

Interviewee: Alf Larson

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 8 November 2004

Location: living room of Mr. Larson's residence in Crystal, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, January 2005

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, February 2005

Alf Larson was born 29 July 1918, in Orebro, Sweden. He came to the United States with his parents in 1922; the Larson family settled in Duluth, Minnesota, where Alf grew up. In 1937, he graduated from Morgan Park High School. Alf then spent some time in the Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota (1938-39).

In March 1939, Alf volunteered for the US Army Air Corps. In 1939, he was sent to the Philippines with his unit, with the 27th Materiel Squadron. Alf was here when the Pacific War began in December 1941.

Alf was among the thousands of American troops captured at Bataan in April 1942. He survived the infamous Bataan Death March and a short period at Camp O'Donnell, used by the Japanese as a POW facility.

Alf's POW odyssey (April 1942 - September 1945)

Clark Field, by Manila, May 1942 - June 1944. Construction work.

On freighter *Noto Maru*, transport to Japan, August - September 1944

Namachi, Japan, September 1944 - September 1945. Machine shop worker.

At war's end, Alf was evacuated to the United States, where he spent several months recovering in military hospitals. He was married in 1946 (wife Jane) and re-enlisted in the Army, 1948-54. Alf then attended college and worked as an engineer until retiring in 1982.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

A = Alf Larson

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is Monday, 8 November 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm speaking with Mr. Alf Larson at his home here in Crystal, Minnesota. First, Mr. Larson, on the record now, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

A: You're welcome.

T: For the record, and please tell me if anything here is incorrect. You were born on 29 July 1918, in Orebro, Sweden. You came to the United States with your folks in 1922; your dad and mom settled in Duluth, Minnesota. You went to local schools, and graduated in 1937 from Morgan Park High School, Duluth. Spent some time in the CCC in Minnesota 1938 and 1939, in March of 1939 volunteered for the US Army; you got into the Army Air Corps. In 1939 you were in the Philippines, with the 27th Materiel Squadron, and you were in the Philippines when the Pacific War began in December of 1941. Let me ask you, when the Pacific War began in December 1941, was that a surprise to you or were there rumors around that something was going to happen?

A: It wasn't a surprise because a good, a month and a half before the war actually broke out the Japanese were violating our airspace over northern Luzon. They were flying reconnaissance missions and so forth. And also we were flying combat missions around the island a good month before the war broke out. We didn't see anybody, but we knew they were there. So, no, it was not a surprise.

T: And so in a sense there were, it was building up to something.

A: That's right. It was a surprise that they hit where they did and how they did it because when we first got the news at breakfast on the eighth, which is the same as the seventh over there, we just couldn't believe it. But we found out in a hurry that it was true.

T: So in a sense, you didn't expect that particular date and that time, but that something happened wasn't all that surprising.

A: That's right.

T: You were captured at Bataan in April of 1942. Let me move to that, for our particular project. When the word came that troops were to be surrendered, what kind of thoughts were going through your mind at that time?

A: Well, for one thing I was kind of mad and disgusted, because I thought we could fight them a little bit further. But as it turned out it was probably the best thing that ever happened to us. Because our lines were broken, our troops were shattered. There was no cohesion whatsoever. It would have been a slaughter. But to top it all off when we were walking back from where we were first stationed, we were walking back to Mariveles. We stopped to rest at (***) and all of a sudden the earth started to shake. It was an earthquake. That was a typical thing to happen over there. But that was a good ending to our...over there.

T: When the word came to surrender, do you remember yourself being more angry or scared? How would you describe yourself?

A: I would say I was more angry than scared, because where we were which was quite a ways back from the line...because I had been up in the front lines until I was transferred back to this depot back there. We couldn't figure why we were surrendering because we were able to fight where we were. But as it turned out we were just a small little contingent. Like I say, King did the right thing because they'd have slaughtered us over there.

T: And you could figure that out later.

A: That's right.

T: What kind of physical shape were you in by early April?

A: Terrible. We were getting two meals a day, but the meals we were getting was what we call lugau, which is thin rice and very little meat. The only meat we got was what we could get out of the jungle. We ate the jungle, is what we did. In other words, anything that moved...when we first got there they told us watch the monkeys. What they eat, you can eat. If we saw a monkey, that's what we ate.

(1, A, 47)

T: That's jungle logic taken to its next step. So food was in short supply.

A: Right.

T: Had you been wounded in any way before you were captured?

A: No.

T: So you were hungry perhaps, but still in—

A: Right. And also I was in real good physical shape because, prior to the war... When I first got over to the Philippines the duty was from eight o'clock in the morning until twelve noon. At twelve noon they locked the hangar doors. You couldn't do anything if you wanted to, and the medics recommended that we lay down and rest because it was hot and humid. I tried that for a while and I got so doggoned lazy I didn't want to get out of bed. So I said that's it. So I bought an old bicycle. I pedaled all over that part of Luzon there.

T: What kind of impression did the Philippines make on you as you pedaled around?

A: When I first got there I thought I was in Lower Slobovia. I said, what the heck have I gotten into? But the longer I stayed the more acclimated I got, I guess you could call it. I started to enjoy it over there. Like I say, I met Filipino peasants out in the countryside when I was pedaling, and once you got away from Manila the attitude of the people was entirely different.

T: In what ways?

A: They were much more friendly. In other words, in Manila they were always looking for a handout. And they would come up and beg to you and try to sell you something. Out in the countryside they would invite you in. Never having seen you before, they'd invite you in for a meal or a drink of water or whatever.

T: So in a sense, you kind of were able to get a picture of the country and the people much more than just staying in Manila.

A: That's right.

T: A place you liked it sounds like, weather notwithstanding.

A: That's right.

T: Now when you were captured and first came face to face with the Japanese, I mean, here's an enemy you've been fighting, in a way. Suddenly they're the captor and right in front of you. What kind of an impression did they make on you?

A: The first group that came up there to us was infantry people. This one Japanese got a hold of .45 caliber pistol from someone. We had tried to destroy everything we had up there. Where he found that, I don't know. But anyway, he didn't know what the thing was all about. He shot himself, with an American .45. And we thought that boy, we're going to get it now because these guys will be mad. Instead of that they chatted like a bunch of monkeys and laughed and giggled and just hauled him away.

(1, A, 74)

T: Their own person.

A: Yes. And the officer told us...he could speak English. Good English, too. He told us, he says, "Get ready, because tomorrow morning we're going to move out of here. We're going to start. We're going to go back up to a prison camp."

T: Did they do any kind of questioning or interrogation of you when they first captured you?

A: No. No.

T: Any kind of searching or taking of your personal stuff?

A: They searched us as we walked on the road. Not when the officers were present. When they knew officers were present they would pat us down and take anything. Like if you had a wristwatch or rings or even gold teeth they would knock that out of your mouth. Gold. And take the rings off your finger. If they couldn't get it off they would sever the finger.

T: So the soldiers took a different approach than the officers.

A: That's right.

T: But you don't remember being questioned or interrogated, so to speak.

A: No.

T: The five day march back up north to San Fernando took a lot of lives. What do you remember most about that five days of marching?

A: The most vivid part of the—two things. The most vivid part of the whole bunch was the fact that we couldn't get water. The artesian wells were flowing right alongside the road up there, but they would not let us get water. But one of the most memorable things that I came across on the way was when we had stopped the night for camp. Camp was just lay down on the ground and sleep. They had dug a slit trench a little ways out from where we were. That's where you went to do your daily chore...duty. I had gone over there even though I couldn't urinate, because I had no water. But it felt like I had to. When I got there I tried and couldn't, and this American came and he was delirious basically. He squatted down to go to the bathroom and he slipped and he fell in. The Japanese made this group of prisoners that was there, that had dug the trench and that, made them fill up the trench with him in it. They buried him alive in the excrement.

T: Was the behavior of the Japanese towards the prisoners something that surprised you, or do you feel that you kind of expected this kind of behavior from them?

A: It surprised us that they were as brutal at times as they were. Not all of them were. But there were some that were...just took delight. One incident, we were walking up and I happened to be on the outside of the line. Because they tried to keep us three, four abreast if they could. This guy, they said he was in the cavalry, he was just swinging a bat and he caught me right across the upper part of my legs. It hurt like sin but I wasn't going to let him know that he'd hurt me. So I just kept right on walking.

T: And was there any indication why he was swinging that bat at people?

A: They didn't say [why he was swinging that bat at people] and nobody ever knew. And another thing that I did see, that I saw the aftermath of, where a tank had run over one of our POWs on the road. I didn't see it happen. I just saw the ragged aftermath of it.

T: Of the body laying there. Now, you said that they weren't all like that though.

A: That's right. There were some that would—I won't say they would really try to help you, but they wouldn't hinder you. Things like that.

T: So two, really two different types, and you never knew which you were going to get.

A: That's right. You didn't know who was what.

(1, A, 116)

T: How was food supplied along this march that you remember?

A: We didn't get any food until we got to the town of Balanga, which is actually just before San Fernando. At Balanga we got a rice ball. But from the time we left just outside of Mariveles and up to Balanga, we had no food. Now there were kitchens along the way and they said—the Japanese, we could see them eating—and they said that we were supposed to get it, but we had broken—they would make up some infraction like, they had searched somebody and found a gun or something. So that we weren't going to get any food. And we could see them eating on the side of the road there.

T: Talk about providing food, but then not do it after all.

A: That's right. They wouldn't.

T: Were you walking by yourself, or were you walking with people that you knew?

A: I was walking basically with people, a few that I knew. We tried to stay together.

T: And what benefits were there to staying together?

A: Each one would look after the other one if they possibly could. If something happened, if you got real weak or something, they would help him.

T: So in a sense, you were dependent on someone else almost.

A: That's right.

T: Who were you walking with? People that you still remember their names?

A: Let's see. I was thinking of this one fellow. This one fellow that I remember was Corporal Manzi. He was walking with us, and the night before we got to Balanga he lay down to rest. He took his shoes off. His feet were hurting him. And somebody, an American, swiped them when he was sleeping, so he had to finish the rest of it to Balanga, to San Fernando, on bare feet. Somebody swiped his shoes. And they left a pair there, but real small. He couldn't even get into them. Why somebody would want somebody his size...

T: So the necessity of needing or wanting a pair of shoes meant that someone stole from somebody else.

A: That's right.

T: What kind of condition were you in at the end of that march then? By the time you got to San Fernando.

A: Pretty bad, because we hadn't eaten. Our rations before the surrender was minimal. I wasn't sick with malaria or anything during the fighting or the early part of the prison, but a lot of people were. Like I say, I was just run down. I attribute the fact that I was even able to keep going to two things: I was in pretty good shape. That is, before the war. And also I had a little pocket Testament that prior to the surrender I would read occasionally. After the surrender when I saw what the Japanese were doing, I didn't want them to take it, so I took a piece of string and tied it to my skivvies and put it in my crotch. And that's where I kept it and they never did find it.

T: How long did you have that Testament?

A: I brought it home with me, but a number of years ago when I tried to look for it, I couldn't find it. I think what happened...I can't accuse anybody of it. We had our daughter and her family...had been divorced and they were living with us for a while. I think they saw this ratty old Bible and said heck, we've got new ones, so they... *(trails off)*

(1, A, 158)

T: Tossed it out?

A: I think so, because I never told them what it was or anything. And I could kick myself for that, because I'm sure that they would never have tossed it if... *(trails off)* I don't know if that's the case or not.

T: But it's not around anymore.

A: No. I have looked everywhere in the house and I cannot find it.

T: That's a loss. Let me ask you about faith. Would you consider yourself a person of faith when you went overseas?

A: Yes. I would attend church and that. I won't say that I was one of these ranting and raving types, but my faith was such that I believed and I didn't blame Him for anything. Like on the march and that, where people would say, why is He doing this to me? I didn't do that. Or another thing: a lot of people that hadn't been in church since they were baptized, if they were then would come and say, if you'll get me out of this I'll go to church every day twice a day for the rest of my life.

T: So you heard people talking like that.

A: Yes.

T: As a man of faith, how did you square what was happening to you on that march, for example?

A: Well, the only thing that I used to think was, He's got a reason for it and whatever it is he'll let me know. The only thing I asked of God was, let me survive the day if possible.

T: Did you find yourself thinking like that pretty much throughout your captivity?

A: Right.

T: Has your faith been, do you feel, different in any way since you got back from overseas then?

A: Well, no. I won't say it's different. I kept it up. Probably a little stronger. Because I've looked back and saw what happened. He's got a plan for me. Whatever it is I don't know, but... Another thing: there have been times when things have happened that I couldn't do anything about, so I'd say, Lord, I can't do anything with it. You take it. And surprisingly enough, it cleared up.

T: It sounds like your faith was a support for you while you were a POW.

A: It was. Absolutely.

T: And yet there were guys for whom religion was not something that they relied on.

A: That's right. In fact, like I say, there were people that...I don't know where they'd been the last time they'd been to church. It had been ages. And that little Bible, that Testament that I had, I got that in the Philippines from a chaplain at Nichols Field.

T: So different people approach this difficult situation in their own way, and for you your faith was important to you.

A: That's right.

T: Well, at the end of this five day march there was a boxcar journey.

A: Right. When we got to San Fernando we were fed there. We were given a rice ball, and then the next morning they put us on the train. These little boxcars were the ones they call forty by eight. Forty men or eight horses. And there were over one hundred of us packed into each one of those cars. You couldn't...we had people die in there, in the car, because, what they did, they shut the door but they couldn't fall down. You were wedged in there so tight that you couldn't fall down. If you had to go to that bathroom, which very few did because we had nothing to pass, you just went where you were. But anyway, it got stifling hot because the Philippines is hot anyway. And they shut the doors on us. It was unbearable in there. When we got up to Clark Field, at Angeles, a town outside of Clark Field, they stopped the train for whatever reason. I don't know. But they opened the doors and the Filipinos ran over and tried to toss stuff to us and the Japanese beat them out and then they shut the doors again. And then they didn't open until we got to Capas, up at Camp O'Donnell.

(1, A, 210)

T: And Capas is where you had to get off and walk to Camp O'Donnell.

A: Right.

T: It sounds like the train journey, although not as long as the march, was horrific.

A: Oh, no, it wasn't as long but we had people die, like I say, right in the car. Suffocation or whatever. When we got to Capas we would just have to hand them off.

T: What goes through your mind in a situation that sounds almost surreal in a way?

A: Like I say, I didn't dwell on it. I said, if the Lord's willing I'll make it. If not...

T: It sounds like you're the kind of person that focused on getting through right now and not worrying about the longer term.

A: That's right. On the march I never thought about tomorrow. It was always today. One step at a time.

T: Did you keep that attitude throughout the four years you were a prisoner as well?

A: I tried to.

T: So a focus on today.

A: Yes.

T: It sounds like if one thought about the future too far, it could get depressing.

A: That's right. That's why I got out of Camp O'Donnell. Because we had work details that would go out there and come back and say, there's ships in the harbor there to take us back. We're going to be exchanged or we're going to be repatriated and we're leaving and... It got to a point where I started to believe it. I said that's...

T: You started to believe the rumors.

A: Yes. So I said, I've got to get out of here. So I volunteered for the first detail that came up, and it happened to be Clark Field, which was the best detail in the whole Philippines. We had people come in from other camps after we'd been there that had gone to other camps and come to us and they said, boy, this is the best one we've ever had. We had running water, cold running water, so we could wash up if we wanted to. We had a roof over our head, because it was a Filipino constabulary barracks we had. Everybody was able to scrounge up a mattress so they had something to sleep on.

T: It sounds like you didn't know that when you volunteered for that detail.

A: No.

T: So that was a roll of the dice.

A: That's right. I just wanted to get out of Camp O'Donnell. Whatever it was, it couldn't be as bad as O'Donnell.

T: Talk about what was so bad about Camp O'Donnell. You were only there for a month and you were driven to get out, whatever the way.

A: There were no facilities whatsoever. The bathrooms was just a slit trench and the food was terrible, and this Japanese commander was playing hob with us all the time. Playing games like turning on and off the water. People were dying like flies up there. We had no medicine, no supplies of any kind. And if you went to the hospital, usually you were put in what we called the Dead Ward, where people were put to die. Like I say, that was bad. There were a couple of fellows that I knew, we got together up there. They knew I liked coffee. A couple of them didn't drink coffee. Now where they got these coffee packets from, D rations, I'll never know. But they gave me a couple of those up there.

(1, A, 259)

T: What was the most difficult thing for you about Camp O'Donnell? Was it the weather, the conditions, the food, or what was it?

A: Just the conditions up there. In other words, people were dying like flies up there. That's why the Japanese finally got rid of that camp. There's a memorial up there. I haven't got it here. There were over 1600 of them that died at Camp O'Donnell in just that short time that it was open.

T: It was only open for a couple of months, right?

A: That's right.

T: So you could see the conditions around you, and realized it was get out or risk dying.

A: That's right.

T: You volunteered for a detail that you didn't know anything about.

A: That's right. Whatever it was I kind of thought it can't be any worse than this.

T: As it turns out it was a good bit better.

A: Much better.

T: When you got to Clark Field, and you've mentioned that was a constabulary barracks that you were put into, so a real building with a roof and walls.

A: Right. The walls were just partway up and the roof would come out sloping down but there was always this opening around it. It was pretty airy.

T: Now what about the work details there? I know you were on a couple of different ones.

A: When we first got there [Clark Field] they had us cleaning up the area, because it had been bombed up real bad by the Japanese themselves. So stuff was scattered over. That's where we were able to pick up our mattresses and things. If we found something like that, we could keep it. So we were cleaning up the area. Then after we got through with that, then they had us doing whatever they wanted us to do. Toward the end we were quarrying rocks for...they were building runways on Clark Field. So we were quarrying rocks to make a base for them.

T: For the actual runway construction.

A: Right.

T: This cleanup when you first got there. The men that arrived, was it one group of men all coming from Camp O'Donnell that actually came at first?

A: Right. Right. There was about two hundred of us in this one detail and we all came down at the same time. Except the cooks had come down...about five of the cooks had come down earlier. So they had set up the kitchen for us.

T: So the Japanese had really planned this was going to be a POW compound.

(1, A, 292)

A: Right.

T: Now, did the same two hundred men, is that the group of men that you were there with for two years?

A: No. Because some of them got sick. Nobody died in our camp, but we had a number of them get sick, and when they couldn't work the Japanese would send them to Cabanatuan at that time.

T: And you would get replacements?

A: And we would get replacements, so that it was changing constantly.

T: Did you ever, yourself, get sick and have to leave?

A: I didn't have to leave, no. But I did get sick. I got malaria there and the...I thought I was going to die. There was no medicine. One minute I was so hot that I couldn't...I would gladly peel my skin if I could, and another minute I was so cold that no matter how much they piled on me...I couldn't do it. So anyway, I eventually got rid of it. In other words, it just...no medicine. No quinine or anything. You just had to sweat it out.

T: Did the malaria recur with you from time to time?

A: No. Not until I got back to the States. Then I got several attacks of it.

T: Did that gradually go away?

A: Yes. The only thing now is that I can't give blood, because I've talked to the Red Cross and they say since I had malaria they can't use it for transfusions.

T: Is that right? Even though it was decades ago.

A: Right.

T: No kidding. They probably don't get too many people at the Red Cross that say, I was a POW in the Philippines and had malaria. Let me ask about the work detail, this quarrying of rock and runway construction. What specifically were you doing?

A: I was never working on the runways. I was quarrying rocks. I was in charge of two...I was a staff sergeant at the time, so I was one of the higher ranking noncoms in the camp. They put me in charge of two barracks, and all that meant was there was extra work, because I had to assign the people their next day's duty. So that's what I had to do besides going out myself.

T: So the Japanese would come to you and say what they needed the next day, and you'd have to put people in different places.

A: The Japanese would come to our officers and they'd say, we need so many men on this and that and whatever. They would tell us that we need so many men for this one and this one. So that's we how we worked it. But they didn't come to us. They came to our officers.

T: And the officers then came to you as the intermediary, and you had to pick the number of men.

A: Yes. Right. Now what I did is—I had a couple people tell me that I saved their lives. One of them, he died here about two years ago, he got sick and I kept him on real light duty. The best duty was the kitchen, up in the Japanese kitchen. I put him on that thing until he got better.

T: So you had, in a sense, the power to decide where people worked.

A: That's right. But I myself, I never worked there. I always went out on the details.

(1, A, 344)

T: Was that a blessing or a curse to be able to pick where people went on duty?

A: I don't know. I guess you can say that you could help somebody.

T: You could also, I can imagine, be accused of favoritism.

A: They realized [there was no favoritism] when they saw [that] it wasn't one group of people that got it all the time. It wasn't one group, but they were the ones that were sick and it wasn't always the same ones. They themselves were the recipient at times. One time or another.

T: So you had to be careful to...well, to not show favoritism to different people at different times.

A: That's right.

T: How did the Japanese hold you accountable for those people? I mean, you're kind of a shift supervisor almost, in a way.

A: Right. I'll tell you, they had you...you were supposed to know where they [the other prisoners] were and what they did and what they were thinking. Two instances of it here. I had two men escape from my platoon. I didn't know at the time that they were going to go. I knew that one man was married to a Filipino, and another one had a Filipino girlfriend.

T: They were both Caucasians though.

A: Right. The two women in question finally got to work up there in the Japanese kitchen. They would meet them, see them on detail, because neither one of those two ever worked in the kitchen. But they would see them on detail, and some way or another they arranged when they would go. The first one was a fellow by the name of Flannigan. He was from Florida, and he just turned up missing one day.

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.

T: So Flannigan just turned up missing? He just wasn't there.

A: He just wasn't there. He hadn't talked to anybody about going. Anyway, the Japanese hauled us out there and put me in front of them and made me the scapegoat of it. [Because I was in charge.]

T: Because you were in charge.

A: Yes. The people that watch the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, this little shack that they built, they built one of those out there. Right in the middle of the compound. Right in the hot sun. I was there for two days. That wasn't too bad. I mean, I was able to survive that.

T: What was this shack like? Describe it.

A: It was such that you couldn't stand up. You couldn't stretch out. You had to be squatting the whole time. And it was right out in the sun. In the daytime it got hot as—

T: It was a metal thing?

A: Sheet metal. It got hotter than heck in the daytime and colder than heck at night. Like I say, the first time it was only two days, so I survived that and I was able to walk back to my compound. After that, they didn't bother me. Life went on the same.

T: Whatever happened to Flannigan?

A: We never knew. He must have gotten away, because I'm sure that he would have been brought back to camp, because there were other camps where people tried to escape and they were caught. They were brought back and executed in front of the people.

T: He was never brought back and you never heard anything.

(1, B, 400)

A: Never brought back. Of course, they said, we caught him and shot him. But we're reasonably certain they didn't. Now the second man who escaped was a fellow by the name of Taylor, and he was the one that had a wife. He escaped while he was on a detail. When they came back in—because you counted off in the morning and you counted off at night. When they got back at night, they were one man short. They had the people there, they kept them all night out there and they didn't know what was going to happen. Here again, the next morning then they called our officers and myself out and they marched us up to their headquarters. On the way up Captain Fleming, who was in charge of our camp, he says, "Well, let's show them we can die like men." So we all expected to be killed.

T: You really did? You figured that this would be...

A: We figured, all of us...because there were Captain Fleming and the medical officer and one other officer and myself. All of us figured, this is it.

They treated us humanely up there. Just questioned us pretty thoroughly. I guess they figured that we didn't know. What they did again, they put me into this little shack. This time for seven days. I would have died there if it hadn't been for this one Japanese soldier. He'd always get the midnight shift. From midnight until dawn. He was the ugliest guy you ever saw. He had buck teeth. Anyway, he had the kindest heart. He would let me have his canteen occasionally. Not every night, but occasionally he'd let me have his canteen and give it back before he got off duty, and

he'd also bring me a rice ball once in a while. Like I say, if it hadn't been for him I'm sure I would have died.

T: As sort of a subplot here, really the Japanese were very different as far as the way they treated you then.

A: Right. This guy, I don't know, he was a Japanese. He wasn't any...toward the very end we were getting conscripted Koreans and things. They were brutal. But this guy was...in fact, when we first got there we had front line soldiers guarding us. They were just strictly gung-ho. They didn't bother us, but they expected us to do what they said. Then as the war went on they would be shipped out because they needed them, and then we'd get more and more conscripts. The way the Japanese army works is that the top rank, he can beat up anybody that he wants. Then the next one down, he can beat up somebody below him, and finally it gets down to the peons and the only ones they could beat up on was us.

T: So sometimes they did, but in the case of this one Japanese who may have saved your life, he didn't.

A: That's right. He was very good.

T: The kind of different Japanese you met, some brutal and some not, how did that impact your kind of long term opinion of the Japanese? Even today.

A: The average Japanese, like I say, I have no quarrel with the Japanese. The civilians and that. My only gripe was against their higher ups. Like the people in the Mitsubishi and all these other compounds, because they really took advantage of us.

T: As labor.

A: Yes.

T: So in a sense, you didn't and don't harbor any real animosity against the Japanese soldier.

A: No. Here again, in Japan while I was working in the machine shop when we knew the war was over, the fellow that was guarding the two of us was a civilian. He'd been in the service. Here again, he was ugly as all sin and he had buck teeth you could eat corn off the cob. Anyway, after the war was over, he came up and got the two of us and brought us to his house and fed us rice and what have you, and I'm sure that he used up a whole week's supply of food for us. But he did it.

T: So you really had this dichotomy between some good and some bad.

A: And the way the Japanese rationale is...I worked in the machine shop. They gave you a gopher. One time he was standing there watching me, what I was doing and

he pointed and he said, "Hey!" and I tried to tell him to go, but this arm of the lathe came down, shattered his arm and the civilians that were there they thought that was the funniest thing. They laughed like mad. Didn't do a thing to...

(1, B, 449)

T: And this Japanese, this young kid.

A: Yes. So the other fellow and I picked him up and carried him up to their infirmary. Nobody tried to stop us. They just...we brought him up there. We never saw him again after that.

T: What did you think about people who act like that?

A: I don't know. I couldn't understand why they did this, because normally people feel pity for somebody that got hurt like that. That whole machine shop just burst out roaring with laughter.

T: Very strange. And the treatment you got on a daily basis from the guards there at Clark Field, was it something that you felt you had to constantly watch them or they were brutal toward prisoners or generally not?

A: As long as you did what they said, if you understood them, then they were fine. But a lot of times they didn't make themselves clear as to what they wanted, so they would hit people.

T: You too?

A: No. I never got clobbered up there.

T: So it was the people under you, in a way.

A: Right.

T: Did you have to learn Japanese or understand Japanese to deal with them?

A: They wanted us to be counting off. I can still count in Japanese. And water. They have several names for water. Basically, to me that was a dead language.

T: Could you understand it when they said something to you? A command?

A: No. I couldn't understand, but usually they would gesture and stuff and then you could interpret what they were trying to tell you.

T: I see. So you really didn't need to learn that much Japanese at all.

A: No.

T: Learn to count and a few key words.

A: Yes.

T: As far as the food they provided there... You were at Clark Field for two years. Did it stay pretty much the same, or did it change over time?

A: It stayed pretty much the same. The rice was a little bit thinner as time went by, but basically it was the same. They would pay us up there. If you were a noncom you got fifteen...in script, you got fifteen cents a week. The others got five cents. We couldn't spend it so, what we did, we pooled it and one time we had the Japanese buy us a caribou. They took this money in and gave it to somebody. I'm sure the caribou was worth far more than they gave him. But they brought it back and our cooks slaughtered it. We dug this pit in the compound and we lined it with rocks and had built a great big fire in there. Then when everything was hot they put the caribou in and covered it up. Then after a while, in a couple of days, we uncovered it and ate it. It was delicious.

T: So having meat was a rarity, it sounds like.

A: Very rare. In the Philippines, at Clark Field, I can't think of any other time that we had meat, except that particular time. The one time, just shortly before we left there, we got a Red Cross packet. There was a can of Spam in there.

T: How many times did you see Red Cross parcels?

A: Two. One in the Philippines and one in Japan.

(1, B, 485)

T: So two total.

A: Two total.

T: That's much less than the POWs in Europe frequently say they saw them. Did you know about Red Cross parcels and just realize you weren't getting them, or was this nothing you knew about?

A: No. We didn't even know anything about them until we got the first one. Then we had no idea that they were sending as many as they were over there, because they were being confiscated.

T: Yes. So that you were not getting...

A: No.

T: The prisoners. About two hundred guys you mentioned were there. How would you describe the relations between the prisoners themselves?

A: Good as far as...there wasn't much intermingling. When we got through working you were so tired you ate and then you went to bed. But other than that I can't think of any fights that occurred there in the camp or any serious arguments of any kind.

T: Did people tend to stick in little groups?

A: Right. Right. Cliques, if you want to call it such. Four or five guys would gravitate toward each other, and that's the way it was through the whole camp. That's the only intermingling, and there wasn't too much of that. By the way, after that second escape they instituted a ten man deal that if any one of the ten men escaped the other nine would be shot.

T: So they announced this, and you knew it then.

A: Yes. Now, in our camp after that there were no more escapes, so they didn't have to use that, but talking to some of the people in the other camps, yes, they did. They actually did follow through with this. Nine man executions.

T: This is conjecture, but do you feel that that really kept people from trying to escape?

A: Yes and no. In our camp you could have just walked out of the camp any time you felt like it. After dark. Because all we had was two strands of barbed wire around the whole camp. One guard was periodically walking. Not in a constant manner. But where would you go? If you didn't have outside sources to help you, you were a dead duck, because the Japanese were offering one hundred pound sack of rice for any prisoner that was turned in. And a one hundred pound sack of rice to the Filipinos at that time, that meant a month's food.

T: You mentioned the two guys that who escaped had connections.

A: That's right. One had the girlfriend, the other was married to one. And we know that neither one of these two were caught, because they were never brought to camp. Also, this Taylor that escaped, he joined the guerillas then. He was actually commissioned by MacArthur. Because he was a private first class and he had been in the 31st Infantry and he organized a group of guerillas in the Philippines. They were in contact with MacArthur through a radio and MacArthur actually elevated him to a lieutenant.

T: Did you learn this after the war?

A: After the war.

T: Does that mean that, on the subject of escape, that you never thought about it yourself?

A: There was no place to go. I had no outside connections.

T: Here you are, a six foot tall white North American. It would be kind of hard to hide.

A: You would have stuck out like a sore thumb.

(1, B, 526)

T: Yes. So even if you had wanted to blend in...

A: You couldn't. In Europe it was a little different, because they were basically the same stature and what have you that you were. And if you could speak the language and that, even if you couldn't, it was easier to get out of there than...

T: You could think about it there, I guess. In the Philippines you'd be...

A: Like I say, it would be like a red flare.

T: Yes. During the time you were there at Clark Field, when you got there at first, things were going pretty well for the Japanese. By the time you left, things weren't going too well for the Japanese.

A: Right.

T: Was it possible for you prisoners in that location to get any news of how things were going?

A: Yes, there was. When we'd go out on details there were always Filipino civilians doing something in the area there, because they kept them working there too. They would whisper to us that short time and they would tell us that...like the name of the islands. So basically we could follow right up. Shortly before we left they were starting to bomb in the Philippines there. Not at Clark Field where we were, but they were starting to bomb and shell the southern islands. And we heard about this. So we knew that they were getting close.

T: So there was scuttlebutt that was passed to you through Filipinos as you were on work details.

A: That's right.

T: Did that help as far as a spirit of optimism among the men?

A: Yes, it did. It really...Okay, unless something drastic happens we're going to make it.

T: Did you worry, yourself or the people around you, that if the Japanese did lose what would happen to you?

A: At the time no, but as it turns out we should have, because they had standing orders that if they invaded they were to kill all the prisoners that they had.

T: You didn't know that then.

A: We didn't know that. Even after I got to Japan they still had those orders. We still didn't know it.

T: Did you worry among yourselves not knowing that, but thinking, what would the Japanese do to us?

A: We didn't think they would. They had signed the Geneva Convention even though they weren't living up to it, so we were optimistic in that sense.

T: By the time you left there, you were getting news of the war coming closer to the Philippines and that was definitely a good thing.

A: Right. In fact, we knew when we got to Bilibid, we knew that the war was getting close, because there were wrecks of ships in the harbor there. They had been raiding up in the Philippines.

T: So when you left to go to Manila to get on the ship to go to Japan, you were able to see Manila at that point...

A: Oh, yes.

T: And figure out a little more how things were going.

A: Yes.

(1, B, 563)

T: You talked a little about the work you were doing there. You were partly a supervisor responsible for people, but you had to work every day yourself.

A: That's right. Just being in charge of the barracks and that, all it did was give you extra duty, because you had to work just like the rest of them and you had to assign everybody so you had that responsibility.

T: But you had to actually pull your weight work-wise as well.

A: That's right, because...just the fact that you were in charge of a barracks and the details didn't mean that you could stay in the camp. You went out right with the rest of them. In fact, when we were quarrying rocks, if you were lucky you got to a place where there were quite a few rocks and you could come in, because they gave you a quota to fill.

T: For the day.

A: Yes. This thing would be so long, so high, and so wide. You tapered it of course. When you'd got that done you went back to camp. If you were lucky, you could get back before dinner, and if not, you may stay out until twelve o'clock. There were times that we stayed out until twelve o'clock. I was right there with them.

T: Quota was quota, in other words.

A: Yes.

T: To quarry the rocks, literally, what kind of work were you doing with your hands?

A: Shovels. Digging in the dirt and the sand that was there.

T: Were there explosives that would loosen the stuff up or were you literally just digging.

A: No. You were the explosive.

T: So you were just literally digging with shovels and then piling that stuff in cars or on piles?

A: On the pile. Right alongside of where you were working that's where they were. The Japanese would...I don't know if the Japanese did or if they had the Filipinos come and get them, but we didn't bring the rocks back to the airbase.

T: The Japanese or the Filipinos did that.

A: Yes.

T: So you were literally just quarrying the supply of rocks.

A: That's right.

T: Did that work change, or was that something you did for quite a while?

A: That was toward the end there. Oh, about the last seven months. But that's all we did after that was quarry those rocks.

T: And how many days a week do you remember working?

A: Seven days a week.

T: So regular days off were not part of the...

A: There was no Sundays or any other day. The only time you had time off was if you were sick and the Japanese knew it. Now, they knew malaria and if you were injured. Other than that they would come, if this guy said I'm sick and couldn't go, they would come and look and if they didn't think he was sick out he went.

T: So that wasn't your decision to make if someone was sick.

A: No, that wasn't our decision.

T: So someone could tell you they were sick, but the Japanese would decide whether they really were or not.

A: That's right.

(1, B, 600)

T: Prior to that last seven months, what kind of work had you been doing specifically?

A: Just general cleanup work is all it was.

T: So that base was in bad enough shape that for a little more than a year you were essentially trying to put it back together.

A: That's right.

T: And what kind of different...was it kind of construction work, or more like just literally picking up the pieces?

A: Picking up the pieces. Because the Japanese, if there was any construction to be done, they did it.

T: I see. The actual building construction or laying cement or whatever.

A: You asked me earlier if I'd ever been interviewed. When we got to Clark Field they interviewed us there. What we could do. I didn't tell them that I had been an

airplane mechanic and an engineer. I told them I was a clerk-typist (*laughs*). You wouldn't believe how many clerk-typists we had in the Air Force.

T: So this was a way of hiding the skill you may have had.

A: That's right. There were some people that said, yes, I worked on the airplane. They actually worked on the P-40s that they had up there that had been damaged and they were trying to put back into shape. Of course, those people were exiled from anything in camp.

T: How do you mean?

A: Nobody had anything to do with them.

T: Why is that?

A: Because they were working for the Japanese.

T: Do you think they were working for the Japanese because they wanted to or they got extra perks or what?

A: They felt they would get extra perks. And some of them actually did get extra perks. But when we were getting ready to abandon Clark Field, they were kept there because they were operators. They all got executed.

T: Is that right? So the ones who had not collaborated but had helped the Japanese, they ended up killing them anyway.

A: That's right.

T: But that was a way that you prisoners kind of separated yourselves out. Those who were seen as helping the Japanese in some way were people that you kind of stayed away from or didn't have anything to do with?

A: That's right.

T: And yet you had to live among these guys.

A: Yes. They had to live with us. It was pretty miserable with them. They eventually got together as a group and they were in this area.

T: Did you see them, if you remember, did you see them as collaborators or more people that got stuck?

A: They were looked on as collaborators. Now, whether that's actually true or not I don't know, but the ones that had said yes, we can do this, we sort of isolated them. Shunned them.

T: Had there been a discussion among you prisoners, or instructions about if they ask you what you can do, don't you dare tell them?

A: No. Everybody just figured out what they could do themselves.

(1, B, 642)

T: So these poor guys, in a way, it sounds like they might have just been honest and got screwed for it.

A: That could be.

T: But it wasn't the majority of men anyway, it sounds like.

A: No. It was very few, I'll tell you. Very few.

T: But they didn't leave when you left.

A: No. They were kept on, because not only were they airplane mechanics but they were operators of machinery and things of that nature. They kept them there. Like I said, we know they were executed because the Filipinos, when we got back to Manila after the war, the camps there prior to being shipped back to the States.

T: So after September 1945.

A: Right. Then they would...we could go in town or whatever. We weren't supposed to, but we could. They told us that all the men that were there, they named them, got shot.

T: When you went back to the Philippines there after September 1945, did you look for people that you knew?

A: No. I stayed in camp most of the time. I went to this little town outside there one time and got a beer. That's when I met this one Filipino that I had met prior to the war and he's the one that told me about these people getting shot.

T: So somebody you had known six years ago or five, six years ago. How much advance warning did the Japanese give you that you all were going to be moved out of Clark Field?

A: They didn't. They just came back in one day and said, they told our officers that so many men would be shipped out tomorrow and then so many men would be shipped out a few days later.

T: So it was really just pretty much an announcement. Tomorrow some of you leave.

A: Yes.

T: Of the about two hundred of you that were there, how many left in that first group?

A: I'd say probably about 150. They kept fifty to shut down the camp. They joined us about probably a week later.

T: So by the time you got on the *Noto Maru* the people had all left Clark Field.

A: Right. With the exception of those that collaborated.

T: When you left, did you have any gut feeling that leaving was a good thing or this is not a good thing?

A: We got a feeling that this is not a good thing, because we knew the Americans and Allies were coming up the [island] chain [towards the Philippines]. If we had stayed there we'd have been liberated earlier we thought. But as it was we didn't know what to expect after we got to Japan.

T: Were there any kind of rumors among the men as you were leaving Clark Field about where you were going or what was happening?

A: No. The only thing they seemed to think...the rumor was we were going to Japan.

T: That was a rumor already.

A: Yes.

(1, B, 686)

T: How did that sit with you again in your gut? Good or bad?

A: Bad. Because I figured that it's just going to prolong this thing, and it did.

T: Yes. By more than a year for you. Now, before you got on the ship you ended up in Manila for a while at Bilibid Prison.

A: Right.

T: You'd been in a place for two years. Now you've shifted. What was Bilibid Prison like when you got there?

A: We didn't do anything there. They didn't put us out on details because they were expecting us to be shipped out. We made two dry runs to the ship before we actually left. For whatever reason, I don't know what, I'm sure that we would have gone if things would have been right, but I don't know if they were being bombed out there. I know there were submarines out there because...but we didn't know that until after we got going.

T: So there were no rumors about submarines before you left.

A: No. No. We figured there was something that was holding them up, because they would have shipped us out before. Anyway on 15 August [1944], the last time, we got on board and we left then.

T: You were in Manila Harbor. You mentioned a few moments ago, in Manila Harbor there was evidence that the Americans were around.

A: Right. You could see some of the hulls of ships out there.

T: Burned out or sunk or...

A: Sunk.

T: So it was clear that the Americans were able to inflict damage on these ships, or could bomb Manila.

A: Right.

T: Did you hear or see any planes when you were there?

A: No. We were there not too long. There was nothing going on at the time.

T: So you could see it, but you didn't experience anything.

A: No. Now whether...actually I'll have to be honest with you. I don't know if they did it in the harbor or if these ships had been damaged outside and came in and disappeared there.

T: But clearly war damaged ships that you could see there.

A: Right.

T: The *Noto Maru*, the ship you took to Japan, when you actually got down there and saw this thing, what kind of ship was this from your eyes?

A: Just a freighter was all it was. There were, in our group there was almost 1200 of us. Eleven hundred and fifty [1150] something and we were all crammed into this forward small hold.

[NOTE: *Noto Maru* departs Manila 27 Aug 1944, arriving Japan after eight days. 1,135 prisoners on board, only 1 death confirmed in statistics. Michno table, 315.]

T: All of you in one hold.

A: All in one hold.

T: Describe the conditions as you leave the dock there and get on the ship. How do you actually get into the hold?

A: Down a rope ladder. Up a gangplank and down a rope ladder.

(1, B, 732)

T: All of you down one rope ladder.

A: All went down one rope ladder.

T: That must have taken hours.

A: It did. I was more or less fortunate, because I wasn't the last group to get on, but I wasn't the first group by any means. The first groups, they were shoved back as far in the hold as they could get and the air there was...it just wasn't.

T: So you had your Clark Field group, and obviously it was only a couple hundred of you, so there were groups from other places.

A: Right. Right.

T: Did you see anybody on the ship there that you recognized from before?

A: No. Just a couple of the fellows that I was with at Clark Field. We all went down there. But other than that, no.

T: So here you are with a bunch of...mostly Americans down there?

A: All Americans.

T: All Americans. No Brits. No Australians.

A: No.

T: In the hold of the ship, you've got one hold with all the people packed in there. From your perspective, as you think about the way that hold was, describe it.

A: It was a dark dingy hole. The only light was in the hatch that we came down. I don't know what it was before, but it stunk in there. It probably was from shipping horses and stuff before.

T: So you could smell what was in there before.

A: Right.

T: Now you mentioned that people were packed pretty tightly. Was it enough to sit down or lay down?

A: You could sit squatted down. Pull your knees up and then the man ahead of you, he had his back against your pulled up knees and your back was against the other guy's knees.

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

T: So again, the conditions on the ship were such that you dared not lose your spot.

A: That's right.

T: You had people around you that you knew? People right around you?

A: Yes. A couple of people that I knew. Yes.

T: So going to the bathroom at all was losing your spot.

A: Just about. That's correct. Our bathroom consisted of one big wooden tub right down below the hatch, and the Japanese would lower it down and bring it up, and they weren't too fussy about when they brought it up either.

T: So you didn't want to be underneath it when it was being brought up.

A: Right. Now people that got really sick down there, they would hand them up to...they would be able to lay down close to the *benjo* bucket as we called it.

T: Did people get sick or take a dive health-wise down there?

A: There were people that got sick. At least there were some. Probably lack of air or whatever it was. I don't know. But there were some people that we kept—I say we—that were passed up and laid there in the more or less open spot.

T: As open as it got, apparently.

A: Yes.

T: And were you able to get up on deck at all?

A: The only time we got on deck was in Formosa. After we left the Philippines they brought us up on deck one time and hosed us down. They'd have a group of us go up and get washed and then go back down and the other group would come up. That's the only time we were on deck until we arrived in Japan.

T: So you spent the whole time of the journey basically down below.

A: Right.

T: So there were no toilets hung over the side of the decks of this particular ship like there were on some others.

A: No.

T: How do you pass your time in tight, stressful conditions? What do you do?

A: You just ignore everything. You just...everything is out of your mind. Just make your mind a blank.

T: How do you do that?

A: I don't know. It's not easy, I'll tell you. When I got to Japan I knew my name, rank, and my serial number. That's it.

T: It sounds like you turned your brain off in a way.

A: That's right. I turned everything off.

T: And does that mean that you really didn't talk very much with the people around you?

A: That's right. There was very little talking in there. The only time there was any noise on the trip from Formosa to Moji was when we were attacked. By submarines. We could hear the thuds, and the people that were Navy people said, that's depth charges. But all of a sudden there was a big explosion, and the hatch was open and we could see this light from whatever. So we figured that somebody hit an oil tanker. You never heard such a roar in your life.

T: Of the prisoners.

A: Yes. And the Japanese, they mounted a machine gun up there and closed the hatch.

T: Now knowing that other ships might be getting torpedoed, I mean two plus two is four. If that ship can get torpedoed, so could the one you're on.

A: That's right. In fact, I would say that most of the consensus of opinion was: hit us! Hit us! Get us out of this.

T: Get us out of it in what way?

A: Just get us out. We probably figured we would die, but it couldn't be any worse than what it was.

T: So for you the relatively okay situation at Clark Field had really gone downhill.

A: That's right.

(2, A, 38)

T: To the point where you kind of hoped that, or didn't care if the ship got hit or not.

A: That's right. In fact, I would say everybody was praying to hit us. *(with emphasis)* Hit us!

T: We talked about your faith earlier. Is your faith being tested here in a way?

A: I would say yes, it was, but even so my thought was, hit us. If the Lord's willing I'll survive, if not...

T: Boy, really to the point where you almost didn't care whether you lived or died.

A: That's right.

T: In tough surroundings like that, do some men handle situations like that better than others?

A: Yes. Some people just went completely bonkers with that.

T: Do you remember specifically seeing or witnessing that around you?

A: Not too much. In fact, we were lucky in the sense that it took us twenty-three days from the Philippines to land in Japan. Now that's a long time. But the ship behind us, it took them forty-five days. Two people that were in my platoon, a fellow by the name of Moldonado, and the other one was Gonzalez; Moldonado was

one of the ones that they killed on board that ship, because he had slit people's throat and was drinking blood.

T: On the ship behind you.

A: That came after us. And the reason I know this, I ran into Gonzalez after the surrender down in, he was in the Philippines at the rest and recuperation camp, and he told me about Moldonado.

T: So in a sense, you could realize then that your ship's journey could have been worse.

A: That's right.

T: But there were people who, like you said, just lost it.

A: That's right.

T: Did they have to be sedated or given to the Japanese, or what do you do with people like that?

A: As far as I know they weren't given to the Japanese. Nobody was killed on board our ship, but I won't say that they weren't slugged or anything.

T: So in other words, you have to deal with people like that.

A: That's right.

T: Even though they're your own people.

A: Yes. One of the ships after us, because that one of forty-five days wasn't the only one, but there was an incident where a father helped kill his own son.

T: That's terrible news. Now when you got to Japan you got off the ship in Moji. What kind of reception was waiting for you there with the Japanese?

A: They took us and put us on board ferries and shipped us over to the...across the bay there at Shimonoseki. There they put us into a warehouse. They issued us new uniforms and they gave us food. That's the best food we had the whole time. We got rice balls and we got fruit and things of that nature.

(2, A, 66)

T: Kind of a banquet compared to what you've had.

A: That's right. Then they put us on board these trains and they came by and told us that we'd have to keep our shades down because people, if they were up and people saw us, they would riot. Well, I don't think that would be the case, but we did keep the shades down.

T: All these, more than one thousand men get off this ship. Did they break you into groups or did they shove all of you on the same train?

A: They were all on the same train, but there were many cars. They would drop off a bunch here and a bunch there.

T: So gradually this group is being whittled down as some go one place, some go another.

A: As far as I know we were the next to the last group to get off. We got off in Tokyo and headed due west. The train kept on going and went up to the northern part of Japan.

T: When you got off, suddenly you're in a smaller group of men again.

A: Right.

T: And did you get on another train at that point?

A: Right.

T: And they took you from Tokyo, west was it?

A: Right. Up to the town of Takaoka. Then from there they shipped us up to this camp Namachi. It was about fifteen miles away from Takaoka.

T: Did you have any idea what to expect when you got there?

A: No. Had no idea, but the treatment that we got in Shimonoseki was the best we'd had, food and otherwise, so we figured, this isn't too bad.

T: When you got to the end destination, were you put into a camp compound that was ready for you?

A: Yes. There were two barrack buildings. Then there was a kitchen compound and toilet facilities. Also there was this big hot tub. I don't know if it had been used by Japanese soldiers before or not. I don't know. But it was on something that was prepared. When we got there we were issued two blankets and this big thing, brick, we called it a brick with straw, to be used as a pillow.

T: Something to put your head on.

A: And the mattresses...there were just two tiers of...lower and upper with these tatami mattresses and they were there.

T: How many men to a platform?

A: I don't recall, but there were quite a few.

T: So it was a big open area basically, and you climbed in and found a spot.

A: Right.

T: The people in this camp at Namachi, were they only the ones that you had arrived with?

A: Right. When we got there, there were no prisoners there. We were the first ones there. Shortly before the surrender we got this group of Singapore people up there.

(2, A, 99)

T: But that was the first and only admission to this core group.

A: Right. And what they did I don't know, because they did not work with our group over in the smelters.

T: So you've got barracks here. How about the Japanese themselves? You've had different types of guards along the way. Who were the guards here?

A: They weren't too bad. As long as you didn't give them any trouble, they didn't give you any trouble. The camp commander, we called him the One Armed Bandit, because he had lost his arm over in Manchuria, the only thing about him in the wintertime... He went down in the wintertime, but that's when it hurt it us the most. He'd get roaring drunk and he'd come into the barracks and he'd say fire up the stove. I'll get you wood tomorrow morning.

T: In English he'd say this?

A: Yes.

T: Just by himself he would kind of storm in there and...

A: Yes. Well, he would have a couple of Japanese with him. But we burned up the wood of course, because he made us. But we never got any replacement for it, so we were cold for a couple of days.

T: Comparatively speaking, he doesn't sound like the worst of the Japanese you've dealt with.

A: Lt. Sense, our American commander, went back and testified for him, not against him.

T: After the war. What happened after the war to this camp commandant?

A: As far as I know he went to prison for a few months and then he was turned loose.

T: So he clearly was not as bad as some of the other ones.

A: No. There were some that, from what I hear when I talked to people, that were pretty bad.

T: You had again not a, comparatively, it could have been worse.

A: That's right. The good Lord was looking over me the whole time.

T: The work you did here, because you were there for about a year...

A: A little over a year.

T: Did you work at the camp compound or did you have to leave there every day and go to a different location?

A: Had to leave there. I was telling you about this one guy that was in charge of us, the two of us. He would come to the camp and get us and walk us to the compound and then he stayed at the compound because he worked there. Then when it came time to come home or for lunch...in fact, we got to eat in our barracks. He'd walk us back, and then back again.

T: How far from your barracks to where you worked?

A: About I'd say half a mile. Maybe not quite that far.

T: So maybe a ten minute walk.

A: Yes.

T: Did you walk through civilian areas and see civilian Japanese?

A: Yes. They didn't bother us.

(2, A, 131)

T: Really? Didn't bother you.

A: They didn't. And they never said anything to us. Just basically ignored us.

T: They saw you and you saw them but...

A: That's it.

T: Did you work together with Japanese at the factory?

A: At the machine shop there are several Japanese working in other areas, yes. But the two Americans, myself and this other fellow, were the only ones that ran the lathes.

T: So just two of you doing this, I mean as far as the Americans.

A: Yes.

T: How did you get on that particular duty?

A: They came through and asked if anybody could run a lathe, and I could, and so I said, yes I can. So that's how I got it.

T: Did you feel bad or nervous at all volunteering for something?

A: No. Because nobody accused us of anything. In fact, the people that were there knew me from Clark Field and they knew that I kept a pretty tight, fair ship.

T: So in a sense, you felt you could volunteer here, whereas back at Clark Field that would have been something a little different.

A: Right.

T: And you didn't get any different treatment the way you described it here.

A: No. That's right. We got nothing other than the fact we could go eat at the barracks. But the other guys, they ate at their jobs at noon over there too.

T: Is this working at the machine shop, this lathe operating, is that the only job you had during the year you were there?

A: That's the only job I had in Japan. And all we did was make wheels for these trundle cars that the other prisoners in the smelter used to haul the ore into the furnace.

T: So you were, you were making parts for another part of the factory.

A: Right. We tried to sabotage a little bit. Like we'd make the axles a little bit larger. But we didn't want to make them too bad, because we knew that if we did it too bad it would hurt the other guys.

T: So you had to walk a fine line, it sounds like.

A: Right.

T: How many days a week were you working here?

A: Seven days a week.

T: So again, days off were not part of the program.

A: No days off for anything. The only time I got off was when I got a real bad earache. I'd gotten a cold and just everything went up into my ear. It got so bad that...no medication. The doctor that was there was the same one we had in the Philippines. He was able to get hot water in a canteen any time I wanted from the kitchen. The canteens were so hot that it burned my ear, and finally it burst in there and whatever it was just ran out. My hearing in my right ear is just terrible, even today. I have hearing aids that I should be wearing, that I do wear most of the time.

(2, A, 170)

T: So that's a lasting impact of your POW time.

A: Right.

T: Was there a daily routine? You got up at a certain time and went to work at a certain time?

A: Yes.

T: What time did you get up in the morning?

A: I really don't know what time it was. It was pretty early. Then it was quite late when we quit.

T: So you get up, have food before you left?

A: Right. The kitchen crew were up earlier than that, earlier than we were, of course. But the kitchen crew, they stayed in camp.

T: Did you get lugau or something else in the morning?

A: Lugau. Occasionally, being up in Japan, we would get soybeans which was good, except that they were so dogged hard that no matter how long you cooked them they never got soft. But they were nutritious. And occasionally they would bring us up some fish or something. So actually in Japan we were fed better than in the Philippines.

T: At least a little bit of protein here. You got fish, even, occasionally and the soybeans, so you're getting something different than just rice.

A: That's right.

T: How was your health during that year in Japan?

A: Good. The only bad part was when I got this bad ear infection. Other than that it was fine.

T: Would you say you were better off than the Philippines, not as well off, or about the same?

A: Better off in Japan than in the Philippines.

T: You've shifted climates for sure too...

A: Right. It got cold up there, and a lot of snow. We never had to shovel the path going to the machine shop. But it was always cleaned up, so we'd always be able to walk without trudging through snow, that is, through a lot of snow.

T: Right. But were you dressed for the weather?

A: As I said, when we got off at Moji and went over to Shimonoseki they gave us new clothes. Japanese uniforms. So we had their uniforms.

T: So you had clothing that was okay for the weather?

A: Basically, yes.

T: And did you have shoes by this time?

A: I had shoes, but we got some new ones from the Japanese.

T: It sounds like you could handle the winter weather fairly well, clothing-wise.

A: Yes. At least our camp could. I don't know about the others. I'm not speaking for the others.

(2, A, 196)

T: Just your own. So, in a sense, again that experience in Japan could have been worse.

A: That's right. It could have been a lot worse.

T: Did the guards accompany you to work at the machine shop?

A: No. Just that one civilian. He'd come and pick us up and bring us down and bring us back. That's the only one.

T: So you really weren't guarded during the day when you were working.

A: No. Here again, where would you go?

T: Right. But did you feel that you were...was there an overseer or somebody there looking after you, or were you kind of working on your own?

A: You were working on your own. But once you got to the machine shop he went off to his job, and the others were doing their work and they left you alone.

T: So there really was no contact or communication between you and these Japanese working all around you.

A: No.

T: You didn't feel threatened by them?

A: No. They were basically...they would smile at you. That was it.

T: It kind of sounds like a strange setting. You're working in this machine shop with other Japanese, but you're not really working with them.

A: Right. You're just there doing your work and that's it. They're doing theirs and that's...there's no intermingling.

T: While you were there at Namachi did you ever hear or see American B-29s?

A: Yes. The surrender was imminent. We did know that. We knew it was imminent because the B-29s were flying at five, six thousand feet.

T: So you could see them.

A: Oh, yes. You could see them, and there was no fighters to go up to intercept them or anything. One night they came over and they hit this steel mill at Takaoka. It wasn't night even. It was daytime. We had just gotten in from our work details and

getting ready to eat. They came over and clobbered this place. They [the POWs] got out there and cheered like mad, and they crawled up on the roof of the place, and the Japanese tried to get them to come down but they wouldn't, so they just walked off and just stood around the camp. Do what you want.

T: So you could literally now see the war coming closer again, just like you had in the Philippines.

A: That's right. We knew it was very close because it was daily. The [B-]29s were coming over.

T: So you could see American planes. But still not really get any news about what was going on.

A: Except from the British from Singapore that could read papers.

T: And they came at the end you said. Or close to the end.

A: Yes.

T: And what did you learn from them. I mean, could you get real news or was it more rumor stuff?

(2, A, 233)

A: No, it was news. At least what they [the Japanese] were telling their population. Now the funny thing about the Japanese military is, they never retreated. They always advanced to the rear to prepared positions.

T: It sounds like the same thing to me.

A: Basically. Like I say, when they came we could follow them up step by step how they were coming.

T: So they were...

A: Advancing to the rear to prepared positions (*chuckles*).

T: But if you knew your geography, you could sort of follow that. And once the B-29s started to come, you could witness it.

A: Then we knew that it was close.

T: Well, how did you experience the end of the war? I mean, it did come rather suddenly in August 1945.

A: Yes. We knew something was up when the guards came out and stacked their rifles and walked off. We figured, this is it. We didn't have any official word, and the next day the Swedish consulate from Tokyo came up and said the war is over. You're living in an atomic age. What the heck is that?

T: Is that what he said to you?

A: Yes. What the heck is an atomic age? He stayed with the officers for a while and then left.

T: So the Japanese guards...you saw them literally...

A: They came in, stacked their rifles, and dispersed.

T: But the Japanese didn't announce to you anything about the end of the war.

A: No. In fact, the One Armed Bandit and their first sergeants stayed right there. What happened though was, after this our food improved, because then we were getting more rice. We were getting fish, some meats, vegetables.

T: So you could notice real change. Guards were gone and the food improved. Was there any word given about when you could expect to get out of this location?

A: We knew that they were close and that the war was over, because they told us and the B-29s would come over and drop food in by parachute to us. They would...they had messages in them like, they told us about women being in the service which we didn't know anything about, and the so-called point system that to get out you had to have so many points. Everybody over there [the POWs] had way more points...maybe we could sell them some of our points (*laughs*).

T: So they kind of gave you updates on the world outside of your POW existence.

A: That's right.

T: And yet, as I learned from you before we started to talk, it was some weeks before you left this camp.

A: It was about a month from the time of the surrender, because we didn't leave until 15 September.

T: How did you manage your affairs then for that month? I mean, it sounds like the Japanese aren't in charge anymore.

A: They weren't in charge, and our officers took over. They didn't force any rules on us other than that we'd stay in camp. Don't go out unless like a guard came and got

us and brought us home. That we got permission to do. But other than that, they did not want us to be roaming around the countryside.

T: And you're working stopped. You didn't go to the machine shop anymore.

(2, A, 281)

A: Didn't go to the machine shop, and people didn't go to the smelters anymore.

T: So in a sense, all of you are just in the camp location.

A: Just in the camp lazing around.

T: Were you tempted to leave camp and go see what was out there?

A: No.

T: Anybody else that you witnessed did that?

A: Not that I know of, no.

T: So in a sense, there was a kind of a sitting and kind of twiddling your thumbs and waiting.

A: Right. I don't remember what day it was, but this one plane landed out there and the sergeant came and told us, stay put here; we're sending a team up to take care of you.

T: So a small American plane landed and you hear, okay, we know you're here.

A: They knew we were there, because the B-29s were dropping food and stuff to us.

T: But they also figured you might want to get out of there, and so they told you just to hang on.

A: Right. They advised us to put a big sign on the top of our barracks "POW" and I think you can see up there (*points at photograph of POWs at camp, taken shortly after surrender, August or September 1945*).

T: Yes. In the picture. So you got up there and did that so they could identify you.

A: Yes.

T: When you got out of the camp you ended up, before too long, down in the Philippines.

A: Right.

T: As far as the Philippines, was that part of the rest and recuperation of getting you back into good physical shape?

A: Right.

T: What did they offer you down there in Manila?

A: At the rest and recuperation they told us any time day or night that we felt hungry or something, go to any kitchen and ask them to do it. If they had it, they would fix it for you. Like if you wanted fried eggs, if they had the eggs they would do it. You could do that to any kitchen in the camp.

T: Now how had your stomach adjusted to a different and more food since August 15?

A: It seemed to have done all right.

T: In the first days, as the B-29s were dropping supplies, did you, you adjusted okay?

A: Right. I didn't splurge. Now there were some people that just really splurged. Even when we got to the Red Cross camp. Red Cross packages. There were some that just sat down and ate the whole thing. They paid for it. But, no, I paced myself.

(2, A, 317)

T: Did you know to do that just out of common sense, or was it watching other people?

A: I just figured that you're not supposed to eat all this at one time.

T: So you did pace yourself. That must have been hard.

A: It was.

T: Now you took a ship back to the States?

A: Right.

T: Did the military, either in the Philippines or even on the way back onboard the ship, did they do any kind of debriefing, asking you about your POW experience?

A: Not very much, no. The only thing, the Air Force recruiters came through.

T: The recruiters?

A: Yes. Back in the Philippines.

T: They didn't waste any time.

A: No. They asked me to sign up. They said, we'll fly you home right away and get you out there.

T: They wanted you to reenlist?

A: Yes. At that time I didn't want anything to do with it. I wanted to get out. That was it.

T: You'd been in since 1939. They were right on you, and wanted you to reenlist.

A: They were there. A few days after we got to camp.

T: Other than them, was there any kind of medical team that came through asking you about what you had been through and...

A: There were medics that came through and examined you.

T: Any kind of counselors or psychologists, things like this?

A: No.

T: So nobody asking you about what you'd been through or...

A: Nothing like that until we got into, back in the States.

T: What did they ask you when you got back to the States?

A: What you thought about the war and just a whole bunch of questions. I don't know what all psychiatrists would ask, but some of them I thought were, what the heck to do you want to know that for?

T: What kind of questions do you remember that you reacted that way to?

A: I don't recall any specific ones offhand. Some of the things they asked you, how do you feel towards them?

(2, A, 355)

T: Towards the Japanese.

A: Like I told them, the average Japanese I have no quarrel with them.

T: Did they ask anything about the specific camp locations you'd been in? Who was in charge or what went on there at Clark Field or in Japan?

A: Not that I can recall. Not when we first got back. Now after we got to Clinton [Iowa] they had a longer debriefing. And there they wanted to ask about where you were and what you did and all this.

T: So you were talked to a number of times, and by the time you got to Clinton, Iowa, it was more detailed and lengthier? Is that safe to say?

A: Yes. At Letterman [San Francisco] they gave us...they were looking out for us more physically than anything.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.

T: Letterman in San Francisco, that was your first stop. And then you got transferred later to Clinton, Iowa.

A: Right. When we left Manila they put us on board a troopship, and they had bunks in there. We were in pajamas. They fed us like kings.

T: All the way across the Pacific there.

A: Well, across the Pacific...on the ship. We were just ahead of a typhoon, so we had a rough passage. But it was just two meals a day, but lots of it. A lot of people got sick, because there was a lot of this. My assignment was way down in one of the lower holds. I never slept there because it stunk. People were vomiting. So I would sleep up on deck. Up in the hallways or the stairwell and so forth. I would not sleep downstairs.

T: Any problem with seasickness yourself?

A: No. I've never been seasick, never been airsick, and my wife, she really groused at me because she got seasick.

T: It's always tough to watch someone next to you having no problems at all.

A: Right.

T: When you got back to the States, how soon was it before you got a chance to see your folks and either your brother or your sister?

A: My brother and sister took a long time, but after I'd been to Letterman they sent us...I never got furlough at Letterman to go anyplace except in town. The last night we were there this one friend of mine and I we went to this restaurant about seven

o'clock in the evening and we stayed there and ate and drank beer, a couple of beers, until about one o'clock when they closed the place. Then the next day they shipped us out to Clinton, and after I'd been in Clinton, I guess probably two weeks, I got a furlough.

T: This is October, November by now?

A: Yes. In fact, it was the latter part of October that I got my first furlough.

T: Had you had a chance to telegraph your folks?

A: Yes. They knew that I was alive and that.

T: But you hadn't spoken to them by telephone or anything?

A: No. In fact we didn't have a telephone.

T: At your house in Duluth.

(2, B, 412)

A: Right.

T: You saw them. You mentioned earlier you took a trip from Clinton up to Duluth, and you got a chance to see your folks there.

A: Yes.

T: When you saw them for the first time, how much did they want to know about your POW experience? Your mom and dad.

A: They didn't question me at all. They just...my mom, when she saw me said, oh! Grabbed me and hugged me. She said, I'm so glad to see you. She never gave up hope. When we were over in the Philippines and we were prisoners, the government, after a period of time, tried to get my mother to accept the ten thousand dollar insurance that I had. She wouldn't take it, because if she did, then that was admitting to herself that I was dead and she would not admit to that. She went to a movie one time in Duluth and they had these newsreels, and she swears up and down she saw me on it because they showed something about the prisoners walking. Where they got the footage I don't know, but apparently they did some. But she swears up and down she saw me. I never saw a photographer, so I don't know. Like I say, she kept that memory alive and she would not turn it loose.

T: Did your folks ever tell you how they handled those years that they were not sure where you were? Did they ever talk to you about how emotionally they dealt with not knowing where you were?

A: They said it was pretty rough, because they were both hoping what my mother said was true, but they had no guarantee of it. When we were in the Philippines we were able to write home twice. The Japanese gave us a form that you could—

T: The little postcard things?

A: Yes. It's basically like that. Where you could check it off: I'm well, I'm sick, etc. And then you could write so many words at the bottom of it. Of course, everybody wrote that I'm well, and then I just wrote and said I'm doing okay and so forth. My mother got two of those messages. The way she got them was that the Japanese apparently would send them out by radio. Two ham [radio] operators from two different locations in California both times copied what was said and sent it to my mother.

T: So she had word at least twice that you were still alive.

A: Still alive.

T: Who was more optimistic, your mom or your dad?

A: My mom was.

(2, B, 442)

T: Did she ever tell you it was easier for her than for your dad to sort of keep the hope up?

A: No. She didn't mention that part. She just said that she never gave up hope is all.

T: When you saw them for the first time, how much did either your mom or your dad ask you about what you had been through the last four years?

A: Not too much. They said it must have been pretty bad, and I said, yes. I guess I gave them the impression I just didn't want to talk about it.

T: Was that, as far as the relationship with your folks, was that uncommon not to talk about things, or was that kind of the way your family was?

A: That's the way basically our family was. If you wanted to talk about something they were open to it. If not, why, it didn't affect them.

T: So, in a sense, you let them know, I'd rather not talk about it.

A: I indicated, not in so many words, but my actions, I guess, and attitude was such that...just like with my wife. She saw right off the bat that I didn't want to talk about it, so...

T: You and Jane were married in early 1946.

A: Yes.

T: When you got married how much she know about your POW experience?

A: Very little. About that much (*holds index finger and thumb an inch apart*).

T: She knew you had been one.

A: Oh, yes.

T: Now your folks lived for a number of years after the war too. Did they gradually, your folks or your new wife, did they gradually find out from you what you had been through?

A: Not too much, no. Because I put it in the back of my mind and I just didn't talk too much about it.

T: Well, something has changed. Here we are sitting having a fairly at length conversation about it. What changed for you over the years?

A: The way the thing started was, I was a volunteer at the zoo down there [in Apple Valley]. This one fellow, he wasn't in the war but he was in after the war, and he was...I don't know just what his job was but he was over in Hawaii, in the intelligence. He came up to me and he knew I was a POW. He came up to me one time and he says, "Do you mind if I interview you a little bit for this article for this volunteer magazine that we have?" I thought a bit and, okay. So he asked me a few questions and wrote an article and it wasn't real long. This Rick Peterson saw the article.

T: When was this interview, Alf?

A: It was in the '70s. Rick Peterson saw the article and he was a real World War II buff because his dad was over in Europe as a pilot on one of these small spotter planes. He introduced himself to me. He didn't tell me what he wanted to do first, but he gradually talked to me and finally he asked me. He said, would I talk to him about that. It took him a year for him to convince me I should talk. Both he and my family said you should open up and tell people what happened. Let them know what actually happened over there. So finally I said, okay. For a little over a year he kept this going.

(2, B, 478)

T: So you were reluctant at first, even decades later, to open up and really bring those memories back to the front of your mind.

A: Yes. I didn't have anything to do with the VA for a long time because when I was in Baton Rouge I went down to the VA at New Orleans, because I had injured both knees in camp. I was wondering what they could do about it, because they were bothering me. They wanted to operate at the time. Our family doctor down there, Dr. Robbins, said don't let them do it unless it's absolutely necessary, because it's a fifty-fifty proposition. You may or you may not. So I said, okay, I'm able to walk yet, so I'll just leave it alone. I didn't have anything to do with the VA until I got up here. Quite a number of years after I got up here. This fellow that I knew that said I saved his life, Tony Urban, and also a POW that was with me in camp there, Bob Boyer, kept after me. Said, go to the VA, you get some benefit out of it. So I finally went down there.

T: But it took you a long time to do it.

A: That's right.

T: How was the VA able to help you once you went there?

A: For one thing, they replaced both knees eventually. The main thing that I got was any of my medication, and that I got through them. Before I applied for compensation, they had this two dollars you pay of medicine. That's what I used. Then the people kept asking me. In fact the people at the VA kept after me. Are you getting any benefits? I said no. They said, get going.

T: So they encouraged you.

A: Yes.

T: What percent disabled are you now?

A: I'm one hundred percent, but part of it is I can't...you're not supposed to be able to work. Which is true. So it's not one hundred percent combat related or anything like that. I'm in the process now of getting everything upgraded because the VA Adjudication Board has changed their mind on a lot of things. So they've been after me to apply for this. Like right here. That's not on their records.

T: So this struggle of what you get compensation for goes on even today.

A: Yes. It's over sixty percent that they got me down for, but I think the VA Adjudication Board said that it was seventy percent. I mean injury related. The

other thirty percent was...can't work. I don't know what...I haven't got the results back of this last application, so I don't know what they've done.

T: It's amazing that sixty years later this process is not really come to an end.

A: No. The reason that they're applying now is that the section that I worked for at the VA, volunteered with, they're the ones that got me to [apply for benefits]...they changed their minds because they had called all the people of supervisory status, called them over there and told them that they relaxed on everything. Get these people to come in and apply for one hundred percent. There's no reason why all the POWs from over there shouldn't be getting one hundred percent now. So that's what started it.

T: Goodness. To go back to after the war: when you got back you, from the way you described it, you weren't talking a lot about it. What kind of dreams or even nightmares did you have about your POW experience?

A: None. I've never had any dreams or nightmares like some of the fellows claim to have. I've slept like a log.

T: So that's nothing you remember waking up or anything like that.

A: No. No.

T: When your kids, you have one boy and two girls, kids sometimes just ask questions.

A: They would ask occasionally, but they also realized that I wasn't amenable to speaking about it too much. If they asked me a specific question I would answer it to the best of my ability, but I would not expound on it.

(2, B, 532)

T: So they could probably pick up, in other words, that Dad didn't really want to talk about that.

A: Right.

T: Were you able to, or willing to, talk about your combat experience? Because you were a combat soldier for several months too. Was that easier to talk about?

A: No. Not really, because combat was fearful. I never saw any hand to hand combat, but we got some close encounters where there was gunfire exchanged between us and so forth. The worst part of the combat was being on the so-called outpost line of resistance which is about one thousand yards ahead of where the main body was. We would string barbed wire and what have you and tie cans and

rocks and things up to alert. The animals over there, there was lots of them at night, nighttime prowling of animals, so they were always going off. And we didn't want to shoot flares from where we were, so we would telephone back and somebody else would shoot flares so we could see. Now sometimes there were Japanese there. Not too often. It was mostly dogs and jungle stuff.

T: But it wasn't something you still wanted to talk about.

A: No.

T: So for your kids, it wasn't you would talk about one and not the other.

A: The combat experience there...I was a platoon patrol leader several times. This was kind of scary because you were up to...your life depended on the Filipinos in the area. Because there were still Filipinos in the area. If they would have turned us in...because they would tell us where the safe place would be. They were also telling us that there was a patrol through or one coming through or had been. So that's basically it.

T: When you got back, you ended up in Louisiana. We talked about that before, how you worked and went to school down there. How much did the people you worked with or the people you knew at school, at Louisiana State University, how much did they know about what Alf Larson had been through?

A: Not too much, because at work every once in a while one of my coworkers would ask me something and I would sort of brush it off as best I could. In school nobody ever asked me.

T: So you were just another student.

A: That's right.

T: A number of guys have commented how when they got back and adjusted to civilian life that they had problems with dreams or sometimes with drinking.

A: Never. Like I said before, I slept like a log and I was never a drinker. Even over in the Philippines. I may go out to have a beer with my meal occasionally but to go visit the bars, no.

T: Or go on a bender after you got back.

A: No.

T: How would you, when you look at, if you stand away from yourself and look at Alf Larson who went over to the Philippines in 1939 and this Alf Larson who comes back from Japan in 1945, how was he a different person?

A: I'd say that the guy that came back in '45 was different from the guy in '39. His religion was a lot stronger, because I just put my faith in the hands of the Lord. I said, there it is.

(2, B, 575)

T: Do you think your personality, the kind of person you were, had changed in any way?

A: Not really. I was pretty friendly before the war and after the war, after I got over my isolation period, I was still friendly but even though I didn't want to talk about the other part of it.

T: So other than that you were, in a sense, you thought yourself the convivial person you had been, a social person.

A: That's right.

T: Before your folks died, did they ever really find out more in detail about what you had gone through?

A: Not much.

T: So something that stayed that way between you and your folks, really, the rest of their lives.

A: Yes.

T: Well, the last thing I want to ask you is this. If you think about your POW experience, which was about three and a half years, how would you describe the most important way that it changed you or changed your life? That was four years of your life.

A: One thing about it, I never take food for granted anymore. Because we were...the Japanese didn't beat us. The food beat us. If MacArthur would have done what he was supposed to have done, we would have lasted a lot longer. I think the outcome would have been the same, but it would have been a lot longer and we'd have been in much better shape. All of us would have been in much better shape. But as it turned out, he squandered our food and our medicine and everything else.

T: Most Pacific POWs are pretty negative on Douglas MacArthur.

A: Oh, yes. The best thing that ever happened to the POWs in the Philippines was when they shipped MacArthur's ass out of there and down to Australia.

T: So you feel pretty strongly about that too.

A: Yes.

T: That's the last question I have. Let me ask at this point if there's anything that you want to add, something that I didn't cover or something you think is important.

A: All I can say is that these people gripe about freedom, but freedom isn't free. Somebody pays a price, whether it's the ultimate price or whatever. Somebody pays a price for what we experience and can do today.

T: Are you in any way bitter or upset with anybody from that period that you feel is responsible for how you lived the war?

A: No. Because I volunteered. I wasn't drafted. So that I can't blame anybody for the fact that I was over there. Other than myself. Because I volunteered.

T: Did you pick the Philippines too?

A: I picked the Philippines. The way I picked the Philippines was when I was in the infantry down there, we went through our Basic Training and when we got through with that they shipped the whole unit, the 3rd Infantry, down to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin for maneuvers. We stayed there for almost a month doing infantry tactics and whatever. Then they trucked us down there by truck and we walked back from Camp McCoy to Minneapolis. That's about 150 miles.

(2, B, 619)

T: That's a little bit of a...you walked back?

A: Walked back. And the last night, the last day, we used to walk about ten miles, fifteen miles a day. The last night before...we knew we would be coming into Minneapolis, to Fort Snelling. The next day. So that night we bivouacked and about nine o'clock, after we'd set up our camp and eat and all that, they came through and played the bugle and roused us all up and says, we're on a forced march. We're assembling at...we have to get to a certain point at a certain time. So we walked from then all night long until we got to Fort Snelling. You never saw a more tired bunch of stragglers in your life. When we got there they said that anybody that's not on detail has a pass. So I wasn't on detail so I got myself up hauled there and took the bus and went home.

T: Let me ask you. You mentioned a few minutes ago that you picked the Philippines as a destination.

A: Yes. I was going to tell you about that. When I was in the infantry there were two guys that were with me there that had been in the infantry for some time and they'd

been over in the Philippines and they kept after me. They said, you've got to go to the Philippines. Boy, the duty over there is terrific. You'd really like it over there. So I said, all right. So I applied for a transfer into the Air Corps. Come to find out that those two guys had been over there, but they had bought out. At that time, if you didn't like to serve where you were, for one hundred dollars you could buy out of the service and get an honorable discharge. And they had bought out over there. Couldn't take it.

T: But they encouraged you to go. And you bought it.

A: And I bought it (*laughs*).

T: (*chuckles*) It's really not funny I guess, as it turned out, but they sold you a bill of goods, it sounds like.

A: Yes (*laughs*).

T: But you said earlier though that you liked the Philippines when you got there.

A: When I first got there I thought it was...I figured, what in the heck have I gotten into here, because the heat, humidity and all that. I was not used to that, being a Minnesota boy. Even though I'd gotten a taste of it down in Louisiana. Because I had been there before. But I thought, oh, this is terrible. But as I say, the longer I stayed there the more I liked it, because I got out of the barracks and the barracks attitude, and started biking around the place.

T: That's how you meet people too.

A: That's right. Outside of Manila, the people, they were a different people altogether.

T: Well, that's the last question I have. I'll thank you again for your time today, for this interview. I'll turn the recorder off.

END OF INTERVIEW