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Interview with
RUFUS SMITH
June 13, 1989

Place of Interview: Hughes Springs, Texas
Interviewer: George Burlage
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Oral History Collection

Rufus Smith

Interviewer: George Burlage

Date: June 13, 1989

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Mr. Burlage: This interview is being conducted in Hughes Springs, Texas, on June 13, 1989. This interview is with Rufus Smith, a survivor of Palawan Massacre in the Philippines, which occurred on December 14, 1944.

We'll begin by introducing Rufus to you. Give me a little information about your background--about your birth and your activities as a youth and so forth.

Mr. Smith: Well, I was born on November 12, 1918, in Nashville, Arkansas. I lived there on a farm until I was about eight years old. I moved over here to the Hughes Springs area, and this is where I basically grew up. I finished high school in Naples, Texas, ten miles north of here, in 1937. Then I roamed around over Texas, New

Mexico, and Arizona until December, 1939. I came back home for Christmas and then volunteered--enlisted--in the Marine Corps on January 5, 1940.

Burlage: Okay, after you enlisted where did you go for your recruit training? Give me a little bit of that information.

Smith: I was sworn in on January 5, 1940. I went to San Diego and took boot camp in the South Platoon in January and February of 1940. Then we went up to Vallejo, and we had to wait for, oh, several days then. I went aboard the *Henderson*.

Burlage: The *Henderson* is what type of ship?

Smith: It was an old troop transport of World War I vintage--prior to World War I, I guess. Anyway, we were about twenty-four days non-stop to the Philippine Islands. We were stationed at the Cavite Navy Yard until Pearl Harbor.

Burlage: Okay, what kind of duties did you do at Cavite?

Smith: It was basically guard duty, and then I wound up in a machine gun company as an instructor for .50-caliber machine guns up until just prior to Pearl Harbor.

Burlage: What happened on the day that Pearl Harbor took place? Where were you at that time?

Smith: I was on top of the Naval Ammunition Depot in the Navy yard with a .50-caliber machine gun, and this crew--I believe it was four or five of us on this particular gun --was there until the night of December 10. That's when the Japanese bombers wrecked the Navy yard--eliminated it. We were attacked, and then we went back in and gathered the pieces of bodies that could be picked up. Me and my squad was there for a week doing this.

Burlage: Were there quite a high number of civilian casualties that you saw caused by the bombings?

Smith: Yes, there was a lot of civilian casualties. I have no idea how many. It would go into the hundreds, though, I'm sure. All this started right at noon, and the Navy yard was full of civilian workers at that time. Most of them, I'm sure, that was down there--a big percentage of them, at least--got killed.

Burlage: Okay, now when did you leave the Cavite area for the Bataan-Corregidor area?

Smith: Somewhere around December 20. I don't remember the date. We were told we were going to go out through Manila, down the Bataan Peninsula, and we were sent

over in the area of Mariveles Mountain, I guess it was--somewhere along a creek.

We was there for a few days, and from there, then, we crossed to Corregidor. There they organized a machine gun company, which I was part of. We went with Lieutenant King as antiaircraft defense. The Army at that time had no more than a few .50-caliber machine guns, so we was put in with their 3-inch antiaircraft guns.

Burlage: How long did you stay there? Did you stay there until the fall of Corregidor?

Smith: Right. We left out from there the night of the invasion and never did go back.

Burlage: You say invasion.

Smith: Invasion of "The Rock."

Burlage: Japanese forces coming in?

Smith: Right, right. We started down to meet the Japs where they was at, and we never did get that far down.

Burlage: After the capture, your capture and the capture of the whole island, of course, what was your activities then? What did you do and when did you leave "The Rock?"

Smith: Well, most everybody, as far as I know, most practically everybody, was down in the 92nd Garage.

Burlage: Now the 92nd Garage was what?

Smith: It was a tank outfit. It was down on the beach. I assume it was tank repair or tank headquarters or something or other. They congregated just about everybody down in that area there. Then we was there, it seemed to me like, fourteen days after the surrender before I left there. Everybody had dysentery and malaria fever and everything else down there. It was getting terrible.

Burlage: How did you leave the island then? You did leave after fourteen days, you said. How did you leave?

Smith: They put us aboard ships that was anchored out there. It seems to me like it was a couple of days later that they took us over to Manila or over near Manila, where we could wade out. Then we waded out to what was then Dewey Boulevard--Roxas now. They marched us down to Bilibid Prison. I was there a week to ten days possibly.

They put us on a train then--110 to a small boxcar--and went to Cabanatuan. They dumped us off there, and we marched out to Camp Three, they called it at that time.

Burlage: Now where is Cabanatuan located in reference to Manila, say?

Smith: A bit north of Manila, probably seventy-five miles--I don't know--maybe a hundred. I don't remember. It was quite a distance, though.

Burlage: What was the routine in the Cabanatuan Prison?

Smith: While I was there, you just did whatever you thought you could get away with to survive. They hadn't really started any work details at that time. We had no water. It would rain, and we would catch a little water in under the edge of the roof--nipa. We get us a little bath. Our detail would march somewhere, and I don't remember where we went to get the water; but we'd get a canteen cup of water or a canteen of water to bring back into camp with us.

Burlage: How did you manage, if you want to use that word, to go to Palawan?

Smith: Well, the rumor was floating around--it got pretty hot--that they were looking for details of healthy men to go to the southern islands on details. I started hunting somebody so I could find out how I could get on that detail. I talked to all the officers that I knew about it. Anyway, I got on the list, and that's as far as I remember as how I got on. When they came around with the list, one of the officers got me on it, I imagine.

Burlage: Okay, now Palawan is located in the southern part of the Philippines Archipelago?

Smith: Right.

Burlage: How did you get there?

Smith: Well, they took the group of us--300-- from Cabanatuan. We marched back into Cabanatuan, got on a train, and rode back to Bilibid. We went from Bilibid down to the port area, and they put us aboard an ol' Japanese transport ship. Two to four days later, well, we arrived at Palawan. On the way down we had stopped at Culion, a leper colony, and unloaded a bunch of sugar and rice there. We then went on to Palawan. We got there on August 2, 1942.

Burlage: What type of work detail was this in Palawan?

Smith: It started out clearing and grubbing and leveling up for an airstrip.

Burlage: What kind of tools did you have? Did you have modern machinery?

Smith: No, we had picks of one sort or another and a shovel. We had Filipino axes, but we didn't know what the hell they was supposed to be for. They wasn't an ax, though. As you start to grub up one of them ol' trees--digging it up by the roots--it'd be eight or

ten to a tree digging and shoveling. Sometimes it'd take a week to get one tree down.

Burlage: How about your living accommodations there: your food, your clothes, shelter, recreation? Could you describe the situation?

Smith: Well, there wasn't no recreation to it. It was all work and very little play. I started out one time that I was going to play a little ball, but after you worked in that hot sun, well, you wasn't interested in playing ball.

Burlage: How about your food?

Smith: As food in camp went, I guess it was fair. What made it fair was the fact that besides what they gave us, we could steal tropical fruit, such as bananas, coconuts, papayas, mangoes that we could steal. That helped out. We ate pretty good part of the time down there, if you wanted to stick your neck out and get out and steal some stuff.

Burlage: Clothing? How about clothing?

Smith: What?

Burlage: How about your clothes?

Smith: Oh, clothes!

Burlage: Did you get any new work clothes?

Smith: We had on what we went down there with. I had on what I wore down there. Oh, we'd been down there probably a year or longer before they issued us anything. Then they'd throw some rags at you, and you'd put them on if you could. You would make patches out of the rest of them.

Burlage: Okay, now were the activities there very much the same day to day--just work?

Smith: It was just work, work, and more work. A little less to eat if anybody got out of line. We were already starving, but if anybody got out of line, you got cut more.

Burlage: How about the treatment of the prisoners at that time? Was there any brutality or any roughing up or anything like that of the prisoners?

Smith: Oh, yes, that was a common, what I call common, everyday occurrence. It was beatings, clubbings. Maybe one Jap would treat you decent if you was on his work detail; and then maybe another Jap would come along that didn't like your looks, and he'd knock the hell out of you for no reason at all but other than the fact that you were an American.

Burlage: All right, how about the events leading up to this massacre? First of all, was the airfield ever completed? Was it ever operational?

Smith: Yes and no. We had completed the first strip. It was paved, and, as I remember, it was about seventy-five meters wide and 1,500 meters long. We mixed the concrete mostly by hand, and we cemented that whole thing. Then there was a strip alongside of it--a dirt strip. It was completed. It was just kind of an auxiliary, I guess, and taxiway probably. Across the road, we had built another strip, and it was in use. It was just a dirt strip, and it was in use at this time.

Burlage: Did the Americans find that airstrip before you people were rounded up for the massacre?

Smith: Oh, yes! The day that they made the initial landing on Leyte...I guess it was September or October 19. I don't know. It was one or the other--on the 19th--a B-24 came in over the mountains, sank three inter-island boats, banked around, and made one pass down the airstrip, and set a large number of planes on fire there, according to the men that was out there. I was inside that day. It set a lot of planes afire on that one pass, and then it went on back. After

that, well, it was a daily routine. We knew the bombers would be in.

Burlage: The treatment of the prisoners after the American bombers started coming in, did it change?

Smith: It did change much, much for the worse.

Burlage: Do you mean food-wise, beatings, or anything like that?

Smith: Oh, yes.

Burlage: Both?

Smith: Yes, they really started beating us on the arms, legs, what-have-you. They woke us up unannounced and just started beating on you.

Burlage: Now give me just the lead-in to the massacre. The day of the massacre, what were the activities, like, work or the actions of the Japs and so forth?

Smith: Well, the work had been for some time--ever since the second raid, when they bombed the heck out of it and tore it up--consisting of going out and filling up bomb craters, or trying to. The morning of December 14, it started out about normal for that time. Everybody went out on the detail and went about their daily routine until probably 10:30 or 11:00. They broke up all the work details and brought everybody back into camp under the pretense that the

large American airplanes were on the way in, and so we were going to have to get in.

We had dug some little trenches and shelters for falling shrapnel--light stuff--down in back of the compound, so they made us all get down in that then. When they got everybody in there--down inside the trenches--then they started dumping gasoline in and followed with a torch. Then the ones that managed to get out of the fire and on their feet, well, they were shot, bayoneted, knocked down where they couldn't do any damage and left there to suffer until they died.

Burlage: Okay, now you were in one of these trenches. What was your reaction when you saw what was going to take place?

Smith: Well, I was one of the few that hardly ever went down and got in the trenches. I usually stayed up in the barracks, so I could watch the planes. But this time they ran me down to there--made us all go--and as I got down the steps--I had barely got down inside there--and all hell broke loose--the hollering and screaming taking place. I jumped. The first thing that I thought of was that the danged guerrillas had landed.

I stuck my head up to see what was going on, and even just at a glimpse [snaps fingers], I saw men running around coming out of...I guess that was the B Company trench. Men were coming burning, and the killing and shooting and bayoneting was going on. I ducked back down and told one of the other men what was happening. "Aw, that couldn't be it! Not this time!" Well, McDole stuck his head out.

Burlage: Was he a friend of yours?

Smith: Yes.

Burlage: Kind of a buddy of sorts.

Smith: He and I were real close buddies.

Burlage: What's his full name?

Smith: Glen W. McDole.

Burlage: He was a Marine, also.

Smith: Right.

Burlage: All right, go ahead with your story.

Smith: I told him, "You better keep your head down! You'll get it shot off! There's a machine gun sitting up at the head of the stairs!" He did anyway and they opened up on him. Then he hollered to me to pull the sand bag out of that wall. In digging our trench, we'd got a hunk of coral, knocked it away, and we shoved it over to the side, dug the hole and put the

dirt in a sand bag, and then covered over it with brush and everything. I thought, well, it'd make a good escape hatch; and it worked out that way. Then we were told to get that sand bag out and get through it and get down on the beach! They wasn't doing it. They didn't believe us. About this time, one of the medics, named Bancroft, jumped in with us there. He was a fire--burning--and he started screaming and telling us what was going on. About that time they threw a torch in on us, but they forgot to throw any gasoline in. So me and McDole helped the men back--there were nine of us at that time in this little hole--we helped them one at a time go through. They jammed that hole. He said he was the last one out, and I know I was the last one out. Anyway, we left out through that hole. Nine of us got down on the beach. He and I made it back. There others were killed on the beach.

Burlage: Okay, how far was the compound--your barracks area--to the water? There was a cliff, as I understand, there.

Smith: Oh, to the cliff it was probably about 150 feet. That would have been as far as it was from the hole. Where we went out to the rear steps of the barracks

back there it was not over 150 or 200 feet. Then it was another forty feet or so down to the beach, right straight down.

Burlage: All right. Now how did you escape the searching parties? I understand there was searching parties and all coming in there looking for any survivors.

Smith: Yes. Well, they had two patrol boats roaming the beach down there--keeping watch on the beach--with machine guns mounted on them, and they were shooting anybody and anything that moved. Then they had men stationed down on the beach with automatic rifles and bayonets and what-have-you, and they was killing people who came through. When I hit the beach down there, after going through this hole, they fired on me. I ran down to the right--to the west--a fairly short distance, and I get behind a bunch of coral and got some protection. There was three or four guys already there, and I told them, "You better split up! You ain't going to be able to hide four and five at a time!" They wanted me to stay with them, and I wouldn't do it, so I left. Right behind them was a wash or crevice. I went back up on top of the thing--cliff--and crawled up there in under a

bunch of overlapping grass and weeds. I lay there until it got dark--laid there all afternoon.

Burlage: While you lay there in hiding, what did you see the Japs doing? Were they still active?

Smith: They were still very active. I was a short distance from the west edge of our compound, I guess you'd call it. Quite, often I could see through the breaks in the grass and weeds what was going on. There were men running around on fire and being shot and bayoneted, and I could hear them hollering, of course, off and on. But then when it got down on the ground, it went out of my sight, and all I could do then was just hear them. This went on all afternoon. Now I imagine this all started right at noontime, I'd say, about 12:00, and by this time--the time I got down there--it probably was before 1:00, I guess, by that time.

Burlage: Now they were searching for survivors. How close did they come to discovering you?

Smith: Do what?

Burlage: How close did they come to discovering you while they were looking for survivors?

Smith: Oh, I thought they had me discovered that time, but there was one time in particular when a little ol'

Jap came in and killed those four guys right below me. I was hiding just right over them. He killed them four, and then he came on up the same way I came up and raised up the grass and stuff and looked under there at me. He wasn't over six or seven feet from me; but it was bright sunshine out where he was at, and he looked under there, and he couldn't see a thing. I thought I had it when he came up through there, but he dropped the grass down and went on back. Then when it came on toward the evening, they came down through there with bayonets--just lined up solid coming in through there with fixed bayonets--jabbing them in the ground every few feet or few inches. One of them stepped on me, but the bayonet missed me, so, again, I got by okay. After that there was two Jap guards right out, oh, within ten or twelve feet of us. They sat down there and stayed there the rest of the evening.

Then one of those darned lizards come up. I heard him coming up that cliff, and he got right close to me, and he looked like he was fixing to take a bite of my left hand. I waved one finger, and he scooted, thinking that I was dead, I guess. He took off and ran right between the two Jap guards,

so they backed off. They didn't come to see what scared him, but they got a little farther back out of the way. I had a horror there, laying there thinking. I looked for another way to jump backwards and get off of that in case they started trying to burn that. I figured they was going to burn that thing before it was over with and run everything out, but for some reason they didn't do it. I guess they figured it was too green to burn, but it would have burnt real good.

Burlage: That evening, then, did they have a count of the dead or anything? Did they know how many had escaped?

Smith: Well, way over in the evening, everything had quieted down--gotten really quiet--and the Japanese counted 149 killed. I said, "My God! Everything has got quiet out there! I'm the only one left alive! I ain't dead, yet!" But they counted 149 that they had killed, and there were 150 of us to start with. So that left me by myself. When I got left behind, what I told the Filipinos after I had contact with them is that I heard them say 149 had been killed, and then I thought, "I'm the only one that made it out."

Burlage: Okay, let's go back. How did you finally get away from that area and get across the bay to the Filipinos?

Smith: Well, when it got dark--as soon as it got good dark--I eased down this cliff the same way I came up. The two guards that had been stationed right out in front of me all afternoon had long since moved on somewhere else. There wasn't nobody right there, so I eased back down the cliff. As I got to the edge of the water, I looked up over the edge, and there it turns out the guard was standing on a tall hump of coral. I couldn't get to him, so when he turned his back to the bay, looking back on the cliff, well, I eased on down in the water and went underneath and swam underneath water as far as I could. He never did discover me, so then I straightened out and started swimming.

Burlage: Are you a good swimmer?

Smith: Yes.

Burlage: At that time, were you a good swimmer?

Smith: Well, I didn't think so, but I guess I was (chuckle).

Burlage: Did you have any encounters in the water with anything?

Smith: Yes, I was somewhere...oh, I was better than halfway across that, I guess.

Burlage: And how far is that across there, by the way?

Smith: Well, the Filipinos said five miles, and the combat engineers, so I was told, measured the nearest way across there at seven miles; so I figured I swam somewhere between five and seven miles.

But in swimming across there, somewhere around midway or beyond, a darned shark got hold of my right arm. I got loose from him--shook loose from him--and started splashing water around there. He didn't come back. Then porpoises...I guess that's what it was; that's what I thought it was; I've been told it was something else. Anyway, this big fish with a big black fin on top, they was all around. There was a lot of phosphorous in that water, so you could see the fish. Any movement in that water and you could spot it. It would light up like a neon light. I could see the fish underneath me. I straightened out and went on back to swimming. They stayed with me the rest of the way across.

I headed for an old fish trap. I used it...I started out thinking about it and then lined up with the point of a mountain over there and the Evening

Star and tried to keep me going straight across there. I swam into this here fish trap--I didn't see it. I butted it with my head, but I got a little break. I rested there for a while.

One of the Jap boats came cruising right up almost at me, and I went back down under the water until it got out of the way. Then I came up and went on across--swam on across. The fish was around me all this time, and until I got out to where I could crawl--I crawled out to where I could lay on my back with my face out of the water--that's when the fish--porpoises or whatever--left me and went on back to sea.

Burlage: Okay, how long did you have to lie there before you were able to continue? You had to be exhausted.

Smith: Oh, I'm sure I laid there two or three hours. I was trying to gain a little strength back. When I first got across, I couldn't even sit up; my back wouldn't support me. When I first started out, I stumbled and fell a lot, tore a lot of skin off me.

Burlage: What was your destination? Where were you going when you finally left the beach area?

Smith: I was hoping to hit the southern boundary of the Iwahig Penal Colony. Filipino civilians were the

prisoners over there, and I knew for a fact that they had been treated worse than us by the Japs, if that's possible. I figured I'd find some friends there, and it turned out I was fortunate. I came to the last little hut--shack--on that reservation over there, and there was six of them. Six of them got together, and they convinced me they were friendly.

Burlage: How did you approach them to make sure that they would not cause you any harm, that they would welcome you?

Smith: When I spotted the little shack, it was quite a ways up the side of the mountain, but I worked hard and got up there. There wasn't no one there, but down on the other side of the mountain there was five or six men working. The dogs found me and started barking, and I kept them from barking. Finally, one of them left the group and came up there. There was only one trail up to this little ol' shack, so I hid by this trail.

As he stepped by me, well, I just stepped out and grabbed him and his bolo and told him who I was. I said, "One false move out of you and you're gone! I'll kill you!" I told him what had happened, and he said, "Okay, Joe, we'll take you in; we're your

friends." I headed on up to the shack, and he started fixing me something to eat. He said, "I need to get the doctor down here to help you." I said, "Well, you get anybody you want to, but if they come in here and make one false move, I'll kill you first!" So he was convinced that everything was okay.

He called his buddies up there, and he sent one of them after the doctor, the other one after a couple of more people.

When they got up there, well, I recognized one of them. I'd seen him over there with the Japs. When they brought him over there, I was sure it was some kind of damned propaganda movie. He had a .45 on. When he got close there, I made a dash for him. He pulled his .45 and pitched it to me, so after that I began to relax. They took care of me and fed me there. They brought some clothes--turned out to be hospital pajamas. That's what I made the hike with to Brooke's Point. They started in...it was the south end, and they drove past the last Jap MP outpost, some twenty-five miles south of it down there.

Burlage: Now you mentioned Brooke's Point. What was Brooke's Point?

Smith: Oh, it's just a little settlement--small settlement--down there. That's what I call it. It wasn't even a town or anything, but that was guerrilla headquarters. Right inland there, a couple of hundred yards, was the headquarters for guerrillas on that part of the island there.

Burlage: Were they very active in that part?

Smith: They were real active.

Burlage: They were ready to do something.

Smith: Yes, they were ready. All they was waiting for was the word to go after it. That's all they wanted. They were pretty well armed. It was small arms they had and hand grenades and such as that. Japs had sent one detail down there to clean them out, and the Japs got cleaned out, so then they didn't bother them anymore.

Burlage: Okay, how long did you stay at Brooke's Point, or was that just a stopping point?

Smith: Well, I guess you'd call it a stopping point or a staging point. They had two-way radios set up and was in contact with our Army headquarters, which at that time was on Morotai Island.

Burlage: Now Morotai Is...

Smith: It is all the way down east of the Celebes, or maybe it's a part of the Celebes. I don't remember.

Burlage: All right.

Smith: It's about, seemed to me, 700 or 800 miles from there, something like that. Anyway, they had a radio. Sometime after we got down there, they sent a radio message and got word to them what had happened and everything. Then they made two or three dry runs. They was supposed to come in and didn't show up.

Burlage: Now you say "come in," what are you talking about? Airplanes?

Smith: Well, they said the Army was sending a rescue plane in. At that particular time, there was six of us that had got away and was down there at Brooke's Point together. There were that many of us that got that far. It seems to me like it was January 8 that a rescue plane did come in, and we got on the plane. We left from there at about 1:00 in the afternoon. We took off in a PBY-2, we called it--a Catalina, they call them now. It came in, set down, and picked us up, and we went to Morotai.

Burlage: All right, now you said there were six of you a moment ago. You said there were six of the survivors that made it to Brooke's Point.

Smith: Yes.

Burlage: How many survivors, all total, made it out?

Smith: All total, there was eleven that eventually got out alive and made it back. The rest of them was killed.

Burlage: Okay, at this point, we're going to stop the tape and continue in just a few minutes. This is the reverse side of the tape and a continuation of the Rufus Smith interview in Hughes Springs, Texas, on June 13, 1989.

Before we take off in that Catalina, we're going to go back and describe the journey from the penal colony--that's the Iwahig Penal Colony--to Brooke's Point. So we'll continue with Rufus talking now. Go ahead and tell us about the six people--when they started out and what kind of conveyance you had and so on and so forth.

Smith: Well, when we got across the bay, and contacted the Filipino at the shack...and before we left there they clothed and fed and patted me up with iodine (the only thing they had). A runner came in and said another man every so many kilometers down the way

had been picked up. So they told me we had to go twenty-five miles that night to get around and beyond that last Japanese outpost.

Burlage: Now how much rest had you had at this time from your swim? Was it immediate?

Smith: Oh, possibly two or three hours, I guess, maybe.

Burlage: Okay.

Smith: Maybe. I just don't know. It wasn't very long. As soon as it got dark that evening, we had to move, which we did. So it was fairly early.

Burlage: It was imperative to move on at that time; you could not wait.

Smith: Yes, we had to get going because the Japs was already over in the colony interrogating people. In fact, they had arrested some, I found out later, because they thought they had hid someone there. Anyway, we went on. We started out on foot with the Filipino in front. I was in the middle, and another survivor was with me there, right next to me. When we got down to where this one fellow was supposed to be, there was two of them, so that made three of us.

Burlage: By "fellow" you mean also a survivor?

Smith: Yes.

Burlage: Two more survivors.

Smith: Yes.

Burlage: All right.

Smith: Two more survivors had been picked up. Before we got away from this spot, then another runner came in way on down the line in the country and said three more had been picked up. So we got down there, and, sure enough, there were. This made six of us that had got away. This was all done...we was on foot.

We still had to get past that last Japanese outpost before daylight, so we immediately took them on. We still just had those two Filipinos with us, and when somebody'd pass out, well, they'd do whatever they could to get them up and get them going again. They kicked, banged, and beat them around to move them. This went on all the way. We crawled around the Japanese outpost--there was thirty-two of them down there--in an old abandoned schoolhouse. We crawled around them just as day was breaking in the east.

We got by there, and just a little ways past them we left the main trail--there wasn't no road, just a trail--and took off across the jungle. A short distance out there, there was a squad of Filipinos--guerrillas--waiting on us. They said, "Go ahead and

rest now, because we'll take care of you." They let us rest a bit, and then we moved deeper into the jungle and put up for the day there. We rested there for the day and night out there like that. We got an early start the next morning. We were still on foot. Somewhere down the line that day, they got a carabao for a pair of us to ride. I don't know how they done it, but they had a communications system set up that they knew where everybody was at and how many there was. We got on this carabao, and while crossing the river, somewhere down through there, one of the fellows fell off of the carabao. He rebroke an arm that had just healed from where he had had it broken when he went out on a work detail. Then we reset the arm. The Filipinos got us some boards of some kind and strips from bamboo and used banana leaves for bandage and pressed all that on there. We got it on there and reset and tied down. It seemed to me like it was some wire they got from somewhere to tie it. They wired that around there and went on our way. We spent the night out in the jungle out there somewhere. I believe it was the next day, then, that some men came in in two *bancas*.

Burlage: Now a *banca* is a small boat that the Filipinos use most of the time?

Smith: Yes, an inter-island canoe, I call them.

Burlage: Okay, a canoe.

Smith: So they divided us up and put half in each one of the *bancas*. We rode that day, then, down the coastline. An ol' Jap plane--an observation plane--was flying over. The Filipinos told us not to move, to keep our head down. They waved and hollered at the Japs, and they went on and didn't bother us.

Late that afternoon we headed toward the beach--a bunch of timber. We got into this timber, and there was a river, so we went up this river just a short distance. We got out and just a little ways out there a Chinese family lived. They had hot food and everything waiting on us, so we ate good and spent the night there with them.

The next day, then, we took off again, and we made it on into Brooke's Point that day. We got down to guerrilla headquarters, and so from there on it was clear sailing. It was just a picnic.

Burlage: At Brooke's Point was where you waited for the seaplane to come in to take you out?

Smith: Yes, at this was guerrilla headquarters, they called it. There was quite a settlement of them all scattered out; they weren't in one place. We spent Christmas down there, and New Year's. There was one Filipino wedding while we was there. Every family threw a party for us. We had to make every one of them, and had to drink _____ to them and eat their chow. The chow was good but the _____ was horrible, but we drank it, too. I guess it was December 8, probably, that the rescue plane could come in and pick us up.

Burlage: Describe just a little bit on your...when you got to the headquarters or where you were taken by the plane, what happened then? Was there any kind of processing and so forth for the people?

Smith: Well, two or three minor incidents occurred there. Number one, we got down there about 8:00 that night, and, of course, it was dark. And it looked like everybody out there was between six and seven foot tall. I never seen so many tall, big men.

Burlage: You're talking about Americans.

Smith: Our own people, yes. Well, they put six of us and an old Spanish-American war veteran who had stayed over there and married and raised his family...he came

out with us from Brooke's Point. In fact, his son-in-law was a guerrilla leader there. My thoughts were, "Oh, he'll come out with us," and he did. They put the six of us in one end of a ward all by ourselves. They kept us separated from everything else. The other end of the ward was occupied by pilots that had been shot down and were recuperating before they went back on active duty.

When I was wandering around, on the first morning I discovered they had two Jap prisoners out there in a little temporary stockade--a big, nice tent. They had a radio apiece, and they had a refrigerator. Anything you wanted that you could imagine, they had it. Well, we started walking out there, not knowing that you were completely restricted there. We liked to have got ourselves killed right there. They had two American guards--Army guards--that were all set to shoot us. They loaded everything up and got ready to shoot us, so we got the hell out of there.

That same afternoon, then, a general came around and told us who he was--introduced himself. He was in charge, and he said, "We're going to award all of you a purple heart, and anything you want

that I can get for you, all you got to do is just say so." So we said, "Well, pull them damned guards off and let us talk to them goddamned Japs you had out there! We don't want to kill them sons-of-bitches. We know that'd be a little illegal, not that it'd really bother us. We just want to talk to them." He said, "I can't do that." One of the guys said, "Well, I'm going to marry one of your nurses." And he said, "Ha! That's between you and her."

Anyway, well, we fall in line out there: "What line are you in?" "Oh, the chow line." So we went in the first day for lunch. We were sitting down eating. We had plenty of food. There were pies going to waste. I got through and decided to eat me a piece of...I believe it was a potato pie. I'm not sure--some kind of pie, anyway. A young fellow right across the table from where I was sitting got to fussing and raising Cain. He'd been griping ever since we sat down there. He started griping about the people eating all the pie. I asked him, "Do you want this damned pie?" And he said, "Yeah, I want some of that!" I said, "Well, I'll tell you, I'm going to give you all of it," and I did--right in the face with the whole damned pie. Now, that started a pretty

good scrap. After that they wouldn't let us line up with the regular bunch. We went ahead in the officers' line. That didn't go too good either, but that's where we lined up after that first ruckus we had over there.

Other than that, it was kind of routine. We got a little something to drink--a little beer now and then. We had plenty of food. We was only there ten days. From there then, Army G-2 flew us to Hollandia, New Guinea. We stopped in there overnight and caught a C-54 out. I believe that's what they called it. That was our transportation back to the States--San Francisco--the next day, non-stop. But six weeks later we was still sitting down there. It was just one interrogation after another from one G-2 officer to another one.

Burlage: Were all eleven of you there, or had they divided you up?

Smith: No, there was only the six of us there at that time.

Burlage: There were six of you, okay.

Smith: To back up, on the day we left on the plane, we found out there was three more men one day out from the headquarters. At that particular time, that made nine of us. There was two more that we didn't even

know nothing about at that time. I didn't know anything about them until sometime after I got home. There was two fellows that didn't make the swim. They stayed on Palawan.

Burlage: So you finally got back to the States. When did you finally get back home or to the mainland of the United States?

Smith: I got back into San Francisco close to April 1, 1945. I stayed at the hospital there at San Francisco a couple of weeks, I guess. Then I went down to San Diego to try and straighten out my records a little bit so they could pay me. I was down there for a month, then, or right at it, before I got to go home.

Burlage: You were discharged from the service shortly after you got back? In other words, how long did you stay in the Marines?

Smith: I didn't get my discharge until September 29, after the war was over. The ol' general at San Diego wanted to know what I wanted to do. He said I could pick out any post and go to any post I wanted to. I said, "Well, I thought I'd get my discharge." "You can't do that, but you can go anywhere in the United States you want to go." I said, "Well, if you ain't going to discharge me, then send me back to the

Philippines." "I can't do that. You got to stay in the States." So he mentioned Eagle Mountain Lake, which I never had heard of. He said, "It's right outside of Fort Worth." Well, I always thought I liked Fort Worth, so I picked it. He told me, "You'll be the only non-duty man on the base, and you'll rate over any of them technical guys down there. So you'll carry your little card with you, and you can go and come when you get ready." I said, "Well, that sounds all right." So that's where I wound up. I had to stay there until September 29, and then the discharge came in.

Burlage: After your discharge, what did you do? What kind of work did you go into?

Smith: I didn't do anything for quite a long while due to illness. I was still eaten up with malaria fever. That malaria fever liked to have killed me, I guess, the first three years back. I got married the first day of December, 1945. I had no job. I was sick, so I couldn't even hold a job. They gave me a pension for disability when I got discharged, so we survived on that for a couple of years, mostly. It was only \$157 a month then. Other than that, I'd pick up an odd job now and then, and that would help out.

Burlage: How about your family? How many children and grandchildren do you have?

Smith: I have two boys and two girls. The oldest boy is the oldest child. The second child was a boy. The third one was a girl, and the fourth one was a girl. Three of them are married. Out of the three we have ten grandchildren. The youngest daughter is not married yet. She is living in Tyler. The others are living right close by. Getting back to this work, they opened up this here steel plant out here, and I finally got on it. I tried to follow construction work and did for a year or so, and then I came back in here and went to work at the steel plant. I worked out there until 1972, and my health got real bad on me, so they put me out on disability. I'm still sitting here basically doing nothing.

Burlage: Well, let's look back on the massacre at Palawan on December 14, 1944. Why did the Jap guards or high command act as they did? Were you ever told that?

Smith: Well, yes and no. We were told, but I don't remember by whom. It turned out that after this happened and was reported, MacArthur's headquarters, through his intelligence, picked up the information that the Jap high command had issued orders that no American

prisoners would be left alive--they'd kill them all. That's the reason that was given after this massacre took place. The Americans went in ahead of schedule to Bilibid and Cabanatuan. They were to be massacred, too. I believe I'm right. They went in ahead of schedule in order to try to save those prisoners to keep them from being killed. This all came down through an order from the higher echelon in Tokyo. I don't know where it originated, but we were showed copies of this order. The fact that we got away possibly saved a lot of those people in Cabanatuan and Bilibid, for they discovered that that was the Japanese policy.

Burlage: The idea was to annihilate everyone and make it look like a bombing.

Smith: Annihilate all of the prisoners, right.

Burlage: In 1948 there was a war trial on the Palawan people in Tokyo. I was looking through it, and just to clarify something here, the testimony given at that time in the court in Tokyo came from the 2nd Air Division. There were two generals--two lieutenant generals--who were tried in that along with fourteen others--sixteen total--and the one general got life because he's the one who signed the last order to

wipe out the prisoners. He said he got his orders from another lieutenant general who was the commanding general of the 4th Air Army. He got twelve years, and the one that got life was the commanding general of the 2nd Air Division. He sent a wire to the Palawan command, which was the 131st Airfield Battalion, saying that the topic had been discussed before and to carry on as they saw fit. At the time of enemy landing, they were to dispose of the POWs at the appropriate time if the POWs harbored any ill-feelings toward the Japanese. What kind of feeling would you have against them?

Smith: I'm sure the Japs knew that we all were thinking about killing the sons-of-bitches. I think that would have been a unanimous feeling. I know that some others feel about like I do, and I still don't have a damned thing for them.

Burlage: Now that was the orders from the high command. The 2nd Air Army was based in Negros, which is one of the islands of the Philippines, and I was looking at this, and I know it came from that high command. If it came from that high command, it had to have come from higher, I guess. There was eight charges against all these people--the sixteen people with

eight charges--which included such stuff as bayoneting, machine-gunning, beheading, burning, just name them. Every kind of monstrosity that there was was mentioned in this testimony. I thought we'd put that on the very end in case you wanted to use it, and we'll close out this interview now with Rufus Smith.

[End of interview]