Floyd Caverly was born 1 Mar 1917 in Shovel Lake, Minnesota, a lumbering town located south of Hill City, Minnesota. He was one of four children. Floyd's father was a blacksmith; his mother died in the influenza pandemic of 1918. Floyd attended country school and two years of high school, then worked several jobs until enlisting in the US Navy in 1940.

In the Navy, Floyd volunteered for the submarine service. Trained as an electronics technician (radar), he then joined the crew of USS Tang (SS-306) and served on five war patrols in the Pacific, from January – October 1944.

On 24 October 1944, on this fifth war patrol, Tang was sunk as one of her own torpedoes went off course and struck the boat. Of the seventy-eight-man crew, just nine survived. Floyd and the other eight men were picked out of the water by a Japanese naval vessel, and taken to a military prison on Formosa (currently known as Taiwan).

Floyd was subsequently transported to Japan, and spent time at Ofuna Naval Interrogation Center (until April 1945) and then Camp Omori. He was liberated from this camp by American forces in August 1945, following the surrender of Japan. Floyd spent many months recovering from his time as a POW, in medical facilities in the United States.

Floyd spent a career in the US Navy, retiring in 1960 with twenty years of service. He then worked many years in the defense industry.
USS Tang (SS-306)
Photographed off Mare Island Navy Yard, California, 2 December 1943.
Source: official U.S. Navy photo, # NH 42273.
Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is 23 August 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project here at Concordia University, St. Paul. My name is Thomas Saylor. This evening I'm speaking with Mr. Floyd Caverly. Mr. Caverly is at his home in Springfield, Oregon, and this interview is being conducted by telephone.

For the record, Mr. Caverly, and please correct anything that is wrong here, you were born on 1 March 1917 in Shovel Lake, Minnesota, a lumbering town. You described it as being south of Hill City, Minnesota. Your father was a blacksmith until the Depression, then he farmed in the area. You were one of four children. You attended country school, two years of high school and then had a number of jobs before enlisting in the Navy in 1940. Among those jobs were working in a logging camp, at a mine in Utah, and then on a farm in southern Minnesota. You enlisted in the United States Navy in 1940 and ultimately were a career man, retiring I believe you said in 1960. You served in the submarine service, and during World War II were a crewmember on the boat USS Tang, SS-306. I believe you said you did all five of the war patrols on the Tang, is that right?

F: That is correct.

T: You described your job on the boat as an electronics technician.

F: Yes.

T: The story of the Tang includes five war patrols during World War II, and we're going to pick up the story at the day the Tang went down, sunk by one of its own torpedoes. The date was 24 October 1944. In preparation for our interview, I read about the Tang and how it was sunk, and also read some survivors' accounts. When all this happened on October 24, 1944, where in the boat were you, Mr. Caverly?

F: When the actual sinking took place I was in the conning tower. We were at battle stations. We were sinking ships. We had just used the last two torpedoes. We fired those two at this crippled ship, and sure enough, one of them ran and hit the ship, sank the ship. The other one went out and ran with what we call a port run or a port running torpedo, which turns to your left and came right around the circle and hit us in the latter part of the boat.

T: From the conning tower could you see all this happening?
F: I couldn’t, but the people on the topside of the conning tower could. Everybody on the topside of the conning tower. And of course we heard everything that went on because we had an intercom...until after we got hit. Then everything went out.

T: So everybody in the boat could kind of hear what was going on with this torpedo?

F: Yes. Because I heard the captain say, “There goes that one! Erratic!” And we knew that it was going out and it wasn’t following a true course. I think it was Leibold said, “Captain, that’s a circular run!” So the next thing he gave was a right full rudder, all ahead emergency. And he said, “Bend them on. Control. Just bend them on.” He meant make the turns. Let’s get speed up. Let’s get going. But it was very much like turning around a city block compared, well, you could do it with a Volkswagen but you can’t do it with five hundred feet of submarine. So we just couldn’t get out of the way of that thing. That’s all.

T: How much time was it, would you estimate, from when the torpedo left the boat to when it came back and hit again?

F: There’s controversy on that, because it seemed quite a little while to me. It seemed like we should have had time to get out of the way, to get going. At the same time the people on the bridge that could see this thing going it just seemed as if it went right out and turned right around and came back and hit us just within a few minutes, or a minute and a few seconds. Not two full minutes even. It would depend on what you were thinking was the correct thing to do at the time and what you were more or less praying for. I wanted speed. I wanted to get out. I would have liked to have felt that little submarine just set by the stern and go out like a speedboat. But it didn’t do it. It couldn’t do it.

T: Torpedoes pack an enormous blast from what I’ve read.

F: Yes.

T: And that boat was not very big. 1870 tons displacement on the surface, according to the information I read. Mr. Caverly, what was the sensation when the torpedo hit the boat?

F: The sensation was—I’ll have to tell you what mine was. I was standing looking at a radarscope and waiting for this other torpedo to hit, you know, and it was running straight. All of a sudden we were hit and now this submarine, like you say, it’s a rather small boat, but it is ruggedly built. You want to remember that hull was, well, the outer hull, what we call the outer hull, was almost a full inch of nickel-alloyed steel. Some of the best steel that you could make. And then there was great big ribs on the inside of that—more or less a big long chunk of pipe, if you want to look at it that way. It was ribbed in there—I think every eleven inches; and they were twelve or fourteen inches through. That was made to withstand heavy sea pressure. So it’s a pretty rugged boat. But when it hit it was just like somebody had snapped us. Just
like all of a sudden an earthquake. You didn’t know which way to step to catch your balance. You were just kind of whipped into… the deck plates all rattled and shook. Light bulbs went out. Things of this sort. So that was the sensation, and right away quick the executive officer says, “We’ve been hit!” I thought perhaps maybe we were hit with a four or five inch shell from one of those cruisers or destroyers. But there were no cruisers in the convoy. A destroyer, they could have had up to a five inch gun that shot us.

T: So you weren’t quite sure exactly at that moment what had done it.

F: Not for a few moments. No.

T: Were you blown off the conning tower into the water or did you have to find your way into the water?

F: I was in the conning tower. Inside of it when this torpedo hit.

T: How did you get into the water?

F: The skipper called down. He had communications. He could talk to us from his bridge speaker, which is a sound powered speaker. We could hear him giving orders. He said, “Radar, I want to know how far it is to the closest destroyer and what the course is on that destroyer.” So I picked up my mike. I had a mike right there that I could talk back to the skipper with. I told him. I gave him the bearing and the range of the destroyer. He called down again. Evidently my mike wasn’t working in his direction, because he didn’t hear me. He called back down again. “Radar,” he said, “I’m asking for information and I want it now!” So I picked up the mike again and I called back. I said, “The radar is out of commission. I have no bearing or range right now.” And his answer was, “I want word. Do you understand?”

And I ran over to the hatch, and I knew that he [the skipper] was standing right above the hatch. I called up the hatch. I said, “Captain, the radar is strictly out of commission.” And I gave him the last bearing and range to the closest destroyer and I said, “They’re coming in on our starboard bow.” The executive officer grabbed me by the nap of the neck (chuckles), and put his hand on the seat of my pants and shoved me up the hatch. He said, “Get up there and talk to the skipper!” And when I got up there water started flowing around my knees and right up around my waist. I got onto the side of the submarine as she seemed to kind of roll to port a little bit and came back up and righted itself. The water went down and I thought maybe it was all right. But then I could see that the stern was going down real fast. Water was up almost to the conning tower already then. So I just stepped off and started to swim.

(1, A, 108)

T: It was almost as if the water came up to meet you, it sounds like.
F: Oh, yes. I just stepped off and I started to swim.

T: So from the way you describe it, almost a minute or so before you weren’t aware that the sub was sinking and now you clearly are aware.

F: Oh, I knew it was sinking. Yes. And I knew it was sinking before, but the only thing was I couldn’t tell the skipper anything about it, see? I couldn’t give him the information he wanted.

T: Now you got into the water and, according to the record, some other men from the conning tower also made it into the water. How soon did the boat disappear below the surface after you got in the water?

F: Well, I think I did have on a wristwatch but I didn’t check the time (chuckles). Pretty fast anyhow.

T: Are we talking more like thirty seconds or ten minutes?

F: No. Not ten minutes. Thirty seconds I’m talking about. It was just like it was diving. And that boat would dive in one minute. It just started to slide right down, stern first, underneath the waves. Now the only thing was, it was only in 180 feet of water. That submarine is 315 foot long. So the stern hit the bottom and the bow was still out of the water a little bit.

T: That’s right. In 180 foot of water, it could be above the water, or part of it could be anyway.

F: Yes. So when it went down stern first it was all flooded by the stern. I just swam away from it because I was afraid it was going to go down and maybe go down with a tremendous suction not knowing about the men down in the submarine, whether they had sealed off that submarine for water tight integrity or not. Which they did.

T: In the water there, were there other crewmembers around you?

F: Yes. There were, oh, let’s see. I’d have to take a stop and try to contemplate a little bit. (pauses five seconds) I know of at least, probably four or six lookouts. The officer of the deck. The quartermaster, chief quartermaster. Leibold—what we called the assistant officer of the deck. The skipper himself was up there. You see, we took battle stations and these people are all needed on the bridge during the battle. You know, I used to copy all that stuff down. I should have sat and tried to figure it all out. I would say there were probably ten or twelve men on the bridge there along with me and the lookouts.

T: What time of the day was this happening?
F: This was happening at just about two o’clock in the morning. The reason I can take and remember this pretty well is that before we made the approach, before we started to fire those last two torpedoes, we had to get in a position between these two destroyers as they were circling this crippled ship. The skipper says, “Do you think that we’ll have time before daylight so we can fire from the surface?” And the executive officer said, “Yes. We still have about twenty minutes of darkness yet, Captain. But by the time we get into position it’s going to be just about two o’clock or two ten. We’ll have to fire then or we won’t be able to make it. We’ll be exposed to the surface.” Because we were right in among the convoy. There were destroyers and everything. We shouldn’t play around.

T: Right. So from that description, this happened at about two ten in the morning [02:10]. What time the next day—was it the next day you were picked up by the Japanese?

F: Yes. It was just about ten o’clock in the morning. And this happened at two o’clock in the morning, and that was about ten o’clock in the morning. They picked us up. Because I know it was probably a little after ten. In between ten and ten thirty. The reason I can remember this and it’s impressed upon my mind, when I was pulled up onto this destroyer, you want to remember I had swam all night.

T: Without a life preserver, right?

(1, A, 160)

F: Without a life preserver or any type of flotation or anything to keep me up. I was a pretty tired little boy. When I finally climbed up this rope ladder that they dropped down over the side and a Jap reached down and got a hold of my hand and pulled me up on deck, I saw that there was a petty officer standing there with a wristwatch on. I looked at his wristwatch to see what time it was. I saw it was a little after ten. I didn’t know, quarter after or twenty after or twenty-five after. I don’t know. But I know it was somewhat after ten o’clock.

T: How many men from the boat were picked up with you by that same destroyer?

F: All nine of us that survived were picked up by that same destroyer. We had one other one, the pharmacist’s mate. He’d come to the surface with a busted lung and he was coughing and blood was running out of his nose and his ears and he was coughing and spitting blood. Of course he had on a life jacket, because he came up from down below. The Japs just took the life jacket off of him and threw him back over the side.

T: So he was alive at that point or not?

F: Oh, yes. He was still alive yet, but he wouldn’t have lived. It was actually an act of mercy, to tell you the truth.
T: During the night were the men that you were with, were you together as a group, or floating sort of apart from each other?

F: We all started out pretty well together right where the sub went down, and it was every man for himself. We kind of criss-crossed one another and came close and far away and towards—most of the night I was absolutely all alone by myself. And Leibold was too. But after daylight came I ran into Leibold and he saw me, so we swam toward each other. We started to wonder what we could do. Now this torpedoed ship that we torpedoed with the last torpedo, it went down by the stern too. And its bow was out of the water. And he said, “Let’s get over to that ship. If we can get on there, maybe we can get a hold of a lifeboat or something like that and we can get to the coast of China.” Because we weren’t too far from the coast of China, either. But this destroyer came down picking up their own survivors and they saw us in the water out there. I imagine—now you have to kind of imagine what went on—but I imagine that they thought that we were some of their survivors yet, and they were in a hulling boat. They pulled over there...

T: So you figure they may not have known who you were until they got right next to you.

F: No. That was it. Then I think that they were kind of spellbound because they wanted to know how did white people, whatever we were, out there. Of course they couldn’t understand a word that we said or anything like this. I don’t know. There’s a lot of suppositions. I suppose this and I suppose that.

T: Yes. Speaking of that, as you’re floating in the water or swimming in the water all those hours, what went through your mind? I mean your boat has basically been sunk and here you are floating off the coast of China without a life vest. What’s going through your mind?

F: Probably one of the first things that goes through your mind is, what can I do to survive? I don’t know. There’s a funny thing. But as long as there’s life there is hope. Which, it panned out. I was picked out of the water and I was saved. I was made a prisoner and one thing and another, but there’s a lot of things that go through your mind. One of them was that all of a sudden I realized that this was a rather unusual way to celebrate a wedding anniversary. It was my fifth wedding anniversary.

T: What year were you married?

F: 1940.

T: So you were a married man on board the boat.
F: Yes. I was an old man. Twenty-three, twenty-four years old is considered to be one of the older boys.

T: By the time that boat went down, let me see, you were twenty-seven years old. You were born 1917, right?

(1, A, 222)

F: Yes.

T: Were you one of the older guys on board?

F: Yes. That’s what I say. Well, the skipper was older than I was and I think the executive officer was right around my age. Maybe a couple years older. But so far as the crew was concerned, and which I was just the crew, I was considered one of the older men.

T: So you’re floating or you’re swimming and thinking that—would you say you were optimistic as a person, that something was going to work out, or were you…?

F: No. No, I wasn’t optimistic in any way at all. But you try to realize, don’t give up because where there is life there is hope. Stay afloat as long as you can. So I didn’t try to swim any place. I had one lieutenant swim by me during the night, and he was a professional swimmer. He had won some awards at swimming in the Academy and he went by me just with a big long overhand stroke. All of a sudden he realized he was close to me and I said, “Is that you, Mr. Ubek?” And he stopped swimming. He said, “Yes. Which way is land?” Now I don’t know why, but I guess I had a peculiar sense of humor or something. I said, “About 180 feet straight down.” (chuckles)

T: So you kept your sense of humor even at that moment.

F: I doubt whether it’s a sense of humor. Just stupidity.

T: What happened to Mr. Ubek? Did he make it?

F: No. No, I never saw him. I was the last person to ever see him I think. Never saw him again. He wanted to know where China was. When you’re out there floating in the water and had just been torpedoed and swimming in circles and the tide carrying you, you’re completely lost. You don’t know which way anything is. And this was before we could see land in the daylight. It was still dark.

T: When you got pulled up out of the water by the Japanese, Mr. Caverly, what was it like to be face to face with the enemy, quite literally?
F: There was a lot of anxiety. You didn't know what to expect from them. Especially when you look over into the center of the ship and you see many men, all with burns and banged up and wet. Because they were picking up their own survivors. See, we sank five ships for them that night.

T: And you could see these survivors on board this destroyer too.

F: Oh, yes. They were on there with us. The first thing this fellow did that had the watch on I was telling you about, I turned my head down and I looked down to look at his watch and he hauled off and hit me alongside the head with his fist (chuckles). So that was the start of what I thought maybe was coming in. We never knew; we didn’t know what to expect.

T: Had you, before this moment, ever given any thought to what it would be like to be a POW of the Japanese?

F: I guess we might have given it a thought but it was always in a, oh, more or less a humorous sort of way. Like we’d sit around and discuss what would happen if we got picked up or something like that. You know, if we became prisoners. Are you ready to eat fish heads and rice? This is what you hear that you get from the Japanese, or what the Japanese ate.

T: So it was more banter and humor than anything real serious.

F: Yes, at that time. That was before we were picked up. You see, we had picked up a Japanese prisoner...

T: From one of the ships that your boat sank?

(1, A, 288)

F: Yes. I forget so many details, but I remember this fellow's name yet. Mishi Tuni.

T: So in a sense you had an up close experience with a Japanese before you were taken a prisoner.

F: Oh, a little bit. Yes.

T: What did you make of that guy? How did he sort of help you to figure out what the Japanese were like?

F: He didn't. He kind of clammed up and was very much within himself. I know we did everything, tried to loosen him up and let him know that we weren't going to hurt him, but of course he didn’t know this either. He had been filled with propaganda, for probably several years before the war even, of what a dirty bunch of people that the Americans were. So about the only thing we could do, every time
an officer would come back into there—we kept him in the after torpedo room and I stood guard over him an awful lot of the time. Every time an officer would come back he seemed to be awfully apprehensive. What’s going to happen now? He recognized an officer of us. The khaki uniform and one thing and another. We taught him—every time an officer would come back we’d make him stand up and salute him. Because most generally the torpedo officer that was back there in the after room, Mr. Flanagan, we’d get him to stand up and salute him. We would salute Mr. Flanagan too. We’d tell him to say, “Marines are sons of bitches.” He learned to say that Marines were sons of bitches (laughs). So that probably got him off to a good start when the Marines picked him up in Pearl [Harbor].

T: Did you transport him all the way back to Pearl Harbor?

F: Yes.

T: So he was on the boat for some days.

F: Yes. He was on board a good thirty days. After we got him on board, I don’t know for sure, but I would say we sank probably four or five ships before we got him back to Pearl. So he witnessed a few of his own ships being sunk.

T: Let’s go back to on board the destroyer. Were you questioned or interrogated at all on board that ship?

F: Yes. They had a couple of officers on there that could speak fair English. They were officers. Young men that had been taught English in school. And then we had another one there that the Japs had picked up out of the water. He was the first mate in the merchant marine. Over the past twenty years he had probably spent three or four years in San Francisco because he had a run from the mainland of Japan to San Francisco. And he picked up some English. So he could talk English fairly well too.

T: When they questioned you on board that destroyer, what kind of things did they want to know?

F: Oh, they wanted to know all kinds of things. How many ships were in the area? How many submarines were attacking there? How many men do you have in your Navy? A lot of things that we just absolutely didn’t know. I couldn’t tell you how many men were in my Navy. I couldn’t even tell you how many we had in the submarine force. I never kept track of that stuff. I had other things to worry about. I had to keep that radar going and keep the sonar going.

T: The remaining survivors, were you kept together on that destroyer?

F: Oh, yes. Yes, we were kept together on there. [After] about three days they would take us out and kneel us on deck. They ran around up there for a couple of days still
picking up survivors. Then we went down into Takao [on Formosa]. We were always kept up on topside. I know we weren't very well tanned [from being in the submarine]. Our skin just didn't take that sunshine, especially the fellows with the lighter skin. Poor old Hank Flanagan. Old Irishman. He had blisters that raised up the size of my hand or bigger over his shoulders and down his back, and then they would fill full of water and break and run. But of course the Japs didn't pay any attention to that.

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

T: Were you physically mistreated on board that destroyer?

F: Oh, yes, to some extent I guess. I know I was rapped over the head with a scabbard, a sword scabbard. Officer standing there with his sword and scabbard in his hand. I don’t know. He thought I was lying. What I was doing, I was supposed to have been making some schematic diagrams, of my radios and my radar and all of this stuff. Which god, I couldn't have done to save me! Oh! He wanted, he just wanted a wealth of information that...

T: He was convinced already of what you should be telling him, it sounds like.

F: Yes. So I had all the plates of the tubes going to ground and that couldn’t have worked. You had to have that in a positive sense. I don't know how well you are versed on electronics.

T: Not very well I'm afraid.

F: But anyhow, that was an impossibility and he knew it too. When he saw how I had that drawn he hauled off and banged me alongside the head. Of course, I've got my hands behind my back tied to my feet and I'm on my knees, and he hit me and knocked me over.

T: Now did they keep you tied up while you on board that ship?

F: Pretty well. Until nighttime came. Then they put us back. They had a kind of a bathroom. It was just a very short tub and kind of a shower that came down over the top of it. Something like we would have in a rec vehicle today. I know it wasn’t long enough for Hank Flanagan to lay down on the floor and straighten out. As short as I was, I couldn’t lay in the tub either. So two of us could sit in the tub together but neither one could lay down. But you could sit up and sleep. Otherwise everybody else had to stand up. We took turns sitting down trying to sleep during the night. Of course, it was hotter than all get out. So it was pretty hard breathing. It wasn’t any fun, I’ll tell you that.

T: Now there were a total of nine of you or eight of you?
F: There was nine of us left there now.

T: The nine of you, did you talk among yourselves about sort of where you’re at, what’s going on, and what’s going to happen?

F: Oh, yes. When we got back in that bathhouse, then we talked because all we had was the little seaman standing outside with a gun, outside the door of the bathroom. He didn’t care what went on in there.

T: What kind of things were guys talking about in there among yourselves?

F: Oh, where do you think we’re at? Where do you think they’re taking us? Where do you suppose we’ll end up? And we would all have our theories. And of course the skipper’s was the, the most logical it seemed like. He was saying we will probably be taken, he said we won’t be left on Formosa. Now his theory was that they [Allied forces] were getting ready to strike the Philippines, and this was just before the Battle of the Philippines started, too. The end of October 1944. The Battle of Leyte Gulf. Of course he knew all of this went on. Most of us did too. He said, “It isn’t very likely that they will take us to the Philippines or Formosa. We will probably be taken to the mainland [to Japan].” And we were.

T: When the captain mentioned that you might be taken to the mainland, to Japan, did that create an image in your mind of anything specifically? I mean you heard, wow, we might be going to Japan. What did that mean to you?

(1, B, 427)

F: We weren’t too wild about that, but where else were we going to go? We didn’t look forward to this at all. This wasn’t like a great big cruise coming up on us.

T: Sure.

F: Anything like this.

T: Now after a few days of this uncertainty on board the destroyer you did dock at Formosa and stayed there for, what, about a week? Is that your estimate?

F: Yes. Between five days and a week. I’ve forgotten just how long it was. We were in a big warehouse like for a while.

T: Were you kept with any other prisoners, or was it just the nine of you?

F: No, it was just the nine of us.

T: Was there any additional interrogating or questioning there at Formosa?
F: No. Not too much, not any more than what, oh, individuals would want to do. You can just about imagine if you were in a detachment of Americans and you had a couple of Jap prisoners and you knew that a couple of you could speak a little bit of Japanese. Say ask them this, ask them that. You know. It was that kind of stuff that went on. I know they even wanted to know if the mama and papa lived in America. Where in the hell else would we live? (chuckles) You know. But kind of funny stuff like this that went on.

T: Did you feel more afraid there on Formosa than you had on the destroyer, or were you feeling a little more secure that you were actually going to live now?

F: Well, we had a pretty good idea that we would be held for interrogation someplace. Professional interrogation. Not this kind of interrogation. These people that interrogated us on this destroyer, they didn’t know how to interrogate prisoners or anything. I can tell you that. There were screwy darned questions that they wanted to know.

T: Perhaps they weren’t trained in that particular… Well, they hadn’t expected to get prisoners, had they?

F: No. No. This was something new to them too. They kept us there, and I remember one night a guard came down and he asked one of the guys next to me there. He said, “Are you an officer?” And it was Truckey, and Truckey said, “No. I’m not an officer.” And he said, “How do you know?” So I spoke up. See we were all blindfolded. We had hoods over our heads. I couldn’t see this guy.

T: So while you were on Formosa there you were bound and you couldn’t see.

F: Yes. We had these hoods over our heads. Anyhow, I told him, “You can tell the officers. They know more than we do.” And this guy, he was very good at English. “You be silent!” he said. “That means shut up to you!” (chuckles) I mean this was the type of people that were coming around and interrogating us.

T: Interrogation light, it sounds like. As if these are people like you mentioned, sort of testing their English on these people who can speak English.

F: Yes. Anybody that they could talk to, speak a few words of English was very proud of it.

(1, B, 468)

T: Let me ask you. There was no questioning there on Formosa. Were you kept in the same location or were you moved while you were there?

F: They moved us around some. One of the things they did, after I think on about the second or third day, they took us up and they paraded us down into this town.
had kind of a village square out there. God, this was kind of scary because the people were all screaming and yelling and I don’t know if they were cussing at us or complimenting us or what they were doing. (pauses three seconds) You don’t know, because you didn’t understand a damn word they said.

T: They just marched you through the street there?

F: Yes. And they showed us off to the people. Look at here what we’re fighting. Look at these poor pitiful souls. They wouldn’t die for their country. They lived and we captured them. Because if you were a good soldier you died for your country rather than be captured.

T: Were you blindfolded at this time or could you see all this?

F: No. We could see all this. They took the blindfold off from us when we started up the street, when they started to march us. Now we had two guards up forward, one on either flank and one guard bringing up the rear. There was about five guards guarding the nine of us.

T: Mr. Caverly, this sounds very frightening, the way you describe it.

F: Well, it was a little frightening. I will say that. We thought too well of it. Because I was expecting them to—actually I was expecting those people to start throwing rocks at us.

T: And did they?

F: No. They didn’t. Because there was too many guards up close to them. I know I was walking right next to a guard and I got up real close to him. I thought, come on fellows, throw your damn rocks. We’ll knock out a Jap here too.

T: How long did all this last?

F: Oh, this probably went on for three or four hours. They marched us uptown and one of the officers got up and onto kind of a little platform they pulled out in the middle of the street and he had a megaphone and he talked to the crowd for about ten or fifteen minutes. I suppose telling them how brave they were, what a hard time they had capturing us. I don’t know. You have no idea what was going on. You couldn’t understand anything. So I don’t know what all he was telling them. I know he wasn’t telling them that we were a nice bunch of boys, that’s for sure.

T: And they kept you all together, all nine of you?

F: Yes. So then they took us back to this barn or warehouse. I don’t know just what you would call it. A building, a clapboard building. The next morning we were up at nine o’clock and they marched us down to this town again and into a railroad
station. This is where we were put on a train and transported up. We left Takao probably right around six or seven in the morning and it was after dark when we got to Teran.

T: What was memorable about the train ride in your mind?

(1, B, 513)

F: Nothing too much anymore. Some of the people that were on the car, their reactions to us when they saw us.

T: So it was a passenger car, not a boxcar.

F: No. It was a passenger train. A passenger car.

T: When you got to the end of the journey here, where were you kept when you got off the train?

F: They got us all off and they made us march then, oh, for maybe about two miles and we got into what we called the Kuran Clink, which was an old, old jail that had been built by the Portuguese back when the Portuguese had captured Formosa and the Philippines. Remember?

T: That goes back a long way. So this is an old building.

F: Four or five hundred years.

T: Were there other prisoners, other POWs in this building?

F: Not that we know of. I don't know of any. Even if they had Japanese prisoners in there, they kept us isolated from them anyhow.

T: Was there interrogation here or work details, or was this a holding facility?

F: No, this was just a holding facility. They put three or four of us in a cell. They had, let's see, how many cells did they have going along there? (pauses three seconds) There was probably about four cells, and they had all nine of us divided up pretty well in there. We stayed there that night. The next morning they came and they put the officers all together in one cell. That was Flanagan, the skipper, and Savadkin. They all went into one cell. Then they redistributed us evenly. All of a sudden they kind of recognized rank.

T: They hadn't before, had they?

F: No, they didn't. Not any more than if we had been cattle.
T: And in this holding facility you were not questioned any more that you recall?

F: No. No, nobody came around anymore. The guard would change. I remember one night one of the guards came in. He had some, oh, I’d call them popsicles. It was frozen sugarcane juice. It really wasn’t sugar or anything like that. It was the juice out of sugarcane. He called it frozen candy. Now he could speak a little bit of English, this guy could. He said, one of the things I remember was, “I am your Christian,” he said. “I bring you some treat.” So he gave us all one of these little icicles. We sucked on them.

T: He told you he was a Christian?

F: Yes. But he was only there for that one shift that night and he didn’t dare get caught. He said, “I must not get observed talking to you. I will be severely punished.” So he didn’t talk to us too much.

T: Were the other guards more hostile towards you that you recall, or not really?

F: Not at this point. They weren’t too bad here yet. The only time that they would get (chuckles) a little bit rambunctious or a little ornery was they were trying to make us understand what we were supposed to do, and if we didn’t do it or couldn’t do it or didn’t understand they would take their gun butts and jab us in between the shoulder blades or alongside the head or in the neck or something. They would kind of beat on you a little bit.

When we first got there, oh, they had little wooden tubs. Maybe held four or five gallons. The Japanese, they call them an ostop. They had these things setting outside of each one of the cells. What you were supposed to do, these things were to wash your feet in. You were supposed to scoop out handfuls of water and rub them on your feet and rinse your feet off. You weren’t supposed to stick your feet in this thing.

Anyhow, they got it over to us that we were supposed to—and we were so dry. We had come all day long up that damn coast without any water to drink. Riding that train. And old Truckey, he dropped down and he just stuck his head in over his ears and started to drink (chuckles). Out of this ostop. And this Jap started to beat on him with his gun (laughing). Telling him to quit. That wasn’t to drink, and all this stuff. But old Truckey, he had to have a drink of water. That’s all there was to it. And they beat him up pretty good. He had lumps on his head afterwards and blackened his eye. That was just because he couldn’t stop drinking water. That’s all there was to it (chuckles).

(1, B, 586)

T: So not understanding the cultural differences or that language meant that you could get beat on.
F: Oh, yes. Yes. It didn’t take much excuse for them to hammer you a little bit, you know.

T: Now it wasn’t many days there before you were put onto a ship and taken to Japan.

F: Yes.

T: Now from our conversation before the interview began, this was a cruiser, a Japanese Navy cruiser.

F: That’s where us enlisted men—the three officers went over onto a destroyer, and from what the skipper had told us, what they told us after we got to prison camp...

T: Were you reunited in prison camp then after the journey?

F: At the end of the journey the cruiser and the destroyer all tied up at the same dock and they took us out of there and they marched us up to, oh, it looked like as if it was a Navy establishment of some sort. Marched us up to this building and they set us down in one little room off the side. No door on it or anything. It was an open room. And they brought an admiral down. Now this admiral could talk English. But, here again, it was a taught English. You used any slang with him, he’d make you repeat yourself.

T: So it was English from a textbook.

F: Yes. Yes. He could talk all right, and he understood what we said and what we were talking about. The impression was made on his mind all right. He knew what he wanted to ask us and he didn’t ask us too much. He did ask us if we thought that the submarines were contributing anything to our war effort and things like this. I know by this time now you want to remember that down at Takao it was real hot summer weather. When we got up here, when we got into Japan, when we got off the cruiser, it had started to rain. It was kind of a fall rain, and at night like that it was cold. I should judge this was probably eight, nine o’clock at night when we were in this building and we were hoping that they would probably bring us something to eat, which they did a little bit later on. They brought us a ball of rice about the size of a softball, just plain old cooked rice. You had that to eat. That was something to eat anyhow. Anyhow, this admiral, he said, “Are you uncomfortable?” The skipper said, “Yes. We are cold. We are very cold.” “Of course you are cold,” he said. “You have no shoes. Don’t you have shoes in your Navy?”

T: Was he serious?

F: Yes. I guess he was. He didn’t realize that we had lost our shoes swimming around in the water for about ten, twelve hours. They were funny people, especially there because we didn’t understand them then at all.
T: What kind of condition were you in after the journey on the cruiser?

F: Oh, I was in good condition. I don’t think I lost an awful lot of weight or anything. I didn’t have too much to eat but I ate everything that was in sight. Just because I figured I should. Some of it was horrible (laughs). I couldn’t swallow it. But I don’t know what it was for. It was probably a dressing used in the place of salt or something. It was kind of a…it looked like a Jello made out of seaweed. It looked like it might be real good. It was purple. It looked like Jello. You take a spoonful of that stuff or a finger-full (laughs) and grab it. Boy, it would choke you to death. (1, B, 645)

T: But I hear you saying that really, when you got something edible that you just kind of ate it.

F: Yes. Whether you liked it or not.

T: Was the journey on board that cruiser one of many days’ duration or was a fairly quick journey?

F: Let’s see. I don’t think it was much over three days to tell you the truth. Three nights and three days.

T: And all you enlisted men were kept together on board the ship?

F: Yes. We were up in the bow of this cruiser. Laying there. There was just room for us to crawl on our hands and knees around there on top of sacks of sugar. The Jap guards were poking holes in the sugar, stealing it, and filling little sacks full of it.

T: For themselves?

F: Yes (chuckles). Because they never got sugar. That was a great treat to them. It wasn’t their daily fare.

T: How interesting. So you witness the Japanese soldiers stealing from the rations.

F: Oh, yes. Yes. And of course we ate what we could of the sugar, too. We would take and poke holes in the bottom of the sack and catch a handful of it and eat it.

T: Right. That’s interesting that they also were taking the stuff.

F: Oh, yes. Kind of human nature. Let’s face it.

T: You don’t have stuff, you take what you can find.
F: Yes.

T: Now in Japan you were held for a number of months at the Ofuna Interrogation Center.

F: Yes.

T: Were you taken there pretty quickly after you got off the cruiser?

F: Oh, yes. We were taken right up, taken by train up there. Now you want to know how many days... (laughs)

T: As much as possible (laughs). Estimate, you know.

F: I remember it was on 3 November when we got into Ofuna. We were sunk on 24 October. So you can see about how long it had taken us to get from Takao up to Ofuna.

T: It sounds like about ten days altogether there.

F: Yes.

T: And Ofuna is where you spent a number of months.

F: Yes.

T: When you got in there, you were still with the enlisted men from your boat, right?

F: Yes.

T: At Ofuna, can you describe the barracks that you were housed in there?

F: Well, they were more or less just sheds. Single clapboard sheds. Another thing...something about the construction. The framework was round poles.

(1, B, 687)

T: On the shack.

F: Yes. And they were not nailed together. They were put together with—what did we used to call them? They were kind of a U-shape staple that they drove into the two pieces.

T: As opposed to a nail.
F: Yes. Well, in fact they were bigger than a nail. But they were made this way on purpose. We found out later that the reason they used this method. The first earthquake we witnessed, we found out. Those darn buildings would just sit there rocking and swinging back and forth, rock and roll, and when the earthquake was over they would all come up. Some of us had to go out and push the corners up and shape them up again. They were all back right together. We found out that these were built to withstand the earthquakes. We didn’t realize this at that time. We called them finger dogs or timber dogs. Dogs driven into the poles to hold them together.

T: For reference, were these shacks big enough for ten men or forty men? How big were they?

F: Oh, let’s see. If I remember right there was actually three buildings and then there was probably room for, well, let’s see, there was three of them—Iku, Niku and Sanku which is Number One, Number Two and Number Three. Number One, Iku, that was the one that we were in. Let’s see. There was one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight cells on one side and only six on the other because there was two outlets for doors to go outside. That took the width of a cell. Otherwise we were put in individual cells. We were held in solitary confinement. We weren’t supposed to talk to one another.

T: So you had your own small solitary confinement area.

F: Yes. All by ourselves.

T: And this individual cell was large enough to lay down in?

F: Yes. It was probably about, oh, I’d say six [feet] by ten [feet]. It was a little bit longer than eight feet maybe.

T: And about six feet wide you’d estimate.

F: Yes. Five to six feet wide.

T: What was inside there?

F: A tatami straw mat. A woven mat that they used for flooring in there. It’s called a tatami mat. And that’s all that was in there. Then they came along and they gave us two blankets apiece and a kind of a pillow. It was a, I don’t know, kind of a narrow sack filled with rice hulls on the inside. Then they doubled them over. That made a pillow for you. That was your pillow. And that’s all that we had in there.

T: Was there a bucket for relieving yourself?
F: No. They took us out [for relieving ourselves]. These three buildings, if you can imagine this now, three buildings side by side and maybe forty or fifty feet apart. Across one end of all three of these buildings it was joined with another building or kind of a cap-building that went over the top of the whole thing there. This is where the guards lived. This is where the galley was. Where they cooked the food.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

F: ...so it was like three buildings in a row and then across the end it was sealed off with another one about probably twelve or fifteen feet wide and made a hallway across and guards lived up there. And the galley was in there.

T: Were you out of this cell on a regular basis during your time there?

F: No. I don’t know. It seemed to me that it was probably, oh, two or three months, two months at least before we were allowed out of the cell.

T: So you were not out of that cell for a couple of months at the beginning.

F: No. We were pretty much locked up in solitary confinement. They would take us out once in a while. They’d come out and the guard, he was learning a word or two of English. He’d say, “You! Exercise.” So okay, we exercised. He’d open up the door and he’d stand back. Then he took us out and we kind of run in place and did some deep knee bends and flailed our arms around. Then he took us back. But we were out there all alone. There was nobody out there with us or anything.

T: Were you aware that there were other POWs in this facility or...

F: Oh, yes. Yes. We saw them. They couldn’t hardly keep us from seeing, because, you see, what we were held there for was interrogation, right? So up here on this big long piece that I told you went across the top there was also an interrogation room. It had a long table in there and some benches. They would take us up and at one end of these tables would sit an officer or two officers, interrogation officers, and then you were set down on the bench by them. I can kind of give you a rundown here of how this interrogation went.

T: Yes. Please do.

F: So they would take and bring us in and sit us down on this bench. Then the interrogation people would say “Good afternoon” or “Good morning” or whatever it happened to be, and they would speak English. They’d say, “How are you today?” and “We have news.” So they would give us some news that they had copied off of the United Press or something like that. Anyhow then they would say, “Let us review what you told us about the sonar.” One of the things they were interested in and that was the sonar. More so than the radar. So I blamed everything that we knew and our efficiency was all on the radar. Really, they had captured some of our
instruction books and books on the JKQC sonar and they would lay those books out
and they’d say, “Do you recognize this book?” “Oh, yes. I recognize the book.” But
then I always told them…like they wanted to know at first where I was born and
what my folks did and how I was raised as a child. How much schooling did I have. I
told them I was well-educated, pretty well-educated. Because I went through the
fourth grade. And they said, “That is good?” I said, “My father only went to the third
grade and he was a blacksmith.” “Were you a blacksmith?” “No. I was not a
blacksmith. I was trained to be an electronic technician.” “How did you fix your
radio?” “Well, if they went out I would change all the tubes. We changed the tubes
until it worked, or we would put in fuses to see if they were blown. If the fuses were
blown we replaced them,” and things like this. I said mostly it was just changing
tubes until it worked. So they gave me the name of Dinki Shuzinski. That means a
light bulb mechanic in Japanese. I was Dinki Shuzinski. The guys used to tease me
about that after we got out of prison camp.

Anyhow, then they would go through this book and of course, I would act like
as if [I didn't know how to read.] I would tell them, you read it to me. I don’t read
very well. I only have a fourth grade education, so I can’t read. They were telling me
that the sound heads on the JKQC, one of them was what we called a magneto
striction sound head. That there is little coils inside the sound head that would
vibrate with an oscillator and it would send out what we called a ping and then we
would wait for the echo to come back and that way you could tell how far away it
was. There we had a magneto striction head. And they wanted to know what that
was made out of. I told them electricity. That was all that I knew. Then the other
one was the listening head and it was a raw shell salt. It was what we called a raw
shell salt. It was like a rock salt with mineral salts, see? Anyhow, this is not
important. The thing was that they wanted to know what kind of salt was in this
head and I told them Morton Salt. Everybody knows Morton Salt, I told them. We
even had it in the kitchen (chuckles). You would take and go along. You never told
them that you didn’t know anything. I always told them how smart I was. That I
knew all these things.

T: Did you think you believed you, Mr. Caverly?

F: You had to know who you were talking to.

T: Meaning?

F: Meaning one of our goons—we referred to the interrogating officers as the goon
rebo. That was in Japanese. He was the interrogating officer. So he was referred to,
to us, as a goon. Now at other times they would be three or four young cadets.
Looked like as if they were still going to school or something yet. Real young. They
could speak a little English and they would practice interrogating us. We would tell
them anything you wanted to. They didn’t know what you were talking about. By
this time we were old interrogators. We’d been interrogated for three or four
months now and we begin to know. Like another thing, the skipper even had told
them a few little white lies. He told them that we had sunk at least five ships for
them. They couldn’t hardly deny that because the night that we were sunk we sunk five ships of the convoy. So he said we don’t know how many that we sunk but we sent torpedoes to five ships of the convoy. He said we don’t know how many that we sunk but we sent torpedoes to five ships and then we sunk two or three more before in another convoy one time. We saw them go down so we know of five ships that we got good credit for.

\[(2, A, 77)\]

T: These interrogators, did you see the same people every time?

F: Not every time. Once in a while one would come in and a week later he would come back again, but nine times out of ten a week later another guy would come. It depended upon what they were interested in.

T: Did these people have names that you remember or were they just faces to you?

F: They were just faces to us, but we gave them names. One guy had nice black, wavy hair. We called him Handsome Harry. Then another one had a real screwed up face. I don’t know. He looked more like a boxer than he did anything else. We called him Gargoyle. This is the way that we identified them.

T: So when you’d go in there you would probably recognize one of the interrogators from a previous session.

F: Yes. That’s right. That’s how that you would kind of know about it.

T: Were you threatened at all physically during these interrogation sessions?

F: All right. I was just coming up to that one there right then when you asked me this. The skipper was in there and he had told them how many ships he had sunk. They said, “Well, we have some good news for you too.” And he said, “Yes, what is that?” “The Navy football team beat Army twelve to six.” And the skipper of course, he sits there, and he says, “That is very good news.” They said, “Here is another news item that we copied. We thought maybe you would like a copy of it.” And they handed him this sheet of paper and it was typewritten in English and it said that the USS Tang had been awarded its second unit citation for sinking one hundred thousand tons of shipping. That’s the last he remembered. The guy that was standing behind him with a club rapped him alongside the head and knocked him out. The goon rebo put his hand in the air, you know threw it up, and this guy banged him. Then after they stood him up and they took him outside and they beat the holy hell out of him out there with that club afterwards.

T: Did that kind of stuff happen to you as well?
F: No. I got rapped a few times for not knowing what I should have known and for telling them a lie. They’d catch me at it. But I was never worked over that bad right then. I got worked over later on for stealing food.

T: There at Ofuna?

F: Yes. Breaking into the food locker. We did everything that we could.

T: How often were you interrogated there at Ofuna?

F: Oh, I don’t know. You see this one guy would be taken down. Maybe they would only interrogate two or three of us. And then the guard would bring you back and he’d have you blindfolded when you went up and when you come back. I don’t know why, but they did. They’d always blindfold you and then they would lead you down the passageway to your cell and put you in your cell. Now while you’re coming along you wanted your buddies to know what the goons are after. When I went up there they were interrogating primarily about the electronic equipment, our radios and our sonar. Things of this sort. And when they really wanted to know how many ships were sunk, how many submarines we had in the area and what our operations were they took one of the officers. Because officers would know more about it than us dumb enlisted men, right? So you see, each one of them had his own profession.

T: I see.

F: The goon would. He’d be a specialist in a certain area. So when they were taking us back and forth we would talk to the guard all the way up. The guard was called Ai, San. That was guard, sir. “Ai, San, you know what I just got telling the goons?” He couldn’t understand one damn word we were saying and I knew it because they’d been our guards right along. We knew about how much English and how much they could understand. We would talk to the guards all the way up and down back and forth and that way we would take and let the rest of them know what you told them.

T: It’s amazing the Japanese didn’t catch onto that.

F: Well, they maybe did. Some of them might have to some extent but that isn’t what they were after. They had their specialty that they had to do.

T: Did the interrogations end after a while or did they go on the whole time you were there?

F: No. It ended a little bit later on. It got fewer and fewer all the time. Every once in a while here would come Handsome Harry back. I forget what he was always after. But I was only interrogated by Handsome Harry once and I guess the old man must
have been interrogated seven or eight times by him or more. It’s hard to think. Fifty years ago. It’s a little bit difficult for me to tell you how often we were interrogated.

T: Sure. Again, more like four times or more like forty times?

F: I wouldn’t say forty times but I know it was more than four. I would say maybe more like ten, twelve, fifteen times.

T: I see. Now you say the interrogations ultimately came to an end.

F: Yes.

T: Did your life change as far as getting out of solitary confinement then?

F: Yes. After a while they let us all out together. All nine of us. Then we had some other prisoners in there that were pilots that had been shot down bombing Japan and some of the islands and some of them there like Tarawa and places like this. Just somebody for interrogation. For intelligence purposes. And when they had just about all the information they thought that they could get from you then they would take and let us out. At first our orders were no speak. We could get out and we could walk around this little compound. There was a little compound in front of each one of these buildings. And we could walk in a circle out there. Now this was getting to be wintertime. Christmas [1944]. That winter we had about fourteen or fifteen inches of snow for a while. Got down as cold as, near as we could figure out, probably ten to twelve above zero. The water pipes froze up and busted.

T: That’s a heck of a lot colder than where you started here.

F: Oh, yes. When we were taken down at Takao, that was in October. Now we’re up to January and February [1945].

T: Right. As to conditions, you’ve moved out of the solitary confinement. Are you sleeping in a room or staying in a room with a number of different men now?

F: No. We all had our own rooms. They were very good to us (laughs). They gave us private rooms.

T: The whole time you were at Ofuna did you have a so-called private room?

F: Yes. A private room of my own. And they used to open up the doors at night. You’d be laying in there on your mat. Asleep. Or half-asleep. And they would sneak in with a club and then they would start beating you over the back, over your backside or your ribs if you were sleeping on your back. They’d hit you right across the stomach or across the pelvis with that damn club. That’s what crippled my back today. I’ve got a crippled back today from dislocated vertebrae that were cracked, there at Ofuna.
T: It sounds like for no reason at all here.

F: Oh, yes. This was for a reason. This was sport. This was a lot of fun. You want to remember that these poor guards didn’t have a thing for entertainment hardly. A few cards, they would play or dice games. So they would do anything.

T: So for kicks they would try to sneak up on the prisoners and hit them on the back?

F: Yes. Yes. Beat you a little bit. This was funny to them. They’d run away and you’d hear them laughing and giggling and telling one another about it.

T: It must have made it real hard to sleep real soundly.

F: Yes, it was (chuckles). Let’s say war is hell, and that was part of it. We had a goose. They had a little pond out there that was all lined with concrete and filled with water. This was supposed to be for a fire. They had an old Mandarin duck that ran around there. An old female duck. I saw one guard take that duck one afternoon, take a nail and poke the eyes out of that duck and then break a hole in the end of the pond there or in the end of this reservoir and shove the poor old duck up underneath that ice as far as he could with a chunk of bamboo pole and watched the duck try to find his way out of there. Just laugh and laugh and thought it was the greatest thing. They were sadistic people. That’s all.

T: That’s a pretty awful story.

F: Yes. It’s horrible. Especially to you and I. To them that was…that’s what I tell you. You had to have something to do to entertain yourself. They were just gory people. That’s all there was to it.

T: Did you develop a hatred of the Japanese, would you say, or more of a pity for them?

F: Well, no. I got back to the States and right then I had a hatred for them. I was figuring out every way I could think of to kill more of them after the war was over. I was a little bit off of my rocker too. I wasn’t too stable. Anyhow, that’s beside the point. I maybe still ain’t. After I got back to the States I ran into Japanese that had been held in the camps here. In fact, I made friends with one of them, and he doesn’t live too far from me right here now. He lives down at Roseberg, Oregon. I got a chance to talk with him and I kind of sympathized with him because they locked up all those Jap people, men, women and children and they were all American citizens. And a lot of them sympathized with the Americans. I was surprised after I got a chance to talk to him. He told me that they were good people there and he said they
couldn’t hardly help but get some people that were spies, that would have turned spies if they could have, that were still in sympathy with the homeland. So I don’t know. I don’t hold any animosity against the individuals much today. There’s a few of them that—personal ones. Personal guards and one thing and another I’d like to get my hands on.

T: Have your feelings toward the Japanese changed over time since 1945?

F: Yes. I think I’ve mellowed out. I was pretty bitter in 1945 and I’ve had a chance now to, well, I live in a different environment than I did during the latter part of the war while I was in prison camp.

T: What do you mean by that?

F: I’m eating better than I did that year in prison camp. I’m sleeping better. Nobody’s going to sneak up and beat the hell out of me at night now. And they haven’t for the last thirty years, forty years, fifty years since that damn war was over. So I say I was bitter all right when I got out of there, but give you fifty years, you see things different now than you did when you were ten years old, don’t you?

T: Sure. So in a sense, time itself has helped heal things for you.

F: And change. Yes.

T: Do you ever have a desire to go back to Japan?

F: No. I didn’t leave anything back there. I have nothing to go back there for. Probably all the guards and everything I know is as old as I am and ready to die, or have died already. I wouldn’t know them or recognize them.

T: And to visit Japan, you have no interest?

F: No.

T: To go back to the camp, to Ofuna. Was there a daily routine? Even after the interrogations were over did you have something to do every day or was there just a whole lot of dead time?

F: In Ofuna it was pretty much dead time. You were fed three meals a day, such as they were. A whole cup of rice and a little bit of soup or what we called soup. It was bean paste in hot water. And things like this. Once in a while they’d boil up some carrot tops and make some carrot top soup for you and things like this. But our daily fare wasn’t rice. It was primarily barley and some rice mixed up with it. About one third rice worms. We had lots of worms in it, along with it. But that was all food. Worms were protein.
T: Did it take some time to get used to those as part of your food?

F: Yes. But you know, it never stayed with me. After I left prison camp I never went back to eating worms again *(laughs)*. That was one thing I got rid of pretty quick.

T: Were you able to communicate with other prisoners during the time you were there and sort of exchange stories about who you were and how you got there?

F: Oh, yes. We had what we called underground telegraph. [When you were] being led up to the latrine you’d tell the guard, “Hey, I’ve got to go to the latrine.” So he would take you up to, it was the benjo in Japanese. He’d take you to the benjo and while you’re going up you’re talking to him. Sometimes it was something awfully stupid and sometimes it was things you wanted some of your buddies to know and let them know who you were and where you were from. Especially when they’d get a new pilot in. In would come a new prisoner, and we had quite a few B-29 [Superfortress bomber] pilots brought in there towards the last because they began to hit the mainland pretty heavy with B-29s.

T: Right.

F: Then we had a strike in February, an aircraft carrier strike out there and I don’t know how many...they had strafing runs and bombing runs and everything else off those carriers. Then they brought in some pilots that they had shot down. When they did we let them know who we were and what to expect from the Jap guards and what to tell the goon rebos when they come. A lot of them would want to know, “Do they have any doctors here?” Because a lot of them were crippled. Broken legs, broken arms and stuff like this. The Japs never would set them or do anything like that. Medical attention just hardly wasn’t there. They had a, what we call a doc, which was about a second class pharmacist mate in the Navy. He was supposed to be the doctor. He’d go down and get himself a load of dope and he took the dope. He didn’t give us any of it.

T: So medical attention isn’t something you could expect for anything.

*(2, A, 301)*

F: No. We didn’t get anything like that. So we let the newcomers know what to expect.

T: Were you able to get any kind of dope from them about how the war was going on the outside?

F: Yes, we would. They would answer us. When they went to the benjo they would tell us our troops have secured Tarawa, or we’re now in the Bonin Islands, and we’re fighting right now for Guam, and things like this. We could just about tell how they were using the islands as stepping stones until they began to bomb the hell out of,
and shell, the battle ships began to shell the big island, Okinawa. When they started to work over Okinawa, that’s when we began to get quite a bit of dope because they were bringing in pilots then.

T: Were you concerned as the war started to go better for the Americans and worse for the Japanese about what would happen to you as a prisoner if the Japanese lost?

F: We found out what would happen to us. It was supposed to have happened. They were supposed to have taken us out... See, they never considered us and a lot of the pilots, anybody that did direct damage to the homeland or the Japanese themselves, I know they always called us, referred to us as snakes in the grass. We weren’t real prisoners. We were, there’s a Japanese name for it, called koko betsu hoiyo. That means you are a special prisoner. You are captured enemy. You are not a prisoner. You are a captured enemy. That’s what koko betsu means. Anyhow they had orders to take us out in case invasion of the mainland, main islands, Honshu and Kyushu, they were supposed to take us out and shoot us.

T: Did you know that while you were a prisoner?

F: Not for sure. It was kind of a rumored thing. You didn’t see it in writing any place or no Japanese ever came up and told us that they were going to take us out and kill us in case of this. But the word gets around among men like that.

T: While you were a prisoner there at Ofuna or even later at Omori, were you an optimistic kind of person that figured you were going to get out of all this, or –

F: We were pretty optimistic by this time because the war was going pretty much our way by then. We were sitting there, at Omori especially, listening to the battlewagons throw those big shells over the top of our camp and onto the mainland, onto Army establishments in there and all those factories. I was in Ofuna when B-29s, about three hundred of them, hit in between Tokyo and Yokohama at one time and just turned that whole country into a big field, because they bombed it with incendiary bombs during a typhoon. And water on incendiary bombs, it just multiplied them twice as good as they would if there was no water there. So it didn’t do any good to pour water on incendiary bombs. They were made out of phosphorus and you know if you put phosphorus into water it will break into flames.

T: So towards the end you could literally see the war –

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 378.

F: They sold that to the farmers. There was what we called the honey bucket brigade. Our toilets would fill up and they’d have to have extra holes to put it in. So we’d get a working party to go over and dig that hole out and seal it up with concrete. They’d bring in some concrete and sand and we’d have to make concrete.
T: It sounds like it was more the exception than the daily rule though, the work details.

F: Oh, no. It was no daily rule [at Omori] that you went out every day.

T: You were moved in, I think you said it was around April [1945] you figure, from Ofuna up to Omori.

F: Yes. I think it was the latter part of April.

T: Was there any kind of forewarning that you were going to be moved?

F: No. Not until one of the Jap guards had told us that the goon rebo said that they were done with us and that we would be transferred to work camps.

T: He kind of tipped you off under the table?

F: Yes. We kind of figured maybe we'd go to the copper mines or something like this.

T: Were there rumors about that kind of work being possible?

F: Yes. We knew that there was work done like that. Because we had fellows in camp there that could even read Japanese. Had learned to read Japanese. Then they would steal the newspapers out of the trash and read the newspapers.

T: So you could get some news, however jaded. Even if it was jaded or tilted toward the Japanese perspective. You could get some indication of what was going on.

F: Yes. That's what I said. I don't know. It's hard to keep an American with his nose clean. He'll have his nose where he isn't supposed to just because he's told not to. And you'd be surprised what we picked up, what we would learn.

T: Do you feel that you were kind of keeping getting rumors or bits of news that sort of kept you aware of how things were going?

F: You had to deduct a lot of what was going on by what you would pick up and where you got it and how you got it. Like if you got a pilot brought in and he had a chance to talk to us for a little bit, you could pretty well believe what he had to say.

T: So you could take a little piece of what you got from him with a little piece of what you learned from somewhere else and almost like a quilt, put together a picture of what was going on.
F: Yes. We knew what was going on pretty well down at Leyte Gulf during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Especially the skipper, because he had a good picture in his mind of the whole layout of the Philippines. He had studied charts. He had studied the maps. He’d been in on some of the drillings of the skippers. Of what to expect in the ship movements and things of this sort. He knew tactics a lot better than what we would. But he would pass the word on to us as he learned them. He knew them.

T: When you think about your time at Ofuna there, whether it was the interrogations or the lack of food or the Japanese or the weather, what was the most difficult aspect of your time there at Ofuna?

F: Lack of food. Definitely.

T: You said that quickly and easily.

F: Yes.

(2, B, 416)

T: Even more than the interrogations and the punishment.

F: Yes. You can take a good beating, but you can’t starve to death day after day after day. And the pangs of hunger will drive you crazy. We talked about it and we discussed it and we would exchange recipes. We did a lot of crazy things, things today you wouldn’t just believe it. How nuts we really were. The situation we were in, it made us all a little nuts. We all came out of there… Psychiatrists talking to us for weeks afterwards.

T: When you went to Omori, was there any kind of advance warning or was it kind of a sudden movement?

F: It was more or less a sudden movement. They just came along and told us one morning. One of the petty officers. In fact, it was this doc I was telling you about. He could talk English a little bit. He wouldn’t, but then by this time we had picked up a little Japanese too. So he came down to each one of our cells and he says to me—he couldn’t say Caverly; they can’t say Rs and Ls. My name was Cobwee. He said, “Cobwee, today you depart.” So today I depart.

T: Now were you moved with other guys? All of you or...

F: There were the skipper…did the skipper go with us at that time? (pauses three seconds) Yes, I think that he did. The skipper, Pappy Boyington [Marine Corps pilot], and there was about, I think, ten or twelve of us moved at that time over to Omori. I don’t remember who all was in that. I can’t tell you.

T: But the camp wasn’t emptied, in any case.
F: No. No.

T: So just a group of you were moved and the remainder were left there.

F: Yes. Ichi and Niko still had prisoners in them.

T: When you got to Omori, from your perspective having this experience behind you, how was that camp different from Ofuna?

F: It was not too much different. Ofuna was a Navy camp run by the Navy, and Omori was Army. Army guards. The people that ran it were all Army.

T: So you’ve moved from Navy to Army control now.

F: And they put all of us in—I think there was nineteen of us, if I remember right. We even had a couple of Englishmen in there. Not English, Norwegian. That had been captured off their ships. The Germans had captured and turned them over to the Japanese over in the Indian Ocean. They had a story to tell. I could tell you a book on that. You could write a book about them.

   Anyhow, there was nineteen of us, if I remember right, and they put us in one of these barracks. They had it partitioned off. Then they came along with about another twenty men and put on the other side of the partition in the back of this barracks. This barracks was probably about forty foot long. It was divided, well, not quite half, in two. Anyhow, they were in the back part and they were mostly B-29 pilots. They were called *bini sukume*. That means B-29 men. But they weren’t all B-29 men. There were some of them Navy fliers off of carriers and things of this sort.

T: But they were kept separate, you say.

F: Yes. They were. It was a peculiar thing here. Only a few years ago did I meet one of those guys that was back there. He was a colonel. He came to one of what we call our shrink meetings down here with the VA. Here he was at the barracks with me. He was telling me about the people that were in the barracks up ahead of him. I sat there and I listened to him tell his story and he said, “Richard O’Kane was there, from the *Tang.*” He was telling about Pappy Boyington being up in the forward but he said, “We never got a chance to converse with him or talk with him or anything,” but he said, “only what we would do through the wall or something like that.” Or on a trip to the *benjo.* When he got all done we introduced ourselves to him, the rest of the group there. And I told him, his name was Ernie Pickett, Colonel Pickett, and I said, “Colonel, I’m one of the guys that was in with the men up forward in your barracks there.” He said, “Did you know O’Kane?” I said, “Yes. He was my skipper.” We became very good friends then. Old Ernie, he had cancer and he died with cancer maybe about three months later.

(2, B, 475)
T: So really, you didn’t even know each other in those rooms because you had no contact between the two.

F: No. We weren’t to associate with each other. We went on working parties there more than we did at Ofuna.

T: Doing what kind of work?

F: We went out and we worked in the gardens a little bit first. In the early part of the summer while we were there. The latter part of the summer. They had a sawmill down there, and we’d haul logs out of the water and rolled them up onto the bank so that they could saw them up into lumber. Now this was a dock that was blown to pieces by our bombing.

T: Because Omori sits right on the water, doesn’t it?

F: Yes. In fact, it was right out, about five hundred feet I would say, off the mainland. It was the causeway between there and the mainland. It was a manmade island. They dug up the sand out of the bay and kept piling it up until they made an island.

T: So you had some things to do there occasionally. Some actual work to do.

F: Yes. Right at the tail end we were digging caves to put, well, I guess that they were probably air raid shelters for people as well as to put, to store food and stuff in for the winter.

T: So a bunch of you were marched out of Omori to this cave digging detail?

F: Yes. Where we worked in this sandstone cave.

T: How many of you went out there, Mr. Caverly? Was it a whole group of men that went out to do this kind of work?

F: Yes. Most generally, nearly all of us would go out of there. That was probably anywhere from twelve to fifteen men.

T: The men from your room.

F: Yes. They would march us out.

T: But it was the men from your room and not men from the rest of the camp.

F: No. No.

T: Were you interrogated or questioned there at all at Omori?
F: No. There was no interrogations going on at Omori.

T: So that finished.

F: Yes.

T: Was the food any different in amount or type?

F: No. We got what we called a maize there. I don't know if you know what maize is or not.

(2, B, 506)

T: Corn.

F: Red corn. It can't be fed to cattle until it's well ground or well cooked. It would just tear the guts out of you. We ate that stuff. They fed us maize. That was our primary diet.

T: How was your system dealing with that as far as digesting it or getting any nutrition out of it?

F: We did, yes, because we had dysentery practically all the time we were in there anyhow. I don't know whether it was digested or whether it just went through.

T: Your health, compared to Ofuna, would you say it was better, the same, or worse while you were at Omori?

F: Health, probably time did more to our health than...as much as anything. So I wouldn't say that it was improved to go to Omori. We just brought what we had from Ofuna over there and kept trying to live. We had two fellows die from our group. A little fellow by the name of Gill. I remember his name. I forget the other guy's name. He was a pilot. Gill was an aerographer that was flying air flights, getting information. Air reconnaissance. He was shot down around Rabaul or something.

T: Had you had guys die at Ofuna as well?

F: Yes. We had some die there too. Never knew who they were, because we were all locked up in solitary confinement. After they were dead, then we were allowed to take them out and bury them.

T: Was it easier for you to get on there at Omori, at least having people to interact with every day?
F: We didn’t risk this too much because if we were caught talking with the rest of the camp or something like that we were punished for it.

T: I was just thinking in that room at Omori you at least had close to twenty other people in the room as opposed to just yourself.

F: Yes. That was good in some ways. In some ways it wasn’t. I mean, we had people in there that didn’t get along too well with other people. They weren’t all submarine people. Submarine people do get along together pretty well. They’re temperamentally fit for submarines. They’ll just about withstand any stress. But then we had fellows in there that couldn’t take that either and every once in a while a fight would break out. In between the old man and Boyington, we had to kind of police ourselves and we kind of took their word for how it was supposed to go.

T: I’m just thinking, the whole time you were a POW you were married. Did you have any opportunity to get word to your wife or your folks back here that you were still alive?

F: No.

T: So no postcards or anything?

F: No. We had no communication whatsoever. We weren’t registered prisoners. We weren’t registered with the Red Cross or anything so we couldn’t…

T: When you got back to the States and saw your wife, what had she known about your status?

F: Ernestine, that’s the skipper’s wife, had a little inkling from some of the War Department that there may have been some survivors off of the Tang. But you know as much about it now as I do about what she knew. Very little.

T: But there was a chance that some people may have survived, some men, but no names.

(2, B, 558)

F: Yes. So after I got back, I think I was home about four or five days and the mail came. And a check came in the mail for me, for her. It was for one thousand dollars. Life insurance policy that I had gotten before I ever joined the Navy.

T: And it was being cashed?

F: Yes. They sent it to her. They told her that they had word from the government that I was missing in action and presumed dead. So they said if the government
presumed him dead we will give you, or present you, his insurance that he had with this company.

T: You were already back at that time you say.

F: Yes. So I mailed the check back to them and told them I was sorry I couldn’t accept it *(laughs)*. I’ve got the policy yet today.

T: At least you were there when that check arrived as opposed to otherwise.

F: Yes.

T: Say, how did you experience the end of the war there at Omori? How did you learn about it?

F: Several things went on. The Japs themselves came and the colonel who was the Jap commander, he came out and he said that, more or less, that things had happened. He said, “It has been agreed that we have an armistice and we must all realize our situation. I don’t want a mass murder here in this camp,” and all of this stuff. He went on to tell us that there was an aircraft flying to the Philippines to meet with MacArthur. I don’t think they did meet with MacArthur, but he said so. General MacArthur, he said. “Peace is in negotiation,” he said.

T: Is this like an announcement that was made to all of you standing out there?

F: Yes. He stood on a big log out in the middle of the compound there and made this speech. All that were gathered around there. So the next morning we got up, and during the night all the guards were changed. We had new guards. They were well dressed in nice, trim uniforms. All of them could speak English a little bit. They were all educated kids.

T: And all the other ones were just gone?

F: Yes. Everybody was gone. Including one camp doctor that we had there. He disappeared too. We found him a little bit later. The Aussies had killed him and stuck him headfirst down the *benjo*. And then nailed the door shut. They didn’t find him for about two weeks after the Americans took the camp over.

T: Were there rumors or inklings, I guess you might say, that something, that the war was going to come to an end? Or were you surprised when you heard that announcement?

F: We weren’t really surprised because, like I told you, we had some of these—even before Nagasaki or after Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the bombing of that. Then they came and they bombed the Tokyo-Yokohama area with leaflets. God, you can imagine how many could be packed into... Five by seven picture and on the back of
it instructions in Japanese. The B-29 came over, reconnaissance plane, and he just peppered that whole area with those damn leaflets and it said—what it was doing was it was telling the people to move their emperor back into the hills and well protected shelter because they were going to drop another super bomb. They called it a super bomb. Said we’re going to drop another super bomb on Tokyo. So to save your people, tell them to get back up into the hills and stay as much underground as possible.

T: Did these leaflets come over your camp as well?

F: They were all over the place. They came down just like a snowstorm.

(2, B, 624)

T: So almost anybody could pick it up and look at it.

F: Yes. They couldn’t stop people from knowing. Absolutely couldn’t.

T: So there was an idea that it was getting close and then...

F: We knew we had the bull by the horns. There was no question. We didn’t know if they were going to do this or not, and I understand that they had planned that they were going to do it.

T: To kill you all?

F: Truman said drop it on the bastards. But I guess that brought them to their knees quick and they said let’s call a truce. So they did.

T: How long were you in Omori after the announcement before you were evacuated?

F: Let’s see. I think that the war was supposed to have been over or at least cessation of hostilities on about 11 or 12 August, wasn’t it?

T: Yes.

F: I think it was, oh, around the twenty-second or twenty-third. I don’t remember exactly. A week or so later. All of a sudden one day, we knew and we heard that the—well, by this time there was flights coming over, dropping us food, clothing. They killed two Japanese guards in the barracks. They dropped two barrels. They would weld two barrels together. Fifty-five gallon drums. And that would just fit in the bomb bay of the B-29. And they would fly right down within five hundred feet over you and drop those damn things onto the camp. They went through one barracks and the guards didn’t go into the air raid shelters and it killed two guards. They were sitting playing a game of some sort. They were dropping stuff to us.
Even the little fighter pilots coming off the carriers one behind the other. Throw cigarettes over to us. Cartons of cigarettes and things of this sort.

T: From famine to feast.

F: Yes. Yes. Pretty soon we had food all over the place. We were getting killed with it *(chuckles)*. You say, how did we know it was over? I mean you take things like this going on, you’ve got a pretty good idea the war is done.

T: How long did it take for you to get back to the United States?

F: They picked us up in these Higgins boats and took us off of the island of Omori and took us out to the *Benevolence*. That’s a hospital ship. In fact, I think she’s laying on her side just outside of San Francisco Bay there yet. I don’t think they ever moved it—she sunk just outside San Francisco. That was about a year after the war when she sunk. I don’t remember the details on it either. Anyhow, took us out to the hospital ship. Gave us kind of a fast check to find out who was about ready to die and who was in bad shape and didn’t have legs and couldn’t walk. I was in pretty good shape yet. They fed us. God, they fed us. They just fed us so much. We ate until we got sick and we heaved it up and turned right around and went back down to that crazy chow line again. We’d done some awful crazy things.

T: I have heard a couple other guys tell me the same thing. That’s for real that you really just went back and got more.

F: Yes. You went nuts. A day later, a day after that, we had a kind of a quick checkup and they gave us what uniforms that they could get for us. They didn’t have too much. It was just what other sailors would donate. I got two pair of trousers. Here, will these fit you? No, the y’re a little long in the legs. All right. Cut them off *(chuckles)*. Grab the scissors. Cut them off. Now they fit.

*(2, B, 695)*

T: Catch as catch can.

F: Yes. I went out onto what they called an old AK, kind of a transport ship. I don’t know how many of us went out there. I can’t remember anymore either. But I know I was on there. This was when the armistice was signed on the *Missouri*. They wanted to know if I wanted to go over on the *Missouri* to see MacArthur accept the surrender and I said, “Are the Japanese surrendered?” and they said, “Yes.” And I said, “That’s all I give a damn. I’m staying right here.” I said, “That’s all I care about. It’s over and we’ve got them whipped.” So I didn’t go over on the *Missouri*. I could have gone over there. But there were so many people there. And I didn’t have a decent uniform. I didn’t even have a damn white hat that would fit me. So I said no.

T: In photos of the surrender ceremony the *Missouri* was jammed with people.
F: You would have never known me in those thousand that were on there.

T: Now were you flown or shipped back to the States then?

F: I was flown back to the States. Two days later they told me, they came in there and they said we got word that there’s an R4D, Navy R4D, flying back to Alameda, California. Does anyone want to go? God! I hollered, Yes! So they put us in a boat, a Liberty boat, and took us over to Atsugi Air Base. Then we went from there and I remember going over Kwajalein. I think we set down and refueled at Kwajalein there and went into Guam. We stayed overnight in Guam. We RON-ed there. Had a checkup on the plane. Got a breakfast. Fed us up good. Flew us on back to the States. We got back to the States, oh, it seemed to me that it was around two o’clock in the morning. I don’t know.

T: This is the first or second week of September here?

F: Yes. I think that we landed in Alameda on 7 September. I’d have to look up the records here. I don’t remember the exact date. It was still before daylight in the morning and (chuckles) they put us, they couldn’t find any spare bunks in any of the barracks that they had there at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital. So they said, “There’s one way up here on the hill that’s got about thirty-five or forty.” All right. We’ll take these and put them up there. And the damn thing was the psychiatric ward. They locked us up in there. Some of us didn’t think took kindly of that.

T: That sounds like a bad joke, quite honestly.

F: Yes. Those old gates swung shut. Wham! And a big padlock was into them. We didn’t know what in the hell was going on (laughing).

End of Tape. Tape 3, Side A begins at counter 000.

F: But the next morning they got a new OD down there, Officer of the Deck, and they began getting a few things straightened out. They found a bunk here and a bunk there and they transferred some people here. Then they told us that people that had relatives in the area—my wife was still there.

T: Was she in the area there?

F: Yes. I had her telephone number that she had when I left. See, I was only gone a year. She was a nurse.

T: Was she in service?

F: No. No. She was a nurse, an RN. She had got a job with a school which was a dental nursing school. She could make twice as much money teaching in this school.
as she could nursing, so she took that job. So when I got home she had a damn good job. Anyhow, she still had the same telephone because she rated a telephone being a serviceman’s wife and working as an instructor.

T: Did you just call her up?

F: Yes.

T: The poor woman. Did she know that you might be coming?

F: She didn’t know I was coming, no. I don’t think anybody knew. Well, yes, she did know I was coming. Because I sent her a telegram from Guam.

T: So it wasn’t a complete surprise.

F: No. She got the telegram before she got to see me. But I actually got in the States before the telegram did, because it took me three days to get released from this hospital so I could go home. But she finally got the word the same day as I went home. That night. They let us out at three o’clock in the afternoon.

T: Now when you first saw your wife there, how much did she ask you about your POW experience, Mr. Caverly?

F: Oh, none, so far as the POW. She didn’t—well, eventually she did. But I mean right away, quick I walked in the house and she said, “How did you fare? Did you eat well?” or something like this. It was nothing like this interview.

T: Over time, you say, did that change? Did she ask you more about it?

F: And after a while it’s pretty hard to sit around without discussing something like this. You’ve been locked up for a year in a Japanese prison camp. You come home, you’re going to say something about it. I don’t give a damn what you say one way or the other. Of course right away the main thing was then was to call my folks back in Minnesota. Her folks were living in Minnesota. And to tell them that I was home and free. Although they had read it in newspapers already. But newspapers sometimes got it kind of balled up too, you know.

T: As far as talking to your wife about the POW experience, did she ask you questions that you remember that were pretty specific about things?

F: Yes. She knew that I’d lost a lot of weight. I maybe weighed, oh, when I went aboard the Tang I probably weighed 165, 175 pounds. I don’t know. When I weighed in when I went on the Benevolence, I weighed just a little under one hundred pounds.

T: Holy mackerel! In those ten months as a prisoner you lost a lot of weight!
F: So I was a skinny little guy when I came home.

T: You might have gained weight, but you’re not going to gain all that back that fast.

F: She said, “They must not have fed you too well.” I said, “Not too well at all, Honey. I’d rather you cook me a steak than anything.” And you know, it was a funny thing. I really didn’t care for a steak too much or anything. I just wanted good old soup. Tasty stuff. Food. I didn’t want anything exotic.

T: Did you crave certain foods more than...you might have been surprised at yourself?

F: I don’t think that I craved anything in particular. But whatever I did eat, I ate very well. I know I went to a restaurant. We went to a restaurant—it was when I was coming back to see my folks. Back to Minnesota.

T: How long did that take before you came back to Minnesota to visit?

(3, A, 48)

F: It took me about two weeks to get released from that hospital where I didn’t have to check in every morning. I used to have to check in every morning and go over and muster. I got some clothes. They managed to get us something of a resemblance of a uniform. They gave me free orders, and finances, to go back to Minnesota. I think that they gave me thirty days. In other words I got thirty days of leave, medical leave. There was a couple that I knew that used to live back there in my hometown. They were working in the shipyards at Richmond, California. Mr. and Mrs. Coleman came over to visit me and they said, “Hey, we’re going back home to Minnesota. Would you like to ride along with us?” Yes, I’d go along. I said I’d furnish the gasoline because I could get all the gasoline I needed for an automobile for my trip home. I had three or four books of gasoline tickets.

T: So you and your wife both went, or just you?

F: No. She stayed and didn’t leave Mr. Grummond with the school. She was the leading teacher there. More or less was running that school for him, to tell you the truth. Anyhow, I went back with them. I remember going back that first morning. We got up and we went into a restaurant, these people I was traveling with. I never thought a thing about it. The waitress came to our table and wanted to know what we wanted. Mr. and Mrs. Coleman ordered their breakfast. He got, I think, a stack of pancakes and she got some oatmeal and toast and jelly and they asked me what I wanted and I said, “What is the full order of pancakes?” She said, “You get three nice big plate-size pancakes for a full order of pancakes.” I said, “Give me a double order.” She said, “What?!” I said, “Give me a double order and a pint of milk.” They
just couldn’t believe that. Here this skinny, scrawny guy would hold that much food \textit{(laughs)}. I don’t know where I put it myself.

T: Did you find yourself eating what seemed like a lot of food?

F: Yes, I did. I did for about the first month. I just couldn’t leave food alone for a while. Not that I really craved it or anything. It was there. And that was how I got to smoking cigarettes too because they were \textit{available}. They weren’t there in prison camp. But I did get some in prison camp. That was something else again.

T: How long did that trip take all the way back from Richmond, California?

F: Four or five days. Four days maybe.

T: Well, when you saw your folks again, you hadn’t seen them for quite some time.

F: No. I saw them...I think I was going across country when I came back from New London, came back to the \textit{Tang}. I got my orders in New London [Connecticut] to come to the \textit{Tang}. It was built in San Francisco or in the Bay Area there. The shipyards at Paleo, California.

T: So then the \textit{Tang}, according to the record, left from San Diego and then went to Pearl Harbor, right? After it was launched.

F: Yes. We had what we call our shakedown cruise. Down to San Diego and back again. We had fast screws put on. Then we headed out to Honolulu.

T: It’s still been nearly two years since you had seen your folks or close to it, right?

F: Yes. Yes.

T: How much were your folks interested to know about your POW experience?

F: Well, they wanted to know all about it.

T: Did they ask you pretty honest questions about it?

\textbf{(3, A, 96)}

F: Well, really the folks didn’t press me. None of my relatives did. They knew that I didn’t care about talking to them too much. Talking about it. \textit{(pauses three seconds)} What was there to say about it? And I kind of let them know this.

T: How did you do that?
F: I just told them. I said, “Listen, I’ve been locked up for a year. It’s been a prison and I was fed but very little, so you can imagine the rest. There isn’t much of anything else that I’ve got to tell you. I don’t want to talk about it.”

T: Sounds like you pretty much told them you preferred not to answer their questions.

F: I didn’t say I didn’t want to answer your questions, but I just didn’t want to talk about it. I didn’t want to discuss the gory details.

T: And just comparing, it sounds like you found it easier to talk to your wife than to your folks or to your relatives.

F: Yes. I talked to my wife a little bit more about it. But she didn’t press me for details either too much. She pretty well knew what we did. She knew that we weren’t fed. I told her what we ate and there wasn’t very much variation in that diet.

T: While you were still in service, and you stayed in the service until 1960, did the Navy, after you got back on duty, provide any kind of psychological counseling or anything like that?

F: No. No. They didn’t have to, I don’t think.

T: So that wasn’t part of the getting you back to fitness routine for the Navy.

F: About the only thing that they did, they gave me what they call Rest and Recuperation leave and then they had Rest and Recuperation duty. In other words, I didn’t have to go right out and go to sea again for four or five months at a time or four or five weeks at a time or even a week at a time. I got a year or two years of recuperation duty in the Federal Building at San Francisco. Tenth and Market Streets. At NPG Radio.

T: So your first duty after all this was over was a Stateside posting.

F: Yes.

T: How long were you kept under medical care or at a Naval hospital?

F: Very short time over there. I think just about a month was about all.

T: Were you back on active duty then by Christmas 1945, or not quite?

F: Let’s see. (pauses three seconds) No, I think it was, if I remember right, it was along in February [1946] before I actually went to active duty. I was on what we call Rest and Recuperation leave at home.
T: So you didn’t have to go to a special R and R facility or anything?

F: No. I didn’t have to report in every morning for quarters or anything like this.

T: When you stayed in the service you were in submarine duty for a while, weren’t you?

F: Yes.

T: Your POW experience, did that come up with guys in service as you were on active duty over the years?

F: Not too often. Once in a while. Questions like, “Did you get anything to eat like this when you were in camp? Or when you were a guest of Tokyo or Tojo? Didn’t Tojo feed you steak and eggs for breakfast?” No, he never did (laughs).

(3, A, 139)

T: So those kind of light comments really.

F: Yes, that’s right. You want to remember that there were quite a few—this one sub I went on there were three of us that were ex-POWs on there.

T: No kidding?! What are the odds of that?

F: Yes. They got a break by having a good Stateside submarine. We went and made daily operations out of NEL, Naval Electronics Laboratory in San Diego. We’d be in every night because we had long-hair scientists aboard with us.

T: With those other guys who were ex-POWs, did you feel like it was easier to talk to them about the POW stuff or didn’t it come up with them either?

F: We used to talk about it once in a while. We’d stop and have a few beers on the way home and you’re bound to sit and talk. I mean you’re not going to just sit there and clam up among yourselves.

T: Was it easier to sort of share the details of what you’d been through with guys who had also been through it?

F: I wouldn’t say that it was hard; and it wasn’t hard for me. It all depended upon who I was talking to. Like I’m talking to you now. It isn’t too hard anymore. It’s hard to remember and get the details I know that you would like to know, but I just don’t have it.

T: Oh Mr. Caverly, you’ve done wonderfully. I’ll say that right now.
F: I wouldn’t say that it was hard. Now there’s other people that I don’t care to talk to about it at all.

T: If I had asked you for an interview like this twenty or thirty years ago is that something you could have said yes to, do you think?

F: Oh, I could have said yes to it, but maybe I wouldn’t have been as ready to do it as I am now. Let’s say I’ve probably thought about it a little bit more now and I wouldn’t understand really what you wanted to know for. What difference does it make? I can’t do anything about it now.

T: But now it is easier for you?

F: Yes. I’ve got a little bit better perspective of life all the way along because there’s so little of it left now. What difference does it make?

T: One of the last couple things I want to ask you is this: after you were released as a POW, how much experience did you have with dreams or nightmares that were specifically about your POW experience?

F: I was released as a POW probably in 1945, right? And 1947, that’s when I went back to active duty again off of the radio station.

T: Right.

F: And this is 2004. You do the math on that.

T: That’s fifty-seven years.

F: That’s how long I’ve been having nightmares. Yes. I’ve got a doctor now that’s got, he’s got me on this Prozac.

T: Has that helped you as far as this...

F: It has, yes. I don’t seem to have the nightmares that I had. I haven’t stopped dreaming yet, but they’re not the gory things. I’m not fighting the Japanese and I’m not... my bad dreams were not all military. I dreamed the other night [that] a couple of teenagers had two pit bull dogs and they were setting them on cows.

(3, A, 185)

T: That’s not a POW dream.

F: No. They claim it’s PTSD, post-traumatic syndrome, that causes me to dream things like that.
T: When you, since 1945, have had images with specific POW images, what kind of things are those typically?

F: Dreams are not a good solid thought or happening. Things change so fast in dreams and everything.

T: Yes, they do.

F: One time I might be getting captured and trying to hide out and a whole bunch of women coming, started screaming and pointing their fingers at me letting the men know where I’m at. Things like this. When you say what kind of dreams do you have...

T: Do you ever recall dreaming about specific that you experienced at Ofuna or Omori?

F: I used to years ago. Probably the first four or five years after I got back aboard the sub. I used to have dreams about a couple of the guards. Not anymore. I get a lot of my old shipmates too. But what controls what you’re going to dream, you don’t know what it is until you go to sleep. Til you wake up and you had it. Then you know what you were going to dream.

T: That’s right. You have a pretty good understanding of how that works. Mr. Caverly, has your Veterans Administration been helpful to you over the years?

F: The latter part they have, yes. I didn’t press them too much at first either. I was a little bit independent. I couldn’t understand how anybody was going to help me anyhow. What are you going to do about...I had bad dreams. What do you do? Have a man stand there and change them for you?

T: So you didn’t think to ask for help.

F: No. I really didn’t care for it until after I got, a couple of times I got (***), stomach and one thing and another. I had pancreatitis. I was in the hospital and that was about the first time. And we had what we called the ex-POW Protocol Exam.

T: Yes. This is the big thing in the 1980s, right?

F: I went through that. Then I picked up some pointers as to what maybe the Veterans [Administration] could do for me. It was a funny thing, but after they prompted me on all of that then they wanted so much proof that I was susceptible to PTSD. And things like this. I was kind of disgusted with them then. I thought that if they have to have that much trouble... I’m getting along all right. I’m doing my work. And I had a good job and was making good money. So I didn’t push the Veterans Administration too much, little problems that I was having. Then when I
got older things began to happen to me and then I began to [think] why should I pay money out for medical attention when the Veterans should give me something anyhow? So I started chasing after it. Then a couple of service officers got interested in me. They listened. They told me, “You’ve got this coming. You’ve got that coming.” They’d get it for me. They would go and get if for me. Pretty soon I began to realize that there was more happening to me than I knew.

T: So they made you aware of more than you had been aware of?

F: Yes. That was the way it was. I know like I had trouble with my feet and I didn’t realize it was because we froze our feet in that damn prison camp over there at Ofuna that winter.

(3, A, 248)

T: Right. Are you one hundred percent disabled now?

F: Yes. I am now.

T: How long have you had one hundred percent?

F: Oh, about the last year, I’d say.

T: So it took a while to actually get that, didn’t it?

F: Yes. I was on ten percent disability for quite a while. They said, “We can reevaluate you and put you up on like twenty-six percent.” Then I didn’t have to pay for my medication. Otherwise you had what we call co-payment. Then I got a high enough percent to take care of that. Then when we got the Protocol, then I was having trouble with my back and I complained about it. Then they took x-rays and CAT scans and said you’ve got dislocated vertebrae. They’re cracked and healed over. It’s like an adhesion or scar tissue within the vertebrae. There was a lot of ifs and ands of what I should do, what I would do if I wanted to and they would do it for me. Then one doctor would say don’t mess with your back unless you absolutely have to. Pretty soon I decided I’m not going to let them whittle on my back unless I can’t navigate without it. And I’m still getting around. I keep taking pills all the time and things like this.

T: So you’ve stayed after them but they’ve helped you.

F: Yes.

T: You mentioned in our earlier conversation about a counseling group or a POW talking group that you’ve been a part of?

F: Yes.
T: That’s your group that meets at the Eugene VA, right?

F: Yes.

T: How long have you been going to that?

F: Oh, I’d say eight or nine years. I don’t remember exactly when we did do it. But I know we used to meet in an old building down on Eighth Avenue and I think that our new building has been up about six years now. I was there a couple years before.

T: Do you think that going to that group has helped you in any way?

F: Yes. A little bit mentally. Not physically. It didn’t do anything for my back. It didn’t do anything for my feet. Didn’t do anything for my pancreas. But it has done me quite a bit of good to talk to other people that are going in the same time, only worse. You know this is something funny. I almost feel ashamed to go to that group down there.

T: Why is that?

F: All right. I go down there and I see some of those guys wheeling themselves around. No legs at all, or one leg sticking out and the other one gone. People with hoses hanging out of their nose and three or four tanks on the back of their wheelchairs and somebody pushing them around. I’m on my own feet. I can navigate yet. I have a little trouble breathing, sure. And I’ve got quite a few things wrong with me, but I’m not suffering like those people are and when I stop to think how much worse off some of these guys are than I am it’s almost (*** of me to take the doctor’s time to doctor me when they have it much worse than I do.

T: That’s very interesting. You see people worse off than yourself.

F: Yes they are. They are worse off.

T: When you get together in the group, is there a doctor there? A psychiatrist there usually with you?

(3, A, 303)

F: He’s a therapist. He’s not really a psychiatrist. He has studied psychiatry and he has pretty good ideas to tell us. His name is Dennis Epstein. And I can tell old Dennis if something is bothering me, I’m having some trouble with the administrative people or something like this, he makes a note of that. He says, “I’ll straighten that right out for you. You don’t deserve this.” Old Dennis comes in and he helps us out and he does this for all us fellows. Right now there’s only three of us
left in this one group. The last eight years I’ve been going. When I first joined this
group I think there was fourteen or fifteen of us in the group.

T: And now there’s three?

F: Yes. They died off.

T: In going over the years, how do you think that talking about it has helped you?

F: Not necessarily talking about it. We talk about other things too. I talked about
fixing my automobile and we’ve talked about the computer and one thing and
another. You know, we all have computers.

T: So it’s a whole range of things you talk about.

F: Yes. We talk about almost anything that might bother us or give us some trouble.
I had a slug infestation here a couple years ago and I think the whole group did
nothing but kill slugs about two years.

T: So it sounds like it isn’t always about POW times.

F: Yes. And we talk some about what happened to us.

T: Is it easy to talk with guys in a group like that that are all POWs?

F: Yes, that’s right. It’s easy to talk to them. We have a lot in common.

T: Even the guys who were POWs of the Germans?

F: Yes. Yes, these too. You’re not much different than they are. Just that you were
treated a little bit different. Your situation may be different, but as far as what the
veterans are looking for from politicians and politics… We talk politics a little bit,
but...

T: It sounds like you enjoy it enough to keep going back all these years.

F: Oh, yes. I go back Tuesday.

T: I had only one last question for you with that in mind, and that’s if you think
about the time you were a POW there in 1944 and ‘45 and that is a long time ago,
how do you feel that the experience changed you as a person?

F: It changed me as a person?

T: Yes. I mean when you think of Floyd Caverly before and Floyd Caverly after.
F: I don’t know what I had expected to change. I can’t look back and say, what did you think that you were going to be when you got to be eighty-seven years old? I would probably tell you I’ll never live to be eighty-seven years old, and I had no idea I ever would either. But I might even make eighty-eight if I keep hanging in here. But it’s hard to say how much it has changed me. My POW experience. (pauses three seconds) It’s hard for me to describe, to tell you the truth, because I didn’t know what, back at that time (*** what I’d be doing today. I didn’t even expect to be alive at eighty-seven.

End of Tape 3, Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.

T: When you got back and saw your folks or saw your wife, do you think they noticed or said to you even that you were changed in any way from before?

F: Oh yes, they did, because they told me afterwards. It took you a little while to get your wits about you. I’d say well, you know, it did. I was, when I first came back, I had a chip on my shoulder a little bit.

T: What do you mean?

F: I figured that after what I’ve gone through and knowing what could happen to me, I just wasn’t going to take any crap off of anybody anymore. It’s hard to find the words to describe it. Like I say, I had a chip on my shoulder. I would fight at the drop of a hat and one thing and another like that.

T: Is that different from yourself before?

F: Yes. I was a little bit [of a] more happy go lucky fellow and I had things to look forward to. I had marriage. I had children to look after. A family to raise. Gradually I mellowed out again.

T: It sounds like you had to get something out of your system almost.

F: Yes. Let’s say I didn’t ever really feel fully repatriated. I didn’t feel free yet. Because there was things in my mind that I couldn’t get rid of. It wasn’t all just POW stuff. It was a lot of things that went on in my life.

T: Let me ask you this: was drinking part of what you did when you got back?

F: Oh, yes. I drank pretty heavy for two or three years there. I drank real heavy in fact. I drank a lot of whiskey. Good and bad.

T: But again it sounds like this is something that ran it’s course.

F: Yes. Yes. I don’t think I’ve had a highball now in two years. One of the reasons is that, it isn’t that I’m against drinking so much. I know that alcohol isn’t good for you.
I know that. But at the same time, I get awfully sick with these hangovers and I can’t stand them anymore. So I’m glad I’m over that (laughing). It was never a habit or an alcoholic situation where I was an alcoholic and I had to drink. I could go weeks on end, months on end, without drinking if I wanted to. I used to go aboard the sub and I never went to sea drunk or anything like this. You just couldn’t do it on a submarine. That’s all there is to it.

T: That’s the last question I had. On the record, Mr. Caverly, thank you very much for taking a good part of your evening and being part of this Minnesota POW project. I want to ask if at this point there is anything else that you want to add before we conclude?

F: Not that I know of off hand. If anything might come up in the very near future I might give you call and let you know about it. But I don’t have anything more to [add]. It seems like we kind of covered it from the time that, especially from the time we were sunk until right up to today.

T: Yes. You did an amazingly good job with recalling specifics and also the way you felt in general about things, and that’s exactly what we’re after. So again, on the record, I’ll thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW