

ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
W. F. MATTHEWS
An interview conducted on
April 1, 1995

Interviewer: John Ferguson

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of W. F. Matthews are unrestricted. The consent form was signed on September 10, 2015 by Tommy Matthews, Mr. W. F. Matthews's son.

Tommy Matthews and his son Dillon J. Matthews submitted this transcript of the interview to the *War Stories* Project.

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The complete transcript of this interview was processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and is available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

FERGUSON: Could you tell me, what were you doing before the war started?

MATTHEWS: I was working for an oil company in Wichita Falls. And he and I got to talking. Course then it was the draft, you know, they were going to draft everybody. He wanted me . . . he was going to give me a real good job, he said "Why don't you go on and get your year over with?" he said, "And then you can have that job we've been talking about." Well, that didn't work out too good. No, I wanted to go about that time, and I had a real good friend in Abilene. He was in [the] National Guard. And he says, "Come on up here and join the National Guard. In November we're going to be mobilized and we'll be going to Brownwood." He said, "You'll be with guys you know and everything will be all right. So you'll do your year and then you'll be through." So I joined the National Guard, 36th Division.

FERGUSON: When was that?

MATTHEWS: That was November. I joined in November 20th, 1940.

FERGUSON: And then when was your unit called up?

MATTHEWS: We was called up then. And we spent, oh, like a month or two in Abilene waiting for them to get the Brownwood camp ready for us to go. We stayed at [the] old fairgrounds out there.

FERGUSON: Where the West Texas Fair is now?

MATTHEWS: Yeah.

FERGUSON: What was the unit that you joined?

MATTHEWS: Battery E, 131st Field Artillery, 36th Division. And we went to Brownwood in . . . I believe it was January, sometime in January, I don't remember the dates. We were stationed there till . . . Well, we went to Louisiana in July, and spent July and August in Louisiana on army maneuvers. We came back and I had to go back to South Carolina and get some vehicles for them. They was having maneuvers up there. But when I got back, well,

they said you can go home for two weeks. Well, I went home and they called me before my two weeks was up, and said “Get back to camp. We’re going overseas.”

FERGUSON: And that was July of 1941?

MATTHEWS: No that was November, first of November ‘41.

FERGUSON: After you'd been in for a year?

MATTHEWS: Yeah I'd nearly been in a year, and so I got back to Brownwood. They done had the unit packed up and ready to go. And our destination was “Plum,” that was what we put on all our return addresses, “Plum.”

FERGUSON: Just a codeword.

MATTHEWS: Just a codeword. We didn't know. We were pretty sure it was Australia, I mean [the] Philippines. We were pretty sure we were going to [the] Philippines. So we shipped out November 11. We all went to San Francisco, spent . . .

FERGUSON: How did you get from here to San Francisco?

MATTHEWS: On train.

FERGUSON: You loaded up all your trucks and equipment and everything on the train?

MATTHEWS: All our trucks and equipment and guns and everything and went to San Francisco.

FERGUSON: What kind of guns did you train with?

MATTHEWS: We trained with French 75s. And then when we got to San Francisco, well they give us 105 howitzers, which was a new gun, American made gun. This was a French gun we had.

FERGUSON: Now that French 75, was that the same one they used in World War I?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, the same one.

FERGUSON: So it was a direct fire weapon?

MATTHEWS: No, it was, you had to put coordinates in there. But it was originally, it was a

team-drawn gun, that you pulled by mules, you know. It had the deals that you pulled it with mules or horses.

FERGUSON: Is that the way you used them?

MATTHEWS: No, we used them, they had rubber tires on them when we got them. And so we used them. Well, doubtlessly they were good guns but they just wasn't . . . They were old, like 20-years-old, or 30, and they had new ones, but we hadn't got them. In fact, all during the army maneuvers, all of our guns, when we were supposed to have some anti-tank guns but we just used some make-believes, you know, then we got some anti-tank guns when we got to San Francisco. But the trouble is, they forgot to put any ammunition in. So when we got overseas, well, we didn't have any ammunition to speak of. Now, we got on the boat sometime after Thanksgiving. I know we ate Thanksgiving dinner in San Francisco, on Angel Island. And then we loaded on a ship and headed for the Philippines. Well, we got to Honolulu one Sunday or Saturday. Spent Saturday night, left Sunday morning, going on to the Philippines.

FERGUSON: Now was this before or after Pearl Harbor?

MATTHEWS: It was the week before. The next week after we was there they bombed Pearl Harbor. It was like the first of December. And then we took off and we were about . . . Well, we was a week out of Honolulu and it come on the radio that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor, and for us to turn . . . Well, they didn't give any . . . They give us a code, I think, for us to turn south. How we missed them . . . We were going due west and how we missed that Japanese fleet I never will know. Because they were coming west and we were going east. And we had one little cruiser, a heavy cruiser, that was . . . that was with us and we had 7 or 8 ships, 2 troop carriers, and the rest of them was freight ships. We were messing along about 5 or 10 knots an hour. If them Japs had ever spotted us, why they'd have wiped us out. But we were lucky we got out of there. We landed then we turned south. We went to Australia and

unloaded, ate Christmas dinner in Australia. Right after that then we loaded back on a Dutch ship. There was six-hundred and something of us, I believe. We got on that Dutch ship and we was all over it. It wasn't even a passenger ship, it was a freight ship. We was just laying around on the decks. They were going to try to sneak us into [the] Philippines. But when we got out there, there wasn't any way we could get through it, so they unloaded us at Java, which is in [the] Dutch East Indies. We serviced bombers that was coming out of . . . dropping back out of the Philippines. We started . . . They was still able to get ammunition in and bombs in from the United States.

FERGUSON: So you went from field artillery to aircraft?

MATTHEWS: To aircraft, yeah. There was a bunch of our boys volunteered to join the Air Force, cause they was going to run out of gunners and things. A bunch of our boys joined, but the commander wouldn't let me join. I tried to but he wouldn't let me.

FERGUSON: When you went to Java, did you still have your guns?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, we ended up with them, but like I say . . . Well I think we finally figured out, somebody did, that we had about eight or ten rounds of ammunition.

FERGUSON: For each gun?

MATTHEWS: For each gun. And we had a lot, we got a lot of machine-guns off them airplanes that was shot up, you know, and couldn't fly any more. We took the fifty caliber machine-guns and mounted them on all of our jeeps, and put them any way we could to have them, you know. Had plenty of ammunition, too, for the fifties. We lasted, we got there sometime in January, I don't know just when . . .

FERGUSON: Was that Java?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, it was Java. The dates I forgot, I should have put them down, but I didn't. And like I say, we serviced that aircraft all through January. And then finally they got . . . The Japs kept pushing them back and shooting them down and they run out of

airplanes. They were B-17s is what it was. And we had some dive-bombers too. We had a little field up in the mountains there that the dive-bombers used. They didn't use the field that we was at. We were about fifty miles from Surabaya in the mountains at a air base up there. That's where we was at. And the Japs come on over there and started strafing, doing a lot of strafing then.

FERGUSON: If we could back up a little bit, where did you take your initial training?

MATTHEWS: Brownwood. Camp Bowie.

FERGUSON: Okay, could you kind of describe what your training was like?

MATTHEWS: Really, I didn't train much. I was . . . We were trying to get our equipment in, you know, new trucks, new cars, and everything, and I stayed on the road most of the time to San Antone, picking up new trucks and things. Meantime, they were having their basic training. Oh, I got in on a bunch of it. It was pretty rough. Of course, we . . . That lasted about a month, then we took to the field, you know, on maneuvers about in the field.

FERGUSON: The basic training, the part that you got in on, was that mostly like drill and obstacle courses, or what?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, drill and dress codes, things like that, you know. Mostly drill. There was a few of the boys that was in the National Guard that knew a little bit about drill, but not very many of them. And then they mobilized. Why they took in about fifty percent or sixty percent new boys in the outfit. We was just recruits, you know, we didn't know one end of a gun from another.

FERGUSON: Your officers and NCOs, were they National Guard or regular Army?

MATTHEWS: They was National Guard. We had one sergeant who had been in the Marine Corps, and he did the basic training, marching and things like that, you know. But all of our officers were National Guard. They had been in the National Guard for several years. They'd been to Army maneuvers in the summertime, you know.

FERGUSON: But everyone trained right there, you didn't go off to basic training camp someplace?

MATTHEWS: Not till we went to Louisiana. They had a big Army maneuver down in Louisiana. We went down there and stayed two months. Spent the first part, July, in the northern part of Louisiana, in the burnt-out forest, had some old burnt stumps about that high (three feet). Then we moved south to Alexandria, Louisiana. It rained every day. We didn't do nothing but dig out, and get stuck again. Like I say that was quite a deal, that Louisiana deal. I think it made soldiers out of a bunch of us. We learned the hard way, you know. We lived on Army rations. But we had our own kitchen.

FERGUSON: Within the unit?

MATTHEWS: Within the unit, mobile kitchens. But we had to eat Army rations a lot of time because we were always moving. Setting up and moving. And like I say, it was pretty rugged down there in Louisiana. Especially that rain. All of us come out of there web-footed.

FERGUSON: What kind of smallarms did you have?

MATTHEWS: We had an assortment. To start out with, we had .45 automatic sidearms. Then they gave us .45 cavalry pistols, that you strapped on the wrong side, you know. And then before we went to overseas, why they got us some old Springfields, World War I Springfield rifles. Took all the automatic pistols up and gave us Springfields. So that's what we carried overseas.

FERGUSON: Had you trained with those Springfields?

MATTHEWS: No. Never had fired it.

FERGUSON: Before you left the U.S. you never fired it?

MATTHEWS: Before we left to go overseas, right.

FERGUSON: And the same way with your 105s, you had never fired those?

MATTHEWS: Never fire them. And, uh, I'm pretty bitter about it. The way they done us,

you know. We was just sacrificed. You know they dumped us out on that island, seven hundred and fifty of us, and there was about a hundred and fifty British, and about a hundred Australians, that had come out of Singapore and fell back. And they didn't have anything. So we was, and they landed fifty thousand troops on Java, and if you remember . . .

FERGUSON: The Japanese did?

MATTHEWS: The Japanese did. It's a long island, like a thousand, twelve hundred miles long, only about fifty, sixty miles wide. We were on the south end, and they landed fifty thousand troops up there, and they were really loaded. You might put this in, what really made them do it, they had shipped a train-load of French 75s that was going to Philippines to train, for them boys to train with, and they unloaded all of them there. We took them and everywhere there was an opening, well we set one of them old French 75s, where you could see it. All over the island. That's all we done for a month or two. I guess we had two hundreds of them. Well the Japs, when they caught us, started interrogating us, well they wanted to know where the rest of the men was. They said, you got all them guns, where's the people? Of course that was the name of the game, to get them to slow down so they wouldn't go to Australia, that's what everybody thought. But anyway it worked, what they started out to do.

FERGUSON: Did everybody expected the Japs to go on to Australia?

MATTHEWS: Well, we did. All they'd have had to done was just go on, there wasn't no resistance. There wasn't no Australian troops, 'cause all theirs was in the Middle East and in England, you know, fighting the Germans. That was the biggest mistake, one of the biggest mistakes, the Japs made.

FERGUSON: They could have just walked on in?

MATTHEWS: Just walked on in. Nothing to it, 'cause they didn't have, we didn't have no defense.

FERGUSON: When you were there in Java, what were your duties, on a just average day?

MATTHEWS: Well, I was in transportation. We were liable to take a truck and go down there and fill it full of barrels of gasoline and go service them airplanes. Or we might go across the island to another port, can't think of the name of it right now, to pick up some bombs.

FERGUSON: So there were still ships coming in?

MATTHEWS: There were still ships coming in on the south side, where the *Houston* was sunk over there. And we were just about pretty busy there for what time we was there.

Servicing them airplanes and doing things on them, you know.

FERGUSON: Did the Japanese airplanes ever come . . .

MATTHEWS: Oh yeah. The strafers, the fighter planes come by and strafed every day, nearly. Yeah, we shot down one of them, one day, with an old artillery gun. Then when we got down, when the Japs landed, well they took "E" Battery and sent us to Surabaya, which is on the south end of the island. Well "D" Battery, "F" Battery, and Headquarter Battery, they went over about two hundred miles north of Surabaya, and was going to try to stop them over there. Well, they didn't stop them, because you know, fifty, five-hundred thousand troops, enough of them they just took them pretty quick, 'cause they run out of ammunition. Then they come on and got us, a few days later. But it was pretty bad, because like I say, they just taken us, we wasn't no resistance, 'cause we didn't have any ammunition. We fought two days, you know . . .

FERGUSON: "E" Battery did?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, "E" Battery did. Yeah we done away with a lot of them with that old artillery piece we had.

FERGUSON: How many guns were in your battery?

MATTHEWS: Four.

FERGUSON: Four guns?

MATTHEWS: Four guns in a battery.

FERGUSON: Did you have any infantry there with you?

MATTHEWS: No. We had one battalion of Australian infantry, and one battalion of English anti-aircraft. And that was the extent of the troops. I think, I'm not sure, but I think the Australians went with the Americans, "F" Battery and them on the other end, up on the line up there.

FERGUSON: So did "E" Battery have any infantry to screen them?

MATTHEWS: We didn't have nobody.

FERGUSON: Do you remember when it was you got captured?

MATTHEWS: February, it was in February. I think, if I'm not mistaken, it was February the sixth. Somewhere in that neighborhood. Like I say, it's been fifty years, it's hard to remember them dates.

FERGUSON: And that was at Surabaya?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, that's where we was captured.

FERGUSON: And then where were you taken after you were captured?

MATTHEWS: We stayed there in Surabaya for probably three months. We cleaned up all the bomb damage that they had done, and we did a lot of dock work, work on the docks, loading ships and unloading them. See those warehouses there were full of raw rubber, sugar, coffee, things like that you know that they raised there in Java. It was a rich island. And we loaded that onto Japanese ships. And we did empty the warehouse. And like I say, we was there for three to four or five months, I don't remember. And they moved us, they moved us several times while we lived there in Java.

FERGUSON: There at Java, about how many of you were there at the camp at Surabaya?

MATTHEWS: Let's see, there was . . .

FERGUSON: I mean, did they move any more people in there with you, or was it just "E" Battery.

MATTHEWS: No, it was just "E" Battery. There was about ninety, ninety "E" Battery. And we stayed there like three to four months. Then they took everybody that was able to work and sent them to Japan. They went in the coal mines, I mean the steel mills there in Japan. And they left about twenty-five of us that were sick, sores on our feet and legs, couldn't walk, they left us there with a bunch of Dutch. See, there was a lot of Dutch people there.

FERGUSON: Civilians or soldiers?

MATTHEWS: No, they were soldiers. And they was a bunch of them there, and they, the Dutch, they treated them pretty bad, 'cause they was in charge of the island, see, the Dutch Island. But they was rough on Americans too, because they didn't like, most of the Japanese soldiers didn't like the Americans. They interrogated us pretty good. They kept trying to figure out what kind of defense we had on California, and they felt we knew. All we'd ever done was come through there. We didn't see no defense. But boy they . . . We had one man that came into camp, he was already over in the Far East, but he was a Superior Bomb Sight technician. He had been in the Annapolis Naval Academy and got one leg cut off in an accident, and he went to work for Superior Bomb Sight. Well you know, they never did know, the Japs didn't, but what he was a civilian with us. We kept, you know we never, nobody ever told them that he was a Superior Bomb Sight, because they would have probably killed him if they had have known. He stayed with us all the time.

FERGUSON: Why was it that you were left on Java when the other fellows . . .

MATTHEWS: I had shrapnel wounds in my leg. Yeah I was, when we was, had our guns set up there, I was back there. I had took the gun up there and then come back and parked the truck out of the way. I was standing there and I could see across the river, oh, three blocks, I guess. Seen them Japs climbing them coconut trees. I didn't know what they was doing. We

watched them, and directly they got us up there, and they strapped a little old bazooka beside their leg, and fired that thing out of that top of that coconut tree. And I was standing there and that stuff just, that shrapnel just sprayed all over, on concrete. I got all that stuff in my legs, and got infected. I didn't walk for three or four months. Didn't have no medicines.

FERGUSON: How soon was it after you got wounded that you were captured?

MATTHEWS: About three days.

FERGUSON: Did the Americans have any kinds of medical units, or anything there?

MATTHEWS: We just had first aids, is all. All the medical boys went with the other, the rest of the battalion.

FERGUSON: So you didn't have any surgeons or doctors . . .

MATTHEWS: No, we didn't have none of that.

FERGUSON: When you were captured, did the Japanese provide any kind of medical help for you?

MATTHEWS: No, they didn't do . . .

FERGUSON: Nothing at all.

MATTHEWS: Nothing at all. We just kind of done it on our own. Until we got better. Over there in that tropics, your feet is your worst enemy, because you get the fungus in there man, I'm telling you. Some of them boys lost their toes, and everything else there. Course there wasn't nothing to doctor it with. Course when we got on up to the other end of the island, in about a year, well they had a little bit of medicine up there, that some of the boys had gotten ahold of. But we finally got better up there, I got where I could walk and everything. And then like I say we was in several camps. Bicycle Camp was one of them, and the Docks was another one, I don't know, several...

FERGUSON: There were camps in Indonesia?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, in Surayaba. And then we went to, went on up north to the other end of

the island. Up there we worked on the docks again.

FERGUSON: Now, was that just “E” Battery or was that some more people?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, just “E” Battery. The other boys had done pulled out, and they went to Thailand to work on the railroad. The big bunch.

FERGUSON: The rest of the battalion.

MATTHEWS: The rest of the battalion, yeah. Also, in the meantime, the U.S. *Houston* was sunk, over there off the coast of Java, and all them, I say all of them, there wasn't very many of them, swum ashore and the Japs took them, put them in the camp.

FERGUSON: With you?

MATTHEWS: No, with the other bunch, the big bunch. When we caught up with them up at Malang, I think it was, a little old camp right outside of Surabaya, well there was some *Houston* boys there, but they were guys that was crippled and hurt.

FERGUSON: Not fit to work?

MATTHEWS: Not fit to work. They didn't take them to the railroad. We went on up to Batavia, and pushed off from there. Oh, we stayed up there, I guess, about a year. We worked on docks, and cleaned up bombed out deals, that they had, the Japs had bombed, you know. I guess about '43 they shipped us to Singapore. We worked on docks there a little while, loaded ships and unloaded ships, and eventually they sent us to Bangkok. We were going to start on a railroad there. And see the railroad come across all those countries over there . . .

FERGUSON: Cambodia and Laos . . .

MATTHEWS: Yeah, all of them, and came into Bangkok, that was the end of the road. And we was going to start at Bangkok and go that way. Things was getting really rough then, the Americans had took over the air, and we could build something today, and tomorrow they'd come over and bomb it, the Americans would. We had two boys killed in our own raids, bombing raids. And we stayed up there about six months, I guess, about the beginning of

1945. And they sent us back to Singapore, 150 of us, English, Dutch, Americans, about fifty Americans. They sent us back to Singapore, and that's where we was at when the war was over.

FERGUSON: What was the attitude of the prisoners toward the American air?

MATTHEWS: Well, we understood. They didn't know we was there. Just like when the war was over, they flew, two captains and the crew that was on the airplane, flew down there one day to Singapore, just playing around, just seeing what was down there. They found out there was fifty Americans there.

FERGUSON: They didn't have any idea you were there?

MATTHEWS: They didn't have any idea we were there. So they took half of us that day and come back the next day and got the rest of them out. They were out of Calcutta, India.

FERGUSON: Just out sightseeing?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, they was just having a big time, you know. And I tell you what, it really was something, them boys . . .

FERGUSON: Do you know when that was?

MATTHEWS: That was in August, the last part of August, 1945.

FERGUSON: So a good while after the war was actually . . .

MATTHEWS: The way we found out the war was over, one morning we got up, we was in Chang jail, big civilian jail, I guess it was . . .

FERGUSON: In Singapore?

MATTHEWS: In Singapore. And there wasn't no Japs. They had left out during the night and went to the south end of island, and all the Japs on the island were down there. There wasn't nobody, and the English took over the camp. And the English, I shouldn't say it, but they were rougher on us than the Japs were. Really. Some of us went out, went over the fence . . .

FERGUSON: The English tried to keep you confined there?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, they wouldn't let us go. We found a warehouse down there full of Red Cross parcels. We made ourselves sick. And we told the English about it, and they got, I don't know where they got some trucks, but they trucked all that stuff into the camp and rationed it out, you know, they didn't give anybody anything. There was more English there than there was Americans, so we didn't have much of a deal.

FERGUSON: How was the treatment of the Japanese toward the prisoners, and did it change any, as time went along?

MATTHEWS: Right at the last it changed, but it was pretty rough. They beat you, you know, for the least excuse, like if you didn't understand what they said, why, they'd whop you one.

FERGUSON: Did they have very many Japanese who could speak English?

MATTHEWS: No. One in a great while. One Japanese that we found, he was a graduate of UCLA, and he worked for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture company. He went back over there to do something and they caught him and put him in the army. He could speak perfect English. But he was just one of the few. Once in a great while, there would be a captain or something, and he could speak English, but just the average soldier, he couldn't.

FERGUSON: That fellow that had been in the U.S., was he as mean toward the Americans as the rest of the Japanese?

MATTHEWS: No, he told us, he said, "This is not my idea," said "Ya'll will be out of here." He told us how long, I mean . . . He was really nice to us, he gave us cigarettes....

FERGUSON: What was your food like?

MATTHEWS: Well, we lived mainly on rice. We'd have a little bit of vegetables and make a soup out of it. They give you a bowl of rice, and pour that vegetable soup on there. But we were lucky because there was lots of fruit down in that part. Bananas, coconuts, mangos, and things like that. So we managed to get hold of a bunch of that stuff like that when we was out

on work parties, you know.

FERGUSON: Would the Japanese let you go out and get that, or did you have to slip off and get it?

MATTHEWS: No, we had to slip off and get it. We was on a big farm out there, we had gardens out there at the farm. Why, they was just about six Japs would go out there with us, and they'd try to watch us . . .

FERGUSON: With how many Americans?

MATTHEWS: With like 75 Americans. I mean not Americans, but prisoners. And they'd try to watch us, of course they couldn't watch all of us. We'd sneak off. And the Chinese were extra good on us, because they'd give us that stuff.

FERGUSON: There were Chinese there in Java, too?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, oh yeah, Orientals, yeah there was Chinese. And of course when we got up to Singapore, there was lots of Chinese, up there.

FERGUSON: You mean Chinese from China, or just the local people there?

MATTHEWS: No, they was from China. You know, they'd moved down there. Been there several generations. We were lucky, we still had a few watches, cigarette lighters. That was the thing all the Japs wanted, was a watch and a cigarette lighter. Fountain pen. If he had a Parker fountain pen, why, he'd be . . . and the Chinese, they was smart enough to know that they was valuable stuff, too. And that's where we got our . . . we all had malaria, real bad, I mean, that malaria was. And we traded, we traded watches, fountain pens, things like that, to the Chinese for quinine. That's what you treat the malaria with. That's what saved us, because, there was plenty of quinine, but the Japs wouldn't get it for us.

FERGUSON: Did the Japanese suffer from malaria like the Americans did?

MATTHEWS: No, they had medicines. And they treated it.

FERGUSON: So, they got the disease, but they treated it.

MATTHEWS: They treated it, they didn't treat us. No they never did give us any, we never did get any medical supplies from the Japanese. Now, never every camp we was in, there was a bunch of English doctors. As we got up to Batavia, there was lots of doctors up there, English doctors, no American doctors, Dutch doctors, and people like that. They would treat the Japanese, and they'd give the doctors medicine to treat them, and then they'd keep part of it. Steal it, I guess you'd say.

FERGUSON: How was your weight effected by your imprisonment?

MATTHEWS: Well, when I got out I weighted ninety pounds.

FERGUSON: What did you weigh when you first joined the National Guard?

MATTHEWS: I weighted 220 when I shipped out for San Francisco. I was as big as I am now, only I was a lot heavier in my chest. But I never gained my weight back. I'd get about 170 and back off.

FERGUSON: When you were still in the United States and you knew that the war was coming, did you think much about the Japanese, or what was your attitude toward the Japanese?

MATTHEWS: We didn't know they was going to do it. We didn't know there was going to be a war.

FERGUSON: Did you feel like the Japanese were the enemy, or the Germans were the enemy.

MATTHEWS: No, the Germans, Germans. We thought more about the Germans than we did the Japanese. And of course you know back in 1940, the news wasn't like it is today. They didn't monitor everything worldwide. And we didn't have, we had a few radios. We didn't keep up with the news. I'll tell you, we was twenty years old, we didn't give a dad-burn what happened. Having a big time, you know, the Army was just another job, you might say. Didn't realize what we was getting into. Well, we never did realize it till we got to prison

camp. Woke up one morning, man, you're in trouble now. But we took it better than a lot of people. I mean I took it better than I would now, 'cause I'd worry myself to death now. But we just, well, we're tougher than they are, we're going to get out. MacArthur had come through and give us a big speech at the airport, said "You boys hang in there, I'll be back." With something to take care of it. That was before I was taken prisoner. Course we knew we was going to be taken prisoner, wasn't no way to get out of there. We'd tried to get boats, like I say, I'd tried to join the Air Force and get out, but I didn't make it. But the boys that got out lost their lives getting shot down in the Air Force.

FERGUSON: Was your treatment any different from one camp to another? Noticeably different?

MATTHEWS: Yeah. One camp commander could be real mean, I mean his rules were . . . every one of them were separate, you know, this camp commander he was maybe pretty good to us. Let you work six days a week and let you rest on one day. And the next one, he wouldn't let you rest, and he wouldn't have no . . . They give us ten cents a day when we worked. And we could buy fruits, and stuff like that, you know, tobacco, smoking tobacco.

FERGUSON: Buy it from the Japanese, or buy it from the natives?

MATTHEWS: No, the Japanese would take it and go buy it from the natives for us. We'd do that once a month, I believe it was once a month, maybe twice.

FERGUSON: Was the quality or the amount of food any different from one camp to another?

MATTHEWS: It was about the same, as far as the Japanese ration was concerned. I forget now how many ounces a day. We got three meals a day, most of the time, except when we was on ships, we just got one. It got rough there right before the war was over with, why, they run out of rations. It was pretty rough food, but the Japanese treated us okay because they knew the war was coming to an end. We had a guy in there, an Englishman, he had a little old radio, that he made, we'd stole the parts. How he kept it, I don't know. Never had

figured, as many times as we got searched. But he never did get caught with that thing. And we knew when the war was over. We knew when MacArthur signed the deal up there. We was, while we was waiting then some, I really don't know what they was, what kind of troops was came into our camp. Had been fighting in the jungles. They were Rangers, I believe they were Rangers. And man, them guys had hand grenades, they had dynamite, they had everything.

FERGUSON: They were U.S. Army fellows?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, they were U.S. Army troops.

FERGUSON: Now, this was after the two fliers landed in your camp?

MATTHEWS: No, it was before it. Because the first airplane that went out, those two, there was two of them together, they went out on the first airplane.

FERGUSON: These Rangers that came in, was that just a couple of days before?

MATTHEWS: No, it was about a week before. They told us the war was over, you know. They had been put ashore with a submarine. And what it was, there was a railroad that went from Singapore up to Bangkok, and that was their job, to destroy the railroad.

FERGUSON: Even though the war was over?

MATTHEWS: No, it was before the war had ended. They was trying to isolate everybody, and they did. Well, that little old railroad, it wouldn't run half the time, 'cause when we went to Bangkok we'd walk two days, get on the train and ride two days, then get back on a ship and ride two days, it was kind of like that, you know. Their transportation was what lost the war for the Japs.

FERGUSON: Did these Rangers . . . Did they report your location, or did they have any contact?

MATTHEWS: They didn't know we was there. They didn't have . . . They'd done lost communication when they landed.

FERGUSON: So they couldn't tell anybody else about you.

MATTHEWS: They couldn't tell anybody else about us.

FERGUSON: Did they stay there with you?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, they stayed there in the camp with us.

FERGUSON: So, they were still there when the flyers came in.

MATTHEWS: And they went out the first time, the first load 'cause they had orders, that they was to . . . first transportation they was to be taken out.

FERGUSON: How many of them was there?

MATTHEWS: Two of them, just two of them. They wasn't very friendly. They wouldn't tell you very much. How long they'd been there, or anything like that. Pretty secretive.

FERGUSON: You mentioned the Red Cross parcels a while ago, did you receive those on a regular basis.

MATTHEWS: Never did get one.

FERGUSON: But there was a warehouse full of them?

MATTHEWS: Warehouse full of them down there at Singapore. We found them after the war was over. We got out, running around, you know, and we found them, and we got some of them then.

FERGUSON: What was in those?

MATTHEWS: Well, there was cigarettes, sugar, chocolate, little old rations, you know. It was pretty good parcels. It done a lot of good for us. Coffee.

FERGUSON: What happened then after those two flyers came in discovered you all?

MATTHEWS: Well, we left the next day. They took all the sick ones that couldn't hardly walk. They took them out that day. The next day they come back and got the rest of us.

FERGUSON: How many airplanes did they send then?

MATTHEWS: Just one.

FERGUSON: What kind of airplane?

MATTHEWS: It was a six, I believe, what they call a six, it would hold about fifty people. And they took us to Calcutta, India. That's where we ended up at.

FERGUSON: How was your health at that time?

MATTHEWS: Pretty bad. I had the ulcers on my legs . . .

FERGUSON: From your wounds?

MATTHEWS: No, from being in jungle. I had malaria, dysentery. We went in the hospital, I stayed three weeks in the Calcutta hospital.

FERGUSON: Was your health better or worse than the average fellows?

MATTHEWS: About the same. We was all about . . . Well, there was a few of them in pretty bad shape. But I was about . . . We were all about the same, all starved to death, you know, and ulcers on our legs.

FERGUSON: How long did you stay there at Calcutta?

MATTHEWS: Three weeks. Then I came back to New York.

FERGUSON: There at Calcutta, was that an American base?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, American hospital. That was the main hospital for all the China-Burma Theater area.

FERGUSON: So it was pretty good sized?

MATTHEWS: Pretty good sized, yeah.

FERGUSON: What did they do with you there?

MATTHEWS: Well, they checked us, our health, and fed us, mostly. They put us all in one big barracks, there, and off to the side of it was a cold storage thing. Canteens. It had every kind of food I guess that there is. Cold storage there, you could just go in there any time you wanted to go and get you something to eat. Or you could go on over to the mess hall. Yeah, I picked up, in three weeks there, I picked up about 25 pounds, I gained. Of course, it was

mostly gut. But then they flew us from there to New York. And we stayed in the hospital there. Let's see, what's the name of that hospital? I can't remember now. We stayed there about two weeks, then they sent us to Walter Reed hospital in Washington, D.C. I got sent home from there.

FERGUSON: All together, then, how long were you in the hospital, do you think?

MATTHEWS: I was in about two months.

FERGUSON: Did you feel like you were in fairly good health when you got released?

MATTHEWS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I didn't get discharged until 1946. March of '46, I believe it was, when I got discharged. Basically, I was in pretty good shape, except I was still having malaria. I got to Walter Reed, I think it was, they come in there, and I had malaria. I told them I had malaria. They checked me and sure enough I did. Course it wasn't bad as it was over in the jungle 'cause they jumped right on it with medicine. And they gave me a shot with a needle about the size of a broom handle and about that long in the butt, and I could just feel that stuff going down my leg, and down my arms, and into my fingers. I never did have malaria any more, for a long time. Yeah, they treated us pretty rough, most of the time. There was a barrier there of language, and they worked us like twelve or fourteen hours a day, and they beat on us pretty good. It seemed like, you know most of them are short, seemed like they resented us being so much bigger than they was.

FERGUSON: Other than the fellows from the *U.S.S. Houston*, was there any more prisoners that joined you?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, we had some boys come off of a ship, civilians that was on a freighter ship. There was one colored boy, and I guess about twenty, no about fifteen, white boys. The colored boy was a cook, you know.

FERGUSON: They were all civilians?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, they were all civilians. They'd been shot and sunk somewhere else, and

they brought them in to Singapore.

FERGUSON: Was there any more servicemen that joined you?

MATTHEWS: No.

FERGUSON: No shot down air crews or anything like that?

MATTHEWS: There was one boy they brought in there, I think right when the war started.

He was shot down and his back was broken. They put him in isolation and he lived in that cell, and that back grew back. It was crooked, but they said the only reason it had grown back was from sleeping on that concrete floor. You know we didn't have any beds at all.

Maybe we had a blanket, mosquito net.

FERGUSON: But at least he survived.

MATTHEWS: Yeah, he survived. He walked crooked. I imagine they could correct it. I never did find out when he come back, whether he got to be okay or not.

FERGUSON: When you were moved from Java up to Bangkok, how were you moved?

MATTHEWS: On a ship, to Singapore, then we rode a train, then a boat, and everything else up to Bangkok from Singapore. Went on land, up there.

FERGUSON: Did that Battery "E" bunch pretty much stay together?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, the main bunch . . .

FERGUSON: I mean the bunch you were with.

MATTHEWS: Well, there was just about twenty-five of us. But "E" Battery itself, they took them to Japan and they worked in the steel mills, making boats.

FERGUSON: But the bunch you were with, did you pretty well stay together from beginning to end?

MATTHEWS: No, every six weeks or something like that, they'd take a bunch of them to Japan. They'd want to take everybody to Japan. Well, they'd put them on a ship, take them up there. We had one ship that got sunk up there.

FERGUSON: A ship full of prisoners?

MATTHEWS: I had several good friends went down on it. And one friend that lives in Abilene, he survived. He caught him something to float on and they picked him up.

FERGUSON: Who picked him up?

MATTHEWS: The Japanese. It was right in Japan, one of the islands, there, I think.

[Discussing National Guard Officers before the war]

FERGUSON: So, there wasn't any superior-subordinate relationship?

MATTHEWS: There was never nothing like that. Course we showed them respect when we had to, but it wasn't nothing for some of our guys to slip over there to the officer's quarters, go in their tent and talk to them at night.

FERGUSON: And you never had any regular Army officers?

MATTHEWS: Never did. When we got to prison camp, we got some marines that were regulars. All the boys off *Houston*. There were Marines. Had one lieutenant, he was sure a nice guy. He was the senior ranking officer down at Singapore.

FERGUSON: He was a Marine lieutenant off of the ship?

MATTHEWS: Yes. They sent all our officers off to Japan. And we had some British, English, Dutch officers, but we didn't have any Americans.

FERGUSON: While you were in the prison camp, did you have any chain of command?

MATTHEWS: No. Had one guy that was in charge of each barracks or that's the way it was most places. We had them huts, you know, bamboo huts with beds on each side and just a hall down the middle. There was a guy that was in charge of that barracks and he had to account for every one of us. We had head count every day. Every morning they had to have head count.

FERGUSON: Did anybody ever try to escape?

MATTHEWS: There wasn't no chance. Now, there was some Dutch . . . Well, they were half Dutch, half Javanese, tried to escape. And they shot them. Finally caught them, brought them back and shot them.

FERGUSON: Shot them all?

MATTHEWS: Yeah. That was what worried us at the last there 'cause we figured if our troops ever landed on Japan, well they'd shoot us and kill us. When we got back, we found out that's what the plan was. We had a deal . . . we had made it up, if they ever lined us up to shoot us, we was going to rush forward and try to . . . of course they'd have got part of us. We knew that they were probably going to kill us.