

Interviewee: Kenneth Porwoll

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 24 April 2003

Location: living room, Porwoll residence, Roseville, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, December 2003

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, June 2004

Kenneth Porwoll was born on 13 April 1920 in St. Cloud, Minnesota, but at age two moved with his family to Brainerd, where he spent his childhood. One of four children, he attended local schools and graduated from Washington High School in Brainerd in 1938. Ken joined a local National Guard unit while a senior in high school, and this unit (194th Tank Battalion) was activated in early 1941 and, in September, sent to the Philippines.

Japanese forces attacked the Philippines on 8 December 1941, and in April 1942 American units there surrendered. Ken survived the subsequent Bataan March, where hundreds of Americans and thousands of Filipinos perished, and a brief stay at the infamous Camp O'Donnell before being sent to work camp details at various locations on Luzon (Batangas, Calavan, and Candelaria).

Ken spent some months at Bilibid Prison in Manila, than at Cabanatuan doing farm work, but in October 1943 he was transported by ship to Japan. There Ken endured twenty-two months as slave labor at the Rinko coal yard, in the city of Niigata. Only at the end of August 1945 were the prisoners liberated, and ultimately returned to the United States. Ken remained in medical facilities until his discharge from active duty in August 1946.

Again a civilian, Ken used GI Bill benefits to attend St. Cloud Teachers College, graduating in 1949. He relocated to the Twin Cities area in the early 1950s, got married (1953, wife Mary Ellen Foley), and began a career at Capital Gear, St. Paul, that lasted until his retirement in the mid-1980s. Ken and Mary Ellen raised nine children in their Roseville home. At the time of this interview (April 2003) Ken and Mary Ellen Foley lived in Roseville.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

K = Ken Porwoll

[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: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is 24 April 2003, and this is our interview with Mr. Ken Porwoll of Roseville, Minnesota. First, on the record, Ken, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

K: You're very welcome. It's my pleasure.

T: I know that you were born on April 13, 1920 in St. Cloud, although you grew up after age two in Brainerd, Minnesota.

K: That is right.

T: Finished high school in Brainerd, too, right?

K: Washington High School, 1938.

T: Let me ask you about growing up in a relatively small town. Brainerd wasn't real big. What's a positive memory you have as a teenager growing up in Brainerd?

K: One of the things was that at that time there was very little organized sports. We had our own baseball teams and we played the Northeast team against the Southeast and against the North side and they gave us the South side. And we did have a public area where we could go and play our ball games. And we did that every weekend in the summertime.

T: Kind of self-organized?

K: Self-organized.

T: So what today would be Little League was kind of self-organized.

K: Yes. Yes. That's right.

T: Were you a good baseball player?

K: Not the best. No. But I was good enough to be picked early in the... because each time you kind of chose up sides too sometimes. I was picked rather early in the game.

T: What's your best position?

K: Outfielder.

T: What was a difficult time or a difficult memory you have of growing up as a teenager in Brainerd?

K: One real big one was my father died when I was ten years old. So that was a real shocker and took some time to get over that.

T: Did he die suddenly?

K: No. He died of pneumonia. He had been a stonecutter by trade and I suspect that part of his problem came from stonecutter's lungs or whatever they called that. When he got pneumonia that took care of him. I remember resenting that very much that kids my age, and I was ten years old, and kids my age that would brag about doing things with their dad or whatever... they could find themselves in a fight with me.

T: Really? So that kind of upset you.

K: Yes. Really. Really upset me. I was ready to fight any kid that would go bragging about his dad. I don't know why but it was one of those things.

T: How did your mom adjust? Here's your mom suddenly with four kids.

K: You know, she did a marvelous job of that in that with four kids and the oldest one was twelve and the house was not paid for, but the stone shed and the metal shop was paid for and owned clear and I think Dad left an insurance policy. She then invested that insurance policy with some man out of Chicago into the stock market. Now how she did that I don't know but she then put a basement under that house. She put central heat into it. She always had an up-to-date car. Not the newest but always one that ran well. We never had to worry about it breaking down or getting it fixed. And my sister went to college. Then when I came out of the service and was hospitalized and was about to be released she wrote a letter and asked what I wanted to do when I came home. There was no home anymore because she had sold the house and moved to St. Cloud with her brother to keep house for him and to cook for him and his son. When I told her I just wanted to go lay in the grass someplace she went and bought a cottage on Bay Lake (*laughs*).

(1, A, 86)

T: That's by Brainerd, right?

K: Up by Brainerd. Yes (*laughs*). Yes. And then she needed a car and my older brother was selling cars and so he agreed to give her a car wholesale price and that she would then sell it back to him in the fall when she was through with it. She always managed to find a buyer that would pay more than what she had paid for the car.

T: Your mom was pretty astute, wasn't she?

K: Yes. Yes. I'm just amazed. I don't know when she died... when she did die, then she left us that cabin and I think each one of the four kids got something like eight thousand dollars to boot besides.

T: Did your mom go to work after your dad died?

K: Never! Never worked outside the house.

T: So she was managing her finances.

K: Managing her finances and she volunteered for church. She was part of the welfare committee and in fact, she was really it. The committee would supply the money and she would see that the people that were sent to her for clothes had clothes that fit and if they didn't fit she sat right down at the sewing machine and made them fit.

T: My goodness. You were ten when your dad died and you finished high school age eighteen.

K: Yes.

T: How large was your high school class? How many people in your high school class?

K: I was going to say... there was as thousand in school so...

T: That's a pretty big school then.

K: Yes. And you can divide that by four. That would be about two hundred, two [hundred] fifty in a class.

T: What kind of memories do you have of high school?

K: Good memories. Fond memories. I had fun. I played on all the sports teams and was captain on most of them somewhere along the line. I liked the coaches. We got along fine. And I liked the teachers too that I had.

T: Were you a good student?

K: Fair. I didn't spend too much time at the books (*laughs*). But I spent enough so that I got passing grades.

T: You went to college after you got out of the service.

K: Yes.

T: While you were in high school, I know from reading your memoirs, you got hooked up with the local National Guard unit.

(1, A, 126)

K: Yes.

T: How did you get involved with that?

K: This in the 1930s was a deep depression time and money was very scarce and the National Guard had the biggest social event in the winter—of the whole year really. They put on a New Year's party that was formal. Dress was formal. It cost something like twenty-five dollars.

T: That's a huge sum in those days.

K: Oh! Yes. And for a young man it was nearly impossible. But if you joined the Guard, then you got a new set of clothes. You got jodhpurs. That's the riding pants that flare out on the side.

T: Yes.

K: With high boots up to just below the knee and all that good stuff so that then you looked pretty sharp.

T: So we often hear of patriotic reasons for joining the service. It sounds like that's the furthest thing from your mind in high school.

K: That's right. And besides that, you got paid for every day, one day a week, that you went to the armory to learn things. You got paid for learning it.

T: So it gave you a little pocket money as well as, would we say, social status too?

K: Yes. Yes. Yes.

T: When you were in the Guard there, did you ever really envision that you'd be activated and be part of a large conflict?

K: Never! Never in the world did I ever—even after we were federalized. I couldn't imagine being in a war. Just wouldn't happen. And they were going to send us to the Orient. I thought, man, how lucky can I be?

T: So you were looking forward to going...

K: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Because I had for years thought that every person, every young man should spent at least a year in the South Pacific. On the beach, under the coconut tree or something like that.

T: You had images going out there.

K: Yes. I was going to get a free trip to all of that.

T: 1938 you finished high school. 1941, early '41, your unit was actually activated. How did you pass the time between—that's almost three years.

K: I went to Junior College.

T: In Brainerd there?

K: They had started a junior college, yes. Then to get money for that I was given a job with a contractor to do the flat roofing on the high school. So I didn't get paid. They just had a fund for me on the high school books. So that paid for my junior college then. One summer's work on the flat roof paid for the two years at junior college.

T: Boy! That was a good deal.

K: Yes.

T: So you did four semesters; finished the junior college before you went.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: When you were activated, February of '41, and this was into the 194th Tank Battalion, right?

(1, A, 168)

K: Right.

T: When the unit was activated did you stay stateside and do training or were you pretty quickly moved to the Philippines?

K: We were first sent to Fort Lewis, Washington, in February of '41 and while we were on maneuvers that summer we got orders to go back into Fort Lewis and pack up our equipment and prepare to sail out.

T: And you shipped out in the fall, right?

K: In the fall.

T: Now tensions between the US and Japan were already, we know as historians, pretty evident then. What were you aware of? What were the people around you aware of, as far as the situation in the Pacific, when you shipped out?

K: We had no inkling of friction between the United States and Japan. Our first inkling was that when we were aboard ship and were in the middle of the Pacific and we are going blackout at night. Then we saw a cruiser, a big ship with big guns on it, and we say, hey, these guys aren't out for playtime.

T: It was a Japanese ship.

K: No. It was American ships. So they're expecting to find something that we don't know about.

T: So you felt pretty much in the dark about what could possibly happen pretty soon.

K: I was. I was absolutely in the dark. I had no inkling about international things at all. Never entered my mind that there was anything like that.

T: When you got to the Philippines... October?

K: October.

T: So really only two months of peace time, before the war started. Talk about the Philippines, and really, a drastically new environment for someone from Brainerd, Minnesota.

K: Oh, yes. First of all the smell. The smell. Just the whole...

T: This is Manila now, right?

K: This is Manila. And the whole countryside. Not Manila so much, but the whole countryside had a stink about it.

T: What kind of a stink? Describe it.

K: Like manure or like a barnyard. Really. And the whole style of living was different and we learned very quickly that you didn't make your own bunk. You hired a bunk boy to come in and make your bunk and keep everything in order. Even your dirty laundry. Goes in a bag and he takes it home and his sisters wash it and they bring it back all ironed and pressed. The next thing is you go to the tailor and have your clothes all made to fit properly.

T: This is a new world for you, isn't it?

K: Oh, yes. And then to go to a shoe cobbler and have shoes made that really fit your feet.

T: No kidding.

K: And then I got pegged as the battalion recreation sergeant whose job it was to go with a lieutenant and find places for R and R for the troops. So we were busy running around loose on the island looking for places for recreation.

T: What kind of stuff were you looking for?

K: Some big resort. Really. Or an area where they could go and spend a day and then maybe come back at night. We found Camp John Hay which was up in the mountains, the northern mountains of Luzon. Which was a good place. And we recycled troops up there by forty or fifty at a time. Then the lieutenant and I took off and went up to Bontok which was up further yet and it was on a road that was carved on the hillside of the mountains and room for one car only. When you came to a guard post, you stopped and the guard called ahead to see if any traffic was coming. If not, he instructed the man to close his gate until we came through.

(1, A, 224)

T: So completely different type of world, isn't it?

K: Oh, absolutely.

T: As you describe it, did you like it or was it something that was too different and a little bit just too much?

K: No. I liked it. The little Negritos that were close Fort Stotsenburg, they lived in the hills there. Just little bitty people. Little skinny people. Only about four foot tall. And they lived in trees like monkeys. They had little grass shacks they built up in the trees. We used to like to go there quite often. Even sometimes during the week to visit them or bring cigarettes and trade with them, or just see the way they were living.

T: Were people in Manila or in the countryside friendly?

K: For the most part they were friendly. Yes. I suppose the American was always considered that he had money to spend and they liked to keep you around until you spent your money and then send you home (*laughing*).

T: What kind of things were for sale? You mentioned trading with people. What was it that you could get from them?

K: Not too much that was worth anything. Even the food. You had to be circumspect about all the time. Especially the baloots, which were chicken eggs or duck eggs that were partially hatched. When you crack them open there's a little chick inside and that was a delicacy, so to speak (*laughs*).

T: You're very diplomatic. You did well in sales, didn't you?

K: Yes, I did (*both laugh*). I did quite well there. And then I remember one trip that my friend Lee McDonald and I took to Manila on the railroad train. You stop at each burial along the way and they're always selling baloots, so we bought a dozen baloots and then we gathered three or four Filipino kids on the train and had them sit with us and then made them eat a baloot apiece.

T: To see how it was done almost?

K: Yes. Or to see if they would really do it.

T: And?

K: And they ate one, but they wouldn't eat a second one. They wouldn't eat a second one. I don't know what we did with the rest of that dozen. I think we threw them out the window of the train.

T: So they would eat one. They knew how to eat it.

K: They knew how to eat it. But, you know, some of the pinfeathers were in the wings already on these things.

T: Cultural differences there, wasn't there?

K: (*laughing*) Yes.

T: When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor they also attacked the Philippines.

K: Yes. Within about seven hours I always say.

T: Talk about when that happened, and how you and others around you responded.

(1, A, 262)

K: It came as a real surprise at breakfast time as I recall it. The man on the radio was saying that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and we did not believe it. We did not believe it.

T: Really? So you thought it was some kind...

K: Til about the third or fourth time we heard it. Then we said there's gotta be something to this. Then it wasn't too long when orders came from battalion headquarters to pack up your gear and move out to the airport where we had already put our tanks in position. So it was a matter of taking your ammunition and packing on out to your tank and getting located out there. Just couldn't understand how that could happen. That Hawaii or Pearl Harbor would be bombed and almost destroyed.

T: So I hear you saying it was almost tough to even imagine what had happened and what that would look like now.

K: Yes. Yes. Very, very confusing. Very true. People that weren't looking for a war and had no inkling that there was any animosity out there in the world at all. Then this happens. Then as we are with our tanks, the general gives an order to go back to the barracks to have lunch and our company commander or our battalion commander who was a colonel says, no, the men will stay with their tanks and the food will be brought to them. As we are sitting there with the tanks about quarter to twelve, at noon, the newsperson in Manila is saying how Clark Field is being bombed and all the airplanes are being destroyed and the buildings are burned and we looked at one another, and we said, this guy knows something we don't know because we're looking at it and there's no damage.

T: You were at Clark Field.

K: We were at Clark Field. And there's nothing going on. Except the airplanes all came in and lined up in a row for refueling as the men went into their lunchroom to have their lunch. And while they're in there then we looked up fifteen minutes later and here's this beautiful formation of bombers. Everybody said, well, the Navy's here. We can quit worrying. They'll take care of everything. But then when things began to drop out of the airplanes we came to life, to the reality of what's going on.

T: So you were at the airfield and it began to be bombed by the Japanese.

K: Yes.

T: How was that? How did you experience that? I mean, suddenly it's real.

K: It's real! There again, what do you do? What do you do?

T: You're in a tank.

K: Yes. How are you going to shoot the bombs out of the air or who are you going to chase? Who are you going to go after? Just real confusing. And then when the strafing planes come in, it really got real then. Whatever was missed by the bombs was not missed by the strafing planes. And my experience was that I'm still the recreational sergeant, the battalion recreational sergeant, and I and the lieutenant are to take a message someplace with a command car. We're roaring down the road and we see this Zero fighter change course and we know that he sees us and he picks us as a target.

So when he did that, we stopped and we got out of the car and ran to an open field, and as he came down you could see his bullets like a sewing machine in the dirt. I thought, oh, my! I've got to be pretty skinny to get between them. And about that time he realized he was in too steep a dive and he needed to raise up the nose of the airplane in order to make the airfield. And when he did that, he spread the bullets apart and they went on either side of us.

T: That's a close call.

K: That was a wake up call that somebody wanted to shoot me. Somebody wanted to kill me.

T: During that day, either at the airfield or even in this case, was there fear on your part?

(1, A, 318)

K: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Yes. Yes. And we would have had more had we known that the gasoline was stored in right behind us in the tall grass. Piles of fifty-five gallon barrels of gasoline. High-octane gasoline.

T: You didn't know that.

K: We didn't know that (*laughs*).

T: That would make you smile a little bit.

K: Oh, yes.

T: For the record, what kind of tank were you the commander of?

K: I think it was called a T-3.

T: So it was a smaller tank.

K: A smaller one. It was new to us, in that stateside we had a double turret tank that they called a Mae West tank. And when we left those behind and they issued us new ones that had a single turret with a 37mm gun. But then when we got to the Philippines they refused to give us ammunition to shoot the guns.

T: So you couldn't shoot them.

K: We couldn't shoot. You didn't shoot the gun until you were looking at a Japanese.

T: So you hadn't practiced at all.

K: Right.

T: How many days was it before you saw or encountered Japanese ground forces after these planes had come over?

K: I don't know the number of days in that I was sent south of Manila to a place called Montelupa because that was going to be the first place they would land. Down in there. But they had decoyed them apparently. Decoyed us. Because they landed in the north at Linguyen Bay, and after that happened, then I was sent north with a group of tanks to meet them up there. I remember spending Christmas Day up there.

T: So we're talking several weeks already now. Was there a sense of...?

K: And the tank people like to say that that skirmish with them there on the Agnu River... nothing was done to prevent their landing. But I think the Philippine Army was there, but they had rifles. What can you do with rifles when you've got Navy ships pointing their big guns down at you? At any rate, they were quite a ways inland and we put had a line along the Agnu River and stopped the Japs there. In fact, they had gotten across the river and then the tanks attacked them on the south side of that river and made a believer out of the Japs and they moved back to the other side. There was about three days in there. It gave everyone else a chance to move out and clear out.

T: How chaotic was the situation in your unit or in places like Manila from what you observed?

K: When I came from Montelupa going north and we stopped at the Manila Hotel to get a drink and the people in there were playing cards and having fun and they said, "Don't worry about it boys. Uncle Sam will take care of these Japs. They'll never make Manila." We tried to tell them, "You better get your walking shoes on and get out of town because they're coming and they'll be here." No conception about it at all there.

T: That's interesting. They thought the Americans would be able to stop them.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: For you at that point...

K: But even the soldiers said we give them three weeks and we'll have them cleaned out of here.

T: The soldiers around you?

(1, A, 359)

K: Oh, yes.

T: Was that infectious? Did you believe that as well or were you a bit more concerned?

K: A little more concerned. Hell, I hadn't even fired the gun. I didn't even know if it would work (*laughs*).

T: Did you have shells yet?

K: No.

T: No shells yet.

K: We did now because Ernie Miller says, "We'll go to that armory and we'll just help ourselves." And they did that.

T: Not giving you shells. I didn't know that one.

K: Yes.

T: The situation in the Philippines became more and more precarious for the Americans who were there. There were no reinforcements as we know. How did you experience those first months of 1942 until you were captured by the Japanese?

K: You know, it's a little confusing in my head. I suppose for the most part confused was the thing because all I can remember is running from one place to another with a tank. Nobody seemed to be sure quite what to do with them once you did get there. My friend Jim McOmis said his platoon ran right through a Japanese CP and somebody had, among the Japanese, put a thermite bomb on the back of his tank, on the top of his tank, so that it burned a hole down through the armor and into the engine compartment and got it so hot in the tank that some of the ammunition began to explode in the tank.

Then it finally dropped down on the cylinder and burned a hole in the cylinder and of course froze the engine. When he reached a point in retreat that he found officers from the headquarters, they told him to get in that tank and go right back to where he came from and he says, "I will do that if you start the tank for me. If you start the engine, I'll go back." Of course you couldn't do that.

T: Sure. Now your own tank. You were kept supplied with fuel, I guess, so you could keep this tank going?

K: Yes. Yes. They had a couple, three tankers that kept making the rounds. And that was part of the logistics --

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.

T: Logistics. How far you could go.

K: How far you could go with the gas you had in your tank and would there be gas at the next spot you were going to or would it be available there. My friend Bill McKeehan from Minneapolis was on one of those trucks and he tells about he had to scramble to supply gasoline to the tanks and different things.

T: How did morale hold up during those months?

K: I thought, pretty good. I thought, pretty good. We were maybe fortunate in that we all had a strong belief in Ernie Miller that he was our lead man and he knew what he was doing. And he had concern for his men so that we knew he would not ask you to do something that he himself would not have done.

T: When did it become apparent to you that it wasn't going work out and you were going to be surrendered or captured?

K: It never dawned on us. It never dawned on the men that I was with that we would surrender or be captured. Never.

T: So I hear you saying that when it finally came you were surprised.

K: Yes. Absolute surprise. And then some of them didn't want to believe it. Some of them said well, I'm not going to surrender. Then one of the officers said, well, if you don't surrender that means you are deserting. You become a deserter and you will be court-martialed after the war. And despite that threat, some of them still took off into the jungles.

(1, B, 422)

T: How did you face up to that situation? Looking at these options of not giving up or giving up. How did you make a decision?

K: My decision was to stay with the group. What the group does, I will do. So what comes, comes.

T: Was there discussion among the men of your tank crew or those around you what to do or not really?

K: You know, I don't remember. The only discussion I remember is how you're going to destroy this tank.

T: You're supposed to, right?

K: You're supposed to. Come down to the conclusion that the only thing you could do was take the back plates off of the guns and throw them in the jungle someplace where they might not be found, and the guns become unusable. Other than that the discussion of surrender or not to surrender was rather limited kind of a thing.

T: When this became apparent it was going to happen, did you have any kind of ideas in your mind about what this was going to mean or what this was going to be like?

K: None. None. As far as I can remember it was just a big blank.

T: Really?

K: Yes. And we were told to move into a certain area, and our company did. And then the lieutenant opened up the treasury and divided out the money among the men, and the cooks came with all the food they had left and divided it out among the men and said, that's it. There is no more, guys. We thought... well, that's it. And I don't remember a whole lot of anxiety either among the men. The one thing that really impressed us was that when the first group of Japanese soldiers came through our area, one was real flushed and red in the face as if he had fever and before he cleared our area he fell to the ground, and the [Japanese] lieutenant in the front of the column came back and unhitched his sword and beat this man with the scabbard. Until the man got on his feet and walked off.

T: Really?

K: And we said, hey, there you go man.

T: What kind of impression did that make on you? Here's the Japanese beating a Japanese.

K: Yes. Yes. It told us that there is no limit to what they could do to you. No limit.

T: A real wake up call it sounds like.

K: Real wake up. So you better start making your mental adjustments now.

T: Did you make those?

K: Kind of. Yes. So that when we were lined up alongside the road... Yes.

T: The march, the Bataan Death March as it's often known, has become one of the more well-known images or experiences that people even now know about World War II. How did you experience those days of walking or marching?

K: A very personal experience. Really. Very personal in that I found myself walking with four other fellows that I had gone to high school with.

(1, B, 487)

T: So you knew these fellows.

K: Yes. And we'd played on the same football teams and basketball teams, and we had competed for dates for school dances and...

T: Because from a National Guard unit you all come from the same place and therefore you know these people.

K: Yes. You know almost everybody in the company. You know them. You know their background. Maybe you know their families. Yes. So kind of an intimate thing. Which in one way is nice, and in another way it is rather distressing too, when things get tough and you have to make decisions as to who gets what or who dies, who lives. And among these five men then, including me, we made kind of an agreement to hang together. We might help one another.

T: How did that work out? That kind of an agreement?

K: Well, that very day the biggest guy gets a malaria attack, and then as his fever changes to a chill he loses his control and is very unsteady. So we get one on either side of him and help drag him along the road. Shoulder him up the road. We'd keep changing off about every hour or so until Jim, his name was Jim McOmis, said that we were going to have to drop him in the ditch because we won't make it if we have to carry him. And we argued a bit. I said, "Let us keep trying a little while longer. Maybe something will break," but it didn't. And Jim again says, "You've got to drop me in the ditch." He knew when he said that, that all stragglers were killed. If you were beside the road when the column passed the Japanese clean up squad came by and killed you.

T: He knew that and you knew that.

K: He knew that and we knew that. And yet he insisted on shouldering his own responsibilities. And I'm helping him at the time we decide to turn him loose, and I'm apologizing to him for our friendship coming to this kind of an end. And he says, "Forget it. Forget it, Ken. I'll just have to find another way." I thought, wow! He hasn't given up. He hasn't quit. He's looking for tomorrow. And he knows his chances are ninety-nine percent against him. But he's still looking for tomorrow.

T: What happened to Jim?

K: Well, we dropped him in a ditch. And we never looked back and we never mentioned his name again for the rest of the days. And after eight days I end up in the city of San Fernando, and the second morning I'm there, I roll over at sunrise and I look into the eyes of Jim McOmis. I asked him, "What are you doing here?" He says, "Laying in the dirt like you are." I said, "How did you get here?" He said, "I walked just the way you did." Then I said, "What happened to allow you to walk?" He said, "Well, when I went in the ditch and I looked up ahead I saw a culvert and I crawled into it and slept off the malaria attack, and the second day when another group of Americans came by I crawled out and joined them." How he happened to lay down alongside of me that particular night I don't know. Then it was my turn.

In the interim time, as the Japanese would pull men out of the line of march and beat them and beat them and beat them and beat them and kill them, they would then look through the walking ranks of the Americans and invite more Americans to come to help.

T: Help the person on the ground there.

K: Help the person they're beating on. Then they all get the same treatment. So you learned after the first event not to go out.

T: Doesn't it go against things that you're taught as soldiers to help each other?

K: That's what became a real hard part. I kept telling myself don't, if you want to live, Ken, don't go out there because you'll die out there. Then when you didn't go out, then you die a little bit inside and you say, what kind of soldier are you, Ken? What kind of a guy are you? You won't go help another American.

T: Somebody you might even know.

(1, B, 564)

K: Yes. Then you get a, yes, but I want to live. And I'm not going out.

T: So a focus on self, I hear you saying, came very quickly. If you're going to make it through this.

K: If you want to live. You have to first make the decision you want to live, and then all the rest of it kind of falls in behind. Then I got mad at God. I said, God, where are you and what are you going to do about this? You know everything. You know what's going on. What are you going to do about it?

T: How religious were you at that time of your life?

K: Right then I was pretty religious (*laughs*). Or anti-religious. I was angry at God. I just hollered at him. Then about the second time I did that, a voice in the back of my head said, Ken, if you want to get to the end of this road you have to walk it, so you better focus on what your job is and focus on walking. Stay attuned to what you have to do to get there. Then when I found Jim in San Fernando, at the end of the march, then I said, God, I'm sorry. You were there, weren't you? And you do care. I'm sorry for being smart-mouth, lippy.

T: Did you find during the next years in prison that you alternated between being angry at God and also being thankful? Did it go back and forth?

K: Yes. Yes. Yes. About every six months or so (*laughs*).

T: You kind of swung back and forth.

K: Yes.

T: You're describing some tough situations in your life, in your memoirs, and other times it seemed like things were smiling on you—as much as they could have been.

K: Yes. Well, each time I got angry with God somewhere along the line I would become aware of a bright spot and say, oh! You were there weren't you? Now why was he there? Why did things turn out that way? I had a mother home praying for me. And a sister. Home praying for me. And maybe some other people. I think that's where my good fortune came from.

T: Quickly after the march, pretty quickly, you ended up at Camp O'Donnell. Can you talk about that facility? The conditions there and how you experienced that.

K: My first impression was that it was a place that was not ready for occupancy. The water supply was one spigot that ran very slow.

T: So there were too many people here.

K: Too many people and not enough facility. The buildings weren't all complete. And those men that got into the frame of mind that they had reached the safe haven, that they're no longer in danger, many of those, when they laid down to sleep never woke up.

T: How do you explain that? What's going on there?

K: I say that if you wanted to survive you had to be aware of that walking, whether you're asleep or alive. I used to say God, if you wake me in the morning I'll try to do a better job tomorrow.

T: Let me ask the tougher question there. There were other guys saying the same thing and they didn't make it. Do you think about that?

K: Yes. I do. And I get out of that one by saying they didn't have anybody praying for them.

T: How about the conditions there? Sleeping, food, sanitary conditions. What do you recall about those?

K: Absolutely minimum. Minimum. The diarrhea seemed to be... How you can have that without eating too much? I guess you can, and that's why so many men died. Of whatever it is they died of.

T: Were people dying fairly regularly at O'Donnell?

(1, B, 627)

K: Oh, by the hour. By the minute. And there were so many dying that there weren't enough well men to bury them or to carry them to the burying grounds and then bury them.

And the toilet facility was a straddle trench in the ground that filled up and no place for it to run. And so the flies moved in and the big, black (***) flies, as big as a thumb nail, were flying around, and when you did get your lugau, the flies were there to compete with you for it. And if they once sat on there, then you were over there in the latrine.

T: That's right. So it's really no wonder that so many guys were sick and dying.

K: Oh, yes. I know there were 1500 of them died in the first five weeks I think in that camp.

T: That's three hundred a week.

K: Then the Japanese were hard pushed for people to do the burial details. Then they bribed them with extra ration of rice. They said whoever would work on the detail would get one and then two extra rations of rice. Many of those men that accepted that challenge then when they reached the burying grounds they fell over in a funk and were kicked in the hole and buried along with the rest.

T: I want to ask you about the treatment by the Japanese, because the reports and your own experiences on the march, are the treatment was pretty horrific by the Japanese. How did that treatment change, or did it, when you got to Camp O'Donnell?

K: Well, the fact that you weren't in daily contact with them gave you some relief from that. But if you were on the burying detail, then you had guards all the way along the line with you. Then at the burying place, too, they were there to see that the holes were dug and the dirt was thrown on the bodies and all. But just the fact that you didn't have daily contact with them made it somewhat better.

But the food was terrible. The food was just boiled rice to a consistency of oatmeal.

T: Almost overcooked rice or something.

K: Yes. And they called it lugau. And it was for men, people that had stomach problems (*laughs*).

T: They knew what they were doing in that respect I guess.

K: I tell you. Yes. And then the water thing was terrible too in that there was always a water line and they shut the water off at night. So you stood in line anyway because if you got out of line, then you wouldn't get back into the same position you were in during the daytime.

T: So there was only one spigot.

K: Only one spigot and so you got four or five men in a group, and one man would stand in line with all the canteens and then you would come and relive one another as the hour went by. And all night long those canteens would go bong, bong, bong, bong, bong, bong. Men standing in line with empty canteens banging against one another.

T: Now holding a number of canteens suggests that people were working in groups or depending on each other?

K: Yes.

T: Was that case for you?

K: Yes. Yes. In that water business.

And then the group I was with decided that if you don't get out of this camp in eight weeks, you're all dead. At the rate they're dying. And the way the sanitation thing is. It's just impossible to live there.

(1, B, 674)

T: Were people moving from Camp O'Donnell?

K: They were being taken out on different details. And the group I got on was a bridge building detail. And it was with a group of Japanese engineers. And the captain in charge of this group understood if you wanted men to work then you had to feed them so he fed us like he fed his troops.

T: Which was much more than you had been getting.

K: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

T: Now you mentioned in your memoirs that you were at a number of work camps, and those were Batangas, Talawan and Candalaria.

K: Yes.

T: You mentioned three. Can you describe the kind of work you were doing there and if those camps were different in any way from each other?

K: Yes. Somewhat different. At Batangas we were building a bridge over a gorge, about a twenty, thirty-foot gorge. In the beginning of that one I came down with yellow jaundice and I was given the option of staying and doing light duty or being sent back to O'Donnell. I said, I'll take the light duty. And my light duty was to carry water from a well that was about two and half blocks away to the kitchen and the schoolyard where we were living and for the cooking and the kitchen use and then a little bit extra for the Japanese so they could do their sponge baths.

This yellow jaundice, I don't know just what it does. It affects the liver and the kidneys. Anyway, you get yellow all over, your eyeballs, your fingernails. You're all yellow, all over.

T: Do you get run down as well?

K: Oh, yes. It saps your strength. And the second time I go to the well there is a pound of sugar with a little note, and it says take three spoons each day. It will help your yellow jaundice.

T: This note in English?

K: Yes. Yes.

T: Who left it there?

K: I don't know [who left it there]. I don't know. I never did see anybody. Or hear anybody. But after that, every time I went to that well there was another gift for me.

T: How could you carry a pound of sugar without being detected? Or any kind of food I guess, for that matter?

K: When you're working alone it's not too impossible. Then I had a little musette bag. All the tankers had a little musette bag they carried.

T: And you had kept that.

K: I had kept that. Yes. And my mess kit and my cup. So I just put it in that and that was safe, because nobody was around during the daytime anyway. And you never ate any of the sugar when anybody else was around, so that they wouldn't know about it (*laughs*).

T: I see. So you weren't sharing this sugar with...

K: Oh, no. Absolutely not. No. No. No.

T: We talked about the group and the individual. So you have to take care of yourself first.

K: Yes. Yes. That's pretty much it. And sometimes that works against you too, because then you think what kind of a person are you anyway? You won't share your good times with somebody else. But I did enough of that anyway.

On the walk out of Bataan I did go to one of those wells that you weren't supposed to go to. But I did it by walking very slowly and I drank my fill of water and returning back to the ranks when others thought, hey, the water's for the taking and they ran and those that ran were shot.

Then along about the fifth day or so, I came along in the evening time, there was a squad of Japanese soldiers making a bivouac for the night and they had a fire going and over the fire was a pot-bellied pot and was cooking away. It reminded me of camping back in Minnesota where we would camp in the summertime and put a pot of meat and vegetables over a slow burning fire and let it simmer all day long and then in the evening when you come back to camp your supper was ready and everything was great. I said, that's got to be a pot of stew. That's got to be a pot of stew, Ken. As I approached the pathway into there, someone among the Japanese blew a whistle and they all lined up and faced east and were singing their song and bowing to their emperor, and while they were doing this I walked in and took the pot off the fire.

(1, B, 728)

T: No kidding.

K: And I got back in line and I scooted ahead so I would be out of synch from where... then when I did finally settle down I took the lid off I found it was a pot of tea.

T: It wasn't stew.

K: So I asked a man walking next to me if he would like a cup of hot tea and he said, I only drink tea with lemon and sugar. Oh, I said, do you have a canteen cup? I said, let me have it and I poured some tea in his canteen cup and I said, see if this is sweet enough for you. And it blew his mind.

T: He thought you were joking about the tea.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: As well he might.

K: Until he drank it. Until he drank it. Then he hollered. So I had to shut him up and then I thought, take what you can use and then pass the rest of it and get rid of it. And I did that. And that water too when I got back in the rank. I offered it to my other four friends.

T: Originally with you.

K: Yes. And they said, you drink it. You stole it, you got it. You drink it. Then I gave it out to other people.

T: These work camp details, bridge building, hard physical work?

K: Yes. Real hard. Real hard. The next one was we had to drive pile into the riverbed with big logs.

T: No machines either.

K: There was a man operating a machine where a hundred guys go around and pulled on this rope and lifted this weight up above the pole and then let it go and it would slowly drive this big log into the riverbank. And while we're doing that there's other prisoners of war in the mountains sawing these trees down and limbing them and bringing them into the bridge area. Then this rope that everybody is pulling on. If you didn't get out of the way of that it would snake and it would rip your skin off.

T: So you had to pull and release all at the same time, didn't you?

K: Yes. Everybody in synch. Everybody counting in Japanese.

T: In Japanese.

K: *(laughing)* Yes.

T: How long did you do work camp detail? All three of those together. How long did those three work camp experiences last?

K: Oh, somewhere about four months.

T: Were you in better shape after the end of those work camps than you were when you started?

K: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. I was very fortunate to get with that group of engineers. This officer told everyone, Japanese and American, that if an American is out of line and needs correction he will do the correction. He will do the punishment. Only he. And so they all understood that. And then he would give us the rations that he gave his men too.

(1, B, 762)

T: Did you have contact with Japanese at this point, or were they just in charge of you?

K: No. No. You worked right with them. They worked right along with you.

T: What did you think of them then? I mean here you're really...

K: On the second bridge, I just couldn't do that rope thing. I didn't want to do that, so I'm watching the Japanese hammer in these Japanese characters in the bridge posts, and after a while I tap him on the shoulder and I say (*speaks Japanese*) I can do that. I can do that. So he says, show me. And so I showed him. Ah, so! He says. And then every now and then I would have to get him to help me, show me how to get around a curve...

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

T: Following your work camp details you were in Bilibid Prison...

K: Yes.

T: And also at Cabanatuan before you went to Japan. At which location was it that you met the fellow that you call in your memoirs Juan Santos?

K: I met him first on the ship going over.

T: To the Philippines.

K: To the Philippines.

T: So you knew this guy.

K: Yes. He's new to the outfit inasmuch as we were short personnel and so in Fort Lewis they put the word out that the tank outfit needs six people to fill out, and usually the company commander picks out his worst one or his headache, and sends that over to get rid of it. So we get several of those kind of people. More than six. I don't know how many we needed, but a number of people anyway. We got a lot of new people come in that way.

T: People not from Brainerd.

K: Not from Brainerd.

T: So this Juan Santos, was he one of them?

K: He was one of them. Yes. He was a card player. He's a dice man. He has a game going aboard ship. But he also had gone to the kitchen and offered his services to wash pots and pans. Oh, yes. They said, hey, sure. So he has access to the kitchen. So he plays poker most of the day and then sometimes in the evening he will go down and wash some pots and pans. I'm seasick. Every time I try to get down in the bowels of that ship my world turns upside down on me. So the second day I am sitting at midnight on the fantail and commiserating how terrible life is. And how I'd like just a bite to eat or something, and along comes this guy with a tray and he sits down like from here to there from me on a coil of rope or something...

T: Six feet away.

K: And he uncovers, takes this white napkin off of there, and the aroma of roast chicken. Oh! I said. Can you spare me just a piece of that chicken? I tell him my plight, that I haven't eaten since I'm on the ship. Oh, he says, you take the whole thing. He says I'll go get another one. And so I wait for him and he does. He comes back. He's got another one of them and the two of us sit there at midnight and we eat our dinner and then I said, "Let me do the dishes." He says, "Never mind. No problem. Come. We go to the rail." He says, "Throw it overboard."

(2, A, 57)

T: The dishes and everything?

K: Everything. Tray and the silverware and everything. Sure. I said, how can you do that? He said we're going into a war zone and they're going to do this, throw this stuff over, anyway when they get rid of us. All right with me. So he feeds me until Honolulu. Each day. Which was only about three days. Then I get over my seasickness. Then when we get into the Philippines, Santos is in trouble. He's put in the guardhouse or he is made to police the company street.

T: Is this guy just a bad egg or what?

K: He's something else. He said he had read the Bible three times. And part of his procedure was, there in L.A., was to go on Sunday morning to Orange Park or some such place and have a little soap box and he put his hat out and preached the gospel until there was enough money in his hat to take him for the week. Then he'd pack up and go.

T: He's an operator.

K: He's an operator. I found out later his cards are marked. As he is policing, he's going by the tent where the barber works, and the first sergeant is in the barber chair who had put the finger on Santos to begin with. So he bribes the guard and says, "Take me in there." And his friend Lopez is the barber, so he tells Lopez to move over and he gets these hot towels. Puts them on the first sergeant until he about cooks him and then he's stropping the razor, stropping the razor and then he lifts the towel a little bit and he's got the razor on the first sergeant's neck and there's this, "Ah, sergeant, we meet again." And the sergeant came bolting out of that chair. Santos goes to the guard tent.

The guard office is a tent out in the tropic sun. And that's where Santos goes. I come on guard duty and he says, "Sergeant, I am so happy to see you. I am so happy to see you. I'm dying of thirst. I'm dying of thirst. I just need something to drink." I said, "Let me get the guard squared away and then I'll see to your thirst." Then I went to get him some water and he... "No, no, no. You don't understand." He says, "I need alcohol. I'm dying. I'm dying for alcohol." I said, "I don't have any money for your alcohol." He says, "Here, take this." And he gives me a roll of bills and I think, not me. No closer. So I call the corporal of the guard and I said, "Corporal, take this roll of bills. Go to the NCO club and get four cases of beer and put them under Santos' bunk." And he does. "And put a blanket down over it so they can't see it." And every time I came on guard duty, that's the procedure.

T: What was he doing with all that beer?

K: Drinking. He's an alcoholic besides everything else.

T: Wow! You knew this guy.

K: I said I owed him, I owed him one, you know. Now comes my time to go to Japan. And I'm in this detail and I leave Cabanatuan and I'm walking down the road and I need to take a leak. So I go to the side of the road and I'm doing my thing. But I'm not smart enough to know that the column has passed me by and I'm standing there exposed and two guards come and hit me, one in the neck and one in the small of the back with their rifle butts. And I go tumbling in the ditch unconscious.

T: They left you there.

K: They left me there. Thank goodness the cleanup squad this time is a truck with American POWs on it picking up stragglers, and they pick me up and throw me in the truck and they take me to the railroad station.

T: This is in Manila?

K: This is in Cabanatuan.

T: Cabanatuan.

K: Cabanatuan.

T: Right.

(2, A, 134)

K: They load us into boxcars and then ship us to Manila. I lose control of my bowels and I'm just a mess.

T: You were in bad shape, weren't you?

K: When we get into the railroad yard in Manila, then the other fellows find a water hose someplace and they put it down my shirt and down my pants and they cleaned me up. Then we get on a truck and I'm trucked to Pier Seven. As I look at that rusty old ship I said, "Ken, don't get on that ship. You'll die on that sucker. Surest thing." So I crawled off a distance and I lay down and I went to sleep. When I woke up there's no ship. There's nobody. Just me and the pier. So I laid there long enough two Filipinos came by and I asked them for food and they didn't have any. I asked them where I could hide and they didn't know. Asked them to take me home with them. They weren't going to do that. No way. But they disappear and they come back with a couple of Japanese soldiers. I later learned that they could get a hundred pesos for turning in an American.

T: Or big trouble if they didn't.

K: Yes. Then the Japanese soldiers tried to make me walk and I couldn't walk. I'd fall down. Then they get a callayso, two-wheel buggy with a pony, and they lay me across the hanes and then they sit on the seat and use me for a footrest and they take me to Bilibid. And they hammer on the gates until somebody opens them and then they have some conversation and then they leave and they take me inside and take me to the execution chamber. They put me on this cement block that the electric chair had been on. As I hear the voice I opened my eyes and I look into two big brown eyes. I say "Santos, is that you?" "Yes, Sarge. Oh, I'm so sorry to see you like this."

T: Here he was in Bilibid.

K: My other trip with him was on Bataan. He is shot in the foot and he loses his foot, his leg in the mid-calf.

T: So he had it amputated.

K: It was amputated. Then I go deaf down on Bataan. Because I had been in a bombing where they bombed down this cement building around us and eventually can crawl out from under this rubble but I go deaf. And they can't help me out in the field.

T: How long did that last?

K: Tried for a week. For a week out there in the field anyway.

T: You couldn't hear.

K: Couldn't hear. So they sent me to the hospital. Who's there but Santos. That sucker always knows what's going on.

T: Operators do, don't they?

K: Always know. Yes. He comes with a big sad story that he would like to form a partnership with me. How much money do I have? I looked and I have four pesos and I have a GI issue watch. "Well," he says, "that's not much but, partner, let me try it and see what we can do."

And I'm there about five days and the day I'm dressing to go, here comes Santos. He changed his name from Sanchez to Santos. His complaint is that things aren't going very well for him and that the partnership won't fly. We have to dissolve it. So he gives me my four pesos and my wristwatch, and then he counts me one hundred pesos and says, "This is your share of the partnership." I said, "Fine. Thank you very much." I never made one hundred dollars easier. I go my way and Santos goes his way. Now when the surrender comes, he has one foot and he has sixty thousand pesos.

T: Sixty thousand?

K: Sixty thousand. He's taken it away from the doctors and the nurses and anyone else that's got a loose buck, and he hires a male nurse to wrap it around his body with gauze. Then they put on a big floppy pair of pajamas, hospital pajamas, so it covers him up and he's trucked off to Bilibid Prison where he sets up shop by hiring two Marines for guards. I show up and he says, "Sarge, my man will come and bathe you, and he will feed you in the morning and in the evening, and then you eat your own ration on top of that. And he will do this until you can go to the toilet on your own power." "Why are you doing this, Santos?" "Well, when I was thirsty you gave me drink," he says. I says, "I did?" He says, "Yes." That's fine with me. And it wasn't

until sometime later that I remembered the guard tent and the beer. And it always seemed like he either owed me or I owed him one.

(2, A, 221)

T: He might very well have saved your life at that time at Bilibid.

K: I think so. I think so.

T: And yet, you broke with him eventually.

K: Yes. Because he wanted me to steal drugs from that room I was in. See the hospital contingent of the Caviti Navy Yard was moved intact into Bilibid. They had their own trucks and all and they took everything that they could with them into there. So they had a cabinet in the one area there that had different colored pills in it, and he came to me and wanted to know if I wanted a job in Bilibid. I said, "Yes. That would be pretty nice." I said, "What would I do?" And he says, "Well, each day you would steal two pills from that medicine cabinet in there." I said, "But that's locked. I wouldn't be able to get in there." He says, "When you there it will not be locked."

T: So he had someone who was going to open it up.

K: I said, "Those pills are for the men in there." He says, "It's not going to do them a bit of good. They're going to die. Those men are dying and they will die. I want to live and I need those pills."

T: So you had a real ethical situation now.

K: And I told him three times, and after the third time he said, "It would have been better for you had you never been born." And I find that it's the ultimate slam a Mexican can give you.

T: That was it. He asked you, in a sense, to join this whole group of operators. There were others.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: Now were the conditions at Bilibid such that it would have been a good place to stay?

K: Yes. Yes. But it's one of those things, too, that in the end it wasn't the best place.

T: Really? What happened at Bilibid?

K: They were starving. They wouldn't feed them. They didn't feed them. And they were skin and bones. Just absolutely skin and bones.

Two other things happened with Santos. After I made the mistake one day in getting up and go to the latrine on my own and relieving myself and then coming back. Ten minutes he's in there. He knows it. "I'm so happy to hear you're feeling better, Sarge." Yes. Then there's a Marine that shows up and says, "Santos wants to see you. Santos has a new deck of Bicycle cards." Playing cards. He breaks it open. Breaks the cellophane off. He's waiting for me. He breaks the cellophane off and then he starts marking the backs of them.

T: So he can cheat playing cards.

K: Then I am flashing the cards for him so that he learns them again. Prove to himself that he can read them.

T: Right. So he can see that back of the cards which will be marked, but he'll have memorized what they really are.

K: Yes. Yes. That's the kind of a mind he had.

Then another time he calls for me and we go into another part of Bilibid and we go up on the third floor of this bombed out building, burned out building, and we look over the wall. That wall is about a five foot thick wall and twenty feet high around there.

T: That's pretty big. Boy!

(2, A, 263)

K: Oh, yes. It's big. Built by the Spaniards.

T: So it's an old place.

K: Really old. And he said, "Look down the street on the left hand side. The second house. Has the upstairs window open." Oh, yes. It does. He gives me a piece of looking glass. "Now you shine the Morse code into that window as I tell it to you and do not hit the window frame. Hit the inside wall." And we do this about twenty minutes and then he said, "That's all." He takes his looking glass and I said, "What did we just do?" And he said, "We just ordered groceries."

T: He's ordering things from outside the camp.

K: In fact the food that that Marine is bringing to me is Spanish rice like my mother used to make, with sausage and gravy and spices.

T: So this guy is connected outside the camp and he runs this kind of operation inside the camp too. What ever happened to him? Do you know?

K: We don't know. I do know this: We were at a convention in San Francisco and his friend Lopez shows up. I said "Lopez, you're the guy. Where is Santos? What's he doing?" He said, "I have no idea." Now the other thing Santos did is if a tanker came through Bilibid and asked for a loan, he would give you the loan, whatever you asked. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred pesos. On an I.O.U. and Lopez says he came home with a shoebox full of I.O.U.s. He said, "I tried to persuade him to burn them. Santos, burn them." "No," he says, "I can't just burn them." So he starts sending out Dunn letters and my friend in Missouri received his Dunn letter for three hundred dollars. You borrowed pesos, which was two to one dollar, and you paid back in dollars.

T: So he survived the war.

K: He survived the war. Costigan goes to the bank immediately and gets a money order and sends it to Santos. And my friend in Brainerd borrowed two hundred pesos from him and said, to hell with him. He's nothing but a damn cheat to begin with. I won't pay him. Costigan in Missouri is still living, even though he's legally blind and can't hear. The guy in Brainerd died of alcoholism and cancer. I think that's the difference in attitude.

T: That the way they...

K: The way they view life and the way they attract life.

T: As far as being more positive or negative?

K: Yes.

T: So you don't know what happened to Sanchez? To Santos?

K: I found another Tex-Mex down there... What am I thinking of? New Mexico. This Costigan says, when you go down there, Ken, you go to the little town of Roy, New Mexico, because the guy in Chicago is sending Christmas cards to Roy, New Mexico, to Joe Santos. So Mary Ellen and I go, get a car. We go up to Roy. A little bit of a place. About six building in the town and then there's a house that has City Clerk. Oh! So we go in. And as I enter there's a lot of laughter and talking and I get in there and the woman says, "How may I help you?" I said, "You can get me the address of Joe Santos." And everything went quiet. Dead quiet and I thought, oh, oh. Just like Dodge City (*laughs*).

T: No kidding.

K: "Oh", she says. "He doesn't live here." "Oh", I said. "My friend in Chicago keeps sending Christmas cards here." So he did live here. "Oh, yes, yes. His wife and children live here but he doesn't anymore." "I'm so sorry to hear that. How can I get

in touch with him?" She didn't help. So I badgered her some more and then she said, "Well, he has a brother that lives here. I don't know if he will talk with you or not." I said, "How will I find out?" She says, "I will call him and see." So she called. She came back and had a smile on her face. "He says he'll see you and if you go to the corner, take a right and go two blocks up and then take another right and he'll be standing in front of the second house on your left hand side." So I go there. I said, "Hi. Are you the brother of Joe Santos?" "Yes." "Will you talk about him with me?" I said, "You know, I knew him in prison camp and I owe him one and I just thought I would like to find him and pay him my respects or whatever." And after some conversation he says, "He lives far, far away though." I said, "Where is far, far away?" "Angel Fire. He lives on the other side of Angel Fire." I said, "Heaven sakes I'm going through Angel Fire tomorrow. That's no problem. How do I find him?" "Angel Fire is just a crossroads. When you get there you turn left and take that road to the end of the blacktop and you will find a tavern there at the end of that blacktop. You turn around and come back to the first ranch house on your left and that's where he lives."

So we go down there and I find the ranch house and there's nobody there. All of the doors wide open and you can see where somebody had sat at the table and had breakfast. So I said, "Let's go back to the tavern." So we go back to the tavern and I go to get out of the car and there are two dogs and they are smiling at me. And Mary Ellen says, "Ken, they're not smiling. Don't you go out there. Don't you be foolish enough to go out there because they're not smiling at you." I said, "You know, you're right. Absolutely right." So we go back. Start down the road and it isn't long there's a pickup truck following. And I slow up and they slow up. I speed up and they speed up. Then I stop. And as they come by they're both looking me over and I'm looking them over. They've got a couple of rifles in the back window of their pickup and they take a left turn and go down into the valley. Kind of open country. So I tell Mary Ellen, "I got to follow those guys." She says "If you do, you let me out right here. I'm not going." (*laughs*) I said, "Okay. All right." So we went on.

(2, A, 351)

T: So you got close but you never found him.

K: Then when I got to the convention I find this Joe, he says you know we're all baptized Joe, he says, you've got to know the middle name. Then I tell him about this guy. And he says, "That's not your Sanchez. That's not your Santos." I said "How do you know?" He says, "It's a neighbor of mine. You know where you come to the end of the blacktop? My dad's ranch is the next ranch on the right hand side of that road." He says, "I know all those people in there. That Santos came home a war hero and he picked a beautiful gal in town and her dad happens to be the richest man around the place and he doesn't like Jose, so after Jose has a couple of kids by his daughter and all, he has these other ranches that need caring so he sends Jose off to the ranch and keeps the daughter and the kids there with him."

T: So the guy you were looking for...

K: This other guys says you have to know the middle name and he says the guy you're looking for is Francisco. That's the man you have to find. I said, "Where will I find him?" "In Colombia or in prison," he says. "One of the two." (*laughs*)

T: That was the rather inauspicious end to that story.

K: Yes. Yes. And this Lopez, he wouldn't tip his hand either. I suspect he would know. Whatever happened.

T: Operators tend to get into trouble eventually.

K: You know as much money as he had at times, whenever I met him he was broke.

T: So it comes and goes doesn't it?

K: Comes and goes. Except in Bilibid Prison where he just, really financed the commissary. The Navy people in charge talked the Japanese into allowing them to have a commissary where the Filipinos would bring produce in and the Americans then could buy it if they had money. Most of the Naval officers had money. And they agreed to that, but Joe financed that thing.

T: So the food was better.

K: And this naval officer... I finally I got a book of his. A few years ago. He is so mad at Santos because when the Red Cross came in for inspection they're not allowed to talk to them but Joe has contact with them. Joe passes a note to them. The officer has to throw his note over the fence, over the wall, over this big stone wall and then he has to wait until somebody throws one back (*laughs*).

T: You were at Cabanatuan briefly –

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

T: Is it from Cabanatuan that you in October '43 were placed on a ship for Japan?

K: Yes. After my thing with Santos in Bilibid, two days later I'm on a detail out of there.

T: He moved you out?

K: He moved me out.

T: So you moved from Bilibid to this detail at Cabanatuan.

K: Yes. The second time that I have been in Cabanatuan now. I'm going back for a second time.

T: You didn't stay there very long though, did you?

K: No. No.

T: How is it that you ended up, and really, many people were transported to Japan later [in the war]. This is one of the earliest transports. How did you end up on this ship, the *Taga Maru*, to Japan so early?

K: My philosophy was there's got to be a better place in the world than the one I'm in. So keep traveling, Ken. Keep moving. When you get a chance to move, move. And you've got to find a better place than what you're in.

T: Now this meant that you had to volunteer for something.

K: Yes.

T: Now the old attitude in the military is, you don't volunteer for anything.

K: Yes. Don't volunteer for anything.

T: How is it that you really took it upon yourself to volunteer and to move to something new?

K: I think my mother was praying for me. And I follow the instincts or urgings.

T: Your own instincts?

K: My own. You know, your own gut feeling about a thing. Another thing, those men that I was with walking out of Bataan, the one that got the softest job, the one that got to be a truck driver, can you imagine that? A truck driving job instead of slave labor. He's the only guy that didn't make it. He was sent back into Bataan and he picked up malaria, and there's nothing to counteract the malaria. He dies of cerebral malaria.

T: And you'd think that his job would be the safest of all.

K: Sure. Safest of all.

T: So does that suggest there's some kind of luck or chance going on here?

K: Somebody's praying for you. We called him Frog. His name was Deyette or Deletti and he was French and we called him Frog. There are some other things in there working too, because all those men that died, certainly a goodly number of

them, had somebody praying for them and wishing them well and looking after their welfare. Attitude helps you through a lot of things.

T: Keeping a positive attitude?

(2, B, 438)

K: It's amazing how you can attract dirt and no good stuff to you by being negative and dirty minded. You're positive and bright and shiny and you attract those things to you. Your mind even works better that way. McOmis. Never gave up. And they were a hundred percent sure that he was going to die and he ended up being positive thinking and finds a culvert and has the presence of mind to crawl into it. Even though he's in the throws of a malaria attack, a chill from a malaria attack.

T: He made it back from the war, didn't he?

K: He did. Absolutely. Yes. Not only that, but he also survived a ship sinking.

T: On a ship to Japan? [The *Shinyo Maru*, torpedoed and sunk 7 September 1944 by an American submarine.]

K: Yes. And there was eighty-three of them were able to get to shore. And the guerrillas on the shore picked them up and took them in. On the island of Mindanao. They then told MacArthur, hey, we got eighty-three of your boys up here and six weeks later he sent up a submarine to pick them up. Then he gets in Australia and he's in rehab and footloose and fancy free and he likes poker too. He likes to play poker. The story is he won the deed to the whorehouse there in that area (*laughs*) playing poker with the madame, and she runs out of money so she puts the deed—she's so sure of her hand—and she puts the deed of her place in the pot, and he wins the pot. Then he gives it back to her when he's shipped out to the States.

T: Let me ask about your ship experience to Japan in October 1943.

K: In some ways it was better than others, but it wasn't good. They're so crowded that you hardly have room for everybody to sit down at the same time.

T: How many have you got on? Any idea?

K: About three hundred fifty in the hold. So there's seven hundred Americans on this ship.

[NOTE: *Taga Maru*, 2,868-ton cargo ship, holds 850 prisoners when it departs Manila on 20 September 1943. Records indicate seventy men died enroute. Ship arrives Moji, 5 October 1943. See Michno 118-119.]

T: And you're all Americans?

K: Yes. But there's also Japanese on there too.

T: Right. But no other POW nationalities.

K: No. No. All Americans. And they all came out of Manila or out of the Philippines. There were two holds in this thing. Forward and the rear hold. The toilet is a washtub in the middle of the hold. There's no lid on it. And people that have diarrhea can't get to it anyway, because you have to walk on people to get there. And those that make an attempt, by the time they get there, they're all done. They don't need the tub anymore.

T: Being on a ship and an open tub rocking back and forth and –

K: You end up living like rats in a sewer. Awash in human feces. And they lower a bucket of rice and a bucket of water down once a day. And the men that were in charge of that had to be really some kind of a Solomon to ration that out so that each man in that hold got a dipper of rice and a swallow of water. They're hungry. They're starved. They're crazy. They're out of their minds.

T: You mentioned people being out of their mind. I try to imagine small space, horrific conditions. Do some people just not, literally not make it mentally? Can you talk about that at all?

K: In the hold of that ship people would scream and scream and scream and somebody would holler, "Shut that sucker up!" A little while later you didn't hear them screaming.

(2, B, 511)

T: What does that mean? Somebody find a way to...

K: Somebody throttled him. Somebody killed him. Somebody choked him. And the boxcars going from San Fernando to Capis, Camp O'Donnell, we again were crowded so badly in there that you could hardly breathe. If your arms were up they stayed up. If they were down they stayed down because you were packed so tightly. Men screamed and screamed in there. And no matter how you cajole some of them to stop using up all the oxygen in the place...

T: By screaming.

K: By screaming. They did it anyway. And then they finally they shut up because they had died. And they had died standing up.

But in the hold I was in, there was one man that seemed to be different in his screaming. And so an American doctor went to check him and he said this man has an appendix that's about to burst. If it's not taken out he will scream until he drives us crazy or until he dies. So he gets word to the ship's officer that he needed

equipment to do this surgery. And the officer sent down a jackknife and a needle and some button thread. Then the doctor says I need light. It's dark down here. I can't see. I need light. So they put a sixty-five watt bulb on the end of the end of an extension cord and lowered it down. Four or five men hold this man while the doctor proceeds to take his appendix out. Then he sews him up and he returns the knife and the needle to the ship's officer. Two days later the Japanese inquire about the health of the man that had surgery, and he said he lives. He sends down two pounds of sugar for the man. Now there's not enough water to drink let alone wash your hands in this hold. And we're living like rats in a sewer. And this man agrees to have surgery. The doctor asks him. Asked his permission, and he agrees to have surgery.

T: He was, I guess, sure to die without the operation. Is that it? You're on this ship a number of days.

K: Eighteen days.

T: How did you keep your own sanity in those kind of conditions?

K: I don't know. I don't know if I did (*chuckles*).

But to finish this other story, they put two men to guard the sugar and to feed this man his three spoons of sugar a day, and then they put two men to watch those two so they don't eat the sugar. When I met this Joe Quinchera, the man that had the surgery, when I met him in 1983 down in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I said, "Joe, how did you get out of that damn hold of that ship? Because it's a twenty foot climb on a rope ladder. And it's almost impossible for a well man to do that let alone one that had surgery like you." "Well," he said, "there was a couple of dozen of us that couldn't do that, so the Japanese put down a cargo net and they put us all in the cargo net and hoisted us out and dropped us down on the pier." I said, "How did you get along in Niigata? Because if you didn't work you were on half-rations and you could starve to death." He says, "I was ward person in the sickbay. I had a job."

T: Boy, I'll say.

K: And he's there with his wife and his son down in New Mexico in 1983 or '84. Something like that.

T: The conditions on the ship... you said earlier that you're not quite sure how you kept yourself straight.

K: I don't know. We reached [Takao on] Formosa, and they finally let us out of the hold of that damn ship and we stunk so bad that every Jap on there wore a facemask. They got us up on the deck and they turned the sea hoses on us. And even though it was stinging and burning, it just felt so wonderful to get cleaned up a little bit.

T: You hadn't seen fresh air or light. Water.

K: Yes. At first they would let us go up and use a latrine that was hung on the side of the ship, but four or five days of that and then we get into a storm and the waves just washed those toilets right off of the rail of the ship, so there aren't any. So that ship rolled and tossed for a number of days. I always felt that I was fortunate to be on that one in that it was stormy enough so that the [American] submarines would maybe have a hard time finding us.

(2, B, 590)

T: That's right. Because the submarines sunk a number of those ships.

K: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

T: Let's move to your time in Japan because you spent twenty-two months in Niigata, Japan.

K: Yes.

T: Describe the arrival in Japan because there must have been different weather as well.

K: Oh, it was cool by the time we got there. It was October [1943].

T: Yes.

K: And as we are sitting out in the open area—I think waiting for a train to show up—along comes what seemed to me a Catholic priest and he was carrying something wrapped in his robes and two acolytes with him with lit candles. I thought, man, am I seeing what I'm seeing? If I am, I can live here. I can live here. That's the second time that happened to me. In Bilibid Prison the same way. I was so miserable and I'm sitting out in the open all by myself, out in the sun. And commiserating what a terrible life this is and I hear a violin playing. It's playing "Ave Maria."

T: Outside the wall somewhere or inside?

K: No. Inside. So I move over to the barracks and it plays through it a second time. Then I said I gotta go in. I gotta meet this guy. So I go in and I ask. Who was the guy who's got the violin in there? Who played? There's nobody in here playing a violin. I said, "There is too. Where is he? I want to see him." (*laughs*) They swear there wasn't. But at that time too, I said I can live where there's music like that. I can live there. Music like that. Now in the book that I read of the commander who ran this Bilibid Prison, in there he says that they had prevailed upon the Japanese to allow them three musical instruments and one of them was a violin. And the man that played the violin his favorite tune was "Ave Maria."

T: So you did hear it, didn't you?

K: I did hear it.

T: Yes.

K: But I didn't know where it was coming from.

T: What a strange image in the midst of that difficult prison situation. Here's music.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: Niigata. I know at Niigata you worked. Niigata is on the west coast of Japan.

K: On the west coast. About two hundred miles north and west of Tokyo. We could see Mt. Fujiyama from where we were.

T: You worked at a place called the Rinco Coal Yard. Can you talk about the work you did there and the living conditions?

K: Our living conditions first off were... to begin with, we had lived in three different places.

T: In Niigata.

K: In Niigata. And the first place was a place that had paper walls. They had wood frame sliding doors on the rooms, but the paneling was paper. So you know, the whole thing was kind of built like that. There was one pump in it and a little washroom area with a long trough where the water would run down. As I remember I thought that they were pumping up toilet papers through that pump. And it stunk. The water stunk. And I never used it. In fact, the first five months in Japan I never washed and never took my clothes off.

(2, B, 643)

T: It was winter, so I guess it would have been cold if you had taken your clothes off.

K: Yes.

T: Did your work change at all or did you do pretty much the same thing?

K: Pretty much the same thing. They had Chinese prisoners of war in the holds of the ship to load, to shovel the coal into the cargo nets, and the cargo net then was lifted and dropped into a barge and emptied while an elevator poked the bucket

nose down into the barge and picked the coal up and brought it up to the elevated track.

T: Niigata is a port city, isn't it? So things were being shipped in and then these Chinese POWs were unloading the coal. You were not doing that kind of work?

K: No. No. But we were to handle the coal from the elevator and either put it on the ground in piles to be later shoveled into coal cars, or to drop it directly into the coal cars as you pushed it around the track. I was pushing a coal car.

T: How big are these coal cars?

K: I think they carried a ton of coal.

T: That's pretty heavy to be pushing.

K: Oh, yes. And the wheels were rigid so that whenever you had to go around a corner you had to push extra hard to get that sucker around the corner. Just really something.

In the wintertime they would allow us... they had steel baskets about eighteen inches high with holes around it. And you put the coal in there and start a fire and then you go there and get warm. Of course it's soft coal and so sometimes soot would string from your nostrils, hang down or from your eyelids, hang down and just (*chuckles*)...

T: But it was warmth, wasn't it?

K: It was warm. At the end of the day you were just a mess. Just a mess.

T: How many hours a day were you working?

K: Sunup to sundown.

T: So that could be longer in summer and shorter in winter.

K: That's right. That's right. That's right.

T: Every day of the week?

K: Every day of the week. We were to have one day a month off to wash our clothes and to do whatever toiletries needed to be done. I don't remember having any facilities to wash clothes, or mirrors or anything to shave by or a razor. You weren't supposed to have a razor. Anything sharp.

T: Sure. What about the sleeping conditions and the food?

K: Of course you were always on the floor. Always on the floor. And sometimes they had a little thin grass mat that covered over the cracks in the floor or whatever. And no heat. No heat in the barracks. And it's like twenty degrees or eighteen degrees outside. In fact, it froze the ice so thick the second winter that when they brought in the icebreaker to open up the harbor—we're on a river and where the river enters, goes to the ocean, they made a wall and the river water then comes into this little unloading area. The ice was so thick, the icebreaker came in and hung up on it. We sang and danced around there for about two weeks before they got two boats in there to hook onto it and pull it back off of the ice.

T: So it got cold there.

K: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Really, really cold. Even the Japanese. They must have used these burners too when they had Japanese people doing this work.

(2, B, 692)

T: Right. You mentioned sleeping on the floor. Large room with lots of people or were there small...

K: No. Big barn-like things. Big barn-like barracks. Heaven sakes, there must have been... Our lot is seventy-five foot here and it was easily this long.

T: Big place. A lot of guys inside.

K: Yes.

T: Were you better fed here...

K: As a matter of fact, the rooms were one hundred fifty in the building I was in.

T: Really?

K: Yes.

T: Were you better fed here in Niigata than you had been in the Philippines? As far as the amount of food or the quality.

K: I think somewhat. I think somewhat better. Yes. In that in the Philippines we tried eating grass and leaves from the trees and stuff like that. It just didn't work. It just didn't work.

In Japan occasionally we had stewed grasshoppers, and that doesn't sound like much except that you never had salt until you got stewed grasshoppers and they were stewed in soy sauce. So they were salty. The only thing is, you had to hold them by the feet and then bite them off at the knees because they got nonskid things on their feet. They'll tear your lips and your mouth apart.

T: So you had to pull those off?

K: Bite them off. Bite them off and throw them away.

T: Describe the taste of those.

K: Oh, delicious!

T: Really?

K: Really. Well, the salt. The main part. And the rest of it is crunchy and crispy so that you could eat them without too much problem. At least I did. Now I usually got all I wanted to eat because many of the other guys didn't eat them. Or snails. They'd bring in bushel baskets of snails. You had to get a little stick to push the foot out. They have a real hard foot. It covers the bottom and you have to push that and get a hold of it and pull that off and then get a hold of the little guy in there and pull him out. I used to eat a bunch of those when they would come. And then on the worksite sometimes there was boxes of fish left in the coal car. And you could smell it coming into the yard. And everybody would run like crazy to get there and get some of that fish.

T: Were people dying here too, like they had been in the Philippines?

K: No. Not like they did in the Philippines which shows... Then there was a white daikon, white radish. It was about as big as my leg some of them. They had those sliced and put in the hot water for soup or stew. Then there was sweet potato vines that they—the Japanese would harvest their sweet potatoes and hang the vines to dry, and then in the winter they would bring them in and they'd chop them up into about three-quarter inch lengths and boil them up and it's pretty good.

T: You're describing variety in food like I didn't hear you describe in the Philippines.

K: Yes. That's right.

T: So it wasn't just rice balls every day, was it?

(2, B, 727)

K: No. No. A little bit extra. A little bit something beyond that.

T: Did the food quality or the amount of food decrease as the war went on, as things began to get tougher for the Japanese?

K: Yes. It did. And in fact, you would see the Japanese even would clean out their—I don't know what you call them, hongos?—their lunch box anyway, the rice goes in. They would be sure they got every kernel of rice.

T: Now the Japanese themselves, were there military guards here or were you working with civilians?

K: There were both. Both. The military guards, they took you to the camp and guarded you there, and then they brought you back to the work site and guarded you there too. But the civilian guard was hired by whoever you were working for. Was there to see that you got the work done. And they all carried clubs. It got to the point they were called vitamin sticks, because if you thought you couldn't work anymore or harder and then they start laying this club on you, you found energy. You found you could move again.

T: So you had a military guards at the actual camp and then the work site that you went to every day...

K: Yes.

T: Now to get from the camp to the work site, how far was that?

K: About three miles.

T: Did you walk that?

K: Yes.

T: Was that through part of the town?

K: Part of the town. Yes, it was. And at one point the school kids would gather, the boys particularly, and they got to throwing rocks. So we said everybody get a rock and peg at these kids and be sure you hit them. Don't just make a farce. But hit them. And if you don't you're going to be blamed for it anyway. So you're not going to be Scot free if you don't throw a rock and you think you're going to get by with it. We're all going to swear that everybody in the column threw a rock. And we only had to do it once. And those kids went running and screaming. And they never showed up again.

T: Did you have other contact with Japanese civilians?

K: Very little. The second year they took us to their public bath house for a bath. It's a big tub. About the size of this room almost.

T: Pretty big room.

K: Oh, yes.

T: Twelve by twenty.

K: Pretty big tub. Yes. About three foot deep or more. And there the women were vying for jobs that day that the Americans were bathing.

T: How do you know that?

K: Because they're all lined up along the wall and tittering and tee-heeing and...

T: No kidding.

K: Yes.

T: How did you manage that? How did you handle that situation?

K: What the hell? I want to take a bath and I'm not going to let them deter me from it. And my first bath, I cried. I absolutely cried. Because I am dreaming of this hot tub and I'm dreaming... My head was terrible. I just itched, itched, itched. And I can just feel getting down in that tub and washing my head and my hair and I'm going to feel so much better. What a wonderful day it's going to be. And I'm in the third group to get in this tub.

(2, B, 758)

T: They weren't changing the water?

K: No! No! Heavens sake. You got a thousand gallons of water or something in there. And heated. So I get in there and the only thing I can think of is warm water and washed. I get in there and I go down under the water and I'm scrubbing head and scrubbing my head and I come up and, aahhhh! Then all the damn gook on top of the water sticks to my hair and I'm worse off than I was before I went under the water. And I think that's the only time I ever cried in prison camp. I just about couldn't take that. I just had a terrible time getting over that.

T: Were there bathing facilities on a regular basis at the camp?

K: No.

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

T: I wanted to ask about Niigata, because I know Niigata also as an industrial center was in 1945, a target for B-29 bombers as well.

K: Yes.

T: Do you recall that at all? Seeing the city, seeing the bombers or experiencing any kind of air raids?

K: Some. Some. Particularly water bombs. Water mines.

T: Mines placed in the harbor?

K: In that a couple of them did make the harbor. They made the roadside. And they're alongside the road in the morning as we were marching through going to work. And they're big things.

T: They're cylindrical, aren't they?

K: Yes. Yes. Eight, ten foot long. Twelve foot long. And by the time we got there the plates have been removed off of them and I supposed the detonating part had been removed and inside looks like powdered milk in there. Every now and then a ship would come down the river from the main city and one of these mines would go off and it would blow that sucker—but they always managed to get out of the shipping lane. By the time we left there, they had eighteen ships on the bottom along that...

T: So you could hear the mines going off.

K: Oh, yes. The water went pfffft! Big stuff. And we'd all cheer and cheer and shout and *(laughs)*... The Japanese didn't like it so well but when the whole bunch is doing it, it was pretty hard to control it. And one particular ship had soybeans in it. That sat there. You could see the top of the hold swell up and get bigger and bigger.

T: Because the beans were swelling up.

K: And then when they went kappoo and all that stuff went flying out.

T: Was Niigata ever bombed, the city itself, by the Americans?

K: Not that we're aware of.

T: So the mine laying...

K: We would see planes way up in the sky and they looked to be about two foot long. Silvery in color. Then a big vapor trail out behind them.

(3, A, 63)

T: Now seeing American planes in 1945 over Niigata, did you begin to put together how the war was really going?

K: We were maybe informed of that earlier on in that Vance, who was a Japanese...

T: His name was Rants?

K: Vance. He was interpreter. He could speak Japanese real good. And so he would eavesdrop and often pass on some of the stuff he would hear.

T: I see.

K: Or if you get a Japanese involved in the conversation and he would mention the Solomons or Truk or Marianna or something like that. Then some Navy guy would say, hey, that's a lot closer than they were the last time.

T: It's like a puzzle in a sense.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: Now a lot of prison stories we hear of secret radio transmitters or radio receivers. Did you have anything like that at your...

K: In Cabanatuan they did. And in the morning, you always got a new batch of rumors. It was never stories or facts. It was rumors. Rumors that would come from this radio they had underneath the diesel engines that were powering the light plant for the Japanese and for around the prison camp.

T: How much were rumors a part of prison life everywhere?

K: Oh, they were big stuff. Big time. You lived one day til the next for the next rumor. Really. And even though you knew the last one turned out to be false or no good, that didn't matter. The next one was better. One is bound to come true somewhere along the line.

T: This is the sense of optimism you talked about. That you were in a sense prepared to at least consider the rumor when you heard it.

K: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I never turned down one of them (*laughs*). I remember some of these guys that would—in Bilibid particularly—somebody in there had some Bibles, and they were reading the book of Revelation, and they were interpreting this whole war thing from the book of Revelation and what the outcome was going to be and where it was going. Give you something to keep your mind occupied.

Another thing is my friend Costigan, who I talked about earlier, is blind in prison camp. He is badgering people to tell him what poem do you know? Tell me the poems you know. And he memorized them. Then he told his friends carve me a chess set so I can learn to play chess. And he did. And this Jim McOmis I talked about. Jim and Harold [Costigan] were kind of close, and Jim would watch Harold trying to make a decision on his move and then when he was about ready, Jim would

remove the chessboard away and then Harold would reach to make his move and he can't find his chess pieces (*laughs*). And he would get just storming mad. He said, "I'm going to kill that SOB before I die. I'm going to kill him so help me!"

Three, four years after the war, we're sitting in his backyard down in Missouri eating watermelon one evening when Harold says to me, "Ken, you know, the man most responsible for my being alive sits next to you." And I said, "Harold, you have to stop eating watermelon. It's affecting your mind." And he says, "I mean it. I absolutely mean that. You know, when he would remove that chessboard, I wasn't kidding. I meant it. I meant it and I never got him killed. So here I am." (*laughs*).

T: Now you mentioned playing chess. Let me follow up on that and ask about passing time in these camps. I mean you worked a lot. You slept. There had to have been time when you were just there. You weren't working and you weren't sleeping. How did people kill time in these different locations?

(3, A, 127)

K: I was never in a spot where I needed to kill time. In fact in Japan, after you worked your twelve hours or fourteen hours and then in the evening if you sat around in the barracks and told stories or laughed or... they always had a sleeper snooping. A snooper around. If there was too much of this going on, then they cut your rations because you had too much energy.

T: I see. So you were encouraged to do nothing.

K: In Japan you had to watch that thing so that you didn't get caught enjoying life, because if you did they would take something away from you.

T: Just to pick up on something you said earlier about walking through town. You encountered those boys throwing stones. Did you see people, other Japanese, or did they see you?

K: If they did, they didn't show themselves. No. The streets were clear of people when we went through. The only thing I remember seeing on the street is a pile of garbage. And sometimes there would be orange peels or peelings from fresh fruit and the men would just fight for getting some of that.

T: Walking to work reminds me of walking at Bataan. It sounds like different experiences walking to work; was it different treatment and different situations?

K: Well, it's pretty hard to get in trouble when there's nothing to distract you. And you could see from one end of the street to the other almost. So yes, it was pretty mundane to walk to and from work.

T: Did it become routine after a while? Going to the same place, the same...

K: Yes. Yes. Kind of like that. And then you try to figure out how I'm going to get one of the better jobs. And I have a little story to tell about that. In the Philippines on my third bridge building there was a nun there had the welfare of the Americans deeply in her heart.

T: This is at Candalaria?

K: Yes. And she has prevailed upon the Japanese to allow the Americans to go to Sunday Mass. And not only that, but the Japanese come too, because they couldn't allow them to go without guards so everybody went. Then after Mass then they had a big feast. Roast chicken and rice and vegetables and fruits and the Japanese were in on it too, so that... man alive! Then the last time we had that, and as we were leaving, then there's somebody passing out fried chicken and along with the fried chicken I get this rosary.

T: He's got this rosary right here.

K: And everybody in the camp got one of these in our work detail, and even the Jewish boys would not give up their rosary even though they said they didn't know what to do with it.

T: You've had this rosary ever since?

K: I've had this ever since, and I carried it to Japan, and in Japan I'm working this trestle, and this day it's kind of slow, and so there's a Japanese man that has a gasoline engine and he pulls three coal cars behind it. He's sitting on the sideline and there's prayer beads hanging from his shift lever. So I go over to him and I'm telling him, hey, you and I are the same. I've got prayer beads too like that. We're the same. And he's saying shut up! Shut up! Go away! Go away! Get out of here! And so I leave.

But then a week goes by and I think maybe he didn't understand me. So I bring my rosary. So on a slow time I go over to him and I say, hi, *aregato*, or good morning and bow and I say see, you and I are the same. And he gets excited. Oh, he gets excited. Put it away! Put it away! I said all right. So maybe he did understand. So I went on my way, but then I see he and the boss man standing together talking and they're watching me. And I say, whatever I did, I did, and it's too late to change it.

Then one day I get run over by one of these dumb cars. I came to the corner and I can't get around the corner and the car behind me comes pushing and slams into me and my legs end up underneath it. And those two men come running. Japanese men. Come running and they separate those cars and they carefully take me out from underneath there and they examine me for broken bones. And they find I have none and I assure them that, yes, I'm fine. I'm all right. Then the boss man takes me to the other end of the track trestle and gives me a yo yo pole and

says, throw the switch (*laughs*). You don't need to throw the switch—it's all traffic one way on the same rail all the time.

(3, A, 205)

T: What was he doing?

K: He gave me a job to keep me out of trouble. And then that didn't work because another civilian came up there. Kind of a burlish surly sort of a guy, and he got a shovel and after a while he takes a look at me and decides that he ought to give me a whack with the shovel. So he ends up and he takes a swing at me and I poke him in the gut with my yo yo stick and we're sparing there on the track, and I said I'm going to knock this sucker off the track, so help me. And I'm working as hard as I can to get him to the edge to knock him off, and here comes the civilian, the boss. The Japanese boss. Hollering and screaming, and he takes this guy and runs him off the trestle. He takes me and puts me in the seat that controls the elevator. Load the cars.

T: That's easy work too, isn't it?

K: Yes. I don't have to use my back. I can use my arms. My arms work all right.

T: But your back was the problem.

K: My back. I find out later I've got tuberculosis of the spine and the nerves are pinching and the muscles are twitching and very painful. And if you misstep anyplace and get a little jar, it's just like electricity going right up my back into your head.

T: That's one of the problems you had to get taken care of after the war.

K: That's right. Yes.

T: Speaking of after the war...

K: Now, before we leave this...

T: Yes.

K: I am home here, sitting here reading the book on Japan and it's saying how the Jesuits, I think, were missionaries in Japan.

T: That's right.

K: Four hundred years ago. What? The 1500s. And then the military decides that's enough of that and they chase the missionaries out. And they give the Japanese

people, all of those that converted to Christianity, an opportunity to give up their new religion or get killed. And those that didn't want to do either one of those then left the area and went into the hills and Niigata is ringed by hills. I think those two men were this people and kept their religion alive for four hundred years without a printed word, without a printed page. Just by word of mouth. And I think those two men were part of that group.

T: You gave two good examples of how they helped you in real ways.

K: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

T: Let me ask about the end of the war. How did you experience the end of the war there in Niigata?

K: Kind of surprising in that after the second big thing happened, and later we learned it was the atomic bombs, two of our men said this war is over guys. We're going to Tokyo and find the Yanks.

T: Where were the Japanese by this time?

K: There. After the first atomic bomb the commissioned officers left.

T: You didn't know about the atomic bombs at this time?

K: No. That's right.

T: So you put this together afterwards.

(3, A, 247)

K: Whatever this big thing was, was enough to send this officer off. And then the second one, the noncoms left, which left the privates. These guys don't know what to do if somebody doesn't tell them. So a hundred guys got together and they marched to the guard house and took their rifles away and they put them in the latrines, down in the bottom of the latrines and then opened the gates and opened all the warehouses, the storage rooms around and found one meal of rice.

T: Now nobody had told you at this point that the war was officially over.

K: No.

T: But you're putting two and two together?

K: Yes. Yes. And you don't go to work. And nobody is interested in going to work.

T: That must have been a clue right there.

K: And so there was one meal of rice in the warehouse. So the men get in groups of four or five and go out in the countryside and take ducks and chickens and produce from the farmers.

T: The farmers didn't resist or...

K: Well, if they did, they'd get beat up. But they for the most part did not.

T: Were you doing this as well?

K: Yes. Then you bring it back into camp and there were people that had fires started and they're tearing the barracks down to build a fire to boil this stuff in a five gallon can, and if you put an item in a pot someplace then you could come back and dip out a bowl of soup.

T: I see.

K: So if you had three items you went to three different pots in hopes that somebody would have a seasoning that would make it taste a little better wherever you went. At least you had three pots that you could go and eat out of.

T: So the Japanese almost melted away.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: How long did this situation continue where, in a sense, you're in the camp but everything is changed?

K: Yes.

T: How long did that go on?

K: I'm a little bit fuzzy about that. August 9 I think was the second bomb.

T: Correct.

K: I think we fed ourselves for at least a week before the Air Corps found us and dropped supplies and clothing and medicines. Before that time though, these two men said they were going to Tokyo to find the Yanks.

T: Two guys literally walked out of your camp.

K: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes. I don't know how they got down there. They just went down to the railroad station and get on a train. They spent a couple of days down there before the shore patrol finds them. They're taken out to the battleship *Missouri* and

they're questioned and they say, these guys are telling the truth and they're turned over to Harold Stassen who is then Halsey's right hand man and who also has been appointed the Navy person in charge of evacuation of American personnel. So he says show me on the map where you came from. And he said look, there's an airfield right there. About five miles away. And they went to an aircraft carrier. They got three planes and they flew up, and at the air station they got a bus and he's got three pilots and an interpreter and himself. And they're two hundred miles away from any backup.

(3, A, 291)

T: And they just rolled into you camp?

K: They came into our camp and he stands in the door of the bus and he sees these guys in Japanese G-strings. That's the kind of underwear you have. And the fire is burning and the barracks looking like they're going to fall apart. And he says, "Man, this is no place for Americans to be living. I'm going to go and get help." He packs off into Niigata, which was about one hundred fifty thousand people I think at the time, and they find the Kempetai who is in charge of all big cities and through his interpreter he tells them that he wants those Americans to be released, and anyone else that there is in that area, and the train on that track tomorrow morning, and they said we have no authority to do that. Then he pulls his .45 and says, "Gentlemen, this is the authority. Get on the telephone. Talk to whomever you have to talk to. Put a train on that track tomorrow morning." And they do.

T: Were you on that train?

K: Yes. Yes. And then he comes back into our camp and says, hey, guys, tomorrow morning eight o'clock be down there at that railroad where the track crosses the road. He says there will be a train there and we will take you to Tokyo and the Yanks.

T: Now how did it feel to you that this whole experience was coming to an end?

K: I don't know. When the officers left and then the noncoms left, you knew that there was something coming that they didn't want to be caught up in.

T: Sure.

K: And then when the first Navy plane found us too they wigwagged a couple of times. Then they left. Then they came back and they dropped a bag of coffee beans. They said, sorry guys. This is all we could scrounge at the ship (*laughs*). And at that time the guy in the back end of the plane, there's a door back there that he could open, and he had taken off his coveralls and wound them up into a ball and tied them and then he dropped them off with a note saying you guys look like you need these worse than I do (*laughs*). In the pocket was a love letter from his girlfriend.

T: He forgot to take that out or what?

K: Yes. It was still in there. And everybody in the camp read that sucker about three times.

T: That was communication with the outside world.

K: That's right. That was the first real communication we had with the outside world.

T: When you left the camp what did you take with you?

K: Took everything I had.

T: Which was what?

K: I could put it all in my pocket I think.

T: You mentioned that rosary.

K: Yes. Rosary.

T: Anything else that you actually owned?

K: I brought my musette bag home too.

T: You still have that thing?

K: I still have that. Yes. I was very fortunate in that there were some times when you boarded ship they made you undress and everybody went down in the hold naked and then they searched all the clothing and as they did they threw it down in the hold and then you had to scrounge around and find something that fit you. And if you had a musette bag or something like that that might not have gotten down in there again.

T: But you kept it the whole war.

(3, A, 330)

K: Yes. And I had a little trouble there in Japan though when I landed. I don't know why. Somebody gave me a piece or a radio, and says hold onto this. Somebody will be looking you up later on. They pulled an inspection as we were going into our camp there in Niigata and I'm hiding this thing and I'm scrounging like crazy to bury it in the ground and a guard spots me and he comes roaring at me and he picks up my bag and shakes it, and out comes an iron cross that you get to hang your sharp

shooting medals on and that fell out of the bag. And he thought it was German. And he looks over and he went don't tell anybody. Don't tell anybody. And he forgot about what I was doing. And I didn't bother picking that sucker up again either. I left it in there.

T: Once you left the camp you went to Tokyo and then to an American ship?

K: No. We flew. Flew to Okinawa.

T: From Tokyo?

K: From Tokyo.

T: What happened at Okinawa and how were you feeling by that time? I mean mentally. Now you're back in American territory.

K: I'm still kind of in a daze and not quite believing that who I'm looking at are Americans here. They're dressed differently. In fact as we got into Tokyo the 101st Airborne met us with trucks and there was one little guy there, his helmet was too big and it would always fall down. Reminded me of Elmer Tuggle in the newspaper comics as I was a high school kid. This guy was always in with the big guys and he was half their size. I just did what they told me to do. This is the procedure. That's what I'll do.

T: Was there a sense of relief at all or of finally relaxing and...

K: We got into Okinawa and we began to feel that way. Then the dumb Air Corps decided we needed a welcome, so they start giving us a buzz job. We're living in tents and the one plane came in and it took the top of the flagpole off. And it flattened all the tents. And we all screamed at the officers, "Call them buggers off! Tell them to get away from here! We don't need them! We don't want them!" The airplanes were one thing that bothered us. First we had the Japanese and then we had the American airplanes. An airplane meant trouble for you.

T: In Niigata it meant laying of mines, right?

K: Yes.

T: Although you never were bombed in Niigata.

K: That's right.

T: And you escaped there. It wasn't long before you were back in the United States proper as well.

K: It took a little while in that we were then flown to the Philippines.

T: So Okinawa and then the Philippines.

K: And unfortunately there, a couple of planeloads of the POWs were dropped in the ocean when somebody pushed the bomb bay doors and they went open.

T: So after surviving all that they got dumped in the ocean.

K: Yes. Yes. And then when we got into, I think it was Montelupa where they had the repo depot, and we were in tents and the kitchen is open twenty-four hours a day. And then they come and they want guys to volunteer to fly to Washington, D.C. And they couldn't get one. They couldn't get anybody to fly.

T: Why is that?

K: Because they dropped them in the ocean.

T: No wonder.

(3, A, 374)

K: Yes. Nobody would get off their bunk for that.

T: By the time you hit the Philippines it had been a couple weeks I guess.

K: Yes. And if you didn't see a buddy within a weeks' time, you didn't recognize him when you saw him. He changed that much in weight and appearance.

T: Pretty quickly then. Well, you're still fairly young so...

K: Yes. And the other thing happened then in the Philippines is that they said anybody that goes to town needs to come through the pro station, the prophylactic station, on their way in. Two of these guys didn't or they came in so late that it wasn't open. And they showed up with venereal disease. About three, four days later. So they take these guys to the place, to where they had met the girls, and they bring the girls in for a physical and then they tell these two guys these girls are carriers of leprosy and incubation period for leprosy is fourteen years. You're now isolated –

End of Tape 3, Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.

T: Let me go forward to the....

K: The other interesting thing was in the Philippines there, I met a fellow from Brainerd. Looked me up and a couple, three, four of us, and he took us down to the

warehouse on the dock where their ship was tied up and they had all the beer in the world down there. Man alive! We weren't ready to drink too much beer.

T: Yes. Did you find reactions to food or things like that right away?

K: You thought that you had to eat it all right away. Don't leave anything behind. Eat everything. They eventually dropped barrels of food to us there in Japan. Some of them broke open and the first ones I went to was peaches and the cans were broken. I ate peaches until I couldn't eat anything more. Then the next barrel we found chocolate bars, so we ate chocolate until we got sick. Then went back to the barracks.

T: You just ate whatever was there.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: When you got back to the United States... I'm skipping forward here a bit. It must have been fall of 1945 by the time you actually got back here.

K: Oh, yes.

T: September? October? You were in hospital for a while in the States too, is that right?

K: Yes.

T: Where were you exactly and what were they doing in the hospital? Was it physical or was it also psychological?

K: It was physical with my tuberculosis of the spine. That needed some fixing and they eventually sent me down to... It was a funny thing. I kept complaining about my back in Okinawa and in the Philippines, and then in the Presidio in San Francisco and they always said, okay, fine, and then sent me on. Then when I got into Clinton, Iowa, the sergeant behind the desk asked me and I said yes, I have back problem. Okay, he says. We'll send to the orthopedic ward. I said, "You know, you're the first guy that's heard me in two months!" And the next morning a doctor came in and says, "I hear you have a back problem." I said, "I think I do." He says, "Let's take some X-rays and find out." Then he brought me back and he read the X-rays and said, "We're going to put you in a plaster cast." I said, "Oh, no. Oh, no you're not. Whatever I've got, I've had for a long time. I'm going home tomorrow." And the doctor said, "Only if you promise to come back here when your time is up." Four or five days or whatever it is. Six days. I'll promise that.

T: So you went back to Clinton, Iowa, after you went home to St. Cloud.

K: Yes. I went to Brainerd really.

(3, B, 444)

T: Was your mom still in Brainerd at that time?

K: No. She was in St. Cloud but I rented a cabin up there in Brainerd and she came up there and stayed with me while we were there.

T: How was the first time you saw your family and loved ones again after all that?

K: One of the things I did not do in prison camp as a prisoner is to think of family. I didn't even want them to know that I would live like this or survive this kind of a thing. That I somehow was going to be different and I would be changed and I would be kind of gruesome myself. I couldn't imagine living through that and not being changed to some degree that way. So I never thought of them while I was in prison camp. I never wanted to see them and I didn't ever want them to see me.

T: When you did see your family again, how...

K: You know the first one I saw was my dog.

T: Really?

K: *(laughing)* Yes. Yes. A little Irish spaniel, rat tail spaniel we call it. He used to go hunting with me and he was in the backyard when I walked up, and it took him a while to recognize me.

T: So he didn't get you right away.

K: Not right away. No. He was kind of leery. Kind of leery of me. I don't know if it was the uniform or whatever. Yes. It took him a while.

T: You had been gone four years.

K: Yes. That one time I was hunting with him and I knocked down a partridge and he'd gone and got it out of the thicket and brought it back. It was still alive and I fumbled it and I dropped it and it ran off again and he ran off and got it and he wouldn't give it to me a second time *(laughs)*.

T: Smart dog.

K: You don't know what to do with it, Ken.

T: So the dog recognized you. Your family?

K: My mother was the only one there along with my uncle and a nephew.

T: As you saw your family members, how much did they want to know? How much did you want them to know?

(pause in tape)

T: I want to conclude the interview by asking about the time after you got back to the States and when you're out of hospital. You were discharged not until August of 1946, so almost a year after you were out of your prison camp experience. How much time of that was in hospital?

K: All of it, really. All of it. I was discharged from the Hopkins TB Sanitarium. I was shipped from Santa Fe, New Mexico, Bruns General, supposedly to the VA Hospital, but they were full so they sent me over to Hopkins because of my tuberculosis history. They hospitalized me there and they didn't want to let me go. I said the doctors in Santa Fe said I was ready for the road. That's where I want to go. They finally, after two months or so or a month, they allowed me to go. But while we were there I was in the same room with Harold Kurvers [of St. Paul].

T: No kidding?

K: Yes. Yes. And Harold had tuberculosis of the kidneys or something like that.

T: He did. That's right. Tuberculosis.

K: And we got a hold of a cigar. Somebody gave us cigars. Then we got a hold of balloon or bubble blowing stuff, so we lit up our cigars and we blew bubbles out the window with smoke in them. And they would get out in the air and then they would burst and there'd be a puff of smoke and it upset the whole hospital. They sent the fire truck out there *(laughs)*.

(3, B, 512)

T: Have you known Kurvers since then?

K: Yes.

T: You met him really by accident?

K: Yes. That's right.

T: In that sanatorium.

K: Yes. That's right.

T: When you were discharged, '46. The war's been over for a year now and you were back in St. Cloud.

K: Yes.

T: How did you go about getting your life back together after five years in POW camps and hospitals?

K: One of the first things I did is I went down and signed up for unemployment insurance and then I went for walks. Every day I walked.

T: You were living with your mom now?

K: My mom and uncle and nephew. I would walk three or four hours a day.

T: By yourself?

K: By myself. In fact it got so that a vehicle from the VA hospital in St. Cloud used to come down that road where I was walking and they would stop and try to pick me up and take me because I'm wearing an Army jacket. I would never get in their truck and then they sent three guys and I said I gotta change my route because these guys are going to insist they pick me up one of these days. They don't know where I'm coming from or where I'm going but they...

T: They thought you might be one of theirs.

K: They don't think I belong out here. Yes.

T: Were those walks, Ken, therapeutic in a way?

K: Yes.

T: How would you describe how?

K: I suppose listening to the birds and looking at the flowers and absorbing the peace around me.

T: Did you think a lot? Are you a person who sort of was thinking through experiences or dealing with things in a way?

K: No. Not really. Well, I was dealing with my healing. I had a lot of healing to do. I was still wearing a steel brace over the shoulders and up the back so that I couldn't bend or stoop.

T: For your spine.

K: Yes. So that was kind of a constant reminder too. So it was really focused on getting out of that harness.

T: Which was constricting, I guess, in a way.

K: Oh, yes. Really.

T: How much contact did you have with other vets or other POWs?

K: Then the other thing I did was go out to that cottage and live out there for spring, summer and early fall.

(3, B, 550)

T: Also by yourself, right?

K: Yes. Yes. And there too I would go for walks. I would go to the next little lake and I would get up on the knoll and look down over the lake and watch the sunfish come up and take the bugs off the lily pads and all that. Good feeling experience.

T: Just sort of solace and outside.

K: You know sometimes I would sleep out all night on the beach. I would have a little fire in the beginning when the mosquitoes are out and after ten thirty, eleven o'clock the mosquitoes left and the moonlight night and I would just lay down and go to sleep.

T: So you slowly kind of got yourself back on track I hear you saying.

K: Yes. Yes. Yes.

T: Did you find other veterans, other POWs or know of other people that you were in contact with?

K: Sure. There were about twenty there in the Brainerd area that came home.

T: That's right because they were all the same...

K: Yes. So all you had to do is go up there and spend a day or two and then we would have get together regularly, maybe three times a year or something like that.

T: Did you attend those things?

K: Yes.

T: How much were the POW experiences talked about by guys?

K: Oh, quite a bit. Quite a bit because you know, our story was so unusual that if I talked to some ordinary citizen they would walk away scratching their head and look askance at you. And then you begin to wonder if you were dreaming this stuff up or making it up.

T: Because it was so fantastic?

K: Yes. Out of the ordinary. And it was only when you got together with another POW that you got verified and you said, hey, I'm not crazy. I'm not making stuff up. I'm not lying. That's what happened to me.

T: You talked about this earlier, I want to touch on this again. How much shame was there in your experience that you had to deal with?

K: Amongst the POWs there was none. Not a bit.

T: Because it was shared experience.

K: It was shared experience. That was another thing. You felt at ease with that group and you could say whatever you wanted to say and you didn't have to hold back or plan on what you were going to say. But out in the general public, I just really didn't want people to know that I had lived through that kind of a terrible experience because they might think I'm goofy. Because they might think that I've been mentally deranged, and maybe that's what they thought my stories were coming from, was a mental derangement. I went to a couple of families who the guys got left over there and one of them, one of the dads said to me, "What did you know that my son didn't know?"

T: His son didn't survive?

K: I don't need that kind of hassle. So then I quit doing that.

T: Again as parents, I can't imagine how parents must have felt.

K: Then there was another one. It was Dayette's dad. You kind of hated to go around there because every time you did he was crying and crying.

T: His son didn't make it back?

K: Yes. Yes. He's the one that got the cerebral malaria.

T: Right. And died... the truck driver, right?

(3, B, 600)

K: Yes. And so it was miserable; we'd always meet him in the VFW up there at Brainerd, because he would hang around there quite a bit. So it got so that I wouldn't go there anymore. Just avoid those kind of people.

T: So again, I hear you saying that being [around] other people with shared experience has always been okay.

K: Yes. Yes.

T: And I know you're part of this POW, ex-POWs of the Japanese group that meets once a month; and you've been doing that for a while too, haven't you?

K: Yes. Been a long time.

T: Now those guys don't always have the shared experience of exactly what you went through...

K: There used to be more shared experience, but Fitzpatrick doesn't show up anymore and Ronald Weber doesn't show up. Phil Trip and Bill McKeenan are dead, and a number of them have died, so that it is shrunk down to just these few and therefore it's more diverse.

T: Guys from Wake Island and...

K: And Korea. And Ray from Corregidor.

T: Al Kopp from the Houston.

K: Yes.

T: That's right.

K: Then LeRoy. He's from the lost battalion.

T: It really sounds like after the war, for you, that you kind of kept your conversations about this experience with a small group of fellow survivors, in a way. Other people, for example, when you were going to St. Cloud State or St. Cloud Teachers College and working. How much did people at Capital Gear in St. Paul where you worked, how much did they know about you?

K: At St. Cloud Teachers, in my senior year I had a history teacher who was a National Guard officer, and he was kind of pulling rank on a book report. For me to do this book report. And you weren't going to pass the class unless you gave this book report. And I'm hanging back and hanging back and I made up my mind that if I have to give one I'm going to use Ernie Miller's book on "Bataan Uncensored." You know why it's uncensored?

T: No.

K: Because the military told him to change it or not print it. And he says I will not change it. And I'll print it on my own then.

T: And he did?

K: And he did. And that's where it got uncensored. At any rate, it came down to touch and go, and I said, I'm ready for your book report and I got up and I started talking about Ernie Miller's book. And then I told the class that I'm part of this book. I lived that experience. And then they got into it. And they asked questions and more questions. And I took three days and finally the teacher says, "Porwoll, if you don't sit down and shut up you're going to flunk this class." *(laughs)*

T: So people were interested.

K: The students were. Yes. Because I made it kind of a personal experience with them.

T: Sure. In those first years after the war, if you think of the time you were a student or slightly thereafter, how much of a problem did you have with nightmares or bad dreams?

K: I went a number of years there with problems and really not until after I was married that they really get a hold of me.

(3, B, 645)

T: You were married only in 1953. That's a long time.

K: Yes. And the kids. If a youngster would come into the bedroom at night and they wore these little sleepers with the plastic bottoms and it would go squish, squish on the floor. I'm out of bed.

T: Really? That's years after the war.

K: Yes. Anything that was out of the ordinary. Ordinary noises that were supposed to be were all right, but I'm still on the alert for the unusual.

T: Even now?

K: Somewhat.

T: Did it fade...

K: Somewhat, but it's much less. I don't have that anxiety about it anymore. Then Mary Ellen used to gently wake me some nights. She says, "You're doing that thing again, Ken." Howling like a wounded animal.

T: So there were years afterwards. When you had dreams or images was it the same images that came back and back or the same dream situations or different ones?

K: Just phantoms. Phantoms. One that used to bother me is I would wake with a start and the shadow would go out the door. I got so I believed that. And I would get up and I'd search the house.

T: No kidding.

K: Then I'd finally say, there wasn't any, Ken. Go back to bed. I had that same experience before the war. I'm working at a resort out at North Long Lake out of Brainerd, and they put me in an old cabin and I would come in the back door and walk through this cabin out to the front porch and then lay down and go to sleep. I'm no more asleep than the floor starts creaking. Creak, creak, creak, creak. Each creak is closer. Until it comes right to the doorway of the porch and I've got my shoe in my hand and I'm going to beat the daylights out of whoever it is. And there's nobody there. Damn. This goes on for quite a while.

Then I get up and I searched that cabin too. Then there's all kinds of creaking. Then I say when you walk in there's only one set of footprints but when you go to search the house there's all kinds of footprints. That means that the floor is depressed each time I step on it, is depressed and it takes that much time for it to snap back up and so there's that sequence. So forget it, Ken.

T: When you were married, you were married eight years after the war ended, your wife Mary Ellen, how much did she ask about your experiences and how much did you feel comfortable telling?

K: In all she asked very little and I offered very little.

T: She knew the basics? That you had been a POW.

K: She knew that I was a POW and how much more I don't know. I don't know if she read anything. She always claimed that she was in college and isolated from the war and so they weren't too interested in the war. St. Kates College. So I always assumed that she didn't know anything about my background really except that I was a prisoner of war. And if she learned—she probably learned a lot from the other wives as we got together with meetings.

T: Over time.

K: Yes.

T: One thing you've also done, I know, is speak to school groups and you make presentations about your experiences. Have you always done that or is this something you've picked up only recently?

K: More recent than early. I think one of the big turning points in me was when Inez Chang was in town promoting her book on the *Rape of Nanking*...

T: That's right.

K: ...and I was there listening to her and I went up to her afterwards and introduced myself, and she was so surprised and then she asked me if I talked. I said, no, I really don't. And she scolded me real good. She said, "You have to talk or the Japanese are going to get away with this like they have with the rape of Nanking. And if you don't who's going to do it?" So she really convinced me that I have a duty. And I sometimes use that as an alibi yet.

(3, B, 701)

T: So that experience kind of galvanized you in a sense.

K: And the other thing now that has gotten my attention is this thing of teaching. I'm a frustrated school teacher (*laughs*). I never made the grade and now I have a chance to talk to them about their attitudes.

T: Yes. And you can wind that through your own experiences.

K: Yes. And I find that rather satisfying.

T: That's interesting. To conclude, let me ask you this. You went through a lot during the war years, both fighting in the Philippines and then years as a POW. What do you think is the most important way that your war experience changed your life?

K: Man alive! That's a hard one. I think I still do a lot of vacillating between the anger and revenge and forgiveness. I still do some of that. More on the forgiveness side or on the move on, Ken, move on. You've been there long enough. And what good is it going to do you to be vengeful or hateful?

T: Were you for a while?

K: I've learned early in the game that to be hateful is very self-destructive. Very self-destructive. I've seen men go to their grave because they were frothing with hate. Just absolutely.

T: Isn't it hard not to be resentful or hateful after what you've been through?

K: If you conquer the ego it's no problem. The ego is the big thing in the whole picture. The bigger your ego gets the harder those things become. And the more you can put it down as to you're just, you're just Joe out there on the street, Ken. I think working down there at St. Paul Listening House has had that kind of effect on me too, that I'm no better than those guys down there and the difference between us is maybe one paycheck.

T: Thanks a lot. That's the last question I've got and I'll thank you on the record here for a nice time today.

K: Thank you for your patience.

T: We're thanking each other. This is kind of a good mutual admiration society.
(both laugh)

END OF INTERVIEW