thing that all of you...you had to be in time. If you didn't, it would just half kill you; it'd just work you to death. But it wasn't so hard once you got the hang of it. It was just like marching. If you're in step, fine. But if you get out of step, by golly, it'll kill you. That's the same way that that pile driving business is. Time was endless, so you just worked on until you drove your piling.

Of course, from that you built your trusses and went right on with your bridge across your stream and out to your elevation on the other side. It seemed like it would take a long, long time, but it really doesn't. Those scaffolds are built out of bamboo, and men could carry those things, and we did. There's nothing that manpower can't substitute for.

Marcello: You found that out working on that railroad.

Prunty: Yes. Manpower can do it. It may take a lot of them, but they can do it. It's like the Japanese said: "Two men, one elephant."

Marcello: About how wide are these streams that you were building these bridges across?

Prunty: Of course, some of them were just small streams, but some of them were large streams, too. You had to build double decks, and there's some triple decks wherein you pulled your piling up and set it on top of the other and fastened it in. We didn't have any bolts, but they were fastened in.

Marcello: How did they fasten the piling when it was double- or triple-decked?

Prunty: They had some nails they nailed in, and then they were vine-tied. You'd think it was impossible and that it wouldn't stand at all, but it will. I can vouch for that. I was on the third deck when I hurt this hand here. Of course, it's about all gone now, but it cut this hand completely out here (gesture). They loaded me on an elephant and took me into camp.

Marcello: How did you cut it?

Prunty: It was a crosscut saw. The upper deck gave way, and it was just like dominoes coming down. I was on the top, and me and Lumsden, who was from Bridgeport--he's dead now--were using a crosscut saw to cut off the top of one of those

pilings at the bed level. It was caught in the saw, and it chopped me up pretty good.

Marcello: You evidently were only on this pile driving and so on for about three weeks, according to my records. Does that seem right?

Prunty: As I say, time really didn't mean anything, and I didn't know whether it was Sunday, Monday, August, December, or when.

Marcellos: You bring up an interesting point. Did you ever have days off at this stage yet?

Prunty: No.

Marcello: You worked seven days a week.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Were you still in pretty good shape at the time that you were on this pile driving detail?

Prunty: Yes, I was in real good shape.

Marcello: Okay, now once that was finished, then you evidently moved back to the 80 Kilo Camp. Is that correct?

Prunty: Yes, for a very short period there.

Marcello: And what were you doing while you were at the 80 Kilo Camp?

Prunty: We were going back over some of the structures that had been built and were reworking some of the second and third decks.

Marcello: So you're really not being worked too hard at this point. Is that correct?

Prunty: No. We were still going out and doing eight hours and coming in.

Marcello: Something I thought of awhile ago. You mentioned that you cut your hand. I'm assuming that you were not able to work for a period of time.

Prunty: That's right.

Marcello: What happened to your rations?

Prunty: At that time, they went right on. They were able to keep me in as sick, and they were allowing a percentage to be sick.

Marcello: Is it later on when they cut the rations of those that were off-duty?

Prunty: Yes. That was when we moved from 80 Kilo up to 100 Kilo.

I'm assuming that a couple of things have happened. First, the Japanese are behind on the railroad, and they initiate the so-called "Speedo" campaign. Secondly, "Speedo" coincides with the coming of the monsoons. Am I correct?

Prunty: That's correct.

Marcello: Okay. First of all, was the 100 Kilo Camp about the same size in terms of the number of personnel as some of these other camps that you discussed, or was it larger?

Prunty: It was larger. We had more Dutch in 100 Kilo. They brought in more there. We had two separate kitchens at 100 Kilo—one for the Dutch and one for the Americans at that time—and also we had one for the Japanese.

Marcello: In terms of location or terrain, it seems to me I've heard it said that it was not a exactly located in the best of places.

Prunty: Well, of course, the drainage there wasn't too good. As a matter of fact, my hand healed up some, and I could bandage it up. They put me to cutting wood for the kitchen. I couldn't use an axe to cut the wood, but I could help saw a tree down. We'd saw it up in blocks, and I could put a block on my back and carry it up there to be split. While doing that, of course, the monsoons had arrived, and the shoes didn't last long in the monsoons--in the mud and water.

Marcello: Let me just ask you this. First of all, how does the Japanese attitude change once that so-called "Speedo" business gets started?

Prunty: Oh, goodness! It got to where whether you was sick or not, you went out to work. If you could get up and walk, you went to work. If you were too sick to do anything when you got out there, then the rest of the kumi had to finish your work, too, before they could come in, and that might be midnight, or it might be after.

Marcello: What time would the day begin now?

Prunty: It began when you could see. What time that was in the morning, I don't know. As I say, I wasn't going out on the line there. I was cutting wood for the camp.

Marcello: How did the disposition of the guards change?

Prunty: Oh, terrible! They were having it rough, too. They were getting beat up because things wasn't going along as fast

as they wanted them to. From headquarters on down, they were really after them. The commandant was staying drunk on sake a good part of the time, and he would really work them over.

Marcello: Now was this ol' boy at the 100 Kilo camp? The commandant?

Prunty: He was the 100 Kilo commandant. That was where I first met "Bluebeard."

Marcello: Describe "Bluebeard."

Prunty: He was a rather dark and rather tall Japanese officer. He was a lieutenant. He had a pretty heavy beard. Most Japanese don't, but he had a rather heavy beard. He kept it fairly well-shaved, but his face was blue. His beard was real dark, and you could see it because of the way he shaved. I'm sure his equipment wasn't a lot better than anybody else's there at that time. He was so mean! I don't know who dubbed him "Bluebeard," whether it was from the novel or where it came from. Anyway, "Bluebeard" stuck. That was the nickname, as far as we were concerned, and it got to be with the Japanese guards. The engineers were a lot... of course, he would beat the hell out of the engineers, too. The guards didn't mess with the engineers much. The engineers didn't raise so much Cain with us. There was always somebody saying something, and they caught on to this "Bluebeard" stuff pretty quick.

It was there at 100 Kilo...I don't know...I had a block

of wood on my back that probably weighed 150 or more pounds. I stumbled and almost fell stepping over a green bamboo tree that was knocked over there. I cut the back of my leg, and in two days time I was out of it.

Marcello: A tropical ulcer developed?

Prunty: Tropical ulcer. Of course, a high fever and so forth went along with that. The doctor that we had there wasn't much of a doctor. He was Commander Epstein. He might have been a doctor in his younger days, but he was possibly eighty then.

Marcello: He was off the Houston, wasn't he?

Prunty: Yes. Anyway, they brought him in there for us as a doctor, and he pronounced me with dengue fever. Anyway, the top of my head got real sore. Every hair on my head was sore. You could feel your hair, and your head was sore. Of course, all of us had gotten down with malaria at that time, and it would last maybe two or three days or a week; then you'd go for a week, and you'd have another spell. But with that tropical ulcer, it got me completely down.

Marcello: What kind of treatment could you give one of those tropical ulcers?

Prunty: Well, I gave it my own treatment.

Marcello: I guess you didn't have much choice because the doctors didn't have any medicine, anyhow, did they?

Prunty: No, they didn't. No medicine. I was one of the lucky ones.

I had a bucket that I could heat water in. I cut me a bamboo--joint of bamboo--log that was about four inches in diameter. It was very light. I split out one side of it, and that left both ends and the other side, and it would hold water. I've seen natives carry water in those as a bucket. I split that out, and I could build a fire and heat water with my bucket and pour hot water in this log and soak my foot in that. It was big enough that I could put my whole foot and leg down in it. This tropical ulcer was on the back of the leg, and therefore it was immersed in hot water that was as hot as I could stand it. I did that for hours on end.

Marcello: For how long?

Prunty: Oh, I don't know. Months. It was there that the sick people's rations were cut off.

Marcello: By this time were you unable to work?

Prunty: Yes. I was completely unable to work. Actually, I was unable to get around, but I did get around and manage to heat my water and soak my foot.

Marcello: Where were you able to build your fire and heat your water, since this was the monsoon season?

Prunty: Well, you just had to build it, by the way, and keep on it, by golly. The monsoon season wasn't just a pouring down all the time. There was rain all the time, all right. It was a mist of rain. But if you get beside a log or something,

by golly, and build your fire day after day at the same place, well, I made it pretty good. As a matter of fact, my place there was where a huge tree had fallen, and at the end of that tree was a latrine. It had been a foot trench that they had dug for the latrine. Behind the bank of that latrine and the log was where I built my fire, and I could set there and soak my leg in hot water.

They cut our rations off, and this Worthington and I were both down. His was fever completely, and he was unable to get up. When it first got him, we carried him from the 85 Kilo back to the 80 Kilo. Anyway, they put us down on the one end of a hut, and there was a stream of water running underneath us. This deck is three inches off the ground.

Marcello: Are you still at the 100 Kilo camp?

Prunty: Yes. And this water was running under it, and that was the best thing for he and I, particularly, that ever happened because the sanitation...that water, of course, was contaminated, but we could discharge our waste into this stream, and it would get on out.

Marcello: Let me just back up a minute and fill in some details here, because I think this is one of the more cruicial parts of the interview. You mentioned that you cut your hand rather badly, so that meant that you couldn't actually go out and work on the road itself.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: You were in camp basically carrying wood and doing some sawing.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Okay. I'm assuming that the wood detail is a continual thing--all the time.

Prunty: It is. It is.

Marcello: Since you were working on that wood detail, you were still on full rations.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: When we talk of full rations at the 100 Kilo Camp, what do we mean?

Prunty: We're meaning a serving of rice.

Marcello: When we say a "serving," I know what that old Army mess kit looked like. Now what is a "serving" of rice?

Prunty: I'd say half of a mess kit of rice.

Marcello: In other words, they would take a wooden paddle or something and put that rice on and level it off and give you half of that.

Prunty: Well, they didn't level it off. They just dumped it on.

Marcello: I see.

Prunty: A lot of times you got it in your canteen cup. You know what an Army canteen cup looks like?

Marcello: Yes.

Prunty: They gave you not quite a canteen cupful of cooked rice. Sometimes there was a little Chinese cabbage or seaweed.

They scrounged some vines and weeds from the jungle to cook in it, but that was it.

Marcello: How many times a day would you get that?

Prunty: When you were on full rations, you'd get it twice a day.

Marcello: When? At lunch and the evening or breakfast and the evening?

Prunty: Breakfast and the evening. If they took anything out on the working party, it was a stew made up of water and pie melon, a little melon they chopped that up and boiled it in there. You didn't have any salt. That salt was precious. They sent two men out with five or ten gallons of that for their lunch, and they could have that in their canteen cup to drink.

Marcello: How about you guys back in camp? Did you get any of that?

Prunty: No, you didn't get any of that.

Marcello: So all you got were two canteen cups of rice.

Prunty: That's true until you got sick, and then you didn't get that.

Marcello: Then it was down to what? Maybe half of that?

Prunty: It went down to nothing. As far as they were concerned, I wasn't even being fed. But that's where a bunch of these people--and a number of them--would bring Worthington and I down there...the rice would burn and stick to the "wajons," and they had to scrape that out in order to get started to cooking more. That burnt rice and sweet potatoes...they was stealing sweet potatoes, by the way, and would bake them and bring them down there. They baked potatoes under

those "wajons" while they was cooking the rice.

Marcello: Where did they get the sweet potatoes?

Prunty: They stole them from the Japanese. Once in a while you'd get a ration of sweet potatoes, but, of course, the Japanese had that all the time, and they were being robbed blind.

Marcello: How were the Japanese faring so far as their rations were concerned? Obviously, they were probably eating better than you guys.

Prunty: Oh, yes.

Marcello: But were theirs being cut, too?

Prunty: Their rations were way down because there wasn't any way to get rations from Thanbyuzayat up to the 100 Kilo.

Marcello: That road was washed out.

Prunty: It was washed out, or it was impassable completely. Of course, it got to where there wasn't any oxen that came up the lines. That was one thing that I failed to mention, was the fact that everytime they drove an ox team up there, they never went back. Somebody killed that ox, and we ate it. You can make a cow sick real quick by sticking him with a sharpened bamboo, and when you do, of course, he just gets sick, fevers, and lays down. Certainly, we wouldn't think about eating one here after he'd been fevered, but there it didn't make any difference.

Marcello: And I guess you used every part of that cow except that "moo."

Prunty: You did. At that time, in the monsoon season, the Japanese

had had a little setback up the country above Rangoon, on up toward Burma. They were falling back. Some were going up, and some were falling back. They were using those little ol' ponies to pull...a little bigger than a Shetland, you know. And those things would give out. Of course, they belonged to the emperor. They had to pray over them when they killed them, but we ate them just the same.

Marcello: You mentioned several other things that I want to follow up on. Let's get back to that tropical ulcer again. Would it be accurate to say that that probably struck you with more fear than anything else that you had?

Prunty: Completely. There wasn't anything that you could do. You knew you didn't have any medicine. You could last out fever. You'd have chills, and you could wrap up in your blanket, and you knew that when you broke a sweat then you was over that that time. It would weaken you. But a tropical ulcer just continually eats at you. Well, it's a malignancy.

Marcello: Describe what it looks like.

Prunty: There's different types of them, but the one that was on me started from about an inch-long cut. By the time I started getting mine healed was when they took me out of Burma. But at one time, it must have been six or eight inches long. You could hide a number three forceps in it--down in it--because the proud flesh had just rolled out--just turned wrong side out and just kept growing. It had eaten the tendon

in two on the back of my leg, and it was down to the bone. A tropical ulcer just keeps growing. It just continually eats on the new flesh, and as it grows--as it eats on the new flesh--proud flesh swells and just turns wrong side out.

Marcello: I understand they stink, too.

Prunty: Oh, Lordy, it's terrible! Of course, anywhere I was they was all around me. The people that brought burnt rice and sweet potatoes down there to me had to have an awful strong stomach to do it. I woke up more than once when there'd be somebody dead on either side. I woke up one morning... and Ray Singleton from Bridgeport--"Poke Eye," we called him--woke up, and he had an ulcer on his knee. He had maggots on his knee, and he just liked to went wild. He just was beside himself. We talked to him and got him calmed down and tried to tell him that, goodness, they'd eat that rotten flesh out, and it would be good for it. He just didn't believe it at all. Ed Worthington and I were both laying there beside him with ulcers, and we picked maggots out of his knee and put them in our legs. The dern things wouldn't stay. I never did get any maggots to stay in my leg and clean it out.

Marcello: That was a method that was used to try and cure those ulcers, isn't that correct, the use of maggots?

Prunty: Yes. When you could get the flies to blow your ulcer and maggots really get in there...they told me it was an awful

sensation, but the maggots would clean that dead flesh out--eat it out to the raw flesh--and when they did, it would start healing.

Marcello: I'm assuming that under those circumstances, that is, having one of those ulcers, you can never ease up. You can't let it go for a day.

Prunty: You certainly can't. You can't let it go at all because the only way you can get relief, or the only way that I could get relief, was hot water. And I mean hot water!

Marcello: How long were you doing that, did you say, that is, applying that hot water?

Prunty: I don't know.

Marcello: Months?

Prunty: Longer. Three months, I guess.

Marcello: And several hours a day.

Prunty: Yes. I'd say, well, from the time people went to work in the morning, and I could get a fire built and water, I'd do that until noon.

Before we left here, our chaplain had given us all a New Testament--small testament--so Worthington and I had a testament each.

Marcello: Before you left here? Do you mean before you left Texas?

Prunty: Yes. We carried them. They let us keep those. There at 100 Kilo, we smoked both of those New Testaments because the pages were thin and made pretty good cigarette paper.

I tell people I've read the New Testament twice, completely, because we'd read it and then smoke it.

Marcello: Would you be using that "wog" tobacco?

Prunty: That "wog" tobacco, yes.

Marcello: Describe what it was like.

Prunty: Well, it was weed, and it came wrapped up in packages that would be fourteen or eighteen inches long. It was just shredded weed of some kind. I don't know what it was. It had a lot of nicotine in it.

Marcello: I understand it would blow the top of your head off.

Prunty: Oh, goodness! Until you get a little used to it, there was no way that you could inhale it. It would just choke you down. A lot of the boys get to where they'd chew it, and it would just paralyze the side of your face (chuckle). This "Snuffy" Jordon, from Fort Worth, always had a big chew of that in his mouth, and there was no feeling to it.

Marcello: Where did you get that "wog" tobacco?

Prunty: Trading with the natives.

Marcello: What did you have that they would want?

Prunty: Anything. Clothing, especially. That's the reason I came out of there with just a G-string, and I mean literally. That's everything I owned, plus my blanket. I held on to this blanket.

Marcello: Given these circumstances--you said you had malaria, dengue, a tropical ulcer, a cut hand, and I'm assuming you're lucky

you didn't get another tropical ulcer with your hand--what kept you going?

Prunty: It would be over tomorrow or next week. Of course, that wasn't all. We had beriberi from malnutrition. Well, you just had everything that they had up there, of course. There was some who died in the hut next to us with cholera. You didn't think about being afraid because it was cholera. If you died, it didn't make any difference, anyway.

Marcello: So as far as you're concerned, a strong will to live as much as anything was responsible.

Prunty: Oh, that's it! That's it! That will to live: "It will be over next month. It might even be next week. And I wouldn't be surprised if it's tomorrow."

Marcello: That is, that the war was going to be over.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: You'd be going home. You still had that thought.

Prunty: Oh, yes. It stayed all the way.

Marcello: Did you see examples of men who did give up?

Prunty: Certainly. Those that stayed over there were the ones who gave up.

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

Prunty: It's very easy. As a matter of fact, about the first thing you'd notice was, of course, that they were mentally disturbed. You'd notice it in their talk and especially when they quit eating. If somebody skipped a meal, you'd say, "Whoa! Wait

a minute here! What's going on?" That was especially true on those sweet potatoes, for after a while baked sweet potatoes get awfully hard to take. But if this is your ticket home, you go ahead with it.

Marcello: Was there anything that you could do to snap these people out of this condition?

Prunty: Nothing but fuss at them. Tell them to go ahead and not eat, that you'd take it. You'd be glad to eat their ration for them if they just wasn't going to eat it at all. You tell them why you were going to eat it. You'd go home, and they'd stay. Which was the truth. And they knew it, too.

Marcello: I've heard it also said on one or two occasions that there were times when a person would resent the fact that somebody else had simply given up and died because it looked as though that person had taken the easy way out, and now whoever was left was going to have to pick up the slack in terms of the work he had to do.

Prunty: Oh, yes. Now you'd have to do his work. You'd cuss him out, by the way, and really tell it to him.

Marcello: I have a theory. It's probably not a very profound one, but let me throw it out to you. Here you have all these guys from Jacksboro. Obviously, you're not all together because you had been separated a little bit, but there's still people from Jacksboro here in this camp.

Prunty: Yes, you bet! There was a bunch of us.

Marcello: Is that an advantage to have in a situation like this, that is, to have friends from the same hometown right there with you?

Prunty: Definitely so. Definitely. It's people that you've known, gone to school with, know their families. As long as you've been together, you know their families intimately--everything about them. Well, they just look at you different.

Marcello: And would it be these kind of individuals who perhaps were seeing that you got the sweet potatoes and all that sort of thing.

Prunty: That's right. You bet. Oh, yes. Marvin Tilghman, Clifford Johnson, John Hensley--just right on. Those people kept me alive.

Marcello: It's interesting how this kind of differs from those that we've interviewed who were on Bataan and Corregidor, where you have a group of men brought together from all over, and it's almost "every man for himself" in that situation. To some extent, I'm assuming that in your case you had to look out for yourself, but you were still getting help from other people, too. Likewise, you would help other people.

Prunty: Right. They were looking out for you. We had some that went out on their own, especially sailors, and there was some of the Selective Service men that might be from Michigan or...one I'd known personally was from Georgia. We called him "Georgia Brown." When you don't have somebody

real close to look after you or to just really shock you into thinking--say something about your family or just really bring it home--then it was easy to drift. Once you gave up, that was it.

Marcello: You mentioned Worthington awhile ago. Is it not also true that in situations like this, two or three people would kind of band together and look out for one another? If one got a little bit extra food, perhaps he would share; or if somebody were sick, they would try and get him some extra rations.

Prunty: Yes! Sure! But overall, it wasn't just two or three people. It was our whole bunch looking out for one another. Have you interviewed "Peanut" Johnson?

Marcello: No, I sure haven't.

Prunty: Clifford Johnson. Clifford worked in the Japanese kitchen a whole lot.

Marcello: One of the choice jobs.

Prunty: Yes, one of _the_ choice jobs. I guess he was as good a thief as there was on the railroad. He really brought me a lot of nourishing food that they'd cook up.

Marcello: And this is what you needed more than anything else, wasn't it?

Prunty: Yes, that's right. When one of them brought you something, you appreciated it so. And they knew you appreciated it, so it made it that much better.

Marcello: You mentioned a moment ago that you were with Worthington in this hut, and I assume that what you were referring to was, in essence, a sickbay or whatever it was called.

Prunty: This one wing, about a twenty-foot section that branched off of the main hut.

Marcello: Why did you go over there?

Prunty: They put me over there when I couldn't work.

Marcello: When you say "they," to whom are you referring?

Prunty: The Japanese.

Marcello: Oh, I see. They didn't want you around any of the people that were well.

Prunty: Yes. "All sick men here because you're no good to us, you're no good to yourself, you're no good to anybody." They never ventured down in there. I couldn't blame them because they stank. It was enough to turn your stomach.

Marcello: Now another one of the big killers, of course, was dysentery. Did you have dysentery?

Prunty: Yes. More than once.

Marcello: All of us, I think, have had diarrhea at one time or another, and we think it's pretty bad. But what is it like in comparison to dysentery?

Prunty: Oh, goodness! Diarhhea is mild. That's the way your dysentery will start. But then you get to cramping with dysentery. It whips you mentally as well, and, of course, there's a lot of loss of blood in dysentery. That's amoebic dysentery.

Marcello: I gather the body doesn't have time to absorb any of the nutrients out of the food that you've eaten--what little food you have eaten.

Prunty: And your body doesn't hold fluid.

Marcello: Is there anything you can do for dysentery?

Prunty: Yes, if you have medicine.

Marcello: I have heard that one of the remedies that was tried was eating charcoal.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: I guess that meant either the wood charcoal or else those crusts of rice that you were talking about.

Prunty: That rice crust, oh, yes. And another thing that "Peanut" got me out of the Japanese was rice polishings. He got me a good mess of that.

Marcello: Now it was at the 100 Kilo Camp that Dr. Lumpkin died in August of 1943. Were you there when that took place?

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: What effect did that have upon the morale of the men?

Prunty: Well, it was bad not only as a doctor but as a friend, as one of the bunch; one that was not only having him look after you, but you was having to look after him. He was just a wonderful fellow.

Marcello: Plus, was there the feeling that if a doctor couldn't make it, things must really be rough?

Prunty: No, I don't think they did on that. I think that they

more-or-less thought that he kind of whipped himself. He didn't follow his own advice as to what he was to do. He just stopped eating. In other words, he got whipped mentally. When you're whipped upstairs, you're gone. I've seen that over and over.

Marcello: What did those men look like when they either left or came off the railroad during this monsoon season and "Speedo" period?

Prunty: You mean when they went out to work or when they came back in?

Marcello: Either or.

Prunty: Well, of course, there wasn't a lot of difference when they went out and when they came back because they were just dragging, anyway. They have a little more mud on them when they came back in. But by the time they've slept in the rain, they'd have that pretty well washed off the next morning. But they were still wet. Of course, they were still trying to be cheerful. They had something to laugh about or to kid somebody else about--he got whipped the day before, or he fell and hurt his ulcer. Of course, there was people that may go on out with an ulcer--those that could walk.

Marcello: Things are continually wet during the monsoon season,aren't they?

Prunty: For fifty-four days and nights. We're talking about...it rained for forty days and forty nights, so the Bible says,

but there was fifty-four days and nights that it didn't quit. It slacked up some, all right. It wasn't raining hard all that time, but it rained. And they didn't see the sun.

Marcello: And I understand it's rather cold at nighttime, too.

Prunty: Well, it wasn't really that cold the way we think about termperature. But we were used to temperatures that ranged up into the 130's. And if the termperature fell to, say, ninety-five or ninety, it was cold. They built fires in the huts. Now that's while I was carrying wood. I stood fire watch at night while my hand was bad. You'd have four hours on and the rest of the night off.

Marcello: What did they build fires in the huts for? For warmth or to ward off the critters or what?

Prunty: Of course, it was for warmth, as far as we were concerned. The Japanese had insisted on us doing it because one day out on the road we was clearing a right-of-way, and we found two cheetah cubs. They wasn't as big as a house cat, and they were a gentle and docile as they could be. We picked those cheetahs up and took them into camp. Well, God Almighty, the Japanese just knew that the mama would be there that night to get them! They just had a real fit. The Japanese stood guard all night over those kittens. We had to take them back out on the railroad the next day, back out on the line the next day, and turn them loose because, oh, yes, they were

definitely afraid that there'd be tigers or lions to come into camp. They had a fire to keep them scared off. Whether they would have or not, I don't know. I don't think they would have been near as bad as the orangutan. There was some of them dang things that looked vicious.

Marcello: Suppose the Japanese decided that they needed more men out on the road during the "Speedo" period. Would they then come through the hospital hut and pull out somebody?

Prunty: Anybody that could walk would have to go out. Of course, if they got them out there, they couldn't do anything, but the people that was already out there had to take their part of the work.

Marcello: I've heard sometimes that they would have those people do is simply use a hammer and break rock.

Prunty: Yes. You bet they did.

Marcello: In your case they could at least see that you had the tropical ulcer and all that sort of thing. That was something they could see. But I'm assuming that if somebody just had malaria or anything that they couldn't see...

Prunty: Unless you was burning up, by the way, they thought there wasn't anything wrong with you. I have to say that I might have had a little political pull to stay in camp. I can't even think of his name now. I can barely think of my own. But this Japanese adjutant would come through with Fowler and make inspections there, and they might inspect another

camp down the line. Ira and I were real good friends. We had been friends all of our lives. After that incident, the bombing of the ship, the Japanese recognized me anytime he came by. He was the one that finally sent me into the sickbay and no work. As I say, he was the one that put me on the wood detail instead of going out on the line.

Marcello: During this experience, what were some of the better jobs, if we may use that term?

Prunty: Well, I tell you, the wood detail or carrying the food out on the line.

Marcello: Or just plain working in the cook shack would be a pretty good job, wouldn't it?

Prunty: Yes. It wasn't as bad. However, after the monsoon started, then one kitchen had to take care of the whole thing. Goodness, they was cooking all the time, from daylight until dark.

Marcello: They couldn't help but be just a little bit fatter than the other guys.

Prunty: That's true. That's true. As I say, there was some of them that laid off a little of what they could have had and brought it down to others that didn't have any.

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

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: Describe how they would take place.

Prunty: Well, they way it took place, they just put them on a couple of rice sacks with a pole on either side like you was carrying

dirt. You'd carry them to where you'd dug a hole where we marked off for a cemetery. I think we put a rice sack or two on the bottom and a rice sack put on top of them and put the dirt on them. The burial party consisted possibly of three or four men.

Marcello: I would assume that grave digging was a tough task, given your condition and the amount of work they had been getting out of you guys.

Prunty: It was. Well, it took about two meters of dirt to dig a grave. You had to move this dirt. Of course, you just had to throw it out. Then the ones that dug the grave had to carry the corpse over and put him in the grave and cover him up.

We had one job at camp that was really a snap, I guess. That was the bandmaster who was aboard ship. Somewhere while we were in Batavia, he got hold of an old German flugelhorn, and he used it for a bugle. "Bandy" would... I can't even think of his name. "Bandy" was his nickname. But that was pretty well his job. We had enough funerals that he blew taps, and then he blew reveille in the morning.

Marcello: Were these graves marked in any way?

Prunty: Yes. Yes, they were. That was another one of his jobs. He'd make a bamboo cross and chisel their name out.

Marcello: On the bamboo?

Prunty: He'd make the bamboo cross and have a teakwood marker on that.

Of course, termites will eat teak. That teakwood with their name on it would be tied on the bamboo.

Marcello: At the same time, would records be kept of who was buried where?

Prunty: Yes, right. Ira Fowler kept all of that.

Marcello: What were the worst jobs?

Prunty: Oh, I'd say the worst jobs was going out on the line, or it was possibly the quarry jobs. Now, of course, the digging of the dirt for the fills was bad because it was raining and you'd dig up dirt and it would just be half of it water. By the time you got to the dump, half of your load would be gone. That was bad. But the quarry work...there wasn't any of the boys that knew anything about rock quarrying and how to hit a rock with a hammer to keep spalls from... and there was so many of them that was cut with rock spalls that would develop ulcers and so forth. I'd say that chipping rock spalls were probably one of the worst jobs, that and laying the rails. The ties wasn't so bad, but cutting ties was a lot of hard work. I never had to cut any ties, and I never cut any wood for the train. I understand the tie cutting was awfully hard work. But the rail laying was... not only was it hard work, but it was heavy work.

Marcello: Under these circumstances such as you've experienced here at the 100 Kilo Camp, what role does religion play?

Prunty: A whole lot. Now there wasn't any organized religious

meetings. The Japanese didn't allow that, and we certainly weren't versed enough in the Bible, anyway, to do so. I suppose that Worthington and I, after reading the New Testament twice, was about as well-versed as any of them (chuckle), and certainly we couldn't have done anything. But within your own self, yes, I think it played a great part. There's just no doubt in my mind but what it did for me.

Marcello: If you pray, what do you pray for?

Prunty: Sometimes for the rain to stop--that incessant rain. Just rain, rain, rain. It'd almost drive you off the deep end. Oh, you'd pray for different things maybe for yourself, maybe for the one next to you, maybe for food, that the whole show would be over with, and just for life itself.

Marcello: When did you leave the 100 Kilo Camp?

Prunty: Actually, I don't remember the date, and that ought to be one of the most important dates in the history on the railroad for me.

Marcello: And where did you go from the 100 Kilo Camp?

Prunty: They put me on a train there at the 100 Kilo Camp, between the camp and the graveyard, and I didn't know which one they was taking me to, to tell you the truth (chuckle). They loaded five of us, I believe. That was Woodrow Starnes, Ed Worthington, Donald Brown, Bill Fillmore, and myself.

Have you interviewed Fillmore?

Marcello: B.D. Fillmore, yes.

Prunty: Yes, that's him. They called him "Bird Dog." They loaded us all in the boxcar, and we were the only ones in that boxcar. We had plenty of room. It was a little over a two-day trip. They put us off at a camp in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. It's what they call the"Mango Camp." It was a rather small camp.

Marcello: It's interesting that you say that that was a small camp. There was also a huge camp there someplace, wasn't there?

Prunty: That was Tamarkan.

Marcello: Oh, Tamarkan.

Prunty: They did make a camp there in Kanchanaburi for a short time there, pretty close to the"Mango Camp." That's where we first really got to see some of the Number Two Branch.

Marcello: The railroad must have been finished by the time you got out of there then.

Prunty: The railroad was finished, as far as trains running, but about twice a week the Allied planes--American planes--would blast that thing out of there.

Marcello: So this must be probably September, October, 1943, or was it perhaps even in to 1944?

Prunty: I think it was late 1943. I'm guessing. It could have been 1944.

Marcello: That's a pretty good stopping place. Why don't we stop

there, and we'll pick this up another day since we've been going at it since 11:00 this morning and it's almost 5:30 now. We'll stop right here.

Oral History Collection

Luther Prunty

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald Marcello Date of Interview: October 27, 1986

Place of Interview: Jacksboro, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Luther Prunty for the North Texas State Oral History collection. The interview is taking place on October 27, 1986, in Jacksboro, Texas. This is the second in a series of interviews with Mr. Prunty in order to get his reminiscences and experiences during his tenure as a prisoner-of-war and as a member of the Lost Battalion.

Now, Mr. Prunty, when we stopped the last time, we had been to the point where you were about to leave the jungle and go to more or less a kind of hospital or rest camp. Let me ask you just a couple of general questions before we get to that point. Can you remember how many of these ailments or afflictions you had at any one time? Do you recall what you had at one time?

Mr. Prunty: Actually, the most that I had at one time, I suppose, was about three, maybe four. That would be malaria, dysentery, tropical ulcers, and then I had hepatitis. That completely put me out for a while.

Dr. Marcello: You mean a combination of all four or just the hepatitis?

Prunty: Well, I suppose it was really the hepatitis. Malaria would really knock you down for twenty-four hours, and then you could sort of whip it out. Certainly dysentery was a very weakening sort of thing, but with the burnt rice--charcoal from that--you could sort of keep it under control. Of course, the tropical ulcer just stayed with you irregardless. You kept up your treatment with it. But the hepatitis so weakened me that there just wasn't much left.

Marcello: Who diagnosed the hepatitis?

Prunty: We had a Navy doctor, an old, elderly commander by the name of Epstein. That was at the 100 Kilo Camp and just prior to me leaving the jungle.

Marcello: Was there any treatment they could give you for the hepatitis?

Prunty: None. None whatsoever, other than native sugar. They tried that on us, and, of course, the native sugar would work against the dysentery. Therefore, there just wasn't anything ...you lived or you died. Most of that was whether you really wanted to live or didn't care. It got to the point where most people really didn't care, but they'd go ahead and live until tomorrow, anyway.

Marcello: What kept you going? You personally.

Prunty: Me personally, I think, of course, religion had a whole lot to do with it. Another thing was talking with people you knew and the encouragement they gave you, the helping. You knew first-hand what a sacrifice they was making because

I'd done some of it, myself, prior to that. Of course, I believed that certainly the war would be over maybe tomorrow. Certainly not more than the first of next month.

Marcello: Even in those darkest days there at the 100 Kilo Camp, there was still that hope.

Prunty: Sure. It was more than hope. It was a reality. It had to be. You wasn't sure but what you'd wake up the next morning, and there'd be an invasion. Of course, there was always rumors to that effect, that they had landed and would be right on.

Marcello: By this time is there any radio still around yet?

Prunty: Yes, there was a short-wave radio. Of course, they tried to keep that as quiet as possible because with someone unthinking or someone with a fever, there's always danger in someone talking. Of course, it was a capital offense to be caught with anything of that nature.

Marcello: This short-wave radio would have been maintained by someone or some group other than Jess Stambrough because he'd gone to Japan, had he not?

Prunty: He went to Japan, yes. Actually, Captain Rogers and another boy by the name of "Gus"Forsman and also Casey operated it. But Casey didn't get into that until we got out into Thailand. Of course, everybody was on the lookout for any and everything. I don't suppose that you would have had to have anything but what somebody could come up with it. It would come from somewhere.

Marcello: You're referring to parts and so on for that short-wave set.

Prunty: Yes, right. If you couldn't get the parts, you made them. There was always material that would come from somewhere, especially after we got into Thailand.

Marcello: I do know that somewhere along the line there had been a hospital camp established back at the 80 Kilo. Had you ever gone back there?

Prunty: I didn't go back to the hospital camp at 80 Kilo. I was very fortunate in staying with the people that I did. There was some boys from Jacksboro that did go back, and none of them survived.

Marcello: That was more or less a place where people did go to die.

Prunty: That's exactly right. Some of them that went wasn't...well, there were numbers of people that stayed behind that was worse off than they were. They were given a chance--not by the Japanese--by our people as to whether or not they would go down there. There wouldn't be any working parties--any work done--out of 80 Kilo with the exception of camp duties. Some of them thought, possibly, that that might be easier down there than otherwise.

Marcello: On the other hand, were they put on short rations when they went down there?

Prunty: They went on short rations or no rations. Of course, they were looking forward to that fact that they'd possibly have better food. They had been told that. I didn't choose

to go, and I did my best to keep away from there. Well, the gunner corporal out of my section and one of the section chiefs that was with me all the time--both of them were from here--went, anyway, and they just didn't make it. They got to the 80 Kilo Camp, and it wasn't what they had been told it was. They built their hopes up too high, and when it wasn't there, they were whipped mentally; and once that happened, well, you were gone.

Marcello: I gather that they didn't send very many "healthy" people back to 80 Kilo to care for all of these invalid cases.

Prunty: Certainly not. They had to take care of themselves. Of course, there was no healthy people that went back with them. There were some that might not have been as sick as the others, but they were all sick. That was a sick camp.

Marcello: That sort of thing must have been especially bad for one's morale, and I can certainly understand why you didn't want any part of it.

Prunty: I certainly didn't want any part of it because by staying back with the people that I knew--and I knew they'd help me in any way they could--I just wanted to take my chances with the ones that I started with.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got out of the jungle and out of the 100 Kilo Camp and over in to Kanchanaburi.

Prunty: We were told that we'd be moving out. They were moving us out irregardless of whether we wanted to move or not. The

sick were moving--people that couldn't work. Of course, they dressed it up real well, that we were going to go where there were lots of food and that there'd be doctors and medicine. Everything would just really be fine.

Well, of course, we were very skeptical of that part, but there was four of us from Jacksboro here that were sick and were right together, and other boys had been waiting on us. We decided we'd chance it. We'd go together. Of course, we didn't have any choice. They told us we were going (chuckle).

They loaded us into a boxcar on this railroad. Mind you, it was a little narrow gauge railway, and the engines were fired by wood. We loaded on, and there was only five or six to a boxcar; and that was unheard of, the way they moved people over there. They moved us, and...I don't know...it took four or five days traveling on this train. I don't remember just how long it did take to get out.

We'd pass these native settlements, and, of course, we hadn't seen anyone but what was working on the railroad. There were no families up in Burma or anything like that. After we crossed the border into Thailand, we began to see the population and people. It was a fairly populated country, and we could see fields of vegetables. There was fruit trees. We really thought we'd landed in a very, very...well, it was heaven to what we'd been in.

Marcello: By this time food is definitely the number one priority in

everybody's mind.

Prunty: Definitely. There were more recipes written in 100 Kilo Camp in Burma than there have been in all the history of the United States, I believe. We were taken, then, to a little camp--small camp--called the "Mango Camp" in Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: Why was it called the "Mango Camp?"

Prunty: Well, it was a mango orchard. Of course, right at that time of the year, the mangos were getting ripe, and we really had a time out of that. Of course, we didn't have any clothes. We'd come out of the jungle and...but there was no working parties.

They did have two doctors there--Dr. Hekking and Dr. Bloemsma. They had also come out of the jungle. That was where they were practicing on the tropical ulcers. Dr. Hekking had devised a surgical instrument from a spoon, and he would dig the proud flesh out of that wound or out of that ulcer, scrape it out to solid flesh. Dr. Hekking didn't work on me, but Dr. Bloemsma did; and he was just learning from Hekking (chuckle). Even though he was a higher-ranked doctor than Hekking, he was still in a learning process on the tropical ulcer. But he did spoon my ulcer out. We didn't have any anesthetic, and it did hurt; but it got it out to the solid flesh, and it bled some and immediately began to heal.

Marcello: Let me back up a minute because I'd like to get some more details on this makeshift operation. Describe just exactly how it took place.

Prunty: This was just in a bamboo hut that was just like we lived in, other than this didn't have some bunks. But they did lay me down on a bamboo bunk that they could get on either side of, and they told me what they were going to do and that it would hurt; but if I wanted to live, they thought that was the proper procedure. So I agreed with them, and they went to work. Of course, before it was over, they had some people helping me stay there (chuckle). It was just an ordinary spoon like we have here, and he had ground that down, sharpened the edge of it. It still had a bevel in it. He just sharpened one side of the spoon. It was sharp enough that it would dig out that decayed or proud flesh. They didn't try to sew it up or anything. They just left it open.

Marcello: What was the recommended treatment at that point, that is, once the proud flesh had been spooned out?

Prunty: The only treatment still was hot water. In fact, they didn't recommend that you use too much hot water after the scraping because that would keep it soft, and they wanted it to harden and scab to where the flesh would start building back in, and then the skin would start growing.

Marcello: How long did it take before you saw results?

Prunty: I'd say three or four days--just almost immediately.

Marcello: That must have done wonders for your morale.

Prunty: It did for everybody. Of course, I think everybody in that camp, with the exception of maybe two or three officers or someone in charge of the camp...cooks...they had brought some cooks. In that camp, though, we had some Australians. We didn't have any English in that camp. We had Dutch and the Americans and two different tribes of Indians.

They were in the British Army and had been taken prisoner-of-war--the Sikhs and the Gurkhas. One of them would eat pork, and the other wouldn't; but they would eat beef, and the others wouldn't eat it. It caused quite a confusion because there was a place for a cookhouse where they could cook. The Dutch didn't want to...they wanted their way of cooking, and they told them, "All right, the Dutch could have the kitchen." The Australians and the Americans cooked and ate together. But the Indians...if one cooked in that kitchen, the other would go: "No way!" In their religion the shadow of the other one couldn't come over their food or it wasn't any good at all.

Finally, Ira Fowler worked that out to where he put one tribe of the Indians on one end of this bamboo building that was possibly forty or fifty feet long. He put one of them on that end of the building and put a little partition up, and then he put the Americans and then the Dutch and the

other Indians on the other end and put up a little atap partition between them.

But when they cooked, everybody had, of course, the same thing to eat; I mean, the ration was all the same. The people that was in the hut were all--most of them--in bed, and they had to carry the food to them. The cooks would cook the food and put it in sort of big barrel things, and they would hold five or ten gallons. Of course, stew was what...they'd have a stew of vegetables with plenty of celery and Chinese cabbage. We was getting a lot of vegetables--something that we hadn't had before. They also got in some beef and some pork. When the cooks cooked this and put it in those containers and set it outside, then the ones that was able to walk would carry these...two of them at a time would have a bamboo pole that you'd put through the bail of the pail and carry it to this hut that it was supposed to go to. They'd have people designated there that would ration it out to the people there.

I know one day the...I believe it's the Sikhs that don't eat pork at all. That's a "no-no." They set all the food out. I don't know whether it was intentional or unintentional, but knowing the Americans and the Australians, it was probably intentional. They carried the food with the pork in it to the Sikhs' hut, and they ate it. The Dutch people are very conscientious about something like that

especially, and they noticed the difference, and they ran up there and told them not to eat that, that it had pork in it. And they had already eaten it. If they could have just kept shut up about it, they wouldn't have ever known anything about it.

But they told them, and that really set off an uproar in camp. Their leader--I don't know what they call him now, but he was a sergeant major in the English Army--got out in the middle of camp. They have a little...I forgot what they call it now, but it was a little plait of hair in the center of their head, and it hangs down back. He got out in the center of camp and spread a little blanket on the ground, and he shaved that tuft of hair off, and that fellow prayed for, oh, three or four days, night and day. I suppose that's what he was doing. Anyway, he was down on his knees, and he'd say three or four sentences, and then he'd bow over and put his head in the dirt. He'd say a few words, and then he'd raise back up. That went on for three or four days. I thought the man was finished for sure, but he made it.

Then, of course, at that camp we got to go bathe twice a week in the river. The Khwae [Kwai] River and the other river runs together there at Kanchanaburi. Anyone that could walk could bathe, and we were only about five blocks from the river. They would line us up--anyone that

could walk and wanted to go bathe. They would send two guards with you. There wasn't possibly fifty people in that camp. Of course, everybody wanted to go take a bath. They'd march us down through town, which there was two or three blocks of a little native village. There was two stone buildings, and, of course, the streets was always crowded. They go somewhere all the time, night and day. You never see a native sleep (chuckle). There'd just be crowds and swarms of natives on the street. They would march us down to the river, of course, with no clothes on. Most of them had little G-strings, but it was very humiliating. The natives had never seen anything like that, and to be told that these were Americans and these were Australians, of which the propaganda...they'd seen to the fact that that's what went on.

Marcello: So in other words, this was really a deliberate attempt on the part of the Japanese to humiliate you before the natives.

Prunty: Right. It worked to some extent. But after staying in that camp...well, there's one other thing. I had just got to where I could walk. Of course, the tendon on the heel was eaten in two and my walking was stiff. I walked like it was a wooden leg, but I could walk around some. Woodrow Starnes from Decatur (Headquarters Battery) was just across the aisle from Worthington and Fillmore and myself. They came in with boiled eggs. Those that were going to die that

night or in the morning, they'd give them a boiled egg (chuckle). The ones that was really, really sick, they'd give them a boiled duck egg.

One thing that happened all the time was that we stole food from the Japanese from the word "go." That one particular day, Woodrow Starnes...they passed by him with their bucket, and he picked a duck egg. When he did he threw it across to me just across the hall. They got all their patients an egg put out, and there was one short (chuckle). They went back checking and trying to find it, but we'd already eaten it. The Dutch people were distributing them, and instead of getting another egg, of which we'd have paid for, they turned it in to the Japanese that someone had stolen an egg.

Of course, they came for a shake down, and nothing was there. They were sure that it had to be in the American hut where the egg disappeared. Of course, they got Captain Fowler and brought him up and was ready to really work him over, and they told them what all they were going to do to the camp. He asked if we'd go ahead and admit it. If we didn't, he was afraid we were going to get some rations cut. He said, "I don't give a damn how many eggs you ate, but the thing of it is, we're going to get rations cut for the whole camp. I told him, "Yeah, I ate the egg." And "Wolftoe" [Starnes] said, "No, he didn't. I was the one that

got the egg and threw it to him, and we split the egg. We both ate it." We admitted eating the egg, so they put us in jail in the camp.

Marcello: When you say "they," to whom are you referring?

Prunty: The headquarters of the camp. That pleased the Japanese, though. The Japanese were overseeing this, and they held a trial on us. We admitted this, so instead of beating us up, they let our officers or the people in charge of the camp confine us to camp (chuckle). That was the funny part of it because we wasn't going out anywhere. For punishment, though, we had to dig a trench around one of the cabins that didn't have a slit trench dug around it, and it had to be twelve inches deep and twenty-four inches wide. The water would come off into that. Then, of course, it could be used in case of air raids. Woodrow and I took the punishment. That was fine. We got out and started to work. It wasn't thirty minutes until every Australian and American in camp was ou there helping us. We finished it, by the way, in a couple of hours or so, and our punishment was over. That was one of the funny things that happened.

And, of course, after we were getting up to where we was feeling a little better, had a little better food and were getting over some of our sicknesses, that was about the end of the "Mango Camp."

Marcello: About how long were you in that camp altogether?

Prunty: I'd say approximately two-and-a-half to three months.

Marcello: Previously, you mentioned that when you came out of the jungle, it took you several days to get from the 100 Kilo Camp to the "Mango Camp." What kind of provisions did the Japanese give you for that trip by train over to Thailand?

Prunty: We started out with just some rice. Of course, that went for about a day-and-a-half, and then we stopped at another station, another camp. I don't have any idea what that camp was, but it was full. We got to the Three Pagoda Pass coming in to Thailand, and there the prisoners that was there brought us out some stew. I think a canteen cup full is what they gave me. That was water and stew, so that was the water we had, too. After we got into Thailand, they fed us again. That was at a camp where they were making railroad ties and cutting wood for the train. I believe that was English because they had come up from Singapore. We were on that end of the line then.

Then, of course, it wasn't but, oh, five or six kilometers from Kanchanaburi back up to Tamarkan and back up to the bridge. Shortly after this egg incident, everybody that could walk walked back to Tamarkan. Those that couldn't walk, they hauled them in trucks.

Marcello: Okay, let me go back a minute and fill in some more. So this small camp was located, like you say, five or six kilometers from Tamarkan and Kanchanaburi.

Prunty: No, it was right in Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: Oh, it was right there.

Prunty: Yes, it was in the little city of Kanchanaburi.

Marcello: I see.

Prunty: As a matter of fact, in 1983, when we went back over there, I could locate part of where the camp had been and there was a...it wasn't a McDonald's, but it was another American restaurant and hotel located on the old campsite, and there was a paved highway alongside it. But at that time, there wasn't anything there other than just the native trails.

Marcello: You seemed to indicate a moment ago that you were able to get hold of the mango fruit.

Prunty: Yes. And there was also breadfruit in there.

Marcello: Were these things distributed by the Japanese, or did you steal them, or how did it work?

Prunty: No. As a matter of fact, the Japanese didn't stay in the "Mango Camp" with us at all. They were out in town somewhere, and there'd just be one or two guards, and they were just on the gates. The guards didn't come into camp other than to bring rations. That's the only time the Japanese came in. There again, they had started letting the prisoners bring stuff from the markets. The Japanese would pick it out at the markets and load it on two-wheeled carts that you'd pull, and the prisoners-of-war would pull those carts and bring them into camp with the rations on it. There was

green vegetables and so forth. Oh, there was sweet potatoes and greens of all types and turnips. That was the first green peanuts I'd ever eaten, too. They brought those in. Thailand raises a lot of peanuts. Then they had sugar cane and stuff like that. That's what we traded with the natives. They'd have sugar cane in their little stands. They had got to paying us 10¢ a day in Japanese occupation currency whether we were working or not. It was just paper, anyway.

Marcello: Anyway, how did you get the mangos?

Prunty: Of course, the mangos, as they ripened, would fall. We devised ways of knocking them out of the tree, all right, and gathering them (chuckle). It was just free choice. If you wanted to go gather your mangos, well, you got them.

Marcello: Were they within the compound itself?

Prunty: Yes. Oh, yes. The huts were built between the rows of mango trees.

Marcello: Were these huts the same kind that you had up in the jungle?

Prunty: The same--made of bamboo and atap leaves. They weren't quite as bad. They hadn't had as much use. This was a new camp, and, of course, we'd got the monsoons over with, and we was going into the dry season. The camp was real good.

Marcello: I'm assuming that here at the"Mango Camp," you were close to civilization, like you pointed out awhile ago.

Prunty: Well, we were a lot closer.

Marcello: Does that in part, do you think, explain why you were getting

better rations?

Prunty: Certainly. Oh, yes. That plus the fact that they could get rations to you. The rations that we were getting were mostly grown right there in the valley.

Marcello: I guess what I'm getting at is this, and I have to be careful how I say this. Up in the jungle and during the monsoons, the Japanese were not deliberately starving you, but they had a bunch of manpower, and they were determined to get that bridge finished even if it killed you to do it.

Prunty: That is what Colonel Nagatomo told us. Certainly, they would have fed us better if they had had transportation ways to get it to us. But they didn't. And, of course, the Japanese that was there was going to have the better part of the rations. Now, I can understand that, but at that time it looked pretty bad.

Marcello: How much did you weigh when you went in the service?

Prunty: Well, when I went in the service, when we were mobilized and left Jacksboro here, I weighed about 165 pounds.

Marcello: And would you have any idea what your lowest weight was while you were a prisoner-of-war?

Prunty: Of course, that was when we left Jacksboro here. By the time we got to Java, I weighed about 175 pounds. As a matter of fact, they was getting after me pretty strong with being too heavy. My lowest weight...when we got out to Calcutta, India--and I had picked up some or picked up quite

a bit--my weight when we got to Calcutta, India, was 118.

Marcello: And you were lower than that.

Prunty: Yes, I had been lower than that. I don't know how much lower. Weight-wise, I don't know that, but strength-wise certainly; and generally weight and strength will go along. That "Mango Camp," though, started me and the men to get back to decent health.

Marcello: What did you do with your spare time? What did you do with your time here at the "Mango Camp?" You seemed to indicate awhile ago that you were not working.

Prunty: At the "Mango Camp," other than digging the trench around the hut, we cleaned the camp because they didn't have any workers to do that. Certainly, they needed the exercise, anyway. We did some calisthenics but not very much. Then, of course, we had a couple of decks--not a few, just a couple of decks--of cards. We played cards. We played poker, and we played bridge. It didn't really amount to a whole lot because everybody knew every card, anyway (chuckle). They'd been with us all the time. It's sort of like knowing your brother.

Marcello: I guess a deck of cards is one of those things that just shows up. There's always a deck of cards around.

Prunty: That's right. It sure does. Then we had a mahjong set. Mahjong is a very interesting game to me. It's just another rummy game, but certainly it's the Chinese equivalent of

rummy, I think. An awful lot of hours have been spent that way. Of course, we were gathering the different recipes that people had put out while they were in the jungle.

Marcello: You seemed to indicate a moment ago that there was trading with the natives. How did this take place?

Prunty: Well, there wasn't much trading with the natives from the "Mango Camp" because we only got out to go bathe. Anytime that you got out...the Thai people knew what was really going on, and there'd be somebody to give you a duck egg or two. They'd give you a little something. If you had any money, of course, or something to trade, they were ready to trade. But after we got up to Tamarkan, that's when the trading really started. We got up there...as I said, we walked.

Marcello: Le me ask you just a few more questions before you get to Tamarkan. How were such things as razors holding out at this point? Or razor blades? What did you do about shaving?

Prunty: There wasn't any razor blades. There was a pocket knife or two. Well, Paul Leatherwood came up with two old straight razors--the old flat-blade razor. It's almost unbelieveable. I don't ever say it very often, but Worthington and I both shaved not only at the "Mango Camp" but also at the 100 Kilo Camp. We didn't have anything else to do. I had a pair of nail clippers, and I literally shaved myself--not once but

several times--with a pair of nail clippers, just cutting off a hair one or two at a time.

Marcello: What'd you do about haircuts?

Prunty: We didn't have any haircuts as long as we were in the jungle, but after we got out of the jungle, then, of course, we started getting into the rackets, as we called it then. Some of the boys came up with a pair of old Japanese hand clippers. As I say, Paul Leatherwood had a couple of old straight razors, and he immediately became a barber because his great uncle was a barber here in Jacksboro (chuckle).

Marcello: Up until this time, had you been able to send or receive any mail of any sort?

Prunty: I had not personally. When we were at 80 Kilo Camp at first, they came in and distributed a bunch of cards that they were going to send home for us. You could say, "I am being treated well." "I have plenty of food." "My health is good." Just two or three little things like that. Or "Ed and I did so-and-so." Or "Dan and I...." Of course, if you could get that home, you could sort of get the message as to who was there.

But as I told you on the tape, I was on the wood party cutting wood for the kitchen. Some month or so after the cards were written and turned in to be sent home, I was cutting wood one day, and I found the cards behind a big log out in the jungle (chuckle). That was some 150 yards or 200 yards from camp. They had just took them out there

and dumped them.

Marcello: From everything I've read in doing background research for this interview, that was kind of typical Japanese. In other words, it was the act that was important. They probably knew that this was something they ought to do, so they distributed the cards; and you did whatever you were supposed to do, and then they just kind of dumped them.

Prunty: Right. They were through with it after you did it and turned your card in.

Marcello: Interestingly, I've also read that that's the way they treated their own soldiers. In other words, they would actually make their own soldiers write letters, and then they'd be collected and gathered and then maybe stored in some warehouse or something where they rotted or mildewed or whatever.

Prunty: I don't know about their own, but I do know that that happened because I ran onto it myself.

Marcello: Okay, now we're ready to get you up to Tamarkan.

Prunty: Up to Tamarkan.

Marcello: And about how far away from Tamarkan did you say you were?

Prunty: Seven or eight kilometers.

Marcello: Did you walk?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: By this time your ulcer is getting a little bit better.

Prunty: Well, I'm getting a little bit better. It took us all day,

and they didn't push us. We just went at our own pace. As a matter of fact, we didn't know where we were going. We'd just go a while and rest and go again.

Marcello: Describe what this Tamarkan looked like.

Prunty: Tamarkan was the largest camp along the line that we had seen and is still the largest one that I had seen. There was a road or street. It was what we'd call just a country road. On one side of that was the prisoners-of-war, and it had a fence all the way around, and it covered some, oh, I'd say, eight acres of ground. Across on the other side and between this road and the river--and, of course, the road was running right up beside the river--was the Japanese camp. It was shady over on their side. They had some good, nice trees. This was going into the dry season and into the hot season. Those atap huts possibly were a hundred feet long, or they might have been longer. They were built where then there'd be about ten feet between them. It covered that whole eight acres.

Marcello: This is a pretty big camp in terms of the number of people.

Prunty: Big camp. Big camp. I'm sure that there was maybe 5,000 or 10,000 people in there--natives, Australians, Dutch, English, and Americans. They did have the officers separated from the enlisted men at the insistence of the English. They had a parade ground out in the center of this. Well, on one side of the parade ground was the officers' hut, and we weren't

allowed to go across that. That was the British way of looking at it.

Marcello: I'm assuming that the senior officer in this camp was British.

Prunty: Yes. And the senior medical doctor there, then, was a Major Hobbs. He took over for the Americans and Australians. I can't remember the name of the English camp commander there. Anyway, the English were in charge.

Marcello: What kind of work did you do here at Tamarkan?

Prunty: At Tamarkan most of the work was going back up the line. By that time we were being bombed out fairly regular. We'd get the approaches put back into the bridge on the Khwae. Our labor was rebuilding those approaches back, and some possibly two weeks or sometimes three weeks later, they'd come and bomb them out again. They'd bomb out different bridges back up the railroad and the road itself. They kept working parties going up repairing the railroad, and they were bringing out the ones that was up there at that time for a little rest--just rotating them.

Marcello: In other words, when you went out on these repair details, you may be out there for several days at a stretch.

Prunty: Oh, yes. Two or three weeks at a time or longer. Some of them would be taken back to cut wood for the trains.

We had Japanese gun emplacements. They ringed the whole camp with gun emplacements. They told us it was to

protect the bridge. And I guess that's what it was for, but they had their guns awful close to the prisoner-of-war camp. But they had the prisoner-of-war camp jammed up against that bridge, too.

As a matter of fact, at one time they was bombing the bridge,and the overflow hit the camp. As a matter of fact, it hit the next hut over from the one that I was in. By that time, we had sort of quit running on that. They was coming in on the bridge and circling the camp and the gun emplacements, and we'd sort of slowed down on getting to a slit trench. They had the slit trenches all dug out around the parade ground. That's when the Japanese...I guess it was in June of 1945 that there was, I guess, twenty-eight or something B-29's. We'd never seen a B-29, but we knew good and well from how high they were and the size they were, even at that height, that it had to be something new. It just literally shook the Japanese up pretty bad. I'm sure that they had been getting rumors of the same thing that we had, that they had been getting the hell kicked out of them around Rangoon and on back up that-a-way and also in the Pacific. By that time, I think, they'd already taken the Philippines back.

When the bombings would start then, when planes would come over, we'd go to the slit trenches, and the Japanese would come across the road from their camp and get in the slit

trenches with us (chuckle). They just knew that the Americans wasn't going to bomb the American prisoners, so they'd just come over there and be with us.

At this camp one day they fell us out there and told us that they were dedicating a monument. Of course, we'd seen it dozens and dozens of times. You had to walk right past it to go to the bridge. They were dedicating a momument and had everybody that was well to come out to that dedication. They dedicated a monument to the people that was lost building the railroad. It seems to me like it was 64,000 that kind of sticks in my mind as to English, Dutch, Australian, and some natives. But that was the ones that had died on the railroad.

Marcello: Do you remember any more of the details of that dedication?

Prunty: Not really. They forced us to go, and I didn't give a dang what they was saying, anyway. It didn't amount to anything.

Marcello: What were your feelings about having to go out there to this dedication?

Prunty: Well, that was being told you had to do something, and that resentment was still there--the resentment enough that if it had been in the dark one-on-one, you could have easily cut his throat and had no remorse.

Marcello: This is kind of a leading question, and as an interviewer I shouldn't ask this. But did it seem rather hypocritical

to come out and have to witness that dedication?

Prunty: Completely. Oh, yes! All the time they was pulling something like that. Yes, very much so.

It was along about that time that I got into the rackets, sort of not expecting to. Anytime you established an easy job, we called it a "racket." We formed a little canteen right up against the road where you could unload from the road into this canteen. But it was still fenced there, and they had several of the Americans working in the Japanese kitchens and doing the cooking for them. I got into the canteen, and, of course, I knew a lot of them that was working in the canteen. I got out through the back and out to the road and got over into the Japanese camp. I knew that if I could get to their kitchen without being particularly noticed, the boys that was already over there would supply me with enough stuff that maybe I could get back to camp with it. I was strolling nonchalantly just like I was supposed to be over there working, and one of them stopped me. He asked me where I was going.

Marcello: Is this the Japanese or a Korean?

Prunty: It was a Japanese that stopped me. I told him that I actually had come over there to see the commandant. Well, lord of mercy, that really threw him, and he took me immediately to the commandant's tent. Well, luckily, he wasn't completely drunk that day, which he stayed a better

part of the time, or at least he didn't have a headache. He must have been feeling pretty good. They started questioning me if I was trying to escape and so forth. Well, "Certainly not. I wouldn't be trying to escape by going through your camp." I said that I'd come over to see him. I told him I was much better, and I said that the men in the camp needed some recreation, that I'd come to see if we could set up some athletics or recreation to get them out to exercise. He thought that over and thought it was a pretty good idea, so he said, "You bet." I got to go back to camp, and he wanted to know what recreation was proprosed. I told him, "Well, baseball," because I knew the Japanese was "gung-ho" on baseball. But we didn't have any balls, and we didn't have any bats. He said, "Well, we'll make them." I was crying for time, really.

He decided and said, "All right, what do you need? You will do this. You will be head of this project." I got back over to camp, and I told Worthington, "Man, I've really got us into it now." He said, "What?" I said, "The damn camp commandant has decided that I'll head up a recreation here, an athletic recreation, for the camp." He said, "Aw, well, we'll do that." We got an old pair of scissors. Where they came from, I don't know. But we got a pair of scissors and an old dull pocket knife and started in on a pair of Dutch leggings. Their officers wore leggings.

They were real fine leather. They were two ply, and we split those out; and we took some old woolen socks and started wrapping...well, we did have a little old piece of gum that somebody had brought in off a gum tree or sap out of a tree or something like rubber, and we wound a string around that. Of course, I had made balls when I was a kid at home playing, and I wound one up pretty good. We got an old suture needle, and we punched holes in the leather. We made us a pattern, and we punched the holes in it and just sewed it up and made a pretty ragged ball to start with. That was something to throw around.

In a few days we got out and had a little practice game with it, all right. We had a pole for a bat. The Japanese decided that they would just get some bats. They'd get some baseball bats. I guess they got them out of Bangkok or somewhere. Natives can make anything. Anyway, he came up with some baseball bats.

In the meantime, we'd been working on some more balls and got it down pretty good. We traded for some beeswax with the natives. We'd roll up that old wool yarn tight, by the way, and run this beeswax over it and make thread out of it. We could pull that pretty tight, and we made some fairly decent softballs.

We got it organized and got it going real good. The Japanese were really tickled to death. As a matter of fact,

they got a team. They got them up a team and came over and played a game. We made sure that they won (laughter).

As I said awhile ago, Tamarkan was where we got really started to going out of camp because the population around the camp...and there's an attorney in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His name is C.A. Back, Carl Back. He was a nephew of "Dutch" Meyers, the football coach at T.C.U. He came from a little ol' town like you were going to Waxahachie on 287. Anyway, we were acquainted there, and Back was a good poker player--good poker player. He might have been sitting on half a dozen cards, but, anyway, he could always bring out what he needed. But he had a bad ulcer and was sort of crippled and limped around. Worthington and I, who had been together all the time, we kind of got in a fuss with Carl. We'd really give one another the dickens. After he got up and got to walking, he'd come by our bunk where we was, but he'd walk over on the other side because we'd hit him with something as he'd come by, just actually for effect. And it worked. Back did a lot of going out and did a lot of poker playing all over the camp. He'd go outside, and he established things on the outside with a Chinaman. That was old "Tin Hooks," was his name.

Marcello: "Tin Hooks?"

Prunty: "Tin Hooks." Anyway, that Chinaman got him anything that he wanted for trading. That son-of-a-gun was just lucky as

you could be. He got to where, by golly, they'd come to the fence and get him and convoy him out. He asked me to go with him a number of times, and there was no danger because they'd convoy you. They'd take us out, by golly, and watch for the Japanese and then bring us back. And they did. I didn't go bacause we was still keeping up this other thing.

He'd come by maybe about dark. He'd store a roll of bills over on the bed with Ed and I. We were keeping his money. People thought that we were really fighting all the time. I guess that boy...they rolled him two or three times a week trying to find...they knew he had money, but they couldn't find it. They couldn't find out where he was keeping it. Ed Worthington and I kept his money. We had money. He wanted us to use all we needed.

He had won a diamond ring off of a fellow they called "Lord Nelson." He was a second lieutenant on the Houston, and this ring was a Naval Academy ring and had, I imagine, a two-carat diamond in it. His folks had plenty of money. There wasn't no doubt about that. "Nelson" got down sick, by the way, and didn't have anything to go on, and he'd been such a "horse," himself, all the way through that no one would pay any attention to him or take care of him. He sold that ring to Back. I don't know. I think he gave him maybe fifty English pounds or maybe 300 or 400 rupees or whatever. Nelson sold him that ring to buy food and medicine.

You could buy a little medicine in Thailand.

So Back brought that to me, and I put it in a ball, and also over a hundred English pounds and all the American money that he could get his hands on. Besides that diamond, I'm sure I had as much as $5,000. I wrapped it in a ball. I made a pretty nice ball out of it and kept telling them that was the tournament ball. I wouldn't let them play with that one because that was the tournament ball. That went on for quite some time.

When they started to move us out of that camp, we couldn't figure out what in the dickens we were going to do because they were keeping the athletic equipment there. Finally, I took that particular ball with me, and when I came out of the hut to go to the parade ground--I just got to the edge of the parade ground--and there was this Japanese that had been with Fowler all the time that was sort of an adjutant that was a little more decent than some of them. I looked and the camp commandant was coming in to shake down the troops and review the ones that were leaving. I pitched that baseball to this Japanese as a present to him. Well, by golly, the other Japanese were there, and that was something... prisoners couldn't give them anything. That was against their rules. So he threw it back. I pitched it back to him, but, no, he couldn't do that. He couldn't take that. He wanted me to have it back. We kept pitching that ball

around there playing with it, and we walked out of camp with that thing. They shook us down for everything. We walked out of camp with that ball, and I gave it to Carl, and I don't know what he done. He didn't go to the same camp I did.

They took me from Tamarkan at that time to another camp. Here at this Tamarkan camp, though, was where they had the gun emplacement up on the mountain that we had to go two to three times a week. I only had to go one time a week to carry food and water up to a Japanese gun emplacement on top of this high mountain, which was possibly 6,000 feet--a pretty tall mountain. The planes had been that day down toward Bangkok and had bombed and were going back to northern Burma or India. The Japanese let them pass and then opened up on them. They didn't hit any planes, but I guess there was a little concussion or rocking them around a little. Anyway, one of the B-24s just peeled off and came back, and, I mean, he sprayed that mountain all over. One of the fellows I was with in the working party was hit, and a Major Hobbes took his arm off then when we got back to camp. He comes to see me about three different times since we got home. He's an Australian fellow.

There at that camp they made another experiment on me. I had had dengue fever--what had been pronounced as dengue fever up in the jungle--and had got over it, so they theorized

that if I had had that and since at that time I was clear of malaria, too, maybe if I'd give a blood transfusion to somebody else, it'd make them healthy. They was just experimenting a little. They put me on one bunk above another fellow who was underneath me on another bunk and plugged us in. The gravity flow...I gave him a blood transfusion. They had no way of checking, and our blood didn't match (laughter). You talk about a man having a hard chill! When they quit taking blood out of me and let me get up, I looked at him, and he was shaking so, by the way, and just having a nervous fit. He was getting clear over that bunk part of the time, and he later died.

I went from there on down to Rat Buri. That's down south and a little west of Bangkok. Then I went on to Phet Buri on the river.

Marcello: Before we get to that point, let me back up and ask you a few more general questions about your stay at Tamarkan. I'm gathering that this camp was so large that it really didn't have any sort of a fence around it or anything.

Prunty: Yes, it had a fence all around it.

Marcello: What kind of a fence was it?

Prunty: Part of it was barbed wire, and part of it was bamboo. These boys that got jobs of herding goats and herding cattle would go outside the fence, and they would establish acquaintances outside. Then they could go back that night and do business

with them. They'd trade them a Japanese goat or something, by the way, for eggs or whatever.

Marcello: So there was a lot of going through the fence at night and so on at Tamarkan.

Prunty: Oh, yes.

Marcello: What would have happened if the Japanese had caught them?

Prunty: Well, they did catch one bunch, by the way. They had them caught. A bombing raid came about that time, and the camp just emptied. The whole camp went through the bamboo fence in getting out away from the bridge. The Japanese lost the ones they'd captured. They came back the next day, and, of course, the prisoners had to fix the fence. They tried their best to find out who they had, but, really, no one knew. Then they caught one where we'd been really getting our news. They had a radio, and also they had established a contact outside, and they were getting English papers. They got caught with those papers. The Kempei Tai caught them. That was Captain "Windy" Rogers and "Gus" Forsman, and they were taken away to be shot, which they never shot them. I believe "Windy" is dead now. Yes, I know he is. But "Gus" was at the reunion in Houston.

Marcello: I've interviewed Forsman.

Prunty: Have you?

Marcello: Yes, I sure have.

Prunty: Well, he was taken by the Kempei Tai from Tamarkan, and

they gave him a pretty rough time, I understand.

Marcello: It is, of course, at this camp from which the movie, The Bridge Over the River Kwai, is based.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Describe the bridge or bridges that were here at Tamarkan. What were they like? Describe them in a physical sense.

Prunty: The first bridge was an old wooden bridge built sort of like we built them up in the jungle. It was built with wooden piling, and it was just a makeshift bridge across the river.

Marcello: About how long was it?

Prunty: That river there is a quarter-of-a-mile wide.

Marcello: How about the second bridge?

Prunty: The second bridge was made of concrete and steel. I believe the wooden bridge was put in a couple of times. I wasn't there when the wooden bridge was being put in. It was while we were up in Burma that that bridge was being built. But then afterwards, when they were bombing the approaches to the bridge and so forth, that steel bridge was worked over. It's still there. As a matter of fact, there's train traffic on it now.

Marcello: That steel bridge was a pretty solid structure, wasn't it?

Prunty: Yes. But it was bombed out a number of times.

Marcello: Let me also ask you this, Mr. Prunty. Is it not true that there were a lot bigger bridges and so on built up in that

jungle? A lot bigger than this one here at this camp at Tamarkan?

Prunty: Well, actually, in terms of the length of the bridge, I don't don't know that there were. This bridge was just a single bridge across there. Goodness, some of those up in the jungle are two and three decks. They were just unbelievable.

Marcello: In terms of complexity, this was a pretty simple bridge.

Prunty: Oh, this was a relatively simple bridge, other than that the water might have been a little deeper here. Well, I'm sure it was.

Marcello: But it was that concrete bridge that the bombers were really after.

Prunty: The approaches to it. They didn't want to knock the bridge out. They didn't hit the bridge but just once or twice, and I think that was an accident. But they would knock the heck out of the approaches on either side.

Marcello: Who had built that bridge?

Prunty: As far as I know, the Japanese and the Siamese. I wasn't there when the bridge was built. I was there when it was kicked out several times (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about those bombing raids, then. Was there a particular time of the day when they would normally take place?

Prunty: The bombing raids themselves might come most anytime, but every day at the same time--you could set your clock by them

if you had a clock--there'd be an observer who came over. We had three Chinese boys with us that was mess cooks on board the USS *Houston*. They weren't Americans; they were Chinese. One of those Chinamen...their English was broken English, even worse than the Texans or the Australians. Ah Chi would say, "Come, look, see. Go back and tell." In this next camp, the "White Pagoda Camp," we built an airport. It just got to be regular there.

Marcello: What kind of bombers were being used? What kind of planes were coming over Tamarkan?

Prunty: Mostly B-24s.

Marcello: This was later in the war that you saw the B-29s.

Prunty: Yes. That was, I guess, it seemed to me like, around the first of June.

Marcello: But you didn't see those B-29s at Tamarkan?

Prunty: At Tamarkan, yes. At Tamarkan is where we first saw the B-29s. As far as I know, that was the only time that I ever saw the 29s.

Marcello: Okay, so one of these bombing raids is taking place at Tamarkan. What would the prisoners do, and what would the Japanese do?

Prunty: Of course, they would sound an alarm, and the prisoners would all go out to the parade ground--that was in the center of camp--where we had slit trenches dug. As I say, they sort of got used to that, and they didn't particularly hurry up much.

I remember one instance when Worthington and myself didn't go very fast, and another...Martin Chambers...Chambers was an East Texas boy, and we called him "Slim." We were all bunking up there together. "Slim" just got outside the hut and laid down in the drain ditch along beside the hut. Worthington and I got almost to the end of the hut, and the planes were already there, so we just dropped off in the drainage ditch. They made bombing raids on the bridge and knocked out the approaches. There was a couple of bombs that overshot their mark and hit camp. As a matter of fact, they hit the hut next to that. As I say, there were only about ten feet between them. Luckily, we were on the offside of that hut, and that put about twenty feet between us and where the bomb hit, and it really dug out a hole. It covered us up pretty good. We looked back down there, and Ed said, "We better go check on 'Slim'." We started back, and I seen him getting up out of that ditch. He was pretty well covered up.

About that time there was another one that hit. Of course, you can hear those things coming and see them most of the time. It completely covered him up that time. We got to him, by the way, and he was getting the dirt off of him again because those trenches weren't more than twelve or fourteen inches deep. He got up and shook like a dog getting out of water, and he said, "You know what? This is

getting completely aggravatin'." He talked like an East Texas Negro, anyway, or a Cajun. I never shall forget his remarks about that. It was really something.

Marcello: What would the Japanese do when one of these raids would happen?

Prunty: They'd come across that road from their camp over into the prisoner-of-war camp, and if they couldn't get somebody to get out of the slit trench, they'd just get in there with him, anyway (chuckle). It didn't make any difference. A lot of times they had water in them, too.

Marcello: What effect did these raids have upon the actions of the Japanese toward the prisoners?

Prunty: It made them a little hostile. After the raids would be over, they'd be pretty hostile for a while. Then they might get off with several people, and one of the Japanese might apologize. They were beginning to see the light.

Marcello: Do you have very many Koreans in this camp?

Prunty: Yes, but not near as many as we'd had back up in the jungle. This was mostly Japanese.

Marcello: What did those air raids do for the morale of the prisoners?

Prunty: Certainly, it was always a morale booster.

Marcello: Was it an indication that maybe our side was winning?

Prunty: "Well, it'll be over tomorrow." The landing had been made, and they were coming in. Then the day came when fighters came with them, and we knew without a doubt that it was

already over (chuckle).

Marcello: I guess you couldn't show your joy too much around the Japanese.

Prunty: No. You had to take it kind of easy on that. Of course, you could tell that the trend of the war was changing.

Marcello: Incidentally, I'm assuming from what you've said that those air raids probably started all kinds of rumors.

Prunty: Oh, goodness! Rumors had always been going on. The Japanese would tell you that they had bombed San Francisco, or they had bombed Amarillo.

Marcello: Had they ever bombed Decatur?

Prunty: They bombed Decatur; they bombed Jacksboro; they bombed Cundiff. Let's see. I've forgotten now...I think it was Dempsey Key that said, "Oh, bullshit!" And the Jap said, "Bombed Bullshit." (laughter) You knew that they was getting this propaganda. You knew better--but you couldn't laugh about it--when we got off and compared notes and so forth.

Marcello: You mentioned that from time to time there would be work details going out of this camp and up into the jungle to repair and maintain the railroad. Did you go on any of these work details?

Prunty: I didn't have to go on one. That's when I was in the rackets. My partner there got in the rackets, also. They were having plays, and they built a theater. Some of the costumes, you wouldn't believe. They were built out of rice sacks and so

forth. They were made out of rice sacks. Ed was the script writer. He wrote the script for a number of those plays they had there.

Marcello: So your racket was being the recreation director, and his racket was being the script writer.

Prunty: Right, script writer for the theater.

Marcello: And this, in essence, meant that you would have gotten out of some of the physical labor.

Prunty: I got out of practically all of it. I went to the mountain once a week.

Marcello: I'm assuming that if the work were equally distributed in this camp, nobody would have been going out on that road too much.

Prunty: That's true. Of course, there was a lot of sick people here, all right--a lot of sick people--but there was also a lot of people that were in relatively good condition.

Marcello: What was your diet like here at Tamarkan?

Prunty: Our diet at Tamarkan wasn't as good as it was at the "Mango Camp" but adequate. We had plenty of greens--vegetables that had grown there in the valley along the Khwae (Kwai).

Marcello: Describe for me how the canteen would get started. You mentioned this awhile ago. Where would you get your initial stock of goods for the canteen?

Prunty: As I told you, back to begin with, I believe, back when we were in Bicycle Camp, the battalion had some money.

Marcello: There was still some of that around?

Prunty: The Japanese didn't take money away from you. That money was split up and carried, and there was still some of that money around. There at the camp, with the Japanese permission, we established a canteen. Everybody was getting paid 10¢ a day whether they worked or not, so this was something to spend their money for and keep them satisfied. That had been sold to them, too. They would allow us to supposedly take the profits from the canteen and replenish. That was how the canteen setup got started.

Marcello: With what would the canteen be stocked?

Prunty: Bananas, mangos. Some of them would make rice cakes, for instance. I think Sidney Matlock got into the racket of making cakes, that is, cookies. There was all kinds of little things there. Fried bananas. There was always somebody coming up with something. As many recipes as they had, if they could get the stuff to follow them...mostly, it was eggs fried in palm oil.

Marcello: I gather that everybody was always looking for something to flavor the rice with.

Prunty: Yes. Sure. You bet. Oh, goodness! If you could buy salt, oh, that made rice twice as good. Then if you could buy a little pork fat or a dried fish...of course, they issued us what we called "white bait" once in a while. It was little minnows that still had the eyes, guts, feathers,

and all (chuckle). They were dried, and they would issue some of those. They were not bad. Actually, a year or two ago I had a barbeque out at the camp, and Bill Fillmore came up with a bag of "white bait." He had sent to Thailand and had them shipped over here. He brought me a bag of "white bait" out there for the barbeque. But it really made that rice go down better.

Marcello: Did you ever get any Red Cross packages while you were here at Tamarkan?

Prunty: If there was ever any that came in there, I didn't know anything about it. No, I don't think Tamarkan ever received any. I heard about Red Cross packages coming in, but I never saw a Red Cross package. There at Tamarkan, some of the boys got mail--some cards from home.

Marcello: Did you ever get any mail?

Prunty: None. My folks had never heard from me when I got...in fact, they had never heard whether I was dead or alive until I got to Calcutta and I got to call home.

Marcello: How about holidays?

Prunty: What is that (chuckle)?

Marcello: Did the Japanese give you any days off here? Well, you would have had days off here at Tamarkan, wouldn't you?

Prunty: At Tamarkan some would have days off but never the whole camp at one time. After we got out into Thailand, yes, there was some days off, that is, for other than working parties.

Marcello: Did you ever celebrate any of the traditional holidays such as Christmas or anything like that?

Prunty: No. There wasn't any way we could have. As a matter of fact, you didn't really know whether it was Sunday or Saturday.

Marcello: You had lost pretty much track of time.

Prunty: Yes, you lost all track of time. Monsoons and dry seasons is all you knew about.

Marcello: So you simply kept track of time by the rainy season and the dry season.

Prunty: Right, just like the natives. As a matter of fact, we lived underneath the natives. The natives were a notch higher than the prisoners.

Marcello: Did you receive much news from the natives concerning what was going on on the outside?

Prunty: Not until the last days.

Marcello: I guess their information would have been no more reliable than the rumors going around.

Prunty: No.

Marcello: You seemed to indicate that you were here at Tamarkan for some time.

Prunty: Yes, for a good long while. I don't really know how long, but I was there long enough to get rid of the lice and bedbugs. It was just a reasonably good camp.

Marcello: What were you doing about soap and toothpaste and things of

that nature by this time?

Prunty: (Chuckle) No, there wasn't any such thing. Lice would not stay in a woolen blanket. Of course, the Japanese blankets were all cotton, and they issued out a few blankets from time to time that they'd have. But I kept my woolen blanket, and, consequently, I didn't have any lice, only just what was on me or was in my bunk. They get in those bamboo...the termites would eat holes in the bamboo, you know, then lice could get in there, and bedbugs, too. Oh, it was something else.

Marcello: How do you get rid of those things?

Prunty: By boiling the blankets. You're not supposed to boil wool, I don't think, but I have (chuckle). And you could also hang your blanket out in the hot sun. Of course, you had to sit out there and watch them because somebody would take them and go trading with them.

Marcello: I should have asked you this a long time ago in the interview. I didn't so I'll ask it now. What can you tell me about theft among the prisoners, that is, prisoners stealing from one another?

Prunty: There was some of that--not a terrific amount--between the Australians and Americans. They didn't steal from one another, but the others had better look out. They were fair game.

Marcello: That's a point I wanted to make. In other words, Americans

did not steal from Americans, or Australians didn't steal from Australians.

Prunty: Some did. There was some cases. As a matter of fact, at the 100 Kilo Camp, I was crippled then, but I could stand guard for our fire watch. The Koreans got scared about us bringing some cheetahs into camp--cubs--and they decided that we'd all be eaten and they'd get them first. They decided that we'd have to have fires in the hallways of the huts. They put the lesser sick to doing that.

While we were in Java, before we left Java, Armstrong had bought an old pocket watch that was as big as a three-day alarm clock. It was huge. They were sending him somewhere. Anyway, he brought me that watch and said, "I wish you'd keep this for me. I can't keep it. You can keep it." I said, "Okay." I used that watch, and I wasn't afraid of it going anywhere. I drove me a peg in a bamboo pole in one of the posts and hung that watch up there where everybody could tell what time it was for the reason that we was on four hours and off on this guard duty. And there one night, by golly, the watch disappeared. I couldn't imagine...I thought maybe...the Japanese had tried to buy it time and time again. They didn't just take stuff away from you.

As a matter of fact, one had come in there, and this fellow Kershner, who lives out of Albuquerque, New Mexico,

now, didn't have hair on his head. He was just as bald as he could be except for just right around the rim. But on his body, there was hair two inches long and just as black as could be. Of course, we didn't have any clothes then. He had a mosquito net, and he was underneath that mosquito net rolled up in a blanket. One night this Japanese came through when I was on this fire watch. He came through there, and he was doing himself a bed check. He was checking to see if we was all there. He checked Kershner, and he was asleep, so he shook him. Kershner didn't know what was going on. He just threw it back and set up. He looked like a bear (chuckle). If you ever seen a Japanese take off, he really did. He thought his time had come. He was already caught.

To get back to stealing, I made a little inquiry about it. Out on work party the next day, one of the boys came to me and said, "Your watch went to the Japanese out there." I said, "Well, are you sure?" "Oh, yes," because that was the only watch in camp. I asked him about it. He said, "No." He didn't know anything about it at all.

Marcello: This is a prisoner that said he didn't know anything about it.

Prunty: Yes. I told him, "I think I can change your mind about that. I want to know about it--how much you got for it and so forth." He said, "No," he hadn't done anything about it. I

just had one leg, but I've always been able to take care of myself. Anyway, he said, "Yes, I took the watch." He sold it. He got twenty-five guilders for it. He didn't have the money; he had bought some food. But he said he would pay me back. I thought, "I don't particularly want the money." It was the principle of the thing that I was on. I didn't see him anymore until, oh, I guess, 1980. We met at Lubbock, and he hollered at me as I came in. He hollered at me. I didn't remember him. I couldn't put a name on him. I said, "Well, I just sure don't remember you." He said, "You ought to. You're the one who beat the hell out of me at 100 Kilo Camp." So I said, "How are you?" It was a little bit embarrassing in a crowd of people. He just hollered it out. My wife really got after me about that (chuckle).

Marcello: I didn't catch that a moment ago. So you actually did work him over to find out what happened about that watch.

Prunty: He had to take a little working to get him to tell the story.

Marcello: How long were you at Tamarkan altogether?

Prunty: I don't know. I really don't know. But it was sometime in 1944 when I went to Tamarkan, and I know it was in July, I guess, before I left there the next year.

Marcello: July of 1945. So we're getting down near the end of the war.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Now did you mention that you were at Tamarkan when the B-29s first came over?

Prunty: Right. I remember that. That was June 1 or June 6. I believe it was June 6.

Marcello: That was a significant date.

Prunty: You bet. You bet. It was really something because we had never seen anything like it. Goodness! Imagine what a B-29 looked like when we had never seen one! The Japanese didn't have anything as big as a B-24. Of course, we could recognize any of their planes or any of ours up to the B-24s. Of course, the P-38 and P-40 was all we knew as fighter planes. That little P-51 came down with the B-24s there one day. Goodness! We didn't know what it was, but we knew whose it was.

Marcello: What was the scuttlebutt going around about that B-29?

Prunty: Goodness! There just wasn't any scuttlebutt to be made. They had flattened Bangkok and Singapore. I think they had made a run on Singapore. I'm not positive, but I believe that was one of the saturation runs they put on Singapore.

Marcello: When all this activity is taking place, is the Japanese attitude changing any?

Prunty: You bet. The Japanese had become nervous. They knew what was happening. We had heard that the Philippines had fallen—the Marshalls and the Philippines and so forth. We were getting that news, but there was no way to confirm it. On the radio, certainly on BBC, that was the news coming out of it, but you couldn't afford to get any confirmation on

anything like that. Besides that, there was so much propaganda flying on the air, anyway, on both sides.

Marcello: Okay, so you move out of Tamarkan, and you go to Rat Buri. Is that correct?

Prunty: Yes. We stayed in Rat Buri overnight, and then we went on down, I'd say, twenty-five miles or so to Phet Buri. From Phet Buri we went west out of there. We actually went west up to what we called the "White Pagoda Camp."

Marcello: I'm assuming that you just passed through Rat Buri and Phet Buri.

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: What was your mode of transportation?

Prunty: The train.

Marcello: I should have asked you this earlier. Has most of the unit caught up with you now when you were at Tamarkan?

Prunty: They caught up with us at Tamarkan, and then they separated out the bigger part of the unit. That's where they put Branch Two and Three together. That was the first time and the first camp, with the exception of a few. There'd be a few little working parties off somewhere else, but the bigger part of them was there. Then they took a group from there to Indochina. There again, I had a chance to go on that, but Fowler was heading the bunch over there, and he said, "Don't go. You've got it pretty good here. If I was you, I'd stay." We were given the chance to go or stay, and we stayed.

Marcello: I should have asked you this earlier. How involved were you in your job as athletic recreation director here?

Prunty: I was really into it. You bet. That was a job that I could do and not have to go out to work. There wasn't any physical work. Of course, I had the job of refereeing the games and picking referees. Of course, I had to make up set rules, too. Some of those were changed from time to time (laughter).

Marcello: Would these be going on every day?

Prunty: No, mostly once every six or seven days.

Marcello: What would you be doing in between? Making your balls and so on?

Prunty: Making balls or making your bases. Just in general playing off, by golly. Staying out of sight. Making them think I was working.

Marcello: People are moving out of Tamarkan, and they're going to various camps here, there, and yonder. Some of them were going to Japan. What were your thoughts about going to Japan?

Prunty: I stayed as far away from Japan as I could get because there was more Japanese in Japan than there were where I was, and I didn't need anymore (chuckle).

Marcello: (Chuckle) Well, I guess that answers that question pretty well. Okay, so you end up, then, at this "White Pagoda Camp," and you say that you go there by train. About how many days are we talking about?

Prunty: A little over a day. The first day, we didn't load out until

10:30, I guess, in the morning. Anyway, it was up in the morning. We loaded out and went to Rat Buri. We stayed all night, and then we loaded on the train again the next day and went on to Phet Buri. We unloaded there, and there was a lot of supplies in the depot. This was on part of the railroad, now, that had been built prior to the war. This was on the railroad that ran from Singapore up to Bangkok. They loaded us there a good ways out in the country some, maybe ten miles. We went out by truck to a camp out there that wasn't finished at that time. We helped finish the camp. It was a very clean camp run by...the camp commandant there was an Australian officer. I made a good friend of him back up in the jungle. Everybody knew everybody about that time (chuckle).

Marcello: You called this the "White Pagoda Camp?"

Prunty: "White Pagoda Camp." We built an airport there.

Marcello: Why did you call it the "White Pagoda Camp?"

Prunty: Right near there was a white pagoda up on a mountain. That was the most distinguishing landmark around, of course. There were lots of pagodas. As a matter of fact, we stayed under some back up after we...well, no, it was after that that I stayed under a pagoda. The pagodas were all over that whole country, and the priests--the yellow-robed priests--just walked the countryside. Of course, they weren't supposed to look more than ten feet ahead of them and never look back.

They didn't beg for their food, but they had small boys that were training to be priests, and they'd get him the food from the population and bring it to them.

Marcello: How large a camp was this "White Pagoda Camp?"

Prunty: It was a small camp made up of, I believe, about fifty English and maybe that many Australians and Americans together. I don't believe there was any Dutch in that camp. It was a real, real good camp in terms of our food. Of course, by that time, the natives in Phet Buri were trying to come out. They'd seen the handwriting on the wall and knew who this was, and they were trying to get us food. The Japanese had to keep them run off. We were also getting wood brought into that camp by the natives. They were bringing it in by ox cart. I got a job there as an "articifer" in camp.

Marcello: An "articifer?"

Prunty: Yes. Doing nothing. Kind of picking up around camp. Worthington was stacking wood or showing natives where to stack the wood. I'd go down and help him. It was near the kitchen, and Garth Oliver and "Peanut" Johnson, a few of them, was always slipping us out something to eat. We were down there on day. We were bragging on this oxen. This young Siamese had a team of oxen and a cart there. They were relatively young oxen, and he had them fat, and they looked good. We was talking about what a good steak would

come off of an ox and was bragging on them. He liked that, that we were bragging on his oxen. He'd try to talk to us. Of course, there wasn't enough Japanese or Koreans around. Most of them was sent out to the airport where boys was working on the airport. They was grubbing the land, and they had an old grader that was pulled by a steam engine to kind of level things up with. They also had an old steam-roller. We were there one day, and he told us that he was... we looked for him every day and picked that certain one. He told us one day that he was going away. He was going on vacation. We questioned him about that. We asked if he was going to get married. "No, no, no." He wasn't going to do that. He was going to get him some gold teeth. That was their worth--the gold that they had in their teeth--and he showed us he had a couple of gold teeth. He told us all of them would be gold sometime. He was gone about a week or maybe two weeks. He came back and he was just grinning from ear to ear. He wanted us to see his gold teeth. Ed just got him completely down and opened his mouth up. We looked at his teeth and bragged on his oxen.

The next load when he came in, he picked up a stick of wood and threw it off over to the side. We went ahead and helped him stack his wood. He'd walk over there and kick that stick of wood. Ed said, "Something's wrong here, by the way. What in the dickens is he doing?" He went on out, and he

picked up that stick of wood to put in the stack, and it had a note in it. What it said was, "Meet tonight when the moon rises at the fence. Four hours forced march and you'll be with your people." We'd be with our own people. You could see forty miles in every direction, by the way, other than the little pagoda hills and so forth. At that time, some had made attempts to escape, and the natives would always turn them in for the reward they'd get. Ed said, "Look, by golly, we may be a bunch of gold teeth if we try this. He may just be needing some more money to get some teeth with." We talked it over.

The next day he came in, and we just gave him a note to take back, and we didn't hear anymore from it. One of the boys that was running the steamroller, when he'd kind of get caught up, he could get off in the shade and lay down and so forth. The Japanese didn't pay any attention to him. Harris, by golly, was running that roller; and Hoffman was driving a truck out on the airport there and would wait until they needed him. They both just took off. They'd been contacted, and they took off. And they made it. The Japanese tried to keep that quiet, by the way, so none of the rest of the prisoners would know that two escaped. They just knew they'd catch them. Well, they didn't, and, of course, as well as we knew everybody, we knew that they were gone. Some knew that they were planning to go. Those were the first escapes

that were made. That was at the "White Pagoda Camp."

Marcello: This person that had the ox cart must have been able to speak some English or read some English.

Prunty: Very little. Very little.

Marcello: Do you think it was he who had written that note, or was he simply delivering it?

Prunty: No. We found out later. That came on the day that we were released. That was some month or so later. We finished the airport. They took us into Bangkok and stationed us in warehouses. We stayed out in the warehouses a couple of weeks and then went out northeast of Bangkok to another work camp where we immediately started digging emplacements on the edge of the hills. We also dug an ammunition dump. These were just caverns. We were just digging a room maybe thirty or forty feet square and maybe ten feet deep, and then we'd cover it over or just tunnel in.

Marcello: Who was it that did write that note?

Prunty: That was Lieutenant Colonel Ball. He was with the...

Marcello: O.S.S. Office of Strategic Services.

Prunty: They called it the Rangers then, I believe. I asked him personally why he didn't answer our letter. He didn't sign that note; and if he had, it wouldn't have made any difference, anyway. We couldn't take a chance on it. I asked him why he didn't answer our note. If he had signed that note, we'd be happy to come. He said, "Look, we couldn't afford to do

anything like that. Hell, I just had enough room to take care of a few people. Had word like that got out, I'd have had the whole damn camp over here, and I couldn't take care of them."

We were out from this work camp from Bangkok, and that's where we slept under a pagoda. We had to walk that way, too. We walked, I guess, fifty or a hundred kilometers. That liked to have done me in completely because I was still crippled.

Marcello: Let me turn over the tape at this stage. Before we get you out of the "White Pagoda Camp," let me just ask you a few more questions. You mentioned that one of the major jobs here was the building of this airfield or airstrip or whatever it was. How big an airstrip was this?

Prunty: I'd say it was a cross strip and possibly 3,000 to 4,000 feet each way. It was one of the bigger strips in Thailand.

Marcello: Did they ever use it?

Prunty: Yes. Some of the boys flew out of there coming home.

How about the Japanese? Did they ever use it?

Prunty: No, because of this "come, look, see. Go back and tell." They were right on that all the time. That was when they were using C-46s and C-47s--which we didn't know what they were. But they were small enough, and they was flying at treetop level coming in. We could see the markings on them to tell who they were.

Marcello: Were these fighter planes or what?

Prunty: No, C-46 and C-47 transports. Fighter planes did come with them a time or two. One of the boys had a blamed monkey that had took up with him up in the jungle, and that thing could hear an airplane ten minutes before anybody else. We didn't have any air raid alarm there at the airport. That danged monkey could hear them, by golly, at least ten minutes away. You got ten minutes warning anytime a plane was coming because of that dern monkey.

Marcello: Do you recall whether or not that monkey had a nickname?

Prunty: Yes, he did.

Marcello: What was the name of it?

Prunty: I was just trying to think. Goodness! Yarbro had him for a while, and he gave him to this dern...I never did know whether he was Australian or English. He claimed to be American, but he wasn't (chuckle).

Marcello: I heard of one of these monkeys, and its name was "Mick the Yank." Was this the one?

Prunty: "Mick" was the name of the monkey, and he got the "Yank" from ol' Yarbro, who lived down at Marfa. That monkey was something else.

Marcello: Pretty ornery, too, wasn't he?

Prunty: Goddern, yes! Not only that, but the sucker would tell you when the Japanese was coming, too. If a Japanese walked in the front end of that hut, then all heck broke loose. No,

there wasn't anybody slipping up on you as long as that monkey was around.

Marcello: Was Griff Douglas in this camp?

Prunty: I believe Griff was there.

Marcello: He was the one who told me about this monkey named "Mick the Yank," and I can't recall which camp it was in.

Prunty: That monkey came all down the line there. That's like "Shipwreck the Cat," that cat that came in on that Dutchman's head when the ship was sunk. "Shipwreck the Cat" didn't make it all the way. Somebody ate him (chuckle). I didn't get any of it, doggone it.

Marcello: You mentioned that you are taken out of this "White Pagoda Camp," and you're taken into Bangkok, where you stayed just a little while.

Prunty: They took us by truck down to Phet Buri and loaded us back on the train. Phet Buri had been bombed out. They bombed out our supplies there. They didn't really have anyplace for us to go. They didn't have supplies out there either, and they had really started giving the railroad a lot of bombing. They had bombed the supplies out at Phet Buri. We were put on a train there, though, and took into Bangkok, loaded on barges, and we made the river trip through Bangkok on barges, which is quite a scenic trip. We were placed in warehouses, then, on the docks down the river between Bangkok and the coast.

Marcello: That could have been a rather dangerous place.

Prunty: It was. We looked for it everyday.

Marcello: Did any bombings occur while you were there?

Prunty: Consequently, we didn't have any bombings there. They bombed out the big bridge there at Bangkok, and that thing is still bombed out. They have never repaired it. They just left it like it is.

Marcello: How long were you down there at the docks?

Prunty: Some two weeks at that time. Then they took us out to... I forgot the name of the place, but it was just out into the edge of the mountain northeast of Bangkok. That's where we started digging the emplacements.

Marcello: Now were you in on these details?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: How was your foot by this time?

Prunty: Well, of course, I was still lame and crippled. I was walking on a wooden leg, more or less. It was just a stiff leg. I'd made that trip from the railroad out to that camp. We walked all day and all night until--oh, I don't know--about 3:00 the next day without stopping. Oh, we'd fall out, have little rest periods for maybe five minutes, but that would be about every two or three or four hours.

We went, then, from that camp over to a pagoda and slept underneath the pagoda for approximately a week. It was seven or eight days. I don't know. The lice and bedbugs

was so thick under that house--the Japanese had to stay there, too--that they decided to move from there. We came back to the camp and started...I had just gone out three different times, I believe, into the diggings.

Then August 14 was our last trip out there. It may have been the fifteenth, but I believe the fourteenth was our last trip out to work. We got out there. They didn't make us work. We just turned our tools in and started back home.

Marcello: In the meantime, what kind of days had you been putting in out there on those emplacements?

Prunty: Long days. They didn't give us any certain meters to dig, but there was a guard on each bunch. Those rooms would have eight or ten people working. Some of them were digging, and some of them carrying dirt out and covering over it.

Marcello: Were you out there from daybreak to dark, perhaps?

Prunty: Yes. We'd start out at daybreak and get in about dark. That was the last time, of course. We'd dig those rooms--I call them rooms--together and cover them with brush and so forth, and then we'd put the dirt back on top. Then you dug a hole--a tunnel--to go from one to the other. It was the fourteenth day of August that they fell us out to go to work, and then they fell us back in, and we had to go back to camp. Well, people was still fresh. They was ready to go to camp. Of course, I happened to be at the back end

of the column, and with a stiff leg there wasn't no way I could walk and keep up with them. That day was what finished me off 100 percent.

Marcello: What happened?

Prunty: I couldn't keep up. I couldn't even jog and keep up. The Japanese worked me over with a rifle.

Marcello: With a rifle butt?

Prunty: Yes. I was almost paralyzed, but I did make it into camp.

Marcello: So he was working you over on your bad leg as well as other places, I'm assuming.

Prunty: Right. On my back mostly. When we got back to camp, then they announced the next morning that the war was over.

Marcello: What kind of rumors were going around that day and that evening?

Prunty: Rumors were really going, but not as bad--here I am, jumping backwards--at that "White Pagoda Camp." There was an eclipse of the moon while we were there. They had dug a moat all around this camp, and they had mounted their machine guns on the outside of the moat facing back to the camp. That eclipse of the moon came, and the natives still believed that it was evil spirits blocking the moon out, and it scared them away. All hell broke loose. They was beating on everything and hollering and beating on tin pans and everything. It was the biggest racket you ever heard. Of course, it came, by golly, when we had all got to sleep. When that

started, the monkey started, too. Goddern! That camp really...we thought they was there. We thought it was the landing. The Japanese mounted their gun posts.

Marcello: And this was all in response to these natives.

Prunty: All in response to an eclipse of the moon, the natives were throwing such a party.

Marcello: I should have asked you this earlier. When you mentioned this Japanese guard worked you over. How did you get back to camp, then?

Prunty: Well, partially, for a little ways, I crawled. Then I walked. Then he finally decided then maybe there was something wrong with me after he satisfied himself by beating on me. He satisfied himself that maybe I couldn't keep up with the group. He just hung around back there and let me make it the best way I could. It took me quite some time to get into camp, all right.

Marcello: Were there any broken bones?

Prunty: No. What it did, it crushed the disc in my lower back. Of course, it pinched the nerve. By golly, my legs just wouldn't work. It was pretty painful to make them work, but that's the way it happened.

Marcello: So what happens the next day? Describe in as much detail as you can remember that next day when they made the announcement.

Prunty: The next day, they made the announcement, and the Japanese

went out of sight.

Marcello: How was the announcement made?

Prunty: Through our officers. They had one officer in camp who was in charge of each of the Australian and the American groups. They also had some Dutch there. They called the three officers that were in charge up there and told them that the war was over, and that they would, if we would allow them to, keep the natives out; but we was free to go if we wished it. They would provide transportation in a day or two back into Bangkok.

Marcello: Who was your officer?

Prunty: I believe it was Fowler. He was back from Saigon at that time.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard the news?

Prunty: There wasn't much reaction because I really expected it for a year or two before that (laughter). I was certainly glad. Actually, it still wasn't real. It wasn't real.

Marcello: What kind of a celebration, if any, took place?

Prunty: There were a number of them that celebrated quite a bit. As a matter of fact, they went up and took over the sake from the Japanese. They had quite a party, but they didn't feel good the next day. Anyway, they loaded us on trucks the second day.

Marcello: So you say that the Japanese just disappeared?

Prunty: The guards did.

Marcello: Including the one that worked you over?

Prunty: You bet you.

Marcello: Were you looking for him, or weren't you feeling good enough to look for him at this stage?

Prunty: I wasn't in shape to really hunt him. Of course, I could remember what he looked like. He was one of the camp guards there.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that you didn't really know the names of any of those guards?

Prunty: No.

Marcello: They all had nicknames.

Prunty: All of them had nicknames, and they were nicknames that we hung on.

Marcello: Usually, it was probably some physical characteristic or some other behavioral characteristic.

Prunty: Right. They took those nicknames; they adopted them. That's who they were.

Marcello: So, anyway, they take you out the second day.

Prunty: They took us back into Bangkok to the warehouses, right where we'd been before.

Marcello: Who is "they?"

Prunty: The Japanese. They drove the trucks.

Marcello: There are some Japanese around now.

Prunty: Yes, yes. The Japanese noncommissioned officers and the Japanese officers didn't go anywhere. They stayed put. They took us to the warehouses, and they brought us food

rations in.

Marcello: Did they still have the guns?

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: What kind of reaction could you note among the natives?

Prunty: Of course, that was one thing. They were keeping the natives completely away from us, but you've been noticing for, oh, several months the change in the natives. They wanted you to go with them. They wanted to give you something. They wanted to do something all the time.

About the third day...no, it wasn't. It was later than that because it was on August 27 that we had a deck of cards, and we was playing bridge. We were sitting in a ring on the floor on a blanket. Ed Worthington, Bill Fillmore, Ira Fowler, and myself were playing. This American major came walking in the gate in full uniform. He had on a sidearm. The Japanese guard paid no more attention to him, and he darn sure didn't pay any attention to the guard. That was when we knew--there wasn't no doubt about it--that these rumors were over.

Marcello: How long were you back here in Bangkok?

Prunty: Let's see. That was the 14th or 15th of August, and they kept us two or three days. I don't remember. But on the 27th of August was when this Lieutenant Colonel Ball, Jr., came walking in there, by golly, with sidearms on. He walked right up in the bunch there. Of course, we didn't have any

clothes on. We didn't have any clothes on, so he didn't know our nationality. He just walked up in the bunch there and said, "Are there any Americans around here?" Worthington said, "Hell, you're standing right in the middle of them." He said, "Could you be ready to go home in thirty minutes?" That's when Fowler jumped and said, "Can you take back twenty-nine of them?" We got up right then. We left everything right where it was and started out the gate. We got the truck that the Japanese had brought in rations on, and everybody got on that truck that could. Every quarter to a half-a-mile, by the way, we'd commandeer another vehicle. When we got to the airport, there wasn't over two or three people on one vehicle. We commandeered every vehicle between there and the airport. The Japanese there still had a ring around the airport. They had their machine guns mounted... rifles.

Marcello: They were acting in a disciplined way, though?

Prunty: Really, they were. They hadn't said anything. These planes just came in and set down. They told us to get on just as fast as we could and not to hesitate. Just as fast as they'd get one plane loaded, there'd be another one hit the ground, by golly, and they'd load it and take off.

Marcello: Did you get on with your G-string?

Prunty: I got on with my G-sting.

Marcello: That's it.

Prunty: Right. I hadn't been on that plane more than ten minutes--

we just got airborne good--and this fellow came back through the plane. Of course, we were on a C-47 with bench seats on either side. He comes walking back through there and asked if any of us were from Texas. Hell, everyone of us was. He said, "Well, is there any Jacksboro or Decatur people on here?" I looked at him, by golly, and said, "Yeah." Hell, I knew him. It was Carl Lovelace. He still lives over at Decatur. They flew us into Rangoon, and there they gave us some clothes and fed us our first meal.

Marcello: Do you recall what that first meal was?

Prunty: No. It was field rations. As I recall, it was cheese--just the old field ration. But they did have a table set up that we could sit down and eat.

Marcello: Now that's interesting. How long had it been since you had sat down at a table?

Prunty: Goodness! It was when I was at Singosari in Java--when the war started, actually, for us. There were nurses there, and there was some Wacs. Hell, we didn't know there was any women in the Army. They all looked like they were sick. They were so white; they didn't have any color to them. We had all been subject to the jungle and the heat for two or three years there, and we looked like a native. We were as dark as the natives.

They asked us if we wanted to stay all night--if we were tired and wanted to stay all night--or if we wanted to

get on out to Calcutta. We said, "Hell, let's go!" We came out over the edge of the Himalayas there, and, I'm telling you, that was a ride we won't forget. They had a rope tied up in the center of this plane with a bucket on it. When someone would start to lose his cookies, they'd just slide the bucket down to him (laughter). Goodness!

Marcello: I guess you were actually flying between those mountains, weren't you?

Prunty: We went over part of them. By golly, that plane was just like being on a real fast elevator. It might fall for seemingly 500 feet or a thousand. You'd think, "Well, this is it. It's gone this time." In another minute or two, you'd go up just that fast--just right straight up. We got out to Calcutta,and that's where we really had our first meal.

Marcello: Describe that first meal in Calcutta.

Prunty: Actually, we got in there at possibly 8:00 in the morning. It was early morning. They unloaded us at the airport and took us to camp. Of course, that wasn't anything new. It was just another camp with a high fence around it (chuckle). It was a hospital there. They had the fence to keep the Indian beggers out. Man, they were just lined up around the fence. They took us into the officers' mess, and we could have anything we wanted to eat.

Marcello: What did you want?

Prunty: I wanted a steak. They brought me out a sirloin steak--a big one, broiled--and a baked potato and coffee. I looked at that son-of-a-gun, and I started. In about three bites, that was it. That was all I could eat. I ate a little of that baked potato. I said, "I'll just have to call it quits." I drank my coffee.

Marcello: That must have been frustrating.

Prunty: It definitely was, but I wasn't the only one. It was terrible, by golly--a terrible waste of food. It really was. There was enough food on my plate to have fed ten or fifteen men for a day's ration.

Marcello: A day's ration up in the jungle.

Prunty: Oh, yes. That's what I meant--for ten or twelve men, the way we'd been eating.

We were all placed in the hospital there. They started examinations and pills. They started trying to de-worm and de-louse us.

That was impossible because military discipline had just about gone. It was sort of nil. There'd be some of them to decide they wanted to go downtown. They'd just go to the motor pool, by golly. They didn't give a darn if it was a colonel's jeep or command car or what it was. They just took it and went. There was a lot of static about that, but there was more static about us when we got downtown. We weren't to have anything to do with the natives at all,

and definitely not to eat. Well, for goodness sakes, compared to the stuff that we'd been eating, the natives had a lot better. They gave us a little money, so, by golly, we could sit down on the sidewalk and eat those fried bananas with the natives, and the MPs would just have a fit. But they also had orders that they couldn't do anything with us. They couldn't understand how on earth we could eat that. Our systems were immune to anything like that. You eat it here now, and it would kill you.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that you guys had taken orders for so long and had been yelled at and shoved and pushed for so long that you were about through taking orders for a while?

Prunty: It was over. We knew that military discipline, all right. But you still, by golly, had had that so doggone much, and you just made up your mind that they'd have to do a little beating like the Japanese did to get you to do it. And they wasn't going to do that. You had it so much better, and there wasn't anything, really, to do. They didn't try to make us do a whole lot. They asked us to please be there in time to take our medicine.

Marcello: Were you picking up weight pretty fast?

Prunty: Oh, you bet!

Marcello: It doesn't take too long to put it back on.

Prunty: No, it sure doesn't. You gain it back pretty fast. They kept me about forty days in Calcutta. From Calcutta they

brought me in to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. Of course, they kept up the pills, and you could go and come as you wanted to because they all knew you were crazy, anyway. I got stopped a time or two out on the lawn there when old General Westmoreland was making an inspection up there one day at Walter Reed. There was guards talking, and I asked him what he wanted. He said, "Your cutting across the lawn here. Walk on the sidewalk." I said, "Hell, I'll get my shoes shined when I get to where I'm going, anyway. It doesn't make any difference." He told me, "No, go on back to the barracks. Go on back to the building until this review passed." I told him, "No. I'm already late."

I was going to the canteen. They gave us two bottles of beer a day at the canteen. That was the prescription. That was part of it. Then we could buy as much as we wanted to, but two bottles was issued. The thing of it was, if you wasn't there to start with, then the first round of beer was on you. So I started on. I told him to get the hell out of the way. I was going on to the canteen.

Well, he hollered for the corporal-of-the-guard, and here he comes. I told him, "Well, you might as well call the officer-of-the-day because I'm going on now." Well, he did. The officer comes down there, by golly, and he was really telling me they was fixing to take me to the guardhouse.

I said, "All right, if you just get to." There was a major who drove up about that time and asked what was going on. They told him. He said, "Oh, hell, let him go. That's one of that crazy bunch we brought in." (chuckle) He told them what I was, and they just backed off and went on.

That went on my record. The next morning I was asked to go for another examination across the street to a building. I didn't think anything about it. I walked in, and when I did there was a steel door that fell down behind me (chuckle). I was behind bars. I was kept there about three days. That went on my medical record that I was really crazy.

Marcello: What kind of treatment were you receiving for your leg and also for your back?

Prunty: They only put me in traction for my back. They did that in Calcutta and straightened me out pretty good there. For my leg they didn't do anything. They had some sulfamilamide and some penicillin. I'd never heard of penicillin. Anyway, I got my first penicillin in Calcutta. Then when I got to Walter Reed, they operated. They tied this heel string--tendon--back together, and they also repaired this hand where I got cut. On this hand (gesture) these three fingers were down.

Marcello: Those are your thumb and your...

Prunty: No, these three fingers here (gesture). This was cut clear to the bone.

Marcello: What you're showing me is your right hand, and it's the little finger and the next two fingers to the little finger.

Prunty: Yes.

Marcello: They were kind of withdrawn or withered or whatever.

Prunty: They were drawn...this right here was completely grown...this finger was growing over here (gestures).

Marcello: Those tendons, I guess, were severed or messed up in some way.

Prunty: I don't know, but they operated and straightened these fingers up. Then they gave me a ball. That's the way I exercised that hand. Now, I can barely tell I had a problem. Oh, sometimes I can tell. This knuckle is completely down. Otherwise, I can straighten my hand out, and the scars are about all gone. They started back here (gestures).

Marcello: At your wrist.

Prunty: Yes. That whole hand was just torn out. They fixed me up. They did a good job at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. They know what they're doing. They'd had some practice, too, I guess.

Marcello: When did you finally get back to Jacksboro?

Prunty: I got back to Jacksboro...I believe it was on December 21. I got home in time for Christmas.

Marcello: What were the biggest changes that you noticed during your absence?

Prunty: Of course, I know there were changes at the time, but Jacksboro

doesn't change that much. I'd been briefed on it. Of course, I had talked home back and forth from Washington, and they had told me all of the news and so forth from home, plus the fact that there was one or two...well, there was a naval lieutenant in Washington that lived here, and I've known him all my life. I went to school with him. There was also a general that was in the Pentagon. He and I had graduated from high school together and went into this National Guard together. He was too young to go in when we went in, but he went as mascot the first year. His father was a medical officer. Edwin didn't go with us. He went on into Randolph Field and became a pilot prior to the war. Then he went to the British Army. As a matter of fact, he was ferrying planes. We couldn't send them over from the United States, but we could take them up to the Canadian line, and they'd push them across the line. He flew planes from Canada to England. When we got back, he was in the Pentagon. He came out to see me and gave me a lot of advice.

He came and got me and took me over to the Pentagon. He took me by the insurance office to make sure my insurance was intact. I told him, "Hell, I'm home. I don't need any life insurance now." But he said, "Oh, yes." He and I argued like we had all of our lives. We got over there, by golly, to the insurance office, and there was a corporal at the desk. He asked for my serial number. Of course, we didn't have any

records. We had to make up records. He said, "Make an allotment from compensation for Prunty's insurance." I said, "What the hell was that? You're not going to take any money away from me for damned insurance! I don't want any!" He said, "You're getting it anyway!" I said, "By God, I'm not!" Me and him got in a little "hassle-wrassle" there. It scared the hell out them. They didn't know whether to call the MPs or what to do. Anyway, Ed finally said, "Now, dammit, they're going to put you out of here on 100 percent disability. What I want you to do is go ahead and sign up for this insurance and make it payable out of the allotment--out of 100 percent. You can be out thirty days, not more than sixty. Then they cut that to 50 percent, and then in another thirty days it may go to 30 or 10 percent. But they'll never cut it lower than what they're paying themselves." I said, "Oh, you're crazy." He said, "Crazy or not, you go ahead because that's exactly what's going to happen."

He was just exactly right because I came back here, and they let me...well, it was about six months before they cut it to 50 percent for this disability and put me on temporary duty. Then a short while after that, they cut it again. When I got my discharge, they cut my disability to 10 percent. I let it run like that until 1951 or 1952. Then I decided, "Oh, well, heck, I'll just convert that to twenty-year pay through the Veterans Administration." And I did. So help me,

all of that time, up until I retired, the government paid for my insurance and paid me $3.16 a month. I thought he was crazy to start out with.

Marcello: Did you have any problems adjusting once you got back?

Prunty: You bet! You bet! There were plenty of problems. I was one of the lucky ones, in a way, I guess. I had been told while I was there...they kept me a little longer at Walter Reed than they did the other boys. As a matter of fact, Marvin Tilghman, who had come in from Saigon, was left there. One of the Brimhalls and Crum were there, too. They kept us. There wasn't anymore of the prisoners left there where we were.

During that time, Mrs. Pepper--Senator Pepper's wife, from Florida--sort of took us over. There was four of us. We saw Washington completely. Of course, they accused Senator Pepper...he was running for President. They really got after him. We went to a joint Senate and House meeting. There couldn't be anybody in there, but there were. They recessed and came up. Tom Connolly was from Texas then, and Lee O'Daniel was the other Texas senator. W. Lee O'Daniel sat over there and looked at us like he was afraid, by golly, that we wanted to borrow some money. Sam Rayburn and Tom Connolly and one or two more of them really tried to take care of us. And Mrs. Pepper took us out to the White House for dinner and a dance. She just really showed us around

Washington, D.C., and tried to explain to us that things was going to be so different. Not only would it be different just coming back out of the military, but under the situations where we had been, it was even going to be worse trying to adjust to civilization.

She was right--quite right. As I say, I was quite a bit luckier than a lot of them because when I got back home, my parents still lived out in the country. They didn't want me to do anything. They wanted me to just stay at home, which I did quite a bit of. I broke over some, all right. I don't know. I might have become an alcoholic if I'd have stayed at it a little longer, but my folks were a pretty good influence on me. I did have enough sense to listen to them some. I didn't do anything for over a year.

After a year there, it was an election year coming up--1946--and they talked me into running for tax assessor-collector of Jack County. The incumbent, who had already announced for office, came to me and said, "There's a rumor that you're thinking about running." I said, "Well, I haven't really decided. There's been a number of people that have asked me to and have wanted to finance a campaign. I don't know." He said, "I'll tell you what. If you will announce, I'll withdraw. I'll guarantee you there won't be any opponent." I talked it over with him, and he said, "I'll tell you what you do. Why don't you come in the office here and see what

goes on and work if you want to. I'll bond you." I went in and fooled around with him there thirty days, I guess. Just before filing time, I said, "Well, yes, if that was the way it is, I think I'll just try it then." That's how I came to be in politics. I stayed in fifteen years there without an opponent.

Then I was appointed to county auditor. The county auditor died, and I was appointed county auditor. I stayed there fourteen years. I retired after twenty-nine years with the county. I don't know whether you call that politics or not, but, anyway, that is the way I got into it and was very lucky.

I didn't have to go through what a lot of the boys did--the adjustments. My family, I think, was the big thing that helped me.

Marcello: I guess everybody had to adjust in their own way, did they not?

Prunty: Yes, they did. They really did.

Marcello: In other words, what worked for you might not have worked for somebody else.

Prunty: Well, I'm sure that it wouldn't.

Marcello: I was thinking, for instance, in the case where you mentioned that you were more or less out on the farm and away from everybody else for a year. Probably for others, it was best that they started working and get back into things

right away.

Prunty: Right. But then those that did, a lot went wrong for them.

Marcello: Were you ever prepared in any way by military psychiatrists or psychologists for adjusting?

Prunty: No.

Marcello: You, in essence, were treated for your medical problems and released.

Prunty: Right. Of course, the psychiatrists that I had at that Walter Reed in Washington, D.C., as I say, knew we were crazy; and as I look back on it, I know we were, too. There's no doubt about that. As far as them doing anything to kind of get me ready for my civilian life, no.

Then I went to Camp Fannin, Texas, to be discharged. Of course, I got over there and came down with malaria the night before I was supposed to be discharged the next morning. Goodness, when I ran about 105-degree temperature, the doctors just went nuts: "You can't do that. You die when termperature goes up like that." Well, with malaria you don't. I've run a lot higher temperature than that. But they put me in a hospital, and I had to stay there for a while.

That's where I met my wife. Actually, she was working for the Red Cross. She was teaching in Lawton, Oklahoma, but the pay was so much better out at the base that she went into finance. From Lawton she went with finance to Guatamala. When the war was over, she came back. Of course,

they didn't need that many in finance anymore, and she went into the Red Cross--professional Red Cross--and was at Camp Fannin. She was stationed at Camp Fannin over a group of people who were assigning discharges. Fillmore had a date with her. Of course, he had my automobile. When we left here, I'd just bought a new automobile, and my folks just put it in the garage, and no one touched that automobile until I got back. When I went to Fannin, well, we'd gone in my car; and there I was, in the hospital, and Fillmore took the car. He and Dorothy had a date, and they came to the hospital to see me. I tell her, by golly, that she was carrying old magazines around, wanting to write a letter home for you. That was about my experience along this line.

Marcello: As you look back on...I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Prunty: We have pretty well kept up with one another through the years. "Quaty" Gordon has done a wonderful job getting addresses and telephone numbers and so forth. He started that, and we're continuing on with it. We're getting a little better each year in that respect. It's been a closeness. That was another thing about getting back into civilian life. When something went wrong that you didn't know what to do about, you could always get a bunch of these guys together, and you could tell it like it was. By golly, there was no punches pulled, and they'd certainly give you the best advice they could. If anything could come out of it, they would have

certainly been behind you 100 percent. And it's still that way. There's a few, but a very few, that don't really associate. The rest of us, I'd say, once or twice a month always have a get-together somewhere. There'll be a get-together Thursday night over at Runaway Bay.

Marcello: Well, it's a closeness that I've never seen--that's for sure--with any other group of people.

Prunty: Honest to goodness, if I was broke and needed money or anything else, I just as soon and just as quick would go to any of this bunch of people as I would my brother. Certainly, he and I grew up together. When we got back I had a little money saved up, all right. The money I had coming in pay didn't amount to a whole lot. I decided to buy my home here. He was talking with me about it. He had just moved to California. He came back here because I was home. I told him what I thought I'd do. He said, "Well, have you got the money to pay for it?" I said, "Well, no. But I can go to the bank and borrow the money. I can get the money. I've got possibly a third or half." He said, "No, you don't need that. Tell me what it is." He paid for my home--all except what I paid down. Every one of this bunch would do the same thing with me. I know I'd do the same thing for any of them. There's no question about it.

Marcello: As you look back--and we can summarize at this point--what do you see as being the things responsible for your survival?

In other words, why did you make it back and a bunch of them didn't?

Prunty: Friends, religion, up-bringing. Just the environmental up-bringing.

Marcello: I'm sure you probably thought about that many times.

Prunty: Oh, yes, certainly. It stays with you. You know without a doubt that your spiritual background and your friends and your education and your up-bringing instill in you that wanting to live.

Marcello: That wanting to live?

Prunty: Right.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Prunty, that's a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of interesting and very important things, and I'm sure that this information is going to be very valuable to whomever reads it and studies it.

Prunty: Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this, not only for me but for the other boys, and I hope that something can come out of it in a way that somebody might learn something. I know I took up a lot of time, here and so forth, but there's so much to tell. When you were living a day at a time for practically four years, then certainly this little amount of time doesn't cover everything.

You must know, for instance, that in our organization

there's no dues. You don't pay any dues. You don't have any membership dues because you don't join. You had to be there to be one, and certainly we're not going to charge anyone for being there. That's the whole situation to me.

Marcello: That's probably a good place to end this interview.

Prunty: Thank you very much.