

November 29, 1949

Robert Arnold Ross
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To Whom It May Concern:

I, Robert Arnold Ross, Serial No. 266988, former Platoon Sergeant, U.S.M.C., am writing this statement, with the hope that I may receive aid to which I honestly believe I am entitled.

On August 4, 1938 I enlisted in the U. S. Marine Corps. At that time, I was in very good condition, both physically and mentally. Medical records should bear me out on this. My attitude toward my fellow man, and toward the world in general was let come what may, I was ready for it. I felt very good and upon completion of my "Boot" training I was, I believe, in the best shape of my life.

In May of 1939, I was sent to Shanghai, China. While in Shanghai, I engaged in Company, Battalion, and Regimental Athletics. I was in Shanghai until November, 1941, at which time I was transferred to Olongapo, P.I. Within a week, War had been declared. The Battalion, of which I was a member (First Battalion, Fourth Marines) was sent to Mariveles, Bataan, P.I. on the opening day of War. On the 24th of December 1941 we were transferred to Corregidor Island. We immediately went on "Beach Defense" where we stayed until the subsequent fall of the aforementioned Island.

Needless for me to explain the rigors of War to you, as you yourself are no doubt familiar with them. Suffice to say, that during the period from December, 1941, until June, 1942, we were thoroughly involved in the hell that is War. During this period I was fortunate enough to be made a Sergeant. My physical condition during this period, while dropping slightly, was still very good.

On, I believe, June 6, 1942 we, as an Island, surrendered to the Japanese. The humility of this act took something out of me. It left me with the feeling that somehow we had failed, although it is a known fact that this was far from the truth. A week or two later, we were transferred to Cabanatuan, P.I., which was to be my "home" for the next two years. The starving and privation endured while in camp was nothing short of bestial, but I must honestly admit that the diet of rice which was outrageously inadequate, was the hardest to take. I could stand an occasional beating, but there was nothing to solve that gnawing feeling at ones stomach. Men actually cried they were so hungry. While in this camp, I contracted Amoebic Dysenterry, Beri-Beri, Pellagra, and the Worms.

In July of 1944, I was transferred to Fukuoka, Japan. We made the trip in the hold of a Japanese Ship. We were packed in like "Sardines" in a can. It was impossible to stand up in our "Bays", and there was just room enough to make our way to the ladder, in the event we had to "Relieve Nature." While in Formosa, a stop-over on our way to Japan, we took aboard a Cargo of Sugar. It was stored in the hold just below us, and needless to say, we went after it like rats. The result was obvious, besides being deprived of many meals by the Japanese, we were given even scantier rations of water than the unbelievably small ones we had been getting. But the worst punishment was that which nature meted out to us in the form of the "Runs." The entire deck of the ship (the section immediately over the hold we were in) became a slimy, stinking mess. Men, myself included, were just naturally unable to make our way out of our overcrowded quarters and onto deck in time to make it. We were on this ship for approximately two months.

I was now in Japanese Prison Camp No. 17, Fukuoka, Japan. And even now, as I think of it, I get a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach. Within a week, by comparison, I was beginning to think that the Phillipine Prison Camp had been a vacation resort. It was a Hell on Earth. Here again our rations were very small, our work much harder, and the hours much longer. On top of this, we had the bitter cold of winter, without heat, to contend with. Our work here was in a Coal Mine approximately a mile from Camp. It was a mine many years old and very very dangerous. Cave-ins were very frequent, and it got to the point that men would do anything to keep out of it. It was not uncommon to have a man beg you to break his arm. It got to the point that so many men had broken "Left" Arms that the Japanese started working them inside the camp on various details. Men with Tropical Ulcers, would get lime from the Latrines and rub it into them in order to keep it going. Others would drop Jack-Hammers on their feet so that they could keep from going back to the mine. There was always that inevitable fear of Cave-ins, which were So frequent. Several men lost their legs, getting them caught in the Chain Conveyors and being pulled into the gears. The Japs had an order out that we were not to cross over a Conveyor in the middle, but while in the Mine, we were at the mercy of some Heathen Civilian Japs, and orders to them meant nothing hence the loss of limbs mentioned above.

The Prisoners were divided into three sections. Preparation, Exploitation and Extraction. The men in the first two groups just had to be able to work. The last group extraction were the men who drilled, blasted, and shoveled the Coal out of the mine. These men had to be the best physically. I, unfortunately, was a member of this last group, though I knew I should be thankful that I had the strength that I did have. Our shifts lasted twelve hours and it was work from start to finish. Sometimes, after reaching the level that we were to work on, usually about 2000 feet down, we would have to walk a quarter to a half-mile to our work. When you consider that a Jack Hammer weighed approximately 80 lbs., and that we carried timbers sometimes 10 ft. long and 10 inches in diameter to our destination, you can see what we had to endure, especially when very little of that distance was covered walking upright. In most places the overhead was so low that we had to move on our knees, and yes even crawl.

I was the recipient of several beatings while a Prisoner, but the one that stands out most was the one administered by the "Sailor." I had a large Carbuncle on my back near my waistline. (I still have the scar.) This did not keep me out of the mine. (If you could stand, you worked). I had been working a couple of hours, and the constant scraping of my belt (with battery attached) against this Carbuncle was almost unbearable. I tried not to show it, as I knew that the Jap in charge of us would really pour it on, if he knew something was wrong with me. In spite of my efforts, however, he soon spotted me adjusting my battery lamp and that was it. He rede me right up to the time the shift ended, which seemed like an eternity. It hurt so bad that at times I felt like vomiting. When we got up to the top he immediately turned me over to the "Sailor" who was the equivalent of a Corporal of the Guard. He told him that I had not done a sufficient days work. It was an untruth, as I had done as good a days work as I had ever done in spite of it. However, my word meant nothing alongside that of the Jap who turned me in. It was the dead of winter, remember, and I had to strip naked and lay on the cement in front of the guard house. The Sailor took a Shovel and rapped me right on the Carbuncle. He hit me several more times, but after about the second or third time I just didn't feel anything anymore. The Carbuncle had splattered with the first hit. He got me to my feet and commenced hitting me in the face with his fists. I didn't even feel the first hit, as I was on my way down. During this episode, I was being observed by the entire shift, and I would have died before I cried out.

At last the beating ended, and I somehow made it back to camp, although the return trip was very hazy. Most of us had no shoes whatsoever, and those that did have shoes were not too well off, as they were nothing more than sneakers, or the equivalent of our tennis shoes.

Another aspect of our temire in the mines might be mentioned here. Often, if we had not filled our quota for a shift, we had to remain until we had filled it. On such occasions, we would be late for the last cable cars going up and would have to walk. It was during these walks up the shaft, that I realized my legs were practically useless. I just couldn't make it. Often the Jap would probe us with sticks or Rifle Butts, in cases where Sentries had been called down, but probing or not there were always those who just could not make it. On such occasions they would send specials down, but we paid for it the next day when we were not given rations and still had to work.

It goes without saying that something of my old self had left me. No man goes through experiences of such brutality, and humility, without losing something. In my case, I think, it was the strength I once had in my legs, and which incidentally, has never returned to normal, as well as my confidence. I have worked steadily since my return to the United States, and at present have a wonderful wife, and two fine children. We are very happily married and enjoy a fairly comfortable life.

However, an anxiety which I have had since the war started, and have tried to keep concealed has never left me, and if anything has gotten worse of late. My legs, (where I had Beri-Beri) just don't seem to keep me going like they used to, and my teeth are absolutely driving me nuts. Although I am unqualified to say so, I honestly believe that if my teeth were all extracted, I would feel a whole lot better. Maybe this is just an obsession I have, but there are very few things that I can eat without them bothering me. Sure, I have had them worked on, both with, and without the authorization of the Veterans Administration. Some of them I have had filled as high as three times, and they just don't stand up.

In closing, I would like to say that I want nothing to which I am not entitled. I served my Country to the best of my ability, as did thousands of others. I received the best reward I could possibly get when I set foot on American Soil. However, I am far from the man I was when I enlisted, and from the bottom of my heart, I honestly believe that it was the causes of my stretch in camp that has left me as I now am. If you, in your capacity, think that I am entitled to a pension or treatment, I thank you. If not, I still hope that in the event this country ever goes to war again, that I may be able to do my part to the best of my ability.

Sincerely,

Robert Arnold Ross
Robert Arnold Ross, 266988