Joseph DeMott was born on 2 August 1918 in the town of Big Run, Pennsylvania. The only child of Italian immigrant parents, he graduated from nearby Punxsutawney High School in 1936, then attended Indiana (Pennsylvania) State Teacher’s College for three years, 1936-39. In the hopes of being a pilot, in August 1939 Joe left school and joined the Army Air Corps.

Following Basic Training, Joe was dropped from pilot training and sent to radio school; upon completion of this instruction, he was assigned to the 22nd Squadron, 7th Bomb Group, as radio operator on B-17 bombers. Scheduled in early December 1941 to fly to the Philippines, the Japanese attacks throughout the Pacific forced his unit instead to Java, in the Dutch East Indies. During February 1942 Joe was assigned to the 19th Bomb Group. Here Joe flew several combat missions before being wounded and sent to a hospital in Malang, eastern Java, before that city was captured. Malang was captured by the Japanese, and on 8 March 1942 Joe became a POW.

Joe remained a POW for forty-two months. After a brief stay at Klukstraat, he spent about a year at a former Dutch forces base; both these were in Malang. From mid-1943 to approximately mid-1944 Joe was at a big camp by Batavia, west Java. He then spent roughly six months each at a work camp in Bandung, in the mountains, and at Bicycle Camp, in Batavia. At each of these locations there were various work details; Joe recalls Bandung having the most difficult conditions. Joe was in Batavia when the war ended; he was liberated on 19 September 1945 and flown to a US medical facility in Calcutta, India. By November 1945 Joe was back in the United States; he was discharged in May 1946 with the rank of sergeant.

Again a civilian, Joe got married (1948, wife Kathryn), and in spite of a vision loss problem due to his POW experience completed an electrical engineering degree from Penn State (1949). He worked thirty years for various engineering firms in Pennsylvania, Iowa, and New Jersey, the final sixteen of those in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Joe retired in 1979.

At the time of this interview (August 2003) Joe and Kathryn lived in East Lampeter Township, Pennsylvania.
In this interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is 2 August 2003, and this is our interview with Mr. Joseph DeMott, at his house here in East Lampeter Township, Pennsylvania. First, Mr. DeMott, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to this afternoon to speak with me.

J: You're welcome.

T: We've talked a little bit, and I want to get into the record this information. You were born on 2 August 1918, in the little town of Big Run, Pennsylvania. That's in Jefferson County. You were the only child of Italian immigrant parents. You attended some local schools, graduated from Punxsutawney High School in 1936, and after high school you went to Indiana State Teachers College in Indiana, Pennsylvania, for three years until 1939, at which time you decided to join the Army in the hopes of becoming a pilot with the Army Air Corps.

J: Correct. At Punxsutawney High School I was president of the senior class and an honor student.

T: The pilot training didn't take place or didn't work out, but you did become a radioman with the Army Air Corps and ended up on a B-17 bomber aircrew, and that's what your job was when the war started, when the United States became involved in World War II in December of 1941. When the war began, soon after you were moved to the Far East. Let me ask you, when you were moved to the Far East, Mr. DeMott, where was your bomb group stationed, your squadron stationed?

J: Actually it split up. Some remained in Hawaii, and my particular squadron went on the Java, East Java, Malang, Java [present day Indonesia].

T: What was the flight path to get from Hawaii to Java?

J: I was stationed in Hawaii for two weeks doing patrol duty. On about January 1, 1942, we were given orders to proceed to Java or to Australia. Then we took off. We landed at Palmyra Island. We were the first plane to land at this small island in the Pacific, which is about one thousand miles, I think, south of Hawaii. Then we went on to Canton Island—I'm trying to think of the others—we went on to the Fiji
Islands; New Caledonia; Townsville, Australia; Port Darwin, Australia; and then Malang, Java.

T: So quite a few stops along the way before you got to Malang, Java.

J: Yes.

T: Where exactly is that located on Java?

J: It’s located on East Java. It’s about sixty miles south of Shibuya, which was at that time the naval station. It’s a seaport now. Probably the name has changed too. And about ninety miles west of Bali, the island of Bali. That gives you some idea.

T: Okay. With the US at war now and your squadron stationed in Java, what was going through your mind? How did you perceive of your own situation and the situation in Java at that time?

J: We knew that the Japanese were coming down. They were already in the Philippines, fighting in the Philippines. We knew that the situation was precarious. The fact of the matter is, after I had gone through several bombing missions, which was probably—we were supposed to bomb Singapore but then that didn’t pan out—anyway, after I was shot and I was put in the hospital, I happened to have a communications receiver. I found out some time in the middle of February that Singapore...it was inevitable for Singapore to fall. And at that time I was very, very much concerned.

Because I figured Singapore down to Java is only a matter of five, six hundred miles. And they were on their way down. So what I had wanted was to...my bomb group had moved inland and I wanted to move inland with the bomb group, but they wouldn’t take me. Things became so bad when the Japanese landed on the island of Java—West Java—they were supposed to come down and pick me up and about seven other Air Corps guys at this Malayan hospital, military hospital. Unfortunately circumstances wouldn’t allow them to land. The copilot later told me, many years later, that he probably would have landed, but then he was not in charge of the plane. Anyway, that was a few days before capture.

(1, A, 97)

T: By the way, what happened to you to land you in the hospital?

J: On the bombing mission to—this was February 2, 1942—on the bombing mission to Balippan, which is a big oil field in Borneo. We bombed the Japanese convoy that was landing there, and on the way back we dropped down to about—we bombed about thirty thousand feet—on the way back we dropped down to about twenty thousand feet and then we were jumped by a bunch of Jap Zeros. During the fighting I got shot through the leg. Quite penetration. I ended up in this Malang hospital on the way back.
T: How many missions did you fly altogether?

J: Officially, I would say four.

T: Because you were wounded February 2, you said.

J: Yes.

T: So your wounds were such that you couldn't move or be moved...you would have to be moved out of the hospital.

J: I had to be moved out of that hospital.

T: You were not ambulatory at that point. You couldn't move yourself.

J: I couldn't move myself. No.

T: Were you in this hospital then when the Japanese came to Malang?

J: Yes. We knew they were approaching Malang. Of course, we had been told beforehand...we knew that the Japanese did not like aviators. The fact of the matter is, we had been told in a previous town about fifty miles to the west of Malang that the American airmen who were in the hospital were all executed. So we expected when they came into the hospital that we would be executed. Well, they came in the night before...I wanted to get rid of myself. Take poison or whatever.

T: I wanted to ask you about this. Staring this in the face, if that's the story you had heard and knowing the Japanese were coming, really how did that...

J: I asked the Dutch nurse for some poison. I didn't care what it was. I said mercury. Mercury is not a real good poison, of course. Of course, they refused, and the next morning I'm still there when I see this Jap officer come in with his guard, and they're coming down, and to me, I figured that was going to be the end. Then later I was told that what happened is, that the previous town had put up a fight and the Japanese were real aggravated about it. The town I was in, Malang, had capitulated real early. They didn't do any fighting. So the Japanese spared the POWs who were captured in Malang. So that was my first fortunate coincidence.

T: I'm trying to imagine how you must have felt when you saw the Japanese come into your room at the hospital.

J: It was just a terrifying moment. You just lie back and you look. Expect the worst when he goes by and checks you out... Apparently they were not...[to hospital patients], I think they were not quite as, probably not quite as mean as they would be otherwise, if you were caught out in the field. I don't know. That's just a feeling.
T: What happened to you now? The Japanese have arrived in Malang and you're unable to walk really, right? What happens to you now?

J: I was kept in the hospital for about a month.

T: In the same one?

(1, A, 148)

J: No. I was moved to another one. Not quite as good—put it that way. Then I couldn't walk. My leg was still... couldn't lift my foot. My knee was completely swollen.

T: It was your left leg?

J: My right leg. Then they took me to prison camp. This is Klukstraat [spelling?]. They carried me in. They put me on a stretcher. Now, this is rehabilitation by a Dutch masseur. He rehabilitated me enough that I could walk with a cane. So that lasted that way for a while, and then after about I think three or four months when I was able to do some walking, then I went on work detail.

T: So it was a number of months before your leg was sufficiently healed where you could get around, really. Was there any kind of initial questioning or interrogation by the Japanese when you were captured?

J: After I would say after a month or two, there were nine or ten Americans in this particular camp, and we were called, we were told to report to Japanese Headquarters. I was told by a Dutchman. He said, “They're out there. They're requesting all Americans to go to headquarters, because they're going to execute you.” I said, “What can I do? I can't jump over the fence.” I appeared there with nine other Americans in front of this Japanese board, whatever you want to call it. They questioned us.

The first thing, they had a couple of intelligence officers and then they had a sergeant major there sitting at the desk. And the sergeant major looked at all of us and he said, “Nippon will question you. If you tell Nippon lie, Nippon will shoot you.” So I stood there and I thought...I hadn't said much. I had had just a little bit of questioning, and I can't recall exactly what, how it was. But the Japanese officer came by and wanted to know what I did. I said I was just a gunner. They asked us some questions. I forget exactly. Whatever they were, I'm not exactly sure. But I can recall that there were quite a few knees shaking along the side there. I wasn't exactly feeling too good myself. After about a half an hour it was over.

T: Was there a second or a later round of this kind of questioning or just once?
J: Just the one time. The main questioning was there. They knew a lot, they knew our bomb group. They knew I was aircrew and all that. They knew all that. I’m not sure they knew I was aircrew. They knew that I was attached to the Air Corps.

T: So they were about acquiring basic information or confirming what they already knew, perhaps.

J: That’s what they were doing. Just to confirm what they already knew.

T: Did this happen at the place you called Klukstraat?

J: No. This happened at the next camp. I was at Klukstraat about a month or so, I think.

T: And when we talked earlier, you mentioned the second, you called it just a larger facility, but it was in the area of Malang there.

J: Yes. Klukstraat maybe had one thousand. The other camp had four or five thousand.

T: So just a larger, much larger facility there at Malang.

J: Yes.

T: And by your own estimations it looks like you got there perhaps May of 1942.

J: That could be close.

T: Can you describe that second facility? Did it have a name that you recall?

J: I can’t recall the name. It had been a facility for native troops.

T: For Dutch East Indies troops?

(1, A, 204)

J: Dutch East Indies troops. Native troops. And of course, the facilities were, they had bamboo huts and I guess you’d call them bamboo beds that we slept on. Nothing was open.

T: Were there a number of different barracks, buildings here?

J: Yes. Yes.

T: And how many people were assigned or quartered in one barracks?
J: Maybe sixty. Something like that. I can't exactly recall.

T: What about the daily routine there? What exactly were you doing? Were there work details here?

J: There were no work details at this place. We were purely, just stationed there.

T: So you were just held. So a daily routine, was there a roll call in the morning?

J: Right. There was roll call in the morning and roll call at night. And during that time we were inspected by a Japanese major...general, and of course, we had been told that if we laughed or made any kind of remarks to this general that inspected the troops, that we'd be automatically executed. They put me in the front row. There were about four thousand of us troops there. And by nature I am easily tickled about something, and when I saw this Japanese general coming down checking us all out, I looked at him and he was sort of...he could have made me laugh. I don't know if you ever saw Charlie Chaplin?

T: Yes.

J: Anyway, I had seen that. I just kept talking to myself. Joe, don't laugh. So I was able to contain myself. Then that was over. Then, and this I recall pretty good, in August of ’42—this is after we had been there for a couple of months—August of ’42 I got a call, notified that the Dutch colonel wanted to see me. They were stationed in a little better quarters than we were, of course.

T: Were you stationed solely with Americans?

J: Oh, no. There were only about ten Americans.

T: So who was in your barracks? What nationalities?

J: There were British, Australians, Americans, natives, Javanese, half-caste, whatever you want to call them. I don’t think there were any Indian troops.

T: Were they all military people?

J: All military people.

T: So coming from a variety of different places and countries.

J: Yes. In August when I got this call, this Dutch colonel called me in. He said, “You sit down. I’ve got something to tell you.” So I said okay. He said, “Up until now the headquarters in Java had received orders that they were going to execute us. Right after we were captured. However, the emperor has decided to let us live, so they’re
not going to execute us.” And alongside the camp there were graves galore of guys that tried to escape. So that had to tell you something.

T: So this, in a sense, gave you a sense of reassurance that you were not going to at least be killed right away?

J: Not killed right away. Later on that didn't prove to be the fact, but that was...

T: So your day was not spent working. How did you pass the time from morning til night?

J: I guess we just talked. We were not allowed to gather in groups. I guess we just talked. I don't recall doing very much.

T: Was there recreation of any kind? Cards, ping pong, any kind of thing?

(1, A, 255)

J: That's right. We were allowed to play cards. In fact, there was a Dutch soldier who was real good at bridge. Taught me how to play bridge. Of course, that didn't last long. They changed their mind after a few months. That's enough of that. That's when they sent us out of this camp. This camp was sort of a regrouping camp.

T: How long would you estimate you were at this larger facility?

J: I would judge five or six months, which turned out to be a holding period, until they shoot us or put us on permanent details. Also, I was pretty much incapacitated by reason of my leg wound.

T: So you spent a lot of time, a somewhat longer period of time here. And essentially not doing very much.

J: That's right. Now, during that period of time, this was in the fall, they were at least feeding us enough to keep us alive. It was rice pap, what they called boiled rice and so on.

T: Was that the standard diet that you had pretty much every day?

J: Right. Now, along about August or September, for some reason or other, the camp commander turned on the POWs and started feeding us very little. The fact of the matter is, it got so bad that one night I had an onion. The only thing that I could eat was an onion. And I ate an onion and my eyes tearing like crazy. During that same time I completely lost my vision. This time about the afternoon and all night long and most of the next day I had...it was just blurred spots. Then it started to come back a little bit. It came back so that I...really very blurred in front, but then I could see to get around. But couldn't read. I had to get it up to about six inches to read the
thing. I slowly recovered from that. Just with peripheral vision. This is just my imagination. I think the camp commander must have had a brother or something down at Guadalcanal, and you know the Japs took a terrific beating at Guadalcanal. We did too of course, but we still maintained the island. I think maybe whatever happened there affected him. He was just taking it out on the prisoners. We were told that we had to bow. As soon as we saw a Jap soldier we had to bow and maintain that bow until they went by us. That was pretty well guarded. They made darn sure that you did that.

T: You mentioned men of different nationalities here. How did you observe prisoners of different nationalities getting along with each other?

J: The British had some kind of a...they looked down upon us Americans a little. We were Americans, and we were still one of the islands that they still... But all in all it proved to be all right. I told one of them, you better forget about that. We're quite a country of our own by this time.

T: How did you find yourself making friends with or spending time with...

J: I spent time with a couple of British. One particular British airman. Javanese half-caste. They were all educated, pretty well educated, and actually the first thing when you think of when you're a prisoner is to escape. So I planned all kinds of escape. I ended up with this Javanese who knew the countryside and an airman who knew about flying. Of course, I knew about flying. I didn't know about landing, but I could take off. So we connived and connived and connived, but as it turned out, the Javanese found out that the Japanese took the gasoline out of the planes. They didn't put the gasoline back in the tanks until the next morning. So we would have to escape at night. We couldn't do it in the daytime.

T: Right.

J: This is something that I even hate to say, but we...the Japanese had issued orders that if one person in the compound escaped, they would execute the other nine. I didn't realize this, but apparently there were only about nine Americans. I guess there were more. But anyway, one of the American soldiers came over and started begging me not to escape because [of] the rest of them. In fact, he started to even cry a little bit. I said, "We're supposed to try to escape if we can." Anyway it didn't work out. But it kind of bothered me, because I had gone to a great extent. I had found spots where the Japanese soldiers were. I could get underneath the wire and escape and so on. In fact, I had put my life in jeopardy just to watch where these guards went.

(1, A, 316)

T: When you thought about escaping, what prompted you to really want to get away? Because that was risky itself.
J: Well, number one, in the first place I knew that the situation was so bad that we would very likely be there until the end of our life. I think probably the chief thing that instigated me was the fact that they had said that they would kill us, execute us. In fact, at that time that was the most driving force. And the other one was just to get out and be free.

T: So with your life potentially in danger anyway, it could be any day, you decided escaping or trying to think about it anyway.

J: Yes. At least it kept my mind occupied.

T: And with nothing else to do, that's not to be underestimated, I guess.

J: No.

T: What kind of people were the Japanese at this first camp you were at? This larger facility.

J: They were, the treatment was pretty bad. If you made any kind of, if you broke any rule, even the slightest rule, they said, they beat you up. For example, I saw two Dutchmen, two Dutch marines. This was my first introduction into what they could do. These two marines, they put a bamboo between the back of their knees and they made them kneel down on the ground and they started beating them over the back with bamboo poles. You know, I never heard one of them scream. They beat them for a while. I had to leave for some reason or other. I guess the guards made us go away. We couldn't stay and watch them. That was just one instance.

T: From your observation was treatment like that random or for certain specific things?

J: At this point it was more of a specific point at this point. As I understand, later we were pretty well guarded by professional Japanese soldiers, and they were...later on when we were guarded by some Koreans and, I guess, the dregs of the Japanese Army, it wasn't that way. It was anything. Anything goes.

T: So the treatment, the kind of people you had as guards changed over the years as well, and the treatment changed with that.

J: The treatment changed. Right.

T: We talked about the conditions, about food, about the Japanese. At this first camp here at Malang, what was the most difficult thing for you personally?

J: Most difficult thing was just being behind a ten foot barbed wire fences. Japanese machine gun posts stationed all around the camp, and knowing that your fate was
almost doomed. At that point I figured that this is it. We’re never going to make it out, so I might just as well go along with the tide.

T: I’m wondering how you internalized that? Did that make you rather resigned or depressed or angry? How did that make you feel?

J: I can’t say I got depressed. I guess being kind of a religious nature, because I’m a Roman Catholic, what I started to do, I started to pray. Every night I prayed. That gave me the solace. It was just pure praying. But at one point, it got to the point I said, Dear Lord just let me live for one day. I just kept on going. I’m just the type of person who just, if I take a blow, I take it and then I go on to the next blow. You just can’t fight it.

T: I hear you saying, kind of one day at a time, or a one step at a time approach as opposed to trying to focus on the far. You just focused on what was here right now.

J: That’s more or less it because I had no...there was no end.

T: Were people dying at this camp at Malang?

J: They were not dying. What happened, there were escapees that were executed, but there was nobody dying in the camp itself because of diseases and so on, malaria and so on, which later transpired, of course.

(1, A, 365)

T: So the health of prisoners at this camp was not such that people were dying from disease.

J: Not this camp.

T: Now this camp, there were no work details, and you mentioned that after approximately eight months or a year, what would be then the first months of 1943, that you were moved to another facility.

J: It was Jakarta. This is the camp on the other side of Jakarta.

T: How was the move announced to people? Did you have some advance warning?

J: No. We were just all told and we were marched down to the railroad yards and put on these cars and transported to Jakarta.

T: Now, were all the prisoners moved from this larger facility?

J: As far as I know they were all moved.
T: So this is a large move of people from one side to the other.

J: Large move of people.

T: Talk about the move. This is going across Java by train?

J: We were in what they would call, I guess, a third class car or something like that. It just had benches on the side of these cars. We were packed in there so much that some had to stand up, and once in while somebody would get a chance to sit down on the bench. On both sides guards were planted. The windows were all covered over.

T: So also lack of ventilation as well, I guess.

J: That didn't help.

T: What do you remember yourself about the trip by train?

J: Just miserable. We didn't know where we were going.

T: They didn't tell you that, did they?

J: Oh, no. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. I just went along with it. When we got to Jakarta we were marched off of this to a big camp on the other side. Then that's where the work details started.

T: How long did that trip by train take, by your estimation?

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 387.

T: Again, how long did the trip by train take?

J: I'd say five or six days.

T: Did you ever get off the train?

J: Not that I recall.

T: So you sat in there, and so the food, the bathroom facilities, all this stuff was somehow contained in this car?

J: We didn't get out of there. We just did everything right inside the car. Whatever we had to do.

T: And they did feed you or provide water occasionally?
J: They gave us some food. I don’t recall exactly how much it was. Just enough to sustain us.

T: That's the way you had described the food at the camp at Malang too. It was just enough to sustain you.

J: Yes.

T: What was the food at Malang? What were they serving every day?

J: We had rice. We had a boiled rice in the morning for breakfast, which (**). They had some steamed rice. It had maggots and everything else in it. I guess it came out of the warehouses. And what we called seaweed water. I never knew what it was. It apparently had to be vegetables that had been boiled or something. It looked like stagnant water. That was for lunch, and then for supper we had boiled rice again.

T: So you were fed three times a day, but pretty much the same stuff.

J: Same stuff.

T: You mentioned at the camp, the big camp over by Batavia, that you spent how long—about a year you mentioned.

J: About a year.

T: Let’s talk about that camp. What can you say about the conditions, barracks for example, housing at that camp?

J: They were still native quarters. However they were very bad. They had long bamboo huts, and all they had across them was bamboo slats all the way down, so you had to sleep on the bamboo slats, which was about two or three feet off the ground. It was all ground. Then the facilities, bathroom, they had ditches where you had to go to the bathroom. At night you could hear the termites eating away at the bamboo.

T: You could hear the termites?

J: The termites eating up the bamboo. This is where we started to work.

T: How many people in each of these barracks approximately?

J: Maybe sixty, one hundred. Very long barracks.

T: Were the conditions here would you say about the same, worse, or better than Malang?
J: They were worse. It was just living like a bunch of hogs.

T: Were you in a barracks with the same people you had been with before, or were things mixed again?

J: They were still mixed.

T: That same people or were you in with new people all the time?

J: More or less new people.

T: Did you pick your barracks or were they assigned?

J: No. They were assigned.

T: So the Japanese assigned x number of guys to...

J: No. I think what happened at this particular camp, the remnants of the [cruiser USS] Houston, the men who survived the [sinking of the] Houston [in March 1942], were also in this camp. Now, before we got there they had sent a whole bunch—I think it was about three hundred of the Houston [US cruiser, sunk by Japanese on 1 March 1942] survivors, the Houston was sunk in the Sunda Strait. Of the three hundred, I think they sent most of them up to work on the Burma Road, along with the 131st Field Artillery. Some of them were also there. It was really a mixed group. I would say there were approximately one hundred, maybe 110 Americans.

T: So you're in the minority. Very much so.

J: Oh, yes. Quite a few Australians, maybe one thousand Australians. Two or three thousand natives and British troops. There again, we were about four or five thousand. This is where they started taking us out on details. We had to go and dig irrigation ditches and we had to work on, they had us digging trenches. Anything that had to do with, and this is something, we had to grow what they called yams or whatever it is. We had to pick them. This was all done for the Japanese. We got nothing. That pretty well took care of that.

T: Were these details that you left the camp for in the morning, went out and did a particular job, then came back at night?

J: Yes. Came back at night. Right.

T: Did you go out in large groups or small groups?

J: We went in large groups. I'm just trying to think back. (pauses three seconds) During the same period of time they also sent a bunch of us down to the shipyards, down to the docks. Carrying. So I don't know how long. We were down there quite
a few times. I recall carrying, the first time, one hundred kilos of copa, which is dried coconut. We didn’t have to carry it far, maybe from the dock to the truck or something.

T: One hundred kilos is 220 pounds. It’s very heavy.

J: On your back. They put it on your back, and you lug it like this (*hunched over,*...)

T: So this is another one of the details that you were sent on.

J: Another detail.

T: How were those details assigned?

J: Randomly. I have no idea how they were assigned. From there, you get down to the docks. I’m just trying to think if they... That’s where I did quite a bit of work. Now, around about that time, I caught malaria there.

We had to learn how count in Japanese and give orders in Japanese. If you were in the front row, you count *ichi, nei, san,* [counting in Japanese], all down the line. If you mispronounced a number, the Japanese were going to come along and hit you in the shins. I saw one guy, the blood was flowing from his leg. That was during one of the work details. I didn’t feel good. When we came back that day we had...I forget. We went for, I don’t know how many hours. Ten hours, twelve hours, whatever it was. We had wooden shoes. We had a couple of shorts.

After that they found me with a temperature of 108 degrees. This is in the tropics now. So they knew something was wrong. I didn’t have to work the next day. I stayed in my bed. They took two or three samples of stool and they looked in the microscope and they weren’t sure exactly what had. So after twenty-three days suffering with a high temperature and then going down to the, hardly make it to the latrine, almost falling in the ditch a couple times, they finally found it was malaria. Tropical malaria. The guard said, “I don’t think there’s any quinine in camp.”

Somewhere—I don’t know what happened—I got quinine. I don’t know whether it was the British doctors, because only the British doctors could convince the Japanese for the quinine, because a whole bunch of us had it. They brought it in and gave me the quinine and there was immediate relief. Just like night and day, because with malaria your whole body is just in complete pain, and when the quinine starts to work you’re relieved of that quite a bit.

T: Malaria, was that something that recurred with you over time?

J: Since I came back I’ve had it two or three times.

T: How about when you were over there? Did you have attacks more than once?
J: I don’t recall having it. I had Dengue Fever. That could be part of it. I had Dengue Fever a couple of times. I had dysentery about three times. The dysentery really, really helped me stay alive.

T: How so?

(1, B, 543)

J: What happened is that, early 1944 this whole camp, four thousand, were told to line up out in a field, the marching field or whatever it was called. About four thousand line up out there to go down to the docks, board ships to go up to Burma. That’s what they told us. Now, we were lined up all day long and all of a sudden we were told we were disbanding. I later found out that [Japanese wartime leader] Tojo had resigned. Somehow there were Japanese reverses. They got so bad that apparently the emperor asked Tojo to resign or he resigned himself. So that was called off.

The next day or so I got dysentery. The draft, as it was called then, the draft was again on. So everybody was called out, but the British doctor said, “You can’t go because you have dysentery.” So that’s when I missed that one. They were sent down to the docks. They got on this Japanese transport which was sunk by a British sub off the coast of Sumatra, and of the twenty-five Americans that were on board, two survived. The two I read about in the POW magazine. I learned that they had survived.

T: So in a sense, you’re right. Having the dysentery kept you off that ship.

J: Kept me off the ship.

T: Although having dysentery can’t be very pleasant.

J: Oh, no. No. I had that three times.

T: It sounds like health problems, malaria, Dengue Fever, dysentery, were a part of your existence.

J: And yellow jaundice.

T: So that as well. Did people seem to move, and yourself too, from one health issue to the next?

J: At this particular camp, Batavia, yes.

T: These work details as you were describing them, every day?

J: Yes. Every day.
T: So every day you were marched out to do something. Did Japanese guards accompany you?

J: Oh, yes.

T: Were they always Japanese?

J: Yes.

T: What kind of treatment did you receive from these guards who accompanied the work details?

J: If you behaved yourself, if you didn't do anything wrong, you were all right. If you stepped out of line a little bit they would come over and crack you with the bayonet or something like that.

T: Did that happen to you on occasion, when you had to receive that treatment?

J: Well, I'm just the kind of guy, I got out of line a little bit, the Japanese guard came up and he pushed his bayonet in my rear end. It didn’t penetrate. Pushed it right into my trousers. He said, “You get back in line.” I got back in line.

T: The guards that you saw, did they acquire nicknames or reputations among the prisoners?

J: Yes. I’m trying to think of... It’s hard to recall some of the names. I know we called one Donkey, and all that kind of stuff, but I can’t remember now.

T: Was he someone you remember because he gave bad treatment or...

J: Gave bad treatment for some Australians. I saw some Australians had to stand out in the sun all day long. I forget for what. I don’t know exactly what happened to them. But I’m going back now to, I’m skipping a little bit.

(1, B, 599)

T: That’s okay.

J: The Bicycle Camp. When we get there, there’s some things I want to talk about. While we were there, the Japanese had heard that...they just loved the goose-stepping of the Germans, so we had work detail and we had to learn how to goose-step. I took on some work details and I recall from (***) eyes right and all this kind of stuff, and the guard started laughing at us when we were goose-stepping. I would really have loved to have a picture of us goose-stepping. The detail. But that didn’t last too long. I don’t know what happened after that. But that didn’t last too long.
At the same time they had an adjacent camp to that which apparently, fortunately, I missed these details. Not too many were staying on the job. I just had to stay there for health reasons. But they had work details on the island of Timor, and one of the times, I guess they brought back what was remnants, what was left of some of the POWs. I think most of them were British. I recall going by that camp, that adjacent camp, they had lined up. They had one hand in front of the other. They were all almost blind. One was just leading the other over to the camp. Quite a few. Eight hundred or something like that.

T: What had happened to them?

J: They were building airdromes on the island of Timor and had been so abused, they had been so beaten up, and I guess lack of food and so on and so forth, that they were no good to the Japanese so they sent them back to Java.

T: It sounds like you escaped a number of worse assignments because of your health on certain occasions.

J: Right. I believe it was the same camp...previous to that, they had taken [POWs] to go to Japan. This is 1945. Americans were from the 101st Field Artillery. One of the fellows was left behind with me. I was supposed to go. He said he’d like to take my place, his friends were all going to go on this draft. I said, “It’s entirely up to you.” I didn’t know where they going, what they were doing. That’s when I found out what happened to the draft. They were sunk by an American sub off the coast of the Philippines, and as I recall something like forty-five or fifty Americans and something right around thirty-some died. Thirty-three or something like that died. I could have been on that ship as well.

T: You mentioned at this camp at Batavia, and you were there, just adding things together here, it looks like until early 1944. Would that be about right?

J: That would be about right. Then we were all shipped to Banding.

T: This camp on Batavia, you talk about these work details which didn’t seem to change much. You went from one to the other, but the same kind of treatment. The food. Among the men, when you were not working, how did people pass their time in the evening or on days off when you got it?

J: I guess just talking. I think we mainly talked about food. We were always so hungry. I think most of the time either that or talk about getting out some day.

T: How hard was it for you to keep a sense of optimism and think about when you get out? Or when this is over.

J: Just to give an example. I believe it was the same camp. We dug irrigation ditches, and this was one work detail, we had to carry big buckets of pig manure out to the
field, with a bamboo pole strung between two POWs. We had a big bucket and bamboo pole on the shoulder, a guy in front of me, and a guy [me] in back. It was balanced between us. I recall telling him, I forget his name, I said, “You know, some day I’m going to get out of here and become an electrical engineer.” He laughed and laughed. I said, “Well, that’s the way I am. I’m just an optimist at heart.” It happened.

(1, B, 656)

T: So how often did you find yourself thinking of home or specific people or…

J: Often.

T: What kind of emotions did those produce? Good or depressing?

J: They were kind of… The effect on me was not...whatever it was, it was temporary. Had no long lasting effect. Whatever my system is, my makeup is, there always seems to be a safety valve in there someplace. So I think too much about it...automatically you shove it way back in the memory or something like that. But it’s not forgotten.

T: But it's just not front and center.

J: Not front and center. Right.

T: You mentioned before we started taping, that you didn't have any way at first and for a while of corresponding with your parents, to let your folks know really whether you were alive, dead, or in between. How hard was that, not being able to communicate with your folks back home?

J: Actually, I don’t think it affected me that much. I thought about it, but it didn’t affect me too much. I figured they would get a telegram from the War Department stating that probably I was shot and missing in action and that was it. My philosophy before I went overseas is, the fact I went to war, and a lot of us weren’t going to make. I figured I was going to be, I figured that was it. I went over and never come back.

T: Really resigned to the fact that that was it, you mean.

J: When we flew over San Francisco Bay I looked down there and I kissed it goodbye. It’s one of those things.

T: Do you think that frame of mind helped you in the long run?
J: Yes. Yes. It helped. It puts in a barrier there that you know that you’re going to come up (***) I guess. It’s very difficult. I saw guys, in fact one of them sat right in front of me.

T: Can you describe what you mean by that?

J: We were sitting there and talking and all of a sudden, I guess we were playing bridge or something. I don’t know, I forget what it was, but anyway all of a sudden he says you’re cheating. He started ranting and raving. I looked at him and I said, “What’s wrong.” There happened to be British doctor there and he sized up the effects, what was happening. He came over and he started slapping him. Brought him to. That was one case.

The other case, this happened with an American soldier. He accused me of being a Pennsylvania coal miner and all that kind of stuff, and before you know it, we got into a fight. A buddy of mine happen to manage a boxer. He was also aircrew and he stepped in and he said, “If you take one step closer I’m going to slug you.” So that stopped that. He said, “If I didn’t stop you, the Japs would have executed both of you.”

T: For fighting, things like that, the Japanese would punish you?

J: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. If they caught you fighting they would punish both of you.

T: Did that reduce the number of conflicts or just keep things underground?

J: That kept things underground.

T: So there were conflicts between prisoners?

J: Yes, there were. In fact, there were some Americans that I probably didn’t care for any more than the Japanese.

T: What do you mean by that?

(1, B, 702)

J: They had that supercilious attitude you know, that they were better than the rest of us prisoners. I guess it was one attitude. These were some Southerners. There was conflict. It is hard to believe that there was conflict in World War II between Southerners and Northerners in prison camp, but it was happening.

T: Did people divide themselves into cliques or into groups sort of?

J: Yes. There were three, two Americans I was close to. One was in the same group, and another was from another group. We were pretty much, as I recall one was Shipley and the other one was Eddie Harbaugh.
T: Had you known them before you were a POW?

J: No. We were sort of a good influence on one another. We sat and talked and so on. It got to the point, I forget which camp, I think it was the same camp, we got to the point where the prisoners were always complaining. We’re not going to get out, we’re going to die, and this and that. That was a costly thing.

T: So there were naysayers.

J: Lots of them. This one time they came up to what I called the crescendo, complaining and complaining. We were sick. There were four of us. We had what we call a kapok. It was an old pillow, for our head we’d have like a pillow, a kapok. A sack or something. Anyways, regular sack. I got up and threw it to the other side and said, to use good manners here, “If you SOBs want to die you lie down and die, but before I lie down and die, they’re going to shoot me.” That brought them back to their senses. I got a letter from this Shipley later on. He called me and said, “You’re an incredible pal.” I tried to do what I could.

T: So there were people who as this went on became increasingly convinced they weren’t going to make it.

J: Oh, yes. In fact, I saw some of them that were sitting in this one particular camp. Just sitting. Sit there and stare, stare you in the face. In this particular, some of these were from the 131st Field Artillery. I recall they just sat there and just, I guess they just eventually, they didn’t care what happened to them.

T: It sounds like they were losing the will to live, in a sense.

J: The will to live. That’s what it was. Yes.

T: I wonder what you can do for someone like that.

J: The guys that I knew, this is what I said, “We’re going to get out of here. We’re going to get out of here in six months. They’re coming up. They’re going to be in Timor the end of this month.”

T: Did you believe that yourself, or was that kind of for consumption?

J: That was just consumption. But I said six months. Six months would go by and they said, “Joe we’re still here.” So when the war was over I said, “See that? Six months.” It was six months from the last time I talked to him (chuckles).

T: You mentioned about six months in timetables. How much were you aware as a prisoner of war about the progress of the war?
J: There were radios in camp. In fact, in one camp they had it in the latrine. What we called the latrine. And we did get messages. Also there was an American civilian—this man happened to be a civilian, this one in Batavia. He worked for Sperry. Was caught on the island of Java, and he had a wooden leg and he had a radio in the wooden leg.

To digress a little. They knew there was a radio in camp, and they called us all out, attention and so on. And here he was, I was next to him and they were giving orders. If anybody was caught they would be executed. Whoever it was would be executed. Here he was with his wooden leg right next to me with the radio. He had trousers on. I can't remember exactly, but he must have... Anyway, they searched all over the compound. Everyplace. They didn't find anything. So that was a scary moment.

Another time we went—outside Batavia there was one camp. Here again, it's sort of foggy, one camp to another. I was asked if I could carry some radio parts. This sort of pillow like. Of course, like cadets or something. What they were trying to do was bring all the parts and put it together at the next camp. We got to the next camp and later on we stopped, and I didn't know it, but this camp commander was one of the worst ones in the southwest Pacific. I called him Lieutenant Sony. This was in the evening and it was sort of dark. He had a flashlight, and we were told if we carried any parts we would be executed. So he's going down the line looking, and here I am standing there beside that little pillow there with radio parts in it. Just a couple. When he put that flashlight down in that pillow looking in it I think my heart went down to my feet and back up and down about ten times. And then he went on. That was it.

T: So there were radios and you were part, at least on a couple occasions, of hiding or carrying these radio parts.

J: That's right.

T: That meant that you were also privy to the news that came over the radios?

J: Yes. We were told what was happening and about Guadalcanal and a few of the other places. We didn't get too much. I think they, the people who had it, were kind of reticent about it because of what might happen. So in some cases we were told you're better off if you don't know, because if the Japanese get a hold of you... The Japanese had their own ways of treating you. They're liable to take you in if they suspected some...

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

T: If the Japanese suspected something, then they would treat you...

J: They would take you out and they would put you...the Japanese Kempetai, which is the Japanese Secret Police, they would take you out and do all kinds of torture. I talked to one Dutchman they took—because his wife had sneaked a note
underneath the fence and the Japanese guard caught this Dutchman. They took him down, and what they did is they put a hose in his mouth and pumped his stomach up and jumped on his belly with a stomach full of water. That's one case that I heard of that.

T: You never fell into the hands of the Kempetai?

J: No. I never fell into the hands... Later on I fell into the hands of somebody I wish I hadn't.

T: The way you described this experience at the camp by Batavia is essentially work details.

J: Work details. Right. Most of the time. To go back to the original one at Malang I forgot what happened...some rehabilitation...I guess I was able to walk. (***) quite a bit. I lost track of (***)

T: Because if you had remained immobile, who knows what would have happened.

J: That's right.

T: The work details continued. Were people dying at this camp by Batavia? Were the conditions at that point or was that pretty stable by now?

J: Most of the ones who died there went on these details or escaped and were executed. I don't know of any Americans who died at this particular camp. I'm just trying to think...

T: So the health was such that people weren't dying from disease or...

J: That's right. That I can recall.

**(2, A, 40)**

T: So that stabilized. You were moved from this camp by Batavia, and again by your own accounting, somewhere around early 1944. What are the circumstances surrounding the move from the camp by Batavia?

J: I don't know. They moved us to the Bicycle Camp.

T: Now, did you go to Banding first? Before Bicycle Camp?

J: I went there first.

T: Yes.
J: We went up there for four, five months.

T: That was before you went to Bicycle Camp. Is Bicycle Camp in Batavia?

J: Yes. Right in Batavia.

T: So in a sense, you spent a lot of time either at Batavia...now, Banding is that...

J: As I recall it was four, five months there.

T: How far is that from Batavia?

J: That’s probably ninety miles inland. It’s up in the mountains. I think it has four thousand foot sea level. It was nice.

T: Now, were all the prisoners moved there or just a group?

J: Just a group, as far as I know. I was part of the group. They did just details. We had to work outside cleaning up and doing all that kind of stuff. Detail work.

T: Pretty similar to the work you got at Batavia?

J: Batavia. Unfortunately, we were not supposed...well, anyway, for minor details. Seven or eight of us POWs...I'm trying to think. There were three or four Americans and at that time, there was also a Negro cook from one of the transports. He was going up there.

T: A black American?

J: Yes. We were all lined up in front of this Japanese—I’m not sure if he was a major or sergeant major or officer or just what he was. Anyway, he had a nice samurai sword and he had just been off the island of Timor where the Americans were bombing the heck out of them. I understand he was even firing this gun at the American planes. Anyway, we were lined up in front of this Japanese officer and he went down the line. I think I was the first one in line. He looked at my identification and he looked at me and he said, “Americano.” I said yes.

He backed off a little bit and he took that samurai sword out of its sheath and backed up a little bit and he went just like this...I closed my eyes. When I opened them he had a hold of it again. I looked at him. I looked at him straight in the eye and he looked at me and he took it again. I kept my eyes open. I saw that thing. I saw that samurai sword right underneath my chin. He was so good at it he didn’t even scrape the skin. But that...I don't know what went through his mind. I knew he hated Americans. I hated him too, of course.

T: What went through your mind?
J: Oph! What went through my mind!? If I had had that I probably would have killed him. But I didn’t want him to do that. After he did it about three times he looked at me. I guess he was deciding what to do. So he turned to the Japanese guard and he motioned him to go over. There was a big bamboo pole. It was about an inch or two in diameter and about six, seven feet tall. He motioned him to come over and start beating me up. So I can still see him going over to this bamboo pole. I could see him starting to swing it. I know enough about air pressure to know that when you feel the air—when he started hitting me on the back—when I felt it getting close, I would move forward and I’d pretend like I was really hurt. It did hurt. It cracked the skin. But it didn’t really do any damage to me.

They did that, I don’t know how many times. Then I guess he was satisfied that I was punished enough and he moved to the next American. And before he moved over there I said, “Look, move forward when you feel that thing, move forward so you don’t get hurt.” I don’t think he moved forward enough. Anyway, two or three got their kidneys bashed. Then he’d go to the next in the line. This Negro happened to be at the end of the line. They go down there and I don’t know exactly what they did. Anyway, they started beating him up and he fell on the ground, which you never do in a Japanese...if they feel any kind of cowardice, then they just beat the hell out of you.

(2, A, 124)

T: So you stay standing.

J: You have to stay standing. I learned that. He fell on the ground and then they started kicking him and beating him. Mercilessly. It just makes you feel terrible because he didn’t know how to take care of himself.

T: Those are lessons you said...a lesson, in this case, that you learned the hard way too?

J: Being an engineer, when you feel the air, you feel something in the back, you know enough if it’s something other than a breeze, you better move forward otherwise you’re going to get really hurt.

T: I mean, about not falling down when they hit you. How did you learn that?

J: I had learned that...I guess on the work details when they came up to me. I was confronted a couple of times. About something. They looked at me and I looked them in the eye. One of them, all he did was just slap me and he went away. But he could have beaten the heck out of me. That was just one incident. The other time, I went out on one work detail. They took me out themselves. About three or four Japanese soldiers took me out. They didn’t say anything, but they kept studying me, I guess.
Anyway, they took me out and they put me on a detail with a coolie. We had to take...the vegetables were in stacks on the ground. We had to lift them up and put them in the front of a wagon or truck. I think it was a truck. The coolie was on the other end and I was on this end. I said to myself, I can't go any lower. The coolie, outside of the fact...if the Jap soldier didn't like what you...we used to call ourselves the end of the line. The Japanese they could slap one of them. You could slap a lower rank. Japanese sergeant could strike a corporal, and a corporal a private, a private a POW. I mean, that's unbelievable. How they could do that. I saw...this was a Japanese soldier who knew... This was towards the end of the war. I saw him being beaten to death by a Jap officer.

T: No kidding. One of their own guys.

J: One of their own men. This was in a place where we had two other Americans and I were building...we were building a monkey cage. Believe it or not. With iron rods. We had to bend the rods, put it around and outside the headquarters ahead of us. They had this land where the Japanese guards would muster for detail. On this one particular day there were about thirty Jap guards mustered for detail and this Japanese sergeant must have looked across the way, because we were fifty feet, seventy-five feet away from the rest of the group. Across the ground. He must have said something to them. He pointed at us and they came charging across there yelling, “Banzai!” They stopped about five feet short. I looked up at them. You have to understand, after a certain length of time you become...we used to say you just become a nothing. I mean, you're just there and you have no real feelings. That's it.

T: Meaning you had trouble...you didn't respond emotionally.

J: I didn't respond emotionally at all. My wife knows this.

T: So in a sense, maybe they wanted you to respond and you didn't.

J: We didn’t. No. I told them, I said stay calm. I pretty well deducted they weren’t going to kill us. They were just trying to scare the hell out of us. That's all. Now, if we had panicked...if we had panicked and maybe run or something like that...I told the other guys just stand still. They'll go away.

T: That must be hard to do though. It must be hard to do.

(2, A, 187)

J: Yes. It was.

T: At Banding...

J: Bando.
T: Bando, up in the mountains there. The details. Did the Japanese in this camp, were the guards still all Japanese?

J: I can’t recall whether they were. I know down at Bicycle Camp they weren’t. But up there, I’m not real...I think about that time they were starting to get...this is Japanese officers, but I think the guard that beat me up, he wasn’t a regular Japanese professional soldier. He was just a reserve or something like that. Later on, at this one camp before Bandung we ran into Korean guards. They were big fellows.

T: How did the treatment from them differ from that of the Japanese?

J: They were generally bigger. Their faces were a little more thick.

T: How about the treatment you got from them?

J: I was stared down a couple of times. We were talking about names. I forget exactly what we called him, but anyway, he was always out to find something. This is another time. I was cleaning up. We had work detail where we had to...all of this garbage, we had to clean up all the rubbish. I’m working and I could hear it, I could hear his hobnails coming.

So I’m cleaning down the line and he comes right up in front of me. So I looked at his hobnails and right away I get up and bow to him. He looked me right in the eye and he walked away. I figured what the heck. He was known to pick on guys. So here again...

T: Do you have an explanation for these things or was it just...

J: It’s coincidence. It’s like another time. A Jap guard was coming off a detail, and for some reason or other we were allowed—sometime or other we could use toilet paper to use the old tobacco that came in the warehouse to make cigarettes. I had lit the cigarette. I never smoked before. If you were caught smoking a cigarette that was really taboo. They would really beat you. Anyway, I was smoking, and I see this guard saw me smoking. I had it in my hand and I squashed it. But I kept my hand closed. He came up to me. Right in front of me. He went like this to me.

T: Shook his finger at you in your face.

J: Yes, shook his finger right in my face as much to say, don’t you ever do that again, something like that. He must have been tired because he just came off duty. He must have been awfully tired because like I said, he was straggling on, and he went on and wherever he went...to his barracks and went to sleep, I guess.

T: That could have been...he could have...

J: Because I saw...for less than that I saw an American sailor have all his teeth knocked down his throat. I saw it right there. The Jap put the butt of his rifle up
against his mouth and knocked his teeth out. Because he had been smart about something. I forget exactly what it was. But he acted smart, and the Jap guard didn’t like it. And that’s what happened. Never act smart in front of them. The only thing that you could do was keep your composure and do what they say and hope the hell you never get caught.

T: Did some prisoners receive from your observation, favorable treatment from the Japanese?

J: Yes. A couple of Americans. They were civilians. They were able to get extra treatment. If I would have had some money that they had off the ship or something like that...they bribed the Jap guards somehow or other. They got some nice treatment. They got some extra food which the rest of us guys didn’t get.

T: How about the work details? Did certain Americans or certain prisoners, in your mind, from your observation, get better details or things that were less strenuous? Or was there really no differentiation, from what you observed?

J: The fact of the matter is, whether you were noncommissioned officer or you were commissioned officer of a lower rank, everybody had to work. We all worked.

(2, A, 244)

T: So there was no, from what you observed, nobody was in good with the Japanese to the point where they got better details or less strenuous labor?

J: The only ones I knew that...the colonels on up. I know this desk colonel didn’t do anything. Now Charlie Forry could tell you more about that because he was working with the American officers.

T: He was. Yes.

J: And he was telling me that Wainright could even hit a Jap. I didn’t see anything like that.

T: How about among your own prisoners? Who prepared the food that you ate?

J: The Dutch.

T: They were the kitchen staff, so to speak. And they were POWs too.

J: Oh, yes. They were POWs too.

T: Who selected the cooks? The prisoners or the Japanese?
J: I don’t know. I have no idea. No idea whatever. All I know is one night we heard a dog barking and the next day one of the guys said, “You got a little meat today, Joe.”

T: Two and two is four, right?

J: That’s right. That was a cute way of telling me though.

T: Protein is protein, right?

J: Right.

T: So they had the supplies, and they cooked the food, and then dished it out to the men.

J: They tried baking bread but it was...you couldn’t eat it.

T: So you had the same...

J: Just rice. They did have some beans. I forget what kind of beans. But it was the beans that they fed the hogs. I know that. I remember eating them and getting sick. That’s the only time I imagine POWs eating and getting sick over eating.

T: So the beans were no good.

J: No.

T: By the time you went to the Bicycle Camp it was late 1944 or early 1945.

J: I think it was late 1944. I’m just surmising.

T: That corresponds to the information that you’ve provided so far. Was that the last stop you made?

J: That was the last stop.

T: Was that the place that you were liberated from?

J: I was liberated from [the Bicycle Camp.]

T: So you were there close to a year or a little less than a year?

J: Eight months or something. I can’t recall exactly.

T: What can you say about the conditions at that particular camp?

J: That was the best of the lot.
T: Really?

(2, A, 270)

T: Really?

J: Bicycle Camp.

T: Best in what way?

J: They did have places where you could take a shower. The buildings were not bad bamboo. The floors were, I think they were concrete, something like that. That was still better than sleeping on bamboo slats with the termites. It had something there. But they were all open buildings. It was the typical, actually a typical tropical hut or compounds. Slate roofs and all the side ventilating.

T: Is this in Batavia too by the way? Bicycle Camp.

J: This Bicycle Camp is in Batavia.

T: Were you moved essentially with the same group of people that you had been in Banding with?

J: No. I met up with some other Americans there. At Bicycle Camp. That's where I met up with Shipley, I mean Hegedall. I met up with another from the same group.

T: Somebody you hadn't seen for a long time, so that your paths crossed again.

J: Yes.

T: Were there other nationalities at this camp as well? Not just Americans.

J: It was all mixed. I would assume by that time that [there were] maybe fifty Americans. Now, there were men, civilians who...all the transports had been sunk. By the Americans. And we met up with some more sailors off the, I guess the submarine Paris and some of those that had been sunk. Survivors from the Houston were there.

T: A real diverse collection, in a way. People from different places and different service branches and different nationalities. Now, you said the conditions were good here. Does that mean the food is better too?

J: All I can recall...we got a little more to eat. The food was the same, but I think, as I recall, because up until then I had lost...I think I weighed about one hundred pounds when I got there and I didn't lose any more.
T: So the food...the variety wasn’t any better but there was a little bit more.

J: As I recall. Everyone went on work details, and from there I went down to the docks, down to the shipyards. There we helped build...a detail was again building fences. They used us to dig holes. While we were there we knew things were happening a little bit because one day somebody sighted an Allied aircraft. It was a Mosquito, a British Mosquito bomber flew over. Way up. We knew then that things were starting to look better. This is in early ’45.

T: Now, did you still have these radios somewhere that you were getting any kind of outside news?

J: Yes. I got some outside news there. I think we got the outside news...we found out that the war in Europe was over.

T: That would be May of ’45. So you knew that pretty soon after it happened,

J: Then afterwards, of course, that made us feel good. Then later on we found out, we were all lined up and we were told that if the Americans landed on Java we would all be executed. This is shortly after the Germans surrendered. So if the Americans landed, this is what they told us then... Of course ,I later found out the Imperial Headquarters in Japan had issued the orders if the Americans landed on Kyushu island, the Japanese mainland, that all prisoners would be automatically executed. That’s where the atomic bomb came in handy.

T: That’s right. That cancelled that. The guards here were or were not all Japanese?

(2, A, 318)

J: No. They weren’t all Japanese.

T: What nationality were they?

J: As far as I knew there was still Koreans. There were still a couple of Japanese professional soldiers, because I remember meeting one.

T: Meeting in a good way or meeting in a bad way?

J: I said there were two camps around Batavia. Bicycle Camp is where I ended up; but there had been two camps before that, right? It’s rather difficult to get the timeframe here. This other camp...I forget...I was doing something. This was in the late afternoon. Doing something and I saw the Japanese officer come up. He said sit down, sit down.

T: In English to you?
J: In English. Good English. So I sat down and he sat down and he started talking. Of course, I still had to bow to him. Here he told me, he said...this is in late ’44, now. He said he had been a student. He graduated from the University of Washington and he had gone over to Japan to visit his folks. I believe he was a naturalized citizen but the Japanese did not recognize that. They never recognized naturalized American citizens. Most people don’t understand that. That the Japanese national...

(phone rings and tape pauses)

...the naturalized Japanese Americans, Japan didn’t recognize them. As far as they were concerned, they were still Japanese. That’s where they were born. He told me he had gone over there and that they caught him and put him in there. I guess he was in the intelligence force. He talked to me a little bit. I just gathered that he knew the war was over. He must have. Because I started talking...he must have figured out from the way that I was talking back to him that I had a little education. Then he left. I never saw him again.

T: That was it? He talked to you? Did he want to talk to you or get information from you?

J: No. He wanted to talk. He just want to let me know that he was not really a Japanese. I deducted from that he probably figured that he was going to lose the war and somehow or other you know...some of them would have to stand up for what they did wrong.

T: It sounds like you encountered all types of Japanese. Some that were brutal, some that were interested in conversation, and everything in between.

J: I met up with one that I actually conversed and he knew the war was over. He was the one that was beaten up and killed by the Japanese commander.

T: I see. And this was towards the end as well.

J: Towards the end. Yes.

T: Were you out on work details when you were at the Bicycle Camp, every day or pretty much every day?

J: Pretty much every day. We’d go down to the docks and help painting fences. Again, digging ditches and then we were—any kind of details you can think of. They would take us downtown and we’d have to pitch vegetables and things.

T: All kinds of things. Just wherever a hand was needed.

J: Wherever a hand was needed.
T: Did you, before the end of the war at all, did you see Allied planes come over Batavia?

J: All I saw was just this Mosquito bomber.

T: So Batavia, from your observation, was never bombed.

J: No.

T: You were at the Bicycle Camp when the war ended, is that correct?

(2, A, 358)

J: Right.

T: How did you find out about the end of the war?

J: I had been told the war was over, but I didn’t believe it.

T: By the Japanese or by somebody else?

J: I don’t know who it was. It was on the radio. And I didn’t believe it. However, this fellow said you’ll find out the war is over. The way I really knew it was over when the Japanese officers came in there without their swords, the samurai swords, and started talking to the POWs. I knew the war was over.

T: Just chatting?

J: That’s why they came in. They were our friends now. They sat down and started to chat.

T: Had they announced to the prisoners before this time that the war was over?

J: No. We had no official word. The American in charge was a Navy commander. He was in charge of the Americans at that time. He officially notified us. The war was over.

T: So he had been notified officially, perhaps.

J: Yes.

T: Now, the war...Japan decides to surrender August 14, August 15, and yet you were in Batavia for another month after that.
J: Another month. Picking up history...Montgomery knew, Admiral Mountbatten knew that there was no way they could send enough Allied soldiers in there to take care of the guards and so on. In our situation, the guards were supposed to stay there, I guess, without bullets, but the Japanese guards were still to maintain the same place. But do nothing. Of course, we took advantage of that. We walked right by the Japanese guards and went down to Batavia and had some coke or what and walked back again. And the Japanese guards just looked at us. By that time of course, it was just...I think I was still numb from the war being over.

T: Yes. Let me ask you, really: how did you respond when you heard that something you had thought about for years had finally taken place?

J: That was it. I had no response. I didn’t jump up and clap or anything. That was it. It was over. That was it.

T: How did you see yourself at that point? I mean, now, when you thought about what...

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.

T: At the end of the war, what did you find yourself thinking about? The future, or the present, or where were you?

J: In the future. I wanted to come home and go back to school. I wanted to get a degree. We were told, this was by a British doctor when the war was over, he had the whole camp, this Bicycle Camp, all lined up and he said, all of you are sterile. Probably be sterile the rest of your life. When he said that, there was a big event. Then he said every year you spend in prison camp takes twenty years off your life. Nobody had anything to say then. That was it.

T: The Japanese were still at their posts so to speak.

J: Still at their posts.

T: What kind of retribution did you observe against these Japanese, because now you’re in close contact with them. So they just sort of stayed to themselves and...

J: We were told, the commander, the Allied commander of the camp was British, and we were assigned certain details. He told the American commander we were assigned to certain posts to guard the fences. They were covered with exactly what...up to fifteen, twenty feet. You were supposed to guard that and make certain the prisoners didn’t go over the wall.

T: So you were guarding yourselves now?
J: Guarding ourselves. Yes. Well, I guess I’m not good at taking this kind of orders. But anyway, I was assigned a certain place. I’m not paying any attention. Up comes this British soldier and he says, “Aren’t you supposed to be guarding?” And I said, “Guarding what? What’s the point of trying to guard the prison? We’re free now.” I said, “The war is over.” He says, “You know, you’re supposed to be going up and down.” I said, “That doesn’t mean a thing to me.” He said, “Are you an American?” I said yes. He was a British colonel.

Anyway, he reported me to the Navy commander. The Navy commander called me in and he said, “You’re supposed to stay on detail.” He never put me on that detail again. The Navy commander just laughed it off. To me it was a joke. But that just shows the difference between the British and the Americans.

T: Right. Very good example. Did you stay, yourself and others, did you stay physically in the camp, or did you leave and come back at times?

J: We stayed in the camp. The Navy commander was given—I forget exactly what kind of orders... We were all (***). He put me on the staff. I was supposed to take pictures and so on. It was really nice to see the Japanese soldiers come by and bow to me after all those years.

T: How ironic. Now they bowed to you. Did you start to get more food right away?

J: The Bicycle Camp, when the war was over, especially after August 14, more food was coming in. I forget how we got it...we got one of these little Japanese cooked hens. It was small. We went someplace and we stripped the chicken apart and it was great.

T: Yes. So the Japanese were still here. The prisoners...did they all stay where they were supposed to?

J: No. No. The civilians went down to Batavia because of the trouble down there.

T: Did you go to Batavia yourself?

J: Yes. The Americans wouldn’t hesitate. We just walked down. We walked down there and then we walked back. Walked past the guards. The one thing about the Japanese, they were very well disciplined. When they’re told to do something, they do it. If they’re told to sit there, they sit there.

T: So the war ended and they were told to act differently, they did.

J: They were just told (*** and they did. It was amazing.

T: How soon was it before you saw Allied soldiers? Coming to the camp.
J: It was sometime the beginning of September. We saw some American commandos. Came in. They came into the camp and they were commandos. They were scrawny. I almost went and kissed one, as dirty as he was.

T: So that's the first Allies that you saw.

J: Right.

T: You used the date September 19. Is that when you actually left the camp?

J: That's when we left it. We left by plane. It think it was a C-52 transport plane. Four engines. From Batavia to Calcutta [India].

T: At that point you were done with Java, you were done with the Japanese.

J: The one that came down had Red Cross nurses and those were the first American girls that we'd seen.

T: For years.

J: Right. We got Red Cross packages for the time. We got toothpaste and tooth powder. Of course, we were well treated.

T: Yes. Now that you were leaving that whole scene behind, what kind of thoughts did you have? Not only with the war over, but now the physical experience is behind you too.

J: I just put it there in the background. I wanted to get home and prove to myself that I didn't have any degeneration of mind. I wanted to prove to myself that I was still sane. Because you didn't know for sure.

T: Did you worry about that? Yes?

J: A little.

T: How did you think that the POW experience might have affected you at that point? If you were worrying about how you were sane.

J: It affected me in a way that I think I started to look in peoples' eyes to see what they were thinking when they wanted to talk to me. In fact, I had a cousin of mine who became a surgeon. This is a few months after I was out. Met me at church. He wanted to talk to me a little bit and he says, "I saw the same old Joe." So that meant to me that I was still pretty sane.
T: So that was a good thing for you to hear that?

J: Oh, yes.

T: Your information that you provided before we started was that you spent time at a hospital facility in Calcutta, in India.

J: Calcutta, for one month.

T: Then at several facilities in the States including Fletcher General Hospital in Cambridge, Ohio. What did the military at these or other hospital locations do for your physical recovery? How did they get you back...

J: At Fletcher General, that was just a...more a place we go, a deportation...we were there to be shipped to other hospitals. We were only there for maybe a week. Then we were given orders to...while we were there, some American business people invited me and Shipley to... It was right after dinner...the reception was absolutely wonderful.

T: Let me move back to Calcutta then and this first month after the POW experience. How did they look after you there, in a physical sense?

J: When we got there they deloused us and all that stuff, and we were given the best, clean bed, linen. The first morning that I was there I felt a hand on me. The wind on the mosquito net. I felt a hand on me. My reaction was to get up. I felt I was being attacked. And as I got up, the nurse grabbed a hold of me and she said, “You're all right. You're all right.”

T: Were there medical tests or other medical things done there?

J: Oh, yes. They gave us...I forget. We didn’t really get the medical tests until we got to Fletcher General Hospital. That’s where they checked us. Malaria, dysentery, diabetes, everything. It wasn’t so much there. They didn't really give me much of a test there.

T: Did you get lots of food or...

J: Oh, yes. Oh, boy! Well treated, and I recall when we got to Fletcher General Hospital I was ushered into the colonel in charge of the hospital and [was] very well received. We’re going to treat you good and all that kind of stuff. Which was nice. The care that we got from the war from the military hospitals was absolutely...I don't know how it could have been any better.

T: What kind of help did the military provide at that time with the kind of psychological recovery of dealing with the POW experience?
J: None. The only thing, when I got to Calcutta I was called into the Intelligence Office, the Debriefing Office, and I got there and I remembered to tell some of the...I mentioned this Lieutenant Sony who was a SOB, and I recall him distinctly saying, “Don’t worry, Joe, we’re taking care of him.”

(2, B, 562)

T: So they knew about this guy already.

J: They knew about this guy right away. They probably hung him.

T: So the debriefing included...did they ask you questions about where you had been and your experiences?

J: Experiences.

T: Was there a psychologist there or any kind of people trained in, kind of what we today might call, posttraumatic stress disorder?

J: No. Not that I recall there.

T: So in a sense, they looked after your physical well-being and were fattening you up, so to speak.

J: Oh, wait a minute. I recall looking at my transport card or whatever it is. So I had to be...for the doctors. It was probably just a doctor. And I recall his putting down on there, this card that had to go along with me, “no reconditioning required.”

T: So you were, in a sense, good to go.

J: I don’t know how in the heck you could...three and half years in prisoner of war camp! No reconditioning be required, is beyond me.

T: You were having problems with your eyesight too at this time, right?

J: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. My doctor said it was optic atrophy. Of course, my leg, I was able to walk, so that was pretty bad there.

T: No reconditioning required.

J: So I really got...really kind of on my own.

T: You were discharged in May of 1946.

J: Right.
T: You were back in the States before then. When did you first see your parents again?

J: I saw them in October. I had the orders to go from Hallowin Hospital in New York to Fletcher General Hospital and I had to pass by my hometown. So I asked the executive officer, can I have pass? Stop off. The executive officer said, I’m sorry. I can’t give you a pass. But he said, if I were you he said, I would stop off. I wouldn’t worry about it a bit. So I did. That was the kind of treatment, you know. Of course, I stopped off for three or four days, and then I got to Fletcher General Hospital.

T: That was the first time you saw your folks.

J: That’s the first time I saw my folks.

T: How was that to see them after four years again?

J: I saw my dad first. He came with a friend to pick me up at the Altoona. It was kind of emotional. Then I got home and my mother was really emotional.

T: During the four days you were there, how much of an opportunity did you have to, in a sense, fill them in on what had transpired in your life the last four years?

J: The Punxsutawney Spirit, which was the local newspaper, came out and they interviewed me. That’s how we got these pictures. Here. This is it (shares newspaper article from Spirit, 1945).

T: Now, Joe, you were back from the service. You spent some time in hospitals, but you were discharged and by 1946, back in school. Let’s start with your family, your folks. You didn’t have brothers or sisters. How much did your folks know about your POW experience? How much did you tell them in other words?

Wife: Very little.

(2, B, 611)

J: I didn’t tell them. I said I had bad food, bad treatment. I don’t think I told my friends anything really. They had received some bad propaganda. Somebody had received a letter from a POW, and under the stamp was marked that I had my tongue cut out. [unclear reference]

T: They heard this about you?

J: Yes. And of course, it wasn’t true. But anyway, when they saw me, they saw me in one piece...the thing is—I think my wife can verify it—most people, this one woman said after my being out of prison camp four or five months, she said you know, you don’t even look like you’re a prisoner of war. Of course, I had already gained about
thirty pounds. Unless you have that look about you, unless you’re crippled, you lost your legs or your arms or you have—we used to call it the Asiatic look—people look like their mostly unstable... In fact, I learned—you can learn an awful lot by looking in peoples’ eyes. That can tell you an awful lot. Where they look and so on and so forth. I think that’s what...

T: Were your folks...they didn't need to look at you. They knew you had been over there.

J: Oh, yes.

T: Was it a case of they didn't ask you a lot of questions or when they asked that you didn’t volunteer information?

J: They didn’t ask. They were just so happy to see me home. All they wanted to do is take me out and show me to the neighbors that I got back alive.

T: Did they?

J: Yes. But I didn’t want to do that. I was back and that was it. I never told my dad much of anything. My dad recognized what I’d gone through though because when he was on his dying bed with leukemia, he said, “This is worse than prison camp.” Which meant that he was dying. So that was it.

T: But he didn’t ever push you for...

J: He never pushed me. No.

T: How about your mom?

J: My mother never pushed me either.

T: You spent a number of years, three years almost, at Penn State. Among people you knew at college, how much did they know about your POW experience?

J: There was one member of my hometown, another veteran who fought in Europe, in Italy and was wounded. He found out that I was going to Penn State. He was in the agricultural department, so he came over and introduced himself and we got acquainted this way. He took me back to Punxsutawney. But he was the only one. In fact, I never talked very much to him.

T: So other people at college, I hear you saying, they knew you were a veteran but that was about where it stopped?

J: That was about it. One day going to class I got behind two veterans who one said to the other—this was shortly after the war—he said, “I’m sorry the war was over.
We had such a nice time down in Miami. Everything was so nice down there.” I’m walking in back of them and I’m saying to myself, “What should I do? Should I get in a fight?” I just continued on.

T: So you didn’t say anything to them?

J: No. I didn’t say anything to them. What was the use?

T: Peoples’ experiences were completely different, weren’t they?

J: Yes.

T: After you finished Penn State you worked in a number of different locations and jobs and just to mention Brookville, Pennsylvania, Burlington, Iowa, Emporium, Pennsylvania, etc. etc. As you worked at different firms and had different sets of coworkers, how much did your employers or your fellow employees know about what you had been through?

(2, B, 661)

J: The only thing they knew I was in the service. My first job was in Brookville as a production engineer, and the engineering manager and, of course, the cohorts they looked at my resume and saw I had been in the service for almost six and half years and they never asked me. They never bothered to ask me what happened, whether I shot down any Jap Zeros...nobody. From the time that I entered college in 1946, September 1946, until about fifteen, twenty years ago...

Kathryn DeMott (entering room): You joined the POW...

J: Very little. Even when I worked at RCA. My coworkers...I never met one POW engineer. I never met...I never had any experiences with any...(trails off) So I just kept it to myself. That’s all.

T: Let me get a little closer to home here. You were married in June of 1948. As you were dating your wife or after you were first married, how much did you tell your wife about this?

J: She could answer that.

T: Let me ask you first.

J: She knew I was a prisoner. She had read it in the Punxsutawney Spirit. So I didn’t have to say very much. That’s right. She read all about it in the paper. She knew I was captured. To begin with, when I was captured, after I was captured, the Punxsutawney Spirit put in the fact that I became a prisoner of war. My wife saw it. Of course, we knew each other in high school. She was actually in the same class,
but in a different homeroom. But I think...the only thing that I can recall that I complained a little bit about was my eyes. I was having trouble because my eyes were watering. I didn’t know what to do. She knew a doctor. Her personal physician advised her that she should send me down to Pittsburgh to an ophthalmologist down there who was a specialist.

T: So she knew about it from the newspaper and also from the eye problems that you had been a POW. How much detail had you shared with her about what you talked about with me today?

J: I think down through the years...not much. There was not much point in talking about it.

T: Let me turn to Kathryn, sitting right here. Kathryn, how do you remember that? How do you remember what you were told and how you sort of learned about his POW experience?

Kathryn DeMott: I knew about his eyes. He was very sensitive. You couldn’t mention eyes to him. I mean, he would just go...very high strung. He didn’t want anybody to know he had any problem. But, of course, I knew he did. So then when I talked to his doctor...we had no help from anybody. He said you should tell Joe to go to Dr. McOsland in Pittsburgh. So he went there.

T: When was this approximately? Do you remember?

Kathryn DeMott: (to Joe) Oh, were we married at the time or were we engaged?

J: No. We were still engaged. This was in 1947.

Kathryn DeMott: About ’47, I guess. And he went down there and Dr. McOsland...well, they knew they could never bring back his sight. He said there was nothing they could do about it, but he didn’t think it would get any worse and he’d just have to live with the fact that he just has to see from the side vision. He trained himself to do that. But when he came back...I mean, to pick up a newspaper he’d have to put it so close to eyes that you knew he had problems. He wouldn’t talk about it. He didn’t—

J: I saw Dr. McCoy too.

T: How about the rest of the POW experience? Actually what it had been like in the camps and the kind of day to day experience. How much...

Kathryn DeMott: Not too much. He wouldn’t talk about it. Because I think he felt if he talked about it he’s reliving it. That’s one of the reasons he didn’t...his folks must have sensed that too. They didn’t want to stir him up again. So that’s why nobody would question him too much about it. He was always so worried about getting a
job. He didn’t want anybody to know that his vision wasn’t good and that he had been in prison.

(2, B, 712)

T: Did you, Joe, did you perceive that having been a POW was a negative thing and an employer might look at that in a negative way?

J: I did. To me being a POW is a sign of weakness. Because you should never get captured. That’s the most horrible thing that can happen to a soldier.

T: In a sense though...I’m just thinking of the circumstances of your own capture having been incapacitated in a hospital bed...

J: I could have had a choice. When we were on flights, when I was on the bombing missions, I carried a .45 in my hip pocket because we were told that if we were downed there that we would be automatically executed, and in my mind I was going to use that first bullet. My wife says I’m not so sure you would. At least it gave me some confidence, anyway. I wasn’t shot down, fortunately.

T: Your plane was shot, but you weren’t shot down.

J: Yes.

T: On the same track of how you remember and how much you shared of this, I want to ask you, Joe, if in the years after the war when you were a college student or when you were first married, how much were you bothered by dreams or nightmares at night about your POW experience?

J: A lot. I would say for the first three or four years I would dream that I was being captured.

T: The being captured part again.

J: Being captured. Either that or I would be breaking out because I always wanted to escape, escape out of prison camp. I had a machine gun and I would be firing away and all of a sudden the bullets would come to hit me and I would fall down, and when I did that I started along the ground. My wife, when we were married, that happened. I would have the sensations.

Kathryn DeMott: I could always tell when he was doing it because he would start moaning and moaning and moaning.

T: So you could hear this.
Kathryn DeMott: Oh, sure. I could hear it. I would wake him up and he would say, “Oh, I’m glad you woke me up. I was captured again. I’m fighting the war again.” And then we lived in a place, and once in a while an airplane would fly over and in his sleep, he would jump out of bed real quick and get under the bed. He said he thought he was being attacked.

J: In the military hospital I was next to a window, and when the Jap bombers would fly over, when they were flying over we would get a warning sign and my leg was in a cast. So I always tried to get under the bed, which I couldn’t because of the cast on my leg. I guess I carried that over.

T: So that image stayed with you.

J: That stayed with me.

T: Did these dreams stay with you for a while? Did they decrease in frequency?

J: They decreased in frequency.

Kathryn DeMott: Once in a while even yet. Not like in the beginning. Just once in a blue moon now.

T: So even today once in a while? Same images?

J: No. It’s something different. It’s like somebody says, you know, Joe, you’re going to be captured. The Japs are coming to capture you. I’m saying how can that be? I guess...I’m not escaping anymore, not being captured. I’m being told things. It’s a weird sensation to be told that you’re going to be captured. I’m saying I was already captured.

(2, B, 751)

T: Once was enough.

J: Once is enough.

T: How much help have you received from the VA? You are a part of the American ex-POWs, right?

J: Right.

T: Let me ask about that organization first. How have they helped you in the twenty years you’ve been part of that?

J: The magazine has carried legislation that has helped. What helped first was the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor. That’s an organization.
T: Were you part of that too?

J: Oh, yes. That includes the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island, and the Dutch East Indies. We're all part of this one group. The Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor.

T: The Dutch East Indies would include you as well.

J: Because what happened is a lot of the defenders of the Philippines had to move south. Like Charlie Forry had to move south.

T: Yes. Because officially, I guess your squadron was transferred.

J: Officially, I belonged to the Philippine group. The 19th Bomb Group.

T: Has that organization helped as well?

J: I received a newsletter. Not so much there...just as information. That's the 20th Air Force. I belong to the 20th Air Force, and they always have a reunion and my wife and I aren't great travelers, so we don't go. But there are always things like the B-29 [Superfortress, four engine very heavy bomber]. General Curtis LeMay of the 20th Air Force. The B-29s down at the Smithsonian Institute. There was a big rigamarole about that and the atomic bomb. [reference to the Enola Gay display at Smithsonian, in late 1990s]

T: In 1995. There sure was. Yes.

J: I guess, you're aware of that. So it's more or less brought me information. From the time I went through all these tests at the VA...was completed in 1948...and I got a letter from the VA. The adjudication officer in '48 said that...

**End of Tape 2. Tape 3, Side A, begins at counter 000.**

T: So the treatment you had...you had ten percent after the war.

J: Ten percent. The adjudication officer...I got that in May of '46.

T: That was right when you were discharged.

J: Yes.

T: And that's irrespective of your eyesight, which was poor.

Kathryn DeMott: Very poor.
T: And they gave you ten percent. Did it occur to you to pursue more than ten percent, or was it a matter of not knowing what to do at that point?

J: I didn’t know what to do. That’s why my wife and another doctor I was going to before, Dr. Lukhart...they wanted to give me bifocals. But nobody told me that I lost my central vision. Nobody did. When I was down there I learned to shift my focus on my own. Time after time after time I would go there. This ophthalmologist gave me a little sharper glasses. And I didn’t need glasses. In fact, they gave me a test. I saw 20-50 both times. He made the glasses just a little stronger so that I could read. So instead of holding things up here I could hold them like that.

T: So things could be a little further from your face.

[3, A, 28]

J: A little further away. I guess I must have figured I’m just going to make it on my own. With the help of the doctors, the ophthalmologist, the help of the professors at State college. There were people that understood. I think being a veteran...I was given a job as an engineer. Veterans got preference. I was treated very well. I never...so I went along. I could never figure out why exactly I couldn’t see as well as the others could. But I always managed to see well enough to hold my job. I could read well enough, and I could look and I could spot cracks in the glass. I could do a lot of things. I could draw very well.

T: So you could live your professional life.

J: Yes. I got a magnifying glass.

Kathryn DeMott: He uses that all the time.

T: So on the job, for years it sounds like, this was your secret that you couldn’t see as well.

J: Yes. My first job they just wanted to know what my eyesight was. The VA put down, which was entirely wrong, they put down 20-50, 20-40. Later eye tests showed my left eye was 20-50, my right eye is 20-50+2, which means I read two letters on the 20-40 line. That’s not enough to qualify you for 20-40. With a little help from magnification I can do most anything. This is where the visual aids come in. With the visual aids, with the help of these doctors and friends and so on, my professional life was very healthy. Being an engineer, being a supervisor, being a manager, administrator for almost thirty years...very happy about it. But there were times it was really tough. And I know that there were times that I missed things and I probably wasn’t reprimanded because...it’s just a mistake. But really I’d missed it.

T: You had ten percent. What percent disability do you get now?
J: I’m totally disabled now. Just recently. In the past three months. This has been going on now for five years.

T: So your attempts to get that increased from ten percent have taken...

J: They gave me a bunch of tests, eye tests and so on. They came to the conclusion, this was in 1947, that I would have ten percent for my eyes and twenty percent for my leg. That was it.

T: So you’d get thirty percent total.

J: Thirty percent total. They gave me additional tests. I went to the ophthalmologist. I received a letter from the VA, the adjudication officer, June 10, 1948, that they had done everything they can. All tests show that I should maintain the same rate. Which, of course, is not true. What happened, about ten years ago, five years ago, I got the whole complete file from Philadelphia, the VA file. From that I found out that I was supposed...the last rating sheet that was given by the claim specialist, the doctor stated that as far as they...they had classified me as...surgical, orthopedic and a special eye. They had numbers what I should get for each one. What they wanted to do, they wanted to evaluate me. At that time they must have figured I was still in college. They wanted to evaluate me. They said review, June 9, 1949.

T: So a year after this.

J: Yes. And it fell through the cracks.

T: So you never reviewed again.

J: This adjudication officer just cut it off.

T: So that was the last correspondence you had from them.

J: Right. Up until I started talking to Dr. Welsh over here, who is an ophthalmologist. He was checking my eyes. I told him a little of the background. He said, “You should go to the VA over there and just sit there until they do something about it.” He knew something wasn’t right. That was in 1974.

So from 1948 until 1974, I got nothing. I didn’t hear from the VA one bit. I was supposed to. Checking back...I checked the rating sheets in there. I found a Title 38, US Code 6060 entitled me with blindness in both eyes with only light perception, and the loss of the use of one leg where I got shot. That’s how I was supposed to be rated. Actually, I was totally disabled with that and with special compensation. I’m waiting for the decision now.

(3, A, 123)
T: So you’re hoping that the decision will prove that they should have been paying all the way back from 1948.

J: That’s right.

T: Joe, the last question I wanted to ask, and that’s just in a larger sense, what do you think is the most important way that your POW experience changed your life?

J: It made me more tolerant. It kept me from getting too worked up about anything. It increased my tolerance level. However, I find out that if I push too hard, that my tolerance level reaches its capacity. Then I guess I have a little temper.

T: Is that different from the way you were, let’s say before your POW experience?

J: I’ve always had a pretty high tolerance level. But the only thing is…I found out during my lifetime that I’m easy to get along with and probably take a lot. Sometimes people push me on that. They take advantage of that. That’s when I kind of explode. I’ve had that a couple of times.

T: So in that sense, you think that your POW experience did change you or didn’t change you?

J: It might have made me a little more…I think it made me a little less sensitive to things. In a way, I’ve been desensitized to a lot of things. My reaction times to calamity is not…I lose my sense of balance. I look at it…calamity.

T: You’ve described this a number of times, as a POW where it was something very traumatic might be happening in front of you, but you just have to accept it and that carried over.

J: I don’t know. I went through a transformation or what.

T: Sort of gear down?

J: Oh, yes. I gear myself down. If I geared up, my blood pressure might be 150 or 175, and I gear myself down. I sit down…I learned to relax. One thing I learned as a POW. I had my blood pressure in a matter of ten minutes dropped from 150 to 130. Right in front of the doctor’s eyes.

T: That’s very interesting. When you think about the Japanese today, what are your feelings about the Japanese?

J: I have no bad feelings. I remember what they did to me, but these were other people. These were not the Japanese of today. It was the times. The Eastern culture is altogether different than ours and we were treated probably…they probably
thought that they were doing the right thing. They were fighting for their country. In some cases, some things I saw...unforgivable. But these are mostly single cases.

T: So it's individual people and not the Japanese as a whole.

J: No. Except that they were going to execute us.

T: That was threatened to you a couple times.

J: Oh, yes.

T: That's the last question I have, and I'll take this opportunity to thank you very much for your time this morning and this afternoon.

J: You're very welcome. I guess I've kind of relived it. This is the first time I've done this. When I was interviewed with Charlie it didn't seem to bother me.

T: So you haven't talked to schools or groups before about this.

J: Just that one time.

T: So this really, this interview today, pulling this stuff all together was a first for you.

J: After all these years. Yes. You think of it. Sometimes your mind...when I'm talking to you I'm seeing reality. I'm seeing pictures. I can see those happenings. I can visualize what happened. I'm talking to you and visualizing. If I talk to you without visualizing I'm all right, but as soon as I start visualizing what happened I can feel myself getting a little worked up. Like some of the beatings and so on.

T: And that's sixty years ago and it still brings this response in you. Again, because of that, let me again thank you very much for sharing this today, capturing those experiences.

END OF INTERVIEW