

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

0097

Interview with  
Volnie S. Burk  
January 10, 1972

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ron E. Marcello  
Terms of Use: Open  
Approved: *Volnie S. Burk*  
(Signature)  
Date: January 10, 1972

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS  
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Oral History Collection

Mr. Volnie S. Burk

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Date: January 10, 1972

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Volnie Burk for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on January 10, 1972. I'm interviewing Mr. Burk in order to get his reminiscences and impressions and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Burk was captured on Fort Hughes, which is an island very close to Corregidor in the Philippines. Mr. Burk, to begin this interview, would you very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, would you tell me where you were born, when you were born, your education--things of this nature.

Mr. Burk: I was born in Burkburnett, May 9, 1917. My education--grammar school.

Dr. Marcello: When did you enter the Army?

Mr. Burk: June 29, 1935.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you enter?

Mr. Burk: No work.

Marcello: Well, this is one of the more standard answers that I get from the other prisoners that I have interviewed. Usually they say they wanted to travel, or they simply liked the uniforms, or in many cases they said that there was a lack of work. In 1935, of course, the depression was still going on, and I assume that it hit the Burkburnett area quite heavily.

Burk: Well, at that time I lived in Graham.

Marcello: I see.

Burk: When I was a kid I used to play soldier and wanted to be a soldier. I don't know why. I forgot about it as I grew up. Then I started working and lost my job. That was the Christmas of '34 and I couldn't get nothing. I used to work once in awhile, but you had to give 10 per cent of everything to get your money. That wasn't right. You worked hard and got fifteen cents an hour, and then you would have to pay some of it to get it back, so I just went in the Army. And I liked it.

Marcello: Did you plan to make it a career?

Burk: I did.

Marcello: You did make it a career eventually.

Burk: No, I intended to.

Marcello: Oh, I see. But after being captured I suppose you changed your mind a little bit.

Burk: No, the Army gave me a medical discharge.

Marcello: I see.

Burk: I lost the use of one eye, partial vision in the other, plus a few other things.

Marcello: When did you go to the Philippines?

Burk: May of 1940.

Marcello: At the time that you went over there did you have any suspicions that the country would very shortly be plunging into war with the Japanese?

Burk: No, I'm no hero.

Marcello: I guess the Philippines were considered pretty good duty in those days, were they not?

Burk: I thought so. I felt if there was going to be a war it would be in Europe, and I wouldn't be in it. As I say I'm no hero. I'm a coward.

Marcello: What was your job in the Army?

Burk: Over there I was chief of the range section.

Marcello: What sort of a job was that?

Burk: Figuring out the firing data for the targets.

Marcello: In other words you probably were on an anti-aircraft gun or one of the naval rifles?

Burk: On Fort Hughes we had two fourteen-inch rifles-- disappearing rifles--four twelve-inch mortars, two six-inch disappearing rifles, and a number of seventy-fives.

Marcello: Let's just go back a minute. Did you go right from the States to Fort Hughes? Is that where you were assigned?

Burk: Well, I was assigned originally on Corregidor, and we had what was called then a quarantine period or a training period of four weeks. During that four weeks four of us went over together. Two of them was assigned to Fort Hughes, and I'd been pretty good buddies with them, so during the four-week period I got a transfer from the outfit I was assigned to to Fort Hughes so we could be together.

Marcello: What was the training like on Fort Hughes? Was it more or less routine or were you preparing for that day when you would eventually go to war against the Japanese?

Burk: Well, at the outset over there we was on half a day duty. Well, you could say fatigue duty. You would go out and check on the guns and see if cosmoline was all over them well, and once in awhile you'd have what's called artillery drill. You'd scrap the old paint off your projectiles and repaint them just for something to do.

Marcello: In other words, generally speaking most of the duty on Hughes was rather routine.

Burk: Yes, at the start it was daily work in the Army. I mean it was like the Navy, you know. If they didn't have nothing to do they painted the ships. If we didn't have nothing to do we painted the projectiles.

Marcello: When did the routine begin to change?

Burk: Oh, I'd say along in the early part of '41, probably April or May, along about in there.

Marcello: How old were you at this time?

Burk: Twenty-three.

Marcello: In other words, you were old enough to know more or less what was going on in the outside world, and you had achieved a certain amount of maturity by that time.

Burk: Yes, I knew what was going on, and as I said, I thought we would be in war, but I thought it would be in Europe, and I didn't see nothing wrong with doing guard duty, maybe, over in the Philippines while it was going on. Let's face it, I was looking after me, I thought.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned some of the armament that was present on Fort Hughes, and from what you said, I gather that it was a rather heavily fortified island, is this correct?

Burk: Yes, it was and it was a small island.

Marcello: How big was it?

Burk: Oh, at the widest point probably 200 yards wide and approximately 700 yards long, maybe.

Marcello: Was it a relatively flat island, or was it hilly?

Burk: Well, half and half.

Marcello: I see.

Burk: It was flat where our barracks were.

Marcello: And I assume that the primary purpose of Hughes was to guard against a naval attack because you mentioned the disappearing rifles and the other rifles on the

island and the mortars. I assume its primary function was to guard Manila against a naval attack.

Burk: We operated harbor defenses, and all of it was seaward except for the mortars which would go around.

Marcello: In other words, essentially it was almost kind of like the American Singapore, is that correct?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: It was to guard against an attack from sea. What were the mortars like? Were they similar to those huge mortars that they had on Corregidor?

Burk: They were twelve-inch.

Marcello: Twelve-inch mortars.

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: They were fairly old weapons, weren't they?

Burk: Well, they were the newest we had, but they were old.

Marcello: I see.

Burk: Our fourteen-inch rifles, one of them was condemned as unsafe to fire in 1925.

Marcello: Is that correct?

Burk: But we fired it lots of times.

Marcello: In other words most of the armaments that you had on Fort Hughes was relatively old.

Burk: Oh, yes.

Marcello: There wasn't too much modern equipment there.



Burk: No, not any. Now I think that they tried to mount-- and I don't know if they ever got it working or not-- an eight-inch naval rifle on Corregidor. Probably the newest armament was on Fort Drum because they did have some Navy turret guns on it that would traverse all the way around.

Marcello: Did you ever get over to Fort Drum?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: What did it look like?

Burk: Well, just about like a ship would on the inside, a whole lot like that, and it was shaped similar.

Marcello: And it was made out of concrete, is that correct?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: And it was another one of these small islands or rocks, actually, to help guard Manila Harbor.

Burk: At one time it was just a little island. I used to have a picture of it before. There was a lieutenant over there named Drum and it was his idea. And they went in there and blasted the top of it off and built this concrete on it.

Marcello: And it had these revolving, movable guns on it.

Burk: Four sixteen-inch guns on it.

Marcello: In other words it was like a stationary battleship, really.

Burk: There were only two of them that would go all the way

around. Two wouldn't because they was below. And then they had several six-inch guns mounted in the walls just like they would be on a ship, only they were on the walls.

Marcello: I've read that there were times when it actually looked as though it was a ship with the current going past it. Some people even thought that it was moving in the water. I don't know if you ever got this impression.

Burk: Yes, it looked like this especially if the tide was moving pretty good. You could see it go by, and it would give you the impression that it was moving. It was a pretty good thing if they had come from the right way, but they came on in the back door, we didn't have much to do with them.

Marcello: This was going to be my next question. Let us suppose that somebody did come, as you put it, in the back door, or actually from the land side. Most of the guns on these islands--this would include Corregidor and Drum and Hughes--were not of too much use, isn't this correct?

Burk: Not too much.

Marcello: In other words, you had naval rifles which fired a flat trajectory and couldn't get over the hills, isn't that correct? Well, the mortars could.

Burk: Now we could get over them, but the guns wouldn't traverse

around to where you could. All these disappearing rifles were fixed, and they would cover a certain area seaward, and we had one that would get a little bit over on Batangas. Battery Woodruff was the name of it--the one I was telling you was unsafe to fire--but we fired five or six hundred rounds out of it, I guess. We fired a lot of them.

Marcello: Awhile ago we mentioned that the armament on these islands was rather old. How well prepared was your island for an aerial attack?

Burk: Well, we had the shell rooms and the gun emplacements. We built a few but not much because in these shell rooms we had as good as we could have built.

Marcello: Now shell rooms, I assume, were a type of shelter against air raid attacks, is this correct?

Burk: They were built underground and they were concrete, reinforced concrete, and, of course, the guns were built up on concrete, and then there was rooms under them.

Marcello: You were referring awhile ago to the disappearing rifles, and I would assume that these guns could be moved out to fire, and then they could be drawn back in again.

Burk: Well, you tripped them to fire, but the recoil actually retreated them back in what we called the gun well. There was just a round hole there, and when they were down, you couldn't see them except from the air. The

only time you saw them was just the instant before they fired when they came up out of the well.

Marcello: How about the mortars, were they more or less out in the open?

Burk: No, they were down in wells about in the middle of the high part of the island. They were dug down in, I suppose, close to twenty feet. They were down in the well and you shot out of it.

Marcello: I see. Were there any anti-aircraft batteries on Hughes?

Burk: We had two three-inch rapid fire anti-aircraft guns, but we didn't have the people to man them. It would have taken a lot of people to man all the guns we had. Then shortly before that big deal came about, "I" Battery of the 59th was moved onto the island, and they were anti-aircraft, and they took over the two we had plus the ones they had.

Marcello: Incidentally, at this stage, maybe we should identify the unit that you were with. What was the unit you were with.

Burk: Battery "G", 59th Coast Artillery.

Marcello: This brings us up almost to the beginning of World War II. Can you recall what you were doing and what your reactions were when you heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Burk: Yes. I was asleep.

Marcello: You were asleep. This would have been early in the morning of December 8th, your time.

Burk: Yes, I would say in the neighborhood of two o'clock in the morning. I had a man on the phone in the range room. I'll back up here a little bit. We had moved out into the field the 28th day of November. I couldn't find out from anybody why, except we moved out to battle stations with ammunition and sidearms. And we never did hear anything then until the attack.

Marcello: Had you been keeping up with world events or the world news very closely?

Burk: Oh, some. We had radios and listened to some guy in Frisco, who we always wanted to kill.

Marcello: Did you ever have much access to newspapers, or did you get into Manila very much?

Burk: Not too often. Of course, it was a good ways in, and I'd go in every two or three months, take a three day pass. Then after we moved out in the fields in November, the percentage we could let go off the island was one man out of what we had. They cut you down to a percentage you could put on pass at any one time, and that left one man. Consequently, none of us left. Who would want to go when there was a hundred and some-odd men and just one gets to go so nobody goes.

Marcello: Well, did this man on the telephone that morning inform

you of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Burk: Yes, he got the news from Corregidor. He was on the phone with an observer on Corregidor, which was the same as he was. Where that guy on Corregidor got it I don't know. I was down on what we called parapet, lower parapet of the gun pit, in my bed.

Marcello: You slept right with your guns.

Burk: Well, we all did. We'd just moved out. That was our battle station there. Some had brought their bunks, and some just brought their mattress and was sleeping on the floor, depending on what you wanted to do. I just moved my bed up there. He came down and woke me up, and he said, "Sergeant, Pearl Harbor has been bombed." Well, I sat up and I said, "Clemments, just get back up there on the phone." I said, "Get back on the phone. This is no time for telling jokes." He said, "Sergeant, I'm not joking. Turn on your radio." Which I did, and he wasn't. Well, that ended the sleep, of course, because everybody got up then.

Marcello: What was your reaction when it finally did sink in that it was true?

Burk: Well, I can't hardly recall. I was shocked because I just didn't think it was going to happen that way.

Marcello: Well, now that it did happen, did you think that the Americans would make short work out of the Japanese?

Burk: No, really I didn't. I don't know why, but I didn't. They told how bad Pearl Harbor was hit. And we were on out there a ways, and we knew that there was nothing to come out there for us, and we didn't have enough. Everybody that had any time in the service knew like the nose on your face that we had nothing to stop the Japanese.

Marcello: Well, the plan was that apparently if the United States did get into war with the Japanese, the Philippines, of course, would be a likely target. And then was the Navy not supposed to eventually come to your rescue, take you off the island, and things of this nature? You were to fight more or less a holding action until help came.

Burk: That's true. Now, as to the Navy, I never did hear any plans except that we were to hold ninety days, give them time to fortify Australia.

Marcello: But, of course, Pearl Harbor kind of ended all that because so much of the fleet was either damaged or destroyed at Pearl Harbor.

Burk: Well, this was still after that. These were our orders. MacArthur left after the ninety days. And then the rest of us, actually, to be brutal, was given up. Well, you stop and think. We were a small number of people in the conflict. What's a few thousand people?

Marcello: How many were on Hughes, did you say?

Burk: Well, there was some Marines on there and some sailors whose gunboats got sunk. When we were captured, there was probably 350 of us. But altogether I believe in the islands there was about 25,000 Americans.

Marcello: Not nearly enough to hold off against the might of the Japanese Army, which was pretty close by.

Burk: Well, we held them off, and at one time they ran ground forces back down on Bataan. Then they whipped Yamoshita, the Japanese general, back to Manila, but then the lines got too long, so the Americans stopped, and then Yamoshita came in with that Osaka Division, another hundred thousand, well . . .

Marcello: There was just nothing else you could do so far as holding out was concerned.

Burk: No, it was just a matter of time then, and that was in the latter part of January, February, March, April, and then May it was all over.

Marcello: When did you have your first contact with the Japanese? When I mean first contact, I mean through an aerial attack or through a naval attack or anything of that nature.

Burk: That same afternoon.

Marcello: This was on the eighth. Was it an aerial attack?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: Can you describe it?

Burk: Well, as I recall, I felt just like a spring, I suppose.



I was tight, tense. But when they dropped the first bombs, it was kind of relaxing. We knew then what it was, and that is about it. I thought, "Well, it's here, and it's going to happen."

Marcello: How frequent did the aerial attacks occur? I assume that most of the initial contact that you had with the Japanese was through these bombings, is that correct?

Burk: Yes, primarily they came over us and just dropped a couple of bombs, I guess, just to wake us up. I don't know. But they hit Cavite and Clark Field.

Marcello: These were their initial targets. They could take care of you later.

Burk: Yes, we weren't going anywhere. Oh, I presume they'd go over a target somewhere on the mainland and have a few bombs left, and then they'd just come over and kick them out on us, Corregidor, and Drum over there, and then they would go on their merry way. That's about the way it went along there.

Marcello: How frequently did these attacks occur? Were they daily? Could you expect them a couple times a week?

Burk: You didn't know when to expect them. Sometimes they'd hit you two days in a row, and maybe it'd be once a week they'd bomb you, and maybe they wouldn't bomb any. They'd sometimes bomb around you, so we just never did know. You'd see planes coming, and you'd take what

precaution you could. If they didn't drop any bombs, well, you'd breathe a sigh and go on your way.

Marcello: As long as you were with your guns, were you relatively safe?

Burk: No, I was in a hole. On top of the island on the other end there we had . . . well, I was chief of the range section on a 155mm right on the point of the island, and I lived right on top of the hill up behind the guns. Now, as far as being safe, in those shell rooms you were fairly safe.

Marcello: This was what I was referring to, but you were not in those shell rooms when you were on the highest point on the island.

Burk: No, as I say we had a lot of guns, and we didn't have a lot of men, so consequently we'd go from one gun to another depending upon the way you needed to fire. We'd fire the fourteen-inch if there was anything we could fire it at. Then we'd go to the mortars, and then we'd go back to the other fourteen-inch, or maybe we'd go over to the 155mm where we'd come from. We had guns from the land firing on us.

Marcello: Right. What could you do about the guns on the land?

Burk: Well, we fired back but they had us out-ranged since ours were old. Our mortars, which were the only one we could reach the targets with, they had a maximum range of 23,000 yards. The Japanese had guns with much greater range than that.

Marcello: And since the Japanese had complete control of the air, I assume that there was no way that you could send up spotter planes or anything like that to aim these mortars.

Burk: No, we had to depend on the observers on the island or maybe Filipinos who were over on the island and who would more or less spy for us. They'd call in where a gun was. I don't think we ever done too much damage with our guns because, as I say, they were mostly out of our range.

Marcello: What does it do to a man, being subjected to this bombardment, a more or less constant bombardment? How does it work on one's nerves or whatever?

Burk: You were nervous. I'd say it would probably work different on you than it would on me. I mean each fellow acts a little different. Sometimes you'd laugh about what was going on, and sometimes you'd cuss, and some of them would pray. At that time I wasn't a praying man and I didn't. Probably, if I wasn't laughing I was cussing, so it went that way. But as I say, there were light moments even during attacks. If something happened that was funny, you'd laugh about it. Of course, at other times it was not funny.

Marcello: What did you find was worse, the aerial attacks or the artillery. Now obviously both of them were pretty bad, but which one did you personally find to be the worse?

Burk: Well, I'll answer your question this way: the artillery was the most devastating. The bombing scared me more

than the artillery because, knowing artillery, I'd get the high part of the island between me and the gun and they couldn't hit me. But that guy up there in the plane could drop it down in your hip pocket. It didn't matter where you were at. I think it was mind over matter there. As I say, the guns to me did more damage than the bombing, really, on the island.

Marcello: Well, some people say that the artillery to them was worse because they couldn't see it coming, or they didn't know from where it was coming, but at least you could see the airplanes coming over. Just the sense that you couldn't see where that artillery was coming from was kind of terrifying.

Burk: But as I say now, even knowing where it was coming from, I felt like I was safer behind this high part of the island with the artillery. It was the most devastating but, you look up, you see a plane, and if he's not coming in a direct line, he's not going to hit you at that time. So you don't worry so much about it.

Marcello: How were the supplies on Fort Hughes?

Burk: Short.

Marcello: As time went on I assume they got shorter. Were you put down to half rations or quarter rations or anything like that?

Burk: Somewhere in around that last part, I'd say quarter rations.

We ate twice a day.

Marcello: But were the meals rather monotonous? Were they usually the same thing?

Burk: Did you ever try eating creamed abalone?

Marcello: I've had abalone, but I don't ever think I've had it creamed.

Burk: Out of a can?

Marcello: No.

Burk: It's like trying to rubber shoe heels. It doesn't cook up.

Marcello: Is this a local dish?

Burk: It's something the government bought from somebody. I don't know what they bought it for, unless they wanted to play catch with it. That's what the Japs that captured it did with it because they couldn't eat it either.

Marcello: They played catch with it?

Burk: Yeah, they couldn't eat that stuff. Somebody said about that abalone that you got to beat that muscle when you take it off the rock for it to be tender, and I think that they just shoved them in the can, and they were something else.

Marcello: But this was one of the staple foods that you ate during those last stages of that campaign.

Burk: We had more but the officer in charge said we should save it because we might need it later. He was right.

Three years later we still needed it. But I could see his point and yet I couldn't because to me the point was we didn't have long, so why bother about saving it?

Marcello: What was the morale like on the island as time went on?

Burk: It was fairly good. I never did see the morale low even in prison camp.

Marcello: Did most people have hopes that they would be rescued, or did most people accept the fact that they were fighting a holding action and it was only a matter of time before they would be captured?

Burk: Well, a lot of us knew that we were fighting a delaying action, a holding action, and that we would be captured. Some of them thought we'd get out, some of the younger men that just got over, maybe eighteen or nineteen years old.

Marcello: Did you personally think much about being captured?

Burk: Well, I knew I'd either be captured or killed.

Marcello: Did you think that the Japanese would kill all prisoners? Apparently this was a rumor going around.

Burk: Well, we were told that. We had some Marines there that had been in China. Service men tell some good stories.

Marcello: I'll bet the island was simply full of rumors.

Burk: Oh, yes. So the Marines told us what the Japs would do. They said they were blind and had obsolete equipment and couldn't fly airplanes and all that stuff. I told

an old boy there one day, a staff sergeant Marine named Cherry, "Cherry," I said, "You know what. I'm sure glad these Japs can't see and can't fly airplanes and got obsolete equipment. They'd whip the hell out of us real quick, wouldn't they?" Of course, those stories came out of the Marines who came from China.

Marcello: How about the health of the troops on Hughes? How was it at this time?

Burk: Well, the health generally speaking was good. Every man had lost weight due, I'd say, to the food and possibly the conditions. I had gone from 160 some down to about 140. I don't know whether it was because I was scared or because I wasn't getting enough to eat. It could have been a combination of both.

Marcello: Describe the events that led up to your capture. Can you remember how they took place? The day you were captured, let's say.

Burk: Yes. I was given a detail. They said there was a ration boat coming in that night.

Marcello: Did very many boats manage to get to Hughes?

Burk: No. That was just coming from Corregidor.

Marcello: I see.

Burk: Not from nowhere outside. It was just coming from Corregidor. We depended on Corregidor for all water and our supplies.

Marcello: There was no water at all on Hughes.

Burk: Not as a well or anything. We had a tank, but the Japs had dropped some kind of acid bomb in it, and it didn't taste very good. You could drink it, but it wasn't very good. But, anyway, the ration boat was supposed to come in, and I had a detail of men down there, this gun crew up on this . . . Hooker was the name of this gun emplacement, Battery Hooker. And then I had the crew down at the dock to meet the ration boat. Well, just a little bit before this ration boat was due in, they started bombarding Corregidor and us with artillery.

Marcello: Could you observe the terrific pounding that Corregidor was getting all these days?

Burk: Oh, from watching at night you could see the burst of the shells.

Marcello: In other words, you were out of visual range of Corregidor?

Burk: Well, we were behind them and Bataan, and they had the guns on Bataan. And they were shelling and they'd just come right on over and get us. But the shelling was going on and on and some of these old boys with me said, "Sergeant, how about us going over to Battery Woodruff until this barrage is over?" There was a Navy lieutenant in charge of the whole detail, and he had some sailors over there. I asked him about it, and he said, "No, somebody has to unload that ration boat." I said, "Well,



it ain't coming in during this, you know." "Well," he said, "Let all of them go but one man. Let one stay here to notify you when the barrage is over." I said, "When this is over there ain't anybody who's going to need to notify us. You can tell when it's over." "Well," he said, "You leave one man." I couldn't tell anybody to stay, so I stayed and they left. In about an hour or hour and a half, I guess it was, one of them came back over there. They said, "Sergeant, we've got to man Battery Hooker." There wasn't nothing to do but get out of that slit trench, crawl up over the hill, and go to it. That lieutenant told me, "What about that ration boat?" I said, "I don't know, Lieutenant. That's up to you now. I've got a gun to man." That barrage lasted until, oh, three or four o'clock in the morning, just 240's after 240's.

And then the next morning, it just kind of subsided down, not altogether, but not like it was earlier. Well, we were going along there, and we were out at this range room or hole. We called it a range room. It had a trench that went out and turned like that to come out. And me an some other guys went outside, and we saw the planes coming, and we ran to get back in there and were a little slow, so we just barely got in there. We got in

the ditch part. We saw these planes coming. There was nine of them. I was laying on my back looking and saw them drop a bomb. I watched that bomb. It looked like it was about forty feet up. I said to that old boy next to me, "See you in Hell; this one's ours." And then I turned over. Well, it missed us by about ten feet. It jarred us up, but it had gone past us and down the slope of the hill a little bit. I sure thought that one was ours. That's the way the day ended. Then we were called up and told we were surrendering about noon of that day.

Marcello: What were your reactions when you heard that you were going to surrender?

Burk: Well, I was called by Lieutenant Chamberlain and he told me, "Sergeant, we have surrendered as of noon. Wainwright has surrendered." He said we could beat off that attack, we could beat off the next one, possibly a third one, but he said it was useless to continue. So we surrendered at noon. I said, "Lieutenant, what do we do?" He said, "Sergeant, I don't know. I've never surrendered before myself." He was about the same age as I was. None of us knew. Well, to us then the war was over, and we were making light of all of it, really. You'd see a guy light a cigarette with a twenty dollar

bill. Nobody thought about money. What good was it?

The Japs would take it if you had it.

Marcello: How long was it before the Japanese came to Hughes?

Burk: That night.

Marcello: Was it just a small group of them, and what did you do with your weapons? Had you destroyed your weapons before they came?

Burk: We only destroyed shotguns and dum-dum ammunition for rifles. They're illegal in war, so we destroyed those. The rest of them we didn't.

Marcello: Nothing was destroyed so far as the artillery and so on?

Burk: No, it was no good to nobody. We had got the better part of it. All of our mortars were already out of action.

Marcello: They had been knocked out.

Burk: Yes, so there was no point.

Marcello: Did you feel a certain amount of relief now that the war was over for you, or did you feel a certain amount of apprehension in not knowing what was going to happen to you from this point onward?

Burk: Both--the relief that it was over, and as you say, apprehension and not knowing what's going to happen next. It can get hold of you. Then, as I said, we had these Marines telling us what was going to happen. Well, a whole bunch of us were in this shell room there at Battery Woodruff. So we were in there, and they had picked up

an American lieutenant that could apparently understand some Japanese, or maybe the Japs could speak English. Some of them could; some of them couldn't. He came up and . . . but we had been shelled earlier in the afternoon, and then just prior to these Japs showing up there--I'd say thirty minutes--we were shelled up there in this place. I asked him about that, and he said they had twenty-four hours or twelve hours--I forget which it was--to accept our surrender or turn it down. It was their discretion, I suppose. But if we offered any resistance during this period of time, then they did not have to accept the surrender. They could annihilate it if they chose. And this lieutenant came up and said, "Everybody come out with your hands up." Well, it gets dark over there, let me tell you, and when you go out of there with your hands up you don't know what's going to happen. I had a lot of thoughts about what I'd do if this happened or that happened. If I had heard somebody groaning or if somebody had been shot when one guy went out, I don't think I would have come out. I think they'd had to come in after me, and I'd have took some with me because I had plenty of armament, but luckily there were no sounds. When we went out it was dark. We went down there on the ground level from this

room and sat around what had been our mess tables. Come daylight, here we were just sitting there looking at each other like damned fools and wondering what was going to happen. There were guards around us, of course.

Marcello: Now right after you had surrendered and you had your first contact with the Japanese, were you searched or anything like that? What sort of treatment did they give you?

Burk: Well, they had us sitting at this table, and one ugly one, real ugly, he came up and . . . I'm goosy. He punched me in the ribs, and I like to have torn up that table because I wasn't expecting him to do that anyway. So he was wanting a watch, and I didn't have a watch, but a friend of mine had an old pocket watch he'd bought in Manila for four or five pesos, and it had an imitation gold case on it, and it was one of those that closed. You'd mash the stem and the front of it would pop open where you could see it. I asked him if he had it and he said yeah. I said, "Give it to me. Old Ugly here wants it." I gave it to him and I made quite a hit with him. He gave me a little jar of hard candy. I took a couple of pieces and passed it around, and that seemed to please him. Then he went off and came back with a can of hash, cold, of course, mostly grease. He said, "Do you like it?" and I said, "Yeah." So he took his

bayonet and opened it, and a couple buddies and I ate it. Then he went off and got a bunch of it and brought it back. You don't eat much of that without warming it up and without having bread. Well, then he brought his buddy over there, and his buddy wanted a watch. Well, I still didn't have a watch, so I asked another boy if he had a watch, and he said he had a Mickey Mouse pocket watch. I said, "Old Ugly has a brother or something uglier than he is up here wanting a watch." But I'd made a better hit with him because he had the better of the two watches. But I was looking at the other guy, and he was giving me pretty mean looks when the guy in charge hollered at him and he took off. To there the treatment was alright.

From there then they moved us over to what had been our old barracks, which was pretty well shattered with shells, and they had us sitting down in there. Up to that point I hadn't seen anybody get hit or anything. Then they wanted a bunch of men. They came in there, and I was in a bunch of about twenty-five of us, and everybody thought like me that we were fixing to get our heads chopped off. He just walked by there and motioned us out and took us off down to the end of the island. I thought that this was it now. They was wanting us to carry water up there to the headquarters, and they gave us a

drink. They wouldn't let us have any to take with us, but we could have all we could drink. It was the first good water I'd had in a couple of weeks, I guess, or longer. Then we sat down again. Then that afternoon they came back again and got us and took us up to Craig Hill where the mortars were. That's where the foodstuffs were stored. We started carrying it down on the dock there for them to haul off. If they'd open a can of something they didn't like, they'd tell you to eat it. Well, when a guy has a rifle with a pig-sticker on the end of it tells you to eat, you'll eat it whether you like it or not. So we got it all carried down there. We then spent that night just more or less sitting there.

Marcello: Did you get the impression, more or less, that at this stage the Japanese didn't really know yet what they were going to do with you and that they were making up these work projects until somebody higher up told them where they were supposed to take you and this sort of thing?

Burk: I presume that was it. Of course, all this had to be done. They needed the water up there, and they had prisoners, so why should their troops do it. They would take a few troops, guard us, and let the rest of them go somewhere else and get the same thing accomplished as with a whole bunch of troops.

Marcello: Were they providing you with any food?

Burk: Very little. I went through the chow line that they set

up the next day--just stuff that they didn't like. They didn't care for tomatoes, catsup, English peas, or canned corn. When I went through the chow line I got two English peas, about a half pint of water off them, a few grains of corn, and about a tablespoon of catsup--that was all that was left. The next morning I got me and a fellow together got a can of condensed milk between us. Then they moved us over to Corregidor.

Marcello: About how long were you on Hughes? Two or three days?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: Two or three days after you were captured.

Burk: We were captured, like I say, at night. We spent the next day, and I believe the next one, and then during that next day we left. It may be that it was the third day, possibly, that we left.

Marcello: You were there no more than three days, then, before you were moved over to Corregidor. I assume it was rather an uneventful ride from Hughes to Corregidor?

Burk: Yeah. As I say, from dock to dock it was 1,700 yards. They used small boats. You couldn't get big boats in there. You got one started and you had to stop it, so they used small boats to move us over there.

Marcello: What did you do on Corregidor?

Burk: Well, they had put everybody down to what they called the 92nd Motor Garage.



Marcello: The garage area, right.

Burk: You've heard of that one before?

Marcello: Right.

Burk: I think there was about ten thousand all told down there. When we got over there, they took us into camp.

Marcello: What did Corregidor look like? Did you get to see any of it?

Burk: Oh, looked like some pictures you've seen of battlefields.

Marcello: There was just nothing standing.

Burk: Scrub trees, you know, limbs sticking up, potholes around, stuff like that. They had picked up most of the bodies by them. I didn't see any bodies laying around. So they put us down there, and I was assigned to second hundred of the second 4,600 people. We were grouped from one to a hundred up to 5,000, and then they started over, and I was in the second hundred in the second 4,600 group which meant that made 9,200 at least. There was an officer who was in charge of the 200 men. He didn't have nothing for us to eat, so we had to fend for ourselves or die. It was up to us. I got nasty with him. I won't say what I said. I don't talk that way anymore. Anyway, I told him I wouldn't starve. I'd be there when he was gone--words to that effect. There were ten of us together. So the next morning, they wanted a work detail. We had two men out of the ten that

were sick. One had an arm nearly blown off from that bombing raid that afternoon when we thought it was all over, and the other one had sore feet. So they watched our little boudoir, as we called it. The other eight of us made a mad rush over to the gate to get on that work detail.

Marcello: What was your boudoir? Whatever things you had?

Burk: Our little area that we had. Maybe your mess kit and canteen, if you'd been lucky a blanket maybe, a shelter half that you could kind of pitch up maybe and stretch up for shade. We got out on that detail, and they took us over to what we called Bottomside, a locker plant, and they had some rice, lard, and sugar over there. So we all lined up there, and they gave you whatever happened to be on hand. You might have gotten a sack of rice or a sack of sugar or a forty-five pound can of lard or four cases of C rations, whatever it might be. But then this lieutenant in charge of the detail couldn't find out what to do with it. He was gone about thirty minutes. He came back and said, "Well, whatever you have is yours. Take it in." Of course, we had lard and rice. We did some bartering and got some sugar and C rations. Then the next day we were out on another detail at Malinta Tunnel on Corregidor. They were hauling rations again. We'd find out what they didn't like and we'd get

a case of that and come out there, and the guard would send us back toward the camp. So we'd just go into camp with it. Between the eight of us, we did pretty good in two days. Then they said anything we brought in we'd have to put in a central depot to be distributed, and we didn't go out any more because we had all we needed--all we could use.

Marcello: What sort of gear did you have after you had been captured? Did you have a mess kit, I presume, and a canteen? Were you lucky enough to get a blanket and a shelter half?

Burk: I had a blanket.

Marcello: But you did not have a shelter half?

Burk: No.

Marcello: What sort of food did you have? What sort of food had you gotten off these details?

Burk: Oh, we had green beans, corn, tomatoes, peaches, bacon, coffee.

Marcello: In other words, these things that the Japanese apparently didn't use or didn't have any use for.

Burk: Well, take peaches, for example. You would go over there in that tunnel and you'd open up a case of corn and pour the corn out and put peaches in there, and he'd see the picture of corn on the box, and then he didn't want it. So you'd have peaches instead of corn, but he thought you had corn. They liked all the canned fruit.

Marcello: I see.

Burk: Of course, when we left there we couldn't take it with us.

Marcello: Oh, you couldn't?

Burk: No, they wouldn't let us.

Marcello: Now you weren't on Corregidor very long, were you?

Burk: No. I'm trying to recall.

Marcello: Was it a matter of days?

Burk: Approximately a week as well as I recall.

Marcello: Did the Japanese rough you up any at all on Corregidor?

Burk: No, not me personally.

Marcello: Did you see anybody getting roughed up?

Burk: No, I didn't. Not on Corregidor.

Marcello: I assume there was still quite a bit of confusion yet, and they were trying to organize things themselves.

Burk: I imagine and the only way you would have gotten roughed up on this detail was if you'd have come out with a case of peaches and he'd told you to go towards the dock and you'd tried to go the other way. You would have got roughed up then, I'm sure. But I don't know. As I say, I didn't see any. I'll put it that way. Of course, I'm sure some went on, especially amongst the officers when they . . . well, I'll take it back. I'll backtrack to Hughes. The first night there was some canned prunes stolen, and the Japs tried to get some men to admit it, and some of the men did and some didn't. Some had got

some, and some didn't. Some of the boys admitted getting them. The ones that admitted getting them the Japs didn't do anything to. But some they just picked out because they thought they had got roughed up, and then there was one or two officers and a warrant officer who were roughed up over this same detail. Of course, the guards got roughed up along with them, too, I mean the Jap guards.

Marcello: I assume at times that the common Japanese soldiers were treated rather badly themselves by their officers and noncoms and so on.

Burk: As I saw it in their Army, any one of them that outranked the other one could whip him, and he couldn't do anything about it.

Marcello: In other words, there was a lot of physical punishment dealt out to the Japanese soldiers, also, by their superiors, I suppose you would say.

Burk: Yes. As I know of, there was no guardhouse in the Japanese Army. If one of them would do something, everybody that outranked him would come along and whop on him, and that was all of it. After everybody got through whopping him around, then it was forgotten, apparently-- whatever he'd done.

Marcello: Where did you go from Corregidor? Probably either to Bilibid or to Cabanatuan.

Burk: We went to Bilibid.

Marcello: You went first of all to Bilibid? I assume that again the trip from Corregidor over to Manila was relatively uneventful.

Burk: Well, except when we stopped.

Marcello: What happened then?

Burk: Well, depending on how tall you were, you could wade or swim. If you weren't very tall, you swam.

Marcello: They didn't take the boat or barges all the way in to shore.

Burk: Well, we were on larger ships here. And they just went to a certain point and there it was. I had to swim a little way, not too far, because you know how an ocean is. It goes out pretty gradually. But some of the boys, the shorter ones, had to swim farther than others. The ones that were wounded and sick had difficulty there. Of course, everything we had got wet. A wet blanket's pretty heavy, especially if you try to swim with it.

Marcello: But you did stick to it; you didn't discard it?

Burk: No, I kept it. And then we marched down Dewey Boulevard, I believe it was.

Marcello: What was that march like? The reason I ask is this: during this march from the docks to Bilibid, did they try to humiliate the prisoners in any way before the Filipinos? Did you notice anything of this nature?

Burk: Well, not particularly. What I noticed was that the Filipinos tried to help us--tried to give us stuff--and the guards got on them, and if they caught you taking it they'd probably cuff you. Other than just marching us through Manila, now they did that because that Dewey Boulevard was really a good ways out, and we were brought down through it.

Marcello: Did you detect that they had made the Filipinos stand out there and observe the prisoners marching?

Burk: I don't believe so. I think the ones that were out there were out there with the purpose of trying to help, really. I saw that all the way along. That was my interpretation and my opinion. Somebody else might have a different one. I don't know how people think, but we just marched on into Bilibid.

Marcello : How long were you in Bilibid Prison altogether.

Burk: At that time just a few days.

Marcello: What was it like?

Burk: Well, uneventful. Again, we managed to eat just by taking the old bull by the horns. Me and another old boy just went up to the kitchen there and went to work. We didn't ask anybody. Directly they had all the rice cooked up. We just picked up a can and walked back to our buddies with it. That's the way we got by.

Marcello : Were you in pretty good physical condition at this stage?

Burk: Yes, I'd say fairly good at that stage. I hadn't been sick. As I say, I probably weighed 140 pounds which wasn't too bad for a young fellow.

Marcello: What was your normal weight?

Burk: Around 160 in the winter, and in the summer I'd get down to 150 or 155. Over there, I'd usually run around 155 or 160. If I got to drinking too much beer, then I might get up to 165. But I wasn't in too bad a shape other than that. The marching and the wet clothes and the wet shoes didn't phase me. I made that with flying colors.

Marcello: But you did manage to hang onto all of your equipment, what little equipment you had, despite the fact you had to swim into shore.

Burk: Mess kit, cup, and a blanket.

Marcello: And you say you were only in Bilibid Prison for a couple of days, and they really didn't have you do anything.

Burk: No.

Marcello: Were you in cells or a courtyard-like or what was it?

Burk: It was just a building. It was an old prison.

Marcello: Yes, it goes way back to the Spanish days, does it not?

Burk: Yes. It was a prison then, and each building was a . . . they weren't cells; they were just prisons. I think they had some on the opposite side from where I was at.



Bilibid is Spanish for wheel, and I was in one half of the wheel.

Marcello: That's very interesting. I hadn't known that, but some of the other prisoners described it like a wheel, where there were kind of like corridors that you might consider to be spokes.

Burk: Buildings made the spokes. Well, just say this table is it. Except for being round, actually it was square, but in each corner, the four corners, there was an L-shaped building which represented the rim. And then in the middle there was a little guardhouse.

Marcello: Which would be the hub.

Burk: Yes. Then all other buildings other than these L-shaped buildings ran at an angle away from that, and it came out like this. This half over here, we never did get over in there. They said that was a political thing over there. Then on one end of it down there there was another wall went across, and they had civilians down there towards the last. But we were just in a building.

Marcello: And you really were on no work details at all while you were in Bilibid?

Burk: No, not at that time.

Marcello: You were just kind of waiting to go some other place, isn't that right?

Burk: In transit.

Marcello: That's right, you were in transit. So you were captured on Hughes, you spent a few days there, and then you went to Corregidor, spent a few days there, from Corregidor they sent you to Bilibid for maybe a week at the very most.

Burk: I'd say two days.

Marcello: Two days, maybe. And then where did you go from Bilibid?

Burk: Well, they loaded us up in boxcars and took us down to Cabanatuan.

Marcello: Was this Cabanatuan I or Cabanatuan II? There were two Cabanatuans.

Burk: Actually, the natural number of it was III.

Marcello: Cabanatuan III?

Burk: Yes, I don't know where II was, but the III was the number of the last camp out there.

Marcello: What was the trip like on these boxcars from Bilibid to Cabanatuan?

Burk: It was pretty horrible because they packed us in. I was fortunate. I was one of the last ones to get in, so I was at the door.

Marcello: These were closed boxcars?

Burk: Yeah, they weren't cattle cars.

Marcello: No.

Burk: And you didn't have room to do much more than to sit down and just squat and pull your knees up to your chest. There was no bathroom facilities, and you just went

where you were if you had to go.

Marcello: What would you estimate the temperature to have been inside those boxcars? Over a hundred degrees?

Burk: Yes, in either end. Now, as I say, I was in the door, so that made it pretty good.

Marcello: Were there any Japanese guards in those boxcars with you, or were they sealed from the outside?

Burk: The doors were left open. And there was one guard, as I recall, in there with us. Of course, he was in the door. He'd make the ones sitting over in this door change with somebody else, kind of a mutual agreement. The ones on this side would trade with them over there, you see, and the ones at the opposite door kept it.

Marcello: Right. Did you lose very many men on this trip, do you know? How long did it take?

Burk: Oh, it was just a matter of hours on this train.

Marcello: Did any of the weak ones die?

Burk: I don't know. Not in the car I was in. And then we, I believe, spent the first night there on the edge of the town of Cabanatuan. And then the next morning they started marching us, and every two kilometers, I believe, they'd change guards with us. They'd put out new guards and just keep us going.

Marcello: What was the march like from the town of Cabanatuan to the prison camp itself? Rather uneventful or . . .

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: Were they pushing you around, shoving you, roughing you up any at this time yet?

Burk: Some were getting roughed up. It depended. If you'd fall out, they'd cuff you around about that, and if you didn't manage to get hold of some water there at Cabanatuan, there wasn't no water.

Marcello: Were you lucky enough to get some water?

Burk: Yes. I was with a bunch that struggled. I mean we hustled, I'll put it that way. We had whiskey bottles or anything that'd hold water. Of course, it wasn't too much, but we didn't try to gulp it down. We didn't know how far we were going to have to go, so we conserved our water until way late in the afternoon, and by then we were out at the camp where we were going.

Marcello: What was the camp like? Describe it.

Burk: Well, it was just an old Philippine Army training camp. There were just barracks in there, buildings made out of bamboo. Of course, they'd already had it fenced in.

Marcello: What were your own quarters like?

Burk: Well, they were just an open building on either end. And the sides were built in such a way that you had what we called a catwalk down the middle, and up about knee-high they leveled off this in split bamboo again, and that was your sleeping quarters.

Marcello: Did they provide you with a mat or something to sleep on, or was it just bare floor?

Burk: Whatever you had.

Marcello: I see. Whatever you had.

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: You had your blanket, and that was about it.

Burk: And there was another deck up above and another bunch. Of course, you had the windows on the side, and they just lifted up. They were made out of bamboo.

Marcello: Did you say that there was a fence of some sort or an enclosure around this camp?

Burk: There was a barbed-wire fence.

Marcello: There was a barbed-wire fence around the camp, and I assume that it was manned every so many paces or whatever you wish to say by guards.

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to Cabanatuan?

Burk: Well, they took us in there, and they'd say this many men and so many noncoms go to that building. In my group there were twenty civilians, twenty sailors, twenty Marines and twenty soldiers that were left out of all this. I was in the last hundred of 1,500 that were up there. And that was the leavings all of them, of all these groups went up that day.

Marcello: Your barracks had a rather broad cross-section, then.

Burk: Yes, it had whatever you wanted--Navy, Marines, Army, and civilians. Yes, we had them all, and we more or

less elected the Navy chief as barracks leader. He was louder than the rest of us, I guess.

Marcello: What was discipline like in the barracks? Did you more or less obey your superiors or your elected leader or whatever you wish to call him?

Burk: Well, there weren't many orders given, really. Some took advantage of being put in charge, and others didn't, and others usually said they were with you more or less, and that's the way it was. He would tell you what the Japs wanted done, and if you did it, no trouble came; if you didn't do it, there was going to be trouble for everybody. Then as I say again, there were others that really wanted to show they had authority.

Marcello: What was the daily routine like at Cabanatuan? Well, what was a typical day like for you?

Burk: Well, just sitting around mostly. Once in awhile they'd take you out, a hundred men, for a wood detail, bring in wood to cook there in the camp.

Marcello: Did most people want to go on these details for something to do to break the monotony, or did you try to avoid these details?

Burk: Well, it depends. Some tried to avoid them and some wanted to go, and then they'd have a swimming detail twice a day. The river ran pretty close to the camp.

Marcello: They allowed you to go swimming?

Burk: They went with us. All of us went to them about this because the only bathing facilities you had were hydrants. There was plenty of water and soap. They furnished us plenty of soap. If you wanted to stay clean, there was no reason you couldn't, and the officer in charge went to the Jap in charge and asked him about us going swimming. Of course, more men could get in the river and take a bath, and at the same time you could wash your clothes--soap them up and get in the river at the same time. Well, then we got word that people didn't want to go swimming. But once you get an agreement with the Japs that you're going to furnish a hundred men at ten o'clock to go swimming, you're going to find your hundred men if it's the same hundred. They didn't care who went to take a bath just as long as they had a hundred, whatever number of men. Sometimes you'd go to the river twice. If you happened to be handy when they needed somebody, you went swimming.

Marcello: What did you do there at Cabanatuan to occupy your spare moments?

Burk: Oh, we . . .

Marcello: Sit around and talk, or was there any reading material, or could you keep gardens or anything like that?

Burk: I don't think there were any gardens. I never saw anybody

with any. If you grew anything good, they'd have taken it. We had cards, dominoes, so we played a lot of pinochle, lots of hearts. That's about it.

Marcello: How long were you at Cabanatuan approximately?

Burk: Well, we got there in May . . .

Marcello: Of 1942.

Burk: Right. And we left there in October of '42 and went to Cabanatuan I. Now we had a show they put on about once a week there in the camp.

Marcello: That was Cabanatuan III?

Burk: Yes, a minstrel show.

Marcello: A minstrel show?

Burk: A fellow named John A. Son and some others put on a minstrel show there. You know, just different ones. They'd put on little skits.

Marcello: In other words, there were certain things you could do from time to time to occupy your time and do things.

Burk: Yes. As I saw it there in the camp, within the bounds of reason you could do about what you wanted to.

Marcello: Did you witness the Japanese roughing anybody up in Cabanatuan?

Burk: That would depend on what you call roughing up.

Marcello: Well, any kind. Let's say from slapping and beating with fists up to executing people. Did you observe some of this?



Burk: Yes.

Marcello: What was it like, if you care to go into it.

Burk: Well, we were forced to watch the executions.

Marcello: Who usually were getting executed? People who tried to escape and were recaptured?

Burk: At least four were as I heard it and as others heard it. Our officer went to the Japs, and this Jap, Colonel Mori . . . he had been, as I understood it, a college-mate to the American colonel that was in command at Cabanatuan III. I've forgotten his name, that colonel. He went to Mori concerning these four, and he said they were getting a local form of punishment. They'd put a two-by-four behind their knees and made them sit back on it with their hands tied behind to a pole for twelve or twenty-four hours. About the time the punishment was up he got orders from Manila to execute them. Now that was the story that went around, that he didn't want to, but he didn't have any choice. It came from higher up that he was to execute them, and that was it. Then, of course, all of us were supposed to watch. I went outside, but I didn't watch.

Marcello: Did they shoot these guys?

Burk: Yes, they shot them. They marched them over there to their graves, and they said one was missed and he spit

on them, so they shot him a second time. I couldn't watch it.

Marcello: Were beatings a rather usual occurrence?

Burk: Yes, I'd say.

Marcello: Did you yourself ever get beaten at this time?

Burk: No, at that time I hadn't.

Marcello: You more or less stayed out of their way, I gather, at Cabanatuan III for the most part.

Burk: Yes, well, I drove a truck a short time there.

Marcello: For what purpose?

Burk: Hauling vegetables from the town of Cabanatuan back out to the camp.

Marcello: Did you manage to get any of the vegetables for your own use?

Burk: No.

Marcello: You were still living mainly on rice at this stage.

Burk: Yes. All this was taken over on what we called the Jap side, and then we were all marched back to the gate going to your side, and if you had anything . . . the only way you could take anything back in on our side was for the guard to go with you when you get to the gate and okay you taking what you had.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any escape attempts?

Burk: No.

Marcello: I understand they had a rather sure-fire way of making

sure that nobody escaped, isn't that correct? Didn't they divide you into squads of ten?

Burk: Right.

Marcello: And if one man escaped, they would execute the other nine.

Burk: That's what they said.

Marcello: And I assume that you would kind of watch your buddies to make sure that they didn't try to make a break for it, isn't that correct?

Burk: Oh, I told them once that if they went, they were to let me know because I'd want to go with them because I believed the Japs would do that.

Marcello: Did you ever have any thoughts yourself of escaping?

Burk: No, I didn't see where I would gain anything. If we had had any troops still on the islands . . . I had opportunities to escape, but where am I going to go, a redhead, amongst dark people? You know, I'd kind of stand out. What have you got?

Marcello: Not knowing which ones would be your friends or which ones would be your enemies, either.

Burk: No, you don't know. So I never did try. I never even gave it a thought. As I say, I just thought I'd make the best of a bad situation, I guess. As I say, I had chances, but I just didn't see where I'd gain anything by attempting.

Marcello: Did you ever see any evidence of collaboration in

Cabanatuan III, that is, Americans who squealed on their buddies in order to get special favors from the Japanese or anything like this?

Burk: Well, you saw things that made you suspicious. That's as far as you could go. I mean, you didn't know because you didn't see him or hear him tell anything. It just seemed like some got a little better treatment than others, and you wondered just why Joe over there got so much better treatment than Pete over here. You got curious. We had a captain once tell us if we didn't do something . . . he said, "I'll turn you in to the Japanese, and you know they'll shoot you." I said, "You're right. They will. I'll go swimming." I had just come in off the wood detail, me and three or four others, and we'd bathed out there in a creek when we got through. But they were wanting those people to go swimming, and he picked us, and we went on because I figured he would have turned us in to the Japs and they might shoot us just like he said, and I'd rather take a bath than get shot, even if I didn't need it.

Marcello: At Cabanatuan III, did you contract any of the usual tropical diseases such as malaria or beri beri or dysentery or any of those things?

Burk: I got malaria.

Marcello: I assume you had no mosquito net.

Burk: Well, we were in the foothills of the mountains. We were up there camped on a bank pretty close to this river, as I told you, and there was a little barrio named Bong Bong. There was a nice road, it was dirt, but it was nice and wide right up to the river of this little barrio. Immediately across that river there was just a wagon track going out through there. From there on it was taboo even for the Japs because those people up there still believed in hunting heads and shrinking them if they didn't like the size of them. And there were no mosquitoes up there, supposedly. So somewhere in this period of time, either on some of my trips into Cabanatuan or whether I got bit down on the mainland farther down, but anyway in August of that year, '42, I came down with malaria.

Marcello: Was it a pretty bad case of malaria?

Burk: I guess. I had it from then on through November before the fever broke.

Marcello: I assume that by this time quinine tablets had run out.

Burk: No, we still had quinine and I was taking fifty-five grains a day. The doctor told me that I was an unfortunate person, that the lining of my stomach wouldn't let the quinine penetrate into my blood. He said, "But I'm going to keep you on the quinine just in case it does break through." So I took it from August, September,

October, November, fifty-five grains a day.

Marcello: Did it eventually help you?

Burk: No.

Marcello: It didn't do any good.

Burk: Nothing except dull your appetite and keep a ringing in your ears all the time. In November--now this was a move up to Cabanatuan I--he got hold of some liquid quinine. He give me six injections of 60 grains each, in the veins, one a day. It broke my fever. I ran a fever from the second day of August to I think it was the 27th of November without letting up.

Marcello: What were the medical facilities like at Cabanatuan III? Were there any medical facilities?

Burk: Very little. We had a little quinine, and that was about it. Oh, we might have had a little methyate if you got a cut or something but no other medicine. Maybe some officer had a little bit that he had managed to get hold of. But the quinine, I don't know if the Japs furnished it or whether the Americans had it.

Marcello: Now I assume your rations at Cabanatuan were rather short.

Burk: Primarily rice and that was the bulk. Sometimes they'd give us what we called seaweed soup. It looked like a water lily they'd boil up, and another one sweet potato vines, they'd boil up.

Marcello: Did you detect that you were not getting as much to eat as the average Japanese soldier?

Burk: I knew that. You could tell by looking.

Marcello: You were not getting as much.

Burk: Oh, no. I didn't get as much as some of the guys in camp. It comes back again to self-survival which comes first. Those people putting it out said they were eating the same as we was, but that was funny because they were holding their weight and I was losing weight. I'm quite sure we was eating the same quality but not the same quantity.

Marcello: In other words, what you're implying is that the prisoners who worked on the chow line were rather fortunate in that they could get a little bit more to eat.

Burk: Sure.

Marcello: How did you go about supplementing your diet? I assume that it wasn't safe for a dog or cat to stray into the camp or something like that.

Burk: I didn't see any cats and very few dogs. We had a few dogs cooked. Now that was out at Nielson Field. To my knowledge, that was the only one.

Marcello: Nielson Field?

Burk: That was out from Manila a little ways. There was a bunch of us out there for about two months.

Marcello: At Cabanatuan did you have any way of supplementing your diet other than through a stray dog or something like that?

Burk: Well, as I say, I never seen any there, and I drove trucks

some, and lots of times I'd haul wood up to Cabanatuan I. Well, there'd be a little store out there, you know. You'd buy some stuff if you had any money. I bought a little stuff and when I was unloading wood at Cabanatuan, people got to bidding for the wicker basket, sack-like thing I had there. They'd give me so much for it, and all the time I'm unloading the wood they'd be bidding amongst themselves, and when I'd get through, I'd sell it to the highest bidder. He didn't know what he'd be getting, so I'd make a little money that way. You would buy a little more than you would take in--sugar, some candy.

Marcello: The Japanese would allow you to stop at this store?

Burk: Yes. Then he would go to the gate with you when you went back in so you could get in with it. That's the way you'd get in with it. If you wanted to, you'd share it with your buddies. You didn't have enough to help 1,500 men, so you had a few buddies that you shared with if you were fortunate enough to get out and get hold of something.

Marcello: You mentioned a while ago that you were in a barracks with some marines, some sailors, and some civilians. How did you all get along? Pretty well?

Burk: Well, fairly well, yeah.



Marcello: How about the civilians? Did they get through this ordeal fairly well or just as well as what you military people did?

Burk: Just about. They were civilians that worked with the military in one capacity or another.

Marcello: Wasn't it kind of surprising that they put the civilians in with the military? Didn't they usually try to segregate the civilians from the military?

Burk: That particular group didn't want to be. They said they had worked for the military all the time, and they wanted to stay with them. For some reason the Japs let them. They were engineers and things like that.

Marcello: In a situation like this, do you make a couple of close friends? When I say do you make a couple of close friends, I mean were there a few of you who more or less stuck together and tried to look out for the other guy, or was it every man for himself?

Burk: Well, some were different. There were some individuals who would look out for number one only. He didn't care what happened as long as number one was taken care of. I had some buddies I went overseas with. I was in the outfit with them. Of course, one of them got killed over there during the war. But one didn't, a fellow named Smith. And there were two brothers, Tubbiville, and they were from Malakoff. They both later got killed going to Japan. We four stuck pretty close together. One of

them in my outfit, and the other one was on Corregidor, and we just got together after the surrender. So if I went out and got hold of something, they had it the same as I did. I'm no hero, but after all, we were buddies. If I got a pack of cigarettes, we smoked until they run out. If I got hold of some candy, well, we had candy until it was gone. If any one of us got out and got anything we shared it, the four of us. That was the way it was. Then Smith got detailed out of there, and the older one of the Tubbiville's, and then the younger one got pulled out, and that left just me. I came down with this malaria and couldn't go out on details. Of course, they shipped them out on different details all over the island working, and I never did get out. Only one I ever got on was that farm on Cabanatuan I.

Marcello: This was later on, I suppose.

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: We'll talk about that in a minute. There is one other question, here with regard to Cabanatuan III. Do any individual Japanese soldiers stand out either for acts of cruelty or for acts of compassion at Cabanatuan III? Did you notice anyone that stood out there?

Burk: At III, I can't say. I don't recall any particular one because I was in that last one. I was in the last barracks, and I didn't go up around headquarters where the Japs were,

so there's lots of stuff that went on up there that I never seen. So I never seen any up there to my knowledge, either one was or the other.

Marcello: What was the attrition rate like at Cabanatuan III?  
Were you losing very many men there?

Burk: Not too many at III. Of course, we lost some, I'm sure, but I don't recall. I mean there weren't any really terribly wounded ones nor any real sickness such as diarrhea, dysentery. That's at Camp III.

Marcello: I assume dysentery was a bigger killer than anything else, was it not?

Burk: The immediate cause, yes. I'd say the ultimate cause was starvation.

Marcello: The lack of food broke down your resistance.

Burk: Yes, but the immediate thing was the dysentery. I'd say that it was a big killer.

Marcello: You mentioned a lack of food, and I assume this was the thing which was constantly on your mind.

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: It overrode every other consideration, I'm sure.

Burk: Well, before the war, a group of you would get together, and it wasn't long until you were talking about women. In there, a bunch of you'd get together, and it wasn't long until you were talking about food because that was the primary thing on your mind. You planned all these menus and these diets--all the food you was going to eat

when you got back. That's what it all amounted to. You went all over the whole camp getting recipies, this, that, and the other. I could have made a real big cookbook if I'd kept all that stuff.

Marcello: Some people said that their imaginations at times played tricks on them, and they imagined that they could smell a certain type of food being cooked. One of the people that I talked to swore that he could smell bacon and eggs cooking someplace. I wonder if you ever experiences anything like this.

Burk: Well, I thought different times I smelled stuff cooking, you know, and you just thought it was your imagination: "Boy, that ain't cooking and you know it."

Marcello: Now you were at Cabanatuan III until October of 1942, and then you moved on to Cabanatuan I.

Burk: Right.

Marcello: Were these camps fairly close together?

Burk: It was about twelve kilometers, I believe.

Marcello: Did you walk from Cabanatuan III to Cabanatuan I?

Burk: No, they moved my bunch in trucks. I was still back in this bunch that was sick.

Marcello: Why did they move you to Cabanatuan I?

Burk: They closed out III. Of course, enough people had died off at one that they had plenty of room there for the ones there at III. Also, that area was less than half a mile from this river, and the other side of it was

head hunters' country, and the Japs just didn't have business in there. They didn't go in there. If they did, a lot of them didn't come back because guerrillas and what-not were in there.

Marcello: I assume it was a rather uneventful trip, then, from Cabanatuan III to Cabanatuan I. Did anything exciting happen on the trip?

Burk: I don't even remember the trip because, as I say, I had malaria, and a whole lot of that part in there was just a haze.

Marcello: How long were you at Cabanatuan I altogether?

Burk: We went up there in October. I guess I left in February.

Marcello: You were there from October of 1942 to sometime in February in 1943. What were the differences between Cabanatuan III and Cabanatuan I that you noticed from a physical standpoint, first of all?

Burk: Well, basically they was the same. They was still training camps for the Philippine Army. The difference was that one was more flat. If it rained it stayed muddy. Now III was built up there in the foothills. It was on a hill, so it drained good. I mean we never did have any mud puddles and stuff around. It would rain and it would drain right off. On that basis, I'd say there was a good deal of difference because if you had disease it would be more prone if you stayed in Camp I

because of the flatness of the area. Other than that, at Cabanatuan I across the road was what they called the hospital area where the real sick were. Incidentally, I went over there in November of '42.

Marcello: This would have been shortly after you arrived there, in other words. You got there in October.

Burk: Yes. I don't know whether it was dysentery or diarrhea. They both act the same, but one is more serious than the other. Of course, I'd dropped a lot more with this diarrhea or dysentery, whichever it was. They carried me over to the hospital side. I weighed probably seventy pounds then. The doctor came over there, him and the colonel that was in charge of the island at Hughes, and this captain was telling me that I needed sulfa medicine. This colonel asked him how much, and he gave it to me, the colonel did.

Marcello: This was from his own personal supply, I gather.

Burk: Yes, he had it. That, I always said, was the turning point in my life because if I hadn't gotten it, I would have died. I know that because you just didn't go as much as I was going with the food I was getting and last. You couldn't.

Marcello: What caused the dysentery usually? Was it the bad drinking water, among other things?

Burk: I never did know, really. I don't recall where the water supply came from at I. At III, I believe it was just the mountain water out of streams. It tasted the same even at I. Whether it was or not, I think where it all started was on that Bataan Death March--the ones that was captured on Bataan. They took them to Camp O'Donnell. You've probably heard of it. Well, now that's where I think most of this dysentery came from, and after they died down in such numbers at O'Donnell, they brought what was remaining to Camp I. Because when I went there in October, thirty or forty or fifty a day were dying, I'd say it was a hang-off from this O'Donnell deal. They died much more than that at O'Donnell.

Marcello: I assume that you didn't do too much of anything while you were at Cabanatuan I, is this correct?

Burk: Well, I went over to the hospital and got out of there . . .

Marcello: How long were you in there?

Burk: Oh, a little over a month. I got this diarrhea stopped, whatever it was, and I went back over there on the other side. They put me on light duty. I was helping lay a four-inch water line, carrying one end of a four-inch joint of pipe. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't been on light duty, but I got off of that and got put on another job there. They had a farm up there. They had these little plots, and they'd designate

certain Americans to be in charge of one plot or two plots, and they'd give them a piece of bamboo to carry around. That way the Japs knew he was boss, and I found a piece of bamboo, and I carried it a couple of days before I got caught up with.

Marcello: What did they do when they caught up with you?

Burk: Well, the Americans caught up with me, and they just took it away from me. Then I carried empty water cans for a day. I'd go so far and get the water and come back so far and pour it out and go back. Well, you had to use your own ingenuity to get by, and I wasn't strong enough to do what they were wanting done, so I was just trying to get by.

Marcello: Did you notice any difference in the Japanese personnel at Cabanatuan I? Were they more cruel, were they more compassionate, or were they about the same in both places?

Burk: I would say about the same in both places. Of course, they were in charge, so common sense says you can do so much, and so much you can't do. If you do over this, they're going to retaliate. Of course, some people got beat up that didn't deserve it, I mean, they hadn't done anything. They just got the idea that he'd done it, or maybe he was with a bunch that had done it, and whoever did it didn't have the nerve to admit it, so they'd just take the whole bunch. Then they'd get them all, and then



they'd know they were going to get the right one. But as a rule, as I seen it the treatment was about the same. Now if we got under Taiwanese--we had some Taiwanese-- it seemed like they were worse than the regular Japanese because their highest ranking ranked below the lowest Jap.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese tromped on those guys, and those guys in turn tromped on the Americans because they were still lower than they were.

Burk: And they knew we were superior to the Japanese, I mean supposedly. Whether we were or not I don't know, but that was the way I gathered it: "This guy is superior to this one that's over me, so I'll just give him old billy-hell because I'm over him." I don't know that that was the idea, but that was the impression I got from the Taiwanese.

Marcello: I assume that at Cabanatuan I they more or less let you alone since you were so ill and so on. Were you subjected to any beatings here on Cabanatuan I?

Burk: No.

Marcello: I didn't think so. Actually from what you said, you got there in October, and you came down with dysentery in November, and you left in February, isn't that right? So you really weren't there for too long.

Burk: No.

Marcello: You were more or less out of commission most of the time that you were there.

Burk: And by hook or crook I stayed out of their way, I'll put it that way. You know, it was the old saying that "Discretion is a better part of valor."

Marcello: Sure.

Burk: Well, if you could stay away from one of them you were better off. You knew you weren't going to get knocked up the side of the head if you weren't within reach of him. That's common sense, I mean that's the way I looked at it. As I said about carrying that stick, I knew I was taking a chance. If I got caught I was going to get whipped. I knew that but I figured it was worth it. I figured, "Well, if they whip me with this piece of bamboo I've got, which isn't too big, about like my finger, I'll get by a day or two without doing much." I just didn't have the strength to do it.

Marcello: Up to this time we've talked about some of the more serious things that had taken place, but can you relate any of the funny things that perhaps might have occurred either at Cabanatuan III or Cabanatuan I that you think ought to be a part of the record? Is there anything that stands out here of a humorous nature? Not that there could be too much humor in a prison camp.

Burk: The only thing I can recall was an Indian fellow by the

name of Antelope. He was in the same outfit in the Army in Oklahoma as me and this one boy, Smith, over there in the camp was in. He wound up over in the Philippines. Well, Smith, myself and three or four other guys, one time in Cabanatuan III, we shaved our heads. And that old boy came up to us in the way of making a joke and said, "Pardon me," and I asked him why, and he said, "I thought the moon was coming up." That was his way of making a joke about this bald head. It's hard to say, but we had a lot of fun. One guy, he had a beard. He came over there at the barracks, and we'd sit around there and shoot the breeze every evening, and then he'd go back to his barracks and go to bed. One day there were a couple of us sitting out there in front of the barracks and saw a guy coming. We could tell he was coming to see one of us. I thought he was coming to see "Tubby" because I didn't know him. "Tubby" thought he was coming to see old Burk, but I didn't know him. The old boy just walked on. We got up and walked into the barracks. He said, "Hey, you so-and-so." We said, "Who are you?" He said, "You know me. I'm Dodson." He'd shaved his beard off, and we'd never seen the man except with a beard on. Well, I didn't know him. Well, we had quite a laugh about that.

Marcello: Did you ever have trouble with lice or bedbugs or things like that?

Burk: No, not bedbugs. We had lice up there at I. Oh, them rascals, I tell you. You'd turn over at night and they'd just run foot races getting out from under the side you'd turned over on. And they'd bite on you, of course. The Japs had got hold of some British underwear, the boxer type that were knit. They had been white, but all of them turned out to be polka-dot where these guys had smashed these lice, and blood would get on them. Then you'd see an old boy take his blanket out and find him an anthill, and he'd spread his blanket out over that anthill.

Marcello: I'd heard about that. The red ants would eat these . . .

Burk: . . . nits off, lice. Well, they can't stand the sun and they'd have to stay in the shade, and the ants would get them. Of course, then you had the problem of getting the ants off. But just all of a sudden they disappeared like they showed up, up there at the camp. I don't know why. Everybody had them and then nobody had them.

Marcello: Where did you go from Cabanatuan?

Burk: Went down in the port area.

Marcello: The port area of Manila?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do down there?

Burk: I was a mechanic--not by choice, but by request. When I signed up to go out as a truck driver, this same colonel

I was telling you about that gave me the medicine told me I wasn't able to go because I had just gotten out of the hospital. I hadn't been out three or four days.

Marcello: Were you kind of glad to leave Cabanatuan I?

Burk: Yes, because that farm was killing me. They said they wanted a detail of truck driver, and I signed up as a truck driver. I asked him about getting me on it, and he said I wasn't able because it would be too hard on me. And I said, "Well, it won't be as hard as carrying these five-gallon cans of water or one end of that four-inch pipe." So he got me on the detail. We got down there, and they didn't want truck drivers. They wanted mechanics. Of course, most Americans do a little mechanic work, though.

Marcello: About how many people were there in this detail?

Burk: A hundred of us left there and went down there, and there were already fifty there. This was one of them times I was telling you about when somebody was doing something and wouldn't admit it, and then a bunch got punished for it.

Marcello: What happened?

Burk: I never did know. I didn't know who had done it until he had gone, and then it was too late.

Marcello: In other words, it was down here in the port area where somebody had done something that the Japanese obviously didn't like, and they couldn't find out who the culprit

was, so they took it out on all of the prisoners.

Burk: No. We went there, and we'd only been there a couple of days. These fifty fellows were upstairs, which was like a lot of office buildings with a balcony. They were up there and this hundred was down on the ground floor. Well, the Japanese Navy was across the street. We were under the Army, but the Navy was just across the street.

Marcello: And I understand they were son-of-a-guns, those ones that were in the Navy.

Burk: They're just like our Army and Navy because there was friction. Well, every morning and every afternoon the Japanese had callisthenics. Everybody that worked there got out there and did callisthenics. Whatever transpired was during a morning period of this exercise. To this day I have no idea what the guy did, said, or what. But anyhow, we were all in there. To be honest, I was just as naked as the day I was born. I was washing my clothes. They said everybody out. I said "I can't because all of my clothes are wet." I just had a couple pairs of fatigue pants--put them on wet. So I went out, wet clothes and all. These two Jap Navy officers came over there. They didn't bother stopping at the Army and telling them. They just bypassed them. But they wouldn't say what happened or who done it. Both of them knew that out of these hundred people there was no one there involved,

but they wanted the man who had done it to admit it. But our officer must have been one of these hundred because these fifty were upstairs, but it was one of the guys that had been there, in the fifty. Well, they ain't even out there. Then they said all sergeants take one step forward, and just as they did that, around the corner of the building came two Jap guards with rifles and fixed bayonettes. I thought this was it because I didn't know what was happening, but here came the guards with their rifles. The rest of them fell out. That's where I really felt the Navy boys were pretty good because those boys that were equivalent in rank stepped forward. They didn't have stripes of sergeants, so the Japs couldn't have picked them out, but they just stepped forward. So then they hit us. I got hit with a two-by-four across the butt. One of the officers had a two-by-two, and he was hitting two licks, and the other guy with the two-by-four was hitting them once. That was all they did to us. They left but then the Jap Army . . . from that day until the day I left that detail, we were always doing extra duty because of that. Because one thing or another would lead up to it.

Marcello: Now had your health gradually been getting better as you moved down to the port area, or were you still in pretty bad shape?

Burk: Well, I'd say I was in pretty bad shape. I weighed about 120.

Marcello: You had picked up some weight, then.

Burk: Well, I was in good shape from what I was in November. That was the way it went along there.

Marcello: What sort of extra duty would you have to do?

Burk: Oh, it varied. Maybe we'd go out and cut weeds, but it would be after regular hours--Sunday, Saturday.

Marcello: Were you working seven days a week or six days a week?

Burk: Mostly five or six. They had their holidays there, and they didn't do much on Saturdays. We just worked on cars and trucks for them, of course.

Marcello: Did you ever try and do anything to sabotage the work?

Burk: No, because they were used cars and vehicles to start with, and the parts we were putting on there were used, and nothing was going to last long. You'd better fix it where it would run. The Jap immediately over your section had to okay it, and the guy over the three sections had to okay it, and the shop foreman had to okay it, and then it had to go down to the yard where another guy would okay it, and then the guy that comes after it had to okay it. So there wasn't really a chance because if you didn't fix it, they'd turn it down and you'd have to do it over, and you'd get whipped because it wasn't fixed right.

Burk: Did you get very many beatings here at the port area



other than this one you mentioned?

Burk: No. Well, I didn't even think of this one, but I got whipped once for sleeping. I had beriberi and I didn't sleep much at night. I layed in the front seat in an old car over there, the one I was working on, because I couldn't do anything until the engine came back. They didn't like you not to be doing anything. I told this old boy, "I'm going to take a nap. You watch." In the meantime he got pulled off and forgot to wake me up, and then the guard caught me asleep. He went to the one that was over me and told him, "If you don't whip him, I'm going to whip you." So you know who got a whipping.

Marcello: What did they do to you this time?

Burk: He just whipped me around, slapped me aside the head.

Marcello: I gather that generally speaking your stay at the port area wasn't too happy an experience.

Burk: No, because that was where I lost my eye.

Marcello: How did that happen?

Burk: The basic cause was starvation. The immediate cause was perforated corneal ulcer.

Marcello: This comes because of a lack of proper vitamins.

Burk: Vitamin A.

Marcello: Vitamin A.

Burk: The doctor down there told me my eye . . . you might be too young to know, but way on back they had cars with

curtains that had isinglass in them. It was a thin sort of a plastic-like stuff. When it'd get old it'd get crackled, you know, just dry and cracked. He said that's the way my eyeball was, both of them, from the lack of this diet. And possibly I got something in it that infected it and caused the ulcer to form. Maybe I didn't. I don't know. I never knew of getting anything in it.

Marcello: There was nothing at all they could do for this?

Burk: No. It perforated during the night. Before I knew it was there it had already perforated, and they didn't have anything to help me anyway.

Marcello: What did something like this do to your morale?

Burk: Oh, not a whole lot as I recall. I asked the doctor what it was. I couldn't stand light in it. He said it was neuritis, or neuralgia I believe he called it, so I asked him a day or two later about that and I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "It's like a cold." Well, I could understand a cold because I knew the eye was runny, but at that time I couldn't see good enough to tell anything about it. The vision just went down in my eyes. I was like that for about ten days, and he came in there one morning. He got the Japs to okay me staying in the barracks, but I had to stay in bed. He come in there looking and I just moved my feet off the

the end of the mattress I had. I'd built a bedstead out of boxes. I told him to sit down and to let me have it. He said, "About what?" And I said, "Whatever's on your mind. You got something. You didn't just come in here to look at me." He said, "I don't know how to tell you." I said, "Well, there's only one way to tell a man anything, and that's to tell him what it is, and that's it. Good, bad, or indifferent--there's nothing you can do about it." He said, "You've lost your eye." I told him, "Well, it isn't the best news, but it isn't the worst. No need crying over spilled milk. If it's gone it's just gone. There's nothing you or I can do about it." That's the way I felt. What are you going to do? There was nothing to do. That was all. I had a lot of fun out of my eyes after that. It got to where it didn't hurt. This blind spot showed up in the other one. I used to sit and cut people's heads off when they were walking. I could cover their head and only see their body, or I could zero in on one of their legs about the knee, and it was just like it was cut off, like he was walking on one leg and one stump. I did that by the hours, just sat and watched people. It'd pass the time.

Marcello: You said that your other eye was also affected. Was that also a result of this lack of Vitamin A?

Burk: I presume so. Optic neuritis, optic atrophy is what I've got in the right eye, and the doctor explained it to me as a dying and a drying up of the optic nerve. I've probably got it in the left, but there's a scar and I can't tell, but this other one, you walk from here to that door over there and a person's head is gone, I mean if I looked right at it.

Marcello: Where did you go from the Manila port area?

Burk: I went back into Bilibid.

Marcello: You went back into Bilibid?

Burk: With this eye.

Marcello: There was a hospital set up at Bilibid, isn't that correct?

Burk: Yes. At that time there was. The first time I went through Bilibid there was no hospital.

Marcello: Right, but then they sent you back to Bilibid because of your eye?

Burk: Yes. At the time I also had what the doctor told me was intestinal pellagra.

Marcello: So now you've had malaria, beriberi, pellagra, plus you had lost the sight of one eye, and . . .

Burk: . . . dingy fever.

Marcello: Dingy fever. I'd heard about it also. Plus you lost partial vision in the other eye. I just wanted to get that into the record. What do you think kept you going? Obviously you had seen men who had lesser afflictions

that give up and die. Literally give up.

Burk: I don't know. And you saw somebody else that fought to the last breath and still die, so it's a hard question. As I say, I've seen guys give up, apparently just quit eating. Now that's a quick way to go, really. You quit eating and there ain't no two ways about it, you're going to die. Now these people who say they go on these fasts and don't eat, they're lying because if you don't eat, you're going to die. There ain't no two ways about it. The only man that could do that, not eat, was Jesus Christ. Anybody else is going to die if he don't eat. I believe that. So I just don't know. Some people say, "Well, it's the diet that caused your body to break." Well, I don't know. This fellow, Smith, he and I went into the Army together at eighteen. We stayed in the Army together in the same outfit in Oklahoma for five years from June of '35 to January of '40. We went overseas and were in the same outfit over there. We got the same food, the same . . . everything was the same. We camped together, were in the same barracks together. My health breaks, his doesn't. Now why? You tell me, I can't. Just like one guy's mental capacity--he breaks in a mental point whereas another one won't. Nobody knows whose breaking point is where, I don't thing. Whether it's physical or mental, some people's are higher and

some are lower. Apparently my physical breaking point was below his because mine broke and his didn't.

Marcello: How long were you back at Bilibid altogether on this second term?

Burk: Well, I went in there in October and stayed until . . . I didn't stay in there long. Yes, I did. That was all in '43. I stayed then until November of '44.

Marcello: You were there from October of '43 until November of '44?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: What did you do while you were at Bilibid?

Burk: Well, I worked some there. Well, I went out one day--I was on light duty--loading gasoline, barrels of gasoline on boxcars. Well, me and a fellow there had some words, a Navy fellow in charge of the barracks. He didn't like me, and I didn't like him. I just irritated him every little point I could. You know, if you don't like somebody you don't . . . and consequently he did, too. He was in the driver's seat, and I knew in the end I was going to get the worst of it, but I was going to get the satisfaction of telling him, let's put it that way. That was the Navy telling the Army, that was one thing there. But anyway, on this light detail I was out with him two or three times. So there one day I was laying on the bed asleep. He came and woke me up. He said, "I want you to go down to the kitchen and grind corn." I said, "Okay." And he said, "This will be a regular detail.

Every eight days our barracks gets it." So I go down there. Eight days go by, and we've got another detail, and I'm on it. But these other nine guys, make up ten, I ain't seen them on it before. Well, that's possible, you know. That was all that was able to go. Somebody had to go--B is pretty close to the alphabet. So eight days later it happens again, but it's a different nine. I get suspicious, you know, pretty quick. Something's not quite according to Hoyle here. I tell them if they've got to double up to put one of those first guys back on there. The next time I go to him and tell him what I think. "Now I know and I just want you to know that I know." That was all I said. I went on back to my bunk, lay down, went to sleep. Next day he sent me up to a place near the front gate. I was to report to a Navy chief up there for a detail. I got up there and this Jap was having convulsion fits--punching his eyes and beating on his knees. All of us together finally understood what he wanted. They wanted ten men to go over to the Far Eastern University to pick rice, you know, pick dirt and stuff out of it. That's what the officers ate, maybe might have been for them. But they had to walk. Well, when you got there you had to see. Well, they had five guys that couldn't see worth a darn and five one-legged people up there on that detail. That was

why that Jap was beating on his leg and poking his eyes about. He wanted ten men that could walk and ten that could see, and he had five that couldn't walk and five that couldn't see. Well, that was off then. This chief told us to go on back to our barracks. I went back and told this old boy that we didn't go out. He said, "You report back up there at two o'clock." I went back up there at two, and they didn't have nothing for me. When they told me there was nothing, I went back to bed. He just let me get to sleep good and then woke me up and told me I could go back up there. "I just wanted to tell you that detail will be regular, every day. I knew you didn't like to grind corn every eight days, so I thought you'd want to work every day." I said, "No, I don't like that either, you so-and-so, but there's nothing I can do about it." And I just went on. I'd go out and work for the Japs over there at this Far Eastern University a whole lot of the time and work in their garden. They had their little extra eats, you know, and they'd share with you. The guards were pretty good. So I was getting a little extra food out of it, and, too, at the kitchen, if there was anything extra . . . sometimes they'd make corn bread. They'd get enough extra corn and bake corn bread, and we'd get an extra piece of corn break out of it. Of course, I'd gripe



about the job, not to this fellow in charge but to the other ones. I'd say I wished I'd get off this, I didn't like this. I knew he'd keep me on it as long as he thought I was wanting off. So I got along pretty good there until I had a flare-up with my eye again and had to get off of it. After that I didn't do anything. He was told by the officer in charge of the barracks to leave me alone because I was an eye patient.

Marcello: Where did you go then from Bilibid?

Burk: Went out to this Nielson place I was telling you about, Nielson Field. Somewhere out on the edge of Manila there was a little airfield, and out there there was nothing to do. I don't know why we were out there, really, except I thought once . . . airplanes came over one night while we were out there before we were liberated, and maybe they took us out there to keep the Americans from bombing out there. I don't know if that would have. I assume that might have been the case because we didn't do anything out there.

Marcello: Now by the time you got out to Nielson Field, this would have been into 1944, isn't that correct?

Burk: November of '44.

Marcello: Could you tell by this time that the tide of the war was turning?

Burk: Well, no. We'd hear rumors. Funny thing about rumors.

You hear the rumor and you go tracking it down, and the last guy you ask would say you told it to him. Well, I know I hadn't told him. That was the way these rumors were. But we had them landing in May, in October. It was a couple of weeks early, our rumor was, but they had them landing there. Had them landing in Lingayen Gulf. It was early, our rumor was, but they landed there when they actually did.

Marcello: Did you ever have any access to outside information? Did you ever get hold of any newspapers, or were you able to hear any radio broadcasts or anything like this?

Burk: No, I didn't have no radio or no opportunity to get one. The only papers we ever got were theirs, the Japanese papers, and they were pretty full of propaganda.

Marcello: I'm sure they were.

Burk: I read an article there once about a commander in their air force. He'd run into a squadron of American planes, and in the ensuing fight . . . well, when he'd run into them he was about out of gas, but he whipped them all off and got one wing shot off, and several hours later, as they put it, in limped the one-winged airplane out of gas. But when he started the battle he was about out of gas. This one-winged airplane made it back two hours later.

Marcello: Were you ever able to send any letters or post cards, or did you receive any mail from home?

Burk: I didn't receive any. We were allowed . . . they'd give us a post card.

Marcello: Which simply said, "My health is fine . . .

Burk: Good, fair, bad, or poor . . .

Marcello: Yes, something like that, and you had to fill in which one?

Burk: If it wasn't at least good, it probably didn't get out. If you put fair, it probably didn't even go because I sent several of them, and my folks got four or five.

Marcello: How about Red Cross packages? Did you ever receive any of those?

Burk: In October of '44, the month I went into Bilibid, we got a box of . . . it had four boxes in it. Prior to getting these Red Cross packages I had just come into Bilibid, and due to this pellagra, I was put on a special diet they had there. The officers got paid a little bit of money, not a whole lot, and they'd buy sugar, canned milk, eggs, peanuts, bananas, stuff of that sort, and I got on what they called the special diet, along with a little medicine to cure up this pellagra. But prior to receiving the Red Cross package, I guess I was getting well before I got it, not too well, but some. We got this forty-four pound box, four boxes at eleven pounds each. It had cheese, candy, canned meat, canned instant coffee, chocolate bars, and a can of butter.

Marcello: Did it ever look as though the Japanese had gone through these packages first of all, or were they rather intact when you got them?

Burk: No, these had not been gone through. They were intact. They still had the metal around them. No, I take it back. They had taken the metal off, but the boxes were still sealed, glued together. Everything was in there just the way it was packed. I said about the medicine earlier, and that was the turning point there because I was way down, and I'd asked the doctor about it, and I just told him I felt like I needed to eat it, while I had it. Stretching it out wouldn't do me no good. He said, "No, it won't. You'll get the most benefit out of it eating it right now." So I didn't try to stretch mine out--eating a bit now, putting it down, waiting until tomorrow to eat another bite. I just ate what I wanted to eat. Consequently, mine was gone pretty quick, but it got me started back up from this pellagra deal.

Marcello: After you had this trouble with your eyes, did any of your fellow prisoners ever try and take advantage of you in any way?

Burk: Well, only this one fellow. I came in there with this eye, and they operated on it, removed the ulcer.

Marcello: They had facilities to operate?

Burk: Yes, a Doctor Ritter, Navy doctor, did the operation, removed the ulcer. Well, they bandaged my eyes, both

of them, and this fellow would come around at mealtime and feed me because I was down and couldn't raise me head up, and he'd feed me this rice. Well, I'd go along for about a week or so, I don't recall how long I was bandaged up. I think ten days. Then he took a pencil and made a hole in this cover over my one good eye so I could see out. A couple of days later he took it off. The first day there I just remarked to the guy next door to me that they served more rice that day at mealtime. He said, "No, the same amount." I said, "Yours may be, but mine ain't." He said, "No, that guy that's been feeding you has been eating more than he's feeding you."

Marcello: Did you ever see that guy after that?

Burk: Yes.

Marcello: Did you ever bring up the subject?

Burk: No, I just told him he looked like he'd gained a little weight. He walked off.

Marcello: Did he kind of get the message, do you think?

Burk: Yes. The old boy was hungry, I guess. So was I.

Marcello: Did you see a lot of this sort of thing taking place?

Burk: You mean like that?

Marcello: Right. Prisoners doing anything to stay alive, to get a little bit more to eat, even if it got down to the point of taking it from one of their buddies.

Burk: Yes, you seen that. Like I say, it comes back to that

old business of self-survival. One old boy out there at Nielson took something from a dog and got punished for it. They had a dog in the camp. He came from China, Suchow. Of course, everybody shared with him. That old boy took his rice, so they said he had to share his rice for three or four days with the dog-- half of what he got he had to give it to the dog. Of course, the dog was getting more than anybody. I mean, if you gave him a little bit and I gave him a little bit, first thing you know he's got a pretty good pot of rice and he liked it. It hadn't hurt you, really. I mean, for you to give the dog a teaspoonful isn't going to hurt you one way or the other.

Marcello: But it was just the idea of seeing that dog grow fat, I suppose.

Burk: Well, I don't know. Everybody liked the dog. He'd been at the prison all along. As far as I know, he made it back. I don't know who brought him back to the States, but the last time I seen him he was still alive. There's no way of figuring people. You're starving, and you give part of yours to a dog.

Marcello: I would assume that while you were in prison camp you saw the best coming out in people as well as seeing the worst coming out.

Burk: Yes, I'd say that.

Marcello: I suppose it's one way of finding out what a man's true character is in many ways.

Burk: I often said that if you scratch under just a little bit, you can see what a man was in there, really. Well, like one guy will steal from another, especially when he can't do nothing about it. That's showing his true colors. Of course, that happened a lot. In just one short period of time it happened to me because after that I could fend for myself.

Marcello: Did you ever give up hope?

Burk: No, not really.

Marcello: Did you really think you were going to be liberated eventually?

Burk: Yes, but to me it then got to be a time element. After we came back in from Nielson to Bilibid in the first part of January . . . we were out there about two months.

Marcello: What were you doing out at Nielson?

Burk: Nothing.

Marcello: Just nothing.

Burk: Just losing weight. I went from 128 down to 92 out there in two months. Doing nothing, but we wasn't getting anything to eat. And then when we came back into Bilibid, they cut our rations again, a little bit, from what they had been previously. They were keeping track of our weight. They'd weigh us every month. They

weighed me when I came in. The first of February they weighed me again and I weighed 88. I'd lost four pounds, and that wasn't much in a month. But then, they cut our rations again, and then the doctor told us that at that rate at the end of ten days a lot of men would die. He said some would die in two or three days, but a lot would die in ten days. Another group could last maybe thirty with that particular amount of food. Then he said, "After that, we'll all start to go." Well, I knew I wasn't in the ten day. I didn't feel like it. But somewhere between that ten and thirty, I was in there. You know how much you weigh and can figure it out. Of course, with what we seen going on around, and airplanes and all, you knew there'd been some big changes, but you didn't know what. So then it got down to whether they'd get here or not.

Marcello: Did you ever fear the war ending. Well, did you feel that if the Japanese did lose that they would kill all of you?

Burk: Yes, we thought of that, I guess, through what we were told. I know on the 4th of February when we were liberated I was in this camp back there by one of these L-shaped buildings.

Marcello: This was in Bilibid Prison.

Burk: Yes, Ward 11. Right out at the end of it we had a slit



trench. It wasn't a slit trench, but it was a tin thing built up at an angle that dumped into the sewer, and they had an improvised flushing system made there, a barrel cut off that made a little water run and when it got full it would dump over there and wash everything out. Well, right by the end of it was a window in the wall, but it was boarded over, and here would have been this trench. All of a sudden there were two or three of us standing there using it and somebody started beating on them boards on that window. Of course, everybody scattered, and I got right back against the wall, close to the window, and I thought, "Now they're coming back here because . . . then the Japs had left us--they'd walked out that day at noon.

Marcello: They just vanished.

Burk: Well, they told us they were leaving, that we were lawfully free prisoners-of-war, but we were locked up for our own protection. And they just walked out. Well, I thought they was coming back and was going to kill us. I was back there next to the wall, and I thought if they'd stick a gun in there and bend it around the wall close enough, I'd take it away from them because he just couldn't get it in there. Well, somebody out there hollered, "Who's in there?" And this boy said, "Who's out there?" They said, "Yanks." Off the bolts came, and that was the way

we were liberated.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you were liberated?

Burk: I don't remember.

Marcello: Did you ever feel any resentment against the Japanese?

Burk: No, not really.

Marcello: I'm speaking about at that time, not now after time may have healed the wounds.

Burk: No, I don't believe then. Maybe one individual along somewhere or another. There'd be one individual you didn't like, just like here. The soldier was doing what he thought was right. He was fighting for his country, he thought, and he thought what he was doing was right, same as I did. It just happened to be he had won one battle and I had lost it. I mean, that's the way I looked at it. Of course, as I say, there were certain individual Japanese I didn't like because they were just . . . well, they were mean. But then there were others who I'd talk to, and they were just as human as I was. They had their problems.

Marcello: As you look back on it--and we've probably touched on this from time to time already--what do you think was the key to your survival? What do you think pulled you through?

Burk: The only thing I can think of is the Lord.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were not a religious man, particularly, when you entered the service. Were you one by the time you had left the service?

Burk: No.

Marcello: Did you see prisoners get religion as a result of being in the camp?

Burk: I'll say this. I seen them get what they thought was religion during the war. They did about like I did before. Some of them said something to me, and I said "No, it's not right to go all through my life and never give the Lord a thought, and then when I get my tail in a crack I call on him." That's how I felt. I went to church, I guess, two or three times that I remember after I was grown until back in the fifties. I just went my way. As I say, that's how I felt about it. I went that long with no thought to the Lord. But the first time I felt like I was in a bind, I'd call on him. Now I prayed one time during the war before we surrendered, but I didn't make any promises. I just said if he'd see his way clear to help me through I'd appreciate it.

Marcello: What were some of the funny incidents that took place in the prison camp. Now we've talked about this before from time to time, but apparently you've thought of a couple more humorous incidents.

Burk: Well, we had a guard up there at Cabanatuan on the farm. His nickname was "Donald Duck."

Marcello: He's pretty famous because several other prisoners have talked to me about "Donald Duck," unless there were

several guards named "Donald Duck."

Burk: I don't know. This was the only one I ever knew of there.

Marcello: How did he get that name?

Burk: Well, he was a little bitty guy, and if he'd get excited he'd jump up and flop his arms, you know, and somebody gave him the name "Donald Duck." He wanted to know about it. The old boy saw he was in trouble, and he told him, "Hollywood, gangster type." That's what they always thought of Hollywood--gangsters, movie stars. Well, he was big stuff. He was a movie star. He went around there for three months with us calling him "Donald Duck," just as happy as if he'd had good sense. Then he went to Manila, went to the show, and what did he see--Donald Duck. He whipped that old boy. He'd whip him awhile, and he'd jump up and down and slap his arms saying "Donald Duck, quack, quack." He really got unhappy about that Donald Duck, you know, movie star. Well, that was just one of the things.

Marcello: Are there any other nicknames that you had for guards?

Burk: Oh, "Air Raid."

Marcello: "Air Raid?" He must be pretty famous, too because I've heard of him before. How did he get that name?

Burk: Oh, he was one of these guys that would cuff you around if he'd catch you goofing off. Somebody would see him, and then they'd holler, "Air Raid!" Then he picked it

up and he got the name because he was the one . . . it seemed like he went around looking for somebody that was goofing off so he could whop them, kick them, or he might hit them, or he might take his rifle butt and hit you with it.

Marcello: Now these guys were all at Cabanatuan, isn't that correct?

Burk: Yes, Number I on the farm.

Marcello: Now, there's an old one that I've heard mentioned, also, under the name of Liver Lips, and I'm not sure if he was at Cabanatuan or not.

Burk: I don't recall him. Of course, maybe I didn't see them all. I wasn't on that farm very much. There was only three or four days there, and I didn't get acquainted too well.

Marcello: I can't recall where he was. I'm not sure if he was at Cabanatuan I, but that was another name which has come up from time to time.

Burk: Well, I named one "Feather Merchant" down there in the port area. You remember reading old Snuffy Smith, "Feather Merchants?" Of course, he didn't know anything about it. When I was talking to somebody else I'd say the "Feather Merchant" because he was like that. He'd get excited and just bounce up and down, slap his arms, waving, chatter. Of course, we couldn't understand him because when he'd get mad and excited, he'd talk Japanese.