** William L. Eldridge**

***A Prisoner of War***

by William L. Eldridge PFC - United States Army 1941 – 1945

Photo - Churchill Downs, KY 2009

**CHAPTER I**

*This story is being written close the fifty year anniversary of my liberation as a Prisoner of War of the Japanese during WORLD WAR II.*

My military carrier began in 1936. I lived in a small mining town called Telluride, Colorado. We did not have much. My father was a shoe repairman and boot maker. My part in the military came when I was chosen from the town to attend Citizens Military Training Camp. The camp was located at Fort Laramie near Denver, CO.

After the first train ride of my life, I arrived in Denver and was taken by arm truck to a tent city at Fort Laramie. We had a very active stay of two weeks, where I learned how to short sheet and put snakes and crayfish in other boy’s beds. We also learned how to pull tent stakes to collapse a tent on top of an unsuspecting occupant. All in all it was a very enjoyable two weeks but I was very happy to return home.

My next contact with military life was in the US Civilian Conservation Corp in Grand Junction, Colorado. Work was scarce, so I joined the CCC to make it easier for my parents and three sisters.

Shortly after I joined the CCC, my father’s work took him and the family to Brigham City, Utah. I soon got tired of the CCC, and went to where my parents were living to have them sign papers that would give me their consent to enlist in the US Army because I was too young.

In order to reach my parents in Brigham City I had to walk and hitch hike to a rail road station about twenty five miles from town. I had a cousin there who worked for the rail road. It was winter and very cold. By the time I reached his house I was about frozen stiff.

I stayed with my cousin for about three days and then he had to leave on a rail repair job so I decided it was time to leave. My clothing was light and not to warm so my cousin gave me some gloves and an old WWI overcoat. He gave me directions on how to take a freight train to Salt Lake City and on to Brigham City.

That night I climbed into a box car and my cousin informed the Brakeman, who was a friend of his, to watch me and get me to my destination. Things went pretty well considering I almost froze to death.

My mother did not want me to join the Army but I convinced her that it was the only thing to do as they were just barley getting by on what my father was making. After getting my parents signature I was enlisted in the US Army and put on a train to Salt Lake City, Utah. From there I was sent to Fort Douglas for processing.

I had talked to the Recruiting Officer, requesting duty in some tropical location and he told me the only place open was the Philippine Islands. He said he had just returned from a tour of duty there and stated that it was real good duty. I will never forget his name, “Sergeant Red Robbinson.” During my two week stay at Fort Douglas all we were required to do was to get up for reveille, eat, and sleep.

After about two weeks we were put on a train to San Francisco, California, with our end destination a staging camp on Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay. To reach the island we boarded an Army tug boat and on the way stopped at Alcatraz Prison to discharge passengers and cargo. I later discovered that the tug stops at Alcatraz coming and going on each trip.

At Angel Island we received training in close order drill and did some processing in preparation for being shipped out to the Philippines. After two weeks we were given a three day pass to San Francisco. There were so many going on the pass that some had to wait for hours until the boat could return for another load. The city was like visiting a foreign country. It was like nothing I had ever seen.

After getting tired of sightseeing, I learned that the bars would serve me even if I was not old enough. I went into the Cave Bar and after a few drinks I got into an argument with two men in uniform who were speaking a foreign language. I felt that any one wearing a US Army uniform should be speaking English. The bar tender asked me to leave, so I moved on to another bar. I did not last long at the next bar as it was considered to be for sailors and soldiers were not welcome there.

During the afternoon another soldier from Angel Island and I had rented a room for the night. When I decided it was time for me to go to bed, I went to the hotel and asked for the key. I was informed by the clerk that we had only rented the room for the evening, and that we would have to pay more to spend the night. This was the first time I had ever rented a hotel room and I hadn’t even been inside. I gave the clerk so much trouble he called the Military Police. When they came I was given three choices; I could pay the extra money for the night, leave, or go to the MP station. As I did not have the money for a room I decided to leave.

We had been informed that the boat for Angel Island did not operate at night so I had several hours to kill. With only a few dollars left I went to a bar and sipped a few drinks slowly to pass the time. The bar I had chosen had a dance floor and there was a nice looking girl setting by herself. I got up the nerve to ask her for a dance and was accepted. After the dance she asked me to join her, which I did. When it got close to closing time I told her it was time for me to leave. She asked me if I would like to take her home and I explained that I did not have any money. She said that made no difference and that she would feel better with someone walking with her that late at night. We started walking south on Market Street and she held my hand. We exchanged names but I do not remember what hers was. After walking for some time I asked her where she lived and was informed her home was in South San Francisco or Daily City. As I had no idea where it was it did not concern me not having any idea how far it was. The next time I asked her how far it was, she said she was sorry for not telling me it was so far, but felt I would not walk her home if I had known. I enjoyed her company so much it could have been twice as far and I wouldn’t have minded.

When we arrived at her home it was day light and she invited me in so I accepted. Inside were two men about twenty five or older and she introduced them as her brother and uncle. They were not too friendly to me until she explained the reason I was there and then they thanked me and asked me to stay for breakfast. The brother loaned me his shaving gear and after cleaning up I felt better.

After about two hours I told them it was time for me to start back. Just thinking about the long trip back made me tired. The brother said not to worry as he would give me a ride on the back of his motorcycle. After saying good bye to the girl he took me to the pier where the boat took me back to Angel Island.

When I returned to my quarters there was a roster on the bulletin board posting me for KP duty the following day, which was Monday. KP duty was one thing every one dreaded, it started at 5:00AM and ended around 19:00 PM, with 30 minutes for each meal and two fifteen minute breads in between. The Mess Sergeant was hated and feared by every one for the way he treated the men. You could not leave the mess hall from the time you arrived until the end of the day. If you dropped a dish or cup and it broke, the sergeant would take your name and serial number and the price would be deducted from you next pay check.

After I was in the Philippines for a couple of months a soldier came to my company and had news of the Mess Sergeant. It seems someone took exception to the treatment of the sergeant and killed him. They found him dead and hanging on a meat hook in the walk in freezer. I was fortunate to receive KP duty only once while at Angel Island. Shortly after pulling KP duty we received word that the USS Republic was being readied to take us to the Philippines. I had never been on a large ship and was looking forward to the trip.

We were taken to the docks in San Francisco and loaded on the USS Republic, which was a converted luxury liner captured from the Germans in WWI. When we were loaded we were informed that over three thousand troops were on board. Some compartments had bunks stacked six feet high. When we were ready to leave all personnel were ordered to go below decks until we were at sea. I did not get to see the Golden Gate Bridge when we sailed under it. I was very disappointed; little did I realize it would be October 1945 before I would get to see it.

The voyage was miserable; I and most passengers were sick most of the trip. We were fed by compartment and from morning to night there was always a line winding through the passage ways and up and down the ladder wells. What made it worse was the ever present vomit from the sick all over the place.

The latrines were a real adventure. There was a water tight door which could be sealed if there was a leak, and to enter the latrine you had to step over a barrier about eighteen inches high. If the ship was listing away from you the floor was only damp, but if the ship was listing toward you, there would be water from one to ten inches deep. If you were not alert it was not uncommon to step into the latrine and be met with a wall of crap hitting you just below the knees.

In the latrine a metal trough ran from one side to the other with several toilet seats situated on top. There was a constant stream of running water to carry off the waste. This was just too much of a temptation for the practical jokers on board, who would wad up some paper and when the timing was right, would light it and let it float from one end to the other under unsuspecting victims. This was a big laugh unless you were on the receiving end.

After about 20 days of a mostly boring trip, we arrived at the port of Honolulu. We had been informed we would be there for a couple of days and might have shore leave. When we docked it was reported that a case of Scarlet Fever was found on board, so no one would be allowed to leave the ship. On the afternoon of the first day they brought on board a band and eight Hula Dancers for an hour of entertainment. The next day we departed for the Philippines. After about two weeks we arrived and docked in the port of Manila. We were informed that the quarantine was still on and upon debarking we were loaded onto Army trucks and taken to Fort McKinley. There we were informed of our assigned company and proceeded to a tent cit out in the country. I was assigned to “M” Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment. Under the policy of the time our own company had the task of giving us basic training.

For the next couple of months we trained in tactics, the use of the 30 and 50 caliber machine guns, 60MM and 80MM mortars, rifle with bayonet, 45 caliber pistols and hand grenades. I became proficient in all and fired the highest score with the 30 caliber machine gun in the Regiment among the recruits.

After what seemed an eternity, basic training came to an end and we were taken to our quarters in Manila. We were located in Estado Mayor and my company was in what used to be horse stables when the Spanish occupied the city. It was very nice. The floors were cement and the walls were cement about four feet tall and had screen all the way around from the top of the wall to the ceiling. There were no doors or windows except for the main entrance and an exit at the rear onto the Pasig River. Our day room over looked the river and was open except for iron bars about 8 inches apart to prevent entry or exit to the river. It was very interesting to set and watch the boat traffic on the river and Manila on the other side. Except for routine duty, life here was relaxed and enjoyable. We paid what we called bunk boys about $3.00 per month to shine our shoes, wash our clothes, and keep our beds made and our equipment clean and ready for inspection. We also paid $2.00 per moth for boys to do our Kitchen Police duties. Most weeks we had Wednesday afternoon off and after inspection Saturdays we had the rest of the day and Sunday off.

The whole 31st Infantry Regiment was stationed in Manila, with the 3rd and 4th Regiments at Estado Mayor and the 1st and 2nd Battalions at Cortel De’Espania, which was the Walled City. We were formed together for parades on special occasions which would take place on a large parade field on Dewy Boulevard overlooking Manila Bay.

Although I was assigned as a number one machine gunner, I requested and was assigned to drive a weapons carrier. This gave me many opportunities to see Manila and the country side on many driving assignments. Plus on maneuvers I did not have to march, and my field and personnel gear could be kept in my truck.

One day while on maneuvers, I was driving through some heavy brush and drove head on into a hole filled with mud and water. These holes are all over the country side and are caused by Water Buffalo wallowing in them to get relief from the heat. I was thrown out of the truck and only sustained a sprained ankle. There was no damage to the truck. After having the truck pulled out I was able to continue. At the end of the day my leg was swollen and very sore. I did not go on sick call and after a good night sleep the swelling had gone down.

Saturday morning as I had no duties I decided to go into Manila. There was a truck leaving the gate and I hitched a ride to the edge of what was called The Walled City. When I got off the truck my leg was hurting so I decided not to go far. After purchasing a bottle of gin I walked to a band standoff of Dewey Boulevard overlooking Manila Bay. After I had been there for a while, a girl came by and asked if she could sit with me, of course I said yes.

We had been there about an hour when a sailor came by and asked if he could join us. I had to go to the bath room and excused myself. When I returned the sailor was walking away with the girl and my bottle of gin. When I confronted him he decided to fight and we went at it. We were pretty evenly matched, with neither of us doing much damage to each other. We fell to the ground and he landed on top of the leg which had been injured the day before. I felt a sharp pain and told the sailor my leg felt like it was broken. He gave me a finale punch and departed with the girl and my bottle of gin.

Hopping on one leg I made it to Dewey Boulevard where I hailed a Taxi to take me back to my company. Hopping on one leg I went to the dispensary and informed the corpsman on duty of my problem. He looked at my leg and stated there was nothing he could do, and that I would have to return to following morning on sick call. He gave me some aspirin and I hobbled to my quarters and went to bed. Because of the pain I did not sleep most of the night. In the morning I did not go to breakfast but went straight to the dispensary. On the way there I met the Sergeant Major, who asked me what my problem was. After explaining, he helped me to my destination. By the time we got there my clothes were soaked with sweat and I had a lot of pain.

The doctor looked at me and asked me when it had happened. When I told him the corpsman had instructed me to come back the following day for sick call he was very angry. He stated that the corpsman would be taken care of and it should not happen again. The doctor’s diagnosis on my leg was that it was broken and ordered me admitted to the hospital at Fort McKinley. It was a very long and painful ride in the back of a 2 ½ ton truck. When I arrived my leg was set and put in a plaster cast.

After some time I was released to my company and had to use crutches for a couple of weeks. When I went back for a checkup my cast was removed but I remained on crutches for another week.

One morning we were informed we were moving from our barracks and would be quartered in a tent city at Fort McKinley. We packed all our personal belongings in our foot lockers which were to be stored. This was the last time I saw it.

My leg was still sore, but when some of the men decided to visit a bar I decided to go along. We rode on a truck to get there with the understanding that we would have to walk back. On the return trip we decided to take a short cut across some fields. Because of the pain caused by the uneven ground my friends had to half carry me most of the way back.

**CHAPTER II**

I had been out of the hospital about one month when we were alerted and ordered to Nichols Field Air Base for duty as perimeter guards. We were informed that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and that there was an expected attack on the Philippines at any time.

We had been there only a short time when the Japanese planes began strafing and bombing the air field. Almost every weapon in the area was firing at the planes, but did not seem to be doing much damage. At one time a plane came over our position flying slow and not too high. It was later made out to be an American observation plane, but was damaged before a cease fire was given. The pilot bailed out and we heard he had been wounded but would be all right.

Shortly after the air attack we were formed into a convoy and were headed out of Manila with our destination the Bataan Peninsula. During our trip we traveled day and night, and most of the time Japanese observation planes were flying overhead. For some reason unknown to us they did not bomb or strafe us. We were wondering why our planes did not attack and drive off the Japanese. Later we learned that most of our planes were caught on the ground and destroyed.

As I have no recollection of time, days or nights, or in what sequence events occurred, I will just write them as they come to me. We arrived on Bataan and established a command post at the entrance to the peninsula. My weapons carrier, along with another carrier had three men assigned to each. Both carriers were ordered to make a reconnaissance patrol of the area in front of our lines. We were to go as far as the town of San Fernando to observe and report any sign of the enemy. When we were about five miles from our destination we observed two Japanese planes strafing and bombing the rail road station. After they left, we approached the station and observed several rail cars burning and the ammunition exploding.

There was an Army Captain at the station frantically unloading ammunition from the rail cars, and upon seeing us, he ordered us to assist him. We had been working about half an hour when someone spotted the Japanese planes returning. Every one hit the ground and I prayed as the first run of bombs was dropped on our position. Using the excuse we had to continue our patrol and against the orders of the captain we jumped into our weapons carriers and sped away from the station. We had gone about half a mile when the Japanese planes were spotted coming up the road toward us. I slammed on the brakes and jumped from the truck, without looking to see where the planes were, before the truck stopped. I had no sooner hit the ground and was lying on my stomach with my hands over the back of my neck when the planes dropped their bombs. The concussion lifted me up and rolled me over a couple of times. No one was injured and they had missed the trucks. Everyone jumped back in the trucks and when I tried to start my truck there was no key in the ignition. When I had jumped out of the truck I had taken the key with me without thinking about it. I found the key close to where I was lying, got back in the truck, and we took off. We took off across country leaving the main road. Fortunately the planes did not return and we drove back to our bivouac area without further incident.

After returning to our camp from the incident at San Fernando, we were ordered to dig fox holes as we were going to make a stand at this location. We were at the edge of a clearing with the jungle at our back and on a forward sloop.

That evening we were sitting around talking when we heard artillery fire to our front in the distance. It did not take long to realize that they were firing at us. The shells began landing all around our position. We dove into our fox holes and did a lot of praying. After several hours an officer from “F” company came by and stated that the Japanese had broken through. He commanded me to take him and some others with him to the rear in my truck. One of my tires had been hit and was flat, but the officer said to go ahead and drive. After about an hour we stopped and put on the spare tire. Driving most of what was left of the night we arrived at a supply depot where we stopped to get tires for the truck and was able to get something to eat.

It was learned that the line had been reestablished and we were to return to our unit at once. When we returned the officer who had taken me and my truck was relieved of his command. I was told he was serving as a private in the company he used to command.

At one time we were unloading ammunition and taking it to a Mortar position about a thousand yards from the road. Several loads we carried around an open field staying at the edge of the jungle so as not to be observed by enemy air craft. On the last trip we were getting tired and had not seen or heard any planes so we decided to cut across the field. About half way across someone at the edge of the jungle yelled, “Look out, dive bombers!” I glanced to the rear and there were two planes with their engines cut (so we could not hear them) diving at us from about a quarter mile away. We dove to the ground, lying as flat as possible, and the planes began firing at us with their Machine Guns. I was praying and thinking, I hop none of the bullets would strike me or the Mortar Ammunition beside me.

When they discovered we had seen them they turned their engines back on and roared down on us. As they screamed over us I heard the whine of bombs dropping and two loud explosions. The craters caused by the bombs were so close that dirt covered me and one of my legs dropped into the crater when the bank caved back in. We did not wait to see if they were returning, but left the ammunition where we had dropped it and ran as fast as possible to the protection of the jungle. The men in the jungle were surprised that we had not been killed or at least wounded. This was the last time I took a short cut without having plenty of overhead cover.

The two craters, one to the front and one to our right were about seven feet deep and twelve feet in diameter. Just a little shorter and or a little bit more to the left and that would have been all she wrote.

I lost track of time, the days that followed were filled with Japanese artillery, small arms fire and enemy planes bombing us at will, with no planes of our own to stop them. The bombers would fly parallel to our lines and drop their bombs. The next flight that came over would overlap the course flown by the pervious flight so as to cover our lines in length and depth with bombs. This was very hard to take as we could do nothing but dig in and pray.

This retreating, digging in and fighting and constantly being shelled and bombed went on for about four months. During this time we were down to one quarter rations, our ammunition was low and most everyone was suffering with Malaria and Dysentery and very weak with malnutrition.

One morning in April all of the units were informed that the end had come, we were ordered to destroy our weapons and surrender to the Japanese.

Another soldier and I went into the jungle to get away from the mob of soldiers moving to the rear toward Marvailes. The Japanese were still shelling us and I received a wound in my left leg. A piece of shrapnel from a Japanese Knee Mortar struck me on my left shin. When I checked it, shrapnel about the size of a pencil was sticking out of my shin. It had stuck in the shin bone. When I pulled it out there was not too much bleeding. I covered the wound with bandages from my belt pack and we continued on. At one point we came to an open area where we could see the valley below. There were thousands of soldiers and civilians moving to the rear toward Marvailes.

We continued on through the jungle and came upon a supply depot where we found some cans of food. We took what we could and continued on. In the distance we could hear shelling, bombing, and small arms fire. At times we could observe Japanese planes flying overhead. At one point we could see Manila Bay and Corregidor.

There was a ship docked about ten miles from us and we discussed trying to reach it. As it was close to dark, we decided to wait until morning and then plan on what to do.

The area was quieter after dark and we settled down to sleep. A short time later the sky lit up and there were several tremendous explosions in the direction of the bay. We later learned our forces had blown up an ammunition dump and the ship we had seen which was the USS Canopus.

When we awoke in the morning our attention was drawn to the area where we had observed the ship. There was nothing but smoke where the ship had been.

I noticed my leg was sore and swollen but it did not seem to be infected. It was decided to eat something and move on. We opened a can of peaches and had not taken a bite when there was a burst of machine gun fire into the trees over our heads. Looking across the clearing we observed a Japanese tank and about ten soldiers watching us. We raised our hands in surrender and waited to be shot or captured. A squad of soldiers came over to us and with rifle butts, bayonets, slaps, and kicks herded us down the hill to the main road leading to Marvailes.

We were pushed into an open field where several hundred other prisoners were being held. When taken prisoner we were not allowed to take any of our belongings, only the clothes on our backs.

There was a lot of artillery fire over our heads directed at Corregidor. There was also heavy truck and Japanese troop movement on the road next to where we were held. We stayed in this field all day and the next night without food or water. There was no shade and it was very hot. The only place to relieve ourselves was on the ground where we were as we were not permitted to move around.

During the night I had my first attack of Malaria, with chills, fever and heavy sweating. When day light came the Japanese began lining up our men in columns of four on the road. This was the start of the Death March.

**CHAPTER III**

I have no idea how many men were in each group, but as they were formed Japanese guards were posted about every twenty five feet on either side of the column. From this point everything is a blur because of confusion, fear, illness, and lack of food and water.

When it was my turn to be lined up and marched off, I don’t know if it was the same day or the next, we still had not received any food or water. Depending on the guards we would march or double time and no one was allowed to drop out. Some too weak that dropped out were shot or bayoneted and left to rot where they lie. No one was allowed to stop to relive themselves, so had to do what they could while marching.

I observed several bodies along the road and in some cases they had been run over by trucks and tanks, just flat stains of blood, flesh, and bones. Other bodies lay in the road or alongside where they had fallen and were swollen to twice there size by the hot sun. The area around them was saturated with oil which had been rendered from them by the intense heat.

At one time we crossed a stream which was about one foot deep and there were bodies all over the place, some half in the water. We quickly learned why so many had died at this location. Anyone who tried to stop to drink the water was killed on the spot. Many were so thirsty that they could not resist trying to get a drink and were killed for the effort.

The worst part was not having any food or water and marching without rest. The guards were replaced several times per day and had plenty of food and water. Although the first guards had stolen anything of value, each change of guards had to search us to see if we had anything left and slap us when they did not find what they wanted.

The first night we were packed in a field hardly large enough to hold us and went to sleep without food or water. The area was covered with waste from those who had stayed before us, and we had to try and clear the ground where we would have to lie.

The next morning it all started again and with the exception of a few who died during the night we were lined up and marched up the road. Sometime around noon we were marched into a small stadium and the lucky ones, of which I was one, were able to get a cup of water from a small well. It was taking too long and some were forced to go on without getting a drink. On the way out of the area they had a fifty five gallon drum of steamed rice. As we passed we were given about a cup of rice and ate it as we marched.

When it started to get dark we were marched to a large tin covered warehouse. There was a water tap on one corner and again those who were lucky got a drink. When it became darker the prisoners were forced inside the warehouse with barley enough room for everyone to stand. The later ones were pushed in and encouraged with rifle butts and bayonets. Fortunately, I was able to get a space against the wall and was able to rest a little better than some.

In the morning we were lined up on the road and started marching again without food or water. As we were leaving the warehouse I observed several men who had died during the night.

About noon we passed a group of what I guessed were Japanese cooks in the middle of the road. They were passing out rice balls about the size of a baseball to each prisoner. We were not allowed to stop, just take a rice ball and continue marching. It was getting late and we were very tired and wondering where we would stop for the night. It got dark and we were still marching, everyone was about to give up, being weak from lack of food and water. Suddenly we were halted and instructed to turn around and march back the way we had come.

About an hour later we were herded into a field and realized the guards had missed the stopping place and had caused us to march an extra two hours. It was very dark and I stumbled over others while trying to find a place to lie down. I tried to clear an area and was so tired fell asleep in the process. In the morning I noticed how dirty the area was with human feces and some of the bodies I had stumbled over were dead and some had been there for some time.

From this point things are hazy, I don’t recall night or day and do not remember having anything more to eat or drink. The march from Marvailes to San Fernando took around seven days and I don’t remember most of it.

When we arrived at San Fernando we were forced into steel box cars. The cars were packed so tight with men that no one could fall to the floor if they passed out or died on the trip. When loaded the doors were closed and the heat became unbearable and there was not enough air to breath. I don’t know how long it took but it seemed like forever. When we were unloaded, several men had died in each box car. We were lined up and marched about five miles to our first POW enclosure. Camp O’Donnell.

**CHAPTER IV**

We were marched to a field in front of a building which we learned was the Japanese Headquarters for POW Camp O’Donnell. A small Japanese man with thick glasses came out of the building and we were called to attention. The man introduced himself and stated he was the camp interpreter. We learned later that he had been born and raised in Riverside, California in the USA. We nick named him Riverside. This was one of several Japanese we came into contact with that had been born and educated in the USA.

Three other Japanese came out onto the porch and one was introduced as the Camp Commander. For the next hour we were informed of the rules we were to abide by. We would salute all Japanese soldiers from private up and failure to do so would result in punishment. Anyone attempting to escape would be shot and if caught after escape would have their head cut off after being required to dig their own grave.

We were very tired and several men fainted from the long standing and the heat. After what seemed an eternity the speech was finished and we were marched to an area which was fenced in and contained several primitive barrack type buildings. They were made of bamboo with thatched roofs and inside had a runway the full length of the building with two platforms on each side, one at two feet and one at about five feet. These were our beds and living quarters with about four feet in width per man. Those who were the weakest took the lower level. They tried to assign buildings according to the outfit you were in at the time of surrender.

The first thing everyone was concerned with was where to get water. We learned that there was one water outlet for the entire camp and there were hundreds in line at all times. During the time the kitchen drew water for cooking no one was allowed to get water. That evening I got my first food in several days, which consisted of a small ration of steamed rice. Personnel from each barracks would go to the mess shack and get a bucket of rice and then divide it among the men in the barracks.

When I was first assigned, someone told me one of my company corporals was in the next building. I went over to see him and was so shocked I could not talk to him and left without him seeing me. I later learned he had Wet Berri-Berri. It is a condition caused by malnutrition and the body retains fluids. If it can’t be corrected a person swells up and drowns in their own body fluids. I learned that he died shortly after I saw him.

I had more attacks of Malaria, although they did not seem too severe. I also came down with dysentery and could not control my bowel movements. The slit trench we used as a latrine was not far from my quarters and I had to go quite often. There were millions of flies and it was almost impossible to keep them off. One day we went to the slit trench and it looked like boiling water with thousands of maggots. They were crawling up the walls and spreading out on the ground surrounding the trench. When you went to the slit trench they would crunch and pop under your feet. About this time several of us were getting very weak from the dysentery and when we squatted down to relieve ourselves we would black out when trying to stand up. This only lasted for a second and we could usually regain our senses before falling. I observed two people who at different times could not regain their balance and fell into the trench. This was a real mess as there was very little water for bathing.

I became weaker and could not go to the slit trench so I wadded up cloth to place between my legs to catch the discharge which I could not control. By this time I started living under the corner of my barracks and was out of it most of the time. When they brought the rice each meal, someone who I don’t know to this day, would get me out from under the barracks and try to get me to eat.

After a bite or two I would crawl back under the building. I don’t know how long this went on but one day I woke up and was lying on a bare floor of bamboo that had half inch gaps. I did not have clothes on and someone was pouring water over my lower half to rinse off the caked on excrement and remove some maggots from my wounds. The bamboo floor allowed excrement to go through to the ground below. I was able to see bodies laid out on the ground beside the building and water from my bath and others was running around them. This I later learned was what they called the Zero Ward, and most that were sent there were not expected to survive.

I don’t know how long I was there, but the shock of what I saw must have given me strength. I don’t remember getting any medicine, but something must have helped me. The next thing I remember was having cloths on and laying on the lower level platform in a barracks.

This I later learned was the ward for dysentery patients. When they brought our rice it was like a gumbo, very wet and like glue. One day the man next to me died and when I was about to report it, the man on the other side of the body said not too. He stated that as long as the body did not stink we should keep quiet so we could share the rice which was served to him each meal. We got away with it for about two days until the server discovered he was dead.

While I was there I gained some strength and was able to go to the slit trench. One day the wind started to blow very strong and the rain came down heavy. Someone said it was a Typhoon or tropical storm and could be very bad. During the night the barracks blew over and I was trapped between some beams. Fortunately I was not injured but could not get out. The roof was holding me down. I stayed in this location until the second day after the Typhoon before they moved the beams and got me out.

I was taken to a building where the floor was made of solid boards and was very clean. For the first time since becoming a POW I had a mat to lie on and Medical Personnel who were clean and caring. It seemed I had been there for only a short time until one day we were informed that anyone who could get up and walk to the door, about twelve paces away, would be transferred to a new camp. I got up and staggered to the door, thus qualifying me for the move.

We were loaded into trucks and drove a few hours to the new location which was POW Camp Cabanatuan.

Cabanatuan was a larger camp than O’Donnell and much cleaner, better organized and the inside of the camp was run by our own officers. The food was still very scarce but water was not a problem so we could drink and bathe as much as was necessary. There were details leaving camp daily for work, but I was too weak, so I was not required to go. Some of those on work details were able to obtain food from the natives and so were in much better shape than those of us to weak for work.

At this time I was down to about 90 pounds and having a hard time getting back my strength. The food kept us from losing more weight but was not enough to build us back up. One day we were very surprised when every man in camp was issued a Red Cross food package. There was canned meat, canned fruit, and candies. There was also tooth paste and tooth brush, which was the first time I could brush my teeth since I became a prisoner. The best thing for me was an issue of cigarettes, which I traded to the other men for food. A ration of rice could be had for one cigarette. I think this was the turning point for me as I quickly became stronger.

After about one week from the time we received the extra food I was put on what was considered a light duty detail. We were taken to the Japanese compound and subjected to the harsh treatment of the guards. We were forced to salute and bow to any guard within sight. If our actions were not what they considered proper, we would be slapped and knocked to the ground. At times like this we were required of us to jump back up and yell HI!! and be prepared to do it again if the guard was not satisfied.

We became acquainted with two guards that controlled most of the work details in the camp. We nick named them Little Speedo and Big Speedo. While working they would continue yelling, “Speedo” to get us to work faster.

The first detail given us was to move a one story building about one thousand yards. The building was about 40 feet wide by 70 feet long. The floor was removed leaving just the cross support runners. The prisoners were lined up on all cross members, filling the building with men. The order was given and we all lifted at once and began walking, caring the building. It was very hard work for me and I did not think I could make it. To make sure no one was slacking off, Little Speedo climbed on our backs and ran all over inside the building yelling, “speedo” and hitting men on the head with a hammer handle. When a man would fall we would try to walk around him, sometimes without success.

This heavy work set me back quite a bit and I tried to avoid details whenever possible. One day about a week later I was in the wrong place and was picked for a detail to go into the hills about 15 miles from camp to cut wood for the kitchen to cook our meals. There were about 20 prisoners and 10 guards and we went in three trucks. When we got to the hills we were required to search for downed wood which was good enough to burn. It took us most of the day to load one of the trucks, with a thirty minute break to eat a rice ball.

We got back to camp before dark and as we were being searched prior to entering the camp I noticed three poles about six feet high planted in the ground. On each pole was the head of a man which had been severed from a body. When we were inside someone informed us the three men had escaped the night before and were caught.

The Japanese made the men dig their own graves within sight of the camp and then kneel down and their heads were chopped off with a sword. The heads were then placed on a pole as a warning to all prisoners not to try to escape.

The next day during morning formation, we were informed that ten man groups would be formed, by name, and submitted to the Japanese. We were told that if any man in the ten man group escaped those remaining behind would be executed. If a group escaped the entire camp would be punished.

In the camp the flies were so bad it was impossible to take a bite of food without chasing them off before putting the spoon in your mouth. One of the officers came up with the idea of giving one cigarette for every small can of flies. For those unable to work it was something to do and the cigarette could be traded for food.

I tried it a few times and it takes a lot of flies to fill one can. Another pass time was trying to get rid of bed bugs and lice. Any time someone was sitting around with a little spare time they could be seen searching for lice and squashing them between the thumb nails. When you took off your cloths you would run your thumb nail along the seams and break the eggs that the lice had deposited there. On a hot day clothing could be placed in the sun and the lice crawled out into the open where they could be killed. In one case a prisoner with a cast on his leg for a broken bone was getting weaker and losing more weight than expected. Medical personnel finely discovered that the cast was full of bed bugs and lice. After removing the cast and getting rid of hundreds of bugs the man recovered.

**CHAPTER V**

The Japanese decided we needed to make a garden and at first it seemed like a good idea. A plot of ground out side of camp was cleared and dug up by hand with shovels and pick axes. This was planted with onions, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables.

The water for the farm had to be carried in five gallon cans about three miles, which in our condition was very difficult. I got this detail several times. Two five gallon cans were carried on a pole over the shoulder, then with a dipper made from a can attached to a stick, a can full of water was poured on each plant. The fertilizer was human excrement from our slit trenches, which was mixed with a little water and deposited around the plants. This was new and repulsive to us and the stink was real bad. It was surprising how big the vegetables grew from this form of fertilizer.

Everyone dreaded the farm detail as it was a lot of work and we came in close contact with the Japanese guards. No one was allowed to talk to another prisoner and if caught they were punished. One form of punishment was making the men caught talking, stand and face each other and take turns slapping each other as hard as possible. If the guard did not think the slapping was hard enough he would step in and usually slap hard enough to knock the prisoner to the ground. If you were able it was required to jump up, come to attention, and yell HI!! as loud as possible. It did not take much of this to break any one of the habit of talking.

Another form of punishment given for talking or not working hard enough was more painful. The prisoner was required to kneel with the top of the feet flat on the ground, then a handle from a shovel, broom, or a stick of some kind was placed behind the knee and then the man was required to sit back on his legs. The handle or stick cut off the circulation to the lower legs and it became very painful. Depending on how cruel the guard was, this could continue for five minutes or much longer. When the guard was satisfied you were told to get up and that is when the real pain started. The only way to get up was fall forward as there was no feeling or control in the lower legs. This continued for several minutes, being unable to get up. Then the blood started flowing back into the legs and was very painful. At the same time the guard was yelling at you to get up and at times giving a few kicks to get you moving.

When the vegetables matured the detail would be searched to insure none was stolen. Anyone caught stealing was usually severely beaten. On man was caught stealing a sweet potato and beaten with the handle of a pick ax. After that day he was unable to straighten up and always walked bent over from the waist.

In the interest of time and repetition, I will not relate the many times of confrontation with Japanese guards, it would take too many pages. . . . .

We thought when the farm produced we would see better food but the only thing we received were the tops from sweet potatoes. These were cooked in water and given to us in a soup form. I don’t think there was much nutrition in the tips but it was something different. We called them whistle weeds as they were hollow and so tough we could not chew them. Another form of food for some men in camp was any stray dogs or cats, also tiny frogs were captured and killed then left in the sun to dry. These were crumbled up and put on the rice for a little flavor.

There were some who were wheeler dealers, trading rice at the present for a meal in the future with rice and soup or a can of food from the next issue of Red Cross packages. In some cases a person would trade so many meals away they could not survive and would try to hide and eat their meal before the collector came around. In some cases they were beat up by the person they owed. Later it was necessary to protect these men by making them eat in a confined area where no one could contact them until they had eaten their food.

I was feeling better and my wounds had become ulcerated and were not as infected.

One morning they called for a detail to go into the foothills and collect wood for the Japanese kitchen and for our cook shacks. I volunteered as I thought my condition was pretty good. This turned out to be a mistake as the work was very had and the sun was very hot. The only advantage was the food at noon, which was more than we usually received in camp and we had a little meat and vegetables. Because of the hard work the extra food did us little good. We expended more energy then we stored up. We worked until almost dark loading the trucks and when we returned we rode on top of the load.

While we worked everyone was hoping that the gorilla bands known to be in the mountains would attack and take us with them. Later we learned several details had been observed by the gorilla bands, but they decided it was too risky as we were not in good shape and could not keep up with them in an escape. Needless to say I avoided any details leaving the camp as the wood detail proved to me I was not in very good shape.

Every morning when we fell out to be counted and received our meager ration of rice, we were marched to the farm for a day of work. This was punishment because we had no food and little water. This routine went on until July 1943 when several of us were informed we were going on a detail and to take anything we had with us.

**CHAPTER VI**

We were loaded on trucks and taken to the ship docks in Manila. We were loaded onto a rusty old freighter that did not look like it could stay afloat. We were required to climb down a ladder into the hold of the ship, and as more men came down we were forced into the darker areas of the hold.

When it was loaded there was barley room to lie down and we discovered that the hold had been used to haul cattle and had not been cleaned. We had no blankets and were required to lie on the bare metal of the floor. We had barley got settled when the ship began to move and the hatch covers were placed on the opening cutting out the light and most of the air. Later they removed a two foot section of the hatch cover to allow buckets to be lowered for use to relieve ourselves. It did not take long to fill the buckets and then they would overflow before the Japanese allowed them to be moved and emptied over the side. When they hoisted them out by rope, the men under the area would be splattered from the over full buckets. Later because of the difficulty in reaching the buckets, a lot of the men would do their business where they were.

When we got out to sea the motion of the ship made a lot of us sick and the floor of the hold became a stinking slimy mess. Once a day food was sent down in buckets by rope and the prisoners designated would try to give everyone their fair share. Water was also sent down by bucket and no one ever got enough.

I do not know how long the trip lasted but it was more than a month. We moved up the coast of China and then over to Formosa, then to Moji, Japan. We were informed that they were dodging in and out of ports along the way to avoid American submarines and air craft. Some ships transporting prisoners were sank in route to Japan.

In route to Japan, several men died and the ropes used for our food and waste were used to lift the bodies out of the hold. When they were on the deck, prisoners were allowed to go up and throw them over the side into the ocean. Some of the men became insane and had to be restrained. Some even tried to stab weak men and drink their blood. I don’t know how I survived. I do not remember most of the trip. When awake I remember the hunger, thirst, and the cold bare metal of the ships floor.

At last we arrived at Moji, Japan and when we were ordered out of the hold I could barely climb the ladder. We were directed to walk down a ramp to the docks, and then marched to a building. We were ordered to strip off all clothing which was thrown away and burned. Then we were required to go into a large vat of disinfectant, and from there to an area for bathing. We would pour water by wooden bucket over us and then soap down. Then before entering the large pools of warm to hot water we were again required to rinse off the soap. After this, which was pure heaven, we were given cloths and taken to rooms where we were examined and specimens taken to examine us for disease.

We were then placed on board a passenger train and actually had regular seats to sit in. The blinds were closed and we were instructed that any one opening them would be punished. The ride lasted overnight and to about mid-morning the following day.

We arrived at the town of Omuta, and were ordered off the train. We were formed into ranks and there were about 500 of us. We were marched down the streets of the town and out into the country side. As we were marching the Japanese civilians lined the streets and would throw rocks at us and attempt to strike us with sticks.

After about an hour we arrived at an enclosure which was to be my home until the end of the war. This was camp #17 Foukoka . The prisoners assigned to this camp were to work in the coal mines. We were assigned to a room which had four men each in it and each barracks housed about 40 men. We slept on rice mats and had about four by eight spaces for each man. At the end of each barracks was a latrine which had a cement trough as urinal and a seat over a half fuel barrel for the rest. This was emptied as it became full.

We spent the next few days learning what was expected of us. The formations were called every morning for roll call and spot inspections. During an inspection all prisoners were formed on the parade ground with all belongings. We were required to strip and were searched for anything that was not authorized. During these formations guards would walk among the prisoners yelling and slapping for no apparent reason.

While we were outside guards would go through the barracks searching and tearing everything out of place. When the inspection was over outside, the prisoners were required to return to their rooms and straighten up everything and prepare for another inspection inside to insure the place was in order. After we settled into the routine of work we would work 9 days and then have a day off which was mostly used for cleaning and inspection.

Although it was not forbidden to leave our barracks during the day to visit others, we soon learned it was a risk to do so. At any time a Japanese soldier was observed no matter how far way we were required to salute and bow. Many times guards would stand out of site and wait for some unsuspecting prisoner to walk by. When they had passed the guard would yell for the prisoner to stop and stand at attention, then would yell and slap the prisoner. If the prisoner was knocked down he was required to jump up and yell HI!! and stand at attention. Sometimes the guard would leave warning the prisoner not to move until he returned and then hide to check that his orders were carried out. If he did not return the guard reliving him would check with the other guard to see why you were standing there before releasing you.

Although we did not have much to eat we did have a mess hall with tables and chairs and a large vat filled with hot tea made with some kind of leaves, which did not taste like tea, but it was hot and during the cold moths was very welcome. We had rice twice per day when not working and when we started working in the coal mines carried a ration of rice in our mess kits for a noon break. There was very seldom much to go with it such as vegetables, fish, or meant.

After about a week at the camp we were informed that we would be going to the coal mines to work. Some of us had a little experience with mines but nothing could have prepared us for what we would endure over the next two years.

On the first day we were to go to the mine, we got up before daylight and after getting dressed, lined up on the parade ground to be counted. We had been told to bring our mess kits and after being counted marched to the mess hall. After eating we went through the line again and received a ration of rice to take for our lunch in the mine. From there we were formed in columns of fours and would start the march to the mine. Fortunately there were not too many civilians up at this time so we did not have to duck as many rocks as the first time we had walked this route when we first arrived. It took us about an hour and a half to walk the distance from the camp to the mine.

We entered a large building and could see large square pools of steaming water and numbered pegs lining the walls. We were instructed to take off all clothing except our shoes and our under clothes, which consisted of a piece of cloth about one by three feet, with a string about four feet long attached to one end. This was similar to the breach cloth worn by the American Indians in the early days. We hung our cloths on a peg and were told to remember the number so we could find our cloths when we finished work. We then went to a counter and were issued a hard hat, a lamp which attached to the hat, and a battery pack which we strapped around our waist.

From there we entered a room with a large Shinto Shrine, where we were required to bow and clap our hands while the Japanese chanted some kind of prayer. It took us by surprise the first time, but after that we would pray to our won God during these occasions. This was the routine we followed every time we went to work in the mines.

From this place we went to a sort of depot where a long line of tram cars were lined up. Although we had remained in the building all this time, it was cold not having any clothes except the breach cloth, and was very cold during the winter months. We boarded the tram and when it was loaded started down a steep incline into the mine. The power for the tram was a large motor above ground which operated a large drum of cable which was attached to the last tram car. As we got deeper into the mine it began to get warm and when we stopped it was actually hot.

The Japanese soldiers were left at the entrance of the mine and we were turned over to Japanese coal miners with a warning that if we did not obey the civilians we would be punished when we finished work. For the time we worked in the mine the same civilians were in charge of us every day we were in the mine. The Japanese in charge in the mine with their nicknames were Casuwala, “The Rat”, Yamamoto, “The Wolf”, Matiyama, “The Greek”, Hashimoto, who was a good man and was always talking about Charlie Chaplin and the movie Modern Times, and Nishmura, who did not stay around long enough to get a nickname. He was injured in a cave in and did not return.

When we came to the end of the tram ride we were taken to a tool shed and issued picks, shovels, and a jack hammer. We were then broken up into groups of about twenty. We traveled about a half hour to our place of work, at times the ceiling was so low we had to crawl and there was water dripping on us most of the time and a small stream running alongside. We came to a high place in the tunnel and the coal was about twelve to fifteen feet high. There was a trough and chain against the face of the coal and it was about fifty feet long. On the opposite side of the trough there were timbers about every ten feet to hold up the ceiling and about five feet beyond the timbers was a space of shattered rock which extended beyond the reach of our lights and was empty to the ceiling which was about twenty feet high. There was always rock falling from the ceiling so we did not have to be told to stay out of this area.

Shortly after we got to our work area we were led about fifty feet down the tunnel. The Japanese lit fuses which had been placed by another crew earlier. There was a tremendous explosion and dust, smoke, and chunks of coal and rock were flying all over the place. Before the dust had settled we were pushed into the area to begin cleaning out the coal. The chain was turned on and began pulling the coal out which in turn poured onto a large belt conveyor and was taken to a central area to be taken out of the mine. At first we had to scrape the top of the coal pile into the conveyor until we got down to the rock floor. Any rock found had to be thrown over the conveyor in to the area we named no man’s land.

When we got to the floor not as many men could work at one time, some men were taken to a location about a half mile distance to pick up timbers for holding up the ceiling which was very unstable. The job of getting timbers was very hard. They were heavy and at times the person had to crawl as the ceiling was so low.

As soon as a space of about two feet was cleared in front of the conveyor the Japanese began shoring up the ceiling with upright timbers and cross members. At times large rocks got into the trough and stopped the chain which could cause a broken chain or a burned out motor. At these times the Japanese in charge would stop the chain until it could be cleared. We later used this to get a break, throwing a rock in the trough when the Japanese were not looking. When the chain stopped it was very quiet except for the creaking and snapping of the timbers from the weight of the ceiling.

Another thing that did not take us long to learn was the danger of large iron deposits which formed in the coal. Sometimes you could not see them as they blended in with the ceiling. If we saw one, we would use a pick and pry it loose. Sometimes the weight would cause it to work loose and fall. Before it fell there was usually a period where small particles would dribble down on any one under it. When a person felt these particles on their back, they would know that it was time to jump out of the way and if it did not fall to take a pick and pull it down.

We were required to dig out all the coal which had been blasted down before quitting for the day. We were also required to put up timbers all the way to the coal facing. If by chance we got everything done, sometimes we got a little break. We also got a short break to eat our ration of rice and sometimes there was a small piece of pickled radish or a small spoon of bean paste.

After our work was finished we took our tools back and turned them in then got on the tram and were pulled to the top. We turned in our hats, lights, and battery packs then went to the bath house where we washed with soap and water and then were allowed to get into the tub for about five minutes. We got dressed and the Japanese soldiers marched us back to the camp. Shortly after returning we went to the mess hall for our rice and hot tea. From the time we got up to the time we finished eating was about fourteen hours. We went to bed and it seemed we had just laid down when it was time to get up and do it all over again.

About every ten days we were given a day off from the mine. On a day off we got up and formed on the parade ground where we were required to take off all our cloths and the guards came around to search everything you had and take every opportunity to stand you at attention and slap you. While we were in formation other guards were going through the barracks and searching everything inside. The floor which was made of four by eight sheets of rice straw woven into thick mats was taken up to see if anything was hidden under them. When removed there is a platform of two by fours to hold the mats and nothing else except the bare ground. When the inspection was completed we were required to go back inside and get everything in order for a barracks inspection to insure everything was back in place. On a day off we might get two or three hours to just lie around and relax.

One day while working in the mine, I was sent to pick up a timber to support the ceiling. After we became familiar with the mine we were allowed to go alone for timbers and other suppliers. On the way I looked for an empty tunnel to relieve myself and after entering I noticed several lunch boxes on the cross member supporting the ceiling. These were left there by Japanese workers who would work in several different areas and return at lunch time. I grabbed one that looked promising and went to another tunnel to eat it. I hate to think what would have happened to me had I been caught.

After eating the lunch I continued with my original plan to relive myself. When you go into these unused tunnels and stop you can hear a rustling noise and see small eyes reflected in the light from our hats. These are large rats that live in the mine and live on any garbage or human waste. At first we tried to kill them, but the Japanese told us to leave them alone as they are a good warning system to detect gas and cave-ins.

Later that day while picking an iron deposit from the ceiling a piece came down and ripped the finger nail off my left index finger. It did not bleed much and after wrapping it I was told to continue working even though it was very painful. I guess this was my punishment for stealing the lunch box.

One of the Japanese over us in the mines by the name of Yamamoto, would give us a break once in a while and so as not to be observed would take us to an empty tunnel. Using some English and sign language he would talk about the movie he had seen which was, “Modern Times” staring Charlie Chaplin. This was the only Japanese in the mines that gave us a break.

A few days later while working I was lifting a large rock to throw over the conveyor and rested it on the edge of the conveyor to get a better hold. The Japanese named Casuala, yelled at me and kicked me in the mouth, splitting my lower lip. He thought I was putting the rock in the conveyor to stop the chain. Although I had done so in the past and would do it again in the future, this time my intention was to throw it on the other side to get it out of the way. Later this same day there was a cave in and the Japanese named Nishamura was severely injured. This was the last time we saw him and everyone was happy as he was a very mean man, always slapping or kicking someone for no reason.

Sometimes the pressure and fear were too much for some men and they would pay another prisoner to break there arm or leg. This was usually done by placing the limb on two rocks and striking it with a pole or pick handle. The idea was to get out of the mine, though tempting I never had the nerve.

One day the Japanese named Yamamoto took me with him to the office in the mine, and while he went inside told me to sit by the door on the outside and wait for him. While sitting there, a Japanese who was not connected with the prisoners came by and started yelling at me. He indicated that I was not supposed to be there and that I had better go back where I belonged. I tried to tell him my boss was in the office and I was supposed to wait for him. He got very mad and struck me across the back with his small saw, leaving several small bleeding holes from the saw teeth. At about this time Yamamoto returned and really gave the other Japanese hell. The injury was not serious and stopped bleeding in a very short time. We went back to the work site and I was not required to work as all the Japanese had to come and check my back.

At the end of the day I got cleaned up and was going to the latrine as I had the runs. My number was called out and the guard stood me at attention and really yelled at me. I had no idea what I had done wrong. He slapped me and knocked me down. As I was falling my bowels relaxed and I dirtied my pants. After I got up he marched me into the office where several Japanese big shots were sitting at a table. They told me to take off my jacket, which was the only thing I had on top as we had no shirts. Then I was told to turn around so they could see my back. As the saw blade also hit part of my butt, they asked me to drop my pants also. This was very embarrassing as my pants were messy from the accident I had before entering the office.

When they had finished the guard took me outside and let me know he was sorry he had hit me as he thought I had done something to get him into trouble. He gave me some cigarettes and as the others had already been taken back to camp he and I walked back alone.

When we got back to camp the guard released me and told me to go to my barracks. The mess hall was closed so I figured I would go to bed hungry. On the way to my quarters I passed the Japanese mess hall and looking in the open door I noticed a bucket of steaming food just inside. There was no one in sight and without really thinking I grabbed the bucket and ran to my room. The other three men were already in bed but when they saw the food they all gathered around and we had a feast.

The bucket held about two gallons and was filled with curried rice, filled with meat and vegetables. I can truly say this was the only time as a prisoner I went to bed with a very full stomach. One of the men volunteered to get rid of the bucket and took it out back and threw it over the fence. We never heard anything about the stolen food and we were very surprised there was no investigation.

About one week after I had stolen the food from the Japanese kitchen, we were awakened by loud noises at about midnight. It was learned one of the prisoners got caught stealing food from the Japanese kitchen. He was placed in the guard house to be dealt with in the morning. Around five AM we were awakened and ordered to form on the parade ground to witness punishment of the prisoner who stole food. We were informed the prisoner had escaped from the guard house during the night and again was caught stealing food. After we were all on the parade ground the prisoner was brought out with his hands tied behind his back.

There were four guards around him with fixed bayonets on their rifles. After a lengthy speech by the camp commander an order was given to the guards and they faced the prisoner. The camp commander barked out another order and the guards lunged at the prisoner running him through with their bayonets. The first guard to stab the prisoner was a Japanese born and raised in the United States and he had attended school at UCLA in Los Angeles, California. After the killing we were ordered to get dressed, eat breakfast, and go to work. There was no service for the man who was killed.

Whenever I hear the Japanese complain about being held in the US Internment Camps this comes to mind. Knowing how fanatical the Japanese were toward their Emperor, there is no doubt in my mind that some would have done sabotage in America when the war was going bad for the Japanese.

**CHAPTER VII**

Shortly after the killing we began hearing and seeing large American planes flying over at a very high altitude. On one day we observed one of the planes smoking and falling from the sky. I saw three parachutes open and drift to the ground some distance from us. I never found out what happen to these men. A few days later when we came up from the mine there were several building and the coal fields of fire. There had been an air raid while we were working under ground, and the Americans had dropped incendiary bombs.

A few days later on our day off from the mine, the sirens blew for an air raid and we were ordered into air raid shelters which held about one hundred men each. They were no protection for heavy bombs but gave some protection from incendiary bombs. The doors were made of wood and small windows were covered with iron mesh. There were four ventilators in the roof also made of wood. When the bombs came down they exploded in the air and thousands of small flares were spread all over. The flares set fire to the ventilators on our bomb shelter so we were ordered out to put out the fires. When we came out we noticed that several building in our camp were also on fire, which we attempted to put out with a bucket brigade.

There were no makings on the buildings, so the American pilots had no idea that there were prisoners of war in the area they were bombing. After this there were bombing raids nearby almost daily. We still went to work as usual.

One morning while proceeding to the mess hall in the dark I stepped in a ditch which was lined with cement and struck my shin on the left leg in about the same location where I had been wounded on Bataan. One of the medics in the mess hall stopped the bleeding and wrapped a bandage around my leg. I went to work and as the day proceeded my leg got very painful and swelled so much that the bandage was out of sight with swollen flesh closing over it.

When we got back to camp I was taken to the dispensary to see the doctor and was admitted. After a few days the swelling went down and the infection was under control. They decided to do a skin graft to cover an area a little larger than a silver dollar. The doctor took a needle and lifted up a piece of skin which he cut off with a razor blade. He took about twenty patches of skin from my left inner thigh and placed them on the wound and then wrapped it in bandages. About a week later they told me they would remove the bandage the next day.

That night I took my hands and rubbed the bandage over the wound hopping it would not heal, so I would not have to go back into the mine. The next day when they took off the bandage the wound was open and bled slightly with no skin covering it. They also took the bandage off of my left thigh and it had become infected with the graft areas running together making a larger wound. A few days later they decided to do another skin graft. This time they took about fifty patches from the inside of my right thigh as the wound was much larger. I would rub my leg to keep the grafts from taking and again when the bandages were removed it was a clean open wound.

The Navy corpsman was suspicious but had no way of proving that I had done anything to keep the wound from healing. They wrapped up the wound and again when they took the bandage off of my right thigh it was infected, with some of the patch areas running together. This was treated and they decided to wait and decide what steps to take next.

A few days later we were ordered into the air raid shelters and we could hear planes but did not hear any bombs. One of the guards was very scared and was crying and tried to get as close as possible to the doors. When we were on the inside the guards closed the doors and stayed in an area about four feet long and the width of the bomb shelter.

About mid-August we were sitting outside the medical building getting some sun when we heard and saw an American plane flying over us and in the direction of what we later learned was Nagasaki. There was a large puff of smoke which looked like a mushroom and later a large muffled explosion. We surmised the bombs had hit a large ammunition dump, having no idea that an atomic bomb had exploded.

The second day after the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki; we woke up prepared for the same routine of trying to keep out of the sight of Japanese guards. The camp was very quiet and upon checking we found there were no Japanese in the camp. We were informed that the Japanese had given up and the war was over.

The first thing of importance was to search the Japanese area for food. We found plenty of rice and several cases of Red Cross food packages which the Japanese had been using for their own use. I don’t remember my feelings at that time, only a sense of relief and freedom from fear. I had been hiding for the past three and on half years. We were instructed by the officers not to leave camp as we did not know what the reaction of the Japanese civilians would be.

About three days after the surrender we saw large American planes flying low over our camp and on one pass over they tossed a message streamer onto the parade ground. We were informed that they intended to drop food and supplies for us and we were to stay clear as some times the parachutes did not open. We cleared the parade ground and stood around to watch. The planes came over low with their bomb bay doors open and as they came over they pushed out pallets of supply’s which were hooked up to large cargo parachutes. It did not take us long to see why they had warned us to stay clear.

Some of the chutes did not open and when they came down they destroyed several of the buildings in the camp. Even when the chutes opened the cargo was so heavy it would crash through any roof it landed on. We had to be very alert and run when it looked like a load was coming close to us. After this first drop we would leave camp when the planes signaled they were going to make a drop.

We could not believe the amount and variety of food that we received and that was the last time we were hungry. We could eat all we wanted at any time we chose.

My leg was not healed, and with the medication and bandages supplied by the American planes I was able to keep the infection down by keeping fresh dressing on it daily. Some of the men were talking about going out of camp and see what was going on outside. Although we had been ordered not to leave camp the next morning four of us took off for town. The Japanese we met would put their heads down and walk in the street to avoid us. There was no sign of hostility.

On the main street we saw some women sitting in front of a large two story house and noticed they did not appear to be Japanese. One of the men who spoke very good Japanese asked them some questions and learned that they were Korean’s that the Japanese had kidnapped and were being used for prostitution. We decided this was a good place for us to stay when we were in town and told them we would look after them as long as we were around.

Their building had a large court yard with about twelve rooms on the second floor overlooking the courtyard, with a kitchen and eating area to the rear. The women stated that they had no food so we decided to do something about it.

We noticed a small truck at the fire station and decided we needed it more than the Japanese. They were not happy about us taking their truck but did not give us any trouble when we took it. We scouted around until we found a ware house and discovered hundreds of bags of rice and barrels of pickled daikon (large white radishes). We took several bags of rice and a barrel of daikon to give the women and later when we returned to camp we also brought them cases of food which the planes had dropped.

With the truck we made several trips all over the country side and to nearby towns. Why we were not attacked as we traveled around I will never know. On one trip we came across a camp guarded by civilian police who carried only sabers. When we investigated we found hundreds of Chinese children about the age of ten. They were kidnapped by the Japanese and were being trained to do the work of the men who had to be away in the service.

We asked them about their food situation and it was very bleak. While we were there we took lime and in very large letters we printed P.O.W. on the parade ground. We informed the guard that they had better take good care of the children and that we would be back.

Two days later we returned to the children’s camp and found a very happy group. The planes had seen the sign and only that morning had made a food drop. We had informed them to stay out of the parade ground when the planes came over and except for a few buildings being damaged no one had been injured. We informed the guards to take good care of the children until the Americans came and that they would be punished if they did not. That was the last time we saw the children’s camp and I do not know what became of them.

On day after visiting our camp to get food and news, we were leaving out the front gate and were met by a group of Navy Medical Personnel who had been sent to check up on the prisoners of war, to see what their health was and what transportation would be required. I noticed one man who looked familiar and upon checking learned he was a man from my home town. He worked in the corner drug store as a pharmacist and I new him quite well. We talked for a while and then he had to leave with the promise he would inform my family that I was well.

We returned to town and as we were passing the mine where we used to work, we observed some of our men and several of the Japanese miners. We investigated and found that they were checking the miners for some who had been cruel to the prisoners. As they called them inside several prisoners would look them over and if he was a bad one, they were allowed to beat up the Japanese. While this was going on an American newspaper reporter came in and protested that we were not allowed to do this. He was escorted out the door and instructed not to return unless he wanted some of the same. Although I had a lot of hatred for the Japanese, I took no pleasure in the beatings so I left.

About three weeks after the war ended, sometime early September, we were informed a train would pick us up to start our journey home. The train took us to the coast through Nagasaki, where we observed all the damage that the bomb had done. It was unbelievable. We had to spend several hours in Nagasaki waiting for the rail road tracks to be repaired.

I was put aboard a Destroyer (Tin Can), which is a small war ship. The space on board was very small, but I was so happy being on an American ship anything would have been good. We took several days to get to the Philippine Islands and while on the sea we were in a bad storm. Most of the men were sea sick and could not eat. It was a good thing we had been getting plenty of food for the past month or many would not have made it. When we went to the mess hall it was required that we go out on the open deck for about fifty yards and hang on to a rope to keep from being blown overboard. I don’t recall how long it took, but I was very happy when we reached the port of Manila.

We were given a bed in a tent city set up on Dewey Boulevard and after getting a shower and clean cloths we were given a physical to determine what our needs were. Then we were shown the Mess Tent (kitchen) where we were informed it would be open twenty four hours per day, and we could eat any time we wanted, and we could order anything we felt like eating.

The next day some of us went to town and could not believe the damage that had been done since we were there before the war. We returned to camp and were formed into groups to be flown back to the States as planes became available. That night I heard a lot of shouting from the next row of tents and learned that they were being formed into groups for plans leaving in about an hour. I left my area and joined the group that was leaving. There was so much confusion no one found I was not supposed to be on the plane until we had taken off and names were being checked for those supposed to be there. The person in charge of the roster said there was no problem and that they would just add my name. He did not question me to find out how I got in the wrong group.

I don’t know how long it took or what route we took but we eventually arrived at San Francisco airport. It was night time and the only ones to meet us were a few soldiers and some members of the Red Cross. I was put on a bus and taken to Dibble General Hospital at Menlo Park, Ca. After being checked over by a doctor, I was scheduled for an operation on my leg. The leg was cut open and pieces of bone were scraped from my shin bone, which had been there since I was wounded on Bataan.

A couple of days after the operation I was given a check for back pay, it was somewhere around $5,000.00. Another ex-prisoner and myself decided it was time to see some of San Francisco and spend some money.

When no one was around we took off on crutches, he had had the toes on both feet amputated and could not wear shoes, so he just had bandages on his feet. We took a bus down town in Menlo Park and deposited our checks in a bank, taking about $1,000.00 apiece. Next we caught a bus to San Francisco and a taxi from the bus station to Fisherman’s Warf. Later that night we wound up at the Band Box Club where I did the Boompsy Daisey with the show girls on stage. That is where I left my crutches.

I bought bandages and salve and kept fresh dressings on my leg. Things seemed to be healing well. They had planned to do a skin graft at the hospital and it would have looked better, but the leg healed pretty well. The nerves were exposed and it was very tender, but outside of that it was not too bad.

After about two weeks I went back to the bank for more money and bought a 1937 Ford. Two days later I went back to the hospital and turned myself in. The nurse told me to hang around and the Officer of the Day would check me in. I told her my car was in a no parking area and that I would return after finding a parking place. I drove off and did not return for another week. When I returned the next time, I was given one week of company punishment, and when my parents came to see me it was reduced to four days.

I was discharged from the hospital and the Army and awarded 100% disability and put on Inactive Reserves. There are many things that I did and things that happened during this period, but to make this short I will end here. Maybe some time in the future I will write more but this gives a condensed narrative of most of what happened.

[1] Age 17

[2] At time of processing weight was ~200 pounds, height was 6’2”.

[3] The walled City is within the city of Manila.

[4] We did not have training in firing ahead of the planes so we mostly fired behind it.

[5] Bataan surrendered on April 9, 1942

[6] The USS Canopus was ordered to be scuttled and sunk to deny use to the enemy on April 10, 1942.

[7] The Bataan Death March began in Marvailes on April 10, 1942.

[8] The wounds referenced are the shrapnel wounds received earlier and the outside of both big toes had become ulcerated.

[9] The Clyde Maru left Manila on July 23, 1943 with 508 P.O.W’s aboard. It arrived in Moji, Kyushu, Japan on August 9, 1943.

[10] Omuta, Kyustu, Japan

[11] Foukoka Camp #17 opened on August 9, 1943 with the delivery of these 501 American P.O.W.’s. Bill’s POW identification number from Foukoka Camp #17 is 155.

[12] Atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.

[13] Bill’s favorite requests were steak and ice cream.

#### News Article Featuring Bill

Bataan Death March survivor recalls ‘hell’

By Tom Mitchell May 16, 2013

Growing up in Utah and Colorado, William Eldridge came to hate bitter cold winters.

In 1940, he walked into an Army recruiting office to enlist and asked the recruiter if he could be assigned to a tropical location. The recruiter assured him that he would have “real good duty” at a place called the Philippine Islands. Little did Eldridge or the recruiter realize this tropical paradise would turn into hell -- and the most horrifying experience of his life.

While visiting one of his daughters, Marvel Sheasley of Manor Township, Eldridge, of Citrus Heights, Calif., recounted surviving the Bataan Death March and spending three years as a Japanese prisoner of war.

Eldridge was born in Vernal, Utah, on May 24, 1922. At 14, he attended the Citizens Military Training Camp at Fort Laramie, Colo., and got a taste of military life, but was too young to enlist in the military.

To help make ends meet, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps where he spent nearly three years.

At 17, he convinced his mother to sign the necessary papers so that he could enlist in the military.

He looked forward to the trip to his “tropical paradise.”

“I and most of the passengers were sick most of the trip,” he said.

“At sea we were ordered below deck. We would stay below deck for the entire trip,” he said, noting: “The latrines were a real nightmare and to make matters worse people were constantly getting sea sick and throwing up. It took 20 days before we reached our first stop, Honolulu.”

Finally, Eldridge arrived in the Philippines and was taken to regimental quarters, Estado Mayor, Manila. Duty for the next several months was pretty routine and there was always some time to go to Manila and enjoy leisure time. Later, his company was ordered to move to Fort McKinley where they would live in a tent city. Suddenly, they were activated to Nichols Field Air Base for duty as perimeter guards. It was there they were informed that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. The war had begun. Shortly after the attack, Eldridge and his regiment left the Manila area en-route to the Bataan Peninsula. There they learned that most U.S. planes were caught on the ground and destroyed.

As word of the Japanese advance came, Eldridge said he quickly made a transition from machine gunner and truck driver to foxhole digger. Artillery shells were exploding all around and he and his fellow soldiers hid in the freshly dug foxholes and did the only thing there was to do -- pray. Eldridge managed to survive days of artillery and small arms fire, and strafing and bombing runs from enemy aircraft.

“During this time,” he said, “we were down to quarter rations and low on ammunition. Almost everyone was suffering from malaria and dysentery. Morale was very low and we were very weak from malnutrition. It was in April, about four months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, that the order came to destroy our weapons and surrender to the Japanese. Another soldier and I decided to run off into the jungle. A mortar round exploded near us and I took a piece of shrapnel in the shin.

“We found a few cans of food and sat down to open a can of peaches. Before we took a bite a burst of machine gun fire went just over our heads. It was then that we saw a tank and about 10 Japanese soldiers heading toward us. We waited to be shot or captured. The soldiers herded us downhill, and had no compunction about moving us along with rifle butts, bayonet jabs and kicks. We were pushed into a field along with several hundred other soldiers.

Eldridge, along with 78,000 soldiers, including about 12,000 Americans, the rest Philippine and allied military, made the infamous Bataan Death March, about 80 miles of walking a jungle trail in intense heat, again without food or water for five days.

Survivors of the march ended up at a building which was the Japanese headquarters for POW Camp O'Donnel. A small-built Japanese man with thick glasses came out and addressed them in perfect English. He said he

was born and raised in Riverside, Calif., and was the camp interpreter.

The POWs were required to bow and salute all Japanese soldiers, even privates. Failure to do so would result in punishment. They were told that anyone attempting to escape would be shot, and if caught, would be required to dig their own grave then be decapitated.

“I was in terrible shape physically,” Eldridge said. “I had malaria and severe dysentery. It was so bad I didn't sleep in the barracks but on the ground just underneath. Finally I was sent to what was called “Zero” Ward, a ward filled with men waiting to die. The Zero Ward barracks always had dead bodies around it waiting to be buried.

Eldridge and a number of soldiers were later loaded on trucks and sent to POW Camp Cabanatuan. He said the new camp was larger than O'Donnel, cleaner and better organized. Food was still scarce but there was abundant water not only for drinking but for bathing as well. One day all POWs were issued Red Cross food packages replete with canned meat and fruit, candies and tooth paste and a toothbrush. Eldridge got to brush his teeth for the first time since being taken prisoner.

In July, 1943, Eldridge and a number of fellow soldiers were loaded on trucks and taken to Manila. There they were loaded on an old freighter and placed in the ship's hold. Conditions about the ship were nothing short of appalling and the soldiers nick-named it the Hell Ship. After a grueling and miserable month at sea, they arrived in Japan. They were taken by train to Camp 17, Foukoka and assigned to work in coal mines. The working conditions were primitive and unsafe. Eldridge said they worked under the direction of civilian Japanese coal miners. The only relief from the misery of the mines came at the end of the shift when they were permitted to take a five-minute bath and were then transported to a mess hall for a ration of rice and tea.

He said the mines were infested with rats. They were instructed to not kill the rats as they served as an early warning device for possible methane gas accumulation.

The end of the drudgery of the coal mines was signaled on Aug. 9, 1945.

He saw an American plane fly in the direction of what he later learned was Nagasaki. He saw a large puff of smoke followed by what looked like a mushroom cloud. He assumed that a number of bombs had hit an ammunition dump.

The prisoners had no idea that Hiroshima was bombed days before.

Two days later Eldridge said the camp was eerily quiet, the Japanese guards were gone. The prisoners raided the food area and found Red Cross parcels that the Japanese had kept for themselves. A Japanese officer appeared and warned them to not leave the camp because he feared the reaction of the Japanese civilians.

More than a month later Eldridge arrived at Dibble General Hospital in Menlo Park, Calif. and was finally treated for an ongoing infection in the leg first injured by shrapnel in the Philippines.

Although he was later treated at VA Hospitals for his leg and other illnesses, Eldridge said he never received a Purple Heart.

“I did receive two Bronze Stars and other medals,” he said. “But I was told that since there were no witnesses to the leg wound I wasn't eligible.”

Eldridge continued serving in the Army doing recruiter duty in Indiana and Brookville and two tours in Korea from 1950 to 1953 and 1955 to 1958. After visiting his two daughters, Marvel Sheasley of Manor

Township and Bernice Rishel of Vandergrift and several grandchildren and great grandchildren, he will head to for Virginia for a May 22 to 26 reunion with fellow Bataan survivors.

“Last year there were only 12 of us,” he said. “I don't know how many will be there this year. That's where I'll celebrate my 91st birthday on May 24. I'll be glad to be there and I'm glad to be alive.”

**Bill's Obituary - William Lyle Eldridge, 93, of Citrus Heights, CA passed away on April 22, 2016**.

He was born May 24, 1922 to the late Raymond and Dorothy (Dean) Eldridge in Vernal, Utah. He was preceded in death by his wife Edna (Ratz) Eldridge on September 25, 1996.He had three sisters who preceded him in death: Lois Ray Bailey, Winona Fay Littlefair and Dorothy Lorraine Peterson. He was also proceeded in death by his son-in-law Darl Sheasley.   
  
He joined the U.S. Army in 1941 at the age of 17. He was with the 31st Infantry Regiment, "M" Company, 3rd Battalion stationed in the Philippines. After the attack on Pearl Harbor he was sent to the Bataan Peninsula where he was captured by the Japanese. He endured the Bataan Death March and spent 3 1/2 years as a prisoner of war. Released in August of 1945, he returned to the states to recover and then reentered the army in 1948 as a recruiter and volunteered for duty in the Korean War where he served two tours. He spent time in Japan, Germany, France and several U.S. posts. He retired in 1963. He worked as a security guard for Wells Fargo Bank.  
  
He was a member of the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society and annually attended the Bataan Memorial Death March in White Sands, New Mexico.  
  
He is survived by his two daughters: Bernice (Walter) Rishel of Vandergrift, PA and Marvel Sheasley of Ford City, PA. He is also survived by his 3 grandchildren: Janice (Robert) Pooley, Michael Rishel, and Jill (Randy) Snowberger; his 5 great grandchildren: Emily, Jacob, Amber, Megan and Bella; and many nieces and nephews.

Fukuoka Camp 17 Project Manager’s Note: I knew Bill personally for several years. A quieter, more humble man is hard to find. Perhaps my greatest joy was the day Bill said he considers me his “adopted daughter.” Having never had a father that I knew, I couldn’t have chosen a better one than Bill! *Linda Dahl Weeks*

Photos Below: Left: ADBC Reunion May 2009 Linda & Bill / Right: Camp 17 POWs - Bill (Linda) Roy (Ed) Friese & Wayne Carringer

