An Interview with:

Mr. Homero Martinez

regarding his experiences during World War II.

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Interview with:

Mr. Homero Martinez
3231 Windfall
Laredo, Texas 78045
Born: November 22, 1917
Died: December 28, 2000
Combat Service: 131st Field Artillery, Java, Dutch East Indies

This interview was conducted by Chris Schaefer at Mr. Martinez' home in Laredo, Texas, March 19, 2000. This version of the transcript has been re-arranged to place the events in chronological order. Words added by the interviewer for clarity are offset in brackets [ ]. Words or phrases marked with (?) could not be clearly understood on the interview tape.

Martinez:

I am going to call you "Chris," and I insist that you call me "Homero" or "Homer." Let's put it on a first-name basis. I feel so much older--I am 82, and I don't want to feel any older than that. When people call me "Mister" or "Sir," I know it is out of respect for the gray hairs and nothing else. But I prefer to deal on a personal plane. Do you agree to my rules?

Schaefer: (laughs) Yes, sir. I sure do.

Homero:

Thank you Chris. That's great.

Now, whatever I tell you, you can use it for any particular purpose that you desire. However, there are some things that I may not tell you along the way, because they were so bad that I would not like them to be publicized, to start with, and secondly, some of them were plain illegal.

Chris: Once I transcribe everything we cover today, I would like to send it back to you to look over. Sometimes that will jog some more thoughts that we could discuss.

Joining up:

Homero:

I was faced with a very difficult proposition--and I am jumping way ahead now in my story, but I want to tell you about it before I forget to mention it at all. The reason I decided not to stay in the army--I used to be a newspaper reporter before the war. I graduated on a Friday night, and Saturday morning I was at work, at a weekly newspaper where I learned to write everything, including D.A.R. meetings, tea parties and stuff like

that. You work for a weekly, you cover everything. I did learn quite a bit, and I enjoyed it.

There were a lot of us like me--I served in the 2nd Infantry Division, and also the 1st Cavalry Division in El Paso for a short time, before I joined the artillery. Long enough to learn the basics of both the infantry and the cavalry. I didn't like the cavalry, although I spent a lot of my time on the family ranch my father's family had. It was about 3700-4200 acres, big enough. I grew up on a ranch and I loved horses. After I got out of the cavalry I hated horses, and I haven't been on a horse in sixty years, except one time and that was an emergency.

I made the mistake. I should have volunteered for three or four years service, then I would have gone into the regulars. I might have been killed in combat later, but I wouldn't have wound up in a National Guard outfit. I had volunteered. I had a very high number, and I would not have been called up until late December 1943, or early 1944. But I jumped the gun and joined in February 1941. I wanted to get done with my military service and I volunteered for one year. Six months later, they increased it to a year and a half--without asking me.

I was in battalion supply, and that's why I was promoted to corporal before I had been in the Army four months. Then promoted to sergeant after we did a good job over there in Luciano(?), Honduras(?), in 1941. But, Captain Taylor, from Waco, our commanding officer, saw my army record. In the first place, he couldn't believe that a Mexican-American could speak such good English. He told me that (laughs). Second, he thought that I had claimed, falsely, that I was a high school graduate (laughs). He couldn't believe it. That was on my service record. "You mean to tell me you were a newspaper reporter? And you wrote in English and in Spanish?"

"Yes, sir."

"How come you know both languages? Do you know Spanish as well as English?"

I said, "Better."

He couldn't believe it. He couldn't understand it. Naturally, he was from up north somewhere. A lot of these farmers, because they were farmers, had met the wrong kind of Mexican-Americans. The ones that never go to school. I came from a town like Laredo where, like right now, we have ninety-four percent Latin-American citizens here. The other six percent are the Anglo-Americans.

He never forgot that discussion we had. My daughter has a coin--simulated gold. A coin with all the faces of the Presidents. On the other side it has the American flag or something. Somebody put it out and he [Captain Taylor] bought one. He sent it to me with a little piece of paper that said, "To one of my best sergeants." That wasn't right--we had some terrific sergeants, but I am the only one he gave that to! I think he

remembered that discussion we had. You know, when he called me up and said "How come you are a Mexican-American and you speak such good English?"

"Very simple, I went to school."

"How in the hell did you ever manage to graduate from high school? Did you really graduate?"

I said, "Sure, would you like for me to send over my diploma?"

He said, "No, no, no." And he kept on about it.

So I said, "Why don't you just assume that I haven't lied about these things on my service record? If you think I have lied, I'll find you all the proof you want." Because he told me that if every thing on my record was true, he was going to get me a promotion and put me to work in battalion supply.

He said, "Well, look. Everything you have got on your service record goes against you. I know about Mexican-American boys. They don't speak English very well; they speak Spanish very well. You graduated from high school. You have no fear of Anglo-Americans--you speak back. You've been fighting all my men, first three graders [privates, PFCs and corporals] and everything else when they call you…make that remark, you know."

In the Guard, not in the 1st Cavalry or the 2nd Infantry--those were professionals; they came from all ranks, including a great number of Jewish people. There, you were just another man. But in the National Guard, "Mex" here and "Mex" there, and "pepper belly" and "taco bender," that kind of crap. At any time they came up with some shit like that, well, I wasn't used to it, it had never happened to me.

When I was in [El Paso], they used to send me to the training battalion when they got Mexican boys. Whether they were going to my battery or some other battery, they called me to go and spend afternoons drilling with them. I would go, and they would put me right in the center, surrounded by all of the Mexican boys. The sergeant would say "Right…" and he looked at me. And I would say, "A la derecha, pelusa, 'right'" and they would know it was going to be called right.

"Column, right!" But first he would say "Right," and then wait to call out the order [so I could translate].

But the boys used to get confused, because for "forward," he'd say "Forward," [then wait for me to translate,] and then he'd say "Forward, march!" They could not understand why there were two "forwards," until I finally got it through their heads what he wanted. (laughs).

But I would turn my head and say, “A la derecha, pelusa.” “Pelusa” means “gang.” “To the right, gang.” They had already learned about the "order" and the "command-of-execution." And they would follow my order on the right turn. Same way for all the commands. That’s how they learned to march, without knowing English. Amazingly, so many of them learned English in the Army. They had never had any schooling. With all the ragging and the joking, in order to defend themselves they decided they had to learn English, and they did.

So, when I was in battalion supply, the officers would call me out to help indoctrinate these boys in the peculiar American military passion of marching. It was an interesting time, they got me in battalion supply, a Latino. The Captain said, “Why do you think you got that corporal’s rating?”

I said, “Well, I don’t know. You said you could use me somewhere else.”

He said, “Because you said you knew accounting, you know typing, and you do shorthand. So, Corporal Waters gave you a test and you are a faster typist than he is, you know shorthand very well, and you do know accounting. We’ve got a stack of papers that high. You’ve got to read the Army accounting manual.” Which was simple as all get-out. It’s a double-entry system, but very simple. He said, “Here’s the first manual. Read it.” So, I read it, and it was simpler than some of the accounting courses I took. He came back in and said, “Is there anything you want me to explain about the system, in manual number one?”

I said, “No, sir. I was able to understand it pretty well.”

He said, “Well, you work on these invoices. These are receipt invoices.”

“Yes, I know. The book explained exactly how to handle them. I looked up the forms and I now am able to identify all the rest. As a matter of fact, with your permission, I looked up all of these forms and I went in the storeroom and picked out all the forms that I have seen here. Picked out the blanks and set up a file. If somebody wants something, if they give me the correct name of the paper, the document, I can immediately find it in my file, and know exactly what they want.”

“That’s a pretty good idea. Keep thinking like that.” He walked away and said, “Work on all of these and I’ll check with you tomorrow morning.” Well, the next morning, when I reported at 8:00, he had been there since 6:00 checking the work out (laughs). He was very happy with it. He said, “You made one mistake.”

I said, “Really? What was it?”

He said, “You put an eight for a six on one of them.” (laughs)

After that, he put me to recording issues to the batteries. At the end of the week, I was ready to post the journal to the ledger and I ran totals to see if I balanced. Well, I didn't, which is normal, you make mistakes. He came in and said, "How are you doing?"

I said, "I'm checking my trial balance."

He said, "It doesn't balance? Well, if it doesn't balance we can't go any further until you balance." The minute he walked out, I found it. (laughs)

I did it, thanks to my teachers in high school. Not because I was a good combat soldier or anything like that. Later, is when the goodies came home--yech!

I had gone out for Golden Gloves, and I thought of myself as pretty much of a boxer. Until the day came when they started counting the ones I won and the ones I lost, and I quit talking about it. (laughs) But, I used to fight. Win, lose or draw, whenever they insulted me in that fashion, I would pick up and fight them. Corporals, sergeants, hell even a staff and a tech, but never a Master Sergeant. I learned real quickly to avoid Master Sergeants. (laughs) And I paid the penalty for fighting these people, but they learned that no matter what the penalty was, I was still going to fight them if they insulted me about my race. It is an egotistic thing, but hell.

This Jewish boy we had in our battery, Bill Maris(?), he said, "They can say whatever the hell they want to about me. That ain't gonna hurt me. Let them say whatever they want to." They called him "Kike" and "Jew," and all kinds of different names. He didn't give a damn.

"Why don't you fight back?"

"What the hell for? These names don't put any bruises on me. You had a fight with Sergeant Phillips the other day." Sergeant Phillips was a roustabout in a circus. (laughs) Pretty heavy. And used dirty fighting. "You came back with a whole bunch of bruises. You didn't have to. All you had to do was keep your corporal's shirt on, and he would not have fought you. But no, you took it off, hung it up and went at it, and got a whole bunch of bruises." That was Bill Maris, the Jewish boy. Such a kindly man.

But, they finally said, "Hell, let the son of a bitch be happy. Don't call him names anymore."

But then, it went to my head. When I got assigned a squad, not only did I stand up for myself all around, I told everybody, "Don't fuck around with any of my squad who are Mexican boys. I am treating them just like I'm treating all the men that are in my twelve man squad." Eleven-man, I was the twelfth man. "I treat them all the same, and I want you to do the same. If you don't, you will have a little get-together with me." Then the sergeants themselves started getting friendly with a corporal [me]. The men took the tip, and they left my men alone.

When I made sergeant, I had a platoon. They call it a section in the artillery. I had my own section of thirty-five men, an officer and myself. Of course, the officer was in command, and I was second-in-command. When I got to be a sergeant, I went around and told everybody, "Quit messing around with my men." One guy didn't believe it, so I took off my sergeant's stripes and we had a fight. After that one, they knew that I meant what I said. I wasn't that good at fighting. It was a job. A minor thing, a stupid thing to be fighting about. They thought, *Hell, I don't want to fight over something shitty like that. Let the son of a bitch be happy.* And they quit.

Chris: You won their respect.

Homero:

It wasn't that much really, it wasn't respect. The respect came later, when I got these assignments in the field, and they found out that I loved being in the field and doing difficult jobs. I gained two bivouacs where there was nothing but a place pointed out on a map, and I could climb it(?). That is where the respect came in. Before that, I was just a damn nuisance.

And there were…most of these [officers] were coming from Texas Tech(?).

<u>Shipped out to the Philippines:</u> (November 1941)

[From notes: Homero Martinez was a Sergeant (E-5, three stripes) when he was shipped out to the Pacific, and was later promoted to Staff Sergeant.]

Homero:

[I am] very admiring of a few of the officers like little ol' Lieutenant [James P.] Lattimore. Little guy. He had more guts. He wasn't afraid of anything. He was one of the few small men who was not trying to prove anything. Oh, Lieutenant Lattimore was great. He is the one that told us the truth on the *USS Republic* [part of the *Pensacola* convoy], going to Australia.

One day, the headline on the ship's newspaper said, "Roosevelt Gives the Japanese an Ultimatum." And I talked to people about it, and nobody had heard of such a thing. Yet, I've got three books written by John Toland--they are fiction, but he reveals that Roosevelt actually gave them an ultimatum to goad them into some action to justify America going to war with them. Some of the men were talking about it and they said, "Well, Sergeant Martinez used to be a newspaper reporter, let's ask him what 'ultimatum' means."

They came to me. I said, "Well, I tell you what. It is a very serious word. It means that President Roosevelt is not giving the Japanese any leeway. You are going to have to fight."

“Ah, baloney. The Japs won’t jump on us.”

I said, “Let’s ask one of the officers.” Well, we listened to Lieutenant Lattimore, but none of the others.

The men said, “Okay.”

I said, “Lieutenant, the men want to talk to you, the men in my section.”

“What about? I’m not their platoon officer. I am the Executive Officer for Captain [Arch L.] Fitzsimmons.”

“I know, but they want you to explain something to them.”

He said, “Okay.” Gets up…(??)..tail. He was a very reasonable person.

So, he came down. “Okay, ask me your question.”

“Lieutenant, what does this mean?” They showed him the little headline on the mimeographed paper from the *USS Republic*.

He looked at it. (laughs) He said, “Oh, shit.” He had not seen it.

He said, “Sergeant, do you know what this means?”

I said, “Yes, sir. I told the men but they don’t believe it. That is why they want you to tell them.”

“You poor bastards are going to war, and so am I!” (laughs) And those aren’t the words that he usually used. (laughs)

Everybody’s jaw fell down. “How can you tell?”

“Well, when a President gives an ultimatum to another nation, it means you shit or get off the pot!” They understood that. I remember him telling them so clearly, in those very words. He says, “The Japanese have no choice but to fight. Or, get out of China.”

Roosevelt knew they weren’t going to do that [get out of China]. So I feel that the old fox [Roosevelt] knew what he was doing. And you’ve go to admire him for pulling such a beautiful trick on the American people, because if the American people had not been in favor of that war we would have lost it.

Pearl Harbor Day: (December 7, 1941)

Homero:

On the day of Pearl Harbor, [Sergeant Frank Fujita and] I had a fight. I went down below [on the *USS Republic*] with my section to start bringing up the small stores. The rifles, the rifle ammunition, some of the machine guns and their fifty caliber ammunition, the gas masks, and a lot of unit stuff like that to give to the batteries, because that was the kind of stuff we could haul up the gangways. He was sent with his section to start preparing six of the 105 millimeter guns, split-trails, to bring up and set two on the fantail, two on the bow, and two on either side of the five inch gun, the only one it [the *Republic*] had. Additional machine guns, to put on the rails around it--we had two fifties on the fantail, the stern, two in front, facing backwards with the five inch gun, and two amidships. It got tough, lashing down those guns, because it was such a narrow passageway. How these guys did it, I don't know. So we had additional firepower.

Then the machine guns went up on the sun deck, and eventually, being in the empty(?) aircraft section, my combat m.o.s. [military occupational specialty], I got assigned as one of the crew leaders. We had at least four fifty calibers, right up on the sun deck. One on each corner. We had an electric pump to circulate the water. Each one was a twin fifty. God, they used to put out a hell of a lot of ammunition. We used to practice on balloons, and they would fly a kite from the fantail. We would practice every day, until we found out what a hell of a job it was to tear down a water-cooled fifty and change the barrel. We burned barrels by the ton on those fifties. God almighty. Luckily, we were packed full of that stuff, where we could practice that hard. It was my section, when I went up on the sun deck in charge of the machine gunners, the machine gunners came from the firing batteries. They weren't used to me, but hell, all I had to do was punch the buttons to start the water circulating, and assign the men to uncover the manual pump in case the electrical system went out and pump the water by hand. So it was a hell of an experience, and we never got bombed.

Chris: So, you were aboard ship at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Homero:

Yes, on the *USS Republic*. It was a converted German passenger liner, given to the United States as part of the war reparations in 1917 or 1918.

Such a discipline that the American people developed during World War II, is utterly amazing. People were losing their young kids right and left. Hanging star after star in their windows. Gathering tin pots, aluminum and tires. Rosie the Riveter going to work in a defense plant, and all that kind of stuff. It's admirable!

Roosevelt and Churchill, and even that egotistical Frenchman, General DeGaulle, they were geniuses. They could make people do any sacrifice to help. They were all cut from the same cloth.

Chris: How did they justify going to fight Germany before Japan, when it was Japan that attacked us?

Homero:

The government was aware of the tremendous advances that the Germans were making into certain areas. One of them was, developing a code machine for messages that was supposed to be absolutely unbreakable. That one didn't work. And we knew that they were developing the hardware to build an atomic bomb. Then we found out that they were very well advanced in their studies of an American, I forget his name at the moment, who developed rocket flight and nobody paid any attention to him. But the Germans understood the military implications of the rocket. What was that guy's name, it was back in the 1920s? He was from Vermont or somewhere in New England. The Germans caught onto the implications of the rockets, but nobody else did. When they found out about that, it was just too much. Roosevelt realized that Hitler, especially when he wrote his book, *Mein Kampf*, he spelled it all out--world domination. Roosevelt took it to heart. Thank God. Because they were cut from the same cloth, except that Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito were the bad boys and Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-shek and DeGaulle, and primarily Winston Churchill, were on the side of the good.

The War in Java, Dutch East Indies: January-April, 1942.

[Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor the *Pensacola* convoy was diverted from its original destination, the Philippines, to Brisbane, Australia. There, the ships were unloaded, then reloaded to resume their voyage.]

Homero:

When we left Australia [on December 29, 1941], the guns that we had put on the *Republic* were put on the *Bloemfontein*, a little Dutch freighter that carried nothing but our battalion. Luckily, it was a brand-new freighter. It was a speedy son of a gun. The whole 131st was on that one ship, guns and all, and supplies for the Philippines. At the time, we were headed for the Philippines, but we couldn't get there.

We turned around when we saw that the convoy that we had practically got disbursed, or sunk, or whatever, and they turned our ship back to Surabaya [eastern Java], where we landed.

From there we went to Malang [southeastern Java] to guard the air group, the landing field. We had all the [artillery] guns with us. [We were] guarding an airfield that was operating with B-17s that had flown out of the Philippines, with only their mess needs--their chow. They had flown out with so few personnel, out of Clark Field in the Philippines. That was the 18th Bombardment Group.

From then on, we took care of the 18th Bombardment Group. That General Eubanks, craziest bastard. I went to his funeral in San Antonio, because he was a real man.

[We were] cleaning and loading their ammunition, .50 calibers, loading them up with bombs, and fueling the planes.

This is Frank Fujita [referring to the author of a book[*]]. [He was in my battalion] there in Java and we got into an argument--the son of a bitch came into my battalion supply and said, "Sergeant, I need some supplies."

"Sure. Make a list and prepare a requisition, get it properly signed, and bring it in here." So he went over and prepared a requisition. He wanted twenty-three machine guns! Eighteen fifty caliber, and the rest water-cooled, thirty caliber.

I said, "You're crazy, Foo. [Sgt. Fujita's nickname was 'Foo.'] We only have twenty-seven for the entire battalion! And here you want twenty-three for your *battery*? A four-gun battery?"

He said, "Yeah, I'm gonna need every one of them!"

"You ain't gonna get 'em!" There we go, we had another fight.

It was ridiculous of him to ask for all the machine guns. But he tried to…

This was in Java, under the command of Lt. Col. Eubanks--a fine man.

Chris: Was he with the 131st Field Artillery?

Homero:

No, Eubanks was CO of the 18th Bombardment Group, from the Philippines. They flew out and went to Java.

One day we had a strafing there on the field. There were only three machine guns firing: mine, Whatley's, and one from the Air Corps that two men were holding from the "spike", the spindle that you use to mount them on a plane or a truck. They had two guys holding it down and one guy firing. There were two planes brought down that day. Whatley and I had placed our… The parade ground was rectangular, kind of like that and the entrance was here (gesturing). I was here, and he was here. When they were coming low, within a hundred feet off the ground, he and I were catching them in our crossfire.

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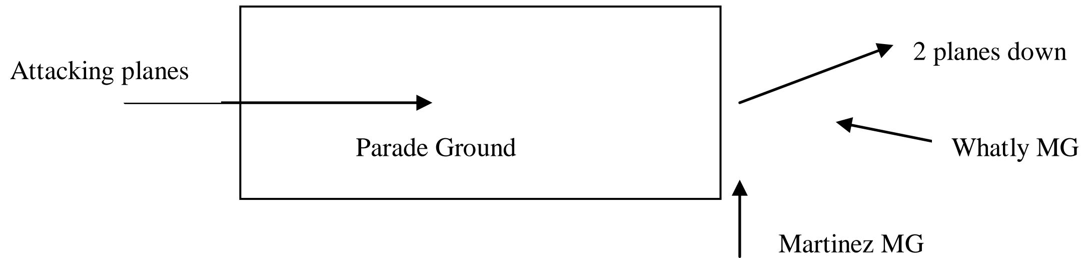
[*] Frank Fujita, *Foo: A Japanese-American Prisoner of the Rising Sun*.



Later, we pulled out seven of our B-17s from fires created by the strafers. I got a letter here that Fitzsimmons wrote way after the war, trying to get some kind of a medal. I think he was hoping for a Silver Star, which is a pretty damn good medal to get. I don't know if we deserved any medal, because we were just doing our job.

Whatley had been in charge of loading the machine guns on the planes. As usual, anything about combat he wanted to learn, a lot. And he had learned how to pull the ribbons [safety catches] on a plane and get them off when they had the brakes off, and that kind of nonsense. So we got to this one, it had the brakes on and we couldn't pull it. He said, "Well, let me get in there, and when I shout and tell you to pull the winch, you pull the winch. Let's get it out of the fire." So with the wing burning, the top of the cansack(?) had been set on fire, he got into the plane without knowing that the damn thing was loaded. And he fiddled with it, fiddled with it, and never could get the brake off.

So he came out and said, "I can't get the damn brake off."

I said, "It must be damaged. What are you going to do?"

He said, "Get the truck cattywompus, get in the truck and set it where I tell you." And we were going to try to pull it by the tail, pull the plane out and get the wing away from the fire.

So Cope(?) moved the truck, and then ran to the tail of the plane and hooked it somewhere--I never knew where he hooked it. He hooked the winch to it, and started pulling it out. Then he remembered, "Hell, I've got a fire extinguisher in the truck." He came and got the fire extinguisher and went and put out the smoldering fire on the wing. He had just barely enough to spread it on the tanks and put that one out, too.

I think both Whatley and Cope really deserve…I was on a machine gun, but they bombed the field, they didn't strafe it so I never got a shot off. So, I think they would have deserved the Bronze Star, or even a Silver Star, not me.

But, we pulled these B-17s out of the fire, seven of them. And one of them blew up the next morning. We didn't even know it was loaded.

He [Captain Fitzsimmons] wrote this thing and sent it on in.

Captain Taylor, he was… He lost his eyesight in prison camp. He was selling insurance when he came back. When he used to go out to look up a customer, he used to carry a pair of field glasses. When he would come to a street, he would use the field glasses to find out where he was. That is the way he would find the residence. His eyes were very bad; he had a lot of trouble. He used to write letters. He didn't die. He used to write letters. God, he would wander all over the page. I've got copies of all that, somewhere in here.

The *USS Houston*--and I have a painting of the *Houston* when it was sunk, and the *USS Perth*, which you are welcome to see the next time you come back to Laredo. Come anytime you wish, or if you want to clarify some point give me a call.

When the Japanese landed [on the night of February 28, 1942], we had been expecting them to hit us on the east coast and the west coast. But they landed on the west, the east and right in the center of north Java, and proceeded to split us into three parts. We had no air coverage, no navy.

From March 1, right after midnight on March 1, my battalion fought under the British and Dutch commands for one week. And we got the hell beat out of us. The Japs outnumbered us.

(pause) You must understand that I couldn't shoot the first Jap that I saw, because I thought that he was another human being, and I was a church-going Roman Catholic. I had been taught not to kill. I believed in that, although I am not a very religious man. And the first Jap I saw, sixty, seventy-five yards away, he was dead meat. I just could not bear to pull the trigger. I had such a mental block, because of my religious training; I just could not do it. It wasn't until I started seeing some of the wounded and the dead, and I started getting mad. Eventually it got so bad that I volunteered for some patrols.

There was no way [we could win]. They [the Japs] had so many people that they would go off against the Australian infantry, they would spread out and surround you. They had so many people. So we had to fight out of that place because the Javanese, the Dutch, surrendered on March 8, 1942. And they didn't tell anybody. We woke up on the 9th, we were surrounded by the Japs, and we had to fight our way out of it. Mostly, the fighting was done by the Australian infantry, but we helped with our 75s [75mm artillery].

[The following information was provided by Hector Martinez, Homero's brother: In Java, near the combat zone, Homero was on the road driving a jeep back to the command post, following a British unit that had left the area. He came upon an Australian soldier by the side of the road who had been wounded in the leg. He stopped, and after giving first aid put him in the jeep and took him to the American camp. After awhile, the Aussie got well but because of his injury was unable to go back into combat and was given easier tasks to perform around the camp's perimeter. He remained with the Americans until they all fell into the hands of the Japanese.]

Homero:

Eventually, we called Colonel Muenchel(?) S. Thorpe(?), a good old German name which went along with his attitude about war. He had been in World War I, with the (?). He was a good soldier. A small man. I have found that small men are quite courageous, simply because they are out to prove that in spite of not being big, they have got what it takes. He was one of those people, a very good man. He made the decision to surrender with the few wounded and sick that we had, and with anybody else that wanted to.

So when the Colonel surrendered, [three of us] went with a group that wanted to go up in the hills and keep on fighting. He gave us permission to take whatever trucks that were left that we could use--to take the best: jeeps, command cars, whatever we wanted, and all the ammunition we wanted. So three Americans, Sergeant Jay O. Whatley; I will never forget him--he was a lousy garrison soldier, but, man, he made one hell of a combat sergeant. He didn't like garrison duty, he liked action. He was our Anti-Aircraft Sergeant. And private Westy(?) Joyce Hoch, from Waxahachie, Texas. He was National Guard, and so was Whatley. He [Whatley] was from a little town outside of Lubbock, I forget the name. They were both National Guard. I was not.

So, we went up in the mountains and went on patrols with the Australians and the British, and some of the Scotch. They had quite a number of the Gordons that had come out of Singapore. They also had quite a number of the Argyles and Southern Highlanders. They say "Heelanders."

We used to ferry them into these areas in our truck. A damn good truck. It hurt like hell to destroy it, eventually. We would ferry them, and then we would sit up on the hills around where they were going to set up a trap or ambush, and we would watch them through the BC scope, the "Battery Commander's" scope. We brought one of those, just for the hell of it.

Captured: (April 8, 1942)

Homero:

On one of those missions [at two o'clock in the morning] I fell into the [Japanese'] barbed wire and I never could get out of that damn stuff.

I still have fifty-nine year-old scratches all over my hands from that barbed wire, and up under my chin. But, I was very fortunate. I have got two Purple Hearts, officially, that medal and the Bronze Star. I was wounded three times, but they were superficial. I don't know why the good Lord has been so good to me but He has, and I'm not complaining. (laughs) Hell, I'm 82 when I did not expect to live beyond 40 or 45 at the most. I've had a great life.

Chris: How did you get so tangled up in their wire?

Homero:

Well, we got up to the barbed wire, and started cutting strings. Two men held them, while the third man, me, would cut [the barbed wire] in the center, and they could hold it, bend it back, and secure it to something. Because the Japanese would hang tin cans with pebbles in them, hang them from the barbed wire strings. They also would hang little strings of cut glass about that long (indicates about four inches) that the wind made very nice music. But if somebody moved the barbed wire, they would jangle. And it wasn't musical--they could tell the difference. Then they would start shooting flares, firing machine guns and all kinds of nonsense.

Chris: So this was at night?

Homero:

Oh, yes. This occurred at two o'clock [in the morning], when I was captured. So, I got caught in the barbed wire and couldn't get out. I spent the whole night there in the barbed wire. I got so scared that my tongue turned into a wad of cotton. God, I was so thirsty. But every time I moved, two things happened: I had a wound up here, on my shoulder from a spent bullet that came to rest and broke some bones here--they [Japanese doctors] pulled it out and I didn't even spend one day in the hospital.

The Japs came out to cut me loose. This little Jap came with a pair of pliers--it would have taken forever to cut me loose with those things. [To cut that wire] it would take some big bolt cutters because we didn't have the proper barbed wire snips, the proper cutters. So, we had a great big old bolt cutter [that we had brought along to use on the wire]. It took three men to cut [me out of] the barbed wire. Two men to hold it on each side, and one man flat on his back to cut it.

They bathed me, and shaved me, and dosed me with some powder to get the cooties off, and gave me new clothes the next morning, including a new pair of shoes, and I couldn't put them on because my feet were swollen from all that damn walking…in that rain. And they sent me back. Second time, same way. I thought these scars on my chin would be gone in fifty years. That is the way I was captured.

The Japs that caught me were front line troops. They didn't go on through all the Goddamn shit. (pause) I try not to cuss. But one of the reasons I haven't seen Dr. Marcello, the guy that has all these histories up at North Texas, or whatever they call that school now, I am afraid I might get carried away and tell him some of the things that I really shouldn't.

Chris: Anything that we discuss, if you want to delete it we will do that.

Homero:

Well, so far, whatever I've said is a matter of record, I guess. Somewhat.

They [the Japanese soldiers] were very good. They gave me water, then they fed me, then they treated my elbow, which was dripping blood. They patched it up--cleaned it and patched it up.

This Jap officer came and hollered (imitates Japanese) and everybody jumped up, to attention, you know. Some sort of a first lieutenant, I guess. I sat down there eating my rice, hungry and thirsty. Boy, that luke-warm water and that food tasted awful good. I felt a lot more reassured about these rough, combat troops taking such good care of me. Well, they knew what I am going through, because that is what they were going through, also. And I felt reassured, that having been captured wouldn't be so bad. I had no idea that it was going to be worse than any thought I had ever had.

So, the lieutenant kicked me. I turned around and looked at the other guys. They motioned me to get up, so I got up. They motioned for me to stand at attention, so I got to attention. Then they kept bowing, telling me to bow in salute to the Jap officer, and I didn't know what they were talking about. So the Jap officer slapped me! That was the first time in my life that anyone had slapped me. Not even in school, nor my parents, or anybody. And I felt it was so effeminate a blow, that without thinking, I reared back and hit him!

All of these "friends" I had met among those guards there, they jumped in and gave me a terrific beating, naturally, for hitting that officer. Well, the officer explained to me in his slightly broken English that I had violated the rules.

When I was captured, we were on the road between Batavia, on the coast, and Bandung, oh what a beautiful city, Bandung in the mountains. Bandung was the summer capitol of the British governor, or whatever.

Then they took me to Sukabumi, a town halfway between Batavia…you see, we were in west Java with the Australians and the British.

So they… From Becac Pass, that's where that damn casement, cement dugout was… There was a guard on the road there, that's where the Japs were.

So, from Becac Pass, I think it's on the maps, on the road from Bandung to Sukabumi and Batavia, we went all the way down to Sukabumi.

They questioned me, beat me, scared the hell out of me. A guy cleaning a pistol, and after he finished cleaning it, pointing it at me and snapping the trigger. (laughs) Hell, I didn't know if it was loaded or not. Another guy, some sergeant with what we called a "pig sticker," a Japanese sword, dancing around, practicing and swishing that thing over

my head. He made some noise with it. (laughs) He's handling it roughly, that big sword, trying to scare me into revealing something, but I didn't know anything.

So I couldn't tell them anything, and they thought I was purposefully withholding it. A situation like that is very nerve-wracking. Being beaten by a guy wearing a glove, so he doesn't hurt his hand--but it sure makes a deep impression on your jowl. (laughs)

Finally, they gave up and put me in the clink again, left me alone to think it over. I was given three meals a day--rice. Three times a day. God, if I hadn't been hungry I wouldn't have eaten it.

I sat down and worked up a schedule of the different places we had been in, in proper sequence, and incidents that had occurred along the way. In combat, in the week that we fought an organized battle with the Japs and lost our butt coming and going.

Our combat was a small part of our experience. A week, for those that surrendered with the Colonel. For us, it was March, April, May. In my case, [March and] one week ending on the 8th of April, when I got caught on that thing. So, we saw almost continuous action for those three months and a week. But it is not the same as spending a couple of years in Vietnam, or six months on Corregidor. It is not the same, and I admit it. I feel a little frustrated because I am the kind of high school kid that used to dote on reading *Fighting Aces*, those twenty-cent magazines they used to sell before the war. *Fighting Aces* and "X. O'Leary(?) the Marine" in *Liberty* magazine, and all that kind of stuff. I thought they were pretty close to actual things. Which, of course, they weren't. They were purely fiction. But to an impressionable kid, it made a difference, you know, to see American troops behaving so valorously. And then, I wish I had it, my father bought a *Collier's History of World War I*. Reading about the tremendous casualties that the British had in the Somme.

We were under MacArthur. That's why we aren't permitted to join the "Survivors of Bataan" [American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor--prisoner of war veterans group]. We were under his command, even though we were in Java and never set foot in the Philippines.

I got the medals, though. The Philippine Defense Medal, the "Meet Chiang Kai-shek" medal which I am very proud of. So I got two foreign medals--the Chinese, and one from the Philippines.

[(from notes) Homero Martinez was a Staff Sergeant when he was captured in Java.]

<u>Prison camp--Java:</u>

Homero:

One day they came in, picked me up and took me to Batavia.

So, we went to prison camp. I want to show you these pictures.

This is Frank Fujita [referring to a picture in Fujita's book], he was not with us in the [Batavia] prison camp. I want to show you these pictures, illustrations. In one of the letters that he wrote for his own satisfaction…

[Reading from *Foo: A Japanese-American Prisoner of the Rising Sun*] "Drawn by Frank 'Foo' Fujita in Yarmarket(?) camp, Surayaba, Java." See, he was in the east. E Battery was his battery, and they were left in east Java, to fight with the Dutch. The rest of the battalion went to West Java.

[Reading] "Sample of coded language developed by Frank Fujita, in order to keep Japs from reading his diary." He developed a language of his own. He tried to explain it to me, but I couldn't follow it. Now, the FBI, when they found out that he kept this diary, asked for his diary. They figured it out, but I couldn't.

[Reading] "The barrio of Surabaya, Java." Being of Japanese descent, he admits here in his book, that he killed seven Japanese. That's not true. He killed over thirty. But, he told me that it's embarrassing to admit killing that many of his fellow race. He spoke Japanese and understood it very well. So he got…this is when he was writing. Then they found his diary and they beat him up.

Now I have two of these books. I won't loan this one. They are both autographed, so they are valuable to me. But this one is, this is like a jewel.

They put me in a barbed wire prison camp [in Batavia], ninety percent inhabited by the British and their allies--the Scots and the Australians. And the Dutch. There was a sprinkling of Americans, about twenty of them there when I was there.

Then, the rest of the American battalion came in from the place where they had surrendered, (pause to think) whatever the name of that town was. And they were put in there [the prison camp in Batavia].

Eventually, I came back to the American group.

Later, the Americans were transferred to what we called the "Bicycle" camp, because they used to have Dutch bicycle military people, bicycle infantry, quartered there. It was a very nice camp. Clean, healthful, with very clean drinking water, baths, toilets, everything. So that was a pleasant time we spent there. Except for the minor interruptions when the guards came in and had a little fun beating people up. And they would do that every once in a while when they needed a build-up of their ego, I guess.

We boiled the water to make tea, which was the only…quinine, tea, and rice were the only things that were in ample supply.

On July 4, 1942, I went out to work under Lieutenant J. B. Heiner. I don't think his initials were J. B., but his name was Heiner. [according to *Last Man Out* by H. Robert Charles, it was David A. Hiner.] A real kindly man, but he had a lot of personal pride. He withstood beatings--when a man got beaten up pretty badly and couldn't stand any more, he would go and argue with the Japs knowing full well that they would abandon the "hit" man and start hitting him. And then when they had him pretty well battered, they would quit. Because he was an officer, they wouldn't go as far as they would upon an enlisted man. So he knew it was going to be a bad beating, but not quite as bad as the one the guy got.

Lieutenant Heiner is still alive, and he has a lot of stories to tell. He was pro-enlisted man. The officers were all pretty stiff-laced, even more so than some of the regulars that I had known in the 2nd Infantry and the 1st Cavalry. The National Guard actually felt themselves to be the best of soldiers, because a great number of them had been in the First World War. But they had not kept up with the modernization of the military. Some of their philosophies on handling and leading men were completely different from the professional soldiers. You must understand that these people were all friends in a town. They were bound to be palsy-walsy with each other, doing favors for each other instead of for the new draftees coming in. Which is a violation of a basic tenant in the military.

An officer should treat everyone even, equal, in order to obtain a certain amount of loyalty. Without loyalty and respect from the troops, an officer cannot do anything--he's only one. And in a company or battery there are only four or five officers, and 120 to 140 men broken down into sections and platoons. If they don't establish that rapport, they become ineffective, up to a point. [The men] become scared and know that they are fighting for their own lives. When you go into combat, even the noise will scare the hell out of you. You forget about the people at your home...

Heiner was in charge of this group that had gone to work…

Chris: Was Heiner a National Guard officer?

Homero:

Yes. And he was a very good officer. He was not lenient, but he favored the enlisted man. He had a lot of the men's admiration and respect, because he would go up to the big boys and argue with them and consequently he got all the dirty details. You notice I didn't say "shit details"? (laughs) I'm turning into a decent human being. (laughs) He always did good work, because the men put themselves out for him. They knew that he got a bad time from the other officers for being--actually, he was doing his job. Leading the men, giving them respect and that feeling of gratitude, and they did better work for him than they did for the other officers.

Chris: Did you find the other officers, the Regular Army officers, to be more demanding or…

Homero:

Well, the professional realizes that he must put on a real good front to convince his men that not only he knows better about war than they do, but that he has got their best interests at heart, to keep them alive and fighting. Otherwise, he cannot do his mission. He knows that regardless of what he does, he's going to have a lot of casualties. But, that is the nature of war--cutting down the enemy, by causing casualties. What the men don't know is, that if the officer takes care of his men you are going to have less casualties. Which is true, because the men take a little bit more easily towards the training. They learn to automatically do the things that save lives in combat. It is unfortunate to say it, but when an officer gives an order it must be obeyed to the letter of the law. Or as Elsa(?) would say, "implicitly!" (laughs) Any mission will fail if orders are not carried out instantly, and exactly the way he gave the order. So, you must learn to differentiate between executing a proper order or just futzing around with it. That is when they get killed. They also get killed carrying out a proper order, but not in the numbers that an undisciplined group will have. That is the worst part. If they could only find a way to instill the protective interest--well nigh impossible because your first time in combat you are scared silly. You don't know what the hell you are doing. Until something cuts through your thinking--you remember some sort of thing like "keep your ass down, keep your belly close to the ground." You look around to spy something behind a tree this way, or a rock, something like that you know. That is when you start to realize the way to save your own skin. You don't do the folks at home, or the government, any good by putting out your head and getting it shot off. When you stop and reason as to what is going on and what you can do to avoid it, you are learning to be a soldier. And everyone has got to go through that.

On July 4, 1942, we were required to sign a document promising that we would not attempt to escape. Of course, the British, the Australians, and at first the Dutch also, and the Americans, all refused to do so. So they fell everybody out in camp--we [Heimer's detail] didn't know. We were out working at Entangapril(?), at the docks, loading ships to go to Japan.

It was all of the booty out of Java. Cars, refrigerators, construction equipment, all the gold they had, anything that was worth anything was going to Japan. Even the junk--steel junk. And the oil that was produced on Java. We were loading all that stuff, so we didn't know what was going on in camp.

At "Bicycle Camp" they [the Japanese] fell out all of the troops and as they came in from work. Some came in earlier than others, they were held briefly and then forced to join the rest on the parade ground. They were there out in the sun, standing at attention. With a couple of Jap machine guns on the ends, and a lot of guards in between armed with bayonets. (pause)

They "applied" the bayonet to a couple of, well not a couple, quite a few people. In the butt, just a little half-inch prick in the ass, just to get them in line.

When we got in, they held us at the main gate for about half an hour. We didn't know what was happening. All of a sudden, a Jap guard brought one of our officers up; I forget who he was. He came and told us. (pause) Several of the men had fainted, being out in that sun at four o'clock in the afternoon. No water, in the heat and the sun, a few men had keeled over. They left them lying there. This officer came and told us what the situation was, what the Japanese wanted, and that they would let us in to join the group, to be punished like they were, and sign when they signed. They [the Japanese] were sure that they were going to sign eventually. [He said that] we could avoid all that and go to our quarters, take a bath, have our dinner and everything, if we signed the paper. This officer told Lt. Heiner, "Well, Heiner, what are you going to do?"

"Well'" Heiner said, "until I get an order from the Colonel to sign it, I won't sign anything." So, the Jap guard was also the interpreter. He understood, and proceeded to give Heiner one hell of a beating. But he never changed [his answer]. So the Jap quit, took the other officer back and we stood out there [on the parade ground].

They called us to attention and we stood at attention out there. It was no fun, because you couldn't move. You got thirsty. We had a little tea left in our canteens. You couldn't move from attention to pull out your canteen and take a swig. Your bowels started feeling the pangs of thirst and--it ain't funny. (laughs)

In any event, the officers finally agreed. They told the Japs that the leaders of all the groups wanted to get together and discuss the situation, and see if they could come to a solution.

They said, "Okay. We will just have some tea and cakes and take you…" By this time it was getting dark, dusk. They said "You can have a light, paper, pencil, we'll give you tea and a few goodies," little rice cookies. "And you can discuss it as long as you want to."

They [the officers] talked for about forty-five minutes. They decided that if anybody was going to sign, they would sign but make it clear to the Japanese that they felt that they were being asked to do something against the League of Nations rules on the treatment of prisoners. Also, that they were signing under duress. They wanted to make it very clear that they were being forced, on pain of death, to sign an affidavit making a promise that was illegal in the World Court.

The Japs couldn't care less about the World Court. To them, the only power was the military. The Japanese were on the rise. Everywhere they went they were conquering right and left. So, they had a reason to feel that they could demand and get anything.

About nine o'clock we were standing out there in the darkness and the Japs turned on all the lights. The officers had been the first to sign the affidavit. The British put out the first order. They handed out a certain number of forms so that people started signing. Then the Australians. Then the Dutch. And finally, they got down to the Americans. But, being the last, we got kicked all over the place. While we were signing the affidavit

promising not to escape, instead of leading you to the line like they did the other people, they went around kicking the hell out of us. Everybody. (pause)

Peculiar people [the Japanese]. And yet, they are an amazing people. They are very clean. They are very hard working. And they are great copycats. They can take anything--they have got to have two things: one thing to examine first, and then after they examine it they tear it apart and leave all the parts in the sequence that they tore it apart. Then they tear the second one apart and put it in the same sequence as the other one. But if something falls, they know where to put it by looking at the other one. Then they put this one together again, after they broke it down and took measurements, and produce something similar to it. From a locomotive down to a hand crank or something like that. And they were always producing things out of nothing.

So, we signed that promise. No more problems. We kept working down at the railroad docks.

In July [1942] we started hearing rumors about a railroad being built in Burma. Of course we had no idea the whys and the whereofs. But we did hear the rumors that they were going to ship allied POWs and a lot of natives to work on that railroad. Of course, we did not know what purpose the railroad would be for, but we found out.

Prison Camp--Burma (the bridge on the River Kwai):

The first to go were some small groups of Australians, then one group of British. Then they said, "Well, you Americans are few, you want to stay together, you're gonna be next."

They asked the American officers to choose a group of 200 men. Actually, 196. That was Captain Fitzsimmons group, the very first group [of Americans] to go to Burma. Well, they put up the list, and I found I was on it. The rumor had gotten around that the National Guard officers were going to get rid of all the bums, you know. All they considered worthless soldiers. The disobedient, the lackadaisical guys, the malingerers, all the guys that had some problems. Hell, nobody's perfect. And a soldier is less perfect than anybody else, because he learns how to survive under any circumstances. I am talking about the rank privates. Some of the higher echelons, sergeants, never get the word. Most of the NCOs knew, they learned. And a lot of the officers, they learned to look for some of that occurring. The lower ranks are always going to take advantage of whatever opportunity they get. Consequently, it's a difficult situation for the officers. Some manage it very well, simply by setting an example for being even handed and treating everybody the same. The best ones, you treat them the same as the worst ones. Especially when they do some harm, the punishment should be equal. At least, in an old Staff Sergeant's opinion.

(interrupted by phone call)

Homero:

"…rag-tags, the 'bottom of the barrel,'" as they called them. "We should send the 'bottom of the barrel' out of here, and get them out of our sight." Captain Fitzsimmons, one of the men who stood up for the lower ranks, took charge of the detail. He was commander of Headquarters Battery, and a very key man to turn loose. But they put him on this detail, to get the troublemakers out of the way.

The list was very odd, because the rumor had gotten around that they were getting rid of the bad ones. I thought I had done a pretty good job.

So, I went to ask the Captain. He said, "No, you are one of my better sergeants."

So I said, "Well, if you put nothing but trouble-makers [on the list], why am I on there?"

He said, "You haven't noticed the reason why you are going on that detail?"

"No, sir."

"You are going because we've got twelve or fourteen Mexican boys going on that unit. None of them speak English worth a damn. You are going to have to translate for them, or they will be beaten to death by the Japs." (laughs)

So, I found out why I was going to Burma. And the day came when we packed one duffel bag, a haversack, and Captain Fitzsimmons asked for some money. The battalion had two million dollars in cash that the Japs had not taken up.

There is a story there: Captain Roy B. Stensland, had flown out of Celebes, after flying out of Mindanao with two million dollars that he was taking to the Philippines. He never got there. So he flew out with one barracks bag inserted into another one, and that one inserted into a canvas duffel bag with two million dollars in cash. It made one hell of a pile. You know, big denominations. He flew with a barracks bag, the duffel bag tied around his waist, dangling on one side of an airplane over an open bomb bay on an old two-engine Dutch bomber. He flew out of the island of Celebes. I think the town is Celebes. He flew out to Java. When he arrived, it was a big surprise to our battalion. They did not have enough money to pay us [before Stensland arrived], but they were able to get money from the Dutch banks.[*]

The Japs didn't pick up that money when the unit surrendered. They knew they would eventually get it, one way or the other.

They pulled doozies on us all the time, like for example they let the battalion [use that money to] buy all the food, canned food and stuff we wanted, to supplement the kitchens

[*] For additional information on Stensland and his mission to hire blockade runners to take supplies into the Philippines, read *Destination Corregidor* by Robert L. Underbrink.

there in Batavia, on Java. Then they shipped everybody out and we had to abandoned all the bags full of this food. And they took it over.

They pulled another one on us…

Chris: Did the Japs not know where the money was?

Homero:

Oh no, they knew. When they searched us they ran across the money we had. I said, "Captain, what are you going to do with that money Stensland brought in?"

"Well, there isn't much I can do. When the Japs find it, they will probably take it away from us." But they didn't. They preferred to do it in a fashion that would not give them a bad name. They got it anyhow, in goods.

So Fitzsimmons asked for money for the men, their pro-rata share. So much for every body of the American group. They could have bonded(?) it. Even two million dollars would have amounted to a hell of a lot of money for [each of] us, for 196 men out of 600 some-odd. But [the Colonel said,] "No, we'll give it to you [to Fitzsimmons]. You are not supposed to turn it over to the men. You use it wisely and well." So they gave him a certain amount of money, but we never saw a penny of it. Fitzsimmons kept it and…

There were only two sergeants in the group [including me], but the other sergeant, when we got to Burma… I was going out with the worker groups. I was going out and working with pick and shovel, just like the rest of the men. The other guy had seniority over me, he was National Guard. So [the Japs appointed him] Administrative Officer, what we call a First Sergeant. So he got that job, but one day he called me and told me he was going to get out of that job, one way or the other, because he couldn't put up with the daily beatings, and everybody was against him. Higher officers were against him, the British were against us, the Australians were the only friends we had. The Dutch were against us. And the Japs primarily were against the American group. He says, "I am not going to put up with it."

I laughed, I said, "What the hell can you do? You gotta follow orders just like the rest of us and that's it."

"No, I'm telling you. You better get ready. Make some plans to get out too, because when I leave you're going to take over."

Oh shit. I thought about it. But I didn't think he would do it. But he did do it. He fell sick. Or put on like he was really sick, I think he was really sick. He got to feeling pretty bad. Got permission to go to the base camp and he never came back. He went to the base camp, to the hospital, and got a job there.

So, when he left I became, temporarily, the Administrative Sergeant [for the Americans]. But the guy never came back. (sighs) I was made Administrative Sergeant--it was the lousiest job I have ever had in my life. Getting the orders--the interpreter would get the orders from the Japs. He would pass them on to Fitzsimmons. Fitzsimmons would pass them on to Lieutenant Lattimore. Lattimore, as Executive Officer, would come to me and say, "Well Martinez, we are going to need so many men at work tomorrow."

"Hell, I haven't got enough fit men."

"Do the best you can."

So I would turn out my work crews short of men, because the men were sick, or just plain tired and just couldn't make it. They had stone bruises on their feet, like some of those sailors who didn't have any shoes. I would leave them out.

Well, Fitzsimmons, the doctor, and I would get beaten after roll call. Every damn day. It wasn't a *killing* beating, but it hurt anyhow. It wasn't any fun, I found out, being Administrative Sergeant.

You got a little bit more in pay [as Administrative Sergeant]. The men used to get twenty-one rupees a day, and I did too as a sergeant because I was just working like the regular workmen. But when I became Administrative Sergeant, I was paid thirty rupees a day.

But you could not spend it anywhere! Until the Japs managed to get the stuff back. They would go out to the villages, commandeer truckloads of fruit, and buy tobacco and rolling papers, stuff like that. They opened a little Japanese canteen, not only for their soldiers, but for us also. And they would get our money back that way. So being Administrative Sergeant was not any fun.

One day they [the men] told me what the engineers were doing. They were urging the men to work faster so they could finish earlier and come in at two o'clock, instead of four o'clock. I said, "They must be playing some kind of a trick on us. I want to go on the work crew tomorrow."

"Hell, you are going to have to wield a pick and shovel just like we do."

"That's all right." So I went out, just like a plain worker. And by golly, the guys hadn't wanted to come in because they had been ordered to be out there until four. But then the engineers from the railroad came and superceded the guards' orders. The guys didn't want to disobey them, and the officer that was in charge of the work crew kept them working until four. So I went out and I talked to this Jap engineer, who had been in Peru. He spoke very good Spanish.

We talked about it, he said, "Now, here's what you do. As soon as you finish, you finish your task, why keep you out here until four o'clock?" The son of a bitch. I took his

word, you know, that they meant what they said. So, the men--oh, they [the Japs] used to do things so beautifully--the men would hurry up. "Speedo, speedo," as the Japs used to say. Popular word with them, "Speedo! Speedo!" And the men would hurry up, and they finished by one thirty or two o'clock. One time they finished at eleven thirty. And that first week [the Japanese engineers] let them come in when they finished, eleven thirty, one thirty, or two o'clock, or whenever it was.

The following week--they gave us Saturday and Sunday off. The following week, on Monday, they went to work. When they finished they went down to the river and washed their shovels, picks, and everything else, brought them up, and fell in. The officer told the engineer, "We're ready to go back to camp."

He said, "Well, you have been doing very good work. But one of our officers is going to talk to you.

So one of the [Japanese] engineer officers came to talk to us, and told us, "You have proven that you can do work a hell of a lot faster. So from now on, you are going to work until four o'clock, but you are going to get bigger tasks to do. If you don't finish by four o'clock, you stay working until you complete, even if it's midnight."

So, we tested them. Sure enough, we didn't come in until midnight.

They used to pull tricks like that all the time. But they did it in a round about way. Make you nibble. And we trusted them as officers, like we would trust our own. But we learned not to. God, they used to work out these beautiful little ambushes on us. For every little thing.

Like I say, they are a very peculiar people. They are very hard working, very ingenious, very clean. But quiet. Some of these Koreans and some of these Japanese, you could tell that some of the common guards were just…coolies. Coolie types. Some of the sergeants were pretty smart. Most of the sergeants were pretty smart men. As you know, the sergeants are the backbone of any army. When you have a good group of sergeants, you also have an easy time because they really run the groups. Maybe I am biased toward NCOs, but in Nevard(?) I saw too much poor officialdom to be…

<u>The "Water Cure":</u>

Ah, here they are. I have these in pictures, this big, in color. And they are more effective in color than in these pictures here. This one is where they've gotten…it's the typical way they did it. Japs hitting on your legs and arms, and the third one holding back your neck. You know you can't control your neck, if they pull it you've got to go with it. They would open your mouth and pour in water.

When they worked it on me one time, they did it a little differently. Clever bastards. (pause) They took a piece of black tape, automotive tape, about an inch, inch and a half

wide. Put it across my mouth. Then they brought a hot water bag, the ones we used for coffee, the ones we used for enemas. They had replaced the outlet tube that goes to the little tip for the enema with a medical tube, soft rubber. But they had somehow managed to transfer that little running clip…you know they fill that tube with water and then they clip that thing on top, which pinches the rubber, and they slide it all the way down to force the water into your bowels. They didn't use the tip, because it is pretty big when they use it for an enema. Instead, they forced the tube into my nostril. I could feel it, scratching, along in here. But they closed off my mouth [with the tape] so the water wouldn't fall out, and they pulled the clip down and forced that water into my nostrils. At first, I tried gagging. I wasn't trying to, it was happening because of the… And it got worse because it kept going up. I turned my head, aachh, I came back around. Finally, it started working, and the stuff going down there [into my stomach]. (pause) The feeling of choking and not getting any air is a horrible feeling. And eventually your stomach gets filled up [with water]. (pause) That's when they start playing bongos with your stomach, with bamboo sticks. And it hurts.

An Englishman was given the "water cure," but he was beaten a lot more severely than I was. That poor Englishman. He had a horrible time. He was one of these blond people… (pause) …who never tans, they just blister. All over red. They always blister. He had a bad time over there in the tropics. He committed some fault; I forget what it was. They gave him the "water cure" and beat him very severely. So severely that for about three months he didn't work. He spent two months in bed, and one month recuperating. All from that beating. Then they put him to doing "light" work in the Japanese kitchen, hauling the water. It wasn't light work--he was carrying two big wooden pails, about, I would say, a quarter of a mile to the river. Filling them up with water, climbing the bank on some steps that had been cut there, taking the pails to the Japanese storage tank, and dumping them in. Then go back for more. They had a whole bunch of guys doing that.

It just so happened that the Japs had been very severe with the American group that morning, because we had been sending our work details short. And this day they had not let them go to work until we filled up the work detail. So the Captain said to me, "Well, send the least sick. Fill up the detail with them. Tell them to fuck off as much as they want to but let them see you. Tell them to fuck off and do whatever they can. Do the best they can because there is no way we can keep them back." We put them on the detail. He, the doctor, and I still got beaten that morning. They went to work.

A little bit later, I had to assign one of the guys to take charge of the sick detail, to take them to the doctor because they asked for one extra man from the additional group, the American group, to go and help with the water detail. So I said, "Gary, you take care of the sick detail and I am going to haul water." The extra would only haul… The Englishman was in a detail that would haul water all day long, back and forth. But the extra would go and haul twenty or thirty trips of double pails on a bamboo stick [called a "yo-yo pole," and carried across the shoulders]. It was heavy work.

I saw the Englishman, said “hello” to him, because I remembered when he was beaten so badly. (pause) I was filling my two buckets, and he had already filled his. He said, “Well sergeant, you are a damn fool for coming on this work as a volunteer.”

“Well, I’m keeping one of the sick guys in bed.”

“Wish somebody would do that for me.”

Those were the last words he spoke. The last words he spoke. (pause) He started walking up the steps. And, usually, a little water sloshes out of those pails. You fill them as high as you can, so that maybe you can fill that great big old storage tank quicker, and you can quit working.

So, the dirt steps cut on the bank were always wet, and very slippery. Therefore, you managed with your toes to force them to hold on and climb up that bank. You see, I wasn’t looking at him. I was filling my two buckets. He was climbing, and I heard a cry. I started to look around, and the two pails came rolling down the bank in front of me. The Englishman was at the bottom of the five or six steps, I forget how many there were on the little dirt stairway, spread out as if he had been spread-eagled. Outside of that noise he made as he fell, he never spoke again. (pause)

You can count every opening on your body, including your eyes and your ears, and your mouth, your penis and your tail. There was blood coming out of every opening on his body. The man just burst, on the inside. He made too big a motion to stay even and not spill the water, and everything burst in him.

To see a man lying there and there is blood coming out of his ears, you look more closely and there is nothing but blood. Coming out in a stream. From the nose, much bigger. From your lungs, through the mouth… (pause)

Well, it isn’t fun. So, that was the “water cure.”

Chris: Why did they subject you to the “water cure?”

Homero:

Oh, we used to steal the Japs blind. Until they decided to segregate the kooks. They would send the British--all British to work in one area, like going to the paper mill. All the Australians, they were very good at it, were sent to the tank repair shops, and trucks. The Dutch were sent to the Japanese vegetable fields, where they were growing [food] for their use. We used to get some of the left over stuff. The Americans would get sent, because we were the smallest group, 196 [men], we were sent off on some little jobs, to dig a ditch or dig latrines for the Jap engineers, or haul rails or haul ties, you know, stuff like that. So when anything went wrong, or somebody stole a machete, a pick, or a shovel, even if you broke one, you got beaten. But if you stole one--you see, in the

Japanese army, when an officer comes and says, "Someone in this room stole a wheelbarrow," or "stole a yo-yo pole," no matter what, just the slightest thing.

The yo-yo pole was nothing but bamboo rods, but when they used them they used to put cloth winding on them so that when they were carried up here [indicates shoulder] they wouldn't mark. They wouldn't wind it on *our* yo-yo poles. We wouldn't do it either, because you wound one up and then turned it in at the end of the day, somebody else would get it. So why waste your cloth on that? It was a hell of a job. And you had to do it.

But the death of that Englishman was caused by that damn "water cure." A lot of them just asphyxiated. A lot of the Englishmen. But they wouldn't quit. Some were asphyxiated, as they threw up. Oh, it's a hell of a feeling. Your mind is what causes that tremendous fear.

Like I said, I have been lucky. Because I endured hunger, thirst, and pain, like very few people have. But I survived it. I was lucky. Not because I was brave or I was strong. It was because I wanted to survive. I went blind in prison camp, twice. Due to lack of food.

<u>Rabbi Nussbaum:</u>

And this Jewish rabbi. At Kilo 22 Prison Camp, in Burma [22 kilometers along the route of the railway]. At the time, I was in fairly good health. But I could foresee that with the rations declining I wasn't going to do very well later on. This rabbi came to the camp we were in, and I heard that he was having…he had applied to the Japanese for permission to serve not only the Jews in prison with the Dutch army, but to give services for anyone that wanted services, of whatever denomination. So when I heard that he was holding Catholic services, I went and asked him if he would have a Catholic service for us. He said, "Of course, I have them all of the time."

So I took a bunch, about fourteen, sixteen, Catholics that wanted to go to mass that morning in this camp. I think it was Kilo camp 22 or 28 or something like that, and we went to him. Little short guy, not very tall. I have a book that he wrote.[*] He never mentions it [what I am about to tell you].

He said, "Yes, I give services for any denomination. The only thing is, for Catholics I avoid certain rituals."

I said, "What rituals?"

He said, "Well, I don't take confessions, and I don't give you the Eucharist, the bread and the wine. I don't do those. I skip them, but everything else, including the ceremony, you get."

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[*] Chaim Nussbaum, *Chaplain on the River Kwai*.

I said, "Well, I am going to bring some men here for the next service. I want to see what it is like." So we went to services, and they were amazing. Identical to the Catholic ritual, with those exceptions that he said were not permitted to a Jewish rabbi.

When the services were over I went to thank him. He said, "I don't have anything to do, let's sit down and talk for a few minutes." So, we talked for about twenty minutes, is what I figure it was. And in that short period he gave me ideas how to survive prison camp.

Later, I found exactly what that rabbi was worth. Not only did he help me figure it out to the point that made a tremendous difference… He ground worms, beetles, snakes, monkeys--you know how we used to kill the snakes? The Japs used to issue machetes for work. When we were working, cutting brush, and we ran into a snake he would get alarmed and he would stand up. We used to kill cobras coming and going, nobody ever got bit. We cut a switch about five feet long, of brush. When we got close to the snake and he started moving his head, he's getting ready to strike. So we would move the branch out here, and make a motion. He would lean way over, like that, and when he did we'd take one stab and hit it in back of the head with a machete. Usually, it damaged it enough that it killed it. Sometimes it would cleanly cut it, if it was sharp enough. But if it didn't, the blow would stun it and you would go up and put your foot behind the head, where he was hurt, and continue hitting it until you cut it.

Then the inside [of a snake] was very easy to clean. You turned it over and ran the machete down the belly, clear to the tail, open it up and grab the gullet, pull it, and everything came out. Intestines, stomach and everything. It left everything nice and pink. It had a taste kind of like chicken, really. You can cut it on the vertebras into pieces and chunks about this big. Because, after you pull out the gullet, you start at the top and you get one man to hold the stuff that you cleared with a knife or the machete around the head, peel about that much [skin], where a man could grab it. You grab the skin that has been cut all the way through the center, and pull it. It comes off, all the way down to the tail. Then you cut the tail off and you have got a great big piece of good meat. Better than monkeys. You know how the natives taught us to catch monkeys? Monkeys are stupid.

There were a lot of wild bongs(?) that we used to cook. When you found one, we would find the husks that it had dropped, you know, the pineapple, with a great big husks growing. We had knives that we had stolen from the Japs, or ways of cutting things, and we would take the husk off. Most of them were old coconuts that had been there, I don't know, maybe a year or two, because they did not have water. We never could locate one that had water. The water would have been great, and very nutritious. We would pick off the husk, then crack that thing, trying to punch the eye out to see if it had water, you know, but they were always dry. But the coconut on the inside was very good. Good and dry, and very tasty. Sometimes we had the growth of the new coconut [tree] coming out. Then they lost their taste a little bit. Initially, the new plant drew all the stuff out. So we learned to eat all that crud, the rats, the cats, and the dogs.

You see, the rabbi told me, "If you value your life, even if it's nothing more than desire to gain vengeance on these Japanese, you will have to do things you never thought would be possible."

I said, "Like what?"

He said, "Well, this morning I had breakfast of a cup full of ants, that I ate with my native assistant. You find a nest, they are practically all over the area, pick them out one by one, mash them a little, and eat them. They are living things. They give you some sustenance."

Years later, I found out from some Dutchman that this rabbi didn't miss one single day in prison camp, when he didn't share his *meager* ration. He had the reputation of having survived prison camp dividing his ration in half. Half to the hospital, the other half for him. And he lived.

I have got his book somewhere in there.

Chris: What was the name of the rabbi?

Homero:

Chaim. He came to the United States, and then he went to Canada and became a citizen.

Chaim Nussbaum. Not a very tall man, kind of nondescript. He was a brain, and he was pretty much of a philosopher, psychologist, I don't know, but being a man of the cloth I am sure he studied. He was very good at it. He made an impression without even trying to. I consider it a miracle that he lived through prison camp on half rations. That was not my judgement--I was told by some Dutch officers and some of the enlisted men. They all wondered the same thing. An amazing man. Eventually he went to live in Canada. He went to school in the United States. He became an atomic energy engineer. I don't remember exactly--I know who has his book. In Boston there is a store, I have the name of the store somewhere, but right now I don't know where it is packed, and I know they have a lot of old books because he seems to be very much admired among the Jewish community.

I have come to admire the Jewish people very much. Simply because of their history. Theirs was the very first written language this world has seen. I have a book, *The Gifts of the Jews*. It is amazing what they have given this world. And I am a big admirer of both the generals and the soldiers for their courage. They nearly lost one war, but they never have lost a real war. They are just like we used to be, they never lost a war.

[The following provided by Hector Martinez: As time went on, Homero's physical condition worsened. The Japanese, seeing that he was dying, sent him to a death camp (so called because no one ever came back). [Note: this was a section of the camp hospital

called the "Zero" ward, so called because then men who were sent there were assumed to have zero chance of survival.] Upon arrival, they just placed him on the ground and left him to die.

One of the prisoner workers there approached him and suddenly he heard a voice say, "Sergeant Martinez, is that you? Man you look terrible and you stink like hell." It was the Australian soldier whose life he had saved [on Java, shortly before being captured]. Then the Aussie, whose name escapes me, said, "I'm going to clean you up and take care of you."

This wonderful comrade-in-arms gave him gruel, water, cleaned him and nursed him back to life - you might say. Well, to make a long story short, my brother, with this man's help was able to return to the POW camp and continue to survive until they were all liberated.]

Prison camp--Japan:

Homero:

I have some things I want to show you.

Here's another drawing, when they were building stages at the Iseki shipyards, to have shows and stuff. [Reading] "Fujita, section chief, is third from left." He would be that one. "All other crew members are English."

I have another one that I can locate. It is also signed by him. If you would like to read it…

Chris: When was this book published? I might be able to get one.

Homero:

This one is going to my eldest son. But I want to show you these pictures because this will give you… He writes well. And the hell of it is, Japanese artist Juwo(?) Hasigawa(?) gave Foo materials to work with in Tokyo, in 1944. He was a Japanese civilian.

These are photographs. Here is one of their exercise sessions, when they were in prison in Japan.

Chris: At the end of the war, did they move you from Burma to Japan?

Homero:

From Burma they took them to Saigon, and from Saigon they put them on a ship and sent them to Japan. A lot of our guys came back with lungs affected by working in the coal mines.

[Reading] "Bunker Hill camp, Tokyo. Bunka gakween, Kanda.(?)" So, this is a very interesting book. Unless you want to buy one that you can keep, I'll let you…I could locate that other one real quick.

This picture is called "A Simple Bashing." There is a guy kicking, another guy holding a rifle, and the officer standing by to make sure that they--because some of the Japs didn't want to hurt you, really. But they had to, that why they used to send a sergeant or an officer to witness the beatings. Let's look at the other one.

This is Fujita's brother. 2nd Infantry Division. He was in the 442nd Regiment, the Japanese brigade from Hawaii. They went to Europe. And they saved a "lost" battalion up there in the Volcious(?) Mountains.

Chris: I thought most of the Japanese-Americans in the Army were sent to Europe. Was Fujita already in your unit when the war broke out?

Homero:

They had a lot of Japanese over there, because they had to get people who understood the language, so they could try to cut in on their [radio transmissions]…

(searches for additional pictures and illustrations)

Chris: Did you find some of the Japanese soldiers to be compassionate toward the prisoners?

Homero:

Very few. This engineer who pulled a doozey on me used to bring me little rice cakes or stuff like that. He really diddled us when they put us onto that work.

In their army they had one American-Japanese, who had gone to Japan to visit his grandfather. The war started…

Here is another one [picture]. This is one of the tortures. Heavy bamboo, cut a point on each one of them. Stand a man; put his forearms on top of the spikes. Give him the buckets full of water, or sand. When he gets tired, he has to let his arm force itself on the spikes. Right here, you can see the tip of the bayonet right on the buttock, because they prick you on the buttock if you try to get out of it. Some guys tried to spill some of the

water, and then this guy would prick him in the tail [with his bayonet]. This was one of the things they did.

We had one Australian and one British, that we knew of, who stood as long as they could and then the damn bamboo…

This is what we called the "male" bamboo. It was only about an inch, inch and a quarter, inch and a half around. It was solid, except for a small hole that you could put a drinking straw through. But when dried, it was just like a steel bar. That is what they used to whip you with. We called it "male" bamboo. Why they called it "male" bamboo, I don't know. They would cut a sharp spike on one end, and when it dried it was like a steel bar. Just like a knife at the point. And there is still one more picture--or a few more [in Fujita's book].

Here is some more of his language that he developed. That other one [picture] is an original and shows the conditions that we were in.

Chris: How did he get all of this out after the war?

Homero:

The FBI got it out for him. When they heard that he had kept this diary that the Japs were never able to locate, he remembered. He remembered where he had hidden it, between the boards of a Japanese school for girls, where they had been imprisoned. So he picked up the phone and talked to a local FBI man, who referred it to Washington. A little while later he gets a letter. They asked, would he be willing to tell them where that diary was, and if they could use it for proof in the prosecution of Japanese criminals. He said, "Yes," told them exactly where it was. They went to Tokyo, located the school, went to the room he told them to, and counted boards from one end. When they came to the right board they took it off and there it was, the diary. Drawings and everything else. They took it out. They used it, and a couple of years later…

(looks for illustrations in the Fujita book)

Homero:

Here's a copy of the FBI letter. 1950. They kept it [the Fujita diary] for years. They figured out his code. I don't think it's mentioned in here, but they are thanking him for the help. Isn't that the letter of "Thank you" from them? It is a very unusual story, really.

The first Jap Fujita saw, he killed. He didn't quibble around like I did.

End of interview.

(from notes) On returning from prison camp at the end of the war, Homero Martinez was promoted to Tech Sergeant. The army wanted to keep him on active duty for a year after he returned, to provide medical care.

[Note: It is estimated that 76,000 people died building the Japanese railroad across Burma, which included the Bridge across the River Kwai: 16,000 European prisoners (including the Americans) and 60,000 Asian laborers.]