For The WAR CRIMES OFFICE

Judge Advocate General’s Department – War Department

United States of America

In the matter of mistreatment of American prisoners of war by the Japanese.

Perpetuation of testimony of ESTIL J. COHORN, Cpl., ASN 15065793

Taken at: Cincinnati District Intelligence Office, 240 Federal Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Date: 23 April 1946

In the Presence of: Leonard L. Cross, Special Agent, CIC, 5th SvC.

Reporter: Leonard L. Cross, Special Agent, CIC, 5th SvC.

Questions by: Leonard L. Cross, Special Agent, CIC, 5th SvC.

Q. State your name, rank, serial number and permanent home address.

A. Cpl. Estil J. Cohorn, ASN 15065793, 1025 Central Avenue, Newport, Kentucky.

Q. Have you recently returned to the United States from overseas?

A. Yes, I returned 3 October 1945.

Q. Were you a prisoner of war?

A. Yes

Q. At what places were you held and state approximate dates?

A. From 7 May 1942 until 23 May 1942 I was a prisoner of war at Corregidor. From 27 May 1942 until 30 October 1942 I was a prisoner at Camp No. 3, Cabanatuan, Philippine Islands. From 30 October 1942 to 28 January 1943 I was at Camp No. 1, also at Cabanatuan. From 28 January 1943 to 6 October 1943 I was at Lepa Batangas. From 6 October 1943 to 16 December 1943, I was a prisoner at Bilibid. From 16 December 1943 to 7 March 1944 I was at Camp No. 1 Cabanatuan. From 7 March 1944 to 11 April 1944 I was en route to Japan from the Philippine Islands. From 11 April 1944 until 11 August 1944, I was in Camp No. 12 at Hitachi, Honshu, Japan. From 11 August 1944 to 4 April 1945, was at camp No. 8-D, Ashio, Japan. I was liberated 4 September 1945.

Q. Did you receive any beatings at Camp No. 8, Hitachi, Honshu, Japan, from a Japanese guard named Ozowa?

A. The camp at Hitachi was No. 12 instead of No. 8. I did receive beatings at this camp at various times between 11 April 1944 and 11 August 1944. These beatings, which were given almost every prisoner in the camp, were at the hand of a man I believe named Oziama (phonetic). He was a mine guard at Hitachi when he beat us. Later he was drafted into the Japanese Army and continued to do guard duty at our camp. Oziama had been in the Japanese Army before and had been transferred to the reserves after being wounded in China. We called him “Liver Lip” because his bottom lip stuck out like a piece of liver. At various times Oziama beat prisoners for minor infractions of rules such as using fire buckets in cleaning barracks or being slow to line up for a meal. He would come into our shacks and if someone didn’t stand at attention immediately or happened to be looking the other way, he would hit him with a thing like a wooden saber which was about an inch thick, two inches wide, and three feet long. Oziama would hit us for practically no reason at all. I was hit about three occasions, once when I was sitting down on guard, once when I was last man to line up in the morning for reveille, and once when he caught me smoking whiles the lights were out.

Q. What injuries did you receive from the guard named Oziama?

A. I did not receive any severe injuries and I know of no one who received serious injuries at his hands. However, I was bruised considerably by his beatings.

Q. Were you subject to any mistreatment by other guards at Hitachi?

A. I received a beating by another guard at Hitachi. I had several broken toes due to an accident while working in the copper mines and when I went on sick call instead of working he got mad and made me stand at attention. Then he slapped me with his bare hands, knocked me down, and stepped on my broken toes which prevented my foot from healing. This guard was about five feet, six inches, or five feet, seven inches tall, of very stocky build, and always liked to play soldier. He was very strict about the way prisoners stood at attention and lined up for roll call, so we called him “Tin Soldier.” I think he was a corporal in the regular army. He was in charge of the guards at this camp directly inder the camp commander. I do not know his name.

Q. What other atrocities did you witness at Hitachi?

A. I saw the camp commander, whose name was Neomoto (phonetic) on several occasions hit prisoners for not lining up properly.

Q. What do you know about the burning of cotton on prisoners’ stomachs as a cure for beri-beri by a Japanese guard named Mizuno at Hitachi?

A. There was a medical orderly at Mizuno at Hitachi. We called him “Burr Head.” I do not know of any cases of his mistreating prisoners in any way.

Q. Do you know of any cases of any Japanese burning cotton on prisoners’ stomachs?

A. Yes. At Ashio, about October or November 1944, I had cotton burned on me. This cotton was burned on my legs as a cure for beri-beri, on my stomach for diarrhea, on the back of my neck for colds, and on my back for back ache. Small packages of moss-like material, probably cotton, were laid on parts of my body and ignited. Nine pieces were placed on each leg, five on my neck, five on my stomach, and five on my back. This procedure was repeated eleven times each day. The man who burned me was named Kato (phonetic). Kato was about fifty years old, short, with heavy mustache, wore shell-rimmed glasses, spoke English, and sprayed as he talked. A lot of prisoners in this camp (fifty or more) were given the same treatment by Kato. Kato was the official camp interpreter.

Q. Can you name any other prisoners who were burned by Kato?

A. Yes. Sgt. John C. Grover, c/o Mrs. C.B. Carline, 7802 Lawn Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, was mistreated by Kato in the same manner.

Q. Do you know any other Japanese who burned prisoners?

A. No, Kato was the only one.

Q. Did you know of mistreatment of prisoners at Camp No. 3, Cabanatuan, P.I.?

A. Yes. At this camp I saw four American soldiers from the Coast Artillery at Fort Drum punished seventy-two hours by being tied to a gate in a squatting position of with no food or water. At the end of the seventy-two hours they were shot by thirteen Japanese soldiers and one officer, and buried in one big grave which had been dug by American prisoners. These men had tried to escape. This was sometime between 27 Many and 30 October 1942. A Japanese officer named Colonel Morey (phonetic) was in charge of the camp at that time, I believe. I cannot identify any of the Japanese who ordered or committed this atrocity.

Q. Do you know of any atrocities committed at Camp No. 1, Cabanatuan, P.I.?

A. Yes, but I cannot identify or describe any Japanese involved.

Q. Do you know of any atrocities committed at Lepa Batangas?

A. Yes. While I was there, between 28 January 1943 and 6 October 1943, I saw one man hung by his thumbs with feet off the ground all day for stealing and selling a blanket to a Filipino. The camp commander, a Japanese named Itchy Marew (phonetic) ordered this done. Itchy Marew was a pilot in the Japanese Air Force. He was a neat, higher-class Japanese, about six feet tall, with a lot of gold teeth. He spoke English. Marew on several occasions also ordered Americans to stand on their toes in a squatting position for seventy-two hours at a time. One man made to do this is Roy L. Ryan, of Princeton, West Virginia, from B Battery, 60th Coast Artillery (AA). Whenever Ryan fell down guards beat him and made him get back into position.

Q. While you were at Ashio, between 11 August 1944 and 8 September 1945, did you witness atrocities by Japanese?

A. Yes. At Ashio I witnessed the beating of an American soldier named Quintania who was from the 200th Coast Artillery. Quintania was hung up by his wrists and thumbs and beaten by six Japanese guards. Also an American soldier named John Hughes from the 59th Coast Artillery was strung up by his thumbs at the same time. A Japanese 1st Sergeant hit John Hughes in the face with a pair of wooden shoes while he was hanging by his wrists and thumbs. Hughes still has a scar on his face as a result. I have the signature of the 1st Sergeant with my luggage at Letterman General Hospital in California, and I will turn it in when I get my luggage. A Japanese soldier whom we called “Three Fingers” helped string up Hughes and Quintania. This Japanese had only the thumb and two joints of the forefinger on his right hand. He had buck teeth, was heavy set, about six feet tall, and spoke no English.

On many occasions I saw the camp commander at Ashio strike prisoners. He was very cruel and watched guards hang prisoners by thumbs. I do not know this camp commander’s name, but he was in charge when I was liberated.

Also while I was a prisoner at Ashio I saw a guard at the copper mines, named Ching Ki (phonetic) work to death an American prisoner from the 803rd Engineers, whose first name was George. George had beri-beri while working in the copper mines. One day while he was sick he, as well as the other prisoners, was ordered to put out twenty-four tons of copper in one day instead of the usual twelve tons. George quit working because he was ill and a guard beat him and made him go to work. George loaded a couple cars and fell out. The following morning he died. Captain Robinson, American medical officer who was in charge of the hospital at Ashio, knows this case well. Also, Clifford Vose, Wilton, New Hampshire, a medical corpsman at the same hospital is also familiar with the case.

Q. Are you able to describe or identify any other Japanese who committed atrocities or otherwise mistreated prisoners during the time you were prisoner of war of the Japanese?

A. I could relate several other cases of mistreatment similar to those I have old you about, but I am not able to identify the Japanese involved.

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 Estil J. Cohorn, Cpl.