

## Karel Aster – WWII

The most trying experience of my years as a prisoner of war was our transpiration by ships from Manila to Japan.

While I was not on the ORYOKU MARU, which was sunk in Subic Bay and where several of my fellow Czech POWs lost their lives, I was transported under very similar conditions, but, fortunately our ship was not attacked by United States forces.

I was on the ship BRAZIL MARU which is described in the article, “Some Survived” and which transported us from Taiwan to Japan.

Rather than to describe the horrors of this experience in my own words, I believe that it is better described by the testimony during the War Crimes Trials, which is contained in the enclosed article.

Karel Aster  
October 2004  
Captiva Island, FL

I.

## Appendix I

### "Some Survived"

The following documents are informational summaries prepared by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers at the war crimes trials of the Japanese personnel involved in the "Hell Ships" episode.

They are included in a photocopy publication, The Oryoku Maru Story, prepared by Lt. Col. Charles M. Brown, 13680 Andover Drive, Magalia, California 95954, in August 1982, copies of which were placed on sale to help raise funds for a memorial to be placed near the site of the sinking of the Oryoku Maru at Subic Bay.

General Headquarters  
Supreme Commander For The Allied Powers  
Legal Section

APO 500  
Feb. 25, 1947

File No. 014.13

Public Relations Informational Summary No. 510

Subject: U.S. vs. Junsaburo Toshino, Shusuke Wada, Kazutane Aihara Shin Kajiyama,  
Suketoshi Tanque, Jiro Ueda, Hisao Yoshida.

Charges and specifications for the trial of seven war criminals alleged to have been responsible for the deaths of more than 1,300 American prisoners of war, have been signed by Colonel Alva C. Carpenter, Chief of the Allied Powers. These charges and specifications have been forwarded to the Commanding General of the Eighth Army who will appoint the military commission to hear the case. The court is expected to convene on February 27, 1947.

Junsaburo Toshino, heads the list accused. He was born in Nishinakajimamura, Onsen-gun, Ehimo-ken, on December 27, 1903. He took his early schooling in Ehime-ken. He graduated from the Physical Education School of Japan, at Tokyo, in 1925.

In March 1925 was drafted into the Army as a Private and served with the Matsuyama 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment in Ehime-ken. He was released from the Army in August 1926 as a probationary officer in the infantry.

In May 1941, he was again drafted into the Army and stayed in Japan until November 1941, when he was sent to Fagi, Formosa. In December 1941 his unit left Formosa for Luzon. On January 1, 1942, the unit landed at Lingayon, Luzon. The unit was stationed in the northwest portion of Luzon Island. He became the Adjutant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Matsuyama 122<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, and remained with the unit until August 1943. In September 1943 he was assigned to the Philippine Prisoner of War camp at Cabanatuan, Luzon. He worked in the office and took care of the Adjutant's duties, as no one had been assigned to this position. In December 1944, Toshino was ordered to escort some prisoners of war from Luzon to Japan, landing at Maji, Kyushu, on January 30, 1945. During February 1945, he rested at Kamonso Hotel in Maji. In March 1945 he came to Tokyo and went to the Prisoner of War Information Bureau where he reported the details of the voyage from Luzon to Japan to a Lieutenant Colonel,

whose name is unknown. On March 27, he left Fukoka, Kyushu, by plane for Formosa. On arrival at Formosa, he joined the Taiwan 112<sup>th</sup>, mixed infantry Brigade.

Tohino was badly injured in a truck accident at Giran, Formosa, on June 6, 1945, and was put in the Giran Hospital. In October 1945, he moved to the Taihoku Hospital. On February 23, 1946, he left Kirun, Formosa, aboard a hospital ship, and landed at Otake, Honshu Island on March 6, 1945. He went to the Otake Hospital and then to the Iwakuni Hospital. On March 28, 1946, he went to the Zentsuji, Shikoka Island. He stayed there until he was apprehended on July 26, 1945.

Shunusuke Wada was the official interpreter for the prisoner of war Guard Commander Lieutenant Toshino. He is charged with failing and refusing on his own responsibility and by neglecting to transmit to his superior requests for adequate quarters, food, drinking water, clothing, sanitary and hygienic facilities, and medical attention so badly needed by the prisoners. In case of Lieutenant Toshino's absence Wada took command of any and all situations.

He was merciless to his dealings with the prisoners; they received no consideration at all.

Kazutano Aihara was a lance corporal in the Japanese Army. He performed the duties of a guard on the prisoner shipment. He is said to have been very vicious, the prisoners nicknamed him "Air Raid". When he came around, the prisoners would look for an excuse to get away from him. They did not even want to be within calling distance. He was in charge of the gardening details and other details that the prisoners were working on during their stay in Cabanatuan. He was one of the guards that accompanied the prisoners to San Fernando, La Union. He was the most hated guard at Cabanatuan.

Shin Kajiyama was the master of the ship, Oryoku Maru. When the Oryoku Maru was sunk he took charge of the Brazil Maru and completed the voyage to Maji, Japan, via Takao, Formosa.

Suketsohi Tanque was a Sergeant Major and was supposed to have performed the duties of a medical non-commissioned officer. He was at the Davao Penal Colony.

Jiro Ueda was a private in the Japanese Army. He was a prisoner guard and is concerned in the mass execution that occurred at San Fernando, La Union.

Hisao Yoshida was also a guard and a private in the Japanese Army. He is also concerned with the mass execution at San Fernando, La Union.

In the latter part of October 1944, the American forces began to push back to the Philippines. The air offensives began to make themselves felt by the Japanese. American carrier based planes were making daily raids into the heart of the Japanese strongholds in the Philippines. On or about October 1944, word came thru that all able-bodied prisoners of war being held in Cabanatuan and Davo Prisoner of War Camps would be transferred to Bilibid Prison, Manila for eventual shipment to Japan. This group of prisoners gathered and stayed at Bilibid until December 13, 1944. On that date at 1000 hours a total of 1,619 American and Allied Prisoners of War were assembled. This group was divided up into groups of about 500 men each. Of the 1,619, about 1,100 were officers, a majority being field grade. All of the group was American except 30 who were Allied Nationals.

At 1000 hours the entire group marched in a column of fours through the main streets of Manila to Pier #7. Pier # 7 was known as the Million Dollar Pier because it is reputed to be the longest in the world. Lieutenant Toshino, the Prisoner of War Guard Commander, was standing at the gate checking the number of prisoners as they left the camp. Toshino was not seen again until the prisoners arrived at the pier.

The group arrived at the pier at about 1100 hrs. and waited several hours before they were loaded onto their ship. At 1500 hrs. a combat laden ship moved out in convoy from the pier and Japanese civilians, some sailor and a group of soldiers to man anti-aircraft guns, total numbering about 1,500 persons embarked. The prisoners were then loaded aboard.

The ship was the Oryoku Maru, a new cabin type vessel that appeared to be designed for luxury travel in the Orient. It's capacity was about 15,000 tons, it was the best Japanese vessel the Americans had seen until that time. The ship carried absolutely no markings of any sort. It was heavily armed fore and aft with 3" anti-aircraft guns, dual purpose, and pom-pom guns. The prisoners were about 20 feet below the main deck.



When the prisoners started to embark Mr. Wada, the Japanese interpreter, was supervising the loading. While waiting at the pier somehow the groups got mixed up so that when Commander Portz led his group aboard the ship he had about 700 men in his group and they were placed in the after hold. It took about one and one-half hours to load group # 1. Group # 2 in charge of Lt. Colonel Curtis T. Beecher, started loading about 1,530 in the forward hold. In this group there were over 800 prisoners. The hold was 60 x 100 feet. There were temporary troop accommodations built about four feet from the floor and extending out 12 feet from the bulkhead, and running around the entire hold area in a square, with no partition, and all wood. The prisoners went down into this hold via wooden steps from the hatch to the hold. Light and air could only come through the hatch opening, which was about 20 x 20 feet. There were no ventilators, no portholes. Group three went aboard and were loaded in the hatch amid-ships with approximately 300 men.

In group # 2 the conditions in the hold were so crowded that the men, a few minutes after entering the hold began fainting.

The Japanese were asked to move some of the men out, the request was refused and they were told that there would be about 200 men put into the forward hold. There wasn't enough air and men were fainting due to the lack of air and intense heat. The Japanese were hurrying men into the hold, in some cases these men were being pushed down the stairs and beaten with rifle butts and shovels. Men were knocked down and off the ladder falling on the men already below. Aihara, one of the guards is alleged to have been one of the men standing at the hatch entrance beating the prisoners as they entered. All during this time Wada was present during the loading and without a doubt observed the treatment being given the prisoners, although he did nothing to stop it.

At about 1800 hrs. all the men were loaded. The weather in the Philippines is tropical and extremely hot. In the lower bays when all men were in they had to assume a crouched position because they couldn't stand upright. No men were permitted in the center under the hatch by order of the Japanese guards. In the upper bays one could stand or crouch but could not lie down.

Prior to embarking, the last meal that the prisoners were given was on the night of December 12<sup>th</sup>, at about 1900 hrs. in Bilbid. For this meal they were fed a ½ canteen cup of steamed rice and ½ canteen cup of soup. There was also an issue of a ½ canteen cup of rice to be eaten in the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup>. The men were allowed all the water they wanted, the majority of them had canteens and canteen cups. The next meal the prisoners received was the night of the 13<sup>th</sup> at 1900 hrs. The meal amounted to nearly a full canteen cup of steamed rice and a teaspoon of salt and seaweed for each man, and one canteen cup of water for one whole bay of approximately 45 men. Each man received the equivalent of three teaspoons full of water. The distribution of the food and water was left entirely up to the Americans; the Japanese had nothing to do with it. Never were the Japanese ever physically present in the holds. Other than this meager ration no food was received while the prisoners were aboard the Oryoku Maru, except on December 14, men in the center hold received morning chow.

When the prisoners first boarded the ship there were a few cases of active diarrhea and dysentery.

No provisions had been made for any latrine facilities in the holds. After repeated request, four five gallon buckets were lowered into the holds. They were placed in the corners. Although repeated request were made to the Japanese for more buckets no action resulted. The four buckets that they received were overflowing within 1-½ hours, and requests to empty them were refused. By 2400 hrs. the lower floor in the vicinity of the latrine was a sea of human waste. The stench in the hold at about 2400 hrs. due to the lack of air and human waste was overpowering.

When the men first entered the ship the temperature was between 85 and 90 degrees. About 0200 hrs. on the 14<sup>th</sup> due to the noise and excitement, the hatch, which was the only opening for air, was completely battened down, cutting off all air except that which seeped through the hatch cover. The temperature then rose to about 120 degrees. Men against the bulkheads, in the bays, were passing out for lack of air. These men were removed to the front of the bay where they were revived. For the remaining time on the Oryoku Maru the air situation became worse, because of the dehydration, weakness, thirst and stench.

No sick bay had been designated. There was no room for it. Repeated requests were made for permission to bring the most aggravated cases of heat prostration and dehydration on deck where they would at least be able to get some air. Wada denied all these requests.

During the nights of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> men became deranged and would wander about the hold stepping on the prisoners, screaming for water and air. Some became violent to the extent that they lashed out with canteens or striking with their fists or feet at anyone with whom they came in contact. It was pitch black in the hold. In this chaos there was no possibility for much needed sleep. On this first night about 40 to 50 men went out of their minds.

About 0300 hrs. on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> the Oryoku Maru weighed anchor and headed out towards the China Sea. At dawn of the 14<sup>th</sup> the forward hatch was opened and in the forward hold there were 8-10 men who had died during the night. At about 0800 hrs. an air raid alarm sounded. The ship was attacked; ricochets began flying into the holds. The ship had been damaged, and was moving now with difficulty.

Several men had been wounded during the raid by the ricochets. During the air raid, it was learned, that at least 30 men had died in the aft hold the night of the 13<sup>th</sup>, mostly due to suffocation. After the raid medical groups were called on deck to treat the Japanese wounded. These groups were severely beaten because "American lanes were sinking the Japanese shipping".

When requests were made for medical aid for men in the holds, and food and water, they were beaten up and told that the Japanese would do nothing for the prisoners.

On the nigh of the 14<sup>th</sup>, and the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> conditions grew worse. Men were suffering from thirst so acutely that many went out of their minds. Much screaming was audible. There was almost a complete lack of discipline, no matter how hard the hold leaders tried to restore order. The need for water was so acute that the men were drinking their own urine and sewage running in the open drains along the side of the ship. These hideous actions were revealed to the Japanese but there was not action taken. The hold was bedlam with screaming, swearing, fighting. Men went crazy and the conditions were like some fantastic nightmare.

On the nights of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> the ship was bombed. The Japanese beached it making minor repairs, and discharged all Japanese passengers, moving back to Subic Bay. The prisoners were still aboard. It was felt that the Japanese knew that the ship would be bombed again and for that reason they took the Japanese passengers off and left the prisoners on.

On the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> while the ship was anchored in Subic Bay about 300 yards off shore from Olongapo Naval Reservation, about 0830 hrs. Wada came around and told the men that the prisoners would be evacuated from the ship shortly; that they would not be able to take their shoes or any other gear, as they would have to swim. He said that the Japanese were instructed to "shoot to kill" so they, the prisoners, had better be very careful. Several of the guards fired into the holds prior to evacuation. About 0930 hrs. the order for the evacuation came through. Prior to this order there had been an air raid in which a direct hit on the aft hold had been made, and about 100 men were killed. There were no life preservers or lifeboats in evidence. Men were forced over the side of the ship with no regard given as to whether or not they could swim.

While the men were leaving the ship, six U.S. planes dived on the ship but just prior to the bomb release point the lead plane zoomed up and wagged its wings in recognition. No bombs were released. During the swim for shore some of the men got aboard the debris from the ship and attempted to float ashore. In one case a raft with five men on it headed for shore, was fired upon by machine gun set up on shore. Two of the men on the raft leaped off into the water, the remaining three were killed.

During the disorder of the evacuation some of the half-starved men attempted to salvage whatever food and medical supplies available on the ship. While going in the compartments in search of food they observed American cigarettes, candy usually in Red Cross parcels.

Whatever food and medical supplies the men managed to salvage were confiscated by the Japanese. During this salvage operation some Japanese came upon the prisoners in the compartments and began firing on them. Lt. Toshino came upon Lt. Wm. H. Brewster in one of the compartments and shot him, killing him instantly.



Once on shore the prisoners were assembled in the area adjacent to a tennis court. During the period of assembling, the men were permitted to fill their canteens at a water tap outside of the tennis court, but to do this they had to stand in line four to six hours. Fifty percent of the prisoners received their first water since the night of the 13<sup>th</sup>; the rest didn't get any because the Japanese as a result of the confusion chased them back into their assembly area. About 30 minutes later Wada came around and had the prisoners marched to the tennis court so that a count of men could be made against the rosters. Placing such a large group of men in the area of a tennis court was almost impossible. A chicken wire fence surrounded the tennis court. A small area had been set aside for the sick and wounded. There was not enough space for a person to stretch out and lie down. Rosters were called off several times. All personnel were told to give any information available to them on persons not present so as to be able to determine how many men were dead or missing and how many present.

In the gathering at the tennis court it was learned that the conditions in the aft hold had been worse than the conditions in the forward hold.

Many of the deaths in this hold were caused by suffocation. At roll call there were less than 1,300 prisoners still alive out of the 1,619 that had left Manila.

At 1430 hrs. American planes came back and bombed the Oryoku Maru; all the prisoners by this time had been evacuated. No food was issued on the 15<sup>th</sup> or the 16<sup>th</sup>, and the water situation was still very bad. On the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup>, one sack of uncooked rice was issued for 1,300 men. This amounted to about two tablespoons full for each man. The same amount of rice was issued on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, the ration increased to four tablespoons full, all of this was eaten raw, although facilities for cooking were stored close by and within sight.

While the prisoners were kept at the tennis court, there was no provision made for protection against the sun. On the third day the men were allowed to leave the court and go into the shade for a few hours. Most of the men had on only a pair of shorts, some more fortunate, had shirts and some trousers; there were no shoes or hats.

At night it was very cold and since there were no blankets, the prisoners were forced to lie on the hard concrete and suffer from the cold. While waiting at the tennis court, six or seven men died from wounds and exhaustion and were buried nearby.

About the 18<sup>th</sup>, after repeated requests made to the Japanese to hospitalize a prisoner, Cpl. Eugene L. Specht, USMC who was suffering from a gangrenous arm, and having no action taken, it became necessary to amputate his arm at the tennis court. There was a mess kit knife for use as a surgical instrument, no anesthetic and no medical supplies of any kind were provided by the Japanese. Specht had been shot in the arm by a guard aboard the Oryoku Maru. Specht's arm had swollen to incredible size, and the odor from it was overpowering. There was no outcry from the patient, only a few groans and "Oh Doctor". Specht survived a few days and subsequently died. It is alleged that Specht would have had an excellent chance to live if he would have been given normal hospitalization.

On the morning of December 20, 1944, 500 of the men were taken to San Fernando, Pampanga and the second group left on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

The first group was placed in the provincial jail, and the second group in the movie house. While there the prisoners were finally issued a canteen of rice. There was a spigot at the theatre with running water and by keeping order everybody received enough water. Ample water was also available at the jail.

About 1800 hrs. on December 23, Wada came to the two group commanders and wanted the 15 sickest men to be selected for return to Manila for hospitalization. Among the group selected was Lt. Dwight D. Edison, Lt. John W. Elliot, Lt. Col. Ulyses J.L. Peoples, Jr., Lt. Col. Samuel W. Freeny, Pharmacists Mate 2/c Deenah R. McCurry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Herman V. Sherman, Major Wendell F. Swanson and eight other unidentified American Prisoners of War.

About 1900 hrs. a truck was brought to where the group was waiting and the sick were driven in the truck to a small cemetery on the outskirts of San Fernando, Pampanga. When they arrived at the cemetery there were a group of soldiers who had dug a hole about 15 Feet Square. When the guards on the truck dismounted, they took up positions about the hole.

Two of the guards brought one of the prisoners to the hole. He was told to kneel at the edge of the hole and to take a position as though in prayer. The prisoner was brought to the hole and he was bayoneted and decapitated.

This procedure was followed until all fifteen of the prisoners had either been bayoneted or decapitated. It is alleged that at this execution both Wada and Toshino were present and that they supervised and took part in it.

From San Fernando, Pampanga the prisoners were moved by train to San Fernando, La Union, on December 24<sup>th</sup>. The prisoners were marched to the railroad station. At the station the men were loaded into box- cars.

Wada and Tohino, by this time having returned from the scene of the execution, Wada again apparently in command, instructed the group commanders that 170 to 180 men would be put in each box-car, which was actually physically impossible. However, 40 men who were the sickest were allowed to be placed on top of the cars. During the trips, in the train, the conditions were very bad. The heat was terrific, and due to crowding and lack of air many men passed out.

When a man became unconscious he was passed from hand-to-hand to the door of the boxcar to revive.

The train arrived at San Fernando, La Union about 0500 hrs.

Christmas morning of December 25, 1944. The weather was bitterly cold.

The men were marched from the train to a schoolhouse about a half a mile to a mile from the railway station. When the group arrived at the schoolhouse, Wada announced that water was available. A detail of men were ordered to dig for water. After digging five feet below the surface water was found, and iodine was used for purification.

At 9:00 AM on December 25, orders were received that the men were to line up and prepare for a march to the beach. After remaining on the beach for two days and two nights; on the morning of December 27, the first group of 236 men were loaded aboard the Brazil Maru, the remainder of the men on the beach were loaded aboard the Enoura Maru. The men were marched to the piers where landing barges were waiting to carry the men out to the transports.

While loading into the barges men were compelled to jump from the pier into the barges, some 20 feet below. If a man hesitated before jumping to the barge the guard would push him off the pier, in several instances men broke their legs. In one case, one man missed the barge completely hitting his head on the side of the barge and falling into the water. When this man was finally dragged into the barge he was dead. All during the time the loading proceeded, it is alleged that Toshino and Wada were present on the pier and witnessed all the incidents that occurred during the loading operations.

The Brazil Maru was an old freighter of about 2,500 tons. It was armed and was loaded with sick and healthy Japanese soldiers. During the six day trip from the Philippines to Takao, Formosa, and no food was received during the first two days except the food leavings of the five Formosan guards. This amounted to about one teaspoon of rice per man. On the third day an issue was made which was three men per mess kit of food. On the fourth there was no food at all.

On the fifth day prisoners were issued five Japanese rolls per man. These rolls were a type of hard tack infested with maggots and mold.

All of the prisoners on the Enoura Maru (about 10,000 tons), were confined to one hold with two levels, forward of amid-ships. The condition was very crowded but not as bad as on the Oryoku Maru. A man could lie down here by doubling his legs. The food was scarce and there was a little water and soup available once a day. The amounts received were small but were much greater than those received by the prisoners aboard the Brazil Maru. During the period of the trip between San Fernando and Takao, Formosa, there were 16 deaths. These 16 deceased were buried at sea. 236 men were moved from the Brazil Maru to the Enoura Maru in Takao Harbor, on or about January 5, 1945.

During the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> of January, the men received one mess kit of rice for each four men with ½ cup of soup for each four men. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, in the afternoon, the Japanese ordered all men in the lower level of the hold to be moved into the forward hold so that sugar could be stored in the lower level.



Approximately two-thirds of the men had been moved from the hold when the Japanese guards on the deck indicated that the other one-third would be absorbed into the upper level, which created an overcrowded condition more than originally, since it was overcrowded initially.

Men were so hungry that they stole sugar despite the threat by Wada that drastic punishment would be meted out. Wada stated “anyone who stole sugar would be severely punished individually and the balance of the group would be punished collectively for an unspecified period”.

On January 9<sup>th</sup>, in mid-morning, during the completion of the morning meal, anti-aircraft fire was heard on the Enoura Maru and all ships in the harbor. Soon the drone of the planes were heard and almost simultaneously the whistle of bombs were heard. The Enoura Maru rocked violently from a near miss, causing a flail of bomb fragments and steel fragments from the sides of the ship that killed about 300 outright and injured a considerable number. After the bombing such first aid as could be rendered to men was made available by the Prisoner of War doctors and corpsmen aboard. This aid consisted of collecting dirty towels, undershirts,

or anything that could be used for bandages that the other prisoners would contribute. Outside of a few first aid kits that the doctors and corpsmen may have had there were no medicines made available by the Japanese. In fact, no aid was rendered until January 11, when two Japanese enlisted hospital treatment consisted of dabbing injuries with Mercurochrome. They further stated that they were not interested in treating the more seriously injured.

The dead bodies in the holds were stacked in the center of the hatch area like stacks of cordwood. They remained there until January 12<sup>th</sup>. During this time, a majority of the men who were wounded and who soon thereafter died from those wounds could have been saved with proper medical attention, but with lack of bandages and medicines it was impossible for the doctors to do much for them.

Finally, in mid-morning of January 12, permission was granted to remove the dead bodies from the ship. The bodies were removed by placing them into cargo slings and lowering them over the side of the ship into barges. Some of the dead were removed individually by tying ropes around the legs or arms and hauling them upon the deck, then lowering them into the barges.

The scene in the holds was like a page from Dante's Inferno --- so dark, but one could see the wraithlike figures wandering dazedly through a maze of stacked corpses. It was not uncommon prior to removal of the dead to sit on the dead and eat meals due to the overcrowded conditions. Items of salvageable clothing that could be removed from the dead were removed. Many of the bodies were in various stages of decomposition when they were finally removed.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, during the afternoon, orders came through from Wada that all the prisoners aboard the Enoura Maru would be transferred to the Brazil Maru. Reasons for this change were that the Enoura Maru had been badly damaged during the bombing. Transfer to the Brazil Maru was affected by landing barges. The move was completed in the late afternoon. The wounded men, fracture cases, etc ..., suffered great pain in transfer as in some cases they were lowered into boats by ropes and hoisted aboard ship in the same manner. At this time, there were approximately 900 men remaining alive out of the original group of 1,619. The ship sailed from Takao on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January for Japan.

The trip from Takao to Moji, Japan lasted from 13<sup>th</sup> of January until the 29<sup>th</sup> of January. During the trip there were two issues of cooked rice a day.

? — There were two or three men to lightly packed canteen cup of rice. No soup was issued at all. This <sup>diet</sup> ~~dies~~ was augmented by whatever sugar the men could steal. Numerous protests to the prisoner commanders brought no results. A diagnosis for the cause of the high death rate aboard the Brazil Maru was due to combination of malnutrition, dehydration and exposure.

During the journey there was active trading for rings, watches, and fountain pens between the prisoners and the Japanese guards and the ship's crew for food, water and cigarettes. A lot of West Point and other graduation rings were traded for a cup of water or ten cigarettes. Anyone who had anything to trade did so.

The water situation was very acute for the first two days out of Takao harbor; no liquids of any kind were issued. On the 15<sup>th</sup> approximately twice a day until the 29<sup>th</sup>, water was spooned out. It was black, salty and unpalatable. At no time even when the death rate was at its highest was the amount of water increased.

Medical facilities aboard the ship were nil. Only the more seriously sick were placed under the hatch which was considered as the hospital area. It was the coldest spot on the ship. Whenever a man was placed in sickbay it was almost a certainty that he would die. Only the men in the last stages were sent there. The doctor and medical corpsmen had nothing whatever to work with – no medicines, no bandages. It is said that one large bottle of sulfathiazol pills aboard the Brazil Maru probably would have saved at least 100 men whose diarrhea was contributing cause to their death.

When the ship first left Takao on the night of January 13, about 15 men died. Bodies were stacked in the hospital area after first being stripped of all clothing by the hospital corpsmen under orders. Available clothing was then distributed to the men who most needed it. Bodies were collected over a two or three-day period before permission was obtained from Wada to get a burial detail to throw them overboard. The first group of dead was about fifty. Generally, bodies would be taken up on deck and buried daily. In the beginning the death rate was between ten and fifteen men per day and it go progressively worse, finally reaching a maximum of about forty dead

per day a few days prior to arrival in Japan. The men outside of the hospital area who had previously shown no evidence of suffering more than the rest would be found dead in the morning. This became so commonplace that a hospital corpsmen would make a circuit of all bays each morning and shout "Roll out your dead". Bay leaders would then check their bays.

A <sup>Chaplain</sup> Chaplain prisoner lead the men in prayer every night until he died five days out of Takao. Another Chaplain gave all of his food and water to the sick until he too died. Another Chaplain who overtaxed his strength by helping the sick died.

Two or three times a day the roll would be called and if a man's name was called without an answer, someone would say, "dead" or give the circumstances regarding his death, such as suffocation aboard the Oryoke Maru. Even though the list had been called many times previously, this was done by order of the Japanese.

The ship finally arrived in Moji, Japan on January 29, 1945. The ship was met by a large boarding party of officers, enlisted men and civilians. It was announced in mid-morning that clothing would be issued topside.

There were about 450 men alive then. It was bitterly cold. The prisoners were issued a pair of wool trousers, a blouse, a suite of cotton underwear, but no socks. Shoes were issued without regard to size.

This was the first time since December 13<sup>th</sup>, that there was enough water available for each man to have as much as he wanted; however, the men were cautioned that the water might be contaminated and that they had better take it easy. Later on food was issued but many of the men were so sick they were unable to eat.

When the prisoners died aboard the Brazil Maru they were stacked like cordwood and all of them presented a uniform appearance; lips were drawn back exposing teeth in a half snarl due to skin contraction, ribs seemed to be bursting out of the bodies and where the stomach would be was a hollow, legs and arms were pipe stems. A combination of cold and rigor mortis gave them a rigid unreal appearance. The eyes were sunken. Most of them were stripped nude and all of them gave a definite appearance of starvation.

Lt. Col. Austin J. Montgomery is at present in Tokyo. Col. Montgomery is one of the survivors of the infamous Oryoku Maru. He will be a witness in the case against the accused. He will give eyewitness accounts as to what occurred during the voyage. Col. Montgomery's home address is 1475 Greenleaf Street, Sherman Oaks, California.

At the outbreak of war Col. Montgomery was a member of the Philippine Division. He was a motor transport officer for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps and commanding officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Regiment, Philippine Scouts.

After participating in the defense of Bataan and the eventual fall of Bataan, Montgomery moved to Corregidor where he was taken prisoner by the Japanese forces on May 6, 1942.

From Corregidor he was moved to the mainland and held prisoner at the Cabanatuan P.O.W. Camp until October 1942. In November 1942, he was moved with a group of prisoners to the Davao Penal Colony where he remained until June of 1944.



While at the Davao Camp Col. Montgomery was moved back to Cabanatuan Camp where he remained until word was received that all able bodied prisoners would be sent to Bilibid Prisoner of War Camp for eventual shipment to Japan. After suffering the horrors of the trip on ship from Manila to Moji, Japan, Montgomery moved to Fukuoka Prisoner of War Camp # 1, arriving there January 30, 1945. In April 1945, he was transferred from the Fukuoka Camp # 1 to Jinsen, Korea remaining there until the surrender of the Japanese forces to Gen. MacArthur. During the time he was incarcerated at the Jinsen Camp Col. Montgomery was Liaison officer between the prisoners of war and the Japanese captors.