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MARTIN CHAMBERS

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Date of Interview: April 8, 1982

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved: Martin J. Chambers
(Signature)

Date: April 8-1982

Oral History Collection

Martin Chambers

Interview: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: April 8, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Martin Chambers for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 8, 1982, in Denton, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Chambers in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Chambers was a member of the 26th Brigade, which eventually joined up with the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, which is better known as the "Lost Battalion."

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

Mr. Chambers: I was born in Milam, Texas, or near Milam, on June 7, 1920. I lived my first twenty-one years of life in Sabine County. I went to school at Milam, to the seventh

grade, and then I went to Hemphill through the tenth grade, and then I dropped out because of sickness--my mother and dad. Then I farmed until I got to twenty-one years old, and then I was going to have to go to the service, anyway, so I went and volunteered for my year.

Marcello: So you actually volunteered for the service while you were here in Texas.

Chambers: Yes, yes, at Hemphill, where I then left from to go to the service. Then they carried us to San Antonio, and I was sworn in at San Antonio on July 8, 1941.

Marcello: How did you eventually get to California?

Chambers: They carried us from San Antonio on the 17th of July to the training center in California. I forgot the number of the training battalion. When we finished our thirteen weeks of training, they transferred me across the river right there at Camp Roberts to this 26th Brigade, Headquarters Battery. In less than a month's time, they notified us that we were going to be going to the Philippines.

Marcello: What was your particular function in Headquarters Battery?

Chambers: I was a machine gunner and a machine gun mechanic. They had two guys,..they didn't have any machine guns,..Robert Coffey and myself. We had been to machine gun training school and training in artillery. They needed us in the Headquarers Battery, so that is why we were in that. Whenever they were going to leave Java, they transferred some of our bunch over

into this 131st to replace the men that had went with the Air Force. The Air Force had lost some men, so they were using our artillery guys to replace them. Then they used us out of the Headquarters Battery to replace those men. What was left in Headquarters Battery left and went back to Australia. They said that they made it, but I never have talked to any of them.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs at that particular time, that is, while you were there at Camp Roberts and so on?

Chambers: We weren't keeping up with current events very much. I wasn't, at least, and I think very few of the regular soldiers were. Maybe some of the higher-ups, I am sure, were, but we were more anxious to get our training over and get through with it (chuckle). We wasn't dreaming of war at that time.

Marcello: In other words, all that you were thinking of was getting that one year in and getting out again.

Chambers: Yes, and being that age of life, to get you a job and settle down to where you could make a living. At that time, permanent jobs were few and far between in East Texas--in 1941. I was working on the farm for my uncle for $20 a month, and I always told him that I was the only guy that went into the Army for $21 a month and got a dollar raise and room and board (chuckle).

Marcello: Now you mentioned that while you were at Camp Roberts, you received orders that you were to go to the Philippines. Did you know that you were going to the Philippines? In other words, was it told to you directly that that is where you were going.

Chambers: No, sir. They gave us the address as "PLUM," and we assumed. As far as them saying that we were going to the Philippines, no, I never did hear anyone say that directly. But everybody assumed that we were going to the Philippines.

Marcello: What did you think of the idea of going to the Philippines?

Chambers: Well, being that age, it really didn't bother me. I thought that it would be an experience, you know. They done told us that we was going to be in for two-and-half years instead of a year, and, of course, after the war started, then it would be for the duration. We were already on the way, and we had a little different outlook on it; but there wasn't anything that you could do about it, so wait it out and see what happens. That's the way that we did the whole time, you know.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you found out that, instead of being in for a year, you were going to be in for two-and-half years?

Chambers: I didn't worry about it a whole lot. I thought, "Everybody else is going to have to be in, so why me worry. Suffer just like the rest or whatever." Like I said, at the time I

didn't have an important job, and I wasn't taking a big loss in pay by going to the service like some guys did. I was anxious to get it over with and get me a permanent job and settle down for a lifetime...which I did, but I had to wait five years to do it (chuckle). I went to work for Gulf Oil after the war. I worked for them 33 4/12ths years, and I retired. They gave me disability retirement because of the problems that I was having--respiratory problems in breathing those fumes at the refinery. It was irritating my...I had been to the doctor and to the hospital two or three times in a year, so the doctor finally told me that the best thing I could do was to get away from there. I was close enough to retirement, and I talked to them. They carry you on sick pay for a year, and then it isn't hard to get a retirement from them for disability. Then you don't have to take a cut in your retirement like you would if you took early retirement without...they have a point system, and then at sixty years old, you get full retirement, also. But I was close to it--I was fifty-nine--so I didn't have to take any cut, anyway.

Marcello: Were you married or single at the time that you went into the service?

Chambers: I was single.

Marcello: Would you say that this was true about all of the other people in your unit?

Chambers: Most were single. Some few were married, but most of them was single. I was living at home with my mother and dad and two sisters. My dad was in bad health. After I had already found out I had to go to the Army, I found out that he was in worse health than he told me. He had not been telling me about it, but he was bothered with his heart more and more. I told him that I wouldn't have to go, I imagine, but he didn't want to keep me from going. He said, "You just go ahead and do what you think." I said, "Well, I'll have to go sooner or later, anyway, and I'll do as much good there as I will here working for you for $20 a month. I'll get it over with. If I go someplace and get me a job, I'll be drafted off of that." I went on, and he died...he was buried on August 9, 1945, before the war was over on August 17, 1945. He almost lived until I came back. But I never did come back. From the day that I left to go to the Army, I didn't come back until I got back from overseas.

Marcello: Now I know that the USS Republic left San Francisco on November 21, 1941, and the 26th Brigade was on the Republic. Describe the first portion of that journey from San Francisco to Honolulu.

Chambers: I remember that real well. Some of my friends and I stayed pretty close together at that time, and we left San Francisco that day on the 21st. They cooked cabbage on that ship for supper that night. The guys got sick, and that ship smelled like spoiled cabbage for the rest of the trip to Hawaii. They

finally got it cleaned up a little bit then--the odors kind of left--but it was rough seas, and almost everybody got sick.

Marcello: How about you?

Chambers: I didn't. These friends of mine would send me down to the PX to get something to eat, and they'd stay up on deck where they could "heave." I'd bring it back up there. This friend of mine that wrote the book, Ben Dunn, he was sick. I'd laugh at him and kid him, you know (chuckle). He'd send me after something to eat, and he couldn't eat it, and he'd give it to me; and I'd eat it and I didn't get sick. He was accusing me of staying well just so I could eat the things that they couldn't have (chuckle).

Marcello: Now the Republic got into Honolulu around November 28, 1941. As I recall, the people on board did get some limited liberty on shore. How about you?

Chambers: Yes, sir, I got to go ashore.

Marcello: How long? Do you recall?

Chambers: We went ashore one afternoon and came back. We could have stayed at night, but I didn't care too much for the night life. I was raised up a country boy, and I didn't do a lot of honky-tonk dancing and nightclubing, so I was ready to go back to the ship after I had seen the town for the afternoon. But I saw some of the permanent soldiers there sitting around. They had machine guns in some of these yards around there. I

didn't know why; I didn't ask anyone any questions. I don't suppose they'd have told me, anyway (chuckle).

Marcello: But you did seem to detect that there was somewhat of a war footing in Honolulu.

Chambers: Not really. I didn't think of it as that. I thought that if we were that close to war, you know, somebody needs to let us know. But they didn't. I didn't know whether they were on manuevers or...I never did hear anyone say that really did know. But I thought that we left Hawaii on that Monday, and they bombed it the following Sunday. I think we stayed Saturday night and Sunday, and I didn't even get off of the ship. Then on Monday morning we left bright and early, and I suppose we were headed toward the Philippines or still on that western route. I knew that we were going west. Then after the war started, you could tell that we had taken a more southerly direction, and we wound up at the Fiji Islands and refueled and went on to Brisbane, Australia.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute here. Now when you left Honolulu, you were part of a convoy, were you not? In other words, the Republic had been joined by some other ships.

Chambers: Yes. We had a cruiser, the Pensacola, and we had a smaller ship with us part of the time, maybe all of the time. It was small enough to be a sub chaser. We had a couple of freighters with us, and it looked like they was loaded with some lumber, and one of them had some planes on it, sitting up on the deck.

What they had down in the deck, I don't know.

Marcello: You were somewhere west of Honolulu, of course, when you received the news of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Describe for me how you heard the news and what your reaction was to it when you did hear it.

Chambers: We woke up, and we were sitting on our bunks. We were kind of enjoying the smooth sailing compared to getting to Hawaii. It was a beautiful sun-shiney morning, and our first sergeant came down in the hold or whatever you call it, and he hollered for our attention. He told us that the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor. He said, "So far war has not been declared. We don't know, but we are sure that it will be. I am just passing the word on to you that I got."

So we just kind of sat tight. We weren't afraid. We didn't know the damage that they had done. We knew that they had sunk some shipping, but we didn't know how much. I was told all my life how tough the United States was, so it didn't bother me, really. It wasn't going to take long to take care of them Japs.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese--at that time--what kind of a person did you conjure up in your own mind?

Chambers: Well, I had seen Japanese and Chinese, and I knew about what to expect, but I didn't know anything about their uniforms or nothing, what they looked like.

Marcello: But you did think that this was going to be a pretty short war.

Chambers: Oh, yes, I didn't think that there would be any doubt about that. I just thought, "Well, we'll have that over, and I'll still have some time to spend in the service to finish out that two-and-a-half years." But it sure didn't work out like that.

Marcello: What actions did the Republic and the rest of the ships in the convoy take after the news of the Pearl Harbor attack was received?

Chambers: They changed courses, and I believe that they might have started their kind of zigzagging to throw the sound systems off--they told me.

We didn't know exactly where we were going then. They still didn't tell us, but word got out that we had orders to come back to San Francisco, but the captain of the ship took it on his own to carry us down to Australia. That's the story that was told to us, I don't know how official that was, either. That kind of got back to us through the grapevine. Anyway, he didn't let them know where he was or where he was going on account of the Japanese would try to find us out there and sink us. The fact of the business is that some of the guys said it had been reported that the USS Republic was sunk, and we didn't ever see a Jap or nothing out there. We didn't see any then. You couldn't tell that there

was a war going on anywhere, as far as we are concerned, other than what we heard.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that after you received the news of the Pearl Harbor attack, you did alter your course, and you eventually ended up in the Fiji Islands. What happened when you got to the Fijis?

Chambers: We didn't go ashore there. We tied up to the docks and took on some fuel, and I don't recall whether we stayed all night there or if we left in a few hours. We might have spent the night there and then left the next day. I wouldn't remember what date that was, either. We got to Brisbane, Australia, on about the 20th or 21st--something like that--of December.

Marcello: Of 1941?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Describe what happens when you get to Brisbane. In other words, where did you go, and what did you do?

Chambers: We got into the dock and tied up, and they was taking us off the ship. They said that we would probably stay there. They didn't know at the time. They carried us out to a racetrack, and they had some tents up. We had these big buildings there that we set our kitchen up in, but we camped in the tents.

After five days, they told us to go and get ready, that they were going to put us back on the ship. So we went and got on this Dutch ship. They came down and told us at one time to pack up our gear and get ready to get off before we ever did

leave, and then after a while they called that off or didn't say anything else. In a little bit, they cranked up and took off, and we were still on there. So they moved around to Port Darwin.

Marcello: Before we get to that point, let's go back and talk a little bit about your stay in Brisbane. When you got off the ship the first time, that is, on December 21, 1941, did you also off-load all of your equipment and so on, too?

Chambers: Off of the Republic, yes, sir. I suppose that they unloaded guns and stuff there--I'm sure that they did--because we put them on that Dutch ship. Of course, I didn't have anything go do with the loading and unloading because we were in the headquarters outfit.

Marcello: Did you undergo any additional training while you were in Brisbane?

Chambers: No, sir,

Marcello: How did you spend your time?

Chambers: Going to town and back on the street cars. When you got to town...we were the first American soldiers to ever land in Australia. The Australian soldiers were overseas fighting, so the Australian people had never met enough Americans to spoil their attitudes by then, and we were treated like kings. They wanted to wine you and dine you and stay all night and eat and go to dances and everything else, if you would. They was really entertaining. Oh, you just had to almost embarrass

one if you went to a pub there. They'd want you to drink beer whenever you had too much already. Of course, we didn't know any of them, but we had on our uniforms, and they knew that we were American soldiers. They really did treat us nice. The Australians, we found out, were nice people, anyway. We got along good with them even in POW camp.

Marcello: Now I do know in some cases, the American soldiers were invited into the Australian homes for Christmas. How about you?

Chambers: Yes, I was invited, but I was on KP and didn't get to make it (chuckle). I wasn't "in" too good with the sergeant making out the schedule. His buddies got to go to town, but us new guys that had just got into the 26th Brigade all pretty well got KP duty. He had a bunch of regular Army people that had come back to the 26th Brigade Headquarters. They had been to Hawaii, and they had come back to Camp Roberts. They hadn't been back too long before they got orders to go back, and most of them...some few of them were Selective Service, but most were regular Army...which was a bunch of nice guys, too. The regular Army soldiers were just a little different breed. Some of them, you know, were taking pride in being a good soldier, and it made a good outfit. Since you was going to be in there, anyway, you might as well be a good soldier. You would get along a whole lot better if you did (chuckle).

Marcello: So you spent Christmas of 1941 on KP duty.

Chambers: In Brisbane, Australia.

Marcello: Now by this time, had you yet stuck up any acquaintance with any of the people out of the 131st Field Artillery?

Chambers: Some few, yes, sir. I met them and talked to them about how I got out there in California. They were from Brownwood, I believe, and they were telling about the Louisiana manuevers, and that was right down close to where I was raised, between Milam and the Sabine River. I knew about all of the territory where they were manuevering in swamps and such things. I talked to them all about that, but I didn't get to buddy with any of them until I was transferred over into it. Then I kind of bunked with some of them then. Of course, we still had our guys from the 26th Brigade. I was in D Battery, and the other guys were in the other batteries. But after we were captured, it really didn't make any difference. They didn't try to keep them separate; they put them all in one.

Marcello: Okay, on December 28, 1941, you leave Brisbane aboard a Dutch motor transport, the Bloemfontein. Did you know where you were going at that point?

Chambers: No. Somebody said that the Dutch said that we were going to the Dutch Indies, but it wasn't anything official. They were just rumors that leaked out, and since it was a Dutch ship, we believed that. We thought that we were going to the Dutch Indies. We didn't know if we were going to Java or Sumatra or Borneo or what, and we got around Port Darwin, and they

dropped anchor, and they talked about taking us off there and leaving us in Australia. We stood there three or four days, I believe, and they raised up the anchor and took off again. They didn't tell us where we were going. We didn't know if we were going in to unload or heading on out. But, sure enough, we went on back out and started up through the islands, the little ol' islands and stuff, all the way from Darwin to Java.

Marcello: I guess that the Bloemfontein was a much faster ship than the old Republic, wasn't it.

Chambers: Some faster because it was smaller, but it wasn't no speedy ship at all. I suppose it was some faster but not a whole lot.

Marcello: You mentioned that you passed through Port Darwin on this particular leg of your journey. I understand that Port Darwin wasn't exactly a very pleasant place.

Chambers: Well, we didn't even get close to the shore there. We were way out. You could see some buildings on the shore, but they were so far away until we really couldn't tell anything about what was going on. You couldn't even tell if there was any movement on the land. They said that it was pretty thinly populated, especially out of the city there.

Marcello: Did you have any submarine scares on this particular portion of your journey?

Chambers: After we got to Java,we did. I didn't see it, but some of the

guys...what they did, they had us standing guard on the front end of the ship--I did--and some of the guys were on the back end, on the sides--first one thing and then another. But most of the men that were standing guard were machine gunners, and they gave us a Browning Automatic Rifle to stand guard with. I don't know what they thought we would do shooting a ship with a BAR, but, anyway, some of the guys that we relieved told us that they had seen a torpedoe go by, and it had been reported on the little intercom. They had just stretched out some field artillery telephones on the deck of the ship--what they had hooked up--and somebody had called and said that they had saw one going by. I didn't hear it on the phone, but somebody that talked to the guy who heard the report on the phone told me about it. I didn't never see any, but I was glad when we got off (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, you do get off of the Bloemfontein in Surabaja, Java. What happens at that point? Where do you go, and how do you get there?

Chambers: They let us off of the ship, and we went to a little railroad station. I don't remember how we got from where we got off the ship to the railroad station. Maybe it was right there, but, anyway, they put us on a little train. I suppose there was about fifty miles out to this little town of Malang. They had a little airport there, and they had us artillerymen servicing those planes. Of course, me being a machine gunner

and a machine gun mechanic, they had a friend of mine and me...when the bombers would land, it was our job to go and clean the guns and make sure that they worked. We didn't fire them, but we would make sure that they would work, and we would replenish the ammunition boxes.

Marcello: Okay, so you go from Surabaja to this Dutch airfield, which was known as Singosari, isn't that correct?

Chambers: Yes. I had forgot it, but Singosari...I remember it now.

Marcello: Describe what Singosari looked like from a physical standpoint. In other words, if you and I were to be at the main gate leading into the base, what did it look like? Take me on an imaginary tour of Singosari.

Chambers: When you went into the main gate, you would go into the barracks, and then there were roads leaving out on the other side of the barracks from a motor pool. The motor pool went out into the airfields, and on the other side of the airfield, I don't remember if there was one or two hangars. It seems like it was two, but I know that there was one for sure. Then past that was the coconut trees, groves. Around the main gate, on the outside of the perimeter was a little farm of tapioca, some corn--not much corn, but some--and coconut trees. They didn't waste any land. They used it all if it wasn't a ditch or something. It was possible that something was growing there, except on this airport. The barracks were built fairly close together, and out at the runways...evidently,

it wasn't as big a runway as they had because some of those planes would come in, and...it was during monsoon season because it rained nearly every afternoon. The new B-17E's would come in, and the ground was wet on them gravel runways. Some would slide off the end and bend the propellers up. One had done that and couldn't move. Another one came in and landed, and he slid into him and chewed the tail off of it. Two planes were ruined right there that had never been used--fresh from the States.

Marcello: This base did not have concrete runways.

Chambers: No, sir, not all of the way, anyhow. To my recollection, they didn't have any concrete.

Marcello: What were your barracks like on the inside?

Chambers: They were stucco buildings. They were build out of tile and stucco, and they had a tile roof on them.

Marcello: What were they like on the inside?

Chambers: They were just a buildings, that's all--just a stucco building--and it would be a hall down the center of it. There would be a partition, and you'd have three or four bunks, three or four guys, in this little partition here. The hall doesn't have any doors on it. Then the bathroom and the toilets were in the end of the building. They didn't have any commodes like we did. It was all different. The Dutch Army didn't have toilet paper. You had a little water faucet there for cleaning up (chuckle).

Marcello: How much contact did you have with the Dutch here?

Chambers: We were around the Dutch quite a bit. We had some interpreters. We didn't work directly with them, other than the interpreter. Of course, he was with the officers, more or less. If they had anything to tell us...the interpreter...he was...I guess that he was staying with our officers in our officers' quarters. I forget what his name was, but he stayed with us even after we left the camp. But as far as being with a bunch of Dutchmen, we didn't have a whole lot to do with the Dutch until we were captured.

Marcello: What were your impressions of the Dutch?

Chambers: I think that the Dutch were inexperienced, as far as work and making their own decisions. It seemed to be a different breed of people, you know. They treated us good, except they had leaders...I suppose that they handled their responsibilities real well. It looked like somebody knew what they were doing for the good of the country.

The natives were a different class of people, but some of the Dutch were good, and some of them...I don't know...just a different language that we wouldn't understand, and there wasn't all that many there. There was more of the Javanese, the higher class Javanese...there was more of them that could speak English, and better English, than the real white Dutch. That was kind of funny, but they did.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that when you got to Singosari, one of the

functions of the unit was to service the B-17's, I assume, therefore, that the 19th Bomb Group was already there when your unit arrived.

Chambers: Yes, sir, They had some B-24's and B-17's, and we understood... well, the guy that was in the Air Force was telling us that they couldn't bring their ground crews with them. That was something else that we didn't hear officially, but they told us. We were sent there for two purposes: one was to scatter us out on this island to make it look like a lot of Americans were on the island and get the rumor out to the Japs that we had a lot of Americans there; and the other reason why we were there was to kind of work as the ground force for the Air Force, to service the planes and load the bombs.

Those guys were flying two missions a day. At one time, I think we had about twelve planes, and then they caught some of them on the ground. And some..,like, if they overran the runway, they would mess them up when they landed. I think that they were down to four or five at one time. It might have been more than that when we left. They left and we left, too. That was in the latter part of February, but I don't know the date.

Marcello: Now when was it that you transferred over into the 131st Field Artillery? Was it sometime during this period?

Chambers: That was just a day or two before we left this Camp Singosari,

Marcello: Okay, let's hold that experience until we talk about a few

more things then. On February 3, 1942, the first air attack occurred. Had any preparations been made prior to that time for the eventuality of an air attack?

Chambers: They had some holes dug around in the camp and in the corners of the camp. Of course, we were still in the 26th Brigade. In the firing batteries, they had set up some of the 75-millimeter guns out on the edge in case of airplanes. They fired those field guns on the Japanese on February 3 when they came in.

Marcello: Describe that first raid as best as you can remember it.

Chambers: We were in the barracks, and the alarm went off. We had been told that with the system that the Dutch had, it would be impossible: "Don't get excited if the air raid alarm sounds because you will have plenty of time to get into your hiding places."

I don't believe that the air raid alarm went off. We heard some planes, and we walked out and looked up. We thought that maybe we were getting some more planes in, which we were glad to see. About that time we started seeing them peeling off, and you could see that red sun on the side. They came in and began strafing, so we didn't have time to get back and get into our holes. They had a little ol' concrete table up and built into the corner there, so I got under that. Some of the guys in the outfit just laid down on the floor.

They didn't bomb the barracks, or they didn't strafe the

barracks. They didn't stay all that long. I believe that it was twenty-seven of them fighter planes.

Marcello: These were all fighter planes that were coming in, and they were strafing rather than bombing.

Chambers: Yes. They might have had a little dive-bomber or something that dropped a bomb. I don't believe that they had many bombs, though. I think that mostly it was just strafing.

Marcello: How long did this first attack last?

Chambers: Oh, I would say ten or fifteen minutes.

Marcello: Were you scared?

Chambers: You bet! You bet (chuckle)! Yes, sir, I admit that I was scared. Well, I wasn't all that scared because it happened so sudden that you really got scared after it was all over. Even up until they up and started shooting, I couldn't believe that they got in there like that, as much as the Dutch had assured us that with the system that they had, that they couldn't get in without them detecting them. But they did.

Marcello: Approximately how many raids did you have altogether there before you left?

Chambers: I believe that they came back on the 7th or the 10th. I forget which. I believe that we had maybe four altogether before we left there.

Marcello: Now on some of these raids, you were subjected to bombing, were you not?

Chambers: Yes, they did bomb.

Marcello: Describe what the bombing raids were like.

Chambers: Well, they came over and circled, and they had those twin-engine bombers. We could hear the bombs fall. They didn't drop all that many bombs, but they had spotted these guns--or one of them, for sure--and they dropped a bomb close to it. I don't believe that they turned it over. I remember that one of the corporals on that gun said that he had always heard that a bomb never hits in the same place. He said he started to go and get in that crater while they were still circling, but he didn't. He went on down farther away from that gun. They came back, and he said they dropped another one, and it hit right in that hole (chuckle). They fired at the Japs with those guns. Those artillery shells was making some fuss, I know that. They exploded in the air, and these were pretty big antiaircraft guns. I don't know how they got the word out, but they said that the Japanese had reported that the Americans had some kind of a new antiaircraft gun at Singosari.

Marcello: What did you do during these raids?

Chambers: We would take off out of camp, and they had a big deep ditch down an old road, I suppose, that was just washed out. It headed up right at the camp, and that ol' ditch was as deep as this room, and as wide, too, and we would go down in it and maybe get into a little pocket on the side of it that had

washed out or something. We didn't have too much of a routine to do. When the alarm went off, you would just pick out the hole that you could find, you know, depending on where you were.

I know that one time we were caught out at the airport, at the hangar, and we just run out in the woods. We couldn't find a hole, and them Japs strafed down in there and strafed out in the woods close to us. We had an ol' sergeant with us there, and I forget his name. It might have been Sergeant Jones, I believe. They strafed and they cut one of them coconuts off the coconut tree, and it fell close to him. He said he just laid there with his eyes shut, his face on the ground, and he said that he knew that it was a bomb, but nothing had gone off. Finally...he saw that it wasn't going to go off, so he raised up and looked over there, and there was a big ol' green old coconut laying about fifteen feet from him (chuckle).

Marcello: Now after that first raid, did you normally have sufficient warning as to when one of these attacks was going to occur?

Chambers: I believe that we did have warnings from there on. I don't think that we ever did have them sneak in like that. To my recollection, we didn't. I think we were warned the rest of the time after then. It just so happened at that time. I don't know how they came in without the warning. But from there on, we did; and a lot of times we had a warning, and

nothing would show up, you know. They were somewhere else on the island.

Marcello: Would these attacks normally occur at the same time of the day, or would that vary?

Chambers: It would vary. We had some in the morning and some in the afternoon.

Marcello: How much damage was done to the base in total as a result of these raids?

Chambers: Other than the planes...now some of the planes that they burned up were crippled, and the pilot never would have been able to get back up into the air to begin with, anyway, because they were damaged. That was why they were setting there. Probably they would have been out on a raid...well, it might not. That's just mere speculation, but they had been sitting there. I know a B-24 was sitting there one time, and they came in and strafed, and they set it afire. It was fully loaded with bombs and machine gun ammo. Something was wrong with it, and they didn't fly it. It had been sitting there two or three days, and they decided not to fly it after it was loaded and ready to go. I say "ready to go," but I'm talking about loaded. Something was wrong with it that it didn't fly. They set that afire with their machine guns, and they had some kind of explosive bullets or maybe tracers--I don't know--but it started a fire, and it was some fire. If it had not been for the plane burning, it would have

been some of the most beautiful fireworks that you ever had seen. That thing had all those tracers in there and ammo boxes, and the bombs were hot when they blew up. They didn't do as much exploding, I don't believe, as they would have if the fuse had been set off. Because it was hot, you know, it just maybe blowed out the side. They had a blow-out, and that ammo and stuff would go up, and it was just all kinds of fireworks and colors from the tracers, you know, blue and red and green. It was a shame to see the thing burning because we needed it (chuckle).

Marcello: During this period, were you still getting your three square meals a day?

Chambers: Yes, sir. If you didn't get your meal at camp, well, then it was your fault. I don't think that they had a very good routine then because they didn't know when...everybody would have a job. They were trying to keep the planes serviced, and if they had a plane in to load or something, we finished what we were doing to it, maybe, before we went to eat. But they weren't making us do it. We were trying to do it because we wanted to, you know. No more than we had sacrificing a meal wouldn't hurt you to make sure that the plane would be taken care of.

I don't remember a time of not having food available when I wanted to eat. I know some of the guys were in the kitchen eating chicken one time...and ol' Fred Grass was from California,

and he liked to eat. He just kept on eating. He got a big handful of chicken and kept on eating. Them Japs came over strafing, and he picked up his rifle and shot back at them, you know. He wasn't scared of anything, ol' Fred wasn't. He said, "Well, that's what we came over here for, is to fight!" (chuckle)

Marcello: Now you mentioned that just prior to the Japanese landing and the evacuation of the 19th Bomb Group, you were transferred into the 131st Field Artillery. Describe how this took place.

Chambers: They told us that they were going to take these men and transfer them into the 131st. They said, "When we call out your name, here are the men that will go to Service Battery, Headquarters and Service Battery." We were replacements, depending on how many replacements they needed, you know. So you would pack up your gear and go with the sergeant. He would take you, and you would go to the hut that his battery was camped in.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were to serve as replacements. What had happened to the men that you were replacing?

Chambers: The men that we replaced...the Air Force had asked for some people, and if anybody wanted to volunteer, they needed somebody like a machine-gunner. I think a machine-gunner or two had got wounded, and I guess that some had got sick--first one thing and then another. I know one or two that got wounded, but not very many. I think that one of them was

a tail-gunner, and some shrapnel or bullets hit and wounded one of them. I don't believe that he died, but I think he had a leg that was in mighty bad shape when they came in. Just various reasons like that was why they took the artillerymen and replaced them. Most of the men that went into the Air Force to replace them was going in as a gunner, a machine-gunner, on a plane. As far as I know, I think that's all that they used. They didn't have anybody that knew anything about working on an airplane that they hadn't learned right there. Of course, we helped to change motors. I didn't too much of it, but some of the guys did. We changed motors. They had a sergeant there, an Air Force officer or somebody, showing them how to do it. In this big ol' hangar, they were changing motors and doing all kinds of repair work.

Marcello: What was your reaction to being transferred into D Battery of the 131st Field Artillery?

Chambers: Well, I had already talked to a sergeant over there, and he was asking me one day why I didn't transfer over because this 131st was an ol' Texas National Guard outfit. He said, "Why don't you just transfer over in our outfit?" I said, "Well, I might do it, but I'll talk to my commanding officer about it." I was kind of thinking that I might ask for a transfer because I knew that a lot of the guys was from Texas--a lot more than was in the 26th Brigade Headquarters Battery--

but I was satisfied with my outfit. I liked the 26th Brigade. We had a bunch of good guys in there, too. But I had done got acquainted with more of them, even though they were from some other state, than I was with the Texas outfit.

Marcello: What kind of reception did these Texas guys give you when you transferred over into D Battery?

Chambers: Oh, it was fine. They were glad to have me over there. It really didn't make that much difference to me because we were around them a lot, anyhow. We were seeing them a lot. The 26th Brigade was one battery, and, of course, they had all of these several batteries, Service and Headquarters and four or five firing batteries. I guess it must have been six.

Marcello: Now the 19th Bomb Group evacuated on February 27, 1942. What were your feelings when you found out that they were leaving and you were having to stay?

Chambers: Well, I kind of felt like that we probably would leave soon, too, sooner or later. I felt like we would be leaving, also, but I don't know what the top officers thought. They might have known that we weren't.

Marcello: So at this point, you had no idea as to how desperate your situation was there on Java.

Chambers: No, sir. We really didn't know. We heard the Air Force saying, "Now they have a big convoy out here in the Makassar

Strait, and what little navy that the Australians and the Americans and everybody have, they kind of got it hemmed up a little bit, and we are bombing it." I thought that those guys were just kind of bragging--until we were on a Jap ship and they bombed it. Then I felt, "They sure wasn't lying about that stuff that they were sinking," because they convinced us.

Marcello: On February 28, 1942, the Japanese land at night, and I think the next day Singosari was evacuated by the troops that were there. What happens at that point? What do you do?

Chambers: They told us to pack everything that we wanted to leave in our lockers and stack our lockers in a building there. Everything that we wanted to take with us, we were to put in your camping bag. We were going to to up on the other end of the island because the Japanese had landed up there.

Marcello: What did you take with you?

Chambers: I just took my bedroll. I don't remember having anything except my bedroll and my rifle.

Marcello: How about your mess gear and things of that nature?

Chambers: We had that. That was part of your camping stuff, too. We were using that all of the time, anyway, in the camp. We didn't have a mess hall. We would just go down by the kitchen and take your mess gear.

Marcello: How about extra clothing?

Chambers: We would take some of your extra clothing. Well, we took practically all of our clothing.

Marcello: And what did you have, in terms of clothing, that you took with you?

Chambers: I think I had about three suits of khakis.

Marcello: How about shoes?

Chambers: I had one pair of shoes that I took.

Marcello: One pair plus the one pair that you were wearing?

Chambers: I took one pair, and I left one pair in my footlocker.

Marcello: So the only pair of shoes that you had was the ones that you were wearing.

Chambers: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, now what happens when you leave the base? What do you do?

Chambers: We get into the truck, and they told us that we were going to the other end of the island. We would ride at daytime. We'd camp, and then we'd eat. Then we'd load up and travel at night with the least amount of light. We weren't very well-informed about how far it was to where the Japanese were or what.

We got up to Bandung, and they carried us out to a rubber plantation, and we camped there two or three days. Then we moved over to another plantation and camped.

I think by that time they had called us in and told us that we couldn't get off of the island, that the Dutch

wasn't going to give us any more supplies because they had given the island up to the Japanese. Of course, we didn't have much to fight with to start with. We had one bob-tailed truck that held our artillery ammunition and rifle ammunition. All of our ammunition was on one bob-tailed truck. The firing batteries went up, and...of course, I wasn't assigned to any gun crew or nothing like that. I was a machine gunner, but they had really never assigned me to a machine gun. They had a machine gun mounted on the truck, in the convoy with that machine gun. They got this .50-caliber machine gun off of an airplane and mounted it on this truck. We didn't know how to look for a Jap or what.

Marcello: So during this period, then, that is, from the time you left Singosari until the capture, you were essentially just moving around constantly?

Chambers: Moving up north to the other end of the island. I assume that might have been it a little bit.

Marcello: What were your feelings about the possibilities of going into combat against the Japanese?

Chambers: I didn't really think too much about it because I wasn't on the gun crew, and I couldn't see how we could do a whole lot of fighting with what we had. Then they sent this E Battery down in another direction, and we didn't even know where they were--I didn't. Maybe some of the officers knew where they

went.

Anyhow, we went up and fired four hundred rounds of that ammunition. I didn't go up to the front and do that. I didn't get any firing at all, other than in the air raids. We saw the Japs bombing places there in Bandung. They came over, and I believe that they had nine of those bombers, and I believe two P-40's got after them, and they were giving them bombers heck. In a minute those bombers turned and went out and dropped their bombs out in the hills and got the heck out of there. There were two P-40's, and...they didn't have any fighter planes to protect them, you know.

Marcello: Now during this period, then, you personally did not come into any contact with Japanese?

Chambers: Not at all.

Marcello: And I suspect that you didn't see any until the surrender occurred.

Chambers: That's right. They told us to take our guns and leave them at this here racetrack. The story goes that one of the gunner lieutenants, Lieutenant Schmid, was going to blow the gun up. He said, "Well, that's the first thing they teach you in the artillery, is how to blow your gun up." And I understand that one of the old majors gave him a direct order not to blow that gun up. I don't know if that was some kind of an agreement that they had done with the Japanese or made with them or the Japanese requested that or what. Now we did drain

the oil out of some new cars and burned the motor up in them. They run them until they wouldn't even turn over anymore. Why they didn't destroy them field guns, I don't know.

Marcello: Now the surrender occurred on March 8, 1942. Describe how you got the word and what your reaction was when you heard the news.

Chambers: We had a Captain Fitszimmons. I don't know now what battery he was captain of. They called us all in, and the officers and all the men ganged around. There wasn't a call for any formation. We all just ganged around like it was a camp or something, you know. They hollered that they wanted our attention, and they told us that the Dutch had surrendered the island. They just speculated as to what would happen. They said, "We don't know what will happen. We're to sit here and then go to this racetrack or stay here until the Japanese come and tell us what to do." We were in a bamboo thicket there, and we stayed there a day or two or three, and the Japanese came and told us to go to a racetrack.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard that the island had surrendered and you knew that you were about to become a prisoner-of-war?

Chambers: Well, I told this guy that wrote the book, Ben Dunn, "Well, they might get everybody else's rifle, but they ain't getting mine." There was a little ol' branch out there, and the

water wasn't but about two or three inches deep, so I took my rifle out there--and he did his, too--and laid it down and stood on it until it bogged down about knee-deep (chuckle).

Anyhow, then they loaded us on trucks, and I don't know... we just sat to wait and see. Our officers had told us that they might just let us run loose there on the island and take care of yourself the best you can, or they might have some work for us to do or what.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any rumors that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Chambers: We had heard that. Of course, you can hear everything, you know, in the service. You could hear somebody say that they weren't going to take us alive. We heard more about that after we were captured. They didn't start off too awful bad.

Marcello: Did you ever give any thoughts to heading for the hills with the hope of eventually getting off the island? And why didn't you?

Chambers: Some of the men did. A friend of mine asked me to go along with them, that two or three of them were getting together to go. I told him, "Well, I might as well stay with the biggest gang." I said, "I wouldn't know where to go, and if we get down there on the beach, and there wouldn't be but four or five, we couldn't get off. There wouldn't be nobody down there to pick you up. You've got no way of contacting a

ship or anything." "I said, I think that since they know where you're at, you could get off out there, too, and they might just decide to shoot you. They wouldn't want to mess with four or five." Well, they said they were going to try it, anyway. They did but they came back. They got to the coast, and they said that there was nothing to leave on, so they came back. Then I was glad that I didn't go.

Marcello: So what did the majority of the men do with their weapons?

Chambers: They stacked them up, and they turned them over to the Japanese. They just left them all in a pile there at that racetrack.

Marcello: Okay, you mentioned that from the point where you received the word of the surrender, you proceeded to this racetrack, which was at Garoet, as I recall.

Chambers: Yes, I believe that that's the name of it. I couldn't remember that, either.

Marcello: Now what happens, then, when you get to Garoet?

Chambers: We stay there, and they come in, and they tell us to load up in our trucks, and they carried us to...I believe they carried us to a railroad station. They put us on a little ol' train, and they carried us to Batavia.

Marcello: Now you did not go to a tea plantation at this time?

Chambers: Yes, we sure did. We sure did. We went to a tea plantation, and we stopped and camped at it for a while.

Marcello: Okay, when you got to Garoet, did you have any contact with

the Japanese here, that is, you and your buddies?

Chambers: They came into the camp and talked with the officers, and maybe a Dutch interpreter or somebody,..I don't think that we had any Americans that could talk Japanese.

Marcello: So, in other words, the Japanese did not come into this racetrack here at Garoet and search the troops or anything of that nature for weapons or contraband material or anything of that nature.

Chambers: I don't recall them doing that. If they did, I don't remember them doing it. There might have been some that came through and looked, but I don't recall them doing that.

Marcello: So what did you do while you were there at Garoet?

Chambers: We just more or less camped and waited until the Japanese came in. One day a Jap officer came in and told us to...I guess that's when we moved to the tea plantation. We moved up there, and we still didn't see too many Japanese.

Marcello: What did you do up at the tea plantation?

Chambers: We didn't do too much of anything, as I recall. I don't believe we worked too much up there, either. They might have come in and got some work parties and carried them out, but I don't think I had any details or any kind of work there. I don't think that I did any work until we went to Batavia.

Marcello: Okay, so all this time, you're still using your own vehicles. Is that correct?

Chambers: Yes. Of course, we wasn't going too far in them. I guess they might have been going to get some supplies. They had orders where to go and pick it up or whatever. They didn't take all of our food away from us immediately, so we were still eating some of the things that we had.

Marcello: How long did you stay at Garoet, and then how long did you stay at the tea plantation? Again, you may have to estimate these times.

Chambers: I'd just have to guess at that. I don't know. It wasn't too long--just two or three days at the racetrack, and then I'd say about the same amount of time at the tea plantation. It wasn't too long at either place.

Marcello: From the tea plantation, you go into your first POW camp, and this is at Tandjong Priok, which is near Batavia. I guess that Tandjong Priok was the port city for Batavia.

Chambers: Yes. That camp was fenced up all of a sudden. Like you say, that was the first camp that we went in.

Marcello: Now did you go from the tea plantation to Tandjong Priok in your trucks?

Chambers: I believe that we went on a train. The group that I went with went on a train.

Marcello: Was there anything out of the ordinary when you got on this train to go to Tandjong Priok?

Chambers: Not to my recollection.

Marcello: Do you have any contact with Japanese troops when you go

on this train?

Chambers: We had some guards--we sure did--on the train.

Marcello: Describe what they looked like at that time.

Chambers: They looked just like you see them on television--a little ol' guy running around hollering. We didn't know any Japanese. We didn't know what they were talking about. They would be yelling and hollering at each other. They were funny people. They didn't seem to be afraid of us. They seemed to trust us as much as they did their own people. If one wanted to get up in the truck or something and he was having trouble, he'd want you go hold his gun while he climbed aboard. He'd hand his rifle up to you because he'd have to have both his hands to help himself up. I seen that happen lots of times. We hadn't been prisoners long when they started doing things like this.

Marcello: What did their uniforms look like?

Chambers: They looked like an old World War I uniform, with ol' wrapped leggings, you know, and those cotton shirts. They was cotton, but they had canvas britches, you know, that heavy ducking. When the war first started, they were pretty decent clothes, as far as not being ragged, but as the war got older and older, you could tell that they were having trouble because their uniforms got to being torn and patched and ragged.

Marcello: Now were they harrassing the prisoners physically during this

train ride?

Chambers: Not where I was. We'd stop at a station, and when we got off the train...I know at one place...I don't know if that was at Batavia or not, but when we got off of the train, they had some Japs there...of course, guys my height, you know, well, they really...they felt like they had took the whole world because they took a guy my size. I was 6' 3", and, boy, they just were not used to seeing anything like that. They thought that they were really tough.

Marcello: So are you saying that they would seem to especially pick on bigger men?

Chambers: They definitely did that. You bet! If they got mad and they wanted to slap somebody, I was one of the first ones to get it, you know. They took great pride in slapping on the taller boys--no doubt about that.

Marcello: Now when did this occur?

Chambers: The first time that I was slapped was in that Batavia camp.

Marcello: At Tandjong Priok?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: We'll talk about that in a minute then. Describe what Tandjong Priok looked like from a physical standpoint. Again, take me on a imaginary tour of Tandjong Priok.

Chambers: It was an army camp, and they had taken...they had porches, stucco buildings with tile roofs. They put prisoners in the buildings. As long as anyone wanted to stay in there...

you could sleep out on the porch.

Marcello: Now is this Tandjong Priok, or is this Bicycle Camp?

Chambers: This is Priok, I believe. I might be wrong on that, but it was the camp before we went to Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: That would be Tandjong Priok, yes.

Chambers: They built this fence, and what they did, instead of setting poles, they had posts holding the roof up on these porches, and they just nailed barbed wire onto those posts. When they got down to the end, they built a gate. And it was new, that part of it; I mean, the fence was new. The buildings wasn't.

There were already some Indians from India in some buildings back behind us, and then they started taking people out of this camp for working on the docks.

Marcello: What were your barracks like here, your quarters--inside?

Chambers: They were the same as the Dutch Army barracks all over. They were built out of tile, and the walls were covered with stucco. They had a porch on each side, and then inside they had these stalls. All of them was built on the same order--that I was in. They had some other buildings, and I don't know if they were different or not. I believe that they were taller buildings, to the best of my recollection, back from behind us that was these Indians was in. They had a lot of them back there, and they were already there.

We went in at night...we got off the train, and we went

down there. We walked quite a ways and carried our barracks bags until we got to this camp. We set up at night, and we didn't see too much of what it looked like as we were walking in. The perimeter had the fence around it, and then when it went up to a building, they would use the post on the porch instead of fence posts. I was surprised, you know, how they always talked about the Japanese being so smart at copying things. They built a gate right beside some of my friends, and we bunked on the porch, and the gate was about 4' x 4'. What they did, they had two posts, and then they put this gate against that, and they put the hinges on the other side, and whenever they got the hinges nailed on, then the gate was on the other sdie of the fence. They couldn't open it; it just stayed closed (chuckle). About a half-dozen Japs came by there to do that, and that showed me right quick that I had been misinformed about how intelligent that they were because anybody would have thought of that.

Marcello: Were there any other nationalities here besides these Indian troops? In other words, were there any British here?

Chambers: I don't recall if there were at that time or not. I don't remember. It's very well possible that it could have been... and maybe some Australians. But I believe that there might have been some others, but that's where I began to lose my memory on a lot of things like that. I couldn't say for sure.

Marcello: You were describing the barracks awhile ago. Were you sleeping

on the floor, or did you have some sort of bunks or beds in there?

Chambers: No, we slept on the floor. At the Bicycle Camp, I rigged up a stall--just a partition--between them. I rigged up a piece of canvas--a piece of old tarpaulin--that I hung there, and then I slept in that as a hammock-like.

Marcello: But here in Tandjong Priok, you were sleeping on...

Chambers: ...on the concrete floor, with just my sleeping bag.

Marcello: Describe how you were fed and what the food was like here at Tandjong Priok.

Chambers: That was where we first went on Japanese rations to my best recollection, and they started bringing us rice that had been swept off of the floor from a warehouse, it looked like. It had dirt in it, and the rats had been in it. It was as dirty as it could be, and you'd feel the sand grinding between your teeth. Then they gave us some cheese, and it was rotten to start with. It was the strongest cheese that you could ever see, and then it had worms in it. What we would do, we'd heat that up and try to get it hot enough to dissolve the worms and get all of them out that we could. Then we'd cook the cheese on down, and we'd eat it. It was hard to eat, but it got to where you didn't have anything else. Our rations had gone then, and we were pretty well on Japanese rations. They would bring us some kind of vegetables, and they were still giving us a little bit of meat--not very much

meat, but a little bit. Maybe they cooked the whole cow in a stew, and they'd give you a dip of stew on your rice, and you'd just stir it up and eat it. You wouldn't look at it. You just ate it.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that the rice contained pebbles and dirt and rat dung. I understand that it was also wormy.

Chambers: Yes, sir, it was. It had weevils in it and worms. At that time, it was bad enough, but it wasn't as bad as it got. It got worse than that, but it was bad then because we were just getting started on it.

Marcello: What was your initial reaction when you were fed food of this type? In other words, did you eat all of it at that time?

Chambers: At the starting of it, I didn't eat all of it. I ate just enough to get by on. Of course, at that time, we wasn't losing so much weight, and we were just in hopes that we would get some better food. So we were eating light.

Marcello: Did you try and pick all of the foreign matter out of the rice?

Chambers: At the beginning of it, you did. But then whenever you did all of that...and you couldn't get it all out, so you'd just finally look and see where your mess kit was and don't look at it--just eat it, like taking a dose of medicine. You couldn't say, "Well, I'm not going to eat this now--I'll just get a little extra rations or something," because you didn't have any extras. That was your only survival for

nourishment. We had a little bit of medicine at the time, but not all that much. We were still a little more finicky about our eating at that time than we were as time passed on. We got to where we wasn't as particuliar.

Marcello: Approximately how much food would you get when you went through the chow line?

Chambers: You would get a pint of boiled rice for breakfast, and that's all. If you got some salt that you got from somewhere, why, you were lucky. If you had anything else, you were that much more lucky. At times they would have eggs, and most of the time they wouldn't. They didn't have that many eggs, so when the kitchen got them issued to them, they would cook them in the soup. But then they finally got to where they didn't do that because the Japanese wanted the people that wasn't working to skip chow--after they got further on into it. They didn't want them having the good food. So they started selling it through a little canteen. When they got eggs in, a big basket of eggs, why, they'd sell everybody an egg apiece; and then if a guy was sick and didn't have any money...he might not even want his egg, so if he had a friend, he'd say, "Well, you can have mine, I don't want it." Of course, it got to where on up in Burma, everybody started dying. Back then everybody was trying to help each other, and on up there, too, when they could, but it got to be so many that you couldn't help them.

Marcello: Okay, that's getting ahead of our story, so let's stay right here in Tandjong Priok for now. So you would get approximately a pint of boiled rice for breakfast. How about for lunch and dinner?

Chambers: You would get a pint of what they'd get on a ladle or paddle or whatever. You'd get a pint of steamed rice, and then you'd get one of these pet milk cans full of soup. Sometimes the soup would have more in it than others, and sometimes it would have less. It depended on how much rations that the Japanese gave us. Then they had fish that they would let the cook cook. We had our own cook, but they would let the cook cook the fish on a day that they said that they could cook fish. They called it "white bait." It would have worms in it, too, and it also had sand in it, too. It looked like what we call little shiners here. We called them "white bait," and they would be dried. What they did, they'd take them and squeeze them, and whatever popped out... that was clean, you know. They didn't just open him up and clean him; they just mashed his sides in. Then he was throwed out in the sun to let it dry. They would get worms in them, but we'd eat everything but the scales and the eyeballs, and that's what we'd get by the time that they let us cook them. That's about all that there was left (chuckle).

Marcello: At that time, that is, in Tandjong Priok, was there an opportunity to get seconds on the food?

Chambers: Sometimes they would have seconds. When we had good food, they had a ruling that you didn't get in line until you ate your first helping. Of course, the guy that went through chow line first, he'd eat his, and he'd stand over there where the second line would start. But what they really were trying to do was to divide it out as equally as they could and as little seconds as they could left. They had to be careful not to over-dip because some of them were liable to wind up without anything.

Marcello: I'm sure that there were a lot of pressure on those cooks in the beginning.

Chambers: Oh, yes. Each guy was griping about it, you know. Of course, even at that, they gave us some beans and stuff. We had a little more food while we were on Java. The food had not gotten all that scarce then, but it was getting scarcer and scarcer. You could tell it.

Marcello: Did the cooks in the beginning have any problems cooking that rice?

Chambers: Not too much. I don't know who started off, but we had enough people,..see, we had a lot of Mexican boys--some of them, you see--and Mexican boys--most of them--ate rice back home before they went in the service. I suppose that they were the ones that knew how to cook rice, and, of course, anybody can cook a stew. You just put everything you have in a pot and boil it.

They had these big wa jongs, oval-shaped pots in different sizes, and some we cooked rice in, and some they'd cook the stew in. And the guys got to where they could ladle it out, and they'd hit it pretty close. They didn't have too many leftovers. You didn't line up early, but some of them would line up for a long time before they started feeding if they wasn't having to work, you know. In Java, in those camps, it wasn't so compulsory that you worked then. They hadn't got enough employment lined up for everybody because they was more or less confiscating everything that they could get off of the island. They'd ask for so many men to go to the docks and load the Jap ship or something like that, or barges, and a lot of the guys were willing to go in hopes they'd get to one of these warehouses that had been bombed out or something. They'd find some milk or food of some kind, you know. They would be in there. They found a lot of Eagle Brand milk in some of those houses.

Marcello: Let's talk about those work details. Did you normally volunteer to go on those details?

Chambers: Not all of the time, not all of the time. Sometimes I did. Everytime I volunteered,,,I got broke of it pretty quick because I never was sent to where there was food. I'd have to go and unload rubber or,,,one of them big ol' warehouses didn't have nothing but rubber or maybe rice. Of course, sometimes you didn't have a choice; you had to go to work

because they'd want so many men.

If you were going to unload rice, why, the guy didn't want that everyday, either. They had it "one man to one sack," and they'd have a couple of guys throwing it up on your back. You'd walk out and carry it across that plank and throw it off in the barge.

Then they were unloading tires, automobile parts, and... everything that the Dutch had stored in these warehouses, they were loading it up and, I suppose, carrying it to Japan or wherever. They would get food and rubber and automobile parts, tires...everything that was of any value, they'd get it.

Marcello: Describe how these work details would operate. In other words, who would assign you to the work detail?

Chambers: Your first sergeant most of the time. Our officers were still with us at that time, and they were in...they always had different quarters for the officers. But our sergeants were still assigning us. He'd say, "Well, we want so many men out of this battery and so many men out of that battery."

Sometimes some of the guys would volunteer for it rather than stay in the camp all day, and then when you went out to work, they wasn't in all that big a rush in most cases. The Japanese didn't seem to be in as big a hurry, and they wasn't slapping too many people around on the work details at that time--some, but not all that much. If they'd ask

you to do something, and you didn't know what they were saying, and before he'd ever point to it or give you any better instructions, he'd have to come up and slap you, and then he'd point to it. It didn't hurt you all that bad; they didn't know how to hit you with their fist. It was mostly like your mama slapping you when you were a kid, you know. They'd slap a little harder than that, but it wasn't enough to knock you out. It'd more or less make you mad more than anything else.

Marcello: So in other words, within the course of a week, how many work details might you go on?

Chambers: At that time, I'd say anywhere from...some guys would go every day. I don't think that I'd go over every other day--on the average, you know. Some days I might go every day for a few days, or maybe one of my friends would say, "Let's volunteer for this work detail." Back then they'd take volunteers, and if they needed any more, why, they'd assign them, you know. First, they'd see how many volunteers they'd get: "Who wants to go and who doesn't?" If so-and-so went yesterday, well, they'd put a check by his name; and if he wanted to go again, alright, and if he didn't...of course, sometimes you had to, depending on how many the Japs were asking for.

Marcello: When you came back into camp after being on one of these work details, were you searched?

Chambers: I don't believe that I was ever searched. I don't think so. They saw us bringing stuff into camp, like, canned stuff that we'd find by the docks, like, say, Eagle Brand milk and some of the other things. But we didn't hide it, and they wouldn't take it away from us at that time. They probably didn't care all that much for that milk and stuff on that rice, no way. They liked that fish heads and stuff like that on their rice better than they did good food, I'd imagine.

Marcello: So at this stage, you were already looking for things to add some favor to that rice.

Chambers: Oh, yes. You bet...and a better rice. Sometimes we'd get a little better rice than at other times, and we thought, "Well, the food is going to start getting better." Of course, everytime that we'd move to another camp or something, we was always hoping that it'd get better. You were just looking for...well, you didn't know how to plan on the future. You just had to do the best you could while you were there doing it. I just always thought, "Well, where there's a will, there's always a way. And I got the will." (chuckle) I just kind of sat back and had that same attitude. I tried not to get all built up when we'd hear a rumor or something. If it sounded good, I'd try not to believe any more of it than I could see. I'd just wait and see. Some

of the guys would get their morale up, and then they'd find out it was a false rumor, and then they was way down then, you know.

Marcello: I'm sure that these prison camps were just one big rumor mill.

Chambers: It was. If you believed it, you could hear anything that you want to listen to, you know. But you soon found out that there wasn't anybody...well, some of the guys had radios, even at Bicycle Camp, and that was one of the last camps...I think that they had some radios hid out when we left there. They got some little bit of news, and some of the guys would hide the radio behind a blanket, and somebody would stand watch. Of course, they'd tell you what happened, and they tried not to get too many guys ganged around listening to it.

We got a little bit of news like that until we left Java, and then it seemed to be altogether different then. You were just about out of contact with any kind of reliable source. What the Japanese did, they'd tell you things that wasn't true, and I think that their superiors were telling them things. They'd tell us how they were already fighting in California and this and that and stuff like that. I believe that they had been told that--probably so.

Marcello: How long were you going to be a prisoner-of-war at this point?

Chambers: How long had we been prisoners at that point?

Marcello: How long did you <u>think</u> that you were going to be a prisoner-of-war?

Chambers: I never did think that I'd be in there over six months. It was always about like it was six more months. After that six months, well, I'd say, "Well, at the most, six more months." Well, of course, we had pretty well established the fact that we lost our Navy in Pearl Harbor, and the Japanese had forced us to go and watch a movie that they had made of that. Of course, they'd put out a little ol' paper. I think this was over in Singapore or Burma. They called it <u>The Greater Asia...but</u> they'd tell us rumors like that. They were telling us...in that little ol' paper, they were telling us one time about how this Japanese pilot had went up and had a dogfight with an American pilot, and the Japanese soldier ran out of ammunition, and so did the American pilot. The Japanese had some rice cakes in his lunch, so he flew up beside him and started throwing those at him. He thought that they were hand grenades, and he showed the American pilot a field that he wanted him to land on down there, so he forced him down with those rice cakes (chuckle). It wasn't too hard for anybody with normal thinking ability to know that they was a little bit false with that kind of stuff.

They was telling about...another one was that they both fell and parachuted into the jungle, and the Jap tied the

American pilot up with all these vines and stuff and brought him out on foot. Oh, there was really some daredevil stories.

Marcello: What did you do with your time when you were not on the work details?

Chambers: We played volleyball, and then we had some material to read. Somebody had some books. It wasn't long until you had read everything that you was interested in reading. We played a little volleyball around in the camp there. They'd get up teams, you know. That seemed to be most about all that happened, unless you went out on the detail.

Marcello: What did you talk about in your conversations,in your bull sessions?

Chambers: I'd say that food was the main thing once we got on that Japanese food. Everybody would be talking about what they ate at home, what they liked. I think it was because they was hungry. They had it on their mind, you know.

Marcello: What does it feel like to be hungry? Now at one time or another everybody has said that they're hungry, but what does it feel like to be really hungry?

Chambers: Well, I'd say that it's the same feeling that you have whenever you go without dinner--you're just hungry. But the only thing about being hungry and not seeing where you were going to get enough ever again to eat, it makes you kind of wonder, you know. And then you kind of wonder in the back of your mind what you could do to get you a little more

food.

I was a lot bigger guy than a lot of guys, and I think it took a little more food for me than it did for some of the others. Of course, I didn't get any more. I know at times I was pretty much of a "chow hog," you know, and some guys would get sick, and I'd help them bring their chow to their bunk, you know, or something like that. Some of them would say, "I just can't eat it. Do you want this?" I'd say, "Yes, I'll take it." So I figured that the thing to do was to eat it, and if your stomach just wouldn't take it, well, your stomach had sense enough to dump it, you know. I'd think, "Well, you're not going to make it if you don't eat it, so you ain't got nothing to lose."

Marcello: Describe what the guards were like here at Tandjong Priok. Now this will be the first time that you had really come into direct contact with guards, really. Describe their conduct. What were they like?

Chambers: Well, in my case I'd try to stay away from them as much as I could. Now some of the guys wanted to talk to them, but I wasn't one of them. I figured that the least you could do with him, the less chance there is that you were going to get slapped around. So if I didn't have to, I didn't mess with them.

But some of the guys would. They'd come by...that's about the time they came out with the order that if a Japanese

soldier came by, you had to stand up and salute him or if you didn't have a hat to put on, you had to bow to him. I was always trying to be at a place that if I saw one coming, and I had a chance, I'd get away. But sooner or later, it was going to happen to you that a Jap would walk up, and before anybody would see him, he'd just make the whole gang line up out there, and he'd just slap the whole bunch of them. Sometimes he'd just slap four or five and go on. So it was things like that. I'd say that most of the slapping was something like that.

But on some of the work details, they didn't know enough about how to work with somebody else. Like, if you were working with a pick and shovel or something, you'd pick up some dirt and move back so that a guy could shovel it, Well, he'd jump in there and slap you and accuse you of goofing off. You couldn't swing that pick while the guy was in there loading up his dirt to get it out of your way. He had to be doing something, too. But they didn't have sense enough to know that, or they didn't want to.

It was too obvious to me that the Japanese are a different breed of people. They got it in their system...they just got some cruel blood in them that just can't be got out, I think. I think that it's just a breed of people that...I saw too many of them that would just call up a little ol' dog and play with the little ol' dog...and we watched them a lot

of the times. A little ol' stray dog would come around where we were working, and they'd play with him and pet him and all, but not one time, I don't believe--not one time--did I ever see him just walk away and leave that dog. He would haul off and kick that dog in the rear with those old hob-nailed shoes just as hard as he could. The poor little ol' dog would just holler and yell, and it'd just tickle him to death. He got a thrill out of it--actually got a thrill out of it.

Macello: Were these the Japanese or the Korean guards that acted this way?

Chambers: Both did that. There were some of them that didn't slap us around as bad as the others did, but there were some of them that would beat up on you. A lot of them would slap the guys around when there was no need for it whatsoever. They just got a thrill out of it.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago, when we brought up this subject, that they seemed to especially pick out the larger or taller individuals. You mentioned that you were 6' 3", so evidently you were one of their prime targets. Can you elaborate on this a little bit, as it occurred there at Tandjong Priok?

Chambers: I think that the only thing I got slapped for there was not saluting and not bowing. I think that I've seen some other guys get slapped around harder than me. I don't think I

got any of the worse beatings, but I think I probably got slapped as many or more times than the shorter guys just for the simple reason of being tall. It didn't seem like they were so much interested in beating up on you as they just wanted the satisfaction of slapping some guy taller than them or bigger than them.

We had an ol' boy that was a great, big guy. He was around six feet, but he weighed 250 or 270 pounds. He was a Bailey boy. It seemed like they always wanted to slap him, but he was a rugged ol' boy from Odessa, and he had worked in the oil fields all of his life. He was a rugged guy, and it'd make him mad, and he'd just cuss them and get madder and madder. It just seemed he was unlucky enough to get slapped everytime anybody got it. I don't think that he got beat up that bad--not while he was with me. But, you know, we were with different guys at different times when they was shuffling us from one camp to the other. You'd be with a guy part of the time, and in the next camp that you went to, he'd stay there, and you'd go to someplace else--not so much until we left Java, though. In Java we were pretty well all in the same camp at the same time.

Marcello: Did the Japanese guards seem to come through the barracks very often?

Chambers: It seems like it was in spells. At times they did. In this Bicycle Camp, they came through pretty often.

Marcello: What would they do?

Chambers: They'd just walk through and look. It seemed like they were more or less wanting to come through and pick out somebody and holler and slap them--two or three. Then he'd go back out. It was just to kind of agitate you.

Marcello: What would happen when a Japanese was approaching the barracks? What would you have to do?

Chambers: You would have to jump up and holler, "Ki o tsukete!" That was their word for attention. You'd have to holler that. But, of course, if you didn't see him, and nobody else seen him, well, then he would come in...maybe he'd just come around the corner and walk right in before you had time. You might have your back to him because nobody would be noticing because other prisoners were going in and out. So maybe he's right in on you, and by the time you realized that it was a guard, he'd done be hollering and getting ready to slap somebody. Of course, a lot of the times he'd get his slapping done, and he'd just turn around and go back out. Sometimes he'd go on down, and, if nothing else, he'd find a guy that he just didn't like the looks of, I guess, and he'd kind of mumble something in Japanese to him and slap him, anyhow. I think he had his mind made up that he was going to slap somebody by the time that he came in the door.

Some of them were a lot worse at that than others.

They didn't have to; it wasn't any reason except just the self-satisfaction that they was getting out of it.

Marcello: At the same time, did you notice that physical punishment was the way of life in the Japanese army?

Chambers: Yes, they slapped each other. That was their way of life. They did. They sure did. Every rank above the other could slap every rank lower than him. The only thing that the Japanese private could slap was the Korean guards, and the only thing that a Korean guard could slap was a prisoner. I think that might be one of the reasons that Koreans got so much kick out of...I guess that they were probably, on the whole, a lot worse about slapping than the Japs were. There were some Japs that was pretty bad at it, too, but I'd say, as a whole, the Koreans were worse than the Japs.

Marcello: By this time, that is, by the time that you're in Tandjong Priok, are certain Japanese guards beginning to get a reputation?

Chambers: Yes. I don't remember the one's names in the camp there now. I remember some of the names, but I've done forgot a lot of the names that I used to know. As you get older, things like that slips your mind. Oh, yes, we had a name for all of them, and whenever you saw one...you knew who the bad ones were, and you'd better be ready whenever you seen him coming because he was going to get somebody.

Marcello: I understand that prisoners would try to pick work details according to whom the guard was, also.

Chambers: If you had a choice, you sure would. Even the one that treated you worst, sometimes you'd go out with him, and he'd have good days and bad days. He wasn't the same everyday. I think it was probably the way he felt, you know. It might have been due to the fact of how much he'd been slapped around himself. That's just speculation, you know.

Marcello: Now by this time, that is, by the time that you're in Tandjong Priok, what kind of relationship has developed between the enlisted men and the officers among the prisoners-of-war?

Chambers: It's pretty well the same thing in anything, I guess. For some guys, it was kind of "buddy-buddy" with some of the officers, but as a whole, we weren't too proud of too many of the officers that we had.

Marcello: Why was that?

Chambers: Before we was captured, we went up to that front line--supposedly going to the front line--and we didn't have but a couple of lieutenants with us. We wasn't being very well informed about anything. Our officers didn't take up for us like the Australians'. If an Australian was getting slapped around, the Australian officer would go and try and get that Jap to stop it. We had one or two

officers that would do that, but most of them were trying to stay back where they didn't get any of it.

We still had some officers that were...we had two or three that would stand up for us. Lieutenant Stensland was one that we admired. He was a good guy. Then ol' Captain Parker was another one that we liked.

We had several in there that just...I think they were in the Army probably by accident more than intention. They was A&M guys that probably was just wanting to go to school, and they did that to help pay the tuition or something more than they were interested in military life. Then there was another thing...the night that the guards were accused of... these hometown guys...if a guy was from the same hometown as his officer, he always got the breaks, we felt like. Of course, it wasn't a whole lot that they could do.

We thought, too, that some of the officers were taking the money that we were supposed to have had and were buying them some supplies with it--that we had had when we were captured--and we felt like they were buying up the sugar when the sugar came into the camp and buying up most of the eggs that they wanted. Then they'd let the enlisted people have the rest of it.

I don't know how much of that was true. Like I say, you could hear any kind of a rumor that you wanted to. It might have been somebody bad-mouthing the officers. But it was

kind of some bad feelings toward a lot of them. Like I say, you got some good ones along with the worst. Probably a lot of the things that we heard wasn't true, you know. I guess that people's morale gets down, and it's pretty easy for them to get to bad-mouthing somebody and get the wrong opinion of somebody, too. But you could see that the Australians cooperated more with their enlisted people--the officers--as long as they were with us, but then they separated them way later on.

Marcello: What happened in terms of military courtesy, that is, saluting and things of that nature?

Chambers: Our officers didn't request any of that. That's one thing that I am glad of. The Australians didn't request it; but the British wanted us to salute them, and we wouldn't do it.

Marcello: We'll talk more about that later on, of course. At the same time, you were still basically under military discipline, however, were you not? In other words, you were still obeying your officers and things of that nature.

Chambers: Oh, yes, we didn't disobey the officers, but they didn't try to be "military" while we where in...I'd say none of the ones that I was with requested any saluting. He'd come by and talk to you. He was like the rest of the prisoners--he was a prisoner, too. I think they all just kind of dropped all of that. They knew that you had to put up with

all that stuff from the Japs all of the time, and they didn't request any additional discipline stuff. I think that's why.

Marcello: What role or function do the officers play while you are prisoners-of-war?

Chambers: At that time, in Java, they didn't have to work, and I don't believe the Japanese was asking them to go out on the working parties. They more or less just stayed in the camp, and they did like the rest of the guys. They played volleyball and stuff like that to get the exercise that they wanted to.

You didn't have to do a whole lot of answering roll call, so we didn't have a whole lot to do with the officers. They had their own quarters, and they had their checker games or whatever, card games, whatever. They didn't buddy-up with the enlisted people all that close, and they'd come over once in a while and check to see how everybody was doing, or even for a little friendly visit, and then go back. We kind of ceased all military discipline and everything. Of course, we still called them "lieutenant," "colonel," "captain," you know, whatever.

Marcello: But there still had to be a chain-of-command.

Chambers: Yes, but they didn't put out any orders at all. I think that they thought was that they would let the Japanese put out the orders, and as we got further on, they started

sending the officers with so many enlisted men. They'd divide us up into kumis. At the time that we were in Java, they didn't have us divided into kumis. When we got on in to Burma, they did, but not in Java. After that they finally separated the officers from us, and I don't know why they waited so late to do that.

Marcello: Now at the time that you were in Tandjong Priok, how was the health of the prisoners holding up?

Chambers: We were doing all right then. I don't know if anybody... I don't even think that we had malaria or anything like that getting started. Of course, we were losing weight; you could see that. But food wasn't really all that scarce then. It was just the type of food that it was. You could get all that you could stand to eat of it (chuckle). I guess, as a whole, people made out pretty good then. They wasn't holding their own, but they wasn't losing weight all that fast, either, because they wasn't having to do a whole lot more work than they wanted to, and that was another thing. The workload weren't as heavy, and the food was better then than it got to be later on, and we did have a little bit of medical supplies in. If somebody wanted to make sick call, he felt like he could go in and get a little bit of medication. Of course, we still had some left from our supplies then.

Marcello: How important was cleaniness going to be now that you were

a prisoner-of-war?

Chambers: It was fairly available. You could bathe, and we had plenty of water and stuff until we got into Burma. In Java we had plenty of water and soap, and you could bathe, and you would have time enough to wash your clothes as much as you wanted to.

Marcello: Are the prisoners realizing that cleanliness is going to be important to their survival?

Chambers: Well, I think that most of the guys...well, there were some of them...like anywhere else, some people are just cleaner than others. I think, as a whole, we didn't have too many guys that just let go, you know, because in the Army like that somebody is going to make a remark and let you know right quick that you need to get out and wash down, you know. So we didn't have too many guys that didn't. There were some few that didn't. But then later on it got times that we didn't have the facilities or the time, either. You'd get out and work all day, and you couldn't hardly move when you came in, so you'd just lay down a few minutes. It would rain on you, and so we'd wash it off the next day, anyhow, in that monsoon season and stuff like that. A lot of the times, too, a big part of the time, if there was any water available, like, a creek or anything like that, when we got through working, the Japanese would let us go for a swim, you know, on the way into camp.

Marcello: Okay, we're getting ahead of our story again because I think this occurs up in the jungle. Getting back to cleaniness again, there in Java, how important was it going to be to make sure that your mess gear was clean?

Chambers: Oh, we did that all of the time. We'd always have boiling water. I think that everybody was real cautious about scalding their mess gear. They'd clean it up after they got through eating, and then they'd go and scour it off and put it away. Then before you ever did go through the chow line, they had some boiling water. Yes, I think that everybody was conscious of that for dysentery purposes. Of course, if it got to where you got dysentery, or it seemed like it, you did it, anyway. I never did have it as bad as a lot of guys. It killed a lot of people. But I think that a lot of the people that died from it was probably some of the cleanest and more particular ones, anyway.

Marcello: Okay, on May 14, 1942, you're transferred from Tandjong Priok to Bicycle Camp.

Chambers: I forgot that date.

Marcello: So that means that you had only really been at Tandjong Priok for about a month-and-a-half maybe. You went in there on March 31, and you got out of there on May 14. How did you get from Tandjong Priok to Bicycle Camp? Do you recall?

Chambers: I don't remember that.

Marcello: Were the two camps very far apart?

Chambers: I don't recall them being too far. I don't believe that they were.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp looked like from a physical standpoint. Again, take me on an imaginary tour of Bicycle Camp as we're walking in the front gate.

Chambers: Okay, going into the camp, there was a street that ran right in front of the camp. When you got right up to the gate, you could turn and go right in...a big iron gate. As far as I know, they never did close them because the guardhouse was right there all of the time. I guess that it was a Dutch Army camp, so I guess they'd close them whenever they wanted. But with the Japanese, I never recall them closing those gates. Then you'd go in, and there were barracks on the left of the street going in, and the kitchen. Then there were some barracks on over that way where there was some Dutch in, and there were some Australians in some of those barracks, also.

Then coming back on the other side of the road, that's where the Americans were. I guess we had our whole...the exact number...I don't remember how many that the...the Army had between five and six hundred, and then there was about that many survivors off of the Houston. We had all of them except that E Battery that went down on the other end of the island, and I never did know where they were down there. They never did get back with us until after the war.

Marcello: What were your barracks like on the inside? Describe the barracks on the outside and on the inside.

Chambers: They were along the same style as the others. They had those partitions and stalls, you know, with three or four bunks--the way that the Dutch Army had it set up. There would be an aisle down the center and no doors, and then there would be a stall right on the other side across. On the outside of the wall, there'd be those porches, and all of them had the big concrete porch with the tile roof. They were all built on the same order. All the regular camps in Java...it looked like all of the army barracks were built on the same order--concrete floors.

Marcello: Were these one-story or two-story buildings?

Chambers: One-story. They didn't have any ceiling, and they had interlocking tiles that, I suppose, they laid on. They didn't nail them, I don't believe. They didn't have any screws or nothing. They just laid up there more or less like a sewer tile, you know, ceramic, and they'd lock into the other one. When you get up to the ridge row, it was locked in, and it capped it off.

Marcello: How many people would be in one of these stalls?

Chambers: I'd say there'd be about twelve feet, and there'd be four to a stall, and right across there'd be that many--four, maybe five. You didn't have a lot of room.

Marcello: Now by this time, are you beginning to buddy-up?

Chambers: Pretty well. You'd get out on work details. I'd say that they began to ask for more and more people all the time on work details. You'd go out and work, and they wouldn't assign you to any certain amount of work. They just liked to see you busy. If you started standing around and talking and not doing anything, then they'd want to come up and bash you around a little bit then. But it didn't make any difference how much work you were getting done; they weren't a very good judge to know if you were goofing off or not. If you were busy, that was all right--just don't let him see you not doing anything--whether it amounted to anything or not.

Marcello: When I asked you awhile ago if you were beginning to buddy-up, what I mean was, were certain small groups of prisoners kind of beginning to look out for one another? I'm not referring to something that is malicious or bad or selfish, but a close relationship might develop between two, three, or four prisoners. If one had some extra food, he might share it with the others and this sort of thing.

Chambers: Yes, I know what you're talking about. At that time, in Bicycle Camp, I would say that good food was scarce, but people weren't eating all of the food. They had eaten enough to survive off of and not lose too much weight, but they were glad when they got through with a meal more than they were looking forward to it, I think, except a few of us (chuckle).

Most people would try and eat enough, but they were glad when they got enough of it down, you know, eating that rice with the rocks in it. We were getting a few beans then. Some of the guys was managing to keep a few eggs and stuff, and a lot of times, if a guy was lucky enough to get food like that on the outside on the working parties, he'd come back in, and he'd probably not even go to the kitchen. If you had a close friend, you would divide with him. Yes, there was a lot of that.

Marcello: Was this buddy system going to be important later on, when you get into the jungle?

Chambers: Oh, I think that it was. I think that it was, really was, except later on in the jungle, some of your closest friends were...you were separated from a lot of them, but you'd pick up another one, you know. You'd buddy with him, and the next thing that you know, you were separated from him. When you were in the same camp together, if you were gone from a guy and got back to camp and he was there, you'd kind of go back to him. It seemed like the guys that was in this 26th Brigade got to knowing each other better and everything before we was ever transferred into this. Now we found some other friends and got to be close to them as any of them, but it was because we were separated, I guess.

Some of the guys were kind of loners and didn't care too much about buddying-up with anybody. And maybe there

would be one guy that wanted to buddy-up with one particular guy, and he don't have too much to do with the rest of them. It was a lot of different personalities.

There were a lot of guys that tried to help others, but, like I say, we're getting ahead of the story there, but they just got to where they couldn't, you see. But as long as we could help, there wasn't too much that they could do. If a guy wasn't sick and they didn't need any help and they could still get their own chow...we didn't have much sickness.

Marcello: The buddy system was going to be important later on, and it wasn't nearly so important there in Bicycle Camp, for example. How would the food compare or contrast in Bicycle Camp with what you had been receiving in Tandjong Priok?

Chambers: It wasn't a whole lot of difference, I wouldn't think. At that time I think we were still getting some beans and things to go with our rice, and we had a little more solid food. At that particular time, food was more plentiful than it was fit to eat. The kind of food that it was was the main thing.

Marcello: Is it not true that, by the time that you get to Bicycle Camp, company funds were being used to supplement what the Japanese were providing? Wasn't company money used to buy things on the outside?

Chambers: They did allow us to buy some eggs and things like that, I understand. We were going to have a big feed on the Fourth of July. They had allowed our officers to buy up some things

to have kind of a Fourth of July celebration, which the English wasn't too proud of.

Anyhow, the Japanese put out an order wanting us to sign something that we would never assist the Americans in case of them landing or anything like that. We wasn't going to sign it, so the first thing that they did, they went over and took all of the food away that they let the officers buy. We didn't get to have that Fourth of July party. Then the next thing, they sent some Japanese down through the barracks with some bamboo poles, whipping up on everybody.

So finally, the word came down that Colonel Tharp told them to go ahead and sign it. We went over and lined up to sign the thing, and he'd be responsible for it. Furthermore, he didn't think that it would be anything of value since we were being beaten for us to sign it, anyway. It wouldn't be worth the ink that it was written with no way. Anyhow, we didn't feel bad about that because we knew that if the people back home really knew the circumstances under which we were signing it, they wouldn't blame us.

Marcello: So did you go over and sign it?

Chambers: Oh, yes! You bet! Everybody did. As far as I know, I don't know of anybody that didn't sign it. It wasn't anybody signing it except for the purpose of keeping from getting beat.

Marcello: Basically, the purpose of signing this document was to state

that you wouldn't escape or that you would remain loyal to the Japanese or whatever.

Chambers: I don't remember the exact wording of it, but that's the thing that I'm thinking in the back of my mind, that we wouldn't try to escape, and we wouldn't assist anybody in escaping, or if there was a landing or any of the Allies came in, that we wouldn't assist them in any way. That's the impression that I got. But we didn't never have a chance. They knew that wouldn't work, anyhow. They might not have known it, but we did (chuckle).

Marcello: There is one question that I should have asked you earlier. Up until this time, that is, by the time that you get into Bicycle Camp, have the Japanese ever processed you in any way? In other words, have they been keeping records and things of that nature?

Chambers: Not that I know of. They knew about how many people there were, but as far as any individual records of any kind, I don't think so.

Marcello: In other words, they had not given you an identification number or anything of that sort?

Chambers: They did give us one--I believe that that was at Bicycle Camp--a little badge, and it seems like my number was five-something. I'd be afraid to say now. But, anyway, that didn't seem to last long, either. I don't know if they had that later on or not. They never did go by that number--

that I know of. Right at the time that they issued them, they might have, but it seems like that didn't last too long. It was just kind of a "come-and-go" outfit, all of a sudden. They might had recorded that number and used it to know where they sent you from there or something like that. Maybe they knew where the numbers were going to go: "So-and-so up to number so-and-so go to a certain place." I don't know that they did that, but it seemed that they'd come out and call you by name when they got ready to send some guys off, from the Bicycle Camp, that went to other places. I don't know if they went by those numbers or if they just went by the names.

Marcello: They were always counting the prisoners, weren't they?

Chambers: Oh, yes. Everytime you went out and in, you'd line up and count. Then you had to learn to count in Japanese. Whether you wanted to or not, you had to learn that much Japanese. You'd count off, and the guard that was in charge of the working party would line you up, and he'd have you to count. You didn't have the same place in formation, but you had to look down and see how many there were, and you had better start thinking about what your number was going to be when they counted off up to you. You'd have to say it in Japanese. You couldn't count in English; you had to count in Japanese.

Marcello: Did you find, as time went on, that it was a good thing to

learn a little bit of Japanese?

Chambers: Oh, it would have been good to have known it. It would have saved you from getting slapped around. I was always one of the guys that was too late to learn the words. I probably wouldn't have known the one he was wanting to tell me, anyhow, so I never went through the trouble to try and learn any.

Marcello: Earlier in our conversation, you mentioned the survivors the USS Houston. Describe your first encounter with them when you entered Bicycle Camp.

Chambers: They gave us another different barracks, and they were coming over to see if there was anyone from their hometown, if they knew anybody, like you do whenever you go into another army camp or something. You immediately start looking around to see if there was anybody that you know from back close to your hometown. Then they began...a lot of them would find out...well, we had so many guys from Texas that they would always...it seems like if any of them was from Texas, they'd find somebody that lived pretty close to them. I don't know if any of them ever actually found somebody that they knew back home or not, but some of them knew about the same people.

Marcello: What kind of condition were they in?

Chambers: They were in good condition at the time. I'd say they were in good condition. They hadn't been captured all that long.

Marcello: How were they in terms of clothing and things of that nature?

Chambers: They were short on clothing because when they got off of the ship, they lost everything they had except for what they had on. And I understand that they kept on fighting as long as their guns would work, that is, they fought until everything was out of shape. Then they started grabbing something and holding on to it.

Marcello: You mentioned that they were short on clothing. How did the Army people respond when they saw this situation?

Chambers: We divided things that we had--that we could afford. We divided with some of them. If you had two blankets...you didn't need a blanket to cover with all that much. A lot of the sailors...the first thing you know, you'd see them with a GI blanket. And then the Japanese gave them some blankets. A lot of the guys would take a sailor and give him a GI blanket; and he'd have two Jap cotton blankets, so you'd give him one of your GI blankets for one of his. That would give each of you a cotton blanket and a wool blanket. A lot of them...well, we didn't have enough stuff to go around to all of them, as far as that's concerned. I guess they had shoes. The Japanese had given them some shoes. I guess that some of them managed to get into some boats, life boats, and get picked up and kept their shoes on.

Marcello: Awhile ago, you also mentioned a Lieutenant Stensland. Describe him.

Chambers: He was a big gorilla-type-looking guy. I believe he was from Washington or Oregon originally. He came back, and he retired from service. He lived down north of San Antonio. It wasn't too long after he retired, I believe, until he died.

Marcello: He was not an original member of the unit, was he?

Chambers: No, sir, he wasn't. Now how he got in there, I don't know. I don't believe he was in the 131st all the time. Maybe he came in from...I don't know.

Marcello: What made him stand out in your mind? You mentioned him awhile ago as being one of the good officers.

Chambers: Well, to me he'd get up and try to talk to the Japanese and try to get them to understand. In case there was a Japanese that wanted to get on to a gang of men or something, he'd try to figure out what they wanted. If he was beating on a guy, and nobody knew why, and slapping the guy around, he'd try to find out what the Jap was wanting because nobody could understand what they was trying to say. He did keep a lot of guys from getting slapped anymore. He stopped a lot of it. That's one of the reasons that the guys like him. And he wasn't ever afraid of them. Of course, he got slapped, too, but it didn't bother him. He was a great, big, tough-looking guy. He wasn't a bully or anything.

He was just a good guy. He'd try to find out what to do, in case of some kind of problem like that, to save a guy from getting slapped. That's one reason that everybody drew a pretty good opinion of him.

Marcello: Were the work details here at Bicycle Camp similar to those that had been carried on out of Tandjong Priok?

Chambers: I think that they were about the same. They wasn't requiring all that much work out of everybody then--up at that time. It was pretty well about the same in both camps. It might have been getting to be a little more work. They probably had more details to load barges and ships by then out of the Bicycle Camp, so they were getting a little heavier workload. But you didn't have to work everyday then--even at that. You could pretty well get a day off once or twice a week and sometimes more. Still, some people volunteered because they was in hopes of lucking into some extra food or something on the work party.

Marcello: By this time, what kind of relationship is developing between the Americans and the other nationalities here in Bicycle Camp?

Chambers: We were kind of separated from them. It got to where you would get to know maybe an Australian or an Englishman a little bit. Some of the guys got real close with some of the Australians. We had an Englishmen that got lost from his outfit, and he just kind of took up with the Americans like

a stray dog. I don't know what his name was, but he was a hair-lipped guy, and he did die. He eventually died. I think he got cholera and died later on. But he got lost from his outfit...they were scattered all over.

When we got into the war with the Japanese, the Australians didn't have anybody left in Australia to defend their country, except women and the older men and young kids. I think that they turned a lot of those guys loose up in Malaya and told them that if they could get back to Australian in any way, they should do it to help defend their homeland. They knew that the Japanese were trying to make a landing. So they seemed to get lost off and get captured here and yonder. This Englishmen got separated from his outfit in Singapore someway or another, and he lived a little while with the Americans. He was saying all of the time that when the war was over, he was going to go to the United States. But the poor ol' guy didn't make it.

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

Chambers: They were plentiful there. They had a bathhouse, and you could go and bathe pretty well anytime that you wanted to.

Marcello: Did they have showers?

Chambers: Yes, they had showers. We still had plenty of soap at that time. I don't think that anybody was having any problem with the bathing facilities. I suppose it was a

chlorinated water system there. I don't know if it was hooked in to the camp on its own or how, but we didn't have anything to do with it, as far as the water system goes.

Marcello: In October, 1942, they began moving people out of Bicycle Camp. One group, I know, left on October 7. Describe the process by which you left Bicycle Camp. How did it transpire?

Chambers: They'd tell you that these people were going to move, but they didn't tell us where we were going: "The Japanese wants these people to get their gear packed up and ready to go because you're leaving the camp." I don't think anybody knew where we were going. We didn't know if we were leaving the island, or we didn't know if we were leaving by train, boat, or what.

Anyhow, they'd taken us out and put us on this ship. They just called out these names. Like I say, they didn't take everybody at one time: "Well, we want so many men up here. When we call your name, go ahead and get your gear, roll it up, and fall out and be ready to go in a certain length of time."

Marcello: What was your reaction to having to leave Bicycle Camp?

Chambers: I was always ready to go from any camp because I always felt like that there was a big possibility that you were going to find something better, and you're not going to find a whole lot worse. I was always willing to take a chance on going someplace else.

Marcello: Do you recall who was in charge of the group that you left with? Was it Captain Fitzsimmons, perhaps?

Chambers: No, he left before me. I had a couple of close friends that left with him. I don't know who was in charge of the group, but we had several officers that left when I left. We had a Lieutenant Morgan. He was lieutenant in D Battery, that I was in. Then we had a naval officer, and I've forgot his name. He was kind of the top officer in the Navy. Then I guess Colonel Tharp was probably in the group that left when I did. It seemed like that most of the officers that were still there after Captain Fitzsimmons left...now I don't know who else left with Captain Fitzsimmons, but I think that pretty well most of the rest of them left when I did.

Marcello: Describe the ship that you were to ride on the next part of your journey.

Chambers: I've got the names of those mixed up--I rode another one later on--but this ship...I don't believe that it was the Moji Maru.

Marcello: Was it the Dai Nichi Maru?

Chambers: Dai Nichi Maru! That's it! It sure was! They carried us to Singapore.

Marcello: Describe what that ship was like.

Chambers: It was a freighter that they had converted into a troopship. They had some rough lumber that was nailed up about four feet

above the deck, and they put a layer of people up on that. Then they put a layer of people underneath it. You didn't have room enough to roll your bunk out. You had to leave it in a roll and sit on it and lean back against somebody else's knees and sleep a little nap like that. It was like that...I don't know how long it took us to go now. I don't know how many days it was. I used to be able to remember those days---dates, you know, when I left this and got there. It seems to me that it might have been in November when we left there, and we went to Singapore. Maybe that was October. We stayed in Singapore until January, I know that. We left about the 1st of January.

Marcello: Let's back up a minute and talk some more about this trip from Java to Singapore. You mentioned that it was crowded. What was it like in that hold in terms of heat and things of that nature?

Chambers: Oh, it was hot! It was hot! You was wet with sweat. If you got down in there and you could stand it, you stayed, you know. If you got a chance to go up topside...well, sometimes the Japs would let you up there, and sometimes they'd run you back down in that hold, too.

Marcello: What were the latrine facilities like aboard that ship?

Chambers: They had one up on top. They didn't have anything down in the hold. You had to go up on top. They had one nailed to where it...they'd and they pump that water through a trough

up there, and it would go right off over the edge. That was the toilet.

Marcello: Was there a continual line of people going to that latrine?

Chambers: Oh, yes. It was overcrowded. You were lucky if you didn't have to sweat a line to it. Yes, it was overcrowded.

Marcello: How were you fed?

Chambers: Food was scarce on the ship. It was real scarce. It was cooked and served on there just like regular food at other times. You'd go through a chow line, but it was hard to... that's about all you could do, was to get into line and sweat it, you know. It'd take so long because it was so crowded, and then by the time you got your food and got out...you'd have to stand and wait until somebody got out of your way. You'd have your food eaten before you got back to get ready to go down in the hold again, anyhow (chuckle).

Marcello: So you did come up on deck to get your chow. It was not lowered down to you in buckets or anything?

Chambers: Ours wasn't, no. I don't believe that the Dutch was fed in the same deal that we were, but I don't know. It's hard to remember, too. Maybe at times they might have lowered some food down there, but I do remember sweating the line on the top.

Marcello: What was the water situation aboard that ship?

Chambers: The water was scarce for bathing. We just didn't have any bathing facilities until we got off of there.

Marcello: How about for drinking?

Chambers: We had drinking water, yes. I don't ever remember it ever being scarce. I think they were letting us fill our canteen up, and you'd have that for the day. Of course, we knew that we couldn't...water was scarce--I'll say that--on that ship. I don't remember, butI don't think that we had any bathing facilities. We had saltwater in the toilet running through there. I guess they had some kind of little ol' pump and water line going through it all of the time.

Marcello: When you were down there in that hold, were you in darkness? Were there any lights?

Chambers: Very little light. None in the daytime, that I can recall. Maybe a little dim light in the corner or something. It was mighty poor light at night. You couldn't hardly see to do anything at night.

Marcello: What did you talk about?

Chambers: We talked about where we were going, and we'd talk about things back home. We'd talk about the possibility of a submarine finding us out there. We hadn't seen any American planes since we had been captured, so we wasn't too worried about any bombers. We didn't think about any bombers.

Marcello: How long were you on that ship?

Chambers: That's what I don't remember.

Marcello: It was less than a week, however, wasn't it?

Chambers: I think so. I think a week would have been as long as we were

on it. Maybe it was four days. Something wants to tell me if was four days and nights, which wasn't all that long. Then we got to Singapore.

Marcello: Describe what happens when you get to Singapore.

Chambers: They carried us to a British Army camp--Camp Changi. I believe that was in October.

Marcello: It was.

Chambers: Then we stayed there until January. They had us going out and cutting palm trees with a...they called it a chunkel. It was a regular...I'd call it an ol' weeding hoe. That's what we called it on the farm--a weed hoe. They had short handles. They'd use that to chop a tree down and use it to chop it up. Of course, when we'd cut a palm tree, everybody would run to the top of it to get the bud out of it to eat it. That was a big fight over who was going to get that (chuckle). A lot of times, we'd cut a bunch of them and take them in and let them cut them up and put into the stew to go on the rice.

We cleared that garden there. We planted it and had some such vegetables growing there. It would just be a guess as to how many acres, but it was a pretty good-sized garden. The Japanese were raising the vegetables for themselves. I guess they were realizing that food was kind of scarce.

Marcello: Describe what your barracks were like here at Changi.

Chambers: They were two-story buildings, maybe three. I know it was at least two. It was a great, big building. I don't remember the partitions in them. I do remember that there were some big posts in there in these big ol' buildings. I don't remember any walls on the interior. Some big concrete posts were supporting the upstairs and the roof, and then they had big porches on them.

It just seemed like you'd make down your bunk next to the wall where you wanted to bunk. You and your buddies would roll out your bunk wherever you wanted to--camp out on the porch or next to a door or wherever you could get. Some of the guys were out in the middle, and some of them were out on the porches. They didn't assign you to any certain area.

By that time then, the sailors and the soldiers were all pretty well mixed. When they moved them, they moved sailors, soldiers, and everybody, so we just grouped up as one group of Americans, is what it amounted to, more or less. We had some Marines off the Houston--survivors--and then we had the Navy, and then the Army. I don't think that we had any Air Force people with us.

Marcello: Were bedbugs or lice a problem in these barracks?

Chambers: Over at Changi?

Marcello: Yes.

Chambers: Not at that time, no. Later on, we did but not in Camp Changi.

I don't believe that we had any body lice there, but we got them later on.

Marcello: Describe the relationship that developed between the British and the Americans.

Chambers: Oh, that was terrible there. The British officers was wanting to keep the camp just like it was, and some of the guys out there was going to try and eat some monkey. They got chunking things at the monkeys, so the British officers went and asked our officers to try and get our guys to stop killing the monkeys. They were going to see how one would eat (chuckle), but they didn't get to try it, that I know of. Our officers went down and told them to leave them alone because the British had requested that they didn't kill them. I don't guess that they were all that wild. They ran all around over the island there. You would see some out...they wasn't pets. They wasn't feeding them, I don't think. They were on their own. So that caused a little hard feelings.

Then the British planted them a little garden around behind their barracks, and they still wasn't making the officers work too much. Then the American boys got to going around and stealing vegetables out of these British officers' gardens. I think one of them might have had some chickens over there at one time. A bunch of the guys (chuckle) got to them, so it caused some pretty hard feelings between the

British and the Americans, I know that.

Marcello: I heard that there were also some problems concerning the coconuts. The British evidently referred to all of these coconuts as belonging to the king, and Americans were not supposed to eat them.

Chambers: Yes, that's true, too. They sure did. I didn't hear them say that, but, like you said, the word gets around. They wanted to preserve the camp. They didn't feel like..they just felt like the Japanese were borrowing the camp. They felt like it still belonged to the British--they felt like (chuckle).

Marcello: This was a huge camp, wasn't it?

Chambers: Yes, sir, it was a big place. I'd be afraid to say how many buildings that they were in, but there were some buildings around that some of the British officers were in that were not two-story buildings, also, too.

But the ones that we stayed in...and that was one good thing. We didn't have any Japanese on the interior part of the camp. You could get out and walk around, and the British officers were out for their walk and exercise, so they was complaining to our officers that we wouldn't salute them. This guy that wrote the book, Ben Dunn, he and I was walking one day, and an ol' English colonel, boy, he stopped and gave us an "eating-out." We told him that we wasn't in the British Army, and we wasn't saluting. He

said he was going to go tell our officers. We said, "Well, that's the thing for you to do. Don't tell us. We don't want to listen to you." He did--he went and told them. I think that one of our officers mentioned to us about him coming and telling us, but he didn't tell us...he said, "Well, I am not going to salute one of them, either." (chuckle) We told him that we didn't feel that we had to salute the British officer because our officers had already told us not to worry about that until we got back on our own military rules and regulations. The Japs were running this thing, anyway, so just forget all of that.

Marcello: Do you recall any problems regarding the distribution of Red Cross supplies here at Changi?

Chambers: Camp Changi? I didn't get any. I heard some of them saying that they had seen some Japanese smoking some American-made cigarettes, but I don't remember if that was Changi or not. There were some rumors that there was some Red Cross supplies, and there was rumors that the British got some of them. We never did. I never did even see any, or I didn't see anybody that got any while I was there; but it was rumored to the effect that the British got some, and they said that the Japanese was smoking some American-made cigarettes at one time. The only Red Cross parcel that I got was almost at the end of the war, but that was way later.

Marcello: What was the food like here at Changi?

Chambers: It was sorry. The only thing...I guess it was plentiful for a while, and then it got scarce. The Japanese had some old mutton that they got out of a British cold storage warehouse that they gave us there. Mutton is bad enough when it's the best it can be, to my estimation, and whenever it gets spoiled, it's twice that bad. But we ate it.

As far as survival, it was pretty good for a while, but then it got to where they didn't even have any more of that spoiled mutton, and it was bad. They got to putting that ol' curry powder in some of the food. It got terrible; it got sickening. But we had done learned by then that you had to eat. Whatever they had, it wasn't going to be desirable, anyway. It's more or less like taking medicine. You was eating for survival instead of...well, you had a desire to eat good food, if you had had a chance at it, but you never did really get hungry for what you were going to have. I ate it more or less like taking medicine. I didn't even look at it. I knew that it wasn't going to taste good, so I just ate it for the nourishment that I could get out of it.

Marcello: Was rice still the basic food that you were receiving here at Changi?

Chambers: Yes. I'd say that all the way through it was the basic food. At times it was more plentiful than it was at others, but I don't know how they got that much dirty rice. We never did get any good, clean, white rice. I don't know...they must

have taken it and mixed it up with dirt or something. You could sweep all the storage house floors in the world and not have gotten that much. I'd have thought that we would have finally eaten it up, but we didn't. It was dirty whenver we started on it in Java, and it was dirty until the war was over.

Marcello: Awhile ago you were talking about clearing the land in order to make this garden. Was that the basic kind of work that you were doing here at Changi?

Chambers: Yes, sir. That's about all of the work we did do in Changi. They might have had some other working parties to go out, but that's the only thing that I did.

Marcello: How hard or easy was that detail?

Chambers: That was hard work, but I was still in good enough shape that it didn't hurt me then. I could do my part of the work then without hurting me at all. I was lucky. I was in good shape physically. I wasn't heavy. When I went in the Army, I only weighed 164 pounds or something like that, and, you know, basic training is supposed to be one of your roughest times. Of course, war wasn't started, and it wasn't as rugged training then as it was later, I'm sure. In thirteen weeks, I gained forty-five pounds in basic training. When I was captured, I weighed 206 pounds. I don't know the lowest weight I got to, but in Burma one time I weighed 118 pounds. That was pretty skinny then (chuckle).

Marcello: How long a workday would you be putting in on this gardening detail?

Chambers: It wasn't unreasonable. We'd go out in the morning, I'd say, about eight o'clock, and we'd come back in at five o'clock--probably eight to ten hours a day.

Marcello: I understand that a pretty good relationship developed here between the Americans and the Scots. Is that true?

Chambers: Yes, we had some Scotsmen that we thought a lot of. We got pretty close to the Scots, and the Scots and the Australians were real close, but it seemed like the British were different. They were from different parts of Britian. Some of them you couldn't hardly understand. You talk about speaking English, They was hard to understand. They said that we was, too, you know, that East Texas drawl, for sure. But I bet that they could understand us a lot easier than we could them. But the Scots were a bunch of good guys. On the whole, they were real good guys, and so was the Australians. We got along with them real good...and some of the British. But I'd say there was more friction between the British and everybody.

Marcello: Why do you think that was?

Chambers: I don't know. I think it must be the way that people are raised up. They get that attitude in the environment they're raised up in, I suppose. I don't know of any other reason.

The Australians was kind of like the Americans were back

in the...they were a little bit behind times. They were then, but they may not be now. They may be ahead of us now. They were just a bunch of good ol' hard-working people. It seemed like the biggest majority of the Australians was farmers or ranchers or working people...truck drivers. You didn't find too many...they had a lot in common with the American people then. Up until World War II, nearly everybody had had some experiences with some good, hard work sometime or the other then, too, and I think that's the reason. I think that England was probably so crowded that they didn't have the experiences that the Australians or the Americans did.

And the Dutch, I think, were a whole lot like the English. I think one thing that caused us not to be any closer to the Dutch than we were was the simple reason of not understanding their language. It wasn't too many Dutchmen that could speak very good English, neither. I think I told you before that a lot of the Dutchmen raised in Java was half-castes. There was a lot of them that could speak real good, understandable English. We didn't have any problem carrying on conversations with them in English at all. Some of them guys could speak several different languages. They could speak Dutch, Malay...boy, they just... they was young guys, too. They knew all of that stuff. They had already been schooled in some kind of vocational school.

They had radio technicans. A lot of them guys we liked. The Black Dutch--the half-castes that was raised in Java--it seems like we got along with them a lot better than the Dutchmen out of Holland. Of course, they had the Dutchmen out of Holland over there running the island--military personnel. But I'd say we got along with the Dutch far better than the British--I believe.

Marcello: As I recall, the Scots actually piped the Americans out of that camp when they left. Do you recall that?

Chambers: Yes, they sure did. They put on a show there. Some of them had on their kilts and bagpipes. Yes, they sure did. I had forgot about it.

Marcello: Now in early January, 1943, your group leaves Changi. As I recall, you board a train there in Singapore, and you go up to George Town or Penang, as it is sometimes called. From there you get on a ship. First of all, describe the train ride from Changi up to Penang.

Chambers: The trains were smaller than our trains here. We were in these little boxcars, and it was overcrowded, too, just like the ship. Anytime that you was allowed to get off, boy, everybody would jump off and straighten their legs and walk around a little bit. I don't recall how many days we were on that train either. I don't know if we was in there two or three days or how long it took.

Marcello: I think it was at least that long. Were these enclosed

cars, or were they like cattle cars?

Chambers: They were like grain cars. They had doors on them, but the doors were left open. They had a stop on them, a roof on them.

Marcello: How hot was it?

Chambers: Oh, it was hot. You'd get a little breeze when the train was going, but it didn't travel fast enough to create a lot of wind through there, either.

Marcello: Would there be a guard in there with you?

Chambers: There would be a guard on every car, I believe. Yes, there was some in there. Of course, he had to have more room than the other guys. He would get to screaming and hollering once in awhile and make them move back to give him a little more room. I think that most of the time he got close to the door and got a little more air than we did, too. If you got caught back in the corner of one of them cars back in there, it was...of course, we were getting used to the hot weather then. I think another thing in our favor that was good for the hot weather part of it was to lose some weight. Then the heat didn't bother you so bad. Then we got used to it, too, so that was the advantage to losing the weight.

Marcello: How were you fed while you were on this train?

Chambers: We would stop at a little place here and yonder, and I think that the food was brought out from someplace. I don't know

who cooked it. I guess it was some of them natives or something. It wasn't much food, either. It was pretty sorry, to the best of my recollection. I don't think that we got any food...well, I know it wasn't good; I mean, I don't know if it was better than Changi. In Changi it got to be where it was real bad food. It got down to grits when we left there, and we were only there about three months.

Marcello: Okay,you get to Penang, and you board another ship on January 11, 1943. This ship, I think,is the Dai Moji Maru, is that correct?

Chambers: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, first of all, I want you to describe what conditions were like aboard the Dai Moji Maru.

Chambers: They were pretty well the same as they were on the other one. It was overcrowded. It was hot. They kept us down in that hold, and they carried us out to this ship by barge and put us on. I understand that the water wasn't deep enough for it to come in to land at the docks. We went out, and they put us on this ship. We just kept setting there and setting there and didn't move for about three or four days.

Marcello: Now, once again, had they divided that hold into platforms or tiers?

Chambers: Yes, it was double layers of people in the hold down there--in some of them. I believe that there was a hold that the

Australians...I believe one of them holds didn't have the double layer, but the ones that we were in...I don't think that they had double layers over the whole thing on it. Maybe it was just a side and not the end. I believe that's right, as best I can remember. They had some of that decking, but it wasn't near like the first one. It was still crowded because they didn't have any spare room--we didn't think. But I guess they did have some spare room because we took on some survivors off of another ship later on.

Marcello: Now when you leave Penang, you are part of a small convoy, are you not?

Chambers: Yes, sir. We had another ship that had troops on it. It had Dutch, and we had Americans and Australians on our ship. We were up front, and then they had some Australians on the back.

Marcello: Now one of these ships had some Japanese troops on it, too, did it not? Some engineer troops or something?

Chambers: The one that the Dutch was on, they had some...I understand they had a thousand Japanese and a thousand Dutch on it.

Marcello: In addition to those two ships, wasn't there also a small escort?

Chambers: A little sub chaser, we called it. It was just around here and yonder, and sometimes it would be plumb out of sight. I don't know if he was out searching to see if he could see

anything.

Marcello: While you were on this ship, were you allowed free movement up on the main deck or anything of that nature?

Chambers: Yes, they let us go up at times, and at times at night I don't think that they didn't, and when it got dark everyone would get down below that could. At certain times in the daytime, they'd let you up on top. I know that because we were talking to a guard...like I say, I didn't talk to them any more than I had to, but I listened to some of the other guys talk, and some of the guys kind of questioned the Japanese about when we were going to leave, in other words, why was we sitting there loaded up and all ready to go. He said, "Four times this ship had been to Burma, and four times Americans...Boom! Boom! Boom!" We didn't believe it because we sure thought that they would have sunk that thing if they had. We kept on setting there and setting there, and one afternoon--I'd say about the middle of the afternoon--they raised anchor and took off.

Marcello: Now by this time, do you know that you are going to Burma?

Chambers: I don't believe. I don't think we knew where we were going for sure...I guess we did, too, because that Jap had told us that four times that ship had been to Burma, and four times Americans, "Boom! Boom! Boom.'" So I guess that we had been told that we were going to Burma. Anyhow, that's hard to remember if we really knew or not.

Marcello: Okay, so you take off for Burma, and a rather important event happens on January 15, 1943.

Chambers: Yes, sir, I remember that real well (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe what happens.

Chambers: We were down in the hold, and some of the guys were playing cards with an old wore-out deck of cards that they had managed to keep--playing Pitch. The ones that wasn't playing... everybody was sitting around watching the game. We were allowed to go up on top some--that's the reason I remember--because here comes a bunch of guys running down the ladder, getting back down. Somebody said, "Here they come!" And we said, "Here who comes?" They said, "Some four-motor planes, and the Japs hasn't got none!" So we knew what they were talking about then. By that time we could hear the bombs going off, and you could look up and see planes.

There was a Mexican boy, Joe Rivera, who was up on top when that happened, and then he came down. He said, "Boy, they got that one over there, and now they're circling, and they're coming after us!"

Marcello: In the meantime, what are you guys doing?

Chambers: We were just sitting there tight.

Marcello: What are the Japanese doing?

Chambers: They were shooting at them. They had a little ol' gun on the back, and you could hear that "bang, bang, bang."

Someway or other, the word came down that the ship was

on fire on the back. I don't recall if that was after they bombed it or before. They came over and dropped a bomb, and we got a report that there was a fire on the back. When they dropped those bombs, somebody said--I don't know if they knew--they dropped them like a planter, you know. They said that they dropped four 1,000-pound bombs--just one of the planes. I guess that the others had already done dropped theirs. I believe it was three of them four-motor planes, and the Japs didn't never hit one with their little ol' gun. That shrapnel came through both sides of that ship. It was all above the waterline, except the concussion, and maybe some of the shrapnel cut a hole in it. But the pumps took care of it, so we didn't have to get off.

We started picking up survivors off of that other ship, but that concussion from that bomb...the rust and stuff in there...if you've ever seen them sweep the gravel back on a road with these ol' brooms when they put down fresh gravel, it creates all of that dust. You couldn't see across that hold in that ship because of that rust from the concussion until the dust all settled.

Marcello: In the meantime, are the Japanese training guns on the prisoners to make sure that they all stay down in the hold?

Chambers: They did, yes. They sure did. They had a machine gun up there. And somebody...I couldn't see him from where I was.

I couldn't see the guy with the machine gun. Someone said that he was swinging that gun around, and he said that everybody should stay down, stay down in the hold.

Marcello: Meanwhile, what is happening down in the hold? Is there panic? Calm?

Chambers: Some of the guys began to kind of panic, but we had a naval officer--he was the one that I couldn't remember his name, as I was telling you earlier--and I thought that he was real dumb. He told everybody, "Just don't panic! If it sinks, we'll have plenty of time to get off! Don't worry about it and stay put!"

Marcello: Are people yelling and screaming and hollering and this sort of thing, or is there quiet down there?

Chambers: They were kind of hollering--"What are we going to do?"--until that officer said that. It seemed like everybody took him at his word because he had had the experience of being sunk once before, so they thought, "Well, let's listen to him." He told them, "Just don't get too excited! We'll have time to get off if we have to!" He said, "Just don't get too excited."

They came and announced that the planes were gone, and they said in a little bit that the fire was out on the back. Then somebody told us what happened, that this gun back-fired on the back of that ship, and it killed most of the gun crew. Maybe the shrapnel from the bombs killed some of them,

too. A lot of that shrapnel went up through the bridge of the ship and killed a lot of Japanese. I don't believe that we lost an American--not one. I think that we had one guy that was up on top, and he never could get back down. He was a naval guy. I forgot his name, too...Jack Yarbro. He got hit with a piece of shrapnel in his back, but he recovered over that.

Marcello: About how long did this attack last?

Chambers: I would say that they just came over and dropped their bombs at the first ship, and then they circled. I'd say it lasted ten minutes--by the time that they made their second run and dropped their bombs at us. Then they left, and we didn't know if they had run out of bombs or if they thought...since they seen that fire on the back, they might have thought that we were going down, anyway.

Somebody said that one of the guys that was out of the Navy got a mirror, and he got in that little ol' toilet over on the side, and he was trying to flash a POW signal to those planes. He said he didn't know if they saw it or not, but they thought then that that might have been another reason that they didn't come back, too.

Marcello: What happens in the aftermath of the attack?

Chambers: We set there and picked up survivors off the ship that went down. We picked up, I think, about 800 or 900 Dutch out of that 1,000, and then they only had about 400

Japs out of that. They said that a bomb hit right in the hold of that 1,000 Japs and killed most of them. Maybe 300 or 400 of them were left. It was way after dark when we were still setting there, and you could still hear them screaming out there--Dutchmen and Japs, too. We didn't know what any of them was saying.

I heard a rumor that some of them big ol' Dutchmen out there had a field night drowning them Japs. They'd drift up to them on something, and them ol' Dutchmen would get that Jap and hold him under (chuckle). They said that they really got rid of a bunch of them out there.

Marcello: What were your own feelings when that attack was going on?

Chambers: I just felt like, "Well, this is it," you know. I thought that this was the end of the road right here. Since they had sunk that other one, I was just ready--if I was going to be able--to get something and hold on when it went down. I didn't have any doubt about it. I think that that's another case where I got so scared after it was all over. I didn't have time to get scared before. It seemed like if somebody was going to walk up and shoot you, you'd just say, "Well, this is it." That's the way I felt. I had no doubt about it that this was the end of the road, and there wasn't too much you could do about it. Whenever it was all over, I thought, "Boy, if I ever do get my foot on land again, I'll live forever!" (chuckle)

Marcello: What was the attitude of the Japanese in the aftermath of this attack?

Chambers: They had these Japanese that was picked up, and they had some officers off of that ship that was sunk, and they just put them on the deck and crowded them in with us. They just elbowed in like they was prisoners, too. They couldn't eat that food, so, boy, I was really fattening up then. I was taking all of that food that them officers... those Jap officers couldn't...they were used to better food than that, and they couldn't eat it, either. So I lived pretty good, as far as food is concerned, but I was still ready to get off.

Marcello: What kind of food were you getting on this ship?

Chambers: They would bring them a little better rice, but they were still feeding us the same dirty rice and stew. Them Jap officers...they was feeding them quite a bit better. They'd bring their food out, and they'd get it and come back and sit down among us and eat, but it still wasn't as good as they had been having, I don't think, so they was giving us a lot of their food then.

Marcello: Did the Japanese seem to be treating you any rougher as a result of this raid?

Chambers: I don't think so, not on the ship, because...maybe they would have if they had had more room. It might have been another thing, too, that they might have been so glad that they wasn't

sunk themselves that they just didn't think about it. But they didn't seem to mind rubbing shoulders with you to have a place to sit down. That was the best thing that I can remember about it. Some of them had some cigarettes, and they'd give some to the prisoners. It was very unusual for that, too. They wouldn't give them a whole pack, but they'd give you a cigarette to smoke.

Marcello: On January 16, 1943, which would be the day following the raid, you came into Moulmein, Burma, and you off-loaded there. What happens when you off-load in Moulmein?

Chambers: They marched us through the town to a jail--Moulmein Jail. Is that the 16th or the 17th? I'm thinking we stayed on that ship all day on the 16th and then until about five o'clock on the 17th. On the 16th, they unloaded all these dead Japs that the shrapnel killed aboard this ship. I guess that a lot of them died, and they were throwing Dutch over the side the next day--that gangrene had set in and killed. They were operating on them without any anesthetics, holding them down and cutting that gangrene out, but I don't think it saved any of them. Maybe that was the same day, but we went on and got off. They marched us to that Moulmein Jail, and they still had some guys there that was wounded and dying from gangrene, too. It was so hot and sultry and sweaty on that ship that if a guy had a wound, we didn't have enough medicial supplies

to get him any first aid, anyway.

Marcello: Did you have any contact with any civilians when you marched from the docks into the Moulmein jail?

Chambers: No, sir, not to my...we saw some Burmese along the side. That was some more things that I heard rumors of. Somebody had said something, you know, this or that a couple times, but you didn't know what to believe or not.

Marcello: Describe what it was like inside that jail.

Chambers: It had a wall around it. They had some cells, but it was so crowded that they didn't make us all go inside and get in the cells. They let us sleep on the porch like we did at the army camps, too. I don't believe that we were in that jail except about two days. They had some big ol' heavy doors there with big bars on them and stuff. I don't think that they locked any of the guys in any of those cells or anything. I think that it was more or less the run of the whole perimeter. You could go anywhere inside the walls that you wanted to. I don't remember how long we stayed in this jail. It wouldn't have been but just a very short time--two or three days at the most.

Marcello: Okay, from Moulmein you go to the base camp for this railroad, and I'm referring to Thanbyuzayat. How did you get from Moulmein to Thanbyuzayat? Do you recall? Did you go by train?

Chambers: I believe that we must have went by truck or either walked.

I don't know if that's what they called it. I don't guess that that was the 18 Kilo--the railhead.

Marcello: That's correct--the railhead. And from there you went to the 18 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: Yes, sir. I believe we walked. I'm sure that we walked to Thanbyuzayat or whatever you called it. To the best of my recollection, we walked. I remember walking through the town...no, that's when we were going to jail. I don't remember how we left that jail--I sure don't.

Marcello: You got to Thanbyuzayat on January 27, 1943. Do you recall the speech that you were given by Colonel Nagatomo when you got there?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What do you remember from that speech?

Chambers: I remember him telling us that we were brought there to work, that we were going to build a railroad. I don't remember too much of the details of it. I know that they were talking about another Japanese officer that made a speech standing on the bank of the river up there, before we ever got there, and where he made his speech from, he was saying that they were going to build that railroad if they had to build it with the bodies of dead people.

Marcello: Wasn't it Nagatomo that said this?

Chambers: I don't remember which one that it was. I don't remember if I heard this one say that or if it was the other one,

but I know we talked about it so many times. But he was letting us know that they wasn't going to have any sympathy for us, that we come there to do a job and it was his job to see that we done it, and that we were going to do it.

Marcello: Now was he saying this in Japanese, and then was it being translated?

Chambers: I believe he was saying it in English, to the best that I can remember. He was making his speech in English, and there was lot of it that I couldn't understand; I mean, it wasn't very good English that he was using.

Marcello: How did he make his presentation? Was he on a platform or anything of that nature?

Chambers: He was on some kind of little platform, the best that I can remember. He was up...I don't remember what it was. It could have been on a bed of a truck, as far as I can remember, but it seemed like it was a little platform, anyhow.

I was more interested in him getting it over with than I was in what he was saying, anyway. Really, I wasn't paying much attention, but I figured that whatever it was going to be, it was going to be a bunch of propaganda or something to demoralize the troops or whatever, you know. So that's the reason I really didn't put as much attention to it as I should have, because I haven't thought about it being that much, you know.

But it would have been a good thing if you could have had a recording of that, but I don't guess that they ever had a tape recorder over there. If they had, they'd have throwed it away before they ever got caught with it, I imagine.

Marcello: Now the first camp that you would be going to was the 18 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: And all of these camps are called "Kilo Camps," and their number depends on how many kilos they are from the rail-head, which is Thanbyuzayat. Describe how you got from Thanbyuzayat to the 18 Kilo Camp and any experiences that you had on your way. How did you get from Thanbyuzayat to the 18 Kilo Camp?

Chambers: The best that I can recall, we went out on some trucks to the 18 Kilo Camp--part of the way, anyway. Actually, what happened I don't recall, other than that it was dusty. I remember that it was dusty and that there wasn't no rain at that time.

Marcello: This was in the dry season, isn't that correct?

Chambers: Yes, sir. The monsoon season hadn't started. When it was not the monsoon season, it didn't rain at all, and then when the monsoon season got there, it didn't quit at all. That's about what it amounted to.

Marcello: Describe what that 18 Kilo Camp looked like from a physical

standpoint. Once more, take me on an imaginary walk around the 18 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: When we came to the 18 Kilo Camp, it was dry and deserted-looking. There wasn't anybody there before we got there, it looked like. There had been some people there, and they had worked some on the rails, but they had been moved out. Maybe they were clearing the right-of-way more than they were building the ramps. They had finished their jobs and had moved on up the railroad, I suppose. We camped there, and we started moving dirt.

Marcello: Now what kind of buildings would there be in this 18 Kilo Camp?

Chambers: They were made out of bamboo with palm leaves. They'd take a bamboo stick and double the palm leaf over it and weave through it with another bamboo string. They'd hang those panels of leaves up. It was approximately three feet long, and they'd make a cover about ten inches to a foot wide, and they'd hang those over the sides, and that was your wall. They had an aisle down the center of these huts that was dirt...ground. Then on each side of this aisle, they had a floor made out of bamboo. They were different heights. They didn't level the ground off to build the floor. It would be higher in some places than others. Some places it would be a foot-and-a-half, and other places it'd be four feet above the ground.

Marcello: In other words, are you talking about a platform on each side of this dirt aisle?

Chambers: Yes, sir. And it was made to sleep on, not walk on. You'd get on it with your feet to make up your bunk up there or to put something in your storage bag if you had one. You didn't walk on it. You'd just roll your bedding up whenever you got ready to go to work, and you'd leave it there until you came in, and then you'd roll it out. You'd sit on the edge of the bamboo floor or platform or sleep on it. You might get up there to straighten your things up or to get something out of your bag or whatever you had.

Marcello: Approximately how many men might there be in one of these huts?

Chambers: I'd say that it would be 150 feet long--some of them. Maybe some of them was longer than others, but they'd give us about two feet of space to sleep on. The next guy that was sleeping beside you, he'd be as close to you as he could get.

Marcello: And that was essentially your home. That was your space.

Chambers: Yes, sir, that was your home when you got off of work. They'd take you into camp, and, of course, you could roam around in the hut or out in the compound or wherever you might want to go or anything like that.

Marcello: Now would there ever be any fires or anything at either end

of these huts or in the middle or anything of that nature?

Chambers: At times they let us build a fire in there and set a drum of water on it to heat to treat our ulcers with whenever we began to get ulcers. You know, our system was beginning to get run down by the time the monsoon season came in, but we didn't have any rain in the 18 Kilo Camp. It was just a hot, dry hole. It was clay or dust.

Marcello: Approximately how many men would it be in one of these kilo camps? Again, you're going to have to estimate this, of course.

Chambers: I know in some of them it was as many as 3,000.

Marcello: And approximately how many guards might there be?

Chambers: I'd say sixty or seventy. That's just a wild guess. They'd have one little hut for the guards. They wouldn't have too many on duty. It would have been easy to have got out of camp.

Marcello: There were no fences around these camps, were there?

Chambers: Yes, sir, they had some bamboo fences around them. Now some of them...yes, they had some fences around the 18 Kilo, I feel sure. I know that nearly all of them had a fence, but it wouldn't have been no problem to have got through it, because a lot of guys slipped outside and traded cloth or any kind of material with the natives for eggs or tobacco or anything they could trade for. It wasn't any problem as far as getting out. You could have

been on a working party, and they didn't have enough guards to keep you from getting away.

Marcello: What did the cookhouse look like?

Chambers: It was the same thing. It was a dirt floor made out of palm leaves and bamboo, and they made the roof out of the same thing. They'd pile enough of those palm leaves up there that...oh, it'd be some water that would spray through when it rained, but it was fairly dry.

Marcello: Now was it at this point that you got your first Korean guards?

Chambers: Yes, sir, I'd say that's where we first started getting some Korean guards.

Marcello: Describe what the Korean guards were like.

Chambers: They were a little bigger than the Japanese. They looked a whole lot like them, but as a usual thing, they were some bigger, I think. They had a little bit different uniform and might have been a little more lighter complected than the regular Japanese, as a whole.

Marcello: How did they compare or contrast to the Japanese guards with regard to their disposition and treatment of prisoners?

Chambers: I think they were a lot more willing to beat up on the prisoners than the Japanese were. Of course, we had some Japanese that enjoyed it, too, but I'd say more of the Koreans because, like we talked earlier, the lowest classification in the Japanese Army could slap up on the

highest of the Korean occupational troops; then their ranks went on down, too, and the lowest thing that they had anywhere was a Korean that was a private--one star, two star and three star--and then you got on up to the star with a stripe, which was usually corporals and sergeants and so forth, and then it went on up to lieutenant and captain. Then anybody could slap a prisoner around, so the only thing that Korean guard could slap around was a prisoner. So I think they took their thrill out on getting to beat up on somebody, and we was the only ones that they could beat on.

Marcello: What means of physical punishment would they employ?

Chambers: I think that it was mostly bashing. Whenever they wanted to do something to you, they'd beat you with a bamboo pole or hit you with a gun butt or kick you with a shoe. They didn't have any special way--just the first thing they thought of that was handy. I know that they'd try to jab you with a gun butt, you know, in the groin or anywhere they could hit you and kick you on the shins or whatever. I was lucky. I was never kicked on the shins, but some of the guys were.

Marcello: That could be the beginning of one of those tropical ulcers, too.

Chambers: That's right. We had one of those later on, when they began to draft people out on the working party. As the men began

to get sick...we didn't have too many sick men up until then, but then as they began to get sick, and working harder, too...and they was making us work harder. They really wanted to get that railroad built. We began to get into worse shape, began to get malaria. I think that I was one of the first ones. I got malaria at the 18 Kilo Camp, and I had had malaria back home before I ever went to the service. We had some quinine then, and our doctor was from out in West Texas, and he hadn't been around much malaria. He was telling me to drink tea and rest.

And at that time, they wasn't making everybody go out on the working party, so you could take a day off if you were sick; but later on, it got to where if they said they wanted 120 men...well, if a hundred men went out--Americans, you know, out of this camp...they'd also want so many Australians and Englishmen and whatever, but I'm just using that number. If you was twenty short, what happened was, they'd send those people on to work, and they'd make all the sick men come out. They'd send a Korean around, and he'd pick out you and you and you, and he didn't know what was the matter with you.

Getting back to the story of kicking you on the shins, we had one guy...I forgot what his name was...he was a sailor off of the Houston. He had a big ulcer almost from his knee to his ankle, and he just had a piece of cloth hanging

over it. He didn't have enough bandages to cover it and no medication at that time to put on it. I guess that Jap thought that he was just kind of putting on. The ol' boy had a chill. He was shaking. He had a blanket around him. That Jap made him pull that cloth up on that ulcer and let him see if he had a ulcer too bad to keep him from going to work. The ol' boy raised that up, and the Jap hauled off and kicked that ulcer with those hob-nailed shoes, and, boy, blood just flew. He died in a short time.

Marcello: So these were the kinds of physical punishment that these Koreans were capable of dealing out to the prisoners.

Chambers: Yes, sir. You'd be on a working party, and he'd come up and kick you. He'd be hollering to tell you to do something, and you didn't understand him. You didn't know what he wanted, and he'd come up and bash you. He might start pointing with his hand and telling you until you did understand. He thought that because you didn't do it, well, you knew what he was saying even though it was Japanese.

Marcello: But in these camps, then, you had Japanese administrative personnel, Korean guard personnel, and Japanese engineering personnel. Is that correct?

Chambers: The Japanese wasn't staying in our camp. They'd be in, like, a camp engineers someplace, and they'd tell the Koreans how many people to bring on the job that they were doing. Then the Korean guards would bring that many people over

to them, and they'd turn us over to the Japanese to work all day. The Koreans would sit around and stand guard, and whenever they got through working us, the Japanese would let them take us back into camp. They'd march us back into camp. The Japanese didn't guard us. I don't know if we ever did have any Japanese guards after we got to Burma or not. I don't recall any.

Marcello: Could you tell that the Japanese had a certain amount of disgust for the Koreans, that is, that the Japanese held the Koreans in low esteem?

Chambers: It seems...but maybe they just got the attitude...well, we know they wouldn't let the Koreans in the Japanese Army for soldiers. They'd use them for occupation troops, so that told us right there that they thought they were a better grade of people than the Koreans. They kind of thought that the Korean was a coolie, I think, compared to them. I think they felt like they were more qualified people for any job than the Koreans would be.

Marcello: At the time that you were at the 18 Kilo Camp, what was your clothing situation? How were you fixed for clothing?

Chambers: I had some shorts, and I still had a shirt or two then. I'd took and cut some khakis off and made me some shorts.

Marcello: How about your shoes?

Chambers: I still had shoes, but I believe they wore out there mighty quick afterwards. My feet were so big...some of the guys

got some Jap shoes, There wasn't a Jap whose foot was as big as mine, so I cut the toes out of some of them and let my toes stick over. It blistered my toes, but I thought, "Well, I'm going to have sore feet, anyhow, and it ain't no use to have them shoes." So I threw them away, I went two-and-a-half years without any kind of shoes. A lot of the guys found some Jap shoes, and then they had some British shoes that they gave one time, but I never did find a pair of them big enough for me. I don't know where they got them--from Singapore probably--but they wouldn't fit me, either.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the work details that you'd be on here at the 18 Kilo Camp. Now you're beginning to build this railroad, and, as I recall, the 18 Kilo Camp was in fairly level country. You really weren't in the jungles yet.

Chambers: No, sir. It wasn't all that hilly, but it was some...I guess we made some cuts, I'd say, fifteen feet deep, but by the time you piled the dirt up on top of that, then you'd have to be carrying the dirt on top of that dirt that you'd done carried out and dumping further back. It was clay and it was hard digging, and that's when they began to assign us three meters per man.

Marcello: They didn't start out at three meters per man, did they?

Chambers: No, sir. They started out...and then they kept raising it.

I forget what it was they started out at. It seems like it was about two. But I think they seen that we couldn't get anymore than that there because it was hard digging at the 18 Kilo Camp. Now that was some hard digging. You'd dig down and hit that ol' clay, and you could hit that with a pick, and you'd knock off a chunk of it not much bigger than a hen's egg.

Marcello: Describe what a typical workday was like from the time you got up until you got in in the evening here at the 18 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: At the 18 Kilo Camp, we'd walk out to the job...

Marcello: At what time?

Chambers: I suppose it was probably around seven o'clock, and we'd work until...at that time they were letting us knock off pretty well around sundown. Sometimes they would let us knock off a little before sundown, and then we'd go by a little ol' creek there. We didn't have a lot of water in there. They'd let us bathe in this creek.

Marcello: How many straight days would you be working? In other words, did you have any days off?

Chambers: I don't recall if they were letting us have any days off. I believe that they let us have a day off at the 18 Kilo Camp. I'm not sure.

Marcello: How often?

Chambers: It wasn't too often. I don't recall how often, but it wasn't

very often.

Marcello: What kind of jobs would you be doing when you were out working on the railroad?

Chambers: We were digging dirt. You was either digging with a pick, or you had a rice sack or a gunny sack that they sacked that rice in. They had a bamboo pole through each side of it and a man on each end between those two poles. Somebody would have a shovel, and he'd pile up dirt on there until he got it loaded, and these two guys would take it up top and dump it. Then they had somebody in there that had a pick loosening the dirt up and somebody with a shovel to put it on there. Like I say, in some places it was hard digging, but even whenever they started to assign you so much dirt to move, it didn't make any difference if it was sandy, or it didn't make any difference if it was clay. They'd still assign you the same amount. They didn't have any consideration for the digging or how much work it would take to get it. If it was on top of the ground, you could get it with a shovel. If you got through too quick, they'd give you some more, but they never did knock off any. It was hard digging. It was tough. When it was getting close to quitting time, they'd let you quit at a reasonable time, but if you finished up too early, well, they'd assign you a little more.

Marcello: Now you mentioned awhile ago that you were assigned quotas.

According to Ben Dunn's book, it started out at 1.2 cubic meters per man.

Chambers: I forgot what it was, but I know that it got bigger, yes.

Marcello: Why did the Japanese increase it?

Chambers: I think they figured that we were getting through too early. I think that's why.

Marcello: Do you recall what time you were getting through when you first started working on that road?

Chambers: Yes, sir. We was getting through before sundown. Of course, we didn't have any watches or anything, and they didn't go by the time, anyway. But if it was too early, they didn't want to take us in because the Japanese engineers didn't feel like they had worked us enough. I think that's why they got to giving us more and more and more. And then we got to where the dirt was a little easier digging once we got away from there. But I don't recall getting three meters at the 18 Kilo Camp. They might have, but I think they might have started that at the 80 Kilo Camp because we had some more sandier soil there.

Marcello: Describe how they would mark off the required amount of dirt that you would have to move. How would this take place?

Chambers: They would take, like, thirty men out in one group, maybe more. Anyhow, I'm just using thirty for a number,

Marcello: And this is what they would refer to as a kumi?

Chambers: Yes, sir. It consisted of different amounts. There were some of them bigger than others, and I think we were the biggest kumi of the whole lot. I think that we had seventy-some men in it when it started out. They'd mark off...if you had thirty men, they'd mark off ninety square meters. Then they had a stick, and they'd go around the edges and check the bank to see if it was a meter deep. They had a notch cut on the stick.

But there was some of them guys that didn't have sense enough to know that we would leave it high in the center. But there were some of them that it wouldn't make any difference. If there was a pile of ol' clay out there where a tree had been caved up, and it might be several extra meters of dirt piled up there for some reason or another, it'd still have to be down a meter deep where that was, too. So sometimes you was getting more than that. Sometimes you could get away with it, and sometimes you wouldn't.

Marcello: Was there any other way that you could cheat?

Chambers: By moving the stakes, it you caught him not looking. That was done sometimes, too. We done that, too. We pulled that stake up. We'd catch him not looking, and somebody would get over there talking to him and get his attention, and somebody else would move the stake. He wouldn't think

to measure it again.

Marcello: Now as you say, you were making cuts and fills on this road--is that correct--for the most part?

Chambers: Yes. You were always having to carry your dirt uphill because if you were cutting it down, you were getting it out; and if you were making a fill, you were digging it up and carrying it up to build it up higher, anyway.

Marcello: Which job did you like the least on that railroad?

Chambers: I imagine that I liked carrying the dirt least because of my feet. I've always had bad feet. I had callouses, and my feet would get sore. I didn't have shoes. A lot of guys didn't have foot trouble. Of course, I had done a lot of pick-and-shovel work before I went to the Army, and some of the guys never had. You know, it isn't anything that you have got to go to school to learn how to use a pick and a shovel, but there is a little art to it, where some guy that has never used one don't know how to take advantage of it, and it makes them burn a little extra energy. I think that my experience in doing dirt work before--hauling gravel or loading gravel at gravel pits and things like that--helped me out a lot. On the farm and doing all the farm work, I was pretty well experienced with picks and shovels and things that they had to work with. I think I wasn't the strongest guy out there, but I think that with the experience I had, I could loosen up more dirt

with a pick than a lot of guys that hadn't never done that kind of work.

Marcello: Now I guess at this time, it wasn't too hard for you to meet those original quotas because you were all in pretty good shape yet.

Chambers: Yes, sir. We hadn't began to get sick too much. I think that I was one of the first guys to get malaria, and I got it in the 18 Kilo Camp. As I was telling you, this doctor never had doctored malaria a lot, and he didn't suggest me taking any quinine. We had some quinine then, but he told me, when it first started out, "You might as well take some of that quinine. Get you a handful of it." So I did. I got me a handful, and I went to raise that little flap up on my bag and put it in there. I took them for a few days until I got over that, and I went back to work. I was way up in the jungles before I got it again. The next time that I got it, well, I forgot all about it. We didn't have any quinine. So that had just about all turned to liquid, but those pellets or pills had come apart, and it was just powder. It was about like the rice. It had dirt and sand and everything in it. Quinine with dirt and sand in it...well, it didn't hurt for it to have dirt in it, so we took a dose, anyway.

Marcello: How sick did one have to be in order to stay off of a work detail? I'm referring now to the 18 Kilo Camp and that area

right in there.

Chambers: In the 18 Kilo Camp, I don't think we had any problems with the quota of men at that time. We were farther on up the railroad before they started demanding it. We were farther on before we got that many sick men. We were up around the 80 and 100 Kilo Camp. The 105 Kilo Camp is where they started doing that.

Marcello: What kind of wages were you getting for working on the railroad?

Chambers: I don't know when we first started, but at the end of the war, we were getting thirty-five cents, I believe, a day. At that time we were probably getting about seventeen or eighteen cents a day. But you had more money than you could spend, anyway, because there was nothing to buy. If they got some eggs in, they'd sell them for a dollar apiece... or a little old cigar, they'd sell it for a dollar...or a handful of that...we called it that "monkey hair tobacco." You could buy a handful of that for a dollar, a dollar-and-a-half. It got up to four dollars for that tobacco--just a little bit of it. Of course, we always had a little bit of something to smoke most of the time. Sometimes we were out.

Marcello: When you were out on the work details, where did you take your meals?

Chambers: They would bring them out from a camp most of the time. Some

of the guys would tote the rice and the soup out to us. They'd bring them in barrels, and sometimes they'd have to carry it two or three miles out to where we were working. I think there have been some times when they'd bring it out on a truck, you know, when we were in further. But a lot of times they'd have some guys carry it out on bamboo poles. One would get on each end of the pole, and they'd hang a barrel on that pole. Somebody would bring the rice, and another couple would bring the soup. They'd carry it out to the working party.

Marcello: Did you ever notice that the cooks were maybe a little fatter than the guys working on the details?

Chambers: Yes, I think that was true, that they were, but I don't think that most of them were keeping anything back. I think most of them were cleaning up the pots and stuff, and they were maybe getting that rice that had stuck to the pot and kind of formed a crust. They were getting things like that to eat, and I'm sure they got a little extra fish heads and stuff like that.

I worked around the kitchen...not in the kitchen, but I worked on the wood party at one time, and I know it was a hard job. We was having to cut that wood and carry it for quite a ways, too. We'd get a little extra stuff to eat by being around the kitchen, but not to the extent that we was getting to go in and pick the stuff out and have

a better meal or anything.

I don't think that there were very many that did it. I think they got more to eat for the simple reason that they could reach in and get something that was probably going to be throwed away by cleaning up, or they might eat and help themselves. They might have heaped their plates a little heavier. I'm sure that that was done, too, but not to the extent that they were getting a lot. They weren't getting enough that they...I'm sure that they were getting a little more.

I didn't want the job even at that. I'd rather go out and work in the dirt as to work in the kitchen because them Japs was always around the kitchen, too. They was in and out, and you had to be saluting and bowing. If you got out on the working party, the guard would get out there and stay out of your way.

You didn't have too much to worry about, but sometimes you would get some that would stand around, and, boy, they'd want you to work and want to see how much they could get out of their men, you know. I think that they were kind of running a race or something. They was wanting to beat you up.

Different guards at different times was different. Sometimes you would have a good one, and sometimes you'd think that you had a good one, and he'd sour on you. Maybe he'd

work with you fine now, and then you'd see him six months later, and he'd want to beat the heck out of everybody.

We had one they called "Magen." The first time that we seen him, why, he always...that's why we called him "Magen"--that was "eating" in Japanese, but I imagine that you know that. Anyhow, he was always talking about eating with us, and everybody called him "Magen." When we first started knowing him, he was a pretty good guard to have around. He was a Korean. Boy, he soured. He went to another camp and got away from us. I guess some of the other guys were with him, but I know I wasn't with him for a while, and, boy, whenever we seen him again...well, we were talking about how glad we were to see "Magen." Boy, they said, "He's changed! You don't want to see him no more because he's the worst one of the lot!" And he was. He was always beating on somebody.

Marcello: Do you remember a guard by the name of "Liver Lips?"

Chambers: You bet. You bet (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe him.

Chambers: He was a big Jap. He had big, thick--I'd say--"nigger" lips (chuckle), and he was darker than most of them. Oh, you bet. You knew "Liver Lips." He had them big, thick lips. He was about like "Magen." He got a lot of thrills out of beating on guys, too.

Marcello: Do you remember one by the name of "Hollywood?"

Chambers: Yes, I sure do.

Marcello: How did he get that name?

Chambers: He gave you the impression that he thought he was a little cute. He was a little guy. He was always wanting to whip up on somebody, too, but it wasn't as bad to get a whipping from him as it was from "Liver Lips" and "Magen" because they were bigger. "Hollywood" probably whipped up on as many, but I don't think that he hurt them as bad.

Marcello: Did you ever participate on any of the bridge building details?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Describe how the Japanese built bridges.

Chambers: They built them out of these logs. They built their forms out of logs, and they'd send some engineers or somebody on ahead of us to cut the logs. They'd deal them out...like, you'd use crossties with broadaxes, and they'd have us to go out into the jungle and tote them back to the bridge. Sometimes they had an elephant to drag them, and sometimes they'd have prisoners to tote them. Then you'd get back, and they'd start stacking them up.

They'd drive these pilings. The way they drove these pilings, they had a rope that went through a pulley, and there was this weight built, I'd say, in kind of a bell-shape, and it had a deal on the top of it to tie the rope on. Then they had this rope come down, and they had ropes

tied on to that rope. They'd run it out to enough people and get out there, and you'd start hollering and staying together, and you'd pull and let it go and drive that piling. Sometimes you'd stand in water waist-deep, and sometimes you'd stand in mud, and sometimes you'd stand on dry land. I know that we have stood out in the water over waist-deep pulling on that thing.

Marcello: And you would drive this pile to a cadence of numbers, would you not?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: "Ishi, nishi, san-yo!" Wasn't that the way it went?

Chambers: Yes. Yes, we sure did.

Marcello: I understand that the prisoners made up all sorts of words to go with that cadence, didn't they?

Chambers: Yes, they did. I don't particularly remember all of them (chuckle). I know they made up a song, you know, where they started blitzing the sick people out. They had a band leader off the Houston, and we called him "Bandy." He could play that trumpet. He got him a real trumpet in Singapore. It was a big, silver-shining one. It was probably a real expensive one. He was the bugle boy, and the Japs would tell him--up at the 80 Kilo Camp--to blow the sick call. They didn't have a call for sick men (chuckle). So he got out there, and he blowed one of them Aussie songs. They used to have a song made up--it wouldn't do to put on

your tape--that was made for sick call. Ol' "Bandy" would get out there and play, and that's what he used to play. Everybody knew the song (chuckle). He changed the wording around to it--everybody did. Anyhow, that's what he'd play. Anyhow, that was the sick call. If you hear that and you were sick...talking about how sick you had to be, if you could walk, you had to get out. Some of the guys that just couldn't walk,..but you had better not stay on your bunk. If they blowed sick call, you'd better try to get out there. So they'd go in there and slap up on them guys for not falling out. It might be a guy in there with chills or high fever or something, and if you didn't go out when you heard sick call, they'd come in and beat up on you right on your bunk--and you sick. A lot of guys went out and worked all day and would come in that night and die--that's how sick you had to be. So if you could move, you could work.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with the natives while you were building this railroad?

Chambers: Oh, I didn't have a whole lot. Now some of the guys had a lot more than me. I had a friend--he was a Dutchman--that did most of my trading for me. He claimed that he was part Portuguese and part Javanese, but he looked like a Chinaman. He got him one of these big, round Chinese hats, and he got him some Chinese black pajama-looking shorts...

maybe a little longer, you know. They'd let these Chinese come through the camp, you know, and they'd go right by the guard. I ought to think of that guy's name, but I don't guess the name would be too important. He'd put all that garb on, and he'd get his basket, and he'd go right out the gate by the Jap guards. They thought that he was a Chinaman. If you had any clothes or anything, you could get a good price for them. We would always give the guy that done the peddling a part of the loot that he bought. We'd give him the money...because we had more money for working than you could spend because you couldn't buy nothing no way. Then if you have a piece of cloth, you could get $40 for it. I had a sleeping bag, and I cut it up, and I made me two or three pairs of shorts out of it. I sold a pair or two of them. After I done slept on that ol' sleeping bag for a year or so...somebody had a needle that we had gotten somewhere. We would take and raval the thread out of the edge of that canvas of the sleeping bag, and we'd make shorts out of it. The canvas had been worn and used so much until it wasn't all that stiff to wear for shorts.

Marcello: By this time have the prisoners become scavengers? In other words, are you picking up any stray object that you think might be of some use to you on farther down the line?

Chambers: We didn't particularly try to get anything unless it was

something to eat. If it was something that we could use for eating..,well, if it was anything. If you could find a tin can that you could use to heat something in, yes, you'd do that. But they didn't have anything...whenever a Jap threw it away, by that time it was pretty well used up because they were...you could see that they were getting harder up and harder up all the time by then because you could see that their clothes wasn't as good as it was when we first saw them.

Marcello: Now in May of 1943, the Japanese initiated the so-called "Speedo" Campaign. They were behind their schedule in terms of completing the railroad, and so they tried to speed up the work. Now it just so happened that the "Speedo" period and the monsoon period coincided. First of all, where were you when this started?

Chambers: We were at the 80 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Now we're really getting back into the jungles and mountains and so on and so forth.

Chambers: It's a little more hilly but not as mountainous as it was farther on up. There were some mountains but not where we were building the railroad--not like it was farther up. I'd say that the railroad wasn't going on the side of them so much as when we got farther up. But it was more mountainous, yes.

Marcello: First of all, describe what it was like to work in the monsoons.

Chambers: You'd go out and work. It didn't make any difference how hard it rained or how little it rained, you stayed out and worked. We were building the ramps one time there close to camp--not very far from camp--and we were carrying that dirt up on that ramp to build a fill--it crossed a little creek--and we worked all day. Whenever we went in that night, the ramp was lower than it was when we started that morning because of going up and bogging up above your knees. You turned down more dirt than you was putting in. The next day we talked the Jap into letting us go back down and dig the dirt up and bring it up the railroad and dump on level ground. That way we finally got it built. But we were climbing up that ramp, and it wasn't nothing but a "loblolly" from down here (chuckle). They didn't have much reasoning. They just thought that you got out there and worked, and it just happened, you know. They didn't use much judgement on a lot of things like that. We wasn't trying to get the job done, except it was hard to carry that mud up that mud bank.

Marcello: What else can you say about work in the monsoons or life in the monsoons? How does it affect your whole way of doing things? For example, how did the monsoons affect your life back in the barracks, if you want to call it a barracks?

Chambers: Everything got wet or damp. Your bedding got wet, and it stayed wet. You'd never get enough sunshine to get it completely dry. There were times when you would get it some dryer than others. Sometimes the ol' palm leaves on top of the hut would begin to rot and get beat around from heavy rain, and you'd get more leaks. A lot of times you'd get up in the morning, and the side that you had been sleeping on was staying so wet until your skin would shrivel up like your hands do when you keep them in water for a long period of time. The whole side of your body would be shriveled like that. You could sleep. You'd be so tired that you'd sleep.

Marcello: What was the temperature like?

Chambers: I suppose that the temperature would be around a hundred most of the time in the monsoon season, which was cloudy and raining. The rain would feel good, but we knew that it wasn't good for you. Whenver the sun began to shine, we were ready for it even though the temperature would get a little higher. The temperature was around...we didn't have to many thermometers, but there was somebody that was seeing one once in a while somewhere and telling us that it was 115 degrees or something like that. That was down at the 18 Kilo Camp.

Whenever the monsoon season came in, it started raining, I believe, the first day of May or mighty close to it.

If there was a day that I didn't see it rain all the way on into October, I don't know of it. It rained some everyday, and most days all day long and all night. Sometimes it rained harder than it did others.

Marcello: How did the monsoons affect the food supply?

Chambers: It was getting worse the farther back in the jungle you got. They were giving us a cow a day to butcher for 3,000 people in the camps when we first started. Then we got back into the jungles, and it began to rain, and they'd butcher the cows down at the railhead and bring them on a truck. The truck would get stuck, and they'd have maggots in them...they'd quarter the meat up and lay in on a flat-bed truck. It wasn't covered, and flies would get on it and lay their eggs and hatch the worms, and the meat would sour. It would smell like a dead cow by the time it got there. Sometimes it took two or three days before they could get it there, and it rained on it and all that.

Marcello: A lot of times the monsoons would wash out the road, and the food trucks couldn't get through.

Chambers: Yes, that's what delayed them and let the meat spoil.

Marcello: All of this food, I guess, was coming from Thanbyuzayat, was it not?

Chambers: Yes, the railhead.

Marcello: Now would the trucks go...the trucks, I guess, wouldn't have

to go all the way back to the railhead. I assume that as the track was laid and so on, the locomotives could come up so far.

Chambers: No, sir, they didn't. Well, later on they did. Later on they did, but it was a long time before the train ever brought the food in. We was up around the 105 Kilo Camp--up in there, where we finished up. I think that maybe we got up to the 120 or 135 Kilo. I don't know how far we got before we finished the railroad, but when we got back in around the 80 and 100 Kilo Camp, the monsoon season was so bad then that...I don't know how far the trucks... maybe the train might have been meeting them and bring it some of the way, but the trains wasn't never close enough to ever see one.

Marcello: So how else were your rations affected when the monsoons came in? The trucks couldn't get through, so I assume this meant that your rations would be cut.

Chambers: That's when they had these dried fish for us, but they wouldn't let us cook them. They let them sit there in the kitchen and let it rain on them, and the worms would get into them; and by the time that they let us cook them, there wasn't nothing left but the worms and the scales and the bones, you know. They were a little ol' fish to start with. They had that little "white bait," and then they had a little bigger fish, and they just opened them up

and let them dry, and they'd bake that. I think maybe a time or two, they had a little oil that they could fry them in, but most of the time they were baked. You could eat all of the fish except the eye balls, and you couldn't chew them up (chuckle). They were petrified, I guess. You just couldn't chew them. They were about the size of a BB. You could eat the rest of the whole fish, and we did. We didn't throw anything away.

Marcello: Describe how the work increased when the "Speedo" period started.

Chambers: Well, they started...I believe it was the 80 Kilo Camp that we were in when they started the "Speedo" and three meter stuff. Anyway, when they started that, we were building on a bridge. We were walking back about seven miles to work on a bridge, and they'd be trying to get so much of that bridge built, and they'd keep us down there, and we'd work on that bridge until way late at night. Then we'd come into camp, and then they'd get us up...but they were doing us a big favor (facetious remark). They were giving us an extra helping of rice and some beans when we'd get into camp. Then we'd get up the next morning at daylight and go back. That's when we started having so many guys...that's when they really started dying.

Marcello: What was the longest stretch you worked at one time?

Chambers: At one time I had worked a 133 days without a day off. I had got an ulcer on my heel, and I couldn't get it well, so Lieutenant Morgan came around and told me, "You ought to see if you can get a day off. Maybe you could get a day off." He said, "Why don't you stay in camp?" Well, I did--I got a day off. Then the next day, they started blitzing us out again--sick people--so I didn't ever try to stay in. I eventually got it well.

Marcello: What was the longest number of hours that you suspect you may have worked at one time on that railroad before you did come in to get any sleep or rest?

Chambers: I think that it'd be safe to say that, from the time that I left camp until I got back, I had spent twenty hours. I think we done that several times working on that bridge there. That kumi we were in was the largest one, and it had dwindled down into the fifties whenever we had finally gotten off of that detail. We lost more men out of that kumi than any other kumi--for that reason, they had always thought, because the other guys would be in the camp down on their beds whenever we got in.

Marcello: Okay, now we're talking about a period when the health of the prisoners really begins to go down. Awhile ago we were talking about the tropical ulcers. Describe how you think you got your tropical ulcer, and then describe what you did to try and heal it.

Chambers: I had two or three tropical ulcers. I had one on my heel. I don't guess that it ever got to the bone, but it got a hole. I had another one on my toe, next to my big toe, that you could see the bone. A guy on the work party dropped an ax on it. He was going to hand me the ax, and he dropped it, and the ax hit it and started the ulcer. It rotted out to where you could see the bone. These ulcers would form a little bit of...it looked like a little netting after the meat peeled out of it, and it never would seal over or scab over. The only thing that we had to do was to sit around and soak them in hot water all day. Then I got to taking a ravel off of my mosquito net, and I'd take and put a thread on each side of that ulcer. I'd pick it up until I got that little white residue of netting that formed in there--that you couldn't wash out. I'd pick that thread up until I got it caught in there. Then I'd pull all of that out, and it left a good, clean, raw-looking sore again. I think that that's exactly what got mine well.

We didn't have any medicine to do it. When we got farther on...and our doctor had died. He didn't know anything about tropical ulcers, I don't think, anyway, but the Dutch doctor did. We didn't have a Dutch doctor with our party at that time, but some of the Fitzimmons people that went on ahead of us did. We had Doctor Bloemsma,

and he got hold of a silver spoon somewhere and sharpened the edge. What he did, he cut all this rotten meat out of those ulcers, and he healed a lot of them when we got out of the jungles. I feel sure...I didn't know what I was doing. I was just cleaning my ulcers. I feel sure that even though not knowing what I was doing, I did the right thing by just trying to clean the sore.

Marcello: When you got those ulcers, that must have really struck fear into you because you knew what they could do.

Chambers: Yes, sir, but I didn't...I didn't...I had been sick before, you see, whenever I was growing up. Like I say, I had malaria, and I worked...I never had no big injuries or anything, but I was kind of a sickly kid growing up, so I didn't get so scared of getting sick like a lot of guys that had never been sick in their lives. It was kind of like when I came back. My granddaddy asked me, "How was it?" And I told him, "Poppa, other than not seeing your folks, it was just about like East Texas. They worked the hell out of you and starved you to death." (chuckle) He thought that was a pretty good explanation. I think the kind of raising up really helped me--I really think so. I wasn't kidding him because I done had twenty-one years of training before I got caught. We didn't have it all that rough, but I think that my experiences of growing helped me a lot--I sure do.

Marcello: I've also heard people say from time to time they would even put maggots on these tropical ulcers. Had you seen that done?

Chambers: I seen that done, yes, sir.

Marcello: How did that work?

Chambers: It didn't work. They were going to get into it, anyway.

Marcello: I guess what I meant was, how would they go about doing that?

Chambers: Oh, they'd just pick one off of something and put it on there. It wasn't no trouble to find one. They was all around the toilets and everywhere else. Some of the guys got started doing that, but they didn't clean those sores out.

I finally got sick enough that I couldn't work along in November of 1943. They had turned this ol' 80 Kilo Camp into what they called a hospital. It wasn't anything but to send you back up to die, is what they sent you back for. They sent me and another little guy that was a friend of mine back, and we was back working at that camp. What they had us doing was bringing the guys around to the medics that couldn't get up and come around. These guys were sick and couldn't get up, and the maggots were all over them. You could take and turn the blankets back on one that was unconscious and see them in their eyes, nose, and everywhere else. They were just laying up there, you know. These guys

had those ulcers all over their hands and arms under that blanket, and they lacked a lot from having them cleaned out. They were rotting just as fast as the worms could eat it. Them guys were just ate plumb up with them.

Marcello: How about dysentery? Did you ever get dysentery?

Chambers: I got it but not the extent of passing blood like a lot of the guys did. I had it. I had diarrhea for two years or longer, but I think a lot of it was just due to the diet. When I got on a solid diet, mine went away.

Marcello: Describe what it was like for those people that had a bad case of dysentery.

Chambers: A guy that had a bad case of dysentery, the first thing he knew in a day or two was that he was so weak that he couldn't walk. If he could get off his bunk, he done good; and some of them couldn't even get off their bunk. They just passed blood--just like their stomachs had been cut open. He'd just bleed to death. That's the same way with cholera, so it must have been a first cousin to cholera. You didn't live long if you got it bad like that. That's what killed that doctor. He got it, and he didn't live but seven days after he got it. I never did have the bleeding kind like that, no--some blood but not to that extent. I mean there was blood like your thoat was cut, you know.

Marcello: In other words, those people really were not digesting what

little food they got?

Chambers: You could take what food you got, and if you were sick or well, you ate it. Of course, some guys would get down so weak then...

Marcello: But I guess what I am staying is with that dysentery, even if you ate your food, it passed through your system so rapidly that your body wouldn't have the chance to use it.

Chambers: It didn't do any good. Then you wasn't getting enough... there wasn't enough food in the food that you was getting to build any blood. You didn't build any resistance; you was losing resistance all the time. You could eat everything you got, and you still wasn't building up any strength. You were still losing strength.

Marcello: I've heard some people say if you had been fed a decent meal, you probably would have had no trouble building that railroad.

Chambers: Oh, you could have had less than decent food and done it. I didn't realize how little food it would take for a man. You see these Americans go around with these stomach hangovers, and they wonder what makes them so fat. If you could have just a little meat patty every day, one egg and a slice of bread and anything to fill you up on, you'd do all right. Now I don't know how much damage that cholestrol does on an egg, but I know from experience that your tongue would be peeling off, and you'd be breaking out

and peeling off in your groin; and if we could get one egg a day, just for a day or two, you'd start getting well. Then you'd get that wet beriberi, and your stomach would swell. I could lap my fingers over on my arms, and my leg down here wasn't except that big around (gesture) around my knee; but down below my knee, oh, it swelled up (gesture) that big around my feet, just like Popeye's built--little ol' arm up here and big here (gesture). We had big stomachs, and your face was swelled.

But if you started getting a egg a day...and we'd take those eggs, and if they were rotten, we'd break it on that rice. We ate that just like we did the rest of it. It had the vitamins in it. I said, "Well, if a dog can eat a rotten egg, I can, too." I could get it down (chuckle). I'd eat them. You know, you can eat something, and you can blow your breath out--and onion or something--and you can smell it on you. Well, I've had my breath smell like rotten eggs. It was hard to eat. Now anything harder to eat than a rotten egg, I don't know what it is, but I ate some of them.

But you'd start getting rid of that water. Your kidneys would really start getting rid of that water, just from that egg--that one egg a day. In four or five days, that swelling was gone. That beriberi, you was rid of it, and that proves to you right there just what a little amount of food...if

we'd had an egg a day with one little meat patty and a slice of bread, we could have made it with a little bit of raw vegetables or anything or watery soup or anything like that.

Marcello: I've heard it said that charcoal was also used to try to combat dysentery. In other words, men would eat pieces of charcoal.

Chambers: We did that. We did that. I've tried it to slow down diarrhea. They claim that it absorbs the mucus. But that charcoal, that went on through with the rest of it. As far as I am concerned, it didn't help.

Marcello: What would you do--just eat pieces of charcoal?

Chambers: Dig it out where there had been a fire built. Any kind of charcoal except bamboo. The doctor said, "Don't eat any bamboo," but I don't know why. They had other kinds of wood but not too many of the kinds that we have around here. They had teakwood in there, and balsawood. Of course, that balsawood would burn up. I'd burn it all. The teakwood, it made a lot of coals, you know. It was a heavy wood. There was a lot of other kinds that I didn't know what kind of wood it was. Wherever there had been a fire, there would always be some coals because you could rake around and get you out some. We'd just rake it out.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that it was also good if you could get some of that crust off the bottom of the rice pots.

Chambers: Yes, sir. That's what I was speaking of. Maybe the cooks got a little extra food that way. Whenever the rice was taken out of the pot, what wouldn't come loose after it sat there and heated up,it would turn brown. It'd turn loose a whole big sheet of it, and then they'd eat all of it that they wanted--the cooks would. Then they'd pile it up there, and somebody else would come by and get it. Sometimes it was burnt like a charcoal, too.

Marcello: During this period when you were afflicted with all of these various ailments, did you ever see cases of men who would simply give up?

Chambers: Yes, sir. I sure did.

Marcello: Describe how you could tell when somebody had given up.

Chambers: They'd start off, "Well, I can't do this; I can't do that." And you'd bring their food to them, and they'd say, "I can't eat it." Sometimes you could just give a guy a good cussing, and he'd get so mad that he'd shape up and say, "Well, if he can do it, I can, too!" I'd tell him, "Well, I'm going to eat mine. I might heave it up, but I'm going to put it down because I know that I ain't going to get something else. I ain't going to get no medicine." I said, "You know that you ain't going but one way if you don't eat! That's all you got. You don't have any medicine, and you ain't going to get something later on that you ain't now, so you'd better eat." Sometimes you could make a guy

mad, and sometimes they'd say, "Yeah, maybe you're right." They would just give up. Yes, sir. I've sure have seen some of that. Well, they figure that they ain't going to make it, anyway. I don't know if they would've made it if they'd tried or not. Some of them tried and didn't make it.

Marcello: How would the burial details take place?

Chambers: When they first started dying, they'd take them out individually and bury them. Sometimes they'd have two or three funerals a day. Later on, when it got down to fifteen or twenty dying a day--I am talking about Americans--they got to where they'd dig all the graves and put them in it, and they'd play "Taps" one time for all the group. But before it got to be so many in number, they'd play "Taps" two or three times a day.

Marcello: Did you ever participate on any of the burial details?

Chambers: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! You bet!

Marcello: It must have been pretty tough to dig those graves, considering the condition that you guys were in.

Chambers: Well, most of the guys that died died during the monsoon season. I don't believe I ever helped dig a grave when it wasn't wet and mud. I know that for some of the guys that we buried we couldn't dig a hole over two feet deep. It'd just get so muddy and stay full of water once you hit a lick with a pick or shovel. It'd fill right up with water,

so if you dug down a foot or two, you were as deep as you were going to get because we didn't have a pump to get the water out. You just couldn't dig a hole, so we'd just take a guy, put him in there, and hold him down with a pole until somebody got enough mud on him to stick him. Of course, it'd come in a monsoon or big rain and wash a lot of them up, too. There'd be pieces of blankets scattered all over the graveyards.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that some sort of ceremony or service would be held for the dead,

Chambers: Somebody most of the time would recite some kind of a prayer or something, and then they'd have a man to play "Taps." That would be for the whole bunch that was buried. They'd get them all in the graves, and then when they'd get through burying for the day, and this is what they'd do.

Marcello: Was it true that they would also usually take whatever clothes that dead person had, because they could be used by somebody else and so on somewhere down the line?

Chambers: Yes, yes. At the 80 Kilo Camp, we did that. These guys dying with dysentery and maggots and everything else would always have some ol' shorts laying around. They'd take and hang them on a wire and drop them in a creek and wire that wire to a little ol' bridge across there. It was a pretty swift current and clear water, and it'd wash them out pretty

good. We'd take them and give them to somebody else. Most guys down there had enough clothes, anyhow, because they'd done got them enough shorts from someone dying, so we'd wash them and sell them and buy an egg. If we hadn't, we couldn't have made it there at the 80 Kilo Camp because they were carrying you there to die.

We seen that, and we volunteered for the first working party that we could get. We went up to the Jap headquarters camp, and nobody was there except one little hut of prisoners. We had some Australians and Americans, too, but they carried you up there to that headquarters, and you done all the unloading of the trucks and everything there. That was one of the worst jobs. Somebody slapped you around everywhere you looked up there. There was just a few prisoners and all those guards.

Marcello: In August, 1943, Dr. Lumpkin died. Do you remember that?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What effect did that have on the morale of you and your buddies?

Chambers: Oh, I think that it lowered the morale of all of them in there, to think that the doctor died like that. It kind of made you think a little bit. He was the one that I was referring to that had the dysentery, and I think that he lived...and we had Lieutenant Hampton that died at the same time. I think that he slept pretty close to Captain

Lumpkin, and they had that kind of dysentery that you just bleed to death, is what it amounts to.

Marcello: Were the graves marked in any way? Or was somebody keeping a record?

Chambers: They let a couple of guys...I know Luther Prunty made some of the crosses and put some of the names on them, but I think that they might have gotten far enough behind that some of them weren't marked. Of course, I think that the markings were knocked down, and the jungle grew back up. They didn't keep the graveyards, and with all the rain and vegetation in there, it would just fill everything back up right away. I bet that you couldn't find nothing over there now probably.

Marcello: On a couple of occasions, you mentioned that you got so ill that in November, 1943, you were sent back to the 80 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Describe what your condition was at the time that you were sent back to the 80 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: That's when I was down to 120 or 125 pounds, and I had an ulcer on my heel.

Marcello: About how large was that ulcer?

Chambers: Oh, it was the size of a quarter, but it was about a half-inch deep. I couldn't walk on it. I could walk on my toe, but I couldn't walk on that heel. I don't think that the

bone ever showed,and I don't have any results from it that bothers me now, after it got well. Then I had diarrhea, and I was having to go to the latrine, and I was having to ,..,we had a rail so that you could go down the hill to it, and I was getting so that I couldn't come back up that hill without having to pull myself up. So they decided that I ought to go to the hospital camp,

Marcello: Did anybody know what that hospital camp was like? Had you heard any stories about it?

Chambers: I don't believe. I don't believe. I don't really think that they did, but the Japs were saying that what they were doing was giving half-rations to the people down there because they wasn't working and earning anything.

We had a soldier and a Marine down there working as medics, helping clean these guys up that couldn't take care of themselves,

Marcello: How did you get from whatever camp that you were at back to the 80 Kilo Camp?

Chambers: They carried us in a truck. They would take four or five or ten, whatever, sick men down there, and it seemed like they just more or less loaded you on a truck that was going back that way,

Marcello: And what camp were you at when you were sent back?

Chambers: I was at the 105 Kilo Camp,

Marcello: The 100 and the 105 Kilo Camps were supposed to be notorious,

weren't they?

Chambers: Yes, sir, they were. That's where we lost a big part of our people. Of course, I think all through there...we didn't have Americans in all of the other camps on up ahead of us, but I think they were losing just as heavy as we were, too, except we didn't have as many Americans in other camps as the Australians and Dutch. I think we lost the biggest part of our people in the 100 and 105 Kilo probably.

Marcello: So you were carried back to the 80 Kilo Camp. Describe the atmosphere of the 80 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: The only good thing about it was that there wasn't too many Japanese. They had some Jap guards there, but they didn't come through the huts, and they wasn't asking nobody to work. This friend of mine that went back with me, this little guy,,.so these other two guys that were working there as medics didn't have anything to do with medicine; they just kind of helped a guy get cleaned up that couldn't clean himself. So they had kind of a little headquarters set there where they tried to bathe these guys and where they would take and get the maggots off of these ulcers and stuff like that. We'd bring them around on stretchers and turn them over to them medics. They'd tell us where to go and pick up one, and if there was a dead one somewhere, we'd go and pick him up and pile him up to be wrapped in his blanket. They'd roll him up in his blanket and fix him to bury him, you know.

We wasn't burying them--this other boy and me. We wasn't on the burial details at the time, but we were getting them around there for the medics.

We'd wind up getting a lot of their clothes, and we'd wind up selling them to the natives. Now he'd go out. He had contact with a native somewhere up there. He'd get a bunch of those ol' shorts, and the Japs wasn't watching us too much, so you could just walk up in the woods and find that native out there. He had a date and met with him once he contacted him, so he was getting him a lot of goodies that we wasn't supposed to have by swapping those shorts that we was getting off of them dead guys. We wasn't taking the ones that they had on, but when we moved a bunk, well, whatever he had laying around there, we'd take it and hang it off of that bridge and let it wash out. Then we'd dry it and take it up there and sell it. That native didn't know that, but he wouldn't have cared, anyhow, probably.

Marcello: Cloth was at a premium over there among those natives, wasn't it?

Chambers: Yes, sir, it sure was--just any kind of piece of cloth. You could get any kind of a price that you asked for it.

Marcello: From what you say, I gather that from what you say, you were getting better after you moved back to the 80 Kilo Camp.

Chambers: Well, we did pretty good there, but we were always in fear that they were going to stop us from seeing that native up

there, and we wouldn't get any food, sure enough. A lot of guys flat died because they didn't have nothing to eat. They served you half-rations, but a lot of them couldn't eat it. Then we were getting a little more food out of the kitchen because there were so many guys that were done too weak to even eat.

Marcello: How long were you there altogether?

Chambers: Oh, I don't believe but three or four weeks, and then we volunteered to go out on a work detail the next time they wanted some men, if anybody was recuperated enough to go out and work. So they'd taken four or five of us from there and carried us up to this Jap headquarters camp. They'd bring some things in--I don't know where they were getting them--on trucks. They'd come in there in crates and stuff. We got a little better food there, and the Japs had some hogs there. They were killing hogs, and they gave us a lot of the fat. We'd render that fat off and eat the cracklings and use the hog lard on our rice, too. So we got a little something there to eat that we hadn't had before. I guess that we gained a little bit of strength back there. Then above the first of the year, the first of 1944, I guess, they carried me back up to the 105 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Were you there at any time when they had the cholera scare?

Chambers: They had some guys that they claimed was dying with cholera

at one time. Then they had a whole camp of natives up there that died from it. I never was on the detail, but some of the guys went to help bury some of the natives, and they said that they buried them like in a cigar box--in a ditch.

Marcello: So you mentioned that you were sent back up to the 105 Kilo around January of 1944. This was actually after the road had been finished, isn't that correct?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: And you were still in the jungle yet?

Chambers: I don't know if...yes, they had trains coming by the 80 Kilo Camp, I know. I don't know if it was finished all the way through or not. I believe it might have been by then.

Marcello: I think they began shipping people out of the jungle in October, 1943, and so you were still in the jungle then, I guess, when the railroad was finished.

Chambers: Yes. I went out in January of 1944--right at the first of the year.

Marcello: What did you do when you got up there to the 105 Kilo Camp?

Chambers: We did the same thing that we had been doing, but work had slacked up from when I got back from 80 Kilo Camp. They were carrying a few parties out working on the railroad, but they wasn't assigning you any menial work. They mostly was going along and piling dirt that had washed away.

Marcello: So it was maintenance work then,..

Chambers: Yes, sir, mostly maintenance work.

Marcello: ...rather than actually building the railroad.

Chambers: Yes, sir. I guess that they were ready to start moving them out and moving them somewhere else, anyway. Workload, workwise, it let up a little. Actually, it go to where you could kind of stay in camp if you were sick, so it was a lot better as far as the work,but the food still hadn't improved any.

Marcello: How long did you remain there at the 105 Kilo Camp before you finally got out of the jungle?

Chambers: Not too long after I got back from that headquarters camp where they had such a few of us. I don't know,..I think I might have kind have got sick again then and had to be sent back to the 105 Kilo. Somebody made an offer to let us go to the 105 Kilo. I forgot how I got transferred out of headquarters camp, but I was ready to leave there because that was a bashing and slapping everyday there.

I was catching the kitchen detail. I'd go down to the Jap kitchen, and that cook they had down there whipped me every day--every day. I was the only one down there, you know, and I think he wanted me just so he could slap me every day. He'd give me a bucket--there was a little ol' creek that ran down by there--to get a bucket of water, and he'd walk up and hand me that bucket and slap me (chuckle).

Marcello: How long were you at that headquarters camp then?

Chambers: I'd say I was there about two or three months--I guess.

Marcello: You were getting pretty black and blue by that time (chuckle).

Chambers: It wasn't all that much beating. He'd just slap, you know. It wasn't enough to show any bruises or anything. He'd just slap you.

But, you know, some of them little ol' Japs would give you some stuff like potato peelings. I'd take them potato peelings and boil them in my canteen cup and take some of that hog fat,..I'd skim that fat out of the pot when it boiled to the top. When they were cooking it for the Japs, they'd boil that pork, and I'd take and render that out, and I'd take and cook me some of them potatoes. That was pretty good eating, so I gained a little strength after I left that 80 Kilo Camp. This was the 85 Kilo Camp where the Japs headquarters were.

Marcello: It seems like the key to getting better is obtaining food.

Chambers: Oh, no doubt. You bet--if you can get any better food from anyway. Another thing that I did one time that helped me a lot...I've forgot the name of these ol' weeds, but I've seen them around home. The Dutch told us that that was wild spinach. Those things would grow up so high around behind the latrine, and I'd take my canteen cup and go and pick me a bunch of that and take it and boil it and put that on my rice. We'd take tea leaves,..if you could get up to

the tea barrel--after they done got all of the tea out of it--and get you a spoonful of tea leaves and put on that rice, that helped, too (chuckle). You would eat anything that you could eat and hope that it did some good.

Marcello: Did you ever resort to eating snakes or any other wild critters that you found in the jungle?

Chambers: Yes, sir, we ate every snake we would find around the 100 Kilo Camp there when everything was getting scarce. If you found a snake, you'd rake him in the ashes. We always had some brush burning along the railroad, and you'd rake it in a pile of those coals and stick you up a stake close to where you had him cooking. Whenever they brought the food out at noon, you'd go and rake your snake out, and the skin would peel off like a baked potato. Then you could take your fork and rake the meat off of the bone. I think that it it wasn't for the idea, a snake would be good eating. It'd be just like a fish, I think, if you didn't know what it was. I wouldn't eat one now. I could but I wouldn't strain my strong stomach to do it. I helped my boy skin a rattlesnake two years ago--he wanted the skin--and we talked about eating it, but I wasn't going to eat any of it. I'd help them clean it and cook it, but I wasn't going to eat none of it. I'd had my part.

Marcello: Did you run across very many snakes?

Chambers: A few but not all that many, surprisingly. We killed a

a python...or a Jap guard killed a python. A Dutchman went out in the jungles to use the bathroom, and he found that python. He came back running and hollering, and the Jap guard went out there and shot him. They cut him up in chunks about three foot in length and put him in one of the rice barrels. We carried him in that night, and they boiled him, but it was gooey. I think that they should've fried him. That thing was eighteen-and-a-half feet long, and there was a lot of meat on that snake. If you could have fried it or bake it...but we didn't have any oil to fry it in, so they just boiled it, and it was gooey. I ate some of it, anyway.

Marcello: What problems were lice, bedbugs, and things of that nature?

Chambers: In the jungles we just got body lice. The only place... we had body lice. If you could ever find somebody that had a can or something that they found someplace and get some boiling water, you could get rid of them--if you boiled everything. But it was so seldom that if you found it and had time to do that, so what you'd do, when you had time, you'd pull your shorts off and smash them the best that you could. But you could get them easily. They was in the huts, on the other guys, and, I guess, the natives and everywhere. I never did have any head lice, but we had our heads shaved. But those body lice would get in the seams of your shorts, and that little frilly edge didn't have

that good a finish on the prison camp sewing to where it wouldn't get frazzled, you know, fuzzy, and that was a real nesting place. I guess the only thing that they had to do was to eat you and lay eggs at the time, so they was worrisome.

Then they carried us from Burma to Bangkok, and we went into an ol' warehouse there.

Marcello: Okay, before we get to that point, let me ask you a few more questons about day-to-day life in the jungle. Were you a smoker at that time?

Chambers: Yes. I smoked for fifty years and quit two years ago. The doctor told me that I had emphysema, and I didn't know it. A doctor in Houston said, "You need to quit smoking, but it's no use in me telling you. You're going to quit one way or the other, and right now you have a choice," That was on the 20th of December, and I said I was going to smoke the rest of the year and then quit. That was two years ago this past January, and I haven't lit another one.

Marcello: What kind of smoking material could you get in the jungle?

Chambers: At times we couldn't get any, and at other times we could get those little ol' cigars. At times you could trade stuff with some of the natives, and at times in Singapore somebody even cut up an ol' straw hat, and we smoked it (chuckle).

Marcello: Do you remember something called "wog" tobacco?

Chambers: Oh, yes, we called it "wog," and we called it "monkey hair," also.

Marcello: That was pretty powerful stuff, wasn't it?

Chambers: Some of it was, but some of it you could smoke and not even taste because it had been wet, and I think all of the tobacco had been washed out of it. But I think that it washed down in some of the others. If you got some out of the bottom of the pile and rolled you a smoke out of that, you could take a puff off of it...you couldn't inhale it, but you could blow it all out, but you'd still have enough in your mouth that would strangle you when you breathed, anyway. That's how potent it was.

Marcello: I understand that a lot of times you actually had to wash that tobacco to get some of that nicotine out of it so that it wouldn't be so powerful.

Chambers: Yes, they did. If you got a bundle of it like that, you couldn't smoke it. I think that's what happened. It was piled up in one of them warehouses somewhere, and it got wet enough that the juice settled out of this and got into that down there, and it made it so strong because all the nicotine wound up in a few bales of it. It'd be a bundle about that big and square (gesture) and about so thick.

Marcello: In other words, it was sold almost like a brick, wasn't it?

Chambers: Yes, sir. It was wrapped in a newspaper, and some of it

was wrapped in banana leaves. Everybody smoked their little pocket Testaments, that had one; we used that for cigarette papers. We'd use banana leaves, and the guy that wrote the book, Ben Dunn, a good friend of mine, had some kind of big ol' book he got in Singapore, and so he let me have that. I was sick at the time and not having to go out and work, and I got to splitting that paper. I had got hold of a razor blade somewhere, and I took that book and split it and made cigarette paper out of it. I split paper all day, and when these guys came in from work, they'd run over and buy, and I'd sell all that I'd split that day. I'd give him half the money for the book, and I'd keep the other half, and we'd buy eggs and stuff like that.

Marcello: When do you think you got at your lowest as a prisoner-of-war?

Chambers: You're talking about physically?

Marcello: Yes.

Chambers: My morale never did break. I just always felt like that there was going to be a way. I always figured that it was going to end. I never could picture how it was going to end, but I think that when I left to go back to the 80 Kilo Camp that I was telling you about, when I didn't have strength enough to walk up that hill, I just kind of wondered then if I was getting close to...but I just kept on telling

myself, "Well, if you can't take it, you ought to have been a milk cow where you could give it." I just feel that if anybody else was going to make it, I was going to be one of them. But you didn't know if they was going to land and take over or whether they were going to march us in one of them ditches out there and shoot us all. I didn't never think that I was going to die. I never did think that I was just going to haul off and die. But a guy was dying everyday, and I guess at one time I felt, "If I don't snap out of this and gain a little strength, I got to do something."

Well, that's when they sent us back to the 80 Kilo Camp. I think that maybe that might have been a little boost in one sense, too, kind of gave you the challenge to get out and do something and find you something because you knew you had to do something. You couldn't keep on going downhill because you didn't have much farther to go, when you're as tall as I am and gone down to 120 pounds and get so weak that you could hardly get up and down. Nobody else could get you up and down; they had to take care of themselves. You had to think that you got to do something and turn a wheel somewhere.

So this is when this other guy and me had talked it over about what we'd do--we'd get them shorts. He said, "If you'll help me wash them, I'll go and sell them." I

said, "Well, I'll do that." He'd found out from somebody else where this native was, and he'd take a whole roll of them. We'd look and see where the Jap guard was; they was up at the entrance there. They had a little ol' guardhouse up there, but it wasn't no trouble to go out the back and into the woods. He found out where to go and meet this guy. He got us a lot of money. These trucks came by, and they would sell us--if a guy wanted to buy anything--they would sell us stuff like tobacco, and once in awhile they'd have some eggs or something.

Marcello: When you say "when these trucks would come by," these were...

Chambers: The Jap trucks. They were carrying supplies.

Marcello: The Japanese would sell you these things?

Chambers: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese soldiers were making a little bit of money, too.

Chambers: I think so, too. They didn't sell us enough to miss it. I think they were just selling us just a little bit of it. I think what they were really doing was passing it off. They was going to leave some at this camp and take some on to other camps. We had these guys there that were doing the talking. They were talking the Japs out of what little they had. It didn't happen but two or three times that I know of. We wasn't getting it every day, but we were getting

tobacco and eggs and little ol' cigars from this guy back out in the woods there.

We began to gain a little strength, but as we were saying a while ago, we thought in the back of our minds that one of these days that the Jap was going to clamp down on letting us get out and deal with that native. Then we were going to be caught here with no rice ration at all,and we'd be laying up there being wrapped up in our blanket, too: "We got to get out of this thing while we're able." So we volunteered to get out of there.

Marcello: While you were suffering...let me rephrase my question. Under these circumstances, what part does religion play?

Chambers: With me?

Marcello: With you or with other prisoners as well.

Chambers: We didn't have too much of that going on. We didn't have time for...there were some guys that did have church services, and I suppose it happened all through the war, too. There were some guys, you know, that when they'd get scared, they'd start praying and reading their little Testaments and everything; but when everything cleared away, they went right back.

I've never belonged to a church yet. I'm a strong believer, and I believe in the Lord as strong as anybody. I don't believe as much in the interpretations; I think the story as a whole is true, but I think that there are still some misinterpretations. That's my on idea. I'm not saying

that the Bible is not true. If the Lord would have written it, I'd say, yes, every word was true. But the Lord didn't write it all, did He? I believed in the Lord, and I thought about Him, and I believe He thought about me.

But I've always maintained, too, that I'm not one of these people who think that, well, because I didn't die... I don't think the Lord came over to save me because I know some guys that died that was more religious and done a lot more praying than I've ever done, and I can't believe that those guys died and went to hell and didn't come back with me, I don't think I'm one of the better guys. I don't know. The Lord I believe in is so superior that I think that you couldn't even compare a human being with the Lord that I believe in. You couldn't compare Him with an ant compared to us. You can just imagine what an ant thinks about what you're doing when you walk by. I think that's how superior the Lord is to us. So why things happen like that, I don't know.

Marcello: Did you pray?

Chambers: You bet!

Marcello: What did you pray for?

Chambers: I just asked the Lord to help me do the right thing, make the right decisions, if he seen fit to give me strength. I still do. I never did do any praying in public. I thought

that it was private, my own thoughts. I've always satified my own conscience.

Marcello: All of this time, are you holding any grudges against any of the guards.

Chambers: No.

Marcello: In other words, while you're a prisoner-of-war, are you ever saying to yourself, for example, "If I get out of this alive, I'd really like to meet this guard one-on-one."

Chambers: Oh, no doubt! You bet! You bet! I'd have loved to have had an equal chance with them, I would now. I always said that there wasn't any use. I've come back, and that's another reason that I tell my stories to a lot of people. I've had two or three people say, when I was telling about getting slapped around, "Well, I Just don't think that I could have took that," I've seen tougher guys than me taking it, so I couldn't see any use in me fighting back. I had a cousin that told me that. I told him, "I've seen guys tougher than me and tougher than you that got slapped around. They didn't do nothing about it, so I don't believe you'd have done a thing neither." We had over a thousand men that got slapped around, and I didn't ever seen any one of them do anything about it. I think they claimed that some had done it, but they shot them, you know. I didn't never know anybody anybody personally that did it.

I think that it wouldn't have been a smart thing to do.

If you was going to hit one back, you could've waited until you got a chance to stick a pick through his head. At least you'd have got one, you know, and maybe you could've to his rifle and got two or three more.

I'll never have any respect for the Japanese people. I wouldn't say...I imagine you meet all kinds of people, and I'm sure you know some that are just as good a people as you'd know anywhere. I've seen too many of them do too many things that they didn't have to do. Like I say, I think you can train them to do things, and they can act nice, and they can learn to act just as nice as anybody, but you can train a mule to do things, too, but you can't never take a mule and make a milk cow out of him either. That'll never be done, I don't believe (chuckle).

Marcello: What do you do about such things as haircuts and shaving?

Chambers: We had a barber. You could let your beard grow as long as you wanted to; that was up to you to let your beard grow. We had a barber that stayed in the camp, and they didn't make him go out on the working party, but he'd have to cut hair. You'd have to keep your hair clipped. You could let it get out a quarter-of-an-inch or so, but it didn't take that ol' boy long to clip your head. I let my beard grow a year-and-a-half one time. Another time I let it go until it got quite long but not that long as the first time.

Marcello: What did you do about toothbrushes and that sort of thing?

Chambers: We finally wore them out. I think mine finally broke. I broke the handle out of it or something, and then I got to where I'd just cut me off a twig and chew it up and use it to brush my teeth. We didn't have any tooth powder or toothpaste no ways.

Marcello: Where did you get the idea of taking a twig and chewing the end of it and using it?

Chambers: In East Texas, old people that used to dip snuff did that--take a black gum. I guess you knew about that possibly. Grandma and people like that used to take a little limb and pull it off, and there'd be a little knot on the black gum. Do you know what a black gum is?

Marcello: Yes.

Chambers: You'd chew it up, and it'd make a little mop, and they'd dip that in their snuff can. Then they'd rub their teeth with it, too. They'd keep that brush in their mouth. Some of them old women made the kids get out and cut them some brushes and chew them up and make a mop for them. They'd lay them up and let them dry (chuckle). They'd make the kids chew them up, but they wouldn't let them have no snuff.

Marcello: I guess you didn't have too much food caught between your teeth, anyhow, did you?

Chambers: No, there wasn't much chewing (chuckle). I had good teeth. I had a perfect set of teeth. My natural teeth was just as perfect as these home-made ones. I thought I could never

get used to wearing them whenever I had to get some. I didn't have but one or two cavities, and I never did have a toothache. But when I got about forty-four or forty-five years old, my teeth just got loose and fell out. In two years' time, they were all gone, and I didn't have a rotten tooth in my head. I had one or two that had been filled. I never had a toothache in my life. They just got loose and come out.

Marcello: When you leave the jungle, where did you go?

Chambers: I went to Bangkok.

Marcello: How did you get to Bangkok?

Chambers: By train. They carried us out on the train--the railroad.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen on the trip from the jungle to Bangkok?

Chambers: Not especially. We saw some planes going over, and they were already beginning to bomb the railroad. Some of the bridges on some of the rivers were already blown out--that we crossed going out.

Marcello: What did this do for your morale?

Chambers: We were glad to leave those jungles, and we were glad to see the planes bombing. They bombed a bridge out four or five times, and we had built it back. We got through building one back one day about three o'clock, and they came over and blew it out again at five o'clock that afternoon. We were glad to see that, as long as we weren't hit.

They didn't mark none of the camps, and so we didn't think they knew for sure what was in every one of them huts.

They did bomb a camp one time that we thought was through a miscalculation with their bomb sight. They was bombing this bridge, and some of the bombs hit on the edge of the camp. The guys were out on the parade grounds, but I was sick. If you was sick, you didn't have to get out on the parade ground. We were already in Thailand--Kanchanaburi. Anyhow, we were at this bridge close by there, and I believe Tamarkan was the name of that camp with that big steel bridge right beside of it. Then we built a wooden bridge after they knocked it out.

Marcello: You mentioned that you go from the jungle to Bangkok. Were you ever at Kanchanaburi or Tamarkan?

Chambers: Yes, sir, both of them.

Marcello: Now was this before or after you went Bangkok.

Chambers: That was before we went to Thailand. We were still in the jungle then. They were bombing the railroad before we left.

Marcello: Well, let's just back up a minute then.

Chambers: I've got that wrong. That was in Thailand, in the edge of it, before we went to Bangkok. Kanchanaburi, yes. Okay.

Marcello: You went from the jungle to Kanchanaburi.

Chambers: Yes.

Marcello: Now that was a big camp, wasn't it?

Chambers: Yes.

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

Chambers: We were more or less kind of on a recuperation deal there. They didn't work us too much, and we got us a little better food. The camp was full of these mango trees, and we robbed those. The Japs was always after us, but we'd wait until dark and sneak out and get us a few mangoes. We began to get a little better food.

Marcello: In what way?

Chambers: I think that we got a little more eggs and kind of got rid of that beriberi. We got enough eggs and stuff to get some of it off. And then this Dutch doctor had some of this iodoform that they put on some of the ulcers and got some of the guys healed up from that.

Marcello: Is this where you got your ulcers healed?

Chambers: That's where I got the one on my toe healed, yes, sir, and on my heal, too. I don't think that it was well at that time. Well, I'm sure that it wasn't because it was still on my heel when I left the jungle.

Marcello: And did the iodoform help you.

Chambers: It helped some, yes. Mine was almost healed when I got out, like I said. They were getting better even back in the jungle because I had been cleaning them out with that thread. The doctor never did hull mine out with that spoon, but some

of the other Dutch doctors were scraping them out, too.

Marcello: I understand that pain was excruciating when they spooned that dead flesh out of there.

Chambers: Them guys were screaming. They sure were. They didn't have any deadening of any kind to put on there. You'd just have to get somebody to hold the guy down.

Marcello: What kind of work did you do there at Kanchanaburi?

Chambers: I don't know that we did any right there or not. They moved us out to this Tamarkan then, and that's where we worked on that bridge, building it back. They sent some of the guys back to the jungle but not me. I didn't go back to the jungle.

Marcello: Now did you say that you were at Tamarkan whenever those bridges got bombed there?

Chambers: Yes.

Marcello: Describe the incident.

Chambers: Well, it happened two or three times. We'd get that bridge built back, and then they'd come and bomb it out. They'd already knocked out the steel and concrete bridge that had been built, I suppose, before the war, but they didn't have the materials to come rebuild it. These bombers was B-24's and some B-17's, and they'd come over and drop bombs at a high altitude, and then they'd circle out and come back and drop some anti-personnel bombs at some ack-ack guns that the Japs had there. They'd

do some strafing, too. They dropped some of the big bombs..,the first time they ever bombed, there was twenty-one four-motor planes that showed up, and I don't know how many were B-17's. Some of the bombs hung on a little late and fell all the way from the bridge into our camp. I don't think we lost any Americans, but I think it killed about twenty-six or twenty-nine, something like that, Australians that was buried. There was a lot of them buried that we dug out. Digging them out lasted until two o'clock that night.

Marcello: Now had the Japanese allowed you to dig any slit trenches or any kind of shelters?

Chambers: Yes, sir. They said that they were letting us dig these trenches around the huts to keep the rats out, to keep the bubonic plague out. They said that we would also use it as air raid shelters. In addition to this, they let us get down in a corner of the camp and dig zigzag trenches for air raids. We couldn't go out of the camp, but we could get back into the other side of the camp. I don't recall if they let us dig trenches in that far side of camp after those bombs or before, but I know that that's where we started going after that. We'd go down to that far side.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese in the aftermath of these air raids? I guess what I am saying, in effect, is,

did they ever try to take out any retributions on the prisoners for what had happened during the air raid?

Chambers: I don't believe they did, really. I don't think they really did. One time we couldn't get out of the camp, and the guards could. Since we couldn't get out, there wasn't any use but to just stand there and watch. The Japs were on one side of the road, and we were on the other, and they had just a lane. Them Jap guards would hear that air raid alarm go off, and they'd come out from their camp and hit this road. They'd run down to the end of that lane. It was just like a track race.

We was laughing at them, and the ol' camp commander seen us one day, so he put a sign on the bulletin board that there wouldn't be any more laughing at the Japanese guards during air raids. We weren't laughing, but we were up there watching. I don't guess he told his guards not to run, but the guards took off down that road. They got down to the end of that lane, and that ol' commander stepped out and headed them off. He stood there and bashed them all with that old saber in the scabbard. He didn't take it out of its scabbard--that ol' saber. He took it and bashed them all with that, and the whole gang of them turned around and had to go back during the air raid (chuckle). I guess he hadn't told them that he was going to stop us from laughing, but that was funnier than the whole thing.

Marcello: There was a canteen there at Kanchanaburi, too, wasn't there?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Who ran the canteen?

Chambers: It was some of our own guys. I guess it was some Americans, British, all together.

Marcello: Was it under the supervision of the Japanese, or how did it operate?

Chambers: I don't believe. I think it was set up in there, and I guess they kind of got together and decided they'd put an American or two and a Dutchman or two...you had to have somebody in there to speak that Dutch--an interpreter, you know.

Marcello: What kind of items could you get in the canteen?

Chambers: You could get eggs. You could buy a lot of eggs if you had the money--when we first got there. You could buy a lot of eggs. I know there was a Jew boy, Bill Barash, from New York, and he was a good poker player. He wound up with a lot of money. He'd get in a poker game, and he'd get me to go down and get us some eggs. I know that I'd go down there...he'd furnish the money, and I'd go get the eggs while he played poker. I went down there and bought a lot of eggs and boiled them and carried them back. He'd always divide them with me for serving them. He'd buy a bag, and we'd put them in a bag and save them up. We'd boil some of them, and we'd break some of them on our rice.

That was where I started getting better. I got rid of the beriberi, I didn't get rid of the diarrhea until after the war was over. And I wasn't having no more trouble with malaria much.

Marcello: What kind of entertainment was available to the troops here at Kanchanaburi?

Chambers: They had a little ol' theater that they build there, and the Japs let them put on a show. I forgot how often it was now. I don't know if it was once every week or once every two weeks. They had some guys that could put on some pretty good entertainment. They put on some pretty good shows. The people that were interested in it, they worked and put on some real good shows with the things that they had to do it with, you know. They didn't have much of nothing but their talent.

Marcello: Were those shows well-attended?

Chambers: Oh, you bet. Everybody went to the show. We couldn't wait for the theater to open (chuckle).

Marcello: How about the Japanese? Did they go?

Chambers: They had some to come and watch it some. I don't think that they watched it near like we did because they couldn't understand the English too well and stuff. They didn't know what was going on, really.

Marcello: And so I gather that you weren't doing too much work here at Kanchanaburi.

Chambers: Not to much, We was getting a lot of relaxation there.

Marcello: Now I do know from time to time drafts of prisoners would be taken from Kanchanaburi and ultimately sent to Japan. What were your thoughts about going to Japan?

Chambers: Oh, I'd have been ready, I think, because I was thinking that Japan would be a cleaner place to live and more free of diseases than the jungle. That would have been the only reason that I would have wanted to go. I think it would have been cleaner because in all the countries there the rivers and canals ran through the towns. The natives went there to wash their rice and to use the bathroom and to wash their clothes. When they got ready to use the bathroom facilities, they'd just wade out into the water and squat down right in the middle of town (chuckle).

Marcello: Now from Kanchanaburi or Tamarkan, you go to Bangkok, is that correct?

Chambers: Yes. Now when we got to Bangkok...

Marcello: About how long had you been at Kanchanaburi?

Chambers: I'd just have to guess at that. I'd say two or three months maybe. I had gained some strength--I sure had--and that was a good thing for me. I don't believe they moved us all. When we left there, we went to Bangkok. They might have, but I don't remember if all of them in Kanchanaburi went to Bangkok at the same time.

Marcello: Well, I think that they went to different places. Bunches

of them went to Saigon, too.

Chambers: Yes, sir. I didn't go there. So I think that you're right. I think so. Anyhow, at this warehouse that they put us in--this big ol' warehouse--they put us in to stay overnight. It was dark when we got there, and they had some four-by-fours laid down on the concrete floor. I guess there was acres of these warehouses up and down the dock. They had this rough lumber laying on these four-by-fours, and they went in there after night. We got off this little ol' tugboat that carried us down the river there because the bridge had been knocked out. They didn't carry us on across; we just got off the train and got on this boat at the end of the track where this bridge had been blowed out.

We went down to these warehouses and went in to go to bed. Boy, I mean to tell you, things started crawling and itching, and we didn't know what it was. The next day we got up, and them boards...you didn't see any bed-bugs on top of them, but it was like bees when they swarm and hang on a limb. I'm sure that you've seen that. They were just hanging on each other. So we just bumped the end of that board on that concrete and then take your foot and smear them, you know. They didn't have no facilities to scald them or nothing, but everybody would take the boards that he was sleeping on. We thinned them

out some. That was terrible, but we didn't have to stay there too long.

Marcello: What did you do while you were at that warehouse?

Chambers: We just spent a night or two there, and then they carried us on to...from Bangkok they carried us up to...oh, I forget some of those little ol'...Phet Buri, Rat Buri... I don't know which ones we went to first. They carried us up there because they were building some airports.

Then the last thing that I was doing...we had went and built a little ol' camp and worked on a project there a while and came back. We went to a bigger camp, and that's where we were when the war was over. We was building gun emplacements. Then we built airports, and the Japs never did land a plane on there. One guy...a friend of mine...when I left and went on to someplace else, he stayed there, and he said that the only planes that they ever landed there was the ones that come in and landed to pick them up.

Marcello: So from Bangkok, you went to various places, then, on different kinds of construction projects?

Chambers: Yes, sir. We went to two different places to build airports.

Marcello: And one place was Phet Buri?

Chambers: And Rat Buri was another one.

Marcello: Describe what this work was like.

Chambers: This work was pick-and-shovel work with rocks, also. What

we'd do was to dig the dirt back, and we'd put some rock down, and we'd fill in the crevasses between the rocks with dirt. We didn't have any concrete to make a... so that was going to be the driveway. We'd pack the dirt down on top of these rocks to make a more solid place for a plane to land. But they never did land a plane that I know of--the Japs never did.

They came over and straffed around these places a few times, and we'd see the four-motor bombers going over it. By that time, we never did see a Japanese plane anymore, so it didn't make any difference what kind of story that they were telling us. We knew who was winning the war because the Japanese didn't have any planes around to be seen anywhere. All we seen was American four-motor planes.

Marcello: Has the harassment kind of eased up by this time?

Chambers: I didn't notice a lot of change. I don't think that they were pushing us out on the labor parties as bad because they had their railroad finished and were done getting it bombed then. They weren't as anxious to get these airports built as they were to get the railroad built.

Marcello: Did it almost seem as if they were trying to find work for you to do now that the railroad was finished?

Chambers: Yes, sir, I believe that was the case, I think that's what they was doing.

We kind of didn't know what to think. We thought the end was getting closer, you know. But we could hear rumors about it being over. Sometimes you wanted to believe them, but you knew better. When the war did finish, they didn't tell us about it until along about the seventeenth. The shooting really officially stopped on the fifteenth, I believe. Anyhow, they didn't tell us about it for a couple of days.

Marcello: Up until this time, had you been able to send any mail home?

Chambers: Yes, sir. They gave us a little card back in the jungle at some time. I guess that we'd been a prisoner for about a year. You'd just sign your name to it, and you had a little block to check that "I am a prisoner of the Imperial Japanese Army, and I am working," and "I am well," or "I am sick." But nobody put "sick" on there because you knew it wouldn't go through. It didn't make any difference what it was about: "I'm working for the Imperial Japanese Army."

My mother and them said that they had been notified that we were missing in action, but they believed that we were prisoners-of-war. At the end of a year, they sent another notice that said that they hadn't gave up, that they still believed that some of us were prisoners-of-war at least. So after twenty-two months, they got this card,

and it was a year old. But my brother was a chemist. He was working at the Gulf refinery before the war started. Of course, he worked on through the war. He didn't know that you couldn't send over a twenty-five-word letter. Well, he wrote a three-page letter and mailed it, and it got through. I don't know how in the world...it said that my folks had moved, and it was about a year old when I got it.

Marcello: But you did manage to receive some mail, also.

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: What did that do for your morale?

Chambers: Oh, that was pretty good. That long letter that he had... them other guys just had a twenty-five-word letter. Boy, they'd laugh at me getting that three-page letter. I said, "Well, my brother's writing, them Japs can't read it, neither." (chuckle)

Marcello: Is that the only letter that you got?

Chambers: I got another card from my sister. I got two or three other cards. You'd get all of the mail that would come in, like, this week, and nobody would get any mail for a month or two or six months maybe. Then it looked like they would bring in a bunch of mail for nearly everybody. Nobody expected any mail because you got it so seldom. I guess the mail I got was always ten months old or older when I got it. The mail that I got to send home was always

...I think they got two of those little cards from me. One of them was twenty-two months after I come up missing, and the other one was just before the war was over.

Marcello: How about Red Cross packages? Did you ever receive Red Cross packages or supplies?

Chambers: At one time. We were in Thailand when we got that. It wasn't too long before the war was over. We got one package. It was a one-man package, and you had to divide it with seven people.

Marcello: What all was in the package?

Chambers: They had some of this instant coffee. I don't remember what brand it was, but it was so old, and it had been so hot, I imagine, in a ship or a storehouse somewhere that it had solidified like a crystal; but we made coffee with it and drank it. We thought it was good because it had been so long since we had had any coffee. And then they had some cigarettes in there that had been wet, and they was rotten, and they wasn't fit to smoke. And I believe that they had a little can of cheese or something.

Then I believe that the war was over, and they brought us in some of these khaki clothes, and I think I finally got me a pair of shoes. But the war was over, and we stayed in this camp two weeks after that, and they gave us some Red Cross,..I think that they wanted us to be looking a little more dressed up than we were. I think

they kind of didn't want the Americans to come in and see what we looked like (chuckle).

Marcello: As you are becoming aware that the war may soon be over, do you worry about what the Japanese are going to do to you if they lose?

Chambers: Yes, sir. Maybe not worry, but we wondered. We talked about it and wondered. This camp that we were in when the war was over, they had us to dig a trench around this camp, oh, I imagine, about ten foot deep about ten or fifteen foot wide. We never did figure out what that was for, so we just kind of wondered, "Well, they might march us in there and machine-gun us and take off whenever the tanks start coming in." We wondered about it. But at the end of the war, well, they used the atomic bomb to get us out, and I still think that might be the reason I'm here today. A guy wrote an article in the Ex-POW magazine the other day that that was the reason. He said that he didn't think he'd be there writing that article if it wasn't for the atomic bomb. Some of its critics have talked about how cruel it was to kill all the little innocent Japs and everything over there, but he said that you never see anybody having any sympathy for the Japs that had beaten the prisoner-of-war to death. Nobody had no sympathy for them. He thought that there ought to be a little bit of publicity in that way, too, you know, to let

the people know that the American people weren't the only dirty people in the world.

Marcello: Were you making any kinds of plans in case it did appear to you that the Japanese would kill all of you?

Chambers: No, sir, I don't think anybody had made any kind of plans because you couldn't have made the plans without involving other people. You'd just kind of have to go along with the herd, I guess. It wasn't too much that you could do as an individual, and then I guess that if you would have got anything going...I never did know of any of the other guys, I had heard a rumor that some of the guys had tried to take a ship over when they was on one of those ships. The Navy personnel and Marines had talked about that. Now how serious that they ever got...they didn't carry it out or anything. But I understand that there was some talk considering the possibility of doing that. They had enough experienced sailors and Marines on there to operate it.

Marcello: I know that Alf Brown and Ben Dunn were at Nakhon Nayok when the war was over. Do you recall if you were there with them?

Chambers: I was with them, yes, sir.

Marcello: Is that the place?

Chambers: Yes. I didn't remember the name of it, but I'd say that it was about seventy miles or seventy-five miles from Bangkok.

Marcello: Now was this where you got some Red Cross supplies? The ones that you mentioned earlier?

Chambers: Yes, sir.

Marcello: Describe how you received the word that the Japanese surrendered and that the war was over.

Chambers: We went out to work that morning. I think that it was the fifteenth, and I understand that the Japanese had surrendered. They carried this working party out, and we were building these guns emplacements on this mountain. They had us to sit down in the road and wait. This Korean went up and talked to one of the Japanese engineers, and they was all...we couldn't have understood enough Jap, but they figured we'd know enough words to catch on to what they was talking about, I guess. You could tell that they were whispering and making sure that none of the prisoners...but we just sat down right in the middle of this dirt road, and we waited until the guard came back. I guess it was thirty minutes or so or maybe longer.

It was a little white cloud sailing by. It was about half-sunshine and about half-cloudy. That guard came back, and he said, "All men go to camp. Very soon plenty rain, plenty rain. All men go to camp." We thought that that was something funny because they never did knock us off before when it was raining let alone when it looked like it was going to rain.

So we went to camp, and they just turned us loose in the camp. We went to our bunks and stayed there all day, expecting to go back out at any time, and they never did come and call us.

Rumors began to flow in then that the Japanese had told somebody, "You should be very happy. The Americans have won the war." The next day the ol' boy that worked in the Jap garage as a mechanic said that he went to work and the Jap over there offered him his rifle. He said, "Nippon has lost the war. You should be very happy. No work. The war is over." On the sixteenth the Japanese put out word that, well, it had been so long since anybody had had a day off that they were going to let everybody have a day's rest. I guess they were making up their mind on how to approach us and tell us what to do about it. They were receiving their orders from the Allies, too.

On the seventeenth it come time to go to work, but there was no bugle call, no nothing. About ten o'clock in the morning, they blowed the bugle, and everybody grabbed their canteen of tea or water or whatever they had and headed out to the parade ground. We had a British sergeant that done all the mouthing. The Japanese would tell him what they wanted, and he'd get up on his little stand and make his announcement. He got up on this little stand, and, of course, the rumors...everybody began to wonder...

nobody wanted to believe it too strong. He said, "Man, this is the happiest moment of my life, to tell you that the war...." He didn't get to complete what he started to say because we got to hollering, and some of the guys were crying and throwing their ol' hats up in the air and hugging each other. It was a heck of a sight.

This guy, Ben Dunn, he was my close friend, and he was standing beside me, and I said, "Well, I be damned!" You had to say something, you know, and he said, "What's the matter with you, 'Slim?'" I said, "Well, I'm going to get back to East Texas just in time to start picking cotton!" (chuckle) He said, "I ought to punch you in the nose!" He got back to Illinois, and he told everybody in his hometown about that. He said that the mayor wanted to see me and give me a key to the city (chuckle).

Marcello: Do you remember a Japanese at this camp called "Blue Beard?"

Chambers: He had a heavy beard that was so black that it was almost blue.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Japanese when the surrender came?

Chambers: They told this British sergeant--he told us--he said, "The Japanese are going to keep on guarding like they've been. They got orders to guard us for our protection. I wouldn't advise anybody to try to go to town or anything because there might be a crazy Jap out there somewhere that wouldn't

know any better than to shoot." But some of the guys did, but I didn't. I said that if I had made it that long, I'd just sweat it out another couple of weeks. Anyhow, they had come by and changed their guards, and they'd go to the guardhouse like they always did. They didn't speak to you, and you didn't have to salute them or bow to them. They didn't say anything to you. They'd march around, and they'd change the guard. This guard that was being relieved would get into the squad and march on around, and they'd get to another post, and they'd change those. That's the way they always changed guards. But if you met them, they didn't act like they seen you, and they didn't pay any attention to anybody.

Marcello: Did you smart off to them now that the war was over?

Chambers: No, we didn't do anything to them. They still had their guns, and we didn't have one.

Marcello: What happened to the Koreans? Were they still here?

Chambers: They were still guarding us. They were still our guards, yes, sir. Now them engineers, we didn't see them anymore after that day that they sent us back into camp because it looked like rain. I understand...some Army Intelligence men came by the house, and they asked me some questions after I got back home. My folks were living about ten miles north of Nacogdoches when I came back. He came by and questioned me and had me to look at some pictures

and have me identify some of the guards.

I asked him if he thought they would ever find any of the guards. He said, yes, that they done had them all. He said, "I think that we've got all of them." What they did, the Japanese told the Koreans, "We don't know what we're going to do and how we're to get home, and you'll have to get home the best way that you can." So the Koreans kind of took off to the mountains, kind of camped out. Some way or another, the Americans got word to them if they'd all come down, they'd arrange a camp for them there in Bangkok. They would all come and get into that camp wherever, and they'd do that at other places, too. They'd furnish them food until they got them all together, and then they'd furnish them transportation to get back to Korea. So he got back and spread the word, so they all came down and got in that camp, and as soon as they got into that camp, they closed the gate and said, "Now we're going to try all of you as criminals of war."

Marcello: I guess you didn't know any of their real names, did you?

Chambers: No, sir, not too many of the real names. I think somebody like ol' Dunn could remember. He was a history teacher, himself, in school. I don't know...he came back and finished his degree. I guess he finished it with a major in history, and he done some coaching. He could remember a lot of things like that that I never even did know. He was more

interested in things like that than I was, too. I suppose that he could tell you more names and things like that than anybody in the whole outfit.

Marcello: What kind of celebrations took place after you found out about the surrender?

Chambers: They found out that the Japs had some sake over there, and somebody got to breaking in their warehouse and getting that sake. It'd come in those six-gallon crocks. They got to stealing that and floated it around in that canal that we dug around the camp, that ditch that I was telling you about. It was filled up with water, and they'd swim along and push it along and get it around. They could put it in that canal and bring it around to the back and bring it through the fence. They said the next day that ol' "Blue Beard" went out there, and it wasn't but one crock of it left, so he took a pick and busted that. There was a crock of that sake hanging up in all of the huts. The Japs weren't coming through the huts, but they knew we got it and was drinking it. I guess that that was the only celebration that we had then.

They kept us there two weeks, and it seemed like that time just flew by. You'd think that you'd be ready to get out, that you'd be really ready to go.

They let our officers come into the camp. They had the officers separated from us at that time, but I don't

know exactly how long they were separated from us. They brought some of the officers in and said that they were going to make arrangements with the Thai government to get us a little better food, which they did. They got us some eggs and a little cleaner rice, so we had better food and stuff. We were gaining strength every day there then.

Marcello: Were any flags broken out? Did anybody have any flags?

Chambers: Oh, somebody had made one. Somebody had made a flag, they sure did, and they hung that American flag up. I don't remember who that was that had it now. Nobody even expected it, you know, and the first thing you know, there was an American flag out there. Somebody made that flag. That was something--that flag being there. I don't know who had that thing now, but I remember the flag.

Marcello: Describe your first meeting with the Americans who were going to liberate you.

Chambers: The Japanese had carried us back to Bangkok, to the same place that had the bedbugs, in the same ol' warehouses, but the bedbugs were gone. We stayed there for about three days. We kind of had the run of the area. We didn't see any Japs, but they did have the guard up at the gate. They didn't have any back in the compound at all, so we were enjoying it. They were giving us a little better food.

One day there comes an American colonel walking down

the street, and he went in, and he asked where the Americans were. We had 120-some Americans, and they told him where we were. He said that he had come to pick up some prisoners. So that British officer got out there and lined his men up, and he was ready to load all the planes. I don't know how many planes. He said he didn't have any orders to pick up any British; he had come to get the Americans. That was his orders. That ol' English officer thought that he'd pull his rank on him, but he didn't scare that colonel one bit. He didn't take nothing but Americans. He asked our colonel, Colonel Tharp, how many we had there, and I forgot whether it was a 123 or 128. He said, "Do you think that you can have them ready in thirty minutes?" "Yes, sir, and I'll give you twenty-five of that back!" (chuckle)

I didn't even go back and get any of my belongings. I had my ol' sleeping bag there that I had already peeled the canvass off of it and made these shorts off of it. I didn't go back and get anything. I left the whole works back in there.

They carried us out and put us on these Thai Army trucks that was parked outside. I don't remember how many trucks, but he had enough to haul us all to the airport. He had three or four, maybe five, C-46's or C-47's out there. They had landed some B-25's, and they had B-25's with those

cannons in the nose of them. They had those faced off toward the outside of the airport. In case anything did show up, I guess they figured they'd have that to protect the rest of it.

We went out and got on these planes and took us to Rangoon. We were real sure that they weren't going to start us off on any heavy food because as long as we had been on that rice and soup, they couldn't feed us no heavy food. We got to Rangoon. They landed to refuel the planes, and they had some of these...we hadn't seen a white woman in three years, you know, in the jungle, and I know some of these little ol' gals must have been rugged-looking, but they looked like if you had touched one of them that they would have broke, you know. They were so...white women, too. They waited on us and made us coffee and fed us sandwiches, and that was really a treat. We got through to Calcutta that night.

Marcello: You mentioned sandwiches. When was the last time that you had bread, a slice of bread as we think of bread?

Chambers: Up until then...oh, a real slice of bread...I don't think that we had had any since we were captured. It turned into rice, and I guess it was rice...now I know one thing that I did do one time. I didn't have anything to eat or anything, but I got hold of some rice, and I ground it up and put some water in it and some salt and maybe a little pork fat

or something and baked it. It turned out a pone, kind of like hot water corn bread, and put it in my mess kit and put it in some ashes and baked it. I don't know where I got the surplus rice at, really. It must have been some rice that I got from a sack that had busted open when we was loading or something like that.

Marcello: But you hadn't had a piece of bread, as we think of bread, for about three-and-a-half years.

Chambers: No, sir, I'm sure that we didn't get no bread after we were captured. Maybe for the first week or two that we was waiting for the Japanese, I guess we had some surplus left over and maybe was baking some bread out on the cooking facilities there. That was the last of the bread, though. Yes, them sandwiches was good.

Marcello: Okay, I'm sorry. I interrupted you awhile ago when you were on your way to Calcutta. What happens when you get to Calcutta?

Chambers: We got to Calcutta about nine o'clock at night, and they carried us to the mess hall. They had roast beef, and they had potatoes, and they had bread. We were used to taking our mess kits and piling it up, you know, and our stomach had stretched to where we could eat all the rice that we could get. I guess you could have ate a wash pan full of rice. Everybody piled their plates up with meat and cheese and everything--rich food--and I don't think

that there was a man in the whole mess hall that ate everything he put on his plate. And we didn't pile it up all that much, but, I mean, it's like if you start to eat some rich candy. A bite or two it is real good, but it gets too rich for you. That's exactly the way that that was. That good meat, roast beef, was just too rich. You couldn't eat a piece of it as big as anything. It was too rich.

Marcello: What food did you crave most while you were a prisoner-of-war?

Chambers: I'd say sweets, and that was a funny thing--any kind of cake or candy or pie. I'd always eat a lot of that at home. We didn't have a lot of variety of stuff when I was growing up on the farm. We never did run short of food, but we didn't have enough to have what we wanted at every meal, and I ate a lot of syrup. I was always a big sweet eater, and I thought, "Boy, I'll catch up on that." You know, I got to the point that I don't eat anything sweet yet. That's so funny. I always wanted sweets until I got out to where I could get it, and now I don't eat sweets--never did after I got out and got home. I'll eat a few pieces of cake, you know, if somebody brings out cake or something. As far as craving it... just a bite or two of sweets...I used to drink coffee but couldn't drink it unless it was half-cream and sugar.

I can't drink coffee with sugar in it because it has got an over-sweet taste to me. After all said and done, I think that I still over-eat on things like meat. I was always a big meat eater. I still love pork, and I love beef.

Marcello: When you got to Calcutta, you were put into the 142nd General Hospital, were you not? Isn't that where you went?

Chambers: Yes, sir. I sure was. I had done forgot. I suppose that was the only one that they had there. I didn't remember it being the 142nd.

Marcello: What kind of treatment did you undergo there?

Chambers: Oh, they treated us like kings. There was wining and dining and partying. They was giving us...you could send a telegram home, you know. I don't know if it was free or a cheap rate or whatever, but you had to stand in a line. I didn't do that because I figured that I'd be getting home pretty quick, anyway.

I got a letter the first week that I was there from my mother. She didn't mention my dad, so I knew that he was dead from that. Then in a few days, I got another letter from my sister, and she told me that they had lost him on the 9th of August.

So I stayed there for twenty-five days, and they started to fly some out in different groups. They were leaving about twenty-five or twenty eight at a time or

something like that go.

Marcello: What kind of medicial treatment did you get there?

Chambers: They gave us Atabrine. I think that they gave everybody a round of Atabrine for malaria. I had a hookworm treatment there. They didn't give me a lot of medication other than that. I don't think that they gave us any vitamin pills or anything like that, you know, for everyday medication. I don't think that they did, other than the Atabrine, until we had taken a certain amount.

Marcello: Did they ever give you any psychiatric examinations?

Chambers: Such as...I don't know what you mean.

Marcello: To make sure...did you ever talk to any psychiatrists or psychologists or anything?

Chambers: No, not until I was trying to get my disability raised about three years ago did I ever talk to a psychiatrist. I didn't ever think that I needed one, and I guess they didn't think that there was anything wrong with the guys as far as their minds. We had a lot of guys that killed themselves, but I haven't ever got that bad yet. I say a lot. We had some few. I think that they claim that there's a higher percentage among ex-prisoners-of-war than it is for a guy that wasn't. We had one guy that came back home, and his girlfriend had got married to somebody down at Henrietta, Texas, and he went and got his shotgun and went up to Henrietta and got on the courthouse steps and

blowed his head off, He hadn't been back two months--a guy by the name of Blackwelder,

Marcello: This would have been the first time that you would have ever had any experience with WAC's,too, isn't it?

Chambers: Yes, We didn't know that the WAC's existed. The WAC's gave us a party, and some nurses gave us a party, and the officers gave us a party. It was a party every night as long as we were at Calcutta.

Marcello: I understand that you guys ran wild in Calcutta.

Chambers: Oh, we did. We had to hurry up to live it up (chuckle).

Marcello: You were trying to make up for lost time.

Chambers; We sure were. People were nice to us everywhere that we went from then on. We got more than we deserved because there was so many other guys that went to the war, too, that didn't have no gravy train.

Marcello: Were you guys kind of of the mind that you were not about to take too many orders from people? In other words, you had been taking orders for three-and-a-half years.

Chambers: We didn't like the idea, but knowing you were in the Army, you didn't want to get in no trouble as far as refusing to obey an order, But I'll tell you what we did do. This guy Dunn and me in Bangkok, when we were waiting to be picked up...we had a Captain Parker, and we had always kind of liked him, but he got out...and I don't know if it was his idea or Colonel Tharp's idea. He came out with

this deal that we was going to start doing some calisthenics. He let us know that we were still in the Army and that we was going to start saluting the officers and all this--that we was going to shape up again. So whenever they blew the bugle to fall in for all of that, we headed out to some bomb craters out there and went swimming. We came back, and they was through with the calisthenics. We weren't there except but about three days, and then they came in and picked us up. That was about as near as anything like that.

Now we came back to the States, and they told us, when we landed in New York, that nobody would be going to town, to turn in all our clothes and be issued pajamas, and stay in the hospital: "You won't leave the compound." So me and two more guys...we went through worse fences than this, and if that's what they want...we kept us out some khakis, and we done made up our minds that we were going to New York, and we did. We went and stayed until about three o'clock that night and came back in. The nurse wanted to know where we'd been. We told her, well, we hadn't been around any womenfolk in so long, and we had to come up and get a drink of water, and we didn't want to come in them pajamas. We hadn't been around women in so long that it would be embarrassing. She said, "Yes, and I've been seeing them empty bunks back there." (chuckle) But they

didn't do anything to us. Everywhere we went...that's what I say. They gave us a lot more royal treatment than, I think, we deserved. We didn't deserve that much more than any of the other guys.

Marcello: When did you finally get out of the service?

Chambers: Some of the guys wanted to get out right then, but I wound up getting out on March 4, 1946. They gave me a month's leave from Longview, and then they sent me to San Antonio. That was a recuperating leave. When I got to San Antonio, I just reported in, and they gave me a three-month recuperating leave from there. So I stayed in San Antonio for a few days, and they said, "We'll have to send you back to active duty to give you a discharge. We can't just discharge you out of the hospital without giving you a medical." So they sent me back to active duty, and I just went over to the separation center and got my discharge and went home.

Marcello: So you started out in San Antonio, and you finished up in San Antonio.

Chambers: Yes. I went into the reception center there, and it was now the separation center.

Marcello: When you got out of the service, did you have any problems readjusting?

Chambers: No, sir. I guess maybe I kind of...I went on vacation for about six months, you see. Well, not too long, either,

really. I didn't know what I was going to do. My folks had rented a little farm there. They was doing some dairying, and they had done real well. Dad was a good judge of stock. We had lost him, and I lived there with my mother and my two sisters and helped them run the dairy. That was a seven-day-a-week job. The girls were fixing to get married; they was grown then. One of them was getting married then, and the other one was getting married pretty soon. I told my mother, "I don't want the dairy. Why don't you just sell the cows, and I'll find me a job someplace."

In the meantime I started to school at Stephen F. Austin, and I thought that I'd go to school if nothing else. So I went that summer, and I was fixing to go on. I went down to visit my brother, who was a chemist in Port Arthur. I was kidding him one Friday morning, and I said, "Get me a job and I'll go to work with you." He said, "I can't get you a job, but I can get you an appointment with the boss." He said, "Would you take a job if you had it." I said, "I'm in no position to turn one down. I'm going to school, but I might need a job worse than I need schooling because I don't know how far I'll go in school, since I didn't finish high school. I don't know if I can ever pass in college without doing more work than I feel like doing, anyway, in book work." So he said, "Well, I'll

talk to the boss and see." They had a rule that they didn't hire anybody without a high school or equivalent education. So he got me an appointment, and I went out there and talked to the chief chemist of the lab. He told me the rules, and he said, "I might be able to hire you on an equivalent since you went to Stephen F. Austin this summer." He said, "I'll talk it over, and we'll see." He talked it over with some of the other top people out there in the employment office, and they said, "Since he's had the experiences that he's had, and he's went to school, I believe we can say that he has an equivalent to high school education." So they hired me.

I worked for them a little over thirty-three years. I have to say that they treated me nice enough to give me 100 percent disability now, and so that will help me on my retirement. We get a lot of enjoyment out of retirement, and we love to travel. We got time to do it.

Marcello: As you look back, what did you find out about yourself as a result of having come through that experience.

Chambers: I don't know if I really found out anything about myself. I don't guess I found out that I could do something that I didn't think that I could do. I couldn't do it now; I know I couldn't do it. But back then I felt like...well,

I could have died in that, too, but I felt like there wouldn't be very many left whenever I did, from my experiences from growing up and things. I wasn't that strong a person physically; I wasn't as strong as a lot of guys that died. I think that it was that you had to take things as they come and not get too excited over it. Don't build yourself up too high expecting to get out of this thing in two weeks, and don't get yourself down so low that you feel that you couldn't live another year if you had to. Kind of hang on and see what happens.

I don't guess that I really found out...oh, I've always considered myself trustworthy. I found out a lot about people that I didn't know, but I didn't find out much about myself. I've always tried to live up to my promises to anybody. We were just raised up as a family like that. If you aren't going to do anything like that, don't promise anyone that you are going to do it--if it's possible to do it, you know.

Marcello: What do you see as being the key to your survival? If somebody were to ask you why you came back and others didn't, how would you answer?

Chambers: I don't know. I'd just have to tell them I don't know. I don't understand it. Like I was telling you earlier, I think there was a lot of guys a lot more religious and done a lot more praying and was a lot more sincere

in their religion. I don't think I did anything morally wrong. I don't think that I was a sinner that the Lord would have kept me from coming back. That's what I was saying--that's what I believe. If the Lord saved you from dying...you know, a lot of people would say that the Lord saved you. I figure that if you believe like this, if you ever die, you're going to hell because the Lord didn't save you. So I don't know. I would like to know the answer to that if anybody ever comes up with it.

Marcello: Maybe that's a good place to end this interview, Mr. Chambers. I want to thank you very much for having participated. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things. I'm sure that historians and researchers will find your comments most valuable when they get a chance to read them.

Chambers: I hope that it'll be worth something to somebody. It has been a good experience to me to sit down and see how much I did remember. I wish that I could have remembered a lot of things that happened that would have been good, but you get older and older, and your mind slips. Mine is, I know that.