

Interviewee: Goldbrum, Louis
Interviewer: Jack Sigler
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Sigler: Good morning, Mr. Goldbrum. You understand that this interview is being recorded?

Goldbrum: Yes, I do.

Sigler: Why don't we start with you telling me where you were from and how you joined the military before World War II and go from there?

Goldbrum: All right. I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and I did all my schooling there. I graduated from high school in January of 1939. I was accepted, because of my scholastic ability, to several good colleges, but I was unable to afford to go to college. The things that are available to students today were not available at that time. So rather than go to college, I went to work in the mornings, during the day, and evening I went to photography school. I graduated from photography school in January of 1941, and it was quite difficult for me to get a job to really support myself. So I decided to join the Signal Corps and was accepted and was sent to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, where I entered the photo section of the Signal Corps there. In April of 1941, I enlisted, and after getting some basic training I was attached to a 1st Aircraft Warning Company, which was the forerunner of today's radar, and we were being sent to the Philippine Islands.

Sigler: And your specialty was as a photographer?

Goldbrum: Yes, I was the company photographer and my job was to photograph installations before, during, and after completion. In doing so, on December 8, 1941 (which corresponds to December 7, 1941, because of the International Date Line), I was in the northernmost part of the Philippines at a place called Bangued, the northwestern most part of the island of Luzon, which was the largest island in the Philippine islands. By radio we were informed that Pearl Harbor was bombed and we were at war with Japan.

Sigler: Had you set up your station by that time?

Goldbrum: Yes, we had completed it.

Sigler: And it was essentially a very early version of the radar station?

Goldbrum: Well, it was radar, but it wasn't called radar at that time. As far as I know, I think radar was devolved by the British. They used that terminology and we used it as aircraft warning. In fact, we had gotten several sightings on the radar scope of groups of planes coming from the north and heading towards the Philippine Islands and then turning around. We relayed those messages to the headquarters in Manila and after a day or so we were told to destroy all our equipment that was sensitive and that we could not carry and join the nearest forces. My company was in the command of a Lieutenant Robert H. Arnold. We gathered whatever equipment we had, we had no real arms because we were Signal Corps, all we had were .45 caliber sidearms. And having no real basic military training, we didn't know exactly what to do, but since the Japanese forces hadn't reached that area yet we were able to go into town, purchase some supplies and decided to proceed into the interior as far as we could go. We went south first and then headed east and on the way we met a Walter Cushing who was the owner of a gold mine. He disliked the Japanese very much because of his dealings with them prior to the war, and because of the war he had to destroy the entrance to his gold mine and was put out of business. He was very gung ho and his trademark was carrying sticks of dynamite with the percussion caps on them in his back pockets and always smoking a cigar. And he was very active in using those dynamite sticks whenever he could. He and Lieutenant Arnold did not get on very well from the beginning because Arnold thought that he was usurping his command and Arnold was content to just lie low and let things come to him whereas Mr. Cushing, who actually held a reserve commission as a captain, wanted to get out and harass and ambush the Japanese as much as he could.

Sigler: At this point you're where, someplace in central Luzon?

Goldbrum: Yes. Well, we're in the province of Abra [??] already. Lieutenant Arnold agreed to let those that wanted to go with Cushing to go with him and the rest would go with him. I and my squad decided to go with Cushing and since that time I never heard nor saw Arnold afterwards.

Sigler: So you don't even know if he managed to join the main forces?

Goldbrum: Well, he never joined, because he wrote a book later called *A Rock and a Fortress*, which I managed to get a copy of and his story was entirely opposite of what I personally experienced, but be as it may, that was his story and we had ours. Cushing then led us into several ambushes against the Japanese. We were quite successful because the natives were very loyal to us and we were able to get a lot of intelligence through them. After the third ambush, just prior to that we had met up with a Major Capayes, who commanded a Philippine constabulary company, which is the equivalent to our sheriff. We sort of joined in with him because he was organized and we were disorganized. Cushing said he had to go away. I believe this was ... as far as my recollection could be, it was about mid-February, 1942. He never came back because, we found out later on, he was surrounded by a Japanese patrol and, due to his belief that he would never surrender, he killed himself. We were then left with Major Capayes and we seemed to get along quite well with his group. He had not too large a group, but basically

a cadre of his best men. He went to the province of City of Lubuaga, Kalinga, in Northeastern Luzon and met up with a Colonel John P. Horan, who was a commander of the 121st Infantry there. It seems that they had a conversation and he explained to him what was happening, who was there, and so on and so forth. Colonel Horan mentioned to him that he heard of a Louis Goldbrum who was quite active and quite heroic and since there was some openings for officers in the 121st Infantry he acted favorably on his behalf and gave him a battlefield commission to first lieutenant. That's how I got the news.

Sigler: Now, this 121st Infantry was US Infantry or Philippine?

Goldbrum: It was US, but you used Philippine scouts who were incorporated.

Sigler: They were regulars?

Goldbrum: Yes, they were the finest of soldiers. Major Capayes came back to me and told me this and said it would be a good idea if I went up to see Colonel Horan, which I did, taking with me four of the American corporals that were with us. He welcomed us and attached us into the 121st Infantry. We happened to engage with the Japanese who had made a landing in Aparri, which is the northeastern part of Luzon, close to North Kalinga. And after several engagements, Colonel Horan realized that his supplies were running short and he requisitioned new supplies from Manila and, upon hearing that there were none forthcoming, he requested to be able to disband. He got permission and he separated his forces into native locales. That proved to be quite a great strategy. He put me in command of the Ilocano native soldiers and my sector would be locus norte/locus sur and Abra. He gave us whatever arms he could and we proceeded to our sector. I settled in an area in the Bucloc Valley in three different barrios, one that was Taguioman, another was Lingey, and the third one Bucloc. I divided my forces in three and we were able to communicate with one another either by runner or a small portable radio, gasoline generated. My job was to keep the Japanese from entering the interior for supplies, food, and rice, that area seemed to be quite plentiful of cattle and rice, and we did so successfully. On the way to my sector we ran into Cushing's mine and we were told there was a cache of dynamite which he had hidden. We found it and, fortunately for me, two of the civilians who worked for him were dynamite-skilled and agreed to join me. It was amazing the way they could handle dynamite, what they could do with putting dynamite in bamboo, in gourds, and all kinds of things that looked so innocent. We put that to good stead and we mined several bridges just in case we had to blow them. We also set up ways of forming road blocks in the mountainous roads there and set up to be as coordinated and controlled as we could be. I didn't allow my men just to lie around. In fact, them being Ilocanos and being natives of the area, some of them even coming from those particular barrios, I ordered them to work with the people in the fields and help them whichever way they could in order not to be known as freeloaders, that we were actually earning our keep. But that didn't really matter, the natives were really very loyal to us and happy to help us. I was able to supply them with news whenever I could from the radio. I'd go around to the barrios at night and discuss the news with the people, keeping up their morale and sort of dispensing with whatever news I could give them.

Sigler: At this point, did you get any support from the main army or were you totally alone?

Goldbrum: Absolutely none. We were too far north and, as you know, they had their hands full on Bataan. But we managed to resupply ourselves from the ambushes. What we took from the Japanese we used against them later on. Whenever we ambushed a convoy the natives used to take over the trucks and strip them down. From the tires they made sandals and it was amazing what they could do with whatever they stripped these vehicles down. This went on until I was noticing that we were running out of gasoline. I didn't have any gas to operate the generators. So I was just about ready to give up on the radio when one day I noticed a group of traders coming from the west coast, carrying long lengths of bamboo, which were hollowed out, and in the bamboo they carried salt, which they traded with the natives for rice. And after seeing that happen several times, I wondered if we could put liquid into these containers and see what happens. I tried that, we found it was quite waterproof, didn't leak or anything, as long as we were able to cover the top with beeswax and then wrap banana leaves around it. It was quite good, no smell or anything. I said, "why can't we just try and go get some gasoline from the Japanese?" We needed some tubing and there were certain reeds growing along the river, which the natives ingeniously were able to hollow out and we use those as syphon tubes. We would follow the natives into town, that were traders, and nonchalantly lay these lengths of bamboo next to a truck or a car or a 55-gallon drum of gasoline and we were able to syphon out gasoline into these tubes.

Sigler: And these were towns occupied by the Japanese?

Goldbrum: Only the Japanese because they controlled everything already. Now, I was young, had jet black hair, was well tanned. I dressed and looked like a native and, to be very honest with you, I was too young and stupid to be afraid. At that time in April or May of '42, I was not quite twenty-one years of age. I was able to get about two gallons of gas in each tube and that settled the gasoline problem. After our first ambush, we were able to pull out the rubber tubing from the trucks and use that, which were a little bit more substantial.

Sigler: Than reeds?

Goldbrum: Right. This lasted quite a while, until the radios deteriorated because of the weather. I had no spare parts. Then our radio went dead.

Sigler: This radio was a short wave radio?

Goldbrum: Yes. We were able to contact Manila with it.

Sigler: You were able to do two way communications?

Goldbrum: Yes. Two of my men were radio operators that were in the aircraft warning. So

that actually took care of that. Afterwards, we were just naturally without any communication except by word of mouth, which wasn't always very reliable. So it was also getting to a point where it was close to the fall of Bataan. Of course, we were ordered to surrender, which we didn't do.

Sigler: That order came via the radio?

Goldbrum: It came to me by messenger from Colonel Horan. And it was a verbal message. It wasn't a written message because, I think at that time, the natives were afraid to write these messages to carry them on. I decided to keep low also, but I realized it was logistically impossible for me to keep the whole group together because of the housing and food situation.

Sigler: About how large was your group at this time?

Goldbrum: We had well over 150.

Sigler: A pretty good size command for a 2nd lieutenant!

Goldbrum: A 1st lieutenant who had no training whatsoever. But I guess necessity is the mother of invention and, as I said before, I was too young and stupid to be afraid. So I did quite well. I developed the respect of the men, most of whom were much older than I, and I guess I had an affinity for leadership. But we still harassed the Japanese and held several ambushes. One in Candon, one near Narvacan, one near Bangued.

Sigler: About how many men did you keep?

Goldbrum: Well, they kept going home on leaves and everything else, but I think I had basically about thirty men at all times.

Sigler: How many of these would have been Americans?

Goldbrum: Only four Americans besides myself. The rest were all constabularies, all mostly under the command of Major Capayes. And we did as much as we could without causing too many problems to make the Japanese come in after us. Finally, on one of my ambushes, which was outside of Narvacan, we had killed a Japanese colonel who was a member of the royal family and that was the final straw. The Japanese sent in a lot of men to hunt us out. So the Japanese tried to get information from the natives and being unable to do so they went into two of the towns which were close by and burnt parts of it and killed a couple natives and beat a lot of them up. And, as a result, the natives were afraid to harbor us any longer, and rightly so, so they asked us if we could possibly go elsewhere. I agreed with them and I decided we would try to go south and join a group that was close by that we had heard about. Then also realizing the impossibility for me to logistically take care of that many men, I ordered them to disband, divest themselves of any military recognition, and go home and keep themselves available for the time

we may need them again. I and the four Americans decided to go south and we traveled mostly at night because the Japanese were all over the place by then. On the third morning of our trip, I was awakened by a sharp jabbing on my side. I jumped up and was confronted by a Japanese bayonet. We were surrounded by a large patrol. I was pushed to join the other four. We immediately said our prayers because the Japanese killed all guerillas on the spot after beating and questioning them. But the Lord was on our side. The commander of this patrol was an American born Japanese. He was born, raised, and schooled in the United States and was visiting his grandparents when the war started and he was drafted. He commanded his men to treat us honorably because according to their bushito code we did not surrender, but were captured unawares, which they did. I was separated from the others and sent by truck to Manila.

Sigler: Were you still in uniform at this point?

Goldbrum: Well, whatever uniform I had. I had a shirt with no markings on it. I never got bars or anything like that, which was just as well because after the war was over, even though I had an affidavit from Major Capayes, the government never recognized the commission, but that didn't really matter. I was just happy to be alive and get home. As I explained, the treatment was ended and I realized that I was a prisoner of war and it's a very unique experience. The realization of a POW hit me. A POW experience is one moment you're a human being and the next moment you're forced to endure desperate conditions beyond even barbed wire or, in my case, a tiny cell. You're often beaten for disobeying an order given to you in a language that you didn't understand and usually done on purpose. And you find yourself in a dimension alien to one you ever experience. You owe your life to an enemy who captured you and doesn't care if you live or die. And, no matter what you hear or read on TV, only if you experience captivity, you can't possibly comprehend what you endure. The Japanese got tired of questioning me after the third day.

Sigler: In Manila now?

Goldbrum: Yes, this was in Billibib prison. I was thrown into a tiny cell in the isolation part of the prison. They didn't let me get in contact with other POWs or anything because they knew I would escape if I could, being that I was used to the area.

Sigler: By this time you must have spoken some _____[??].

Goldbrum: _____[?]. I didn't have any language of Tagala because I wasn't in the Tagalac region.

Sigler: And at that point they hadn't declared it the national language.

Goldbrum: Yeah. Well, each province had their own dialect; even among the natives there were certain idiomatic expressions that were native just for that area. And I languished in this cell, not seeing another human being except for the Japs who brought me at indefinite periods

scraps of food left over from theirs. Finally, on the 24th of July, I'll never forget that date, 1943, four days after my twenty-second birthday, I was taken out of my cell, allowed to bathe. I was given a salve to put on the sores all over my body. I was given a shirt and a pair of shorts. With my hands tied behind my back, I was marched to the port of Manila to join a group of 500 other American POWs being sent to Japan as slave labor. We were put together and we were placed in a small hold on a freighter called the *Mate Mate*. The hold was so small that the only way we could rest was to sit back to back. There was no sanitary facility or water. There was very little ventilation because when we were under way, in order to zigzag away from the submarines that were active in that area, they kept the holds closed. And for three days we languished like that while they were zigzagging. No food, no nothing, and many of us got seasick, threw up. A lot of people had dysentery from before. And you can imagine how that placed smelled and the conditions we were in. And finally on the fourth day they considered themselves safe. They opened the hatches and allowed us to go up in small groups. The first thing we did was pass up three bodies of three men that died who were just dumped unceremoniously over the side. We were able to bathe ourselves with a bucket of seawater. We were given small amounts of water to drink and a little amount of food to eat and this is the way it was until 9 August of 1943. We landed in the port of Mogi on the island of Kyushu and from there we were sent to the town of Omuta in Fukuoka Province. And we entered what looked like a comparatively new, clean compound and our spirits were immediately raised because we thought that probably from then on we were going to be treated like human beings, but those thoughts were quickly shattered. The commander, perched high on a reviewing stand, told us that he did not consider us as POWs, but war criminals. He did not care if we lived or died and his only interest was in the amount of coal production that we could produce as a group. In that way, we found out we were going to be working in a coal mine, which happened to be a coal mine owned by Mitsui Industries, the same Mitsui that exists today. The coal mine where we were going to work was part of the abandoned mine that the civilians couldn't work.

Sigler: You mean because of the danger involved?

Goldbrum: That's right. We were given numbers, my number was number forty-five because at that time I was the forty-fifth ranking as a sergeant, which I used after they wouldn't recognize it (my commission as 1st lieutenant). And we were assigned wooden tags with a hole on the top and in the front of the barracks where we were in was a board that designated whether we were at the mess hall or the toilet or the bathroom or the coal mine or the hospital, et cetera. And we had to put our tags on the designated spot. If we happened to be out of our room and a Jap guard came in and our tag wasn't in the right place we were given a beating. We marched to the coal mines every day and on the way we noticed that every man, woman, and child were being trained, with whatever weapon was at their disposal, sticks, stones, shovels, whatever you could think of, to repel invaders in case there ever was an invasion. They used to pelt us with rocks or anything. We prayed they would throw things at us that we could eat because we were very badly fed. Most of us lost about a third of our weight. We were given a box of cooked rice. The box was about the size, if you can imagine, of twenty-five cigars, that's about exactly the size of it, shallow, and on it was a couple slices of salted radishes and some strips of soy soaked

seaweed. And that was supposed to sustain us at twelve hours of work and when we got back to camp we were given another portion of rice and sometimes a watery vegetable soup if they had it. We never got any meat, except the one time there was a beached whale, which we got some whale meat. And occasionally we would get a bun. After a while, a lot of us were starting to lose our sight because of the lack of the proper vitamins and working in the coal mine. The Japs cured that by dumping a truckload of tangerines into our compound and after eating them, skin, peels and everything, our sight came back and then periodically we would get more tangerines. As I said before, we worked in the most dangerous parts of the coal mine.

Sigler: Did you ever receive anything from the Red Cross?

Goldbrum: No. We never received a package, except at one time Baron Mitsui himself came into the camp to inspect us. We were told to put on special clothing, which was put aside just for that time. We were given about a third of the Red Cross carton and they prepared a special meal for us. The real sick were hidden somewhere and I frankly don't think it meant anything because I'm sure he knew what was going on. We weren't allowed to be questioned or answer or say anything to him. I think he had one or two Red Cross people with him. But we worked in these dangerous places, in fact sometimes we used to chip coal off of the ceilings on our backs, that's how low it was. And this went on for a while and in October of 1944 . . .

Sigler: So you'd been there over a year now?

Goldbrum: Yes. My left hand was crushed in a cave in. Also, it hit my head and my nose. I got a deviated septum from it and if it wasn't for a buddy of mine who went in, endangering his own life to pull me out, the guard would do nothing. They would allow me to stay there and get buried alive. After he pulled me out, the rest of the thing came down. My hand was repaired by a Captain Hewlett, who was a wonderful surgeon, but without any anaesthesia or any decent thing. He was just able to irrigate, clean out, the wound and sew it together.

Sigler: He was an Army doctor who'd been captured?

Goldbrum: Yes. He was one of our doctors. His name was Thomas H. Hewlett; I will never forget him.

Sigler: Did the Japanese provide any medical supplies at all?

Goldbrum: Very, very little. Afterwards they supplied some dental novocaine, but that good for a superficial thing. But they didn't give us anything at all really, was very little. And because of their policy, if you don't work you don't eat, so you go on half rations, I rushed back to work with a bandaged hand and I was given a job to oversee a conveyer system, which purposely was broken down every once in a while by the fellows working so that they could get some rest. And one by one each one of us would get a beating for it, but that became part of the game already. This lasted until early in January of 1945, when we noticed large flights of planes overhead. We

didn't know they were American until almost immediately thereafter the Japanese had us to dig air raid shelters. And as soon as one was completed, they would plant dynamite above, around, and in these shelters. And we were told that if there was an invasion we would be buried alive in them. And the Japanese meant what they said; we got to a point where we never discounted any threats that they made. Finally the Japanese ... out of frustration our beatings were more often, we were worked harder because of the reversals that were coming back to them.

Sigler: You weren't seeing any of the air raid results at this point?

Goldbrum: Well, one, we didn't see it, but they bombed someplace near our camp and one of the bombs went astray and landed in our compound and, believe it or not, it destroyed my barracks. So we were doubled up in other barracks. Fortunately no one was hurt, and just kept on until one morning we came up on the coal mine and we noticed large columns of smoke coming from the west. Our camp was across the bay from Nagasaki and the Japanese guards told us that there was an accident in one of their fuel dumps. That's what they were told so they told that to us. The next morning we got up, we're told we don't have to go to work, that we met our quota of coal so we were getting another day off. We were also given a little bit more rations and we just languished and rested and hung around. And we also noticed that the Japanese guards kept away from us, didn't come near us, didn't bother us. And they delighted in harassing us, in the past we had to stop what we were doing, bow and salute the lowest private. If not, we got beaten or they would take away our daily ration or the three cigarettes that they would give us occasionally. Fortunately for me I didn't smoke, so I was able to trade off my cigarettes for food. And the next morning we got up and the camp was completely empty of all Japanese. And we didn't know what to do, we were afraid to go out. And we just wandered around, not knowing what to do, and somehow word came to us that the war was over, that the Japanese surrendered. We then went out of the camp and went into town and tried to scavenge whatever extra food we could. But we also found, we discovered later on, that there was a warehouse in one far corner of the camp compound that was stacked from floor to ceiling with Red Cross parcels, of food, clothing, medicines, et cetera, which we never got. The Japanese wouldn't give it to us because if we were using those materials and that food we would be living and eating better than their soldiers. Finally, on the 19 of August by coincidence . . .

[End Side A

Goldbrum: Finally, on 19 August, ironically exactly to the day two years after we arrived at the port of Mogi, we were taken out of the camp and we were trucked through Nagasaki to a hospital ship to take us to the Philippine Islands.

Sigler: Now, when you say you were taken out of the camp, by Americans?

Goldbrum: Yes.

Sigler: Can you go back and explain when you saw the first American forces?

Goldbrum: This was on August 19.

Sigler: August 19, they arrived at the camp?

Goldbrum: Yes, and they took us out of the camp and we went by rail to Nagasaki and, to this day, my viewing of the utter destruction of that city sort of brought back a retaliation of a sort of the misery that I and my buddies went through and sort of caused great delight to me at least, and I remember it to this day. We were put on a hospital ship in the port of Nagasaki and we were sent to Manila where we were given new clothing. We were able to contact our family and as soon as possible after debriefing I was put on a ship, it was the Dutch ship *Klipfontaine*, and was sent back to the United States. I arrived there in October of 1945. And there I was put into the Madigan General Hospital at Fort Lewis, Washington state, and there we were, you know, our bodies was sort of re-nourished and rebuilt for us. And then we were sent by train to Rhoads General Hospital in New York.

Sigler: You were still being kept pretty much as a group?

Goldbrum: Well, I was part of a group, not exactly the group that was there, but they sent POWs from all over. It was unbelievable how many POWs the Japanese had, not only Americans but Australians, Dutch, British, Korean, everything. Literally, they had millions that they used to replace civilians that they put into the service and we were contracted by these private industries who paid the Japanese government for us to be used in their facilities as slaves. There's another story about that, but I won't talk about that now.

Sigler: Go ahead.

Goldbrum: Well, to this day the Japanese refuse to apologize for this. To this day, our government acts as our adversary instead of our advocate in us trying to get some reparations from these private industries who made millions and billions of dollars on our blood and sweat. Instead of them helping us, they fight us because according to the Treaty of 1952 with the Japanese, they unilaterally took away our right to sue. Because at that time we were using Japan as a bulwark against Russia during the Cold War. And every time we tried to sue, the State Department sent down representatives to squash the case. And they seemed to disallow our premise that we're not suing the Japanese government with whom the treaty was signed, but these private industries, which to this day exist and their businesses are in our country making billions and billions of dollars. Yet, we can't get any reparations for either our injuries or people that survived them, their families, for their deaths of their sons or husbands or uncles or whatever you want to call it. I get too aggravated talking about it, I'd rather not.

Sigler: Well, let's go back to you were in one of the general hospitals?

Goldbrum: I was at Rhoads General Hospital where they treated me mentally by some therapy and then when I was declared well enough, they sent me to Valley Forge General Hospital where

they repaired the injury to my left hand. And ingeniously they were able to repair my hand by replacing tendons and I now have about seventy percent use of that hand.

Sigler: That's good for medicine of that time, the late '40s.

Goldbrum: Oh, yes. I believe, I'm not positive, but I believe the person that operated on me was the surgeon that took care of the Dodgers, the Brooklyn Dodgers, when they were injured. But my hand came out pretty good, my health came back, my weight came back. And I met my wife, Florence, of fifty-six years during one of my recuperation furloughs and we were married in January of 1947. And I was discharged in April of '47, exactly six years after I enlisted. And we have three children, we have six grandchildren. I retired to be relocated to Florida seven and a half years ago.

Sigler: From New York?

Goldbrum: From New York. I live in Boca Raton now. And I have to tell you something that I live with for the rest of my life. I have to say that the experience of a POW is unique. POWs fought in two wars. First, they battled an enemy with guns and second, we fought to survive unspeakable conditions in POW camps. By using our wits, those of us who kept their thoughts and faith in God and America survived. And after liberation their bodies were free, but our minds will never forget our captivity. I can never forget the hunger, brutality of my captors, the loneliness and fear that resulted from my capture. And I don't believe that these memories will ever leave me till the day I die. And in closing, every morning when I awake I thank the Lord for selecting me to survive and return home from a living hell and God bless America.

End