Ray Makepeace was born on 5 March 1915 in Minneapolis, one of four boys. He attended local schools, graduating from De La Salle High School in 1932. After high school Ray did several stints in the Civilian Conservation Corps in northern Minnesota, worked for three years in Duluth, and in 1938 played minor league baseball in the St. Louis Cardinals system. He was working locally in Minneapolis when he decided in February 1941 to enlist in the US Army.

Within just a few months Ray was shipped to the Philippines and posted to a coastal artillery battalion, but by May he was transferred to the island of Corregidor, in Manila Bay, and attached to the Harbor Defense Command. He was stationed here when the Japanese attacked the Philippines in December 1941. In May 1942 Ray was one of thousands of American service personnel captured on the island.

Ray remained a POW of the Japanese for nearly forty months, primarily at two locations: Manila (worked as stevedore in the port area of Manila); and Kameoka, Japan (slave labor in a lead mine). Like other POWs of the Japanese, Ray endured malnutrition, mistreatment, and disease; in his opinion, the work in the lead mine was the hardest and most dangerous. Ray was at Kameoka when the Pacific war ended in August 1945.

Following his evacuation in September from the lead mine camp, Ray returned to the United States; he spent time in several medical facilities before being discharged in March 1946. Ray used GI Bill benefits to attend a tech school in Minneapolis and then worked briefly in retail sales, but he spent his career in the insurance field, working for Phoenix Mutual for thirty-one years until his retirement in 1980. Ray was married in 1947 (wife Martha), and helped to raise four children. He was interviewed at his home in Minnetonka, Minnesota, in February 2004.

Ray died in December 2005, at age ninety.

Ray Makepeace’s POW odyssey (information provided by interviewee)

- May 42: captured on Corregidor
- Jun – Jul 42: Bilibid Prison, Manila
- c. Jul 42 – Jul 44: Port Area of Manila; worked as laborer, then as stevedore
- Jul – Aug 44: Hell Ship transport to Japan: Nissyo Maru (sailed 17 Jul 44)
- Aug 44 – Sep 45: Kameoka, island of Honshu, Japan; slave labor in lead mine
Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is February 18, 2004, and this is the first part of our interview with Mr. Ray Makepeace of Minneapolis, Minnesota. On the record, Ray Makepeace, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me. From our talking before we started taping, I know that you arrived in the Philippines in April of 1941, right?

R: Yes.

T: When you think back, what kind of memory do you have of...did you expect some kind of hostilities or were there rumors about something going to happen that you recall?

R: The first of the rumors that we had, that we thought were odd, were when hit Hawaii and that was in April 1941. They had a band there, you know, when you come in to Honolulu, says Aloha on the tower. And the Army band met us there and they played the “Song of the Islands,” which is beautiful, and when they laid their instruments down they said, “You’re suckers!” We didn’t understand what they meant, but what they were trying to tell us, there’s going to be a war and you’re going to be in it. This is what they said in Hawaii. So when I got to the Philippines the 31st Infantry Band met us in Manila, at the port of Manila, and they played the song of their island which is a beautiful song, and they did the same thing. They said, “You’re suckers!” So they said, you’re going to be in a war. Well, actually, it seemed like an adventure. It didn’t scare us.

T: So the thought that there might be a war and you might be involved in it wasn’t something that filled you with trepidation or anything?

R: No. No. If you get through your training, you know, in the military, you’re a professional. You look to have somebody else do your worrying for you.

T: Now were there, that said, were there guys who were concerned or were worrying?

R: Not too much in the regular Army.

T: That’s right. You guys were all—were you all enlistees?
R: All of us. There was no draftees with us.

T: Talk about the kind of work that you did, specifically as a member of the Harbor Defense Command there on Corregidor.

R: I had many, many jobs. In other words, I was—you know what a G-2 Unit, G-2 is?

T: Intelligence?

R: Intelligence. I was in the group called S-3.

T: What did S-3 do?

R: Most of the information happening on the island, transfers, news about the war. Different things came to me. I read it. Because I took shorthand and I was the only guy in the unit that could read the general’s writing, I was his man. So he gave me something and then I’d take it down in shorthand and go back and type it and take it in and he’d sign it. As a matter of fact...

T: Did this make you kind of privy to certain kinds of information that came through the unit?

R: Lots of it.

T: What did you learn before other people knew it, for example?

R: I knew some of the oddballs in the officers’ ranks, and you knew something about the queers, and go back to some of the cases we had there. A lot of unusual people in the Army. I think the saddest case I met was an old sergeant that was over there and married a native woman and then had many children. He was screwing his daughters. There was incest.

(1, A, 36)

T: So that’s kind of...well, you learned a lot of inside details, shall we say?

R: Yes.

T: What about details about island preparedness, or Philippines preparedness, or expected moves by the Japanese before December?

R: At that time, many people probably didn’t know that there was a fleet of Japanese out there. We didn’t know where they were. I kept thinking it was quite unusual, because this information came down from the MacArthur’s headquarters at that time in Manila to General Moore’s headquarters which is the Harbor Defense
Command, and it seemed like they were perplexed and it wasn’t the Army. It was
the Navy didn’t know what the hell was going on over there. We had what was
called the Asiatic Fleet. If you read the history, we lost the whole thing in about two
weeks. What we didn’t lose the first day, we lost in two weeks. I knew about this
stuff. You know, over the years I’ve read...when I look back. Most of it, why should I
remember it? At the time, you know, it would hurt people.

T: Yes.

R: That we found. That I knew about. I knew when there was going to be
promotions. That’s the only time he bawled me out.

T: Let me ask you: how did you experience, personally, the beginning of the Pacific
War on December 8?

R: It’s amusing. On December 8, I had a three day to Manila, which usually I put in a
week before. We got three days off a month. You go to Manila. And you go with
another man, so we always had two men left in a section, whatever your job
happened to be. So I come down to the orderly room in my class A uniform. We
always had to be dressed in khaki and you had to pass inspection. We went down to
the orderly room and they check you into the sergeant and I said, “I want my three
day pass.” He says, “You’re not getting it.” I said, “Why? What did I do? Did I screw
up?” And he said, “No. Go listen to the radio.” So I go and listen to the radio and it
says over and over again, “Pearl Harbor bombed. Bombed.” You know, different
places. I guess they hit Indo-China some places there too, the same day. And I said,
“What the hell’s the difference? I’ve got a three day pass. I’ll be back in three days.”
He said, “No way, Makepeace.” So, you know, that was...that was a surprise. Then of
course, to go from Corregidor to Manila, [which] is twenty-six miles. So when that
came in, they regenerated the whole air—we had the whole harbor mined. It would
be dangerous going in there because we did have mines floating around and ships
were never supposed to be in there at night. That was the amusing thing. He said,
“You want to go to town?” (chuckles)

T: Let me ask you now. How much were you genuinely surprised the war had
broken out, or were you just surprised that it had happened right then and there?

R: No. I really wasn’t surprised. You know, most of the reports we were getting,
everything was negative. And we kept getting word they’re still trying to locate a
large fleet that is believed is somewhere out where the Marianas was. I didn’t know
at that time where the Marianas was. I didn’t know where, later on, where
Guadalcanal and [the island of] Vela Lavella. You learn a lot of things after. Too late.
But here, our Navy was not capable of...well, they were probably closer than Hawaii,
than the Hawaiian force. But yet, we didn’t know anything about it. We didn’t know
where those troops were going and they were on their way to the Philippines.
Landed at Lingayen Gulf.
T: Right. Now you were in Manila then. How soon before you got back to Corregidor?

R: When I was in Manila, you say?

(1, A, 73)

T: Yes.

R: I never got my pass. I never actually left Corregidor.

T: Right. Ray, what changed after December 8 there on Corregidor?

R: Well, we moved into our gun positions and I was assigned to a bomb shelter with the general and his staff. We got out of the barracks. The bad thing was pulling guard at night, because if you move around at night in a war zone, anybody moving is going to get shot. And I had to go from where I was bivouacked at that time, I had to go a quarter of a mile down a railroad track to get down to the communications center [where] I was working at that time. I walked down that railroad track at night. It was dangerous. On each side of it all the way down I could hear men. I was challenged. What you do, you give your name, rank, and serial number. And you want to whistle. Say, I’m coming. I’m an American. My name is Makepeace, serial number so and so. Because these guys were ready to shoot. You see, the Japanese had commandos we didn’t know about, and they were around that island then and we didn’t know about it. You didn’t know about it either, did you?

T: No. I know that they made attempted landings on Bataan. The surrender on Corregidor wasn’t until into May, though.

R: 6 May.

T: Yes.

R: We went out to our gun positions in the evening—I went to our gun position, I think, about eight or nine o’clock. They expected a landing any of those three nights because the moon—it had something to do with the moon. The moon would come up around ten o’clock, which gave the Japanese visibility, but they’d be coming in in the darkness. That’s where, my gun position was between two beaches, and this is where we expected them to land. We had a lot of machine guns and stuff in there. So it was unusual in one respect that I’m in the gun position. I’m sitting next to a building, this building I used to live in. It was the provost marshal shack. I lived in there part of the time until it got blown up and was burning. Somebody threw a grenade down and...I said, some son of a bitch throwing stuff throwing stuff down on us.

There was a sergeant out there. I always remember his name—it’s Sergeant Vermillion. He said, “Makepeace, get your ass down. I’m going to spray behind you.
There’s something up there.” So he turned the machine gun around from where he’s facing beach to my direction, sprayed behind us and nothing happened. There was a few minutes later, I would say within five minutes, there came down five torches just like—do you know what a Roman candle is?

T: Yes.

R: It pointed out five or six gun positions where we were. Each one of those landed right over our head. Kind of like a sparkler. The Japanese in Bataan were looking at that, which was only three miles. And then all of a sudden, as we were looking across there, Bataan lit up like a torch from one end to the other. That was their artillery and they laid that artillery barrage right in our area. Right where this guy, whoever he was, pointed our gun positions. And then he got his ass out of there. See, he was probably a Japanese commando behind us. That’s when we took it. Boy! I tell you, that was the worst artillery barrage. I wouldn’t want to go through that again.

T: What was that like? Talk about that.

R: Scary. It’s scary as hell. You can’t do anything. You just lay there and pray that it doesn’t hit you, and you can hear every shell as they come, especially the—these were what they call 240 millimeter howitzers. That’s a big piece, almost ten inches. And I knew they were there because the next day when we got surrendered some of those were duds that came down on us. But they killed everything around there. Knocked all the nests out including ours. We got hit. A couple of guys there, I never did know what happened. We never saw them and they probably got blown to bits. The crater came up to my heels. I was in the end of it. When it hit me, hit in the area, it blew me up in the air. I came down. I was out for a while, a little while. Bleeding all over. Little pieces of cinders and steel or something like that.

T: You could have been hurt a lot worse, it sounds like.

R: The concussion was more. The concussion went up my ass and paralyzed my legs. I could stand up, but I finally got my equilibrium and the sergeant said, “Makepeace, get another belt,” you know, of .30 caliber. We still had the gun left. The gun didn’t get blown too much away.

T: So the concussion from the shells...

R: Oh, it was terrible. So I went to the aid station. They patched me up and then I went and got the ammunition. Then I went to go back. I couldn’t get out. The barrage was right on it again. So I went up to the other end and then I reported, told the general, I said, “I think we’re all knocked out down at that end.” And he said, “Just hold tight. There’s going to be a big change here in the next eighteen hours.” Now this was about ten thirty or eleven o’clock at night. What he was trying to tell me, but he didn’t say, was, that we were going to surrender.
T: So he knew it.

R: Wainwright and his group probably were on their way out there then. They were on Bataan, probably negotiating with [Japanese General] Homa.

T: Ray, what kind of physical condition were you in after all those months on Corregidor?

R: Well, we didn’t get much to eat. I probably, at that time, I was...had a little dysentery. Most of it was hunger. We hadn’t taken a bath. We had inadequate supplies of water. They knocked our water supply out which was under the tennis courts on topside at Corregidor. I wasn’t in good shape. I probably weighed about 155, 160 pounds. All of us were underweight.

T: How much weight had you lost by that time?

R: Oh, probably about ten or twelve pounds there during that siege of Corregidor. But at Briddengam I got down to ninety-eight.

T: How did you, yourself, take the news that American forces on Corregidor were actually going to surrender and that you were going to become a POW?

R: You know we just...I just felt...I had no emotions at all. In one way, I’m relieved. All of a sudden there’s no noise or the terrible sound of shells bursting and all the rifle fire and all that shit. It was almost a deathly silence. I think a lot of us said, “Well, it’s over.” But we didn’t know what was going to happen, so it was like a bunch of lost sheep.

The Japanese troops came and then they spent the night with the troops. Their troops started fires all around Corregidor and cooked food and they shared their food with us and we traded cigarettes. But those are the combat troops, and they were gone the next day. They were probably on their way down to Guadalcanal or some other area.

T: Was that your first actual face to face encounter with Japanese?

R: Yes. We’d been bombed and shelled and everything all along. But now we see them. They’re just little guys and they were as skinny as we were (chuckles).

(1, A, 153)

T: What kind of impression did they make on you as a young man, these Japanese soldiers?

R: Well, I saw them before. Oh, no. I saw them when I was a prisoner. I saw none of them actually in combat.
T: Did you see them when they landed on Corregidor then?

R: I could hear them, but I couldn’t see them. Because they came in, in waves, in launches. Launches, you know. There are probably sixty, seventy men in each boat. We sunk a lot of them. They lost two, three thousand men trying to take us. Most of it, you know, we got our guns down low enough so we could fire at them and sink them.

T: When did you actually first come face to face with Japanese?

R: Well, the first Japanese I made an encounter with was...we got herded into this big shelter [Malinta Tunnel]. The only shelter left on Corregidor. It was the hospital shelter. There was about five thousand of us in there. And a Japanese officer came in with a flag, a white flag, and two enlisted men, one with a rifle and the other one had a flame thrower on his back, and he just said in English, he said, “Clear this place. In ten minutes I’m going to turn the flamethrower loose.” So then we went out the other end and, of course, the other end of this entrance was the main entrance. There was the Japanese troops out there. As we came out they took our watches and fountain pens and wanted to search us, see if we had any contraband on us.

T: Did they actually search you?

R: Oh, yes.

T: What was that like, really being at, sort of at, it sounds like, at the mercy of your captors now?

R: You didn’t do anything about it. If they wanted something, they took it. If you didn’t give it up, they’d kill you. As simple as that.

T: It’s a pretty simple equation, isn’t it?

R: Yes. They’d kill you.

T: Now you stayed on Corregidor there for some weeks, didn’t you?

R: A couple of weeks, until the big rains came and then they—Corregidor where we were, in the 92nd Garage. That was a hellhole. It was a bad place. And then all those latrines overflowed and all that human shit floated down on us and there was flies, black flies. Billions and billions of black flies. Every place. You opened your mouth, they fly in.

T: This 92nd Garage, how did that facility get that name?
R: The 92nd Garage area was a seaplane landing base. It was, the concrete sloped right down into the water so when an amphibian plane came in he would land in the water, and then you could use the wheels to run up to shore. Then it had a gate, big garage there where they could recondition, do whatever they wanted to do on these planes.

(1, A, 186)

T: And they were using that as a holding facility.

R: Yes.

T: Now were you just being held there, or was there any kind of interrogation or questioning going on there?

R: Not too much in our area here. We stayed right down close to the beach where we could go in the water. You didn't have any water to drink, but if you were thirsty and get your body soaked in water your body will absorb water too. So I did that every day. But there was no food. I did a lot of foolish things there. Got the hell beat out of me one day.

T: For what?

R: I was hungry, and so I just made it on myself. They said, "Don't mess with them. They're mean bastards." So I walked out of the camp up there and I went past the guard shack. Just two Japanese there or three. When I went by, I just acknowledged. I didn't salute or bow, which you were supposed to do. We didn't know that. So they hauled me over. Worked me over a little bit. Then they tied my hands behind my back and they put a log there, tied with my legs. They took my cover off, my hat, whatever I had on. Then I sat in that gun position there for about four hours I guess. They call it the sun treatment. I got up. I mean, they finally released me and they gave me two cigarettes and told me to get the hell out of there (chuckles).

T: So after kind of abusing you for four hours, they give you a couple cigarettes on the way out.

R: Yes. They were unpredictable. What I wanted was a change of uniform. I worked my way up to my battery, which had been hit heavily by bombs and shell fire, and I got up into there and I had my book there. I had all my clippings in there from—my mother sent it to me—when I was in track meets and stuff. And I also had pictures, autographs of the people that used to come to the Nicollet Hotel. I worked there for a while as a bellman. Japanese guys came in there and then he challenged me and he wanted the book. I said no. The next thing I know, I got that bayonet right close to my belly and then he saw the picture of this Dorothy Lewis, who used to be a skater. I guess he fell in love with it so he took the book. I never saw that. But he told me to get the hell out of there. So I went to the barracks next to it, which is connected.
found a uniform in there. It was white. When you went to town we wore civilian clothes, usually white. This thing fit me, so I put it on. Then I went back out of there and I went back down through the shelter that we were kicked out of and I went up to MacArthur’s headquarters, and I knew there was food in there.

T: So this holding facility, sounds like the Japanese were just sort of parking these guys until they could figure out what to do with you.

R: Yes. They had more prisoners than they knew what they were going to get.

T: They finally moved you to the mainland, right?

R: Yes. Went down to Paranaque. Got off the ship there and waded ashore, and we looked bedraggled. Formed up in ranks in four and marched from there to Bilibid [Prison in Manila].

T: How long of a march was that?

R: I think it was about five miles maybe. It was hotter than hell that day, and the Filipinos laid out food and stuff for us. The Japanese were a little more higher class than the infantry. They were cavalry. They rode horses. And they didn’t object. The men would go there and take the water and drink that and then keep right on going.

T: So you were able to, if things were laid out on this march, to pick stuff up for some nourishment.

(1, A, 235)

R: Yes. Yes. All I had was a mess kit and a canteen, I think, at that time.

T: Did you keep that mess kit and canteen with you for a while?

R: Long time. I had that mess kit until I boarded the Nissyo Maru. We had to throw all our utensils into the hold.

T: That’s more than two years in the future here.

R: Yes.

T: What kind of conditions did you find at Bilibid Prison when you got there in Manila?

R: Actually, the one I was in became a very good one, but we made it a good one. We had to clean it up. The Japanese troops shit wherever they were. They were kind of a filthy bunch, their infantry, their combat troops. It was a pigpen. We lived in a
warehouse first. Then we moved into the Port Customs Building called the Marsden Building. It's at the end of Pier Seven in Manila. Pier Seven is the largest pier in the world at that time. That’s the pier we worked on. Most of the ships came in there. We unloaded it.

T: You went there after Bilibid Prison, right?

R: Yes.

T: What kind of conditions did you find at Bilibid Prison when you went there?

R: You couldn’t describe them. There was dead guys all over and guys dying and...you know. Everybody had dysentery. When you get dysentery, you just can’t help yourself. You just shit, shit, shit. It was a pigsty. It was even worse than that. I was there for, oh I suppose it would be less than two weeks I’m quite sure. It was like a nightmare. You know, we had no facilities, no beds, no nothing. You slept on the ground. Then you sleep on the ground, you’re at the mercy of the insects or whatever is crawling around the grass around you.

T: It sounds like it’s overcrowded as well, the way you describe it.

R: Bilibid was overcrowded. Yes. They had a lot of people though. That was a hospital. That was the hospital then at the end of the war for us. In other words, anybody that came into Manila and there was something wrong with them, go to Bilibid. The Navy had set up a headquarters in there for naval, they had that going there...when I got to Bilibid, from Corregidor. It was operating as a hospital also. In 1942.

T: Now, luckily, it sounds like you weren't there very long.

R: No. You don’t survive long.

T: How was it that you got out of Bilibid and other people didn’t?

R: I volunteered as a, I said that I could do electrical work. I was a welder. That’s what I told them (chuckles).

T: Now you also confessed earlier, before we started taping, that you knew nothing about welding.

(1, A, 275)

R: No.

T: Was that simply a ploy to get out of there?
R: Yes. I knew if I stayed in I wasn’t going to last long because I was...some of those
guys from Corregidor were in pretty bad shape too. See, the guys on Bataan
surrendered, they were in bad shape. But we had another twenty-six, twenty-eight
days of the same stuff. No food. Little water. Terrible living conditions. You never
got any sleep or anything like that. So you go three, four days without sleep, you’re a
walking zombie.

T: Yes. Then you were...here you’ve got months and months of not enough food and
not enough sleep.

R: Yes. Sleep you don’t miss until all of a sudden you say, geez, I haven’t been to bed
for three days.

T: Well, listen, you welder, now you’re going to leave Bilibid, apparently, and go
work as a welder. Did that worry you any that you were going to get found out or
exposed as a fake?

R: I don’t think the Japanese knew much about welding either (laughs). When I
worked at this Santa Mesa skidway, the help in there was Filipinos. They helped us
as much as they could. Like when I had dysentery and one of the Filipinos brought
me what they call a guava leaf. There’s some very bad poisonous tasting stuff. And
he says, “Eat the whole thing.” And I did. It cured my dysentery. Native herbs. I
don’t know what it was.

T: Now when you moved to the Manila, the port area of Manila, you were there by
your own information, about two years.

R: See, when I first went to Manila I was at this garage. I think it was called
Bacharach Motors. This was where this twenty of us were all specialists. We did
something. Welding, carpentry work, stuff like that. So they were trying to get these
boats that they invaded us with fixed, to be used again. And that’s how I happened
to go from there, because we became too friendly with the Filipinos. Then they sent
me to this warehouse, which was the port area gang, and there was about two
hundred of them then in this warehouse. The food there was a little better. There
was a little more rice, because the Japanese then were winning all over. They were a
little more easy to get along with than they were later on when they started losing.

T: So you noticed a difference as time went on.

R: Oh, yes. The combat troops, the Japanese combat troops, weren’t bad guys. In
other words they’re just like us. But the ones you feared were the ones that were—
we called them sword swinging civilians, and they wore a green collar on their shirt.
And what they were, were the ones that were in the China Campaign and were
wounded. They hated everybody. They took it out on us.
T: Who were, for the most part, who were the guards when you worked at the port area there? Mostly those kind of people...

R: They were regular army. They were withdrawn from battle someplace, refitted, retrained, and then their first job was probably just in Manila and doing drill. Exercises and drills and getting ready to get ready for a next campaign. They were just like us. They never get through fighting. You've had it, boy, you've had it.

T: You noticed these combat soldiers, from your perspective, were a little better as guards than...

(1, A, 333)

R: Much better.

T: That's interesting. Now approximately two hundred guys, that's the number you mentioned that you worked with at the port area...

R: Well, it became four hundred. It was called G.G.'s Four Hundred Thieves.

T: Is that where you met Howard Swanson?

R: Yes. I kind of...adopted him. When these guys came down from Cabanatuan they were in pretty bad shape.

T: Is that where Swanson came from?

R: That's where he was, yes. And when he came down he was pretty thin, weak, and we had to teach these guys how to loot, you know, steal. But don't steal too much. Don't get caught. And I do believe the Japanese knew we were stealing their stuff. But as long as it didn't affect them too much it didn't affect us either.

T: What kind of things did you steal, and really, how do you decide how much and when to take it?

R: Well, we worked on a sugar ship. Actually, the Japanese, they had so much sugar, when we worked a sugar ship they knew we were bringing in sugar. But Swanson, he overdid it. He stole one hundred pounds at one time. He got caught.

T: That was obviously too much.

R: Too much (chuckles). A couple pounds is all right, but don't steal... We used to steal like stuff that they stole from the English at Singapore. Like you get a cargo that happened to have corned beef in it. Corned beef. Vienna sausages. Nestle sweetened milk.
T: Now is this the kind of stuff you’d have to eat on the spot, or could you hide it and eat it later?

R: Eat it on the spot. It was too hard to hide, kind of hard to hide a can of Nestle Sweetened Condensed Milk or even a can of corned beef, but they did. I mean, some guys did, but I never tried that. I got beat up enough without asking for more.

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 379.

R: …and they gave me the sun treatment.

T: You mentioned that. How about when you worked at the port area there? Was physical punishment part of the routine?

R: I’d get knocked around a little bit, but usually when I did, it was something that I did that I was at fault.

T: Think of an example of that.

R: I’ll give an example that happened to me when I was in Japan. Innocent, very innocent thing I should never have been beaten up for. I had an Australian overcoat. When we were in Japan we had no heat. It was colder than hell there. Thirty-three feet of snow. I had no socks. It was cold working in that mine. I took the inside of the overcoat, there’s the thing that runs out, where they put the buttons on. It’s an extra strip. I cut that strip out. Didn’t hurt the coat at all, and I made two pair of socks. One for each foot. Then they had an inspection one day on the overcoat. I heard a lot of jabbering and then the next thing you know they said I should report to the hill. I said, oh, brother, what have I done? When I get up there, there’s a—he was a master sergeant in the Japanese army. He was rather a fair guy, but he was one you didn’t want to cross. He was big and he was strong and he was mean. He didn’t want to be in the war any more than we did. So he read me, in Japanese, that I did something wrong. I didn’t know what it was, but I found out later. So he made me take my shirt, which is a jacket, take that off and strip down to the waist. Then he takes his sword off his belt and I thought the son of a bitch was going to cut my head off. I thought, it’s not so bad. I get it over with.

Then he took the sword out of the belt. It’s a Sam Brown belt just like we had in the United States Army, and he doubled up the belt and he gave me eleven lashes across the face. Now, what you want to do there, you never want to let a Japanese knock you off your feet, because if they knock you off your feet, you’re dead. Never raise a hand to defend yourself, and you’ll live.

I took the eleven lashes. And after the third or fourth lash I didn’t feel anything. My face was numb. But it brings the tears, you know. Your tears are involuntary. And then when he got through he said, in Japanese, put your jacket on. I put my jacket on and he turned to me and he said joto hatai which means: joto means good; hatai, soldier. What he said in Japanese, you’re a good soldier, and he
gave me two cigarettes. Didn’t make sense, but he gave me two cigarettes. I took a real beating. Eleven lashes across the face. He was a pretty good size Jap.

T: That’s the unpredictability again, isn’t it?

R: Yes. But if he’d knocked me down, though, he’d have probably killed me.

T: You talked about that as an incident where you may have deserved what you got for the uniform. How about in the Philippines there? Is there an incident you can think of where maybe you didn’t deserve it and still it happened?

R: No. I stayed away from the Japanese.

T: Was it possible to avoid them?

R: Just don’t be around when something’s happening to anybody. Get the hell away from it. Get as far away as you can, because somebody’s going to get knocked down or beat up. You get serious. They’d lose their temper there and they were just like...like a mad dog. You couldn’t predict them. They might be smiling, and they’d knock you on your butt.

T: How much did you really see them on a daily basis in Manila there, when you worked at the port area?

R: The port area, now it wasn’t too bad there. The guards there were pretty lenient with us because we made their job easy. We didn’t cause any trouble. But we were stealing everything we could and eating it on the job.

T: You were getting more calories than what they were just giving you.

R: You’re damn right we were.

T: Now, you were here with a couple hundred guys, right? For a pretty long period of time.

R: There were four hundred of us in the port area.

T: How about...I’m thinking about groups, the importance of friends or close friends. Did you have a close group of friends that you stuck with?

R: Yes. I had Swanson and then another Marine by the name of Frank Glischinski, who was from St. Paul. Glischinski stayed in the Marine Corps. He became a master gunnery sergeant which is a high rank for an enlisted man. Between me and Swanson and Glischinski, we associated together and we kind of shared everything. Like when Swanson came down from Cabanatuan he was in pretty bad shape. And there was a ship that I worked on a couple times. It was an inter-island boat and I
always remember the name. The name of the boat was *Alabat*, a Spanish ship. The captain on there was a Spaniard. He spoke English and somehow the Japanese let him keep the ship and he brought supplies for the Japanese back and forth in there. And I asked him one time, I said, "If I could get you a fountain pen or a wristwatch, would you be able to get me some eggs for some sick men?" And he said, "See me next time." Next time I got about five or six eggs, and I fed these to Swanson and Glischinski and I got them back on their feet.

*(1, B, 434)*

T: They both came from Cabanatuan?

R: Yes. Both Marine Corps. Swanson was a Marine. He was stationed on Bataan and Corregidor, but Glischinski was up at...oh, what the heck is the name, up where Clark Field is. *(pauses three seconds)* Fort Stotsenberg. Something to do with the Navy up there. He was a fleet Marine. You know what a fleet Marine is?

T: Was stationed on board a ship, right?

R: That’s right. Yes. That was his job, but they would also be port guards. Any place where there’s water, there are also guards, Marine guards, around them.

T: Sure. How much did you guys depend on each other on a day to day basis?

R: Not too much, but if I asked them to do something for you they would do it. We would do it for each other. If I had something and they wanted it, why I’d give them some of it. Sure.

T: And the same goes the other way too, if they had something.

R: Sure. Yes.

T: Now the daily routine, kind of the job that you did. Did those change a lot or was it pretty much the same thing every day?

R: Pretty much the same. We always feared working on Japanese ships that carried cement. Cement was just terrible to work with. The dust. The cement dust would get on your eyelids. You’re sweating. It would get in your pores. And when you work on that and your skin is as dry as a bone...cement ships we hated. We hated heavy machinery.

T: When the ships came in, be it a cement ship or something else, how was it decided who would work on what ship or did everyone work on the same ship?

R: They’d always know by the...the Japanese would get their orders from the port commander that they needed one hundred men or two hundred or four hundred,
and he’d get them. So we had four sections. We had three sections were working men, and one section was called the inside detail, which took care of the hospital we had and did the cooking and the maintenance work around the building.

T: Was that easier duty, as it were?

R: Oh, I don’t know. A lot of men preferred working on the dock. We worked a deal with the Japanese. You can’t work eight hours in that kind of heat and humidity. So what we had is what’s called a kotai kotai. All a kotai kotai. Kotai means exchange. So we’d always tell the Japanese changee changee, or kotai kotai. So we work a half an hour, rest a half an hour. Now you work down in the bottom of the ship there, when the average temperature in Manila each day is around ninety-five and the humidity is about ninety, you perspire a lot and you lose your strength fast. But if you could only work a half an hour and then get a half an hour rest, they’d get more work out of us. Then they wouldn’t lose so many men to sickness and death.

T: So really, it was in their best interest to kind of be a little flexible.

(1, B, 463)

R: You bet.

T: And both sides knew that, it sounds like.

R: Yes. And of course the Japanese, they’re a little...they like to...Black Market shit to us.

T: How did that work?

R: Well, they liked Mickey Mouse watches and they liked Shafer pens. You know, the Shafer had the dot in it. So we fixed up some of these...we got some of these cheap Filipino pens and we drilled a little hole and put starch in there and then let it harden. So we just told them it was a Shafer pen. They don’t know the difference. You’d ask them if you could get, maybe, an extra rice ration or something like that.

T: So there was contact and communication between the Japanese and the Americans.

R: Communication was a hard thing. You know when a Japanese, when they talked, their talk is very guttural. In other words, they talk loud. They shout. But I did run into one Japanese there. He was a young man. I always remember him. His name was Odaka. He was seventeen, eighteen year old, battalion of the Japanese and they worked out with us when I was in this garage in the Manila port area. A twenty man detail. He came across the street one night there and he says, he asks me, “Are you a Christian?” And I said yes. He says, “I’m a Christian.” And he took his rosary out. I said, “Oh, yes. I see you are Catholic.” He said, “Yes.” Then in the language he could
speak with the little English he knew, he had gone to a mission school, he said, “Is there anything I can do for you?” And I said, “You can get me some peanuts.” See, peanuts have ascorbic acid in them. Get some of this vitamins in us. Otherwise you get scurvy very easily.

So he brought me some peanuts and he talked a couple times. I didn’t ask him where he was going, but I knew he was going to Guadalcanal. That must have been. It was the only place that they were trying to take at that time. So their officers, they stopped any crossing at the street there. See, they’re on one side of the street and we’re on the other. They didn’t want any communication between us, but when he’d see me he’d wave at me.

T: That’s interesting.

R: The Japanese guard there in the port area, we called him “Skivvy.” He liked the name. He said, “What does Skivvy mean?” It means screw in American.

T: So here’s this guy...talk about him a little bit.

R: Well, he befriended us. He would go to his commissary, and whatever he could get with the money he got or what we would give him, he would bring us back Japanese food, cigarettes and stuff like that. In return, we taught him to speak English, and occasionally he’d give us a can of milk, which was very scarce. He was a good Jap.

But what killed my liking for him, we were on a truck one day going out to Santa Mesa when I was working in the boat works out there, and we go past Santo Tomás University where all of these interns were, American civilians. The Filipinos would hold their fingers up in a V, meaning V for victory, and they’d hiss. The Japanese love song is a hiss. This trucker stopped six times. That one day they killed two people there, and I saw a woman in a bakery and the truck stopped that we were on, and he got off with a couple others and went in that bakery and they pulled that woman out by her hair and they beat the shit out of her with golf clubs, rifle butts. We made an agreement all of us. We don’t recognize any Filipino. Do not smile. Keep your eyes straight ahead.

T: Really? Why was that?

R: If we acknowledged them, the Japs, they’re going to kill them. They’re looking ahead and they’re giving us the sign. When he [Filipino] gives the sign, the victory sign, either he’s dead or you are.

(1, B, 506)

T: Yes. So there’s these, not only what you’re describing as kind of better Japanese and worse Japanese, but even among the ones you describe as having good qualities, they do things like that.
R: Yes. That's the way they're brought up. There's not a damn thing you can do about it.

T: I'm thinking [about] how long you were a POW or how long you were at Manila, for example. Does it get hard to stay optimistic about the end of all that?

R: Yes, it was. I think at the last, it got to the point, you know, men are dying off pretty fast. And every time a guy died you'd say, “lucky son of a bitch.” We didn't want to kill ourselves, but there were guys that...one of my friends there, his name was Newman. He was from Iowa. He worked in the mine with me and he told me one day, he said, “I’m going to kill myself.” And I said, “How?” And he said, “I’m going to blow myself up with dynamite.” I said, “Where?” And he says, “Right here in this lateral.” I said, “Don’t do it in here! You’ll kill a bunch of us. The walls will come down.” It was dangerous working in these mines. So he moved to a lateral and he held two sticks up against his stomach. We all had lanterns that we used when we worked in the mines. They're carbide lamps. So we all had ways of lighting, burning if we wanted to. But he blew himself all the hell. Not much of him to bring into the camp.

T: Some guys did give up.

R: Well, he was sick. I think, you know, a lot of these men...we had no water aboard those ships when we went to Japan, and I never took a leak for eighteen days, so you can imagine what’s happened to your kidneys.

T: Yes. They're shriveling up.

R: And it could be that he had stones. That's the worst thing you could have. If you're sick on the ship, what are you going to do? What are they going to do for him? You can’t do anything for them.

T: Yes. That’s right. Did you find it hard yourself to sort of stay optimistic or not get depressed?

R: I was optimistic one day. Then the next day you're arguing with a guy. You take both sides of the question. Yes we are, and no we aren't. But at the last, you know, it just got...our minds started to go.

T: This is in Japan now?

R: When we were up there in the mountains. Once in a while we’d get a chance to rest. We very seldom saw the sun, because they’re up in kind of a bowl at the top of the mountain and we didn’t see the sun until approximately eleven o'clock. And after two o'clock it’s gone. We’re way up. But we’re in a saddle at that top. So these two guys are great friends. One guy—they were arguing—and he came up to me and he said, “This son of a bitch says that squirrels lay eggs. I say they don’t.”
(chuckles) So I mean, there's guys arguing about little simple things like if a squirrel lays eggs or do they hatch them out.

T: Yes. I'm thinking that it must really get to you after a while.

R: Oh, yes (with emphasis). And you get to the point where it takes you a long time to say anything. What you are trying to say. Your mind is affected. Your body is affected. And you become ornery and you get hard to get along with.

T: Did you notice that among other people, or even yourself?

R: Yes. Among all of us. I had five fights in there. I had one guy going to kick the shit...it took like a half an hour to get my hand around to punch him. In other words, everything is slow motion.

T: Were there conflicts between prisoners or between groups of prisoners?

(1, B, 550)

R: Oh, yes.

T: About what mostly?

R: Well, actually, most people won't believe this, but you can ask Swanson or any of them. The strong fed on the weak. There was a lot of theft going on in the prison camps, and you know about this comradeship? Boy, in most cases the comradeship ceased to exist.

T: So for you, you saw a lot of almost...just kind of conflict with each other or preying on each other almost.

R: Yes. Well, they were stealing from each other. That's the worst thing you could do. You don't steal something. Man, that's his life. You're stealing something. This story has never been told, but cigarettes were legal tender. Did you know that?

T: Yes. I have heard that from a lot of guys. Now, were you a smoker?

R: I was. I got to the point there...then I went on what they call kari shigota, light duty, because I was pretty weak. But when [I was on] kari shigota it seemed I worked harder than I did in the mines. To get a cigarette or a drag I...there was an old sergeant there, and every morning he went to work at five o'clock and I was usually on guard duty. I was taking guys' guard duty for them for one cigarette for one night.

T: So you're really selling your soul, in a sense.
R: Never getting any sleep. You had to be careful at night, too. The guards roaming around, and you want to come to attention and give them the proper salute. They’ll knock you on your ass.

T: Yes. So having cigarettes, or trading for cigarettes was a big deal.

R: You bet.

T: Now where did the cigarettes come from? Were they Japanese?

R: They issued us five cigarettes a week, the Japanese did. So everyone had currency in a way.

R: Among the Americans?

T: Yes.

R: No. Not when we got to Japan.

T: So the cigarette issue stopped when you got to Japan?

R: No. We got the cigarettes issued to us, even in Japan. Five a week.

T: And that was kind of the currency that you had. That was almost like money, in a way.

R: Well, it was legal tender. Men would sell...like a guy, say for instance he’s going to get rice for supper. He’d sell half the bowl of his rice for three cigarettes. The guy that gives him the three cigarettes, he comes and he’s going to get half his bowl and the guy ate the bowl. So we had court systems. You put some of the men on...they had to repay their debts. But then we had men watch so the guy didn’t make deals with somebody else. See, the cigarettes were more important than food. Hard to believe, isn’t it?

T: Yes, it is. So really, having them or being able to get them was...

R: The guys that didn’t smoke were pretty well off. But the smokers, they died early.

T: Now, you were a smoker though.

(1, B, 587)

R: Yes, but I barely made it. But I never traded any of my food for cigarettes.

T: So that’s one step you didn’t take.
R: That’s right.

T: Now how much of a, from your perspective, how much of a problem was theft? For example, when you worked in Manila. I mean, prisoners stealing from each other.

R: There was some theft there. There wasn’t much of it done from each other in Manila.

T: More like that in Japan?

R: More of that in Japan, yes.

T: Really? How do you explain the difference between...

R: Because Japan was much, much more rugged. It was terrible. It was a case of survival of the fittest. And many of the stronger beat up the weaker.

T: You mean literally?

R: Yes. Beat the shit out of them.

T: You know, there’s the myth of companionship and sticking together, and what you’re saying, is that went out the window.

R: You bet your life. This became a matter of life and death. Even Swanson one time almost tried to kill me, thinking I stole something from his Red Cross box, and actually what happened, there was some Mexicans, and we don’t know which one. We know one of the three stole his box. That’s a matter of life and death. Red Cross box. We got once a year. [This incident almost certainly in the Philippines.]

T: And there was lots of good stuff in there, wasn’t there?

R: Oh, yes. Weighed eleven pounds, if it was full.

T: How many of those did you get over the years?

R: Well, let’s see. I think I got two in Manila, and one in Japan. Three.

T: That’s not very much.

R: See, the German prisoners of war, they got them every week.

T: Yes. That treatment was much different, wasn’t it?

R: Yes.
T: When you hear about or talk to POWs of the Germans, do you feel like you have much in common with their experience?

R: No. Theirs was much different. The hard one was probably the 106th Division, which lost at the [Battle of the] Bulge and was captured [in December 1944]. They marched and walked at least three to five hundred miles. They were between the [Soviet and Allied] armies.

T: Now for you, I'm thinking about Philippines or Japan here. Were you a religious person at that time?

R: You became religious.

T: And what do you mean by that?

R: Well, we had a lieutenant, Navy. He was probably what would be equivalent to a first lieutenant in the Army. He was a good Navy man. Annapolis. He kept a bunch of us together, Catholics. Somehow or another he got a hold of some rosaries and he got some stuff. I don't know how he got it but he got it. Name was Hamilton. We would have meetings. Stuff in the Bible. Stuff about religion. So most of us, among the Catholics, it was a prayer he gave us. It's called a Memoriam. I still say it every day. There was nothing else. After religion, what else is there?

(1, B, 628)

T: Would you call yourself a particularly religious person when you went over to the Philippines?

R: I'd gone to Catholic schools.

T: Well, me too. Now the question's still there. Were you a particularly religious person? I mean, was your faith important to you when you went over there or did it grow as a prisoner?

R: No, I wasn't. No. You became religious after we got out of the prison camp, I'd say. Most of us.

T: So that experience as a POW sounds like impacted the level of your faith or the seriousness of it.

R: Yes. But Hamilton, he was a nice guy. You know, the Navy and the Army never get along together, and the officers never get along with the enlisted men. There's a wall. But I talked with him a couple times like that and he asked me about my education and he said, "Be sure and say that Memoriam every day so you can get out of this thing alive." And he'd been badly wounded. His ship was sunk and, geez, he
had scars on his body. I mean big slashes. Shrapnel came in and out. We had twelve officers in this prison camp in Manila. He was one of them. Most of them were Navy. Or was it fourteen? Whatever there was there was only three of those officers survived.

T: Holy cow!

R: They went down on I think the Arisan Maru. You ever hear of the Arisan Maru?

T: Yes. Yes. I was just reading about those hell ships recently.

R: Yes. That's where most of our officers were lost. I think the Arisan, out of 1700, 1691 died on that ship. [Anton Cichy and Glenn Oliver, both Minnesotans and alive as of early 2005, were among the handful of survivors of the Arisan Maru sinking.]

T: Well, let me ask you. Now, for some prisoners, and this has come up with guys who were in Germany for example, is the subject of escape. How much did that ever cross your mind?

R: Actually, if you escaped, you know, we had what we called shooting squads. Ten men squads. One man escaped, the Japanese kill the other nine.

T: How much of an impact did that have in making people not escape?

R: There were some cases. In other words, to escape it was...well, I'll give you an example. I know some fellows that escaped from one prison camp. Six of them I think it was. They had fifty-four men up to be executed. They did execute some of them. That sentence was carried out several times. I had planned to escape too. I was in contact with...we had an under... (trails off)

T: You know, on that subject, of information, how much news did you have and how much did you depend on rumors?

R: Most of it was based on rumor. I tell you, you know, rumors, sometimes you believe them yourself, if you started them.

(1, B, 674)

T: How does that work?

R: That happened to me one time. I was working in the port area this one day. I think it was after a big sea battle we had with the Japanese, and the Japanese...I was on the docks that day. Most of the Japanese fleet pulled in outside of the range of the harbor, between Corregidor and Manila. They were probably out five or six miles. Then some of these ships came in and we took their wounded off. I remember there was a Japanese ship there, I think it was the Brazil Maru. But when I came in, I said
there was hospital ship out there and I think they’re going to exchange us for Japanese nationals \textit{(chuckles)}. I told a guy, and it went like wildfire through our camp. Then of course, they embellished it. They said probably we will be taken to Harbin, so we will be out of the war and we’ll be in Harbin, which is in Russia I think.

T: So after a while you started to believe a rumor you had actually started yourself.

R: Yes. Yes. And it was good, because when they added stuff to it, it really sounded good \textit{(chuckles)}. That was one rumor I started.

Then the other one was there was a ship called the \textit{Gripsholm}. That came into Manila. That brought the Japanese from the United States into Manila, and they were going to go from there to Shanghai with the \textit{Gripsholm}. And they dropped off some of the Japanese in Manila and the rest were going to Shanghai. That’s all I remember. I worked on that ship. And that ship, somebody said, that’s the ship we’re going to be exchanged on. And the Japanese said, “If any man thinks he can escape on that ship, we know every inch of it.” They said, “You know what will happen to the other guys that don’t get away.” So we agreed among ourselves none of us would try it. But I did work in the \textit{Gripsholm}, helped cleaning it up.

T: So the rumors, they were a part of everyday life as well…I mean, you mentioned two examples. But did they come and go?

R: Rumors, yes. Rumors you \textit{lived} on. And then some guys say believe, and others guys oh, shit, you’re anti-American. That would start an argument.

T: But as opposed to rumors, I mean, how easy was it for you to get a hold of hard news as far as even how the war was progressing?

R: Actually, we did have, in Japan, we had a…the Dutch were there before us. There was the Dutch East Indies. They got picked up at Sarabai and Java, Sumatra. They’d been in Japan for maybe two years. And there was a lot of officers, and they were also Dutch officers from the Netherlands. They, every once in a while, they’d come to our barracks and they just liked to run an inspection tour for the Japanese. The Japanese never accompanied them. They just came through and they said, this is the gin, and then they would tell us a short note about the United States has now invaded Vella Lavella. Didn’t know where the hell Vella Lavella was. Then they mentioned other places. Bougainville. Islands out there in the Pacific. They took them [islands] little by little.

T: So you’d get this information piecemeal.

R: There was a radio, but I don’t know where it was.

T: So somebody in Japan there had a radio.
R: Yes. They had men with tremendous talent among all these people. We had guys that could make a violin or could make a guitar, could compose music, and you had people that had been on the stage or in movies and things like that. We had a lot of talent every place.

(1, B, 737)

T: Did you have any kind of spare time in Manila or Japan to actually make use of all these talents?

R: We did. Yes. In Manila we had one guy who was pretty good and so he directed a play. We called it Klondike Kate (chuckles).

T: The what?

R: Klondike Kate. I never heard of it, but we had it. We got some costumes with the permission of the Japanese from the Filipinos so we could dress some of the guys up like women. And we had music. We had a couple of guitars. Mouth organs and stuff like that. Then we had one guy there by the name of Bob Levering, who later became a congressman for Ohio. He was an attorney and he was a civilian. He was in our prison camp and he ended up in Manchukuo. He’d always give the rendition of that one where they made the movie out of, where the guy blew the horn to warn the British that the Arabs are coming or something. They were waiting for them. What the hell was the name of that movie?

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

R: …food because they’ve got to expend a lot of energy. And they would. They’d give these guys steaks, which came from caribou.

T: So this treatment in Manila, it was hard work, but it sometimes was…you got okay treatment from the Japanese.

R: But that was…see they were in occupied Philippines.

T: Yes.

R: In their homeland there’s nobody going to criticize, right?

T: Yes. And you’ve mentioned more than once, the treatment in Japan was different than what you got in the Philippines.

R: Oh, yes. Much different. Yes.
T: You know what? Because the next thing I want to move on to is a larger subject and that’s the hell ship *Nissyo Maru* transport to Japan. What I’d like to do is to pause the interview for this evening.

**END OF PART ONE**
Part Two (25 February 2004)

T: Ray, let me start by asking you when you got, actually when you got on the ship, do you remember moving from the prison camp? Which camp were you at before you got on the ship?

R: I was in the port area there. Right on the end of Pier Seven.

T: Okay. So they moved you right from there to the ship?

R: Yes. Just walked across the street.

T: That was easy. Were there Japanese guards around when you got on the ship?

R: Oh, sure. They were all over the place.

T: Any that you recognized?

R: No. I don't think any of those from port area were on there. I think their detachment probably got shipped out to some of the islands. God only knows. But I think the ones they had on the ships were exceptionally cruel.

T: On the ship itself. The ones they had on the ship, you mean?

R: Yes. Yes. They were bad. They were psychos, I think. Most of them were probably campaigners from China, Mongolia, and places like that. They were not a good bunch of Japanese.

T: So even in comparison to others, these were some of the worst.

R: Yes. Degenerates we called them.

(2, A, 17)

T: Now when you got on the ship, describe the process. Could you take your stuff with you? And was it a stressful time?

R: This is the unusual part of it. Before we boarded ship they issued us all new uniforms. Fairly good jackets and pants. And we had shoes and even had undershirts and stuff. So we thought, oh hell, this is first class. When they herded us aboard the ship, and you just boarded, and they wanted you to go right down into the hold, but the English speaking Japanese, we had to remove all our clothing. Our shoes. Of course, this was a good idea. Getting rid of the shoes or sandals, whatever you had, because we didn’t know we were going to be so closely packed in there. So there went our personal belongings. We didn’t have much, but I did have a bottle of
water. Luckily. Then all the stuff that I had taken aboard, I figured I'd have some tea, and I had a little sugar that we stole it off the docks there. All my personal possessions, letters and stuff that you accumulate.

T: Everything had to go?

R: In the hold. And that went in the hold below it. And I remember, I thought, shit, I don't want to get on this thing, because it was hotter than hell and guys were passing out from the heat and the humidity. We were just too crowded. They tried to get everybody, 1600 or 1700 guys, in the back hold.

And I remember going down there and I thought, I gotta get out of this place. I had to take a crap anyway. So I told the Japanese, in Japanese, I had to go to the _benjo_. _Benjo_ is Japanese for toilet. On my way down through the hold I saw some men who were already in little cubicles and, geez, they were crowded in there like sardines. There were guys passing out from the heat. I remember one guy came up. He says, “Have you got a razor?” I said, “What the hell you want a shave now?” He says, “I want to cut my wrist.” That's what he said. So I got away from that guy. I got up to the top of the ship again. I went down the hold and up the other side and I got some fresh air, and I used the box on the side of the ship. They put little boxes there. When you take a crap it would go over the side into Manila Bay.

Then I was herded back down into it and then they said that they would put some men forward. So was that your friend that was a neighbor, Versaw? He went forward. I think there was nine hundred in their hold. They were in a larger hold forward. We were in the rear hold, and the diameter of the thing was fifty by seventy. Fifty feet by seventy feet.

T: That's not a big space.

R: Well, we had seven hundred plus in there. Seven hundred, they said. But I knew there was more than seven hundred. So three hundred men could sit down but four hundred had to stand up. We shifted every hour.

T: Now this may seem naïve, but were there any kind of sleeping quarters there?

R: No.

T: Just one huge room there.

R: No. No. You slept with your knees up around your chin. That was your space when you sat down. And we were aboard that, I think it was twenty-two days. Twenty-one days, twenty-two days.

T: How about any kind of fresh air, light coming down there?

R: The only [fresh air and light] was when...they had the hatch boards down most of the time, and the only way up was the ladder where they took the refuse up and
dumped it over the side. If your bowels gotta move, then you’d just go in that tub. And to get over to that tub you took your life in your hands because you had to go over bodies of slippery, slimy men. They were mad, pissed off, insane.

T: Yes.

(2, A, 53)

R: A lot of killing going on in that ship too. Did he [Versaw] tell you about that?

T: Well, this is one of the things I wanted to ask...now, he [Versaw] was in the forward hold. You were in the back. Let me ask, from your perspective, were tempers short? Did people actually begin to fight with each other?

R: Oh, yes. Oh, there was a lot of fighting going on. Man, they were just trying to kill each other, it’s what it was. They were murderers. In other words, there was no quarter. If you get the guys holding one guy back, he gets pissed off. He’d poke him. We had one hell of a time. Then the Japanese are going to throw grenades down there and machine gun us if we didn’t get quiet. They got some kind of order down there, finally. Then there was no water. That’s the bad part. We suffered for lack of water.

T: So it sounds like there was really a dog eat dog attitude down there.

R: It was. Yes. Any buddy-buddy shit, that went over the side when we boarded that ship. It was every man for himself, believe me.

T: You, personally, were you there with any people that you knew? Any friends? Or were you just by yourself?

R: Actually, the funny part of it is, an old guy, I always remember his name, Renkin. He was an old infantryman. He was a lifer. And he transferred over into the Air Corps. They called it the Air Corps then. Renkin was an ornery old bastard, and I often worked with him on details and working on loading and unloading ships. Never liked him. He didn’t like me. Then he just said that he happened to be close to me and he said, “Makepeace, you and I never got along,” he said. “But it’s a matter of life and death. I’ll tell you what we do. You and I are going to buddy up here. You sit and I’ll guard you for an hour, and then we just change positions.” I’d stand and he’d sit down with his knees pulled up. We did that for the twenty-one days.

T: What difference did it make from your perspective, having at least one other person to sort of depend on?

R: You better, because there was some killing going on in there. The men were killing each other and they were sucking the blood out of their veins. Didn’t you know about that?
T: Tell me about that.

R: Well, there were guys that would kill a man, and then they’d suck his blood. There was no water. The water was the hard thing to go through there. There was a lot of murder on the ships with the hell that...and then there’s some of the men in our hold, they decided that... The Japanese said, you stay in the hold. You can’t go out. But we’d worked on these ships many, many times, so we knew there had to be a hold underneath that, which was a hold. Down there, there was sugar, and some of the guys got down there, which made a little bit more room for us. When I went down they were smoking. They would have been executed if they’d been caught. And the cargo down there was sugar, and also all of the stuff we’d thrown in the hold was in there.

T: All your personal effects.

R: Our personal effects. These guys didn’t have it too bad that got down there. But you had to very secretive about it, because if you get caught, you’d be executed on the spot. So when the guy died, I remember the first one, his name, he was an old Navy diver, his name was Chopchick. I always remember him because he was in the port area in the detail with me. The priest said he wanted quiet in the hold, that one of our comrades had departed. And one guys said, “Let the son of a bitch go. He’s lucky.”

T: Now, were there others had died as well on board there?

(2, A, 87)

R: Oh, yes. I think, it’s hard to figure the number, but we estimated about two hundred of them died.

T: What happened to the bodies?

R: We’d throw them over the side. They’d send a net down and they’d hoist them out and dump them over the side. What else are you going to do with them? You can’t leave the bodies in there. They stink up the joint.

T: Yes. Was it hard, I mean, from your own perspective, how hard was it sort of mentally, emotionally to keep your wits about you?

R: You just gotta. I can’t say how we survived. I really don’t know. But in one incident—did he tell you about the night that we were in the midst of a submarine attack?

T: Yes. He dates it as July 26 [1944].
R: In our hold we had a priest, Father Riley. The ship, either one ship on one side or both ships on both of us took torpedoes. Then we started dropping depth charges, and this is when the men panicked. That’s when the Japanese, they surrounded over the top there. They had machine guns and grenades ready to throw down, because we think the ship is going to go down. This priest got up there, and I don’t know how he did it, but he got the men to dead silence and then he had them say the rosary. That was in our hold. That quieted them down. That saved our lives. Then of course, the ship took off. We took off in a zig zag—we could tell it was zig zag because the moon would be one place sometimes. The next time it would be in another area. When you looked up through the hatch board.

T: So you could tell by the position [of the moon], [that the ship] was moving.

R: Well, yes. We were going. Yes. We were going pretty much. You see we were at—I forget whether it was just before we got to Formosa, which is also called Taiwan. We were in the harbor at Takao and then when we—I think it was a day out of there when we were attacked by the American subs. Then we took off up toward China. Went up the China coast behind [the small islands of] Quemoy and Matsu. Then we joined a large, pretty large convoy. There were even dirigibles in it. We got above board there. We got above board in Takao when we got there. I remember. And they hosed us down with salt water, because we were all filthy. We were living there. The bowel movements were moving around in the hold down there. I sat in shit, five inches of shit there, for about fifteen days, I guess. Or ten days.

T: It just filled floor of the hold.

R: It was slimy with shit. Vomit. See, and then we got in at Taipu, which was a rough thing to. Men become violently ill, and then they vomited and shit and everything else. All mixed in the bottom of the ship.

T: It sounds like it could hardly have been worse.

R: It couldn’t, no. The only peace we had is when the priest had us saying the rosary and when we got out of there. And it didn’t get any better. Men were still dying. They were still howling like wolves. Then we had men crapping out because they didn’t get any water. They said they gave us water, but it probably, if you did get water, it would probably have been a tablespoon a day. You know, and these bodies perspiring and the humidity down there. The temperature was always around 130 down there. It was always...your body heat and perspiration.

(2, A, 126)

T: And a metal ship.
R: Yes. And the men were, some of them were licking the dew, or whatever you call it. Condensation on the side of the ship.

T: What kind of panic gripped you or other men when it was clear the ship was being attacked by American submarines?

R: They panicked. They howled like dogs. Because you know, the noise, what’s constant, there’s always a moaning, groaning sound. Clamoring. You just got used to it. Pretty soon you got used to everything. You could even sleep during this howling and growling and fighting. I remember one of the kind of amusing incidents. They had a big tub there and the guys were supposed to—in one corner of the hold. If you could get there, you could empty your bowels into that, and then that would go up and throw over the side. The rope broke and that dropped down on the guys right under that hold. The hold, rope, go up that ladder. And that shit on them all over *(chuckles)*. And when they served rice once in a while, down here you had no way of washing your hands or your utensils. This guy, he was a friend of mine, Bob Levering. He wrote a book about it. I have the book. It’s called *Horror Trek*. He later became a congressman in Ohio. He married a congressman’s daughter there. Then he became a congressman.

T: That’s a pretty good business.

R: Yes. He was actually well educated. I think he was either in legal or engineering. I don’t know which. Or both. He was a remarkable guy. And he wrote the book. He’s even got one passage in there. It’s bullshit. He always used to question me when we were in prison camp about my past life. He said, some day I’m going to write a book. I told him I swam a lot around Corregidor. We’d spear fish and tease the sharks and shit like that.

So in his book he had written in there, “Ray Makepeace is one of the few men that made it from Bataan to Corregidor by swimming on the night of April 9.” I was a good swimmer. I swam around the island a lot. There was about four or five of us guys. When we had our day off or time off we swam. We explored. There were caves in the sides of the island. We went into them.

T: When the ship was under attack, did you begin to consciously think about what the hell you might do if it started to sink?

R: This is it. I just said, this is it. The last chapter in my life.

T: Did that make it easier or more difficult, in a sense?

R: I don’t know. You just get numb. You say, the hell with it.

T: Was that the closest call you had in that respect, as far as attack by American planes or ships?
R: That was at that time. Yes. I’d been under artillery barrages before. Artillery is terrible, you know. When [on Corregidor] I had one hundred batteries with four guns in each battery shooting at you from three and a half miles away. And I was in that barrage. Of course, it killed a lot of people around me. It blew us out of our holes. We all got banged up pretty good.

(2, A, 162)

T: That was on Corregidor, wasn’t it?

R: Yes. So I thought that when I went out. But in Japan there about two days before the surrender [in August 1945], I was done. I was in pretty bad shape. I was no longer able to walk. If I wanted to get anywhere, I had to crawl on my hands and knees and then pull myself up by my hands. And I just told them, I said, “You’re not going to send me down in that mine again. I’ll never work in that mine again. You can kill me. Do anything you want.” I said, “This is it. That’s the last.” And they said there will be no work in the mine today. They said it was some kind of…one of the birthdays. Somebody in the royal family in Japan. Then the next day, which was I think the sixteenth over there—see, everything is a day later [because of the International Date Line], that’s when they said there was an honorable peace between the Empire of Japan and the United States.

T: So physically, so to recap: there was a time on Corregidor, a time when you were under attack, and a third time right before the surrender when you thought you were done.

R: Yes.

T: Other than those times, would you consider yourself a fairly optimistic person in the thought about your chances?

R: Yes. Yes. But I mean, there comes a point when you say you can’t go any further. You can’t go anymore. This is it. Don’t push your luck.

T: Yes. How much was luck a part of surviving that whole ordeal?

R: Ninety percent, I think. You had to be lucky.

T: You mean, there were guys as good as you, in a sense, who just weren’t as lucky?

R: That’s right. Yes. Well, you could be walking around, you could be on a detail, and this is when [on Corregidor] they were shelling us from a distance. It was sporadic. It was just harassing fire, but they’d put a shell in there and kill three, four, five guys. One night there, this is before the invasion, and I think it was about April [1942], the date is about the seventeenth when, what the hell was his name…this Doolittle bombed Japan. It was right after that we had a place that we smoked and
when we’d go out of the shelter. In other words, they put out an order that said, “Don’t go out. We can’t stand any more casualties. We have a thousand people in the hospital in there.”

T: Let me move on to when you arrive in Japan, and I think it was at [the port city of] Moji. Is that right?

R: August 17 [1944] I think it was. The date.

T: Do you remember getting off the ship?

R: Yes. It was in this harbor. Well, it was Moji on the island of Kyushu, which is the southernmost island. Most of us, some of us were able to get off the ship. Climbed the ladder to get out of the hold. We were in terrible shape. You were surrounded by people and there was all kinds of Japanese medics, and what they would do, they were running tubes up our asses to see if we had dysentery. Everybody had it. And they put us in a...attached to this big pier, it was like an escarpment. It was big. And it was like an opera house there on the end of it, and then they put us in there overnight. There were some English prisoners there from Singapore, and they brought in little baskets of food. There was rice, and salted cherry, and maybe a piece of fish in them. That’s the first time we’d eaten in a long time. We had all the water we could drink too.

T: Wow! That’s a switch.

(2, A, 210)

R: There was a sign there said “Water. Do not drink. Contaminated.” We all drank it. When I was aboard ship you know, so long, and I saw why a Navy man—I can pick a Navy man out even today, the way they walk.

T: How’s that?

R: They kind of sway from side to side with the rocking of the boat. Because I remember one guy there, a friend of mine. He was kind of sick, and he asked me if I would bring him some water. He was in pretty bad shape. So I took two canteen cups and loaded them with water and I fell right on my ass coming back there because I could have swore that building was rocking.

T: Oh, from being on the ship so long.

R: Yes. That’s what happens, you know. They get that swaying walk. Especially guys that are on destroyers.

T: When you got off at Moji, were there Japanese civilians around too?
R: Yes. They were watching us. We were practically naked there. And some of them, you know, there was a few that looked rather sad. They thought these are guys. Where are our sons and husbands? Could they be being treating that way by the Americans?

T: Could you make eye contact with the people or were they...

R: Yes.

T: What kind of feeling was that? Any kind of emotions come up? Pity? Hatred? Anger?

R: It was depressing, I think, for the Japanese to see us and we were depressed to see them. Like they’re ogling us. Even though they were depressed but looking at us because—don’t forget they took just about all of their young men too.

T: Yes. The people that came off the *Nissyo Maru* with you, those that were still alive, did you all get shipped the same place or...

R: No. We boarded a little dinghy and then you go across a causeway and then you’re on Honshu. That train proceeded up the coast. I think we went to Nagoya and Toyama, which were pretty good size cities, and they told us we could not look out because those cities bordered the Japanese Sea and we could see the Navy. A lot of their Navy ships are in there and they looked in bad shape. As they went along they dropped men off. Some men got off at Toyama and some got off at Nagoya. Then we went up to Kameoka. That’s where we got off. There were, I think, two hundred got there. Some of those guys went to the lower part, a town called Finatsu, which was about five thousand feet lower down the mountain where we were.

T: How many of you actually went up the mountain, as it were?

R: One hundred.

T: Just a hundred of you.

R: Yes. We walked up the mountain. It was a long way after we got off. Most of us were barefoot. It was cool and fresh air. We could breathe. There was water and things like that. When you got the camp up in the mountain, of course, the Japanese always stood on an apple box and gave a speech. It was always the same bullshit. Don’t do this or that or you get killed or head chopped off crap. But they did feed us good food up there. It was the first time we tasted soybeans. Everything was rationed there. Boy, it was weighed right to the ounce. There was no man supposed to get more than another. So the food at first was ample. Considering the rough voyage we had.
T: Now Kameoka was the only place in Japan that you worked, right?

R: Yes.

T: So the food, you noticed right away, was an improvement over what you'd had before?

R: Of course, we'd had such bad food aboard the ship. But we had good food in port area. We thought almost comparable to port area. Which meant we got enough. But we got to Japan [and] it wasn't too long before [we felt for] the first time that hunger, actual hunger. I remember they had something there, something like a potato, a commodi or something, and they gave that in place of rice. When I got through eating I was hungrier than when I started, and it was that way all the time thereafter.

(2, A, 262)

T: This constant hunger.

R: Yes. Hungry. Yes. The center of Japan is like a spine. The coastal areas, the plains, is where we were going to—when the Americans came back [reference to planned invasion of Japan, scheduled for Fall 1945] they were going to, they'd make their landings on the plains. Which the Japanese knew and we knew. It would have been a slaughter. Been a million casualties there.

T: Yes. Now Kameoka is not a very big place.

R: No, just a small village. It's larger now. Swanson went back there.

T: Yes, he did. Howard Swanson. He did go back. Now, the guys who went with you, all Americans up there?

R: There was one Englishman—don't know where he come—he said he was the sole survivor. He was an English doctor. His name was Jackson. Then we had the Javanese, one from Java and Sumatra. The Dutch East Indies Army. I think we had one hundred or more of those. They were in the camp with us. We didn't have much contact with them. They kept us separated as much as possible.

T: So were they already there when you got to Kameoka?

R: Yes. They were already there. And another group was already there too. They were from Mukden. They were called dame Americans. Dame means no good. They couldn't handle them up in Mukden, so they sent them. That's where we were kind of thinking, hell, this is a penal camp. That's what it was.

T: Can you describe the work you were doing there?
R: Actually, we were all issued little hard hats, you know, like they wear in the mines, and a little lamp which operated off of the same stuff that you use for welding. What the hell do they call that stuff? Carbide. And we were just issued enough to last about four hours, but you always, in your mines, you worked in groups of maybe six, eight or ten, so all of us didn’t use our lamps at the same time or we’d be in the dark. Terrible dark in a mine. It’s dangerous walking around too.

There are chutes you could go down if you’re in the dark. So we had to go down. It was, I think three hundred steps down. When you go up the side of the mountain into an entrance up there. Just like a cave entrance and then down you go. Then we, our group, each time that we went down we’d meet in a little room there. There were electric lights in it. Kind of dim. Then the bosses in the mine would call how many men they needed. They called them holes. The same as we’d call them. Hole. Then they’d call off—like, I was always in san hole. San is number three in Japanese. In san hole we kind of, at one time we had a nice old timer. He was gentle, but he made us work. Then I transferred out of that into another group of guys. A bad one. It was a bad mine. We went into another lateral because there wasn’t much ore in there. And you had so many ore cars to fill otherwise you’d work sixteen hours. Long shift in a mine. Without food.

(2, A, 324)

T: So there was a certain amount of work expected out of each group.

R: That’s right. And then, of course, some groups would get their quota in, in about five or six hours. Then the Japanese thought everybody should do the same. They didn’t [consider the fact that] some of the men were in terrible physical shape. They should have been in a hospital. They were walking corpses. Americans tried to reason with the Japanese, to give some of our people an opportunity to work in the kitchen where they could eat the scale on the pots where they cooked the rice. And you could see a guy go in and work there a week. You could see. He would come back. He looked healthy.

T: Did you get that kind of duty yourself at all?

R: I caught it once.

T: How was it decided who would get that kind of better duty and who wouldn’t?

R: I don’t know. I think that if you had the Marines in charge, why they’d get Marines. The Army favored the Army, and the Navy favored the Navy. In other words, there was a lot of buddy-buddy between the services. The Marines would treat the Marines, but they won’t treat the Army. And it broke down too. Pretty soon, even brothers were enemies of each other. It’s hard to describe it. It’s a kind of life nobody would understand. It was life right down to the bitter end. Didn’t the other guy tell you that too?
End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.

R: ...the food, and then we had the problem of men selling their food for cigarettes. I suppose you know about that.

T: Well, yes. From your perspective, what was that like?

R: Well, men would sell their rice for cigarettes. Cigarettes were the legal tender, and cigarettes were almost—this is where I found out cigarettes are pure dope. One drag off a cigarette in the condition we were in, we couldn’t walk a straight line. We whirled around. You would get dizzy. It’s hard to describe what the drug is in cigarettes. These men would trade their meals for cigarettes, and then they’d die. A lot of men would probably get three, four meals on the come for cigarettes, and then he’d eat those before they could catch him to get these meals to have him pay his debt.

So they had court systems. Kangaroo court, set up in prison camp. Some of these men had to pay back their debt. They owed a whole bowl of rice to one guy who gave up cigarettes to get the rice, and then he wasn’t paid. They said that he had to give one half of his bowl for three meals. Then they had a special room for these guys. To isolate them from the rest. And then they had men in charge. In some cases the guys in charge became just like them. We called them rabbits.

T: Why did you call them that?

R: I don’t know. Just called them that. Tried to put them in the rabbit room.

T: So it sounds like there were some rivalries between the guys.

R: You bet. Yes.

T: It sort of sounds like the comradeship or the all together stuff wasn’t working too well.

R: It sort of passed away. When it got down to the bitter end there it was dog eat dog, and men stole from each other, which was bad. When you stole something from a man, that’s part of his life. You didn’t get Red Cross boxes very often and this was a problem. Some guys could hoard their food. But then when they hoarded it, somebody’d steal it. So every time you lost some food like that you became weakened.

(2, B, 403)

T: Did you, for example, worry that your stuff was going to get stolen or have anything stolen?
R: I’d eat it up as fast as I could.

T: So when you got a ration of food, any food, you ate it right away.

R: Yes. Like one guy said, he started eating—most of this now involved when we got back onto United States hands on the various places we were, like in Okinawa and Yokohama and Manila. We had all we could eat any time we wanted to. So what do we do? We’d eat until we couldn’t get any more in and then we’d throw up and start over again. One guy said it tasted as good coming up as it did going down.

T: So there was that adjustment with having nothing to having everything, overnight.

R: Yes.

T: The conditions between men, sounds like they’ve gotten a lot worse from when you first became a prisoner.

R: Oh, a hundred times worse. In other words, well, our motto was, cheer up, things are going to get worse.

T: How did one keep a sense of humor?

R: It was hard [to keep a sense of humor], but you had to. You know, one time you will start an argument on one side, and then the next day you will be in the argument and you’re on the other side. In other words, I’d see guys like...two guys are very good friends and they’re both in my shack in Japan. They were arguing one day. One guy said that squirrels lay eggs. The other one said no, they don’t. And the next day he said, I think that squirrels do lay eggs. The other guy said no, they don’t. Then they’d fight.

T: Almost an irrational argument.

R: No. It wasn’t rational. You see, when you get talking sometimes, you get off the track. You were talking about—what the hell was I talking about? Just like, you know, people get Alzheimer’s (chuckles). We had the Alzheimer’s early.

T: You mentioned a shack there. What kind of quarters did you have there at Kameoka?

R: Kameoka we lived in a barracks-type, but when we got there, I think I told you before, the guys that were there ahead of us, they lived upstairs and the Dutchmen, when we talked to them, the Dutch officer said to get as much mud as you can and put in and fill those cracks, because you will need it this winter. So we did have details making mud, and then we put those in the cracks because the barracks were cold.
We slept on a mat. It was called a sowali. That’s native name for a mat. That thing was infested with lice and fleas. And we were issued five paper blankets. And we slept on a platform. Let’s see...there were four, eight...I think there was sixteen men in each one of these units. One room berthed sixteen guys. Each man had his space. It was twenty-eight inches. Because they weren’t very wide. There was a lower bunk and upper bunk on both sides.

In the middle there was a little square box that had sand in it. Once in every great once in a while they’d give us a handful of charcoal, and that was our heat. See, there was no heat in those barracks. The only heat we had in there was, when we came in from the mine there was a hot room, because when you come in from the mine you walked down the mountain through the snow. It was colder than hell and you’re wet. And they’d allow you to...I think they gave us a half an hour, and the guys would sit there up to that stove and their legs would swell up as big as their thighs. In other words they would just swell up. That was beriberi, you know. You know what beriberi is.

(2, B, 441)

T: Yes.

R: Pretty serious. There were some kinds of humor. There was one guy that saved his bun. We got a bun for lunch, but nobody could even wait to eat the bun. They’d eat it as soon as they get it. This guy, what he did, he put it in a canteen cup and then put water and it swelled up and made it look bigger, of course. He was sitting there feasting his eyes on it trying to get warm. The lights went out. When the lights went on, the thing was gone. Somebody got it.

T: So the theft was just always around, or the possibility of it too.

R: Yes.

T: Now, could you laugh at something like that even at the time?

R: Well, it sounded humorous how a guy could lose his meal there in almost like a flash in your eyes, but the lights were probably out there for twelve or fifteen seconds probably.

T: And that’s all it took.

R: Yes.

T: Was your daily routine at Kameoka pretty much the same?

R: Yes. You woke up, I think, six o’clock, five forty-five, six o’clock every morning. Then you had to have your bed arranged and you had to stand at attention until they came through and inspected you. You had to have your blouse buttoned up, all the
buttons, and you better not be missing any buttons too. And we had no needles or thread, so they’d work you over for that.

T: For having your uniform out of order. [You told me of one instance earlier in the interview.] Now you’ve mentioned some pretty awful things, the work itself...

R: Oh, the work was terrible. Awfully hard.

T: Literally, what were you doing down in the mine?

R: We’d rake. We had a little rake. They called it a *shakashi*. And you raked that into a thing like a frying pan, and then you dump that ore into the cart. Then when the cart has got enough that the Japanese is satisfied, then you run it down. There were tracks running down through a chute, and you had to get down the chute. It was awfully hard to dump those things. They were heavy. And they only allowed two men. Then you bring it back and you do it, and the next time two other men take it down. So we changed off so somehow you get a rest without, you know, dying from overwork. Some of the guys just went nuts in there. One guy said he was going to kill himself, and he did. He was a friend of mine. He was from Iowa. His name was Newman. But I think he had probably kidney stones or something. He took a couple sticks of dynamite and he just lit the dynamite with these little lamps we had and he blew himself up. Wasn’t much left of him.

(2, B, 484)

T: Did you know Howard Swanson at that time?

R: Yes. When he came down from Cabanatuan I was already in port area. I inherited him. Each one of us took one or two or three guys. I took him and there was another guy by the name of Swanson, from Brainerd, and then there was a Frank Glischinski. He was from St. Paul. I told them how to loot the ships and how to hide the stuff on you and not to take too much. Then I had kind of a deal going with a little Spanish boat, inter-island. I think it was called the *Alabat*. I got some duck eggs. I probably traded with the captain of the ship, and he got me some eggs. So I got those for Swanson and Glischinski.

T: Now these guys, did Glischinski and Swanson also go to Kameoka?

R: Yes. The three of us were together all the time.

T: How were you able to help each other up at Kameoka, where there’s not much to go around?

R: Not much you could do up there. Swanson and I ended up in the same room. At one time I was in the same room with Frank. The three of us, when we were in
Manila in the port area, we slept on the same deck. We all three lined up in a row there.

T: You were with these guys for a couple years.

R: Oh, yes.

T: It sounds like you weren't able to help each other very much there in Kameoka.

R: Well, we did. But in Japan you couldn't help each other. What you had and you're probably, sometimes you'd be in a different shift in the mine. I was in the same shift with Swanson a few times. Not all the time.

T: How much did you know in Japan of how the war was going?

R: The only thing we knew about it, about oh, once or twice a week the Dutch, they had a Dutchman would come through there. I don't know what his job was. Like, make you feel good. So he'd come through with another assistant and he'd look around and make sure no Japanese are around. He said this is the gin—news in Dutch or Javanese is gin. Then they'd give us what they got. They had a radio someplace in there. Then that's when they started telling us about Guadalcanal and Vella Lavella, Bougainville and Esperantu [Santu], and places like that.

T: So you had some news of things.

R: Yes. At that time. But very sketchy.

T: Now, into 1945. By early 1945 the Americans had invaded Iwo Jima, and B-29 bombers began to fly over the islands of Japan more and more. Were you able, did you ever see American planes flying over?

R: Nope.

T: So for you, there were no visual clues.

R: No. Actually, I was not in the military objective in Japan, because the mountains are nothing. The American bombing was mostly Tokyo and Nagoya, Toyama and Kyoto, places like that.

T: Places that you weren't.

R: Yes. We were in the clouds all the time too. You can't see anything. You're in the clouds too.

(2, B, 518)
T: So you had some news, but no visual clues that the war was going better and better [from the Allied perspective].

R: Nope.

T: What kind of rumors passed among the men about what might happen if the Allies, the Americans, did invade Japan?

R: If they did invade, we were to be executed.

T: Now, when did you learn that?

R: Oh, pretty late in the war, when the Japanese finally conceded the news we were getting. The advances the Americans were making. Something was happening. But we knew they were not in Japan yet. You know, they didn’t take the Philippines until almost 1945. So the Japanese had 320,000 men in the Philippines. That’s a hell of a lot of people.

T: Yes, it is.

R: Japan, we just couldn’t see that, you know. We’d been through there [on trains, going to the final camp locations]. We thought this would be an awfully hard place to take, because the people... When I was in this one little town one day, we went up to the top of the island there, on a detail. The top of this, where I was, in Kameoka. Twelve and thirteen year old kids up there doing the manual of arms as good as we could do them.

T: No kidding. You could see these kids.

R: Yes. They knew the sign up there. I remember it showed a picture of Uncle Sam. Propaganda sign, and it showed him in...big, tall guy with his striped hat. He had a Jap around the neck and it said “Kill a Jap.” That was a sign up there in that area where we—I was taken up there once in a while to do exercises.

T: Now how often did you see Japanese civilians? Because you walked to work, right?

R: No. We didn’t see them very often, to tell you the truth. Once in a while I think, one wintertime there. We were in thirty-three feet of snow. That’s a hell of a lot of snow up there. We had to clear an area there for some...there was some danger, but they wanted us to work. Then we saw these civilians, and then other times on a detail we had to go up the mountain a little ways and pick up our ration of coal and our food. We’d sometimes see civilians. And another time I was having eye trouble and they sent me up, another detail up to the top, and I went to a place, and they gave me a pair of glasses (chuckles). They don’t test you, just give you glasses.
T: Right. So contact with the Japanese wasn’t something that you really had, even though you were in a smaller town, as it were.

R: Yes.

T: What do you think was the most difficult thing of those things you’ve talked about here at Kameoka, and there’s been a lot? Whether it’s the lack of food or the weather or what.

R: The food. You were hungry all the time, and you can’t even describe hunger. If you didn’t eat for six months or a year, let’s say you lived on eight to twelve hundred calories a day. You’re going to lose a lot of weight on it. It would take you six to eight months to get that feeling of constant hunger which you have all the time. You could eat. When you get through eating, you’re hungrier than when you started. That’s hunger.

*(2, B, 556)*

T: That’s an interesting feeling that I think most of us can’t relate to, of eating and still feeling hungry.

R: Nope. That’s a strange feeling.

T: And from the way you talk about it, hunger and the desire for food kind of dominated your waking moments.

R: All they talked about is how they’d put whipped cream on potato peelings, and duck wings dipped in honey. You know, some of the weird stuff. There’s a book that I have somewhere around here, and it has a book of the recipes *(chuckles)*. What they dreamed up. What they were going to do when they got out of prison camp.

T: I’ve seen some of those. The strangest mixes of just anything and everything.

R: Yes.

T: Let me ask, how hard was the transition from tropical weather to a snowy winter?

R: Not too bad. In other words, we were used to everything almost. We could adjust fast. You do it fast, or else. But we had quite a few guys, you know, that caught pneumonia up there. But they didn’t last long in the mountains.

T: Did people die up there at Kameoka?

R: Oh, yes. Yes. There were quite a few. We burned them all. When they died, we’d just take them—about 150 yards from camp there was a, I guess you’d call it a place
where they cremated them. A crematorium. We put the guys on a tray, and of course, no clothes on. You always saved the clothes.

They always showed that they'd had an autopsy, all split from the breastbone down to their belly, and the cause of death is always pneumonia, heart attack, something like that. Never hunger. The guys starved to death or got worked to death. Exhaustion.

T: That's very interesting. So it was attributed to some physical cause, and not to...

R: No. They didn't have many...we did have this Dr. Jackson. He did the autopsies. It's kind of sad, you know, taking a guy down there and just terrible. You had to put him in there and they had to have their knees up so they could burn them. He's like a chicken. You tied the wings and legs together. *(pauses three seconds)* That was the way it was. And then of course, you go back to camp and it [corpse] was burning, and you could smell it. Sometimes it smelled pretty good. I got a couple details on that, and I always hated that. I hate death, and I hated to have to go down there and have to listen to that…they always had the bugler blow taps.

T: At each one of these funerals.

R: Yes. Sad.

(2, B, 590)

T: So guys, it sounds like, at first when you were captured there were guys who died after you left Corregidor, and then it sounds like it leveled off when you worked in the port area with fewer deaths, and now in Japan...

R: Oh, yes. We only had one death in there [port area in Manila]. That was from an accident. We got rid of some guys in there that were hurt. I don't know what became of them later. They got injured. Broken legs or arms or necks and so forth. Working on a ship is dangerous.

T: But the dying from starvation or disease...

R: No. Not there. Food was very good in there. We just told the Japanese, if you want us to work on your merchant marine, our officers told the Japanese, and we had a Japanese that was sympathetic toward us. Said that you'll have to feed us better if you want us to work, because these men are in bad physical shape. So the Japanese increased our food. Then of course, we stole everything that wasn't nailed down there too.

T: Were the Japanese aware that the theft was going on?

R: Sure. I'm sure they were. As long as it didn't get out of hand. I'm sure they did.
T: Let me move to 1945, specifically to summer, and it is in August that the Pacific War ends. When did you or the other men at Kameoka have an inkling that something had changed?

R: We knew nothing about the war news up there. It was all conjecture. The only difference we noticed was when they had blackouts, which they didn’t have before in the mountains where we were. We just thought, this son of a bitch is never going to end. Then came that day, you know, that I refused to go to work. Then there was peace. But none of the men...nobody was surprised in there. There was no cheering or emotion or anything. We were too far down the drain to worry or...and we just had to stay in that camp until some guys came in, parachuted in.

T: How was the news actually announced or shared, if you will, with the men?

R: The Japanese...it was August 15 or 16. They had a large group of our men up on top, and that was the first time they went up there. But this time they were surrounded by Japanese troops with machine guns. The order went out, from Tokyo or someplace, that if the Americans invaded, all prisoners would die. This is a known fact. Everybody knows that. I didn’t make it up there. I was too sick to get out of the sack. I couldn’t even walk. But Swanson told me that while they were there, and the order was going to be given by the commandant, the machine gunners got about one hundred of us. There was about one hundred up there at that time. Some car came up the mountain. I don’t know how a car even came up the mountain, but there was a way to get there on the path. And the Japanese, high ranking officer, walked up to the stand that the commandant was giving his talk through the interpreter and then he turned to us and he said, "Dismissed." That was probably the day of the Japanese surrender. But the actual negotiation didn’t take place until sometime in September. [2 September 1945, on board USS Missouri]

T: Now, did they make an announcement that you recall that said the war is over?

R: They said the United States and the Empire of Japan have made a peaceful something. I don’t know. They didn’t sound like...they didn’t say surrender. They used the word...negotiated something.

T: So this officer came in, and the translator put that into English.

R: Yes.

T: And you recall that this news being received rather quietly.

(2, B, 646)

R: Yes. Most of us...everybody in the camp was in terrible, bad shape. But what happened then, you know, when we took the camp over, the Japanese military, the sergeants and the corporals and whatever were guarding us, took off. And the
commandant stayed with us. We called him "Onion Head." That was his name. I
don't know what his name was, we called him Onion Head. He said that he would
stay with us because he didn't know how the civilian population would accept this.
So then these guys came in. Parachuted in. They told us to stay in the camp. They
would get help here as soon as they could. It was an officer, a colonel, and he was
twenty-eight years of age we found out, and there was an OSS man, and probably
some other intelligence.

T: How long did that take before they arrived, though?

R: They came in about four or five days after the surrender. Then a few days, they
said, we'll get help in here as soon as possible. They told us put up signs on the top
of the building, POW. Because where we were, we were in the clouds most of the
time. We were hard to find. Then a couple days later two Navy planes came over
and they waggled their wings at us, and dropped a note and it said, we'll be back,
and then two days later B-29s came. Two of them. They made a pass, then they
went around the mountain and came back and they dumped all this food, medicine,
and stuff at probably three hundred feet. Some of those chutes didn't open. The
canisters and everything broke open. We ate, like in one big old barrel of peaches,
we picked them right off the ground and ate them.

Then there was another one. One of the strange—I told the doctors, they
didn't believe me. During the war we used sulfa for wounds. And when this came
down, I said, Oh brother we can take care of—because most of us, our wounds were
still draining. We had wounds all over from ulcers and crap like that. Bug bites. So I
went out there and I took a handful of that and then I plugged up these holes in my
leg. It was DDT. And I told the doctors that, and they said you'd be dead if you did
that. I said well, take a look at the legs. In five days they healed up. It was DDT. I
knew it was DDT because then somebody told us what it would do. So we took it in
there. We sprinkled our areas with it and you should have seen the fleas. They took
one jump and died (chuckles). Billions and billions of fleas. I never saw so damn
many fleas in my life. And they tormented us. And the crabs and the lice. Bedbugs.

T: So there was a period of some days or weeks that the camp was not controlled by
the Japanese and before the Americans actually arrived.

R: You mean in our camp?

T: Yes.

R: Well, let's see. August 15, let's say the fifteenth, until September 7.

T: How was the camp run or administered, and by whom?

R: Well, the English or the Dutch more or less took over. They outranked our—we
only had a second lieutenant. The Americans, that's the only officer we had. We had
that bunch upstairs from Mukden, so we all went under one command. So then we
went to the warehouse and we took out the food there. There was a lot of food in there. Could have been issued to us, but never was. There was corned beef and squid and soy sauce. Hardtack. You know, rations that these troops eat. Wool blankets. Clothing. We got it all. So we ate. Just sat up and eat all the time. We didn’t even sleep, I don’t think. I don’t remember sleeping. I was eating all the time. I said I wanted to walk out of this camp, but I still had to be carried out by a truck. I couldn’t walk down that mountain.

(2, B, 710)

T: With the end of the work and more food, how did relations between the men improve?

R: Everybody was in what you might call…euphoria. Joy. I remember one old guy named Blowser. He was a Marine. Somehow or another he got a chicken, but I don’t know what happened to the chicken. All he had was the legs when I saw him. We used to call these quaning, quan fires. He’s out there with a pail of water and he had these two chicken legs, and he was boiling them. There’s no meat on the legs.

T: But he had them.

R: Yes. He was nuttier than a fruitcake.

T: Did the conflicts or the fighting, that kind of stuff, stop?

R: Yes. Or it did in our place. I don’t know about other places.

T: So there were a couple weeks where this prison camp at Kameoka was sort of self-administered, as it were. I mean, there were no Japanese to run it, so you ran it yourself.

R: Oh, sure. Yes. We had an American flag. We got that up. We had one because we used an American flag when we took one of these stiffness up to burn them.

T: Now, I’m wondering, did people from your camp, yourself included, go out and look for the Japanese?

R: Some did. Yes. There was a group below us. They were five thousand feet down the mountain, I think. They were at Finatsu. They were part of the port area gang. There were about one hundred of them down there and they came up. They were in better shape than we were. I know that. But they worked in a smelter down there where they were making steel. Evidently they got more food and better treatment, from what I hear. That’s what they said.

T: Were you content to wait for the Americans to come or were you...
R: Yes.

T: Did you want to leave the camp?

R: No. I was in no condition to go any place.

T: Did you or other men worry that the Japanese might, civilians might come up to your camp?

R: No. The Japanese were, but we weren't. I think the Japanese were happy the war was over too.

T: So from what you're saying, there was little, if any, contact here between the Japanese civilians and you prisoners.

R: Nope. Very little if any.

(2,B,758)

T: So those couple weeks you kind of just lived on a little island, it sounds like.

R: Yes.

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

T: ...so you kind of just spent your time eating and waiting for the Americans to come back.

R: Yes. Waiting for orders. They just said, “Hold tight; we'll tell you what's going to happen next.”

T: And they did arrive then, Americans. Did they come by truck or...

R: The Americans were halfway up the mountain there. They were mostly Airborne guys. I think it was the 11th Airborne. That was one. I know they were in Yokohama. (***)

T: Do you remember when those Americans first arrived and you saw them up close and personal?

R: When we went down the mountain, when we went down in trucks to go to Yokohama, that's the first Americans [we saw]. There was little villages on the way down the mountains, and they were there. They weren't standing guard. They were moving around with the people. In other words, the people accepted surrender.
T: Was that what you, in your mind’s eye, had expected, or had you expected more resistance from the Japanese once the surrender came?

R: No. They were pretty bad shape too. When I look back at how they looked, the Japanese were a robust and healthy people. When I went down the mountains and even up there where we were, the soldiers were getting thin like we were. We were down to eating bark off the trees, and we had a detail out cutting grass. We were eating grass soup, if you can imagine that. We were in bad shape. And yet...it was different. Some camps had it a little better than others, but I think Kameoka was always a bad one.

T: You were not in walking condition when you left the camp, you said.

R: I could walk, but I’d never have been able to go down from that mountain. We were over ten thousand feet, and to get down to that railroad below was about, oh, it was about nine thousand feet below us. Or ten thousand feet. That’s a hard walk down that damn mountain.

T: So did they truck you down?

R: Yes. We had one old beat up truck, and there was several of the guys in the camp, about twenty or thirty of us, who were in pretty bad shape. I was one of them.

T: Now, were you flown out of Japan then right away?

R: Yes. When I got down to Yokohama they deloused us and issued us...took all our old clothes away and then they gave us new Air Force outfits. Coveralls and stuff like that. Deloused. And then they had all the coffee and some interrogation. Not much. Then they said, you can go home or you can leave here by hospital ship. There was two of them out there. One was the Benevolence. I always remember that. That was one, and there was an English ship out there. And they said, otherwise, what you can do, we’re going to fly a group out here tonight. We’re going to fly them down to Okinawa by C-54 [four engine transport], if you want to go. I said, fine, that’s good enough for me. So I flew. Left that night. Then we got down to Okinawa. I think it’s only about five or six hundred miles from Japan. It didn’t take us long, but I think we landed in the darkness down there.

(3, A, 37)

T: Did you leave Japan with any personal belongings at all?

R: No.

T: So all those years of being a POW, you literally left with nothing but the clothes on your back.
R: Yes. One friend, this Glischinski, he worked in the mine with me. Somehow he got some pretty stones. One was a very pretty stone which he gave me and then I had it made into a necklace for my wife, which she promptly lost. It was beautiful. It was a piece of—you see, lead is actually ten percent silver. This one here was like set on a little platter. Small. About an inch and a half high and an inch wide.

T: You were on Okinawa, then in Manila, San Francisco, and finally...

R: Presidio [San Francisco], and then they went to Salt Lake City. Were grounded. From Salt Lake City to Clinton, Iowa, and then I was there for three months and then they furloughed me for—I had one hundred or one hundred and some odd days furlough. And I was supposed to go down to Texas to get discharged. I forget where it was in Texas, but Brown Medical Hospital. All I know is Brown, and then I read in the paper it's closed so I don't know what to do. I don't know. So I just stayed home and then finally the Army got a hold of me and sent me over to Camp McCoy [Wisconsin, used then as separation center]. I went through a medical there. They gave me the uniform I had on and said, go home. That's it.

T: That's kind of a...not very flashy ending.

R: (chuckles) No.

T: Just kind of petered out there, didn't it?

R: Yes. Well, I was in the hospital in Iowa down there for three months. It was good living there. I had a private room, being a staff sergeant. All the food you could eat. Good entertainment. There was name bands and all the big bands, the Dorsey Brothers and Harry James. There were dances every week down there I was in the hospital. There was two hundred civilian workers, mostly female. Then there was a company of WACS. That's two hundred and then there was Army nurses coming back from Europe. Most of them pregnant (chuckles).

T: This is a big facility, in other words.

R: It was a very big place. It was made of Quonsets. Practically all Quonsets connected one to another. But beautiful facilities.

T: Now they took care of you whatever wounds or infections you had and fed you...

(3, A, 64)

R: I had a bunch of them.

T: On the other hand, how much did the military attend to what we might call psychological recovery?
R: Not too much. I figure all of us were psycho. Why bother with them? I’ve taken all kinds of intelligence tests. They all come out the same. I’m sane. They got me now. I just got a letter from the VA here recently. They’re looking for volunteers to go through some kind of an intelligence-psychopathic or whatever the hell it is. I know it’s the same thing. They take two hours to go through them. They’re multiple choice, you know. Then after you take that thing, then you take it over again and see if you come up with the same answers. It’s just a study. They do this every once in a while.

T: Sure. So do you feel they gave you any kind of, what we might call, therapy at that time or talking to you about your experience as a POW?

R: Oh, I talked to some psychiatrist. In fact, the guy I talked to was nuttier than I was. He smoked a cigar and he said, tell me stories. That’s all he kept saying. Somebody told me later on they threw the net over him and took him away.

T: It sounds like he was in more need of therapy than you were.

R: *(chuckles)* I guess.

T: Now you were at Schick General for three months you said, right?

R: At Schick General, yes, three months.

T: Did you see any members of your family when you were there? Brothers or your parents or…

R: An aunt came to see me, and my girlfriend. But none of the family. Both my brothers, they were still in. One of them was still over in the Pacific. One of them was returning from the Pacific, and the other one moved to California. He was working in a defense plant there. My mother, she couldn’t very well leave the house to get down there. I called her. I said, “I’ll be home soon.” That was it. But I was in contact with her by telephone.

T: Was your dad still alive too?

R: Well, yes. See, the parents were divorced, and he lived in California. See, that’s where I spent part of my furlough.

T: So you got to see your dad.

R: Oh, yes.

T: When you first saw him, what kind of communication was there between you two about the POW experience?
R: To me, he was just a friend.

T: How curious was he to know your POW experience?

R: Oh, he asked a lot of stuff and I told him some of the things. I said, actually, it’s over. In other words, we didn’t talk much about it. Come to think of it, we didn’t, I can’t remember talking about it at all. People would say, “What do those bars on you mean? On your sleeve.” We were entitled to [wear] nine overseas bars [on the left sleeve of our uniform]. You get a bar for each six months [in overseas service].

T: A bar for six months. Right. So you could have nine?

R: Yes. Actually, we decided seven was enough. So all of us wore seven.

T: So your dad, do you remember him not asking about it, or you just not talking about it?

R: Not talking about it.

(3, A, 97)

T: Was that the same when you talked to your mom, too?

R: A little bit I told her. I told her, you know, one thing, I said, “I’m different now. Because I’m home, there’s some things you must know about me. Don’t come near me at night. Don’t touch my face.” That was always a—when somebody touched your face, you got a knife in the other hand.

T: That was something you were very sensitive to?

R: Yes. She did one night. She come in there, because I slept in a room and the thermostat was over my head. Somehow her nightgown touched me and, geez, I was out of bed and had her down on the floor in nothing flat.

T: No kidding. Boy!

R: Scared the hell out of her.

T: Yes. Did it scare the hell out of you too?

R: Yes. She didn’t get hurt or anything.

T: How hard was that for your mom to adjust to, in a sense, a new Ray?

R: Oh, I don’t think she had too much of a problem. First thing, I had a lot of back pay. So I bought her a new television. Not a new one, but I bought her a television
set. Remember, in those days when they first came out they were called Hallicrafters. They were eight or ten inches. I got her one and I gave her six hundred dollars.

T: That’s a lot of money in those days.

R: Oh, yes. But I had 4400 dollars, I think, of back pay.

T: That’s a ton of money in those days.

R: Yes. [Before I was captured] I made an [pay] allotment out to the Bank of America at Frisco. Besides the [pay] allotment to my mother.

T: Was your mom any more curious than your dad to know about your POW time?

R: Oh, yes, I think so. She attended all these meetings they had in Minneapolis. They had a regular association of people whose sons or husbands or whatever relatives were in prison camps.

T: And did she talk about how that helped her when you were gone? During the time you were gone?

R: Yes. Because most of the news they gave them was quite cheerful. Once in a while some letters would come through from POWs to parents. They’d read them. Even though it wasn’t her. But she’d get a message once a year from me. You know, in prison camp we could write a little note, twenty-five words or less. And usually the Japanese—I don’t know if you’ve ever seen one of those little cards we had. What you do, you say [select from three options] I am well, not well, sick. You scratch out the ones that you aren’t. Then you say, I am well. Then you could say in there, like I’d say, “I’ll sure be glad to see a Minnesota winter again.” Then she knew I was in the islands. And then when I was back in Japan, I got one there. I said, “I’ll enjoy a Minnesota summer again.”

T: So she knew you had been moved. So your mom was able to at least keep some...to know that you were alive.

R: Yes. Late in the war she got a little note. I got it here stashed away. It was a guy from a submarine, picked up a Japanese propaganda broadcast and they mentioned the Japanese...make you listen to that. Then they say something, your son is all right. That’s where he got it. So he sent that to her, and I still have it. He picked it up. He was a radioman on a submarine, so they must have been above water with their mast up to get the message. But they tuned in for Tokyo Rose and stuff like that. That’s the way the Japanese got the propaganda to the Americans. You had to listen to the broadcasts, and it said someplace...you would hear someone that you know. You never knew who it is. So they all listened.
T: So your mom was able to sort of piece together, like a puzzle almost, that you were at least still alive.

R: Yes. They had me as a MIA for two years because I moved from two, three different camps. Until I got to port area. Then I was more stationary there. But the Red Cross never caught up to me.

T: So you never received anything from anybody.

R: No. I did get one box. I found out it was a friend of mine's wife. But when I got the box all there was, was a pair of shoelaces and a pair of socks.

T: Everything else was gone?

R: Yes. Some Japanese strafed it [stole the contents].

T: Did your mom save those postcards that you sent?

R: Yes. I got them.

T: So she was conscious, certainly, of what was going on.

R: Yes. She saved all the letters. I got a whole pack of letters that I sent here. You know, in peacetime. I was describing the islands to her and what it was like over there.

T: So she kept...that's an historical record in itself.

R: Yes. I was in a good unit over there. I was in that intelligence outfit, which wasn't bad in peacetime.

T: Yes.

R: I had a little leeway and I got promotions pretty fast and they wanted to send me to artillery school too. I was supposed to come back to the United States sometime after the first of the year. That would be 1942.

T: Now you were married in February 1947, right?

R: Yes.

T: Now the woman you married, was that the girlfriend you mentioned who visited you at Schick General?
R: No. She was number six (chuckles).

T: After you were married and when you had kids growing up, how much did your wife or your kids know about you having been a POW?

R: Not much.

T: Was your wife not curious?

R: No. Not really.

T: Did she know?

(3, A, 161)

R: Sure.

T: Did she not ask, or did you not talk?

R: Not really. I never talked much about it. I would speak Japanese to people. They’d say, what the hey you talking about? I would just laugh. And of course, I get around Swanson. He and I speak Jap to each other occasionally.

T: Now, on the other hand, you’re doing this interview with me right now. Did something happen or did you change sometime that you started to be able to talk about it, or want to?

R: I suppose. Somebody asked me once, “Why don’t you tell people about that?” I think it was some teacher or something. I tell you who it was, it was Phil Brain. Phil asked me. He asked me one time. He said, “Would you come to a school.” He said, I have something to do with that school and talk to the class and tell them about this prison. I said okay. So I did. Talked off the top of my head. Answered questions. Then I didn’t talk for a long time. Then somebody asked me and I did, and then gradually people started asking questions and basically about somebody that they knew was in the same area and stuff like that.

Then when the World War II History Roundtable [at Fort Snelling] asked me if I would give a talk, I said sure. I didn’t prepare anything. I brought some of the stuff along. People wanted to look at those postcards that we sent, and letters and things. Then after that somebody heard about it and several schools called me. So I went to Edina a couple times, and Minnetonka, and a couple senior centers.

T: Did it get easier as it went? I mean, the more you did it was it easier to talk about it?

R: Yes.
T: To the point where now in an interview situation like this you’ve answered questions without any difficulty at all.

R: I don’t have any problem. I don’t think any of us do, do you? (chuckles)

T: Like you mentioned, as your kids were growing up, did your kids know you’d been a POW and ask you about that?

R: Oh, yes. They did. Yes. My daughter was probably more curious than the boys. I have three boys and a girl.

T: How did you answer her questions?

R: What do you want to know? And actually, the ones that ask most questions were my relatives, you know, my brother’s kids. Daughters and sons. Occasionally somebody is very curious. They probably saw a movie and say, did that really happen? You know, something real bad. I’d say yes. They happen but I mean, hell, this is war. This is the way things are. Lose all your…lose your marbles.

T: So people have asked you questions. They have been curious over the years. They’ve asked you and your ability or your willingness to talk about it has increased over the years.

R: Yes. I was at another one here. I was on there the same time as the guy, his name is Jerry Driscoll. He was a prisoner. He was shot down over Hanoi or something. He was a prisoner for six years. So they invited me and Jerry to give a talk. They had quite a group of kids. This was a school. It’s the Wayzata school, which is a citadel. It’s a great big school. We talked to several classes. Jerry talked first and geez, the guy got emotional. He started crying and I thought, oh, boy, this is… (chuckles). And as he talked I could see the kids were actually getting a little bit antsy.

So I gave the next one. I kept it short. But I just told them what it was like to be a prisoner. I think I brought a couple items along they could check, look it over. And some of them they’d come up after. Ask a lot of questions after. They had to go back to their classes. So she asked me—her name was Wade—some kind of program, Honor Our Heroes or something like that. Asked me if I’d talk again, but twice I turned her down. I just don’t feel like it. The kids in the school, they gotta be seventeen, eighteen years of age to understand this. The younger ones don’t know. They’ve seen too much John Wayne and probably saw “Midway” a hundred times and “The Longest Day” and stuff like that.

(3, A, 223)

T: Do you still accept requests? If teachers ask you, do you still go to some groups?

R: Oh, yes.
T: But older students, you say.

R: Yes. I’ve gone to...well, the people here in this center where I live. There’s one hundred and some odd here. They said, “Why don’t you give a talk some night.” I said, okay, I will. I scheduled that and they liked it. Of course, I made these tapes [film] too. You’ve got one of them.

T: The “Barbed Wire Club”?

R: Yes. And then from that somebody else...oh, yes. They invited me and that other place to listen to another POW, which I did. I was amazed. The guy was a prisoner of war and he was in the Philippines but brother, he sure gave them a snow job (chuckles). And I walked out. One of the people said, “I haven’t seen you for a long time.” Said, “you were a prisoner too.” I said yes. “Did you make a tape?” And I said, “Yes. It was on Channel 2” [Twin Cities public TV]. He said, “Can I buy one from you?” So I sold two, three, four of them there. I still got some in the car, but I never push anybody.

T: The “Barbed Wire Club” tape.

R: Yes. They're pretty good, I thought.

T: Yes. It is a pretty good tape. In fact, I’ve used it in class as well. Now, when you heard a guy giving a snow job, how did that make you feel?

R: I felt kind of uneasy, you know. Making himself a great big hero. I knew some of the stuff he said, that he did this and that to a Jap. You know, as a prisoner he got mad at him and worked him over. I thought that’s bullshit, boy! You don’t work a Jap guard over. You’re dead.

T: Did you confront the guy on it or let it go?

R: No. He’s happy doing it. I think he’s a little ticked myself. But he charged a buck, you know. Everybody there paid him a dollar. Made twenty-three bucks. What the hell.

T: So he was doing it for a little money.

R: Yes. And his book.

T: So he was pitching a book as well as making a buck.

R: Yes. I think I ran into him the first time. He came to one of our conventions we had down—I think we were in Mankato or St. Cloud or someplace. He came there and passed his books out. He remembered me then, but this time when he looked at
me, he didn’t even know who I was. But I think too, you know, he’s in his eighties too.

T: Sure. A couple more questions. Some POWs talk about nightmares or dreams they had after the war when they were no longer a prisoner.

R: Oh, yes.

(3, A, 259)

T: What about that for you?

R: There was one. I had a repeater for many, many times. And it was always the same one. When I was in the hospital in Schick General. It would be...the guy, he looks just like MacArthur comes in, in a brilliant green goose-knee uniform and start choking me. That was the dream. When I got nightmares I’d scream and holler, and then the doctors said, Makepeace is on his—if he’s on his back again, roll him over on his belly.

T: And that would do it?

R: Yes. Then I quit dreaming those things. I stayed off my back.

T: How long after the war, or after the end of your POW time, did you have that dream or others?

R: I never really had it after I left the hospital.

T: So when you got back to the States, or when you got out of Schick General, the nightmares about the POW time aren’t something you remember?

R: Oh, yes. We still have them. You know, there’s always the one that we’re trying to escape, but we know that we shouldn’t because we always had the old bugaboo one man escaped he’d shoot the other nine men in your shooting squad. So those were always the thing. And then there’s the thing, if I don’t make it I get killed. There’s always a...I can get...pleasant dream. I get up and take a leak and go back to bed and pick up where I left off on the pleasant dream. Most people can’t do that.

T: And how about the unpleasant ones? Do you get rid of those?

R: Yes.

T: Are dreams about your POW time something you still have?

R: Oh, not very often. I will if I’m going to give a talk someplace. What am I going to talk about? Then prior to the talk you will dream. This was right after...you know,
we’re all taken prisoners. Especially in port area. There’s quite a gang of us, and these guys were from Bataan and Corregidor mostly. That was like a zoo at night. You should hear the noise. The nightmares. The men hollering and screaming in their sleep. There’s one, Glischinski, God, he had a voice. He’s a typical Marine, a voice you could hear him one hundred yards away. He says, “The sons of bitches are coming at us! Get down! Get down!” He’s standing up and waving his arm. He’s sound asleep.

T: So when you were a POW, for example in the port area, there were guys having nightmares then about the war.

R: Oh, yes. You bet. A lot of it. You know, some of the men there had it pretty rough. It’s hard to separate which was worse, Corregidor or Bataan. Were the hell ships worse than the Bataan March? Most of the guys I talk to say that the Bataan March was a picnic compared to the boat rides. On the March they could breathe. Had air. But in the ships you didn’t have air. You didn’t have…but I think the ships were one of the worst things that could happen to me. I always remember the book I read about the Black Hole of Calcutta. They had it pretty rough too.

T: How would you explain that what people know about by far is the Bataan March, far more than those hell ships?

R: Exactly right. Yes. I don’t know. I’ve often thought to myself, the Bataan March really was something, but yet I know guys that were on the Bataan March that said it was a piece of cake. Road. Some of them marched. The ones that were in bad shape in Bataan, they would have never survived. It’s just like...like I say in the hell ships. Some of the ships, there were ships where they lost most of the men. These men came from bad prison camps and were sent to Japan, and their ship was sunk. My feeling is these men would not have survived in Japan. They’d have survived the sinking, but they would die in Japan. Which is true. The residuals of the hell ships is much worse than any residuals of the March. This is my feeling. I made marches too, you know. The march I made up the mountain. I marched up a mountain barefoot.

**(3, A, 328)**

T: But the hell ship, for you, was still the worst of your experience.

R: Yes. I couldn’t believe it. This is happening to me? I wish this was only a dream.

T: Did you really? Was it to the point where you really looked at it almost and asked if it could possibly be real?

R: Yes. Yes. How could people be this cruel to people? Like the Japanese were to us. Life didn’t mean a damn thing. These guys had all gone through combat experience. They were good people on the ships, and here they were a little quivering, skinny
piece of meat. Not even talking sensibly. Losing their mind. Screaming. Hollering. Wanting to kill somebody. You can’t describe it. I never seen a movie on it. They can’t get enough skinny people to put on it (chuckles).

T: You have a good sense of humor, Ray, I’ll tell you (chuckles). That’s got to be it.

R: It’s like I say, some of these guys would have to stand up twice to cast a shadow. They were that thin.

T: Yes. The last question I have for you is kind of larger question. When you think of yourself before your POW experience and you consider yourself after, how would you identify the ways that that experience changed your life?

R: I don’t know. I don’t think it changed me too much. Hell, I’d be better than being on Omaha Beach. Although I would have traded imprisonment for Omaha Beach any day of the week. I’d take a day on there or a week on there rather than a week in a prison camp or in one of those ships. You know, some of the guys it brushes off pretty well and others were going to go around the world. They’re going to be bragging about it the rest of their life.

T: And what kind of person are you?

R: It happened. I survived it, so I did pretty well. I mean, it probably made me a better man. I went to work. I took some technical schooling, which didn’t help you a bit. Sold magazines my younger days, and sold life insurance. Hell, I led the agency for eleven years. Wrote millions, and the company honored me. All these trips back to Hartford. All bullshit. Which you’ve got to do anyhow, so...

T: You sound like you allowed it to sort of roll off when it was over, as opposed to Torment...

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

T: ...the guys and you ask them how did this impact you, and boy, some of them, it’s been on their mind every day.

R: Yes. I don’t do that. Once in a while like somebody...like take the humor of something that you got, and they say what did you...what was your favorite saying, and I say we always liked to hear the old saying, cheer up—things are going to get worse. And people say no. They look at this paper of ours [American Ex-POWs Bulletin] and [on the cover] it shows the men coming out of a compound. Did you ever see that in the American ex-POW [Bulletin]?

T: Yes.
R: That flag there says, cheer up—things are going to get worse. People say, does it say that?

T: It sounds like a sense of humor is something that was invaluable. Being able to laugh, even a little bit, at things.

(3, B, 388)

R: Well, there was a lot of goofy stuff in prison camp, too. I can think of some of the humor. Trying to teach these new guys we got from Cabanatuan, don't be a hog. Don't try to steal all the food in the hold. Leave some for the Japanese. We had this one guy there, and we were working on one ship that had corned beef. It was corned beef. I think it was English corned beef. Philly beef they called it. Whatever the hell it was. We were issued these old helmets that the Philippine Army wore. They looked like a medieval helmet they wore back in the days of the Crusaders. They were made of coconut husk. He had one of those, but some of us had...keep from getting too much sun on the head. So this guy came in. He had a can of corned beef under each arm and he had one in his crotch where we usually kept everything and he had one under his hat. The Japanese kicked him in the ass and everything else. He kept holding onto his hat. The Japanese got the four cans, or whatever it was. Then he whacked him and the helmet came off, and another can came out of the hat (chuckles).

T: Holy cow. So there's times when you could laugh.

R: Yes. Swanson, one time...you know, we always bragged that we brought in three pounds of sugar in our crotch or underarms or something. We've got it hidden on us. We went through a shakedown and they didn't find it. Swanson said, “Shit, I'll get one hundred pounds.” And he stole one hundred pounds of sugar.

T: Now how do you deal with one hundred pounds of sugar?

R: Well, actually, it was a very unusual detail. We had an old chassis of an automobile with no motor in it. We called it a rice burner, because we had to push it to make it run. It had no motor. Put a flatbed on it. We could load a lot of rice and sugar and all kinds of crap like that instead of carrying it on our back. This particular day Swanson was on the detail. We were bringing it from Pier Seven where we lived, on the end of it. That building, Marsden Building. They were putting it in a warehouse behind us. Swanson, in a flash—he was stronger than hell—he picked that hundred pounds up and carried it up three flights of stairs and hid it under his bunk. Unfortunately, he got caught.

We had real trouble that day. What happened, this one guy in the barracks was trying to help warn us not to do it because the Japanese were alerted to something. The Japanese were very jumpy. So what he did, we had one of our American officers, Naval officer, down there standing next to the building waiting for a detail to come in. So he wrote on a piece of paper, “Watch the next load coming
in,” and he dropped it and it came down by—this guy’s name was Lieutenant Commander Raymond. He reached down and picked it up and there was a Jap guard there. The Jap guard said, what is that? And he took it away from Raymond. Raymond tried to get it back. Then the Jap got suspicious. He takes it and gives it to the sergeant of the guard. So on there it says, “Watch the next load.” Now what do you think is going to happen? The building is going to blow up or something. But that was...he was trying to warn Raymond to get out there, to warn Swanson don’t steal that sugar.

T: But he did anyway.

R: Yes. He got caught. He did eleven days in yeso. Their jails were called yesos. And he was on rice and water. It wasn’t a very good detail. But he did his time. He still claims to this day that he got away with it, but I never saw any of the sugar.

T: Isn’t memory a funny thing?

R: Yes. You ask Swanson, did he really get that hundred pounds of sugar in there, in the port area. See what he says.

T: All right.

R: Say [to him], where the hell did you hear about that?

T: I’ll have to tell him then, you know, that it was you.

R: Yes.

T: That’s the last question I had, Ray. I'll thank you very much, and turn this machine off.

END OF INTERVIEW