# Torvald A. Thompson

 **Army - PFC.**

The following oral history testimonial of Torvald A. Thompson came about at the request and encouragement from family members to create a memoir of his WWII experiences. In January of 1995, during a winter visit to Las Vegas, Nevada, Torvald (Toby), sat down with his daughter, a court reporter, and began speaking of his wartime experiences while she reported his words verbatim stenographically. As part of the Veterans’ Oral History Project, this is being preserved to the Library of Congress for their collection of oral testimonies.

This testimonial was reported and transcribed by Barbara Kulish.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. Insofar as possible, this transcript tries to represent the spoken word, Thus, it should be read as a memoir and not as either a researched monograph or edited account.

To the extent possible, the spelling of place, names, foreign words and personal names have been verified, either be reference resources or directly by my father. Some uncertainties will inevitably remain regarding some words and their spellings. In these scenarios a (ph) follows a word or name that is spelled phonetically.

AN ORAL HISTORY BY TORVALD (TOBY) A. THOMPSON

“MY WWII EXPERIENCE AS A JAPANESE PRISONER OF WAR”

January 1995

I had my draft notice to appear before the draft board. My friend Dale Minger also had his notice. We wanted no part of the infantry, so Dale and I went to Des Moines to enlist. Dale and I went to high school and played football together. The recruiting officer said he had two openings in the Philippine Islands (that’s a joke). We thought that sounded interesting, so we signed up.

After taking the Oath of Allegiance to our country, along with about six others, we were sworn into the Army of the United States on May the 20th, 1941. After the swearing-in ceremonies, we were given brooms and other cleaning equipment and told, “You’re in the Army now, clean up.”

We went by train to San Francisco, then by boat past Alcatraz Island, which was interesting to see, to Angel Island where we were issued some clothing and other necessities. We had no training there. We were kept busy tearing down some barracks and KP (kitchen police). We left Angel Island on June 6th, sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge, which was exciting. The ship was “President Pierce,” the first trip it had made as a troop transport. I remember it had a working swimming pool.

I was asleep in my bunk one day when a fellow, Albert Kelch (ph), woke me up and wanted me to sign up for boxing. He was from Kanawha, Iowa, and had come with us from Des Moines. I had a little experience in boxing in high school, but just for exercise. He said he had boxed at fairs and carnivals where a man would take on all comers. It turned out that I was to fight him. The night of the fight, he came out of his corner charging at me and screaming like a mad bull. He did not hit me, but after I landed about three blows, he was on the floor bleeding profusely from the nose. The fight was stopped and I was declared the winner. Then I was to fight a big fellow by the name of Red Shaw (ph). He was close to 7’ tall. The Army did not have shoes that fit him. This was supposed to be for the heavyweight championship of the boat. I was scared, and I believe he was scared too. The fight did not come off as I was put in the hospital for an ear infection, which was caused, I believe, from the water in the pool.

Somewhere out in the ocean everyone was ordered below deck. There was a Japanese warship off to our left. It seemed to be sitting dead in the water. We arrived in Manila on June 24th, one month and four days after I enlisted. Before I ever got off the boat I was ready to go back home. I was assigned to the 59th Coast Artillery, Headquarters Battery on the island of Corregidor, which lies at the entrance of Manila Bay. Corregidor is about two miles wide and four miles long, shaped like a tadpole with the tail pointing towards Manila. The 12-inch guns were installed in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

The Japanese stayed out of reach of our guns. We had the regular barbette carriage and the disappearing cannon, 12-inch. When fired, the recoil would propel the gun down behind the parapet. The guns would not transverse far enough to hit Bataan. Our first air raid was probably on the 9th with wave after wave of planes bombing us. I was laying in a ditch along with others when they hit the water main above us. We were soaked from the water coming down the ditch. I admit I was scared. The first bombing raid. One never gets used to the artillery and bombing.

After Bataan fell on April the 9th, we were shelled from Bataan, along with daily bombing. It was great to see some Japanese planes shot down by the 60 anti-aircraft batteries on the island. On the 29th of April, the emperor’s birthday, they started shelling us from Bataan before daylight and continued until after dark. The shells were landing almost like machine-gun firing. Also bombing by the air. In peacetime Corregidor was a peaceful place, lots of trees and jungle. After our battle was over, there was very little vegetation left. The trees were mostly stumps. Japan paid a good price on their assault on Corregidor. Several landing barges were destroyed but they managed to secure a beachhead. Also some light tanks got ashore.

We had no supplies reach us since the war started, so there was a shortage of food and ammunition. We had been on half rations even before Bataan fell. All the guns and equipment were destroyed to keep it from falling into the hands of the Japs. General Wainwright surrendered the garrison on the 6th of May 1942. It was probably the saddest day of my life to be taken prisoner by the Japs. The next morning on the 7th, we were all assembled at bottomside with our hands up. A young Jap soldier kicked me and took my canteen, which was one thing I didn’t want to lose. Later in the day Jap soldiers came through and picked about 18 men. I was one to follow them. There were soldiers in front, to the side, and to the rear with fixed bayonets. They took us around the east side of Malinta Tunnel. I heard an American soldier say, “There goes a firing squad.” At that time I didn’t care one way or another. We were taken to the area where they made their landing. On the way we had to push a Jap officer’s car out of a mud hole. A large Jap field hospital was set up to the west of the road. The Japs had picked up all their dead, but the American soldiers were lying where they fell. We had to carry water back to Malinta Tunnel for the Japs. They brought their own water with them.

Malinta Tunnel was about 900 feet long and about 25 feet wide with about 60 laterals for offices, hospitals, supplies, living quarters for high-ranking officers and so forth. In peacetime a trolley ran from topside through the tunnel to the point. There was also a small airfield at the point area.

Later in the day we were taken to the 92nd garage area. The buildings were gone but cement foundations were there with a sandy beach. It was a natural cove with Jap machine guns all along the perimeter. I had had no water to drink in the first two days. I finally got some water on the 9th. It was hot with no shelter from the weather. One can go much longer without food than without water. To this day I always carry a jug of water if I am on a trip.

While we were at the 92nd garage area we got two rations of rice a day: Lugow rice in the morning, which was thin, watery rice one could drink from a cup. Lugow was our breakfast no matter where we were. It was always the same, about ¾ of a canteen cupful. In the evening we had steamed or boiled rice. We were at the 92nd garage area for about three weeks before we were put on barges, then take to ships which took us to Manila. We were marched through the streets lined with Filipinos. Some gave the “V” for victory sign with their two fingers. We were taken to Bilibid Prison. We were not put in cells but allowed to move about.

I had been bothered by a toothache for some time. There was an American naval officer who was collecting silver coins to use in dental work. He filled my tooth using silver coins. I don’t know how he got the coins soft enough. The dentist drill had a flexible arm, sort of like they use today, but it was operated by someone on a crank. The filling lasted until the early ‘50s.

We were at Bilibid three or four days when we were marched to the railroad yard and forced into railroad cars. We were packed in so tightly that all we could do was stand. It was hot. Some passed out. I was in a corner where I found a small hold high up so I got some fresh air. It seemed that we were in the car most of the day. We ended up at Cabanatuan. We spent the night in a schoolyard. It rained all night, so I got very little sleep. Four men escaped that night. The four men who escaped were caught, made to dig one large grave, and were executed at suppertime on the campground. In the morning we were marched to Camp 3, about 15 miles. It was located in the foothills of the mountains. In the evening we could hear the drums of the Igorots in the mountains communicating with one another. I had been told that the Igorots were not subdued by the American takeover of the Philippines. They would bind their bodies with some sort of rope, thus the smaller caliber weapons would not stop them. That is where the .45-caliber pistols were developed.

We were getting three meals a day; Lugow for breakfast, boiled rice at noon, boiled rice with some mung bean soup at night. Many of the men who were on the Bataan Death March came to Camp 3 later on. They were in worse shape than we were. Men were dying 25-35 a per day from malaria, dry beriberi, scurvy, dysentery, and malnutrition. I had tropical ulcers on my legs that would not heal. I had some wet beriberi at the time, and fluid would drain from the ulcers. Some people died just because they could not eat rice three times a day. They just gave up. One had to have a will to live. The Japs were drying small fish about three inches long on top of a roof. When they got to smelling real “good,” they gave them to the cooks to make soup. Each man got a half canteen cupful. I looked at mine and there was an oily bubble on top. It was the most putrid, rotten stuff I had ever tasted. I thought to myself there has to be some food value in it, so I got another half cupful. It didn’t make me sick. Cats or dogs that wandered into camp were quickly in the stewpot.

We were divided into 10-man squads. It one escaped, the rest would be executed. We had one man in our group who was probably insane. He thought the Japs were after him. We had to watch him to make sure he didn’t try to escape. The last I saw of him, the Japs had him in a cage.

The sanitation was very bad. The latrine was an open pit, probably six feet deep, four feet wide, and ten feet long. Sometimes a man would fall in and would have to be helped out. Men who had no chance of recovery were sent to the Zero Ward to die. Men who were on the burial detail may have been carried out themselves in a few days. Punishment for prisoners who had done something wrong was to stand in the hot sun holding some object over their heads until they collapsed. Some were made to kneel with a bar behind their knees and his arms around the same bar and hands tied. Sometimes the hwol barracks would have to stand for hours in the hot sun.

We had to learn to count in Japanese. “Bangoo” in Japanese means “count off.” It was easy after one learned to count to ten: Ichi (1), ni (2), san (3), shi (4), go (5), roku (6), shichi (7), hachi (8), ku (9), ju (10), juichi (11), juni (12), jusan (13). Ni is 2 and ju is 10 so niju is 20, sanju is 30, sanjuichi is 31, etc. We had a Jew in camp whose number was 55, which in Japanese was “gojugo.” We found some humor in that. His comment would be, “I wish they would let me go.”

I decided that if I was going to survive, I was going to volunteer for the next work detail that left. It could be better, it could be worse. I didn’t think it could be much worse. I left camp in September of 1942 with 99 others, not knowing where we were going. I do not remember anything about the trip to the island of Palawan. It is all a blank in my memory. Palawan is the southernmost island in the Philippines group just north of Borneo. There were 400 Americans there when we arrived. We were at Port-au-Princessa, Palawan. We were building an airfield out of the jungle. Most of the trees and brush had been grubbed out when we arrived. It was pretty primitive. Four men would fill a litter with dirt and carry it to the low spots, or two men with a bag on a pole. Eventually they got a small railcar with movable tracks to carry the dirt. I remember breaking up coral with a hammer and chisel. A Jap plane landed one day and was parked on the far side of the field. I thought it would be great to take the plane and fly to Australia.

The barracks were in a U shape with sleeping quarter on both sides. Steps led down on each side to the toilet facilities. There was a courtyard between the two sides with some palm trees. Rice was stored beneath the living quarters. Two men stole some rice from the storage and were caught. They were taken to the center courtyard, hands tied behind their back. A Jap officer with pistol drawn and two soldiers beat them with clubs, breaking their arms. Our food was always the same wherever we were: Lugow for breakfast, rice for dinner, rice and maybe mung bean soup for supper. The rice had weevils, little white worms, which were hard to see in the rice. We would pick them out if we saw them. Also rat droppings were not uncommon.

I believe I had a guardian angel watching over me, also the prayers of my family and friends and my prayers helped me through this ordeal. I was sick with malaria and dry beriberi, also called electric feet. It felt like thousands of pins were sticking into the bottoms of my feet. Very painful day and night. When I walked, I would try to walk on the sides of my feet. I and six others that were sick were sent back to Manila in May of 1943. Normally this was not done; one either lived or died in camp. I was lucky to have left Palawan.

Sometime probably in late 1944 or early 1945 the Japs brought the workers in from the airfield, probably because an American invasion was imminent. There were 150 men left there. The way I understand it, there were open pits next to the cliff which were used as air-raid shelters. They were put in these pits and the Japanese doused them with gasoline and set them on fire. They also had machine guns set up to kill those who escaped. The Japs had been dumping their garbage and rubbish over the cliff. Two men who hid under the garbage and four others escaped somehow. One of the men who hid in the garbage swam to another island, was picked up by some guerillas, eventually was picked up by an American submarine and taken to Australia. His name was Glen McDole (ph). He was an Iowa highway patrolman in western Iowa for many years after the war. He told of the conditions in the camps. He memorized the names of 149 of the men but could not think of the 150th. A lady from California read about him and wanted to know if he knew her brother, Joe Ubelle (ph). He was the 150th man McDole could not remember. After the war, the remains of those 144 men were interred in a common grave at the National Cemetery in St. Louis.

One further comment on Glen McDole. Years after the war, Eleanor and I ran into him while on a camping trip at the river in Lime Springs, Iowa. We were awakened by lots of activity around us. It turned out that they were having a republican rally, Iowa Chops. Governor Robert Ray was there. Glen McDole was his security guard, and we go in on the “feed.”

In April 1943, the six of us who were sick were taken from Palawan to Bilibid prision in Manila. I found Dale Minger there. I stayed at Bilibid for three or four days, then was taken by railcar to Camp 1 in Cabanatuan. I believe Dale went there at the same time. The barracks were 60 feet long, with 120 men double-decked on each side and an aisle down the center. We slept on bamboo slats. There was always a problem with lice and bedbugs. There was an eight-foot fence around the camp with guard towers intermittently spaced around the camp.

We would receive Red Cross packages maybe every four to five weeks. Usually four men would share a box. As I remember, there was cheese, instant coffee, Spam, cigarettes, powdered milk, a chocolate bar, among other things. I remember a fellow from Arkansas who would start in the morning with one or two Red Cross items and start trading. He would come back with a barracks bag half full of food. No matter where we were at, cigarettes were like money. We were issued maybe ten cigarettes every week or ten days. The price of a ration of rice depended on the number of cigarettes available. One could buy a ration of rice for maybe four or five cigarettes at the time cigarettes were issued. Some men would rather smoke than eat. Sometimes there would be three or four men after a ration of rice. If that man sold his rice for cigarettes, then he would try to make a deal to get something to eat.

Dale and I decided to save our cigarettes and buy a bag of Ponchetios (ph), a candy similar to saltwater taffy. We got hold of a bag on the black market. One evening we were sitting behind the barracks thinking about home and decided we would sample one. That led to another. Soon they were all gone. We had planned on using them to buy extra rice.

We were still in death squads of ten. Whenever we met a Jap soldier, we had to stop and bow. This was pretty hard to do. Incidentally, I acquired a canteen while I was still in Camp 3. Our main job at Camp 1 was working a vegetable farm. We raised camotes, that’s like a sweet potato, carrots, and tellium, among other things. The only thing we got off the farm was tender leaves from the camotes and telliums. According to the dictionary, tellium is a worthless weed. Sometimes we would find some weeds that we would pick for greens. I liked the pigweed the best. We would put it in a quan bucket and take it to the kitchen where they would cook it for us. The quan bucket could be any old pail or container that would hold water. There were several around camp. I believe the kitchen had some also. The American Defenders of Battaan and Corregidor have a magazine published by the organization called “The Quan.” This title of the magazine was taken from the quan bucket.

Once in a while the Japs would butcher a caribou. It was very good. We got very little of that, just enough to flavor mung bean soup. The mungo bean is the same as the mung bean found in some health food stores.

We had names for most of the Jap guards: Air Raid, Donald Duck, Smiley, Baby Face, to mention a few. Air Raid would come to the farm both in the morning and the afternoon. When anyone saw him coming, it would be whispered all along the line that Air Raid was coming. It would be head down and bottom up. He carried a club about four feet long and about 1 ½ inches in diameter. We would always take a stretch along with us in the mornings and afternoon to carry in the man that got beat up by him. I was never beaten up by him. Smiley could beat a person up and never change the expression on his face. Donald Duck sounded exactly like Donald Duck when he talked. He must have seen a movie about Donald Duck, because he would beat anyone who called him that. Another guard always wanted to talk about the Chicago gangsters.

“Yasumi,” meaning “rest” in English, was always a welcome relief. We were always told “takusan,” meaning “much” or “many,” “shigoto,” meaning “work.” So “takusan shigoto”: much work.

I never got on the “honey” detail. The toilets had a door in the back which opened up and they could dip out the contents into a bucket. The bucket would be carried on a pole by two men and taken to the garden and poured between the rows of vegetables. There were lots of termite mounds in the fields. They were sometimes up to six feet tall. We would have to chip them up and spread them on the surrounding area. These mounds were almost like cement. Usually there was a cobra or two in these mounds, which would kill and have the kitchen boil them. They were good. As far as I know, no one was bitten by cobras. Just once I was on a treadmill to lift water from one level to another for irrigation. Once was enough for me.

Camps 1 and 3 were the only camps where we had church services. We had some church services in the pole building with a roof overhead. Also in Camp 3 I remember the Protestant Holy Communion under a tree. The Catholics also had their services. Mother sent me a pocket New Testament shortly after I got to the Philippines. It brought me much comfort during trying times. I had printed the hymns “The Old Rugged Cross,” one of my favorite hymns, and “Come Thou Almighty King” on the last page while at Camp 3.

I tried to keep it hidden from the Japs, but they eventually put an order out that all books, bibles, and so forth were to be turned in for inspection. I turned in my new testament. When I got it back, they had “censored” stamped inside the front cover. I brought it back with me and I still have it.

In the latter part of June 1944, 500 of us were taken to Bilibid Prison. On the 2nd of July we were loaded into a cargo hold of a ship in Manila Bay. Another 500 were loaded into another hold. I am not sure where they came from. I was in the hold of the ship on July 4th, 1944, waiting for a convoy to form. I think we were in Manila Bay for four or five days before we left for Japan. We were lucky to have left when we did, as many of the ships that left later in November and December were torpedoed by American subs. There were no markings on the ships that were carrying the American POWs. Some Americans survived the sinking of ships and were picked up by other ships. Some came to our camp in Japan. Lots of American lives were lost. These ships became known as “Hell Ships.” We had a bucket brigade for body waste, which was pulled up through the hatch by rope and dumped overboard. There got to be quite an odor problem as some was spilled in the process. The Japs eventually slung two cribs lashed to the sides of the ship so two men could up at a time to do their thing. Our ship had a boiler problem, so the convoy left us. I thought it must have been a couple of days before they got it repaired. A few days later we were in a terrible storm. They said it was a typhoon. It’s a good thing it didn’t happen while we were without power. I don’t remember how long the storm lasted. I thought we would never make it. It was not a pleasant experience. Men were getting sick, mostly of dysentery. The conditions were terrible, with some men lying in their own waste. Those who died were buried at sea. We stopped at Formosa, now Taiwan, where were allowed on deck in small groups. I think we were there for about two weeks while they loaded salt into one of the holds. The rice paddies up the sides of the mountain were interesting to see.

The hold of the ship was red with bedbugs by the time we got to our destination, also lice in the seams of our clothing. We called them “seam squirrels.” At one time on the trip, men were getting pretty loud, wanting more water and better conditions. The Japs threatened to close the hatch if they didn’t quiet down. We arrived at Moji, Japan, on the island of Kyushu on the 2nd of September, 1944, having spent 62 days mostly in the hold of the ship. We went by train to the town of Omuta. From there we marched to Fukuoka Prison Camp No. 17. There was about 200 of us who went to Camp 17. I don’t know where the rest went.

There were about 500 Americans, 200 English, 200 Australian and Dutch POWs already there. They had been captured in Singapore, Java and the East Indies. The Americans and Dutch worked in the coal mine, while the English and Australians worked in the zinc mine.

When we first got to Camp 17, we had a Jap interpreter who had lived in Riverside, California. We thought maybe we had a friend, but he turned out to be otherwise. He talked like an American, using some American slang. He was the cause of some POWs getting beaten up. Our barracks held 50 men, five men to a room. There were sliding doors into each room from a long hall. The floor where we slept was made of tightly woven straw, maybe two inches thick. They were hard. There was no heat in the buildings, and it would get real cold, with snow at times. We had two blankets, no pillow. There was a latrine at the end of each building. There were facilities outside with running water to wash clothes. By the way, the latrine was old-fashioned outhouse: no running water. They were connected to the end of each barracks. We had a large mess hall where they cooked the rice and we ate our meals. Breakfast consisted of ¾ canteen cup of watery rice, lugow again. We would be up before daylight for breakfast and draw our ration of rice to take to the mine. The noon meal would be boiled rice with four or five slices of daikon. They would be 1 ¼ - 1 ½ inches in diameter. They were pickled. We have daikon in the States, but usually much larger in diameter and maybe a foot long. It tastes like a radish. Our evening meal would be rice and mung bean soup. Occasionally the Japs brought in dogs. They were skinned, gutted, and put in a pot and boiled. We had dog soup. There is very little that is not fit to eat if one is hungry. As a POW, I was always hungry.

We would be on our way to the coal mine just after daylight. Our clothing the Japs gave us was light green pants and jacket, which looked like gunnysack material. We would draw our headlamp with the battery attached to the belt around our waist. Before we entere the mine, we would have to bow to the sacred mountain, Mount Fujiyama, for the safety in the mine. We rode an open railcar which took us into the mine. The mine, I believe was 250 yards under the sea. We had a lateral which was flooding, so we had to go in and bring out the equipment. I don’t know if they pumped the water out or sealed the lateral.

There were very few places in the mines where one could stand upright. I developed an open sore over the bone located just below the neck, even with the shoulders, due to bumping the bone on the ceiling of the mine several times a day. The men shoveling coal sometimes had to shovel on their knees. My job usually was building yumacs (ph), cribs made from timbers placed in a square from the base to the ceiling. These were filled with rock to shore up the ceilings. There was always a lot of rock in the mine. I also did some shoveling and operating a jackhammer. The coal was carried to the top by conveyor belt. I often think of John L. Lewis, who was the head of the coal miners union. He was working for a better working conditions and better pay for the coal miners. The coal miners earn every cent they get. They are underpaid.

Once when were lined up outside the mine to go back to camp, I heard my number, “1242” called in Japanese; sen (1000), nihyaku (200), shiju (40), ni (2). I went to the Jap officer and stood at attention. He accused me of not bringing a pickax out the mine, which he said was checked out to my number. I said I had not checked out a pickax. He slugged me twice. He didn’t knock me down.

We had a large bathhouse with warm water where we could take a bath once in a while. It was probably 10 by 20 feet. That was the only good thing about our camp. I think the Jap men and women took baths together in these communal tubs. We did not have any women in with us.

Many nights we would have to go to the air-raid shelter when there was a possibility of an air raid. Sometimes we would spend several hours in these shelters in one night with no sleep. Then we would have to get up to go to work the next day. They were real good shelters made with wood beams on the sloping sides and top, then two or three feet of soil on top of that. The Jap commander had planted squash on the sides of these shelters. I at times had to stand guard at night to keep them from being stolen. He knew where every squash was and would check them every morning. One night the American bombers burned out about 1/3 of our camp. The next day our barracks was required to write a letter to our family asking them to petition the American government to stop bombing Japan as they were hitting POW camps. I wrote the letter and addressed it to some Eastern city. I sure didn’t want my family getting a letter from me like that. A couple of days after our camp was hit, I was outside when an American fighter plane came out of nowhere and banked so he could look down on us. He seemed so close that I could almost touch him. He waved his wings and was gone that quick. Another time I saw these silver bombers, B29s, I think, probably 12-15. What a beautiful sight.

The only bad thing was that one plan was hit by anti-aircraft fire. It seemed to disintegrate. One man parachuted to the ground. We never knew what happened to him. The rest of the planes continued on their destination through the black puffs of bursting shells. One has to admire the airmen. After I got home I saw an article in the Elgin Echo about an Elgin man who was shot down over the town of Omuta, Japan, and that he had parachuted down. Chances are pretty good that this was the man I saw. It is pretty certain that he was beheaded.

I got so I could not work in the mines because I had so much fluid in my body from wet beriberi. My legs were like logs. The rest of my body had much fluid. In the mornings when I would wake up, the fluid would be distributed more to the upper body. My eyes would be almost swelled shut. I was put in the hospital where I got a cup of coffee in the evening, which acted like a diuretic. I was up every 10-15 minutes all night long to go to the bathroom. In the morning I looked at myself in the mirror and it scared me. I looked like a walking skeleton.

The Japs seemed to get meaner as time went on. Some of the guards talked about a big bomb. One day the Jap commander called us all to assemble and told us that the war was over and that we would soon go home. There was no jubilation among the POWs, everyone just went back to the barracks sort of subdued. Some confessed to others that they had stolen something from them. The next day the guards had gone. There was more excitement around the camp. American plans began to drop food and medical supplies by parachute.

I should mention also that some men got into trouble trading their ration of rice for cigarettes. There was a little Dutch padre who would take these fellows through the chow line and sit with them while they ate their food.

The first American into our camp was a reporter from the Chicago Daily News. He interviewed me and others and sent it to the States’ main newspaper. My interview was sent to the Des Moines Register. I guess the mail carrier brought the paper out to the folks. That is the first time they knew I was still alive. They did get a few letters from me. I did not receive any letters until I got to Manila. There I got a letter from my dad saying, “Walter Gell is near you.” He used to work for my dad at times. He was a skilled craftsman. He was on the Island of Wake working as a carpenter when he was captured by the Japs. Walter made it back to Wadena. Also Dale Minger made it back. There were three Jap POWs from the small town of Wadena, Iowa.

American soldiers arrived in camp on September the 15th. We left camp on the 17th by rail. We got to sit in coach seats. What luxury. We were repatriated through Nagasaki. Nagasaki is just across the bay from Omuta. On the map it looks to be about 50 miles. The International Red Cross was there with coffee and doughnuts. What I saw of Nagasaki was total destruction. Most of what I saw was not burned but total demolished. I believe that the only building left standing was a brick building on the waterfront.

I was put on a British aircraft carrier, the HMS Speaker, and hospitalized. I was very disappointed as I wanted to be on an American ship. There was an American hospital ship anchored far out in the bay. The English sailors were real excited on day. They were having ice cream for supper. I could hardly wait either. I got two small teaspoons of vanilla ice cream. What a disappointment. The British ship took me to Okinawa. I was put on a plane to Manila where I was put in the hospital. It was more like a large field hospital. I flew to Los Angeles where I was put in Letterman General Hospital. What a thrill to be back in the United States.

At Letterman Hospital, I was diagnosed as having pulmonary tuberculosis. I think at Letterman I was weighed for the first time. I weighed 130 pounds. I had probably gained a few pounds by then. I was sent to a hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for a few weeks, then by hospital train to a hospital in Milwaukee. While in the hospital in Santa Fe, Mother and Dad came out to visit. Also my brothers Orvin, Tillman, Floyd and Glen came to visit. I licked the tuberculosis. The problem I have now is neuropathy caused by malnutrition and beriberi. My feet are probably 85 percent dead from the heel forward. It is working up into the calves of my legs, also my fingers. There more I am on my feet, the more they hurt. It is very painful.

I have been asked if I have dreams or nightmares about my POW days. Many of them have been forgotten. There are two dreams I have had several times. One I was on the roof of the farmhouse where I was raised, behind the chimney, with a machine gun. Thousands of Japs were coming down the hill east of the house. I never got a chance to shoot before I woke up. Another dream is that I was in a while frame house all alone. There were no trees or buildings as far as I could see in any direction, but on the ground were thousands of Jap soldiers lying prone on the ground face down with the right hand holding his rifle with fixed bayonet beside him. These soldiers were in perfect rows in all directions as far as the eye could see. Again, I was awakened, I suppose from fright.

One takes our freedom for granted until it is taken away. Our country has paid a high price for our freedom, from the Revolutionary War in 1775 up to the present time, and will continue to pay the price in the future. There is quite a controversy about the dropping of the bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. I learned several years ago that the Japanese planned to execute all the POWs once their homeland was invaded. From a selfish point of view, the bomb saved my life, it saved thousands of American servicemen, and perhaps several hundred thousand Japanese lives. I am grateful for President Truman having the courage to drop the bomb, bringing a quick end to the war.

##### God bless America.

**Obituary**

****Torvald (Toby) A. Thompson died June 22, 2007. He was born August 28, 1918 in Fayette County, Wadena, IA, the son of Thore and Olive Gunderson Thompson. He married Eleanor L. Johnson October 8, 1949.

Toby enlisted in the Army in May, 1941; was stationed on the island of Corregidor and was captured by the Japanese on May 6, 1942. During his three and a half years as a POW, he was forced to work in various POW camps and spent his last year working in a coal mine. He was awarded three Bronze Stars.

Toby resided in Waterloo, IA. He was a partner in the Video Center for 13 years and was the owner of Thompson TV Service for 14 years. He retired in 1980 and enjoyed fishing, gardening and travel.

He is survived by his wife Eleanor, two daughters and one granddaughter.