My Prisoner-of-War Story

By Harm Hannink

As told by Harm’s wife Jennielavon Hannink

Dedicated to the memory of Harm Hannink and our children Lance, Brad, Gerrit, Faith and Hope

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**Preface**

Reluctant to relive the horrifying, inhuman treatment suffered in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, my husband, Harm Hannink, of whom I write, chose only at rare intervals to reveal his experience. At these infrequent moments I jotted down his words on bits and scraps of paper. Gathering and constructing these insights made me aware of the imperative to pass to our children and grandchildren this legacy of sacrifice, courage, and perseverance. Only through communication with Jesus his Savior was he lifted above himself and his environment.

**Enlistment and Training**

Where in the year 1939 could a man obtain free room and board and also gratify a desire to see the world? Joining the United States Army was the answer for me. Friday of the third week in August was the beginning of that procedure when I called on the recruiter at the Salem, Oregon Post Office. Looking me over he thought I’d make good army material. After being asked if I had any hernias, could bend and stretch, and after being weighed and measured, I was on the way to becoming part of the United States Army.

The recruiter, a sergeant, on detached duty in Salem from Monday through Friday, took me to Vancouver, Washington barracks that Friday afternoon. Here, along with other enlistees, I had records examined and references checked. More extensive physical tests, including a chest x-ray, were given followed by a psychiatrist’s five-minute lecture. After affirming, with right hand raised, the reading of the Articles of War, I was now a soldier in the United States Army. It was September 7, 1939. Two weeks had elapsed between recruitment and being sworn in. Immediately the uniform was issued.

Five of us were put on a Pullman train bound for San Francisco, where those destined for overseas were shipped. It was my first train ride. Arriving at 10 p.m., the train was ferried across the bay to Oakland where we spotted a restaurant. Having had no supper, we ordered a big meal. Just as we were ready to eat, we heard a big voice ordering us out immediately. No, we couldn’t eat, but I made a sandwich of my pork chop and ate it later. The ferry left for Fort McDowell on Angel Island at 12 midnight, so we had to hurry. There a gruff sergeant said, “Get in line. Attention! Column of four. Draw your linen in a single line.” These were good barracks. After making our beds, it seemed no time until the 6 o’clock reveille sounded. A bugle blowing summoned us to the parade grounds for roll call. Then it was police the parade grounds, make beds, mop a huge floor, shave and march to chow.

“You dumb heads! Right! Line up in a column of four. Four abreast. March – one, two, three, four.”

Back at the barracks for an 8 a.m. formation we learned close-order drill, right face, left face, about face, column right, column left, and to stand at attention. Military courtesy included the proper way to salute a flag and to say, “Yes, sir.”

Occasionally I had KP or fatigue detail. Shortly I was put on special duty detail. Monday through Friday we boarded the first boat to San Francisco and reported to the army dock for rations which we loaded on the boat. Noon meals were taken at Fort Mason in San Francisco. Between one and two in the afternoon we headed back to Fort McDowell.

**Fort Drum**

My time at this place ended sometime in January, 1940 when we boarded a ship bound for the Philippine Islands. Now called “salt-water con-coms, “we were divided into companies. When a first sergeant who was going back after furlough asked for volunteers, I became an orderly who ran reports to the officers’ quarters. With free run on the ship, what more could you ask?

Just out of San Francisco we encountered violent weather. The rougher it got, the better I liked it. The rest were all below deck, but I never got seasick. In one week, our army transport, the *USS President Grant*, reached Hawaii where we had a two-day lay over. In another twelve days, the first of February, we disembarked at Fort Mills on Corregidor, one of the Philippine Islands in the Manila Bay. Here at Fort Mills we received three weeks of infantry training with an issued Springfield rifle which held five rounds of ammunition for target practice. We also practiced using the bayonet and were instructed in guard duty.

Of the four islands defending the entrance to Manila Bay the largest was Corregidor accommodating Ft. Mills which lies five and one-half miles northwest of El Fraile Island (The Friar) – a rock with 90-foot pinnacles which was transformed into Ft. Drum. Caballo Island, designated to become Ft. Hughes, lies north of Ft. Drum. Carabao Island, jutting into the bay a few hundred yards from the Cavite shore and southwest of Ft. Drum, is home to Ft. Frank. These Manila harbor defenses, The Harbor Defense Command, at the mouth of Manila Bay looked out on the China Sea.

My assignment was to E Battery of the 59th Coast Artillery Regiment on Ft. Drum atop El Fraile Island, a rock 144 feet at the widest point and 350 feet in length.

The United States government engineers blew the top of the rock away to eight feet above the water line and built concrete and steel exterior walls 20 to 30 feet thick around it – a challenging achievement. Begun in 1909 and finished in 1919, this concrete battleship became one of Manila Bay’s harbor defenses with room for men and guns. This engineering feat proved well worth the cost and effort. Earlier El Fraile Island belonged to the Spanish who used it as a lookout point. The United States acquired it in 1898 as a result of the Spanish American War. The gun deck 30 feet above the mean low tide had overhead protection of 18 feet of concrete and steel. On either side the 6-inch guns boxed in steel and flush with the wall were called Battery Roberts. Two of the 3-inch AA guns, Battery Exeter, paced one on each side of the stern, taught the Japanese to never approach from the rear. The other 3-inch gun named Battery Hoyle.

I was assigned to the four 14-inch, two to a turret, of Battery Wilson and Battery Marshall set on the foredeck. Battery Wilson’s turret could traverse 360°. The great rifles of Drum discharged 1,660-pound shells. Constant maintenance was needed to keep them serviceable.

On Ft. Drum with its bow thrust into the China Sea I received instruction in coast artillery, provisional infantry and close-order drill. A full-strength platoon comprised of sixty-four privates and corporals with three sergeants had a lieutenant as commanding officer. A battery, comprised of two platoons, was commanded by a captain. Ft. Drum had three platoons.

On this concrete battleship were many homesteaders, corporals, and sergeants, who had been there a long time. One had been there since it opened in 1922. In the old army a soldier being transferred to another location would lose his rank. During World War II, he transferred in grade.

By September 1940, when I’d made my first stripe, I became a PFC. This entitled me to be a first-class gunner. In June 1941, I became a corporal. The only difference was the pay. A buck private made twenty-one dollars a month, a PFC, thirty, and a corporal, forty-two dollars a month. Often a corporal would be in control of a platoon and sometimes I was called to do this also. This responsibility included calling roll, leading calisthenics and close-order drill besides inspecting barracks. One of my responsibilities was being in charge of swabbing out the fourteen-inch guns.

Many disliked being on Ft. Drum because it was so isolated. Every weekend some men went to Ft. Mills by boat on a pass if they had no guard duty. Ft. Mills on Corregidor Island was bigger with a PX, library, and a theater. I spent much of my leisure time in the library. At Ft. Mills enlisted men’s clubs served beer and hamburgers. Here, too, on Ft. Mills was a chapel with services every Sunday. Services at Ft. Drum Chapel were held every two months for communion with a few words for a message. Soft drinks, gum, ice cream cones, toothpaste, beer and tobacco were also available on Ft. Drum, - yet not quite like the PX. On Ft. Drum second-rate movies were shown outdoors every night and these had to be rewound before another reel could be shown. On Ft. Mills we could see a better movie, such as *Gone With the Wind* indoors for fifteen cents. Corregidor, formed from volcanic rock, also had good beaches for swimming.

Two three-day passes a month to go to Manila were issued. A pass to Ft. Mills was not considered off-base since both were harbor defenses. These passes extended from Friday morning through 10 a.m. Monday.

The natives did KP, shined shoes, made beds and took care of laundry. Three dollars a month for this service was automatically taken off of the paychecks.

All clothing made from denim and khaki was purchased by the army and manufactured on Ft. Mills. Each soldier was individually fitted and responsible for the cost of tailoring. Each needed six sets of khakis since we changed clothes every day. Either uniform could be worn for dinner. The jacket was required for infantry drill. For reveille each wore an undershirt and jeans.

On Dec. 2, 1941, Col. Bunker, Commander of the 59th Regiment (Ft. Drum was a part of the 59th Regiment) received orders that Ft. Drum was on war alert. All formations except duty formations were discontinued. We were all ready to man the guns at any time. No more passes were issued. Observers at telescopes watched for Japanese.

Three months before this President F.D. Roosevelt had cut off Japanese imports, eliminating all trade with the United States. The Japanese made a false show of negotiations for peace. On the same day, Dec. 7, 1941 (Dec. 8, Philippine time) that the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, was in the Japanese Embassy, they bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii where the American Pacific Fleet was stationed. The Japanese gave the implication they were going to settle the trade war peacefully.

The Japanese could get Dutch East Indian oil for payment in gold which was relatively scarce in Japan. No gold, no oil. To get the oil our fleet had to be out of the way first. Our Asiatic Fleet was based in Manila.

Our battleships, the *USS Arizona*, the *USS Oklahoma*, the *USS California*, the *USS Virginia*, the *USS Utah*, and the *USS Nevada* were at the anchor at Pearl Harbor when they should have been steamed up and out to sea. The fact that they weren’t was criminal negligence on the part of Admiral Kimmel and Lt. General Short who had a week’s notice to be on war alert. Lt. General Short’s plane hadn’t even been fueled. All the airplanes lined up on the airstrip with no gasoline were a perfect target. They could and should have been fueled and dispersed around the perimeter, ready to go.

General MacArthur also seemed to not understand the seriousness of the war alert on the Philippine Islands. After the Saturday inspection, planes were in neat rows as in Hawaii. Even after a radar warning that enemy planes were approaching, American planes were ordered to remain grounded. Even after radio reports that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, no orders were issued to get those fighter planes into the air.

At 12:45 p.m. December 8, 1941, a day after the infamous Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese in one decisive hour had in reality captured the Philippines. Fifty-four Mitsubishi bombers flying from Taiwan hit everything in sight leaving Clark Field, 60 miles north of Manila, in a devastation of grounded pilots, blazing hangars and strewn runways. Simultaneous attacks two days later on Nichols and Neilson airfields on the outskirts of Manila suffered the same devastation.

It seems the only ones to obey orders were the Coast Artillery Corps. Orders were issued on every bulletin board outside every company office – “All Asiatic Installations Now On War Alert.” I read the orders myself.

On Ft. Drum at 9 o’clock we heard on the civilian radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. The news was officially announced about noon. The next day we watched Japanese bombers strafe the Cavite Naval Yard inside Manila Bay. In two hours it was wiped off the map. Though some of them came within range of our anti-aircraft guns we got orders not to fire unless attacked. Those planes met no opposition from American planes that had been knocked out the day before. About Jan. 1, 1942, when they began attacking our harbor defenses, we started firing on the Japanese with the casemated 6-inch rifles of Battery Roberts and the AAs.

Maybe three or four days later the Japanese started firing on us with 240 mm guns from Cavite province on Luzon, the main island of the Philippines. That destroyed our AA guns and range finders. One round smashed through the armored shield of Battery Roberts, destroying our port side casements. Since we were fired on day by day, details of men were sent to top deck to put rock, steel, and fresh concrete in the shell craters created the day before.

We found the location of their 240 mm guns and put them out of commission with our more effective 14 inchers, Battery Wilson and Battery Marshall. The Japanese immediately moved other 240s behind the hills of Cavite, so now we could not hit them with our 14-inch guns. From then on it was unsafe for anyone to be on top deck. Anyone foolish enough to be caught there encountered Japanese fire. With 14 feet of concrete and steel overhead we were relatively safe on the lower deck. Shells hit again and again on the tops, sides and faces of our 14-inch gun turrets with no damage.

In late April the Japanese decided to rid themselves of troublesome Ft. Drum. By early May they took all the fortified islands under heavy fire. One day we counted 540 hits. The noise was terrible – like being in an iron barrel struck by heavy hammers. Even so, the chips and dents on Drum were superficial. Not a man was lost, although several were wounded in the fight for Ft. Drum. Our guns were credited with knocking down several enemy planes. We did more damage to the enemy with our more effective guns than any other outfit compared to the number of men involved. Ft. Drum’s guns continued firing to the end. The forethought of the little fortress’s designers on all-around heavy armor proved sound.

Later the entire Philippine Defense was issued a Presidential Unit Citation. Men on Ft. Drum on two separate occasions were awarded an oak leaf cluster for excellent firing on Japanese-held positions. William M. Belote, Associate Professor of History at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD., writes in his book, *Corregidor*, “Drum’s men proved tough, for despite the concussions and continual “rocking of the ship” from hits outside, Capt. Sam Madison’s Battery E had no cases of combat fatigue.” As another put it, “These men were tough guys who prided themselves on being hard and not showing fear.” I was proud to be part of Battery E.

Soon after, Major General G.A. Moore, Harbor Defense Commander on Corregidor, gave us orders to stand by and be ready to hit targets on Bataan, now in Japanese hands. We continued to fight until May 6, 1942. No longer could we hold off the Japanese. We were nearly out of food, ammunition and water. Besides, the oil supply used to heat sea water for conversion to fresh water was depleted. To the end Ft. Drum continued to be Gen. Homma’s most difficult and fearful foe.

**Surrender**

Bataan peninsula had been captured already on April 9. Now the island of Corregidor had been invaded. Their subsequent surrender and ours as part of the harbor defenses meant capitulation of all the Philippine Islands to the Japanese. We’d been standing by our guns all morning the sixth of May when about 11:30 the Ft. Drum Commander, Lt. Col. Kirkpatrick, called us into the dayroom. He announced that General Jonathan Wainwright, Commander of the Armed Forces in the Philippine Islands, had ordered all armed forces in the Philippines to surrender. Lt. Col. Kirkpatrick didn’t want to surrender. When he received the call, he slammed down the receiver. Another officer said, “You must answer the telephone.” This gave us one-half hour to destroy all equipment, render the guns useless, water down the ammunition and throw our rifles into the sea.

At 12 o’clock sharp on May 6, 1942 our United States flag was pulled down and a white sheet, the flag of surrender, was hoisted. I don’t know what that means to other people, but when our flag came down and that white sheet went up a feeling of complete sorrow came over me. It seemed we hadn’t done our job. I felt we should have fought to the last man. I’m not a sentimental man but it hurt me. I felt real bad that day – empty. That the United States should surrender was unthinkable. It was as if we had done something wrong. With heavy hearts we were aware that our lives hung in the balance. We knew that our hours of freedom were numbered. This was an extremely low point in the entire war for those bearing arms. Later that day a Japanese plane flew over flapping its wings as a sign of peace.

That evening we ate all we could lay our hands on until an officer stopped us. We might sit here a long time with insufficient food. Conserving food wasn’t new. We had been on half rations since Bataan fell a month before.

Even though the harbor defenses had surrendered, that evening about dark the Japanese, who had already taken all the harbor defenses, opened fire on Corregidor for two or three hours to destroy any Americans who may not have gone into the area designated by the Japanese. Some on Ft. Drum ran below deck fearful of Japanese fire but we were not fired on that time.

**Capture**

The next morning we ate some food, but after the stoves were demolished, there was nothing. About noon we watched as a Japanese flotilla approached our concrete battleship, as Ft. Drum was known. Lt. Col. Lewis S. Kirkpatrick, the fortress commander, ordered his men on top deck to form companies and platoons in regular army formation, while he and the master sergeant went to the sally port to escort the Japanese to view the surrendered troops. Checking to see we had no weapons, they commanded us to go downstairs. On the way down at several landings we were quickly and surreptitiously searched for money, watches or other valuables. This was stealing, not an official search. Guards prodded us along with bayonets. Someone on top was pushing us down, hurrying us onto the waiting boats. I happened to sit next to a good acquaintance of mine, Leslie Frank. After exchanging small talk, Les said, “It would be a good thing if you and I teamed up – stick together.” We shook hands on that agreement. From then on we pooled our resources continuously and helped each other to the best of our ability. This pact remained intact until the Japanese separated us.

We thought we’d be taken to Manila on these captured fishing boats, but instead they headed out of Manila Bay along the south coast of Luzon Island to a small sugar town with a loading dock. This was Nasagbu, southeast of Manila Bay on the South China Sea. When we landed about five in the afternoon we waded ashore in three feet of water and were marched up to the Japanese guard headquarters. Everything that hadn’t been filched before, was now officially removed, except the clothes on our backs. We were carrying a barracks bag with a few items of clothing, a mess kit, a little food, cigarettes, and matches. We never saw it again. We were marched to our job of repairing the sugar-loading dock that the American engineers had blown up. Forming long lines to pass big rocks from one to another like the bucket-brigades in early America, we filled the dock’s holes. We worked all night with no food or water. After handling rocks for four hours, we rested two hours, sitting with our eyes open. If anyone’s eyes closed, a blow in the bare head with a rifle butt worked quite effectively. This continued for two days in the broiling sun and two nights. We had no water for two days and no food for four days. Some men who drank salt water were semi-delirious. At the end of the second day we got some water. Then it was back to work for the next two days with no food, and a little water. The fourth night we were allowed to sleep on bare broken cement. That evening we had food: a little moldy rice. That wasn’t much but after four days our stomachs were so shrunken and since the digestive process had stopped, we could hardly eat. A little was plenty or too much. Really, at that time there was no demand by the stomach for food. This treatment, it was related later, was revenge for Ft. Drum’s men dropping a 14-inch shell on Bataan where a high ranking Japanese officer was killed.

The morning of the fifth day they kept us in an empty sugar warehouse where we spent the night on the cement floor with nothing over or under us. There was no more work after that at that place. We were fed one-half cup of rice twice a day.

Then after three or four days we could buy bananas, mangoes, candy or other food form the natives to add to our diet. I had seven pesos in the match pocket of my pants. Others had hidden money in their socks or had pinned it to their underwear. What we didn’t know was that their food was contaminated with bacteria causing dysentery, an intestinal disease. Some symptoms include abrupt onset of diarrhea with blood and pus in the stool, lower abdominal cramps, nausea, fever, chills, muscle pain, and dehydration. Within a few days we all had diarrhea. We could say “bingio” (bathroom) and relive ourselves in the trees. Soon everything was black with flies, pants were dirty and buttocks were sore. Certainly, there was no water for cleansing. Normal hygienic measures were not available for the prisoners. The natives were immune. In the Philippines no food was ever wrapped to eliminate agents of infection. In the summer and fall of 1942 prisoners died like flies in our stinking, dysentery and malaria-infected camps.

Three weeks later we were put on a ship that transported us northeast to Manila harbor where landing craft led us on the beach adjoining Dewey Blvd. Here wealthy foreigners lived. Lining us up four abreast we were forced to march in a “Victory Parade” four miles through Manila to Bilibid Prison. Many foreigners who couldn’t leave Manila, held up the V for Victory sign. They weren’t permitted to talk to us or give us anything since the guards kept the prisoners 50 feet from the affluent spectators. When we reached the poorer section of Manila, Philippine natives lining the narrower streets tried to throw food and candy to us. If a Japanese guard noticed it, he’d whack them on the head. The adults saw they were being punished for giving food, so they sent the little children in between the guards’ legs. One Japanese guard chased the children and punished the grownups for sending them in. They had tried their best to comfort us.

Darkness overtook us as we entered Bilibid Prison. It had taken all day to load, unload and march. After a scanty meal of rice, we slept on the ground where we could find a place to lie down within a stone wall enclosure. The cells were jammed full of Corregidor prisoners who had come earlier in the day.

The next morning, with no breakfast, we were marched to the railroad station and crammed into boxcars with standing room only. Several hours later after the train was loaded and the doors locked, we started the trip to Cabanatuan. With no windows, very little air, and no food or water, we were packed in so tightly we couldn’t fall down. With no place to relieve ourselves except in our clothing, the air was sickening-stinky, stuffy, suffocating and unbearably hot.

After detraining we started the six-to-seven-hour march to Camp III at Cabanatuan City in Caban province. A bayonet stick kept us moving and in rank. Once we stopped for water. A schoolground provided space to camp overnight. A little rice and water was the evening meal. Those who couldn’t get to the cauldron went without. During the night we were forced to sleep in the mud when the first rain of the season flooded the schoolyard.

The next morning after one-half cup of rice we continued the march to Cabanatuan Camp III, about six miles from the city of Cabanatuan. During that march we had some sadistic guards who always wanted us to move faster. Energetic, fresh guards replaced tired ones constantly. Marching in closed ranks, four abreast and three apart, we were prodded, clubbed and bayonetted to keep a good, lively pace. Anyone stepping out of line to relieve himself was likely popped in the rear with a bayonet. Any too weak or sick to keep the pace were likely to fall. Those weak, sick, slow and finally fallen marchers were thrust through with a bayonet or shot and left by the side of the road. Anyone trying to help them would meet the same fate. Reaching camp late that afternoon we had some water to drink, but not enough to satisfy. That night we had a little rice to eat. Inadequate food and water left us completely exhausted.

**Survival**

Cabanatuan Camp III had been built to train Philippine troops, so the barracks were in fairly good shape. A water system was in place but not maintained. Latrines with six to eight spaces were outside and roofless. Since water was struck at two feet, the latrines were never deep enough. Though there were shower heads in communal baths, the Japanese refused to supply sufficient water. With building capacity allowing for only half the number of men needing space we were crowded together on beds of bamboo slats with no mats, sheets, or blankets.

During the first month, we had no water to wash ourselves and scarcely enough for drinking and cooking. We subsisted on a little wormy rice sweepings with camote vines for color. These extremely coarse and indigestible fibers caused diarrhea for everyone. Soon thereafter, because of the open latrines, the place was covered with flies. Again, dysentery spread by fly-borne germs became an epidemic. Very soon I suffered excruciating stomach pain from amoebic dysentery. With the latrine trenches full now the prisoners had to cover them, dig new ones and make boxes with accommodations for sixteen.

No soap or water to cleanse our bodies led to skin diseases such as jungle rot, tropical ulcers and other skin infections or illnesses. In her book *Corregidor*, author Milly Wood Kennedy states that General Wainwright was moved by the pitiful condition of the American prisoners and wrote General Homma requesting him to radio President Roosevelt for food, clothing, and medical supplies. His request was never acknowledged by the Japanese General. Our starving bodies lacked resistance to fight all the diseases. Lack of medication resulted in much suffering and by the end of 1942, 2,500 men had died at Cabanatuan.

Our chance to wash came when sufficient rainwater streamed off the roof. Under the eaves we painfully washed our tender bodies, filthy pants, and other clothing. In the absence of soap and razors, the many skin sores on the head, face and groin were matted with hair. We couldn’t keep the dirty hair out of the raw infections. During the rainy season many did recover from the skin ulcers. But some were so weak they never recuperated. The combination of fevers, malnutrition, malaria, and dysentery was just too much.

Within a month or six weeks many started coming down with beriberi, the result of insufficient food for four months on Ft. Drum while holding off the Japanese, and we had still less to eat under the devastating Japanese rule of two months. The polished rice we ate lacked vitamin B1, thiamine, causing beriberi. We had no liver, lean pork, kidney beans or whole grains, all sources of vitamin B1. Our appetite for food was nil. We experienced swelling of the whole body, paralysis of the legs and arms and decreased circulation with difficult and painful breathing.

With the first rains came the Anopheles mosquito spreading malaria and the Aedes mosquito causing dengue fever with its skin eruptions and severe pain in the joints and back. Either disease will lay a man flat.

During this time I also suffered from what we called Guam blisters or tropical ulcers. These blisters were all over my body but especially in my groin and on my face. With pus in my beard, running sores elsewhere, and with no medicine there was nothing to do but bear it. Razors could have kept the dirty hair from further contaminating the festering abscesses.

Around mid-July 1942, our captors issued bars of laundry soap for men who had severe skin ulcers. I had a bar of this very strong lye soap. Instructions were to scrape off the scabs with a fingernail, make a paste of soap and a little water and apply this into the open sores. After this caustic treatment a man would be shaking so uncontrollably with pain, he would have to lie down. This remedy did have some effect on the blisters but when the Japanese issued razors we could shave. This, with delivery of clippers to keep our hair short, reduced the infections. One thing to remember in the tropics is to keep clean or you’ll contract all kinds of skin diseases. Some sores I had were so deep they took months to heal. Many crater-like scars remain.

Beriberi, malaria, pellegra and dysentery were rampant with no treatment of any kind. About this time I got beriberi with paralysis, bloating of the entire body, loss of feeling and coordination in my hands, feet and legs with extreme pain in all my joints. When I did try to lift my feet to walk, I’d fall flat on my face. I couldn’t even crawl. A week later I couldn’t walk at all. My buddy, Les Funk, and some others helped me to the latrine for a few days. Shortly, I became completely immobile and was moved to zero ward in the “hospital.” Unable to move, I lay in my excrement for three or four days. Only eight men were in that little death shack, three of whom died during that time. I didn’t expect to live. I’d made my peace with God. Only by His grace I’m still alive. But I can’t give a rational explanation for why I’m here. The fifth day they slaughtered caribou for the entire camp. The blood, heart and liver were given to the hospital for the sickest men. I was given two or three portions of cooked blood and liver. That started me on the road to recovery. The B complex vitamins in the blood and liver counteracted the beriberi. Within a week of better food, I was sent back to regular camp. I could walk with the help of a stick.

Some men in the camp had no work, except to carry something here or there for a Japanese, or to cut wood for the kitchen fires. Groups of 200 to 300 men were taken to work on Clark, Nichols or Nielson airfields that had been destroyed in December, 1941. I was too weak to be chosen to go on any of these details. The men on these details outside the camp could buy American canned foods, such as bacon, milk, pork and beans, beef and fish from the Philippine natives with pesos. Though the men on Ft. Drum had been “pretty well cleaned out of their money,” many of the men in Camp III were from Corregidor Island and hadn’t bee so thoroughly searched as the Ft. Drum men. Some of them had lots of money.

When General MacArthur declared Manila an open city around Christmas, 1941 and the troops retreated to the Bataan Peninsula, the United States money in Manila banks were transferred to Corregidor, the largest fort. A few days before Corregidor surrendered, the officers decided to sink the gold and silver currency in the bay off Corregidor. But the paper money remained til May 6, 1942, the day of surrender. Any soldier helping to burn the bills had a good opportunity to load his own pockets and many did. Possibly, it was this money that was used to buy food, drinks and cigarettes from the Philippine people at exorbitant prices. When the natives saw a work detail coming down any road or trail, they would peddle their wares. The Japanese let this go on for a while, to get rid of all the American money so their own worthless occupational money would be used. But the rule was that anyone caught using American or Philippine currency would at least be severely beaten, get worked over pretty good or suffer execution. Consequently, there was a period in the camp when some who had a chance to buy, lived very well while others were starving to death. My buddy, Les Funk, and I did not have money needed to obtain that food.

The Geneva Convention, an international conference held in Geneva, Switzerland in 1864 set rules to improve the conditions of the wounded and prisoners-of-war. The Japanese said they would treat soldiers captured in the Philippines as captives and not prisoners-of-war. They had not signed the international agreement. Article two of the Geneva Convention states: Prisoners are in the power of hostile governments, but not of the individuals. They shall at all times be treated humanely, particularly against acts of violence and measures of reprisal.

The Japanese established a store, run by Americans, for officers’ use. Captured American goods such as canned fish, canned beef, jelly, canned milk, cigars and cigarettes were for sale. When the money was gone, we *all* lived on rice and “whistle weed” soup made from camote vines whose stems were so thick and heavy they could be made into whistles.

Within a month or six weeks of being in that camp, nearly the whole camp was sick, except those who could buy food. Even some of that food was impure enough to kill people. Sugar was readily available but this was for Philippine livestock. Many impurities besides sulphuric acid and other refining chemicals in the sugar would in a day or two kill anyone buying this sugar when on the trail with a work detail. A low-dose won’t kill an animal but ravenously hungry men would eat too much. One time a sergeant gave another man on a wood detail money to buy some sugar. But the man ate it all on the way back. The next day the sergeant was told that the man wouldn’t feel any punishment for stealing his sugar. He was about to be buried.

Sometime in August, 1942 the Japanese transferred a work detail to Manchuria. I was on that list too, but since I could only walk with the aid of a stick I couldn’t go. Les Funk and I were separated at this point. We’d been together for three and one-half months after the surrender on May 6.

Then for the next month, since I was unable to go on any work detail, I was water faucet guard. I had to make sure no one got more than one canteenful of water a day. Low-pressure on the water pump caused a water shortage so we still took a bath only when it rained.

After Les Funk left, I took up with another man by the name of Redding. We really became buddy-buddy. In December, 1942 we both had to go to the hospital. That’s the last time I saw him.

So here I was once again in the bamboo shack hospital’s zero ward with room only to lie down. This time it was a battle against the extreme fever and chills of malaria and a recurrence of wet beriberi and its swelling of the whole body. Edema and paralysis, symptoms of the late stages of beriberi, weren’t hopeful signs. An adequate diet including vitamin B1 would have prevented it. No medicine, none at all, was available. About mid-January, 1943 I was released to regular camp. Another miracle – I had survived another hospital stay! We were continually exposed to these tropical diseases. Sick people died; they didn’t get well. Why did I live? Later the Japanese brought in some quinine for the malaria.

Before the war, Cabanatuan Camp Numbers I, II and II and Camp O’Donnell had been bases for training Philippine Reservists. In November 1942, the few left at Camp I were moved to Camp III where there was a hospital facility. Lacking proper sanitary arrangements, the dead were left lying around. With the death rate at 40 to 50 men a day from mid-July until December 1942, few were strong enough to bury them. Even after they were removed, the nauseating odor from the mass burials in shallow, watery graves hung like a pall over the surviving prisoner-of-war.

In the fall of 1942 the captured chaplains were permitted to hold open air services at Cabanatuan. The Japanese agreed that that would improve the men’s morale. There were some light-weight talks, but a couple of the chaplains were excellent. “Jesus Led Me All the Way” was my favorite song. We sang it often. The chaplains were permitted to use captured American materials. What an inspiration to see a chaplain with a Bible in his hand! This encouragement, together with the singing, carried us on for a while.

When we received our first Red Cross parcel in December, 1942, I weighed about 70 pounds. I probably got up to 100 pounds during the next four of five months with half of that food parcel, an occasional can of milk or beef or a candy bar. A few pounds of food can make all the difference in the world. The other men were affected the same way. When we had fish, I chose the head. I knew there was fat around the eyes. For awhile we were given a teaspoon of dried fish every few days. In mid-January when the Japanese started feeding us better, they also worked us harder. They saw what an improvement American food made.

Everybody in camp exempt those in camp hospital, and even some of them, had to work on the prison farm. Anything grows anytime of the year in the tropics. We grew tomatoes, Chinese cabbage, cucumbers, peppers, corn and camotes which resemble sweet potatoes. All work was done by hand with the stronger men using the shovels and hoes to make seed beds on ridges of soil. Growth depended on the rain. In the dry season a weaker man’s job for the day was to carry three-gallon bucketfuls of water in each hand to the small plants. Anybody caught picking anything off plants in the garden was punished with a beating or torture. All vegetables were to be brought to one of the kitchens, separate buildings for preparing food for every two, three or four hundred men. As one vegetable was harvested, another was started. Very few tomatoes or peppers got into the kitchen. Many, myself included, devoured these vitamin-filled vegetables on the sneak when the guard was otherwise occupied. We were searched for produce at the gate every time we came back into camp. During the next four or five months the death rate dropped from forty or fifty a day to five or six a day. In the long run it was better to be on a work detail. The food was better. But the Japanese didn’t care if they worked the captives to death.

**Japan**

Sometime in August, 1943, I was put on a five-hundred-man detail to go to Japan. After marching fifteen miles to Cabanatuan, we were put on a train of boxcars. This time there was more room. Some could even sit down. With some rice and a canteen of water this trip of about 150 to 200 miles to Manila was tolerable. Detraining, we marched immediately to the ship, a freighter, where we were hustled into one of the forward holds made to accommodate men, not material. Two decks of rough planks with built-in bunks provided enough room to lie down with a walk-way between the rows of bunks. The one latrine on top deck was woefully inadequate for the needs of 500 men. A guard allowed only four or five in line on top deck at one time. Many, myself included, always had diarrhea from the food. Dysentery was prevalent too, but not always active. Even the food was better at this time, but by our standards it was still a starvation diet, grossly deficient in protein, fat and vitamins. Thinking positively was a little easier now since we weren’t doing anything.

Leaving Manila we stopped at Lingayen on Lingayen Guild, on the west coast of Luzon Island, to load one hold of the ship with ore. Those two days I stayed on the hold except to use the latrine. Next we stopped at Formosa where it took a couple of days to load tobacco. Since that hold was next to ours with an opening in between, the native Formosans saw we were out of smokes and threw us a bunch of tobacco leaves once in a while – a pleasant diversion.

The second or third week in August we docked at a big port city, Moji, on northern Kyushu, the southernmost principal island in Japan. On this slow freighter trip of several weeks, not a man died. Every other ship I heard about making this trip lost scores of men. After disembarking, we marched several miles to a railroad station, amid threats and jeers of the populace. We thought we were living in luxury when we were put on a passenger train. A breakfast of rice on the ship and a big bun and water on the train at noon held us that day. The slow train took all day to get to Omuta, a seaport on the western Kyushu Island. That evening we were marched to our prison camp, Camp #17, three miles from the railroad station. We were the first 500 American prisoners-of-war to occupy Fukuoka Camp #17. Later, we numbered 1,700.

Women in the mess hall had rice soup and tea ready for us. After a good night’s sleep and roll call, we had more rice soup and tea. This lasted three or four days. The fixed, daily food allowance was set by the Japanese army officials in charge of the prisoners’ food. Seven hundred grams of rice or almost three cups of cooked rice a day was supposed to be allotted each prisoner. Camp doctors reported such fare was insufficient to support life in a bed patient.

A Japanese army lieutenant gave our Camp #17 commander, Major Mamerow, orders on camp operations. Every Christmas after the war, he sent a Christmas card to the “First 500” with a list of those he contacted. I had the pleasure of receiving cards and notes from several of the men I knew.

Doctors and medical corpsmen took charge of the hospital. Dr. Hewlett performed surgery with a razor blade. Naval officer, Lt. Little, had charge of the mess hall. About noon that first day American labor was already in the kitchen cooking for us.

For the next ten days we attended classes for ten hours a day for instruction in mining soft coal. Through an interpreter we memorized the Japanese names for the tools and their uses. Orders were given in Japanese: Hurry up; work hard. Over 200 foremen could speak English. When meeting a Japanese guard or officer we had to salute and bow from the waist. American POW’s worked as a crew. We didn’t intermingle with civilian Japanese or Korean workers.

Now came our first experience in the mine. Before the two-mile march to the mine, accompanied by Japanese soldiers, we stood in line to be counted. We were counted again when we got to the mine. Then we were turned over to Japanese foremen and assigned to work in squads of five or six men. Eight or nine sub-foremen were in charge of fifty men. Every day the head foremen directed each sub-foreman which job to do, on which level to work and the tools to use since each day was different. Each squad carried a 40-pound jack hammer and drills one-half mile into the tunnels. Carrying a 40-pound jack hammer on a shoulder of skin and bone was no joke. We rode in cable cars to the underground storage place to pick up our tools, which were strictly accounted for in the evening. A Japanese squad leader was responsible for all the tools being returned. Tunnels were lighted, but not the coal faces so each man was issued a light for his belt when he got his tools for the day. Even though batteries were charged, you might not get the same battery or light the next day. Each man had his own numbered cap.

When we got to the mine’s coal face usually the first job was for one man to drill holes five feet deep into the coal face in which to place a dynamite charge, while other men had to go some distance away to bring timbers to brace up the ceiling. Then we waited outside the tunnel while one Japanese foreman lighted the fuses. If they all ignited, the men picked up and threw the exploded rock behind the conveyor and then shoveled the coal onto the conveyor which emptied the coal into cars. After the blast a lot of coal came loose and shoveling this took three or four hours. Then we used a pickaxe to bring the remainder down and shoveled that onto the conveyor.

When the coal had been removed, we braced up the ceiling with timbers four to six inches in diameter in varied lengths, seven to fourteen feet. Each Japanese foreman had a saw and hatchet to cut the pine poles the length needed. The fourteen-foot ones were almost too light to hold any coal. Cross pieces over the poles had to be absolutely tight so we drove wedges under or above the poles. If any loose coal was released when we tapped the ceiling, we improved the situation by setting the poles closer together, four or five feet apart to hold the rock in place. After each blast, we repeated the picking, bracing and shoveling.

One morning I noticed the framework in the mine didn’t look safe. The Japanese foreman said it was and to go to work. As I was driving the pickaxe into the coal face, the rickety timbers gave way, and I crumpled under a pile of coal and rock from the main fault. They dug me out, then laid me aside thinking I was dead, but later kicked and beat me until I regained consciousness. When I came to, a Japanese foreman was beating me on the head. No mercy. Go back to work. I was told I had been unconscious about four hours. Civilian coal-mining overseers were sadistically harsh, especially toward American POWs.

After the timbers were in place and the coal was blasted it was time for a welcome rest for lunch. Each of us had a little wooden box with a lid tied with a silk kerchief which didn’t last long in a coal mine and when threadbare wasn’t replaced. These boxes, two and one-half by four and one-half inches, held barely a full cup of rice. By eating slowly we stretched the time as long as we could.

With a ten-hour workday, fourteen hours had passed before we got back to camp. Walking to the mine took one hour each way; one hour after work was used to count us and it took one hour per day to get in and out of the mine.

Bathing facilities at the camp consisted of a huge concrete tub into which 50 men were crowded at one time. Before getting into the tub, we washed off the excess grime with soap and handfuls of hot water from a bucket. Then we could get in, soak, wash and rinse. Many took little time pre-washing so the black water wasn’t exactly cleansing. Eventually 1,000 men used the same water. We were counted again after our bath.

At supper we were counted again. Each one’s number was crossed off by the checker as he was served a few mouthfuls of rice and a bowl of watery soup. No one got a double-rice portion.

The next morning we were awakened by a Japanese guard calling, “Tinko” which meant get up, stand in line and be counted. Before we went to bed, it was another “Tinko.” When we marched to the mess hall or to the barracks, we were always counted. Each man had a number burned into a small board (three by one by one and one-fourth inches) with the numbers running vertically. The hole at the top fit over a nail with the numbers running in order: 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282. These boards hung over the door of the room occupied by five others and myself. That number showed where each man slept. Mine was 279. Each man showed his number at the mess hall, the latrine, at work, on sick call and in our room. We were in serious trouble if we went into another room in the barracks. We could be severely whipped if our numbers showed we were in the room and we weren’t there.

That was quite a trick sometimes. Each prisoner was supposed to get three or four cigarettes a day with no light provided. If anyone wanted to smoke before going to bed, someone had to sneak into the kitchen, the bathhouse or to a neighboring barracks, knowing a man was covering for him. The whole camp had a good warning system. We could see the Japanese guard house and which guard on duty was walking around. They usually came in the door at the front of the barracks, but sometimes they came in the back way. If they saw more than six in a room the extra one got knocked around the head with a rifle butt or worse. The POWs could sit on a bench in an enclosed hall outside the room to smoke.

Some left their well-worn, almost useless shoes under the bench at night. Straw mats couldn’t withstand the wear and tear of the shoes. Others slept with their shoes on to prevent theft of such necessary items.

At first when we got to camp, we were still hungry. It wasn’t as bad as in the Philippines since we weren’t working. But when we started working in the coal mine the food ration was totally inadequate. Soon everybody was stealing from everybody else including the Japanese workmen if we could find their food box. The mining company fed Camp #17 men less food, so they could make more money. Someone was likely to grab your lunch box if you turned your back on it. Rice in the wooden box was a constant. A slice of salted turnip cured in brine or salted seaweed or a salted cherry were incidental. About the only source of protein was ground, salted and fermented soybeans worked into a paste. We liked that, but got little of it.

After a couple of months the Japanese decided to pay us. But to be eligible for wages we had to put out a certain quota of coal. At a store set up in camp we could get a #1 tall can of fish balls for 80 sen. A yen is equal to 100 sen. Cookies, salmon, and sometimes candy and cigarettes were for sale too.

Over the pay incentive to work harder, we were given a bonus for more and cleaner coal. This might be a few cigarettes or a few more send a day. The workers were paid ten sen, equal to five cents a day. Numbers 277, 278 and 279 hung together and shared alike. By pooling our money we could share a can of fish. Fish balls in soybean oil packed more nutrition than salmon.

This payment of money for harder work to get more and cleaner coal went on for three or four months. Then went our bosses saw how much the Americans could accomplish, they discontinued the pay but still required the same amount of coal. If we slacked off, the Japanese beat us up more. Just thinking of extra food had made us work harder. Their excuse for closing the store and discontinuing the sen was that the money was used for gambling, which was illegal. If a man didn’t smoke, he would sell his cigarettes. If he was sick and unable to eat, he sold his rice. There was too much money for the amount of goods for sale in the store.

At first I slept with all my clothes on but found it was warmer to put some of them on top of my body. Clothes constricted blood circulation. Blankets issued during the coldest part of the winter were a help since I was always cold in winter. The weather was colder than in California with more freezing temperatures. After six or seven hours in bed, it was back to the mine.

Among the Americans at this time there were no chaplains at all. The Dutch who arrived in camp in July 1944 were blessed with a chaplain. Religious services were held every Sunday, if possible. I attended when I wasn’t working. Since I could speak some Dutch, I became acquainted with a few of them. Three I remember were Wagter, Vogelzang and Wassenaar.

They even brought their own spices! Pepper! I had not had pepper for a long time.

Since Sweden was a neutral country, we could send news home through the Swedish Red Cross by signing our name to a card the Japanese wrote. My parents received three cards stating that I was in good health, had comfortable quarters, and received pay for my work, and that we had many recreations. This was far from the truth!

Marching two and a half miles to and from work at the mine wasn’t so bad in the fall. But we got mighty cold in winter walking through three or four inches of snow in exhausted, downtrodden shoes and when available captured British overcoats. Maybe the snow would be gone by noon. In the mine a G-string was our only working wear. Each of the three 10-day shifts was interspersed with “yasuma,” rest day. If that day coincided with change-of-shift day, certain duties in camp had to be performed anyway. “All the clothes” had to be washed. Each one had to have a shave with a razor blade and a short-as-possible haircut with a clippers. American barbers were especially assigned to this duty. At first safety-razor blades were issued. When they became too dull, the barbershops were set up with straight-edges razors.

On change-of-shift days we had to stand for parade ground inspection. Everybody had to be out there every tenth day except the cooks, those sick in the hospital and those tending to the sick. There was no reason for inspections except to line us up and count us off, make speeches to work harder and to witness punishments. The men were beaten for a while, and later given more beatings in the guard house. Just looking the wrong way or putting your number on the wrong nail in the barracks was punishable. To be harassed by guards while sleeping during our rest time was an ordinary occurrence. We lived in constant fear.

Work in the mine was rugged. None of us was used to it. It was dangerous work with rocks or other debris collapsing on bare feet or on feet in ragged shoes. No one wore protective clothing and bruises and skin abrasions, infected with coal dust, were slow to heal. No medicine was available. Consequently, most had diseased hands, shins, feet or toes.

Many accidents occurred, some quite serious, such as broken limbs. A man carrying a timber might stumble and fall. But any injury had to be extremely serious to get medical attention. If we could walk, we were ordered back to work.

In this Mitsu mine under Nagasaki Bay, the men worked on eight levels with differing temperatures. On the hot, dusty elevations we breathed coal-dust saturated air constantly. Level four was the dustiest. Some levels were chilly with cold water dripping incessantly from the ceiling. The lowest was 4,000 feet below sea level.

Once the pickaxe of a fellow miner accidently glanced off of the coal face and pierced through my foot. With a band aid covering the stab wound I walked back to camp at the end of the work day, trailing blood. The whole foot became so badly infected, I was put in the hospital. The Dutch doctors, having no medicine, put maggots in the festering wound to eat the pus. A bandage kept the maggots in place. Did that itch! After four or five days healing began and it was back to work in the mine.

One thing always bothering us was diarrhea or dysentery with its persistent fever coursing through our bodies. We had to run behind a conveyor to relieve ourselves and run back to work again. On winter days we were glad to work in a warm section of the mine – a relief from colder areas or the cold barracks on topside.

According to Japanese army regulations, the foremen, who were civilians were not to beat any prisoners. But when we couldn’t understand them or couldn’t or wouldn’t work hard enough, they would clout us on the head. We were supposed to report any infraction to the United States Army, but the army closed its eyes. What could they do?

# Punishment

Being under the complete control of the Japanese military we were expected to conduct ourselves as captured servicemen under strict military orders which included saluting and bowing from the waist to every superior. The physical and emotional torture was almost unbearable. Hopelessness hung over us like a dark cloud. It was constant, day after day, month after month, year after year. We had no idea what day it was. That wasn’t important. We were always hungry, yet had to work hard.

I kept a low profile. To be unnoticed was a means of survival.

At the gateway to the compound, where we marched in and out, the guards would take the most serious offenders (in their eyes), set them at the gateway, make them kneel with a big stick between the back of the legs and knees, with the hands tied to the stick and the head held back with a rock in the mouth. Sitting that way for five or six hours was a good punishment and a good example for all Americans. This was for stealing Japanese food or disobeying camp rules, depending on the whim of the Japanese who caught the offenders. Some legs froze and had to be amputated; with the stick in such a place all circulation was cut off. When Japanese guards saw any heads down, a swift kick in the shins would snap the head up. Sometimes the person would have to keep this excruciating position in front of the guard house. When we went out to work, he was sitting there. When we came in, he was still sitting there. If the offense was bad enough, he was put in jail in that position with no food, little water and a beating for good measure. The men being punished slept on rice-straw mats with no blankets. The Japanese would tell them, “You’re hurting, and now you’ve learned.” They served them a big meal of heavily salted rice and then withheld water. You could hear them scream winter or summer from the pain of a dehydrated body, wishing for death. Shooting is easier – no torture involved. I saw four men who experienced four days of horrible torture and were then shot. The jail sentence was from five to ten days. Some men never returned to their barracks. I just cannot rationalize the torturing. They had a different psychology. I suppose it had some effect all right. Japanese commanders just enjoyed seeing people suffer. We were slaves of no value. Sometimes men were beaten without cause using fists, clubs, sticks, rifle butts or anything handy to satisfy their brutal whims. It was normal to get worked over but not all guards got pleasure from inflicting physical and psychological pain on prisoners. Those guards who did beat the prisoners revealed their basest human behavior.

The mining company had several POW camps around Fukuoka, but camp #17 of all of them was the most miserably inhuman place. Each day again witnessing and experiencing cruel physical and mental torment taxed even the strongest men. Camp #17 was 40 to 50 miles directly south of the city of Fukuoka and about 30 to 40 miles almost directly east of Nagasaki.

Eventually, 1,700 prisoners were there including Americans, Dutch, Australians, and a few English. In January or February 1945, Americans from the Philippines came off the Hell Ship where they had been for 49 days. These men were in terrible shape. After the Americans torpedoed the Japanese ship, they were packed like sardines into another ship, suffering outrageous conditions.

By the end of the war most of the Americans had been transferred to Japan. They wanted American POWs on the home islands for better control. If the United States won the war, they said they were going to kill us all. The atomic bombs, dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and on Nagasaki August 9, saved our lives. If our forces had invaded Japan more American lives would have been lost fighting on the beaches than were lost in the atomic bomb blasts.

**Freedom**

On August 16, 1945, as our swing shift moved down into the mine, the order came down to go back up on top. “The war is over,” the foreman announced. Our work for the Mitsui Coal Mining Company, where I had spent two years, was finished. The armistice the Japanese asked for was signed on this date, August 16, 1945. Since we were not working, we spent our time eating, sleeping and waiting for further developments. On September 2, 1945, we suspected the war had indeed ended because all the military guards disappeared. This was the very day General Douglas MacArthur and the Japanese signed the peace treaty aboard the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. Now it was official. My days as a “guest of the Emperor,” as we were told when we were captured, were over.

On the 4th of September American B-29s dropped rations by parachute. What a day! Food! Always on our minds! Now we had lots of it! We ate steadily for two and one-half hours, relaxed and ate again – and again and again. Dropped at an increasing rate we hardly knew what to do with it by the 10th day. We could pick up what we wanted at the mess hall. A few times we wandered beyond the camp, happened on a chicken farm and enjoyed roast chicken.

No Americans had yet arrived to rescue us. Becoming impatient more than 200 of us walked the three miles to the railyard at Omuta, a port on western Kyushu. On our way we saw trucks and wagons pulled by horses or oxen bringing food into the city.

Knowing a little Japanese we convinced the Japanese railroad officials to make up a special train for us. The yard crew uncoupled two passenger cars, directed passengers off and we were on a straight, nearly 100 mile run to Kagashima, a seaport on the south coast of Kyushu Island. The efficient Japanese railroad system served us as well.

The American airbase at Kagoshima, taken from the Japanese, already short of food didn’t expect to feed over 200 more men that evening. The flour for their own men was rationed. Sharing gave us all something to eat, although we wished for more. The next morning a prime, absolutely American breakfast of three sausages, three pancakes and coffee proved a total treat. No rice.

As space became available that morning an army C-47 bound for Okinawa took us the 500 miles over the East China Sea. I sat on the deck on my Japanese knapsack of meager possessions that we carried to the mine every day. These civilian planes, stripped and converted to cargo planes, carried food and clothing in and prisoners-of-war out.

After our arrival at Okinawa for an overnight stay, officials gave us a fast look-over health wise and sprayed us with DDT. Medics administered shots to prevent measles, mumps, tetanus and diphtheria accompanied with a shot of whiskey to help us relax. Vitamins were given to help replace those we had done without for so long. Then, after the luxury of an invigorating shower, our filthy, ragged and bug-infested clothes and knapsacks were burned. Our first issue of fresh, clean clothes with plenty of food made us feel like new men.

The following morning on our B-24 flight to Manila my seat in the bomb bay offered a kaleidoscopic view of the sea water below through the constantly jiggling doors. Landing at Clark Field we were transported by truck to the 29th Replacement Depot where we were housed in tents and slept on cots.

The medical examiner told me there was no dry beriberi when he asked me to enumerate the diseases I had lived with in prison camp. He knew there was a wet beriberi. I had endured both. If they had been more knowledgeable they would have understood the symptoms of both in POWs.

Here we were allowed three cans of beer a day, all the cigarettes we wanted and the pleasure of great American food. Some American soldiers who had captured Manila complained, “This old slop again.” No POW grumbled about the food. We still had a good appetite. I had gained 40 pounds in the last 40 days.

Tomorrow – tomorrow. Everyday officials assured us we would leave for the States tomorrow. After three weeks of waiting for an available ship we set out on a good-sized coast guard ship. For me ocean travel is always enjoyable and made better with good food and a good mattress. Days hurried by. Talking, leaning over the rail watching the waves, playing cards and other games, sleeping and eating filled the two-week trip.

After docking in Tacoma, Washington we went by bus to Madagen General Hospital at Ft. Lewis, Washington. How good it was to meet my old buddy, Les Funk here.

Since my roommate and I had relatives in Yakima, one week-end we expected to surprise them. But I was the one surprised. Uncle Seine Boertien had moved to Lynden, a hitchhiker said. Catching a bus I did visit with Uncle Seine, my mother’s brother and his family.

Reporting back to Ft. Lewis at Tacoma I found the ward I had been assigned to was closed. Orders to report to Dibble General Hospital in the Bay Area gave me a 10-day delay enroute. Here was my chance to go home. I bought a bus ticket for Modesto and surprised Dad, Mom and my brothers and sisters. Six years had gone by since we last had seen each other.

At Dibble Hospital after 24 and 72 hour sputum tests and stomach cultures, the diagnosis was a full-blown case of tuberculosis. Since my case was not highly critical doctors determined immediate treatment was not necessary but I was put in isolation.

Next I reported to O-Teen Army Hospital at Asheville, North Carolina. Even at this large hospital no action was taken during these few weeks.

It was late May, 1946 when I reported to Bruns Hospital at Santa Fe, New Mexico. Doctors here gave me no chance. When a nurse came to check on us, I saw my name was on the terminal list. I was very sick, not only because of tuberculosis, but also because of a treatment doctors used at that time, called pneumothorax. This treatment was induced by artificial means, allowing air to enter the pleural space causing the lung to collapse and rest. But it blew a bigger hole in the lung. I was consigned to the terminal ward since I was going to die anyway. I was discharged from the army November 18, 1946 while a patient at Bruns General Hospital.

Shortly I had orders to return to O’Teen Hospital. This was an army hospital during World War I and was later under control of the Veterans Administration. When the wounded came in from Africa during World War II, it was taken back by the army. Now on my second stay at O’Teen the Veterans Administration had assumed control again.

On the passenger train from Santa Fe to Asheville another tuberculosis patient and I shared a compartment. Our nurse in another compartment picked up our food from the dining car and served us. Many servicemen on this train were on their way to New York and New Jersey. Buses took us from the depot to O’Teen Annex.

A Jewish doctor assigned to my case was honest with me. “You are on the terminal list,” he said. “At Bruns Hospital they gave you pneumothorax. If you are willing, I can give you pneumoperitoneum. It won’t hurt. We can give it a try. Say yes or no.” I said, “Yes.” This good doctor, knowing my condition was becoming worse, knew it would be necessary to use an additional therapy. This treatment, given at intervals, introduced air into the lining of the abdominal cavity compacting the lung to rest it.

By July or August 1947, I was getting tired of it. When I asked the Colonel for a transfer to the west coast to be near my family, he seemed reluctant to honor my request. I asked him who he was running this hospital for—himself or the patients. The hospital received money for each patient. “I’m going to leave anyway,” I said, “I would like your authorization.”

After a 30-day furlough I reported to the Veterans Administration Hospital at Livermore, California. Tuberculosis patients resided in cottages on the grounds. Treatment here continued for a year and for three more years in Modesto with Dr. Treadwell. Then the disease was declared arrested. Tuberculosis is a debilitating disease. It took a long time to regain my strength. Since I was 100% disabled I couldn’t work to amount to anything for several years.

**Reflections**

Why did I live while so many others died? Only by the grace of God I’m alive is all I can say. Giving up the will to live meant death. At times I really wanted to die, yet in my subconscious I wanted to live. A man was mentally gone first. He would just quit eating rice. It didn’t take much to die. We were all sick all the time. We had not enough food nor the right kind – no vitamins. All Pacific Theater EX-POWs suffer the residual effects of lack of vitamins. Fifty-seven percent of the strong, young men captured on Bataan, Ft. Mills on Corregidor, on Ft. Drum, Ft. Frank and Ft. Hughes (all the harbor defenses) and incarcerated during the three to four year period, died. The going must have been rough.

Those living surely must bear some residual effects. The suffering of every prisoner-of-war was so great no one will ever know, or believe it if told to them. The cost in human live was expensive. The buddy system helped us survive. Really, it was needed. Groups of two to five men shared food, information and cigarettes. A man who didn’t share very likely didn’t make it through.

It was continuous – seeing all your buddies just skin and bones, all bloated up, being carried out having a little rice straw thrown over them. Would I be next?

It was too much. What is worse? To see someone executed or being beaten to a pulp, or hearing the screaming from the pain of a dehydrated body knowing the same pain myself? It was mind shattering and reflected this in the body too. The constant repetition of brutality and uncertainty left psychological scars never to be erased completely. What was worse? That is hard to say. If one has been in hell for years and then to describe one day or incident as being worse than another, he is unable since hell is the epitome of suffering. Hell is a qualitative value, with a quantitative dimension. This is both a psychological and a physical hell of what I went through.

The benefits of all this? I had lots of time to think. While shoveling with my head down, still in my mind I had that certain knowledge my only hope in life and in death was Jesus Christ. It made my life realistic just at those moments in time. Also, during the times I was in the hospital, I went to sleep as I prayed for the people at home. Going through this I was and am on the safe side.

Les Funk, my Cabanatuan Camp III buddy, and I continued and enriched our friendship over the years until he was called to his heavenly home. Sol (Schwartz ?) also from Ft. Drum, and I keep in touch, too.

The United States I came home to in 1945 seemed like a foreign land – it was a changed society, far different than the one I left in 1939. The shock was severe. For some the war brought success in monetary terms and war-time jobs in the aircraft industry and ship building because the farmers were able to sell their commodities to the government. People were prosperous; when I left many were poor. Now there was money to buy, not just necessities, but luxuries as well. The people had a different outlook on life too. For a physically and emotionally depleted POW adjustment to the American way was difficult.

Freedom is not free. The cost is considerable. During World War II Winston Churchill said, “Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.”