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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MR. SAMUEL W. ABBOTT

INTERVIEWER: R. WAYNE PYLE

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Biography

Samuel W. Abbott was born August 10, 1917, in Kirbyville, Texas, located in the piney woods of East Texas. His parents were Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Abbott, now deceased. His youth was mainly during the Great Depression years, and he graduated from high school in 1935 at Kirby High School, Woodville, Texas.

Because there were no jobs available for high school graduates in 1935, and there was no money available for higher education, Mr. Abbott entered the Civilian Conservation Corps after high school, serving there until he enlisted in the U.S. Navy in August 1936.

After 22 years of continuous service, interrupted only by being captured by the Japanese on Corregidor, P.I., on May 6, 1942, and being held prisoner for 42 months, he retired from the U.S. Navy in October 1958.

In 1957 he married Dee Thornton, a Hattiesburg native, therefore, he made his home in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1958, after retiring.

Mr. Abbott entered Mississippi Southern College in January 1959, and earned his B.S. degree in Accounting in August 1961, one year before the college was changed to University of Southern Mississippi. He received a teaching fellowship at the University of Denver and shortly after graduation entered the University of Denver and completed work for the MBA degree in Accounting, December 1962. With no teaching aspirations then, and after a short stint at an accounting position for a trucking firm, he accepted a position as an accounting instructor at Pearl River Junior College, Poplarville, Mississippi. After 16 years at this job, he retired for the second time in 1979.

He is now enjoying retirement with his wife who also has retired after teaching for 32 years in public schools.

ERRATA

Page 5, line 3 from bottom: “[It was] a light cruiser. [I was on it] a little over a year.”

Page 20, line 6 from bottom: The Monkey Point area is on Corregidor.

Page 75, line 11-15:

MR. ABBOTT: They caught fire, and then the firemen went down there. Then they exploded, and the people went down there to watch. Then five, six hundred people were killed in those several explosions on those ships.

MR. PYLE: This is in 1947?

MR. ABBOTT: Nineteen forty-seven.

Page 83, line 9: After “from his own government,” insert “They cut the veterans and still keep increasing the. . .”

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MR. SAMUEL W. ABBOTT

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of the University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Mr. Samuel W. Abbott, a retired navy man and former instructor at Pearl River Junior College. The interview is taking place at Mr. Abbott's residence at 304 North 21st Avenue, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on October 23, 1980. The interviewer is Mr. R. Wayne Pyle.

MR. PYLE: Mr. Abbott, I would like to thank you very much for spending this morning with us. To start off with, the first thing I would like to ask you is a little bit about your family background. Now, you're originally from Texas, is that correct?

MR. ABBOTT: I'm a native Texan. I was born and raised in the piney woods of east Texas, in Kirbyville, Texas. I went to school in Tyler County, finished high school in Woodville, Texas.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Now what year were you born, sir?

MR. ABBOTT: I was born in 1917.

MR. PYLE: Nineteen seventeen, same year we got in World War I, then.

MR. ABBOTT: Couldn't register then, that was the only thing.

MR. PYLE: Okay. What occupation were your parents in? Was your family a Texas family from way back?

MR. ABBOTT: From as far as I know, way back. My father was a lumberman.

MR. PYLE: Your mother a housewife, I would imagine?

MR. ABBOTT: Housewife.

MR. PYLE: You would have been born in 1917, you were at the perfect age, really, to remember the early years of the depression pretty vividly. You would have been a young teen-ager, and it would have made quite an impression. What do you remember about the depression? How did it affect Texas?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, there were some rough times. There was no such thing as food stamps and welfare back in those days. There were just a few grocery handouts, and people just scratched out a living. Nineteen thirty-five, when I finished high school, there were no jobs available, none of anything for a teen-ager. So I went into the CCC, which is the Civilian Conservation Corps

started by Franklin D. Roosevelt, and there I remained for 13 months.

MR. PYLE: What sort of work did you do in the CCC Camp?

MR. ABBOTT: Forestry work, fighting forest fires, digging ditches, building bridges, building the roads.

MR. PYLE: Now this would have been in 1936, after you graduated?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, 1936, I finished high school in 1935 and went into the CCC.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, that's right.

MR. PYLE: Do you remember what kind of money?

MR. ABBOTT: Thirty dollars a month--one dollar a day plus your board, and you had to send twenty-five dollars of it a month to your parents.

MR. PYLE: Oh, so you got to keep five dollars a month out of that?

MR. ABBOTT: You got to keep five dollars

MR. PYLE: Goodness, plus your room and board.

MR. ABBOTT: That's all you needed. That's all you needed, because back in those days, you could buy six packs of Bull Durham smoking tobacco for a quarter and that would last a week [laughter].

MR. PYLE: You know, it's odd that you mentioned the smoking tobacco, because being out in the forest, that's probably pretty important there.

MR. ABBOTT: Nobody could afford tailor-made cigarettes, as they called them back in those days. But thank goodness I don't smoke today.

MR. PYLE: Yes, that helps. You worked in the CCC Camp for 13 months, did you say?

MR. ABBOTT: Thirteen months.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: Then signed up for the navy.

MR. PYLE: Signed up for the navy. I noticed in the article Mary Ann Wells did about you, you mentioned something about you had to have good teeth to get into the navy.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, back in 1935, I had one row of upper jaw teeth that were crooked. I had to hitchhike all the way to get to Houston, Texas. I didn't have any money to get over there, and I hitchhiked to see the navy doctor to see if I could pass. Then when he gave me the okay, I had one broken tooth in the front, and I had to have it fixed before I could get in.

MR. PYLE: Is that right?

MR. ABBOTT: And, you had to have a high school education.

MR. PYLE: I had no idea that they had those kind of stringent requirements back then.

MR. ABBOTT: Oh yes, they had. Of course, once you got in, then they'd take care of you. But now, they'll take you in if you got--I've seen them take them in and pull their teeth, when they're young people, and make them dentures.

MR. PYLE: Yes, they'd even take Michael Spinks now [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, I've seen them bring in young women, took them in Bainbridge, Maryland, 19 years old, and pulled their teeth and make them dentures. I had to wait six months after I signed up, because you had them taking about two a month in 1936. The whole navy only consisted of about a hundred thousand people. Now, there's that much navy in Norfolk, Virginia, alone.

MR. PYLE: Yes. It was truly a mothball fleet then.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, there was just a small navy back in those days.

MR. PYLE: It's odd, I think, that you got into the navy. Now you were born and raised in the piney woods of Texas. There's not a whole lot of water out there. No big pieces [of water] like you're going to have in the navy. What made you decide [to join] the navy rather than the army or the marines?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, back in those days when you could afford a ten-cent or fifteen-cent movie, they made a lot of navy pictures, and that, of course, is always glamorous to a young kid.

MR. PYLE: Sure, sure.

MR. ABBOTT: You know, you thought it'd be like that. Well, that, plus talking to somebody, people that were in there.

MR. PYLE: Was there any navy background in any of your family?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay. You're first-generation navy man then.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, as far as I know. I never saw any of my grandparents, or know anything about my grandparents on my father's side. I only remember seeing my grandparents on my mother's side one time, when I was real small. So, I don't know much about their background or history. I never got much into tracing genealogy. My wife is a big genealogist. She traces her background, but I never have.

MR. PYLE: Now you joined the navy in 1936?

MR. ABBOTT: Nineteen thirty-six.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Did you go active in thirty-six? You just mentioned six months waiting there.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, it was 13 months from the time I entered the CCC. You see, I graduated from high school in May of thirty-five, and then went in 13 months in the CCC. It took six months from the time I signed up before the navy called me.

MR. PYLE: In the CCC?

MR. ABBOTT: In the CCC, and then from then until August, when I went in, August the sixteenth, I believe, in 1936.

MR. PYLE: August the sixteenth of 1936?

MR. ABBOTT: August 16, 1936.

MR. PYLE: You said that your memory wasn't too good these days [laughing].

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I can remember that. That's my sister's birthday. I remember that [laughter].

MR. PYLE: Where did you take your training?

MR. ABBOTT: San Diego.

MR. PYLE: San Diego, I would imagine that would have been quite an experience for a young fellow raised in Texas.

MR. ABBOTT: Oh, that was the first time I had ever been out of the state. The farthest I had ever been from home. I was homesick.

MR. PYLE: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But you soon get over that.

MR. PYLE: Do you have any fond memories of San Diego and Mexico,

right across the border there?

MR. ABBOTT: We never got an opportunity when I was going through training. They were too strict in those days. They didn't give you any opportunity, and when you finished your boot training, you immediately were transferred to a ship.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: So, I went to San Francisco directly from San Diego, and I never did know too much about San Diego because we didn't get much liberty.

MR. PYLE: Yes, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: Except just walking around town, going to the YMCA back in those days.

MR. PYLE: San Francisco, that would have been another memorable experience.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, back then it was.

MR. PYLE: It was a beautiful little town back then, wasn't it?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. I went to Mare Island Navy Shipyard, right across the bay from San Francisco.

MR. PYLE: Were you immediately assigned to a ship?

MR. ABBOTT: I was on a ship. I transferred to the ship up there, the U. S. S. Memphis at Mare Island. Then when it came out of the navy yard, then we went directly to--well, we made a trip in 1937 up into the northwest, up in Seattle. Also, we were one of the first ships that had been up to Portland, Oregon, the City of Roses, in years. Then, we made a trip to Pearl Harbor, which was really glamorous back then--to get to go to Pearl Harbor in 1937.

MR. PYLE: Now were you at Pearl Harbor long, or was that just a stop along the way?

MR. ABBOTT: That was just a stop on the way. Then, we came back to the states. Then in the later part of 1937, I was transferred to the Asiatic Station. So, I was only on the U.S.S. Memphis, my first ship, a little over a year.

MR. PYLE: What kind of ship was that?

MR. ABBOTT: A light cruiser about, a little over a year. Then I was transferred to another ship, a transport ship to Asia.

MR. PYLE: Yes. Now you were on the Asiatic Station, did you go

over to China?

MR. ABBOTT: Oh, yes.

MR. PYLE: Is that right?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay. There was an international incident that happened over in China on the Shanghai River in late 1937 called the Panay. Do you recall that?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. It was, well, a lot of pronunciations of it. I think they called it the U. S. S. Panay--

MR. PYLE: Panay is correct, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But I call it Panay, too. But it was sunk in the river. It was a riverboat.

MR. PYLE: Yes, it was. It was part--

MR. ABBOTT: And then it looked more like war would break out, at that time, with the Japanese sinking the Panay. It looked like war would break out at that time. Right then, it looked much more so than when it actually did in 1941.

MR. PYLE: Right. It was a very rocky time, then.

MR. ABBOTT: Right, rocky time.

MR. PYLE: With a lot of diplomatic negotiations going on between Japan and the United States and such, I was wondering how that affected the men in the navy that you were stationed with? What they thought?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we, even though it was a part of the United States Navy, it was almost a different part of the navy.

MR. PYLE: Yes, that's part of the old Shanghai River patrol there.

MR. ABBOTT: River patrols, some of those sailors had been on the same ships for years. They could hardly speak English, they had been there so long. They spoke Chinese and had Chinese records [laughter], some of those old-timers.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that's something.

MR. ABBOTT: But it was still part of the United States Navy.

MR. PYLE: I was wondering if there was any kind of war fever at

that time?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, it looked bad. That's the only thing I can tell you. It looked kind of bad. Looked even, like I said before, looked even worse than it did when the war broke out in 1941, four years later.

MR. PYLE: Now where were you stationed in China?

MR. ABBOTT: I was on a ship.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: I was on three different ships in the Asiatic Station. I was on an oil tanker, which made trips to Singapore and the Dutch East Indies, and places like that hauling oil. Then I was on a mine sweeper, and I was on the mine sweeper when we went to Shanghai, Yent'ai [Chefoo], and Tsingtao [Ch'ingtao] and all along the coast. Of course, Hong Kong is not part of China, but we'd been to Hong Kong many times, too, as a British Crown Colony. Well, we were in part of China too. That was the ships that I was on prior to the time that the war broke out.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: But I was actually in the navy yard in Cavite working in charge of the commissary store, the enlisted man in charge of the commissary store in Cavite at the time the war broke out in 1941.

MR. PYLE: I see. I was wondering, did you ever go into inland China, or were you just on the seacoast?

MR. ABBOTT: On the coastal area, we didn't really get inland. Of course, it was a thrill just to get to Shanghai. We stayed there two weeks one time, just anchored in the river. We got plenty of chances to go all over Shanghai. It was a cosmopolitan city, real cosmopolitan, all nationalities were living there.

MR. PYLE: I wondered. I was asking that because China was such a powder keg in the thirties, had a couple different skirmishes with Japan. Of course, that's where World War II started, with the Japanese going into China again.

MR. ABBOTT: The ship that I was on, we'd be anchored in the same port with Japanese ships.

MR. PYLE: I see. I see. What kind of relations were there between the American sailors and the Japanese sailors?

MR. ABBOTT: None.

MR. PYLE: None? Okay. Did they seem hostile, or just no association

whatsoever?

MR. ABBOTT: No association whatsoever.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. Was that by order, or did it just never come about?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, the language difference I imagine. Even though we weren't at war, I'm sure we were more friendly back in those days with China than we were with Japan, because China was one of our, in my opinion, one of our best allies. We should have never, never lost China to the communists, but we did, and we paid the consequences.

MR. PYLE: Just what you said, that we should have never lost China to the communists, I can't help but think that Stalin had the same view there too, that he wasn't crazy over the Chinese communists himself.

MR. ABBOTT: But, it's surprising today that after a whole new generation of Chinese, when there was so much hate for American, that now they're--

MR. PYLE: Yes, opening diplomatic relations and exchanging cultural ties and--

MR. ABBOTT: And the people, they claim, I just got through listening to a television program, how friendly the Chinese were. Well, we don't know how much of it is true. The Chinese were trained in being good hosts.

MR. PYLE: Now when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, where were you stationed at that particular time?

MR. ABBOTT: In the navy yard at Cavite.

MR. PYLE: In Cavite?

MR. ABBOTT: And there, of course, it would be December the eighth out there. On December tenth, they bombed us. Fifty-four heavy Japanese bombers came over the navy yard and almost obliterated it.

MR. PYLE: Exactly where is Cavite located in--

MR. ABBOTT: Right across the harbor from Manila, about five miles. I don't know the exact miles, but we use to go by ferry from Cavite to Manila. It's all a part of Manila Bay, but it's an island across from Manila.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. Try and reconstruct in your mind the feelings about hearing about Pearl Harbor. What was going on in your mind and the minds of the people around you, what were the thoughts?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we just didn't have any idea of what damage had

been done. All we got was just rumors and we had no idea that so much of our navy was ruined, or sunk, destroyed right there at Pearl Harbor. Actually, we were given no instruction whatsoever, in Cavite, on what to prepare for or what to expect. Nobody had ever told anybody how to take cover when bombs dropped, or what to do when bombers came over. They did have a few anti-aircraft guns there, but they were World War I vintage--shooting at them, which went up, I guess, about halfway.

MR. PYLE: Yes [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: And instinct, you know, an animal lives by instinct; although, I reckon that just instinct told me when the air raid signal went off, I closed my commissary doors, locked it all up nonchalantly and laid down by the side of an old adobe wall, when the bombs started falling, a big old brick wall, not a brick wall but adobe wall. Laid flat, I guess I probably laid with my hands over my head, [laughter], like it was going to keep me safe! But then, when so many bombs fell and people ran and were scared--Filipinos and American, mostly Filipinos--then the shrapnel just cut them into pieces. Just cut them all--cut heads off, arms off, tore bodies, just mangled them, you know. It was all over the place. Then, they hauled them out of there like butchered beef. Of course, the instinct paid off for me, because I laid flat on the ground. Of course, I was scared to death [laughter]. But the only injury I got out of it, I stuck a pencil in my cheek, and it was bleeding a little bit. I had a pencil in my pocket like this [gesturing], and when I laid down, I stuck that pencil in my cheek.

MR. PYLE: A self-inflicted injury [laughing]!

MR. ABBOTT: I didn't get a purple heart out of it [laughter]!

MR. PYLE: No purple heart for that one [laughter]! It's really surprising the lack of military footing that the U.S. military personnel was on then. They had no contingency plans for bombing raids and such as that.

MR. ABBOTT: I heard people say when those bombers came over, "Just wait until our fighters get up there and get them!" We didn't have any fighters to go up there and get them. They were already destroyed on the ground at Clark Field before they ever started coming over to bomb us. What few we had were already destroyed.

MR. PYLE: From what I understand, the planes that they had over there were pretty antiquated themselves too, along with the anti-aircraft guns.

MR. ABBOTT: We stayed in Manila from December the tenth until Christmas Day of 1941. We cleaned up much of the mess, and, you know, the electricity was all out in the navy yard there, so we had all these reefer boxes with food in it, hindquarters of beef and everything that started to decay. You had to do something with it, and so that's what our job was until, oh, for the first couple of weeks, was to burn that, and to destroy it all to keep down disease. Then we went to the naval hospital, which was, oh, two or three miles from the navy yard. When they painted the cross off of the hospital, they

bombed it. They bombed it, and that's where I was. I was over there. I remember jumping--we had an air raid, then I jumped right in a foxhole, not a foxhole, but a ditch, right on top of an admiral [laughter].

MR. PYLE: That's good taste [laughter]!

MR. ABBOTT: And the admiral says, "Don't worry son, just stay down," [laughter].

MR. PYLE: Did you say, "Don't worry sir, I will?" [Laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: I think I had just taken a bath, of course, you didn't get very many, and filled my hair with, back in those days, I probably put in Vaseline, or something, in my hair, you know. Then when I dove in that dirt--

MR. PYLE: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But anyway, the admiral was very nice about it. He was in there first [laughter].

MR. PYLE: The first bombing in Cavite was December tenth, you stayed in Manila until Christmas, the twenty-fifth. Was there a lot of bombings?

MR. ABBOTT: Oh, a lot of it. They just continuously were strafing and bombing and coming back--not every hour, not every, maybe not every day. But when they'd come back, then they'd be scout planes that would come back over and see what else they could find that they needed to come back a little later to work on. So, we just lived in fear. Didn't know what was going to happen next.

MR. PYLE: Did there seem to be much order on the part of the military higher command, the American higher command there?

MR. ABBOTT: Not much.

MR. PYLE: They just didn't really know what was going on either, for the largest part.

MR. ABBOTT: Not much.

MR. PYLE: Okay. MacArthur, of course, was commander in chief over there in the Philippines. Who was directly in charge of the naval base?

MR. ABBOTT: I really and truly don't know, unless it was the navy yard commander, and I don't even know who he was.

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay. Also in the article Mary Ann Wells wrote concerning you, she mentioned you were transferred into the marines.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I drove. We had to completely abandon Cavite and

Sangley Point where the hospital was, that was the air station and the hospital. It was a seaplanes base there at Sangley Point, and the hospital was on Sangley Point too, which was right, as I said, about two or three miles from Cavite. Then we abandoned, took all the useful trucks, that we could find, to Bataan on Christmas Day in 1941. I drove a panel truck all day long going to Bataan on that day, and we went to Mariveles, which was across the harbor from Corregidor which was right in the center of this entrance to Manila Bay. It was a fortress. Of course, there were passages on both sides, but Mariveles was the station over on the Bataan side.

MR. PYLE: And Bataan is actually a peninsula?

MR. ABBOTT: It was a peninsula, yes. Where we were going we didn't know. We were just kind of disorganized. We had to stop several times on the way, because the Japanese fighter planes were strafing us, and hit the ditch. You know, get out and hit the ditch when they're coming over. So, I stayed there in a disorganized fashion in Mariveles, actually attached to nothing except for survivors, just trying to survive.

They had a tunnel there that you could go into in case of air raid, a shelter. They did send a lot of sailors out on patrol and no instruction whatsoever on how to fight a land war, but just go out and try to fight some snipers. If a sniper had landed on Mariveles, then those Japanese, of course, were soldiers, and they'd get up in the trees, camouflaged. We lost a lot of sailors that way. They'd go down through the woods there trying to find those Japanese. Fortunately, I didn't have to go on one of those patrols. But we lost a lot of men like that.

MR. PYLE: Now these sailors that are on the patrols, were they impressed into the marines at this time?

MR. ABBOTT: No, not at that time. They'd just send a bunch of us stray sailors on patrol. That's the only thing they had, right there at that time.

I heard high ranking American officers tell me and tell other people that, "This war won't last three weeks. The Japanese don't have anything. They can't even see." That's how uninformed our military was back then.

MR. PYLE: There was obviously an intentional coverup of the damage done in Pearl Harbor there.

MR. ABBOTT: There apparently was. We didn't get any. The first thing we knew about it was when we got, oh, several months later, when we got ahold of a Life magazine, that [had] finally got out there somehow, and had pictures of it.

MR. PYLE: I guess that was a situation where the rumors couldn't have been as bad as knowing the truth. Normally, they try and quash the rumors because it always gets blown out of proportion. But, [the bombing of] Pearl Harbor so entirely annihilated the American fleet and planes, that the rumors

were better than the truth.

MR. ABBOTT: I honestly believe that if the Japanese had come right on over from Pearl Harbor to the West Coast, they could have been halfway, or a third of the way, across this country before the country ever woke up.

MR. PYLE: That's a valid point. That's a very good point.

MR. ABBOTT: That's how disorganized and how unprepared we were. I guess I shouldn't say this, but that's what worries me now. We hear so many conflicting stories about our military preparedness, and are we actually prepared? I'm not worried so much about it for myself but for the next generation.

MR. PYLE: And that too is a valid argument that a lot of people have. It worries a lot of people. What was your reaction, your personal reaction and that of the people around you, when Roosevelt declared war? Was there much excitement, much elation, or just how did it affect people?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I think there was. You know, Roosevelt just had some kind of a magnetism about him, or something, that people just believed in him, kind of a father figure.

MR. PYLE: That's true.

MR. ABBOTT: Whatever he said, like the day, "Pearl Harbor will live in a day of infamy." Well, it's almost a forgotten thing. If the president didn't bring it up today, when Pearl Harbor day is, a lot of people wouldn't even know, wouldn't even remember December the seventh. That's how quickly this country forgets things. Maybe they should forget. But on the other hand, some things like that we, and, I guess I shouldn't say this, but when I went to this reunion in Fontana, one thing that I did not see, and I believe they would have run me out of there if they had of--nobody drove a Japanese car.

MR. PYLE: Oh, is that right? You know, I hadn't even thought of that.

MR. ABBOTT: I wouldn't buy one even today. Your car's not a Japanese [model] is it?

MR. PYLE: No [laughter]. Good old American Dodge Aspen sitting out there. When the declaration of war was made, did the Americans over there seem very excited, or how did you personally take it?

MR. ABBOTT: We were excited, bewildered, didn't know exactly what to expect. But there was certainly much more willingness to get into this thing and get it over with than there was during Vietnam. In other words, everybody wanted to get into it, do it, and get it over with.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: I guess, as I said before, they believed what Roosevelt said.

MR. PYLE: There was kind of a foolhardy approach, too. You mentioned that they believed that we could whip the Japanese in three weeks.

MR. ABBOTT: There was a lot more patriotism back then than there was during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

MR. PYLE: Patriotism was fashionable in the thirties and forties, even the fifties. Certainly it's gone downhill since then.

MR. ABBOTT: That's some of the false things that we heard. I guess, if the high ranking officers believed it, what should we believe if this thing's only going to last three weeks? We're going to get this thing over with in three weeks.

MR. PYLE: That initial enthusiasm that you're describing on the declaration of war, what happened to it after those first few days of bombings?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I guess we were just more or less in a state of shock. We didn't know--

MR. PYLE: I was wondering if everyone was immediately discouraged, or still in limbo?

MR. ABBOTT: It was such a total destruction, death all around, people were just in a kind of state of shock. It's hard to describe right now when it's been 35 years ago.

MR. PYLE: Yes, it's one of those things you never really forget, but it's hard to vocalize. When was it that you were impressed into the marines?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I was, as I said before, I was on Mariveles with a kind of disorganized stray. It was a kind of a stray sailor unit, sailors that didn't have any ships to go to. We were just in kind of a disorganized unit over there in Mariveles harbor which, in that harbor, was a submarine tender, the U. S. S. Canopus.

MR. PYLE: U. S. S. Canopus?

MR. ABBOTT: Canopus.

MR. PYLE: How would you spell that?

MR. ABBOTT: C-A-N-O-P-U-S.

MR. PYLE: Okay, good.

MR. ABBOTT: All the sailors that were still attached to it was in the harbor, and it was tied up there close to Mariveles. They were more or less giving us subsistence. We didn't live on the ship but we lived in the tunnels and facilities that they had there. There was a kind of a navy installation there. So, we were just in a kind of a disorganized situation trying to organize as much as possible with a bunch of stray sailors. That's how that, I say, that's how some of them were sent out on patrols when there were rumors that a Jap boat had landed. They were going to get out there and do something about it. Just like a bunch of sailors were going to go out there squirrel hunting. In other words, in a kind of a laughing attitude and--

MR. PYLE: "Let's go get those Japs." Pick up a baseball bat, or whatever.

MR. ABBOTT: "Let's go get those Japs." The Japs were sitting up in the tree, camouflaged, and picking off sailors like they were sitting ducks.

MR. PYLE: That would tend to quell your enthusiasm real fast when you realized that they're shooting real bullets.

MR. ABBOTT: In February of 1942, they finally decided that the remnants of the 4th Marines were on Corregidor, on various locations around the perimeter of Corregidor. They needed reinforcements, so they sent the spare sailors to be incorporated into the marines. So, they just give us some marine khakis, and we didn't have much clothes anyway. So, they just give us some marine khakis and said, "You'll be under corporal so-and-so."

Well, I was a second class petty officer whenever I went to Corregidor to the marines. I made first class. I had already taken the examination, and it just hadn't come through. But they told me after I went over there as a marine, I'd been fighting with the marines, that "You made first class." I said, "What's that, Pfc.?" [Laughter] I remember saying that. I was a first class petty officer which was equal to a sergeant, first sergeant in the army or marines. Anyway, it was an agreeable thing. I figured the marines knew a whole lot more about land warfare than I knew, and we got along just fine, even though I carried a rifle and spent a lot of my time digging foxholes, staying in foxholes and ducking bombs and shells.

Now the whole island, the whole island of Corregidor, was designed to defend Manila harbor and Manila Bay area seaward. So, the guns would only train 180 degrees. Of course, they had many big guns on the island, and they also had other, what they call Fort Drum over there on the other side of it. Fort Drum which had fourteen-inch naval guns on it, and then you had Fort Hughes, which was over close to it, and they were all designed to train 180 degrees. But nobody had ever thought, in their military preparedness, that the Japs would come from the rear. So they put out, we declared, the whole military and the Philippine government, had declared Manila an open city.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But the Japanese didn't--

MR. PYLE: They didn't respect that?

MR. ABBOTT: They didn't respect that. So they came on into Manila, took over Manila, and then set up artillery. Shelled us from the Manila area. So, we couldn't very well retaliate from that way because, well, probably we wouldn't have anyway because we would have been firing on, killing civilians. But they were firing at us from the rear, so we got it in the wrong direction. They'd fire, when Bataan was about ready to fall--see, it fell in April of 1942.

MR. PYLE: Yes, April the ninth of 1942.

MR. ABBOTT: Then those big naval guns were firing over our heads because they were pointed over in the Japanese area over in Mariveles. Then the night that they landed, they were--I mean landed on Corregidor--they were firing at the Japanese in the boats.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: Some of those big guns sound like a big boxcar. The shell projectile, which weighs over a ton, well over a ton, when it comes over your head then, that's a weird sound. They wore out the rifling in the guns, you know. Those shells were tumbling, and it sounded like a big boxcar going over your head.

MR. PYLE: Is that right? That must have been an interesting sound.

MR. ABBOTT: It was a weird sound. But they would sink some of those Japs' boats, coming over us, whole boatloads of them because there was about, I don't know the exact distance, a mile or two across there from Mariveles to Corregidor. From the reports that I get, they killed about seventeen thousand Japanese that night when they landed, but they just kept coming, you see.

MR. PYLE: Is that right?

MR. ABBOTT: They were sending them by boatloads, and they landed on the Monkey Point area, which was the flatter area of Corregidor. I was up on the other end. We got a lot of fatalities in that area that night that they invaded Corregidor. Now, we didn't know what went on, because most all of the headquarters was in Malinta Tunnel. We had a big tunnel there. That tunnel is still there. I'd like to go back someday.

MR. PYLE: What's the name of that tunnel?

MR. ABBOTT: Malinta.

MR. PYLE: Malinta?

MR. ABBOTT: M-A-L-I-N-T-A, Malinta. They had hospital units

everywhere, just went everywhere underneath the ground with four hundred feet of rock over your head, and hospital wards. The military offices were all underground. That's where MacArthur was.

MR. PYLE: I was just going to ask if that's the big tunnel that MacArthur was in.

MR. ABBOTT: We never saw MacArthur. They were using sugar bags and rice bags and things around the tunnel to keep shrapnel out. We were on two meals a day, on rations of two meals a day, under our own government: one kind of a cracked wheat breakfast about nine o'clock in the morning, and then nothing in the evening until late that afternoon, and not much then. We were digging roots. They had a root on that island that tasted kind of like a potato, and we'd dig some of those things and cook them up during the daytime and during the noon meal. Then they had a lot of horses and mules up on topside in the army part, and when those horses or mules were killed, they would slaughter them and bring the meat around to the various units. That's the first time I ever ate horse meat and mule meat and knew it. A lot of our people couldn't stand it. I said, "Well, give me your ration." [Laughter]. I think it was a little strong; but if you're hungry, you'll eat anything.

We didn't actually know--we knew that it was getting close to the end, but we didn't actually know until our officer told us to take our rifles--we all had a little Springfield rifle--and take them apart, disassemble them, and throw them piece by piece into the ocean. We were going to surrender. We marched out. That was on May 6, 1942.

MR. PYLE: The fall of Corregidor.

MR. ABBOTT: We stayed there, oh, a couple of weeks, down in that area of Monkey Point. No place to live, just out on the Monkey Point area, flat area, where there used to be aircraft hangers and so forth, down in that area, but they were all gone. We just stayed down in there for work details. They used a lot of work details going in and loading some of those groceries, I mean that food area that was used around the tunnel, loading it aboard Japanese ships.

MR. PYLE: Now they used, you mentioned sugar bags, and things of this nature, rather than sandbags because preparedness--they just weren't ready for it?

MR. ABBOTT: They just weren't ready for it. They were also undoubtedly preparing us for a longer holdout too. There just wasn't much groceries to pass out to the people.

MR. PYLE: I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about this period before I move on. In the article that Mary Ann did about you, you mentioned that wearing marine uniforms and taking orders from marines is almost an emotional experience.

MR. ABBOTT: Oh, well, I said that as a--there always was a rivalry between the navy and the marines.

MR. PYLE: Of course, yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Just like between two football rivalries, there's always a rivalry. Some of the navy ships that I was on, we had marines. We'd always play pranks on them. Maybe that was a little bit too strong there when I said it was an emotional experience.

MR. PYLE: I thought it was a kind of a cute comment though, and I was wondering how emotional [laughing].

MR. ABBOTT: We used to joke about if we wanted to get the marines out of the way on ship, you know, they're always in the way, just paint that area. They'll get in that fresh paint [laughter]. We got along just fine. There's an old marine sergeant major down at the Naval Home in Gulfport.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Much like yourself, I'm not sure I could pronounce it and do it justice.

MR. ABBOTT: Skwiralski is his name.

MR. PYLE: Skwiralski?

MR. ABBOTT: Ski, yes [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Okay, sergeant major from the U. S. Marine Corps who was in the 4th Marines on Corregidor, and it's Frank S-K-W-I-R-A-L-S-K-I, okay. He's down in Gulfport right now?

MR. ABBOTT: In the navy home.

MR. PYLE: In the navy home in Gulfport? Oh, yes, I see an address and everything there.

MR. ABBOTT: We had a friend down there that [lived] just the other side of Gulfport, between Gulfport and Biloxi.

MR. PYLE: Let me mention this for the sake of the cassette so they'll know what we're talking about. This is a publication called Home Port that is published at the U. S. Naval Home in Gulfport, Mississippi, and--

MR. ABBOTT: The new Naval Home was established in 1976. It was moved down here from Philadelphia when the old Philadelphia Naval Home, which was there a hundred years or more, was no longer serviceable. So we can say that Senator John Stennis was instrumental in getting this.

MR. PYLE: Yes, we'd like very much to talk to Mr. Skwiralski.

MR. ABBOTT: He's in good health. I think he'd be glad to talk to you.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that's fantastic! You mentioned the surrender order that you were given. Who gave you that particular order? What rank officer, do you remember?

MR. ABBOTT: Whoever was in charge in our marines. I don't know what he was. He was probably a major. I don't know.

MR. PYLE: I can't help but think that that must have really stuck in the craw of a lot of marines, to be ordered to dismantle their guns, throw them away, and surrender.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I reckon they just told them there's no chance to hold out. They've already landed in force. So, I reckon the orders came from MacArthur himself. No, I'll take that back. Let me back up on that.

MR. PYLE: It would come from Wainwright, I guess.

MR. ABBOTT: Wainwright.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Because MacArthur had already gone out by submarine. We never saw MacArthur. But Wainwright was out visiting us all the time. He'd come out, and he visited all the different, what do you call it, platoons? I guess that's what they call it.

MR. PYLE: Platoons, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: And he, I don't believe, was scared of anything. When bombs would fall, or shells would start to come, he'd never take cover. He was either crazy, or he was brave [laughter]. But I have more, I'm going to say this, I don't care who knows it. I've got ten times more respect for him than I had for MacArthur. A lot of the other people feel the same way about MacArthur. MacArthur, no doubt, was a fine general, but a political general.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes, very true. Very true. And he wielded that political influence that he had.

MR. ABBOTT: He told Harry Truman just about where to go, didn't he?

MR. PYLE: Yes, well--

MR. ABBOTT: Or vice versa [laughter]!

MR. PYLE: Yes, that can be debated both ways, couldn't it? Jonathan Wainwright, you said you saw a good bit of him around the island,

visiting the different platoons and the outposts.

MR. ABBOTT: We didn't have to go to the tunnel to see him. He was out seeing us.

MR. PYLE: Yes. I was just going to ask your opinion of him. How he came across to you?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, he was, my opinion, of course, I never had any direct relationship with him except just through the course of his business. I think that he was a real fine man. I can't say any more about him other than that. I have a lot of respect for him.

MR. PYLE: Okay. And you also just mentioned that MacArthur left Corregidor by submarine. It's a lot of controversy, many people like to have the romantic view of MacArthur on the back of a patrol boat going over to Australia.

MR. ABBOTT: He left by submarine. They took out not only MacArthur but some of the key men along with him. I guess if we had held out a little bit longer, they would have taken most all the sailors; because sailors, with any rating, with any skill at all, were greatly needed back on ship. But if they'd held, and they could have got more submarines in there then--but all the time we were on Corregidor, all we did was live on rumors, "Just keep on. Hold out another few days. Help is on the way. Hold out, help is on the way."

MR. PYLE: When knowing all along that there was no help?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we just didn't know anything. But we were told, "Hold out, help is on the way." I know what's going through the mind of those hostages in Iran. Well, it's just a little bit different situation than we were in over there in Japan. But, I'd be just as glad to see them come back as their folks and the whole country. But in two or three months, they'll probably be just forgotten about, just like we were.

EDITOR'S NOTE: On 4 November 1979 Iranian militants seized the U. S. embassy in Teheran. The 52 hostages were released on 20 January 1981.

MR. PYLE: It's a shame.

MR. ABBOTT: We lived on rumors. We were going to be promised this, promised that. Now, thank goodness I have retired from the navy, and I don't have to worry about it too much, about this Veterans Administration. But a lot of our people do have to worry about the Veterans Administration, and there's no beds for them. They don't want to take them. They didn't know anything about what happened. Some of the young doctors today don't know what happened to peoples' minds and things that were incarcerated for four years, five years. We had, when I went to Fontana in August, Lieutenant General John Flynn, who was incarcerated five and a half years by the Vietnamese, spoke to us up there. He was the highest ranking [officer] that came back out of

Vietnam, shot down over Vietnam.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: You just don't realize some of the treatment that some of our veterans are getting today. I hate to interject any political thing in this, but a lot of our VA hospital beds were taken by Cuban refugees. Our veterans [had] no place to go in Florida.

MR. PYLE: Yes, you hate to interject the politics into it, but by gum, the politics are there.

MR. ABBOTT: When a person who fought for his country and suffered for his country four--I was three and a half years, almost three and a half years, and people like John Flynn five and a half years--why did they survive? Well, it's a mystery to me. You had to have a strong will to live. Once you gave up that will to live, you didn't make it. I know. I've seen big old strong boys, a whole lot stronger looking maybe than you, say, "I ain't going to eat that old rice. I'm going to do this," or, "I'm not going to do that." But I helped bury them.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes. I'm going to talk about that in a lot more detail as we move on here. Let's see, it was brought out to me in an interview I did not long ago concerning a World War II POW that was on Corregidor also, that the order he was given was that, in this tone, that the officer told him, "I can't command you to surrender. Do what your conscience tells you." Were you all given any kind of leeway at that, or were you just told to dismantle your guns and surrender?

MR. ABBOTT: In toto, en masse, just hold your platoon, give up. Of course, if we had known what we'd had to go through, I don't think we would have ever done it.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: We didn't think we'd ever have to go through all that we went through.

MR. PYLE: Relive for me if you would, or tell me the process that you went through after the surrender of the platoon. You mentioned that you were put on work details and were living in the open.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we lived in the open and just slept with the--made improvised shelters there on the Monkey Point area of Bataan, which was on old hanger area, aircraft hanger area. And we stayed there. We had our own details. They used just, more or less, a survival until they got ready to do what they wanted to do with us. But they did use some of the people, not only the sailors, marines and all, for work details. They'd go out and help the Japanese clean up the dead. In other words, not only Americans but the Japanese too.

MR. PYLE: The Japanese dead too? I see.

MR. ABBOTT: The Japanese dead were--they'd take and cut an arm off and cremate it and bury all the rest of the body and send that arm back to Japan; but just that, they saved a portion of it.

MR. PYLE: Well, I'd never heard that before.

MR. ABBOTT: And then, some of my best friends there went up, and even marines, we were friends. A lot of us were friends, we had to be. But it's a terrible sight to walk by, as we're walking by that area after the war, right after we surrendered, to see some of our best friends just sitting there by, you know, all swollen up, half of his face shot away. He was killed during the night of the invasion. A good friend of mine, who was in the store with me in Cavite, had gotten shot that night. He was out on that area too. Got shot in the stomach, nobody could get to him, and he drank his canteen of water and took his .45 and committed suicide.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Of course, that was the gory part of the detail, of picking up [bodies]. They had American bodies stacked up outside of the tunnel, just like cordwood. Just bodies just stacked up there ready for shipment, I mean for burial. I don't know where they buried them. I guess they buried them there on the island. They claim they have a national cemetery right there now, on the island. When we went to Fontana, we were talking with some people who made the trip over there last year, and they are going to have another one in 1982. We were, my wife and I, are thinking seriously of making that trip in 1982, if the situation in the Philippines settles down. There's an awful lot of guerilla activity and anti-Americanism right now with [Ferdinand] Marcos dictator and anti-Marcos. You been reading the papers?

MR. PYLE: Yes, certainly did.

MR. ABBOTT: I wouldn't want to go over there right now.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned Fontana and the reunion there. Fontana where? Where is--

MR. ABBOTT: That's Fontana Dam, North Carolina.

MR. PYLE: Okay. You mentioned it earlier before we started recording, and I--

MR. ABBOTT: It's about a hundred and something miles from Chattanooga and Knoxville, out--

MR. PYLE: Okay. It's on the western end of North Carolina, then?

MR. ABBOTT: Western part of North Carolina.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. What was your treatment by the Japanese? Were they brutal with the American prisoners there?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I don't recollect too much of it, except what I just got through telling you. Except, that a whole bunch of them at one time were lined up--now, I wasn't in that group, but I was told that--lined up by a big tall cliff. The Japanese soldiers were going to push them all over the side, [let the men] fall into the ocean. It happened that a Japanese officer came by and stopped them.

There was a lot of kicking and laughing and indignities that went on then. Of course, the first thing that a Jap saw of me, I had a twenty-one jewel Elgin watch on my arm, and he said, "Aah-ne," and I just held out my arm, and he took it. I had one carton of American cigarettes, and he took that and took everything that we had. Just went through what little bit of personal belongings that we had. After that, it was just a matter of survival.

We had a lot of people that were sick. Bataan was one of the most malaria-infected parts of the world and a lot of them had dysentery. So, a lot of the time was spent right there on the island digging latrines, until they decided what they wanted to do with us.

MR. PYLE: Makeshift jobs just to keep you busy, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Makeshift jobs and keep surviving, and right there a lot of people died even right there on the island with dysentery because it doesn't take long for dysentery to take a big strong man and emaciate him into a bunch of bones, in just a very short time.

MR. PYLE: The Japanese didn't extend any medical courtesies to the prisoners, did they?

MR. ABBOTT: No, no they didn't. We had a--I hate to keep referring back to this--but we had an American Red Cross executive who spoke with us in August about the situation, about the international treatment of prisoners. The Japanese were not a signatory to it, signatory to it.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see, to the Geneva Convention?

MR. ABBOTT: They never have signed it. So therefore, they didn't go by the rules of warfare as far as prisoners were concerned.

MR. PYLE: I've been told that the Japanese view of those who surrendered, that they're already dead, so they can treat them any way they want to. Is that true? Were you aware of that sort of attitude?

MR. ABBOTT: You mean as far as the Japanese were concerned? They, I think, that they doped their military people, drugged them. That's my opinion, that they drugged them, and it was a great honor to die for the country.

MR. PYLE: For the country, yes, and for the Emperor.

MR. ABBOTT: It's like they're now doing right now in Iran, that they die for the country. They preach that into their head. So actually, I think they were instructed never to give up--fight to the death. So in a sense, that may be what the Japanese thought. It was kind of a dishonor. You were dishonored by surrendering.

MR. PYLE: What sort of orders were you and the other American soldiers given by the Japanese so far as things like escape? Or not pulling your load on work detail? Did they outright tell you if you try and escape you will be executed?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, yes. You will be shot.

MR. PYLE: If you don't do what you're told, you will be killed?

MR. ABBOTT: Right. I believe it just about got you through Corregidor [laughter].

MR. PYLE: Yes. The group of people that you were with on Corregidor, until you got shipped out elsewhere, or imprisoned, were there any that tried to escape?

MR. ABBOTT: Not on Corregidor, you couldn't escape because everywhere you've got water.

MR. PYLE: I was thinking on Bataan, when you were--

MR. ABBOTT: Well, in Bataan there were some, they tell me. Of course, I don't know, some of them did go into the guerilla units. But you didn't know. Just like in Vietnam, you didn't know. Back then, even though the Filipinos were supposed to be our friends, you didn't know whether they were traitors or not, and they didn't know whether you were going to be turned in. I'm sure that some of them got into friendly units, and I'm sure that a lot of them got killed in the process.

MR. PYLE: That was the case, the gentleman I mentioned that I interviewed last month. He was able to escape from the Death March and join the guerilla unit and fought for three or four months until he was captured.

MR. ABBOTT: But I wasn't in the Death March because we had gone from Bataan to Corregidor in February, see, then to fight with the marines. Of course, Bataan fell in April of 1942, and we didn't fall for almost a month later, May sixth. And we, the remnants of what was on Corregidor, then we stayed there about two weeks, somewhere along in that area. I may not be exact as far as the time. But then, we were taken by a Japanese ship, landing boats, or I don't remember now exactly what they were, and landed in Manila. They had the kind like when they show pictures of MacArthur jumping off into

the water. The only thing is we were out far enough, if you couldn't swim you'd drown, because the boat couldn't come in. A lot of people I'm sure did drown when they [tried]--couldn't swim, and some of them tried to help the other people get far enough where they could touch the bottom. We walked on into the beach area. That was out on the, at that time, it was called Dewey Boulevard, I believe. But I think they've renamed all that stuff now. It was Dewey Boulevard at that time, and we had to walk several miles down the boulevard, hot, guarded by many, many Japanese. Of course, it was a pretty shameful thing to have to do, to walk down by what few Filipinos that were there watching us. They took us into the Bilibid Prison which was actually a Filipino prison, and that's where the Japs used as a kind of a staging center. I don't know exactly how long I was there, several days.

MR. PYLE: They just used that as a point to move you out elsewhere?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, out elsewhere. I know that I had gotten ahold of some quinine pills, and I had been taking those. I'd take those quinine pills as a prophylactic against malaria. Those quinine pills would make you almost so drugged that you'd stagger if you got up during the night to go to the bathroom.

MR. PYLE: I didn't realize they were that strong.

MR. ABBOTT: It did the job for me. I had enough just to take them, and also I was fortunate enough not to get dysentery. Those are the two things that killed most of them, malaria and dysentery.

MR. PYLE: How did you get the quinine pills?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I knew that there was some left over. I don't know exactly how they were given, but it must have been somebody that still had a supply. Some part of the medical units, or something, that gave them to us, and we could take them if we wanted to.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, that was the old way they used to treat malaria was with quinine. Now during the war, they invented another drug called Atabrine.

MR. PYLE: Ataman?

MR. ABBOTT: Atabrine, and it would turn you yellow just like if you had jaundice, but it did the job as far as--

MR. PYLE: Now you said that you never contracted dysentery.

MR. ABBOTT: Never contracted dysentery and I never contracted malaria, and I was in the most malaria-infected country in the world.

MR. PYLE: That's something.

MR. ABBOTT: Mosquitos there in Bataan were awful. I don't know, as much as mosquitos like me, I don't know how I kept from getting it. Unless, like I said, I think we were given some of those pills to take in Bataan as a prophylactic against it.

MR. PYLE: Dysentery, now you'd normally catch that through food and water, is that correct?

MR. ABBOTT: It's some kind of an amoeba. I don't know what it is.

MR. PYLE: I was thinking it was passed in contaminated water and food and such.

MR. ABBOTT: I just don't know how it is. It's kind of like, if you don't know, a doctor doesn't know what anything is, it's a virus, amoeba or something [laughing]. But anyway, they have no control at all over their bowels, and they may just go down from a big healthy person to skin and bones. I've seen people, well, I'll have to get to that a little bit later, about what they would say when they would take the people to the cemeteries.

But anyway, we stayed there in Bilibid a few days. Then they loaded [us] aboard boxcars and took us to Cabanatuan which was an old Philippine constabulary barracks. No [beds], just bamboo slats to lay on. There was no bedding, just bamboo slats.

MR. PYLE: You were never incarcerated in Fort Santiago in Manila, by any chance?

MR. ABBOTT: No, I don't know where Santiago is.

MR. PYLE: It's one of the prisons there in Manila.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, there was one called Santo Tomas, which was a university. Civilians and the nurses and all were held there.

MR. PYLE: I'm not familiar with it.

MR. ABBOTT: Santo Tomas was a university, a Philippine university--Catholic, I guess, university.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: They were held, the nurses and the civilian internees were held [there]. I don't know whether the military was held there or not in Santo Tomas.

MR. PYLE: How long were you at Cabanatuan?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I was there in Cabanatuan until--I reckon, it was about the middle or latter part of July of 1943.

MR. PYLE: Roughly two months then?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: Oh, 14 months!

MR. ABBOTT: Fourteen, over a year.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: We did farming and worked the farm details. Of course, we were very sparsely fed. Everybody lost a tremendous amount of weight and disease started getting them. I imagine there were 20 or 30 a day that would die, have to be taken to the cemetery.

MR. PYLE: How many, roughly, numbers of American prisoners were at Cabanatuan? There would obviously be many thousands--

MR. ABBOTT: There were several thousand. I'm not sure how many there were. There were two of those camps. There was Cabanatuan one and two, and another one called Camp O'Donnell, all up in the same area, up in the northern Luzon area of the Philippines. But I don't know exactly how many there were. There was quite a number.

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay, and I've been told that one of the ways that the Japanese stopped the Americans from trying to escape was simply that they told them that if one of the men in your squad escaped, the entire squad would be executed.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, they told us that. Yes, they told us that. When they first, and by the way, this guy Skwiralski that I mentioned was in this same barracks that I was in.

MR. PYLE: I noticed the name Cabanatuan down there, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: He was in the same barracks that I was in, and that old fellow has a list of all the names of men in his barracks.

MR. PYLE: Oh, is that right? That's fascinating.

MR. ABBOTT: In the Cabanatuan area, we had not been there long, and we saw four Americans that were hobbled, tied up--you know, the Japanese, the Orientals can put you in an awful bind as far as binding you up--and hobbled them to where they were just in severe pain and torture, lying out there in front of the Japanese, what they had said was the headquarters of the Japanese. [It was] not very far from where we were in the camp, and in that

hot sun all day long and by the end of the day, they were begging to be shot. They were just in such misery. Well, they marched those four guys, unhobbled them, and they marched those four guys right by our barracks. They had four little shallow graves not very far out there. They lined them up and then blindfolded them and gave them a cigarette and shot them right there.

MR. PYLE: Oh, you witnessed this then?

MR. ABBOTT: I witnessed that, yes. They had tried to escape in the Philippines.

MR. PYLE: To your knowledge then, they did not kill the entire squad.

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: But you mentioned that yes, you were told that by the Japanese, that they would execute the entire squad.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. Well, mainly they told us that, well, they did tell us that in the Philippines, but they strongly impressed us when we were divided up into squads when we got to Japan.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: Of course, I've heard a lot of people say, "Why didn't you try to escape when you were in Japan?" Well, you stick out like a sore thumb. Your eyes are not slant [laughter]. There were people who were white people but of the Caucasian race, Germans. You better start learning how to speak some German if [laughter]--

MR. PYLE: It's hard to fake that guttural German sound! You mentioned that part of the work details that there was farming and such as this. What was the typical day like in Cabanatuan? What time did they get you up? What did you eat? When did you go to bed? When did you--

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we'd get up early in the morning about daybreak. They'd give us a thin gruel, what we'd call lugow, which was watery cooked rice.

MR. PYLE: Lugow would that be--

MR. ABBOTT: L-U-G-O-W, I guess. They called it lugow. It was a thinly cooked, kind of like the gruel, I guess they gave the old guy in prison in the "Wizard of Id." You know, in the comic strip?

MR. PYLE: Oh yes, Spook.

MR. ABBOTT: They gave us that gruel [laughter]. That didn't last very long. It was too watery.

- MR. PYLE: What size of a portion did they give you?
- MR. ABBOTT: Around a cup full.
- MR. PYLE: They called that breakfast?
- MR. ABBOTT: That was breakfast. Sometimes you got, if you were lucky, you got a work detail that would go over and help the Japanese clean up around their place. They'd let you scrape their pots, their rice pots, you know. That was a treat then to get that burnt rice. It tasted like bread, you know. They also used it mostly for, the burnt rice, to treat people who had dysentery and what's that other little, not dysentery but--
- MR. PYLE: Jaundice?
- MR. ABBOTT: No, the one that you have kind of where you're loose but you're--not loose bowels but--
- MR. PYLE: Diarrhea?
- MR. ABBOTT: Diarrhea.
- MR. PYLE: Okay.
- MR. ABBOTT: Diarrhea, treat diarrhea with. I had that, of course, several times. But they'd treat that as best they could with--
- MR. PYLE: With burnt rice?
- MR. ABBOTT: With burnt rice.
- MR. PYLE: I've never heard of that before.
- MR. ABBOTT: Yes, it would help. Then they also had a hospital there, and they had carabao every now and then. It was a water buffalo, and kill it and give you a little bit, make soup with it anyway, a little bit. Then they'd use the blood. They'd curdle the blood and give it to the hospital part of the camp and fry it, that blood or whatever it is. That was supposed to be good for the sick people.
- MR. PYLE: Is that right?
- MR. ABBOTT: Yes.
- MR. PYLE: I might just as soon be sick! I don't know, it doesn't sound all that healthful to me.
- MR. ABBOTT: Yes, it doesn't sound too good does it [laughter]?

- MR. PYLE: Did you get three meals a day?
- MR. ABBOTT: No, no. Never got three meals a day. You got a little ration in the morning, and then you didn't get any more until late that evening when you quit work.
- MR. PYLE: I see.
- MR. ABBOTT: Then, of course, by the time you got through working in the fields all day and being guarded and digging ditches and everything else that had anything to do with the camp, you were too tired to do anything else, except lay in your bunk--not bunk--but lay in your slats and try to get some rest.
- MR. PYLE: These farming details, I would imagine that that was an enviable detail too, just the fact that you'd be around some kind of food.
- MR. ABBOTT: Yes.
- MR. PYLE: Were you able to sneak any food, and what happened if you got caught?
- MR. ABBOTT: Well, you'd have to be very careful.
- MR. PYLE: I was told that in many cases they would just try and dig roots and eat roots and such as that. But, if they were ever caught doing it, that a lot of times it was immediate death.
- MR. ABBOTT: Well, I don't know that we dug any roots in there. The roots that I mentioned before, we dug under our own country on Corregidor. There was a root that grew there, but I don't know whether they--oh, I'm sure that somebody snitched something every now and then, but if they caught that they--
- MR. PYLE: I was thinking on these farming details--it's an edible root that's kind of--it's some kind of a tuber.
- MR. ABBOTT: Well, yes, they grew a lot of these little they call dicon pickles, which is real hot. The Japanese eat that with their rice, you know. They pickle them, and then they slice them. They eat them with their rice. But, the Americans weren't too fond of those, so they had to be pretty hungry to eat those.
- MR. PYLE: What did you get for your evening meal?
- MR. ABBOTT: The same thing, rice and soup. The soup was made out of well, maybe sometimes it was flavored with a little carabao meat. Other times, it wasn't flavored with anything, just a gruel, a soup.
- MR. PYLE: Yes. Okay, I see. It certainly doesn't sound very

healthful.

MR. ABBOTT: They let you keep your old canteen and canteen cup, if you still had one, and I still had mine. They'd pour you a little soup in your cup. One time I was eating, and normally, I didn't even look down, but I was eating it, and just happened to look in my old rusty spoon that I had, a great big old caterpillar had been cooked up with it. I didn't eat him. I just threw him aside, but I couldn't afford to throw my soup out [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Yes. I would imagine a lot of people would have been happy to have eaten caterpillar [laughter]!

MR. ABBOTT: A big, old fuzzy caterpillar, I threw him aside and kept on. They had some kind of a bamboo looking thing that they would cook up too. We called it blowguns. They would make soup out of it, chop it up. Of course, when we got to Japan later on, they gave us a lot of soybean curd. I've seen pictures of it in the paper, not long ago, about how they take this soybean curd and cut it off into blocks. It doesn't have much taste in it, but it's rich in protein. I must tell you, but I guess it's my luck, about this old hamburger meat they fix up now, I imagine you get a lot of it at these restaurants.

MR. PYLE: Well, an awful lot of soybean in those.

MR. ABBOTT: I could remember--well, I'm getting off the subject because I'm talking about that--the Krystals used to be so good. Now, they're not worth it.

MR. PYLE: Of course, they still advertise that it's a hundred percent beef. I wonder sometimes [laughing]. You mentioned you got up early in the morning, daybreak. You had a little bit of this gruel. What different kind of work details were there?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, it was a rural area. So, it was just either farming, or helping the Japanese, or digging a ditch, or working around the camp.

MR. PYLE: I've been told that cutting trees, that they had details that cut trees. They hauled lumber.

MR. ABBOTT: I wasn't on any of those. I don't know. But then it was just another year or so of trying to survive--living on rumors. They'd give us a Japanese paper, English publication of the Japanese news. In one of those papers, they told that they had sunk ships, and one of the ships happened to be one that I had known that my brother was on. But I didn't know whether he was still on it or not.

MR. PYLE: Which ship was this then?

MR. ABBOTT: The U. S. S. Monsen, a destroyer, M-O-N-S-E-N, or something like that. I don't recollect how to spell it, Monsen. But it was in Guadalcanal. It just so happened that after the war was over, my brother was

on this ship.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: But he wasn't killed. He had just come out of the fire room. He was a fireman. Came up topside to get some fresh air after he got relieved. The ship got a torpedo, sunk the ship and killed everybody down where he worked. But he said he didn't know anything until they picked him out of the water and took him to a base hospital over in Guadalcanal. He had shrapnel all over him. He stayed in the hospital about a year. There's a plate in his head, a plate in his elbow, and a plate in his back. He's pretty well banged up, but he retired from the navy. I haven't seen him in 25 years though.

MR. PYLE: Is that right?

MR. ABBOTT: I hear from him. I've got a letter from him now. But he lives in Japan.

MR. PYLE: Oh, he lives in Japan.

MR. ABBOTT: And got a wife, I think, in Japan. Right now he's in, the last time I heard from him, he was in San Francisco, and he's in the Merchant Marines, keeping his time up in the Merchant Marines to get retirement on that.

MR. PYLE: Well, he's probably got over 30 years then.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, he's retired from the navy, been retired from the navy about ten years. He's trying to get enough time in the Merchant Marines to retire from it too. He told me last time, he keeps telling me he's going to come down to visit me but I don't know.

MR. PYLE: When you were at Cabanatuan was that just an American camp, or were there Australians there too?

MR. ABBOTT: In the Philippines?

MR. PYLE: Yes, sir.

MR. ABBOTT: No, just Americans there.

MR. PYLE: Just Americans there?

MR. ABBOTT: Just Americans.

MR. PYLE: Was there, did you ever think of attempting an escape?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we thought of it, but I didn't too strongly after I saw what they'd do to people who didn't make it. That took the desire out.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes. I was wondering if that kind of conversation

would be prevalent when you'd get together at nighttime, that sort of thing.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we'd talk about things. Mainly what we talked about, when you're hungry, you talk about food: what we were going to eat when we get back to the States.

MR. PYLE: The guys never gave up hope about getting back to the states, then?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, a lot of them didn't. The ones who did give up, didn't make it back.

MR. PYLE: They were the ones that died?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, you've got to have a will to live. I think that even applies to people who maybe have sicknesses, or terminal illness otherwise.

MR. PYLE: Excuse me a second.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: I had just asked you about the conversations, what kind of things you talked about: you mentioned food, when you're hungry; what you'd do when you get back to the States; there was talk now and then about escape. What sort of things did you do for recreation, relaxation, was there any such thing as that?

MR. ABBOTT: None, none while I was in there, none that I know of. There was none even planned, because the people were too tired--except just to sit around what little bit of time you had before dark. Just talk, that's the only recreation there was.

MR. PYLE: In the movie The Bridge Over The River Kwai, it comes out very pointedly in there that they got a Bible. They had Bible study groups and read the Bible and such as this. Did that go on?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, no, not collectively, individually. I had a New Testament that I had carried with me all that time, and I'd read that New Testament over and over.

We had no place to take a bath and we'd just, in hot weather, we'd be hoping that we'd get a shower. We'd get up under the eaves of the house to take a bath. When it did rain, I don't know how that water could be so cold in hot weather, and you'd, [within] just a few minutes underneath that water, you'd turn blue.

MR. PYLE: Solid steam!

MR. ABBOTT: You'd have to go get in what little bit of bunk that you had to lay in and cover up with a--we did have an old blanket, and we'd cover

up with that blanket trying to thaw out. You'd get so cold, even though it would be hot weather outside, just like getting under ice water out here right now [laughter].

MR. PYLE: I was in Vietnam for a year and a half, and I noticed the monsoon rains were cool. But the second it stopped, it was just all steam. That you were just miserable right afterwards [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Just thinking about prison life at Cabanatuan, what kind of clothes did you have? Did the Japanese issue any kind of clothes, or is it just what you happened to have on when you were captured?

MR. ABBOTT: Just what we had survived with. That's all we had.

MR. PYLE: What happened, I'm not that familiar with the Philippines--

MR. ABBOTT: What we were captured with.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Not being familiar with the Philippines, I don't know what kind of climactic conditions you have year round. Is there a cold season?

MR. ABBOTT: No, in the Philippines there, it was just tropics.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Solid tropics all the way.

MR. ABBOTT: You had a rainy season, like you said.

MR. PYLE: Of course.

MR. ABBOTT: But it was just tropical weather, kind of the same practically all year round.

MR. PYLE: Okay, you never really worried about freezing then in cold weather?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay, good. You also mentioned that you weren't given medicine, or anything like that, but that you were fortunate in never getting dysentery or malaria. You did mention the quinine pills, but did you take any preventative measures against getting sick, against getting dysentery?

MR. ABBOTT: No, no.

MR. PYLE: I was wondering if there was anything that the guys did collectively to--

MR. ABBOTT: Well, you learn in a situation like that. It was a case of, I guess, what goes on in the world today: dog-eat-dog survival. In other words, some had it, some didn't. Some of the American military medics had somehow gotten some of these, whatever they had to treat that with, the medicines that back when they were captured and somehow or another had carried it on into the prison camps and got away with it. But, they would not give it out. They'd sell it if you had the money. If you didn't have the money, it was just tough.

Some of these medics would take the gold teeth out of a corpse, when they'd die, and put them in a little sack, knock them out. I didn't like to see this. Maybe I shouldn't say this. This isn't heresy. I know it happened. So, it was a case of--we've got some rotten Americans, in other words, that didn't care anything about their fellowman.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned that it was a case of dog-eat-dog many times. In a case like three and a half years of imprisonment, there had to be a lot of things that went on that were accepted at the time, but as you look back at it now, it's things that you wouldn't necessarily be proud of. Not you personally, but prison life will do that. Were there things like that that you could talk about? You mentioned taking the gold out of a dead man's teeth. It's one of those things that you did as a matter of survival to use to buy things to keep alive. On the other hand, it's not anything that you'd look back at fondly, 30 years later. What sort of things like that happened?

MR. ABBOTT: You mean in general?

MR. PYLE: Yes, do you recall any other things of that nature?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, but I think we'll wait until I get to Japan.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: We'll say some of the things there. Then I'll interject again this instance of Fontana and also what happened to me in 1949 when I was in Pearl Harbor when this American lieutenant, naval academy graduate, who was a mess officer in Japan. I'll bring that up [then], just so we keep it in some sort of chronological order. I'll wait until we get there then.

MR. PYLE: Okay, good. I'll put that question--

MR. ABBOTT: But then, back in the Philippines, we're still in Cabanatuan, I said I didn't get dysentery, didn't get malaria, but I did have severe beriberi. Beriberi is caused from malnutrition. Everybody had that. There are two kinds of beriberi. There's the dry kind and the wet kind. The wet kind, they swell up about twice the size, the feet and legs swell up. I had the dry kind which hurt just like arthritis, and I'd have to get up during the night, several times during the night, and stick my feet in cold water to numb them, where I could get back to sleep for another hour or so. We had nothing to treat that with.

MR. PYLE: It begins to make sense now. In another interview I did, a gentleman had dry beriberi, and he said that in Japan, a lot of times at nighttime, people with dry beriberi would go outside and stand in the snow. I didn't realize why they did that, but it was to numb the pain.

MR. ABBOTT: Numb the pain.

MR. PYLE: But they said that the next morning, they'd have to chisel them out of ice, if they lived, because they would freeze.

MR. ABBOTT: As far as I know there was nothing--they didn't have such a thing as aspirin or anything like that to take. I don't know whether it would have affected it or not. We also had started to get scurvy, which was a lack of vitamin C. Your tongue would get completely raw. When the Japs finally decided they better do something about it, they got ahold of some limes, citrus limes, and brought it in and started doling them out a little bit to the prisoners. When we'd get into those limes, we'd almost have to cry--

MR. PYLE: Burn?

MR. ABBOTT: Burn your mouth. You imagine putting the lime juice in your mouth when your mouth is raw. But it did the job.

MR. PYLE: That stuff can really stop the scurvy. Why did the Japanese do this? Was it out of concern for the welfare of the Americans, or were they afraid that it would spread to the Japanese?

MR. ABBOTT: No, it wasn't anything that would spread. It's not a communicable disease, as far as I know. It's just a lack of vitamins. But I don't know, after a while I guess, they felt like they couldn't just let us all die. They had to do something.

MR. PYLE: The stories that I've been given about the Japanese in the prison camps was that they could have cared less. That there was no compassion, and that's why it surprised me that they went out of their way to get some limes.

MR. ABBOTT: There wasn't much compassion, no. I guess it was just probably some orders, maybe from headquarters, that maybe we better do something for them and get some work out of them some way. That's when I guess they started, about forty-three is when they started sending these details in various groups to Japan.

MR. PYLE: The Japanese guards themselves, were all of them ruthless, mean, brutal, or were there some that--

MR. ABBOTT: Some of them were pretty decent. You find that I guess in all walks of life.

MR. PYLE: Well, sure.

MR. ABBOTT: But some of them were just brutal, just like you find some sergeant, I guess, in our own army, or officers in our own army, or military.

MR. PYLE: Some policeman, some of anything, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But we had some of them that were pretty good, even to talk with. We had some of them that would even want to have a little, well, I said--well, you asked me before, did they have any kind of recreation. The Japs would have a little entertainment thing that if people kind of gang around sometimes and maybe there'd be a few people that would get up and kind of entertain if they had survived with a harmonica or guitar or something. Most people weren't interested in it but the Japanese would want to wrestle us. Some of them would want to wrestle sumo, the sumo type wrestling--where you take, I don't know, I guess where you take, go around and see who could throw each other to the ground.

MR. PYLE: But this was as a form of recreation, rather than trying to hurt someone.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: Not too many Americans would take them on, because even though the Japanese were little, they were strong. We were all too weak. But in good shape, we could have taken them and heaved them 30 feet [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Was there ever any thought of what would happen if you did defeat one of them? Was there ever any fear of retaliation.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't really know, because I didn't wrestle with them.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: I do know that if you had ever struck back at one of them, or, for instance, one time I was caught with a cigarette where I shouldn't have been smoking. Of course, this was in Japan where I was going in the mine, and they caught me smoking too long. He started hitting me with his rifle butt and kicking me with his hobnail shoes. And, as I would go down, I'd get back up, and he'd knock me down again. I had it in my mind, "I know I can hit that guy a couple or three times and knock him right on his back," because he was just a little fellow. But that's what they wanted you to do. They wanted you to fight back, and then they could take their bayonet and use you as bayonet practice. So, you had to take the indignities. It's pretty hard to do when you're--and bow to them like you were some subservient slave, or something.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But you had to just, as they say in athletics, if you get a good beating, suck it up and go on and try to do better the next time [laughing]. It's pretty hard to do sometimes.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned the incident with the cigarettes in Japan, and you mentioned that you had a New Testament that you were able to read. I'm rather surprised that the Japanese allowed you to have reading material.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, the Japanese, I can say this, they did not try to brainwash us. They did not try to keep you from practicing your religion, if you were religious. They had no such, like the communist brainwashing, there was none of that. They had no doctrine or philosophy except their domination of the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. That was what they wanted. I don't think we had too much of a thing to fight against there anyway, because I think Asia for the Asiatics would have probably been a better thing for the whole country. Well, that was all they were after, was just believing in that. They didn't try to indoctrinate us as far as, "You can't practice your religion," I think. I don't know whether we had any chaplains per se or not, but I don't remember that. But they didn't try to discourage or encourage.

We worked ten days, ten days a week, I mean [on] ten days and off ten days; not off, but ten days and you changed. That was when we were in Japan. Now we were getting a little ahead of myself again. But we had no Sundays, so to speak.

MR. PYLE: While you were at Cabanatuan, you worked seven days a week, four weeks out of the month, every day was a work day?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, we had no holidays. You'd just go on.

MR. PYLE: In your typical work day, was it 12, 13, 14 hours a day, no such thing as an eight-hour day.

MR. ABBOTT: As long as they wanted you to work.

MR. PYLE: Sunup till sundown?

MR. ABBOTT: Till dark, sunup till sundown.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned brainwashing, that sort of thing. The movie The Deerhunter came out two years ago. Did you perchance see that?

MR. ABBOTT: I didn't see that.

MR. PYLE: It's about Vietnam and the prisoners of war, that sort of thing. It portrayed soldiers in Vietnam, American POWs, portrayed them playing Russian roulette by order, of course. Was there anything of that nature?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Interrogation, was there much interrogation? Did you ever get interrogated?

MR. ABBOTT: I never was interrogated other than just the main--I tried to--I mean they might have done it to some people but I couldn't definitely say that they went any further than what the Geneva Convention says: your name, rank and serial number. I didn't squeal on anybody or divulge any secrets. I didn't know any anyway.

MR. PYLE: The officers, were they separated from the enlisted men?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Were they treated roughly the same as the enlisted men? Or were they given better--

MR. ABBOTT: Not a whole lot better. Not a whole lot better. The colonel who was my American commander in Japan, now I don't know too much about, I think there was not much that I knew there in Cabanatuan because we were still in a--well, even until it was over a year--we were still [in] kind of a period of survival and disorganized. If we had any commander, American officer, I don't know. But the colonel, who was actually a major at the time he was captured, went to Japan with me. I saw him in Fontana. He's still living. I'll bring that up later too about when we go to Japan. He was at that meeting [in Fontana] and I hear from him. He writes letters to us and keeps us informed on the people who were in this camp in Japan.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that's interesting. That's good. Okay. I really can't think of anything else to ask you about Cabanatuan itself. You were there 13, 14 months, something like that.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we were there from, let's see, we fell on May the sixth, forty-two. We stayed around in Bilibid a few days. I don't know how long we were, I guess we got to Cabanatuan in June or July, probably in June, I can't remember exactly, of 1942. But I know that I didn't get out of there until the latter part of July of 1943, so we were there a little over a year.

MR. PYLE: Okay, about 13 months.

MR. ABBOTT: And then that's when they took us out--500 of us--and put us on a detail going to Japan. We didn't know where we were going. We just knew they were going to put us on a detail.

MR. PYLE: Right. I was going to ask you one other question about Cabanatuan--the death rate.

MR. ABBOTT: Very much so. They were just--

MR. PYLE: Very high?

MR. ABBOTT: They would stack them in like cordwood. It was very high, no arrangements for any kind of a burial other than getting them underground.

MR. PYLE: Did all of the American personnel still have their dog tags?

MR. ABBOTT: As far as I know. I have mine.

MR. PYLE: You still have yours?

MR. ABBOTT: I found mine the other day, in with some junk. I've got mine [laughing].

MR. PYLE: I was wondering if there was any kind of identification for these mass graves to let people know.

MR. ABBOTT: I'm pretty sure that they did because they claim that--I talked with some people that went on this trip to the Philippines and said they've got a beautiful, if there is such a thing as a beautiful cemetery, that there was a beautiful cemetery of all these heads stones. I don't know whether they have got names on them or not, but it was a beautiful cemetery. But I don't know how in the world that they ever got them out of there after they were buried like cordwood, you know, stacked in there, and twenty or thirty to a grave, how they ever got them out of there.

MR. PYLE: How close of associations do you make with fellow prisoners? Do you allow yourself to get very close with them?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, you pick out maybe a buddy or two you kind of buddy with, and we talked. Oh, I remember one fellow lived in Los Angeles, and I didn't know him from Adam, but we just got kind of close as friends. We'd get to talking about our families. We were just going to meet after the war. I mean after we got out of this and going to do this and going to do that, and that was the last I ever heard of him. You know, I guess that was just something to keep a conversation going.

MR. PYLE: I've been told that it's not healthy mentally to make very many close friends in that kind of situation because they die so fast. You never know. Okay. I was wondering if you ever kept up, for instance, with any of the people that you were with in prison. Obviously you have, you just mentioned the colonel.

MR. ABBOTT: There's been many, many books written on people that were in that prison. I have read a few of them. Some of them are complete fiction.

MR. PYLE: What are some of the things that come out in these books

that's just fictionalized?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, there's one in here that I read, and I don't have the book right now, some guy loaned it to me not long ago, Ninety Days of Rice. It had no bearing under what the subject was; but, the author was supposed to be a member of our gang that went to Japan. We were talking about this when I was at this reunion. Nobody can find out who he is. He's using some kind of a penname, and all the heroics that he did is almost impossible. So there's a lot of fiction in here, and I'm sure that there have been some good, true reports written. I wish I had kept a good diary of everything that went on. I could have, but I said to myself, "Oh, there's going to be so many people writing books on this stuff there's no need to." So I never did do it [laughing].

MR. PYLE: You didn't attempt to take notes, or anything of that nature?

MR. ABBOTT: No. I should have. If I had known today though, looking back, a lot of these notes would have been beneficial, not only to myself, but to people that are trying to get the Veterans Administration to do something about their illnesses. We've got a lot of young doctors that don't even know what the word beriberi is. If they do, they don't act like they know that's something that may go on through the rest of your life, or if you've got some kind of [an ailment] or people who are--every person is an individual. It affects one person's mind in a different way than it does somebody else's. Some people couldn't take the horror of some of the things you go through. Some of them crack up. I know that I have been guilty myself saying that so-and-so, he was in the war talking about their particular son and maybe I was a little bit too fast in saying that, "Well, I went through a lot of that too. It didn't bother me." But that particular individual probably just wasn't strong. He was built different, just one that didn't have a strong constitution. And I'm not saying that I'm all that strong but it just affects people differently.

MR. PYLE: You just mentioned a very valid point, that it does affect people differently. You also mentioned that it didn't bother you. I know that you were using it as a generalization that it did, but it affects different people different ways. How did you go about living day-to-day over those long months, thirteen months or so at Cabanatuan? Were there any particular things that you'd set your mind on to make it easier?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, you'd just set your mind on rumors. I don't know how rumors have a way of finding their way into camps, or a situation like this. Rumors that so-and-so, the faith in your country, faith in God, I guess, if you got some religion, you got faith there too--and just the hope that I can't let my life end right here. In other words, just don't give up.

MR. PYLE: Okay. That's said just about as well as it can be said. But you know when you think about it, you can look for all the deep philosophical meanings and everything, but many times it just boils down to the fact that either you want to live, or you don't want to live.

MR. ABBOTT: There are many ways, people who have survived this much longer than I did, you know, in Vietnam, some of them seven years. The things that they said they did, I don't doubt it that you had to do something to keep from going stark crazy. Some of those people were in isolated cells, cell blocks. You read how they invented their own code system to circumvent the guards. I guess you can do a lot of things if you want to. The will to live, and as I said before, many, many guys, big old healthy looking young boys didn't have the will to live--gave it up.

Well, we left. There's 500 of us that were pulled out of the camp. How they arrived at my name, or how they got it, I don't know. But anyway, I was in a group of 500 that was on a detail. The only thing we knew is that we were going someplace. They didn't tell us where.

MR. PYLE: Did you look forward to the possibility of leaving Cabanatuan for another place?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, in a sense. But, not knowing exactly where you're going, you just didn't know. But they took us down to the port area, back on the boxcars again, back to Manila. Then they loaded us aboard ship in Manila at the docks. They still didn't tell us where we were going.

MR. PYLE: Do you know the name of the ship by the way?

MR. ABBOTT: No, some kind of maru. Maru means ship though. I don't know what the name of it was now. But they put 500 of us in the hold of this ship, and there were about six of us in a bay. They had us kind of in stalls and six of us had to lay around in those stalls almost in knots, or one this-a-way and one that-a-way [gesturing].

MR. PYLE: Yes, I see what you mean now by knots [laughter]. You all had to tie yourselves up just about.

MR. ABBOTT: We got underway, and we had two army doctors aboard. Of course, they didn't have anything to practice with, you see. We also had these other officers, one Colonel John R. Mamerow.

MR. PYLE: Colonel who?

MR. ABBOTT: He's a colonel now. He's retired, but he was a major back then. M-A-M-E-R-O-W, Mamerow, who turned out to be our American camp commander. We knew we were at sea but we still didn't know where we were going. We apparently did an awful lot of zigzagging.

MR. PYLE: Avoiding American submarines?

MR. ABBOTT: Avoiding American submarines. Of course, I don't know, but I've been told that several Japanese ships with Americans [on board] were sunk. About a week later, we got to Formosa or Taiwan. That's the first time we saw daylight.

MR. PYLE: You were kept in the hold of the ship the entire time, then?

MR. ABBOTT: We had buckets down there that you'd use for latrines, and it'd be taken topside. I don't see how anybody survived the filth. They fed us and all that came from topside. I wouldn't have known any of the details. They'd go up to topside to get the rice or to empty the buckets.

MR. PYLE: Were there any deaths on the trip?

MR. ABBOTT: No, not a one.

MR. PYLE: Oh, that is amazing!

MR. ABBOTT: Not a one. We had 500 of us in this hold, 500 of us got there. But we got our first bath, salt water bath, when we got to Formosa, hosed down with salt water.

MR. PYLE: I bet that felt good.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, salt water makes you feel sticky, you know, if you don't get something to rinse with. You've been in the ocean?

MR. PYLE: Oh, many times.

MR. ABBOTT: You know how sticky you feel when you get out if you don't rinse down? But it felt better than being stinking and dirty. Anyway, we got to Formosa. We didn't know it was Formosa. We found this out later. Then after we stayed there one day, I don't know, maybe the Japs needed to, I think the Japanese owned it then or had control over it, and they probably took on some provisions or oil or something. We took off again and then we arrived in Japan August tenth. Now, I don't know of the exact port but it was, I believe, it was Moji or--I'm not sure, but it was on my birthday in 1943.

MR. PYLE: Oh, is that right!

MR. ABBOTT: August 10, 1943.

MR. PYLE: August 10, 1943.

MR. ABBOTT: When we got there, they gave us two rice flour buns made out of rice flour. That was a treat because you didn't ever get anything to put your teeth in. But backing up a little on the ship, when that boy was operated on there for appendicitis--

MR. PYLE: I just wrote a note down, I was going to ask you about that.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't know exactly how it happened, but I do faintly

remember it. The American doctor that we had who was apparently a fine surgeon and somebody said, "What kind of razor blade did he use?" I don't know. Somebody said, "Did he use a straight razor?" I don't know, because I didn't actually witness the operation but I do know that he operated over there, and I guess without any anesthetic.

MR. PYLE: I was just thinking, that must be terrible conditions. There would have been no anesthetic. There would have been no way to kill the pain.

MR. ABBOTT: The fellow that I met and talked with in Fontana who has a fish produce place outside of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, said, "I'm the one that helped sterilize the instruments, the razor blades." The Japs apparently let them boil the razor blades for it. I don't know what kind of razor blades they used. I'm going to have to find that out next time. I'm going back next year.

MR. PYLE: That's interesting.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't know how far the appendix is in there, but anyway he did enough of a job that the guy lived, and when they got to Japan a few days later--he must have been operated on inbetween Taiwan and Japan--he survived. When he got to Japan it must not have been but a few days later that they took him off. They took him to a hospital, probably for further recovery.

When we got there, they put us aboard a train and drew the blinds. They had black curtains on the train. We couldn't see out and couldn't look out to try to look out. A Jap would pop you up side the head, or something. Occasionally we got a peep out, but we didn't know where we were.

MR. PYLE: You couldn't read the road signs anyway.

MR. ABBOTT: We couldn't read the road signs anyway [laughter]. Anyway, we got to this place called O-M-U-T-A, which is across the bay from Nagasaki, about 68 miles from Nagasaki, and that's where they had a coal mining camp.

MR. PYLE: About how far from Nagasaki? About 68 miles away?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, about 60 to 70, just across the bay. I can show you my map there. The next time you come back I'll put it out.

MR. PYLE: But it's that far around the bay then?

MR. ABBOTT: I've got a map that came in my National Geographic. It shows where Fukuoka is and also Omuta and Nagasaki. You can see how close it is. It probably has a scale on the map but it's not very far. We were there when they dropped the atomic bomb in Nagasaki. We went into this camp and that's where we stayed. There are some old barracks there that were Japanese-style barracks with paper doors, straw mats. They gave us a pillow made out of straw, hard straw. The Japanese use that even today. Did you watch Shogun?

MR. PYLE: Yes, I did. Sure did.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, they even used that. They had a straw pillow. I never could use the thing. It's too hard. I'd ball up what few dirty clothes I had, or any other thing that I had, like a towel, or something like that, and try to use that as a pillow.

MR. PYLE: Mr. Abbott, it might be a good idea for us to break here before we get into the Japanese prison, and then pick this up in Part II of the interview.

MR. ABBOTT: All right.

MR. PYLE: Just in the way of ending right here, I'd like to say thank you very much for the day.

MR. ABBOTT: I enjoyed it, and I hope I hadn't--a lot of people don't--used to, before, didn't want to talk to me because they thought it bothered me. But I enjoy talking about it, and I hope I don't bore anybody.

MR. PYLE: No, I don't think so. Thank you.

Part II

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of the University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is Part II in a series of interviews with Mr. Samuel Abbott, and it's taking place at his home located at 304 North 21st Avenue, in Hattiesburg, on October 30, 1980. The interviewer is Mr. R. Wayne Pyle.

MR. PYLE: Mr. Abbott, on behalf of the university, I'd like to thank you very much for spending this second day with us. I'd like to thank you in advance for making the list that you did of perspective interviewees for us to contact. We appreciate the work that you've done. I'd like to start out--in our first interview, just reminding you, we had gotten you through the Philippines in World War II. You had been captured, were in the Philippines for a good long time, and had just been shipped to Formosa and then on into Japan. So, we'll just start off there, your landing in Japan and where you went.

MR. ABBOTT: I never will forget the day we arrived in Japan, on my birthday in 1943, August the tenth.

MR. PYLE: That would make it easier to remember wouldn't it? Where did you arrive? Where did you dock? Do you know?

MR. ABBOTT: It was on the Island of Kyushu, in one of the seaport towns. Anyway, they kept that pretty secret, what place it was. I don't remember exactly. But anyway, it was about an all day train ride from where we landed to the camp that they took us in Omuta, O-M-U-T-A, Omuta, Japan, which is across the bay, I guess 60 to 80 miles. That would be a little further from Nagasaki.

MR. PYLE: Since you went to the trouble of bringing out a map to show me this, why don't we discuss, just a little bit, the formation of Japan, the three major islands and exactly where Nagasaki would be in relation to, let's say, Tokyo or Honshu.

MR. ABBOTT: All right. There's five major islands in Japan, and I was on the southernmost island, which was Kyushu, which is also where Nagasaki is located.

MR. PYLE: Nagasaki is up on the northwestern coast.

MR. ABBOTT: Right, close to where I was. I was just across the bay. See, this is Nagasaki [indicating the location on the map], and Omuta is just about 60 to 80 miles [from there]. I don't have the exact scale there.

MR. PYLE: Right.

MR. ABBOTT: Of course, the first atomic bomb was dropped on, we call it Hiroshi'ma but the Japanese call it Hiro'shima.

MR. PYLE: Right, exactly.

MR. ABBOTT: On the Island of Honshu, which was north of where I was located, and east of Honshu is Shikoku. Then the northernmost island is Hokkaido. I don't remember the other ones, one more major island.

MR. PYLE: I think I was just setting you geographically, that you're on the southernmost major island and near the larger city on the island, Nagasaki, okay. Describe for me the prison camp that you were in. What did it look like physically?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, it was a typical built barracks. They're built with whatever they build it with in Japan: paper doors, sliding doors, and straw mats. I'm not sure what the outside was. It was probably lumber, a frame building. Then the barracks were divided off into cubicles where five to six, seven, eight men would stay in a cubicle. Maybe not that many in every one, but they had them designed for that. No bedding, the only bedding we had was the straw mat that was the floor and a straw-type pillow for your head, which most people couldn't use because they're not used to that hard of a thing to lie on.

MR. PYLE: Right.

MR. ABBOTT: No heat, except habachi pots for the wintertime. Just like you have here in the states, habachi pots for barbecuing. That was all the heat that we had.

MR. PYLE: What kind of a town was Omuta?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, the best that I recollect, it was a pretty good-sized town, a coal mining town. But as far as the exact population, we didn't see too much of it. As I said before, when we came in, of course, they had the railroad cars blinded. The only thing we could do is peep out occasionally when the guard wasn't watching us. It was a pretty good-size town. Our camp was located about a mile from the coal mine and about a mile or so from the downtown part of Omuta.

MR. PYLE: I see. What kind of numbers were at the camp in Omuta of American prisoners?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I was in the original 500.

MR. PYLE: That was the first 500 that got there?

MR. ABBOTT: The first 500 that got to this particular camp. Now all the camps were numbered--like Fukuoka was the main prisoner of war camp, and I was in Fukuoka number seventeen.

MR. PYLE: How would you spell Fukuoka?

MR. ABBOTT: F-U-K-U-O-K-A. Fukuoka, and I was in Fukuoka number seventeen located at O-M-U-T-A.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Most of these camps that were in this area were coal mining camps.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: The coal mines, from what they told us, was condemned before the war and reopened because the Japanese needed all the fuel they could get. The shaft to the coal mine went right down underneath the ocean floor, Nagasaki Bay. It was a fairly modern except it--probably the reason why it was condemned before, there were so many accidents--it took much to keep the water pumped out because the water would seep through. You had to keep pumping the water out. You had good veins of coal in it.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned that when you got there you were in the original 500, the first who got there. How many went through that camp from the time you were there?

MR. ABBOTT: I was in the original 500, which we were numbered according to our rank or rating. Therefore, we started out with the senior officer that was in our camp who was made our camp commander. By the way, I saw him in August in North Carolina. He's Colonel Mamerow, M-A-M-E-R-O-W, army colonel. He was a major, I believe, at the time he was captured. Of course, he had the number one, ichibon as they call it in Japan, number one. I was, of course, a first class petty officer, and my number was 17. So there were 16 people higher ranking than I was in the camp, and the rest of the numbers then were on down to 500, down to the Pfc.'s. But they numbered us according to our rank or rating in the actual military, which didn't mean an awful lot because all of us had to work.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I was going to ask you if the officers had any--

MR. ABBOTT: Well, the officers didn't actually dig coal like the enlisted men, but they had jobs. Of course, the base commander was just the general flunky for the--name only, in other words, being the base commander. He had no authority. Mess officers, general officers cleaned in the camp and cleaning details around the camp and so forth. They didn't actually do the coal mining.

MR. PYLE: I'm going to ask you a group of questions about POW life in Japan when you were there. First of all, what kind of food rations were you on?

MR. ABBOTT: Very meager, three little bowls of rice a day, which was much more than--I don't know the exact weight of it--but it wasn't much more than a good-sized cup full of rice, bowl of rice. Of course, the morning [meal]

was a softer rice called lugow. It [was] made kind of like cereal.

MR. PYLE: Lugow, L-U-G-A-L?

MR. ABBOTT: L-U-G-O-W, I believe it was.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: It was made kind of like a cereal, like oatmeal. The other two meals were a little steamed rice with some kind of soup. The soup was usually no more than just a gruel made out of various Japanese vegetables and maybe sometimes some dried fish or whatever meat that they had very rarely to flavor the soup with. Sometimes that meat was dog.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I was going to ask if you got much meat. That doesn't sound like a particularly nutritious diet [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: No, when we went to work in the mine, when we went to our breakfast, or whatever shift that we were on--we changed shifts every ten days, no Sundays, but every tenth day was what they called a rest day or in Japanese a yasume day.

MR. PYLE: Yasume day?

MR. ABBOTT: Y-A-S-U-M-E, yasume day, but that was a misnomer because they usually had plenty for us to do. They'd make us get out of the barracks and go out on the drill field so that the Japanese soldiers could come in our barracks to see if they could find any loot, contraband, or whatever it might be, so they could search. If they weren't doing that, then we were busy trying to clean up what few rags we had, scald them, or something, to kill the body lice. So, it was almost a waste of time to kill the body lice out of our clothes because as soon as you went back in the barracks you'd get them again.

MR. PYLE: Oh, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: You never sprayed, or had nothing to spray with. We kept our heads shaved. We had no razors per se but we did have access, or, I got ahold of GI case knives and would sharpen them to a razor sharpness, and would shave each others' heads. We had very little soap to keep the body lice out of our heads.

MR. PYLE: Right, exactly. Japan, even the southernmost island that you were on, of the major islands, would be terribly cold up there during the winter.

MR. ABBOTT: It was just about like the south, or maybe the northern part of, say, Mississippi.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see, okay.

MR. ABBOTT: About like Oxford, up in that area. Because we did get snow but no, of course, not as much as the northernmost islands like Hokkaido where they had the olympics just a few years ago.

MR. PYLE: I fortunately have never experienced body lice. But during the winter though, are they still as prevalent?

MR. ABBOTT: Oh yes, yes. They were prevalent all the time.

MR. PYLE: In other words, a freeze wouldn't take care of the body lice as much as it did the men.

MR. ABBOTT: No, there was no way to control those.

MR. PYLE: Of course, lice would have just been one of the illnesses that you would have suffered over there. What are the recurring illnesses that cropped up over there and what kept--

MR. ABBOTT: Well, mainly malnutrition. Polished rice has no food value hardly whatsoever, except just starch. So then, they started mixing the rice with barley and other grains. It helped some but it was very poor grade. Sometimes weevil infested, but we had no choice. We had to either eat it or not eat at all. Well, mainly the diseases that we went through were of the malnutrition type which is like, as I said before, scurvy, lack of vitamin C and then the other ones, lack of vitamin B, B-1, which is what caused the beriberi--the swelling of the whole body, namely the limbs and the dry type [of beriberi] and some had the dry type which hurts like arthritis. The other ones would swell up twice their normal size.

MR. PYLE: Good gracious!

MR. ABBOTT: This wasn't near as bad though in Japan proper as it was in the Philippines, before we had gone to Japan. So they finally started doing a little bit more for us as far as feeding a little bit higher [grade food] or nutritiously. Whether it was good or not, it was still a more nutritious rice and a soup. Of course, there was always plenty of green tea but that had no food value.

MR. PYLE: Green tea?

MR. ABBOTT: Green tea, well, they use a green tea in the Orient.

MR. PYLE: The orange container over there?

MR. ABBOTT: No, that's the stuff they sell in Japan. This was given to me by a person I knew. It was a green tea. In other words, our tea is, I reckon, processed brown tea. This is a green tea. It's good. You get the same thing in a Chinese restaurant right now. Right down here, if you go to a Chinese restaurant, you get a green tea.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see.

MR. ABBOTT: I don't mean that the tea [is green]. The leaves are green. In other words, they're sort of being processed into a dry type.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: We'd fill up on that just so that you would feel full to help the hunger.

MR. PYLE: Oh, right, exactly. You mentioned that sometimes you got dog. Americans don't normally eat dog. How did the men feel about that? Did they eat it thankfully?

MR. ABBOTT: Oh, yes, we didn't have much choice. We couldn't afford to throw anything away. I'm sure that the Japanese were in dire need of everything that they could get. They were suffering too, from [a lack] all type of meat, especially. Even today, beef in Japan costs a fortune almost.

MR. PYLE: True, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: They had no beef. [They] had no meats of any kind. And fowl, we didn't get any fowl. We did get dried fish, but most of the meat, red meat, if you call a dog red meat, [laughing] was dog.

MR. PYLE: Because of the climactic change of going from the Philippines to Japan, how about your clothes? Did you have the same clothes, or did they issue some?

MR. ABBOTT: They gave us a little bit heavier Japanese-type clothes. They gave us wrap leggings, like the Japanese army wore and a little bit heavier Japanese-type clothes and split-toed shoes, like the Japanese army wore. We went through training--just like if we were going through training in the state-side military.

MR. PYLE: Just like basic training?

MR. ABBOTT: Just like basic training here. We had to go through basic training and learn all the commands in Japanese, even including learning how to goose-step.

MR. PYLE: Oh, is that right? I guess the Japanese had to be able to communicate with you.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, that's the way the Japanese marched. They marched just like the Germans.

MR. PYLE: I didn't realize that.

MR. ABBOTT: They goose-stepped. We had to learn that, when we

marched to the coal mine, or where ever we went, we always had to march, keep in step and follow the commands in...Japanese... Their right-face or about-face may be a little bit different, not only in the language, but the way they do it. You learn to do it one way American, and you learn to do it another way in Japanese.

MR. PYLE: I've always thought that a right-face is a right-face. But there are different ways?

MR. ABBOTT: Their about-face was much different from the way they do it in the American military.

MR. PYLE: I see. The treatment, how were you treated over there by the Japanese as prisoners? Was there as much cruelty as you had heretofore experienced?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, it went on. I've been slapped and kicked for maybe some little minor infraction, such as smoking a cigarette when I shouldn't have been.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned that experience, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: People who tried to steal a little bit of food, extra food from the galley and were caught, were severely prosecuted, even to the point of some being severely beaten. One particular person had cold water poured on him in sub-zero weather and froze to death. In other words, that was the punishment for that.

MR. PYLE: For stealing food?

MR. ABBOTT: We had pretty severe punishment for any kind of minor infraction. Of course, some of the guards that took us--the military, the Japanese army took us down, who were our guards in prison camp, marched us down to the coal mines and then turned us over to the civilians who had charge of us while we were in the coal mines, in other words. Some of those civilians were pretty rough. They abused their authority and would severely beat people. Of course, on the other hand, you'd find one every now and then that was a pretty decent fellow, and every time that we went to the coal mine, normally we wouldn't have the same boss each night. They called them a Sho-tai-joe.

MR. PYLE: A Sho-tai-joe?

MR. ABBOTT: Sho-tai-joe who was the boss man. We had to learn our numbers. We never had a name. I reckon it's kind of like we're going to get in this country. One of these days we'll just start, when the person is born, they're born with a social security number, and that's what will stick with you the rest of your life, will even go on your tomb. Maybe that's a little bit farfetched but that's exactly the way we're headed as far as computers, you know, all you practically are right now is a number.

MR. PYLE: That's true.

MR. ABBOTT: And that's all we had. We never had a name. Our name was never brought up. We had a number. My number was 17 or ju-nanna-ban or jusitche-ban. Either one of the two is all right, jusitche-ban or ju-nanna-ban. The poor devil that had a number like 368, he had a lot more to learn. He had to learn his number. When they called out your number, you had to holler hike, here. In other words, hike means here, and if you didn't answer, then when you did finally get around to answering and they did find out who you were, you'd get a severe working over. In other words, a good hobnail shoe in the behind or a cuffing with their bayonet or with their hands. You learned your number, in other words, like 368. I still know how to count ichi, nee, san, see, go, roko, sichi, hachi, ku, ju [laughter].

MR. PYLE: I see [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: We learned a lot of Japanese. There's two ways, of course, to write in Japanese. The language part, spoken language, and then there's a written language. One of them is called katakana which is the syllables. In other words, all the marks like this [indicating], that's katakana. Then, there's a hiragana which all official documents were made in. There's another kind of written Japanese.

MR. PYLE: Okay, now what is that?

MR. ABBOTT: Hiragana and katakana. Most of your Japanese language is in two-word syllables. In other words, like good afternoon is ko-nitche-wa. Or, good morning is plain old ohayo.

MR. PYLE: Just O-H-I-O, just like the state?

MR. ABBOTT: Ohayo, two syllable words.

MR. PYLE: So you did pick up a good bit of the language.

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. We could sit down, most of us knew enough Japanese and the Japanese knew enough broken English that we could sit down, maybe during our rest period or when we were eating our little lunch that we took with us to the mine, and carry on a conversation with the Japanese. Some of them could carry on a pretty good conversation.

MR. PYLE: There was that kind of association now and then?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, some of them were real good. They liked to, of course, a lot of them liked to tease us about the Japanese winning the war, and they would try to rub that in and anything that would be detrimental toward our morale. They were very good at that.

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask you about morale. That would have been a difficult thing to keep up, and without morale there's, I would assume, that

that there would have been a tendency for the men to give up. That's a particular problem, being an officer that would have been part of your responsibility.

MR. ABBOTT: A good part of morale--in other words, the people who actually gave up, a lot of this happened, maybe for no reason, some cases no reason of their own. But morale was the biggest problem in the Philippines. When they took us to Japan, then it seemed like we were continuously getting in new prisoners of war. In other words, like the original 500, which were Americans first, and then later on we got a contingent of Dutch. We got a nontingent of Australian and some English that would come in in different groups. They would always bring in rumors of what's going on. Of course, most of them turned out to be just rumors. But we lived on rumors and hope.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. ABBOTT: The Japanese would give us access to an English published Japanese edition newspaper that most was propaganda about the Japanese, but some of it turned out to be truth. So actually, the morale wasn't as big a problem in Japan as it was in the Philippines. I think that the abrupt change of lifestyle that most young Americans were used to probably caused a lot of it. Then after you got yourself conditioned to it later, the ones that did survive, it wasn't quite as hard. But it still wasn't easy. It wasn't by any means. Everybody wasn't happy is what I'm getting at.

MR. PYLE: Certainly.

MR. ABBOTT: It certainly wasn't happy. No happy days in there.

MR. PYLE: How much fraternization did they allow between, let's say the Dutch, Australian, British soldiers?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we saw each other for they did keep us in the same camp but in different barracks. So therefore, the way we worked, even in our work shifts, we worked separate. We didn't get too much contact with each other. After they'd come in and we'd initially see them, we didn't see too much of them after that because everybody was busy working.

It was a pretty hard thing to get the Japanese to see that there wasn't but 24 hours in a day. They would do their best to try to get 30 out of a 24 hour day [laughing]. In other words, they had three shifts working in this coal mine. They would get us up at, say, if you had the morning shift, they would get us up at two-thirty, three o'clock in the morning. [We would] stand out in the snow or cold weather and be counted several times before they ever marched us down to the mine, we'd have to wait.

MR. PYLE: Sounds kind of like today's military [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, I think some of them had our schooling, and it's typical military. They would take us down to the mine. We couldn't do anything

until the next shift got through. Of course, they'd have to work their full time, so we'd just have to kind of wait around. And some people, at that time, were so hungry that they'd even eat their lunch that was designed for--

MR. PYLE: Several hours later?

MR. ABBOTT: Several hours later. Then, they'd have to do without anything later then. So, that would go on, every tenth day we'd change shifts, morning shift, swing shift and the night shift, what they called the graveyard shift.

MR. PYLE: Exactly, yes. One tends to forget that these eight-hours days are a lot longer than eight-hour workdays.

MR. ABBOTT: Oh, much longer than eight hours. Then, by the time we got back in and off of our shift and got what little bit of food that was coming to us, then we were so tired that there wasn't much visiting or fraternization or anything except just going and turning in, because you knew you didn't have too many hours before you were going to have to get up and go right back again.

MR. PYLE: Right. I was going to ask you, and you may have just answered that, about recreation, what sort of things you did outside of just work and eat.

MR. ABBOTT: Very, very, rare, very rare. No organized sports or anything. No intramural sports or nothing.

MR. PYLE: Okay. In recreation, I'm also including leisure time. Was there much card playing?

MR. ABBOTT: No, not anything.

MR. PYLE: Nothing of that nature?

MR. ABBOTT: We just didn't have the facilities, or you didn't have the time, or you were too tired, or you just didn't--very little of that.

MR. PYLE: Now Americans are pretty ingenious people. When you're confined with almost nothing, it's amazing sometimes how you can utilize those things to have something to do, or things of this nature. Were there any of--could you give me any examples of that type of thing, like writing on toilet paper for letters?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, no. As far as I know, that didn't go on because we just, as I said before, we worked nine straight days. You were so tired that there wasn't any way to get any letters out, mail out. Then on that tenth day, as I said before, they kept you doing something, or you occupied yourself with trying to do the chores that people do, trying to clean up what few clothes you had, or scald them or get the body lice off of you a little bit, or shave each

other's head. That was about the only thing that could go on.

MR. PYLE: Was there ever any talk of escape?

MR. ABBOTT: Not in Japan, because it was just almost impossible there.

MR. PYLE: There's no place to escape to in Japan. You'd kind of stick out.

MR. ABBOTT: You stick out. A white man would stick out. It was just almost impossible in Japan. But, of course, some of this might have gone on in the Philippines, and I'm sure it did. But a lot of those didn't make it, and some of them did, but I can't elaborate on that.

MR. PYLE: Torture, did you experience any of this? Did any of your men experience any of this ?

MR. ABBOTT: Oh yes, as I said before, they would torture the person that they caught stealing.

MR. PYLE: They were frozen with the cold water--

MR. ABBOTT: Water on them until they froze to death, or this--well, we'll get to that later. But I'm not going to name any names, because I did that to the intelligence when I came back, the turncoats that we more or less had in there that they would, for example, would squeal, turn these people into the Japanese. Then the Japanese would in turn punish them. When we come down near, after the war was over, then I'll kind of elaborate on that a little bit.

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay. Was there any systematic torture, organized torture, or was this by and large in retribution for things?

MR. ABBOTT: Just in retribution.

MR. PYLE: Or as punishment perhaps, rather than retribution?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, looking back now, when I was first captured on Corregidor, I had one carton of American cigarettes, and the Japs took them off of me. I wished that I had quit at that time completely, but when you're hungry, it seemed like that a cigarette would have some kind of an effect to quell the hunger. So we'd take a cigarette and smoke it several times and butt it, and then the more you smoke it, the stronger it would get so it didn't take as much to satisfy your nicotine craving, or whatever it would be. So, when we'd get down to the mine, for example, everybody would try to get that last draw or so before we would get on the train that would take us down in the elevator down into the shaft and in the mine into the pits. So one time I was smoking mine just a little bit too long after they told us to board, and I got a severe beating with the--in other words, mainly it was hitting me with a bayonet, scabbard of the bayonet and his hands. As I'd fall, I'd get back up, and he'd knock me down again and kick me with his hobnail shoes. But mainly, that

was just a good working over that, in retribution of not being--in other words, pretty hard to take. I surely [would have] liked to have, even in my weak or emaciated condition, to have hit him a couple of times...and knocked him for a loop. That's what they wanted you to do, so they could use you then for bayonet practice. But you just had to take it. But this didn't happen, I'm sure that there was more, a whole lot more severe than what I got, but I didn't witness it except, as I said before, these people, the one that tried to swipe a little rice and then was turned in, poured cold water on him until he froze to death.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned he was turned in? He was turned in by?

MR. ABBOTT: He was turned in by the American mess officer, if you could call him a mess officer.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. To your knowledge was there any attempt to brainwash?

MR. ABBOTT: No. They did not brainwash us because they were not communists. They didn't have any system that I know that you had to tell anything other than name, rank and serial number. I never, I know that I personally was never, or tried to be forced to inform on anything concerning the military. The only philosophy that the Japanese had was the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In other words, they were determined to take over all of China and Asia, and they did a pretty good job of it. Yes, I didn't have too much bone to pick against that.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. What was the death rate at Omuta? How long were you there at Omuta?

MR. ABBOTT: I was there at Omuta from forty-three until the war was over in forty-five. Of course, we stayed there about a month, approximately a month, after the surrender was signed on the Missouri, in Japan. Not all of them did. Some of them were adventurous, and some of them just got on out and rode trains and went various places. Maybe they got out a little earlier than what we did. But most of us, after the war was over, we knew about it, and somehow or another we just stayed there. We got plenty of food. We'll get to that in a few minutes, how the American military came over and dropped us food. We knew then time was short. We had already taken over control of the camp, and the Japanese had been run out. We got their rifles and other things and run our own camp under the American military--

MR. PYLE: Is that right?

MR. ABBOTT: Until help actually came.

MR. PYLE: Toward the end of the war, as it got on into the summer of 1945, did you notice, was there any perceivable change in the attitude of the Japanese toward the American prisoners? Did things ever get better?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we didn't know. What we mainly worried about is when things started to get rough. Of course, we could see that the American planes were coming over in great numbers and the carrier base planes, which we knew when the carrier based planes come over, that the carriers weren't too far off.

MR. PYLE: Exactly, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: And then, of course, we could see the heavy bombers come over, the B-29s I believe [is] what they called them back then in World War II. We knew then that something was up and something was happening. But as far as the Japanese go, they didn't treat us any better. But, we had it in mind that when things really got rough, what would they do with us? Would they?--so we just didn't know.

MR. PYLE: Was there a widespread fear that they'd execute everyone?

MR. ABBOTT: There was a fear that maybe we would be executed. Of course, I joke about it now, but I said that if they'd shot us alphabetically, they'd have gotten me first, or right up near the top, and I wouldn't have had to watch others. That was not a very good thought. We didn't know what atomic bombs were--we could hear the bombs dropping all the time. They even got too close at one time, and the incendiary bombs that the Americans dropped burned about half of our camp. It caught fire and burned. I didn't have anything left in July of forty-five except what I had on my back, my mess kit and a rusty spoon.

MR. PYLE: Straw quarters would tend to burn pretty easy, wouldn't it?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, and they burned about half of the camp. Of course, I don't think they did it intentionally, but they just got too close when they were bombing other areas around the town and the coal mine and the area. Those incendiary bombs just got out of hand. But I believe the Americans knew where our camp was. Otherwise, they wouldn't have intentionally bombed it.

MR. PYLE: Did the Japanese make any efforts to protect the American prisoners during bombing raids?

MR. ABBOTT: We had an air raid shelter that we would have to go into. A big trench with a cover over it, and that was the only protection, a big air raid [shelter]. Of course, it was just a trench dug in the ground with a cover over it.

Of course, as I said before, we didn't know--we knew that things were getting close--we didn't know what was going to happen. I'm sure that we heard the atomic bomb, if it has a sound. If we heard it, we didn't know what it was because we heard so many other bombs.

MR. PYLE: Exactly, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: But they did run us down into the air raid shelter, and we stayed there all day. Then several days later, we could notice that something was happening because they stopped us, told us that we won't be working for a couple of days. We won't be going to the mine.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. ABBOTT: It turned out we didn't know. Of course, we didn't know that at this time, but it turned out down in Palawan, which is in the Philippines, some prisoners were executed.

MR. PYLE: Where now?

MR. ABBOTT: Palawan, P-A-L-A-W-A-N Island. They had a bunch of American prisoners down there, and they ran those in an air raid shelter, along at that time when things were getting rough, and set fire to the air raid shelter and burned up all the prisoners.

MR. PYLE: Killed every one of them?

MR. ABBOTT: And anybody that tried to escape from that, they would be bayoneted as they ran out. That's some of the things that we actually thought would happen to us, which actually did happen to a group in the Philippines.

MR. PYLE: I see. I see.

MR. ABBOTT: So, then things got a little better. When the war was getting near the end, it got a little bit better inasmuch as they stopped our work, a little bit before that. I'm not a proponent, or whatever you call it, of the Red Cross. I'm sure that the Red Cross does some good things. The International Red Cross tried to get Red Cross boxes to us to help supplement our food. Of course, the Japanese gave us very very little out of those boxes because they took all American cigarettes and took everything that they wanted. Then whatever was left, they'd give to us so they did give us a little bit more of the boxes, whatever they didn't want. During the time, things were getting a little better, but still in all, we weren't--we were jubilant in a way, except that we couldn't show it because we didn't know what was going to happen as far as the Japanese. When they did tell us after we were out about a week of work, they just kept saying we won't get to work tomorrow. We won't go to work tomorrow. And after it got about a week, then we knew all of a sudden that things just happened.

The Japanese, I can't tell you exactly how it happened, somehow or another the Americans were left in control. I think we even got ahold of their rifles, the Japanese rifles. Of course, I hear, that they--but it was all only hearsay and that wouldn't stand up in court--but I've heard so many of them say that they took the Japanese commander, the Americans did, and strung him up. I

don't know this. I can't prove this. I wasn't actually in on it.

We did have a complete run of the town. We just went anywhere we wanted to. We went into the town that was left. There wasn't much left. The Japanese people seemed to be as glad as we were that the war was over. They were very friendly to us.

The Americans started dropping us food. They came over one time, and they came over too low. They were dropping food in a sling, instead of a barrel, with parachutes and the parachutes didn't have time to open. A lot of the foodstuff, like C-rations and fruit cocktail and fruits and things like that, would hit the ground and splatter everywhere. I'll never forget one. I looked up one time and saw a group, a parachute coming down that wasn't completely open and coming in a hurry! I hit the ground just as if it were a bomb coming. It came right through the barracks. Then it hit the concrete slab, and when it was all over, after I got over my initial shock, I picked some of the fruit cocktail off of me and then went to work on it [laughter].

MR. PYLE: Didn't take you long to figure out what to do with it!

MR. ABBOTT: But it was a lot of laughter, of course, now--and joy--but there was a lot of sadness too. Because as I said, they came over in those B-29s, and it looked like you could stick a boxcar in those bomb bay doors when they opened those doors, bomb bays. We even had some of our American prisoners that were killed by--

MR. PYLE: American bombers.

MR. ABBOTT: With the foodstuff that was dropping.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes, right.

MR. ABBOTT: We had one person, that I know of, that had his leg cut off. I think he never did get out. He bled to death. But then they went off a little bit further, and they painted signs out from the camp there in an open area--a target for them to come over next time. And somehow or another, they came over higher. Well, most of the food that they dropped was canned goods, C-rations, but they tasted mighty good to us.

MR. PYLE: I bet they didn't drop very much rice pudding.

MR. ABBOTT: What?

MR. PYLE: Rice pudding.

MR. ABBOTT: No, they didn't drop any rice.

MR. PYLE: It wouldn't be one of the more popular items.

MR. ABBOTT: But they dropped many, many items of clothes. We could

care less for clothes. A lot of the Americans would take their clothes over into town, or into the town area, and if they saw a chicken, they would trade their clothes for chicken. They would come back to the camp and have fried chicken, back at the camp. It was all that. We were on our own then.

So when the Americans came in to ports, they had to sweep all those mines out of the harbor before ships could get in. Of course, there was other things, other airports that some of the military had gotten into. Some of the rumors started flying and some of the more adventurous, anxious prisoners of war started going out. We had a complete free run of anything we wanted to do. We went out into the area, as I said before, and got chicken or anything that we could trade these clothes for and bring it back to camp and cook.

MR. PYLE: There wasn't that much looting on the part of the American prisoners then?

MR. ABBOTT: What?

MR. PYLE: Looting, on the part of the American prisoners? They would go into town and--

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I don't think they actually looted. They would trade, take something over to trade. Of course, the Japanese were in bad shape too, and the clothes were more appealing to some of them than probably the chicken was. I'm pretty sure that if they did not want to trade, they just would go on and probably take it. Of course, I can't prove this. I know that I wasn't in on any taking anything by force.

MR. PYLE: That must have been a terribly exciting time, after the Japanese had abandoned and left you the run of the town and the prison.

MR. ABBOTT: It was pretty exciting in a way, but you still were in a kind of a quandry as to what was going on, because I think it was all--most of us were living in a kind of a period of shock. We just didn't know what was going on.

MR. PYLE: As far as yourself is concerned, did you do any traveling?

MR. ABBOTT: No. No, I stayed there. I stayed there because I was content going through all of this to have plenty to eat. Then after they started dropping food, I figured, "Well, I'll just let them come get me." Of course, now backing up just a little bit, you know, it was like the illnesses. We did have a rash--what caused it I don't know--of meningitis, but it killed quite a few of them.

MR. PYLE: Spinal meningitis?

MR. ABBOTT: Spinal meningitis, and I had it. Luckily, I didn't know what it was, but I came in from the coal mine one day, and I had a headache

that was just killing me. Then the next thing I knew, they had taken me somewhere and tapped my spine. We did have two good American doctors in the camp. We had a Japanese doctor, as I said before, I believe I told you before, that was John Hopkins educated.

MR. PYLE: I don't remember if you had mentioned that or not.

MR. ABBOTT: Okay, he was John Hopkins educated, and he was, I believe, a little bit pro-American but he couldn't show it.

MR. PYLE: Sure, of course.

MR. ABBOTT: I wouldn't say that he was. I wouldn't say he was too much pro-American, but maybe sympathetic with the American cause. He could speak perfect English. Don't ever kid yourself the Japanese are small, because this guy was a huge guy and always an immaculately dressed person.

MR. PYLE: Something you would expect from someone from John Hopkins.

MR. ABBOTT: But anyway, they took me and put me in isolation. They had a little isolation ward, and I was in isolation for three weeks. Of course, the American doctor, when I saw him this time in August of this year, I told him, I said, "I was one of your patients. You saved my life." He said, "Well, I have a lot of them that I tried to save." He was a good one.

MR. PYLE: I've got a note down here to ask you about medical facilities and medical treatment.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we had a pretty good--in other words, we had two medical officers that were in the initial 500 that went up, you know. One of the medical officers is one that operated on this fellow in the hold of the ship.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned the appendectomy, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: Appendectomy. And he was, I don't know whether he was regular army or was drafted back there, he was a good surgeon. San Francisco, I believe, he was from. Of course, his name was Captain Thomas Hewlett.

MR. PYLE: Hewlett?

MR. ABBOTT: H-E-W-L-E-T-T, Hewlett. I saw him in Fontana in August, and he said he had retired from the army after 27 years.

MR. PYLE: Oh, is that right? He stuck it out. The Japanese then, just from what you've told me, they don't seem to have acted inhumane, as far as medical treatment.

MR. ABBOTT: No, it seems to have been what they would do, if things were going in their favor, as far as the war effort, they would be more

generous to us. I mean more generous in releasing some medicine. Now the Japanese, no doubt, were in short [supply] of a lot of medicines. But luckily, when I had spinal meningitis they were generous enough to supply the medicine, or whatever it took, after they withdrew the--whatever they do for spinal meningitis--tap your spine and take the fluid out, and then replace it with something else. So just luckily I had caught it at the right time, if I had to have it. The American doctor told me, looked at me like it was a miracle. He said, "You're not only lucky, only a few people back in normal times get through spinal meningitis." He didn't know how I had pulled through.

Then, when the Japanese [doctor] came over to visit me, along near the end of my isolation--I believe this was in 1944, must be some time in the latter part of 1944--he was there with his face mask on, talked to me in perfect English, and wished me that I would get back to my loved ones, and so forth.

MR. PYLE: What was his name? Do you remember him?

MR. ABBOTT: What?

MR. PYLE: Do you remember this Japanese doctor's name?

MR. ABBOTT: No, I don't remember his name. I can't remember that.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: But he had a brother that was also in the Japanese military, but I don't think he was a doctor. I think he was a high ranking Japanese officer. I wish I could remember. I think what I'm going to do--it won't affect this, but the next time I go back to Fontana, I'm going to see if I can't find that out, what that Japanese doctor's name was, whether he's still living or not. Some of those people I learned a lot from this time. You refresh your memory that, you know, after 35 years you just can't remember all these things.

MR. PYLE: Certainly.

MR. ABBOTT: I guess I'm fortunate that my mind is as good as it is right now, that I can remember most of these things but I can't remember the exact times and names. That's something that kind of eludes me.

MR. PYLE: During this month or so that the Americans have taken over the camp and began to have the run of the town after the Japanese had abandoned, Major Mamerow, at that time--

MR. ABBOTT: He was a major. He was a camp commander. I really and truly don't know how we organized ourselves, if that's what you were going to--

MR. PYLE: That's what I was going to ask.

MR. ABBOTT: I just don't know. It was probably a kind of a loose

organization. As far as any setting up any military command or anything, it was just kind of a loose organization. We just had a kind of, "Well, we're going to survive until help comes."

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask if he made much effort to control the men.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, I don't think, no, he couldn't very well do that because everybody had the run of the [prison camp]. But there wasn't any, as far as I know, there was no going over into town and looting. We were just so glad to be out and get out and be free, that people would even go out and mix and mingle with the Japanese population [inaudible].

MR. PYLE: That brings up a question here. Did you, in the time that you were in Japan, ever make friends with any of the Japanese? Were you ever able to get on that close of a relationship?

MR. ABBOTT: No, other than just talking with them in the coal mine, I never was able to. Never tried because of the language barrier, and there was no, as far as I know, no close fraternization with the Americans and with the Japanese. The only ones that I considered to be turncoats were just doing it for their own survival. In other words, so they could live a little bit better than the normal person would.

MR. PYLE: I asked that because you had mentioned that sometimes during your luncheon break that you had picked up enough Japanese and the Japanese soldiers had picked up enough broken English that you could converse.

MR. ABBOTT: Well, we would all sit down there with groups and talk.

MR. PYLE: And that they would kid you and then your relationship with the Japanese doctor and that sort of thing, that's why I asked.

MR. ABBOTT: The Japanese doctor is the only one that I knew that could speak good English. Of course, I'm sure they had an interpreter, but he was the only one that I knew that could speak good English.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see. Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: I'm sure he had to learn to speak English to go through John Hopkins [laughter].

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes, and medical school is not the exact thing to attempt with a language barrier.

MR. ABBOTT: Now, those were pretty adventurous people that went out on their own, because as I said before, it was a loose organization. No names, no name called, wasn't a roll call or anything like that. They went out and caught trains. Some of them I met at Fontana said--I talked to some of them this time that said that they did that. Of course, there were only twenty

something of us there at Fontana from that particular camp, but there was some other camps around there too that said that they had done the same thing, had got on Japanese trains or buses and just rode. They had rumors that the so-and-so airport over there that we [could] go to and see if we can get out. Some of them did get out in maybe two or three weeks before we did, the bulk of them did--caught airplanes out. But I can't elaborate too much on that except what they tell me. I know I stayed there until they came and got me.

Now when they did come to get us, they brought a Japanese train, railroad train, into the depot. By the way, there wasn't much left of that town except the depot and railroad track. I'm not sure the depot was even there. I know the railroad track was, but maybe the depot was gone because the American bombers had almost obliterated the town.

MR. PYLE: That being an industrial town with coal mining, I could see where it would be.

MR. ABBOTT: Most of it was burned up. It was, you know, just incendiary bombs like that got our camp. And they put us on these--do we need any more in the camp there now? I'm taking us out.

MR. PYLE: Yes, we're progressing out of the camp now.

MR. ABBOTT: They put us on this train, and then it seemed that it was almost day--well, maybe not quite that much, that would be a little over a half a day we had to go around--where we had to go around the harbor, and we came into Nagasaki. Now, this was somewhere in the neighborhood of approaching a month after the bomb had been dropped, and there was still signs of a lot of corpses still lying there that never had been picked up, skeletons and so forth. Because from all the reports that I get, there must have been about a hundred thousand people, somewhere in that area, that were killed. Nagasaki was a good-sized city.

MR. PYLE: Yes, it was, yes.

MR. ABBOTT: It was almost completely destroyed. It was just flat. Some of the ironies of an atomic bomb is that maybe one building would be standing here, and not completely destroyed, and everything around it completely flat for miles.

MR. PYLE: That is interesting.

MR. ABBOTT: Then just every now and then, you'd see a building standing and everything around it was completely flat. They were just--it was a desolate looking thing to see the destruction of what was once a thriving city, almost paralyzed with nothing there, just obliterated.

Well, I know that they met us, the incoming prisoners of war, and they had some kind of facility set up that we would go in and dump our clothes, our old clothes that we had on in a pile and go through a delousing station, DDT and

whatever they used to kill the vermin which was on our bodies. Then we got a bath, and then they gave us whatever clothes that the Americans, khakis or whatever it was, you know, that they could get ahold of to put new clothes on the prisoners. They put us on ships of various--now I don't know what they did with all of them, but they put us on some ships they could get in the harbor there, like transports, or such, or certain types. They put me on one, and we went to Okinawa.

MR. PYLE: Due south?

MR. ABBOTT: Okinawa would be right here [indicating the location on the map]. Okinawa. Then they transferred me to another ship there and took me to the Philippines. We stayed in the Philippines for about two weeks and had complete run of the town. We could do anything we wanted to do. We were guests of the military. We had everything free we could--even though they paid us, gave us three month's pay of our rating or rank, when we were captured, but we had no need for money.

MR. PYLE: Everything was free anyway?

MR. ABBOTT: Everything was free.

MR. PYLE: I know that there was a bang-up time in Manila then [laughter]!

MR. ABBOTT: Everything was free. I mean everything around the base was free. Now if you went over into town, you'd have to pay, of course, I'm sure. I've even seen some of the people who paid that wanted something maybe real stronger than beer and buy a bottle of--

MR. PYLE: There were several of them.

MR. ABBOTT: Buy a bottle of whiskey, which probably would cost them fifteen, twenty dollars over there in the black market. Most of us, as far as the food and what you wanted, they had right there on the base there, such as beer or anything else that you wanted to eat was free.

MR. PYLE: I'm going to back you up to Nagasaki just a second. When you saw Nagasaki, when you saw the destruction, the carnage, were you aware yet that an atomic bomb had been dropped, or was that just a foreign concept completely?

MR. ABBOTT: The word atomic was not coined as far as we were concerned, and I'm sure the same thing happened in this country. They didn't know what atomic meant. Somebody asked me today, "Did you hear that atomic bomb?" I said, "Well, no doubt we heard it, if it makes a noise."

MR. PYLE: It was indistinguishable from every other noise--

MR. ABBOTT: No, because the word atomic was so closely, that was

such a closely guarded secret, I guess, until the word had, even in this country, you didn't know, wasn't even coined, was it? As far as the general public was concerned?

MR. PYLE: Probably not, no, probably not. Nagasaki then, as far as you were concerned, you were under the impression it was just normal bombing?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes. We knew that something terrible had happened. But all this didn't come to light until some future date when we knew what atomic bombs were, after they'd dropped them in a few different places there, which no doubt shook me. I'll say this myself, that even though I was a prisoner of war there, I am awful sorry that our country was the first to ever use atomic bombs in warfare and hope I never see it again. I reckon that is one of the greatest things, even though I'm not going to take a side on the presidential race in public, but I feel nuclear control or nuclear war is something that is probably the greatest that's--but how it could ever be done, I don't know. Because it would be--I don't think that we could ever make any concrete deal with the Russians. I don't want to get off into politics. But I don't believe that if we even signed a treaty with them they would abide by it.

MR. PYLE: We may get into some politics later in the interview as I ask you some more questions. Okay, I've got you now in the Philippines. Did you have to go through any sort of debriefing? In your repatriation experience?

MR. ABBOTT: Nothing except just in general. We didn't go through any questioning of anything, except just who you were and what camps you came out of and so forth. They gave us--now, this was no matter whether you were navy or a marine or a soldier or whatever you were--they just gave us all a complete sea bag or a barracks bag--what they call them now, I think, in the army--full of clothes. They had no navy clothes so I wore--

MR. PYLE: Army clothes?

MR. ABBOTT: Army clothes. I wore khakis. That's all you needed, couldn't care less, but we put it all in the--even had the helmet and the field, jump boots and all [laughter] but--

MR. PYLE: Did you have any insignia or ranking?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: To identify your rank?

MR. ABBOTT: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: No. We didn't have that either. We didn't have anything else, just a suit of khakis. Rank didn't mean anything. Everybody had the same. Didn't matter if he was a general or a colonel or whatever. I'm sure generals

and colonels got, maybe a little more, but as far as I know, everybody got the same treatment.

Of course, we didn't know how long we were going to be there. We didn't realize we were going to be there two weeks. It was way back in October, I guess, before we got back to the States. They had a few Japanese prisoners there in this particular place that I was in. So we got a little bit of, I don't say revenge but I guess that's what it was. So we asked--some of us prisoners asked the American guards--could we relieve them for a little while [laughter]. But we didn't do any torturing or anything. We just wanted to surprise them, you know, when these Japanese soldiers or whatever they were, we'd talk to them in Japanese. When we told them, when we took over the rifles, say, "We want you to hiyako shigoto." That means, "Get to work and do it in a hurry." In other words, they were surprised that we could learn, that we could speak Japanese to them. I'm sure that with a little more extra effort, and I'm sorry now, but I said back then that there's no need of me to learn Japanese perfect because it's going to be a dead language as far as I'm concerned when I get out of here [laughing]. But I wish now that I had learned the language and learned to speak Japanese wouldn't be hard. But to learn to write it would be hard. That would be another thing.

MR. PYLE: And particularly in that style there.

MR. ABBOTT: The characters, yes.

MR. PYLE: That katakana?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, katakana, that's characters like Chinese. Then there's another type that's more or less like a shorthand. The one that's put into commercial use, used for publications, or whatever it might be.

MR. PYLE: That's hiragana?

MR. ABBOTT: Hiragana.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. ABBOTT: You know Japanese have, just like a lot of those islands in the Philippines, they have various dialects. They speak different, just like we do in the South, we speak with a different accent, use different words in some cases than they do in the North. So there is a different accent. They are just some different words in the various islands of the Japanese islands and also thousands of islands in the Philippines. There are thousands of different dialects in the Philippines. For a person who lived maybe in Mindanao couldn't understand a person who lives on Luzon.

MR. PYLE: I see. I mean, there's that much of a break-down that you just plain couldn't understand?

MR. ABBOTT: Oh yes. Tagalog is the main language in the Philippines,

but there's many other dialects.

MR. PYLE: Being able to speak Tagalog doesn't--

MR. ABBOTT: Like Zamboanga--Zambo, you've heard of that over--the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga? I was in Zamboanga. Of course, there are some beautiful islands in the Philippines, but they speak a language that's altogether different. They probably couldn't understand somebody on Luzon.

MR. PYLE: When you got back to the United States, do you recall what day you got back?

MR. ABBOTT: No, it seemed like they stopped us off in so many places.

MR. PYLE: I guess you stopped in Hawaii?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, yes, they finally they put us on--I don't know how many of us there were, but by the way, this was the first time that I had ever been on an airplane. They put us on a seaplane, navy seaplane. I don't know how many of us were aboard. I don't guess over two or three dozen on this particular plane. We flew back to Honolulu by the way of Saipan, some of the Wake Islands. Of course, that was just mainly for refueling. Then when they got us to Honolulu, at Pearl Harbor, that was the first time I had ever seen women in the service. I didn't realize--what in the world are these women here doing in the service? We didn't have such things back when we were captured, you know. All the women we had in the service were nurses.

MR. PYLE: Now you were a single man at this time?

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, I was single.

MR. PYLE: That may have been a little exciting [laughter].

MR. ABBOTT: Yes, but we didn't have time to fraternize [laughter]. Of course, everywhere, we were just royally treated. Everywhere we went, we got good treatment. Of course, there was no great celebration or anything like that, or anybody to meet us with leis around our neck, or anything of that sort, or any of our relatives or anything like that to meet us. But then they put us on a--

MR. PYLE: Were the marks of Pearl Harbor still there, of December seventh of forty-one?

MR. ABBOTT: Well, if we did see any, we didn't know because we didn't stay there long enough. It was a kind of a transfer through to change planes. So we didn't have time to go back to see whether or not the marks were still there. By the way, I didn't get back to Honolulu, my first trip to Honolulu was in 1937, before the war, and I did not get a chance to go back to see Pearl Harbor or Honolulu until 1950, 1949, I believe it was, after the war. I went back on a ship and stayed there 30 days. So, I didn't know. We didn't get a chance to