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Interview with

C. L. PRYOR

December 5, 1987

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Waller F. Jones

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Oral History Collection

Charley Pryor

Interviewer: Waller Finley Jones Date: December 5, 1987

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Mr. Jones: Today is December 5, 1987. We are interviewing Mr. Charley Pryor, a former Marine veteran, about his experiences in regards to treatment of himself and his fellow servicemen by the Japanese as a prisoner-of-war. My name is "Fin" Jones, and I am here on the behalf of the North Texas State University Oral History Collection.

Good morning, Mr. Pryor. Could you please start this interview by telling us a little bit about your background--when you were born, where you were born, and your family generally?

Mr. Pryor: I was born in February, 1920, way out in the hinterlands of Oklahoma near a little place called Elmore City, Oklahoma. It would be in Garvin County--the central part of Oklahoma. We

lived in Oklahoma until I was about nine years old, and then we moved to Texas--out in the western part of Texas, out on the south plains. I guess, until I joined the Marine Corps in January of 1939, we lived somewhere in about a sixty-mile radius of Lubbock. I am the oldest of four brothers. I have four brothers and four sisters, of which I am the oldest.

We went through the Depression years in West Texas, and they were not altogether something that we'd want to go through again. In January of 1939, we were still in the cotton fields "pulling bolls," as we called it. That's where you pull the full boll off the plant itself. We had finished our work on Friday evening, and on Saturday morning my uncle and I intended to go back and work Saturday morning. But it was misting rain and impossible to work in the fields, and this continued on through Monday.

On Monday morning he suggested that we come to Dallas and join the Marine Corps. We had contemplated this before. I had written for the parent's consent forms, and they had sent them; and I had filled them out and had my parents sign them, and I returned them. So they had those on file. So we set out to hitchhike to Dallas and join the

Marine Corps. I had never seen a Marine, to my knowledge, and wouldn't have recognized one had he walked through the front door. But it was something that I thought would offer better prospects than what we were involved in at that particular time of working in a cotton patch. So I am, in all essence, a fugitive from a cotton sack. So we left that cotton sack right at the end of the row.

It took us two days to hitchhike from the vicinity of Levelland, Texas, to Dallas. On the morning of January 11--I guess long before office hours--we were sitting in the hallway outside the Marine recruiting office ready to enlist. Well, they told us when we got in there, "We wrote you a letter to report next month, but now that you're here we'll go ahead and examine you." They were on a quota system then and were pretty strict in whom they accepted. They rejected my uncle immediately because he had been in the Army at one time, and after his dad died--my grandfather--he had gotten a dependency discharge from the Army. In those days you could buy yourself out of the Army, but he had used this dependency angle to support his mother--my grandmother--and to get out of the Army on that

pretext. So the Marine Corps rejected him in that they would not accept anybody that had their dependency discharge from some other branch of the service.

We had hitchhiked in with two guys the day before with an elderly gentleman that picked us up and brought us into the vicinity. They were dressed in their National Guard uniforms, and they had informed us that they were going into the Marine Corps and had told us where all they would go and what kind of uniforms they would wear and how they'd impress all the girls around the world and so forth and so on. They were there. They showed up well after they had begun the physicals that morning, and immediately they rejected one of them as being color blind. Then they asked the next one if he wanted to go ahead without his buddy, and, well, he didn't know whether he did or not, and he would think about it. So he put on his clothes, and he went out to think about it. He came back in about an hour and said yes, that he would go on in. So they had him take his clothes off again, you know, but he didn't even get all of his clothes off, and they said, "Oh, my gosh! I wish we'd noticed this before. We can't

accept you. You're swaybacked." Gosh, it astounded this young lad, you know, to know that he was malformed like that. He said, "Swaybacked? What in the world is that?" They said, "Well, your spine goes out and then in and then back out. That's what we call 'swaybacked.' We can't accept you." There wasn't anything wrong with his back. He had just jacked around with them, you know, and being indecisive like that put them to a little bit of extra trouble, so they just rejected him forthwith. So with these two guys the Marine Corps will never know what they missed, I guess, and these two "commandos" probably went on and won the war in Europe.

But we were accepted that day and left for San Diego, and I went through boot camp in San Diego. I'm another one of the "Hollywood Marines." As they used to say, "Are you a 'Hollywood Marine,' or did you go to boot camp?" Which meant, "Are you a product of San Diego or Parris Island?" So that was our start.

We had left school as a junior, and we'll not pick up our formal education again until I have retired from the Marine Corps. I retired from the

Marine Corps on August 31, 1962, after nearly twenty-four years of active service. I enrolled as a freshman at Baylor University at age forty-two in September of 1962. I was a freshman at Baylor. When I enrolled for the 1963-64 semester, I lacked three hours of being a junior. I had finished fifty-seven hours of credit work in that one calendar year. I finished Baylor in two-and-a-half years, and then three years after I had enrolled at Baylor as a freshman, I was asked to come out and be a member of the faculty--the political science faculty--and work on my master's degree at the same time. So I got my advanced degree--master's degree--there at Baylor, and after having completed work for the master's degree, I went to the University of Texas and began work on my doctoral program to fit in with the talents and experiences of the total faculty there at Baylor. They wanted me to specialize in the government and the politics of the Far East with a minor emphasis on the government and politics of South Asia. So my primary emphasis, then, was on the study of the governmental and political systems of Red China and Japan and with secondary emphasis on the government of India and Pakistan.

Jones: Without a reflection of what you have since then learned, what kind of regard or notions or experiences or ideas did you have about the Japanese people back when you were just joining up with the Marines?

Pryor: Well, of course, when I first joined up with the Marines, I had little knowledge--as most of our people would have had at that time--of the Japanese themselves. One of my favorite subjects in school had been geography at one time, so I knew where Japan was. I knew the products of the country. This was all a relative thing; it was just something that you would acquire from formal reading. Before I enlisted in the Marine Corps, I knew little about the Japanese people.

Then in January of 1940, the Marine Corps transferred me to China, and in China I went aboard the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet at that time, the USS *Augusta*, and became a member of the Marine detachment on the ship that carried the admiral's flag out there. Admiral Thomas C. Hart was commander-in-chief of the Asiatic Fleet at that time. We thought it would be an excellent opportunity to travel and see more of the Far East

by being a member of the ship's crew of a flagship like that. Of course, this worked out to be true.

We traveled around a great deal in the Far East. We spent the summer of 1940 in North China, operating in and out of the port city of Tsingtao. The city of Tsingtao was the primary city on the Shantung Peninsula. This area had been...well, this port had been ceded to the Germans. In history we know this as a German treaty port. Of course, most of the treaty ports were English. The United States claimed no treaty port, but the English and French and the Germans had developed Tsingtao. It pretty much reflected the culture of Germany. But during World War I, the Japanese had assaulted the Germans there, and they had been victorious. They had, I guess, acquired considerable knowledge of the Shantung Peninsula, particularly of the harbor and the facilities in and around that port city, so it was one of the first targets that were targeted by the Japanese when they invaded China formally in 1937. So at the time we were there, it was a Japanese-occupied city.

Jones: Is that the first place that you saw Japanese?

Pryor: This would be the first place that we would have contact with the Japanese soldier, with the military. They controlled all of that area around Tsingtao and the adjacent Shantung Peninsula. For the most part, we had little contact with them--just face to face contact. They controlled all the city. The police forces for the most part were either Sikh--that would be the Indian Sikhs--or Japanese military police. All the traffic was controlled for the most part by the Japanese.

But they didn’t frequent the same places that we did. There were certain areas around the city that were denied us; we were proscribed from going into them. Then on the other hand, in areas that we would frequent, we never encountered a Japanese soldier on any liberty.

Jones: When you saw them, it would be just like passing down the street?

Pryor: It would be passing along the street or in and around...now let me explain it. Here on the promontory above the anchorage itself, in the port of Tsingtao, there are a number of hills. They are prominent hills. They are not mountains as such. The Germans had fortified these in World War I, and they

had the gun emplacements that commanded the anchorage. So it was ideal maneuvering grounds in and around these hills and among the old German forts. These, incidentally, were immediately adjacent to some of the finest beaches there were in North China. The Japanese would sometimes come out of the hills and maneuver down along the beach area itself in maneuvers, and they would make their fake bayonet charges and squall like a bunch of galled tomcats, you know, as they made those charges. It's much like they do when you see these karate or some of the other martial arts experts. As they make their leap or assault or movement, they squall like a banshee.

Jones: So I gather it was reminiscent of shrieks rather than anything that you remember like in the Marines--nothing western about it at all.

Pryor: No, no. I don't know why they do this. In fact, I've never explored the idea at all--why they think they've got to make this ungodly noise at any time they are undertaking some kind of maneuver like this--their bayonet charges and so forth. We knew this, and, of course, we'd snicker and laugh at all the racket. We felt confident that we could take

them. I was trained in Marine infantry tactics. I was in the 6th Marines there in San Diego. When I left boot camp, I had been assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. We trained as regular infantry in those days, of course, giving emphasis to the amphibious maneuver and developing that capability. We were confident, and to see all these little fellows running around with all their yelling and their nondescript uniforms of which...well...

Jones: They looked like ragtags.

Pryor: It was comical to us particularly because the Marine detachment on the USS *Augusta* was the sharpest bunch of Marines that I have ever seen anywhere. Everything we wore was tailor-made, and our brass buttons had been taken from us and had been gold-plated. We had gold-plated buttons on our blue uniforms. So we were a picked crew. I was 6'2" tall, and I was one of the "feather merchants" on there; I was down in the 2nd Squad of the 2nd Platoon. We were organized into two platoons aboard the USS *Augusta*, and, gosh, these other guys up there were 6'3" and 6'4". Really, 6'4" would have been about the maximum height of any of our people in those days.

Jones: **That was going to lead to my next question, which will get us into something later when we address yourself as a prisoner. If you Marines were handpicked...and even by the norm even today, you stand well above the average male height. Did you feel that these little Japanese felt somewhat embarrassed by their physical stature? I'm sure they could see you walking around and seeing that you are far and superior above them and physically intimidating. What were your feelings? What do you think that they thought? You said that you snickered when you saw them doing these things maybe to boost their aggressiveness when they did these attacks?**

Pryor: **Well, we did. Of course, we were thoroughly ignorant of the Japanese capability at this time. The only thing that we could understand at all was the physical observation. We couldn't know at that time. We had never encountered--nor had the world at that time ever encountered--what was inside this little fellow. Later on, particularly from my experiences in prison camp when I observed the Japanese soldier, particularly as a combat soldier, I came to understand then why they were as successful as they were in early parts of the war. He is a tenacious**

soldier, and I have seen them perform feats we wouldn't even dare ask an American military man to undertake. And they discharged it. They overcame maybe some physical limitation such as height or size with tenacity and heart.

Jones: In other words, I guess in their way they exhibited their own *esprit de corps* to overcome their physical limitations.

Pryor: They had it. They had their own particular kind of *esprit de corps*, and it served them well, as we learned from hindsight. But I'd think that at this particular time, in 1940, few of us had any respect for the Japanese soldier as a soldier. It just beggared understanding because we had nothing with which to make comparison with, but in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, we came to an understanding of their tenacity and their ability as a military man.

Jones: There are a few things that I would like to mention to you on the upbringing of most of the Japanese soldiers and then later on, in the 1940's, the entire mobilization of the Japanese people. I guess it would do well to mention, of course, the Code of Bushido, which initially was confined to the realm of the Samurai warrior in ancient Japan. That is

their knight's code, and it was such that it demanded full obedience even unto death, unquestioning obedience unto death. Later on, there was an imperial rescript put out by the Department of Education of Japan, and it was called "*Kokutai No Hongi*." I didn't know what that was until I did some research on it, myself. It was the fulfillment of the emperor's design to conquer the world, and it was changed somewhat from its original meaning many, many, many centuries ago when it was called "*Hakko Ichiu*." That means, literally, "eight corners of the world under one roof." At that time in feudal Japan, it just meant that the emperor wished to control the entire realm of Japan. Later on, for propaganda purposes, the military...and then later on, when it filtered down through the educational systems in the high schools and middle schools, they redefined eight corners of the whole world to take it as not the known world of feudal times but, in fact, to spread their manifest destiny not unlike our own Monroe Doctrine.

Within this was an obligation to duty to the emperor at whatever cost, and this was all in a balanced equation which was called *giri*. That is an

obligation to anyone--and this will reflect later in some of the actions of the Japanese that you observed and might fit into the "why" of what they did--*giri* is an obligation to balance a situation much like a mathematical equation. If someone felt that he had been maligned or had been embarrassed, it was up to him and his family name to balance that equation, that is, to repay at whatever costs. If somebody's family had insulted another's family, then it was up to the insulted family to balance the equation to make right the payment or reimburse or to take whatever steps it took to balance that. It was redefined later in a system of *chu*, which means it goes higher than just *giri*. Rather, within the realm of the emperor's direction or his ministers or his senior officers, that military execution must be done at any cost; and as long as it is done in the emperor's name, then it is virtuous, and it absolved everybody of sin. For no matter what they do, if they do it in the name of the emperor or at the direction of their officers or at the direction of their sergeants, because they all were representative of that system, then they are absolved of whatever sin they might incur.

Oftentimes this might be defined as a *meirei* or an execution of military orders not unlike, I presume, the building of the railroad from Burma to Bangkok. These people would get the railroad built at whatever cost. It did not make any difference in the bodies or lives of whomever; they were to get it done.

Now that's as much as I want to go into that, but this obligation or sense of repayment--fulfillment of my obligation at any cost--is what finally put, I think, some tenacity and some tremendous inner strength into a lot of these people. They grew up with these codes. Today they are still prevalent except for the emperor worship, other than the fact that he's the titular head of the state. It's with this, I believe you know, that General Hideki Tojo, who was the minister of war, on the 8th of January issued a military field code, and it was of such that he said, "Never die in disgrace. You owe honor to your god and your family, and you never lived to bear the shame of imprisonment by the enemy." With a code such at that, I imagine they would have had it easy to transfer it off to their prisoners, wondering why that many Americans or

Australians did not feel the same shame when they surrendered. Now this may or may not be the case with all the Japanese, and certainly it was not confined to just a few; but there are many interpretations of it, probably by their commander in charge, which, of course, deals many cards out and can be interpreted many many ways.

I know that you were a survivor of the *Houston* and was in the water when it went down for many, many hours and was finally picked up by the Japanese. I would maybe ask you from that point what you felt when you were captured and took aboard the Japanese vessel and then put on the beach--what your feelings were about your situation, what you think the Japanese felt, and any kind of treatment that you thought was unusual. Just generally give me your impression of your very first capture.

Pryor: Well, until the accomplished fact of the actual sinking of the USS *Houston*, certainly you know fear. In the case of the member of the crew of a warship, that fear will be the loss of the ship. I'd think that few, few members of the ship's crew ever seriously questioned that in the loss of the ship that life will be lost, too. I don't think at any

time do you think that there's that real possibility that you will leave the ship unscathed and physically fit and will be subject to capture by the enemy.

We used to joke about this at times: "What are you going to do when the Japanese get you and you start eating fish heads and rice?" Well, we'd do this in a jocular fashion just to pass time. But it became an accomplished fact. Until the actual sinking and you knew all was lost, you have that fear of the unknown, that dread that the inevitable is about to happen, and you have no way of knowing whether or not you'll survive. You realize the odds are preponderant that you will not be a survivor.

But I was one of those survivors, and I made my way with the assistance of one of my shipmates to a life raft. I had abandoned ship without a life jacket, and he had helped me to a life raft. I had swallowed fuel oil and saltwater, and that's a terrible thing to do. I vomited and retched all night long. I was sore as a boil for several days afterwards just from retching. There was nothing there to emit after the first few times, and so you go through these terrible spasms of retching.

But we made it to this life raft, and there were several wounded on it, and a goodly number of other people were in the company of the raft. So we attempted to make the beach, and should we make the beach, we figured that we would retire inland, you know, and join the Dutch forces and continue to prosecute the war by whatever means would be available to us. But we knew little of the currents in these confined waters where we were, and they flow strongly, depending on the nature of the tide, either from the Java Sea to the Indian Ocean or from the Indian Ocean to the Java Sea. At times we could count the individual trees--coconut trees--along the beach, and then a current would pick you up and take you out of sight of the beach. You couldn't see any beach.

Shortly after we'd been in the water, a submarine almost ran us down. It came so close to us that the diesel fumes from the exhaust almost asphyxiated us. Then shortly after that, a Japanese transport almost ran us down. We could see the individual Japanese soldiers on there, and they could see us in the water, and they yelled, "Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe!" That was the first inkling that many

of us had. I know that in my case it was the first inkling I had that we were in the midst of a convoy that was making a landing on Java--the west end of Java. I told a Marine lieutenant we had on the raft there with us, "Lieutenant, this is a landing force! We're in the middle of a landing force! The worse thing we could do would be to make for the beach. We'd best make for these mountains over here because they'll be landing over these beaches. If we can make it to these mountains, then we may be all right."

But we never made it. Anyway, dawn came, and as we could see around about us, we were in the midst of this entire landing force--all the transports and everything. They were already making their invasion of the landing area, and so we just packed it in and sat there then and waited for them to come pick us up because we were right in the middle of the whole fleet.

They picked us up later on, well after midday. We'd been in the water about thirteen or fourteen hours, I suppose. They came to pick us up in a landing craft, something like our LCIs--what we call

Landing Craft Infantry, which land troops over the beach.

Jones: With the front-opening gate.

Pryor: Yes. They picked us up in such a craft, and they had us abandon our raft and...well, they first attempted to tow the raft, but they couldn't make headway against the current, and so they had us abandon the raft and all clamber aboard this LCI-type vessel.

They took us into the beach and put us to work. Immediately before they put us to work, they'd rounded up a goodly number of other Americans off the *Houston* and a few Aussies off the *Perth*. A Japanese officer--I'd think today he'd probably be the rank of major--came to us, and he spoke English quite well. He had a good command of the English language, and he told us, "You are prisoners-of war. We are not going to shoot you." I'll say right now that had they done so then right then, I don't think I'd have tried to dodge it.

Jones: You were probably so disgusted with your suffering, and you were also mad.

Pryor: We were so thoroughly sick and despondent and depressed that it didn't seem to matter. It seemed that the world had already ended, and had they shot

us, it would have just been the formality of the situation. It would have just been the formality of ending life because it had already, in essence, been taken from us.

These people that protest and these who get out here and demonstrate against any exhibition of freedom and liberties are a bunch of unmitigated fools. There is no person who can understand what it is to lose liberty until it is lost. Anyone who has ever lost it in a situation such as we had lost it can be less than tolerant of any of those that question its worth. I have no tolerance for them at all. Back in the Vietnam War days, I'd have locked these people up so far back in the hinterlands, by god, that they'd have to pipe daylight in to them to find out who they were. I have absolutely no respect or no acceptance for those who would question the nation's policies when the nation says, "It's time for us to do this and thus and thus." In the military, we hook up and go. You may question an order at times, but we learned that it's prudent to carry it out and then question it in its aftermath.

But, no, I have never been more despondent in my life. And I'll say this. Your paper will be about

the attitudes of the Japanese soldier toward prisoners-of-war. I formed an opinion a long time ago of respect for the Japanese combat soldier. These are first-class troops. They are making the assault on the island of Java. They have been in assaults before; they are veterans. We will never experience the courtesy and respect and conduct from any people in our aftermath of capture such as we did from these combat forces. I think it's analogous to two outstanding athletic teams. Here at this present time, we are going through the high school playoffs, and you are down now to the best eight teams in the state. These kids respect one another. They're going to try to beat you, but they'll respect you as they beat you, and the loser will respect the other guy for being better than he was. You have respect for somebody that is superior. We'd fought and we'd fought well. We fought to the bitter end, and we lost.

These Japanese combat troops respected us. As they came ashore, the infantry had already landed and had moved inland, but then we witnessed the unloading--the offloading--of all the support troops. Much of the artillery that landed was horse-

drawn--horse-drawn gun carriages and caissons. These people, as they assembled in their area preparatory to moving inland--moving out in support of the front-line Japanese soldiers--they would eat their rations. Of course, here in our military forces we know them all as C rations (combat rations). They were pre-packaged. Most of us that have ever been in the military know what we are referring to. Well, theirs were a little bit different. Much of the rations they shared was a kind of hardtack with hard candies in it and a little knit bag made from mosquito netting. Then the combat ration would be augmented by a ration by some kind of prepared seaweed and plums. They had scads of plums, and they were packaged in great wooden tubs. This was a part of their ration that they shared. It was on the order of something like our baker rations that have to be prepared in some way. It was not packaged for the individual but was to be shared among a group of individuals. The only food that we would be privileged to have at this time would come from the shared food of these combat soldiers. They would take some of what they had, and then they would give us what they had not eaten themselves.

Jones: Was this done with any kind of...I want to try to get the tenor of how they felt. Did they give this to you begrudgingly?

Pryor: No, no. They would smile, and they never ever evidenced any manner of animosity or anything like that toward us. And it came from the individual soldier. We didn't see many of the officers in this particular area. We saw noncoms but not the officer-type military man. They would do this on an individual basis, so you knew it came from just something back under that they respected in us as having done the best that we could. It was the respect that one individual would give to another for being good at his craft.

Jones: I understand.

Pryor: And this we noted even after we had been incarcerated. They kept us there unloading landing craft through that afternoon. You know, you go through several phases in an amphibious landing. You land the assault troops. Then you land those that are in support of the assault troops--your tanks and your artillery and your engineering elements and so forth. Then the last phase of it is what we refer to as "general unloading." They pass the word from the

fleet commander to begin general unloading, and then you bring in your vast mountains of stores and supplies and so forth that will support and sustain the amphibious forces.

In the general unloading portions of it, we paid a heavy penalty there for that. Everything they package weighs a hundred kilos, and that's 220 pounds. When they began to bring in these mountains of rice packed in these rice straw bags, well, this is rough. Many of us had no clothes. I had come ashore barefooted, but with a shirt and a pair of overall-like clothes on. When they told us to move this mountain of rice, a couple of us grabbed hold of a bag of that, and they said, "No, no, no! One man, one bag!" This was rough, particularly for those that had been in the water for hour after hour after hour, and to have no shirt or nothing between this...when I say "made out of rice straw," I mean the rice stalk itself.

Jones: So it's real abrasive.

Pryor: It's abrasive. They stitch those together in some fashion with a cord or so, and it would just be like wheat straw. And it's abrasive.

Jones: They could obviously see that you were suffering under duress inasmuch as, one, they were heavy, and, two, do you think they received any pleasure out of having you struggle with these things that were obviously kind of offsetting to your weight, even though you were large?

Pryor: Well, I don't know. We never had time to make much observation (chuckle) other than to do what we were told to do, and we continued that until about 11:00 at night. We had moved most of it, and then they secured us for the night. We slept there on the beach, and it was cold. It got cold during the night. Of course, we all had been in the water then for nearly twenty-four hours, in and out of it for very brief times, you know, for only a few minutes at a time. But we tried to cover up with palm fronds that had fallen from the palm trees--coconut trees--in the area. We tried to get a fire going, but these were wet for the most part and would not burn well enough to throw off any heat. So it was one of the most miserable nights that I ever spent in my life.

The next morning the troops had all moved--the support troops have all moved out--so they loaded most of this material on two-wheel carts, and we'll

encounter these carts again later on in the war up along the Burma railway. But they loaded this stuff on two-wheel carts, and then they put the idea to us that we'd be the motive power for these carts. So we moved out--we didn't know where--and we just moved out onto a paved road. There was a concrete road that ran just off the beach a ways, and I don't know where it eventually goes, but I know that it went to the city of Serang on the west coast of Java about twenty-five or thirty kilometers inland from the coast. We made it that day, and that's the most miserable day I ever knew in my life, I guess.

Jones: When you were moving these carts up from the beach, did the Japanese...you say the combat support troops had already moved out, and so I guess what we'd call combat service support people were the only ones left.

Pryor: Right.

Jones: Did they treat you...

Pryor: Altogether differently.

Jones: Oh, they did?

Pryor: These people are those that are usually what we in our military understanding call "the zone of communications." You have your combat zone, and then

behind that you have your zone of communications, and you have a lot of people there that are not identified as combat troops. They are occupation troops. That will be the kind of person that we'll encounter throughout most of the rest of the war--any direct contact.

Jones: Did you receive any abuse--verbal, kicking, whipping, say, a bamboo stick or whatever--in trying to whip you to get this cart off the beach and onto the road and on down the road?

Pryor: Yes, we'll begin to experience that at this time. It was not so much an individual assault or beating; this is denial. We had not been fed. We had not been given anything to eat except from these combat troops before they moved away from the beach area and went on into their assault positions. These people that are in command of the beach areas, here in the Navy and Marine Corps we know them as "beach parties," and they are organized to get this stuff onto the beach and then organize it in such a way to get it to where it is supposed to go in the interior. They have zones of action up ahead, and they know that material from this particular vessel is to go to a particular unit. So they have their

own skills, but even under the best of conditions, it looks like organized confusion--an amphibious operation is that. As you know, it's one of the most complicated maneuvers that the military could ever be asked to perform. In a land assault, you very seldom consider seriously the possibility of assaulting the enemy unless you have a preponderance of force, but here in an amphibious operation, you have a force of zero. He has the preponderance of force, and you have to assault him with zero force.

Jones: Starting from scratch.

Pryor: You start from scratch. You are trying to move him from his positions when he had the preponderance of force. Then in all planning for this thing, you begin planning as much as four to six months before you actually make this, and you have got to anticipate what you will need at a particular time. Let's say that two hours after the landing has been made, you'll need so many rounds of 81-millimeter mortar ammo at a certain place. You've got to anticipate this ahead of time. These people in the rear echelon forces have an expertise, but it's not the expertise that, let's say, one combat man respects of another. They do not know combat.

Jones: They're just interested in getting their little job done.

Pryor: They're interested in moving material. That's their job. So how they get it done...and when you do it with manpower, well, sometimes you come to not altogether a meeting of the minds (chuckle). It depends on who is the "mover" and who is the "movee."

Jones: I'm starting to get the picture. You said that you weren't fed. If some of the rear echelon types would start maybe--I don't know--popping, whipping, or whatever, do you think it was with malicious intent, or was it just something that they were just indifferent to you altogether and you were just there in their space?

Pryor: Well, it's a thing that I...altogether, I served in the Far East for seven years. I have been practically in every country in the Far East with the exception of Siberia, and I would just as soon avoid Siberia if I have any choice in the matter. But in all other countries I've been there, and we've come to know that there is a mind-set among the Oriental peoples. They are fatalists, and we come to understand that in the order of things out

there, human life is one of the cheapest commodities in the Far East. As I taught one time, a student of mine asked me one morning during the Vietnam days, "Mr. Pryor, I read a story in the newspaper this weekend, and this story dealt with the matter of a child who had been run over and had been killed by a G.I. truck in Vietnam." According to the relater of this story to me, the United States Government had compensated the family of this child with the equivalent of about $600 in American money for the life of this child. It compared it to another incident in which a G.I. truck had hit and killed a water buffalo. The United States Government had compensated the owner of the buffalo--the family that owned the buffalo--with the equivalent of about $1,300 in U.S. money. He said, "How can you place the value of $600 on the life of a child and $1,300 dollars on the life of an animal?" I said, "First off, you discount the moral aspects of these related stories. It's a question of economics. The water buffalo is the means of family subsistence; the child is a drain on the family's welfare. The child must be provided for, but the water buffalo provides

for the family. It’s a question not of morality but a question of economics.”

So it’s related to the same thing. The abuse of a person is just not anything unlike abuse of some of our people to an animal.

Jones: It’s just inconsequential.

Pryor: We have kids here who will persecute a cat. They’ll kick a dog or something like that, and they wouldn’t do that to a person. Here we’ve got a moral code that proscribes it, but over there it’s not a question of morality. It’s a question of real life. It’s within the codes of many people of the Far East that he who is superior is oftentimes abusive to he who is a subordinate or in the inferior position at that time. And certainly we were in the inferior position. So it’s a thing that we’ll come to understand; it’s a thing that we’ll come to accept because we had no other alternative to its acceptance.

I’ll say now that certainly I’ve been abused. I’ve been bashed; I’ve been beaten. All of our people were. But it was not an everyday thing; it was a sometimes thing. I guess that quite often when we were subject to such treatment, we invited it--

stealing something from the Japanese cookhouse or Japanese warehouse or being caught trying to make a deal with a native to buy or sell something that would benefit us. This was prohibited behavior, and, of course, the Japanese would have to impose some limits on our behavior for purposes of control.

Jones: This is interesting because now I think we're getting to the meat of what we're trying to establish. What I'm picking up is--coupled with what you've said about the mind-set, which makes all the sense in the world over there, and I can understand it the way you've said it--this superiority thing and indifference is not one of morality as we understand it over here but just a matter of expedience. In your case it was to get these Americans to hurry up and move these things around--get it on--and popping you would be the same thing as "giddap" to the water buffalo or whatever--just go ahead and get it done. Now if they are of that mind set--and it's inconsequential, I'm sure, without a moral sounding board to bounce it off--they probably didn't think that they were doing anything wrong.

Pryor: It's accepted. It's an accepted behavioral pattern. The greater tragedy of all of if, as it regards our behavior and the loss of so much life later on in working on the railroad and so forth, is that they had a job to do, and they prosecuted it. We understood their situation, and we understood our own, and we've come to accept that their ways are not necessarily our ways. We do have different codes of morality. Way back yonder I said that I have seen the Japanese impose conditions on their people that we would not dare to subject an American military man to, and it will involve much of what we'll experience up on the railroad.

But the greater measure, I'd think, of abuse will be the abuse of denial. First off, the Japanese from the outset of the war were not a nation with a surplus of materials to wage war with or to sustain their civilian population and certainly not the populations within occupied areas. Gosh, we were superfluous. If they hadn't needed our labor, I doubt the few of us would have survived.

Jones: That's a point that I wish to ask you right now. I don't want to jump around too much, but this is a good time. There have been several instances--

recorded instances--where Japanese doctors were seen running up and down the hospital wards shooting their own Japanese soldiers. One, because they decided they were injured goods; two, it would save them the disgrace of being captured alive; and three, if they should come back, they wouldn't have to provide medicine for their own. Then I can only presume that if they had so little regard in this mind set for their own soldiers who could not be expedient enough to carry on the war for Japan, then they could even be caring less for any of the captive people that they had with them.

Pryor: Well, that would be true. I don't know. I never experienced anything of, let's say, maltreatment other than the physical abuse of their own soldiers. I've seen it. I've seen it many times, although not to the point of taking life.

Jones: Could you reflect on a couple of those times when they abused or punished their own?

Pryor: Oh, I've been instrumental in getting Japanese soldiers in hot water (chuckle). Of course, we had seen it before as a sometimes thing--an isolated incident. In one particular case, we have finished the railroad, and we're in Thailand now. I was sent

with nine other Americans to an area in Thailand that few knew about. The Japanese had built a large workshop area in virgin jungle out here about...it would be about twelve kilometers out of the city of Kanchanaburi. That's where the bridge over the River Kwai is. They had conscripted labor--Chinese labor, for the most part--out of the tin mines of Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur, down in the Malay Peninsula. They had commandeered machinery, machine tools--lathes, shapers, planers--and they had established a foundry. They could melt down scrap iron, and these Chinese workmen could make a sand mold and mold almost any kind of piece that might be needed for a machine. Then they'd finish it off on the shapers, planers, lathes, so forth and so on, drill presses. There were only ten Americans in this camp along with 300 English, about 300 Dutch, and about eighty-five Australians.

As we were still yet completing this camp itself, such as roadways and drainage ditches and so forth, we worked with a crew to build drainage ditches. You worked in two-man teams. You had a pick and a shovel, and you worked in two-man teams. We

had to dig these a half-meter deep and a half-meter wide and then so many meters of linear length.

When we had gone through Moulmein, Burma, on the way through Burma to build the railroad, I had been put in charge of a work party to go to Japanese headquarters and build a garbage pit--dig a garbage pit--adjacent to their kitchen. I had about twenty men assigned to me to work on this. Gosh, they got over there, and this ground...it was in the very deepest part of the dry season, and to dig in this dirt would be like going out there and digging in this concrete roadway. You could hit with a pick, and it'd make a little dust fly, and you'd leave a mark, and that would be all there'd be. They weren't getting anything accomplished.

A Japanese soldier came out shortly after midday, and he watched them do that. They weren't getting anything done, so he got everybody out of there, and he took a pick. There is such a thing as artistry with a pick. This Japanese soldier was an artist with a pick. He told me afterwards that he was a professional coal miner in Japan before he had been conscripted. He had been a coal miner, and he was an artist with a pick. And I think I'm the only

one that learned how to use it as he did, as he showed us. So on the railroad, I used a pick every day, day after day after day after day. Nobody ever changed off with me because I'd pick up much more dirt than anybody else, so I kept on that pick.

But when we worked on these drainage ditches, then, in Thailand, I'd pick it up, and this other guy would shovel it out. So shortly after midday, we had completed our task, and this little Japanese two-star soldier...when we finished, we just sat down in the shade of a little bush there. It was the only shade available, and so we just sat there at *yasumi*--that means to rest in Japanese--and here comes a little two-star private. "Shigoto! Speedo! That means, "Fast!" "No yasumi! No yasumi!" And we said, "Shimai," which means, "We finished our work." "No shimai! No shimai!" So I showed him where we started and where we ended. Then he stood this other ol' boy...even in prison camp this other boy weighed about 180 pounds. He was a big ol' fleshy sort of soldier. He was a staff sergeant in this Army unit that had joined us there in Bicycle Camp in Batavia, Java.

Jones: This is an American?

Pryor: American.

Jones: Okay.

Pryor: He was one of these people that if twenty or fifty prisoners were doing something and the Japanese didn't like it, well, he was the one that they would pick out of the group to make an example of.

Jones: He was a whipping boy.

Pryor: Yes. On the other hand, if we were not doing something we ought to be doing, well, he again would be the one they'd pick on to make an example of (chuckle). So he just was that. So instead of picking on me, well, he picked on this ol' boy. His name was Mallard, B.J. Mallard. We called him "Staff" because he was a staff sergeant. So he stood him down in this ditch and then proceeded to bash him. He couldn't reach him, you know, unless he stood him in this ditch that was half a meter deep. So he stood him in that ditch, and then he was bashing him. Then the *gunso* [sergeant] came along. This *gunso* was a professional soldier.

Jones: He must be like a top sergeant or something.

Pryor: It's the equivalent to one of our first sergeants, although in many respects he's accorded the ceremonial aspects of a commissioned officer. They

salute him and bow and scrape and all that, so he's something kind of...in the military structure he'd be typical of our first sergeant. But when it comes to purposes of "perks" [perquisites] or ceremonial recognition, he is something superior to what the first sergeant would be.

So the *gunso* came along, and he spoke fairly good English. He was one of the fairest Japanese soldiers I've ever seen or ever encountered anywhere. He came over and he asked me, "Why is your friend being punished?" I said, "Well, we completed our work, and we were sitting here in the shade at *yasumi*. The Japanese soldier told us 'No *yasumi*,' that we had to do more work." He said, "Where did your task begin?" I showed him. He took his...they all carried a stick one meter long, and he measured it off, and he looked at it and said, "You have done a good job. This is a fair day's task." He said, "You have performed well." He said, " I will not impose on you a greater task when you have finished your task early." He said, "I have given you a fair day's task, and that's all you are expected to do." So he took that little two-star private out in the middle of the road, and he bashed hell out of him.

Jones: (Laughter).

Pryor: I mean, he bashed him, and this *gunso* could hit. He was one Japanese soldier that knew how to hit. Later on, he broke the jaw of one of our guys.

Jones: For an infraction?

Pryor: Yes. We had finished our task for the day, and we were to return to our work camp where we lived--where we were quartered--and we had a *tenko*, you know, counted off to see if everybody was there, and there was one man missing. So they had all the *hanchos*--that's be those in charge of working parties--check their work parties, and they determined who was missing. They went back out there into the area where they worked, and they found him asleep.

So the *gunso* led him up there, and he said, "You are not considerate of your friends." He said, "They have worked hard today, and they are tired, and they are hungry, and they want to go in and take a bath and to have their meal. You have kept them waiting." He said, "You must be punished." And he hit him one time and broke his jaw. Every afternoon, beginning the next day, the *gunso* would send a

couple of eggs and a hand of bananas to this joker (chuckle).

Jones: That’s unusual. This is going to be a really good example. This balancing of the equation that I spoke of before--*giri*--there was something unbalanced in it. This man had not done what he was told to do; he had made an embarrassment. Everything was an uneven keel. It sounds like to me that the *gunso* was trying to balance the equation, meaning something had to be done to remedy this problem, and he rectified it.

Pryor: If he’d have asked one of us, we’d have done it (chuckle).

Jones: (Laughter) But do you think that could possibly be part of this balancing, this fairness?

Pryor: Well, it’s understandable in that context. The *gunso* was considering the greater need of all of us as being far, by gosh, superior to the need of that one. He was the example.

But then later on, I saw this in connection with another Japanese soldier. And this goes beyond the being superior. It goes to the mind-set situation, too. It was our practice then among the ten Americans...we were all singled out. All the natives and Chinese workers knew us, and, of course,

all the Japanese workers knew us. We noted a distinction they all made between Americans and other prisoners. Of course, I don't think that in the fact that there were only ten of us entered into it at all. I think that even at times on the railroad when we were subjected to the stress and strain of completing that road, when we'd have a new Japanese guard or...well, when I say Japanese, most generally our guards were Koreans that had been conscripted for service in the rear echelon areas. They were not combat troops. They were "rear echelon commandos," as we sometimes refer to them, you know, unflatteringly.

Jones: I understand even the Japanese looked down on even the Koreans.

Pryor: Oh, they did. They did--as a people. Just not as individuals but as a people. It's much like the relationship with the Ainu. Still yet today, to my understanding, the Ainu are not incorporated into the main structure of Japanese life. They're considered almost like the Australians look at the Aborigine.

Jones: Right.

Pryor: But we have seen this in other times, particularly on the railroad when we'd get a new guard. When they found out you were an American, gosh, they'd want to sit you down and talk about America. They could understand "New York" and "San Francisco" and "Texas." You could mention Texas, and, of course, a preponderant number of us were from Texas because this National Guard unit that we came together with in the Bicycle Camp of Batavia, Java, was a Texas National Guard unit. Of course, their ranks had been augmented by selective service personnel, but in the main they were Texas boys. But the Japanese understood Texas--"Ahh! Texan! Ushi!" meaning "many cattle," you know. So they understood that and the movies. They understood Hollywood and the movies. They had a fixation on two movie stars particularly: Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin. If you told one of them...and we learned this early. One of them might question you and ask, "Deanna Durbin! Miru? Miru?" You'd say, "Ah-so! Taik-san!" You know, you'd say you saw Deanna Durbin many times. Well, usually your work was over for the day. You'd sit there, and he'd want to talk to you about Deanna Durbin, and you'd

lie to him faster than a dog runs downhill, you know. It was something that they did.

Even as they were our sworn enemy and we were at war with one another, in the subtle nature of things and ways of human behavior, you could sense an admiration for things American. We stood apart. When a new bunch of Japanese would take over out at this workshop area...and they were Japanese. Our guards in camp were Korean, but out at this workshop area, they were skilled technicians--engineer-types. So they would immediately...the bunch that would be outgoing would point out, "America, America, America, America, America." Of course, the natives were on to this, too, but we've digressed from our story.

But we fared rather well in Thailand. We had more to eat, but let me say it was not out of the generosity of the Japanese altogether. But the Japanese pretty much live off the land when they go into a place. Their troops are expected to live off of what we'd call "local subsistence," and certainly, we as prisoners-of-war would be expected to live this way. I mentioned several times the great tragedy of denial. In Burma the Japanese just

couldn't get the materials with which to subsist us or clothe us.

Jones: Are they having problems with themselves because of submarines?

Pryor: Right. Then when the rainy season set in, it was a problem of transportation. In supplying our end of the railroad down there, they had three trucks that could move in the rainy season, and they were all American trucks. They were multi-wheel drive. We had a four-wheel drive Chevy, and we had two six-wheel drive Rios, and they were the only thing that would move in all that mud and mire of the rainy season. So it was a question of subsistence.

But now Thailand is an export country, and they grew and produced a surplus of foodstuffs. So we fared rather well. They did pay us some little bit--a few cents a day for work--and we were able to buy an egg occasionally with it and maybe a handful of bananas. Then the military man's fancy begins to turn to other ways. Well, you never thought of girls or anything like that out working on that railroad in the jungle. It just didn't enter your mind. But in Thailand, well, it does. We were well-fed. Ten of us had a scale out there. Well, there was only about

six of us that worked out there because a couple of them worked in camp. But we had a list of the ten best looking Thai girls there was in among about 2,000 of them that worked out there. We had a list of ten. Occasionally, we'd revise it. We'd see a new one, and we'd moved one of them off of the ten, and we'd put her in some order on there. But they had one out there that held the number one position for, oh, a great length of time. I had been the ushi man at one time. I had herded the cattle the Japanese kept in camp, and we killed one a day regardless of whether it weighed sixty pounds or six hundred pounds. We killed one cow each day.

The Japanese officer finally decided that I was too familiar with some of the natives around there. And I was familiar with them. I knew when the little girls went to the village to buy stuff for resale--mangos, papayas, bananas, thread, tobacco, eggs, peanuts--and I'd know when they would come back along the trails from the village. They'd resell them through the various kampongs (that would be a collection of two or three, four, five huts, you know, in one area. So they would stop and rest for a minute, and they'd put their "yo-ho" pole down with

the baskets swung from each end of it, and when they'd get up and move on, well, there would be an egg left there, and that was left for me. So (chuckle) I was getting along a little better than I should have been expected to, I suppose, and this Japanese officer finally determined that and took me off of the cattle detail.

He sent me back out to the workshop area, and I was in charge of a work party, then, that laid water lines into these various shops. One day I was out there and a Japanese soldier came for me from our camp and said, "Ushi man, you come." He said, "Ushis all jungle go." They'd gotten a new herd of cattle in the day before to replenish the bunch that we'd had, and they'd put a couple of Englishmen and an Irishman on these cattle, and, gosh, they'd taken them out, and they didn't understand...they just barely knew which was the front end of a cow and which was the rear end of a cow. They had taken those cows out, and they were wild, and, gosh, they had gone to the jungle. They had just disappeared. He hadn't been with them, and he knew the Japanese shoko (officer) would just beat the hell out of him because he hadn't been with them. He was off down at

the *kampong* having liberty, you know. One *kampong* there had about eight prostitutes working there, and another one had five. So that's where he was.

Jones: So he feared for his life, and he needed to have somebody save his bacon.

Pryor: So he came out there and talked to the Japanese that I was working for to release me and let me go with him to see if I could find the cows. That's how I got the cow job in the beginning. They'd lost about a dozen cows, and in a couple of hours I had recovered all of them. So then I became the cow man.

So I came out there, and I found the cattle. They'd gone back to an old Indian's place that I knew about, and as soon as I found their tracks in the jungle and knew what direction they were going, I knew they were going back to where they had been accustomed to staying, which is only about four kilos down the road. I recovered those cattle.

The day I was gone, the guys came in and said, "Charley, we saw the number one gal of all number ones today." She was probably the most beautiful Thai girl I ever saw. The next morning when we were at work, they pretty soon told me, "Charley, she's in that shop." I said, "Who's in that shop?" They

said, "Well, that number one of all Thai girls is in there."

It wasn't long after that that this little ol' Japanese soldier spotted her. He was another two-star private, and we called him "Pipe-up." These lengths of pipe we carried were about six feet long, and they were made of reinforced concrete. They were six inches in diameter, and they were tremendously heavy. For two men they were a tremendous load. It was prestressed concrete. We would carry these on a "yo-ho" pole, you know, and carry them at length. Then I'd tell them to set them down and take a *yasumi*. "No yasumi! Pipe up! Pipe up! Pipe up!" So we called this clown Pipe-up. And so he spotted this good-looking Thai girl. Directly he came to me, "Hancho, you come. You Thai speak." I said, "I no speak Thai. Nippon say no speak to Thai people." He said, "I see you speak!"

Jones: So you were reflecting on when you were taken off the cow job one time because you had been too friendly with them, and so therefore you didn't want to get back into the same situation.

Pryor: Right, right. But he wanted me to speak. So he drags me in there and says, "You speak Thai girl." I said,

"Nani?" which means *what* do I speak. He wanted me to make an arrangement for him. He wanted to proposition her. He thought she was all the same as one of these prostitutes, and he started off offering five baht--five dollars. Their unit of currency was the baht. Sometimes they called it tical. But we called it then "baht." There was a hundred sen in one baht. But he started out with five baht, and she just laughed at the silly clown.

That afternoon--middle of the afternoon--we had a tremendous thunderstorm--lightning and all playing around--so we went inside this shop--it was a locomotive repair shop--to get out of the lightning and the storm. He was up to 200 baht (chuckle). He had me raise his offer about twenty times already that day, and he was up to 200 baht, and she still laughed at him.

Jones: And so he's getting frustrated by this time.

Pryor: And so several days later, as all of the natives came in and turned in their tools at the tool shed, she stood there...and she wore a very clean, neat dress every day. She never wore anything twice in a row. She was always neatly dressed and always just immaculately clean. She stood there, and she had a

wonderful figure. Gosh, she was full-figured. So "Pipe-up" just walked over there, and he grabbed her by the breast and had a good feel. The *hancho* in charge of her work party reported him to the *gunso*; and this same *gunso* that had bashed the other little two-star stood him up out there, and he just whaled the hell out of him.

But then that wasn't the worst of it. The next morning when "Pipe-up" came in to pick up our working party to go out to the workshop area, he could hardly see. His eyes were swollen practically shut, and his face was swollen. It looked like one of our neighbor's dogs one time that had got bitten by a rattlesnake. His head became terribly swollen, and he couldn't even see. His eyes wouldn't even open. It didn't kill him, but it made him terribly sick.

Jones: This is what the *gunso* had inflicted on "Pipe-up?"

Pryor: No, the three-star privates had. They had it where these three-star privates lived in one hut, and then they had an adjacent hut that the two-star privates lived in, and then they had another hut that one-star privates lived in. They were segregated according to their rank. These three-star privates

had gotten over there and gotten into their sake that night. The story we got is they called him over there repeatedly during the night and bashed him. All of them had a go at bashing old "Pipe-up."

Jones: Now let me try and understand. What he had done warranted the punishment of the *gunso* and the punishment of the *gunsos* or the...

Pryor: It was offensive to the common soldier as well.

Jones: So that warranted or gave them license to also take care of him.

Pryor: Reprimand him (chuckle).

Jones: I understand.

Pryor: And point out the error of what he had done. Now how you would compare this to and how you would equate it with something like the Rape of Nanking would be...it would just be problematical.

Jones: I see.

Pryor: We know there that from the higher command on, the higher command condoned the Rape of Nanking.

Jones: Can you give me a feeling about that? Why it was just unlicensed or wanton destruction and rape and pillage?

Pryor: Well, the commander there was not a front-line commander. I think he knew his limitations, and he

let his subordinates do things that a front-line commander would have put a stop to.

Jones: I see.

Pryor: In our military, you know as well as I know that we've got our people that rise up through the ranks according to their political mind set. They are just of that nature that they ingratiate themselves with those, let's say, that are in a position to influence their well-being. You see a lot of people that are condemned because they're maybe very aggressive as a front-line commander.

Well, there are those critics, and in your study of history, you've come across it more than one time--criticism of General Patton. They say he lost 10,000 men, by God, in this one assault. He lost them in one fell swoop--he lost 10,000 men. When you look to it, certainly he took usually the most direct way.

All military units probably are confounded with the same problem. You've got your people that earn their way politically, and then you've got those that earn it the hard way, by thunder, the real professional ways of being a military man. Patton was one like that.

But now compare him to a commander like Montgomery. I don’t wish to infringe on the feelings the English have for Montgomery; but Montgomery would probe over here, and then he’d probe over there, and then he’d probe up here, and he’d probe up here. He’d lose 200 men today, and he’d lose 200 men tomorrow, and he’d lose 200 men there. Six months from today he still hasn’t won the objective, and he’s lost 10,000 men. Patton assaulted it, by God, on day one, and he lost ten thousand men, but he got the objective.

The Marine Corps got a man--”Howlin’ Mad” Smith--who was the same kind of man that Patton was. He, by thunder, made the frontal assault, he secured the objective, and he lost “X” number of men. And there are those that said, “Well, he shouldn’t have done that; he shouldn’t have taken that direct an approach to it. He lost too many men.” Well, another commander over here--particularly a political-type--understands the ramifications of a few losses today and a few losses tomorrow is not noted as much as losing them all in one day. But the Japanese had their people like that, too, and the commander at

Nanking was much the same way. He did not command his troops.

Jones: Let's get back maybe to a smaller sphere. Can you recall what was probably the most bizarre type of punishment? Or did they just have a small little laundry list of punishments that were meted out from different camps?

Pryor: Well, in reflection I think that for most of the punishment for minor infractions of the instant, it would be involved mostly with some kind of bashing--physical abuse. We had many of them that were more abusive than others and would be more prone to disable you if they could. We've got certain names...I never knew any of their given names. We were not that familiar with the Japanese language or, let's say, name structure to understand. Today, it fascinates me that many of them are named Yamamoto. Moto means "originally" or "formerly" and yama is "mountain"--Formerly Mountain." A lot of them are named Ishi this or Ishimoto--"Formerly Stone." But we never knew that, and, of course, we'd attach some name to them. Like, we said "Pipe-up," and we had one named "Buff Head" and another one "Liver Lips." "Liver Lips" had almost negroid-like

lips. He was a big, monstrous Korean, probably from way up in northern Korea somewhere. In Asia there seems to be a corridor from North China into Manchuria and across North Korea and into northern Japan where the people are predominantly much larger than the typical Asian. I don't know whether it's the influence of the Mongols or...it probably is. They're all, I guess, some Mongolian derivation or extraction. A couple of these Koreans, "Buff Head" and "Liver Lips," both were like that.

Then we had another Korean soldier we called "Hollywood." He was the neatest, most correct, and well-dressed soldier that I ever saw among our Japanese forces. He was almost fastidious, and so we called him "Hollywood." And he was a mean bastard. Oh, he was mean! I had a double dose of "Hollywood." We first knew him in Bicycle Camp in Java, and then when I go to this camp--this work camp--in Thailand, by thunder, there's that stinking "Hollywood." And he's just as mean as a rattlesnake there, too, as he was before. He would bash you for no pretext. If he didn't think you bowed to him deep enough, well, then he'd stand you up and bash you.

Jones: Do you think maybe in some strange way he thought that was an infraction, like, "Well, I don't think this is good enough. I think I ought to punish him."

Pryor: I think he was just representative of a minority among them that just was suddenly thrust in a position of superiority, and there are those who cannot accept and discharge authority. This would be his manner of exercising it because by virtue of his position, it was endowed to him, and he would use it. Many of the others accepted it without recourse.

Jones: What did he do? Cuff you or hit you with a stick or slap you?

Pryor: Yes, and with anything--any one of these three, "Buff Head," "Liver Lips," or "Hollywood." Then the Aussies had a couple there in Singapore that we met, too. They called one of them "The Boy Bastard" and the other one, "The BBC." They called one "BB" and one "BBC." One was "Boy Bastard" and the other was "Boy Bastard's Cob." To the Aussie, the "cob" is your buddy, you know, and so they called them "BB" and "BBC." And they, too, were rather large Koreans, and they would bash you with no pretext. They didn't have to have a pretext; you didn't have to be violating any rules. Even in the mind of them, I

don't think that they had to have any justification. They were just in a position of superiority and dominance, and they wished to exercise it.

But that would be the most common thing--bashings along that order--and it might be with a fist. Most generally one of these large guys, like "Buff Head" or "Liver Lips," those two, would just go insane. They thought if they could see blood, it was just like a vampire bat. They'd just go insane then.

Then more serious infractions of the rules--and usually we would ask for it--would be like thievery. I guess there's nothing that's more of an anathema to the Japanese than thievery.

Jones: In Samurai days they would cut the hand off from their own people that they caught stealing.

Pryor: They are scrupulously honest in that respect, and they couldn't understand why we would resort to thievery. Of course, they weren't as hungry as we were, either, at times. Of course, we've got our element here today, by gosh. The police tell me down here now that we've got those among our midst who would rather than steal from somebody than work for

somebody. The Japanese take a very dim view of this kind of behavior.

Most generally, it would be that we were trying to get something the Japanese had not provided us. It was representative of this problem of denial. They either didn't have it, or they couldn't get it to us. It was either a question of not having that resource or not having the transportational ability to provide us with that resource--food and clothing. The Japanese usually fared well. They had stores, and they ate. They had cured fish, and they had cured seaweed and all kinds. They'd have stores of this *daikon*. They've got a big, long, white radish that they call a *daikon*. I've seen them in some of the supermarkets here.

Jones: It's big, white tuber.

Pryor: A big, white tuber. They put those up with seaweed and peppers and garlic, and they'd make kind of a pickled thing. It's not wholly unlike the *kimchi* that the Koreans make. It's a pickled thing, and it goes well with rice.

So anytime we could, we'd swipe their fish,or we'd swipe anything that they had...a little extra rice out of their cookhouse. If we got caught, then

their standard punishment for that would be to stand you at attention in front of the guardhouse. Seventy-two hours would be probably the most apt sentence--stand at attention for seventy-two hours in front of the guardhouse. Now, well, you say, "That's physically impossible." I guess for the most part it would be, but one of our people had to do that, and lie told us later on that at nighttime, after the *gunso* and the *zhoko* had gone to bed, they would let him slump down there in place and kind of grab a little bit of ... a few winks of sleep hunkered down there. In the daytime, he didn't expect it. If the sun was on that side of the building where he stood, well, then he stood in the Sun. Sometime during the day there might be a little shade there. Occasionally, they'd bring him a drink of water so that he'd get a drink of water, and that would be all. That's harsh punishment.

Jones: If he passed out, I'm just going to presume they'd revive him and stand him back in place?

Pryor: Well, they may let him stay there for a bit, and they might be compassionate enough to let him grab a little bit of rest there in a comatose position. But anytime that there was the possibility that the

gunso or the *shoko* would be around, then it was standing there at attention. But that was a common type of punishment throughout, I think, most of the prison camps, whether it'd be in Burma, whether it'd be in Thailand, whether it'd be in Indochina, or whether they'd be in Japan or wherever--to be caught stealing or possibly trading with a native.

The Japanese didn't confiscate everything that maybe some of our people have been led to believe. When I was captured, one of those "nuts" that was on this life raft with us had a gold watch, and, gosh, he was scared to death. Immediately after we got on this landing craft, he took this watch off, and he gave it to one of the boat crew members. I think it was probably the engineer--the one that tended the motor. The engineer looked at it, and he gave it back. Then the guy gave it to the coxswain--the one on the tiller who was in charge of the boat--and so he looked at it, and he gave it back. Gosh, he insisted. He didn't want it back.

But they didn't have any intent to take our personal things. Of course, I didn't have anything to take (chuckle). But some of the guys had rings, and they didn't take their rings. This would be so

on through--throughout. In some areas troops reported that they took everything they had--all of their valuables. But this didn't happen down there where we were. These front-line troops didn't search us. They never searched us once down on the beach. Of course, we didn't have anything. Most of us were so deprived of clothes at that time that we couldn't have hidden anything had we wanted to. But they never took personal possessions--fountain pens or anything of that order. In some places I would imagine they did.

But that goes back to another thing you mentioned before. You mentioned something earlier in your introductory remarks about individual commanders. We noted among Japanese forces that military units oftentimes assumed the characteristics of individual commanders. If the commander was an abusive rascal, most of the people under his command would tend to be that way. They would take their cue from the commander.

You know, it's kind of analogous to American forces back in the Civil War days. You would have, let's say, an important individual here. Let's say he lived here in Dallas. Let's just use modern

cities, you know, for analogy. And he would go out here, and he would round up 200 men to serve with him; and he would offer himself and his 200 men to the Confederate forces. Well, they would brevet him as a major or a colonel, and so they would be known as "Sherman's forces" or whatever (named after the commander). In Japan I know that many of the units that we encountered would be raised from a particular city, and instead of being the 3rd Battalion of so-and-so regiment, they'd be known as the "Ishi Regiment" or the "Mishimoto Regiment."

Jones: The name of that commander.

Pryor: Or it may take the name of the city from which they had entered the service. It could be the "Sasebo Sea Force" or something on that order. Instead of having some kind of military identity, it would be the individual that had been responsible for, let's say, recruiting them into service, or they'd be identified with their home of origin.

More than one of their military units would assume the traits and characteristics of the individual commander than what ours would.

Jones: That's right.

Pryor: We've got our people that can be aggressive. Like,

Patton's forces were aggressive. But it's not that he was aggressive that rubbed off on all of them. It was, by thunder, that lie promoted aggressiveness.

Jones: So you're saying by way of analogy that the conduct of these different Japanese forces, be they in camps or wherever, reflect oftentimes the...

Pryor: The individual, let's say, idiosyncrasies or characteristics or traits of the individual commander.

Jones: Sounds good. If the units reflected their commanding officers' personalities or idiosyncrasies, as you said, was there any difference between the way the enlisted men might have treated you as opposed to the officers? Were they different, or were they pretty much the same, depending on whether they were combat units or these reserve units? Did they actually have different distinctions according to rank?

Pryor: Well, probably not so much as to rank. Of course, we would have minimal contact with those of officer rank--commissioned rank. On work details, officers very seldom showed up on the job; they just passed by, you know, in a hurried fashion. Our immediate contact would have been with the individual

soldiers. Certainly, officers would be setting forth the prescribed, I guess, parameters within which they would operate and how they would operate and how they would conduct their activities and so forth and so on. We didn't have much contact with the officer-type material.

But the worst bashing I got in prison camp was from an officer. It would have been probably six weeks to two months before the war ended. They had a pretty big bombing raid in and around the vicinity of Kanburi. Kanchanaburi, which I mentioned a while ago, is the long name. We just usually shortened it to Kanburi. That's where the bridge over the River Kwai was built. They'd had a pretty big raid that one particular day, and this officer--the one that had removed me from the cow detail, who thought I was going too well--was over in our side of camp. We had two parts to this camp, and in the part around where the prisoners stayed, we had been forced to dig a tremendous moat all the way around it. It would be approximately some three to four meters deep, and then it would have been about four meters wide at the top. Then it slanted down-sloped--from the inside--from our camp side--and then the bottom

of the trench would be about two meters wide. Then we threw all the dirt on the opposite side--on the Japanese side of the camp. They had machine gun emplacements at each corner of this moat.

This officer was on our side of camp that particular day, and he came back later in the evening after he had gotten tanked up on cake. He came over there in a drunken condition. He stated that he heard some Australian man speak "come again" when the bombers were overhead, you know, carrying out their mission. So he came over to the hut. The ten Americans stayed in this hut with eighty-five Australians. There was about a hundred to each hut, and we stayed with the Aussies. He came into our hut, knowing that this was an Australian man that spoke "come again," and so he was going to find out what individual had been so emboldened enough and brazen enough to say this. He came down one side of the hut...and our huts were divided in such a manner that half of us slept on one side on a sleeping platform raised off of the ground about two feet, and then half of them slept on the opposite side, with about a five-foot walkway between the two platforms. He came down on the side that I was on.

The first place near the entrance to the hut was where the hut commander slept, and that was one of our Americans. One of the first sergeants out of F Battery, that field artillery unit, was our hut commander. He asked each man--he'd stand in front of each man--"Did you speak 'come again?'" Every one of them replied, "Nai."

Jones: Did they understand what they were being questioned about?

Pryor: Oh, yes, yes. We got that. Most of us could understand. They'd speak a little English, and we could speak a little Japanese. Then a number of us could speak very good Malay, and many of them had been in Indonesia, and they could speak Malay. So between Malay and English and Japanese, we could make ourselves understood pretty much. Sometimes in one sentence you'd use a mixture of all three languages. We understood the question.

So he came down near the middle of the hut where the nine of us Americans slept, the nine of them excluding the first sergeant that slept at the entrance to the hut. This ol' boy that I said would always get bashed--Mallard--was the first to be questioned, and I slept next to Mallard. So he

stepped in front of Mallard and said, "You speak 'come again?'" "Nai." So then he stepped over in front of me. "Ah, ushi man, you speak 'come again?'" I said, "Nai." Well, hell, he knew it wasn't me. He knew me, and he knew it wasn't me that spoke. But when I said, "Nai," the damned fool hit me across the windpipe with the flat of his hand--a karate chop across the windpipe. God, I could hardly swallow for two weeks.

Jones: Why do you think he did that if he knew it wasn't you?

Pryor: Probably, I was a marked person. He probably figured I'd gotten away with too damned much throughout the whole thing. I was received favorably by all of his guards over there because to go out with me and the cows was like liberty to them. They only got one day of liberty about every three weeks, and then only to go into that little ol' local village of Tamuan, which was a very small village. There was little attraction there. So to go out with me with the cows, they had a whole lot more fun and opportunity to have a good time than otherwise. And I never "ratted" on them in any way and always protected them, so we got along very well with most of them.

But this officer probably knew all that.

Jones: He probably thought, "Well, this is the payment of a longstanding debt. It's time to pay him back."

Pryor: Yes. "I'll remind him of a few things that he's gotten away with.'' So he whopped me up on the throat with that karate chop. That's the only time that he hit me, though. Then he went on down all the way through to the end of the hut and came back up the opposite side and asked each one of them, "Did you speak 'come again?'" "Nai."

Then my assistant at the time with the cows had been an ol' Australian. Oh, gosh, he was up near sixty years old. He had been a veteran of Gallipoli, and he'd had the toes of his right foot shot off, and all he had left was the big toe on that foot. To see all of his ether toes shot off and then that one big toe, it looked like that one toe was six inches or eight inches long (chuckle), and it stuck out there, you know, so prominent-like. He had a pot belly and a little grizzled hair on his chest and all that. He said, "Ah, Australian ushi man, you speak 'come again?'" "Nai." I said, "You're in for it now. He's going to bash the hell out of you." By thunder, as soon as he said, "Nai," that joker

wheeled and whopped me upside the head--and I didn't even have time to duck--with his fist. He whopped me upside the head.

Then he spotted a board underneath our sleeping platform there by where Mallard slept right next to me. This board would have been about, oh, two feet or two-and-a-half feet long. It was about four inches wide. It was thicker than a one-by-four, but it was not quite as thick as a two-by-four. It was something in between ... oh, about maybe one-and-a-quarter inches thick. And he took that piece of board, and he measured off ol' Mallard ... he put it upside his head, and he'd draw it back like he was going to hit him. [Tape turned over]

Jones: This is part two of interview with Mr. Charles Pryor.

Pryor: He measured ol' Mallard off with that board, and I said to myself, "Now, wait a minute." I had time to reflect on this a bit, you know, while he was measuring Mallard off, and I thought, "When he swings at ol' Mallard, he's going to duck, and, by thunder, I better be ready to duck, too, because he'll swing on through, and it'll whop me if I don't."

Just about that time ... I don't know what might have happened, whether or not he would have assaulted us with that board or not, but evidently somebody from the guardhouse had gone over to the officers' hut, where the officers and the *gunsos* stayed, and alerted this warrant officer that was in camp--he'd just been there a short while--that the officer was over there raising hell with all of us and was drunk. So the warrant officer came over there, and he took the board and started talking to the officer in Japanese. The gist of it, I have no idea what it was. But finally, without any protest, he put the board back underneath there from where he'd picked it up and went on.

But he was the one missing link whenever the war ended. This officer was gone. All the rest of our Korean guards and forth had stayed in place, and the *gunso* stayed in place. But the officer left. I'd liked to have had a piece of him--just a little bitty piece--because that man brutalized me, by God, when I didn't deserve to be. I would have been just a little bit mindful of getting an eye for an eye (chuckle). But he had bailed out of there. Of course, the little *gunso* that we had with us had

also come over with the warrant officer, and he, too, had interceded with the officer.

There was a little fellow that I had much respect for. He was one of the most unkempt-looking soldiers that I ever saw in the Japanese military. If you had to pick out a Japanese to do a character of, it would be him. He wore big glasses, and he had the buck teeth, and he wore that little cap, you know, with the little visor on it (it just barely did cover his little eyes). He was short and stocky, and he wore boots. We called him "Puss in Boots," and the boots came up above his knees. He carried his ancestral "cake knife," you know, the sword, and if he didn't hold his hand on the hilt of it and force it down, it would drag behind him (chuckle). Whoever had handed it down or had originated the instrument probably had been just a little bit taller than "Puss in Boots" was.

In this camp, when bombers came over and we heard the sound of an airplane engine aloft, it was the duty of one member of the guard to immediately come over in the prisoner side of the camp and ask the first prisoner he met, was it Nippon or American. And if the prisoner said, "Nippon," well,

they'd go on about their business; but if he said it was American, well, this guard would go back to the front of the guardhouse where they had a section of railroad rail, iron rail, oh, about two feet long, and they hit that with an iron bar. It'd make that clanging sound. So then the first guy out of the hut and over on the prisoner side of the camp would be "Puss in Boots," the *gunso*. He was always first. I mean, the little fellow could scoot when there was an American airplane in the vicinity (chuckle). You'd think, "Well, gosh, such as this is the representative of the Japanese soldier and the heroism that they display and all that and the denial of fear?" I'll tell you, this is the most decorated Japanese soldier that I ever saw.

Jones: The *gunso*--the sergeant?

Pryor: He had fought in Manchuria, in China, in the Philippines, in Malaya, and ... he was on a ship that was sunk by our gunfire the night that we were sunk. We sunk some Japanese transports, and he was on them, and he had to swim for it just like we did.

Jones: Through all that, he bore no animosity toward you.

Pryor: He bore no malice toward us at all. In every respect he was courteous to us, and he treated us with the

respect that one professional would accord another professional.

Jones: So in what you've just said so far...

Pryor: And he was a front-line soldier.

Jones: Then that's what I was thinking. He had no real intendant biases of these rear echelon clowns.

Pryor: No, it was a thing apart from them. I know that in the last bombing raid, before we got news the war had ended, they came over our camp, and the planes were B-24 Liberators. They were American; they had the American markings. Often we didn't know. They'd be flying so high we couldn't see the markings. We knew that the Royal Air Force flew some Liberators, and we'd never know whether they were English or Americans making the mission. But this time they were Americans, and they came down so low over our huts that the propeller wash and slip stream would lift the atap. See, these huts of ours were constructed entirely of bamboo, and the bamboo leaves were folded over a slender piece of bamboo and the laced together. Then they were put on like shingles, and so they would shed the water. They'd be about this length, about a foot. They'd make a piece of material about a foot in depth. It would

lift that right up, just like your fingers would stand up, and you could see the facial features of these people. They had no mask on or anything, and you could see their features. If one of them had been your brother, you could have recognized him as being your brother.

Jones: They flew that low.

Pryor: That low. Particularly the nose and tailgunners were where you could get a look at them. They went over this workshop. They had never bombed a workshop area. But they went over it. They criss-crossed it, and they snooped, and they pooped around there looking this place over.

This little *gunso* was in a slit trench about fifteen feet from where a couple of us Americans were. We'd dug these around our huts--immediately adjacent to our huts--and he was in a slit trench that we had dug about fifteen feet from the one that we were in. Some Japanese soldier out of this workshop area cut loose with a .50-caliber machine gun out there. That little ol' *gunso* jumped up out of this slit trench, and he shook his fist in the general direction of where this firing was coming from, and he screamed out out there. Of course, this

was a mile-and-a-half over there, and he screamed over there, "Kora! Kora! Bakana! Bakana!" That [*bakana*] was like calling you a fool. Then he looks over at us and sees us watching him, and he said, "Nippon haitai!" [Japan defeated] He took gross exception to this fact, that they would be so emboldened as to cut loose on one of these bombers with a .50-caliber machine gun.

Jones: So I guess these are toward--like what you say--the waiting days toward the end of the war. Probably seeing the handwriting on the wall, he didn't want to exacerbate the situation by inflaming the bombers coming over and bringing them back to that target.

Pryor: Well, he was right. They were doing the extreme, detailed reconnaissance of this area. Certainly, they had information on this place because they had OSS teams working in that general vicinity. We didn't know it at that time, but we knew later on. We ran into these people in the camp from which we were actually liberated--where the planes came in to pick us up and fly us out. In the camp that we were in there, they knew how many English were there, Americans, how many dogs we had in camp, that we had one goat. They knew how many Korean sentries we had,

how many Japanese officers we had. They knew the extent of the sentry posts. I didn't even know that. Living in camp, I didn't know the extent of the sentry posts within camp and the hours they changed guards. But these OSS people knew; they knew all that.

So had they conducted another raid, they probably would have pasted this workshop area in an unusual manner. They had bombed, one time previously, a train on the siding that had put in near our camp, and one piece of shrapnel came into our camp. Oh, gosh, it weighed several pounds and was probably six inches long and probably three or four inches wide at its widest part. It was a jagged piece of shrapnel about half an inch thick--probably part of something like a five-hundred-pound bomb. It had flown through there, and it sounded like a boxcar itself coming through there, you know, the jagged configuration that it was and making all this noise. It landed not far from this same slit trench that we used to go to.

But, now, they had reason to know what this was, and they were getting a very good look that day. The Japanese knew this. They knew it was just a

matter of time until it would be accomplished.

Jones: As the bombing increased and as the reconnaissance increased, what was their temperament as far as you or your fellow prisoners-of-war could discern? Did their treatment toward you pick up more badly? Was it slackening off? As they knew the impending end was coming on, how did their treatment of you differ, if at all?

Pryor: Really, very little. Well, since we had gone to Thailand, few of us would have any gripes or, let's say, criticism, of our treatment there. We were well-fed. We were out of Burma and its rainy season. The hurry up, "speedo" efforts to complete that railroad was all in our past. We were not sick and had no illness, and we were not plagued with the great tropical ulcers that had killed so many of us as we worked on the railroad. So actually, we fared rather well, I guess, as prisoners-of-war. It was not an undue thing.

They finally took me off of work party out at the workshop and put me into...again, at the orders of this officer, they put me to cutting wood for the kitchen. That was the hardest work that there was in camp, was to swing an ax all day. It would take

three of us all day to cut wood sufficient to cook the meals for all the prisoners and then the Japanese cookhouse, too.

Jones: This was at the insistence of this same officer?

Pryor: Yes.

Jones: This is the same one that you had run into several other times as the ushi man and then in the barracks.

Pryor: Same one, yes.

Jones: You think this guy had it out for you (chuckle)?

Pryor: I think he had me pegged. This was the hardest job that there was in camp--woodcutter. Before he came there, they had established a double ration of food for the three woodcutters, and lie thought maybe he was getting the best of me. He thought he was putting me into something I didn't know a whole lot about--cutting wood. But as I mentioned earlier, I grew up in West Texas, and in West Texas in the Depression years, when winter came on, you heated the house with wood stoves. And the wood you used was mesquite, and you know that there's more wood to a mesquite ... the greater part of the wood is underneath the ground--it's in the root system--than it is in the trunk system. So if you fuel with

mesquite, you grub it out of the ground, and you work these mesquite stumps up. You pretty soon get to work the wood. You work yourself to death, or you learn how to read wood and use an ax.

Jones: So unbeknownst to him, he had thrown Br'er Rabbit into the briar patch.

Pryor: Into the briar patch. That would be a good analogy. I saw one man in prison camp that was more efficient with an ax than I was, and that was an Australian lumberjack--professional lumberjack. He could make more wood with an ax than I could, but I deferred to nobody else. These guys on *yasumi* days--rest days--a lot of them used to come over there and watch us cut wood--just to see us use the doggone ax. The other two guys used a saw, and I used an ax.

But except for isolated things such as that example with me, they didn't change routines, didn't change rules, didn't change modes of behavior at all toward us in the waning days. They knew that we had pretty good information, I think. They had a tremendous *kempei* force [secret police] around there toward the end of the war. I'd think it was instigated not so much of our contact with the natives or anything as with the OSS.

Jones: **By *kempei*, do you mean their police?**

Pryor: **Yes, the military police--the *Kempei Tai*. It was kind of like the Gestapo. They operate more like the Gestapo than they do as American MPs.**

Jones: **I understand they inflict a lot more torture in their interrogations.**

Pryor: **And so they had numbers of those people. Some of them would be dressed as natives, and they'd be stupid enough to approach a prisoner and want to speak to him in Thai or Malay or broken English or something, you know, like a native would use and then ask him a question and then put the interrogatory suffix on it, *nani*. They'd come out with *nani* or *ka* or something on that order, you know. It was a dead giveaway. They were just a little bit silly with their attempts to fool us.**

Jones: **What would be their chief idea of interrogating you? To find out if you knew something they didn't?**

Pryor: **Yes. It was probably to try to trap you into some kind of revelation of something they didn't know--to divulge something that they were only suspicious about, such as this contact with the natives. Many of these natives were working with the OSS. We know that now because we found out after the war was**

over. A lot of natives would disappear, like, policemen and members of the military that would disappear, and they didn't know where they'd gone. They just dropped from sight, but these OSS people were working with them. I know just before the war ended, in one remote area of this workshop, they approached an Englishman and told him that our friends were fifty-three kilos away and that they would like to have one American soldier, one Dutch soldier, one Australian soldier, and one English soldier go with them to meet our friends. He came into camp and related that. There wasn't many professional military people in camp. I was one of the few that had been in the service for a while, you know.

I used to brief an Aussie that we had who was a radio engineer. The Japanese out here had a radio--one of these that was a Crosly with a tuning eye on it. I'd seen them before the war had started--a big console model. Well, I don't know ... they'd probably confiscated it down in Indonesia or probably down the Malay Peninsula somewhere. But they had it, and it went on the blink, and out of 500 Japanese technicians out there, they never had

one that could fix a radio.

Jones: Incredible.

Pryor: So they came to the POWs and asked if anybody knew anything about a radio. This one Australian soldier off of the *Perth*--I think his name was Archer--said that he was a radioman, and he could fix it. Hell, Arch could design a radio station. He was an engineer--a radio engineer--and he didn't mess around with fixing radios. He could design them and build them from the word "go." So they brought their radio in there, and he fixed it. He asked them for certain materials that he knew they didn't have and they couldn't provide, and so he fixed it so it came back about every two weeks. I think in the book that I did for Dr. Marcello I mentioned this. He could get up some morning and say, "Well, the radio ought to be in today," and, sure enough, more than likely it would be in sometime during the day. He put certain crystals in one of the transformer coils, and it would corrode over. In that dampness out there, it would corrode over in about two weeks and short everything out. So it would come back, and he'd scrape it all off, you know, and start all over again. He put a short-wave band in it, unbeknownst

to the Japanese.

Jones: Did he ever get caught?

Pryor: No. I don't know whether they ever suspicioned him or not. I don't know why they didn't because he would disconnect it before he gave it back to them. He'd disconnect the shortwave loop, and then he'd reconnect it when he was working on it. They always had a guard standing over him there so that he couldn't listen to the news.

I had come by a one-volume encyclopedia, and it had a set of maps in there. So we were able to keep up pretty much with the war in Europe. It was reported more than the war in the Pacific in the stations that we'd be able to hear--New Delhi and a short-wave station out of Melbourne. Then on very, very, very rare occasions, he could pick up some newscast from KGEI in San Francisco. It must of been on the bounce 300 times--on the skip. But very seldom could he get KC3EI. Most of it would be out of New Delhi, and most of it dealt with the news of the war in Germany. So we was able to keep up with the war in Germany fairly well. Then we'd follow the island warfare pretty well, but, of course, there were no differentiated lines, you know, of combat or

so forth. It was just island hopping, so it was not as easy to keep up with the war in the Pacific as it was with the war in Europe.

But we would go along there, and in between times we would not have access to the radio, I'd brief Archer on names to listen for in Europe and the island names in the Pacific. So in just tuning across, occasionally you'd hear one of these names, and he'd remember the name that he'd heard because it would ring a bell with him.

Jones: So as he worked on this radio, he alone would pick up this information and later disseminate it to you all.

Pryor: Yes, we'd get it, and we'd get out our maps and look at it and follow it along, so we were able to keep up fairly well. Then toward the end of the war, they began to propagandize a bit--psychological warfare aspect of it. The Liberators would come over, and instead of dropping bombs, they'd drop leaflets. This was directed at the Thai people--not at the Japanese military and not at us, certainly, but at the Thai people.

Jones: Did this inflame the Japanese any?

Pryor: Well, yes, it would. They'd try to confiscate all

these leaflets. A favored place they used to dump a lot of this was in a place called Banpong. Banpong is the switching terminal. The railroad's main trunk line comes out of Bangkok, and it comes to Banpong. Then there's a branch that branches off from Banpong and goes down the Malay Peninsula to Singapore. Then Banpong was the Thai terminus of the road that we built. It went up to Kanachanaburi and on up through Three Pagodas Pass. It crossed into Burma there at a place called Three Pagodas Pass in the Uthai Mountains and then went on down to Thanbyuzayat, Burma, and then eventually to Molmein and Rangoon.

Jones: And so the Americans would drop these leaflets over this facility you're talking about. Then I am going to presume they were wanting to set up a paper trail. It would seem logical they could just push this information on to other people.

Pryor: They'd drop these leaflets. Banpong was about forty-five kilometers from where we were, and you could usually count on it, within an hour, that we would have a copy of it in our camp and with an English translation of what it would say. It would be printed in Thai. Some of these people that worked with the OSS and all would see that we got a copy of

it in camp and a translation of what it was.

Jones: Did the Japanese ever get mad if they ever found one of these leaflets?

Pryor: Oh, they'd probably still be working on (chuckle) us if they'd found one of them, but they fortunately never caught any of us with anything like that.

Jones: Did they ever come out and verbally restrict you and say, "We don't want to find these here."

Pryor: No, it was just understood. We'd have no contact with the Thais. We were not to have absolutely any manner of contact with the native populations either in Burma or Thailand.

Jones: And what would be punishment for consorting with these types?

Pryor: Well, in my recollection I never knew of anybody that got caught fraternizing with the native population, so I don't know. It would be just conjecture, but I would suppose it would be maybe solitary confinement in some areas where they had the facilities, or it might be standing at attention. It would be of some serious import.

Jones: How serious would it have been if your friend Archer had been caught with that radio?

Pryor: Oh, gosh!

Jones: Do you think they would have executed him?

Pryor: No, I don't think they would have done that. In the camp immediately adjacent to the Bridge over the River Kwai, they had an antiaircraft battery set up, around this bridge for protection. They came over and they bombed this bridge, and they bombed this AA battery, and a couple of stray bombs landed in camp there and killed some of them. But in this camp, they had a newspaper, they had a radio, and they put out information. The Japanese knew they were getting good information, good news. Well, by "good" I mean reliable. And the only way they could know was to have access to a radio. They'd come and search at inopportune times, and they never found it. They had built this radio in a tin can. This can was described to me as being about six inches square and about eight inches in depth. They had a little post exchange there in camp, and they Could buy...if you had money, you could buy peanuts--they would be shelled peanuts--and you could buy an egg, mango, tobacco, papayas, such things as that. This radio was in the bottom of that can, and they had peanuts on top of it. The Japanese had actually been in there, they said, looking for that radio. They'd

take the lid off it and reach in and get a handful of peanuts and eat them, and the radio that they was looking for was underneath their hand.

Jones: Less than inches away.

Pryor: Then one day they walked in there and walked right to that can and picked it up and carried it away. I guess they beat ... I don't know. I don't recall the number. But I think it was more than two. I believe it was three. They beat three of these people involved with this project--beat them to death.

Jones: Were these natives or prisoners?

Pryor: They were prisoners. They were English.

Jones: Beat them to death?

Pryor: Yes.

Jones: How did they pick those out?

Pryor: Well, the English never determined that. Somebody ratted on them. Somebody played stool pigeon and told them, and they came right there ... they didn't search for anything. They came right there and picked that can up with the radio. They had the names of practically every person that was involved in this news dissemination network.

Jones: Did you know of what happened to the different types and sorts of people that you knew that were in this?

Pryor: No. I only knew of this second-hand and didn't know of it first-hand at all. This had already happened when we came through this camp. But the English did find the Japanese that were responsible for this, and they were executed in Singapore after the war. I picked up a magazine on the rack one time when I was here in Dallas on recruiting duty, and I saw a story there. It had a picture attending this story that showed Japanese lying stretched out there--three of them, I believe, in number--and I read the little transcript underneath that related to this picture. This was the story. This was why they were executed--for murdering these three Englishmen in connection with this radio in that camp at Tamarkan, Thailand.

Jones: I bet you that really brought the war immediately back to you, knowing that you were right there in the vicinity of it.

Pryor: Well, it was one that I had personal knowledge about ... well, personal, though second-hand. But we did get this information. I don't know what they would have done to Archer if they would have caught him with this. I'm wondering why at least one of them was smart enough to wonder, "Well, now why is it that when we have this radio, we never hear this

English language broadcast? Yet when he's finagling around with it, you hear all this English language stuff coming through here."

Jones: Could you even guess why they didn't put a guard on it that would be listening or have knowledge of English to pick up what he was listening to?

Pryor: Well, evidently they didn't, and it was to our good fortune, really (chuckle). We had other sources of information. Of course, the Chinese there were extremely adept at sabotage. Of course, they were bitterly opposed to the Japanese, and they would pass along information to us. But we didn't know whether we could believe it altogether. In fact, at the time that they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we didn't have access to the radio. It was in that interim period when it was still yet working. And the Chinese told us first: "War ended. America drop one bomb, kill 200,000 people. One bomb kill 200,000 people."

Jones: You found this incredulous.

Pryor: Yes. We had no conception of atomic weapons. Well, actually very few people did have.

Jones: Regardless of who you were.

Pryor: Yes. Even here in the United States, it came as a

tremendous surprise to the greater number of our populous. Only those involved in the Manhattan Project probably had any conception at all. Eisenhower probably wasn't even aware of it. But they told us all this, and it sounded so absurd, you know, you dare not believe it

But it was, in essence, the truth, and we knew it for several days before the Japanese called us out on the 17th day of August. Working parties were in for noontime, and when they fell out to go back to work at noontime, we had a formal *tenko*. We had a second Japanese that we had known back in Bicycle Camp in Java, and we called him "Turtleneck." He was Japanese. He was an interpreter. He understood English and spoke English quite well. He was out there with the *gunso* conducting *tenko*. It wasn't the officer; he had already bailed out. He said, "The war is finished. Japan and America be friends again. You are free; you have your liberty." He said, "You have won the war, and Japanese will receive instructions as to your disposition." He said, "The Japanese are told that you must stay in camp until your people give other instructions." He said, "All foodstuffs in, the warehouse

is yours." That was about the gist of it.

Jones: What were your feelings toward the Japanese then, that is, once you had come down off the ceiling, as it were, after hearing this?

Pryor: Well, actually, we weren't up on any ceiling. I thought for years that whenever they tell me the day the war has ended and we are free again, I won't come down to earth for six weeks or so, that I'll be up in the clouds. But when they told us it was all over, most of us just turned and went back to our huts and crawled back up on our sleeping area there. I slept on a mattress that I'd made out of that long Johnson grass. They have a grass they grew over there, and it's like the Johnson grass that grows here. I had stuffed some rice bags with this long grass and made a sleeping pad about that thick--about four or five inches thick. I'd made one for myself and one for three or four other Americans there. We just crawled up there and took a little bit more rest until the time for us to go back over there and start cutting wood for the kitchen. I kept on working until the day they moved us out of that camp.

Jones: So although there was no enforcement of it, you just

carried on as before.

Pryor: We just carried on the same routine. Actually, except for this officer ... that mean booger! The rest of our Korean guards at that time were fairly decent people.

Jones: Did any of them ever change? Like, they were really hard, and then once the war was over they...

Pryor: No, no. We couldn't see any perceptible change in their behavior from the time they first came there with us. Of course, they'd change personnel from time to time--transfer them as we do. But with any of them that came there, we never noticed any perceptible change in their behavior. They treated us decently. We got plenty to eat, and we were not ill and beset with the various skin and rash-type diseases, you know, that you have in the tropics and so forth. So we had no complaints for our physical being.

Jones: There was certainly no more punishment after that day.

Pryor: No, no. They stayed there, and they were still there when the Americans left camp. We were the first to leave.

Jones: Were they still armed?

Pryor: They kept their arms. As far as I know, they still had them. We stayed in our camp. We didn't take off like a bunch of blind dogs in a meathouse--running around the country and looking at what was going on outside camp. We stayed there because "Turtleneck" had told us, "Japanese will receive instructions as to your disposition." So we reasoned that somebody would be coming for us, and it would behoove us to be in one body when they did. We knew it would just be a matter of a very short time, and, hell, most of us thought we could have stood on our head for the time it would be that they would come there.

There's another thing that I would point out that relates to this matter of the respect that one professional military man will receive from another professional military man--one that's trained in the combat arms particularly. When we were first captured and moved into this prison in Serang, Java, our guards there were Japanese. It would be Japanese from front-line units that had been pulled out of the line for what we like to say is "R and R" or "rest and recuperation," you know, for two or three or four days. Their duties then would be to guard this prison where we were. A number of us were

placed in a theater--a native theater--closely adjacent to the prison.

Jones: So you have front-line troops guarding front line-troops.

Pryor: I noted some things there at Serang. There would be ... and how you'd explain it, I don't know. It's just that the subordinates take their cue from their superior. They'd let us out of each cell. There was about thirty to thirty-five of us in a cell that was designed for about ten natives; and there would be three times that number. Sometimes we couldn't all lie down at one time. Somebody would have to sit up out in the passageway near the cell door. We would be permitted out about fifteen minutes a day to exercise around the little compound there. We had a couple of changes of guard, and the officers in charge of the guard ... before they would permit the turnkey to unlock the door--the steel door--and let us out...it was a barred door, not a solid door but a barred door. Before they'd let us out, they'd pull their little ol' Nambu pistol out and get it ready there just like we, by God, were Godzilla or (chuckle) one of the most vicious things that you could ever imagine. Boy, they'd stand there with

that little ol' pistol at the ready before they'd ever let us outside.

Jones: So at least these front-line troops still had credible belief in your potential as fighters.

Pryor: Probably some of them did. We probably looked the part because by then we had several days or even a couple or three or four weeks of growth of beard on our faces. Most all of us were covered with fuel oil, and we looked like that piano there at the very best (gesture).

Jones: And with the Japanese fearing hair--generally they don't have much--probably you almost scared them to death.

Pryor: Well, even though we were emaciated and skinny as a rake, well, they still had some fear. We didn't get much to eat and less to drink. Everything had to be boiled, and we didn't get not more than a pint of water a day per man, and hot water does not quench thirst. The cooking was all done by natives, and they had a way of preparing rice that I've never encountered in any place yet. They would take a section of bamboo--big bamboo, about the diameter of five or six inches--and they'd cut it off above two joints. They'd bore a hole in one end of this joint,

and they would put rice in that up to a certain amount, and then they'd pour water in it; and then they'd drive a plug in the end of it and throw it in the coals. The green bamboo will not burn, but it would set there, and in the heat it would steam. The water inside would steam and cook this rice. When the rice was done, they'd take a machete or bolo and whack the bamboo in two and just lift this whole section of rice out. It was rubbery. It had a rubbery consistency. You could drop it on the concrete, and it would probably bounce--most unpalatable.

Yet we had one change of guards, and there was an officer that came in there in charge. According to his soldiers, he bought from his own personal funds about a little three- or four-ounce loaf of bread baked in a little individual little loaf. It was about this long and about so high (gesture), and it looked just exactly like a little loaf of bread in a little pan.

Jones: So it was about six inches long and maybe four inches high.

Pryor: It would be about four inches long and about three inches high and made out of wheat flour. He bought

one of these for each prisoner in that prison. They were there for three days, and he done that each day for three days.

Jones: Did you ever experience this before or after him?

Pryor: Never before nor since. Why would this one do that?

There's another thing that I would point out in their attitude toward prisoners. Of course, I'm a Baptist, and Baptists along with the Catholics and many of the Methodists and the Mormons believe in missionary work. I take my hat off to the work of many of these Christian missionaries. I have encountered several Japanese and several Koreans that would admit to you privately, "I am a Christian." I dare say that you could not find one example from among them that ever raised his hand to a prisoner.

Jones: So it was almost a feeling of relief if they admitted this in confidence that you wouldn't have anything to fear from them.

Pryor: At the end of the war, we had one Korean soldier with us that had been our guard for ... he was there when we came to that camp, and he was there when I left eighteen months later. We called him "Papa-san." He was older than most of them, and we called

him "Papa-san." He used to tell me, when he used to go out with me to the cattle ... first off, we'd get out there, and he'd want me to sit down there and go over his English with him--correct his English pronunciation. "Airflane"...if it started with a "p," it was an "f." A word that began with "p" he'd pronounce "f"; and if it began with "f," like "fork," it would be "pork" (chuckle). He was Christian, and he knew we called him "Papa-san." He said, "You speak all prisoners. You speak. 'Papa-san' no bash. No man speak." And I know he's right; I know that he never struck a prisoner. He said, "I'm a Christian."

Jones: And this was prevalent for those others who were the same?

Pryor: And in this time of our greatest trial, I guess, when we were first captured in this ... where the officer first bought us the little loaf of bread, there was a three-star Japanese private. He, too, was a combat soldier. We called him "Smiley." He had a mouthful of gold teeth--all these teeth across here (gesture). He'd open his mouth to smile, which he'd smile most of the time, and it looked like the sun coming up in the morning. We called him

"Smiley." The first thing I heard him say...he came to our cell door one day, and he looked in at us in this horrible shape we were in, and he said, "I Christian. I brother have..." and he tried to say "Sacramento Valley." Pretty soon we could begin to assimilate their pidgeon English a little bit better, but it seems he had a brother that was a vegetable farmer in the Sacramento Valley. He said, "Someday war finished, I come America." I hope he made it; I hope he came. He was one of the most compassionate persons that I ever encountered in prison camp.

At nighttime, when he'd be making his rounds on guard, you'd hear a noise at this cell door, and you'd go up and see, and there'd be a tin of rice, maybe a little bit of vegetable soup, on this tin shoved under there. It may be a tin container of water. When we'd get out for these fifteen minutes to exercise in the day, "Smiley" would usually be out there. Even off duty, he'd manage to be somewhere in this compound.

There was a well in this compound with a curb, oh, about two-and-a-half feet above the ground, and it was a well maybe four feet in diameter. Of

course, it had a little structure over there for you to draw water out of a bucket, you know, out of this well. The curbing on it was wide enough that you could sit oil it. “Smiley” used to sit on the curb of this well, and a bunch of prisoners would be released into the compound, and he’d get up and wander off. Then the first prisoner would go over and pass by the curb of the well, and there would be ten cigarettes there on the curb. Those prisoners would go back in, and “Smiley” would be back sitting oil the curb. The next bunch of prisoners would come out, and he’d get up and wander off, and there would be tell cigarettes left oil the curb.

Somewhere it would be a real privilege to shake hands with some person who was dedicated and committed enough to serve the Lord that said, “There’s the product of my work--‘Smiley.’” He was a combat soldier. He’d smelled the burnt powder. But at a time when it could have been detrimental to his own well-being, he was a compassionate, caring personality. You’d find that. It would be a conflict of the general run, but somewhere you have got to believe that the work that these people (missionaries) do is good, whether

it be among the Japanese or whether it be among a people from the jungles of South Africa or the bush of Africa or wherever. When that person hears it and he believes it to begin living it, by thunder, everybody that comes in contact with him is the beneficiary.

Jones: Did you ever wonder what happened to those people like the *gunso*, these people that maybe in the last days you saw? After you'd left, did you hear of anything that happened to them?

Pryor: No, I've not heard of any of them directly. Certainly you wonder about some of them because you have reason to respect many of them. At one time I snickered and laughed at my supposed, I guess, beliefs about the Japanese soldier. It not complimentary. But after I saw the Japanese soldier in action and after I saw them in the tragedy of Burma, I'm going to say ... I have not clarified one thing that I referred to previously. In time I came to know the Japanese expected something of their people that you wouldn't dare subject an American soldier to, and that was particularly notable when we were in Burma. I did refer to the fact that they only had three trucks that could supply the work

camps along that railroad. I would see these Japanese combat forces pass along. They used this construction road as their own means of communication and transport from Bangkok. They used to come in, I guess, by convoy from Japan to Bangkok or from the Philippines to Bangkok, wherever. They would off-load in Bangkok and then go by rail as far as they could up through Thailand. Then they would get in on this construction road for the rest of the way. Then in the mire and swampiness of Burma there, these trucks would just mire down and become totally useless. The Japanese soldiers would load everything on two-wheeled carts, and they were the moving power for those carts. We would hear them come through at all hours of the night, throughout the night and into the wee hours of the morning--two, three and four o'clock in the morning. They'd come along, and you'd hear them along this construction road, which would be immediately adjacent to our huts. They'd be slogging there in that mud and in the incessant rain--miserable and just physically taxed to the point of total, I guess, exhaustion. They'd be pushing these carts with their logistical supplies and so forth on there, manhandling them just by

plain brute manpower and dragging them through all this mud and the mire and the muck that attends the monsoon season in Burma and India. They'd be singing their chant. I don't know the words to it, but it's like the "yo-ho" pole. These coolies, these Chinese coolies, chant that, and they chant it in rhythm to the way the pole will swing so that you soon know how to use that pole, It can be dead weight, or you can make the springiness of the pole work for you. It seems that the spring bears some of the weight. Over in that part of the world ... well, you were in Vietnam, and you saw little kids six years old out there with a little "yo-ho" pole, and they'd have two five-gallon tins of water or something. Two five-gallon tins would be full of something--some weight.

Jones: Incredible weight. And they could Valance it so that between ... and you'd walk...

Pryor: On that little "yo-ho" pole. And a six-year-old child would be carrying that.

Jones: Then I've seen some Marines try to pick it up as dead weight and rather than take the steps on the upbounce--take a step and stop or misstride, just like, "one-two, one-two, one-two"...you can move it

down ... and I've seen some guys try and just collapse under the sheer weight of it because they don't have the rhythm.

Pryor: Well, they were of that nature. There's another sense that I saw in the attitude toward these people that baffles me even yet. I could not hazard an explanation of it. We worked for the engineers; they were building this railroad. They were Japanese. Our guards were Korean that actually worked with us on the work details. But the engineers that supervised the effort and all were Japanese.

One of these trucks could bog down, and if they were in the vicinity of a number of POWs, they would get these POWs to help push them out. If our Japanese saw our people down there pushing on this truck, they lit into them good and made them get the devil off of that truck and get back to the task that they were responsible for.

They had two Caterpillar tractors--a DC4 and a DC6 Caterpillar tractor--up there with front-end winches on them. All we used those winches for was to snake a line around a large boulder on the side of a hill and drag it down there to level ground where we could jump on it with sledge hammers and

pound it and make little ones out of big ones--pound up this for ballast for the railroad. Do you think these guys would go down with that Caterpillar and drag these trucks out of the mire? No, sir.

One group did not cooperate with another group. Now why, I wouldn't even hazard an explanation. Why would they not? Well, you might presume--which would be correct, too--that it would only be a mile down the road until they'd be stuck in the next mud hole, and they'd have to abandon it there. So it is just as well to abandon it right here and get on about their business. They might not make a mile before they'd be bogged down again.

And to see some of the things they'd get away with would be unbelievable, and yet they subscribed to it and believed in it. In the early stages of the railroad, before they ever adapted locomotives to the rails--regular locomotive engines--they used a truck with flanged wheels--a diesel-powered truck--and it would tow two or three cars--light rail cars--behind it. I've seen them unload one of these trucks onto the rails, and they'd put one rail on top of another rail, and over here they'd put another rail from the flat car on top of the other

rail and then roll the truck off. Then you'd figure, "Well, one of these is going to slide off." But it didn't for some reason. I don't know how they got away with it. They didn't stake it to where it would not. They just jury-rigged anything.

Jones: Japanese are certainly...

Pryor: Quite frankly, I admire the Japanese. I worked for everything that I have, and all that we've accumulated we've earned ourself. I started out in the Marines Corps as a private, and I retired as a captain, and I worked for it. I learned my business, and when I had learned my business, I started learning that other guy's business over there, particularly if he was senior to me. I learned his job so that one day when he wasn't there and they said, "Well, who can do this," I could do it. That's how I got ahead. I was commissioned during the Korean War, and I was commissioned because I was doing an officer's job at that time. I'd learned their jobs. There couldn't any of the officers do it, but I had learned to do it. As a master sergeant, I had learned it.

Jones: That only seems fair.

Pryor: We were in the field one time to go through a field

exercise firing the 90-millimeter guns as field artillery in a surface gunnery role. We had just got the batteries in place and ready to begin shooting in the early afternoon, and our S-3 officer ... see, in a field artillery unit, the battalion operations officer is the key. He's the key man. He actually runs the whole battalion in the firing missions. So our S-3 officer ... I was his operations chief. He got an emergency call out there that a son of his had been injured in an accident and had been taken to the Naval hospital there at Camp Lejeune, and so he had to leave. When he left, the colonel said to the executive officer, "We may just as well pack up and go back into base." The "exec" said, "Well, I suppose so." Incidentally, the "exec" is the guy that had enlisted me into the Marine Corps here in Dallas in January of 1939. He's a major now, and so he's our "exec." So I knew him very well in that I worked in the colonel's command post all the time, you know, and whatever we done, I was around his command post as his operations chief. So I said, "Colonel, if you Want to try it, I can shoot the battalion." He said, "Why do you think so?" I said, "Well, let me ask you. Do you think Major

LaPlante could do it?" He said, "Well, yes." I said, "Well, I'm the one that taught Major LaPlante. He didn't know until I taught him." He said, "Well, let's try it then." So we shot for a week, and I was doing the major's job as a master sergeant. So when Korea came along there and they came out with an order to promote meritorious NCOs to second lieutenant, well, I would be "rooted" to second lieutenant (chuckle).

Jones: I understand. I'll never admit to being one, but, whew, that's a humiliating experience-- second lieutenant (chuckle). Okay, let me reflect to maybe as ending this. What we mentioned and talked about before, regardless of the imperial rescripts that tried to make fanatics out of a lot of them, soldierly-like compassion came through even all that when they were instructed to have no compassion whatsoever for prisoners.

Pryor: Well, it would be an isolated incident. Of course, you and I know that the Japanese code--particularly the code of the Samurai--is deeply ingrained within the Japanese people, even those who never, I guess, were of that class. Even those that, let's say, later on were kicked out of the class never denied

their Samurai heritage. Now it’s easier for you and I to understand it than it would be for just the plain American off the street because you and I were Marines. And if there is any military unit in the world that instills in its people the sense that “We are the best. You are a Marine, and you, by thunder, never forget it,” it’s the Marines. This old adage of “there is no such thing as an ex-Marine,” well, there’s over 200 years of history that supports that, and it’s been instilled in every man that went through there, and it’s been instilled forcefully. When the “boondocker” meets the “buck,” you have a tendency to grasp what they’re trying to put across to you. And you know as well as I do that it still goes on; they still spend a lot of time out there getting some size twelve “boondocker” out of some recruit’s hind-end. It’s not degrading; I didn’t feel degraded. I just figured, “By God, if this is going to make me better than what I was, if that’s what it took, well, then I accept it.” And I knew I couldn’t whip the guy that was doing it, anyhow, so he was a better Marine than I was (chuckle).

Jones: (Laughter)

Pryor: But let me say that I've had the opportunity to observe a few of the world's elite forces. I would mention the Scotties. I would pretty much begin with the Scotties. Every highland regiment is a royal regiment, and let me tell you that any English military force that has "royal" in its title is an outfit that you don't want to get mixed up with. They have as much *esprit de corps*, by God, as the U.S. Marine Corps ever thought about having. They have earned it on battlefields through history for hundreds of years, and when you have a unit like that, there's no quit. You tell them to charge hell's fire with a water bucket, and, by God, they'd be doing it! The Gurkhas are another such outfit. The Royal Welsh Fusiliers are that, and the Royal Artillery. You could overrun their guns, but you'll never beat them! You could overrun their guns, and you'll never beat them because they're going to be there. They've got hundreds of years of history, by thunder, that sets them up as better than the next one.

And in the Marine Corps, we believe that. I believe it just as firmly today as the day I left boot camp or any day in between then. I told a young

lad the other morning after you had called ... his teacher called me, and he wanted to know the difference between the Marine Corps and the Navy. He's considering the military forces. I said, "It depends on what you want to do. If you're going in it just to learn a trade that will benefit you, look to the Air Force or the Army. But if you want to go into it for a career and be the best that there can be in the way of a military man, go with the Marine Corps." I have commanded an Army unit at one time in Korea, and I have served with the Air Force--particularly in the last years of my Marine Corps career. I was involved in the air defense of Southern California, and I worked with the Air Force every day. I have lived aboard ship; I know the Navy from one end to the other. But, by gosh, when it comes to looking after the man himself and preparing him to look after himself, the Marine Corps will do it where none of the rest of them do.

I sat in on a secret meeting one time in El Paso, Texas, with a bunch of Army officers. In the aftermath of Korea, they had done all these hearings that resulted in the Uniform Code of Military Justice. They talked about Army troops breaking down

in prison camp--their morale--and this one would rat on that one, and they would not try to escape and not look after each other. It was anything but commendatory. And this guy was an Army major that had given this discourse, and in World War II he had been a Navy doctor and had gone out of that and had gone into the Army Medical Corps then with the rank of major. He was a psychologist. An Army officer at the rear of the room asked him, "Well, you have dragged the Army through all this for all these minutes.'' It was about an hour-and-a-half. He said, "What about the Marines?" And he said, "I'm glad you asked that. I'm glad you asked that question." He said, "There wasn't enough Marines captured in Korea to give any kind of cross-section as to how Marines would conduct themselves in prison camp." He said, "Of the 251 or so that were captured, as far as we could determine, every man conducted himself as he ought to as a prisoner-of-war." He said, "That speaks something for Marine training." He said, '"You go out there with a platoon of soldiers, and if they get cut off, they're lost. You write them off the books. But if you cut off one Marine, he'll find his way back.

He’s trained to find himself a way out of it; he’s trained as an individual to take care of himself.”

Jones: Right.

Pryor: And the Army trains in battalions and regiments.

Jones: And once they are decapitated, they just turn to mush.

Pryor: They just lose all their identity. Today, the Army’s got some crack units. Those they called “Green Berets” and those they call “Rangers” are crack units, and, by God, they are men. They’re trained like we are as Marines, except they go beyond that some.

Since I’ve taught in college, some of my college students have said, “Mr. Pryor, why are the Marines subjected to all that abuse and punishment as they go through training?” I said, “It has its purpose. It’s not to degrade the individual, but it’s to find out if an individual has a breaking point and where is that breaking point. We’ve all got a breaking point somewhere--most of us do have--but is it as such a low level of stress that he’ll fail in a routine mission and jeopardize the entire mission? Or is it such a high point that he’ll give his life to protect his buddies?”

I like to give the example of a Marine that I had with me in Camp Lejeune. I used to count him one of the three sorriest Marines that I had in my unit--I was a first sergeant then--and every time I looked up, there would be something wrong with these three jokers. First off, they went sick call every morning. Before I took over that unit, they were at sick call every morning. The major--the "exec" of the battalion--had sent me out there as first sergeant, and he said, "Sergeant Pryor, I'll be frank with you. You're taking over a battery, and there's a reason for it. When this unit was in Guam, the battery commander of Charlie Battery envisioned himself as a real disciplinarian. And he told the colonel, "Give me all those 'eight balls,' and I'll square 'em away!" He couldn't have squared away Mama Taylor let alone anybody else. He was a sorry officer; he couldn't discipline anything. So they unloaded all those "eight balls," and I wound up with them now as first sergeant. I didn't know where to start in, but I started in with the sick book. I looked at that. I had the charge of quarters bring it over to me the afternoon I went out there, and-I saw the same names there: "Moore, Smith, Baugh

... Moore, Smith, Baugh." Every day that they were to do something in adjacent to the barracks, I'd see "Smith, Moore, Baugh." I went down to sickbay with that, and I said ... we didn't have a doctor, just a chief pharmacist's mate. I said, "Chief, look at this." I said, ''What do you know about that? What do you see?" ''Well," he said, "I see a lot of names that are down here every morning." I said, "Yeah, but you're not going to see them much longer." I said, "These guys are wasting your time, and they're not worth a damned plugged nickel to me." I said, "They're professional goof-offs and gold bricks, and I'm going to put a stop to this. The next time they come down here for sick call, I want you to give them a double dose of castor oil." He said, "Well, I'll do it." That's the last time you see "Smith, Baugh, and Moore" on the sick book (chuckle).

Jones: (Laughter) That's great; that's great.

Pryor: They didn't go. For inspection they'd be fouled up every time. In those years of the late 1940s, we didn't have any money. We were strapped for money more than we are today. And there were no transfers. They couldn't afford to pay mileage and all on transfers, so they just kept everybody on station.

Jones: If I might digress, is there anything that you would like to say about ... did any of your feelings change over the years toward the Japanese?

Pryor: No, no, really not. They didn't abuse me terribly. I was a professional military man, and I know that oftentimes some of the hardships that they imposed on me was the consequence of carrying out their orders. I carried out my orders. You've got a right to question an order; you only have an imposed obligation to carry out a lawful order.

Jones: Lawful order.

Pryor: That's what it is with an incident involving Calley at Mei Lai. Any order that he would have received there is inconsistent with the rules of land warfare, but there's a mitigating circumstance there, too. This was in a declared free fire zone. These people were not supposed to be there, and in being there they were subject to whatever fate befell them. But to willfully destroy-human life like that was inconsistent with the rules for land warfare. Of course, you and I don't know what is in that transcript. We don't know what the results of that investigation proved.

But I know that most generally the Japanese

were carrying out their orders, and some of them were abusive. But they were no more abusive to me than they were to their own people. It's something that is acclimated into them as it is with us.

Jones: It does show consistency.

Pryor: Yes, it's a consistent pattern because they do it to their own people. The *gunso* beat hell out of two people that I knew about. I instigated one case. Here I am, the instigator, and I'm the one that should have been, I guess, the subject of his displeasure.

But then in time ... of course, I was back in Japan later on during Korea. We'd go on "R and R" to Japan. Yet today I'm a great admirer of the Japanese people as a people. They're an industrious and persistent people. That's how I got ahead in the Marine Corps; that's how I've gotten ahead in my education. I would never go to bed before 9:00 in the morning when I was going to school, and oftentimes I would work until 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning before I'd ever shut the books and lie down for a nap. That's why I was able to finish four years of college work at Baylor in two-and-a-half years.

Jones: Whew!

Pryor: Fifty-seven hours in the first calendar year.

Jones: That's incredible!

Pryor: And then I taught a full load of courses at Baylor and took nine hours of graduate studies at the University of Texas working on my doctorate. That makes for some long days and some short nights.

Jones: So in much the same way you're saying the Japanese people have that tenacity.

Pryor: They have that tenacity and that capability of perseverance. I saw it exhibited even in prison camp. Subjecting an American soldier to putting him out there between the shafts of a two-wheel cart and telling him, "Get behind it and push," our people wouldn't do it. They just don't persevere that much anymore. We tight have back in the frontier days when it had to be done, but we don't have to do it today. We think we've got too many easy ways of accomplishing what we want to accomplish. But the Japanese still persevere--individually and as a people. They have risen from the poorest, poorest, poorest of circumstances, and look where the nation is today. It's the dominant economic nation in the world today. You go look at the ten largest

corporations in the world, and seven of them are Japanese.

Jones: A fact.

Pryor: Of the largest banks in the world, by God, six out of ten of them are Japanese. I admire them for their initiative, for being industrious, and, by God, all of them for the most part being hard workers and having a desire to work.

Jones: This will probably be my final question. Do you have now any reservations or grudges as some others who had run into some real bad Koreans? Of course, we're not going to disclaim that officer you'd like to see one more time, the one that bugged out.

Pryor: Well, I'd liked to have seen him then, but today it would be like swatting him with a wet noodle (chuckle) from a physical standpoint.

Jones: Well, I don't think you'd probably know him today.

Pryor: No. I don't hold it in my mind anymore. What is done is done, and that's a long time ago. It was fresh in my mind then, and if he had been around there, I'd like to have seen if he could have done it. He might could have. I was in pretty damn good shape then, myself. I had used an ax for eight months from sunup in the morning to near sundown in the evening, and

at my release I weighed 168 pounds. I was as hard as the concrete out there in that road; I mean, I was one fine physical specimen. And I was strong--exceptionally strong. If you don't think it takes some strength... sometime if you're ever around a blacksmith shop, take a sixteen-pound sledge hammer with a thirty-six-inch handle in it and put it up on an anvil, and then grasp it by the end of the handle and raise it up straight, hold it straight. I could do it, and one Englishman could do it. When I was in Korea...I was all over Korea, from one end of it to the other--well, as far up as Seoul. But in all the cities--Taejon, Taegu, Osan, Suwon, Kimpo, Seoul, Pusan--I consciously looked for people like "Hollywood" and "Buff Head" and "Liver Lips." I can see them. They are just as clear in my mind right now as they were in the darkest days of our captivity.

Jones: Would you actively seek retribution on them if you found them?

Pryor: I don't know whether I would or not. I am certain that I would have reminded him of some of the stress and strain that he had imposed on me at various times, and then, by thunder, if he hadn't have been

properly, let's say, apologetic, I might have just bashed him right down quick, at least once between the horns, to see what would happen (chuckle).

Jones: (Laughter)

Pryor: I don't know that I would have done much more than that, but I think I would have approached him and reminded him that, by thunder, I was now in the place that he was once in, that he is on the other side. But today it doesn't disturb me, and if I ran onto one of them, I wouldn't...all the bitterness is gone; all the rancor is gone; all the desires for revenge or so forth are long buried in the past.

Jones: Well, Mr. Pryor, I appreciate it. Thank you very much for finishing reel number two on our interview for 5 December 1987.

[End of interview]