Dwight Shaw was born on 3 November 1920 in Berger, Idaho, the youngest of eight children. He grew up in the Berger area, graduating from Hollister High School in 1939; after living briefly in Washington, D.C., in October 1940 Dwight enlisted in the US Army Air Corps and was assigned to the 5th Air Base Group at Fort Douglas, Utah. In late fall 1941 this unit was stationed in the Philippines, on the island of Mindanao.

When Japanese forces attacked the Philippines in December 1941, Dwight’s unit was at Del Monte Airfield, Mindanao. With thousands of other US military personnel, Dwight became a POW in May 1942. He was at Camp Casisang, on Mindanao, until approximately October 1942, then was transported with other American POWs to the Davao Penal Colony, also on Mindanao. Dwight did various work details, including in the rice paddies, and endured hunger, poor treatment, and different tropical illnesses.

In mid-1944 Dwight was in a group of POWs placed on a hell ship for transport to Japan; the journey took more than two months, ending at the Japanese port of Moji, on the island of Kyushu. POWs were transported by train to Yokkaichi, by Nagoya, where Dwight worked for several months in a plant that produced fertilizer. In June 1945, Dwight was in a group of about 150 POWs moved to Camp #7 at Toyama; here the work was in a factory, a scrap iron smelter.

American B-29s firebombed Toyama on the night of 2 August 1945, destroying over ninety percent of the city, but the POW compound was spared destruction. Two weeks later the war ended, and on 5 September Dwight and the POWs at this facility were evacuated by US forces. Dwight spent some days in the Philippines before boarding a ship for the United States. He was at several military hospitals before his discharge in April 1946.

Again a civilian, Dwight returned to the Berger area and, after 1946-48 with the Sheriff’s Department, took a position with the Postal Service, retiring in 1975. Dwight re-married in September 1946 (wife Phyllis), and helped to raise five children; after a divorce he married again in 1964 (wife Susan). Dwight Shaw was interviewed in February 2004 at his winter home in Yuma, Arizona.
T: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is 14 February 2004, and this is a telephone interview with Mr. Dwight Shaw of Yuma, Arizona. I just turned the recorder on, so on the record, Mr. Dwight Shaw, thanks very much for taking time out of your day to sit and talk with me about your POW experiences during World War II. I know a bit about you from reading your book, The Foot Locker Fifth, which you wrote about ten years ago, is that right?

D: I think 1992 was my first printing.

T: You’ve gone through more than one?

D: Well, I reprinted it, yes.

T: In that book there’s a lot of detailed information about you. For example, you were born 1920 in the small town of Berger, Idaho.

D: Right.

T: There’s more here, and I’ll read it into the record. Correct me if I make any mistakes. You grew up in Berger and finished high school 1939. That was not Berger High School, but Hollister High School. You were in Washington, D.C., briefly living with your brother, you mentioned. Then you had a rather humorous way of saying how you volunteered, or felt you were volunteered, for the military service in October 1940. The description in your book is of you kind of raising your hand with a couple other guys and realizing after the fact what you’d done.

D: That is true (chuckles).

T: It’s a little more difficult to join the service these days, I think (chuckles). Continuing: you trained at Fort Douglas, Utah, and then in late 1941 were transferred to headquarters in Headquarters Company of the 5th Airbase Group and describe a none too pleasant trip across the Pacific, part of it on the President Pierce, and finally arrived in Manila in the Philippines November 1941. You got to the Philippines, as it turns out, not long before hostilities actually started. One thing that I’m interested in is, when you got there was there, as you think about it, was there a feeling that some kind of hostilities were imminent?
D: The first clue I think, as I mentioned, was that we had a cruiser escort as we went across from San Francisco to the Philippines. Well, let’s see. I guess we were escorted out of Hawaii. We stopped there for a couple of days. Then when we left Hawaii we had a cruiser escort and blackout conditions. So it was very obvious to us that something different was taking place.

T: As you thought that through as a young man of twenty, twenty-one years old, did it occur to you that it could actually lead to something like war and did you have an idea what that could be? What that would be like?

D: Didn’t have an idea of what it would be like, but I don’t know if I mentioned, but, my father-in-law at that time, when we left Salt Lake City, I told him that I felt that I was going to have to survive a war before I got back to America again.

T: So this was something that was, at least from your perspective, in the air or a possibility.

D: Yes.

T: It also, war in the Pacific anyway, would entail some kind of hostilities with the Japanese.

D: Yes. Right.

T: What kind of image, mental image, did you have of the Japanese? What kind of people they were or that? I mean that was a foreign culture to most Americans.

(1, A, 32)

D: Right. Those Orientals don’t think the same way we do. I think probably now, sixty years later, maybe they’re coming around to a little more...their thinking might parallel ours a little more than it did at that time. And then I think I mentioned in there, and believed it that we had, I believe, a November issue of Reader’s Digest on board the ship that told about their paper houses and that they... I think the article said six weeks was how much time we gave the Japanese if we went to war with them. That article is available I’m sure. I think it’s November issue of 1941 of Reader’s Digest. They went into detail of how we would wipe them out in six months time.

T: Now when the Japanese did attack the Philippines and you were there, did the thoughts of that Reader’s Digest article or this image of the Japanese bring a sense of self-confidence to you and the men around you, or did that kind of go out the window once the war actually started?

D: Well, no. We still felt that it would be short. Even though we weren’t prepared to contribute much to the program. We still felt that we would prevail in a short time.
T: Now, do you remember the first time you were under attack by the Japanese? I mean physically.

D: Yes.

T: Can you talk about that from how you remember it?

D: Well, the very first time I was on a detail of supplying water to the B-17 crews, and we had a tanker and we’d go down to the river or the creek, whatever it was, and fill this, pump water into this tank that we were pulling with the Jeep. Then we’d go up and fill Lister bags for the B-17 crews that were on the airfield. Then the first attack we had while we were down at the stream filling it, we saw these airplanes in broken clouds and just naturally assumed that they were ours. Then when we got back to the airfield and we were filling these bags then these Zeroes, as they turned out to be, they dove out of the clouds and started strafing us. That was our first attack.

T: What goes through your mind in a situation like that where you’re being strafed and it’s suddenly very, very real?

D: I’m sure we were scared. I’m sure we were frightened. We fired back with rifles which is the only thing that we had. Dove into holes for our own safety. From then on, I guess we had a different attitude as far as what was about to happen.

T: Now it was still a number of months before you and the rest of your unit were surrendered in May of 1942. How did the mood, how did your own mood, change in those four or five months? Were you a person who remained fairly optimistic or not really?

D: I think we were always optimistic or we probably...if we’d known what was ahead, I’m sure that there probably would have been more of us that had died than did. No. We were optimistic, I think, all the way.

T: How long was it before discussion started, either you or men around you, about gee, we might actually end up as prisoners of war?

D: Oh, had no idea that that was...you understand, we had absolutely no news whatsoever. From the time that—well, now, I shouldn’t say that we didn’t have anything. But we were still not, as I remember, weren’t particularly impressed with the fact that the Japanese had invaded different places in the Philippines. But we still felt optimistic that it was just a short, was going to be a short period until the thing would be over.

T: How much of a surprise was it to you then when in early May the news came that every American was to surrender? You included.
D: It was a big surprise. We weren’t contributing anything to the war effort. We were just hunkered down trying to survive and still I don’t ever remember that we weren’t still optimistic until... It came, as I remember, a complete surprise when General Wainwright radioed our headquarters and ordered us to surrender.

T: Did you hear that news from somebody else within the headquarters there?

D: Yes. From our commanding officer.

(1, A, 98)

T: How do you remember your own reaction when you did hear that news now, for the first time?

D: Well, I was very, very apprehensive about what was going to happen.

T: Was it a short time thereafter that the actual surrender took place then?

D: Yes. Yes. Within a day or two.

T: That’s not much time to think about it or prepare, really, mentally.

D: No.

T: You put down your weapons and marched out, as you describe it. Do you remember the first time you actually physically saw the Japanese up close?

D: Yes.

T: What do you remember about that?

D: We dressed up in the best we had, which wasn’t much. We still had khakis. We put on our best. Why, when I stop and think about it, I don’t know why we did. But we, on orders, we dressed in the best uniform that we still had. Then we got in vehicles, our vehicles, and started out for the rendezvous point. I don’t remember. It was probably, I would guess, probably maybe a couple hours drive. There we met them and they quickly unloaded us from our vehicles and got in and started driving them around themselves. Then the hate really came to the forefront then. When we saw them and we were totally at their mercy. Then we really hated them from that moment on.

T: Would you say you didn’t hate them in that way before that time?
D: No. We didn’t. Because we still...until the day of the surrender still felt that it was, we still were optimistic that they were going to send in reinforcements. The Americans were going to send reinforcements and that we’d still prevail.

T: What’s it like? You described a moment ago being totally at someone’s mercy. What kind of a feeling is that? To face a situation like that.

D: It’s terrible. When I read now about people that end up in prison or end up in jail, maybe prominent people or maybe habitual criminals, I have a feeling of what’s going through their mind and what they have to face.

T: Do you feel, in a sense, that you, thinking of prisoners, kind of share or shared an experience in a way? Of being totally at someone’s mercy in a way?

D: That question again please.

T: You mentioned prisoners, what is it that you feel in common with people like that when you think about it?

D: Among our own selves?

T: Yes. You mentioned...

D: I have sympathy for...especially when people are almost innocent when they accidentally are convicted of automobile manslaughter or something like that, because it happened out of the clear blue and was not anticipated. I kind of compare our situation to those people and I feel sympathy for them because I have a slight idea of what they’re about to endure.

T: That’s an interesting analogy. As opposed to someone who might commit a criminal act consciously.

D: Yes.

T: That’s interesting. The first place the Japanese took you, and I guess the other members of those who had surrendered with you, was Camp Casisang.

(1, A, 154)

D: Yes.

T: That’s on Mindanao.

D: Right.

T: And your recollection is that you were there about six months?
D: That’s right.

T: That would be through early fall of 1942.

D: Yes.

T: The first place you’re at now. Was there any kind of initial interrogation by the Japanese or were you questioned at all about anything?

D: No.

T: So in a sense, you were just part of a larger group that was moved along to this first facility.

D: Yes. Of course, I was a PFC at the time so I’m not sure what might have happened with the officers—if they were interrogated or not. But in that first camp I think, as I wrote in the book, we were treated very fair. They furnished us with everything, almost everything, that was available in the way of food and so forth. There wasn’t much. But they did go out of the way to kind of cater to our appetites.

T: You talk about this experience in your book and the way you’re referring to it now, were you at the time a bit surprised by the treatment you were getting?

D: No. I don’t think so. I think we expected to be treated as Americans. I think that prisoner of war was the farthest thing from my thoughts ever until we walked in. Never, ever occurred that this might be our fate.

T: And the treatment you had at Camp Casisang there, would you differentiate that from the treatment you had at Davao Penal Colony?

D: Oh, yes. Yes. From the day we left that camp, from then on it was an entirely different attitude, definitely as far as the Japanese were concerned. We became enemy combatants...former combatants at that time.

T: The treatment you had initially, what about the Japanese at Camp Casisang? What kind of people were they, in your recollection, and what kind of treatment did you get from them on a personal level?

D: They didn’t, really didn’t bother us. We just more or less did our own thing there. It was just the fact that we didn’t have many facilities for the comforts of home but we made out the best we could. Really, as I keep saying, we knew it was just for a very short time anyhow, so I don’t remember that we were ever in...there wasn’t much left there at that time or available as far as food or anything was concerned. So I don’t remember for that six months that we suffered in any way except that we weren’t free to leave.
T: Now the people that were with you were all Americans at this point, right?

D: Right.

T: And estimate the number of Americans that were imprisoned there.

D: I am thinking maybe two hundred.

T: A relatively small number.

(1, A, 206)

D: Right. It was just our own headquarters squadron, the Fifth Airbase Group. Well, there may not have been that many because...yes, yes, there would be. I'm getting ahead of myself. The whole, all of us would have been there and there were 160 of us to start with. Then there were some others that had come in, like the PT boat crews that had brought MacArthur down to Davao. They were there. So we had a few Navy. They were the ones that were the crews of the PT boats. And then we had a few from other bomb groups like the 19th Bomb. We had a few people there and they were with us because they had flown into Davao and never got out again. So we had a few 19th Bomb and...I would think two hundred would cover it though.

T: Were these all enlisted? Had your officers been separated out?

D: No.

T: So your officers and enlisted men were in the same small facility here.

D: Yes.

T: Was there a daily routine here? Any kind of work details that people were going on?

D: No.

T: So you're really just biding time, in a way.

D: Yes. I think I have a picture there in my book of where we were raising a garden and...

T: Yes. Yes. And people don't look that unhealthy, comparatively speaking, to other...

D: No. We weren't. We were okay. We hadn't suffered for the lack of food. Maybe the quality. But we hadn't suffered for the lack of food up to that point.
T: At this early point did you know a lot of the men with whom you were imprisoned? Or at least know who they were from being in your unit?

D: Knew them all.

T: Was that a help or a hindrance, as you see it, that everyone knew each other?

D: I think it was a help. Of course, we teamed up...well, as you do under any circumstance. We kind of teamed up with the ones we liked the best. But then I don’t remember that we ever tried to reject anybody.

T: You mentioned friends. Did you have a couple of people that you were closer friends with than others?

D: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: In your case, who was that?

D: I'm going to see him on the first of March at our reunion that we’re having in Laughlin, Nevada. Cline was his name. Bernard Cline. Was one of my closest friends. And then...are you interested in others?

T: Yes. If you have names. People. Because these names may come up in the future as we talk.

D: Then Clifford Getner who I wrote about in my book, that if you remember, that he loaned me money to buy some cattle.

T: Was he the one that went down on the Shinyo Maru or survived that?

D: No. No. No. He was with us all the time.

T: That was Kirker that you have in your book. Robert J. Kirker, I think.

D: Yes. Kirker. He and I were real close. And then after the war we were real close up to the time he died.

T: You mentioned a couple guys there. What’s the importance of having close friends during a POW experience? How did that matter for you?

D: I think it was very important. You enjoyed their company, naturally, and you looked out for each other and helped each other as best we could.

T: How could you...
D: Another one, one of my very closest friends was one that ended up as my brother-in-law. It was James Patterson.

\textbf{(1, A, 273)}

T: That’s right. You talked about him in your book too.

D: Yes.

T: Yes.

D: When we left Manila on our way to Japan, he and I were bunked together down in the hold of the freighter so we became very close.

T: How do friends help or depend on each other in a POW situation? In real terms, what can you do for each other? What can you expect from someone else?

D: In our particular instance it was, I think friendship was about the…we didn’t have anything to share much in the way of needs, if one of us were sick we got sympathy from our close friends which was helpful and I think if it had come down to defending or saving one of our close friends, we’d have probably taken some extreme chances to help them out.

T: I ask because I’ve talked to dozens of ex-POWs now, and time and time again I hear that the friendship, the bonds of friendship that men developed while they were POWs is stronger, or some have even described it as a completely different kind of friendship than you make in the real world. Is that something that you would agree with?

D: I would agree with that. Yes.

T: And the couple people that you mentioned became friends that you’ve now had for nigh on sixty years.

D: That’s true. That’s right.

T: And have you kept in contact with some of these men that you became friends with pretty consistently throughout the years?

D: Yes. Most of them are gone now. You know, the survival of those that survived are getting pretty few.

T: One thing that occurs to me, at Casisang, or at Davao where you spent a year and a half anyway, did having friends become more important as the conditions decreased? Davao by your own description was a different can of worms than Casisang.
D: Yes. I don’t know that it was any more important than at any other time. As I
said, about all we could share was our friendship or our support. We didn’t have
any material things to share, hardly, and if we did have something we shared it.

T: At those locations on the Philippines where you were imprisoned, what kind of
things did men talk about? You lay around, you work, or you have a lot of lax or
dead time as it were. What kind of things do people talk about?

D: I think I mentioned this before too. Pretty soon almost all conversations ended
up with food because whenever you’re hungry, it’s pretty hard to concentrate on
much anything else. That’s number one in your mind.

T: Was that something that was even, in a sense, more important than a subject like
thinking about escaping?

D: I don’t remember that we ever, that escape ever came to my mind. There were a
few, as you read I’m sure, and know that there were some details that did escape.
But then also we were in these groups of ten that they were...they had threatened
to assassinate, kill anybody in the rest of the group if somebody escaped. So that was a
deterrent, I’ll tell you for sure. Most of us.

T: So it was intended to have that effect and it sounds like it did.

(1, A, 351)

D: It did have. On most of us. Now there was a group...and he wrote a book, Ten
Escaped From Tojo, I think, and I mentioned this in my book. His name was Sam
Gracio. He was a pilot. They escaped, and then he wrote in his book that he was so
happy to hear...when he escaped he didn’t know for sure and he had reasons to
believe, I think, that the rest of his group was going to be shot that were still in
camp. Then he said in his book, well, I’m so happy to know that that didn’t occur.
Well, that didn’t occur, but their escape caused the death of many, many others
because the camp was just tightened down to...whereas we were getting along fairly
well until that happened. That was the end of any freedoms that we had.

T: So those who escaped, in a sense, forced others to pay a certain price.

D: That’s right. And maybe they were...I suppose according to...

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.

D: ...prisoner of war try to escape.

T: At the same time...but there was a real potential price to be paid and that could
mean the death of other people. More than...
D: That’s right. And it did occur, but not that they were shot. They didn’t do that. They didn’t shoot anybody because they were in that group, but the consequences of their escape and how the whole atmosphere of the camp changed. It did have a very definite effect on our survival.

T: From your description it…the better days as it were, were those first ones at Camp Casisang.

D: Oh, yes.

T: And it only got progressively worse...

D: That’s right.

T: As time went on. Thinking of both of those Philippines locations, I’m thinking about the war that was going on the whole time you were prisoners. What kind of news did you or could you get about how the war was going on outside of your own little world?

D: All we had was what the Japs were telling us, which was that Chicago bombed, New York all bombed. They kept feeding us that line how we were losing the war. I guess maybe we almost were for a while. But of course, we didn’t believe a word of it.

T: I’m laughing about Chicago being bombed. Did you actually hear that on occasion?

D: Yes. Yes. That’s what [they told us.] Chicago bombed. New York all bombed. Yes. We heard that.

T: Well, that sounds a bit far-fetched, even then. Were there rumors going around about the progress of the war or about other things, that sort of made the rounds in camp?

D: Always. I think I mentioned that we lived on rumors. Rumors, rather than being a detriment, were real important to us because the only rumors that were expanded on were those that were good.

T: So it was up to the listener to sort of sift through the rumors and decide what was there and what wasn’t?

D: Yes. But then why not believe it if it’s good.

T: You sound like a, and your book too, kind of an optimistic person, personality-wise.
D: I think so.

T: How do you think that helped you or didn't help you as the years went on there?

D: Oh, I'm sure it did help. I never, ever gave up. From the very beginning when I knew that the war would only last six months at the longest until we got out, I never did. I was, I think I mentioned in the book, became very ill one time. That was the only time that I gave up. But I thought I was going to die from dysentery.

T: Right. That was from...was it the barley diet?

(1, B, 414)

D: Yes.

T: Yes. So you really feel you kept a sense of optimism, or a sense of somehow I'm going to get through this?

D: Sure.

T: Did you notice around you, were all people like that or did some men struggle with that?

D: I don't remember that we ever discussed negative things too much. I think that most everybody tried to stay positive. I'm not sure. I think all of my close friends, though, and the ones that I talked with every day, I think that we all were pretty well felt that we were going to survive, that we were going to get out of there.

T: Was that any more difficult, that sense of optimism, when you got to Japan?

D: I don't know. I think by that time we'd become pretty blah. I don't remember. We didn't ever give up. That's for sure. Then especially when we got to Japan in September of ’44, two months September, November, two months later, our bombers started flying over our barracks, as I think I wrote.

T: Yes. You did.

D: Of course then, within a couple of months of our arrival in Japan we became very optimistic because we knew. Then we knew positively what was happening.

T: Was there any fear, that you recall, that you might be killed by the Japanese out of retribution if they indeed were to surrender?

D: I don't think we thought about that. What we were afraid was the Americans were going to kill us.
T: Yes.

D: And they came close to it.

T: Yes. The treatment by the Japanese at Davao was qualitatively different, you mentioned. On a daily basis, what’s an example, a typical example, of how the Japanese treated you or others in kind of the daily routine?

D: We didn’t have that close contact with [the Japanese.] In Davao I became a cobbler, a shoe repairman to start with. So I didn’t really have any contact with them. Our officers were mainly the ones that communicated with the Japs. They didn’t come around on a one to one personal basis.

T: Now the work you’re doing as a cobbler or shoe repair or shoe making, was that considered by you or others better or easier duty in any ways than some of the other work details?

D: Oh, definitely. Yes. It definitely was. Easier.

T: Easier in what way?

D: The majority of the groups at that time were out in the rice fields, and I did have some experience out there which I think I describe, but...

T: Yes. It sounds like back-breaking work actually.

D: Oh, yes. Yes. It definitely was. And rather dangerous if some insects and sickness...

T: How did you manage to get the job on this shoemaking or shoe repair? It sounds like other people might want the same job.

D: I have no idea, now that you ask me. Me and one of my very closest friends who I didn’t mention before, Charles Bruce. He and I were the shoe repairmen. I did that for several months before they finally closed it down and then we ended up out in the rice fields too. But that was along toward the end of the Davao Penal Colony.

(1, B, 463)

T: What was the most, if you think about your time there, what was the most difficult job that you had, at least from your perspective?

D: I think the very worst that I...Are we talking Davao or Japan?

T: At Davao.
D: At Davao. The very worst was when we went out on this, a few of us, went out on this detail and we were cleaning up these fields of *rami*. That was the Filipino name for it. Or maybe the Japanese name for it. I don’t know. But it was—I think I describe that in my book too. These fields had grown up to, well, they’d almost gone back to jungle, and so we went in there and cleaned those up and it was back-breaking and there were snakes and insects biting. That was, I think, probably the most difficult job that I had.

T: That sounds, from your own description now and in the book, sounds pretty awful. It was the snakes part that finally got me. The insects you mention though—and insects have come up in conversations with other POWs of the Japanese as being just of all types and sizes and always around.

D: Yes. That’s true. And then of course the snakes were...this stuff was grown up to maybe six foot tall, and the snakes would be up in the top of those plants and so we had to be very cautious about running into snakes.

T: Yes. And those were different types of snakes as well, right? That you may or may not have seen before.

D: That is true.

T: How much were you bothered by the climate? I’m thinking growing up in Idaho and going to the Philippines, it could scarcely be more different.

D: I don’t remember the climate particularly bothering me. It was kind of like Arizona in a way, that the nights were cool or cold like last night right here in Yuma even though it’s supposed to get up to seventy today. It was down to thirty-seven last night. That’s the way it was in the Philippines. The nights were cold and we sometimes suffered from the cold. And not ever really from the heat.

T: Really? So from your perspective, it was more the cold nights that were bothersome.

D: That’s right.

T: Did it make a restful sleep more difficult?

D: Very definitely. And of course, mosquitoes were a definite factor there too. We had mosquito netting or you probably wouldn’t have survived. Still a lot of people, including me, ended up with malaria.

T: Now malaria was one of the illnesses that you...were there other things that bothered you consistently, health-wise?
D: I had this excruciating pain that would hit me right in the arch of one of my feet that would just cause me to roll around on the ground or on the floor or wherever it was. It was kind of in the back of my mind all the time that when’s that going to hit me again? But after we got out of there it never, I’ve never had any symptoms of it since.

T: So it was something that came upon you while you were there and hasn't bothered you since you left?

D: Yes. It was just like being jabbed in the arch of your foot with a sharp knife—that would be my closest description.

T: While at Davao or at Casisang, the whole time you were in the Philippines, in your own book you don’t describe yourself as a particularly religious person. I’m wondering what the importance to you of faith or of religion was now in a very different setting.

D: I had just married the love of my life. Just before I went over there. She was Mormon. And then we started out from Salt Lake City, Utah, the center of Mormonism.

T: Right.

(1, B, 517)

D: So a lot of our people were Mormons. A lot of the guys were Mormons. So I teamed up with them and made every effort to...I read their books which some of them had and I was preparing myself to become a Mormon, which was very difficult because I’d been raised to think that Mormons were the scourge of the earth. My own father. So that was my religion there. That wasn’t what I was raised. That wasn’t the way I was raised. But then, no, I wasn’t. However, I did always...well, I went to Sunday School as a youth. But then later on as I was growing up I didn’t participate in church or almost anything else.

T: How much did your faith or did a faith help you or not help you during the time you were a prisoner of war?

D: Oh, I think it helped. I think I mentioned along there in my book, that we had these little New Testaments that the Salvation Army had given us. For the lack of cigarette paper, those that were smoking used the pages out of it to roll native tobacco into cigarettes, and then whenever an air raid came, they got it out and were down in the hole reading it.

T: You mentioned cigarettes, and as a non-smoker in a quite different era, some of your descriptions of the value of cigarettes were mind-boggling.
D: Yes.

T: Can you talk about that a bit? They seem to have acquired a value well beyond what one might expect.

D: It was the most valuable commodity we had. Especially in...well, all along. After they became scarce. But in Japan, as I think I mentioned in there, the guys that were starving to death, would trade their food for cigarettes. I attributed my survival, which I am a little ashamed of, or possibly my survival, for the fact that even though I had smoked from the time I was—my dad let me smoke when I was seven years old. So I had smoked, I never was a heavy smoker, but I did smoke until I got involved with this Mormon girl, and of course smoking was something they didn’t believe in, so I quit smoking. But we still got an issue of cigarettes in our Red Cross packages—which were very few and far between. But we could trade cigarettes for food. That’s how strong the nicotine habit can be for a guy come thumping down the hall with his legs as big as large stovepipes and can barely walk, trying to trade his ration of food for a half a cigarette or whatever he could...

T: You did some business with cigarettes. You mention that in your book, and you just alluded to it now. Really, I guess from that perspective, made a pretty decent profit as it were.

D: I’ve got a picture of it right here on the wall in front of me. A newspaper article where I had this chromatic harmonica—which I’m going to play in special music in church tomorrow.

T: That very same one?

D: Not the same one but exactly the same, but not the same one.

T: Because that was one of your possessions...

D: No. I think I wrote in there that I traded that to a guy for food and cigarettes.

T: Which you then turned around and...

D: That’s what got me started. That’s what gave me a bankroll.

T: Yes.

D: No money. But cigarettes.

T: That’s right. You traded that what you called one of your most prized possessions for cigarettes and food, and essentially, then as those cigarettes became scarce, traded those for more food.
D: That’s right.

(1, B, 577)

T: Yes. Was that what you were referring to a few moments ago when you said you were a little ashamed of how that worked?

D: Yes.

T: And in a situation like that, why would one be ashamed, perhaps?

D: Well, here was a guy that you knew or maybe you didn’t know, but he was a fellow American that was about to—you knew that he wasn’t going to survive. He was on his last gasps at the time he was trading his food for cigarettes. There wouldn’t have been anything I could have done to save him. But it makes you feel a little ashamed that you were living off of somebody that was dying because he didn’t have any willpower.

T: Now within the small group of friends that you had, that wouldn’t have been something that would have occurred to you to do. To make those kinds of trades with one of your close friends.

D: Oh, no. No. That’s right. When I think of it, sitting right here at this moment I wonder why I did it at all, but doggone it, hunger and cigarette habit are two things that are hard to combat. I think of these people over there in these countries where they keep having kids and they know that the kids are going to starve before they’re born. I can’t imagine those people even having sex because that was the last thing that came to our mind was sex. And here we were a bunch of young American boys.

T: You mentioned that in your book too. It just almost completely disappeared. That whole...

D: Oh, yes. We didn’t talk about sex. If the subject came up it, switched to food real fast.

T: (laughing) You said in the book, it always got around to food.

D: Always. That was the main subject. When you’re hungry, your number one goal was something to eat.

T: You know, you mentioned kind of, in your own experience, kind of feeling a little bad about maybe some of the trading you did. As you looked around and observed other men, did you see people maybe displaying behavior that was maybe below the level that they wanted to be? Maybe doing things that wasn’t quite right in the real world?
D: Oh, yes. Certainly. I don’t know. I think maybe I mentioned guys... the damn Jap would throw down his cigarette butts and maybe an educated American would, they’d dive and fight for it. And the Japs would purposely do that to, they’d throw their cigarette butt on the ground and then kind of laugh at these guys that were fighting over it. But that tobacco. You just can’t believe until you’ve had the experience that I had the power of nicotine. So I can certainly sympathize with anybody that finds it almost impossible to quit.

T: Were you ever a smoker after the war?

D: Yes.

T: So you reverted back to that.

D: I smoked until 1976 and then I quit. I was smoking a pipe. I was out on the farm. Smoking a pipe. I planted pipes all over that farm. Losing them. Then about a year ago I decided, well, I’m eighty years old, eighty-two, eighty-three. I enjoyed that pipe. Something else is going to kill me besides that pipe. So I started smoking it again. Not much. Never smoke in the house. Never smoke in the car. Just sitting around with nothing else to do and I light up the pipe.

T: That’s a nice philosophical way to look at life actually, if you’re already eighty years old, it’s probably going to be something else.

D: Well, I have cancer down my prostate so that’s probably going to eventually get me. However, it’s not bothering me particularly now, and at eighty-three going on eighty-four, well, I’ve already outlived my life expectancy by six or eight years.

T: A pretty healthy way to look at it, Mr. Shaw.

D: I’ve had a couple other writers that have interviewed me and I caution them. I don’t think you’re going to run into this problem, but I’ve cautioned them that I once in a while read a book written by somebody that I was with most of the time and they, even as bad as the treatment was by the Japs, they exaggerate it. I’ve read several extreme exaggerations of the treatment that we got. How bad it was.

(1, B, 655)

T: Of how bad it was...

D: I’m not saying that it wasn’t bad...

T: Right.

D: When I first got out and people would say, “How was it?” Or maybe they’ll still say, and I said well, I have never heard or read anything that couldn’t have
happened, but then I just know that some of the writers exaggerate the treatment. I know that it's exaggerated because I was there.

T: Yes. And that's another part of the value I think of some of the work that the project I direct does, is to sort of collect as many of these kinds of these conversations as possible, to sort of lay another kind of record out there and say well, there's that, but there's also these testimonies, dozens of them, that say something else.

D: Of course, you read my three interviews with Shinyo.

T: Yes. I was reading through your book and they're not in the table of contents and all of a sudden I get in there and here's pages without numbers. And here's Robert Kirker, and then there's Don Gillen, and Hayes Beliso, and right in the middle there and I thought what a neat source for me, in a sense, because it's three other voices that I can look at.

D: Yes. At reunions I recorded those on video, and then I didn't have any other means of doing it, so then I recorded the sound off of the video onto a tape recorder and then I typed it from the tape recorder and it's word for word. I didn't embellish that or change anything.

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

T: Do you remember, if you could think back to before you went to—and the ship you took was the Canadian Inventor, was that right?

D: That's right.

T: I did a little research on that as well. When you, before you boarded that ship, did you have any kind of gut feeling yourself about what this experience, what was in store for you?

D: No. Not really. We didn't know for sure what was happening. I guess we had a pretty good idea that we were headed for Japan, but I don't remember that they indicated that.

T: That you were going to Japan?

D: Yes.

T: Were there rumors or was there knowledge to you or other men about past groups that had been selected for being sent to Japan?

D: Well, we knew that some of our people had gone to Japan early, out of the Philippines. Not too long after we got in prison camp, probably within the first few
weeks, they picked some people and took them to Japan. They were in Japan the whole time.

T: Do you recall thinking about, visualizing for yourself, going to Japan and thinking whether that might be an improvement over what you had in the Philippines as far as conditions or whether you thought just the opposite? Whether this would probably be not a particularly good move.

D: I don’t remember that we even, that that even came into our mind. What was in store for us. I think we were pretty dulled by then.

T: Almost an acceptance of whatever it is?

D: Whatever came along. Yes.

T: Was that your personality in general? Would you describe yourself that way? A person who kind of accepted what came along?

(2, A, 19)


T: Is that a strength as far as the conditions you faced?

D: Yes. I would say so because if you were fighting it without any accomplishment, well, you were defeated all the time.

T: Yes. That’s true. Describe, from your perspective, the space on board the Canadian Inventor and what impression that ship made on you.

D: We were put down in the hold. We had, of course, we’d just gotten off of these two different ships that—when we came from Davao. I think we probably covered that.

T: Yes.

D: Where we were jammed into those two ships coming up from Davao. Although we were only on one of them for one day. Never did figure out why they unloaded us in Sabu and then left us set there for a few days and then loaded us on another ship for a day into Manila. Now where were we?

T: Actually just getting onto the Canadian Inventor. So what this means is that getting on a ship that had a bad condition so to speak, was not something new to you. So in a sense, you could kind of envision what this was going to be like.
D: Yes. It was an improvement as far as space was concerned. Whereas before there wasn’t even room for everybody to sit down at the same time. When we got on there we had a space. I mean, we had a place to lay down or sit.

T: So, in a sense, you were packed in as it were, but not as tightly as previously.

D: That is right. Yes.

T: Now you mentioned in your own book, *The Foot Locker Fifth*, that it was a while before that ship actually sailed out of Manila Bay.

D: Yes. I don’t have the book right handy, but I think we boarded on the Fourth of July and we didn’t sail for—I don’t remember how many days before we sailed. But they were assembling a convoy and as soon as the convoy was put together to their satisfaction I guess, then we sailed.

T: The men on board the ship were men you had been with at Davao as well?

D: Yes.

T: Does that mean that sort of organizing yourselves, self-organization in a small area, was made easier by the fact that people knew each other or not?

D: Oh, yes. We had our close friends that were with us. So that was definitely an advantage.

T: I’m trying to imagine being in a tight area like that with hot weather and minimal supplies. Did some people handle that situation better than others?

D: Oh, yes. Yes, they did. Definitely.

T: How about yourself? From your perspective. How was that to sort of day after day, to sit and really not even be under way yet?

D: Oh, I accepted it I guess. I don’t remember. Some people went a little berserk. I had one of my very best friends as a bunk-mate when we got on that ship. I just don’t remember what we did to pass the time away. Talk about home and food, I guess.

T: Yes. Because there was nothing...you weren’t even on work details now, so it was...

D: No.

*(2, A, 60)*
T: The waking hours were simply spent sitting, I suppose.

D: That’s right. That’s right. We could go up on deck.

T: Could you estimate how many men were on board that ship?

D: I think that’s documented somewhere, but I’m not just exactly sure right off. Everybody that came from Davao that they felt was able-bodied was on board that ship. So if we started out just doing a little mathematics in my head...there was 2000 of us there at one time, and then 750 plus ten, 850 went down to what they called the Lesang detail where they lost most of them. And those that had died. I’d guess probably between 800 and 1000, but there may not have been...well, now wait a minute. Then anybody that...I left some of my friends there. Going to see one of them tomorrow, I hope. That wasn’t able to travel so he stayed there at Bilibid Prison.

T: Now, about the journey which, as you mention as well, ended up taking quite a long time. It was stops for this and that. You mentioned once coming under attack by American submarines.

D: Yes.

T: How did that impact the people in the hold there? Yourself specifically, or those around you? To know what was happening.

D: I can’t remember that we were particularly pleased, because if they had torpedoed us, well, we’d have been dead I guess. We weren’t quite ready for that yet.

T: Were you aware of that then? In a sense, of knowing that if the submarines were able to hit the ship that you were probably all going to go down with it, or a good number.

D: Yes. Yes. They had depth charges. I don’t think they had them on board our ship, but some of the escort ships at that time—at the time that we were attacked or they thought we were being attacked at least, we had escort. They were the ones that were dropping the depth charges, and of course, the depth charges were terrifying to us because we were down in the hold of the ship, and it was very noisy and vibrating from the depth charges that the Japs were putting out.

T: The sound must have resonated through the metal of the ship below the water line.

D: It certainly did.
T: Boy! And I'm moving from one thought to another. In your book you mentioned not only that, but also a typhoon a couple of days after that. From your perspective, which of those bad experiences was the worst, the typhoon or the fear that came with the submarines?

D: I think probably the submarine. Yes. I think probably because that was something that was going to happen immediately if it happened at all.

T: How long did that typhoon actually last as far as the effects of that storm?

D: How long?

T: Yes.

D: As I wrote in the book, they had three boilers on board the ship and we had already lost one. Then when the typhoon started we lost the other. So they couldn't even steer a course. So all the escorts left us. We were out there by ourselves and just rolling in the troughs of the waves. Of course, we were down in the hold of that ship and you could see the water a mile high right out through the covering of the hold. Then, I think I mentioned in the book, when we tried to go to the bathroom, which we only did every twenty, thirty days because of the lack of food, well—they couldn't cook. I think I mentioned that in there.

T: Yes.

(2, A, 110)

D: It was open pots on the deck with a fire under it was how they cooked, and they couldn't cook for days because you couldn't even keep water in the pot. So they had a box hanging over the rail of the ship and if you had to go to the bathroom or had to try, you crawled down over the rail and hung on out there on that box.

T: For dear life, I suspect.

D: For dear life is right (chuckles).

T: And that's humorous in the way that you describe that. In the many things I can envision as I read your book, and you have pretty detailed accounts of things, and I try to close my eyes and envision that one, and that one just makes me want to laugh and just cry at the same time. I just can't possibly imagine that. On smooth waters it sounds bad, and it sounds, well, just beyond horrific in rough seas. It must have been a relief to you to get off that ship.

D: Oh, it was. Very definitely. Yes. It was a relief to us to dock, I'll tell you.
T: Now according to your account, eighty-three days from start to finish on board that ship. Had you lost people along the way?

D: Yes. Yes, we did and they were buried at sea. Yes.

T: Was that illnesses or lack of food? What finally, actually got the people who did die, because you mentioned at Davao that had pretty much stabilized.

D: Yes. Well, if you were weak to start with and then you go out there for days without food, not even enough to survive on hardly, well, unless you were in pretty good shape, you didn’t make it. Although I don’t remember that we lost a lot of people off that ship. We had people that would go nuts. I don’t know. I sometimes wonder if they didn’t throw them over. I’m not sure about that.

T: So some people, the mental strain was simply too much.

D: Right.

T: How did that sort of manifest itself? How could you tell that somebody had literally gone over the edge?

D: Oh, they’d be raving maniacs. Making a lot of disturbance. Which makes me wonder if they, if maybe the Japs...I don’t remember that they did, and I wouldn’t accuse them of it, but it certainly wouldn’t have been above them to get them out for their own benefit.

T: Were the relations between the prisoners on board, I mean, with...it seems that tensions would be higher. Did people manage to get along pretty well or were there difficulties between the prisoners themselves?

D: No, not much. Not much. Amazing that there was very little thievery and I don’t remember any fist fights or anything like that.

T: So although things were tense, that having a little more space than you had in those previous ships, may have contributed to that.

D: Yes.

T: Well, when you got off the boat, off this ship in Japan, it’s not the tropics anymore. When you did get off that ship, did you come into contact with Japanese right away?

D: Immediately.

T: In what capacity?
D: First, I think I described that we were covered with bedbugs and lice and whatnot from that ship, and they ran us through spray nozzles like a herd of cattle. Then immediately they took away everything we had. We threw everything we had in a pile and then they gave us back—it wasn’t particularly cold at that time, because they gave us back a pair of shorts and an undershirt if you had it. Then they started close order drill in Japanese. Right then and there. That was harrowing because if you didn’t follow the commands, which some of them couldn’t, they would ram you, and then they would march us right out to the—this area was kind of a slag pile from a mine or from a smelter, probably. Kind of a black gravel, sand type thing. They would march us with Japanese commands out right to the edge and then they’d give us reverse, whatever. I don’t remember the commands. I used to know them all. Right at the very edge. And you kept going until they gave you the command to come back. So they subdued us right off the bat when we got in Japan. I mean within hours, immediately.

(2, A, 178)

T: Was that, even in your imagination, was that not what you had expected when you got there, or had you not really expected anything?

D: I hadn’t expected anything. Had not the slightest idea what was in store.

T: Did people talk at all about...as I imagine people might do with lots of time to sit and think. Gosh, what’s going to happen to us when we get there? To Japan.

D: No. No. Not that I remember.

T: But what did happen was this kind of, to pick that up again, almost like militarization of the prisoners by the Japanese, in the sense of forming you into a marching unit, the way you describe it. Almost like Basic Training.

D: That was just right off the very first day that they did that. Then we went, as I remember, we went to the barracks that had been constructed for us that was right there on the edge of the ocean or the bay. So we went to our barracks and from then on everything was in Jap commands. Our tinko, which was our count, I think I mentioned that in my book. Put some of the guys in the same spot every time because that’s the only—they couldn’t remember how to count. So we’d always put them in the same spot so that their number would always be the same when we were counting off.

T: So they could learn that. Because otherwise you had to count off in order, and if your position changed you...

D: That’s right.

T: You had to know the right number.
D: Yes. And it wasn’t that complicated, but some of the guys just couldn’t get it, or they were scared or something, but they just couldn’t follow. And if they didn’t, they’d knock them around a little bit. So...

T: How did you do? I mean, you were a POW of the Japanese for several years. How much Japanese did you end up picking up?

D: I was in command of a detail, as I had mentioned. The honcho of a detail and everything... So this detail, I marched it out of the camp in the morning and we goose-stepped in front of the guards and did a right face or left face and then marched to our job. But on the way, we stopped at a shrine and did left face or whatever it was. Doffed our hats and bowed to the east, or the sun, or whatever it was, and then back. Then marched on to the detail itself. That was all in Japanese by my command.

T: Does it amaze you now that you learned so much of that, in a sense, those commands or words?

D: No. You had to. It was a matter of necessity. Now, some of the guys actually picked up some Japanese. But I really didn’t. The only Japanese that I knew was what I had to know. We always said the most beautiful word in the language was “yasame,” which meant stop and rest.

T: That’s one you still remember.

D: Yes (chuckles).

T: Now, when you got off at Moji, you were transported by train to the first location where you stayed for some time, right?

D: Is that what I wrote?

T: Yes. You landed at Moji and it was not too long before...

(2, A, 230)

D: Oh, that’s right. Yes. We landed there. So then you’ve corrected my memory. Because we landed there and they gave us a box lunch and we loaded on the train, and it wasn’t til we got to Yokkaichi that this business of the close order drills and all that stuff started.

T: And you were at Yokkaichi pretty quickly after getting off the ship. Is that right? I mean, you didn’t stay at Moji all that long.
D: No. No. I think probably the same day or something. I think we caught the train right off the bat.

T: So Moji was just a place to land and then move out.

D: Yes. It was just a seaport, I guess.

T: When you saw the Japanese countryside there at Moji or at Yokkaichi or on the way if that was possible, did the physical surroundings make any kind of impression on you as ugly or beautiful or anything?

D: No. No. It didn’t. No. They marched us when we got to... I’m trying to think of where it was where they marched us downtown and the people didn’t show any animosity toward us or anything else as far as that goes. I don’t remember that they—they were just people gawking at us and us gawking back, I guess.

T: Do you remember them visually observing you? I mean, did the Japanese...

D: Well, I’m sure to them I ‘m sure it was an oddity, but I don’t remember any...like I say, I don’t remember any animosity toward us or...

T: I know from conversations, some POWs of the Germans had described local civilians throwing rocks or verbally abusing them as they were marched through towns, and this is not something that you recall from your experience with Japanese civilians.

D: Not at all. What little contact we had with—that is with the general public. Of course, we were in contact with civilian workers for the entire time that we were working in Japan.

T: Was that at Yokkaichi and Toyama?

D: Yes.

T: Were those just civilian workers who had been there prior to your arrival?

D: Yes.

T: How closely, for example, at Yokkaichi, and you mentioned at Yokkaichi you worked at, was it a fertilizer plant?

D: Yes.

T: First, what kind of work were you doing there?
D: Of course I was in charge of the detail, and it was a commercial fertilizer, a mixture of different ground up rocks. Like phosphates or nitrogen or whatever it was. I don't know. Probably not nitrogen. But phosphates, I would guess. It was ground. They did have a mill that ground this stuff up into a fine powder. Then our job was to put the—we had these little pushcarts. So we put in so many shovels of, or so many carts of one thing and then so many carts of another, and we put them in this oven. Put that stuff in the oven-type thing. Then they introduced sulfuric acid, if I'm not mistaken, and the stuff cooked. Then after it cooked it was supposed to be pushed out of this oven slowly with a hydraulic press, and then there was scrapers that went around to scrape the stuff off. Well, they didn't work. It was always either too hard or something, so that was a big job, was digging that stuff out of these ovens. Then after we got it out of the ovens, then it went on a conveyor belt. I think I described that. Down into the warehouse and then dumped out on the floor, and then there was a bunch of gals there that filled the sacks, these straw sacks, and tied them. Then, fortunately, we didn't get in on carrying those sacks because I don't think we could have done it.

(2, A, 304)

T: It sounds like dusty, dirty work.

D: Yes. It was. And as I said, being the honcho, I worked twice as hard as some of my men because we had a contract and we had to fill it before we could get away. Besides that, if there was any problems they reprimanded me, not the guy that was causing the problem.

T: So in a sense, you did have a responsibility for those people and what they were doing.

D: Yes. I did. I did.

T: How does one get to be honcho of a detail?

D: You've got me. They picked me. I didn't pick them.

T: Seemingly at random, Mr. Shaw?

D: I just don't know. But that's an interesting question. I don't have any idea how they picked me. Our command didn't pick the honchos, so how they did that, I don't know.

T: And once you were the honcho it wasn't a...I don't get the impression it's a position you could politely decline or refuse.

D: That's right. Nor was it an honor.
T: Did it bring you any benefits, extra food ration...

D: None.

T: So you’re talking about a lot of minuses here and really no reward or return.

D: Yes.

T: How many men were you responsible for? In your detail.

D: On that particular detail I think there were maybe twenty.

T: And these were all American POWs?

D: Right.

T: Did you find it difficult to, in a sense, be responsible for people or to have to worry about their actions, behaviors, or work output?

D: I was probably in better shape than average, and so I was able to do more than the average too as far as that goes. I can remember names right now of people that I wasn’t very friendly with afterward because of how they left me holding the bag as the leader, as the honcho.

T: So in a sense, they weren’t working as hard as they might have for the benefit of the group?

D: That is right. That is right. Nor did they have any particular concern for me. As long as I was going to do it, well, let me.

T: That sounds like a potentially disruptive or unpleasant situation.

D: Yes.

T: Was it at the time as well? Did you find that it caused difficult situations from time to time between the men, or between you and the men?

D: Not that we carried along, but I definitely resented it and I probably demanded better from the guys that were under me. I’m sure I would have.

T: The work that you were doing there at Yokkaichi, were you on different details or was this the only one that you were on during your time there?

(2, A, 371)
D: The only one I was on. Yes. There were different details there, but that's the only thing I was on.

T: Did you work every day?

D: No. I think we had a day off.

T: A regular day off?

D: I think we had a regular one day off. Probably Sunday. I'm not sure.

T: During your time there, did the number of hours you worked per day stay pretty stable?

D: Yes.

**End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.**

T: ...getting up and going to the plant as it were almost as a shift worker? I mean, doing the same thing every day at a normal time. Punching in, punching out.

D: Yes. See we were working side by side with Japs. Jap civilians. Of course, our guards by that time, is what we called stick guards out on the detail. All they carried was a stick with—and they were civilians. All they carried was a stick shaped like a sword that they could whack us with if they decided to. But then, of course there was military not far behind. Not far away all the time. But then we were working right side by side with these Jap workers who were on the same job we were.

T: Talk about that. That seems like, in a sense, a surrealistic image of the Japanese being your captors on one hand but your coworkers on the other.

D: Well, of course they had been doing what we were doing before we got there and so they...we were doing the dirty work, but they were there each day and we got acquainted with them and tried to converse with them. I don't remember they ever gave us anything to eat, but they didn't have that much. I always remember they always stopped and had their lunch with a little rice and tea or whatever it was, and they smoked these crazy little pipes with what we called monkey hair, was what we called the tobacco which was... And they'd sit around during their break and smoke this little pipe. And we got along with them as far as I remember. Now, some of the stick guards we hated.

T: Really? So there was a difference between, in a sense, your Japanese coworkers and these stick men or stick guards.

D: Yes. That's right.
T: How much were you able to converse or to communicate in any way with these Japanese coworkers?

D: As much as we needed. There was a young man that, we called him “Junior,” that was—I can see his face now—the big boss of the place; he could speak some English, this guy, and he was nice to us as far as that goes. He never did, this young man, never did abuse us in any way. So we could converse with him. But then, [because he spoke English] we got our thoughts exchanged between these guys we were working with.

T: The stick men you mentioned are another category. Who were they exactly? They sound like guards walking around to monitor work output.

D: Oh, they were. That’s exactly what they were. But they didn’t carry guns. But they did have authority to reprimand us. That stick was what they used. Of course, if you had ever fought back or anything, there were gun guards close by.

T: Which suggests that when they did use the stick, rightly or wrongly, you had little choice but to take it?

D: That is right.

T: Were they there to monitor you and the Japanese workers?

D: Probably. Probably. I don’t think they...well, just like the women. They were young ladies and I think that they were sympathetic to us. In fact, a couple of times they slipped us little sweet rice cakes, so they were sympathetic to us and we were working in fairly close proximity, but we didn’t even make an attempt to talk to them because that was definitely out.

(2, B, 421)

T: And did they tell you that or did you just sense that?

D: We knew it. I don’t remember [if] they told us. We knew it without being told.

T: I’m wondering kind of in a larger sense, during the couple years you were a POW you had some very negative experiences with Japanese guards or captors, and what you’ve described here as not unpleasant interactions with Japanese civilian workers. Are you able to, in a sense, draw a picture in your mind of how you feel about the Japanese based on those kind of wildly divergent experiences?

D: Well, do you remember in my book where I described after we got out?

T: Immediately after we got out?

D: Yes.
D: And we were swimming with them, and riding the train with them, and catching rides with them out on the... It’s a wonder they didn’t...I’m surprised they didn’t eliminate us. You would have thought they would have hated us so bad that they would have killed us or something out there. But there didn’t seem to be that much animosity on either side. Immediately. And I mean, I’m talking immediately after. The next day after we got turned loose. So at least the war was over.

T: Is Japan a place that you've visited since 1945?

D: No.

T: And have you ever had any desire to visit Japan?

D: I did at one time when I heard how they were ripping us off with prices. I lost any desire unless somebody else was paying the bills.

T: So it may have entered your mind, but you never actually did go back.

D: No. Never did.

T: How would you describe the way you feel about the Japanese today?

D: I used to feel better toward them than I do now. And it has nothing to do with being a prisoner of war but I find them to be very abrasive when you get around them, like in Hawaii, which I’ve been over there three times. Or wherever they are. And there’s lots of them around you know.

T: Yes.

D: They almost act egotistical to me and that has nothing to do with, as I say, with my POW experience. Because I feel the same way towards some other minorities too.

T: So here’s, for example in Hawaii, years or decades after the war you actually come into contact with Japanese who may not even have been born in 1945.

D: Oh, yes. Right.

T: That’s interesting. You mention in your book, on a different subject, that hunger became a larger and larger concept.

D: Yes.

T: Is it that the type of food was different or the amount was different? What made hunger such a larger concept suddenly after the Philippines?
D: I think hunger is probably one of the strongest desires there is. If you're hungry, I think it overshadows almost anything else.

T: Would you describe it as yourself being hungrier in Japan than you had been at Davao, for example?

D: No. No. I don’t think so.

T: But it seems that the rations, that is what you were actually being given to eat, changed once you got to Japan. Is that right?

(2, B, 465)

D: Yes. It did.

T: And it was barley suddenly. Lots of barley you said.

D: Yes. We started out with rice, and then pretty soon we were on a steady diet of barley. And then when the war ended we were strictly on beans. Red beans.

T: So the diet changed...

D: Yes.

T: Over the approximately one year you were in Japan.

D: That’s right.

T: As far as caloric intake or the amount of food you needed, did it stay the same or did you find you were getting more or less along that year?

D: I think it stayed about the same.

T: So you were hungry, but from your perspective, you and other people around you weren’t starving.

D: I think everybody was starving, but I’m small, five foot seven, and was raised, as you probably read in the book, wasn’t raised with a silver spoon in my mouth, so I think that those two factors were a great advantage to me. To be small and have been raised during the Depression and knew what hard knocks were.

T: That’s interesting. So your childhood around Berger, Idaho, may have helped you in the long run.

D: Yes. Definitely.
T: Did you think about that at the time as well? Thinking that, you know, I can handle this because of that.

D: Yes. Because we had people in there, especially reserve officers, that were probably college graduates and—in fact, they were. I think in most instances, college graduates, and they probably were born and raised in either luxury or with everything they needed until all at once, suddenly they’re plunged into this environment, which in some instances, I already knew of.

T: On a different subject, how much were you able to pick up rumors or news, what have you, about how the war was going in the Pacific when you were there in Japan?

D: I didn’t pick up anything. However, they did concoct a radio. I’m sure you’ve run across this in some of your other interviews, haven’t you?

T: Yes. Radios seem to pop up in the strangest places.

D: And I wasn’t aware that there was a radio and when I—having gone into electronics to a degree since that time, I don’t believe (chuckles) some of the descriptions of how they built this radio.

T: Is that right?

D: Yes. It doesn’t come to my mind right off, but some of the descriptions of this radio, as far as I’m concerned, were impossible. I’m not saying they didn’t have one that worked.

T: Sure. But you weren’t...you didn’t have one nor were you privy to one.

D: No. That’s right. And there wasn’t ever anything. I don’t think even alleged, in Japan. This would have been in the Philippines.

T: So in Japan there was no news coming, as it were.

D: None.

T: Does that mean that the rumors stopped or got thicker?

(2, B, 507)

D: Oh, better.

T: Better rumors.

D: (chuckles)
T: Because there's nothing to base them on, right? What kind of rumors made the rounds? Were there popular topics?

D: Oh, yes. It was always mainly exchange of prisoners.

T: Boy, you know, I'll tell you in doing these interviews that is one that almost everybody mentions. That they heard something from somebody that there's going to be an exchange.

D: Yes. We didn't have any bad rumors. Gosh. We didn't want to listen to any bad rumors.

T: So they were good ones.

D: Certainly. They weren't true, but they were good.

T: Now you're a smart man and you had heard lots of rumors. Did you still believe them or did you find yourself...do you think you just wanted to believe them?

D: I wanted to believe them. Yes. I wanted to believe them. I think I described in my book, in this one detail that I was on, we saw there was this ship out in that bay and we decided that it was a white ship and we could see red crosses on it. I mean, I think we really saw them there even though they weren't there. But it was so far in the distance that if somebody said they could see a Red Cross on it, well why not? Then of course we exaggerated on the rumor to the point that we thought we were about to...I think we actually, oh, maybe deep in our heart we didn't, but then, why not? Why not believe it?

T: As far as piecing together ideas about how the war was going, by early 1945, B-29 Superfortress bombers were beginning to bomb Japan. When you were at Yokkaichi did you see or hear any of these bombers?

D: Oh, yes. I think I describe that in my book. See, we got there in September. In November of 1944 they started coming over. They weren't necessarily B-29s. They might have been. But they started coming over in large numbers at night. Then we were right across the bay from Nagoya, which was an industrial center, and so they were bombing Nagoya. So then the next morning when we'd go to work we could see the fires and the smoke and whatnot, but we weren't allowed to look in that direction. If they caught you looking in that direction they would whack you one.

T: So they kept you, in a sense, trying to put blinders on you to look the other way?

D: You did your looking out of the corner of your eye.

T: Now your job at the fertilizer plant and your quarters were both in Yokkaichi?
D: Yes.

T: And I'm thinking of geography. It is on the same bay, so you could see Nagoya across the water there.

D: That's right.

T: Was Yokkaichi itself ever the target of bombers while you were there?

D: Not while I was there. But later I guess.

T: Did you piece together that if the Americans are bombing Japan things are probably going fairly well?

D: Oh, yes. Definitely. From then on we were very optimistic. We were optimistic, I think probably whether they would do away with us or not. Probably came into our minds a little more. A little stronger than the thought had ever been before.

(2, B, 555)

T: So you mean, as your overall feeling of optimism about the outcome of the war increased, so did your concern with what the Japanese might do to you?

D: I think, yes. But it wasn't real strong in our mind.

T: So it was there, but not something you could worry about from day to day.

D: That's right. Yes.

T: You've mentioned more than once you're a person who sort of accepts things, and I imagine that worrying about what the Japanese might do to me every day could be—that could drive you right into the nuthouse.

D: Oh, yes.

T: So with Yokkaichi not being the target of bombers, from reading and listening to you, the most terrifying moment might have been the earthquake.

D: Yes.

T: In Idaho, is that earthquake country?

D: No.

T: So was this a new thing for you?
D: Yes. Well, no. We had earthquakes in the Philippines. So that was the first experience I ever had with it. With an earthquake. But then we didn’t have any buildings there or anything. But I can remember an earthquake and looking out and seeing the palm trees being whipped back and forth. No damage to us.

T: This earthquake in Yokkaichi, was it stronger than that one?

D: Oh, yes. It was...well, they had this huge, high—I don’t know how high the chimney was that had been there for forty years, I think. Something like that. Since it had been built. And it shook the top off that. So it was the strongest earthquake they’d had in many, many years.

T: Now, in your book you mentioned that you were at work at the fertilizer plant when the earthquake hit.

D: Yes.

T: Had you been given any kind of training or directions of what to do in case of earthquake?

D: No.

T: So how did you decide what to do?

D: I decided immediately to get out of the building, because we were in this big warehouse and, of course, it was a creaking and a cracking, and so it became obvious that the best thing to do was to get out of the building. I may have been following a leader too, because all the Japanese and everybody started running out of that building.

T: So they knew it was time to get out.

D: Yes.

T: From the way you describe it in the book, the time at Toyama there, or at Yokkaichi, was one that you had some physical problems as well.

D: That was one of the times that I thought my days had ended. I think I said that this roof came down and fell on me and hit me across the leg, and then I was already kind of halfway down into the crack in the earth which was right on the—we were right on the beach. Everybody else was running for a barge that was out on the water. Why, I don’t know. I guess because the earth was kind of opening up and whatnot. Everybody ran out and got on that barge, including me, after I got out from under the stuff. I ran over and got on the barge also. Then immediately thereafter
the Japs moved us to high ground because they expected a tidal wave or whatever it is that happens.

(2, B, 604)

T: Yes. Tsunami comes generally after the earthquake. Right. And was that the case? Did a tidal wave come?

D: It didn't happen, but they moved us up to high ground. But then we had aftershocks for days after that and I was probably more terrified of the earthquake than anything. And then, even after I got home, or maybe even to this day. Here in Yuma we have a little tremor once in a while. The earthquake, still, would probably terrify me more than anything else.

T: Boy, that experience really stuck with you then.

D: Yes. Yes. I don't ponder about it, nor do I worry about right here in Yuma sitting here on a superfault. I don't worry about it, or I wouldn't come here.

T: Sure. But when you're reminded of an earthquake with a tremor or something, you can flash back to that Japanese experience.

D: Yes. Or sometimes things happen that alarm me, you know, just something happens that things are shaking a little bit it seems like. So that was the thing that stayed with me to this day.

T: Did the earthquake damage the fertilizer plant to the point where you couldn't work there anymore?

D: Yes.

T: Maybe you can’t make the connection, maybe you can. Is that what prompted the Japanese to move you out of there?

D: I doubt it, because it wasn't long thereafter that these details were moved out of Yokkaichi and they already had barracks, these compounds built and barracks built for us.

T: Is this at Toyama?

D: At Toyama.

T: To remind me, when exactly did you move from Yokkaichi to Toyama?

D: June of ’44.
T: So it was, gosh, you were at Yokkaichi about nine months then.

D: From June until September.

T: From September ’44 to June of ’45.

D: No. No. We didn’t go to Yokkaichi until June of ’45.

T: To Toyama, you mean.

D: I mean Toyama.

T: So the Yokkaichi time would be after when you got off at Moji...

D: Yes.

T: Until June of ’45.

D: Yes. It would be September until June, and Toyama June to September.

T: When you got to Toyama was the group moved en masse, that is, all those who had been at Yokkaichi were packed up and moved to Toyama?

D: No. No. In our group there was only 150.

T: Who were moved.

D: That were moved. We discovered after the war that I think there were three camps in the area. We, apparently, were the first group that was moved out, but they must have moved other groups, probably of 150, very soon thereafter. Otherwise I would have been aware that they had moved other groups out.

(2, B, 654)

T: To wrap up the Yokkaichi period, you mentioned food, and the work, and the Japanese, and the earthquake. Safe to say from what I’m hearing, the earthquake was the most terrifying thing that you faced there.

D: At Yokkaichi, yes.

T: On a day to day basis, what did you find most difficult? Was it the quarters or the men or the food? What would you say really bothered you most on a daily basis?

D: Oh, I don’t know. Probably being cold. Probably been the most miserable experience of Yokkaichi.
T: That’s a completely new experience after the Philippines, isn’t it?

D: Yes. We never did get warm. We didn’t have enough food. As I think I mentioned, we slept in piles.

T: Yes.

D: To get warmth from each other.

T: Yokkaichi was…yes, the winter must have been just completely different than the Philippines.

D: Oh, yes. We had snow there. Not much, but light snow.

T: After tropical conditions that must have been a shock.

D: Yes. And then we didn’t have…well, I don’t think they could have given us enough clothes that we could have kept warm because we didn’t have the food to produce the body heat.

T: So you were behind the eight ball in that respect as well.

D: Yes.

T: The move to Toyama. Toyama isn’t all that far really from Yokkaichi. Yokkaichi and Nagoya. Better conditions for you, or not as good?

D: Oh, it was new. I wasn’t honcho of a detail anymore. I had a job. I think I may have mentioned in the book, that after we got there, there was a bunch of weeds inside the…well, right out on farmland they’d built this wooden wall around the area and then built the barracks. There was lots of weeds inside there, and we used to go out and eat those weeds. Gave everybody that participated, gave us the runs. In fact, it was a weed that I had eaten before, cooked. That was lambsquarter, I think is what we call it. I don’t know. I guess conditions were a little better there than...

T: You said it was new quarters, in a way. They just built these out in the middle of a field, I guess.

D: That’s right. That’s right. It was just right out in the middle of a—whatever they had been. Rice paddy or whatever it had been.

T: Here you’re working in a steel mill.

D: Yes.
T: Now not being the honcho of a detail, you mentioned that right away. Is that a relief for you?

D: Oh, yes. The job I had was firing a coal stoker. That was just on my own. Breaking up lumps of coal and shoveling it into the stoker.

T: It sounds easier than the way you described the work at the fertilizer plant.

D: Yes. Definitely.

T: Now, were you working about the same number of hours per day and days per week?

(2, B, 719)

D: Yes.

T: So the workday hasn’t gotten any longer or shorter from your recollection here.

D: No.

T: And you weren’t at Toyama all that long. A couple of months. Did the food situation improve or stay about the same?

D: About the same because, as I mentioned, when we were in Toyama we went from rice or barley to beans. So we were three times a day, or whatever they were feeding us, probably twice a day, and it was beans. It was not that bad actually, as far as food value.

T: No. Actually the beans, when you think about it, would be better than the rice, wouldn’t it?

D: Yes. Yes. Probably as good as anything they could feed you for one item.

T: The guards you had at this facility, at the actual camp where you lived, civilians or military?

D: They were military.

T: And the treatment that they gave to men, and you included, about the same as what you received from military guards in the past?

D: Yes. I don’t remember they bothered us. We didn’t give them any reason to.

T: In reading your account, and also some others, you had the terrifying moment of the earthquake at Yokkaichi. You had the terrifying moment of the firebombing
attack, and you dated this exactly: August 2, 1945. If you could describe that a little bit, as really how that... because I’m...

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

T: ...whether you survive this or not.

D: Of course, we were aware of the air raid warning system they had there. If there was the possibility of an air raid, they started blowing sirens, and then if they anticipated it was going to be in our area, then they started blowing the short blasts. That wasn’t the only time that we had air raid warnings with short blasts, but that was the only time that we got, well, we got bombed by B-29s flying over, just dropping a bomb here and a bomb there, but that was all in the daytime because they couldn’t touch them, you know.

T: Yes.

D: But this was at night, and so we had already dug these three holes that were for fifty men apiece. We did that immediately when we got to this new camp. Dug these holes. It was just a square hole that would hold fifty guys. Probably six feet deep. I don’t know, don’t remember what it was. Then they ordered us—it seems like it was about ten o’clock at night they got us up and made us go get in those holes. There was nothing happening. Pretty soon then the long wailing sirens. Then pretty soon the short blast which indicated that it was going to be in the immediate area. And then pretty soon they had searchlights on the planes. So then they started coming over and they were in a V formation of three and they were, I think they were possibly B-24s and B-17s, maybe.

T: So you could see the planes yourself.

D: Oh, yes. Well, first with searchlights, and then from the fires. The fires were so intense that we could see every airplane. We’d watch them until they—because they’d be off to the side with no danger to us because they’d be mainly over the town of Toyama. But then pretty soon we were right at the edge and three would go over, and then the next three would move over a little more, and then the next three. The pattern was a little more toward us. Then pretty soon they were over the top of us. And they dropped bombs in our compound. Little canisters of...

(3, A, 30)

T: The incendiary bombs.

D: Right.

T: So in a sense, you could not only see this and hear it, you could sense the bombing pattern getting closer and closer to where you were.
D: That's right. But then all of this time, these bomb cases were...then the wind was just this very, very intense firestorm to where the flames were right over—it was like hell must be, because the flames were right over the top of our camp and these bomb cases were going through the air just (whistling noises wwww, wwwwww, wwww) you know, and these Jap guards stayed up on top. We'd say, "Come on, get down here with us," and they wouldn't do it. They stayed. Never once did they ever take cover. They stayed up on top and took whatever was going to happen. None of them were hurt that I remember, even though those cases landed in our compound as well as a few canisters.

T: It sounds as if, even listening to you describe it, sounds like a harrowing, not even a harrowing, worse than a harrowing experience. I mean the earthquake was one thing, but this bombing... What thoughts went through your mind as you're laying there? Because you're completely powerless.

D: Oh, yes. Yes. All you could do was sit there and watch until they got over the top of us. Then we'd stick our—at least I did—I'd stick my nose in the dirt, which wasn't going to help me any, but... (chuckles).

T: I guess that's all you can do. I mean...

D: Yes.

T: You can only burrow down so far I suppose.

D: That's right.

T: When the sun came up in the morning, were those fires still burning in Toyama?

D: Oh, intensely. Yes.

T: From your vantage point, and in a sense, lucky for you that the camp was slightly on the outskirts of town, I guess.

D: Yes. Definitely.

T: How long did those fires burn, from your vantage point?

D: I think I wrote there that when we went to work the next morning, back to the steel mill which was probably a half a mile, and it was quite badly damaged, the steel mill was. Now, your question again.

T: If you could not only see the effects of the fires, how long do you remember them burning?
D: Yes, that's what I was going to say. I think I wrote this, that we were the only thing left in the whole area. Every other little building, every little farmhouse, as far as we could see was gone. Was burned. Probably set on fire from the intense heat, I would guess, rather than that they were actually hit with any of the canisters.

T: Were you able to see any of the people that were remaining from this destruction? Any of the Japanese civilians?

D: Of course, the people at the plant that we went to. We went back to the steel mill and they immediately put us to work trying to get a firebreak back under cover, because I guess they dissolve in the rain. So we'd move them out of the burned out sheds and move them to a shed that still had some protection from the elements. Of course, that didn't last long because the end came shortly thereafter, you know.

T: Yes. So you did have to go back to work, really, the day after this happened.

D: Immediately after. Yes.

T: The way you're describing it, it doesn't sound like normal operations were really possible anymore.

(3, A, 72)

D: Oh, no. No, they weren't. I think I wrote in there that they burnt down the kitchen and we'd go in, and even though they told us not to, there was baked potatoes in there from the fires, and we'd go in and gather up those baked potatoes and eat them.

T: It's food, isn't it? The starch was probably good for you.

D: Yes.

T: It was really. This was August 2. It was only a couple of weeks later that the Japanese agreed to surrender. How did you and the people in the camp at Toyama receive the news? How was it delivered to you, in other words, that the Japanese had agreed to surrender?

D: We had an officer, American officer, by the name of Captain Stubbs. So then he assembled us and he tried to describe what the Japanese had told him; and they tried to describe the atomic bomb to him. But then announced that the war had ended on account of this atomic bomb. That isn't what they called it. I remember that they said something about that the people were covered with a white sheet; they were all right or something like that. They didn't know any more than we did.

T: But they tried to describe the effects of some weapon that had done this destruction.
D: That’s right.

T: Was this the Japanese speaking through an American interpreter?

D: It was our commanding officer that was relaying it to us. He had been informed by the Japanese.

T: I see. He had received a report, and was now telling the rest of the men.

D: Yes.

T: Did he also bring the news that the Japanese had surrendered? Or that the war was over?

D: Yes. That’s what it was. That’s what he was telling us, and that was why they had.

T: How do you recall reacting to the news when you heard that the war was over?

D: It just…it seems kind of dull. Really, (chuckles) you’d have thought that we would have been dancing in the street, but it just…kind of a dull memory in my mind.

T: Really? So in a sense, you almost expected yourself to have been happier than you were? Or more overjoyed?

D: I think we knew it before they told us, really. In the back of our mind. Just from what was going on. I think we pretty well knew. Well, the last day that we were over there at work. Here came these airplanes in low and we ran for cover. They had an evacuation plan there. The Japs did. If something happened. What we were supposed to do. If there was going to be an airraid or something while we were at the factory. So we were supposed to assemble and then we’d all go to wherever it was. Well, in this case, we saw these doggone airplanes coming in low and we just took off running. Then all at once we realized that they were ours. That was before we’d been notified that the war was over. So I guess it didn’t come as any, when the announcement was actually made, it wasn’t any surprise.

T: It sounds like it almost confirmed what you already expected.

D: Yes.

(3, A, 115)

T: Now it wasn’t right away that you got out of Toyama.

D: No.
T: I’m not really clear—how long were you at the camp, at the facility, before you actually were evacuated out?

D: There was an airport nearby and so they came in within a day or two or whatever. They came in in a C-47 and came to our camp. There had been an officer, a Navy officer, killed and the pilot injured when they were dropping us food out of a TBM and that crashed right near our camp. This C-47 came in to pick up the body and pick up this injured pilot. That was the first we saw American troops. Then they flew them out off of this airfield that was right—it was just a dirt field right near our camp. So then they were going to move us out in these C-47s. So then we moved from our camp down to the airfield. But we didn’t have any barracks or any housing or anything. We just went down there and we were there for, well, until our name came up. We were there for a few days.

T: So a number of prisoners talk of, several weeks even, remaining in their facilities before they were evacuated. For you it was much faster, then. Actually getting out of the camp and then out of the airport.

D: Yes. Yes. Maybe I had dates there. I don’t remember. From other peoples’ diaries. I think within two weeks of the end of the war we were out of there.

T: That intervening period where you were still in your camp or near the airfield but the war was over, did your feelings about the Japanese, or their feelings about you, change, or was there any contact between the two groups?

D: Yes. There was some contact. Of course, they started bringing us in food. So they were still there and they started feeding us. Bringing in food and feeding us. Then of course, the Americans by then were dropping food to us all over the place. All we did was sit there and get fat. When I got home, people couldn’t believe that I could have possibly been abused because I was fatter than I had ever been in my life. We just fattened up like a bunch of hogs.

T: You took a lot of calories in and were retaining them for a change.

D: Yes. That’s right (chuckles).

T: In your mind or the minds of others around you, was there any feeling of wanting to get even with the Japanese in those couple weeks before you actually left?

D: No. No.

T: So ideas of retribution weren’t something you remember.

D: No. No. Nor do I remember anybody else having any feelings along that line.
T: You’ve mentioned some not unpleasant interactions with some of your Japanese coworkers there, particularly in Yokkaichi where they seemed to be doing a job like you were, in a sense.

D: Right. Yes.

T: I want to skip forward. You talk in your book about going to Okinawa and the Philippines and San Francisco and making the trip back, and you’ve mentioned now sort of fattening up pretty quickly to the point where you physically began to feel better pretty quickly?

D: Oh, yes. Well, when the war ended, after I got over that one case of dysentery when I thought I was going to die, I don’t ever remember being sick again. So I was in good shape, comparatively. Very thin, but in better shape than average.

T: The people you were with at Toyama there, when it was clear you were going to be evacuated out, did you communicate to each other then about staying in touch after the war, or feeling a sense that these were people you had a close bond with or friendship?

(3, A, 176)

D: I don’t remember that we talked about it, but that’s what happened.

T: And that happened pretty quickly after the war, too, didn’t it?

D: I organized a reunion. We started out in Salt Lake, so the reunion was in Salt Lake. The first one that I have record of was in 1951.

T: Relatively speaking, that’s pretty quickly. Some of the other stories I’ve heard of people not really reaching out until the 1980s. So for you, it was on your mind not too long after the war to touch base with these people again or some of them.

D: That’s right.

T: When you got back to the States, and before 1951, a lot happened in your life judging by what you describe in your book. I wanted to ask, one of the things that had kept you going for many years was the woman who was in your life and that was Vaudis?

D: Yes.

T: And you say pretty squarely in your book there that, you said she had remarried and moved on, in a sense. Really, I’m wondering on a personal level, how did you come to terms with that?
D: I never have *(chuckles)*. I think I mention in there that she died a couple, three years ago, and there was some closure by the fact that she was gone, but always, it was always in the back of my mind. You’d think that I should have hated her, but actually that wasn’t the case. Still isn’t. Always in the back of my mind I’d fantasize once in a while that for some reason or other that we were going to get back together or something. I don’t know how to describe it. But it definitely affected me deeply for many, many years. There wasn’t a day passed that it didn’t come into my mind for years. It’s very dull now.

T: Can you say is it better that you didn’t know it when you were a POW?

D: Oh, definitely. Very definitely because that was… I said a prayer and said goodnight to her every night before I went to sleep for all those years. So if I’d known this… well, I don’t know, but I wouldn’t have been as determined to survive I’m sure.

T: You mention that sense of determination and having something to latch onto, and that being one of the things you latched onto when you were a POW.

D: Yes.

T: You did survive. Other POWs have talked about a sense of guilt, of wondering, trying to explain to themselves how it is they survived when other very good men did not. How have you processed that dilemma over the years?

D: I’ve read that over and over and sometimes I wonder if it’s kind of a… it’s been said so many times by so many people, I just wonder if some people think that that’s something that they should say.

T: That’s very insightful.

D: Yes. That’s not the case with me.

T: You don’t think about it, or you don’t...

D: Oh, it comes to my mind, but I don’t feel any guilt for the fact that I survived and they didn’t, because I couldn’t possibly have changed anything.

T: When you do think about your own survival, what would you identify as the main factors that allowed you to survive, or why did you emerge in August of 1945? What was important for you in that respect? Of why you survived?

D: I think Vaudis was an important factor because… mentally that was a very important factor because I didn’t have any other—my parents were both gone. I didn’t even have a home when I went over.
T: That’s right. That’s right. You didn’t.

D: Whenever I went overseas. So she was probably responsible for the fact that...and then as I mentioned earlier today, my size and my upbringing was the main factor why I survived and others didn’t. Then as I’ve written there, there were people that didn’t have enough willpower to keep from trading me food for my cigarettes, which I think I mentioned. I feel some guilt about [that], but the guys were doomed anyhow. Being tougher than average. That’s what it amounted to.

(3, A, 256)

T: More than once you’ve mentioned your own tough upbringing in Idaho there, as sort of giving you the kind of survival skills, in a way.

D: Definitely.

T: How much, in your mind, does luck come into it, ultimately?

D: Ah...probably the most lucky thing that happened to me was that I was scheduled for the Lesang detail and then was taken off the list for some reason or other. If I had gone, well, my chances of survival...I don’t know what the percentage is, but eighty-three out of...

T: Seven hundred fifty or something.

D: Seven hundred fifty is not very high.

T: Yes. That’s right. Because the guys from the Lesang detail were on the Shinyo Maru.

D: Yes.

T: Yes. That’s right. And that’s...so that’s luck.

D: And like I say, I was on the list, and then for some reason or other I was taken off and I don’t know why. Nobody knows how they chose the people to go or why, like me, I would have been taken off the list after I was on it.

T: So you can identify at least one case, specific case, where luck mattered.

D: That’s right. That is right.

T: In this period after the war, shifting a little bit, when you saw people you knew again, family, friends, how much did they ask you about your POW experience and how much did you tell them?
D: Told them whatever...it never did bother me to talk about it. So I don’t remember there being any...there’s more of a demand for me as a speaker now than there was then, really.

T: Yes. That’s interesting. Obviously, we’re sitting doing this interview today.

D: Yes. Then we’re leaving tomorrow for this reunion and I’m supposed to give a twenty, twenty-five minute speech over at the Ramada Express in Laughlin. It’s a veteran orientated place and they have a veteran’s museum and then they have a big show, free show, that they show every day. So I’m supposed to be the featured speaker on the second. That was just an example of the fact that it’s...I went to a school or two right off the bat.

T: After the war you mean.

D: Yes. But it never did bother me to talk about it.

T: So in a sense, had I come to you in 1950 for an interview like this, you would have been able to say yes?

D: Oh, sure. Sure.

T: Do you still talk to schools occasionally?

D: Occasionally, yes.

T: When you go to a school and you’ve got kids out there eighteen or younger, how do you decide, or how do you describe your experiences to them when they have no hook to put it on, in a sense?

D: Well, I really don’t have much leeway you know. The only thing I know to tell them is to tell them it as it was. It depends upon how much time they allocate. About how much detail. But then, of course, this thing that I’m going to give on the second, and the last speech I gave not long ago at Kiwanis, was the fact of how ill-prepared we were when we went into the service in 1940 and how we’ve definitely got to avoid ever letting our military get to the shape it was at that time. So that’s one of my main messages at this time.

T: So you draw a correlation between levels of preparedness then and now.

D: Yes.

T: Another question on the school groups, I guess. I’m thinking of like movies. There’s movies about themes. Sometimes they’re rated G. Sometimes PG.
Sometimes R. Do you filter certain details or certain events out when you talk to school groups? Is there almost an easier version that you can provide for them?

D: I never have gotten involved in anything that would frighten anybody. Anything about that. As I think I told you before, I’ve read books by people that I was with every day for four years and they embellish the details to make it sound worse than it actually was. It was bad enough. If you’re totally accurate, it’s bad enough, but then to add to it is... I think most of the stuff I’ve read, that has happened. Well, you’ve interviewed a lot of guys that were with me. Do you find that they have had a lot worse experiences than I’ve described?

T: What’s interesting is how people choose to describe the events that happen to them. It’s especially interesting when I can compare experiences, that is, yourself and Bob Dowding and Abe Sabbatini, who’s a guy that Bob Dowding... Do you know Abe Sabbatini?

D: Well, yes, but I didn’t know he was still alive.

T: He is. In San Mateo, California. I interviewed him in the same way, and that’s when it’s interesting. When I can really look at experiences that had a lot of overlap. They were both in Japan like yourself. And to see how people talk about, or remember, certain things and what level of detail. Bob’s experience, you’re right, parallels yours almost exactly.

D: Yes. He was at Toyama, wasn’t he?

T: Yes. He was.

D: Yes. We were together the whole way then.

End of Tape 3, Side A. Side B begins at counter 381.

D:...going to give over in Laughlin.

T: Oh, I see. So Bob’s not coming this weekend.

D: No. He’s not. He can’t come because of his wife.

T: Yes. I haven’t talked to him now in...

D: So I included twelve pages in the back of my book which was kind of his story. Then he wrote his own, so then the next printing that I had I did away with those twelve pages and added a little to the end of mine. But then when he wrote his book he sent it to me and I edited it for him as best I could. But then when his book came out, it wasn’t the same book that I edited because he went to a professional writer.
T: He did.

D: Yes. So it wasn’t his words.

T: It changes when it’s not our words and that, I think, is the strength of your book, is that it’s not filtered at all.

D: Yes.

T: It’s, in a sense, it’s your experiences, and when I read that book I can hear you talking, particularly because I know your voice now and I can link it directly to you talking. Bob’s book is good and I think it’s clear now, to me, that it was written after yours.

(3, B, 393)

D: Yes.

T: But it’s not Bob Dowding speaking. I’ve listened to him and that’s not him.

D: Yes.

T: Carl Nordine claims he kept a diary while he was at… was he at Yokkaichi or…?

D: Yes. Yes. He was with us. Went overseas with us and I’m not sure whether he went to Toyama or not, but he’s well up in years. He’s probably eighty-seven or eighty-eight or along in there. It would be worth your time, probably, to get with him. I’ve got my stuff in Idaho. I don’t have his address right now but you could…

T: You’ll be back in Idaho April 15 you said, approximately?

D: Yes.

T: Okay.

D: Yes.

T: Where does Carl Nordine live? Do you know?

D: In Wisconsin. I can probably come up with his address and I could email it to you.

T: Yes. You have my email address, right?

D: Yes.

T: Yes. Because it’s always interesting to layer these perspectives.
D: The fact, well, he was second quartermaster and all the food that he procured for us...I'd like to call him and ask him what he did with it, because I didn't remember getting any of it. Oh, he's a nice guy. I don't mean to say that.

T: Do you see him occasionally?

D: Yes. Occasionally, but he's not...I don't think he's in very good shape or he would have been to our reunion in St. Paul there because that's not that far away.

T: Yes. That's right.

D: But I'll get his address and I'll email it to you.

T: That would be swell. It's interesting to hear...the diary thing is something that comes up. There's a lot of...there's a number of published accounts of diaries and, of course, one has to wonder about things like that.

D: I think the name of his book...*We Fought With What We Had*.

T: How long ago did he publish that one?

D: Let's see. It came out about...I think about ten years ago. And I don't think it was ever reprinted.

T: I can find it through the library.

D: *We Fought With What We Had*. I'm pretty sure...if that's not the title of Bob Dowding's book, is it?

T: No. Bob's book is called...I have it upstairs, not downstairs.

*(3, B, 422)*

D: Then I gave you the correct title.

T: Okay.

D: *We Fought With What We Had*.

T: It's interesting to hear you say that you have always talked easily about this, about your POW experience. When you decided to write your book, did you rely primarily on your own recollections by putting those down and then testing them against...with other peoples' accounts before you published this?

D: No. No. The only thing that I used other people's diaries for was dates.
T: How did you decide...I mean, when you wanted to refer to other things, how did you decide what diaries or what accounts were valid or worth your while?

D: The ones that I used that I listed there they were all...like Stanley’s diary, it was strictly a date and just May 1 we got Red Cross packages, June 6 we were moved from so and so, but no details. Just dates and maybe a few words following.

T: Did you find yourself at all questioning your own powers of recall when you read something else that may have differed from your own memory?

D: No. There’s one thing that...of course, there are some things that other people, my close friends, can’t remember that I positively know were true. But then I wrote something in my book that in my mind I know it’s true and nobody else can remember it, and that was where I wrote about that they took fifty gallon drums and made those gas tanks and put them in the bomb bay of an old B-18.

T: Right. And no one else recalls that.

D: Then flew it to Australia. Nobody else recalls that, but I do. Now how could I come up with something like that because I would of never dreamed of doing that. I wouldn’t have stood there somewhere and said well, there’s an old B-18 they’re not using. The Japs are going to get. Why don’t we do what they did? So I think it’s true and nobody else remembers is.

T: It’s too far-fetched to be false, in other words.

D: Or there would be no reason for me to dream it up.

T: Right. Yes. And it’s too specific of a story to have been just imagined.

D: Yes. So I think it’s true and there probably isn’t anybody in the world anymore that could either confirm it or deny it.

T: Now some of the people who could confirm or deny things you’re going to see in the next couple of days here at the reunion. You mentioned that you’ve been having these reunions, you said 1951 was the first one. How have they changed over the years with what you do when you get together.

D: Talk. And that’s what we’ll do this time. Just talk.

T: Is that pretty much a constant in the fifty-plus years? Is that primarily what you get together for?

D: Oh, yes. Of course, when we started out, we all had kids so we entertained them. We had kids with us you know. So whenever the guys got together, we’d talk and
the women would go off and do their own thing. And that’s what we still do pretty much when we get together. Just talk. And it’s always nothing. We’re laughing most of the time that we’re talking. We aren’t digging up any of the horror of the experience. We’ll bring up a subject and then we’ll laugh about it. Mostly. You know.

T: How much of your conversations deal with common POW experiences and how much are things about news of the day or VA benefits or other things?

D: Oh, mostly our POW thing. We don’t talk much about the news of the day. I think almost all our people would agree that the VA and the government has taken very well care of us. I don’t think anybody has any complaints. Of course, we Jap POW’s feel we’re, generally speaking—I’ll ask you if you find this to be [consistent]—we have a feeling that we’re a different breed of cats than the German prisoners. Do you find that?

(3, B, 478)

T: Oh, absolutely. And I’ve interviewed about twenty of each and really, even on my own website now I divide them into two different categories. There’s very little in common. I mean the whole ideological perspective of the Germans and the Japanese was completely different.

D: That we would ever have a reunion together.

T: And why do you say that?

D: Well, I shouldn’t say that. I shouldn’t say that. But of all the...like I’ve had three of these reunions in my hometown, Twin Falls, Idaho, and it’s published that we’re having a POW reunion and never ever has there been a German POW show up. Nor would I go to one of theirs.

T: And the odds are that you must have POWs of the Germans in your area.

D: Oh, I’m sure we do. Yes. Yes, I’m sure we do.

T: Would you say there’s really a lack of points of contact between the two, or is there a little bit of hard feelings or antagonism?

D: I guess maybe, and I’m speaking for myself strictly, but I know that like in the ex-POW organization there was a German prisoner in there that helped our people too, but those guys were...some of those people that were in...just the fact that they were in a prison camp for maybe thirty days or maybe six months, and all at once they became entitled to one hundred percent disability or something. So I guess in my mind I have felt a little animosity toward them to some degree and I shouldn’t. I’m ashamed of myself to even mention it really.
What’s going to be the product of these interviews you’re having with me and others?

T: I plan to continue interviewing ex-POWs through 2005, and then to write a book based on the interviews [and I did! Long Hard Road: American POWs during World War II (2007)].

Once again, thanks for your time today.

END OF INTERVIEW