

This story covers  
just a very short  
part of my life  
and I am thankful  
that the rest was so  
good to me and brought  
me such a wonderful  
and loving family

Grandpa



First - I should explain the circumstances that eventually brought me to the Philippines.

After graduating from an English Language school, I joined the Bata Shoe Co. in Zlin, Moravia, in the fall of 1936.

After graduating from the mandatory course in shoe manufacturing, I eventually got a job as assistant to the manager of the Exhibition Department, Dr. Ing Arch Joseph Cernovsky, who was responsible for setting up shows, exhibitions and pavilions at Fairs for the Company.

In 1938, the major project of the department was to prepare the Company exhibits in the Czechoslovak Pavilions at the 1939 World Fairs in San Francisco and New York.

In February of 1939 we left for the USA to supervise the set up of the Bata exhibits in San Francisco and New York. My main job was to work as an administrative assistant and interpreter for my boss, who could not speak English.

Our assignment was finished late in May and the original plan was that we should return to Czechoslovakia.

But there was no longer a Czechoslovakia. Earlier that year the Germans invaded the country and converted it to the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

We certainly did not want to go back and fortunately the Company offered me a new job in the USA.

I was sent to Belcamp, MD where the Company was in the initial stages of building a shoe factory.

When I arrived there - by bus from New York - I was the third employee and brought with me the first machine, a typewriter.

But the project proceeded rapidly. There were some 100 experts/instructors who managed to get out of the old country to help with the set up of the factory and training of local employees. By early 1940 we were already producing shoes.

The political situation in Europe forced the Company to move its overseas headquarters to the USA with Mr. J.A. Bata (principal share holder and chairman of the board) in charge.

He divided his time between offices in Washington, DC and the factory in Belcamp, MD.

The Company had a well established program in decentralizing its production facilities, originally necessitated by economic conditions, and was already well established beyond the borders of continental Europe in both Asia and Africa.

Prior to the occupation by Germany, they still shipped thousands of shoe machines to the USA to establish additional manufacturing units.

The concentration was now (besides the USA and Canada) on Central and South America and the machines and instructors originally sent to Belcamp were assigned to start and operate these new units.

Sometime in 1940 a decision was made to open a factory and retail stores in the Philippines (then a USA Commonwealth) where we already had a couple of retail stores.

L. Gerbek, who was assistant manager of the Belcamp factory, volunteered for this assignment since neither he nor his wife were too happy in Belcamp.

At the end of 1940 he started to select his team and we began to ship machinery to Manila to establish a modern production of leather and canvas shoes.

Ludik asked me to join him and I gladly accepted. By then we had become good friends, we were going farther away from the war to a rather exotic country still under the American flag.

Another member of the team was Alfred Fishgrund, a longtime employee in the retail division who recently arrived from Manila and his willingness to go back and assurance that it was a great place to live further assured us that we had made a good choice.

Other members of the party were:

F. Kovar -designated production mgr. (with wife and two small daughters)

Dancak, Fila and Zajic - shoemaking instructors

J. Varak - machinist

Krizova, Zapletalova - sewing department instructors

None of us had any worries or concern that the war would affect us there. We had full faith that the company management knew what they were doing. After all, the brother-in-law of the Big Boss and the niece of Thomas Bata were leading us. And we were so young. He was 28, she was 21 and I was 20 years old. And their daughter was just three months old.

And off we went in early February, 1941 by train to San Francisco and then on the PRESIDENT PIERCE to Manila with stops in Yokohama and Hong Kong.

Upon our arrival in Manila, we were greeted by the resident Bata manager, Jaroslav Hrdina, and settled in our temporary quarters.

Soon we found a suitable factory building with an adjacent house and garden and all the production employees moved in. It was located in Pasay, an adjacent suburb to Manila.

Fishgrund and I moved into a pleasant apartment with Gerbec and his family, Jenny and baby Joan, plus a Chinese nurse, Ahyeen.

My initial job was clearing the machinery through customs, arranging delivery to the factory and all material purchases for the factory.

Our main store was in an excellent downtown location at the corner of Rizal Avenue and Carriedo Street, and there we located our head office.

The company was registered under the name Gerbec, Hrdina, Inc. and the stores were named G&H Shoe Co.

We did not use the name BATA because of the complications that arose when Germany occupied the Czech Republic and took control of the main Bata plant. And so all went on well.

The Japanese were involved in a bitter and brutal war with China but it did not seem to affect us. We were more concerned about the war in Europe -- and so far all the news was bad.

Then came December 8, 1941 -- bombing of Honolulu and the next day of Manila, followed by the declaration of war.

There was a small group of Czechs living in Manila - some businessmen, some refugees from the Nazi oppression and a few employees of the former Czech government.

The Japanese were now our enemies, as much as the Germans, and we fully understood that if we wanted to regain liberty for our fatherland, we would have to do whatever we could to contribute to their defeat. It was only natural that we should offer our services to the USA. A small delegation approached the US Army Headquarters and was readily accepted.

By the end of the year 14 of us were inducted with official status as employees of the Department of War.

What follows is a recollection of my services and experiences as described in a letter to my parents dated "Manila, October 11, 1945" written in Czech and here in translation:

*On December 30, 1941 we volunteers were notified to report to the Army & Navy Club in the late afternoon.*

*We received no specific information on what to expect and assumed that this would be a meeting where we would be informed about our duties.*

*We dressed casually, brought no supplies and assumed that we would be back home later that night.*

*We were advised not to make any outside calls and waited till dusk when we boarded several military passenger cars with window shades drawn and lights dimmed for blackout precautions.*

*The military driver said he could not tell us where we were going and we drove well past midnight, passing a lot of military traffic all going our way.*

*We were way up in the mountains somewhere when the driver turned in a side road and stopped in front of a building. There was nobody around, and it was pitch dark when he escorted us into a large hall which looked like a mess hall.*

*Early in the morning we were contacted by an Army captain who told us that he would be in charge of our group. First, he explained to us that we were on Bataan Peninsula on Manila Bay southwest of Manila. Then we were asked to swear allegiance to the USA. We were issued personal I.D. cards stating that we were civilian employees of the Department of War. We were issued plain khaki uniforms. We were divided into three groups and told to select our companions. We were five - all Bata employees: Karel Dancak, Jaroslav Hrdina, Joseph Varak, Antonin Volny and myself.*

*We were taken by another soldier several miles deeper into the jungle, which surrounded us everywhere, to a motor pool depot and introduced to the officer in charge.*

*We were briefed on our assignment: we would patrol the roads using a huge tow truck and bring back to the motor pool any vehicles that could be salvaged and from those beyond repair we were told to salvage as many spare parts as possible.*

*It was fortunate that Josep was in our squad as he was an excellent all-around mechanic.*

*For our sleeping accommodations we were each issued a folding army cot, blanket and a shelter half.*

*Fortunately it was the dry season and so we did not have to worry about rain.*

*After a test run with our new wrecker and a frugal meal in the unit's mess - out doors with no tables - we settled for our first night in the jungle.*

*I wrapped myself in the light blanket for protection against mosquitoes and fell soundly asleep.*

*Sometime later at night I woke up with a start, feeling that somebody was touching my legs. I sat up with a jerk and what I saw in the dim moonlight was a huge python slowly sliding over my legs. I sat there, paralyzed, not daring to move and watched the seemingly endless body of the snake slowly slide off my legs.*

*When I woke my friends and told them what happened, we all decided that we must find a safer place to sleep.*

*Next morning we consulted with our unit commander. He was very sympathetic and told us that the best he could do was to offer us a broken bus -- no wheels, no engine, mostly broken windows, but the bus had a good roof. So we dragged it away from the junkyard, fixed the interior to accommodate our bunks and felt safe and even luxurious as we slowly made small improvements.*

*The segment of the road assigned to us was about 30 miles long and ran along the Eastern shore of the Bataan peninsula on Manila Bay.*

*At first we were not that busy and worked till about 5pm. Most wrecks were mechanical breakdowns and we just towed them to our motor pool. As time went on, the Japanese air attacks intensified and there were more and more wrecks beyond repair until eventually our main effort was to keep the roads clear. Soon the dive-bombers started to come daily looking for any moving target on the road. We felt relatively safe, as there was a lot of jungle cover near and close to the roads. But we were witnesses to several fatal bombings where the damage was not just to equipment but also to human life.*

*Our workload became heavier and we usually stayed on the road till dusk. At the same time the food began to run out and we were reduced to two rations - mostly rice - and fewer canned goods like pork and beans, Spam and corned beef.*



*We did not see our other Czech friends too often as they worked from another depot.*

*At about this time, early January, they volunteered to go with an Army unit into No Mans Land and dismantle and recover a rice mill which was desperately needed in Bataan where some rice grew and could be harvested but where there was no way to process it. For this daring act they were awarded The Medal of Freedom after the war. Unfortunately some received it posthumously.*

*Sometime in February one of our members, Antonin Volny, was transferred to other duties -- intelligence and prisoner interrogation -- as he was fluent in Japanese.*

*His case was particularly tragic. He was a member of the Czechoslovak Embassy staff in Tokyo till the Czech Republic was occupied by Germans in 1930. He then moved to the USA and got a job with Bata Shoe Co. in Belcamp, MD as the Hotel and Housing Manager. That is where we met and became good friends.*

*At the end of 1941 he was sent by the Company to China to look after the Company's interests there and left early in November for the USA from Hong Kong. The ship stopped in Manila and he interrupted his voyage to visit with us Czechs who had come to start the factory that he had known in Belcamp.*

*However, the war started on December 8 and he no longer could book passage on a ship so he volunteered and came to work with us for the US Army.*

*At the end of 1944 he was shipped to Japan and lost his life when the invading USA forces bombarded the transport.*

*Early in March I got a bad case of dysentery and had to be sent to a hospital. Fortunately the hospital, which had been built by US forces before the war, was still intact fully staffed and with a supply of*

*medicines. After a few weeks, I was transferred to a field hospital which was just a group of tents in a swampy jungle ravine.*

*Two days after I left the original hospital, it was bombed by the Japanese with many casualties to patients and staff.*

*After about a week in Hospital #2, I recovered sufficiently to return to my unit and to duty.*

*When I returned to our motor pool and searched for our bus I was in for a shock - there was no bus - and, instead, just a huge crater in the ground and debris strewn all over the place. Some of it was still smoldering. After searching for the pool headquarters, I found out that they were in the process of moving to a new location and that my friends were alive and well. When the raid had started, they ran for shelter to a deep foxhole about twenty yards from the bus and thus avoided injury.*

*Our motor pool base was now moving frequently as the Japanese bombings substantially increased and during our patrols we escaped many strafings thanks to the jungle which was almost always close to the road.*

*It was during this period that the Japanese attempted night landings in the south of Bataan and, although most of them were successfully repelled, some Jap soldiers managed to penetrate the defenses and set themselves up in trees to snipe at any moving target.*

*The situation with our defense was deteriorating and finally, on April 9th, our commander advised that the USA Forces officially surrendered.*

*We were instructed to destroy all useful equipment, fuel, supplies and arms and proceed to an assembly area at Mariveles Airport in southern Bataan.*

*The narrow highway was horribly overcrowded and the four of us decided to try to reach the coast and proceed along the shore to our destination. We had made this descent of the cliffs before and the next morning had no difficulty reaching the coast.*

*The coast was very rocky, difficult to walk on and bordered by high cliffs. We had a trip of perhaps 15 to 20 miles ahead of us and when the tide rose, we had to occasionally wade through deep water or swim.*

*After reaching the coast, we soon realized that the USA Forces on Corregidor Island did not surrender and their AA batteries and coastal artillery were still firing at the enemy.*

*Our first reaction was how could we escape to Corregidor? The distance was short - perhaps ranging from two to five miles - but without a boat it was impossible to cross.*

*Early in the afternoon, as we struggled south, we saw a boat - a small cabin cruiser anchored some 100 yards offshore and as we got closer we came across a cave in the cliff. Inside we found an old Chinese Mestizo cussing and cursing that there was something wrong with the engine and it would not start.*

*As one of our men was an experienced auto mechanic, we immediately decided to try and start the engine. Varak and I waded and then swam to the boat -- I to help him as he was not a good swimmer - and after a while he managed to solve the problem and start the engines.*

*We discussed our next move with the Chinaman and he told us that we could not cross directly to Corregidor from the spot where we were because the straits were heavily mined and we would be exposed to Japanese artillery fire now set up on top of the cliffs.*

*He suggested that we proceed south toward Mariveles, staying as close as possible to the coast, and he believed that there was a channel free of mines from there to Corregidor.*

*So that was our decision and we started our trip south. As we proceeded, we picked up more soldiers, who were struggling along the coast, until we hit our full capacity and well over it but we still had to pickup some more desperate and hysterical soldiers who threatened to blast us out of the water if we did not take them on.*

*By then we were so overloaded that we had to carefully distribute the weight and tell everyone to sit still and not to tilt the boat. My assignment was to go below deck where, in the small windowless cabin, we were packed - perhaps ten or more of us.*

*We finally started crossing the channel that the Chinaman had thought was free of mines and we hoped for the best.*

*Down below the situation was scary. We could not see anything and several times we had to struggle to subdue a hysterical soldier who desperately tried to go up top, which made the boat rock dangerously. It was so bad at one point that we had to beat him unconscious with our side arms to keep him quiet.*

*But we finally reached the Corregidor dock safely and disembarked only to be taken in custody by a detachment of Marines who were awaiting orders on what to do with us. We were herded in to a small shack ashore and what I still remember is that I saw a sugar container on the table. It was the first sugar I had seen in months and I grabbed it and ate it all, choking.*

*The Chinaman who saved us disappeared and we never saw or heard of him again.*

*Among the guards was a sergeant of Czech origin, second generation, who still spoke some Czech who was amazed to find us there and promised to help us find more permanent shelter. And, indeed, he did when later he lead us to a huge underground food warehouse located in a ravine not too far from the Malinta Tunnel entrance where the headquarters and hospital were located.*

*Well, it was heaven. We had plenty to eat, everyone was friendly and we felt safe and secure.*

*The bombings and artillery attacks increased every day till in the daylight hours they were almost continuous. We were safe as we were deep underground and only felt the whole place shaking when the bombs scored a direct hit. After a few days we no longer dared go out during the day. The artillery attacks were the most dangerous as there was no advance warning till the bombs hit.*

*One day our warehouse suffered a direct hit by a huge bomb that penetrated the reinforced concrete ceiling and two additional floors before it exploded. Fortunately, we were in a section where hundreds of sacks of rice were stored and they sheltered us from the flying shrapnel. Our feelings of safety were also shattered.*

*We were, however, reunited with four members of the Czech volunteer contingent (Maravek, Volny, Hirsch, L. Hermann) who were evacuated from Mariveles by the Navy, thanks to Volny's good connections. He was assigned as to interpreter to Navy Intelligence and so had made contacts and friends with some high-ranking officers.*

*The resistance of Corregidor did not last too long. Most of the heavily fortified big gun replacements were useless for an attack on the island from Mainland Bataan because they were built to face the open seas and the straits leading in to Manila Harbour. They had been designed to protect the entry to Manila Bay by sea and not invasion by landing crafts from the mainland. Rapidly the artillery*

*positions that had been built to protect us from invasion were destroyed and the ammunition started to run low.*

*Finally, during the night of May 5th, 1942, the Japanese successfully landed troops and tanks at the entrance to Malinta Tunnel, where there were thousands of people including hospital and headquarters personnel, and threatened to dynamite the entrances to the tunnel and bury everyone inside. The US Commander, General Wainwright, had to surrender.*

*The first Japanese soldier whom I encountered the next day set a bayonet against my chest and yelled "PESO. PESO!", probably the only non-Japanese words he knew. When I handed him my pocketbook and gave him all the cash, he pulled out all my documents and ripped them up and then when he came across some checks, my army paychecks, he again yelled the question "PESO? PESO?" and when I shook my head he ripped them up and threw them away. After a complete body search, he found only some cigarettes to take and left me to search another victim.*

*I quickly collected all the torn pieces of checks - which amounted to about \$1000. - and hid them away.*

*In the long run, I lost them anyway three years later in Japan during an air raid when all my possessions burned.*

*I must have been searched at least 20 times by every soldier who came along but I was a big disappointment. No more PESO.*

*During the next few days the POWs were assembled on a flat area near the waterfront.*

*There were about 12,000 of us and we were divided into two groups - Filipinos and Americans - separated by a barbed wire fence.*

*There was no shelter and we lived and slept on the bare ground. The heat during the day was intolerable and soon many prisoners developed oozing tropical ulcers.*

*The sanitary conditions were nonexistent and men relieved themselves wherever they could. There were no tools available to dig latrines.*

*The drinking water situation was desperate and we all had to wait in long lines at the few sources of water available. Only very few had been able to secure containers to store more water than just a canteen.*

*There were no food rations and we had to survive on what we managed to bring along or steal when some of us went on work duty.*

*We could not bathe nor wash our clothes although we were just a few hundred feet from the bay but always behind barbed wire and guarded by the Japs. Dysentery cases were increasing.*

*Finally, after about three weeks, the Japanese decided to relocate us to more permanent POW camps.*

*We were loaded on ships, crammed on top and below the decks for the short trip across the bay to Manila.*

*We were unloaded and had to wade ashore in an area south of the city at the start of the Roxas (then Dewey Blvd.)*

*We were formed into marching groups guarded by Japanese soldiers on horseback with whips and drawn sabers and so started the "Victory March" to show off the humiliated US soldiers to the Manila public.*

*We marched within a few blocks of where I lived before going to Bataan and where my friends still lived. Many of them were in the*

*audience but I did not see anybody I knew and there was no chance of them recognizing us in our filthy clothes and long hair with full beards.*

*And so we marched through the entire city to our destination which was the Bilibid prison, a large old facility for detention of convicted criminals.*

*In Bilibid we stayed only a few days.*

*We were introduced to what would be our diet for the duration of our internment - boiled rice three times a day with occasional additions of sweet potato vines, vegetable leaves, occasionally water buffalo soup, fish powder or some radishes.*

*Any combination was bland in flavor with not enough salt and never enough volume.*

*We were transported in groups by train - in cattle cars - by Cabanatuan in Nueva Ecija province, some distance north of Manila.*

*From the station we were marched to our camp, about 15 to 20 miles distant, again with no water and no food and in the heat of the day. Some men were already in such poor condition that they did not survive.*

*Our destination was a military camp, built for training Filipino troops shortly before the war, but never completely finished or occupied.*

*The camp consisted of long bamboo huts covered with palm frond branches common to most native Filipino houses called nipa shacks. There were no furnishings - we slept on the bare floor.*

*We did not work. Twice a day we had to assemble in formations on the parade grounds and were counted off and three times a day we were fed our meager rations of boiled rice.*



*We spent our time in boredom, complaining about our conditions, speculating about the state of the war or talking about food.*

*Most of us started to really suffer from malnutrition, unsanitary conditions and lack of physical comfort. Like many others, I suffered from Beriberi, which is extremely painful, weakening eyesight, jaundice and diarrhea.*

*A part of the camp had to be set up for patients who no longer were able to take care of themselves or were not ambulatory. Very few ever made it back. They died and were buried in mass graves.*

*One of our Czech boys - Joseph Varak - got so sick and suffered so from dysentery that he had to be moved there and we gave up on him. But a miracle happened! A message was smuggled to us from Manila that Joe's girlfriend who worked with him in the shoe factory and had come with the original group of Czechs from the Old Country, had given birth to a baby girl.*

*So we went to tell Varak before he died. He didn't seem to understand and was just blankly staring at us.*

*But to our utter disbelief he was released from the "hospital" a few days later, regained his appetite and slowly progressed to recovery.*

*He was never seriously sick during the rest of his prison stay but finally, in late 1944 or early 1945, lost his life when the Japanese transport he was on was bombed and sunk somewhere along the northern coast of Luzon.*

*His girlfriend, Pepca Zapletalova, and her daughter survived the war. She met a GI in Manila, got married and they moved to Tennessee where, hopefully, they lived happily ever after.*

*During an early stay in this camp, two young Navy officers were captured while attempting to escape. They were tied to poles erected*

*in the middle of the parade grounds and kept there, under guard and without food or water and exposed to the burning sun until their execution by firing squad, which we all had to witness.*

*At that time the Japanese camp commander issued instruction that if any prisoner escaped, ten men from his barracks would be chosen at random and executed. I did not hear of another escape after that.*

*There was another incident which I will never forget. The Japanese gave our mess hall a live water buffalo (Caribou) to slaughter and process to augment our food supply. The problem was that the kitchen crew had no tools to implement this. We were without arms, knives or tools to slaughter the poor animal. Eventually the animal's legs were tied and the helpless beast underwent a horrible ordeal.*

*They tried to crush its skull with rocks, pierce it's body with bamboo stakes and choke it with a rope noose. Nothing seemed to work and the poor animal was rolling on the ground and issuing terrifying sounds of pain. Finally, a Japanese soldier was permitted to use his rifle and finish the suffering animal off. Thank God that this was the last live animal that we received.*

*After about three months in the camp, I started to suffer from Beriberi, an extremely painful disease that starts in your toes and makes them extremely sensitive. It feels like somebody is sticking a needle in your toes. I also suffered from Hepatitis and, as a result, developed a revulsion for food, as scarce as it was, and really had to force myself to get the rice down. I was losing control of my bowels and this caused difficult and painful problems for me, particularly during the twice daily parades where we had to stand for a long time to count off. The guards accepted no excuses and everyone had to remain standing in ranks till the end.*

Eventually, in October of 1942, most of us were marched to another POW camp in the vicinity of Cabanatuan. This was a much larger camp and we were reunited with some of the other Czechs. Toni Volny, who worked for the Czech Slovak Embassy for several years before the war, was appointed interpreter by the US Camp Administration and lived in different barracks within the camp. Through his contacts with the Japanese he was often able to help us.

After a brief stay, the Japanese decided to start a farm near and camp and almost all of us had to go out and work there. First, roads had to be built, ground leveled, irrigation ditches dug, rice paddies constructed and flooded and finally the planting started. The work was hard. We worked ten hours each day with a short lunch break when we ate a small rice ration which we had brought with us in our mess kits. The Japanese guards were mean and often brutal. The work, mostly stop labor, was boring and exhausting.

I was still sick, my dysentery had returned, and I had severe deterioration of my eyesight. It got so bad that I could not tell the weeds from the vegetables when I was working which occasionally resulted in punishment by the Japanese guards who assumed I was stealing the vegetables.

When I could not work any more I was transferred to a hospital camp which was much worse. Most people were sicker than I was and dozens were dying every day.

My friends were not allowed to come visit. The only work, if you were considered strong enough, was digging graves and burying the dead.

Eventually, around Christmas, we received some Red Cross medicines and food. This helped me get back on my feet and as soon as I was strong enough, I requested a transfer back to the main camp and to work.

*Finally, at the end of January, 1943 I was allowed to go back and was thrilled to join my friends Hrdna, Hirsch and Varak, with whom I moved in again.*

*There was some outside help arriving in the he camp and we even managed, occasionally, to get some financial help from Gerbec in Manila which was brought to the camp by a German Catholic priest. With money we could buy bananas, other fruit and nuts and occasionally even eggs in the commissary and we could always trade on the ever-existing black market. The most popular and valuable trading item was tobacco.*

*Hdrina got himself a job as a caribou cart driver and so on his frequent trips to the city of Cabanatuan for supplies, became an important conduit in smuggling things into camp from messages to food and medicines.*

*One of the keys to survival was to have good buddies who would support and help you and in that respect I was very fortunate.*

*There was Hirsch, Hrdina and Varak. We lived in the same hut and shared everything.*

*After I got back from the hospital. I started to work on the farm again. The hours were very long -- ten hours per day with ten days on and then one day off.*

*The guards were sometimes brutal. One put out a burning cigarette on my back.*

*Occasionally we got a break from the monotony and went on a different work detail cutting and gathering wood in a nearby forest. The guards came along on horseback.*

*Being in the deep woods, lightly guarded, brought thoughts of escape but the Jap rule of killing ten innocent prisoners after each escape made it unthinkable.*

*But after two or three months of digging and weeding life became more and more monotonous. After returning to camp and standing in line for count-off and then again for food, we were really too tired to think of any entertainment.*

*We usually sat under the eaves of the huts, exchanging scuttlebutt and talking about food. There were very few books to read as the only ones around were those brought in by individual prisoners. And there were not many because other things were so much more important to bring with you when you moved from camp to camp. The few books that were brought in suffered much damage as pages were torn out and used to roll cigarettes, so if you wanted to read a book you either had to have another one to trade or buy or borrow if for payment in food or tobacco.*

*Hirsch and I finally managed to get hold of a Mickey Spillane mystery novel with the last 10 pages missing. But we had a book to trade and we were in business.*

*Another important and necessary diversion was shaking out our clothes and blankets so we could catch and kill the bed bugs.*

*Some men started tiny vegetable gardens close to their huts but these did not last long as almost all the crops were looted and stolen.*

*The food situation improved somewhat due to help smuggled into camp from the outside, some meager Red Cross package distribution and some produce from the prison farm, although this was minimal since most of it went to the Japanese garrison.*

*In early October, 1943, the Japanese selected about 600-700 fairly able-bodied POWs to send to work on another project. I was among those selected and so were Otto Hirsch and Leo Hermann.*

*Otto was my best friend and buddy. He was two years older than I, a graduate of a classical gymnasium in Moravia, intellectual and even-tempered but somewhat impractical. He came from a well-to-do Jewish family in Moravia, managed to escape with his brother, a doctor, before the Nazi prosecution and got a visa to go to Shanghai but when they docked in Manila he skipped ship and, with the help of a local Jewish organization, found shelter. For a while he even worked for our Company as a shoe salesman. His brother became a ship's doctor on a British liner and eventually a physician in the British Navy. Otto's parents perished in the Holocaust.*

*We two were rather excited about the change but Leo Hermann was distressed. Partly due to help sent by his wife and smuggled into camp, and partly because of his natural trading skills, he became one of the big dealers in camp and even established some trading contacts with the Jap guards. If you wanted something really badly and had a way to pay for it, you went to Leo. He even lived in one of the camp administration buildings and I do not remember seeing him on work details too often.*

*It was painful to leave our other Czech friends behind: Volny, who became camp interpreter and was very helpful in relations with the Japanese; Varak, the excellent all-around mechanic, started making furniture for us and even made pots and eating utensils from scraps of metal; Bzoch and Fred Hermann, who shared our barracks and managed to get a "goldbrick" job on the farm supervising and maintaining the water pumps which irrigated the farm. There were also the two Lenk brothers who lived in another barrack but were always good for a story or a hot rumor.*

*We were transferred to a camp near Las Pinas, not far and south of Manilla. The barracks were originally built for the new Philippine*

*Army before the war. They had been hardly used, built above ground with good shower and latrine facilities and surrounded by a solid high fence which kept us isolated from the outside world. All in all, it was the best facility we had been in since becoming POWs.*

*After a few days of getting organized in the camp, the Japs finally decided to introduce us to our new task.*

*We were marched to a flat or slightly undulating area a couple of miles from the camp, partially covered with abandoned rice paddies, and told that we would be building an airfield. There was no use objecting that under the Geneva Convention POWs were not to be used to work on military projects.*

*Gradually we built and laid a narrow gauge rail line. We were furnished wooden box carts probably brought in from some abandoned mine which were approximately 6x4x3 and issued picks and shovels made from old oil drums and really too flimsy for the job.*

*We were divided into groups, most working on loosening and leveling the soil while others were assigned to load and push the carts to a lower area which had to be filled.*

*Otto and I with two other men were assigned to loading and pushing the carts. In the confusion of getting organized we managed to select what seemed to be the smallest box and got ourselves a spot toward the end of the line of carts, knowing full well that the heaviest pressure by the guards would be on the first carts to work fast because the rest of the line could only move as fast as they did.*

*In order to get the same cart every day, we painted the name "Lady Aster" on it and that started the trend of others marking their carts.*

*It was the beginning of the dry season and the ground was dry and hard as a rock, making it difficult to work with our primitive tools.*

*The carts had to be fully loaded and when the signal came from the front of the line, we would pass a couple of guards who, if they did not feel we had a maximum load, would start beating us.*

*Our inadequate and monotonous diet consisted of boiled rice and a few greens or vines from sweet potatoes. Once in a while we were allowed to buy bananas from the Japanese if we had money. There was a warehouse full of Red Cross food in the camp and occasionally we got a meager issue. Some men were so desperate that they started to catch rats and grill them on an open fire. That's something I never tried.*

*After about two months of this drudgery, I got a lucky break. The administration decided to open a shoe repair shop and after interviewing several candidates, they selected me because of my background in the shoes business. It was a frustrating job but it kept me in the camp. The work was much easier than digging at the airfield and I even managed to get more food.*

*Our tools were very primitive and basically we only had old automobile tires to repair soles and heels.*

*But this "vacation" did not last too long. The Japs were in a hurry to complete the runways and more and more work was demanded from the prisoners.*

*They set a quota stating that only 10% could report ill, while the actual number was probably 30%. It was a difficult and thankless duty for our American doctor to decide who could be sent out to fill the quota.*

*In the meantime, a shipment of footwear arrived and it was decided to close down shoe repair and send me to the airfield. That was about the middle of January, 1944. I rejoined my group leveling and loading*



*the box carts and pushing them to where fill was needed. The ground was now so dried out and hard that it felt like we were working in a rock quarry. It was also very hot. We had a daily quota to fulfill and since we could not start pushing and unloading the carts till they were all filled, we were often pressed into loading the carts ahead of us. We learned fast to pace our work.*

*The conditions were so bad that there were more and more cases of self inflicted wounds, most often broken arms.*

*The dry season slowly turned into the rainy season and the clay rock turned to mud. Even torrential rains were no excuse for not working.*

*There was not much we could do to relieve this tedium. Occasionally we got some rations from the Red Cross supply and this usually started furious trading activity. Not everyone got the same thing, so we had food, sweets, coffee and tobacco to trade.*

*In our group, which consisted of some Swedish and Norwegian civilians, we played a lot of chess and bridge. The others played differed card games, mostly poker or a Navy dice game called "Acey Ducey".*

*But the greatest escape from reality was sleep and dreaming which could carry each of us into a wonderful and different world.*

*We talked about suicide but I really do not remember any actual cases at that time.*

*Even though we were so much closer to Manila than in the Cabanatuan camp, we had almost no contact with the outside world.*

*The priests were not allowed to visit the camp, there were no Filipinos working on the airport, nor did we see anyone on the daily march to and from work as we went through a totally deserted area. The camp*

*supplies were brought in by trucks manned by Japanese and so even the supply of rumors was minimal.*

*A couple of times we got outside mail, but since I could not expect letters from my family in Europe and the friends in Manila were not permitted to communicate with the POWs, it was a great surprise to me once to read my name on the list of mail recipients.*

*But the surprise turned into shock when I finally got the letter. It dated back to 1941 and was from the New Yorker Hotel advising me that my account was over due \$14. It had been forwarded, re-forwarded and re-re-forwarded till it finally reached me.*

*Toward the end of May, just before the start of another rainy season, I got an infection in an ingrown toenail and the doctor decided to operate because of the danger of blood poisoning. There were no painkillers available – and I had four men holding me down during the operation. At the same time, the doctor performed a circumcision because of hygienic problems. After ten days recuperating, I had to go back to work.*

*That was my last “vacation” in the Philippines and from then on we worked every day without a break. The rainy season started and we worked in rain, mud and storms until September 20, 1944.*

*At that point, we were working in a rocky creek bed next to the airfield, dynamiting rock, breaking it into smaller pieces with sledge hammers, and piling it up to be transported to the landing area to reinforce and stabilize it.*

*It was a dark cloudy day and we were expecting rain. As I looked in the sky, I saw a six-plane formation approaching us, which was nothing unusual, but then we saw a single plane flying directly toward the formation. Two planes peeled off and blasted the single plane to bits, with debris falling close to us.*

*In a few minutes the sky was full of planes. The Americans were back after two and a half years. We nearly went crazy with excitement. But then the shrapnel and bullets started to fall, and we, as well as the Japanese guards, ran for shelter wherever we could find it.*

*It was a great air show and the Japs were able to put up only weak resistance. We counted about six Jap planes shot down before the rest of them fled.*

*The Japanese were in shock and we were marched back to the camp. From that day on, the air raids continued but we still had to go to work in the field. When the raids started, we as well as the Japs, ran for shelter and foxholes.*

*To our great delight, the airfield that we had built for over a year with our sweat and blood was being destroyed.*

*On September 30, 1944 we went to work as usual but early in the afternoon we were unexpectedly marched back to the camp.*

*Upon our return we were issued Japanese winter uniforms and were advised that we would be moving the next morning.*

*With the exception of about 100 POWs, we were transported to the main pier to be loaded on ships.*

*Two weeks earlier Leo Hermann who suffered from asthma had been transferred to a hospital. When we got to the dock POWs from other camps were already there and Leo was among them, having been brought on a stretcher. By evening, when they started to load us on the ships, there were nearly 2000 of us.*

*Thus began for us a descent in to hell, which lasted 39 days. Later in history these transports came to be known as HELL SHIPS.*

*One by one we climbed down a narrow ladder to a cargo hold which only recently had been used to transport coal. The wooden floor was covered with layers of coal dust.*

*We climbed down through a small opening in the hatch cover, then down a steep ladder. We descended about 25' into an area approximately 80' x 80'. It was a slow, seemingly endless process, as they packed about 700 of us into the hold.*

*By the time they got us all in, there was hardly enough space to stand or sit and, in addition, we each had a sack with our personal belongings. They secured the cover of the hatch with heavy beams and steel cables, leaving only a small opening for the ladder, which was then pulled up. We all thought we could not last more than 48 hours before suffocating. The first night and day we got neither food nor water and were suffering from thirst.*

*The next day we were advised that we should prepare for a twelve day trip. The conditions were so terrible that it is hard for me to describe them.*

*No one was allowed to go out on the open deck. Soon some men started to pass out. Others went crazy and were totally out of control. Some died.*

*In order to gain more space, some managed to attach their blankets or shelter halves to the side walls or even to the ceiling so, eventually, we could at least sit up, one against the other, but at night we just slept in a pile of twisted bodies.*

*Our food rations consisted of two meager mess kits of boiled rice and half a canteen of water, delivered to us on a line through the small opening in the ceiling.*

*We were starving but the real suffering came from thirst.*

*We traveled all night and finally, early in the morning, were unloaded somewhere in west central Formosa. We waited for about four hours. It was bitterly cold but we did not complain. There was plenty of fresh air and plenty of room to stretch out.*

*We were finally transported by bus to our new camp, which was called Shirakwa. It was located on a plain with mountains to the east and, evidently, it was a camp for high-ranking officers from the Philippines, Hong Kong, Java and Singapore. There were some merchant marine officers there as well. We were told that just a short time before all the officers above the rank of colonel had been shipped out.*

*Most of the POWs were British and Australian and were in pretty good shape, even though the food was not that plentiful. They had managed to hold on to most of their personal possessions and were very good to us. We got shoes, warm clothing and even cigarettes. I was assigned my own bed with a straw mattress.*

*After a few days, when we had recuperated, we were sent to work on a farm. The work was not hard, the hours short and we even enjoyed the opportunity to get out of camp. There was not too much food, but it was adequate.*

*I made many friends, we played a lot of bridge and there was even a library. It was, by far, the best camp I was in.*

*I got back in pretty good shape, gained weight and was up to 140 pounds. I felt pretty good.*

*In January the Allies started to bomb regularly but the targets were far enough away from us so we were not in immediate danger. We just had to draw all the curtains, extinguish lights and stay inside.*

*But all this was too good to stay unchanged.*

*At the end of January, 1945, some 200 of the POWs from the Philippines were ordered to pack up for departure. We suspected that we would be sent to Japan. We went north by passenger train until we reached a small port city called Taihoku.*

*There we were loaded again on a cargo ship, the Melbourne Maru, and proceeded north. This time the conditions were much better. We each had enough room to stretch, lights were kept on all night, food and water were adequate and every day we could go topside for some fresh air. We soon discovered that the boat was carrying a cargo of sugar and some food, and soon after supplemented our diet well.*

*During one of our stops, the ship was strafed and bombarded but, fortunately, the damage was light and we could continue the next morning. We sailed north through the RyuKyu chain of islands, stopping and seeking safe shelter at a small island almost every night.*

*After two weeks, we finally landed in Japan on the Island of Kyushu in the port of Moji.*

*This portion of Japan had not yet been bombed by the Allies. All was in tact, and there and dozens of ships in the harbor being loaded as if the war was thousands of miles away.*

*We were lined up in a parade ground, divided into groups, and had to wait eight hours in the bitter cold for our transport.*

*For the first time since taken POW, we were issued bread and later informed that we would be sent to work in coalmines for a civilian firm, Mitsue, but still under army supervision.*

*We were told that we would go to the city of Omuta, which is about 50 miles north of Nagasaki across a bay. There was no blackout at all*

*and things looked so normal that we began to realize it would still take a long time before we could hope to be liberated.*

*Our transport arrived at our destination about two am. We were told that it was called Fukuoka Camp #17.*

*It was a large camp, perhaps 2000 ft x 1000 ft, surrounded by a high wooden fence topped with barbed wire and charged with electric current. There was a huge parade ground in the middle with air raid shelters underneath.*

*We were taken to a spacious dining hall and served a good hot soup and – again – real bread.*

*After the meal we were lined up with our possessions and searched. All forbidden items were confiscated – in my case that included pencils, paper, a rope and, what hurt most, a sack of sugar, which I had salvaged from our last boat transport. We were stripped of all our clothes, deloused, and issued warm underwear.*

*After that we were marched to a big swimming pool, in a bathhouse, which was filled with steaming hot water. We were ordered to wash up and jump in the pool. The guards pushed those who did not jump, and anyone who tried to climb out was pushed back. We really suffered from the heat but had to stay for about five minutes before they let us out. We didn't realize at that time that this would be a daily routine and that we would get used to it.*

*We were taken to our barracks – long, narrow wooden shacks divided into five rooms which each housed ten POWs. We each got two padded blankets (futons) and three blankets. There was plenty of space for each of us when we spread them on the floor. After the bath when we were comfortable and warm, those who could lit a cigarette (I had a pipe and some loose tobacco) and we thought we were lucky to be in such a good camp.*

*In the next ten days there wasn't much for us to do. We were issued an American overcoat and special overalls to be worn when we went to work in the coalmines. The worst part were the morning and evening parades when we all had to line up and wait to be counted. We each had to remember the Japanese number assigned to us and yell it out. Mine was 1859 and I still remember it as SEVHAPUYAKUROKYJEWQUE.*

*Compared to our past experience, the food was not too bad. We had hot soup with some vegetables and rice in the morning and evening, with an occasional issue of bread and for lunch, when at work, we were given a small wooden box with rice and, often, radishes. As usual there was just not enough of it.*

*Early in March we were assigned to a day shift and went to work in the mines.*

*We had to get up at 3:30 in the morning, march to the dining hall, had breakfast and were issued a wooden lunch box of rice to take along*

*We assembled on the parade ground, were counted off and, in formation, marched to the coal mine where we each issued a miner's headlamp with a battery, which connected, to our belts. We took a small narrow gauge railroad underground, traveling about one-half mile. Then we walked for about 20 minutes in low, narrow tunnels until we came to our office station. We were divided into working squads and each one had its own gang boss – mostly Japanese ranging in age from 16 to 60. There were also Korean and Taiwanese among the bosses.*

*Our duties varied. Sometimes we build supports for new shafts. This was very hard work because we had to carry the logs on our shoulders, two men to a log. The logs were up to 12 feet long and weighed between 200 and 300 pounds. The tunnels were low and because of our height we had to carry them in a crouching position, which made it doubly difficult. We learned to coordinate our steps*



with the leading partner and chant YO HO YO HO, which made it easier.

There were often obstacles in our way, which meant that we had to take the logs off our shoulders, slide them along the ground and then reload. Usually we had to carry the logs for about 1/2 mile. Our "must" assignment was to build three supports each day with a total of nine logs. That took us about six hours plus time to adjust and set up the supports.

Our other assignments included moving equipment, electric motors, conveyors and rails. We usually had to work in new and hard to access shafts and tunnels, sometimes in great heat, sometimes up to our knees in water and almost always cold water dripped from the ceiling. And in those conditions we worked barefoot.

At other times we had to dynamite layers of coal, then dig and load it into carts on an electric rail. Our assignment was to load three metric tons per person and we couldn't stop until we reached this goal so sometimes that meant foregoing the lunch break.

We usually worked till 4 pm but by the time we got out of the mine, bathed, changed and marched to the camp it was often 6pm. Between six and seven we had to assemble on the parade ground to be counted off. Only then did we get dinner and afterward we were so tired that we literally just passed out. While the food was better than we were used to, it was not enough to sustain us for the heavy work. Soon we started to lose weight.

Probably the most dangerous assignment was when we had to go into abandoned tunnels to recover timber supports. Evidently there was a great shortage of timber in Japan and, in order to reuse it for the new shafts being dug, we had to take down every second or third ceiling support and carry it to the next project. In several cases the ceiling collapsed and the miners were badly hurt.

*Another risk came from the solid boulders embedded in the soft tunnel walls. Occasionally the pressure on the rock was so great that, without warning, a boulder would shoot out of the wall like a cannon ball causing great damage and even death.*

*Originally there were three of us Czechs in the camp. Leo Hermann was sick and went to the mines only a few times. He suffered from asthma and malnutrition and, what was worse, lost the desire to keep on living. He died on the first of May.*

*My good friend and buddy Otto Hirsch went to work with me every day until he lost his eyeglasses. Because his sight was so poor, he wasn't able to work in the mines and was only assigned to topside duties in the camp.*

*My health was holding out and I did not miss a day of work....despite my excuses! Nothing to be particularly proud of. I was lucky, had a few real close escapes but no injuries. Time dragged on and we were all starting to lose hope.*

*Early that summer, the Americans began their bombardment and there was hardly a day or night when we didn't have an air raid warning. We spent the days in the mines and our nights also underground in very cramped quarters. Our rations were cut and the Japs became more and more brutal. Prisoners were often tortured or even killed for minor infractions. From what we could see on our way to the mines, the countryside was burned out from bombs and the people were living in makeshift shelters, often just holes in the ground.*

*There were less and less Japanese coming to work but new reinforcements, slaves from Korea and China, came but, under severe penalty, we were not allowed to speak to each other.*

*During the night of the third day after the proclamation all Japanese soldiers disappeared. When we woke in the morning, they were all gone and in a meeting with our officers, we were told that the camp was now under our control and that a detail would be selected to take over the weapons the Japs had left behind. They would be used to maintain the safety of the camp. About sixty rifles were discovered in the guardhouse, as well as some ammunition.*

*There were about 1700 of us in the camp. We still did not feel secure and didn't want to provoke the Japanese as they could have slaughtered us in a few minutes. That part of Japan is very densely populated and we were vastly outnumbered.*

*But things began to change slowly. First, children came to the fence and begged for food. Later they were followed by adults who tried to trade clothing or any of their other meager possessions for food. Eventually some of our more daring men visited the town where all seemed peaceful but there was nothing to buy for money. When I first visited the town with Otto, we still felt insecure and strange walking around without a guard holding a bayonet behind us.*

*Around August 28 we first saw American planes circling above the camp, parachuting us some food, but we had no real news because we didn't have radios. We waited and waited, and became more impatient. There were rumors that the Allied had landed in Nagasaki, but we weren't sure. We were now moving freely around the town and even took some short trips into the countryside. We found out that trains were operating and some soldiers even decided to take the train to Tokyo.*

*But Otto and I decided that we had waited so long and survived so much that we should wait a little longer before exposing ourselves to unknown danger. We had enough to eat and even had plenty of cigarettes as well as those 60 rifles within the camp to keep us safe.*

*We got hold of more weapons, confiscated some vehicles and ordered the Japanese to provide more food for us. We even recruited some of our former foremen and gang bosses from the mine to come to the camp and work for us cleaning up, cooking for us and taking over all the dirty jobs including cleaning of the latrines. They were only too glad to do it as they were generously rewarded with food.*

*After the first appearance of the Air Force, the planes came frequently, dropping us drums of food and supplies.*

*Still, some tragedies took place. Some of the parachutes didn't open, causing the drums to crash into a waiting crowd, killing some men. There were also cases of men dying from over eating.*

*Finally, on September 13, the first American appeared in the camp – not a soldier but a reporter from some Chicago newspaper. He was the first free American we had seen in nearly four years and was full of authentic news. He told us that there was a new president, that the Japanese finally surrendered after two super destructive bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that we had not yet been repatriated because the occupation had not yet reached the outer islands. He took many names and addresses and promised to communicate with our relatives. It was all too much to absorb.*

*On September 16, a detail of about 30 US soldiers arrived with instructions to arrange our evacuation to Nagasaki and on to the ships that would carry us away from Japan. It was a miracle that they survived our hugs and embraces.*

*We were transported by train to the Nagasaki harbor, passing through the city that had been totally devastated by the atomic bomb.*

*At the train station we were welcomed by a military band and by nurses with coffee and goodies. They were the first white women we had seen in nearly four years. It was an emotional as well as strange feeling and we really did not know how to react.*

*We were taken to an area where we were told to discard all our clothing, get deloused and take a hot shower before we were issued clean underwear and uniforms.*

*We were finally under the American flag and feeling free.*

*Next, we were transported to an aircraft carrier, billeted in clean cabins and told that our first destination was the island of Okinawa. We got haircuts, medical attention, all the food we could eat (and more) and a free run of the ship.*

*In Okinawa we went through an initial interrogation and those with serious medical problems were shipped by air to the USA while the rest of us would proceed to Manila to a Replacement Camp for final sorting out.*

*We boarded another transport vessel and landed in Manila on September 28, 1945. There was no big welcome party at the pier but we were each met by a Red Cross lady and given cigarettes and chocolate.*

*We boarded buses and were transported to a camp about 25 miles from Manila called the Replacement Depot.*

*The devastation of Manila was catastrophic and could certainly be compared with Nagasaki.*

*For the next few days we were interrogated in detail about how and when we joined the Army, in what capacity, where we were sent and what we did. The information was verified by communicating with officers who had been in charge of us and eventually we were identified as Repatriated Foreign Nationals, employees of the Department of War. We received back pay for the entire war and in about a week advised that we were released from military control.*

*During the interrogation we were free to visit Manila and, in the process, met some acquaintances that survived the war there.*

*One of them was Alfred Fishgrund, a good friend of mine who worked for the Company as the retail sales manager. He told me that the Gerbec family survived and that they had left soon after their liberation to visit their families in the USA and Europe. They were not expected back until May or June.*

*He was staying in their suburban Manila home that had not been damaged and was fully staffed with servants. He suggested that I move in with him as soon as I was released from military control.*

*This was a wonderful break for me, as the servants, some of whom I knew from before the war, took excellent care of me.*

*In the meantime, I had to reestablish my status as I had no proof of citizenship from neither any country nor a residential permit to stay in the Philippines. The last problem was solved when I agreed to pay income tax on my war earnings to the city government and they, in exchange, gave me a permanent residential permit.*

*Eventually – in December – I got news from my family in Czechoslovakia. They had all survived the war but after the communists took control, my father was prosecuted as an exploiter of the workingmen and sentenced to hard labor in the local sugar refinery. He recommended that I delay my visit till the situation stabilized. And so it was that I didn't meet and visit my family until 24 years later, Christmas of 1959.*

*I applied for an immigration visa to the USA and was advised by the American Consul that my application would be treated favorably and that I would not have to go through the quota system, but that it would still take a few months.*

*In the meantime, my friend Fishgrund and I got in touch with the export division of the Bata Shoe Co. in New York and we started to work on importing to the starved Manila market. The major problem was the lack of shipping space and, to a degree, the lack of available goods in the USA. But almost everything we could get shipped, we could sell with ease – from shoes to cosmetics, from beer to glassware and so we made some pretty good money.*

*Finally, late in April of 1946, I was granted my immigration visa to the USA and secured departure on a military transport to San Francisco for the early part of May.*

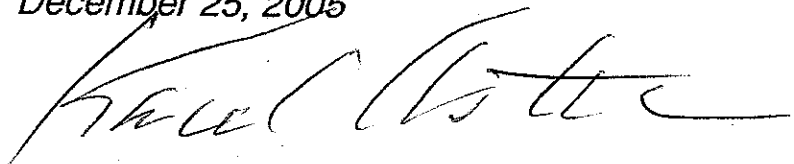
*Before my departure, I spent a few days with Ludvik Gerbec whose family was coming to Manila on a ship, which, before docking in Manila, had to unload its cargo that was destined for the Southern Philippine Islands. When the ship was relatively close to Manila, UTA, as we called him, managed to get a lift on a seaplane while his family spent another three weeks on the boat. And so I did not get to meet Jenny and Joan until 13 years later when they decided to move to the USA.*

*While still in Manila, I found out that out of the 14 Czechs who offered their services to the retreating US Army at the end of December, 1941, seven had perished during the war and seven survived.*

*After the war, I stayed in touch with only Otto Hirsch, who had settled in California, Karel Dancak in New York, Arnost Moravek who had returned to Czechoslovakia and Norbert Schmelkes who had rejoined his wife and her family in Mexico. Fred Hermann was killed a few years after his return to the USA in a civilian air crash. Hans Lenk, who suffered from tuberculosis, died from his disease before getting his immigration visa.*

*And now I am the last one who still remains alive to tell the story.*

*Captiva Island, Florida      December 25, 2005*



## 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.



1

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS  
SUPREME COMMANDER FOR THE ALLIED POWERS  
LEGAL SECTION

Tokyo, Japan  
9 May, 1947  
APO 500

File No. 014.13  
Public Relations Informational Summary No 574  
SUBJECT: Result of the Trial of Junsaburo TOSHIBA et al.

Death by hanging for two; 25, 20 and 10 year imprisonment at hard labor were for four and the remaining two of the eight defendants were acquitted. These were the verdicts handed down by the Military Commission hearing in the case against the eight Japanese charged with being concerned in the deaths of more than 1300 prisoners of war being transported from Manila to Moji, Japan, where they were destined to be disposed throughout Japan for use in labor battalions.

Junsaburo TOSHIBA, former Lieutenant and Guard Commander aboard the "Hell Ship" was found guilty of murder and supervising the murder of at least 16 men. In other specifications, the accused was found guilty of causing the deaths of numerous other prisoners of war. TOSHIBA was the first to receive the death sentence, the other was Kazutane AIHARRA Lance Corporal... The prisoners nicknamed him "Air Raid" and all of them would take cover to escape being beaten by AIHARRA. He was in charge of the gardening details and other details the prisoners were working on during their stay in Cabanutuan. He was sentenced to hang for killing numerous American Prisoners of War and participating in the decapitation and stabbing of 15 others.

Shusuke WADA, whose charges paralleled those of TOSHIBA, was the official interpreter for the guard group. He was found guilty of causing the deaths of numerous American and Allied Prisoners of War by neglecting to transmit to his superiors requests for adequate quarters, food, drinking water and medical attention. WADA was sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor.

Sukatoshi TRANQUE, Sergeant Major, was found guilty and sentenced to 25 years at hard labor. He was found guilty of the charge and specification charging him with the killing of 15 prisoners of war at the San Fernando Cemetery by decapitation and stabbing.

Jiro UEDA, Private, was found guilty of the charge and specifications and was sentenced to 20 years at hard labor. He was also connected with the killing of 15 prisoners of war at the San Fernando Cemetery.

Sho HATTORI, Sergeant of the Guard, was found guilty of the charge and specifications four. As Sergeant of the guard he deprived the prisoners of drinking water and failed to restrain Japanese Military personnel subject to his supervision, from beating the prisoners. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment at hard labor.

Hisao YOSHIDA, guard, and Risaku KOBAYASHI, medical corpsmen, were acquitted. They were charged with being connected in the murder of the 15 sick prisoners of war at the San Fernando Cemetery.

The charges against TOSHIBA AND WADA are almost parallel. Both are charged with being responsible with the death and inhuman treatment received by the prisoners. TOSHIBA is charged with failing to provide adequate quarters, food, drinking water and medical attention, and by refusing to provide reasonable measures for the protection of the prisoners from the hazards of war. It was charged that TOSHINO did willfully kill an American Prisoner of War by shooting him. Another charge against the accused was the fact that he ordered and permitted his military subordinates to kill 15 American Prisoners of War by stabbing and shooting at San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippine Islands.

WADA was charged with refusing to transmit to his superiors requests made by the prisoner commanders and failing to provide

adequate quarters, food, drinking water and medical attention.

The other members in the group of defendants are charged variously with taking part in the decapitation of the 15 Prisoners at San Fernando, Pampanga, and with numerous beatings and other brutalities which occurred during the voyage from Manila to Moji.

The Oryoku Maru sailed from Manila on December 13, 1944. It was bombed by American planes at Subic Bay. The ship was damaged so badly that the prisoners and all other occupants were moved from the ship and interned at Olongapo Naval Base. While there, the prisoners were treated as animals. The group of prisoners were then moved to San Fernando, La Union, from whence they boarded the Enoura Maru and Brazil Maru, both Japanese transport ships which were to take them to Takao, Formosa. The ships arrived at Formosa and while laying in the harbor, were bombed. The Enoura Maru was damaged so badly that all the prisoners were moved on to the Brazil Maru. After several days at Takao, the Brazil Maru sailed for Moji, Japan, arriving on or about January 30, 1945.

Of the 1619 prisoners who boarded the Oryoku Maru at Manila, approximately 450 survived to disembark at Moji.

In making a statement on the case, Mr. Alva C. Carpenter, Chief of the Legal Section, General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, says "Of all the cases of brutality and mistreatment accorded prisoners of war that have come out of World War 11, none can compare with the torment and torture suffered by our soldiers who were prisoners of war of the Japanese aboard the ships Oryoku Maru, Brazil Maru and Endora Maru on the voyage from Manila to Japan during the months of December, 1944 and January, 1945. It is a saga of men

driven to madness by sadistic captors. Today, of the 1619 men who set sail on the voyage, less than 200 are alive. I have read diaries, written at the time, tomes of recorded testimony, have talked to survivors and no place in recorded history can one find anything so gruesome and horrible. No mitigating circumstances can explain or condone such cruelty. The callous and vile conduct of the captors will live in infamy.”

The prosecutors for the case were Mr. Allan R. Morrison of 4496 Aukai Street, Honolulu, Hawaii; Mr. Thomas D. Aitken of 540 Stockton Street, San Francisco, California and Mr. Leonard Rand of 537 Summer Avenue, Newark, New Jersey.

There were originally nine defendants in this case. When the Prosecution rested its case, the defense made a motion for the dismissal of the case against Shin KAJIYAMA, the Captain of the Oryoku Maru. The motion was sustained by the Commission on the grounds that it was developed in the course of the trial that there was nothing which KAJIYAMA could have done to have prevented the atrocities. It was brought out during the trial that KAJIYAMA had protested taking the prisoners aboard the ship at the start and continued to protest and was threatened with court-martial if he did not take the prisoners aboard the ship without further argument. The evidence further indicates that he had made several attempts to alleviate the condition of the prisoners but, inasmuch as he was a civilian merchant man in command of a ship chartered by the Army, the group commander refused to let him do anything on behalf of the prisoners. The Court, therefore, saw nothing for which he could be held.

In the fall and winter of 1944, the Japanese High Command had decided to transport all able-bodied prisoners of war captured in the Philippines to Japan for use as slave labor. The case against the eight defendants concerned a specific case in which 1619 prisoners of war

were herded aboard the Oryuko Maru, a Japanese ship which was later christened the "Hell Ship". Christened with blood and sweat of prisoners of war. The story of the trip of the 1619 prisoners of war was a choking, gruesome, repulsive and hideous tale. The story that unfolds for the court and the world by the prosecution was a story of large scale suffering, torture, agony, horror, bloodshed, murder and death. It was an Odyssey which began on December 13, 1944 when a group of prisoners variously estimated at between 1619 and 1630 shuffled through the gates of the old Bilibad prison in Manila and trudged wearily to the harbor for embarkation on the Oryudo Maru. These prisoners had been rounded up in compliance with a directive to send all able-bodied prisoners to Japan for labor, and it appeared that the test as to whether or not a man was able-bodied was "can he walk". Of course, some of these prisoners had to be helped along by their comrades and some of the collapsed beyond the help of their comrades and had to be picked up by trucks - but that did not affect their status as "able-bodied". The Japanese were scraping pretty hard at the bottom of the barrel when they rounded up this gang of "able-bodied" laborers. There were 92 Lieutenant Colonels, 5 Commanders, 170 Majors, 14 Lieutenant Commanders, 261 Army and Marine Corps Captains, 36 Naval Lieutenants, 400 Army Lieutenants, 12 JQ Naval Lieutenants, 31 Ensigns, 154 Warrant Officers, 375 Army, Navy and Marine noncoms, 181 Army, Navy and Marine enlisted personnel below the rank of noncom and 47 civilians. Most of the enlisted men were medical personnel and the largest class of commissioned officers consisted of Chaplains, Medical and Dental personnel.

The prisoners were hustled up the gangplank and jammed in to three holds with all the pandemonium of a herd of cattle being stampeded over the ramps and into the slaughter pens of the Chicago abattoirs. The Odyssey ended on or about January 30, 1946 when about 450 half-naked emaciated corpses shivered down the gangplank of the Brazil

Maru in Moji, Japan. Of those who disembarked in Moji, not one was able to walk normally and more than one-half being carried ashore. Many died within a few weeks as a result of the trip. Today it is estimated there are about 200 to 300 of the original 1619 men who boarded the Oryoku Maru in Manila still alive.

Those men who did not reach Moji died of suffocation, starvation, dehydration, disease, bombing, shooting and beheading and every single death that occurred was caused by, or at least contributed, to, by the defendants TASHINO and WADA. The other defendants were involved in only a part of this mass murder.