

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER  
0069

Interview with  
Mr. Robert Gregg  
March 24, 1971

Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald Marcello

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Robert M. Gregg  
(Signature)

Date: 3-24-71

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Oral History Collection

Mr. Robert Gregg

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Decatur, Texas

Date of Interview: March 24, 1971

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Robert Gregg for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 24, 1971, at Decatur, Texas.

Mr. Gregg was a member of the "Lost Battalion" during World War II and was subsequently captured by the Japanese. I'm interviewing Mr. Gregg in order to get his experiences and reminiscences during that period when he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II.

Mr. Gregg, before we get into your actual service experiences, would you please give us a brief biography of yourself. When were you born? Where were you born, your education and so on and so forth.

Mr. Gregg: I was born in Decatur, August 23, 1915. I went to high school, finished high school in Decatur. No college work.

Dr. Marcello: When did you enlist in the Army?

Mr. Gregg: January 27, 1941.

Dr. Marcello: 1941. Why did you enlist?

Mr. Gregg: I was drafted.

Marcello: You were drafted into the Army?

Gregg: I was, yes.

Marcello: And you ended up in the 36th Division, is that correct?

Gregg: That's right.

Marcello: Which was originally a Texas National Guard outfit.

Gregg: Right.

Marcello: Where did you take your basic training?

Gregg: Camp Bowie at Brownwood.

Marcello: Camp Bowie at Brownwood, Texas.

Gregg: Right.

Marcello: Was there anything interesting that happened at Camp Bowie that you think ought to be a part of the record?

Gregg: Nothing more than just regular Army routine, I believe.

Marcello: I see. At the time you enlisted in the service, did you ever have any idea that the country might possibly soon be plunging into war?

Gregg: We thought about it, but we didn't think it would be at least not as soon as it was. And when they told us that we were going to the Philippines, we thought we were missing all the war business. We thought everybody that was going to get into the war was going to Europe.

Marcello: While you were at Camp Bowie, did you undergo any sort of special training that might prepare you for what you might possibly meet in the Philippines?

Gregg: No, not any special training. It was just regular Army

training. We had some training in Louisiana, which was probably similar as much so as could be to the terrain and so on of the Philippines, but no special training at all.

Marcello: I see. Even during this stay in Louisiana there was really no special training, let's say, so far as jungle fighting or things like that were concerned.

Gregg: No, no.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you learned that you were going to the Philippines?

Gregg: Oh, we were all pretty happy. Of course, there was lots of boys who decided they didn't want to go and wanted to stay in Brownwood. And there were lots of transfers, but to the majority of us that sounded like a good trip to us. We was ready for anything but what happened.

Marcello: Did the Philippines usually mean pretty good duty so far as the Army was concerned?

Gregg: From what we had heard, it did.

Marcello: Now I gather that you left the continental United States from San Francisco, is that correct?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Could you tell us a little bit about the trip going over?

Gregg: Well, when we first left the water was pretty rough, and we had lots of sick soldiers. By the time we got to Honolulu we was pretty well straightened out. Then we got into the land swells. And we had seasickness again, or at least a lot of

the boys did. We stayed two days in, I believe, in Honolulu. And between Honolulu and the Fiji Islands, war was declared, or we went to the Fiji Islands after war was declared and refueled. And then from the Fiji Islands to Brisbane, Australia.

Marcello: If I may interrupt here a minute, when you were in Honolulu, did you perhaps see any extraordinary preparations being taken there, that is, so far as guarding against the possible Japanese attack? Now you weren't there too long, and I don't believe you even got off the ship.

Gregg: We had three-hour liberties, I believe. But we didn't see, or at least I didn't, anything that showed any sign of preparations.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you learned about the attack on Pearl Harbor? Now like you say, you were somewhere close to the Fiji Islands when this took place . . .

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: . . . is that correct?

Gregg: Yes, we were three days out of Pearl Harbor, I believe. Oh, it sounded bad to us. Of course, none of us knew what war was like then. And the old ship we were on, we thought with the .50 calibers and a few Navy guns that we could kind of pick off the Jap Navy of the Air Corps or whatever might come over. And we found out later that we'd been sitting ducks for whatever come after us.

Marcello: What sort of precautions did the ship take after war had been declared or after the Japanese attack had taken place?

Gregg: All the communications were cut off; lights were turned off. And at night we'd travel in a different direction from our daytime travel. The Japs knew that we were out there, but they couldn't locate us. The old ship's captain kept them in a storm, kind of, and we finally arrived in Brisbane, Australia.

Marcello: How many ships . . . was it a convoy, or was there just this one ship?

Gregg: One transport ship and, oh, two or three, three or four destroyers. I don't remember how many.

Marcello: I see. You had some destroyers as escorts?

Gregg: Yes.

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

Gregg: Oh, they took us to a race track, and we stayed there about a week. And so far as I remember, it was all liberty, a few odds and ends to do around the camp, but pretty easy going, most of it.

Marcello: Did you enjoy your stay in Brisbane?

Gregg: Real much, real good. Just an awful lot. We liked the Australian people, and they treated us real good, real good.

Marcello: Apparently, your group was the first American soldiers ever to set foot on Australian soil, is that correct?

Gregg: Yes. We were the first American soldiers that had been there

in a long, long time. I don't know whether there had ever been before or not. And a long time since there hadn't been any Americans off their ships in there.

Marcello: Incidentally, what was your particular function in your outfit?

Gregg: I was on the seventy-five millimeter gun crew.

Marcello: Now this was essentially what? This was not an antiaircraft battery or company. This was an artillery company, isn't that correct?

Gregg: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Essentially, this is what . . .

Gregg: On the transport . . .

Marcello: . . . your function was.

Gregg: Yes. On the transport ship after war was declared, they took part of the gun crews and put on Navy guns and tried to transfer all of us, or some of us, into the Navy and stay on the ship.

Marcello: You just weren't lucky.

Gregg: No, we didn't make it. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Well, how long were you in Australia before you got the word that you were on your way to Java? Or did you know that you were on your way to Java?

Gregg: Well, no, we still thought we . . . of course, we didn't . . . we were never told that we was going to the Philippines, but all the gear was stamped Philippines, or not Philippines, but it's PLUM, I believe . . .

Marcello: Right, it was called Operation PLUM, I think.



- Gregg: Yes. I don't think we knew where we were going when we left Brisbane. We went up to the northern end of Australia and stayed out, oh, a few days. I don't remember how long. And then they told us that we couldn't get to the Philippines, and we were going to Java.
- Marcello: Do you think that you were possibly going to Java all along, or do you think that they were trying to get to the Philippines from Australia?
- Gregg: I think they meant for us to go to the Philippines because we had men over there, and they needed help.
- Marcello: Now were you still on the same ship, or had you transferred to another ship? In other words, I assume that you left San Francisco in an American ship.
- Gregg: Yes.
- Marcello: Now, when you got to Australia were you on a Dutch ship? In other words, where does the Bloemfontein come in?
- Gregg: I believe . . .
- Marcello: I think it was the Bloemfontein . . .
- Gregg: Yes.
- Marcello: . . . was it not?
- Gregg: Yes, it was.
- Marcello: And . . .
- Gregg: The American ship was the Republic.
- Marcello: Right, and the Dutch ship, I think, was the Bloemfontein.
- Gregg: Yes. Right now it seems to me maybe that we got on the

Bloemfontein when we left Australia, but I'm not sure. I know we arrived in Java on the Bloemfontein because there was some Javanese waiters or ship helpers or something on the ship.

Marcello: Well, I'm pretty sure this was correct. It seems to me you did transfer to the Dutch vessel when you got to Australia.

Gregg: I believe so. I believe the Republic come back to California.

Marcello: Anyhow, what did you think when you were going to Java or when you had heard the news that you were going to Java?

Gregg: Oh, we, you know, a bunch of kids, and we thought that was something new and sounded good to us. We were getting out of . . . we knew what was going on in the Philippines or thought we did. And we thought that was going to be real easy in Java, maybe.

Marcello: You mentioned a bunch of kids. How old were you at the time?

Gregg: Well, I was twenty-four, twenty-five. But I was older than most of them . . .

Marcello: What do you think the average age was of these people?

Gregg: About twenty-two or three.

Marcello: I see. And as I recall when you landed at Java you debarked at the city of Surabaja, is that correct?

Gregg: Right.

Marcello: What did it look like to you? Can you describe what the place looked like?

Gregg: Well, it looked more like the towns over here than we had thought it would. We didn't know what to expect, most of us.

But it was a real nice town, we thought.

Marcello: Pretty big town is it not?

Gregg: Pretty big town, it sure is.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you ever have any scares going from Australia to Java, that is, were there any submarine alerts or anything like that?

Gregg: Yes. We had one or two and I didn't see anything, but one officer said a torpedo passed in front of the ship. He was on the bow of the ship, but the GIs knew nothing about this then. But there was a few, if I recall, once or twice they, I believe, called us to quarters. I'm not sure, but I think.

Marcello: I see. In other words, so far as you can recollect, there were a couple of submarine alerts.

Gregg: I believe, yes. Yes, I believe so.

Marcello: So what happened when you debarked at Surabaja?

Gregg: We loaded all our gear in trucks and went to Singosari which was a Dutch camp, I guess. And the Air Corps . . . all the planes that had got out of the Philippines eventually came there also.

Marcello: But you went from Surabaja to Singosari?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: And this was an airport, or there was an airport at this particular place.

Gregg: Yes.

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

Gregg: Well, most of the work that we done around there was helping the Air Corps. The old colonel took the artillery and I guess you'd say made ground crew Air Corps boys out of us. And he was a real fine fellow we thought--still do.

Marcello: Who is this individual?

Gregg: I knew you were going to ask me that, and I can't recall his name right now.

Marcello: Now this wouldn't have been Colonel Tharp would it?

Gregg: No, that was our . . .

Marcello: That was your commander.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do at this particular place?

Gregg: We loaded bombs on the planes--hailed them from out of the brush in trucks to the planes--and helped repair the planes when they'd come in. They'd take one Air Corps man and about half a dozen to a dozen artillery boys, and he'd show us what to do, tell us, and then go on and tell somebody else. And we worked just as hard as we knew how, because they were a real good outfit and real good fighting men, we thought. They got out of the Philippines in those planes, and they were trying to head. . . . By then, we knew what was going on out there, because they were out every day, and they could see what was coming our way.

Marcello: What was the terrain like? What was the geography like around this airfield?

Gregg: Well, it was kind of in a hole so to speak. There was hills around it and timber--heavy timber--and the planes would kind of have to drop down after they come over the hills. And the airport runways were real short. They were made for small planes. But these boys in the old B-17s would set them down and get them stopped someway. The boys coming . . . when they brought planes after we'd been there for awhile--brought B-17s from over here to Java--almost all of them run off the end of the runway. And they had to be repaired before they could go out on a mission.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with the Dutch at this particular time yet?

Gregg: No, not very much.

Marcello: Apparently then, you had quite a bit of respect for the people in the Air Corps.

Gregg: You bet. You bet. Well, they were just regular guys, and they had a hard job to do.

Marcello: I assume they were flying against some rather insurmountable odds at times, were they not?

Gregg: They sure were. They were using these old '17s for fighter planes, bombers, whatever come along, and every time they'd come back, I could remember the boys that were jumping out and kissing the ground. And then you could look at the plane and tell real easy why. There would be holes in the thing that you could throw a barrel through sometimes, and most of the

time, or lot of the time, there'd be one or two of the boys that we'd have to carry in.

Marcello: Essentially where were those planes flying to? Formosa? Taiwan? Do you know where their missions were taking them?

Gregg: The only thing I know for sure is that there was a huge convoy coming our way.

Marcello: A huge Japanese convoy.

Gregg: A Japanese convoy, yes. They were bombing this convoy.

Marcello: I see.

Gregg: Now other than that, I don't know what their missions might have been. But that was a whole lot of it-- the most of it, I think.

Marcello: Now up until this time, of course, you had not yet seen any Japanese. Is that correct?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Or had the airport been buzzed or bombed or anything yet by the Japanese?

Gregg: We hadn't been there too long until the fighter planes come in. The first time they give us quite a scare.

Marcello: Were they bombing, or was it just a matter of strafing the airport?

Gregg: It was strafing at first.

Marcello: Do you remember what you were doing at the time?

Gregg: I sure do. (Chuckle) We were in camp cleaning our . . . we had World War I rifles that they'd issued us after we got over there, and a few of us were cleaning our rifles and the siren

went off. Of course until then, we hadn't been very excited or anything. Of course, we'd seen a little bit of what had happened to the planes, but we didn't really know what it was like. But everybody had a place to go, if the siren went off, if they come in. But nobody (chuckle) went to his right place, or maybe there was a few exceptions. And I was in a little ditch with a cook that had on a white uniform and several other boys. And we sat down and waited for them. We were kind of looking forward for something to happen. But after they'd been there about a half a minute, we'd wished we'd been way out in the brush. They just peppered us--not us, but all around us. The bullets were just whistling and singing. You still remember just exactly how they sounded. By the time they left, we'd had a pretty good baptism.

Marcello: What were your thoughts when you were down there in the ditch and these planes continued to strafe the airfield?

Gregg: (Chuckle) I thought the next bullet was bound to hit me. They were coming through thick.

Marcello: About how many planes were there altogether in this first raid? Of course, I guess you were so busy ducking your head you really never did know.

Gregg: There was, I'd guess, fifteen or twenty. But that might be a wild guess.

Marcello: Did they do very much damage on the base itself?

Gregg: No, not too much.

Marcello: In other words, it was mainly strafing and no bombing at all.

Gregg: That's right. That's right.

Marcello: About how long had you been at the airbase before this original attack came? Was it a matter of days or a matter of weeks?

Gregg: I believe very few weeks. I don't believe it was weeks. I'd say, oh, maybe two weeks, something thereabouts.

Marcello: When did they come back again?

Gregg: It wasn't very long. They gave us a pretty hard time, and then the bombers started coming then and blowed things up pretty good. We used our artillery guns for antiaircraft guns. It didn't work too good, but we used them. We used our old World War I rifles after we got over the initial shock of everything. But they located the gasoline places where we had them in the brush, and the hangers. They cleaned us out pretty good before it was over.

Marcello: Were these air raids a daily occurrence thereafter?

Gregg: Almost, almost every day.

Marcello: Did they destroy most of the airplanes? In other words, did the Japanese meet very much opposition from your flyers?

Gregg: No, we had a few P-40s, and the Dutch had, oh, I don't know how many, just a few fighter planes. But there was too many Japanese fighter planes for them to do much good. I can remember one fellow coming back for refueling, and he said that the hunting was real good up there. There was plenty to hunt.



Marcello: Looking back upon your experiences in Java, just how well do you think you were prepared, so far as equipment is concerned, to meet an enemy?

Gregg: About as poorly as it could be. I think we were supposed . . . if we got to the Philippines, we were supposed to get new equipment, but everything we had was World War I, I believe. The old seventy-five millimeter guns, and our rifles, and that's all we had. Oh, I believe we did have a few .30 caliber automatic rifles. But that was about all.

Marcello: I don't know if it was true here or not, but I know several of the people in the Philippines complained that the antiaircraft shells often times couldn't even reach the bombers. Did you find this true with your weapons?

Gregg: Well, yes. When the bombers come in, we couldn't do anything with the bombers. They were too far out of reach for us.

Marcello: In other words, generally speaking they bombed the base with impunity. They had hardly any opposition at all.

Gregg: Very little. Very little.

Marcello: Was this a rather frustrating thing to have these bombers come over and not to be able to do anything about it?

Gregg: Yes, it was. It sure was. They tried to get the B-17s in the brush or in the air somewhere when the bombers were coming, but they played havoc with about everything we had.

Marcello: About how long was it before the Japanese landed on the island? Now obviously they were bombing all of the air

facilities and so on in preparing for an eventual assault on the island. About how long were you in Java when the Japanese first landed?

Gregg: Let's see, I believe . . .

Marcello: Of course, you can only approximate this.

Gregg: I believe we landed about the twelfth of January, and we were captured the eighth day of March. I know it was the eighth day of March. The twelfth of January I'm not sure about, but something like that--in January sometime.

Marcello: Can you possibly recall the events as they took place from the time that the Japanese first assaulted the island? What exactly happened? Do you recall? In other words, what I'm trying to ask you to do now is more or less relate the events leading up to your capture or the capture of your unit.

Gregg: We left the airbase--Singosari in our trucks, and, oh, we went all over the island so to speak. Maybe not all over, but anyway we were all around, and then right on the last we set our guns up, oh, rather close to the coast. And we could hear the Japanese building a bridge or something where they were coming in. We were set up in the edge of a field, and about the time it got light we could see the soldiers in a road in a lane getting around behind us. And we stayed a little while and then moved out. And just about the time we got on the road and down the road a piece, the little old shack where we had our gun hid they hit it with mortars and just cleaned the thing out.

Marcello: About how many men were in this particular unit with you now?

Gregg: This gun crew?

Marcello: Right.

Gregg: Oh, about eight, I believe, eight or ten men.

Marcello: In other words, it was just this gun crew. It wasn't the entire unit?

Gregg: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Just one gun crew.

Marcello: Right. Okay, continue on from there.

Gregg: Let's see . . .

Marcello: So they had blown up the shack, or whatever you wish to call it . . .

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: . . . where you had your weapon.

Gregg: I can't remember just where we went to after that. I know we pulled those guns around with the trucks, the different batteries. Of course, we were scattered all over the island-- the different batteries. And then we went to a . . . oh, I don't know, a mountain or something that overlooked the place where they were coming in and did fire. We had three or four guns on this mountain.

Marcello: In other words, had several of the units come together or something . . .

Gregg: Yes, yes. You had . . .

Marcello: . . . and you had set up positions on this mountain.

Gregg: Right. And Lieutenant Stinsen was our forward observer. And

we fired I don't know how many rounds. We used up the most of our ammunition anyway. I know. Of course, they were coming in by the thousands. All we could do was just slow them up a little bit. And after we left there, after we moved out from that place, I believe that's all the firing that we ever done.

Marcello: How come you had to move out of that particular mountain position?

Gregg: They were crowding us a little bit.

Marcello: I see. The position had more or less become untenable.

Gregg: Yes. (Chuckle) And we moved in . . . the whole group with exception to one battery--E Battery--was concentrated in one place, and Allied Headquarters at Bandung, I believe it was, sent word down for us to stack our guns and ammunition and everything at twelve o'clock that day.

Marcello: Now were you a part of this one battery that had been left behind?

Gregg: No, . . .

Marcello: That was E Battery that was left behind. Isn't that correct?

Gregg: That's correct.

Marcello: Essentially would you say then that from the time the Japanese landed your units were mainly fighting just a type of holding action?

Gregg: Right.

Marcello: Stop, fire a little bit, retreat, stop, and fire again--this sort of thing. Obviously, you didn't have either enough men

or equipment to hold off the Japanese.

Gregg: Our mission was just to delay them. They knew we couldn't stop them, but just delay them as much as we possibly could. And every time they'd start landing somewhere one gun or maybe two or three would go down and fire until they'd come in so thick that they had to move out.

Marcello: Do you believe that is essentially what your main mission was in being sent to Java--just to fight a type of holding action?

Gregg: I think so. After war was declared, and what had happened on the Philippines, I think we were just basically sent there just to delay them, because they were coming down through the islands and not being delayed very much.

Marcello: In other words, the people of the "Lost Battalion," as they were later called, were really expendable. Is that a good way to put it?

Gregg: That we were. This old colonel that was coming in from the Philippines with the Air Corps got the mission to fly us out. But before he could get that organized they sent word down that the Air Corps would leave but the artillery would stay. So they kind of dumped us in the laps of the Japs, or that's the way we felt.

Marcello: I see. I'm sure you did. Okay, what happened next then? You were fighting these delaying actions, and finally the word came down from Allied Headquarters that you were to stack your arms and surrender. What did you think about this?

Gregg: Oh, we really thought that that would be the wind-up of all of us. We felt they would shoot us. The most of us felt that way.

Marcello: This was the general feeling of the Americans--that the Japanese didn't take any prisoners and that you could expect the worse.

Gregg: That's right. That's right.

Marcello: Did you ever give any thoughts to head for the hills and perhaps conduct some sort of guerrilla activity?

Gregg: Well, yes, we all thought of this, but as soon as they got on the island they put a bounty on the white man. There are an awful lot of natives in Java. Some of the boys made a little run, got away a little piece, but they were kind of rounded up. And it looked like, oh, it might have been possible, but next to impossible to stay away from them.

Marcello: This is very interesting. In other words, what you're saying is that the natives on the island really didn't have any sense of loyalty to anybody.

Gregg: Whoever was the winner the natives were with them, and that was true in all of the places that I was. Whoever was the top-dog, that's whose side they were on.

Marcello: I see. Now at this time or up to this time had you had very much contact with the Dutch at all. Were you fighting side by side with the Dutch or anything like that?

Gregg: No. I don't know about the others, but it seemed like in our

group that when we'd go down to meet the Japs, we'd meet the natives and the Dutch coming back every time. I don't know whether that just happened with the gun crew that I was on or not, but we met them coming out every time we'd start down to the coast to see if we could slow them up.

Marcello: Oh, I see. In other words, the Dutch were continually retreating, and it appeared to you as if they weren't putting up any resistance at all.

Gregg: We didn't feel like they were.

Marcello: I see. Now were there any British troops on the island?

Gregg: There were Australians . . . let's see . . . yes, I guess there was because after we were captured, there was Australians and British and some Indian troops in this first camp that we were in. So I guess there was.

Marcello: Okay then, you got the word that you were to surrender, to lay down your arms. What did you do next?

Gregg: They told us to go to a race track and put all the trucks around the track--trucks and guns--and stack all of our rifles and hand guns and everything--stack it up there, and wait for some Japanese to come down and tell us what to do.

Marcello: I see. In other words, you went to Surabaja. Is that correct? Is that where you surrendered? Where did you go to park your trucks and lay down your arms?

Gregg: I don't remember the town now, but I just remember that it was a race track.

Marcello: I see. I see.

Gregg: I don't remember . . .

Marcello: Well, okay. So you went there, and you stacked your arms and so on. You obviously hadn't seen any Japanese up to this time. Is that correct? Well, other than from a distance.

Gregg: Yes, yes. Just from a distance. That was all.

Marcello: In other words, you hadn't seen your captors yet?

Gregg: No.

Marcello: You hadn't seen them before you had surrendered or had laid down your arms?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do in the meantime while you waited for the Japanese? You say you stacked your arms and parked the trucks. What did you do in the meantime?

Gregg: (Chuckle) Well, just killed time. Some of the boys got drunk, some of them was playing poker--just whatever anybody felt like doing to kill time. And the most of us didn't feel too much like doing anything. Just kind of sitting around and wondering and waiting for what was going to happen next--really expecting them to come in shooting.

Marcello: Well, what exactly did happen?

Gregg: This Japanese officer, the first I remember seeing him, he come walking down along side the race track and looking for our head man--Colonel--and I believe stayed a little while and then left giving him orders what for us to do. And then I



don't think we saw any Japanese any more until they moved us. They started moving us around then. They moved us to a tea plantation and we stayed awhile. We left all our trucks--our trucks--and then we walked part of the time, camped on the side of the road for a few days one time, and eventually wound up in our first camp called Priok.

Marcello: Let me ask you this now. How long after the officer visited the race track did the Japanese soldiers move in to remove you? Was it a matter of days or a matter of hours or . . .

Gregg: Two or three days, I believe.

Marcello: I see. And in the meantime you were just there doing nothing. Just waiting. Is that correct?

Gregg: That's right.

Marcello: Did you have freedom of movement at this time? Could you go into town and so on?

Gregg: No. We were to stay on this race track.

Marcello: I see. Did anybody ever go into town?

Gregg: Probably did, but not that I know of.

Marcello: I see. I see. Well, what was the initial reception that you received from these Japanese soldiers when they came to move you? In other words, did they rough you up any?

Gregg: No.

Marcello: Did they just have a job to do and do it, or just exactly what?

Gregg: Well, I don't remember just exactly how it all come about, but

they give orders to the colonel what for us to do. And then they started gradually moving us toward this camp from this race track where we stayed for two or three days.

Marcello: Did you move on foot?

Gregg: Part of the time.

Marcello: What sort of a trip was it?

Gregg: It was pretty rough. (Chuckle)

Marcello: In what way?

Gregg: Well, we had all . . .

Marcello: Would you care to describe it?

Gregg: We had all our gear to carry, and they banged us around some-- not as bad then as later on--but we had all our gear to carry . . .

Marcello: Now this is your personal . . .

Gregg: . . . on your back.

Marcello: . . . gear. Is this correct?

Gregg: Yes, yes, yes. Just personal gear.

Marcello: What was the weather like?

Gregg: Hot.

Marcello: This, of course, made the movement just that much more difficult, I suppose.

Gregg: Yes, and by then, of course, we still had some American food, but it was getting pretty scarce. We didn't really know how good it was, or we'd have saved a little more of it, I guess.

Marcello: The Japanese hadn't provided any food at all up to this time?

Gregg: I don't believe so, until we . . . well, yeah, I guess they did too after we started moving. But I believe we used the big part of ours up before we left this race track maybe. I can't remember for sure . . .

Marcello: I see.

Gregg: . . . to save my life.

Marcello: Now you said awhile ago that the Japanese roughed you up a little bit on this march or on this movement to the prison compound. In what way did they rough you up?

Gregg: Oh, they'd come along with a bamboo pole and start talking to you, and of course, we didn't understand. And they'd take a pole and beat you on the head or on the back or on the legs, or take gun butts and punch you in the stomach or in the back.

Marcello: Did you ever experience any of this personally? On the march, now, I'm referring to.

Gregg: Not anything that hurt me. It made me mad. I did get a little bit of a going over with a piece of bamboo, but it was not serious.

Marcello: What did he rap you for?

Gregg: Because I didn't understand. He was telling me something or asking me to do something, and I didn't understand what he wanted. And he whopped me with it, oh, three or four times, I guess.

Marcello: Was it about all you could do to retain your temper?

Gregg: (Chuckle) Yes, but when you look around and there's a bunch

of guards with bayonets looking--and I think they were kind of itching for somebody to do something--it kind of cools your temper a little bit. It kind of simmers you down when you look around a little bit and see that you don't have much chance of getting by with anything.

Marcello: In other words, they had the guns, and they were the bosses. Is that correct?

Gregg: They were the bosses, and they were enjoying it, we thought.

Marcello: You really did get the impression that they were enjoying their work.

Gregg: I think they were. I think they were.

Marcello: Why do you think this was?

Gregg: Well, the United States to them was a powerful nation, and they had captured at least a part of it. And the majority of them were pretty small, and they kind of enjoyed slapping us around a little bit, I think, because they knew that we couldn't do anything without somebody getting shot or a bayonet run through you. And I don't know, I just think because we were Americans that they seemed to enjoy it a little more.

Marcello: While they were moving you from the race track to the internment camp, did they make it a point to show the prisoners off before the local population. I know this was done in the Philippines and it kind of goes along with what you just mentioned. Because in many cases, the Japanese apparently made sure that the local native population saw the American

prisoners. Again, this is a form of humiliation, and the Japanese could tell the native populations or the native people, "Well, look. You see the white man isn't so invincible after all. Look how easily we were able to overcome them and to conquer them." Did they make a point of doing this to your group, that is, to make sure that the local civilians saw you in the condition you were in and what have you?

Gregg: I can't remember anything special. Now they marched us through the towns all right. And maybe they did do that, but I don't personally remember seeing or hearing anything to make me think of that.

Marcello: Did you notice any crowds of people along the streets or along the roads watching you march by.

Gregg: Oh, yes. They lined up like it was a circus parade.

Marcello: Is that correct? Did they appear to enjoy the fight of Americans marching along?

Gregg: I think they did. The native people, as soon as the Japanese come, they were all for the Japs. And I think they enjoyed it. And I know some of the Navy boys that were on the ship run into that when they got to shore.

Marcello: This was the Houston you're speaking of?

Gregg: Yes. They were cut up pretty bad, some of them. They run into groups of these Javanese people which had been on our side until the Japs got there, and then they were on the other side.

Marcello: Did you also get the impression that these Javanese did not

have too much love for the Dutch?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Why do you think that was so?

Gregg: I think because the Dutch kind of hornswoggled them.

Marcello: I see.

Gregg: One Dutchman would have control of a, oh, rice plantation or . . . they just . . . they used them more or less, I think. And they resented it, and they knew it, but they were then not able to do anything about it, I think.

Marcello: That's a very interesting point that you made awhile ago. And you say, once again, that your impression seemed to be that they kind of enjoyed seeing these Americans and the Dutch and the British and what have you walking down the street as prisoners.

Gregg: I think so. I think so.

Marcello: Did they ever do anything to help any of the prisoners? Let us say, if a prisoner had fallen or became ill or was injured or anything like that, did you ever see any acts of compassion on the part of these local natives?

Gregg: Not that I recall right now. Now we did trade with them a little, but the trades that we made were all in favor of the natives. After we'd been captured awhile, anything that we could trade--that we had that we could trade--or sell to the natives, we did, but we paid pretty dear for whatever we might get from them.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever confiscate any of your personal belongings at this time? I'm referring now to such things perhaps as watches or things of that nature.

Gregg: Yes, they took quite a few watches and rings, and oh, jewelry mostly, I guess. I don't remember anything else in particular. But I know they took . . . I can remember seeing one boy lose his watch. He fussed about it considerably, but the Jap told him that he needed his watch, and he didn't need it anymore. And he took it and wore it off.

Marcello: Okay, so you went to this internment camp. What exactly was it like. From a physical standpoint, what did the camp look like? Do you recall?

Gregg: It was just a bunch of buildings--pretty shoddy buildings--and this is where we got our first . . . yeah, that's where we . . . that's where the Japs first started to feeding us. We were completely out of American food, and the rice that we got was cooked in barrels--in old oil barrels--that hadn't been cleaned out. And the rice was swept up off the warehouse floors and put in tow sacks and just sat down in these barrels and then built a fire around it--poured water in it of course, and built a fire around it.

Marcello: What did it taste like?

Gregg: (Chuckle)

Marcello: At this time, I assume you really weren't starved that much that it tasted good. Correct?

Gregg: No, no, we thought we were hungry, but we really wasn't too hungry then. We got hungry before we left there because that was all there was. And some of the boys, I can remember hearing them say that if that is all we were going to get to eat, they'd just wind theirs up right there, that they wasn't going to eat that rice.

Marcello: Continue.

Gregg: Rat pills and dirt and bark and anything that happened to be on the floor was in that rice.

Marcello: This was all they gave you then? The rice that you got was the scrapings off the floor?

Gregg: That's right. That's right.

Marcello: Did you have to do your own cooking?

Gregg: We did in a very few days after we were there, but first . . . I guess we did all the time. I believe they brought it in the barrels, maybe. I can't remember, but I believe our boys done the cooking of it maybe.

Marcello: Was there a barbed wire fence or some sort of enclosure around this compound?

Gregg: Yes, there was a fence around it.

Marcello: Was it heavily guarded by the Japanese?

Gregg: Yes, we had lots of guards around that, the way I remember it now.

Marcello: What were the barracks like, or your living quarters?

Gregg: Kind of like a wore out barn would be in this country. Just



barely sheltering us, that's about all you could say for it in this first camp. They moved us eventually from that camp to what had been a Dutch camp, I believe.

Marcello: Was this the Bicycle Camp?

Gregg: That was the Bicycle Camp, yes.

Marcello: Well, before we move on to the Bicycle Camp, how long were you at this first camp? Were you there very long?

Gregg: Oh, I think a few months--three or four months, maybe.

Marcello: What did you do while you were there?

Gregg: We worked at the docks.

Marcello: Oh, I see. This camp was located along the docks.

Gregg: Yes, pretty close to the docks. And we loaded and unloaded barges and took stuff out of warehouses and hauled it from the docks to the barge and loaded it on barges--rice, and I don't remember--just whatever happened to be there.

Marcello: Was it pretty hard work?

Gregg: Yes, it was. Two hundred twenty-five pound sacks of rice was pretty heavy. It got heavier later on, but we wasn't used to that, and it was pretty hard work to start with.

Marcello: About how many hours a day did they work you?

Gregg: Oh, normally then, I think, oh, from a little after sunup--I don't know about the time--but a little after sunup 'til about night. We'd get up and eat breakfast about daylight--sunup--and go to work and then come in about a little before dark. That's while we were in Priok Camp.

Marcello: Priok--that was the name of this original camp?

Gregg: Yes, that was . . .

Marcello: Priok.

Gregg: Priok.

Marcello: I see. What was a typical day like at Priok? Now you mentioned that you would get up at dawn or sunrise and eat a little bit of breakfast which I assume consisted of rice. I assume you had a roll call every morning?

Gregg: Yes, I believe they counted us every day when we'd get up in the morning. And I think before bedtime, I believe they counted. I know they did a lot of the time. I'm not positive about all the time.

Marcello: Then what happened after breakfast and roll call?

Gregg: Well, we'd begin to get sick then with the change of food and the kind of food we had, and the ones that didn't feel like working or were sick didn't have to go to work and stayed in camp. And so far as I remember now, there was no work around camp to do. Oh, they might have had some small chores but no jobs to do for the Japs that I remember now.

Marcello: In other words, from there then those that were able went down to the docks and worked there all day.

Gregg: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Were you under the supervision of the Japanese Army at this time?

Gregg: Yes. We had guards. I think we had one officer or a non-

commissioned officer maybe sometimes, and then several guards that would go along and stay with us all the time.

Marcello: Were these guards . . . did they do the job? Did they supervise you very, very closely? Or was there loose supervision. Did they knock you around some more?

Gregg: I don't think they did too much . . . oh, there was always somebody getting a little going over about something, but they hadn't really started to working on us so much while we were down there that I recall. There was some. There was some in the loading and unloading of the stuff besides the rice. Somebody would stick something in his pocket and occasionally somebody would get caught. And they'd get a pretty good whipping over that. Something like that, but they were still pretty high over what they had done. And, of course, they were enjoying it all right then, but they didn't beat us around, beat us too much that I recall right now.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that some of these people were coming down with sickness. What sort of sickness?

Gregg: Oh, dysentery, stomach troubles mostly at Priok. The rice didn't agree with us and the kind of rice, and nothing but rice. And it was mostly dysentery down there.

Marcello: Was there very much malaria?

Gregg: Not then.

Marcello: I see.

Gregg: Later on there was an awful lot. I don't recall any malaria

in Priok.

Marcello: About how many prisoners were there at Priok altogether?

Gregg: Oh, I don't know. It would be a wild guess. I'd say 1,000 or 1,200 maybe.

Marcello: And this included several nationalities.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: This was American, British, Dutch, Australian, maybe a couple of New Zealanders, or something like that.

Gregg: Yes, yes. And one group of Indians. And I did know their . . .

Marcello: Sikhs?

Gregg: I believe so.

Marcello: What was your own physical condition like at this time? I'm referring now to your tenure at Priok.

Gregg: I was still in good shape at Priok.

Marcello: Had you been losing any weight?

Gregg: Oh, yes. I began to lose weight all right.

Marcello: How much did you weigh when you went into the service? This will give us some idea of how much weight you lost as time went on.

Gregg: Well, about 185 to 190 was my normal weight when I was in . . . oh, I got up a little more than that down at Camp Bowie because it was rather regular down there, and I hadn't been used to quite such regular hours. But about 185 or 90 was my normal weight. And I don't know in Priok. Of course, we had begun to lose weight, and I don't know how much I weighed when

we went in there, and I don't know how much . . . I know it was quite a bit less when we left.

Marcello: Now at Priok, was the battalion still all together yet, or had it already been scattered by this time, or was it beginning to be scattered?

Gregg: We were all together at Priok with the exceptions of this E Battery that went to Japan.

Marcello: I see.

Gregg: Or later on went to Japan.

Marcello: That later on went to Japan.

Gregg: But our battalion was, I think, all together with the exception of E Battery.

Marcello: At Priok did they segregate the men according to nationality? In other words, were all the Americans together, and all the British together, and this sort of thing.

Gregg: I believe so. Yes. I know the Americans were all together, and I can remember that the camp was in a halfmoon shape or maybe a complete circle. Anyway, I can remember the Indians, and they fascinated us--their way of doing things. And then the Englishmen, Australians, and so on. I believe they were all grouped together. Or, each nationality was grouped together.

Marcello: Did the Americans still maintain military discipline while you were in this camp? In other words, were you still respecting and obeying your officers and so on?

Gregg: Yes, yes, we did. They were still inside the camp within our

group. They still pretty well had control of the bunch.

**Marcello:** Considering the circumstances, how would you judge the morale to have been at this time? Let me put it to you this way: Did you personally have hope that you were soon going to be liberated?

**Gregg:** Yes. I lived mine--three months at a time, and they still laugh at me about my three month hitches. But most of us felt like within, you know, a short time that the Americans would come in and get us. And when our first three months was up, well, I started on another three months. I was about to run out of patience with them, but that's the way I lived mine--three months at a time. And when that next three months would be up, well, I'd start on another one.

**Marcello:** Do you think that this is perhaps one of the things that kept you going--the fact that you had never given up hope, and that sooner or later you believed that you were going to be rescued?

**Gregg:** I never give up for a second that I wasn't going to come home. The chances looked rather slim sometimes, but I never gave up. The ones that completely gave up are still out there, a lot of them.

**Marcello:** I'm sure they are. Were there ever any escape attempts at Priok that you recall?

**Gregg:** Not that I recall.

**Marcello:** Well, again, I guess there was no place to go, isn't this

true? I suppose the jungle was just as hostile as the Japanese in camp.

Gregg: It was. It was.

Marcello: And then, of course, with the natives looking around for a bounty the chances of surviving were rather slim.

Gregg: That's right. I don't know that there wasn't anybody out in the jungle, but they were real scarce if there was. Couldn't have been many.

Marcello: Did you have any contact with local natives at this time? Once again, I'm referring to the period at Priok.

Gregg: Well, we'd see them, you know. They were all around the places where we were working. I don't remember anything, only a little trading that we'd do on the sly occasionally. Other than that I don't remember anything else.

Marcello: You mentioned "trading on the sly." I assume this was forbidden by the Japanese.

Gregg: Yes, very much so. That caused lots of bamboo pole beatings.

Marcello: I was just going to ask you what would happen if they did catch you trading with the natives?

Gregg: You had broke their rules pretty bad, and you were punished one way or another with a bamboo pole beating or standing at attention for an hour or two, sometimes longer. Or sometimes they'd put a bamboo pole . . . make you get down on your knees and put a bamboo pole under your knees and then one under your arms up here. Make you sit down on those things for an hour

or two.

**Marcello:** Did any of this ever happen to you personally? I'm referring now to the time at Priok.

**Gregg:** I got some bamboo pole beatings for not being able to move some stuff one time or not moving it as quick as they thought I should when we were loading or moving bags of rice out of warehouses to put on the barges. And he came up jabbering, and, of course, we didn't understand anything to start with. He decided I wasn't moving as fast or didn't move it as fast as he thought I should, and that's why he gave me a little beating for it.

**Marcello:** You said awhile ago you couldn't understand any Japanese, but I would assume you picked up the language pretty fast after a couple beatings, is this correct?

**Gregg:** (Chuckle) Well, you pick it up a little faster than normal. We didn't try to understand any at first because we thought we was going to be out in about three months. And we didn't think we had any need to learn Japanese. It would have been a big benefit to us if we'd started right on the start of trying to understand and learn the Japanese. But we didn't think we needed it, so we didn't try to understand. Of course, we did learn the hard way to understand them a little better even before we decided we was going to have to stay awhile.

**Marcello:** What were some of the specific rules that the Japanese had? What were some of the things that they expected you to do?



Was there anything like bowing to officers or enlisted men or things like this?

Gregg: Oh, yes. (Chuckle) We had to bow every time a Jap officer come by or . . . let's see, I don't know about the guards. I know any time they come up to you jabbering, though, you had to bow to them.

Marcello: And if you didn't bow, I assume you got the bamboo pole once again.

Gregg: That or the gun butt if they had their rifles. And the guards always had their rifles. Yes, we done an awful lot of bowing to them.

Marcello: Did you ever see them or did you ever witness any extremely cruel punishment at this particular time other than the ones that you've spoken about? I'm referring now to Priok.

Gregg: Priok. No, I don't recall anything at Priok that was real bad.

Marcello: Essentially, it was the beatings and this sort of thing?

Gregg: Yes, yes. That's the way I recall now.

Marcello: Did you have very much contact with the other nationalities at Priok? I'm referring now to the British or to the Australians or those people?

Gregg: I think we were all free to go to the different places and talk with them in this camp. That's the way I remember now. I don't remember of any restrictions on that.

Marcello: What was your opinion of the British?

Gregg: (Chuckle)

Marcello: Now I want you to be candid about this.

Gregg: (Chuckle) Well, the group that was with us, a lot of them were not too good. Oh, half of them or maybe less were real fine people. And I had one fellow that has visited me twice since then that was a real fine fellow. But they were . . . I don't know, maybe they had been in the Army . . . they had been out in that country a long time, a lot of them had. They just kind of turned themselves loose, I'd say.

Marcello: When you say "they turned themselves loose," what do you mean?

Gregg: Well, their morals had kind of fallen on them a little. And they were kind of "all for me and to heck with everybody else."

Marcello: What were sanitary conditions like in the British barracks? I'm leading up to something here because most of the other "Lost Battalion" people that I have talked to felt that the British were very dirty, and I guess you might agree.

Gregg: At Priok I don't remember the camp conditions. But I know we thought they didn't keep themselves cleaned up as much and take care of themselves like we were at least. Well, they were pretty ornery bunch, I'd say. A lot of them, I don't know. I don't remember at Priok what the camp looked like, I mean that is so far as sanitary conditions and how they kept it cleaned up and so on. I don't recall.

Marcello: Did many Americans lose their lives at Priok? Or was it just a matter of a good deal of sickness here?

Gregg: Mostly sickness at Priok. I don't believe we lost anybody at

Priok. I might be mistaken about that, but I don't remember that we lost any boys at Priok.

Marcello: In other words, any way you look at it the Americans didn't lose many people . . .

Gregg: No.

Marcello: . . . at Priok.

Gregg: That's right.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you would like to mention from your stay there? Let me ask you this: had you formed any close friendships with any of your buddies here, or did most of the prisoners more or less stick to themselves?

Gregg: You mean the American boys?

Marcello: Yeah, I'm speaking now of the American boys.

Gregg: Oh, yes. We had already begun to kind of . . . well, I'd guess you'd say form families, maybe. Two boys or two or more would eat together. I mean by that, if I go out on the working party and I can trade, beg, borrow, steal something to eat, when I got into camp, if there's two of us, it was divided two ways, or if there was four, it's four ways. We'd formed families, I'd guess you'd call it--something to that effect. And then maybe I would go one place to work, and one of the other boys would go to another place. And whatever we could gather up to eat, we'd bring it in and then we divided everything--put it together and divided it.

Marcello: Were there ever any amusing things that happened at Priok that

you can recall?

Gregg: (Chuckle) I don't remember anything amusing. Yes, I remember one thing. When we were leaving, getting ready to leave Priok, we had one boy named Wright that was the son of a Texas Ranger. And this boy looked like anything but a Ranger, but he was real good guy. But he put a rope on his gear and put it around his neck. And then all his gear began to slip down, and it got hung someway, and it was choking him. And he hollered as much as he could holler, and nobody was paying any attention to him for a little bit 'til he began to stagger, and then we saw that he was really in trouble. And we all went over and had to cut a rope to turn him loose. And we had quite a bit of fun over Slug Wright, we called him.

Marcello: Slug Wright?

Gregg: Slug Wright tying a rope around himself and almost hanging himself with his own gear.

Marcello: Where did you move from Priok?

Gregg: To Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: You went from Priok to Bicycle Camp?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: About how far away was this either in terms of miles or in terms of days or . . .

Gregg: Well, not very far in miles.

Marcello: Did you walk the distance?

Gregg: Yes. Yes, I think we did.

Marcello: Was there anything that stands out in your mind on this trip to Bicycle Camp?

Gregg: Not that I recall right now.

Marcello: Was it very similar to the march to Priok? You know, did the Japanese keep prodding you along and beating you when you weren't going fast enough and things of this sort?

Gregg: Oh, yes. They almost had a line of Jap soldiers along to keep us going, keep us walking, and everybody in line and not to talk to the natives and such things as that. I don't remember anything unusual.

Marcello: What was the Bicycle Camp like?

Gregg: We thought it was real nice. It seemed good. Well, it was. It had concrete floors and stalls, we called it, oh, I guess as wide as a bed or maybe a little wider. And then it had a partition. It was all open with an aisle down the middle . . .

Marcello: You're speaking now of your barracks?

Gregg: Yes. I believe there were two boys to a cubicle. And the camp barracks themselves were real nice.

Marcello: Now had this been an old Dutch Army camp?

Gregg: I believe so. I'm not sure. I believe it had been though.

Marcello: Did it have any sort of a barbed wire fence or enclosure around it?

Gregg: Yes, all the way around there was a barbed wire fence all the way around there.

Marcello: Now so far as location is concerned, was this somewhat inland

in comparison with the camp at Priok, or was it also along the coast?

Gregg: Yes, was it on the Batavia?

Marcello: There is a city of Batavia, of course, in Java. And I believe Batavia is inland, isn't it?

Gregg: Well, the town's name, I can't be sure of now, but this was on the coast.

Marcello: It was on the coast again?

Gregg: Yes, yes.

Marcello: What did you do at Bicycle Camp?

Gregg: We had working parties. This was the same town, a different camp.

Marcello: I see. A different camp in the same town.

Gregg: Yes, it had to be. Because . . . I think. (Chuckle) I'm sorry but I can't remember. I didn't think things like that would ever get away. But we were still on the coast because we still had working parties to the docks and warehouses.

Marcello: I see. Did you ever have to raise any cargoes out of sunken ships or anything like that? Do you recall anything of that nature?

Gregg: No, I don't believe I helped.

Marcello: Was the routine generally the same at Bicycle Camp as it had been at Priok?

Gregg: Generally speaking, yes.

Marcello: In other words, you got up in the morning around the same time, and the meals were approximately the same, and your whole

daily routine was about the same?

Gregg: Yes, practically the same thing. We had working parties. We got up at sunup or thereabouts and had our working parties. I think our daily routine was very similar to Priok, I believe.

Marcello: Did you have the same guards and commandant here that you had at Priok? Or was there a complete changeover? Do you recall off hand?

Gregg: Yes. This was a different setup, different people. Bicycle Camp was where we run into the Navy boys. They were already in this camp.

Marcello: You're referring by Navy boys. These are the survivors of the Houston?

Gregg: Yes, yes. The survivors of the Houston. They were in this camp, and they had their guards, and everything was all setup when they moved us up there with them, the way I recall now.

Marcello: Up until this time we really haven't talked that much about the Japanese. Were there any Japanese that stood out as individuals? In other words, is there any of them that you can remember at this particular time, either at Priok or at the Bicycle Camp? Certainly you must have had nicknames for some of the guards?

Gregg: Yes, the ones with nicknames were further on down the line. I don't remember at Bicycle Camp. I'm sure there was. I don't recall any Jap nicknames now.

Marcello: Not at Bicycle Camp anyhow . . .

Gregg: At Bicycle Camp, yes.

Marcello: . . . is that correct? About how long were you at Bicycle Camp altogether?

Gregg: I think about six months, I believe at Bicycle Camp, the best I can remember, thereabouts.

Marcello: Is there anything else that really stands out in your mind during your tenure at Bicycle Camp?

Gregg: One thing. One day we came in off of a working party, and there were some officers standing with their backs to . . . that were facing the building, and some guards were standing out over there with guns ready to shoot if necessary. And we got in the camp, and it was in a terrible uproar. Everybody was going helter-skelter. And they had ordered all of the prisoners to sign a paper that . . . well, they wouldn't do anything to offend the Dai Nippon Gun, I believe. Anyway, it was Japan. I can't think just the words it was, but it was Dai Nippon something. And, of course, then nobody knew what that was. They didn't know what they were supposed to be signing or why, and there was confusion galore. But there wasn't any choice as to signing it. And we decided that no matter what we signed in there as far as . . . if and when we got loose, there wouldn't be anything that they could hold against us for signing something under pressure like that. So we signed it and everybody signed it. Some of them held out a little longer than others, but after it was all signed--everybody



signed it eventually—then things smoothed out then, and they were satisfied. But we had to sign this paper that we wouldn't do anything to offend the Japanese government.

Marcello: How did conditions differ in the Bicycle Camp from those at Priok?

Gregg: It was a much cleaner camp. It had better barracks, and the food was . . . well, we had a little better food. You had better cooking facilities.

Marcello: How about the punishments which were dealt out by the Japanese guards? In other words, were the Japanese guards rougher here than they had been at Priok or were they more lenient?

Gregg: Oh, I think about the same. There were some little static along I remember, but I don't know what for in particular. Disobeying their orders or not saluting or not bowing and things of that nature is all that I remember right now. Nothing real bad so far as things went as far as comparison to the rest of them.

Marcello: Was there still a mixed group in this Bicycle Camp? In other words, were all nationalities represented here? Or was this strictly an American camp?

Gregg: Well, I believe this was all American camp.

Marcello: I see.

Gregg: Just a . . .

Marcello: You said you were in this camp for how long? Approximately six months?

Gregg: I think so, yes.

Marcello: Now you'd been a prisoner for six, about ten months altogether, is that correct? Didn't you say that you were in Priok about four months? And in Bicycle Camp around six months?

Gregg: Yes, that may be off a month or two.

Marcello: Sure, well, that stands to reason.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Had you been receiving any news from the outside world at all at this time?

Gregg: The most news, the way I remember now, that we got was that occasionally there'd be a Jap that could speak English, and he'd tell us what the Japanese were doing. And by the questions we could ask him, we could usually figure out what was going on. Of course, then they were tearing us up about everywhere they went. But by reading between the lines, we could kind of figure out what was going on. Now there was a radio, and I believe that there was one in Bicycle Camp. I'm not sure now.

Marcello: I assume this had to be kept in secret.

Gregg: Oh, yes, you bet. I think they'd take it apart as much as possible, and then at certain times these guys would each take his part, and they would put the thing together and pick up newscasts.

Marcello: These were your only source then of outside news . . .

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: . . . from this secret radio or from what you could gather

from the conversations of the Japanese guards?

Gregg: That's correct.

Marcello: And I assume you didn't have very much access to any newspapers.

Gregg: (Chuckle) None at all, none at all.

Marcello: None whatsoever?

Gregg: None whatsoever.

Marcello: Is there anything else which possibly stands out in your mind from your stay here at the Bicycle Camp?

Gregg: They let us play basketball and volleyball some at this Bicycle Camp. I can remember playing basketball and volleyball there. I guess we had more freedom at least in camp than we did later on.

Marcello: When did you find time to play these things? Were you still working from sunup to sundown?

Gregg: Well, the ones that were working . . . now in Bicycle Camp, I don't think we ever had more than a third or half of the boys out on working parties at one time, the way I remember. And the ones that stayed in camp had nothing to do. They were free to play dominoes if they had dominoes or anything they wanted to do as long as the guards didn't object to it.

Marcello: Did the guards more or less leave you alone when you were in camp, or did they still continue to harass you?

Gregg: Oh, some in Bicycle Camp. But not real bad, I think. I can't remember more than just isolated incidents when they'd come in

and give us a little hard time for one thing or another.

Marcello: What items were the prisoners forbidden to have, that is, so far as personal possessions were concerned? Now naturally weapons of any kind would have been forbidden.

Gregg: Yes. I think they searched our gear and took out everything in the way of knives or anything that they didn't want us to have. We had our mess gear and our blankets and a few clothes, and that's all we were left with.

Marcello: How about matches? Were you allowed to have matches?

Gregg: We smoked. Matches, I think, were kind of a thing of the past as far as we were concerned. From the little fires that we had is about the only way that I can remember having any way of lighting our cigarettes and so on.

Marcello: What did you do so far as replacing your clothing was concerned?

Gregg: (Chuckle).

Marcello: I assume by ten months some of your clothing had worn out.

Gregg: We wore shorts, made shorts out of what khakis and fatigues we had. And when they wore out you just had to hustle. You had to trade with the natives or steal something from the natives or do without. And some of the boys wore . . . well, all of us did at one time or another . . . what we called G-strings. Just a piece of cloth with string tied around your waist and you pulled the cloth. I didn't too much. I wore some but I managed to have a pair of fatigues that were made

into shorts.

Marcello: I can recall Jack Moss telling me . . . Jack Moss, of course, is one of the members of the "Lost Battalion." He thinks he can still cut out a pair of shorts to this day. (Chuckle) He had to do it so often.

Gregg: (Chuckle) I started to say out of our shelter halves and some out of blankets and out of the mosquito net . . . the mosquitoes were terrible and on the bottom of these mosquito nets there was a strip of cloth about something like twelve inches wide. And there had been a many and a many pair of shorts made out of the bottom of that mosquito net. We learned to do everything connected with getting along to live by the way. It made thieves out of us. At least I guess you'd call us that. It was just survival. You had to do something because what the Japs give us just wasn't enough to live and work on most of the time.

Marcello: How did you supplement your diet? In other words, I suppose that if a dog happened to stray out . . . into the camp, he was pretty fair game, is this correct?

Gregg: That's correct. Anything that was edible, and edible meant anything you could get your hands on, almost. Anything that come along, dogs, cats, some snakes. I can't think of anything that come around that was in any way edible that somebody got it.

Marcello: Did you, yourself personally sample most of these delicacies?

Gregg: I didn't eat any dog. I know a lot of us did. There was lots of dogs eaten. I did have a sample of a piece of snake. And some of them said it tasted like chicken; it didn't taste too good to me. But how it tasted didn't have a whole lot to do with it. If we thought it would help us get home--and we'd decided that rice ball and whatever we could get to go with it was our only chance to come home--what it tasted like didn't have too much to do with it. Of course, it made it better if it tasted good, but basically it was something to eat. It had a little power to it.

Marcello: Would it be a safe assumption that perhaps you thought more about food than anything else?

Gregg: Continually. From before we left Priok 'til I had my first meal in Calcutta, India, I don't think there was any time that I wasn't hungry. We filled up occasionally on something, but you were still hungry. We even dreamed of being hungry. At Priok I can remember T. J. Spencer over at Jacksboro threatening very seriously to take his shoes and cut the tops off of them and start boiling them. That sounds like something of a fairytale or something you'd dream up, but I sat there listening to him, and he was dead serious as he ever was. He was hungry. And I don't think there was ever a time when I'll say 99 per cent of the boys but what they were hungry.

Marcello: What did you usually talk about when a group of you got together?

Gregg: Over there at . . .

Marcello: Yeah. I'm referring to the prisoners when you were at camp-- when a group of you managed to sit down or stand around and talk.

Gregg: Well, for one thing, among the boys that were good friends I don't think a one of them had a secret left when we come out. It was something to do and something to tell about, and we'd run out of recent things to talk about. We told, talked about the things we used to do. Of course, food was always uppermost, but when we could sort of forget that, well, we'd talk about our girlfriends back home. Some of the boys were married--not many. The girls back home and . . . some of the scrapes we'd been in--some of us. Just general GI talk, I'd say. Of course, it was under different circumstances but pretty much what a bunch of GIs would do that had been cooped up.

Marcello: Up until this time were you more or less keeping score or keeping a tally sheet on the Japanese guards? What I'm trying to get at here, are there any of them that you really wanted to get even with if you got out of camp? Was there any of them that you singled out? You know, boy, I'm really going to get this guy when I get out of here? I'm referring now up to . . .

Gregg: Up to Bicycle.

Marcello: . . . Priok or Bicycle Camp.

Gregg: No, I didn't get in too much trouble at Priok and Bicycle Camp

with the guards that I recall now.

Marcello: Where did you move from Bicycle Camp?

Gregg: We loaded on a boat at Bicycle Camp, and, well, they told us we were going to the other end of the island. I was in the first group that left the Bicycle Camp, and they said not to take any clothes--one change of clothes--that we might be gone a few days. And they took us down to the docks and loaded us on a boat and we went to Singapore.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen on the trip from Java to Singapore? Were there any air raids or any submarine scares or anything like that?

Gregg: I don't believe so from Java to Singapore.

Marcello: What were conditions like on the ship?

Gregg: Oh, real, real bad. They just pushed us down in the hold almost. There was just barely room to sit. We were crammed in there like sardines. They let a few out at a time--up on deck--to get a little fresh air all along. I believe most of the time there were some of them out. But it was terrible in that hold from Java to Singapore.

Marcello: What did they do so far as sanitary facilities were concerned while you were down in the hold of this ship?

Gregg: I don't recall anything about that.

Marcello: Did you lose many people during this trip?

Gregg: No, I don't recall losing any boys from Java to Singapore.

Marcello: Apparently up until this time the unit was fairly well intact



so far as losses were concerned.

Gregg: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Sick men, yes, but not too many of them had died up until this time.

Gregg: Right.

Marcello: Is that a safe assumption?

Gregg: That's right. That's right.

Marcello: You were still primarily suffering from the same things that you had had perhaps ever since you were in Java.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Dysentery, and maybe a little bit of malaria and this sort of thing.

Gregg: Yes, that's right. That's right. We were still in fairly good shape then.

Marcello: How long did this trip take? A couple of days?

Gregg: No, more than that. Seemed to me like we were in there a couple of weeks.

Marcello: Wonder how come the trip took so long? Obviously it's not too far from Java to Singapore.

Gregg: I may be mistaken on how long we were in that thing. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Well, it could have been that long. Was it an old ship or . . .

Gregg: Oh, yes, it was an old ship. It was a Japanese ship. Maybe it wasn't that long. It seemed like several days to me, now. I don't know how many days, but it was more than two days. I

think I know. Seemed to me like we were on there ten or twelve, fifteen days.

Marcello: What was it like when you got to Singapore? Or to put it another way, what did you do when you got to Singapore?

Gregg: We didn't have much work to do in Singapore. There was already a camp set up there. Oh, we had small working parties doing . . . working for the Japs cleaning up and straightening up and moving a little of their gear and things like that. But the work wasn't too bad in Singapore, as I recall.

Marcello: Now is this when you stayed at a place which had formerly been a leper colony. Some of the people in Singapore stayed at a leper colony, did they not? A place which had formerly been a leper colony.

Gregg: No, not in Singapore. The leper colony was in Burma.

Marcello: Oh, I see. That was later on after you had been moved out of Singapore.

Gregg: That was later on.

Marcello: I see. That was my mistake then. Well, you didn't stay in Singapore too long, did you?

Gregg: A week or two, couple of weeks, something somewhere along there. Two weeks or from one to three weeks.

Marcello: Did anything out of the ordinary occur there that you recall?

Gregg: No, I don't remember anything out of the ordinary at Singapore.

Marcello: Okay then, I guess we can more or less now get into the main

part of your tenure as prisoner-of-war then. Is that correct?  
I would assume that you spent the duration of the war in  
Burma.

Gregg: Well, about eighteen or twenty months in Burma.

Marcello: I would assume that that's the part that perhaps stands out in  
your mind as much as anything.

Gregg: Now that was one of the roughest parts of it, yes.

Marcello: Okay, what happened? You were in Singapore for just a couple  
of weeks. Obviously just a temporary stopping place, you  
might say.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: And then from there, you were sent to Burma. Is this correct?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Could you describe the trip from Singapore to Burma? How did  
you go?

Gregg: We went to Rangoon.

Marcello: By boat?

Gregg: By boat. And I remember when we got on the boat the skipper  
of this boat had gone from California back to Japan on a free  
vacation or something of the sort. And they put him in the  
Navy, and he was the skipper of this ship.

Marcello: Now he was a Japanese-American or something like that.

Gregg: Yes, yes. And he asked if there was any boys from California,  
I remember, and there was. And he asked them what they knew  
about certain movies and towns, and he asked how they'd like to

have a Milky-Way candy bar. And there was no doubt in anybody's mind that he knew too much about the towns in California and everything over here to not be. And he told us then how come he was in the Navy. But they took us from Singapore and . . . we stopped at Rangoon and stayed, oh, I think one night maybe--just overnight. And then from Rangoon on up to Moulmein.

Marcello: Moulmein. Did anything eventful happen on that trip from Singapore to Rangoon?

Gregg: We had a few scares, but no bombing as some of the ships did have.

Marcello: In other words, there were a couple of air attacks.

Gregg: Yes, but we were not bothered . . . no hits or anything. We come through in good shape and made our trip on up there without any mishaps.

Marcello: What did you think about this? Were you kind of hoping that the Americans would bomb or torpedo these ships, or, you know, you were kind of between the devil and the deep blue sea, so to speak.

Gregg: (Chuckle) Right, right. Every time we saw an American plane, we were always glad to see them of course, but sometimes we were glad when they got done and got out of there because they kind of stepped on our toes a little bit, tore things up sometimes.

Marcello: Okay, so you landed at Rangoon, and then from Rangoon you went to Moulmein. How did you make that trip--by railroad?

Gregg: No, we got back on the boat.

Marcello: I see. Had you ever gotten off the boat--when you got to Rangoon, that is?

Gregg: Well, I think we did. I'm not sure. I know we spent the night in Rangoon. I guess we didn't get off that boat; we just looked, I guess, because they wouldn't have took us off.

Marcello: Did they let you up on deck?

Gregg: Some.

Marcello: But essentially you were still crowded down in the hold of that ship.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Crowded pretty tightly.

Gregg: Real, real tight. Sure was.

Marcello: All right, what was Moulmein like?

Gregg: Now, if I'm not mistaken, that's where we spent the night in what had been a leper colony. I know we got up the next morning and found out where we'd spent the night, and we were all scared to death.

Marcello: How did you find out? Some of the Japanese guards tell you?

Gregg: There were signs around, if I remember. Or maybe somebody told us, but I know there was some signs, it seems like.

Marcello: Well, Burma had been British possession, so perhaps the signs were in English.

Gregg: That's the way I remember it. I can just almost see them now. They had two stories kind of like a loft in the barn, maybe,

where I slept. And I know when I got down on the ground and for some reason got to looking around, somebody told me that we'd spent the night in a leper colony and that that stuff was real catchy, and we might all have it. But I think it had been vacated for some time probably when they took us in there.

Marcello: But you only stayed there one night, is that correct?

Gregg: Yes, I think one night--not more than two. And then we loaded up, or packed up, and went out on the railroad from there out to the Forty Kilo Camp, as we called it.

Marcello: The Forty Kilo Camp? Was that where the railroad had begun, or was that how far the railroad had progressed up to that point?

Gregg: Well, they had these camps all up and down every five kilos or thereabout. Well, it might have been as far as the railroad was, but that's where the . . . I don't know just for sure now how come they took us out there. But that's where . . . and we walked that doggone thing.

Marcello: You walked where?

Gregg: Well, maybe not all the way, but we walked the biggest part of that distance.

Marcello: To the Kilo Camp--the Forty Kilo Camp.

Gregg: To the Forty Kilo Camp. Yes.

Marcello: What was the railroad trip like from Moulmein? Was it crowded? Were you packed in boxcars, or exactly what was it like?

Gregg: Well, it was always crowded whenever (chuckle) they . . .

Marcello: Whenever they moved you.

Gregg: . . . whenever they moved us, it was crowded. I can't remember that being any different to any of the others. I think it was just a crammed and jammed deal like the rest of them, the best I remember.

Marcello: What was the Forty Kilo Camp like? Before we get on to talk about the Forty Kilo Camp, you mentioned that you walked a pretty good distance until you got to the Forty Kilo Camp. Do you remember anything about that hike?

Gregg: I know we was all give out by the time we got out there. I can't remember anything other than being real tired and getting in there about dark.

Marcello: Had your shoes given out by this time, or did you still have shoes?

Gregg: Oh, I still had shoes then. Yes, I think I still had a pair of my old GI shoes by then. Some of the boys were already barefooted.

Marcello: The Japanese, I assume, made no provisions for providing shoes or anything.

Gregg: They issued a few shoes, but the most of them were so small that there was very few of our bunch that could wear any of them. They weren't big enough for the big-footed American boys. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. What was the Forty Kilo Camp like?

Gregg: Well, this was a big camp, and it was--as almost all of them--

it was just, well, it was bamboo huts--completely bamboo--with poles strapped together with the stripping off of the stuff, and then the leaf parts on top piled real thick and pretty steep to make them turn water. All of the camps were, oh, basically about--the buildings, at least--were about the same. They were, I think, almost completely bamboo. The floor part of it where we slept, and all the poles, the corners, and the eaves, and everything was bamboo poles, and the leaves on top were stripped down with the stripping off of these bamboo poles.

Marcello: In what sort of physical condition were you at the time you got to the Forty Kilo Camp?

Gregg: Still in pretty fair condition at the Forty Kilo.

Marcello: Had you had dysentery?

Gregg: Oh, well, yes. Not real bad. The Forty Kilo was when the boys began to really have the fevers and malaria, and dysentery and beriberi . . .

Marcello: Pellagra?

Gregg: . . . pellagra--everything.

Marcello: Most of these things are dietary deficiencies, isn't that correct?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Most of them come from a lack of proper diet.

Gregg: Right. Right.

Marcello: Did you ever get tropical ulcers, or did you ever see anybody



that had the tropical ulcers?

Gregg: Oh, well, I only had one or two. Got a little scar or two on an ankle, but none of them were oh, bigger than the end of your finger.

Marcello: Why don't you describe these tropical ulcers. What exactly are they like, and how do you cure them, and so on.

Gregg: Well . . .

Marcello: How do you treat them, I guess would be a better way of putting it.

Gregg: Everything--the grass, the leaves, the trees, the bamboo, anything--anytime you cut your hand or foot, leg, anywhere, that stuff was always poison. And it would make a sore. And that would just . . . if you didn't . . . if it wasn't cleaned out--really cleaned out--and dug out to the good skin, good hide and good flesh, that thing would just keep growing and growing and growing just, I guess, like a cancer maybe. It'd just gradually get bigger and bigger and bigger. I've seen boys their leg from their knee to their ankle--that whole thing--just a solid sore. And when it gets big, there's just no way to do anything about it. The only chance that we had was to get on them as soon as they started, clean that thing out even if you had to take a knife or anything, and cut that stuff out of there to the good hide, and get it disinfected with hot water. We used hot water and tea leaves. And, of course, we didn't have any medicine at all--no disinfectant or

anything of the sort. But we boiled tea leaves to draw the soreness and what have you out of those places. They'd boil these tea leaves and make a compress and put on those things. The Forty Kilo is where Dr. Hekking, the old Dutch doctor, was assigned to us. He was a godsend to the American boys. But he still had a little bit of his medical stuff. And he'd take what he called a spoon and just do absolutely what I said a while ago--just scrape that out 'til there wasn't anything left; and then he'd make a compress out of that boiling water. Tea leaves had been boiled. Of course, the water all had to be boiled. There wasn't any good water to drink without it being boiled. And he'd make those compresses and, of course, sometimes it'd work, and the ones that it didn't work on are still out there.

Marcello: Did you say these tropical ulcers, if they weren't treated properly, would just continue to spread.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: In effect they were eating away the flesh. Is that correct?

Gregg: Yes, right. That's right, that's correct.

Marcello: Were these things a result of a lack of cleanliness and a lack of adequate diet, or . . .

Gregg: Well . . .

Marcello: . . . combination of things?

Gregg: Yes. By then we were run down. We hadn't had proper food, and everything would tear us up nearly. And, of course, we

didn't have any medical supplies of any kind. And it was just a pretty hard road. Anything that happened didn't get tended to right then when it happened. And, of course, working on the railroad, there's rocks and bricks and sticks and stones and walking backwards and forwards to work. There's something happening all the time. And every little old place on a lot of the guys would just make sores. This old Dutch doctor . . . I don't know what it was but it was some kind of green stuff that he'd gathered out of the jungle that he said was good blood medicine. Tasted just like crabgrass or Bermuda grass or something. But I believed everything he ever said. And when he'd show us and tell us what to get, a lot of us would get it. We'd boil that stuff all day, some usually out of a little group that ate together. A whole lot of the time there'd be one that maybe would be able to stay in camp. And he'd boil this stuff, and we'd eat it not because we liked it but only for the possibility of keeping our blood in good shape and being able to survive that stuff.

Marcello: Now, did you ever see them use maggots to try and eat the dead flesh off these tropical ulcers?

Gregg: I sure did, I sure did. And it worked part of the time. It really did. I saw one boy with a place just above his ankle, and it was beginning to get pretty big. And they put them things in there, and they cleaned it out. That sounds like the . . .

Marcello: What was the pain like when they scraped these ulcers?

Gregg: Jus like taking something and tearing on your hide. Just like cutting flesh, cutting your leg, or if a cut place or something taking something and start scraping on it. The pain was pretty hard, pretty bad.

Marcello: I was going to ask you awhile ago about what sort of medical facilities were available in these camps, and I think you've more or less answered that question. The medical facilities were practically not existent, is this correct?

Gregg: That's correct.

Marcello: Did you have any quinine . . .

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: . . . to combat malaria?

Gregg: We did have quinine. It was in very limited supply, but there was some quinine.

Marcello: Did you contract malaria?

Gregg: I had malaria but never very bad. After we were through the jungle, I had what the old Dutch doctor called "jungle fever." It really liked to tore me up . . .

Marcello: Now, what was . . .

Gregg: . . . did tear me up.

Marcello: . . . "jungle fever?"

Gregg: Well, I really don't know how it was different from malaria, but for about a week or ten days I couldn't even get out of bed without help. It just made me so terribly weak, and you

can't eat. I don't know how it's different from malaria. Well, it is similar, I know. But the old Dutch doctor called it "jungle fever." Maybe it was . . . well, I don't know. I did have malaria but not very bad. I made it through the jungle in real good shape.

Marcello: Considering.

Gregg: Considering, yes.

Marcello: And compared to everybody else.

Gregg: Compared, yes, that's what I meant. The ulcers I had were small, and the fever I had didn't bother me but very little. And I was able to work with very few exceptions every working day we had through the Burma Jungle.

Marcello: I've heard some of these people also talk about the death hiccups. Did you ever see those or experience those? You might tell us a little bit about those.

Gregg: Well, I'll tell you one experience I know. Before we left Java I got hold of a little can of cream, sweetened cream. It was, oh, about that high and so big around. And I carried that with me. I still had it in the last camp that we were in in the Burma Jungle. And this boy from Jacksboro started in dead man hiccups. And the Dutch doctor come down and he said, "Well, he's got about another couple of hours, and he's going to be gone."

Marcello: This was always a sign that a prisoner was dying, isn't that correct?

Gregg: That's correct.

Marcello: . . . when he got through his hiccups?

Gregg: When he started what we called the dead man hiccups, with very few exceptions that wound him up. The old Dutch doctor said that if anybody had any can of that sweetened cream he could mix it with water, and if he could get him to keep it down, he'd mix a little spoonful of that with a little bit of warm water. And he said if he could get him to keep down the last spoonful of that, he had a chance. Well, I'd carried that can of cream, been carrying it for I don't know how long, twelve, fifteen months, I guess. I'd carried it for me, but I couldn't set over there and watch that boy go like that. So I went and got my cream and took it to the old doctor. And he got him to keep that . . . well, before the last, before he got to the last spoon. I think he'd had about half of it. It'd come up. It'd keep coming up, but he finally kept some of it down. And I don't know how long it was now, but a while after that he stopped the hiccups, and he's schoolteacher in Austin now.

Marcello: What essentially brought the dead man hiccups?

Gregg: Well, he was just out of power or I guess the fever and everything that they'd had. I guess probably his stomach maybe got infected or something. I don't really know for sure just what he done that kept him from dying. I don't know enough about medicine I guess to answer that.

Marcello: What was work like on the railroads?

Gregg: Pretty rough. We carried rails, we carried cross-ties, we dug tunnels through the mountains and filled up the valleys. When we were digging, they'd allot so much work for every man to do. And when we'd go to work in the morning, there was ten of us. We usually had to move a cubic yard of dirt per man or a meter as they called it out there. And if it took you until ten o'clock that night for your group to get that much dirt moved, well, that's how long you'd stay. Stayed 'til you moved your quota.

Marcello: Suppose you moved your quota very quickly. Did they increase the quota?

Gregg: Usually they did or you had to help somebody else. You didn't get to go home or anything (chuckle) like that . . .

Marcello: I see.

Gregg: . . . if you happened to get through early. However, if we managed to look like we were going to get in too early, why, everybody begin to . . .

Marcello: Slack off a little bit?

Gregg: . . . slack off and make it last until the normal quitting time.

Marcello: I assume once again that you were working from sunup to sundown. Did it usually take you that long to get your quota?

Gregg: We . . .

Marcello: Or did they expect it to take you that long to get your quota?

Gregg: Well, they expected it to take that long. But most of the

time on the railroad we ate breakfast before it got light, and it was dark . . . oh, not all the time. Part of the time we'd get in before night. But a lot of the time we were working a good ways from the camp, and it'd take us a good bit of going and coming from the camp.

Marcello: I assume that you walked from camp to work.

Gregg: Most of the time. After the railroad bed was finished and we were working on past where it was finished, they'd have these flat cars, and they would bring part of the guys in on them. They run those things up as far as the railroad was fixed and bring us back to camp part of the time. Part of the time we got to ride.

Marcello: About how much had your weight dropped by this time? Could you estimate it?

Gregg: Oh, I guess, oh, forty to fifty pounds under normal.

Marcello: You were somewhere down then to 130 pounds, is that safe?

Gregg: Thirty or forty pounds.

Marcello: Somewhere around there?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Did you notice that the bigger men usually suffered more than the smaller men because of this loss in weight?

Gregg: That was true a lot of the time. In fact, I think generally speaking, yes. All the way. Of course, there were exceptions to that. It seemed like the bigger men had a little harder time. I know a lot of the ones that died, not all of them, but



on the start the guys that we felt like were the healthiest, strongest, and the most apt to survive the whole thing were the ones to go first. Now, you know, that's not always, but that's the way it turned out a whole lot of it.

Marcello: About how many men would you estimate you were losing a day here? About how many a day were dying?

Gregg: Of the Americans?

Marcello: Yes.

Gregg: Oh, I don't know. Let's see.

Marcello: There were several a day, is it safe to say that?

Gregg: Yeah, we were losing men every day.

Marcello: When you get right down to it, there really weren't that many people in this so called "Lost Battalion" altogether. What was your full strength?

Gregg: Well, of the soldiers we had something over 500, and then there was one battery sent to Japan. We had, oh, 400 and something to start with after we were captured, and about 500, I believe, Navy boys. Of course, we wasn't all in on that railroad, but a big part of them were. I doubt if it would be more than one, you know, from start to finish for the Americans. We was up and down that railroad. Oh, I doubt if it had been more than one a day. Of course, there was times in some camps where we lost a lot of boys, and in some camps we didn't lose any. They said there was a man for every cross-tie on that railroad from start to finish. But the Americans in comparison to the total

number of men was pretty small in there.

Marcello: I see. And you think this was mainly a result of the fact that the Americans perhaps were a little bit more sanitary than some of the other groups? About as sanitary as you could be under the circumstances.

Gregg: Yes, yes. I can remember Melvin Clay laughing at me in one camp about sweeping the dirt floor. Of course, we all jarred at each other and kidded and so on all the time. But we kept our places as clean as it was possible to be kept, which wasn't too good at times but . . . And one thing that I think was a difference between American boys and a lot of the others or, that is, in our group, was that the majority of our group were farm boys. And we grewed up during the depression, and we all worked like the dickens, had to. And we were in real good shape when we got into this--as good a shape as boys could be in. And I remember Doctor Darwin putting on my paper, "in perfect condition," when I got in the Army. And I thought of that a whole lot of the time while we were out there. Things had changed considerably, but we were in real good physical condition, and we knew how to work. And we decided if work was out ticket--work and the rice bowls was our ticket home--then that's the way we were coming back.

Marcello: Do you think that most Americans were also a bit more optimistic . . .

Gregg: Oh . . .

Marcello: . . . than some of the other groups?

Gregg: . . . much more, much more. That was one of the things that the Japs could never get over. It didn't make any difference how rough, how it was raining, how cold, or how anything, the Americans were continually talking, going on, and as far as they could tell, having a good time and enjoying it. We never lost our sense of humor, and everybody was going on about something all the time. And they couldn't stop it. And I think that bothered them as much as anything.

Marcello: Now by this time, I'm sure some of the Japanese guards here must have had nicknames.

Gregg: (Chuckle) Oh, yes. We had, let's see, "Liver Lips."  
(Chuckle)

Marcello: "Liver Lips?"

Gregg: (Chuckle) Yes.

Marcello: Now how did he get that name? Do you recall?

Gregg: Well, I think he might have been Korean but he was big. He was a real big fellow, and he had real coarse features, and his lips were thick. He had real, real thick lips.

Marcello: Was he rough?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: If he was a Korean, I think this was probably the case because I think others have told me that the Korean guards were many times worse than the Japanese guards.

Gregg: That's right. They were lots of the time.

Marcello: Why do you think this was so? Do you think because the Japanese had been picking on the Koreans for so long that now finally the Koreans had somebody that they could pick on?

Gregg: I think that was just right. They were just passing the buck. They'd been stomped on and chewed on beat on until they had a chance to do something else. And I think they were just using it while they had the chance.

Marcello: What were some of the favorite tricks that "Liver Lips" used to pull?

Gregg: Oh, I can't remember anything in particular. He was of the ones that maybe you'd walk by him today, and he might take his gun and hit you in the back and knock you down with it. We couldn't smoke and maybe he'd come along and he'd give you a cigarette and then take a pole and beat the tar out of you because you were smoking. Simple things like that were the kind of things that he'd do if he had a chance to do something. I guess he saw it as legal as far as he was concerned.

Marcello: Do you remember the nicknames of any of the other guards?

Gregg: Let's see. (Chuckle) Right now that's the only one I can think of.

Marcello: Do you remember the Americans doing anything to sabotage the work on this railroad?

Gregg: The prisoners?

Marcello: I'm speaking of the prisoners now, yes. Obviously, there must have been things that the prisoners did to try and sabotage some of the work or some of the Japanese equipment or things

like this.

Gregg: Well, there was, yes, but not a great lot that I know anything about that could be done. Some of the fills that were supposed to be packed and filled with rocks and things were just kind of scraped over. But most of the things that we had a chance to do really didn't amount to any great lot, that I know anything about or that I remember anything about, now.

Marcello: Was your work mostly all pick and shovel work?

Gregg: Well, yeah. Not altogether. Now we laid the rails. I handled an awful lot of the rails and the cross-ties.

Marcello: But I mean, it was all hand work.

Gregg: Oh, yes.

Marcello: You were using your back and your muscles . . .

Gregg: Oh, yes.

Marcello: . . . and this sort of thing. No machinery whatsoever.

Gregg: No machinery at all.

Marcello: What sort of progress did this railroad make?

Gregg: Well, surprisingly, it come along pretty good. Of course, I don't know how many miles in a month or anything, would be completed. But our planes, before it was ever used to amount to anything, would blow out and drop bombs on the bridges and keep the thing out of commission. They were watching that thing all the time. And bombers would come over and blow out the bridges all along. But as far as our sabotage work, oh, there was some, but it was rather minor, I'd say, that I know about.

Marcello: You mentioned a while ago about the bombers knocking out the bridges on this railroad. Did any bombers ever hit the camp?

Gregg: Uh . . .

Marcello: That is, the camp that you were in . . .

Gregg: Yeah.

Marcello: I'm referring to.

Gregg: Not any of the camps that I was in that I recall. Along up and down the railroad, I don't believe. I can remember seeing the bombers going over. And I can remember one of the boys pointing them out to a Jap officer, and he hollered, "All men to the brush!" and so on. But so far as I remember right now, I don't believe any camps that I was in were bombed while I was in there.

Marcello: What sort of atrocities did you witness while working on those railroads? I'm referring now to the punishment which was dished out by the Japanese guard.

Gregg: (Chuckle) Just about anything your imagination could reach. I know one boy stood at attention until he passed out.

Marcello: This was out in the hot sun, I assume.

Gregg: Yes. The thing that hurt me the worst that I got in the Burma Jungle was in a railroad yard trying to pry a switch rail off of a flat car. And that little old guard . . . I thought I could think of his name that we had for him, but I can't think of it now. But anyway, he'd jumped up on that flat car with three pieces of telephone wire and started to whop me on the

back with them. And he was just about to cut me in two. And normally, if you moved when the guard was doing something to you, you were really in trouble. But I decided he was going to kill me with that wire anyway, so I jumped off the car. And he jumped down and got his gun and scratched me in the stomach with his bayonet a few times and screaming and hollering. And then he finally left me alone and went back up there to show me how to pry that rail off, and he couldn't get it off. So he jumped down and motioned for me to get back up there and went on. But he was just cutting the blood out of me every time he hit me in the back with that wire. And I decided that I didn't think I could stand it so I left him. But that was all. When he got through talking, that's all he ever done to me. They treated a lot of the boys pretty bad. I've seen them take clubs, guns, and stuff and just whip them 'til it looked like a human body couldn't stand it.

Marcello: As the war started to take a turn for the worse for the Japanese, did you notice any change at all in their outlook and their behavior or what have you?

Gregg: Yeah. After we'd begin to romp on them pretty good, we got lots of whippings for nothing. They'd hear about Americans bombing some of their ships or whatever, and they were in pretty foul moods most of the time the next day. We caught it pretty good. And it was easy to tell when they come out and maybe they might just walk by and slap you and keep a going and

never say a word and such things as that. Well, you could figure that things hadn't been going to good for them.

Marcello: Do you think in many cases, too . . . well by this time perhaps or in certain stages of the war the bombing raids on the Japanese cities had already taken place, and it was quite possible that they could have lost some relatives or loved ones or what have you in those bombing raids. Am I correct in assuming that you didn't always stay at the Forty Kilo Camp? As the railroads progressed, did you not move to a different camp?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Was there one every five kilos?

Gregg: Yes. They had different groups. If they had a group a laying rails, maybe we'd get to where the next camp would be closer to where we'd finish. And they'd move us on down. Maybe just a group, not a whole camp. But we went to the Forty Kilo and the Sixty Kilo, and then we went back to the Ten Kilo Camp and then come back down through again. They'd take us down the road and then maybe come back. Never very long at the same camp. They moved us up and down that thing.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't do the same job all the time?

Gregg: No, no, no. We might dig a ditch or dig out a side of a hill making the railroad right-of-way today and maybe go somewhere and unload a carload of rails the next day. And we never knew when we got up in the morning when we were fixing to go to work or what for sure we were going to do or which we were



going to go.

Marcello: Was there very much stealing among the prisoners? Did they steal among themselves? Now, obviously, they'd tried to steal things from the Japanese . . .

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: . . . but was there much stealing among the prisoners themselves?

Gregg: Some, not real bad, though. We had some boys that would steal any time they had a chance. But the ones that was in the camp, generally speaking, would kind of keep an eye on things. Now, of course, we lost things all right. There wasn't a great lot to lose, but if you had anything, whatever it might be, if you had a little extra food that you was going to have that night for supper or something, if it disappeared, well, you were in a pretty foul mood. And there was some but not real bad.

Marcello: How was the discipline in this camp? Were you still obeying your officers? Did they assign you to certain details and so on, so far as keeping the barracks clean and this sort of thing?

Gregg: I think basically we obeyed the officers pretty well all the way through. However, it was kind of everybody for himself so to speak; except for the little groups that I mentioned awhile ago. It was basically up to the individual in the barracks, the way I remember it. If you wanted to keep your bunk clean and the ones around you wanted to, why, you did. We always had a leader or somebody that would be in charge of each working party or a group. And as long as we had officers, as

long as there was officers in the camp, why, they'd be in charge of the group or the non-commissioned officers. And part of the time it would be just anybody that would be responsible for us. If something happened, the first guy that got the whipping was the guy in charge of the working party. And then it went from there on down.

Marcello: Did a black market ever develop in any of the prison camps?

Gregg: Oh, yeah. We had guys that for some reason could get to stay in camp awhile. They'd make a contact with the natives some way, and then they'd buy stuff from the guys . . . find out what the natives want, and then whoever they could find it from in camp, and then they'd sell it to the natives for an outlandish price if they could, and then whatever they got from the natives, why, when it got back into camp, why, it was just a pretty wild price. Had sugar in the Burma Jungle. They said it was what the Indians used for horse feed. Oh, it was about four inches square, I guess, and maybe a foot long--maybe ten inches. And it was brown. We called it brown sugar. But it was sweet, and it tasted good. It went good with the rice. And that brought some rather high prices sometimes. You'd get that from the natives.

Marcello: Did you think a lot about sweets such as candy, ice cream, and this sort of thing?

Gregg: I missed milk more than I did sweets; 'course, I missed the sweets all right. But I was raised in . . . we had a dairy, and I'd drink a lot of milk all my life, and I think as much as

anything I missed having a cold glass of milk. Of course, we missed everything, but . . .

Marcello: Did any of the Japanese soldiers ever fraternize with the prisoners in any way?

Gregg: Well, yeah. There was some of the guards who when they were off duty were just like a normal human being, I think. (Chuckle) They'd come over and sit around and . . . now, not any great lot, but we had some. Asked questions, mostly. They wanted to find out what they could about the United States--how we lived and all about it. And just talk about everything in general. And it surprised us the number of Japanese that we'd run into that could speak English and also that had been educated over here. We run across some all the time, but we had some who would come over and sit around, drink tea with us. We drank hot tea. That's about all we could . . . all the water had to be boiled, and you put tea in it. When you had tea, why, it'd give it a flavor anyway.

Marcello: Could you ever expect any special favors from these individuals who did fraternize with the prisoners?

Gregg: No. When they got back over where they belonged, why, that was just about the wind of it. One I remember--a Jap officer--real young, started asking me what I thought about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. And usually if you told them what you really thought, why, you got the heck beat out of you. But this guy just insisted that I tell him what I thought about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. And I said, "Well, I guess one more bamboo

pole wouldn't make much difference." So I told him. And he just laughed. And he was real smart, and he understood the whole situation. That was sitting on the back of the flat car going to work. And the next morning, he come around where I was again, and he brought me some Japanese cigarettes. And as long as we were at that camp, and as long as he was out there, wherever I was on that flat car, he'd come and sit down by me and give me something. Sometimes it'd be something to eat or some cigarettes or something, but every morning he'd have something for me. And when I told him what I thought about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, I was ready to take another clubbing because that's what had always happened before. But he was as near human (chuckle) as any of them that I can remember.

Marcello: Wonder why he reacted this way when you told him your true feelings about Pearl Harbor?

Gregg: I don't know. He was just a little different from the rest of them for some reason. And he spoke perfect English. I don't remember if he'd been to school over here or not, but he was an educated man, I know.

Marcello: We talked about the fact that you obviously were not getting enough to eat. But I think we ought to put it in the record. Was this deliberate on the part of the Japanese, or simply didn't they have much food to give you? Or were they giving you exactly what the Japanese soldier was getting, and that

wasn't enough for you?

Gregg: I don't really think they cared whether we lived or died, but the food we had was maybe not as good a quality--I'm sure it wasn't--but, it was basically the same as the Japanese soldiers were eating. Their mess gear had a little lid in the top, and that was for fish heads. And then rice in the bottom of that. The times that I can remember seeing them eat, that's what they had to eat. They were eating basically just about what we were eating. I think, of course, they were raised on that. They didn't know any different and we did. We didn't like it, and the rice that we had was the left-overs as far as they were concerned. It was dirty and wasn't near as good or as good a quality as what they had. But I think basically we had very similar stuff through the jungle anyway to just about what they had to eat. Maybe theirs wasn't rationed quite as much as ours, I guess. They had more probably per man than we did.

Marcello: Was there ever very much fighting among the prisoners? In other words, did tempers ever grow short?

Gregg: (Chuckle) Yes.

Marcello: Usually what was the cause of any disagreements or fights which occurred among the prisoners?

Gregg: The ones that I know about . . . just arguments or "I'm going to get ahead of you in line." "I'm ahead of you in this chow line." Just things like kids would fight over, I guess you'd

say. Everybody's temper was . . . well, nobody felt good most of the time. However, I think for the whole group that we done pretty good. Of course, there was some . . . a soldier and a marine would get in a squabble, or a sailor and a marine, or a sailor and an army boy.

Marcello: Also, there's another thing I want to get in the record here now. We've been talking about you working on this railroad, and, of course, the first thing that comes to many people's mind is "Ah-hah, he was working on the Bridge over the River Kwai." And obviously this was not the same railroad. Isn't that correct?

Gregg: No, I think it is the same railroad.

Marcello: It is the same railroad.

Gregg: I think so. When they had the movie down at Arlington, all the "Lost Battalion" were invited to come down and see that movie. Now I may be mistaken, but I don't think so. I think that's on what we called the Burma Railroad.

Marcello: Did you ever get to see that bridge?

Gregg: Well, I didn't see the movie. But from the pictures that I saw of the advertising of the movie, it looked exactly like the big old bridge that I didn't help build but did ride over that thing. And it's a way on . . . I don't know, I think . . . way on down on the south end of that thing somewhere. I've never been positive about the connection with the whole thing, but I've heard some of your, no, our group say that that is

on the Burma Railroad. I couldn't confirm that, but I really think it is.

Marcello: Where was this railroad going to. In other words, it started in Moulmein. Is that correct?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: And where was it going to?

Gregg: All the way through Burma on down into Siam.

Marcello: I see. I see.

Gregg: Or Thailand, Siam.

Marcello: I'll have to check it out on the map. And if the road or the route possibly crosses the Kwai River, why, maybe it is one and the same.

Gregg: Well, I think it is, but (chuckle) I couldn't say for sure that it is. But I know when they had that movie down there that our group had a special invitation to come down to see that thing.

Marcello: All right, I don't think there are any other general questions that I have about the life in the prison camp itself. I think now perhaps, we're ready, if you think so, to talk about the events leading up to your eventual liberation. Would you care to describe those events? Let's say the last week or two or however long you were in the camp before the Americans or the Allied Forces finally came.

Gregg: Well, I was in Saigon when the war was over.

Marcello: Saigon. You mean the Saigon of Vietnam?

Gregg: Yes, uh-huh.

Marcello: Indo-China at that time.

Gregg: Yes, yes.

Marcello: How did you get there? I think this needs to be a part of the record.

Gregg: Yeah. Well, when we left the Burma Jungle, we road our railroad on down to Thailand.

Marcello: Had you finished the railroad?

Gregg: Well, basically it was finished. I think by that time the Americans were bombing those bridges pretty regular, but they were using the railroad, that is, the Japanese were for supplies and such. But it never was totally altogether, I don't think. After the Americans started getting over there and bombing that thing, they kept it pretty well tore up. But we rode the thing from . . . I was at what we called the Eighty Kilo Camp--the last camp I was in in Burma.

Marcello: Which one was the worst? Which camp was the worst?

Gregg: The Eighty Kilo for our group.

Marcello: Why was that so?

Gregg: Well, the camp area was terrible. They'd had epidemic of cholera there just before we come in, and they'd buried hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of boys. And by then we were getting in pretty bad shape--just gradually, you know, going down. And the food was getting worse by then. Everything seemed to be in just . . . it just got a little worse all the way through there. And by the time we were down



there, it was just . . . more boys who's resistance was getting lower and lower, and more of them got sick. Just in all respects, it was just about as bad as any camp we had, I think.

Marcello: Had your own weight more or less stabilized at around 130-135 pounds? Or did you lose even more weight?

Gregg: I hadn't until then. Now, on down in Thailand is where I had that jungle fever. And I don't imagine I weighed over 115-120 probably by time I got over that. I got so weak I couldn't get up out of bed. And I got one of my worst beatings while I had that fever. The Jap officer come through, and you were supposed to get up and salute him or bow to him every time he comes through, anytime one comes around, and I was stretched out on the bed, and I couldn't get up. And he pulled me up and he wam-banged me pretty good 'cause I hadn't got up and bowed to him.

Marcello: When were you down in Thailand? Was that when the railroad was finished?

Gregg: As far as we were concerned, yes.

Marcello: When would this have been about--1944 or 1945?

Gregg: 1944, I guess. I'm not too good on my dates. I guess the early part of '44, I would believe. We went on down into Thailand and from there to Saigon. And from Saigon to Dalat.

Marcello: What were they sending you to these places for? Why did you go to Thailand and to Saigon and to Dalat?

Gregg: Well, I think Thailand is just on the way to Saigon, and in Saigon we worked at the air base and shipyards loading and unloading supplies. And then they shipped a bunch of us to Dalat and we tunneled a mountain up there for communications. That was getting on toward the last, you know, and things were tightening up for them, and they had figured on using that for their communications on that mountain.

Marcello: Now, had your unit been split up again by this time or did  
. . .

Gregg: Oh, yeah. We were scattered all the way from Java all the way through. We had boys everywhere. Then they took us from our groups in Dalat to . . . I can't think of the name of that place . . . up farther on north to where there was a railroad and a river--railroad and a highway bridge across a big river--that the Americans were keeping a hole knocked in all the time. And they took us up there to take supplies across the river in row boats. Just before the war was over they took all of us back--the most of us--back down to Saigon. One thing I remember on that railroad going from Saigon to Dalat, they had these little stations, oh, every five or ten miles, and the clock and the restroom--the clock was in the building and then there was a little restroom outside. And every one of them--every clock--had been shot, and every restroom had bullet holes in it. And after the war was over, we run on to

some Air Corps boys, and they said they done that just for something to do. They patrolled that railroad everyday. When they'd get to one of these stations, they'd shoot the clock and the building.

Marcello: Well, how long were you at these various places? I'm referring now to, oh, the Thailand, Saigon, Dalat business.

Gregg: We didn't stay in Thailand . . . oh, maybe a month or six weeks. And they took us to Saigon, and we were in Saigon, oh, four or five months, I'd say. And then they took a group to Dalat and then on up to this river. From the time we got to Saigon 'til the war was over it was a little over a year. I guess it was May or June in '44 when we got to Saigon, and then we were in Saigon when the war was over then.

Marcello: Is there anything that you remember from your stay in Saigon or Dalat that stands out in your mind, other than the things that you've already mentioned? Were there very many American prisoners in Saigon?

Gregg: Not a real big bunch. There, was oh, a few hundred people, a few hundred prisoners there. They had some English, Dutch, just some of all the group, I'd say, but not a great number of prisoners altogether in Saigon.

Marcello: Did living accommodations improve quite a bit here over what they had been, let's say, back in the Kilo Camps?

Gregg: Oh, yes. We were in the jungle about eighteen months, and we hadn't seen an electric light or anything of the sort. And I

remember how bright the lights looked. And the camp we were in--the first camp in Saigon--was a French Foreign Legion camp, which was a big improvement over the jungle all right.

Marcello: Now was this in the heart of the city, or was it on the outskirts or . . .

Gregg: On the outskirts. The river that comes into Saigon, this big river . . .

Marcello: The Mekong? Wasn't that it--the Mekong?

Gregg: I believe so. They had warehouses along these docks, and our camp was just across the street from these warehouses. And the ships in the river out there is what the Navy boys blowed up the day they come in and stayed all day. Did they tell you anything about that?

Marcello: No, they sure didn't. In fact, you're the first one that I've talked to who wound up in Saigon.

Gregg: Oh? Well, carrier planes . . . now, this was along, oh, a month or two before the war was over, I suppose. We were eating breakfast one morning just about sunup, and we saw these planes--they were over the airport--but we thought they were Japanese planes just coming up. And we were watching them and commenting, and a Japanese plane then started off at the airport and got up a little bit, and about three of these planes circled him, and we could hear the machine guns. And that plane went down smoking. But we still didn't comprehend what was going on. In a minute here come up another one, and

the same thing happened again. Then we decided there was something going on, and these carrier planes had come in and were just circling the airport waiting for these planes to start up. And they burned or shot up every plane on the airport. Every one that started up, they got that one. Then they started to bombing the shipyard, channels, and your warehouses, the railyards, gasoline dumps, the refinery. They stayed 'til about twelve o'clock, and all of them left, and we were out in the rice patties in the mud trying to keep from getting hit. And we thought it was all over so we come back, and they started to dishing out the rice again. And at one o'clock here they come again. And they stayed 'til just nearly sundown. But they cleaned out everything the Jap's had in the way of transportation, fuel, ships, the warehouses, the airport, everything.

Marcello: What sort of a boost did this give your morale?

Gregg: Oh, real big. Real big.

Marcello: Was this the first time you really, definitely, knew that the Allies were winning?

Gregg: Yes, for sure. There had been some . . . P-38s had been in a time or two. One or two or three and stayed a little bit, and pulled out. And we were, of course, pepped up considerably. But when these boys come and stayed all day long and did just whatever they wanted to do, we knew then that things had to be going our way and was getting way along. Of course, there was

never any doubt in our mind as to who was going to win the war, but, it was a long time coming we thought. But we knew then that when them boys could come in and stay, we knew that that ship was sitting out there not too far because we could see those planes . . . we could tell how long one would stay. He'd come and stay his turn, and he'd take off, and he'd meet while another one was coming in, and we knew they couldn't be too far away from the size of the planes. And we knew they was carrier planes. And we knew then that we kind of had them by the tail in a downhill pull.

Marcello: And obviously these planes weren't receiving too much opposition?

Gregg: They had some antiaircraft guns. We lost one plane. We saw one plane go down. They shot him all to pieces.

Marcello: Essentially then at Saigon you were primarily doing odd jobs. Is this correct?

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: Here, there, and wherever they needed you?

Gregg: That's right.

Marcello: You worked for awhile on the docks, then you worked for awhile at the airport like you were saying. Obviously your hard work had been behind you. Is that correct?

Gregg: That's right.

Marcello: The worst was over when you left the railroad?

Gregg: Right.

Marcello: Did your health improve some while you were in Saigon?

Gregg: Some. And the food was a little better. We had more opportunity to get other food, and we had one ship--Red Cross ship--come to Saigon. If we had got what come off of the Red Cross ship after we got to Saigon, we'd been sitting on the world, but we got a little box about a foot square and four inches deep to four or five or six boys. Everything was concentrated--coffee, sure wanted that.

Marcello: You just had one of these little boxes for that many people?

Gregg: Yes. All the medical supplies went to the Jap hospital, and clothes went to the Jap officers.

Marcello: Now this wasn't the way it was intended, however. Isn't that correct?

Gregg: No! That is correct.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how many Red Cross packages you actually got during your whole tenure in the prisoner-of-war camps. You could probably count them on your one hand. Can you not?

Gregg: Yeah, and give you three of them back. (Chuckle)

Marcello: (Chuckle) Two of them in other words is as many as what you got?

Gregg: Yes. One other time we got a little Red Cross stuff. I can't think just what it was now. We had a package of cigarettes to five, maybe. I can't remember exactly. But anyway twice we got Red Cross stuff. In Saigon when this ship come in, we had to unload that thing. And we got about what we could get in

our pockets when we was unloading as what they give us, actually give us. They were hauling it all away for the Japanese hospitals and officers and wherever they wanted it, what they wanted of it. We got the tail end of it.

Marcello: Did the treatment of the prisoners get better here at Saigon, that is, so far as the physical punishment and what have you that the Japanese had been dealing out before.

Gregg: No.

Marcello: Were there still the usual beatings and so on?

Gregg: Yeah. We still . . .

Marcello: Are there any that happened to you personally that stand out in your mind?

Gregg: No, I didn't personally get any . . . mine wasn't as bad in Saigon as it was through the jungles. And in the jungle and Thailand is where I had my roughest time.

Marcello: Now in Thailand . . .as you mentioned earlier, you actually weren't in Thailand too long were you?

Gregg: No, no.

Marcello: But you were there long enough to contract this jungle fever and to get this beating by this officer.

Gregg: That's right.

Marcello: What did he beat you with--club? Of course, you were probably so sick that you really don't remember.

Gregg: I felt that one as little as any of them because I was so near out that I didn't hardly know what was going on. I think he just used this piece of a bamboo. That seemed to be their special.



Marcello: Did you ever get to visit Saigon at all, that is, other than on work details?

Gregg: Not . . .

Marcello: They kept you pretty closely supervised, I assume.

Gregg: You bet. You bet. We went through Saigon after those planes were in there, and there wasn't any gasoline, and we walked--all the working party--we walked. And we went down through town part of the time going to work, but other than that that's just about it. That's all.

Marcello: Describe the day that you heard about the surrender.

Gregg: We were walking in from a working party, and a Frenchman on a bicycle come facing us, and I was on the lefthand side of the column, and that guy circled in and said, "The war is over" twice--never slowed up, never moved his head or anything. And we all began to look at each other and couldn't hardly believe it. We'd been in that thing so long that anything that sounded like that was hard to absorb. But we went on into camp, and we thought things seemed a little different. But we went ahead and worked. They took us on out the next day and we worked. But when we come in the next day, the native carts and, of course, all kinds of transportation--whatever way they could get--our camp was just full of bananas and food--everything. Well, we knew then that beyond any doubt that the war had to be over because they wouldn't be doing anything like that.

Marcello: The natives had switched sides again.

Gregg: The natives had switched again. And then the next day, American planes come over and dropped leaflets, but they fired on them with antiaircraft guns. Well, that kind of shook us a little bit. We wasn't real sure that our bunch of Japs had got the word yet.

Marcello: Did you ever have the fear that even though the Japanese had surrendered, did you ever have the fear that you would be killed anyhow?

Gregg: Yes. (Chuckle) You bet. Around this camp, this French Foreign Legion camp that we were in in Saigon, they brought a company of, I guess, Marines in there, and they set up gun implacements all the way around our camp. And had the Americans invaded Indo-China, had they come in there, they was going to kill the prisoners. We found that out from one of the guards after the war was over. One of them had been a sort of a half-way decent fellow, and he told us what had happened then. From the Allies somewhere or another we learned later on that that was really true. They set those things up. Of course, we faced death every day one way or another, and that didn't excite us too much. That was just another one of the things that could happen--might happen. But when it gets to be every day, just day in and day out, one more don't make much difference.

Marcello: So anyhow, you got the word that the Japanese had surrendered;

the leaflets had been dropped.

Gregg: Yes.

Marcello: The planes were fired upon; you were worried. Then what happened?

Gregg: They moved us from this French Foreign Legion camp to a French Army barracks and told us then that the war was over. The Jap officer in charge of the camp told us that the war was over, and they moved us to this French Army barracks.

Marcello: Was there any elation or jubilation among the troops?

Gregg: (Chuckle)

Marcello: Yelling and so on. Did they allow you to do it?

Gregg: After we knew the war was over, we didn't listen to them anymore. The guards that had treated us the worst were not to be found after the war was over--after we actually knew the war was over. They disappeared.

Marcello: Were you looking for them?

Gregg: (Chuckle) You bet. The ones that had treated us sort of human they stayed. I don't know what happened to them, but they stayed around their guard houses and places where they'd been.

Marcello: Did the Japanese seem kind of relieved that the war was over? Could you tell from what they were saying?

Gregg: I think so. I think they were almost as happy as we were. They didn't show it exactly and express it and turn loose like we did, but I think they were almost as happy that the war was

over as we was. Now the Jap officer in charge was a sad looking fellow. And the one Japanese article that I wanted the worst--I could have got and didn't have the nerve or the guts or something to take it--was a Jap saber. And I was going to (chuckle) take this saber from this Jap officer, but he looked so sad and something that I just . . . our nerves were just, you know, we'd been . . . our nerves had been keyed for . . . all the time. When I actually knew that thing was over, it seemed like nothing made any difference anymore. I just kind of turned loose. I don't know how to say how I felt, but relieved, I guess. But I thought a whole lot about the possibilities of getting killed after the war was over. And the Vietnamese had their uprising against the French before we left.

Marcello: You were an eye-witness to some of this?

Gregg: You bet you. I was right in the middle of Saigon.

Marcello: This was after the Americans had liberated you?

Gregg: Yes, uh-huh. And just all at once it looked like the Vietnamese come out of every building, up out of the ground, behind every bush. They had guns, they had clubs, sticks, bamboo poles, rocks, knives, just anything they could get. And they were hunting the French. Well, we had all kinds of clothes then, I mean, that we had bought, you know. But I had on my dogtags. And I have never or never will again be as proud of my dogtags, but when I pulled that dogtag and they

could see that I was American, why . . .

Marcello: You mean they were coming after you?

Gregg: You bet. I had on some French white britches. And they was after a lot more of them. But just as soon as I could get a loose and get started toward camp, I come back to camp, and I stayed after that. Well, we had some boys that had some more narrow escapes than I did. One old boy got a bullet, got a crease in his head. He had on a French hat, and he didn't have his dogtags on. Had all kind of scrapes. And it was real, real shaky for, oh, half a day.

Marcello: That's very interesting because that in a way goes back to something that we talked about a little earlier--about the fact that the Japanese had pointed out to all these other groups that the white man could be defeated.

Gregg: Yes, yes.

Marcello: And I think you see a perfect example of it here with what you were talking about in Vietnam. You know, all right, the Japanese beat the French, so apparently the Vietnames figured, "Well, we can beat them too."

Gregg: Yes, yes. They were going right along. That is right.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you remember about this Vietnamese uprising other than this close scrape that you had here?

Gregg: No, just that few hours . . .

Marcello: Oh, it did last that long--it was a couple of hours?

Gregg: This was in the afternoon, and I think, oh, by about night they

had the French people--men and women--and they killed a lot of them. And they had the rest of them in buildings and guarded. It was a pretty quick affair.

Marcello: Who finally restored order? Did the American troops?

Gregg: No.

Marcello: You had been liberated by the American troops.

Gregg: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Isn't that correct?

Gregg: Well, there was just a small group of Air Corps boys come in. We actually wasn't, I guess you say, wasn't liberated until we flew out of there. There was one or two Americans come in and stayed with us in the camp, and one Indian paratrooper--not American Indian--was in there just kind of to help keep order. But we were just kind of loose there for a few days--two or three or four, something. I don't remember.

Marcello: Well, had the Japanese turned the camp over to these for . . . to the Americans and this Indian paratrooper?

Gregg: Yes, the Jap officers told us to stay in camp, that his orders was to keep us in camp, but of course, he wasn't enforcing anything. He told us what he had been told, but that's about as far as it went. The boys were going out the gate and over the fence, and nobody was worried about what the Japs thought anymore. The bad ones had gone, and the good ones wasn't bothering us, and they didn't care. So it was just kind of an open city there for a few days.

Marcello: As you look back on your three and a half odd years or longer as a prisoner-of-war, what perhaps stands out most in your mind?

Gregg: Well, for one thing the close ties between the boys . . . there's a group that I guess nobody could be any closer to-- kinfolks, blood kin, or anything else. And I think I'd go just as far for those boys as a man could go for anybody because we done whatever had to be done for each other regardless of how it might effect us. If we had one boy that was sick, if there was any way that he could be made well and able to go again, well, that's what we done. What it might take to do that or how didn't have anything to do with it. It made some friendships that will never change, and in some ways it made better boys out of us, I think. I think we all have a better understanding of what makes the world tick in different countries-- about changing their views and the way they live. We didn't like the Japanese food or what they fed us even when they thought they was doing their best. They didn't like what we had. They didn't like our way of doing things, and we didn't like their way of doing things. I don't think you can change basically a group of people or a country. You can't force a way of life down them. What we like to do we do, and I just don't much believe in trying to make everybody do the way we'd have them do. Let them do the way they think best, and let us do the way we think best.