Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

Richard Bates

Merrill's Marauders, Burma, WWII

1995

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Bates, Richard, (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1995.
User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 117 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 117 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Richard Bates, a Baraboo, Wis. resident, discusses his service as a replacement member of New Galahad with Merrill's Marauders in India, Burma, and China during World War II, and his later attendance at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Bates relates his basic training at Camp Craw (South Carolina), transfer to Texas where he was assigned to the 97th division, and boat trip from Camp Patrick Henry (Virginia) to Cape Town (South Africa) and finally to India. Bates refers to the difficulties Merrill's Marauders faced fighting in the Indian climate such as tropical disease, deterioration of equipment, isolation, poor rations, and the lack of supplies. He talks about fighting the Japanese along-side American trained Chinese troops, night attacks, and the Marauders extremely high casualty rate. He also evaluates the supplies, skills, and attitudes of the Japanese solders. Bates reveals his duties as a scout including patrolling and mapping, and later duties as an Intelligence Non-Commissioned Officer gathering information and searching the battlefield for materials. He also comments on the interactions of the United States Army with native populations. Bates discusses being stationed in China and preparing Nationalist (Guomintang) Chinese troops for combat both against the Japanese and Mao's communist army. Bates also comments on the men in Merrill's Marauders, and the mystique surrounding the group. He touches upon his reaction to VJ-Day, return to the United States, difficulty finding work, and use of the GI Bill. After the war, Bates mentions living at Badger Village, a community for veterans attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison; difficulties with the VA relating to chronic malaria; service related nightmares; and involvement in the American Legion, VFW, and Merrill's Marauders Association.

Biographical Sketch

Bates, (b. March 11, 1925) served with the 97th Infantry, Merrill's Marauders, and the 475th Infantry. He served as a Technical Sergeant, and was honorably discharged December 19, 1945. After the war, he eventually settled in Baraboo, Wis.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.
Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.
Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2001-2002.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Mark: Okay. Today's date is April 12, 1995. This Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Richard Bates of Baraboo, Wisconsin, a veteran of Merrill's Marauders in World War II. Good morning.

Bates: Good morning.

Mark: Thanks for coming in.

Bates: Glad to.

Mark: We should start, I suppose, by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you were raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Bates: Well, I was born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1925. And my dad had jobs, the Depression caused him to move but I guess you could say I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. I lived there most of my life before I went into service. And I was in high school, Pearl Harbor attacked.

Mark: Where at?

Bates: Hartwell High School in Cincinnati. Yes.

Mark: Eleventh grade or something like that?

Bates: Yes. No, no, no. I was--1941--I guess I was a freshman.

Mark: Did you recall hearing the news and do you recall your reaction?

Bates: Well, yes. They closed--

Mark: And as a young man--

Bates: I was at a matinee and they closed the theater and announced that the United States had been attacked. So I went home and it was all on the news, on the radio. My, I guess my reaction was surprise. I had a brother who was in service at the time.

Mark: Already.

Bates: Yeah. He had been drafted, one of the lucky numbers in the first 1940 draft. Yes.

Mark: As a 16, 17 year old young man, do you remember if you realized there would be any implications for your life?

Bates: Yes, I did. I was quite interested in politics and history and such things. So I knew more, probably, than the typical person my age because we were following the radio news every night; a friend of mine and I. We'd been listening to Hans VonKaltenborn talk about the German menace all this time so we were aware of what was going on. We, I knew that it was going to be, that I'd wind up in service. I knew it was not going to be a short war.

Mark: Did you, because you followed the news, was this attack a surprise to you?

Bates: The attack was a surprise because I didn't know that much history. And I didn't know that the Japanese had a history of starting their wars with surprise attacks. The attack was a surprise. It was even bigger surprise, of course, when we found later, I guess, how poorly they were set up for it.

Mark: I suppose you were watching events in Europe more than the Pacific.

Bates: Yes. Yeah, we were watching that. Although at that particular time there was a lot on the radio because, you know, the Japanese envoys were there negotiating with our State Department to try to resolve the impasse. That was big news to all of us at that time. Because it looked as though we were going to have a problem with Japan but nobody knew how big. But we knew that there was a problem.

Mark: That something was brewing.

Bates: Yes, yes.

Mark: And so you enlisted in 1943. Did you finish high school before you were--

Bates: No, my junior year.

Mark: So you didn't finish school by the time you went into the service?

Bates: No.

Mark: Were you 17?

Bates: I was 18.

Mark: You were 18.

Bates: Yes. I was, there was a lot more illness back in my day and I missed practically a whole year with scarlet fever so I was a year older than my grade.

Mark: I see. I was wondering if you had to get your parents' permission. You were 18.

Bates: Not at 18.

Mark: You didn't have to. And so you chose the Army.

Bates: Well, actually, I tried the Air Force. Our high school had kind of geared up. We had an old World War I veteran named Art Reisner who had been in the infantry and he had persuaded the school authorities to give all the juniors and seniors gym every day and set up an obstacle course. Some of the courses were being geared toward more practical things than math. So we actually had a course in aerial navigation, which I took. So I thought, well, I might do some good in the Air Force but my eyes kept me out of that. So then I tried the Navy--my dad had been in the Navy--and the Navy thanked me and sent me out the door--right after the eye test.

Mark: The eye test.

Bates: Yes. But the Army was glad to see me. Did all that in one day.

Mark: At a recruiting center or something down in Cincinnati.

Bates: Yeah. Down in Cincinnati, downtown.

Mark: So describe for me going into the service. I assume you had to report somewhere. Get on a bus or a train or something.

Bates: Well, we had to report to a place called Fort Thomas, Kentucky--a town across from Cincinnati. They drove you down. We had to stay down there for a few days while they tested us. And after the tests then they came up with the assignments.

Mark: These are--

Bates: It was right after school ended. The Monday after we got out of the junior year.

Mark: I see. And these tests were what? Physical test, mental test?

Bates: Well, the physical test was given ahead of time. But the had what they called the AGCT, the Army General Classification Test, which I think, in retrospect, tested your ability to learn quickly. And they give you radio test. Those were the two most important ones. The AGCT was the most important. I was classified on the basis of that. I did well on that. And so I was sent to a special unit, which is kind of strange because it was called ASTP. Are you familiar with that?

Mark: Yeah.

Bates: Well, one of the requirements was that you had to have a high school diploma and I'd told the person there, I said, "You're assigning me to this ASTP battalion"--they were going to train a whole bunch of them for infantry and then give them their assignments--and I said, "I don't have a--I just finished my junior year." And he said, "Well, you did really well on the test. That must be why they decided to send you." And, as it turned out, then when I finished by basic they said, "You don't have a high school diploma so we can't enroll you in the program." I said, "Well, I'm not surprised." I had my assignment already. They gave us further tests down there at Camp Craw, South Carolina. In the course of the test--we went in weekly for a test of some sort along with our regular infantry basic--and it was kind of strange when I got my assignment because I was going to be sent to a language school and I had never shown really any interest in language in high school. I took nothing other than the regular English. But I was going to be assigned to a language school because they seemed to feel that the tests showed that I could pick up languages easy. And it turned out I could. But I wasn't going to the language school.

Mark: I see. We'll come back to that. I'm interested in your basic training in South Carolina. It lasted about how long?

Bates: Fourteen weeks.

Mark: Fourteen weeks.

Bates: Yeah, they had just shortened it from seventeen because they were losing too many riflemen overseas.

Mark: And what did this training consist of? Was it shooting and physical training, classroom?

Bates: It was all three. We did a lot more physical and classroom-type stuff in terms of applied classroom--tactics, signals, a lot of conditioning. We had a test at the end where we went into the field for a week and basically survived on very little sleep. We started off with a 25-mile night hike--and that was sort of our graduation. We did a lot of things, learned a lot about infantry. We were going to be general replacements so we were trained on every weapon that the infantry used except heavy machine guns, which worked like light machine guns. We were trained on every one that the infantry used because who knew where we were going to be going. So we got very general training. It was probably more detailed training than the men that went into a regular division because they were immediately slotted into something. That was the purpose. It was a big camp. We had 35 battalions going at one time.

Mark: What sort of equipment did you have? This is kind of in the middle of the war. Some of the vets I speak to when they're trained early would describe training with broomsticks for rifles--

Bates: No.

Mark: --or wooden rifles. You had--

Bates: We had M1 rifles. We were being trained for the infantry. And we went out and used the other rifles, the other guns--the carbine, we had to qualify on that and we had to qualify on the mortars and the light machine gun and we were taught to use grenades--but the M1 was the one we had with us at all times. They were old but they worked. The only thing we weren't trained on was the submachine gun. There weren't enough of them. They were being supplied to the units overseas. That's a whole nother story. But basically they were finding out we were under gunned with the BAR.

Mark: We'll try to come back to that. And what was discipline like in this camp?

Bates: It was very tough.

Mark: A lot of screaming and yelling and four-letter words?

Bates: Yeah. They were, a number of our men were regular Army men and a number of them were men who had, apparently, gone in early and were now being used as instructors. It was run, you know, quite a bit like some of the movies in the sense that they--and they really gave us a hard time to start with because we were supposedly bright and any time we made a mistake they just loved it. But, you know, there was a lot of push-ups, fall out and do push-ups, do this, do that, screaming at you all the time. But eventually they began to realize that we were going to make soldiers and we got to respect our sergeant and our--we had a platoon sergeant and we had a corporal as a section leader--and we got to have a lot of respect for them.

Mark: Now, this was kind of an elite group of guys. Was there much of a washout rate? Did a lot of guys drop out of the training cycle at some point?

Bates: No. Oh, you're talking about Merrill's' Marauders?

Mark: I'm talking about--

Bates: The basic.

Mark: --your training. Even in Air Force training there was maybe ten percent of the guys just couldn't hack it and left. I'm wondering if this was tougher--

Bates: You weren't allowed to leave, basically. You had to make. I'll give you an example. Had a guy come in who was grossly over weight. And he was in pre-med, which was kind of strange. He weighed over--he became a good friend. His name was Irvin. He weighed over 240 pounds. He was only about 5'9" and he didn't make the first indoctrination walk around the inner circle of the camp which was laid out in a big circle with spokes. But he made the 14 weeks because they put him on a diet. And when--they assigned a man every day to see that he got no extra food and they gave him a measured amount of food--and by the time it was over--see, we'd have to help him. If anybody started to fall, somebody had to grab his rifle; somebody had to grab his pack. And he made it through. And he was down under 170 pounds at the end of 14 weeks.

Mark: That's interesting.

Bates: The only guys I know that dropped out were in gas training. We had several guys who were gassed and I think were discharged as a result of it. They made a mistake with the gas--

Mark: Took the mask off or something?

Bates: No, no, no. They were--one of the training was they had a ridge and what we had to do, which I thought was kind of dumb, but we had to go down off this ridge and they were releasing different types of gas from cartridges and we'd run through the smoke, sniff, come back over the ridge and get together on the other side and talk about what it smelled like so that we could quick gas recognition. It turned out the wind shifted during the course of the thing. When we came down on the other side the gas was drifting down and a whole bunch of guys, we all started to cough and whatnot and most of us made it back up. And there were six or eight guys lying on the ground so we all took a big deep breathe and went back down and carried them back up. But they were discharged.

Mark: I see. A disability discharge.

Bates: Disability. Those were the only ones I knew that--everybody in my platoon--you had to make it. I mean, they just would not let you.

Mark: That's interesting. What sort of backgrounds did these guys come from? I'm interested in kind of a social portrait of the guys in this unit. Educational background, regional--

Bates: All right. There were fellows who were college graduates who scored well on these tests. I was one of the youngest ones.

Mark: Almost have to be.

Bates: But I'd say most of them were low 20s down to the 18s like me. They came from a diverse set of backgrounds. As we came together it seems as though they were all pulled in from the eastern part of the United States. There seemed to be three groups that kind of argued with each other. The fellows from New York and New England, a whole bunch of fellows from the south who were still fighting the Civil War verbally, and then a bunch of us from the Midwest who came from Illinois and from Ohio. Those were the two big induction centers; one in Illinois and one in Ohio.

Mark: I see. And was there any sort of serious tension between these groups? Was there a lot of ribbing? Hey, Reb--that kind of thing?

Bates: Just a lot of ribbing.

Mark: It didn't get in the way of--

Bates: No, it didn't hurt at all.

Mark: --cohesiveness or anything.

Bates: No, not at all.

Mark: I see. So, to pick up where we had left off before--and I had forgotten some of the details--after this training you were told that you weren't going to ASTP after all.

Bates: Right.

Mark: And then what did they do with you after that?

Bates: Well, there were about 80 of us out of the battalion who were not given assignments. Some of them like, I guess I was the only one that got in there without a high school diploma, but the other fellows apparently didn't do well enough on the tests they gave during basic and they decided not to use them.

So about 80 of us were put into Pullman cars and we were shipped to Texas where we joined the 97th Division.

Mark: I see.

Bates: As replacements there. They had already, apparently, had some drafts go out to other divisions.

Mark: And what did you do in Texas?

Bates: I was only there for two or three weeks and then we went down to Louisiana and from about the, early in October until early in March, we were in Louisiana maneuvering. The division had what they called “D” exercise, division exercise, where the regiments maneuvered against each other through October and November. And then we had five divisions maneuver against each other in December, January and February.

Mark: Of ‘44 then.

Bates: Of ‘43, ‘44. The winter of ‘43-’44. Yeah.

Mark: So, Merrill’s Marauders, when did you hook up with them? That’s not 97th Division is it?

Bates: No.

Mark: I didn’t think so.

Bates: I was sent in as a replacement. Now, I found out a lot later--but in April of ‘44--they took about 2,400 of us from the 97th and put us on a train and sent us to Fort Mead, Maryland where we linked up with 600 regular Army men from the three regiments that had been guarding the Panama Canal--the 5th, 14th, and 33rd. And they were, it was interesting listening to their stories. But, anyhow, they were going to be, I think our non-coms. And so there were roughly 3,000 of us. And we didn’t know what was going on at the time but the first three battalions of Merrill’s Marauders had been started off in February of ‘44 and had maneuvered as a flanking group and raiding group to help the Chinese and an American tank battalion were trying to open a road that they had plotted to get through India, or through Burma, to rejoin the Burma Route. They called it the “ledo road” at the time. Later they named it for somebody; I can’t remember who. And anyhow, they were losing so many men. A lot of it to disease.

Mark: Over in the theater.

Bates: Over in the theater. They realized that they were going to have to have some Americans there to replace them and to join them. And, of course, we knew nothing about this. As far as we knew, we were a casual regiment. You know what that is.

Mark: No, I don't.

Bates: A casual regiment is a group that's organized to take you from point A to point B and it includes all kind of people, not necessarily all infantry or all Air Force, and we did have some people that weren't infantry in the group. And even had some limited service men. They kept telling us the big physical is going to come before you go overseas. Well, there was no big physical. It was just seven shots and check you for syphilis and away you went. So we were, I guess you could say we were rushed in the standards of the time because we got on that train we didn't spend very long at Fort Mead, we got all new clothing and what not, and then we were shipped out on a transport ship that went by itself--unescorted, a former luxury liner--

Mark: From Maryland?

Bates: From Newport News, Virginia. Camp Patrick Henry was the port of embarkation. It was in the swamps there near Newport News. But that ship made a 32-day trip, unescorted.

Mark: All the way to--

Bates: All the way to Cape Town. Sixteen days at high speed and turning and twisting all the time. It was a former luxury liner. And at Cape Town we linked up with, we got ashore one day, one 12-hour period there, and there were 6,500 of us on the ship. And, as I say, we were not a unit. We never met our officers on the ship. We met these regular Army men who were billeted in with us and that was about it. We had no idea we were going into combat. We knew we were going into combat but we had no idea we were going to go as a unit.

Mark: And you had no idea where you were going.

Bates: We had no idea where we were going until we got, oh, a week or so out. They told us then that we were going to South Africa. And it wasn't until we left Zanzibar where we picked up an English luxury liner, troop ship, and three destroyers, and they convoyed us through the Indian Ocean. They had stopped twice, of course, for fuel--at Durban and--and when we left Zanzibar they told us we were going to India. That's first when we knew where we were going. And when we got on the train to India we still didn't know where we were going. But as I say, they got us on the train right from the ship so they moved us all the time. It took us 32 days to get to Bombay and--

Mark: What was your ship ride like? What kind of accommodation did you have? Seasickness.

Bates: Well, we were stacked five high and we were down in the very bottom hold, our particular unit. And it was pretty uncomfortable. There was a lot of seasickness. The ship rolled a lot. They had put two big five-inch guns up high above the main deck, I guess maybe for antisubmarine or antiaircraft, who knows--they practiced shooting at balloons--but that weight made the thing roll a lot, even on a calm sea. And we, I found that I had to stay near the centerline of the ship. I couldn't go over and watch the flying fish. A lot of us were on the verge of it. And, of course, the way they had the toilets set up, which were just troughs, and the troughs ran across the grain of the ship so you can imagine what that was like. The same way with the--we were only fed twice a day because the lines were so long. It was a Navy crew. They just didn't have the, you know, they could only feed us twice a day because the lines took so long. They reversed the lines but we spent like two-and-a-half hours in the chow line before we got to the food in the morning and then only an hour coming back for supper. And we had to stay down between 10:00 in the morning and 5:00 in the afternoon. So we spent most of our time below decks. They did turn the lights on during daylight so you had lights to read by but at 5:00 the lights went out. All those little red ones, that way you could find your way to the stairs and the toilet, that's all we had the other time so you couldn't even read. It was very monotonous.

Mark: Thirty-two days is a long time.

Bates: Yeah, it was.

Mark: So you landed at Bombay.

Bates: Landed at Bombay. And the trains were right there at the key.

Mark: So you didn't get into town.

Bates: No, we got right on the trains. There was some Gray Ladies there, British equivalent of Red Cross; they gave us coffee and doughnuts. We got right on the train and got right out of there. We arrived in the morning so we got a look at the city and got to smell it.

Mark: Describe that for me.

Bates: Oh, well, we actually smelled it before we landed. It was getting near the end of the dry season and the hot season--they have three seasons in Indian. They have a fairly warm dry season and then they have a hot/dry season and they have the monsoon. The place really stunk. There were people with shanties right along the railroad track, you know. And, of course, the garbage went in the streets. We finally got used to it after a couple of days, because the whole country stunk at that time of the year.

Mark: And so you got right on a train--

Bates: Right on a train.

Mark: --and just headed inland somewhere.

Bates: Yeah, we just went inland. We crossed the plateau, the Deccan Plateau. We had cool night going up through the mountains right there by Bombay but then we got up on the plain and, where it again was hot. It was like being--it was really hot. The temperatures really go up there.

Mark: And what time of year was this?

Bates: It was in May. And the temperatures go over 100 degrees every day during the day up there before the rains hit. And we were in cars with no windows, so they were well ventilated but it was just hot air. I mean, we were thirsty all the time. They tried to supply us a lot of drinks. And they stop--the train was a steam train--they stop and put water in occasionally, you know. We crossed there, I don't know how many days, I think four, five days it took us to cross.

Mark: And you debarked where?

Bates: A place called Ramgarh which is about 200 miles west of Calcutta, still up on the plateau. The plateau slopes down from west to east so it's a little lower there. And we were just there two days and they issued us packs and guns and ammunition and put us on a plane and flew us into, first, northern India to an air base that day--we stayed overnight there--and the next day we flew into Burma and landed at the field. Now the original three battalions, Merrill's Marauders, had made their way to there and captured this field, which was just outside Michenau, the big supply base on the Irrawaddy River. The Japanese were supplying their campaigns in north Burma to attack India--part of the attack on India--and to stop the American train, Chinese and the American tank battalion from coming in from way up in northeastern India. So this was the supply base for them. From there, there was a railroad that went west to a place called Mogaung. The idea was to capture this city and cut off the supplies going west. But by the time the original Marauders got there they were so wiped out from disease and casualties, but probably two-to-one disease that they were barely on their feet. And it was all they could do to hold onto the airfield. We got flown in when the Japanese were actually attacking the airfield trying to recapture it. Right around the first of June.

Mark: As you're landing, it's being shelled or something?

Bates: We were being shelled, yeah.

Mark: That was your introduction to combat.

Bates: Yes, that's right. We had to get out in the rain. By then the rain was falling, rains were hitting there. It really didn't rain all the time. Well, let's see, I guess it did from then on. It rained all summer. But we had to get out and run for the west side of the strip and get down out of the artillery shells. And then our first assignment was to attack west of there and try to drive the Japanese back.

Mark: And this was how long after you arrived?

Bates: The next morning.

Mark: So you got right into it?

Bates: Yes. Our battalion went in first. There were three battalions, as I mentioned, and we were the third battalion of what they called New Galahad to distinguish us from Old Galahad. By then the only thing left of Old Galahad was the first battalion and they were greatly under strength. The other two had been evacuated. The guys that were left were in bad shape. And so our battalion went in and because the place was supplied by air and the planes in those days didn't carry big loads they were trying to supply us and Chinese troops that were being landed too. Our battalion was in there for I think maybe ten days by itself and they finally landed second battalion. So there were two American battalions and about two Chinese regiments, about the size of an American battalion. Eventually there were about, eventually it got the elements of about four Chinese divisions in there but it was kind of, they were never over two in strength. And the first battalion never did come. There wasn't enough air supply, apparently, to keep three American battalions supplied. So the first battalion stayed back in India and trained together which was kind of interesting. When they finally arrived they knew their officers, they knew their sergeant and they had trained together.

Mark: As for you--

Bates: We learned on-the-job.

Mark: On-the-job the next day after you land.

Bates: Yeah. And we land totally without any support weapons. All we had was rifles for about the first week. We eventually began getting the mortars and automatic rifles. As a matter of fact, the automatic rifles came and I had to carry one for a while. I hated the thing.

Mark: And so this attack on your second day in Burma, was it successful?

Bates: Well, yeah, we moved forward a little bit. Each day we tried to move forward a little bit. And we managed to get the field secure. It took us about two weeks--by then the second battalion was in too--it took us about two weeks to drive them far enough where their artillery wouldn't hit the field.

Mark: Was this kind of constant, ongoing combat? Or was it, did you fight at night as well as the day?

Bates: We fought at night mainly because the Japanese fought at night. We didn't launch any night attacks. The Japanese did. They tried to recover ground at night. It was very slow, as you can imagine 'cause we weren't very good. Individually we had training but we didn't know everybody. Fortunately we knew our hand and arm signals and we had to husband our ammunition--ammunition and food seemed to be a real problem--and oil; we ran out of lubricating oil in a hurry. For a while we were operating our M1s with our hands instead of the think operating automatically.

Mark: And it's raining at this time, too.

Bates: Oh, yeah. It rained almost constantly.

Mark: So, what happened after this then? Did you finally get a break so you could sit down and shake hands with the guys you were going to be serving with and your officers?

Bates: No, no, not really. We were, I have a problem remembering the chronology. I wrote my memoirs for my kids and this is a time I could not put things in order. But I could just say this is what happened, what it was like.

Mark: That's actually quite common.

Bates: Yeah, I suppose. I can remember outstanding events like that first thing when we weren't--and I was at the bottom of the, I was a rifleman. I had been trained as a scout by the way with the 97th Division. But none of our records were with us then. So I would say that for at least three weeks or so it was continuous combat in the sense that we were being shelled. It could happen day or night. There were counter-attacks. We'd made a little ground at times. It was kind of demoralizing 'cause you didn't know who you could depend on, you know. If you know people, it's a little different. Then at the end of about three or four weeks we were pulled back and the second battalion occupied our position. And I guess because we were experienced, if you can put it that way--

Mark: Battle hardened.

Bates: --we were now being used north and west to block Japanese reinforcements coming in. We were setting up ambushes and running combat patrols and also providing security for the field because the Japanese wound up attacking from the west. And so part of us were on field security and basically we were trying to--what we were trying to do, between us and the Chinese, is tighten the ring where the Japanese could no longer send reinforcements in. By the time we had a circle around the city, or half circle you might say, the Japanese had managed to get about another 2,000 troops in. And so they managed to get a total of about 4,600 troops into the city, counting the men already there. And we started out with two American battalions eventually, with about 3,000 men. It was not organized the way they did in Europe--the triangular set-up. I know you're familiar with that. We were on the old square set-up.

Mark: I didn't know that.

Bates: Yeah. And our platoons had four--well, the typical reorganization went with smaller squads in the triangular divisions in Europe and you had three squads per platoon. We had four squads per platoon. We had 12-man squads. We had big platoons. We also were just trying to be self-contained, as we didn't know we were long-range penetration troops. That's the way we were organized. Somebody told us anything but that's the way we continued to be organized in our second campaign in the March task force. We did a lot of long-range penetration in that central Burma campaign just like the early Marauders had. They had done the penetration and they, basically, you know, they would settle for roadblock and force the Japanese to attack them or they'd attack a Japanese supply base. That's kind of the best way to do it if you don't mind hiking. Whereas we spent our time in attacking a fortified town and it took us 78 days.

Mark: I was going to ask that. How long did it take you before you finally--

Bates: August 3 before we finally wiped the place out. The Japanese got about 400 men away down river but we counted over 4,000 corpses. And, as I say, we started out with these two battalions, about 6,000 total, and there were about 6,000 Chinese. By the time the thing was over the Chinese had committed about another 6,000, the Americans and Chinese. And we hadn't committed any more Americans. So by the time it was over 3,000 we were down to about 700, between us.

Mark: Now, you mentioned disease. How much of this, how many of the casualties were disease versus--

Bates: I'd say two out of every three.

Mark: In your experience too. Before you got there and then afterwards, the same thing.

Bates: Yeah, well, the thing was even worse for the Marauders in the first campaign getting there. They lost more men to disease than to combat by far because they were not attacking fortified positions where you have heavier losses. So that their ratio of casualties was probably closer to three disease and injury--count injuries too, injury casualties--to one combat casualty. So most, in our particular case, in our experience it was about two to one, guys dropping out with malaria or typhus or some fever unidentified. The medics used to put a FUO on the guys toe.

Mark: FUO?

Bates: Yeah. Fever Undetermined Origin. And a lot of guys were marked dead with that. They never did know what it was. There were a lot of--typhus and malaria were very big in Burma. It was one of the worse malaria areas. Well, there were seven varieties of malaria there.

Mark: I was just about to ask you, what sort of diseases there were. You pretty much answered that question.

Bates: Well, we had typhus, we had malaria, we had, as I say, some fevers they never unidentified, we also had problems with leeches. And they would come up with jungle rot. It would eat right through your skin. Now, we used a lot of methylate, I don't think they use that anymore. It's sort of an iodine compound. And we were issued bottles of it because anytime we got a scratch you had to put it on right away or it would open up into an ulcer. And, of course, amebic dysentery was bad. You could not purify your water with the purification tablets. The amoebae were endemic in that area and we all got that and that was bad stuff. You could cure it with massive doses of sulfa. That's what finally put me in the hospital. Malaria and amebic dysentery.

Mark: Now, when were you in the hospital?

Bates: Two days before Michenau fell. You had to have--

Mark: You missed the grand--

Bates: Yeah, I missed the looking around, I guess you could say. We were in the midst of our final attack, as a matter of fact when I went out. You had to have, they were so short of men that you had to have over 102 degree temperature for 48 consecutive hours before they'd consider even sending you back to the airstrip where they had a little hospital.

Mark: But I suppose if you have 101 fever for three days--

Bates: It didn't matter--not the best combat fighter--no, no. Most of us were suffering from malaria. I think it was the malaria and dysentery that finally got me. We all lost a lot of weight 'cause we were all on K-rations the whole time. The MREs. But there was only one menu then. And nothing extra. They were supposed to be emergency. We were on it for two months. So we all lost tremendous amounts of weight. Which didn't give us any energy either.

Mark: I want to come back to supplies. But I have some more questions about disease.

Bates: Okay.

Mark: Were you briefed on the fact that you might be in this disease-filled environment? Did you get any particular inoculations or that kind of thing?

Bates: No. Oh, we were given seven shots before we left and one of them was against plague.

Mark: Which they still have today.

Bates: Yeah. And it was funny. Those shots, we all got sick with the plague shot in the camp, you know, kind of sick. Well, maybe the seven of them together, six and the vaccination. But we were not told anything as to where we were going. When we were given our weapons and whatnot we were each given a big bottle of Atabrine and told to take it from now on.

Mark: Did everyone do that?

Bates: Oh, I think almost everyone did. There might be some who didn't. There probably were some who didn't. We all took it religiously. We all turned kind of yellow.

Mark: Now, this is not the best environment to have to fight in. I mean, you're under supplied but it's a very--

Bates: We were wet all the time, too.

Mark: --hostile environment. What sort of, did you have any sort of special boots or combat clothing or any of that kind of thing. Or where those developed after the experiences of your unit?

Bates: Well, we were at the end of the longest supply line. We had combat shoes instead of combat boots. You know, the high-cuts but not with the--so we had to wear leggings. We wore them.

Mark: The old World War I type?

Bates: Yeah. We wore them, not puttees, leggings. They--

Mark: The canvas ones.

Bates: The canvas one, yeah. We wore them because it kept the leeches off your legs when you went through the streams and the rice paddies. The place was just sodden. Holes were full of water. Not full of water, but I mean water dripped in the bottom of our foxholes all the time. Clothing, we had ordinary green combat fatigues, helmets. Our underwear quickly rotted. And with the dysentery we go to where if you couldn't wash it out you threw it away. Our socks rotted because there was sometimes days when we--by the time we had a chance to take our shoes off, felt we were safe--the socks were gone. We had, it just was damp all the time. It just rained off and on. It didn't seem to have any pattern to it. It just rained and then it wouldn't and then it rained and then it didn't. I met some fellows from my outfit years later and we were talking about the one sunny day we saw, when it was sunny all day. It rained the night before and it rained the night after, but it didn't rain that day and we all got baked. There was just steam rising from the ground, you know. That's when I became a scout, by the way, when they moved us out on this stuff. By then apparently somebody realized I had been trained as a scout and our INR platoon--you know that word?--had been ambushed and so they needed a new man anyway. And INR platoon as far as I know was just constituted a lot of men period that they needed. So I wound up in that.

Mark: And so this is before the end of the mission I take it.

Bates: Oh, yeah. It was when we were drawn back to protect the airstrip and to try to prevent the enforcements from coming in. That's when I became actively involved in outposts and scouting and apparently did okay there because then I was, got put sort of in charge of planning patrols. We had very few maps so I wound up copying maps to hand out to the guys to take with them. It was just ridiculous.

Mark: Were they fairly accurate? Or kind of--

Bates: Well, they were kind of like a large-scale map so they--roughly one inch to the mile--and I have to say that even though they were real old--they were survey of India maps from 1890-something--but if they said there was a trail there, there was a trail there. We used those maps on our second campaign where we hiked to central and eastern Burma. The only difference was the Air Force by then was on the job and they did air photos and brought them up-to-date so we started getting them with our mills for directed fire. We started getting the mill-grid on there. With the British maps we always had to estimate because there was no grid on it. They were just for our mortars and machine-guns and whatnot.

Mark: Now, as for supplies. When your socks rotted off or something, did it take long to get new supplies? And in combat did you run out of ammunition?

Bates: It sometimes took two or three weeks to get a new pair of socks.

Mark: So you'd be barefoot.

Bates: Well, no we had shoes.

Mark: Well, shoes without socks.

Bates: Oh, yeah. They were smooth inside. You know, those old shoes, they put--somebody had a bright idea--put the smooth leather on the inside and the rough leather on the outside. That was called the combat shoe. We had problems; we didn't run out of food. Well, it was always the same stuff--it was K-rations.

Mark: Wasn't much I take it either.

Bates: No, no. It was not designed for long continuing exertion. Most of us lost anywhere from 30 to 50 pounds. I was in my mid-80s when I went over--180 something--when I went overseas. When I wound up in the hospital in India and they weighed me I weighed 135 pounds. The ration was not good.

Mark: And in combat were there times when you couldn't get enough ammunition and that sort of thing?

Bates: There were times when you were afraid to shoot because you were running low. I don't know anybody, of my friends, that ran out. But you got to the point where you were looking down there and you realized what you got left and you, we sometimes just had to call off an attack because nobody was shooting anymore. I don't blame them. I mean nobody wanted to have some Japanese come into your hole with a bayonet, I mean we took bayonet training but most of us figured that we never wanted to get involved in that sort of thing, to be honest.

Mark: Yeah. Oh, I can imagine. So Michenau fell, you got out of the hospital after how long?

Bates: Well, let's see. I was back with my unit in four weeks. I was in the hospital three weeks, a week at a convalescent camp and back.

Mark: And was this in India somewhere. They pulled you back that far?

Bates: Yeah. Well, see the airstrip was nothing but they just had, it was surgical mainly and stabilize. They got you back there and they didn't even have buildings, of course. They had supply parachutes up over the operating tables and you had cots, they flew in cots, and you had a folding cot and, you know. I got evacuated by oxcart to a little airfield and then a guy with an L-5 flew me back to the main airfield. I lost consciousness and when I woke up I was in India. And they had a regular hospital in India. It was in Province, way up in the northeastern corner. Dinja (sp??) was the name of the town.

Mark: A little cooler I suppose.

Bates: It was raining there too and it was hot. But it was, we were in buildings. We were out of the rain. They were old tea plantation buildings with dirt floors. Again folding cots. But they took real good care of us there. So I was there for three weeks and the released me to the convalescent camp.

Mark: So you were back on the line then--

Bates: About a month.

Mark: About a month later. And Michenau had fallen by this time. So you were doing deep penetration, long-range.

Bates: Yeah, but not right away. You see, when Michenau fell our battalion was down to between 300 and 400 men out of 1,200. So they waited until the Chinese and the American tank battalion when on past and they waited until they finally built the road up to Michenau so supplies could come in by land. So what happened was we stayed there north of Michenau. We moved out of the battle zone, up-river about 10 miles and set up a camp, with tents. And we were fed canned goods, B-rations, which were pretty good and awful lot of spam. And we were reorganized. That's when we became the 475th Infantry. The third battalion and second battalion were stationed there. The first battalion was brought in from India. And there were a few men from the original Marauders who had not been with them all the time and they were sent to the first battalion to give them the benefit of their experience. And so we were reorganized into the 475th Infantry, which was the same kind of outfit--long-range penetration. And we got new weapons. There was--General Stilwell did this--and that was kind of interesting too because we were muttering and grumbling when he spoke to us and finally he wanted to know what was the matter. Am I taking too much of your time?

Mark: No, not at all. There's no such thing.

Bates: Okay. Well, we were sitting out there in a muddy field, you know, and he came about a week after I got back and about three weeks after the men, the battle had ended, you know, and they'd still been sitting there eating junk. Not even a movie screen flown in, you know. And there they sat. As I say, I came back from the hospital--I looked like the picture of health compared to the guys that hadn't been sent out. And anyhow we started getting the men back. So out of our 1,200 there were about, we wound up with about 700 of the original men were fit for duty, including me. Then we got about 500 replacements in who had been in cavalry basic in the States and we had from the middle of, the second week in September until the middle of October to train them. And that was good. We could give them the benefit of our experience. We could condition and harden them. And we had fellows passing out from heat stroke in the first phase of the campaign because we'd been sitting on a ship. We hadn't had any exercise for 40-some days. And we were in terrible shape. We could get these fellows shaped up, you know, and fit them into our group. And so that was good. We were back almost to strength. We came back to about 1,100 men.

Mark: And were they good troops?

Bates: Oh, yeah, they were fine. They were all young guys fresh out of cavalry basic and we had to teach them the infantry commands rather than the cavalry commands. But they turned out find.

Mark: I'm thinking as the war went on and the draft went on, perhaps a lower grade of...

Bates: Oh, I think that was true--by the time I went in I think the lower grade was getting in. Physically, I think the men we got in were not quite the size of the guys that had originally gone over.

Mark: I see. But in terms of learning capabilities--

Bates: Well, yeah. If you're not training officers I think you can train guys to follow directions. You know what I mean. I was the Intelligence NCO by that time for our battalion. I kept the map and I went out to the companies and searched the bodies and tried to recover material and made a trip to all the line companies every day to gather intelligence information.

Mark: So what sort of combat is going on at this time?

[End Side A, Tape 1]

Bates: Nothing going on then. We were regrouping in this camp and training the men. They brought in a cavalry regiment that had been training in the States for two years, dismounted, of course. We also helped train them. But they had been in India for about a month so they got some good training back at Ramgarh. They knew what to expect and they'd been together for a couple of years so that would help. Cavalry regiments were smaller, there were about 2,000 of them. So they were camped right near us so we had about 5,000, a little more than 5,000 men then. And there was a Chinese regiment attached to us. We never saw them but they were attached to us. And then on the 15th of October we took off on our next mission.

Mark: Which was?

Bates: Which was to move south and assist the Chinese troops who were in trouble down near a town named Bamau about 110 miles south and then we were going to go off into the mountains to the east. We were sent south first to threaten the Japanese. We had a couple of battles down there with the Japanese. And then we were suddenly--we didn't know we were going to do this--but we suddenly made an about-face after marching about 200 miles to the south--being involved in a few battles there. But again the battles, no battle is fun, but it was more to our liking. We occupied a position and the Japanese had to come to us. We took a lot lighter casualties that way. We had a lot more march casualties. There weren't that many march casualties in this fortified town. But we had a lot of march casualties.

Mark: What's a march casualty?

Bates: Accidents.

Mark: Accidents and disease?

Bates: Broken bones. No, not counting disease. Broken bones. I'll give you an example of that because I did some research on that for the kids. Anyhow we were down near a place called Mogok, a diamond mining area, and then suddenly--somebody must have planned it all along--we left a month ahead of the cavalry so we were down there, you know, the old thing use the willing horse?

Mark: Ugh hum.

Bates: Yeah. So they sent us out first. See, we'd already been used once, they sent us out first. Although I have to say that in one of those battles they did use the first battalion for at attack rather than one of us and the first battalion hadn't had any combat yet. We thought that was only fair that they get to do the job. As I say, we were down, by December we had marched 200 and some miles and had been involved in three different battles and we were about 200 miles south of Michenau and then we turned and headed northeast right up into the mountains. Crossed a big river for that area, called the Shweli, and we were up over 5,000 foot ridges and 6,000 foot ridges and down again. It was a terrible march. That's what I was talking about march casualties. Out of our, by the time, let's see, I'm trying to think how many men we--we'd already lost 200 men marching in the first 200 miles--300 men. But we got 200 of them back after these battles when we rested and regrouped and we carved out a strip and they started landing and we got about 200 of them back. A lot of them were just heat stroke and things like that because we carried heavy loads. And that's what I think did the guys in. By then we were experienced enough so we didn't carry any heavier load than we had to but we're still hauling about 90 pounds. From there we made a forced march and threw in a road block of two regiments on the Burma Road behind where the Japanese were trying to keep the American and Chinese tank battalions from getting to the Burma Road. We threw in a roadblock there up on the plateau to prevent them from getting more supplies and to force them to attack us and relieve the pressure to the north. Our regiment went first. The 124th Cavalry left a month after us and marched directly to the place. They had to follow part of our path. This was in December, about mid-December, and we marched--that was the worst marching I ever had--we had over 700 guys evacuated when we could find a place to get them. If he broke his foot or something he had to limp to the next place where we had an airfield and get supplies.

Mark: I was going to say, how do you evacuate them?

Bates: Well, we couldn't for a long time. We had some mules we put the worst guys on. And when we could find a place, clear a clearing to get our supplies--we were still being supplied by air--we'd get them there somehow 'cause you couldn't leave them. And then the planes would come and pick them up. In that period, and I'm trying to think, it was roughly, we got marooned up in the mountains by cloudy weather and couldn't get supplies for about 8 or 9 days. That's where we got rid of most of our fellows. We still had a problem with malaria until we got higher in the mountains. In that period we lost, our regiment not our battalion, but our regiment of 3,100 and some men, had over

700 men evacuated with broken bones. A lot of them were march fractures--the instep cracked or they broke an ankle or something like that going down those slopes and going up those slopes. So we lost, that was, I don't think that was expected. And then we had the usual evacuations--malaria and what not. So we would up, by the time we got to our roadblock, and I'm talking about a period of like three weeks, we were down to about 2,200, 2,100 men. We were kind of proud of that one. We averaged 22 miles a day marching. And we threw our roadblock in I think around, I've got it down here, around the 10th or 11th of January. Three battalions. And the cavalry arrived about three days later and threw in a roadblock to the north of us. So we were the experienced outfit, were set up on the road to prevent reinforcements from coming in and to block supplies and they were set up to prevent the troops that might come back to try to break through. So we were there for the next month. That's where we took the artillery. We dug some pretty deep holes, cut down trees, dugouts and everything. We were up on a mountain, a low mountain overlooking the road.

Mark: And they were trying to drive you out.

Bates: They were trying to drive us out. Yeah, as a matter of fact they were pretty quick reacting. We didn't realize what had happened but when we moved into this position our battalion was the first one to attack--as the willing horse again. We drove these Japanese out of this valley area and managed to occupy this low mountain where the road was and then our second battalion occupied farther south. They took the brunt of the land attack coming up from the south because they were on a bigger mountain and the road went around the edge of that mountain. We were there to, basically, once we got in position we were protecting our drop zone and protecting our headquarters and our artillery. But they counterattacked the next day. What we didn't realize was there was a Japanese regiment moving north to reinforce the men in the north and we had also parked ourselves right above an ammunition dump. And so they counterattacked, well, four times in the next night and day to try to get us out of there. After that there was an occasional attack but--

Mark: Pretty much gave up.

Bates: They pretty much gave up the attacks because they weren't getting anywhere.

Mark: I see.

Bates: But they pounded the hell out of us, of course, with artillery. They could bring up 150-millimeter guns and whatnot and they made some big holes in our hill.

Mark: I bet they did. And so, how did this battle eventually turn out?

Bates: Well, the Japanese quit.

Mark: They didn't surrender or anything like that.

Bates: Well, no. What happened was that the men north fighting the American-trained Chinese troops and fighting the troops from China, there was a triangle there that they were trying to capture in this road junction. And there was one American tank battalion with our Chinese. They basically ran short of ammunition. Had to leave all their, any tanks they had north of that intersection they had to leave there. That was another thing. The Japanese tanks weren't very, you know, weren't the greatest but when you don't have any then they can be a real problem. They would wheel those tanks up and shoot the hell out of us, you know. We stayed under cover pretty well. They gave up. They had to abandon their trucks, they had to abandon their tanks, what tanks they had up there, and they had to filter back through the hills. We held our position until the middle of February and by then they were pretty well gone. Then we moved south along the road away from the battle area and from there we were flown into China to act as advisors and trainers to the Chinese troops in China. That was in March '45.

Mark: Okay. Let's come back to that. I have some questions about the actual Southeast Asia campaign. Intelligence on the Japanese--now, you mentioned you were intelligence NCO--did you get any indication of how the Japanese held up under these conditions? Did they suffer from the same sort of rotted socks and equipment problems?

Bates: Yeah. They had the same problems, they had the same problems. They were the same miserable specimens. They had quinine though instead of Atabrine. They could handle their malaria better. They had good field units. Their medicine seemed to be up to standard. They, what shall I say, but they had to endure the same thing we did.

[Pause on the tape- continues on same side]

Bates: Oh, I only know two fellows, personally, who got themselves out. One fellow let the jungle rot get to him and he couldn't walk anymore. He, they court-martialed him. I guess he wound up in a stockade back in India.

Mark: It was quite obvious this was self-inflicted.

Bates: He wasn't taking care of himself. He wasn't putting the methylate on the sores. I know the guy ran, just plain ran. I was coming up to one of the rifle platoons from this fellow who, incidentally, had been a tough talker on the boat, came running back with a scratch on his head and said, "I'm hit, I'm hit." and he never stopped until he--I saw him in the hospital later in India and he was working for the Red Cross women there.

Mark: Reassigned.

Bates: Reassigned, yeah. But the Japanese, I'm sure there were people that couldn't cut it on both sides. But when you hear about all these things on all the psychiatric cases and whatnot and the Marauders, the original Marauders, they had a lot of psycho cases comparatively speaking. So it happens. But I think one reason we didn't have as many was we had nowhere to go. In Europe they could desert and they could go back into a town and, you know, I read that there were thousands of deserters when the war ended in Europe who couldn't handle it anymore. We didn't have anyplace to go. It was the same way, the Japanese; they were a different kind of people. You had no flags of truce, you know, like when we were in close combat. You couldn't bury your dead. If you went out to get your wounded, they shot at you. The medics got shot at when they went out there to get the wounded and you just had to lie there and watch them swell up and split open and smell and the Japanese never, never surrendered the ones who fell. When Michenau fell we captured about a dozen. They were all in the hospital. They were all sicker than dogs, you know. We captured this one guy in our battalion in the Central Burma Campaign and he was wondering around out of his head with some fever. And the fellow who brought him in kind of apologized. He said, "well, I know you want to question these guys. I couldn't shoot him. He didn't have a gun." Because, basically, if we saw them, we shot at them. But we had nowhere to go. I guess, that's the way to put it. The Japanese would not give in and, on the other hand, we knew that surrender was out of the question. And then, where do you run? You had nowhere to run really.

Mark: I get the impression that you guys thought fairly highly of the skills of the Japanese fighters.

Bates: Yes.

Mark: They were good troops and worthy opponents and that sort of thing.

Bates: Oh, yeah. They were more than we wanted. They were, I'd say probably their only weakness would be in this fortified town. They were going to defend that thing to the death, you know. And sometimes they would not even withdraw to another line. They'd be in a pillbox that we'd passed, you know, dugout, I should say, that we'd passed. And they'd still be shooting. They wouldn't get out and go somewhere. I wouldn't want to fight anybody any better. I guess that's the best way to put it.

Mark: What about your allies in that theater. The British and the Chinese. You had some dealings with them in combat situations, I take it.

Bates: Well, we had no dealings with the British. One of our battalions had to go over and help out a British unit. That battalion did have, that was in the Central Burma Campaign. The British stayed out of that area because they had their main forces. You know, they had most of the--empire forces were the big forces in Burma. We were a sideshow as far as they were concerned. And they didn't even want, the didn't think it was worth it trying to open a road to China. And from the practical standpoint I guess it wasn't in the sense that not long after the road finally was opened all the way to China and trucks made their trip the war ended. So in that respect they might be right. But there were two kinds of Chinese. We never saw the one. There were a total of six divisions of Chinese that Stilwell persuaded c to take to India--feed them, train them, organize them, give them American weapons--and then use them to open the road to China. And the other Chinese--

[Interruption]

Mark: We were talking about the Chinese.

Bates: Yeah. These Americans trying to train Chinese. He got permission to use them in Burma to try to go through to China. And they were up to strength and even their officers had been given some training and they had American equipment, which was pretty good. Some of our weapons were very good for this area and some of them weren't. In some cases the Japanese were better off than we were. The Chinese that were coming out of China were ordinary Chinese forces that had been dragged out of their villages. Many of them were lucky to even survive getting to the front and they were greatly under strength and not trained and not very effective. But we never had any direct contact until we went to China. Then we could see how bad things were there. But the American-trained Chinese were good. They had some esprit and they were probably not as nuts as we were but they did the job.

Mark: But the held up.

Bates: They held up.

Mark: And about some of the indigenous peoples of Burma. As you're going up and down all these rims, I mean it's pretty much wilderness but people--

Bates: There were villages everywhere.

Mark: Yeah. And a lot of different ethnic groups as I understand it.

Bates: Yes.

Mark: Did you have much contact with these sorts of people? Did they help or did they hinder your efforts?

Bates: In the first campaign, the attack on Michenau, there was almost no contact with the natives because it was just battles, you know, and they pretty much stayed out of sight, and I don't blame them. That was an area of country that the Kaichens, a major north Burma tribe, lived and farther west there were the Nagas, some headhunters that still hunt heads up there. They have the--

Mark: You hear them on the news once in awhile.

Bates: Yeah, they do. These people were a big help to the Air Corps people down planes. The Americans with British agents went in and said, you know, we'll give you so much silver for every aviator you rescue. And they were help back in there. The Japanese never got back in there among the Nagas. The Kaichens on the other hand didn't like the Burmese government and they didn't like the Japanese. They were the only real group to resist the Japanese actively. And there was an OSS group--you're familiar with that--they had a couple of detachments--and one I can remember is detachment 101--that were flown in by parachute and organized the Kaichens and they dropped supplies to them and they used them to really make it miserable for the Japanese in Kaichen country. And they finally organized, I guess a regiment of Kaichen rangers they called them, and we had, in our second campaign, we had a platoon of them attached to our battalion to aid in scouting and dealing with local people.

Mark: And were they helpful?

Bates: Oh, yes. They kept us posted, you know. We could travel much more freely through the country with them and we were never ambushed. Part of that was we did some of our own scouting, too, but I mean the point was the Kaichens were a big help. Now we moved out of their country when we moved south but some of them still disliked the Japanese enough to come with us. And the other native people, when we were marooned up in the mountains, they would trade with us for food and whatnot. But basically one thing I noticed with every village we went through some of the villages the Japanese had burned. Probably in retaliation for something; I'm not sure what. We'd go through a village that had been burned right out. We'd come to another village that hadn't. Most of them were up on ridges in that country. And we noticed that they were after their experience with Japanese they weren't going to take any chances with us. All you saw was old men and women. You didn't see kids, you didn't see young women, you didn't see young men. So we had really very little contact with them.

Mark: And so the road was open and you went into China then?

Bates: Yes.

Mark: There wasn't any combat with the Japanese at that point, is that correct?

Bates: Not for us. Our combat was over. We were--

Mark: Oh, I understand that we were still fighting the Japanese--the Chinese were still fighting the Japanese.

Bates: Yeah. And what happened to us is we were parceled out in different areas of China. Some training the Chinese troops, helping them and their training. And some of our battalion, for example, were with the Chinese advance units giving them advice on tactics and whatnot.

Mark: Where were you in China?

Bates: I was in east-central China near, south of the city of Chaing Shaw, no I mean Hankow. We were in Hunan Province. That's the core of south-central China and there were American air bases there. B-29 bases, they were bombing Japan. The Japanese finally got irritated enough and recaptured all the bases. But we were in that area when the Japanese launched two offenses in March and again in April and we were involved in, well, for one thing, I wound up getting sent with a platoon and a lieutenant who was about my third S-2 officer to take a river trip to see where the Japanese might be able to bring vehicles across because they wanted to be able to defend those areas particularly. That was kind of an interesting trip.

Mark: This was probably a much different war than it was in Burma.

Bates: Oh, yeah.

Mark: A more settled area.

Bates: Oh, yes, yeah. For us it was certainly relaxing. We still had things to do but it was not war. Not after what we'd been through.

Mark: There's still no love lost today between the Chinese and the Japanese.

Bates: No.

Mark: Did you get a sense of the sort of feelings they had towards the Japanese? Or for that matter is the civil war going on at the same time?

Bates: Well, it wasn't going on just then. It broke out shortly afterward. But we could see that, well; the biggest thing we could see was the corruption in the Chinese government. The Chinese--

Mark: In the Nationalist government.

Bates: Yeah, in the Nationalist government. Because a lot of the material coming in was never being used in combat. We could see these Chinese troops didn't have the right equipment and we knew it was coming. And they were stockpiling it to fight the Communists is what they were doing. In Hunan Province until Hunan Province was invaded the local warlord's troops had not been in combat because they knew if they ever turned their troops over to the Guomintang, the Nationalists, they'd never get them back. So he had fresh troops, equipped troops, in Hunan when the Japanese started and those troops saw their first action in the spring of 1945. They had been trained by the Germans originally. They had gray-green uniforms, they had German uniforms and German weapons. I thought that was interesting. Black coal scuttle helmets and these machine pistols and whatnot. They looked pretty spiffy 'till the war started.

Mark: And they never saw combat until--

Bates: Never saw combat.

Mark: --until the very end. So, as for the Chinese, the Guomintang army, did you get a sense of how prepared they were for combat? INTERRUPTION-- different than the Chinese troops you had dealt with in Burma.

Bates: Oh, they were totally unprepared. They had had no real training. They were really treated badly by the people who had press-ganged them out of their villages. I read later that almost half of them would die before they ever got into combat just from being mistreated. It was hard, figuratively. But they were ill equipped with weapons. We kept wondering where those M1s going into China were going 'cause they weren't coming into east China, east-central China, where we were. They were using Infields and Springfields and things like that. It was sad, really. You could see why they weren't any good. You could see why they could not advance against the Japanese because they didn't have the equipment and they didn't have the training and whatnot. The best we could do was train them to hold a position for awhile and then drop back. I mean, that's basically, I think, what we did with them was, you know, well here, 'cause you fired so many shots and, you know. We wound up training them in how to retreat.

Mark: Did you, let me try to rephrase that--what did you know about the pending civil war that was going to come out? Were you aware that there were two different armies fighting against the Japanese?

Bates: Not at that time, no. I didn't know that at all. We weren't told a whole lot. We were completely in Guomintang territory. We could see the place was going to pieces just by watching the value of the Wan drop. But we could see that things were bad. For example, after the war ended we were all put on odd jobs until we were shipped home. A lot of us wound up driving trucks. There had been a quartermaster truck unit there that had been shafted by the government. They were volunteer truck drivers and truck company people who had joined all the minute Pearl Harbor was attacked and they'd been sent to India, I mean Iran, for two years. And you were supposed to be rotated home in two years. They'd been sent to Iran for two years and they thought they were going to be rotated home. They rotated them to China. And they were operating the truck line in China. And they were really squirrely by then, as you can imagine. And we would up taking over their operation gradually to keep the supplies coming that were still in India. We found out quite soon that we had to put two armed men in the first truck, two armed men in the middle of the convoy, truck convoy, and two armed men in the end to make sure no drivers diverted off side roads to sell the contents. And we also had to have two armed men on every ammunition and medical truck. And no Chinese drivers. No Chinese drivers in the front trucks, the end trucks, or in the middle trucks, and no Chinese ever drove the medical trucks or the ammunition trucks.

Mark: Because this--

Bates: Because they'd be hijacked. They'd be hijacked.

Mark: Oh, hijacked.

Bates: They'd be hauled off somewhere and sold. That was after the war.

Mark: I've got some questions about Merrill and the people in Merrill Marauders and then we can go on to some postwar things. What sort of guys landed in this rather elite unit? Was it pretty much the same kind of people you went to basic training with? Were they better-educated, bigger guys, better fighters? How would you characterize these people and how did you and all these people end up in this particular unit? Were you selected or happenstance?

Bates: I think there was a lot of happenstance. The original three battalions, they say were volunteers. But I know the meaning of "volunteer" and I know a lot of them were encouraged to go. I think a lot of them were some of the misfits from the Pacific outfits that were, they were kind of half-promised that with this one campaign they'd get sent home. Well, only the guys that had two years in got sent on. The others didn't. I would say that, in general, the men that wound up were the new men to the divisions. Like, we were the new men in the 97th so off we went. I'd say there were a fair number of malcontents in the group. The one thing I think we had to be was physically fit. None of us, except the regular Army men who came in, was over 21. They were all 18, 19, most of us. Some in their 20s that were drafted into this unit that were sent to join the original Marauders so we were a very young group. I had my 21st birthday after the war.

Mark: As for the general himself, not too many units are known by the name of their general. What did the guys think of General Merrill? Was he a charismatic figure?

Bates: Actually, you know, some pressman coined that phrase.

Mark: Merrill's Marauders?

Bates: Yes. And, you know, it sounds nice. And he made it--most of the way through the campaign to Michenau, but not all the way--he had a heart problem. Developed a heart problem and I could see where the malnutrition and everything and then he wound up back in Michenau. Didn't last long there and was evacuated again and never came back. And there was a Colonel Hunter, his deputy, who actually was with the unit the whole time. And poor Colonel Hunter when they evacuated what was left of them, within about a week or so after we arrived, they got rid of the rest of the original group because they were shot, they were no good physically. Colonel Hunter got stuck behind to manage our two battalions and did a good job. Merrill, I think, was very instrumental in the training and then getting the group going and, I think, had a lot to do with the formation of the unit and the training of the unit. And they had a lot of training. They trained a lot in India before they ever came through--like six months or something like that. Whereas, we just got off the boat. We were always a little surely about that. We had some, yeah; I'd say Merrill earned his fame. But eventually gave out, physically. As a matter of fact, there was only one of the colonels that went with us on our second campaign who was with Merrill's and that was a Colonel Osborn who had escaped from the Philippines somehow when the Philippines were attacked. He was in command of one of the battalions and he wound up in command of our regiment. We had a lot of respect for him. We had an older, reserve colonel who had become a colonel by being in the reserves a long time and not doing a hell of a lot, and he just completely screwed up. Our officers finally appealed to higher headquarters and maybe, I can't remember just when, two or three weeks before we captured Michenau he was relieved of command. He was awful. He wouldn't leave battalion headquarters. In two--there were three phases in the Michenau fighting--and one was the attack toward the west side of town. The other, we were coming down from the north. And the three rifle companies are up ahead and the headquarters company, which had all kinds of people in it, formed the protection to the rear. It had the I&R platoon, P&D platoon--pioneer and demolition--they called them something else, I think, in Europe. But anyhow, we'd get across a rice paddy and--that was another thing I had to respect the Japs for. Boy, they'd sew themselves up somewhere and stay there until somebody got them. They'd shoot at everybody that moved across a rice paddy. I remember in this last campaign they finally relieved--the last phase--we had this big rice paddy and I had to go up there every day and work with the attacks and pick up materials to see what was going on. He would not move the battalion headquarters across that rice paddy and move the Battalion aid station. Our wounded had to come back, in full sight of these Japanese snipers on this big curving rice paddy, he wouldn't leave--he never visited a rifle company. He was just absolutely useless. And finally they replaced him with Lieutenant Colonel Harold, Arthur Harold, who became our battalion commander. If anybody was worshipped, he was. This guy was just a complete about-face. He was everywhere. I got to know him kind of personally. I guess it's that ATCT again. I had a good memory and I could remember things and repeat them verbatim, that sort of thing. And I wound up as sort of his "go for" in the Central Burma Campaign. When I went to the various companies I'd have things from him that I had to find out and come back. Save him a trip, I guess. And so I got to know him pretty well. He eventually recommended me for a commission. And he was like a father to me in China. He called me--is this off the subject?

Mark: No, not at all.

Bates: Well, he called me in China and he had just given two of my buddies field commissions--they took field commissions--and he said, "I gave them all the same choice. The war against Japan looks like it's going to go on." We didn't know about the atom bomb. And he says, "you can have a field commission but you'll have to leave this outfit. And we have an intelligence officer so you'll have to go with somebody else." And he said to keep that in mind. The other two fellows took them and did go. Both of them stayed in the service and were, I think, quite successful. I kept in contact with them after all these years. And he said, "But you have two choices. You can go before a board in Konming--back in southwest China--and they can recommend you for officers candidate school." And he said, "This way you'd be in the States at least three months. You'd get a month leave when you get back and you'd have officers' candidate school. It might be six months and the war might be over by then. I gave the other two that choice. It's up to you." And I said, "Well, I don't want to leave this outfit unless I went back to the States." And he said, "And if they don't pass you for OCS, I'll give you field commission when you come back if you want it. But you'll have to leave the outfit because we have

Lieutenant McKay." So I went back to the board in Konming and was waiting for shipment back to the States to OCS when the war ended.

Mark: I see. That was my next question. That led in quite well, actually.

Bates: Yes. And they said, well, then they called me in and they said, you know, you would have to sign up for a minimum--I think they said three years--and I said, "No, thanks."

Mark: And why did you say that?

Bates: I didn't like the Army. I didn't want to make a career out of it.

Mark: Now, you're talking about VJ Day?

Bates: VJ Day, right.

Mark: Do you recall hearing the news of the bomb and the Japanese had surrendered?

Bates: Yes, yes. Our battalion radio operator always kept us up. That was another thing we did. He would make copies of the news each night. He'd tune in on the Voice of America station, broadcasting out of Cincinnati by the way--they were the only 500,000-watt station in those days--and he would then write down the major military news of the day and we'd take copies to each company and they'd pass them around. He heard about the surrender listening to the Voice of America on the battalion radio.

Mark: And that's how you learned about it at first?

Bates: Uh hum, yes.

Mark: Was there much celebration? I can't imagine--

Bates: No, not a whole lot. We were all scattered out among the Chinese. The biggest celebration I remember, and being a medic you might appreciate this--by the way, we carried, I think, I don't know what your table of organization was--we had four doctors with our battalion in our battalion aid station, which I think is about twice the number, regular.

Mark: I worked in a big medical center and worked in a clinic.

Bates: Well, I think two is standard in a front line outfit. And two of our doctors died of Typhus, by the way, in Burma. But anyhow, the one doctor said, "Well, I think this is a celebration." So we got some canned grapefruit juice that had been shipped over and he broke out some of the medicinal alcohol and we sat around and drank grapefruit juice and alcohol and chatted about it a little while. That was our celebration.

Mark: What about the bomb? Did you understand, you know, being kind of out in the boondocks, so to speak, and brand new--

Bates: No. We knew that--we didn't know what it was. We knew that some bomb had flattened downtown Hiroshima. We got that first. And then we, the next thing we heard another one had gone off and the Japanese had decided to surrender.

Mark: No that was in September.

Bates: That was in August.

Mark: August. I'm sorry. They surrendered in September. And you didn't leave until December.

Bates: No.

Mark: What did you do in the mean time?

Bates: Well, that was when I got transferred--they demobilized our outfit and I got transferred to a quartermaster truck company running between--the way they did it in those days, you had two shifts of drivers during the war. When the war ended, I think, they cut back, doing it differently. But a line of trucks would go a days drive to a quartermaster truck station. The trucks would be checked over and another bunch of drivers would take them over and drive them that night and move them up to the next station. And drive back the next morning with empty trucks. That's the way they kept going. And so we were involved in that for awhile. And then I was called in, I'd had another bout with malaria and I'd been in the hospital near a town called Gwayung in Kwaijo province. That's kind of in between--Hunan's here, Kwaijo's here--well going from east to west--Hunan, Kwaijo and Hunan--Hunan was back on the Burma boarder--and it kept getting higher like steps. Hunan's over 6,000 feet above sea level, just the low spots, so driving the trucks was very interesting in that country. Gravel roads and mountainous country.

Mark: Winding roads I would suppose.

Bates: Oh, terrible. We had one where you could take an ordinary two-and-a-half ton truck and if you didn't make the curve just right, you had to back up and take another shot at it. There were switchbacks. There was one with 21 switchbacks. Anyhow, the last better than a month before my point total came up to be shipped back to the states, I drove mail truck and that was kind of interesting. I had stayed at a hostel in Konming where I had a bed and I had a place to me and we ate, the Chinese fed us. That was mine. And I'd drive two days. And I had a bunk in Gwayung--no, in some town in between. I'd drive from Konming to Gwayung--I'd drive one day half way through the mountains--they had a bunk there for me, you could stay over night there--and then I'd drive to Gwayung with the mail truck. And stopping at every little base along the way to unload mail. I had an armed guard with me--another infantryman. And then I'd have a day's layover, then I'd drive two days back and a day's layover. I had three bunks and so did my guard. I got to see the country that way. Gorgeous country, you know. The nice thing about it, of course, was it was in the fall; the rains had pretty well ceased and the weather was nice. A mail truck wasn't loaded like these two-and-a-half ton trucks we were driving loaded with aviation gasoline. That seemed to be the most common thing they hauled was aviation gasoline to those bombers. So it wasn't as hard to get up and down the hills with that as it was with the others.

Mark: And so in December, you finally left. If you'd describe--

Bates: November.

Mark: November.

Bates: In October we were flown to India and we stayed around Calcutta for about a month, moving closer and closer to the port until the last week we were in a bunch of buildings inside the Jaialeia Race Track in downtown Calcutta. You had to watch to see if they were running races before you crossed the track and we were right across from the--I think it was called the Victoria Albert Memorial, I'm not positive of that--it was a big memorial--and the British had a big, two big swimming pools there. One for the colords and one for the whites and a place where you could get food and whatnot, snacks, and we'd go over there and we'd walk through downtown Calcutta and killed a little time that way if we got on the ship. We got on the ship third week in November.

Mark: And this didn't take 32 days, I bet.

Bates: It took just about that.

Mark: Really.

Bates: Because we were on a freighter. It wasn't a big transport. We were on a former tank carrier. There were only about 2,400 of us on there. We still only got fed twice a day--we got a sack lunch for breakfast--and we could go up and down any time we wanted. We could go on deck and it was really pleasant. The food was good. I'm sure we all gained weight. We went back through the Suez Canal. That was interesting. I mean, seeing the Gulf of Ayden and seeing the Red Sea and the Suez Canal and through the Mediterranean. We got to see, not a whole lot of the Mediterranean but we saw the Island of Panthalarea and went up south of Sicily and Gibraltar. It did take 32 days. But it was 32 nice days, I guess you could say.

Mark: And you landed back and Newport News or New York City?

Bates: New York City in a blizzard.

Mark: So I take it there wasn't a parade or anything.

Bates: Oh, no. As a matter of fact, we weren't supposed to land the weather was so bad, and this retired Norwegian captain just put it to the docks without tugs. He took a little piece of the dock off but they had trucks waiting for us. They took us to the Staten Island ferry--put us all on the Staten Island ferry--and we went over to New Jersey and got on trains. We got into Camp Kilmer, New Jersey about 1:00 in the morning and they had a steak dinner for us.

Mark: And this is where, sort of, un-processing happened?

Bates: Yes. It was around the 19th of December--19th or 20th of December.

Mark: I suspect it's not where you were actually discharged.

Bates: Yes, right there.

Mark: Okay. So, how did you get back to Cincinnati?

Bates: Caught a train. They discharged us and took us to a station in Philadelphia. And we caught the train on the 22nd of December. I was on a train that evening. The train went all night. Got into Cincinnati the next day, the next day early in the morning, the 23rd of December. Take that back. The 23rd I got on the train. The 24th, I got home on Christmas Eve.

Mark: I see. You made it back for Christmas.

Bates: Yes. And I was down with malaria on the train.

Mark: Really.

Bates: Yeah.

Mark: Was it cold and snowy and that kind of thing?

Bates: Oh, it was cold. It was awful. The guys piled the coats on me. And I, with a light attack, it was the recurrent type. There are many kinds of malaria, of course. I was ambulatory by the time we got to Union Terminal in Cincinnati.

Mark: And you're 21 by now?

Bates: I wasn't quite 21.

Mark: You're a 20-year-old young guy, just back from the war, what were your priorities for getting the rest of your life on a track?

Bates: Well, at the time I wanted to be a teacher. And so I got a job working for Western Union for a little while and decided to enroll the following fall.

Mark: At Miami of Ohio, not to be confused with Miami, Florida. That football team.

Bates: Right.

Mark: --comes first to mind-- [Bates made agreeing sounds over Mark]

Bates: Right.

Mark: And so you started school in the fall of '46.

Bates: Well, I actually got delayed and wound up drifting around sort of aimlessly and I didn't really start until January of '47.

Mark: I see. What did you do in the meantime? Were you home?

Bates: I worked a lot of jobs. I worked for Western Union awhile. They hired a bunch of fellows. And then I worked on the Chevrolet assembly line. There still is a plant, I guess, in northern Ohio, which is surrounded by Cincinnati.

Mark: Did you have trouble finding work? I mean, there were a lot of GIs coming home by this time.

Bates: Well, I had trouble finding a job that seemed to lead anywhere. 'Cause most of the fellows were coming back and getting their jobs back but a teenager didn't have a job when he left. Oh, the other thing I did, I went to, they had a program that spring--when I got out in December--that spring I went down to the University, to Hughes High School in Cincinnati and they had a program for veterans who didn't have high school diplomas.

Mark: Oh, yeah. I had forgotten about that.

Bates: And what you basically did was they had set aside I think four or five classrooms and what you did was read the book, if it had a lab you did some lab work, you had a teacher sitting as a resource person to answer questions, and when you finished the unit he gave you a test. And so I went down and I, I only needed two credits for my high school diploma, so I took two credits--one in physics--down there for the high school diploma and got my high school--basically, with nothing else to do, I did two full-year courses in second semester.

Mark: Now, was this free or did you have to pay for books?

Bates: It was free.

Mark: I see. I was wondering if you had to use GI Bill benefits.

Bates: No, I didn't have to use it for that.

Mark: But you did for college?

Bates: Yes.

Mark: Did the GI Bill cover all your expenses? Did you get through college, and then you went to graduate school. That's how you got to Wisconsin.

Bates: Well, it was kind of strange. We hit the bureaucratic crap again. I was eligible--in malaria and I was still getting sick with it--to go under Public Law 16 for disabled veterans rather than Public Law 346. What they did there was approve a plan for you.

Mark: Under PL 16.

Bates: Under PL 16. The other fellows, they didn't have to approve a plan. And my plan was to get a masters degree in geography and a teaching degree. And the plan was approved. So I went to the--and it was--I only had four years eligibility--so basically what I did was take as many courses--they would let you do--they won't let you do that nowadays--but I went through Miami University in two-and-a-half years, going summer, too. In the summer I'd take 15 credits and I took 18-21 credits each semester in the winter so I got through. So in 1949 I graduated and came to the university here. That program was, I was, I had enough eligibility left then to make it that way.

Mark: Under 16?

Bates: Under 16. But a funny thing happened was that I didn't, they would give you three months pay, which was $120 a month, after you graduated to help you get organized. That was going to carry me through the summer. I had to borrow the money for tuition and whatnot but we were staying down at Badger and I was going to go through the summer that way, you see. And it turned out that what they said was that I got the three months pay but I had to switch over all my eligibility from Public Law 16 to Public Law 346 and I got a note one time instead of a check and it said "We can't pay you under two different laws in the same month."

Mark: You got kind of stuck in the middle.

Bates: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: But these benefits took care of your education petty much.

Bates: Oh, yes.

Mark: I see. Did you have to work in college at all?

Bates: No. We decided that if I was going to make the maximum use of my benefits, I was going to have to take as many courses as I could. The benefits would not have carried me through to the master if I worked.

Mark: Right. Did you get married during this time? You're using the word "we."

Bates: Yes, I got married. When I graduated from the masters program I had two children.

Mark: I see. And you lived in the Badger Village.

Bates: Yes.

Mark: I'm interested in the Badger Village myself. So you came here to graduate school. How did you find out about Badger Village? Perhaps you could describe a little bit about what it was like up there. 'Cause you were there a little later than most of the guys that I've spoken to.

Bates: Is that right?

Mark: You didn't get there until '49.

Bates: '49, yeah. Well, how did I find out about Badger? Well, that was all in the information I got from the University of Wisconsin. There were six schools that were considered tops in geography at that time. And Wisconsin was relatively close to Ohio. And they said they had veterans housing on campus but most of the veterans were out there at Badger. As they put it "a few miles outside of Madison."

Mark: Quite a few miles.

Bates: Yes. So we would up in North Badger, which was two room apartments in buildings that were built like "H's" with six apartments in each building. And the facilities were in the middle, so twenty-four apartments. And we'd catch the bus--old World War I school buses to ride in every morning. I used to catch the 6:15 bus three days a week, and come back on the 5:15 bus; 5:30 bus three days a week. The other two days I had a night class both semesters on the masters program and then I'd catch the 10:15 bus and I'd get in at, we'd get back if we were lucky about 11:30.

Mark: Yeah, I was going to say--

Bates: And then to catch the 6:15 bus the next morning.

Mark: I suppose on winter days it was quite a trip.

Bates: They were cold buses. Occasionally we got stuck here and there. But the only little heater in those buses was up by the driver.

Mark: Now, up in the Badger Village, by this time were there a lot of graduate students such as yourself? Were there a lot of undergraduate veterans by this time? That you recall.

Bates: I think there were still a lot of graduate veterans who started a little late like I did but didn't rush through. See, they were taking the regular four years. But there were quite a few graduate students, too.

Mark: All the kids and wives and that sort of thing.

Bates: Yes.

Mark: What sort of social activities did you have up there? Did you have a lot of contact with your neighbors? Did everyone to things separately?

Bates: Yes. We had contact. We would do things with the neighbors. We still have some life long friends that are, as a matter of fact, coming to see us this June from there. He was a graduate student in social work. He worked with the people in the colonies. You know, the mental institutions. He worked on placement and training. Well, he's retired now. They would try to have something every weekend at the village there ‘cause there were quite a few people there.

Mark: So group--was there a community center there or something?

Bates: Well, there was a gym there. And a little school. They had a little elementary school there.

Mark: For the kids to go to.

Bates: That the local school district operated for some of the older kids. There weren’t many but there were some.

Mark: I see. And what about life on campus. By this time were there still a lot of vets on campus?

Bates: Oh, yeah. Quite a few, quite a few.

Mark: And in your graduate program?

Bates: Oh, yeah. I’d say a lot of them were in the graduate program.

Mark: And then after you finished school you got a job right away in Baraboo.

Bates: Yes.

Mark: And so employment wasn’t a problem for you.

Bates: Well, it really was. There weren’t a lot of school teaching jobs opening yet ‘cause the “baby boomers” weren’t coming through.

Mark: True.

Bates: I had my oar in the water in Cincinnati at Miami University and a few opportunities opened there but they didn’t seem to be paying any better than Wisconsin. And some of them were quite limited. They had religious qualifications and race qualifications and I didn’t fit into some of those. This one opened up in Baraboo. A fellow quit suddenly on them. And so I taught there. It was just going to be to get some experience because once you have experience then you can get recommendations. So we ended up staying there all but one year the whole time.

Mark: I see. As for other kinds of benefits, did you use the GI housing loan or were you able to finance a home on your own?

Bates: The housing loan is a Wisconsin loan.

Mark: There was state and federal.

Bates: Well, I could get the federal. I couldn't get the state.

Mark: You could not get the state?

Bates: No, because I didn't go in from Wisconsin.

Mark: I see. As for the federal one, did you use that or not?

Bates: Yes, I used it for low interest loan to buy my first house. The one I'm living in now. Could you shut this just a second?

Mark: Yeah, sure.

TAPE TURNED OFF

TAPE TURNED BACK ON

Mark: As a disabled veteran, you were classified as a disabled veteran.

Bates: Only as long as I kept getting malaria.

Mark: Because of your malaria.

Bates: But if you went a year without it then you were no longer a disabled veteran.

Mark: Is that the way it worked?

Bates: That's the way it works.

Mark: And so how long were you considered a disabled veteran?

Bates: Until 1954. 'Cause I kept getting malaria attacks for the next nine years.

Mark: And you had some contact then with the VA.

Bates: Yes.

Mark: The federal and state, perhaps? Federal, not the state so much.

Bates: Well, I had contacted--the VA used to have an office right there--when the UW had all the veterans the Milwaukee office had a branch in Madison at this time--and I was in contact with them for awhile. And then they closed that obviously when the veterans went out of the UW and then there was occasional contact with the Milwaukee office.

Mark: As a result of this malaria, these malaria attacks, were you ever hospitalized?

Bates: Yes.

Mark: Did you have to, you had to go into the VA medical system. Did you find that it was, did you find it adequate? Did you find it, did it--

Bates: I wound up with, I had three attacks where I had to be hospitalized. In each case it came on so suddenly, it hit me so suddenly that they took me to the nearest hospital. One was at Miami University in their clinic. Fortunately, there was a nun, not a nun a nurse, who had been in tropical medicine and she knew what kind of smears to use. And so that was diagnosed. I ran into problems every time because I wasn't in the VA hospital. They took me to the nearest hospital and the VA was not going to pay for my hospitalization 'cause, in both cases we were students with unreliable cars and--we didn't even have a car there for awhile--and ran into problems that way.

Mark: And so they did not pay then.

Bates: They did finally pay.

Mark: They did? But it took a lot of meetings and phone calls and letters and all those kinds of things.

Bates: Yeah.

Mark: Now, you fought in Southeast Asia. And of course as you know, 20 to 30 years later there was a war there. The veterans came back and complained of a lot of readjustment problems. They didn't feel accepted back into society. Many had psychological problems. Did you experience any of these kinds of things? Nightmares? Did you feel that your sacrifices were appreciated by the public at large?

Bates: Well, I had nightmares. I was bothered with nightmares for a long time.

Mark: A long time being how long?

Bates: Well, about 20 years. And then they came back. About 5 years ago I was asked to go talk to the kids in the history unit at Baraboo High School. They said, well, you know, you were about these kids age when the war started and you went in--how about talking about your experiences from a teenager's standpoint. Well, then I had nightmares. The kids asked some pretty dumb questions but they also asked some very good questions. And some of the things that I said I would try to answer and recalling some of those things I guess really upset me.

Mark: Okay.

Bates: You know. It would bring back these vivid memories, you know.

Mark: I don't want to pry into it but was it--.

Bates: Sure.

Mark: --combat related?

Bates: Yes. Combat related.

Mark: I see.

Bates: Well, I can try to answer your questions.

Mark: It's up to you.

Bates: They would be like, you know, one of the kids, well more than one, but one, you know, what's the most horrible sight you saw--or horrible experience you had? I think you try to shut those things out of your mind. But then when I said, well, you know, there were a number of bad things. Then all of a sudden one of them popped into my mind. Listening to a guy scream all night. And when you advance the next day you find that he's right out there and you may have been the guy that did him in. And he's been shot in the groin and he's bled to death and finally died of shock after screaming. Things like spending three days looking out there at that same corpse and watching it swell up and whatnot. And, of course, the nights--it's hard to explain the nights. I tried to tell the kids, you think the silence bothers you, but in the jungle areas the noise bothers you. There's so many bugs making noise and so many things going. If things are all quiet, it's almost deafening. You think, God, anybody could, they could run up at me and I wouldn't hear, and now all of a sudden it gets real quiet. Something disturbed everything and they shut down. That sort of thing. And I still, I haven't had any dreams until I started talking to the kids. And then I may be bothered for two or three weeks after that.

Mark: What about acceptance back into society? A lot of Vietnam vets complain that they were ignored. But they were a much smaller percentage of the population--

Bates: They were.

Mark: --every other _____ a majority of 20 year olds at that time.

Bates: They were, yeah.

Mark: What was your experience? Did you get a pat on the back? Was it possible for you to buy a drink? These sorts of things.

Bates: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I think it was kind of old hat by the time we got back. We were just kind of accepted. I didn't feel that, I mean, people that knew us welcomed us, you know. But when I got back you weren't walking around in your uniform or anything. I mean, I don't know, I think some of these Vietnam men asked for it--they were still running around with their uniforms on. They were setting themselves apart.

Mark: I see. I've got one last area and it involves veteran's organizations.

Bates: Yes.

Mark: Did you ever join any of the major groups like the Legion and the VFW and that sort of thing?

Bates: My dad talked me into joining the VFW and the Legion right after the war. And I stayed one year in each.

Mark: You didn't join after that?

Bates: No.

Mark: So, after you moved to Wisconsin for school, you didn't join any of those?

Bates: I didn't--no, no. I was invited to but I was--I got so ticked off at both of them.

Mark: For what?

Bates: Well, I'm not a reactionary and the leadership in both of them at that time was World War I men who were established, reactionary, they hated Roosevelt, they hated the New Deal, they hated the unions and I couldn't stand going to a meeting in any of them without listening to those bastards bitch, you know.

Mark: I see.

Bates: And I just, I couldn't stand them.

Mark: I see.

Bates: And I still think they're that way. I still think the Legion leadership is status quo if not turn back the clock. I think they make too much of being a veteran. I think, I guess I feel they make too much of being a veteran.

Mark: I see. Now, as for reunions, I got your name because you are a member of Merrill's Marauders Association. This is different, apparently, in your mind.

Bates: Oh, yes. Yes.

Mark: Explain the, why did you join the Merrill's Marauders Association? And why? And what do you get out of it?

Bates: I joined it as soon as I found out about it. When I was in Wisconsin. I guess maybe in the late '50s. It had to be the late '50s before I realized that they had an association going. It's since been expanded. It includes all of the infantry in Burma. The 124th can join. After all the number of membership, members are going down, and the Ranger, the unit that carries our colors is the 75th Ranger Regiment. And we have very close affiliation with them. There are members, joined the association now so the thing will keep going after all the old birds are gone. And I joined that because they had a newsletter. And I'd read about friends in it. And they have a convention every year.

Mark: And do you go very often?

Bates: No because I was teaching and they have it on Labor Day weekend.

Mark: Not the best time for a teacher.

Bates: No, I can't go. I can't get out. I've never been to one. Some of my friends have been to one and you get a report of who showed up and that sort of thing. I thought maybe this Labor Day weekend--something's interfered with me every Labor Day weekend. They're going to have one in Ashville, South Carolina this Labor Day weekend. I might go for the first time.

Mark: Interesting. You've exhausted my questions. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Bates: Okay. I think I've talked too much already.

Mark: Oh, you haven't. Well, thanks for stopping in.

Bates: I don't know whether you're interested in this or not. This is a handout I give to kids, only you'd have to run a copy.

Mark: Sure, I can copy this, absolutely. Yeah, I keep--every interview I do has its own separate file.

Bates: I gave this to the kids because I found they're asking questions about things like that and I only talked to them one class period and we get bogged down on that kind of stuff. So I give it to the teacher and I'd say run a copy of that and they can look at it ahead of time and then they can ask any questions. And after they look at that, the main thing they say is how do you get over the hill with all that?

Mark: Well, thanks for stopping in. I absolutely appreciate it.

[End of Interview]