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Interview with

CHARLES W. BURRIS

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Oral History Collection

Charles W. Burris

Interviewer: Richard A. Cruz Date of Interview: April 5, 1984

Place of Interview: Hurst, Texas

Mr. Cruz: This is Richard Cruz for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on the 5th of April, 1984, in Hurst, Texas. I am interviewing Charles W. Burris to obtain his recollections of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, the Bataan Death March, and the internment of the American and Filipino troops at Camp O'Donnell.

Mr. Burris, could you tell me a little bit about yourself--date of birth, where your home town is, family and so forth?

Mr. Burris: I was born March 28, 1917, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Most of my life prior to the service was spent in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Mr. Cruz: When did you enter the service?

Mr. Burris: I entered the service in September, 1940.

Mr. Cruz: What was the nature of your training and your branch of service?

Mr. Burris: It was as a flying cadet.

Mr. Cruz: When you completed your training, what was your rank and your unit?

Burris: My rank was second lieutenant, and I was assigned in a general way to the Philippines. I didn't have a unit until I arrived in the Philippines.

Cruz: About when was it when you received your assignment to go overseas to the Philippines?

Burris: I think it was late April, 1941.

Cruz: What was your reaction to this? Did you think there might be war with Japan, or was anyone thinking about that very much at the time?

Burris: I wasn't thinking about it much at the time. I don't know whether others did or not, but my reaction was that I wanted to go to Alaska, and they sent me to a hot place around the equator. I figured this was probably the general way the Army functions.

Cruz: You'd rather have been in a cold place, huh (chuckle)? How did you travel to the West Coast? Where did you go aboard ship?

Burris: I went to San Francisco. I don't remember the name of the military base. However, it's well-known, and I should remember it, but I don't. I stayed there for a few days--maybe a week or maybe a little longer--and we boarded a ship. I don't remember the name of the ship, either. It was in the Presidential Lines, but I don't remember the name of the ship. I could find it, but I don't remember it at the moment. Then we went by ship to the Hawaiian Islands.

After four hours delay in the Hawaiian Islands, we went on to the Philippines. It took about a month.

Cruz: You stopped only four hours at Hawaii at that time?

Burris: As I remember it, it was four hours...

Cruz: This is at Pearl Harbor?

Burris: ...from about eight o'clock at night until midnight.

Cruz: You didn't get a chance to get any shore leave in that short a time?

Burris: I went ashore for the whole four hours.

Curz: You might not have been there long enough to make many observations about this, but did it seem that there were any unusual precautions observed there--defensive preparations--or was it just business as usual?

Burris: Just business as usual.

Cruz: What other stop-offs were there in passage?

Burris: There wasn't any.

Cruz: That was it.

Burris: The next place was Manila in the Philippines Islands.

Cruz: When was it that you arrived in Manila?

Burris: I think it was late May or early June. Probably late May.

Cruz: Upon your arrival what were your first impressions of the place when you got there?

Burris: Everything was different than I'd ever see before. The way the Filipinos were dressed. Many of them were barefooted. They would sit in a squatting position on their own legs,

and it seemed to be very comfortable for them. It's very uncomfortable for me. They seemed to be very poor, although this was supposed to be the richest country in the Orient. They were better off than any other people in the Orient.

Cruz: This is what you had heard before you...

Burris: Even when I was there. They all seemed to be happy and all, but they still seemed to be very poor. Many times I used to look at them and say, "Well, the only difference between me and them is that my folks were Americans. If my folks had been Filipinos, I'd be just like them." I was just lucky, I guess.

Cruz: What was your first assignment there? Could you describe your duties?

Durris: We went to Clark Field, and I believe I received my orders at Clark Field to join the 17th Pursuit Squadron. We did that fairly quick--the ones that were assigned the 17th. I don't think we spent more than two or three days at Clark Field. We went on to Iba, where the 17th was located. At Iba I guess I was just a pilot. I think I was assigned to some work, but I don't remember ever doing any of it. Essentially, I spent my time learning to fly with the squadron.

Cruz: What was the social life like for you and the other men there on the Philippines?

Burris: It was drinking, gambling mostly with cards, and flying.

We developed the habit of going into the little town of Iba and having tomato soup and crackers. That was a big thing. I enjoyed every one of those visits in that little town.

Cruz: Was there a little barrio there you could visit...

Burris: A little barrio, yes.

Cruz: ...and provide some entertainment and food?

Burris: Well, there was very little entertainment. However, later on, not too long before we left, they brought in a movie house. They developed a movie house. We saw "Test Pilot" with Clark Gable and Myrna Loy. We all got a bang out of it because we recognized the ship that Clark Gable was flying in the opening scene was the same ship that we were flying there at Iba--the P-35.

I saw a lot of things. I took a lot of pictures as entertainment, too. I took a lot of pictures--things like a man walking up the road. He must have had...oh, he could have had twenty-five dogs, each on a string on each hand (chuckle). The dogs were pulling him up the road practically. I asked somebody what was this all about. They said, "Well, this man makes his living. He starts down at the lower end of Luzon and comes north collecting dogs. When he gets up to a northern place, up there where some group of natives were that we didn't see much, they would sell the dogs to these people, and they would eat them. The man made his

living that way.

Of course, the meat was hanging out in the open air--full of flies. You had to shoo the flies off to see the meat. There was practically no refrigeration. They had ice once in a while. At least some barrios had ice. I'm not sure Iba had any ice. That's about it.

It rained so often that we got a lot of gambling and drinking in. It rained hard. For instance, I was told that at Baguio it rained forty-eight inches in twenty-four hours. It really rained in the Philipines during the rainy season, and that summer is the rainy season. The summer months are the rainy season. My books got soggy. I had to throw them away. My shoes, if I didn't wear them at least every other day, they'd get green mold on them. The only thing we kept dry was our parachutes.

Cruz: Boy, that's rain!

Burris: That's about it. We did a lot of gambling and a lot of drinking. We'd run out of food, but we never run out of beer.

Cruz: (Chuckle) Never run out.

Burris: They'd fly beer in to us, where they wouldn't fly food in to us (chuckle).

Cruz: I assume that none of you men ever tried the balots--the duck eggs?

Burris: The balots? I never ate one. I didn't even know about it

until I got into Manila, and I saw in the walled city this girl selling balots. She described one to me, and I asked her, if I bought it, if she'd eat it. She said, "Yes, it's very good." I don't remember her breaking the egg, but she must have. What was in there was a little duck. It had little orange legs and a little orange bill and fuzz and little wings. She just bit right down through the head and all (chuckle) and ate it with relish.

Cruz: You let her eat the bird (chuckle).

Burris: I never did eat a balot.

Cruz: Not even a drumstick (chuckle).

Burris: No.

Cruz: Let me ask you a little about the equipment that you all had there and the state of preparedness. What were the main types of airplanes that you had there?

Burris: We had one or two A-27's. It's nothing but an AT-6 with a little bit bigger engine and a three-bladed prop. We had...I don't know...maybe five or six P-26's. The rest of the airplanes...I don't know how many we had...probably eighteen or twenty P-35's. I could be wrong on those numbers. The P-35 is the airplane that Clark Gable flew in the opening scenes of "Test Pilot."

Cruz: Were any of these some of the famous P-35's that arrived there that you said were intended for Sweden, with the

Burris: The instruments were in metric units. Altitude was in meters; speed was in kilometers per hour; fuel was in liters. We usually did a little mental arithmetic on each one to really have a feel for what we were doing.

Cruz: I wonder what the mechanics said when they first opened those crates?

Burris: I don't know.

Cruz: You might not want to quote them (chuckle).

Burris: (Chuckle) I don't know. They didn't seem to have any trouble. They worked on them and did a good job on them.

Cruz: When you were there, were there many P-40's?

Burris: There was not P-40's while I was at Iba. No, we didn't have any. I'll put it that way. There may have been a few, just before I left Iba, at Clark Field and Nichols Field. Shortly after we went to Nichols Field, I checked out in a P-40. I believe that's correct. I won't swear to that. I don't really remember that clearly. I don't remember checking out in a P-40 at Iba. I think it was at Nichols.

Cruz: Since we're on to that subject right here, could you describe to me the flying characteristics of the P-40--take off, speed, maneuverability?

Burris: Well, it had a long nose out in front of the pilot. The nose was long, and it seemed to want to twitch all the time it was operating. The whole front end of the airplane just

kind of twitched. It bothered me right at first, like, it might twist off, but you got used to looking at it, and it didn't bug you at all. The airplane was slow in a climb. I always thought it had a pretty good speed. I was just beginning to feel comfortable in it when the war started, so I didn't get too many hours in it. I think I got maybe forty or fifty. I was just beginning to feel comfortable flying the airplane. It would dive...it would pick up speed in a power dive. It was just fantastic. I think it got up close to the speed of sound. I don't think it ever got into the speed of sound, but it got fairly close just right away. It would dive good. Especially at altitude and under a full load of ammunition, it would climb. I think it probably took me close to an hour to go from, say, 18,000 feet to 24,000 feet and probably thirty minutes or less to get to 18,000 feet.

Curz: How did they seem to compare to the Japanese fighters--the Zeros?

Burris: It's not fair for me to say. I didn't get into any combat. I just wasn't aware of too much about the Zero. I did later on, after I saw them. I wasn't flying, but it was pretty apparent to me that they could out-turn the P-40. At least where I could see them, they could do a loop just from straight and level flight. They didn't have to dive and pick up speed. They just did a loop up just from straight

and level. So they must have had powerful engines and light bodies and a fairly small armament.

Cruz: Did the P-40's have...were they equipped with oxygen for high altitudes?

Burris: Yes, high altitude maximum began about 24,000 feet.

Cruz: Were there plenty of parts and assessories and so forth for the aircraft that you had in your squadron?

Burris: Yes, I think so. I think that everything...if the airplane was worth fixing, they always fixed it, and they seemed to have the parts.

Cruz: From what you said, the pilots didn't have time for much experience at flying, like, the P-40. Did you have much opportunity for gunnery practice, for combat exercises in this aircraft?

Burris: We practiced the normal turning types of tact quite often. My experience with shooting was at a stationary target. There was a sleeve that we used with the A-27, and some pilots got to shoot the sleeve. However, I didn't. I never had any practice with the sleeve.

Cruz: To the best of your knowledge, were there any problems with the guns or the armament of this aircraft--the P-40?

Burris: No, the P-40, as far as I could tell, had powerful guns. There was enough of them to...I'm sure that if those bullets hit a Janpanese airplane, they would just tear it to pieces.

Cruz: Yes. I was curious because I had heard that there were some

problems at times with jamming. I was aware that the armaments were pretty heavy on the P-40 compared to the Japanese--the .50-calibers on the P-40's.

Burris: The only time I shot in a P-40 was once when I thought I was going to get in combat, and I just checked my guns. I don't think anybody else in my squadron shot the guns on a P-40 until after the war started. They may have and I've been unaware of it, but I don't think they did. That time that I shot, the tracers went right out there in front of me. I never heard of the guns of a P-40 or a P-35 jamming--either one.

Cruz: Could you tell me about the flying experience or combat experience of the pilots? Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

Burris: I don't think anybody had any combat experience, even the older pilots. We were in kind of two separate groups. One was a class or two ahead of us, and then there was our class. I call them the older pilots--the more experienced pilots. They were very good. We had lots to learn to catch up with them.

Like, one time I was in a little game with one of the older pilots, and I out-turned him, and he went into a power dive. He had the presence of mind to roll in some trim, which I didn't make any effort to do, and he got away from me. I turned to the right, and he turned to the left.

There was nothing I could do about it. He told me, after we got on the ground, that that's what he did to get away from me.

I also believe that some of the pilots understood leading the target much better than I did. I didn't know the first thing about it. It was incomprehensible to me. I thought you had to get behind an airplane, directly behind him, to shoot him down. But I'm sure that some of these pilots knew and had the ability to lead a target or an enemy plane and do a pretty good job of it. However, in my case I probably would have tried to get on the Japanese tail and probably never would have done it.

Cruz: That's interesting. How would you describe morale during this period before the Japanese invasion?

Burris: I think it was a good as could be expected. We didn't get to fly enough, but I don't think that bothered our morale any. I think it was all right. We had an exceptional commander. I think he was the first American ace in World War II, that is, except for maybe some flying the Canadian ships or English ships under the other countries. As far as the American force is concerned, I believe he is probably the first American ace of World War II.

Cruz: That's fascinating. On the bases you were on during this period, what were your impressions of the state of preparedness?

Burris: I didn't think much about it. I just trusted...I had to learn

to fly and...

Burris: Just took care of your flying.

Burris: My problems were about all I could handle. I think I was a little in awe of the Army. The rank and even the enlisted men...I was a little in awe of the whole organization. I didn't have a sense of history about me at all. I think I do now. I think, if I were to be in a situation like that now, I would be looking at things like this. But everything was so new to me that even if it was just the very beginning of something, it was so new to me that I was in awe of that.

For instance, one of the men was assigned the task of developing a defense for the little area around Iba against air attack and, I guess, sabotage. This man had had some previous experience in ROTC or someplace, and he set up ground fire, crossfire, and located guns and described what should be done. I thought it was very good. Whether it was or not, I don't know. Again, I just thought it was awful good.

Cruz: Now from Iba you went where?

Burris: I think it was about the time of the dry season. I'm not sure, but it probably was October that we were shipped to Manila at Nichols Field.

Cruz: I see.

Burris: We checked out there shortly in P-40's--to the best of my

memory. We didn't have any restrictions. Like, at Iba most of the time it was raining. In between rain storms, we'd get out and fly. But at Nichols field, with the dry season, it was a matter of having an airplane. We had more pilots than we had airplanes. It was a matter of just taking a turn to fly. We were trying to get familiar with the flying characteristics and the maneuverability of the P-40.

Cruz: Where were you and what was your reaction or your feelings upon hearing of Pearl Harbor?

Burris: Well, we had been on alert on a daily basis for four or five days or maybe a few more...maybe ten days. We'd been on alert almost daily--maybe two or three alerts each day.

Cruz: These are the days leading up to December 7?

Burris: Just prior to December 8 for us. I didn't really understand about Pearl Harbor. I didn't know much geography. I thought it was in the Hawaiian Islands and probably was told that, but I didn't have any firsthand knowledge of it. I didn't ever see it. I was only there four hours. I knew the war had started. I know I tried to see a movie, I think, three or four times that Sunday, and each time we'd get called back to go to the base. Then they released us, and I tried to go see the movie. The movie was...a girl that sang, this one girl that sang "Over the Rainbow."

Curz: Judy Garland?

Burris: Judy Garland. And then the other one sang with kind of an

operatic voice. What was her name? Do you remember? She married a Frenchman and is living in France today.

Curz: Jeannette McDonald?

Burris: No. It was a young girl about the same age as the other one. Anyway, I tried to see that movie, and to this day I've never seen it. I'll probably get to see it someday on television.

Cruz: Maybe you'll get your chance (chuckle).

Burris: Anyway, the last time we were called, we got in the movie, and we was called away and back to the base. That time we were stuck--we stayed there. That last time I left for the field, what I had on was what I had to do with. I didn't have any way to shave. I had very little money in my pocket --maybe $50 or something and a handkerchief and maybe a comb and my clothes. That's what I had, and that's what I was stuck with for quite a while. I never came back to Manila after I left Manila. When I took off to go to Clark Field on the second time I flew, I never came back to Manila again; so I left everything there, and the Japanese got it, I guess.

Cruz: So you left for Clark about when?

Burris: It seemed to me like it was around eight or nine o'clock Philippine time when we were called back from the alert. It might have been an hour or two later when they bombed Pearl Harbor. I'd have to check the times on that.

Cruz: This would be on December 8?

Burris: It was Sunday, December 8, in the Philippines. We were on the other side of the dateline. On Monday, the 9th, was the first time I took off. That was the day that I flew without a good strap on the oxygen mask.

Cruz: Could you describe that incident?

Burris: At this time I was assigned to Colonel Dyess's squadron, which was, I believe, the 21st Squadron. When we got notice to take off, why, we took off. We had a full load of ammunition, and when I got to altitude at 18,000 feet, that's where we put our oxygen masks on in those days. We were going to stay at no higher than 18,000. We'd fly all day at 18,000.

Cruz: What type of aircraft were you in?

Burris: This would have been anything. This was a P-40 with a full load of ammunition. When I went to put my mask on, the strap broke. I tried to tie the strap back together with it around my head and tie it on me and fly the airplane, too. I had to turn loose of all of the controls to do this, and that airplane kind of...I was doing some sloppy flying. Then I'd have to right the airplane and get back up in formation and try to put the mask on again. I don't know why I didn't think to put the mask down and then periodically breathe into it. I just got tired of tying it on, and I finally got disgusted and threw it down. It went probably in the

bottom of the cockpit of the plane, and I could never get my hands on it again. I just decided I could fly without it.

For a long time I thought that...I remember getting to 24,000 feet in my...everytime I'd turn, I'd lose a little altitude, and I'd have to get back up there. I thought it was because it was a high altitude and a heavy plane that was causing me to drop that way and that I just wasn't making my motions smooth enough. Now I think it might have been that I was trying to go to sleep, too. I was in and out of sleeping maybe and not realizing it.

Anyway, I was flying around in a sloppy fashion without any oxygen, and then all of a sudden I was down around 15,000 feet and still without oxygen. I was still above Nichols Field. I don't understand to this day why I didn't blow out over the ocean someplace and not know which way to come back. I was right over Nichols Field, and I don't remember ever being anywhere except over Nichols Field, so I must have the airplane in good trim, and there must have been practically no wind that day at any altitude because it would have blown me away. I think I was asleep maybe an hour.

When I came to, I was all by myself. The rest of the people had gone. I think they went into Clark Field and got into combat. I was about out of gas, and I just went back in and landed. When I landed some high-ranking officer

ran up to me and asked me if I'd been in combat, and I said, "No." I was kind of surprised. I actually thought that I had stayed in formation all the time until after I was a prisoner-of-war. Then I realized that there was a period there that I was with people, and then the next thing I knew, I was all by myself. So I think I was very lucky that I didn't blow out over the ocean someplace and not know which way to come back. I'm lucky that a Jap didn't shoot me down. I was just flying around asleep.

Cruz: How long a period would you say you were up there?

Burris: For maybe an hour. For maybe an hour. And I was about out of gas--just real close to being out of gas. I think I was on my last tank at altitude, but it was a wing tank, and I think that wing tank was probably close to an hour. I think I was sleeping up there about an hour. I'm guessing but I think that's about right. I used to tell people then that 24,000 feet didn't bother me at all, and then I thought of this (chuckle), and I think it did bother me.

Cruz: Is this...

Burris: That evening the squadron all joined up again and came back to Nichols Field. Some of them got into combat over Clark Field, and I think some of them got killed, too. I'm not sure. They seemed to be all there. I took off from the same spot again. We flew up to Clark Field just before dark and slept in the woods. That was the first day.

Cruz: Did you ever find out why that line broke that way?

Burris: When I got back on the ground, I picked it up and looked at it for the first time. As I remember it, that strap was about an inch wide. It was thin--maybe a sixteenth of an inch thick--but an inch wide. It was soft rubber where it would stretch and wouldn't be too tight on me, but yet it would hold firmly in place. There was a cut--a straight cut--about three-quarters of the way through. And then from there on, it was a little "S" shape break where it looked like the cut had been there prior to me putting it on; and then when I stretched the rubber to snap it into place, the little tiny bit that was left just tore loose. It was a little "S"-shaped curve, so I figured that that strap had been cut deliberately or accidentally maybe by somebody putting it into the plane and it got pinched by the action of some lever or something.

Curz: Either sabotage or negligence?

Burris: It could have been...well, that's just the way it was. It could have been sabotage maybe. I don't know. It could have been an accident, and it could have been sabotage.

Cruz: Where were you before the withdrawal to Bataan? Could you describe your activities during the period previous to that withdrawal?

Burris: If you will, let me finish. I only had one more day of flying.

Curz: Yes. Okay.

Burris: The next morning we took off. We were supposed to take off and climb as a squadron at 24,000 feet again. They wanted us to circle over Mount Samat. When we took off, it was just before dawn and maybe an hour before daylight. Anyway, I was number six to take off again, like I was on the previous day. I may be wrong about that date. It seemed like it was Monday the 8th. Anyway, that's enough. I could be wrong on that date. We took off, and it was dark. I would count to ten...I'd count ten seconds when the airplane on my left took off. Then I'd just turn my brakes loose and go. I was sitting there with my throttle full but brakes on, and all I had to do was just let loose of the brake, and she was going down there at full throttle. As soon as I started to move, I saw the other man take off.

I could see him just plain, but as soon as I started to move, everything went black, just completely black. I couldn't see outside--anything. It was just completely black--no trees, no horizon, no light of anykind. I could see inside the cockpit, but I couldn't see out. I knew that I was in trouble. The airplane would probably turn, and no telling where it would go. I would be taking off in a circle. For some reason--I don't know why--in way less time than it takes to tell, I thought about chopping my throttle and stopping, but I'd already gone so far that sombody would be taking off before I could do it, and that

would be bad, too. In other words, I was committed to take off, so I dropped that real quick. I look around, and I couldn't see nothing.

Then for some reason I looked up, and I could see through this stuff. What it was was dust. Looking straight up, I could see stars through it. Some areas would be a little heavier than others. I realized that the airplanes taking off ahead of me were stirring up a dust storm. Again, I don't know why. We were always landing wherever we pleased and taking off wherever we pleased, and we never had any dust storm. But this morning we had a dust storm by the airplanes.

So I saw a star. As I looked up, I realized what it was, and I saw a star just slightly ahead of me, maybe five or ten degrees ahead of me. Probably five degrees. So I ended up taking off and looking almost straight up to keep myself in a straight line, and I made it. I broke out of the dust just like that (snaps fingers). Then I got in some trees and in and out of the trees just like that (snaps fingers).

Then just as I was leaving the trees, something slapped the bottom of the airplane. I don't even remember if I had the wheels up by then or not. It may have slapped the wheels, or it might have slapped a wing. I don't know. Then my next thought was that I was being fired on. Tracer

bullets was all around me, so I turned out all my lights and thought the Japanese had beat us to it again and were just waiting for us to take off and clobber us.

I turned off all my lights and then went up to altitude and got over...this time I had an oxygen mask, and I didn't go to sleep (chuckle). I had traded the oxygen mask for a new one. But I was up all by myself when I got to altitude, and it got daylight. I was the only one up there.

It seems to me that about an hour later, why, another pilot in the squadron joined me. It was sometime later. We flew around together, and then we went in and landed at a new field just south of Clark Field called Rosales. I still didn't know what had happened to the squadron--why they didn't show up. He apparently didn't, either. We were talking. We were supposed to meet at another little auxiliary field if we lost the squadron, so we decided to fly up to this. I told him I knew where it was, so he said he'd follow me, and we'd fly low and join the squadron before we flew up high. So we flew up there, and he's the one that found it. I couldn't find it. He found it (chuckle). I don't think he'd ever been there before. It had barrels--fifty-five-gallon...drums...

Cruz: This was where?

Burris: ...all over the field. It was just a little auxiliary field kind of north and east of Clark Field.

Cruz: What was the name of this?

Burris: I don't know. It was just a little auxiliary field.

Cruz: Did you ever discover the source of that fire that you were talking about a minute ago--that shooting? You mentioned the tracers...

Burris: Since we couldn't land there, we went back to Clark Field. That's when I saw some other airplanes in the distance. I tried to signal to him by hand. I don't remember ever using the radio, and I don't remember ever hearing anything on the radio. I don't think my radio was working. That could have been sabotage or something. I don't know. It could have been anything. Maybe I kicked the switch off with my knee or something. I don't know. I did that one night. I kicked the switch off for all the lights on the airplane--the master switch. I just kicked it off with my knee when I made my first turn. Anyway, that's where I'd shot my bullets, and everything seemed to work just fine. But I recognized them as friendly aircraft, and I came back in and landed at Clark Field.

That's when I found out what happened. I'm not sure, but I think Colonel Dyess...I know he made it. He was there. I think probably the other four people ahead of me killed themselves. They run into parked B-17's and other airplanes and trees. The parked B-17's caught fire, and their guns were tilted high and low and every which

way. They were just firing wild--just automatically. Just due to the heat, I guess, that set them off. That's what caused the tracers. It wasn't the Japanese at all.

Cruz: I see. In this takeoff you were referring to earlier, yes.

Burris: That's what caused that. I found out about several people dying. Probably some people after I took off got killed. I don't know. I don't know how many got killed, but the squadron didn't seem to operate as a squadron after that.

I think the next day I was sent back to the 17th. By then there were so few airplanes left. After a few days there, I was assigned to an antiaircraft battery.

Cruz: This catastrophe you described, which unit or which squadron did this happen to?

Burris: I think it was the 21st.

Cruz: So quite a few pilots and aircraft were lost there.

Burris: It seemed to be quite a few pilots left, but I just don't know. I don't know how many got killed, really. I kind of always thought it was maybe six, possibly even nine, but that doesn't seem right to me because I think too many of them were there. So I don't really know how many were killed, but several were.

Cruz: So after this you were assigned to antiaricraft...

Burris: I was assigned to an antiaircraft battery, and I stayed with this...it was Battery B, 200th Coast Artillery. I stayed with this unit until just before our little war was over.

I think I was sent back to the 17th when they went to the front lines to use their guns in horizontal position as cannons instead of antiaircraft guns. They sent me back to the 17th, and I think I got back there...the end of the war was less than two weeks away, I believe. It might have been ten, twelve days--something like that. It might have been two weeks. It wasn't very many days. It was almost over with. I do think that the bombardment...I think the strong bombardment had started before, and that's the reason ...they didn't have many guns. That's the reason the anti-aircraft guns was sent down there. It was very close to the end of the war, as far as we were concerned.

Cruz: So this was at Clark where you were assigned to the anti-aircraft guns?

Burris: Assigned there. And I stayed with them as we retreated back into Bataan, and then I stayed with them on Bataan until just before the war was over. Then I got sent to the antiaircraft battery. Anyway, when I went to rejoin the 17th, they were on beach defense. I joined them just about two weeks--probably a little less--before it was all over.

Cruz: Do you remember approximately what date it was or about what time this was when you...

Burris: Well, it would have been near the end of March that I was sent back to the 17th--near the end of March because the

war was over for us on the 9th. We surrendered on the 9th of April, 1942.

Cruz: What were your impressions of the withdrawal into the Bataan Peninsula?

Burris: I wasn't aware of it, except as I was with the antiaircraft unit. I remember one night the commanding officer seemed to be real excited, and he got some information from somebody. He got his maps and went into a little building and had some light in there, and he studied the maps and decided what he was going to do. I stayed outside and kept anybody from coming in the door, that is, anybody except the ones that should have been there.

Then after that it seemed to me like we rushed right back into Bataan. So he got word on orders or something that I was kind of unaware of. I was just an observer, really, was all I was. The reason they wanted us pilots to be there was because they shot at every airplane. Every airplane was an enemy. They shot some of our airplanes down.

Curz: You were more or less observing and spotting and helping...

Burris: I would determine whether it was a target or not as early as possible. We had an Indian boy there that would find the target long before anybody else could see it, and then he'd tell us where...he'd point where to point our... I had a BC scope to look through. I'd look through that,

and I could see them. Invariably, there'd be an airplane flying right up there where it was, and most of the time--I should say almost every time--it was a Japanese airplane because Americans weren't flying too much. I think they had seven or eight airplanes left--maybe eleven--in that area. They weren't flying much except right at first, and even then mostly what I saw was Japanese.

Cruz: So would you say, from your own vantage point, was the pullback there well-organized or just sort of disorganized?

Burris: It didn't seem to be organized to me. What I've read since the war, I believe it was planned probably by MacArthur, but he waited until the last minute to deceive the Japanese, was what his intention was. Then word got out to just kind of run back in there real quick. I think this happened so quick that it seemed to be a little disorganized, but it had to be that way in order to get away with it. The Japanese had the strength that they might have cut us off from it. They possibly could have landed at Subic Bay and disrupted that movement back in there. I think it was "organized-disorganized." From my position everything in that war looked like a mess. None of it looked good. But I didn't see the overall picture. All I saw was what was going on around me.

Cruz: What was the terrain like on Bataan?

Burris: Around the mountains it was flat and close to sea level.

There was quite a few artesian wells where the water was good without any treatment. The mountains were rather high and big. I know I walked around on a mountain quite a bit, and I was awful stiff the first few days. I just wasn't used to doing that much walking up and down hills. It was fairly steep. Right around the water's edge, it was a drop of thirty or forty feet--just a tremendous, sheer drop.

Cruz: What was the nature of the defensive preparations that you were involved with?

Burris: It was about as good as could be expected. They had just a little of this and a little of that. They took some .50-caliber machine guns off the P-40's that were wrecked, I guess. They put them up on a little tripod and in a special arrangement, and they made antiaircraft .50-caliber machine guns that way. They had a little cannon with little wheels that shot a 20-millimeter shell. If you put it up at its maximum range, it would fall over backwards when it shot. You'd have to put it back up again. They had a Marlin machine gun that would jam after one shot. Every once in a while it would jam after two shots. But that was the most I ever saw it shoot. After the war I was talking to a Navy man about that, and he said that we probably had the bullets in backwards. It was a cloth belt, and we had them in backwards, he says, because otherwise that little gun would just spew them out just real good--

a beautiful gun. It was a new gun to the Army, and it didn't seem to be much good to me.

Also, if we were ever attacked there, I always wondered about that. We were acting like we were going to defend it, but actually I think it would have been...sticking out on these little points of land, if they attacked it and shelled it, about all you could do is leave--long before you could use your guns.

Cruz: Or get cut off?

Burris: So I suppose that if you want to take any further thought, they would have taken some of these guns back with them a little farther up and that way make them effective because if you just left them there, you're just running off from what you had to fight with. I think that's probably what should have been done, but we were acting like we were going to defend it and repel an invasion there. Maybe we could have. Maybe a sneak invasion we could have repelled. I don't know.

Cruz: What was the supply situation? How would you describe it in, say, January and February?

Burris: I never noticed any bad supply situation when I was with the airplanes, but when I was with the antiaircraft unit, our food supplies went down fast. The ammunition we used was bad--World War I.

Cruz: A lot of duds.

Burris: Powder train fuses packed in 1917.

Cruz: Amazing.

Burris: The bullets most of the time wouldn't go off where these fuses were set. It was obvious they didn't work right. Once in a while they'd go off right but not very often. And yet this battery, while I was with it, claimed, I think, twelve or thirteen kills. I only saw one airplane that they shot down.

Cruz: But they claimed twelve or thirteen (chuckle).

Burris: Something like that. They would shoot at an airplane, and other people would be shooting at it; and they'd shoot at it, and then it would fly off. We'd get a call back on the telephone that a Japanese airplane fell. They'd say, "That's ours!" (laughter)

Cruz: They'd all raise their hands. No one was really sure who got it.

Burris: It probably was claimed by several batteries (chuckle).

Cruz: I've read that the rations were halved and then later...

Burris: They went down more than half. People were finally scrambling for anything. I know they tried to boil some beans, you know, these beans that was on these trees that have little beans hanging from trees. If you eat them one at a time, they taste kind of sweet, so they thought they could make some syrup. We still had some pancake flour, and we were eating twice a day, and not many pancakes apiece, either.

We'd run out of sugar, and they thought maybe we could make sugar. When you concentrated that stuff, it was as bitter as all get-out. It didn't work good at all.

Cruz: It didn't work.

Burris: People were killing everything they could--wild pigs, carabao, anything else. I had some chili made out of a young carabao one time. It was delicious. I don't know whether it was really delicious or whether I was just hungry. It seemed delicious to me--just real good. See, this antiaircraft battery was from New Mexico. It had a lot of Mexicans, and they loved their chili, and they knew how to make it, too.

Cruz: They knew how to make it (chuckle). You were lucky there. How was the morale of the men that you were around at this time--January and February?

Burris: Well, the morale of the antiaircraft battery in January was okay. Toward the end there, it seemed to me like it was kind of down, and yet it didn't seem bad, either. I know I was concerned about the war lasting until the rainy season and what were they going to do about that. Of course, we never even made it close to the rainy season.

Oral History Collection

Charles W. Burris

Interviewer: Richard A. Cruz Date of Interivew: February 21, 1985

Place of Interview: Hurst, Texas

Cruz: This is Richard Cruz for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on the 21st of February, 1985, in Hurst, Texas. I am interviewing Charles W. Burris to obtain his recollections of the Bataan Death March and his internment at the hands of the Japanese in the Philippines. This is the second interview.

Mr. Burris, in January of 1942, how was the morale of the men on Bataan that you were around?

Burris: I'd say it was pretty good. None of us talked about being stuck there forever. Most of the men were Mexicans and were from New Mexico. They had never had much schooling. I'd say the average school age was probably somewhere around the third grade with a tremendous number having just a few weeks or few months of school, was all they had, so that you had to show them what to do. If you showed them what to do, they'd do it. They never questioned you at all. In Battery B of the 200th Coast Artillery, the men seemed to be all right. We didn't have much to eat, but I don't think anybody complained even about that in

the battery. I know I was sent one time out to a boat that was anchored out in the bay there to get some supplies, and I got some supplies and brought them back. I think, for the most part, none of us realized what a bad situation we were in.

Cruz: Where was your location in January, 1942, approximately?

Burris: I think it was probably on Mount Bataan--on the slopes, about halfway up Mount Bataan, I think that's true. I'd have to have a book or something to know where it was. Let me look.

Cruz: So it was on the eastern slope of the southern-most mountain of Bataan. What kind of rumors were going around at this point?

Burris: None. At least I wasn't aware of any. I was supposed to clear them for firing at targets. About the only targets we had were Japanese targets. There was hardly any danger of us shooting our own planes anymore. I stayed with them until I went back to my own squadron, which was a little over two weeks before the end of the war.

The artillery had already been shot up--destroyed--by the Japanese, and they needed antiaircraft guns to fire horizontally. They took them up to the front and sent me back to the...there weren't any antiaircraft guns anymore. They were just artillery. So I went back to the squadron, but that was in January when I was there. I'll say that

we were at that position about the middle of January. I guess I stayed there with that group until about between two and three weeks. I don't think it was twenty-one days. I think it was closer to fourteen.

Cruz: And then where was it you went after that?

Burris: I went to the Bataan defense position where my squadron was located. I'll show you that on this little chart.

Cruz: So you rejoined the 17th Pursuit Squadron--your original squadron--at Mariveles.

Burris: Near Mariveles.

Cruz: About when?

Burris: About near the end of April. We surrendered on the 9th of April. I don't think it was more than twelve days. It might have been fourteen. It might have been a little more, but probably around twelve days. The Japanese had really been pounding us up there at the front, and they finally just destroyed all of our artillery. Then that last two weeks, they put up a tremendous artillery barrage for just a long time. Everyday just a fantastic number of shells were falling in. It destroyed almost everything in a certain area--probably across the entire front from the west side of Bataan to the east side of Bataan. Just probably everything was destroyed to a tremendous depth.

I know the scheme of fighting was to draw the Japanese in at the center, give them a weak-looking position at the

center and draw them in there. Then, instead of backing up ahead of the Japs, they went off to the side and let the Japanese come in. Then when enough came in, they closed back in behind them and had their guns pinpointed at them and just wiped them out.

They did this over and over, but when this new Japanese commander came in...I forget his name, but he was the one, I think, that got executed. He's the one that took Singapore and those places. He just brought a bunch of guns up there and just tore up everything all over the place to a big depth so that our troops were disoriented. It must have been really bad up there because a lot of people who had fought good just took to running. It was just too much. It didn't last but a day or two. It lasted a couple of weeks. When the Japanese didn't have any resistance, they just come swarming in--anywhere they wanted to.

Cruz: Was your squadron functioning as an infantry unit at this point?

Burris: Yes. We were on beach defense. The only thing to do was just be ready. There was no attacks on that area at all. Our job was to just be ready. That's about all we did. The men did a good job shooting at airplanes when they were attacking.

There was a little dry dock that had been sunk. It was a floating dry dock down at that little Mariveles Bay.

The Japanese went to attacking that, and they'd come right over us and our positions. The men that had guns that could shoot at airplanes, they did it. I think they got one. I think I was told that they got one of these Japanese planes. The machine guns there were out of airplanes--air-cooled machine guns--and I don't think they could have fired very long without just melting or jamming. They depended on the movement of air to cool them, and, of course, firing from on the ground, you couldn't do that.

Cruz: What about when you all heard of General MacArthur's departure? How did that affect morale? How did that affect people's thinking?

Burris: Well, it wasn't too good. I know we laughed about it.

Cruz: Did you hear the phrase "Dugout Doug?"

Burris: Yes. And I used it. I used it along with the rest of them. I used that word. Shortly after I was captured, I realized that...I talked to some other people about World War I. I didn't know he was in World War I, but he was a general in World War I. He was a fantastic commander, and brilliant. Finally, I realized that he was good, and the fact that he left was good. The fact is, it would have been better, I think, if we had gotten as many fliers out of there as they could--me included. Let us fight someplace rather than let us wither on the ground there and do nothing.

Cruz: Did you feel as if many of you might be evacuated?

Burris: I had that thought, I guess, almost the entire time. I just couldn't see why they would let somebody that they had spent a full year training just have them hanging there, sit there and be inefficient doing anything. I figured they'd pull us back someplace where we had airplanes and could fight, and that's what they would do. It seemed the sensible thing to me. The British evacuated Dunkirk, didn't they, and brought their men back so they could fight again with a better situation for themselves? That makes sense to me. Actually, I read articles about people who flew down on orders from Bataan to Mindanao, and they were accused of trying to...what do you call it?

Cruz: Desert?

Burris: Desert. They treated them as deserters. They would order them back. They came down on orders to do something. I don't know what it was, but they were ordered to fly down there. So they flew back--just followed the other guy's orders and went back and forth. It seemed to me that that's the thing we all ought to have been doing if we could. We weren't doing nothing but just losing up there. That's what I thought.

Right up until the last, it kind of shocked me that... I knew there was a lot of trouble up there on the front. I could hear the guns going and all, but it still didn't

dawn on me that we were stuck there. I couldn't see anything wrong with anybody leaving. If they had left anywhere, as soon as they got back in American lands, they'd be put right back into conflict where they could do some good. They weren't really deserting. It wouldn't have been deserting. It would just be doing the sensible thing, as far as I'm concerned. I figured that's what they were going to do, but, by golly, they didn't do it. They just let us stay there.

Curz: Toward the end of this, by March, how was the food that y'all had? Were rations cut pretty low? What was the condition of the people around you by March?

Burris: The rations were low but still all right. I think we were eating two meals a day by then, and they weren't bad. They weren't real good. They were real plain. But after I got back to where my squadron was--my squadron was the 17th--they were eating, I believe...I just don't remember real well. I keep wanting to say two meals a day, but I don't remember. It went down fast after I got there. The food went down real fast. It got to be where we were eating hotcakes almost exclusively morning, noon, and night. I think it was just two meals a day for a while. It still didn't dawn on me that we were going to...I knew it was bad someplace up there, but I just didn't dwell on it, I guess. I tried to keep the men from dwelling on it.

Cruz: What were your activities? How would you describe your activities and thoughts during the week or two preceding the surrender?

Burris: "Well, that's it." I knew it was bad, but I still had hopes that we'd be taken off or be allowed to go off someplace. It just didn't happen.

Cruz: When did you hear about the surrender?

Burris: I guess it was two days before the surrender that we were told that we'd surrendered--just at about dusk. Then the next day we were told to destroy our guns and scatter our small ammunition around and go in with one empty weapon with no shells on us or in the weapon. The Japs would take them from us. So we destroyed the guns. We threw our small weapons ammunition all around the bushes and waited for the surrender. Later on, I guess the next morning--I don't know exactly when it was--we were told after that, though, that we weren't going to surrender after all (chuckle). We went around trying to pick all this stuff up.

Then the next night I think we were told that we were going to surrender on the next morning, the next morning being the 9th of April, Philippine time. That's when we surrendered. We just walked out carrying big white sheets on a stick or something and walked out in line, and finally we were directed where to go by the Japanese. We went there and threw our guns in a pile and just waited.

Cruz: This was near Mariveles.

Burris: Yes. Now then, while we were walking, after we got out on the road, a Japanese airplane flew over our heads not very high up, about two or three hundred feet, and about that time there was a tremendous explosion, and the wind just blew. It almost blew me over, and it may have. I'm not sure. I went down, anyway. It was a tremendous blast of air. I thought the Japanese plane had dropped a bomb close by, that they were bombing us or maybe strafing us. Then I realized that the airplane didn't drop anything. He was still flying around in a little circle.

What they did, they blew up an ammunition ship out in the bay. It had nothing but ammunition on it. They blew it up, and it made a terrible explosion. Just the whole thing went up in one instant, I guess. The wind was pretty strong on us, and the noise was terrific, a big noise. That was the most exciting part of that.

Cruz: What was the weather like that day?

Burris: Sunny, hot. That part of Luzon is hot until April, May, June, and then it starts with the...what do you call those things? Like the hurricanes we have here, they call them typhoons over there, I guess. They just come up one after the other in the summer months, and it just rains, rains, rains. The winter months were dry.

Cruz: What was your first impression when you were that close

up to the Japanese soldiers? What was the first thing that you saw?

Burris: I don't know that I had any impression. I wondered what they were going to do to us, how they were going to handle our surrender. I was just taking care of myself and just doing what I was told to do.

Cruz: Right at this point, how would you describe your physical condition, and what belongings did you have with you?

Burris: I had a pretty good set of clothes. I had just made my second trip to Corregidor, and I came back with some clothes and raincoats and stuff like that, preparing for the summer season and the wet season. I think I had two extra pairs of shorts and two undershirts, maybe some socks, a couple of towels, razor and shaving equipment. I don't think I had any shaving soap, but I had a razor. That's about all except for my personal belongings. If I could have kept those, I'd have been in pretty good shape.

Cruz: What happened to those belongings? How long did you get to hang on to them?

Burris: I think about the first day...we stayed all night in this location--kind of a central location--and then groups of us were pulled out to go on the march. I guess I was near the front end. I wasn't at the front end, but I probably wasn't too far behind. I think I went out around noon. I went starting on this march.

On that day I ran into a great, big Japanese soldier. He must have been six feet tall and broad as a man can get --just a big, burly-type of soldier--big. He was lots bigger than any Japanese soldier I thought I was going to see. But they had smaller ones, too. The one that stopped me was tremendous. He took my musette bag with all the clothes in it, and he made me empty my pockets. He took my money and everything I had in there...my fountain pen. He took my watch. He took my mess kit. He may have taken my little hat. I don't know. I don't remember. Anyway, he took my complete mess kit. I walked away from there with my clothes on me and my canteen. He wanted my shoes. He pointed to my watch, and I gave him that. I gave him all of my musette bag, and I gave him all that stuff without any trouble at all. I guess you'd say I meekly gave it to him.

But when he pointed to my shoes, I told him, "No." He put his bayonet against my stomach and pressed it a little bit and looked at me real mean and then pointed to my shoes again. I knew I was going to have to do some fast talking then, so I showed him--by using my hands-- that my shoe was like this (gesture) and that his shoe was about twice that long--a little exaggeration. I'd point to my shoe and say, "This long," (gesture) and then I'd point to his shoe and say, "This long." (gesture) Then I

said, "No." I thought sure he was going to kill me, but I had started on this tack...the reason I did it was not because I was brave or anything but because I was afraid to be without shoes. The Filipinos showed me...I'd been there before and seen on the Filipinos' tremendous sores all over the lower part of their legs and feet. They were deep sores, and they were as big around as quarters. Some of them were as big as fifty-cent pieces. They were deep, and pus was running out of these sores--lots of them. They were barefoot, and I figured it was because they were going barefoot that they got these sores. I was, I guess, more afraid of going without shoes than I was of that man with his bayonet. It was not bravery.

I almost panicked. I didn't show any panic, but inside of me I was...when he wanted my shoes, my heart turned a flip-flop. I was really worried about that. The only reason he gave them to me...he was holding my watch band, and it was clear plastic, which, I guess, was new in those days, especially for the Japanese. It was clear, and he could almost see through it. But he couldn't. He'd bend it and twist it. He got to be fascinated with this, and when I told him "no" the second time, I just turned and started walking up the road, and he let me go.

Cruz: Was this the day after the surrender?

Burris: This is the first day. It was the day after the surrender,

but it was the first day of the march, which was the next day.

Cruz: How were the soldiers organized? Just in a long column? Were there many guards?

Burris: We were in a column about three or four wide. There were a few guards walking on each side of us and ahead of us and behind us. We changed guards every so often, but we didn't change POW's. We just kept going. Some nights we walked all night with a few stops for a guard change. It was a stoney road--real rough, dusty. It had a lot of old flat stones in it. I remember at night it would get cold, and I'd lay down on those rocks. The heat was coming up, and it was warm and comfortable. I just fit right into those rocks and went to sleep, even though maybe I wouldn't be there more than twenty or thirty minutes. Then they'd get us up and start going again.

Cruz: What were these Japanese guards like that you were around?

Burris: They weren't as bad as they were later on. They were bad enough. They wouldn't let us get any water. They wouldn't let us have anything to eat. They'd set us out in the sun when it was hot in the daytime. They'd keep us going at night.

I ran through a gauntlet. They had one gauntlet. They had a row of Japanese soldiers one night, and they were hitting us with the butts of their guns and long

clubs. We had to go through that. Everybody that had to go through it would run, and I did, too. I ran. I tried to lean forward or down or backwards to avoid the clubs as I was running. I had some hits on the back of my head, but the full force was glancing on the top of my head and went down and hit me on the shoulders or the upper back.

I remember getting water once, but we never had anything to eat from the day we surrendered until about five or six days--probably six days--when we got into San Fernando. I remember getting into San Fernando, and I was tired. Boy, I was tired! As soon as they said that was the end of the march, I just lay down and went to sleep. It didn't take me two seconds to lay down. Once I lay down, in about two or three seconds, I was sound asleep. I was wore out.

Cruz: How long was the march?

Burris: I read where it was 140 or 150 miles. I don't remember which.

Cruz: I meant how many days did it take.

Burris: I'd say about five or six. I don't remember exactly. Some days we'd sit out in the sun most of the day and not move. Then at night...I think we got to sleep one entire night or almost. Not really. Maybe from midnight to daylight or something.

Cruz: Do you remember much about the stops along the way--places or towns where you might have spent the night?

Burris: I don't remember any. I know there was some. Especially after you left Bataan there was some. The Filipinos were alongside the road. They were not in any great crowds, but there were people on the side of the road. I think they gave food to the soldiers. If they had any chance, they gave it to them. They were sympathetic toward us.

Cruz: Were there any incidents that you remember along the march that stick out in your mind?

Burris: Not too much, except that I just got tired. Nothing happened to me other than that one occasion with the soldier taking everything but my shoes and clothes. The fact is, we couldn't get water. We passed a lot of artesian wells, but they wouldn't let us have any water.

I know that I was so tired that when I got to San Fernando, Pampanga, we were put in a little compound, and I went to sleep. There was a friend with me, and he leaned his back on a tree down at the foot of it, and I just laid down and went to sleep.

Then there was a shot. Some Japanese shot somebody, or shots came out. I woke up, and all these Filipinos were racing past me, running away from where the shots had been fired. Everybody ran past me, and I thought, "I got to, too," so I jumped up and started to run. My friend grabbed me, and he pulled me back and said, "Where are you going?" I realized then that I could only run over

as far as the other side of the fence. The other side of the compound was all the further I could go, so I laid back down and went to sleep again.

Cruz: How long were you at San Fernando?

Burris: I think we were just there that night. I don't know whether we got a rice ball that morning or not. I think we got one rice ball, and the next morning--I don't know what time--sometime the next day--we were put on a train and taken to, I think, a little city there, a little barrio there, Tarlac. I think that's...I may be talking about the ...what do you call it? The parish was Tarlac. I think it was Tarlac.

Cruz: Describe this train ride.

Burris: The train was terrible. My memory says the train was made out of metal. The boxcars were made out of metal, and it was small boxcars. They just put men in there until they just couldn't put in anymore--just stacked them in there. Everybody was up against everybody else--just crammed in there. I was near...we had a little opening in that metal, and I could breathe pretty good. I was right up against that. It was hot in there, but I could still get fresh air to breathe. It didn't affect me as much as it did some of the guys in the middle. There were people in almost every boxcar that passed out and died from suffocation, is how bad the crowd was in there. There was not

enough air coming in to furnish the needs for the men that were in it. The ones that were crowded the most and away from any opening in the boxcar sides or door...some of them died.

Cruz: Did they allow you an open a crack in the door and let in any ventilation like that, or did they just close...

Burris: They just closed the door, and that was it. The only thing good about the trip was that it didn't take long. I think we made it in about four or five hours. When I got off the train, I think it was in Tarlac. We had a short walk to go to...oh, that prison camp there.

Cruz: Camp O'Donnell?

Burris: Yes, Camp O'Donnell. When I got there, I thought, "Well, surely the bad stuff is over with. The rest of it is going to go uphill." You know, it would be easier for us. But it didn't turn out that way. It was worse. It was really bad at Camp O'Donnell.

Cruz: Could you describe Camp O'Donnell as you first saw it?

Burris: Well, it was just a bunch of...I think it had been a barracks for Filipino soldiers before the war. There was grass shacks--grass and bamboo. I say shacks--it was little buildings. I was put into a place with mostly Air Force personnel. I was sent into an area where we only had a few of these little buildings, and they were really small. I did not have a building to sleep in, so I just

lay down and went to sleep wherever I could find a spot to do it. There were no mosquito nets, and the mosquitos were fierce.

I don't remember...I've got it written down someplace, but my memory is bad on this. I think we were there maybe two or three months. I'm not sure, but I know it was bad. In our area we ate twice a day, and it wasn't much. It was very little. That's where I first found out about the word lugao. It was just a soft, thin, mushy rice--just real thin rice. There was no salt, no pepper--no way of flavoring it. It was just like eating flour paste with a little bit of rice grains in it.

Well, everybody lost weight rapidly at O'Donnell, and disease got going real good. People couldn't resist disease because they were to weak from no food. They were even rationing our water. The water spigots would operate about four hours a day, and there was only about three or four spigots. You just couldn't get enough water for all the soldiers that were crammed into that place.

I know our death rate went really up. It was about thirty a day--every day. The Filipinos was several hundred a day--every day. Their burial details went day and night. They never stopped--continuous. Day and night, somebody was going to the grave. It was a bad place.

The disease...you couldn't ward off anything. I got

malaria about a month, I guess, before I left there. I wasn't much good for anything when I got malaria. I'd just sit and shiver and shake. Then I'd sweat with alternating fever which I couldn't satisfy with a chill. That's just miserable.

Cruz: When you arrived there, were there many POW's already there?

Burris: There was quite a few there, yes.

Cruz: Were you greeted with any speeches...

Burris: No.

Cruz: ...describing the rules of the camp?

Burris: No, we weren't greeted with that, but we had a speech in camp. There was a Japanese--I don't know--some officer--who got up and made a hate speech. He told us we were the scum of the earth and didn't deserve to live, but they were benevolent people, and they'd let us live. Actually, they'd let us exist if we could. They tried to kill us by starvation. There was food to be had, but they just deliberately held it. And there was medicines to be had, and they didn't give us any medicines. A person who would get malaria and dysentery at the same time was just automatically dead.

They just died like flies, and the fact is, they didn't care to live hardly. They were just so weak that they just lay there, and flies crawled in and around their mouth--and they were still living--around in their eyes, and they

didn't brush them off. They were too far gone. They'd stink like death before they died. I lost many a friend there. That was the worst place in the world. I don't believe it can get much worse than that, and yet they didn't harass us any there. They didn't try to brainwash us. But they did promote sickness, I'd say, and they wouldn't give us any way to help ourselves. We had very little food and very little water.

Cruz: How much food and water did you get here?

Burris: I got to eat twice a day, and the average was about a cup or a cup-and-a-half of lugao in the morning and a cup or a cup-and-a-half at night. The morning lugao was thinnner than the one at night. The morning lugao was runny--the runny-type--and the evening lugao would be a little bit thicker. As I remember, that's all we got when we were there.

Some people had sweet potatoes. I was on detail once with some men, and I couldn't get the drinking water because the spigots weren't operating, so I just walked around and around trying to hunt someplace that had water. I ran into somebody about noon that was eating some sweet potatoes, and we got a third meal to eat that day. I didn't have a mess kit, so I borrowed somebody's mess kit lid and knife. I scraped me a stick clean with the knife and took this little half a cup of sweet potatoes--they called

them camotes--got it stuck on this lid. I took that little stick that I shaved clean, and I'd eat with it.

At that time I had already...I saw so many people dying around then because it was so filthy that I reserved my left hand for eating, and I reserved my right hand for any work or touching people or any object...I'd touch it with my right hand. I didn't do anything with my left hand except eat with it (chuckle). I tried to segregate myself away from disease that way. I don't know whether anybody else tried that or not, but that's what I tried to do. My biggest trouble was, when I borrowed somebody's mess kit, I had to mostly wait until the next meal before I could... say that in the morning I borrowed somebody's mess kit. I couldn't give it back to him sometimes because there wasn't enough water to wash the mess kits with. They'd get river water and boil it, and they had a barrel of that at the chow lines. I always cleaned it out pretty good without...we never washed much off of our mess kits except by that boiling water. I'd have to wait sometimes until the next meal in order to wash the man's mess kit that I'd got and give it back to him. Somebody always had a lid to give to me or something. If I had to, I could use my canteen cup.

Cruz: So you had to forage for mess gear.

Burris: I kept a stick, and I'd clean it off everytime for every

meal. I'd try to wash it, but I'd still scrap it off for the next meal. I tried to eat that way.

Cruz: What kind of details were at this camp?

Burris: All I had was water details. There were some others, but I wasn't on anything but water details. We just walked down in the hot sun and came back. Sometimes soldiers would pass out on these details. I know I came back...I didn't have a sign of malaria, and one day I came back, and I helped carry somebody else's load of water. It seemed to me like it was the weakest man in our group. I'd help him carry the water, and he'd take that little flag I was carrying--Japanese flag--and he'd walk in front of us with that. On one of those details, I generally got everybody's canteen filled that was on the detail. There were a lot of people on details that didn't get any water that day. Hundreds of you would line up to get water at these spigots, and it would come time to shut it off just before you'd get there. That part was pretty bad. People were actually starving for water. I think lack of water, when it's short like that, is probably the most...I can't say the words. It's worse on a person than anything I know, even food.

Cruz: Debilitating.

Burris: Yes. They'd just go crazy. They'd lose their...that's what they'd do. They'd just go off their rocker from want of water sometimes. I almost went off my rocker for want

of shoes, so that's about it, I guess.

I never will forget the number of people that died. You take thirty days at thirty men a day, and that's nine hundred people dead. We were there...I'm never sure, but I think it was over two months. It may have been three, but I don't really remember. I'd have to look it up.

Cruz: How would you describe the relations amongst the POW's there at this camp?

Burris: I thought it was pretty good. I know that on the march I got hold of...a friend of mine had some iodine pills to put in water--put iodine in lister bags. He had some little pills like that, and he loaned me that bottle, but before I could get back, he was sent off someplace ahead of me or something, and I didn't get in contact with him any more. I had his bottle, and I found one of the soldiers down where I filled up with water for my canteen that one time...I found one of our soldiers there--17th soldiers--and I gave him what was remaining of the iodine pills. I didn't see him any more.

But at Camp O'Donnell I met this guy that I had got them from. He wanted them back (chuckle), I told him what I did with them, that I gave them to one of the soldiers there. He said, "Yeah, that's a good story." (chuckle) He didn't believe me.

On the march was this other incident that just gave

me the idea of what was coming. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was selfishness. It was "me." Take care of "me." It was, "To heck with everybody else! I'm going to take care of 'me!'" This one soldier was eating some weeds that he'd picked up off the road someplace and was eating them--grass. It was some kind of weed. I think it was pig weed. They called it pig weed in Arkansas. I think he found some of this pig weed, and he was eating it because he saw the pigs eat it and get fat on it. So he was eating it, too. He was kind of hiding it from me, and I asked him to let me see what he was eating so I could get some. He said, "I'm eating it now." He wouldn't tell me and wouldn't show it to me. I said, "Where did you get it? I'd like to go get some." He said, "Well, you just find it around here any ol' place." (chuckle) Even though he was going to have to walk off the same as me from that spot, he still didn't want me to have something that might deprive him of something. We were beginning to show evidence of selfishness and disbelief in what the other person said.

Cruz: Overall, how was the treatment by the guards at Camp O'Donnell?

Burris: They were all right. They didn't bother us much. They were anxious to kill us if you tried to escape, but that was probably the only thing they did to us. They were all around there. As long as you were doing what you were supposed to be doing and not trying to escape, they let you alone.

They killed a few people that went kind of crazy. One guy was trying to crawl out right under the fence with the guard standing right on the other side of it. Some of them were bayonetted. This one guy I was telling you about, he was about half out of the fence, and the Japanese were just ready to bayonet him. Some soldiers got him by the legs and pulled him back and wouldn't let him go. He would have been killed. They killed some of them there, I'm sure, although I didn't see anybody get killed. I saw that one guy try to get killed. He was out of his head.

Cruz: Were the officers and men here kept separately or just all together?

Burris: They were all mixed together. Now in this hate speech, this Japanese officer told us that we didn't deserve to live and that we had promised that we would fight to the last man and didn't do it. He said the Japanese would do it--if they said that they were going to do it, they would do it. He says that our word wasn't any good, that we were just lower than a snake.

He also put us into ten-man squads. If anyone in this ten-man squad escaped, the other nine would be killed. We were supposed to keep each other from trying to escape that way. The few people that did try to escape where I was later on, they were killed. Even though they captured them, they were killed. And they were not only killed.

They were tortured. They spent a whole day torturing a person before they'd finally kill him.

Cruz: Did they...

Burris: That comes in Cabanatuan. That's where I saw some people... I knew some people that tried to escape. But their main thing was that they just tried to kill us by starvation and disease.

Cruz: What kind of shack or building did you stay in? How many men were in there with you?

Burris: I didn't stay in any shack. I think I stayed in one small shack one or two nights. Most of the time, I was just out on the ground. Even in the shack, it was ground--dirt floor. There wasn't much difference. It might be a little harder. There was a lot of mosquitos. I spent a long night swatting mosquitos. I learned how to kill them everytime, but I don't think I learned how to kill them before they infected me with that disease. I know that if one stuck their thing in you and settled in to suck up your blood, then they wouldn't move. You could just swat them with no trouble at all. But I think that if they had already...if one of them was infected, he gave it to me.

Cruz: By the end of your stay in O'Donnell, what was your overall condition--weight, health?

Burris: My weight was low. I'd say it was maybe eighty pounds. I was weak. The sun was unbearable to me. I'd pass out--

just drop like somebody shot me or something. I don't know whether it was the malaria or the heat or both--I don't know--but I know that it took all the strength that I had out of me to keep going in that hot sun. That's all I had at Camp O'Donnell, was malaria and lack of weight. I was losing any reserve fat I had on me. I think I weighed probably about eighty pounds.

Cruz: What had been your weight to begin with?

Burris: About 140 pounds.

Cruz: So that after a time then, you were sent to Cabanatuan.

Burris: Camp Cabanatuan. We went there by truck. It took them the best part of a day, but we went there.

Cruz: How would you describe the scene there?

Burris: There were quite a few people there ahead of me and my group. There was fences but not much. You could tell that the camp was just beginning to be organized, and again we ate very few meals. Again, it was just as bad as...well, not quite as bad. It was a little bit better than Camp C'Donnell, but you still lost weight on it. With me having malaria, I hadn't been there more than a week or two than they just sent me over to the...the hospital section was nothing more than segregation. They just moved the sick people over to this area and away from the people that were well in order to keep disease down. When I went over there to the hospital section, we

didn't work, but we were all in such bad condition that we shouldn't be working, anyway. I think I dropped down to seventy pounds in that hospital. I was weighed once, and I think my weight on the scales was...we had the kitchen scales in grams and kilograms, and I think I weighed something like thirty-two kilos--something like that. How much is that? I think it was thirty-two kilos. Don't 2.2 kilos make a pound?

Cruz: Somewhere around seventy pounds.

Burris: I think about seventy pounds. Again, I began to have all these diseases that the rest of these people had. I just had one after another.

Cruz: What diseases did you have?

Burris: Oh, golly! I still had malaria. I'd get so hot from malaria that I passed out. I got blind. I went blind because I got so hot with malaria. I got blind. When I was coming on the little walk over to the hospital section, I went blind, and somebody had to carry me. I think that's what they did. They carried me until I got over there. Then I got my sight back, and I walked again. I think I had a temperature of 106 degrees...no, wait a minute. Maybe it was 110 degrees. I had a temperature of 106 degrees when I worked. But, of course, a malarial temperature is not serious like other temperatures. I felt pretty good with a 106-degree temperature. When I passed out the day I went

over to the hospital section, I probably had a temperature of 110 degrees. I was weak. I didn't have any strength. I was just like a kitten.

I know I went blind again when I was over there. I was just walking up a path over there toward my little part of the shack, and I went blind, and I stumbled, and my hip hit a hard, sharp rock. Shortly after that, I got paralyzed. I couldn't move my arms or my legs. It was always one of them that I could move. Generally, it was three of them that I couldn't move. Then if I got movement in one arm, then one of my legs would go out. I guess that lasted a month or two months--something like that.

Then I got wet beriberi. My legs swelled up like two balloons, and I couldn't bend my knees. The swelling across my joint was so big that I couldn't hardly operate my legs. The swelling went up to my crotch, and it didn't go any higher. After a while I started losing water, and it went down. It took me less time to get over it when it finally started. I think I had wet beriberi at least six weeks or maybe two months--something like that.

As I got over that, got over being paralyzed, I got dysentery. I started going to the latrine about thirty-five or forty times a day. I wasn't getting hardly any sleep. I'd lay down, and in about twenty minutes I'd have to get up and go again. So I got weak from lack of sleep,

and my body lost more fluid. I started defecating blood. I'd go strain and get some mucus and blood.

Before I got dysentery, I went eighteen days without defecating once. I was worried about it, and some guy had some milk of magnesia, and I got a small spoon of milk of magnesia and went the next day. That was on the eighteenth day. Then I went eighteen days again, and I asked the doctor, and he said, "You're not eating enough to go any more often than that." Again, that guy gave me another little spoonful, and on the eightheenth day there, and I went pretty quick.

I had paralysis, malaria, dysentery, beriberi...I don't know. I can't think of any more after that. During this period, two or three months of this stuff or maybe longer, I got so weak that I didn't want to talk to nobody. I'd just go sit out on the little bench outside my building. I'd just sit out there. It had a little kind of board across it that you could use as a table. I'd sit there with my elbows on the board just like this (gesture) and hold my head and just sit there until my next meal or time to go to bed--something like that.

Cruz: Was this in 1942?

Burris: It was late 1942. There was a period there when I wanted to die. I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up. I'll put it that way. I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up. It was just too much effort to keep on living. I was in

such bad shape that I asked the doctor to send me to the Zero Ward. We had what we called the Zero Ward. That's where you went to die. Then the Double Zero Ward was for after you died. Then you waited there until the detail picked you up. So I asked him to send me to the Zero Ward, that I couldn't control my bowels and I was just making a mess around there. I wanted to die, anyway. Just send me down there. I really wanted to go to sleep and never wake up. I had that feeling for some time--maybe about three or four days. I have it written down someplace, but I don't remember too well.

Cruz: He wouldn't...

Burris: He wouldn't do it.

Curz: Did you see this Zero Ward ever?

Burris: Yes. I went down there whenever I could because I'd go down there and see friends of mine. I'd take them water. That's one thing we did have. We had water at this hospital section. I knew a lot of them couldn't move. They were just laying there. Flies would be walking...like I described to you before at Camp O'Donnell, it was the same thing. They smelled of death, and they reeked of it. Flies and stuff like that were crawling around on them, and they didn't even bother to brush them off. But they'd recognize you and talk to you. I'd give them water, and they were just overjoyed at that. Again, I gave them water with my right hand (chuckle),

and I didn't let my canteen touch theirs. I was careful to pour it down in theirs. I didn't touch them with my left hand--same old stance.

While I was there...almost Christmas or maybe after Christmas--I'm not sure--of 1942, I went to the other side of the camp. While I was there, my malaria was so bad. Boy, it was just knocking me for a loop every once in a while. A friend of mine had been...I think it was Jack Heinzel. Jack was working on a detail outside around in a truck. The Japanese would take him around, and he'd do the work--loading and unloading the truck and maybe driving the truck for them. He brought back some quinine. He came over there to see me in the hospital section. He saw I was in a bad way for malaria pills. The doctors didn't have any. He gave me...I think it was one quinine pill. I think that one quinine pill was all I had the rest of the time I was in prison, and I had malaria all the time I was there. I think my temperature dropped down from close to 110 degrees down to about 106 degrees and stayed there. I was always aware of the temperature, and it would bother the top of my head. I think it was around 106 degrees because I know I worked with 106 degrees, and that's the way I felt, so I think it was right around 106 degrees with that one pill.

Then there was another man by the name of Savage.

He lives here in Fort Worth. Jack Heinzel lives about halfway between Fort Worth and Weatherford. I think it was Savage that gave me three cigarettes.

While I was at Camp O'Donnell, my trousers rotted off at the knees. I'd sleep in them, and they'd get hot and sweaty, and pretty soon they were just rags attached. Eventually, the crotch rotted out, and I was just wearing a little skirt (chuckle). My underclothes were just rotted --gone. It didn't take no time for them to go. So I was more or less naked. My shoes rotted off of me. It was a good thing because I would have never got them...they would have broken with that swelling. The beriberi was so big I would have had to cut them off if I'd had shoes.

Can I say something a little bit off-color here?

Cruz: Sure.

Burris: When I couldn't get water, I used these pants for toilet paper (chuckle)--the part that rotted off. I'd use them for toilet paper. Then when I got a chance to wash them, I'd wash them. If I had water handy, like I did at Cabanatuan, I'd take a shower. After work I could take a shower. I didn't defecate very often. I think it was calm in three or four days--the whole time I was there-- except for the time I had dysentery. Instead of even bothering to dirty that cloth, I'd just go and come back and take a shower and clean myself up. I did that, but

that was something a little bit different, I guess. But I know that's what I used it for.

But these three cigarettes got me a new mess kit with a good knife, fork, and spoon. They got me two pairs of trousers. One pair was green...I think it was green or blue--not Navy but Marine trousers. The other were khaki trousers. Both were in good shape. I got two or three pairs of holey socks. I got a couple of towels. They were kind of weatherbeaten, but they were towels. I got some salt. I got an old second-hand toothbrush. I got a pith helmet. I got a tremendous amount of stuff with those three cigarettes.

Cigarettes in Cabanatuan...that's the first place I knew cigarettes were valuable, and it was in the hospital section, too. People who had cigarettes could trade the cigarettes for other soldier's meals. They'd trade half a cigarette for your morning meal and half a cigarette for your evening meal. I'd say that in the hospital section there, I witnessed about five people who committed suicide, knowing what they were doing. They traded their meals for half a cigarette and knew that they weren't going to live a week doing that. They'd still do it. When they'd be giving the death rattle, they'd still be begging for a cigarette. The guy that was giving them to him, I remember that he said, "If you'll just hang on

until you get your next meal, I'll give you another half a cigarette." I think he did hang on, but some of them probably didn't. A cigarette is probably next to dope ...what do you call it when you...

Cruz: Addictive?

Burris: Addicted. Next to dope. Maybe it's just as much addictive or more so.

Cruz: The desire to smoke was there as much as there might have been a desire to die?

Burris: Oh, yes. They would rather smoke, knowing they were going to die. They enjoyed the few puffs on the cigarette that they were going to get. It wasn't a first-class cigarette they were getting, either. The Filipino cigarettes were wrapped in wallpaper. I'd see people breathe in on them, and the flame would burn right under their nose (chuckle), and then they'd blow it out and blow this other smoke out; and then they'd take another puff, and a new fire would start right under their nose (chuckle).

These three cigarettes were just that kind that I got this stuff for. I tried to trade for them myself, and nobody would talk to me. None of the soldiers would talk to me. So I give a soldier that I'd been...well, I helped him. I worked with a group that had a little contest for cigarettes as a prize, and my group of men won that prize. In a way he may have figured I had done him a favor. I

don't know what. Anyway, he traded those cigarettes for all this stuff that I got. I'll bet you he kept some for himself, too. He may have kept one cigarette for himself and got all this for two cigarettes. I still got more than I ever dreamed of getting. I had something to put on my head, and I had everything but shoes.

Cruz: About how long had you been there when you were able to pull this off?

Burris: I was probably at my next to my sickest period there, although I wasn't wanting to die anymore. By the way, the reason I quit dying was because I finally realized that my family was depending on me to come home if I could, and I didn't have the right to just lay down and quit. It wasn't treating them right, so after I thought like that, I cut it out. There was about three or four days there, a few days, anyway--I don't remember exactly--when I just sat there, and my only thought would be on how nice it would be to go to sleep and never wake up. That's what I wanted to do.

Cruz: When you remembered your family, this brought you back.

Burris: Family brought me back. I didn't have that right. To me at that time, it was a luxury to die. Also, there's one other thing. Most of the people who died gave up hope. I think that's about as close as you can get to what I got. I didn't give up hope. I thought the Americans would be

there in the next few weeks. Every week I thought they'd come in the next three or four more weeks--every week that would go by. I didn't lose hope, but the people who did lose hope died quick. They didn't last long.

I saw one man...I don't know what was wrong with him. He came over to the hospital section, and he was big and muscular and didn't act like there was a thing wrong with him. I thought, "My gosh, you don't belong over here!" You know, in about a week that man was skin and bones and dead. He had something real bad. That's the way it was. You'd get something like dysentery and a strong reaction from malaria at the same time. With malaria you don't want to eat, and the dysentery just drains you of all body fluids. If beriberi went up to a guy's stomach, he died. If that swelling went up as high as your stomach, you died before it went any higher. I think it was pushing against your stomach and lungs and everything else up in this upper part of your body.

Doctors sometimes would come with a knife...they'd clean a mess kit knife, and they'd stick it in their legs to drain this liquid out before it went too high. Your skin was real thin. My legs were like that (gesture). I was just kind of stiff-legged. I just barely walked. I'd stick a knife in that and drain it out. I'd say that almost everytime they did it, the guy died. A few of them lived.

Some people had their scrotum swollen up as big as ...not basketballs but soccer balls--about soccer ball size. When they'd urinate they'd just spew everyway. It would come out between the pores of their skin, and it was just a terrible mess, and they couldn't clean themselves up there at all. One guy that I knew was in the bunk next to me. His got swollen up, and he took a knife and punctured his own scrotum and drained the water out. He had a piece of medical tape. I don't know where he got it. He had it about that (gesture) long and about three-eighths of an inch wide--something like that. He taped that cut up, and it healed. He got well, and he never had that beriberi swelling again, either. He did all that himself. I'd have been scared to death to do that.

Cruz: I think most of us would (laughter). What kind of details did they have--at least the first part when you arrived there? What were the details like?

Burris: There wasn't any details. There wasn't any details. I just spent my time going around visiting people that I knew. There was no work. Then I got sent over...about the time the work started, I got sent over to the hospital.

Right around Christmastime, a little bit before or a little bit after--I'm not sure--they wanted volunteers to go work on the farm. I said, "I'm well. Let me go." That's another thing. The Japanese...if you don't work,

you don't eat. That's the reason we got two meals a day in the hospital, and the two meals we got wasn't enough to keep your body and soul together. The workers got a third meal. On the workers' side their morning and evening meal was a little better than ours--not much--and then they got a third meal of something. Most of the time in Cabanatuan, it was weed soup and lugao. Thirty minutes after you'd eat the lugao, you'd go drain it like you would after you drank a bottle of beer or something.

One time--one time--in that hospital section, they gave us all the rice we could eat--lugao that we could eat. I ate and ate that stuff. I went back and forth and got more and more, and I swear I was having trouble breathing. It was just coming up right into my neck. So I couldn't eat any more, and I was still hungry. That stuff didn't satisfy me. I was still hungry--awful hungry. I wanted to go get some more, but I just couldn't swallow any more. They destroyed, I think, the rest of it. There was plenty there. About thirty minutes after they destroyed it, I could eat some more (chuckle).

Cruz: Oh, too bad.

Burris: It was all gone. That's another thing--rice. I may just say this so you can have it on your record. We used to talk about rice a lot. We came to the conclusion that rice was...the main good point of rice is that it would

take the flavor of anything else. Anything else you add to it will improve it. If you've got a bed of rice, you can put something else with it. If you can get enough of something else so that you don't have any rice, that's when it tastes the best (laughter).

Cruz: You saw all the rice you wanted to see?

Burris: But at the same time, I think we all realized that our stomach wouldn't digest hardly anything, and that lugao ...actually, we probably consumed every bit of that...we didn't have enough of it, but what we did get, I bet our bodies took care of almost all of it. Otherwise, how could a person go eighteen days without defecating once and then follow it up with another eighteen days? I think I was getting all the good there was in that rice. If I'd had enough of it, I'd have been all right. That weed soup had no flavor--no salt, no pepper. It was just rice, water, and weeds.

Cruz: What kind of weeds did you get?

Burris: I don't know. Some kind of weeds. Sometimes it was a pig weed, but generally it was just some kind of weed. It looked like somebody just pulled up a bunch of weeds and boiled it. I could chew on it and swallow it. I guess there was some nourishment in it.

Cruz: In October of 1942, a new commander was assigned to that camp there. The commander from Number Three was sent to

Number One.

Burris: I was never aware of this.

Cruz: I was just curious...from your point of view, was there any change in the treatment or conditions at the end of 1942? Anywhere from October to December?

Burris: When did he get sent there?

Cruz: This was supposedly in October of 1942 that the commander of Number Three was put over...the main man for Number Three was sent to Number One, and then that commander was put over...

Burris: I think it got a little better about that time--not much but a little better. We still got two meals a day, and we still didn't get enough, but I think we got more than we did before. It may have been about this time when they gave us that one meal that we had all the rice we wanted.

Also, while I was in that hospital, there was about 2,000 people to eat there, and we got thirteen chickens to feed that 2,000 people. So we had lugao and weed soup and chickens. To be fair about it, they thought they'd put it in with the weed soup and just boil it until the meat went off the bones. That way everybody would have some of the value of that thirteen chickens. Filipino chickens are small. They're almost like crows--just a little bit big bird, and that's all. Their eggs look like bird eggs. A duck egg looks like a chicken egg. There's not much meat on them, and thirteen of those chickens

didn't go...I didn't even get a bone to suck on. I didn't know I had...the flavor of those weeds would kill the neutral flavor of the chicken. The neutral flavor of the chicken was just killed, so none of us knew that we had any chicken except those that found a bone.

Cruz: It was the idea of chicken.

Burris: They'd go around with a big smile on their face and sucking on this bone. Then one time I think I got an ankle bone of a carabao while I was over there. I went around trying to break that open. I sucked out all the marrow I could out of where it was cut. Then I went around trying to break it apart so that I could get some more. I cleaned the outside of that bone good. Gristle and stuff was hanging on there, and I ate that. Then I tried to get the marrow. I couldn't do it. I couldn't break that bone.

Cruz: Did you get any Red Cross parcels while you were at this camp?

Burris: I got it around Christmastime. Like I say, I got it after I went back over to the workers' side.

Cruz: Around Christmas of 1942?

Burris: Either around Christmas or a little bit before or a little bit after. It wasn't too long after I got on the workers' side in Cabanatuan. I got a Christmas box. I know one man ate the whole box the first day he got that Christmas box, and he died that night. But he died not hungry. He may

have been in misery from eating too much. His stomach was shrunk and everything from the long period that he hadn't had much to eat, and then he ate all that spam and all that jelly and Klim milk. They gave us a little package of...I think this was a pretty good size. That Klim milk can was about like this (gesture). You know, that's milk spelled backwards--Klim. It was a powdered milk. I never see it anymore. I don't guess they make it anymore. It was yellow and had...I think it was powdered whole milk.

Cruz: Did the Japanese let you have the whole parcel, or did they keep some for themselves?

Burris: I think I got a whole parcel. Not only that, but shortly after that, I got a parcel from my mother. Her parcel wasn't any bit smarter packed than the government's parcel (chuckle).

Cruz: Had you had any idea that the Japanese had actually sent names on back home?

Burris: Not at that time.

Cruz: This is the first indication of that.

Burris: I think it wasn't too long after that that we got our first letter. I got a bunch of them in there someplace. I just throw this stuff around. What they would do, they would give us a little card. On this card it would say, "I am," and then you had your choices. "I am well." "I am sick" "I am real sick." "I do not expect to come home." "I do

expect to come home." They gave us all kinds of choices like that. One soldier put down on his card that he was very sick, and he expected to die, and he didn't ever expect to get home. Everything was as negative as you could get it on that card. I said, "What are you doing that for?" He said, "It's the truth." I said, "Yes, but you don't want your folks to know that, do you? You want to make them worry themselves sick over you?" He said, "That's the way it is."

Cruz: He didn't care.

Burris: He didn't care. And some people took up the habit of eating rice, and to get the most good out of it, they'd chew every mouthful of rice they got in. They'd chew it a hundred chews before they'd swallow it. There were several people who would eat one rice grain. They'd take your little ol' sticks and pick up one rice grain and chew that a hundred times (chuckle) before they swallowed it. I'm sure you couldn't ever feel it, but after the first few chews he didn't know what he was chewing. He'd just keep it in his mouth and let the saliva work. He'd keep on counting his chews--a hundred. Then he'd go after another one. Some of them that had salt would take their little sticks and get one grain of rice and dip it in the salt and come up ...I'd gulp mine down, and I probably didn't digest...I think I got all the good out of it, anyway. I think there

wasn't enough in me to not get the good out of it. They had a point, but I couldn't stand it to look at them. They just chewed day and night. They'd make a morning meal last until they got the evening meal. Then they'd stay up half the night eating that. When they went to sleep, they'd save some so they could eat before they went and got their next meal. They were always eating.

Cruz: They had a great imagination. How would you describe the guards at this camp? Were there different kinds? Did you notice any differances between different kinds of guards?

Burris: They were just Japanese. However, they were meaner. They got mean there. They would harass you. You'd be working on the farm, and they'd just come behind you and whack you with a stick. They didn't always need a reason to do it, too. They'd come screaming at you. Some of them poor soldiers would run screaming with their clubs.

Most of the time, they carried a hoe club. A hoe, the bottom part of it, was about like a pick handle. Those big ol' English hoes--big ol' thick hoes about like this (gesture), a square thing--were thick metal. They kind of curved down and went around and hook onto that thick part of the handle. It was almost as big as a pick handle. But they had pulled these things out of the hoe and used it for a club.

They'd come waving it at you and screaming bloody

murder, like they were just going to tear you to pieces. Most people would just get scared to death. But that didn't scare...someway or another, I didn't...I think I had so much disgust for them.

The way they did things was just primitive. If they wanted to move a building, they just put enough people around it to pick it up and walk away with it; and if they couldn't do that, then they just didn't get it moved (chuckle).

They'd come and ask us...they didn't ask me, but some of the higher ranking ones wanted us to figure out a way to make water flow uphill. I couldn't figure it out. What they meant was...well, they said, "Well, the Japanese can do it." I think the colonel told him that you couldn't make water flow uphill. That was all there was to it. It would come downhill everytime. Their idea was to make a water wheel or use a pump. Yes, you could do it with a water wheel and a pump--something like that--or you could carry it up. That would make it flow uphill. So they made a water wheel, and we...I walked that water wheel. You'd walk until you got tired, and then you changed with somebody else, and he'd walk until he'd get tired. Then you'd go back up there and walk on it. It wasn't much good. I think we'd have done better by just carrying the water up there. But, anyway, they worked on that for a while.

Cruz: So you got more food once you started on the work detail?

Burris: Well, we got more than we had in the hospital, but it was not enough. I don't think my weight...well, there was times when it was better. I think my weight maybe went up to ninety pounds, maybe close to a hundred pounds, but it never got above that.

I think we had the real hard times about three or four times. Our body weight would get up between ninety and a hundred pounds, and then it would go way down to the bottom--just all of a sudden--and just stay there for a while. It was continuously like that.

We thought about food all the time. There was a man who used to come around and give us lectures. He was the most popular lecturer of all, I think. He would come back and say, "When I get home, I'm going to get me a big hotcake, and I'm going to put it on a great, big meat platter; and then I'm going to smear butter half an inch thick--good ol' country butter, half an inch thick on it; then I'm going to put on maple syrup--just pour it over it until it's just swimming in in; then I'm going to put some bacon strips on it; then I'm going to put some ice cream on it; then I'm going to put some fried eggs on it." He just kept building that up until...and he'd take another hotcake and just keep on stacking them on up. It probably went to the moon and back (chuckle). Candy...every food he could think of, he would mention it. The rest of us were just

sitting around and drooling.

We had a library there. Some people brought in some good books. Did you ever read Oliver Wiswell by Kenneth Roberts?

Cruz: No.

Burris: Don't even know the author?

Cruz: No.

Burris: You haven't heard of Northwest Passage?

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: He wrote that book. He wrote lots of them, and generally he had most of the characters in there.

Cruz: When was it that you got books?

Burris: Not too long after I got to Cabanatuan. Somebody was bringing in books and magazines. Of course, after a while the books and magazines were destroyed for toilet paper. But I think people didn't do it...the most popular book... the Saturday Evening Post had some Aunt Jemima pancake pictures in color in it. I read that book from cover to cover, I guess, ten or twelve times. I'd drool over that Aunt Jemima's pancake thing. You thought about food all the time.

This one guy that escaped...he didn't really excape. He was hungry, and there was food on the farm. So one night he went out under the fence and made it. He went out there and ate his fill, and then before daylight he

got in...they had some haystacks, and he got in those haystacks and stayed there. Then the next night he'd go out and eat some more and come back. Of course, the first day he was missing, and I don't know whether they killed those other nine or not. I don't think they did. I didn't see it if they did. Anyway, they did that, I think, two or three times. I think some people told me they saw it happen. Friends of theirs were executed like that. But I didn't see it. Of course, I wasn't running around looking for it either.

He sneezed one day while the guard was...people were working on the garden out there, and he sneezed, and the guards found him. They brought him back, and right in full view of us...well, almost full view...there were some fences over there, and people were going back and forth. They tied him to a stake, and the Japanese circled him, and they'd throw rocks at him. Every once in a while they'd sing and chant this stupid song that they got. They'd throw heavy rocks at him, and they'd run in and kick him as strong as they could, or they'd hit him with a club or their rifle. They just beat that man to a pulp. They took all day doing it. They just brought his bones and skin over and dumped them on us to bury. It was pretty bad.

Then they had another habit...if they caught you

stealing...say, you ate an onion. They'd smell our breath to see if we'd eat any onions that we'd picked. If they caught you there, they put you in a little...and this was used for other things, too. They put you in a little small chicken coop where you could just barely sit leaning over. They put four of them guys in there and just crowded them up. You couldn't lay down or nothing, sleep or nothing, unless they lay on each other. I guess they kind of laid around. I don't know how they did it. It looked to me like they didn't have room for nothing. They fed them twice a day, and they fed them real skimpy rations.

There was a preacher, and he was a Baptist preacher. He's a retired major general now. He made Chief of Chaplains. That's as high as you can go as a chaplain. He did a lot of things. He was always baptizing the people. Everytime he'd get a chance, he'd give them his speech. He was working at being a preacher. He was working at it. He would baptize people. He divided his meal into four parts and gave each one of them other guys a quarter, and he ate a quarter--in that little coop. In fact, everything that happened to him...every time something bad happened to him, he just got more self-sacrificing.

On the ship, the Oryokou Maru, that third ship, he started praying at night. He'd give the Lord's Prayer. I got to where I couldn't go to sleep without that. I

got to where I couldn't go to sleep without that. I figured we was dead on that boat, anyway, and I just couldn't go to sleep until he'd give that prayer. He gave that for a while, and then somebody else started doing it. I met him down there at one of these meetings and asked him how come he quit giving that prayer. He said, "I was wounded on that first ship." The guy...well, he's marvelous.

Cruz: Do you remember his name?

Burris: Yes. I can't say it now. That's terrible. Two minutes ago, I can't remember anything. Forty years ago, I can.

Bruz: Robert Preston Taylor?

Burris: No, just Preston Taylor. I think it's Preston Taylor. I got his book in there someplace. You can borrow it from me if you want to. There's other things that he did, too, but everything that I heard about him and saw about him while he was in that prison camp, if anybody was a hero, it was him. Now there were several heroes during the war, but I don't think of any heroes in that prison camp except maybe Taylor.

Cruz: How much cooperation developed amongst the POW's as time went on?

Burris: Very little. Very little. It was mostly fighting each other.

Cruz: You would describe it as every man for himself.

Burris: Everybody was selfish. It was dog-eat-dog. The fact is,

they caught a dog. A group caught a dog inside the camp, and they killed him and ate him. I didn't see it, but another guy saw these guys and said, "What are you eating there?" They said, "Dog." He said, "You know, I never had any dog. I sure would like to have some dog so I could tell my folks back home what it tastes like." This guy says, "You go get your own dog." (chuckle) It was selfish. That was one place that I learned, if I learned anything--and I don't guess it's good--that the human being is a marauder. I believe he would steal from his own mother if he was starving hard enough. You couldn't keep food around--they'd steal it. You ate it. I've got a little square plot of land about like so (gesture)--maybe a foot-and-a-half square on each side--and I planted five or six okra plants in there, and I ate them quick. When they'd get just a little bit big, I ate them. I'd liked to let them stay on longer, but I couldn't stay around that little garden when I was working, and I had to eat them or somebody else would take them.

Cruz: So there was stealing?

Burris: Yes, there was quite a bit of stealing. People would have things, and they would use it to their advantage--like cigarettes. They didn't mind seeing that guy die. They just wanted his food. Some of them guys were pretty fat. One corpsman, when we were getting ready to go on this boat,

he was laughing at us. He says, "You guys are taking all your strings and bottles and nails and getting it all in a package. I'm not going to take nothing but this bottle right here--sulfathiazole pills. I'll be eating like a king while you guys are worrying about your strings and nails and bottles." (chuckle) You know what my thinking was? "I wish I was the one that had that bottle of sulfathiazole pills. I'd do the same thing."

Cruz: A valuable commodity.

Burris: Oh, yes. You see, the Japanese would get venereal disease, and this sulfathiazole would cure it. I think it would cure both kinds. It would cure it. They got four kinds now, but we had only two then. That sulfathiazole...he got that someplace, and I bet you that while he was in that camp, none of it went to sick American soldiers. It went to the Japanese for some mango beans or something like that.

Cruz: Was there much stealing from the Japanese that you saw?

Burris: Very little. They'd do it if they could. They sure would.

Cruz: But there were some dealing with the camp guards?

Burris: There was a lot of dealing, and if the officers would catch the guards dealing with the soldiers, often they would punish the soldier real severely. For that reason the soldier would put the blame all on the POW.

That's another thing. I was so disgusted I didn't want to learn the language. That was a stupid thing to do.

I should have learned the language. A lot of people were speaking it. I should have learned to do it, too, but I was just completely...I couldn't see how they beat us. I didn't reason that we were running out of ammunition and all, like, back at that artillery. Orders came down that we were to shoot only at a group of three airplanes or more. If there was two airplanes or one airplane, we didn't shoot it. If you did shoot at it, you could only shoot three rounds per gun. That would be twelve rounds. That's not enough to get to tracking good, but that was the rule. Then not only that, but the ammunition in those bullets had been sitting since 1917. We'd throw the missile out, and the little fuses that you put on those things had a sign on it: "Corroded fuses. Packed in 1917." They were powder train fuses. Those shells came out, and they would burst...one of them burst inside the muzzle of a gun and killed, I think, the entire gun crew. One exploded just outside the muzzle and killed almost the whole battery. They were high-explosive...what do you call it? Concussion or something. I forgot all those names, but they were big compression shells, and they would tear an airplane up without a direct hit. There would be enough strong shearing forces from this explosion to break most airplanes. Then you had a little bit of shrapnel, too. But the main thing was concussion. That's what they called it--concussion-type

shell. Sometimes they'd even go up and shoot about where they were supposed to go but not very often. Anyplace they were liable to go off. You just didn't have very much control, and it was almost a farce to shoot them.

Yet that battery claimed, I think, oh, at least twelve, and I never saw but one go down. What they would do, they would shoot at this group of three, and then all three airplanes would fly off, and somebody would call up on the phone and say, "The Japanese lost an airplane over here. It went down." So we said, "That's ours! That's ours! Another one!" That's the way they did most of them. One looked like they got a direct hit on it, and it just exploded. That's the only one I ever saw go down that was theirs. I don't know how many batteries were claiming the same airplane (chuckle).

Cruz: Mr. Burris, I'd like to thank you for participation in this interview and for your time.

Oral History Collection

Charles Burris

Interviewer: Richard Cruz Date of Interview: May 14, 1985

Place of Interview: Hurst, Texas

Mr. Cruz: This is Richard Cruz for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 14, 1985, in Hurst, Texas. I am interviewing Charles W. Burris in order to obtain his recollections as a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II.

Mr. Burris: The hospital section that I was in--in Cabanatuan--was about the same as the Camp O'Donnell place. We didn't get any more food, and maybe it got a little less. But there was one big improvement, and that was that we had water. We had all the drinking water we wanted. You know, if people drank too much, it might slow down, but generally we didn't suffer for water, and we even had enough water to boil our clothes and get the bedbugs and lice out of them and put boiling water over the inside the barracks, in the bamboo stuff. Bedbugs and lice would hide in the cracks and in your clothes and in all that, and you'd pour boiling water all over that place. It kills about 90 to 95 percent of them. Some of them we didn't get the water on. We would have had to take the building apart to do that, I guess. We could depend on it that in a few days we

could sleep pretty good. Then pretty soon it got big numbers of insects again or...what do you call them? Lice? Maybe in about a month or every two or three months, we had to boil it down again. We had boiled water for that, and it was good drinking water. It wouldn't come out of the river. It came out of a well.

I just met a friend of mine that used to work...a friend of mine now. I just met him now, but he used to work on that pump. It was between the two penned-in areas for the POW's. The Japanese were in the middle, and down in the middle they had a pump. It would pump our water and maybe do a few other things. I think it was built strictly for water. So we had pressure almost all the time. Although maybe the food was even worse than--and not as much of it--at Camp O'Donnell, the big improvement was the water. We could keep ourselves clean--cleaner--and we had water to drink.

Cruz: The Japanese started that farm. Did you work on that farm very much?

Burris: Well, yes, after I got out of the hospital area. See, the farm workers ate three meals a day, and the meals were more of it and better, thicker--more food. So I was just wasting away--gradually wasting away. After I got over my sicknesses...did I cover that before--the number of sicknesses I had?

Cruz: Yes, I believe so.

Burris: Well, after I began to get over all the sicknesses, they would give us a chance to volunteer to go over to the farm and get three meals a day by working. I said, "I'm well. Send me over there." The Japanese carried that on to just about everything. If you don't work, you don't eat; and if you work, you eat. Now they didn't give us much more to eat when we worked, but we did get more, and we were hungry enough to go after it. Anything we'd eat was great. But even the carabao...if he wasn't getting enough to eat, and they worked him too hard, why, they'd just work him harder. Then he'd fall in his tracks, and they'd beat him and make him get up until he just died or was about to die. When the beating wouldn't get him to move or anything else, then they'd just shoot him and eat him. If a chicken didn't lay an egg, she went to the pot. And (laughter) they wasn't going to feed nothing that didn't produce something. That's kind of the way they were. Now I don't know whether they were quite that way with their own troops or not, but they sure worked things that way to people that were their enemies. If they could do it to them, they did it.

Cruz: You say you got the three meals. Did that necessarily mean any more variety, or was it just the same?

Burris: There was a little bit more variety than we got in the hospital section. It didn't amount to much, but we got a

little sugar once in a while. These cooks would grind... they had some stone mills that people made, you know, and they'd grind that rice down and make kind of a coarse flour out of it. They'd give us a little cookie that had a little sugar in it, and I guess it had a little lard in it, too, or some kind of grease. Once in a while, they'd give us a little cookie like that, and other than that, it was the same in variety as the hospital section. The lugao was thicker. I gained a little bit when I went across to work--in weight--but not much. I held steady at about... oh, I forget now, I think it was around ninety to a hundred pounds. Someplace in there I held my weight, whereas in the hospital, I was down low. I stayed most of the time around seventy pounds. Once in a while, it might get up to seventy-five or maybe even eighty, and then I'd go back down to being low. So it was more of it, and we were more active, though. We didn't work when we was in the hospital, and we didn't do any good for our muscles there. The people that laid down too much got bed sores, and they got infected, and they died. Well, I've told you about the sicknesses.

Cruz: How long did you work on that farm, by the way?

Burris: I worked on that farm for years. I think it was from the time the war started until maybe the first Christmas or maybe April--something like that--about a year after the war started, I went from the hospital section into the...you know,

all this time, up to about a year, I made the march, went to Camp O'Donnell, and then came to Camp Cabanatuan. After a few days there, I was in the hospital section, and then I stayed there until about maybe, say, about the ninth of April, 1943. That's when I went to...in other wrods, about a year after the war started...and it might have been earlier or later. I don't remember. I kind of think I was there at Christmastime, but then again I'm not so sure. I don't know. My memory is not that good there. So about a year afterwards, I went to the workers' side, and I stayed there until about November 25, 1944.

Cruz: Could you describe the chores you did out there on the farm?

Burris: Well, when I first went over there, I think mostly we cleared land. It was big ol' brushes and trees and weeds and thickets and all kinds of stuff. We were given English hoes. An English hoe is almost like a pickax in America. It has an iron blade about, oh, six, maybe eight, inches wide and about a foot--or a little over--high. The hole for the handle is slightly smaller than our pickax. And, I mean, it's light. But instead of having a short handle, it had a handle...what's the length of a hoe? About six or seven feet...

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: ...something like that? The hoe handle that we know? It had about the same length of the hoe handle that we have,

but, of course, instead of it being a little ol' broomstick, it was nice and big like so (gesture), see. It got a little bit heavier at the end that had the blade. That blade was thick. It was about, oh, I'd say, about half an inch thick. It curved down--a little bit of a curve in it--and it was sharpened approximately at the point, and you'd lift usually a pretty good weight.

Cruz: Heavy son-of-a-gun.

Burris: When you got on the end of that hoe, you'd come down, and it hit that ground pretty hard. It would dig out weeds and roots and things.

We had sickles to cut the stuff that we'd cut that way. Then there would be a row of guys that would follow that sickle with rakes or maybe the...I think they raked it off some way or another. Then another line would come by with these hoes, and they'd chop all the roots out and chop the whole ground up. Then somebody would come along and kind of rake it. They had the carabaos at plows, and they'd make rows if they were going to plant something in rows. See, in the rainy season...and it rains heavy over there. I maybe told you it rains...for a long time, it held the record--and maybe still does have the record--for the world. It had forty-eight inches in twenty-four hours. That's a lot of rain in one day, isn't it? Four feet in the rain gauge. It really rains, see, so they built high

in rows, and it'd fill up the rows with rain real easy, and then, of course, you'd plant the stuff on top of these rows. It had all the water, but yet it wouldn't go sour. We planted cassava. Have you ever heard of that?

Cruz: Is it like a sweet potato? Yam?

Burris: Well, it's like an Irish potato. It tastes kind of like an Irish potato. It's starchy. I think we use it to make tapioca. I don't know how they process it, but I know it takes eighteen months before you can harvest it. Then about every six months, we'd plant it again so that when we started to harvest, we could harvest it every six months. So it was a pretty big place. If you harvest in the wet season, why, unless you took pains to keep it dry, it would get moldy real quick. It just would draw the moisture in it, and it would spoil just real quick. So you couldn't bind it up in the windy season. You had to keep it down in root form, which is kind of a, oh, just knotty, every which way--roots. Long--maybe not long--but just knotted and going all kinds of ways. But it's good eating it. It tastes like potatoes--those ol' Irish potatoes.

Cruz: What other kind of vegetables did you plant?

Burris: Well, we planted sweet potatoes, and they called them camotes. It was the first time I'd ever seen a purple sweet potato in my whole life. Their pigs grew small; the chickens grew small...a chicken egg was like a bird egg

here, and a duck egg there is about like a chicken egg here. So they didn't try to weed out the bad ones and keep just the good ones. They just planted everything. Some sweet potatoes were nice and orange and sweet, you know, and some of them were white, and they tasted like Irish potatoes, as far as the taste is concerned. They didn't look like it, but they tasted like it. The purple ones were a little bit bitter. So we had that full range of any color from bright orange to weak orange to yellow to white and then gradually into purple. We planted camotes; we planted onions; we planted beans, what they called mango beans. They looked like about the size of small peas, but it was a bean. It kind of had a little mark on it kind of like a black-eyed pea, except it was perfectly round and real tiny. We planted okra, eggplant. There was more, but I just can't remember them all offhand.

Curz: Did this food production benefit the prisoners?

Burris: Yes, it did to a little extent. However, they didn't give us anymore than they had to. If we hadn't been working on the farm, we didn't get anymore food. We got a better variety. We did get to eat some of this stuff. Then we planted corn--field corn. We had field corn, and we could soak it with ashes and make hominy out of it. It was kind of a fourth grade hominy, but we could still eat it and digest it. Sometimes we would boil it and eat it like a

roasted ear. So we had a better variety--more, bigger variety--and, also, we still depended on the old weeds--just a weed soup. I don't know what kind of weed it was. It wasn't even pig weed. In Arkansas they've got what they call a pig weed. Do you know about that?

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: Well...

Cruz: I know of the pig weed.

Burris: Well, they call it pig weed in Arkansas, and it's the same thing in the Philippines. I learned to like that pig weed. About the only way we got to eat pig weed was to be out on a detail, and some would be growing wild, and we'd pick it up. I don't think we planted it. They didn't care if you brought back a whole bunch of pig weed to eat. So we had pig weed, and we still had the rice and sometimes a little sugar.

One time in the hospital section, we were issued...it was about 2,000 people in the hospital section. We got thirteen small Filipino chickens to feed that whole mess. To get it even, you know, spread it out amongst all of them, why, they'd just put in the weed soup and boil it --all with the weed soup. They'd boil it real good, and nobody tasted their chicken. Nobody tasted any chicken; they didn't even know they was eating any chicken. But they must have had a little chicken in that water. The

weed soup would just drown out any chicken flavor. So all you knew you were eating was weed soup, and there wasn't even any grease on it. There was no grease. There wasn't any grease at all. Some people got a bone, and they'd suck on it, but all it had was that soup on it. They didn't taste chicken. I think chicken bones are hollow, anyway. They don't even have any marrow, do they?

Cruz: I don't know (chuckle).

Burris: Every once in a while, while I was in that hospital section, the Japanese killed a carabao. They'd give us the bones. All we got at the hospital section was the bones. They'd boil them in with the soup, and sometimes, if the light would shine on it just right, you could see a little shimmering grease on the top of your soup. It wasn't enough to taste, but you could see it, you know. Then they'd give the bones out to the POW's where I was. When I got a bone, everybody in the barracks got a bone. Mine was a kind of like the ankle bone or the part going up the leg or something. Where it was cut, I'd try to suck the marrow out of it, and I'd try to dig it out. I'd fiddle with that bone for two or three days (chuckle).

Then the officers...when we first got to Cabanatuan ...we hadn't been there very long. There was a major that gave a speech to us. The subject of the speech was that rank had its privileges. He said the line officers...

well, it had to be below field grade officers. That meant everybody below the major rank. They were going to get a commissary in, and the field officer rank and above would take what they wanted, and if there was any left, why, the rest of us could have it. Of course, we never saw anything. I didn't see anything.

Oh, I did, too. I got to buy...one time I got...I saved up a couple months' pay. When I started getting paid, I saved up and got a can of noodles, and all it was was something like macaroni, you know, already cooked and all stuck together in a big wad. It was just disappointing as all get-out. But then I got that, but generally what I bought was field corn. I was able to buy field corn.

Cruz: How were you paid?

Burris: Well, we didn't get paid until we was in the workers' side and when they started calling us prisoners instead of captives--prisoners-of-war instead of captives. Then they paid the officers and men. They paid the officers...officers didn't have to work to get their money. But if you didn't work, you didn't eat (chuckle). So he worked. The enlisted men got a pitiful amount of money. I don't remember. I don't know what it was, but I got fifteen pesos a month. The first month I could buy...like I said, maybe I had to wait two months before I could get that can of spaghetti, and then I said, "Heck, this is no way to do it." So I

think I took almost my whole fifteen pesos each month to get a canteen cup of field corn. I think I bought that maybe twice, and one month wouldn't do it. It took more than fifteen pesos. Inflation was so bad that I couldn't catch up enough. It was terrible to buy a canteen cup of corn.

Cruz: Now who were you buying this corn from?

Burris: From what they called a commissary. They'd bring in a little bit of stuff. Bananas over in the Philippines, some of them, are about this long, about this big around (gesture) --just little things. Then some are nice big ones, and some of them...they don't try to...they used to not try to raise the best. They raised whatever they had. So anything above a banana of about two inches long was called a "field officer banana," and we never seen any of that (chuckle).

Cruz: Who ran this comissary?

Burris: I don't know. I had to give my money to a guy, and he'd make a list of different people who'd give him money and what he could buy for us.

Cruz: Did you ever hear of Ted Lowan or a Moe Gardner? I ask because these were men that sort of set up little stores.

Burris: Well, I didn't know them. I didn't know about them. Now the people that ate good in both the hospital section and the workers' side was the people that worked around the

kitchen. Now I'm sure that they ate all they wanted. They were fat--nice-looking, fat guys. They weren't lean and bony like them pictures there. They were fat and kind of pot-bellied fat. It wasn't good fat, but it was... they had all they wanted. None of the officers in charge of the kitchens tried to hold them down to the same ration we had. They all said it was just impossible to do it. You couldn't do it. There ain't no way to do it (chuckle).

Cruz: They were working with...

Burris: The food. They were working with...

Cruz: ...the Japanese in the kitchens, or was it all...

Burris: No, they were working with the Americans.

Cruz: All POW's.

Burris: We had them great, big ol' wok things made of iron. They must have been three or four feet across. They worked on the food, and there was no way you could keep them from getting it.

Cruz: Who decided who had to work in the kitchen?

Burris: I don't know. Generally, it was the guys that were the healthiest, and I think probably that was the only basis because after they got there, they got fat. They were all eating pretty good. Even if it was divided evenly among the rest of us, why, we wouldn't have noticed any difference, anyway, because if you eat like that, that's not going to hurt you; but if you had to divide that among everybody, we

wouldn't have got but just a smidgen more.

Cruz: Did this cause resentment against those chaps that worked in the kitchen, or do you know of any reprisals?

Burris: Oh, no, mostly it was envy.

Cruz: Envy.

Burris: Yes. Everyone wanted to work in the kitchen. If they could, they would've. They didn't ask me to work in the kitchen, and I didn't push it.

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: For a long time there, you wouldn't want a guy that was sick around food. So they tried to put all the sick ones off to one side, and then even there I think the kitchen people were the best among us probably.

Cruz: And you were in Camp Number One as you found out later?

Burris: I think so. I think it was from the descriptions I've heard. I think it was Camp Number One, and probably it was the biggest camp. But I'm not sure. Then later on, I think, just before the surrender, why, we were all put into one camp, and it was the same camp I was in. Whether that was Camp One or Camp Three, I don't know which.

Cruz: Did you get to garden for yourself?

Burris: Yes. Toward the end of the thing, I was in the barracks with a Navy commander. He was our barracks commander; he was our leader. He didn't ever work. He just made the list and sent us out. To keep himself busy, in front of

the barracks and in back of the barracks, he built a nice, pretty little flower garden and kept it all nice, and it was his activity. Of course, he didn't get to eat the noon meal, either. He sat down there one "Frunday." We didn't get off on Sunday; we got off on Friday--a day off on Friday. So we called it "Frunday." I was sitting out there, and he was admiring his garden, and he said, "Burris, don't you think that's a pretty little flower garden I've got here and in back." I said, "Yeah, but you can't eat it." (laughter) So he tore up his flower gardens and divided that little land among the rest of us. I think my little plot was about the same as the others, and maybe was two-feet square--this little, tiny patch.

I planted maybe five or six okra plants there, and they grew pretty fast. But you couldn't let them get up to a decent size to eat because somebody would steal them, so you had to just beat somebody to them, you know. They wouldn't steal them when they was like that, you know, just barely ripe, but when they got up to about that long (gesture), they were getting dangerous. So you'd eat them--just get them. Even then they probably stole some from me. Of course, while we were gone on working parties, the barracks commander would kind of watch it for us. There wasn't any stealing then to speak of because he'd catch them. But at night, when we were sleeping--you got to sleep some--

everyone of us--I think that's when they done it mostly. I grew nothing but okra, and it'd grow there year-round there. Eggplant probably will, too, I think. I'm not too sure about that. I didn't care much for eggplant. Okra seemed like it would grow faster, so I just went with the okra.

Cruz: Well, did the men sneak food when they were working there on the farm and whatever?

Burris: Yes.

Cruz: What kinds of food?

Burris: Well, every bit that they could get. They'd eat it right on the spot if they could, and then some of them tried to bring it in with them. And they were successful every way. The Japanese would smell your breath and get you on the onions. Several guys got good beatings for that. Then some people brought it into the camp, and if the Japanese caught it with you, they'd take it away from you, and you'd get a beating for it. So some people put it in their canteens. They'd put stuff in their canteens and bring it in like that, and I think the Japs caught on to that before too long. There was still stealing going on, and, like I was telling you, I think that that chaplain took the place of somebody on one of these beatings,I think. He ended up in the little chicken coop with about three other guys.

Cruz: This was Preston Taylor?

Burris: Well, yes. I don't know whether we should mention his name or not. If you can, I'd like for you to get in touch ...well, the thing is, I don't want to make him uncomfortable, *and I don't think I've got the right to do it, either. I* slipped up and told some people some other things about what he did, and I'm sure he wouldn't want those told. It was good stuff, too, about him. I'd appreciate it if you'd give him a call, and let me know, and then I'll tell you. I'll tell you it all just freely.

Cruz: Well, you talked about wood details and water details and working on the farm. Were there other kinds of work?

Burris: We worked on a farm; we worked building an airfield. It was just like a bunch of coolies. We dug the ground with the hoes, and we may have had some shovels, and we may not. We ended up putting the dirt in baskets. Two people would get on a basket and carry the dirt from a high place to a low place and dump it. You worked all day--just the most primitive-type work that you could imagine. They cut down a lot of ant hills, and generally there was that cobra snake inside of it along with about four or five different kinds of ants. Did I tell you about those ant hills?

Cruz: I don't think so.

Burris: Well, they grow big. They grow, oh, five or six feet high, and they have probably been there for hundreds of years--the

same ant hill. I think the ants build them high because they want to get out of the water. I showed you the pictures in my album, didn't I?

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: The water comes up on the big stilts of these houses, and it'll come right up to the bottom. They know how high the water gets in the worst cases, and they'll put their stilts that high. In the rainy season, they'll be sitting on the steps or in the doorway kicking the water with their feet. The only trouble with that is that they got all kinds of poisonous snakes swimming around in that water (chuckle). I don't know what happens to the pigs. I guess they put them in the house with them. I don't know. Of course, the chickens can get up into the trees, I guess. I just never thought to think about the pigs that was always running around underneath. It rains over there. Boy, I'll tell you, it really rains.

Cruz: What kinds of things were smuggled into camp?

Burris: Well, now there was a friend of mine, and as far as I know, he never did dip into this stuff; but some Filipino who gave out...a priest, I believe. He would come in with the commissary stuff, you know, to us. He'd bring in money--I think money--and maybe other special foods or something, and this was to be divided among the men of his squadron. They brought it to him, and he would pass it

out to the men. I don't think he ever touched a bit of it. So they did smuggle stuff in, but that was about as close as I got to it. I think it was mostly food or money to buy food out of the commissary or something like that. So I think he did a good job there. He must have been tempted to take part of the food, if that is what it was, because he was hungry, too.

Now this ol' boy, when we was out on the wood detail, he would get hold of some kind of bird or something--catch this bird--and take it and kill it and take it out there, and he'd get a hollow log. Then he'd fix it up so that one end was tight, and you know the old trick that got the rabbit. The animal or something that would come in there, and he'd get clear inside that log, and when he'd take the food in his mouth, this thing would shut the door behind him, see. So he would catch different kinds of small animals that way. He'd take the guts from one and take it out there and put it in the trap. Sometimes he wouldn't catch nothing for four or five days and that stuff that he was taking out there was smelling to high heaven--just rotten. You couldn't hardly...and he'd put it in his pockets, you know (chuckle). He'd stink to high heaven.

But nobody complained about it much. I know it was terrible. He smelled rotten--just like that stuff. Yet

everybody knew just what he was doing, and they couldn't complain. The guy had a right to get something to eat if he could do it in a legitimate manner. Nobody would holler about it. I don't remember anybody complaining, but I thought it smelled terrible.

One time I was working with him, and he got an iguana. That nice, big, ol' thick, heavy tail, you know, that big (gesture)...but it was the meanest-looking ol' lizard I ever saw. Boy, he had sharp teeth, and big ones, and a big mouth. The ol' boy was ready for it, anyway. He waited for these iguanas. He'd turn that thing up on its end, you know, that log. Then he had a stick or something, and he had a string or something on it--wire maybe or something--and he could get it around that thing's neck. He'd peek in there and get that wire on that thing and tighten it up, and then he'd lift it out of there and kill it and take it home. Then he'd set his trap again. Then he had fresh guts to put in the next one (chuckle). I never got to eat...he didn't ever give me any meat,and I didn't ask him for any of that. It was his. He was a busy boy like that.

Cruz: Did he share very much or...

Burris: No, I don't think he shared with anybody. It was his, and you didn't ask. Now when I was in the hospital section, there was one ol' boy who had a little can of white pepper.

I saw him putting that white pepper on his lugao, and I was eating that old tasteless, starchy soup. I asked him for a little bit of the pepper, and he'd put a little bit on my food. I didn't think how rude I was being, you know. Then the next meal I asked him for it again, and he'd put a little on there. About the third meal, he said, "No." He said, "Look, this is all I got. If I share it with you and everybody else around here, I won't have any for one or two meals." He said, "This is mine." He says, "I won't ask you for your stuff." He says, "This is mine. I'm not going to give you anymore." He said, "I'd like to, but when this is gone, I don't have any." I realized then that it was even wrong for me to even ask, so I never asked him again. Nor did I envy him again. I would have liked to have had some, but he was right. If I'd have had some, I'd have felt the same way.

Cruz: Did most of the men around you feel that way about it?

Burris: Yes. Some of them were a little slower in catching on than I was--and I was pretty slow--but I think he was right. I mean, it was his stuff, and when he run out, he wasn't going to have any. It didn't last too long even then, see. But he was nice enough to give it to me a couple of times, I think, maybe three. Then finally, he just shut it off, and I don't blame him a bit. I was sorry I'd even asked him for any. It was nice to eat something with flavor

in it.

Anyway, we worked...let me see...we worked on the farm; we worked on the airfield; we made paddle wheels or water wheels to walk on to lift the water from one level to another ...and that didn't last too long because it was kind of inefficient. You could put a hundred people with two five-gallon oil cans and carry water up to a higher place than that faster than you could with that stupid water wheel (chuckle). But we did walk on that. I did a little walking on that water wheel. You didn't have to go very fast; you just couldn't go very fast on it. You know, the bearings were kind of sloppy stuff. They weren't very good. I don't remember how we lifted the water. With tin cans or something, I guess. I don't know. I don't remember that. But I remember walking on it. I worked in the rice paddies. I planted the rice, and I massaged the rice paddy. I saw a little article here on the TV. I think it was last night--about the Chinese. Did you see it?

Cruz: Yes, I saw that.

Burris: And that's the way you worked--with your back bent all the time. It's a back-breaking job. You stand there in that water and stick that rice down below the water--little sprouts --and stick them down and plant them. Then when the weeds start growing up...now these people would stand up and do it, but I don't know whether it never occurred to us or

not, but the way we did it, we stood up and reached down in that mud and pushed down the roots with our hands to the bottom, you know, and then we just pushed that plant under the water. So whether you was weeding it or planting it or anything, you bent over. Your back was sore every day when you'd spend a day like that out there.

We moved houses, I mean, these grass shacks--great, big ones. What they do, they just nail big ol' boards across on the inside and stick them out the outside and take the floor out and put enough people on these boards to just pick it up and walk away with it. Then they'd have somebody up on top getting the wires out of the way and this kind of stuff, and we'd move them boogers.

I know the litters of food was heavy, especially the camotes. That's where I hurt my back. I was carrying a load of camotes with some other guys. I think there was about six or eight of us on this litter. They'd take heavy wood, and they'd tie this bamboo lattice work across there, and that thing was heavy enough right there without anything on it. Then you'd fill a bunch of camotes on top of that...I think a man's share was probably 150 to 200 pounds for about eight men--heavy boogers, boy. Heavy son-of-a-guns.

I know that I got under one, and I was with some people that was a little bit taller than me, and I was

having to reach up to get any load. I think I pushed up on it too hard, and my back snapped. I just dropped. I couldn't get under it no more then, so that ended me carrying litters for a little while. Then I started back again, but I was careful. I didn't push too hard against it after that because I didn't know how much weight I was...whether I was equal to them just touching it or what. So I pushed up against it, and it was too much. I got some vertebrae in there that's kind of bad, right in the pit of my back, and that's where it got me--right back in here. I don't know whether it bent me backwards or what, but it just kind of bent me, and I didn't have no strength in that for a few days. I think it probably pushed a disc or two or three out of place, and then finally I went back again. Unless it would give me some bad trouble, why, it was all right.

Then that happened to me again. The Japanese would make pins of wire--barbed wire pins--big ones, maybe a hundred feet in diameter--pretty big pins. They'd fix a gate that would open in, but it wouldn't open out. We had a couple of stakes, and they had weights pulling on it so it would pull it up tight, you know. The poor animals didn't have enough sense to pull. They tried to push to get out. They put a big ol' block of rock salt out in the middle, and that was enough. They'd catch these carabao, and then they'd shoot them and cut them up into quarters,

and then we carried them out to their trucks, and they took them off to their kitchen. I know my back gave way under that. They'd take a carabao, and they would mix a Holstein ...bring the Holstein and the carabao together. The animal that come out of that was not black like a carabao--or from a dark grey to a black--and it had spots on it like a Holstein. But instead of having a white background, it had a medium dark grey background, but definitely black spots are in that. That animal was bigger than a Holstein, and it was bigger than a carabao. It was a tremendous animal. Boy, I don't know. I think some of those bulls would get up to 4,000 pounds.

Cruz: Did you see many of these?

Burris: Yes. I saw two or three. They'd get big. Oh, they were big! This one we carried was tremendous, and there was only four of us on a quarter. Of course, it didn't have the guts in it. They threw the guts away right there...I think... no, they took the guts home. They took them home.

Cruz: You wouldn't want to try to milk one of those son-of-a-guns, would you?

Burris: Well, that's what they was trying to develop--milk, see. In the Philippines there was no fresh milk. You go west of the Hawaiian Islands, and there's no fresh milk out there. The Philippines doesn't have any fresh milk except that carabao milk, and they don't give much milk, and it's kind

of funny tasting. There's just no milk. Now you can get canned milk from the States. You could get that, or you could get powdered milk. In those days we had the cans called Klim--milk spelled backwards--and it was rich whole milk in powdered form. You'd mix water with that, and it wasn't bad, but it's not as good as fresh milk. Nothing is as good as fresh milk.

Anyway, that's what they were trying to develop, and I guess they had maybe $50,000 tied up in those experimental animals. They'd just turn them loose, and then we'd catch one, like I was telling you I did one time. It's a big animal. It's tremendous. Oh, boy! I'd never seen a cow as big as that. I think they were improving it better, but I don't think they ever got it...by the time that war was over, the Japanese probably killed them all. I know we killed every one that was in Bataan. Any kind of animal that was on Bataan was just out of luck. Somebody killed a boar, and that was the biggest pig I ever saw. Meanest looking pig. Great big teeth. Tough.

So everything that grows big in the Philippines is bad (chuckle), and everything that grows little is good. The people are little; the chickens are little; the monkeys are little. The lizards are big, and the snakes are big, and the flies are big. I never saw such big flies. There was a fly over there that, I'd say, is about twice the size

of our horsefly. Big ol' green things, black and green and shining, you know.

One of them...I was sitting out on the wood detail one time--just sitting there at noon and eating--and I didn't feel nothing on my knee. I don't know which leg it was on. Maybe it was this one (gesture). I looked down there, and there was one of them great, big ol' flies sitting there, and he was locked into my leg. He was sucking the blood like crazy. It got into a vein there and was drinking it, you know. Then I brushed him off, and he just died right there. He fell down dead. He was so full of that blood he just (chuckle)...I must have busted it someways, like a balloon too full of air or something. He just dropped dead. But the blood that came out of that knee! It just squirted out and was about the diameter of a pencil lead. It squirted out there, and I closed it up and held it a little while, and it stopped. But it was tremendous, and I didn't even feel him there. I didn't even know he was there. I had to look at him to see him there.

And the bees...tremendous bees in all colors. All striped and unstriped and all kinds of stuff. The honey they got is kind of bitter. It tastes sweet, but it's not like the honey we get around here at all (chuckle). I've seen the honey...I was on that wood detail again when

this big ol'...what do you call them?

Cruz: Hive.

Burris: This comb or hive was hanging down...it was as big as a fifty-five-gallon drum, and it was hanging down off a limb, and it had pulled the limb down until the bottom of this hive was on the ground. We worked at cutting logs around that area, and the Japanese had a little guard area around us. I was just in my G-string--was all I had--and I guess I had a pair of shoes at this time. I don't know whether I did or not. I think I did. That's all I had on, was a G-string, or maybe it was that...I might have had those little short pants on, too. I think that's generally what I was wearing, was short pants--with or without a G-string.

But anyway, they threw rocks into this beehive. Of course, that made the bees mad, and they come out swarming for blood. They just kind of circled around, and they'd see you, and they'd just get you like that, see (gesture)--just dive-bomb you--and they'd sting like a son-of-a-gun. I got stung about five or six times, and I tried to run under branches to scrape them off of me, you know, and I couldn't get out of that circle or I'd get shot (chuckle). It was a mess. The Japanese just died laughing at us. Then that circle of bees kept getting bigger and bigger, and it got the Japanese (chuckle), and they quit laughing

then. They were busy ducking the bees, too. A guy might have even made an escape there. I don't know.

Cruz: Who chunked that rock in that hive?

Burris: Some Japanese. Just to torment us, you know. Now on Bataan there was a soldier who told me...I don't whether it was in our group or not, but he said he knew how to rob a beehive. So they found one, and they let him do it. He didn't know how, and he got killed.

Cruz: My goodness.

Burris: The bees come out, and they just plunked on him and killed him. He probably didn't have any air to breathe. I don't know how he died for sure, but the bees...well, the bee stings was enough to kill him, I guess--hundreds and hundreds of them. If that wouldn't have killed him, well, he didn't have any air. So he got himself killed. But these people who say they know how to do something, they don't really always know. They seen somebody do it, and they don't really know what it's really all about.

But, anyway, the bees were big, and the ants were big, mean. Everything that's good grows small, like the chickens and the ducks and pigs. The pigs are little tiny things. Grown hogs are little tiny things, except the wild ones, like that boar I was telling you about. He was a big son-of-a-gun. I don't know how to describe it for sure. He was just big. He had a big head and big mouth and was

mean-looking and tough as a boot.

When the war was going on and I was with the 200th Coast Artillery, they got hold of a carabao, and they killed it. They put it out amongst all their batteries. No, they didn't. They had a central place, and we all went to eat there one night and had kind of a party. They gave us chili. It was a New Mexico antiaircraft unit and had mostly Mexicans, and they love that chili. There was plenty of wild chili around--them peppers, you know--hot peppers--and that was about the best chili I ever ate. I think the meat off of it was off the rump, that I had. It was tender meat and lots of meat, and it looked just like the chili we got at home. I know they must have improvised some way to make it taste that way. But it was delicious.

Before the war, down in Manila, I'd go get one of these sizzler steak places like we got here, you know--sizzling steak on a hot dish. They had that in the Philippines. When I went there, I always went and ate there. It was the best food that they could get in the Philippines, and it was every bit as good as something we'd have at home. So that carabao is good.

Now we ate horses real quick. Them horses were gone. We had a bunch of horses, and we took them with us--somebody took them with us--and they passed them out for food for us, and it was good. Horse meat has a stringy texture,

more stringy than that beef, but the flavor is...well, it's not the same, but it's good if you haven't eaten any.

I don't know what dog is. I never ate any dog, either. But any animal that got in that prison camp, well, he was gone--rats, dogs, cats. In fact, this one ol' boy was telling me that the Japanese had...I think it was a big ol' collie dog in their pen. I don't know how they got hold of it. He must have come close to the fence or something (chuckle).

Cruz: That was it.

Burris: Well. that group of people had dog that night. They still joke about it. One guy would come to us and say...maybe we were having a party, and he'd say, "This is good, but I'd sure like to have some dog. Wouldn't you like to have some dog? Wouldn't you like to have a big ol' collie dog up here?" They'd do that. I never got to eat any.

This one ol' boy asked, you know. He said, "What's that you're cooking there?" The guy said, "Dog." He said, "You know, I've never had any dog." He says, "I wonder what it tastes like? I'd kind of like to be able to go home and tell my family that I ate dog and tell them what it tasted like." Then this ol' boy said, "I'll tell you what." He says, "If you want to eat dog, you go catch your own and then eat it because you're not getting any of this." (laughter) But there wasn't any animals left

in camp. Boy, they went quick.

Cruz: Did you encounter many traders or dealers there in camp? People that were always swapping and trying to get ahead that way?

Burris: Well, yes, yes. There was people who had cigarettes, and they could trade for almost anything. Cigarettes was the basic exchange. If a guy had cigarettes, he could live almost as fat as them people that worked in the kitchen.

Cruz: So the kinds of trading you saw mostly was for food.

Burris: Was for food. Well, did I tell you I got some free cigarettes one time?

Cruz: Well, you told me about how you got your mess kit...

Burris: Mess kit.

Cruz: ...fixed up from those cigarettes.

Burris: For those three cigarettes, I just got a tremendous amount of material. I didn't get any food, but I did get some salt. I got a little salt. So those cigarettes was valuable. Now later on, when I was in Korea, it was kind of like a stock market, and I probably ought to tell you about that later. But there was some people trading, and since I didn't have anything to trade, I didn't do any trading.

Cruz: Did you ever see people use money or food to try to get off of work details?

Burris: No, I don't believe I did. I don't think they were given

a chance. Now there was some people with fairly higher rank who didn't want to go to his work, and some chaplains used their rank to stay off work. I mean, we're all reduced to just surviving, that's all. I'll put it this way. Hardly anybody can go through an experience like that and come out of that saying that they can really hold their head up.

Cruz: Did you encounter many people that were concerned with the general welfare, so to say?

Burris: No. Everybody was concerned about themselves. I got a feeling that almost anybody...I don't know. I don't really know, but I got a feeling that surviving is such a strong thing that under those circumstances a man might try to do his own mother out of something. If she was dying and starving like he was, he'd get it almost any way he could if he could get away with it. Now it's kind of an unwritten law that the guys that got caught got punished if they were stealing. I think that kind of helped a little. I don't think there was any law made. It just happened.

Cruz: What sort of punishment?

Burris: Well, they probably beat him up a little.

Cruz: Did you ever see or hear of this being done?

Burris: No, I didn't. I didn't. But I think it did go on. If you were caught, you were ostracized, and you took some punishment. They let people around you know it, and they

were punished.

Again, like, in Korea there was one colonel--I believe it was a colonel--yes, I think it was colonel--while we were out working on the farm away from the place, he would dig into other people's food and steal it and eat it. He got caught. Everybody really poured it on him. He wasn't beaten or anything but probably only because of his rank. He was turned in later on when we got home. He was turned in. So I don't know what happened to him there, but it was a pretty bad thing to do that.

Of course, everybody who thought they could get away with it might try. I didn't try it. However, I wasn't "goody-two-shoes," either. I took advantage of other people on one or two trades that I was able to make, and I'm not very proud of that. I don't remember what it was, but I think I got the best of them on the trade, and they were still willing to do it. I'm not very proud of that. It's a hard thing to go through something and be like that one...I feel like he may have been the only one in that whole camp...now there may have been more, but I feel like he was probably the only one that met the requirements of a preacher or reverend or whatever you call them--reverend, preacher. It just didn't get too bad for him. The harder it got, the more self-sacrificing he got.

Cruz: Is this Mr. Taylor that you're referring to?

Burris: Yes. He just seemed to be more self-sacrificing. It's amazing. I marvel at him, and I look down on the others, and yet I wasn't too different from the others. If I could have got out of work, I would have--because of my rank or something else. I won't say that. I was anxious to get that third meal, too.

Cruz: Was there much, as you could see, much military courtesy or discipline maintained?

Burris: Completely broken. Completely broke down. Absolutely, completely broken down. If you'd get mad at somebody, rank didn't matter a hill of beans if you fought them. If you got angry enough, the only resource you could go to would be fighting.

It was an enlisted man that...I had a bar of soap in Korea--a small bar of soap. I was trying to wash the blankets for people for cigarettes so I could get something valuable for myself. I probably shouldn't have been doing that, being an officer, but I did. I would guarantee that the lice would be out of the blanket, or it would be dead (chuckle). I was washing a guy's blankets. It was a beautiful...I think it was blue--a Navy blue blanket or Navy blanket. It was so filled with lice from that ship when he got off in Japan...he got off that ship in Japan. He was covering himself up, and he was just skin and bones, and he had cigarettes. I don't know where he got the

cigarettes, but he had cigarettes. I was washing his blankets, and I was guaranteeing...you know, I had a bottle, and I'd wash it with soap and water and run over it with a bottle to kill all the lice that I couldn't get off of it. They were just matted in there. I think I washed his blankets once. Maybe it was twice, but I think it was only once, and he died. He probably died within a week after we got in the...he was so far eaten up with these lice that he didn't know anything. He was gone. He was so far gone that he didn't try to fight them. He just lay there.

While I was washing his clothes, they called me away, that I needed to do something. The Japanese wanted me and some other people. The Americans got me to go help with this little job, so I had to leave my washing clothes in this little tub or wooden box that the Japanese had. So I took off with them, and when I came back, this enlisted man had taken my clothes and had threw them out, and he was washing his own clothes with my soap. I came to him, and I said something to him. I took his clothes out of there, and I said, "I'm sorry," and I put mine back in there; and I think I said something, like, "Don't you ever do that again--use my soap and throw my clothes out here and you take over and use the same water and the same soap and everything I had, and without my permission," or something

like that. He gave me some kind of a sassy answer, so I went to fighting him. Neither one of us had any strength. This was close to the time when we got off that ship. We didn't have any strength. I know everytime I swung at him I just fell on the ground. I missed him, and I'd fall on the ground.

Anyway, there was some pretty good fights. Now the guy in the kitchen in the Cabanatuan hospital section was a Jewish kid. I forget his name, but he was the kitchen chief. He was a second lieutenant, and he was running the kitchen. He was fat compared to us. There was some other guy that got riled up at him, so they started to square off and have a boxing match out there. This kid that was mad at him was a professional boxer, I think, but he was skin and bones. So actually they were about even.

Cruz: Not much sting in his punches?

Burris: Well, there wasn't much sting, and he could duck as good. His timing and everything was off, but he still gave that fat cook a pretty good fight. I'd say they broke about even. I think there was a major in charge of that barracks that I was in at that time, and he encouraged the fight. I guess he did it to get it out of their systems, and, also, it's the military thing to do. You just go ahead and encourage that, if that's what they want, and let one of

them win. So they fought until it was pretty obvious it was about a draw. They fought for quite a while there, and the Japanese gathered up by the fence and were looking at them, too. So he finally stopped it, and there wasn't any winner. So he finally stopped it. But at first he encouraged it and let them go. This guy from the kitchen was healthy enough to offset his knowledge of the fighting, so they fought pretty even.

Cruz: Did you see a fair number of fights there in Cabanatuan?

Burris: Yes, I saw several. Usually, the guy that was the strongest and the biggest and the healthiest would win. This was common knowledge. It was the only thing to do, and rank didn't matter. I may have told you this. I didn't see it, but this guy told me about it. He said that one of the majors in the building there--a little shack--with Colonel Beecher...he said that one of these majors and a private got to fighting. They were fighting right outside this little special building for high-ranking officers, and Colonel Beecher came out, and he grabbed that major, and he said, "What's the idea? Don't you know better than to fight with a private?" This ol' guy says, "Well, Colonel, I didn't mind it when he called me an s.o.b., but he called me an old s.o.b." (laughter) And that's what brought it on.

Oh, yes, about Colonel Beecher, he was getting the

liver and maybe the lungs and maybe the tongue and maybe even the brains--I don't know--and heart and the guts and stuff like that out of the carabao when the Japanese killed a carabao. They wouldn't eat the liver and all this other stuff. They thought it was bad. So Colonel Beecher...all that came through him first, and his little shack took out what they wanted, and they had nice little liver steaks and I don't know what all from this other stuff, and he let the guts and the stomach and the rest of it go on out to us. There was some food value in that, too.

Of course, by the time I got it...I never did get a piece of meat or even a piece of the gut or anything, but I did get some soup...now this is on the workers' side. It was my weed soup, and I got some that definitely had a little bit of oil, a little bit of grease or something, that I could taste the grease. Probably just barely, but I could taste it, and, boy, it tasted wonderful.

One thing, we all got self-conscious about vitamins. I don't believe there was a guy in that prison camp that didn't know all about vitamins, and it was pretty accurate because they'd read books about it and ask doctors about it. They knew which vitamin was for your eyes and which was for this and that and protein and all this stuff, you know.

Anyway, Colonel Beecher got to talk to...the Japanese

commander would talk to him, you know. Generally, if he wanted things to happen in our prison camp, he'd let us take care of them as much as possible. If he wanted more people out there working, why, Colonel Beecher would have to find some more people to go to work, you know. So what he did, Colonel Beecher was telling him how good that liver was, and the Japanese said, "No, that's bad. It's terrible looking stuff. We wouldn't touch it." The Japanese didn't eat that kind of food. Colonel Beecher just kept insisting. He said,"Here. Taste it. Here's some. Taste it. It's good. You don't know what you're missing." Finally, he got that guy to taste it, and the guy liked it, and Colonel Beecher didn't get no more liver (chuckle).

Cruz: Him and his big mouth.

Burris: Yes. Stupid, wasn't it?

Cruz: Yes, it was.

Burris: Now, I'm hollering a lot about Colonel Beecher--there's another guy. He did put himself in that group. Apparently, it was all right from the colonel for that major to give that speech about rank having its privileges, you know. They were going to see to it they got the best, and if there was any left in the commissary, well, they'd pass it out for the other people. They took all that meat and stuff off that carabao. We got the hoofs and the legs--cleaned-off legs--and if there was meat on it, it probably

disappeared in the pot or else the kitchen gang ate the meat.

Anyway, Colonel Beecher was on that boat I was on, and, again, he and his staff got the food first, and they took reasonable helpings for themselves, and then he'd give the rest to the rest of the ship. He did that. But during that night on the Oryoko Maru, he didn't shirk being a commander. He tried his best to quiet that bunch down. It was a madhouse in there. You don't know. All night long there was screaming and fighting and wrestling and writhing and beating each other up and cutting each other with razor blades on the neck and wrists and drinking *their blood. Some of them ate their own defecation. Some* of them, you know, defecated in their mess kit and ate it. Some of them would drink their own urine. They were crazy for water. They were just screaming for water. The Japanese yelled down there that if we didn't quiet down, they were going to shoot in there. Boy, that made it worse. Colonel Beecher tried to quiet them down. He got hoarse trying to quiet them down all night long. The Japanese did shoot down in there and kill some people, but it didn't help any; I mean, these guys were just completely out of their minds--most of them.

There was a few, like me and a few people around me, but if I'd have stayed under that cover that night, I'm sure I couldn't have made it. I'd been just spent--just

like a rag, you know, with no stiffness left in it at all. I was just spent, just drooped, no strength hardly to lift myself up, or my hand or anything else. I'd just be wore out, and it was a terrible struggle just to stay alive down there, I'm sure.

Now I got people back where I was leaning against the buklheads there. They'd come rolling and wrestling and hollering and crying and yelling and cussing and all that stuff. Two or three of them got on my legs, and I just threw my feet up and just put my feet on them and pushed them down a little bit farther down the line. I guess they kept going, so somebody else was doing the same thing. It was a madhouse. I can't describe it. There's no words to describe it.

Colonel Beecher sat on that ladder,and he tried to control them. I think there was maybe about four or five or six...I don't think there was ten people doing it, but I think there was at least four--probably somewhere in between--killing people to drink their blood. They went crazy for water--just absolutely nuts. He kept trying to quiet them down, and some ol' boy yelled, "How you like it, Beecher? You ain't gettin' no water, either. You're going to die like the rest of us," you know, and all this stuff. He couldn't control them. Nobody could control those men. The threat of death didn't even control them.

So he was the colonel, and he acted like a colonel, and he finally ordered those people to be killed. He says, "Whoever they are," he says, "kill them. If you don't kill them, they're not going to stop killing other people." He says, Kill them." He says, "Choke them to death; take your shoe off and beat them with your shoe till you kill them. But kill them." And they did. He'd hear them guys getting beat up, and there was big noises,you know, and finally all that blood-sucking quit because they killed them. That was on the colonel's orders.

But I think he saved more people than he got killed. Those people were terrible. He also kept control of those on these other ships. So he did not shirk his position as a commander, and he took some beatings, too. When people stole rice, he got some trouble, too. I don't know whether he got in trouble for that, but there was things happening on there that we were doing, and he took his...

Cruz: He caught it, too.

Burris: ...he caught it, too. At least that's the way I remember it. I don't remember everything, just like I don't know why General Taylor...he would say the Lord's Prayer every night on that ship. He'd say the Lord's Prayer before everybody went to sleep. It just took two or three nights of that, and I got to looking for that every night. Boy,

I said that with...to myself, maybe out loud, but I think I said it to myself. I followed through on that, and I was really, I guess, begging for my life when I was saying the Lord's Prayer. So to me that's the most important prayer in the Bible. My dad told me, "If I ever get in a place where you're really afraid, and it doesn't look like you're going to make it, say the Twenty-third Psalm." Well, I knew a little bit about it, but I never did learn it.

Anyway, the Lord's Prayer, is what Taylor did, and, boy, it had a tremendous effect. Now he didn't start doing this until we was on the last boat, I believe. It began to get cold, and we were hungry--weren't getting hardly any thing to eat. There was several days after these bombings that they didn't give us nothing, nothing--no water, no nothing. We were just going downhill fast, and then we got up in those cold waters, and it was cold, and you didn't have any body heat. The people just died from freezing just right and left. I think we lost about twenty, thirty, forty a day or night. Now in the daytime, the sun would hit the side of ship--one side or the other--your bulkheads or what do you call these things here--ribs--which would stick out, so there was a gap where the floor was around. There was a gap there, and you could lean your back up against there, and there was hot air coming right up that

thing, and it just kept coming all day long. But when it got night, it was just the other way around. It got cold. Them places were cold air--freezing.

Then the decks got ice on them,and the ropes got ice on them. I used to go out on that deck to go to a box they had slung over the front end of that ship, and it would be just swinging back and forth. The deck was full of ice, and I was barefooted--I had lost my shoes again--and I'd climb over to that box and just barely make it in that thing. The box would swing away from the ship right about the time I was getting in, you know, and I didn't know whether I was going to drop into the "drink" or not. Then I got in the box, and I'd sit there and take my britches down and look down under there and look at that water go by, you know, and it looked cold. I thought, "Well, if I fall in, the first thing I'll do is just take the biggest drink of water I can and just try to drown myself right there." Even if they would stop and pick me up, I would probably die, anyway. And they probably wouldn't even bother with me.

Anyway, you felt those things like that, so, again, Taylor...oh, I asked him later on when I met him in town here--it's been several years now--I asked him why he quit saying that Lord's Prayer. After a few days, why, somebody else took over and said the Lord's Prayer, and he never did say it no more. I come to find out--I think he told me--

he said he was wounded in that Oryoku Maru. He was in that back hold, and they got a direct hit back there from a bomb. There was quite a few people in that hold, and more people died in that hold than any other. I believe *it was probably the most crowded.*

Then we were so packed in all the holds that people died from suffocation the first night, before we ever got bombed. So we were packed in there tight. I think, again, more people died in that aft hold from suffocation than any other hold.

Cruz: Well, back to...

Burris: We got away from Cabanatuan, didn't we?

Cruz: Yes, a little bit.

Burris: Let's backtrack to Cabanatuan.

Cruz: Back at Cabanatuan, were there--in your experience--like, Jap lovers or chronic boot-lickers or informers that were around?

Burris: No. There was people who traded with the Japs. I didn't have nothing to trade with them. I didn't have anything that they wanted. Even if I had've, I don't know whether I would have traded with them or not because it was dangerous to trade with them. Some of these guys would go outside the fence to trade with the guard. If a Japanese officer came up there and found them in that situation, that guard wouldn't admit they were trading. He'd say, "No!

No! This man got out here!" And he was taken away and killed. So it didn't pay to be friendly with the Japanese for you to stick your neck out that far.

They shot one guy in the prison camp who was not even attempting to go. He had his back to the fence when they shot him, but he was close to the fence. He had a garden out there close to the fence, and he was picking up something from it, and they shot him in the back.

It just didn't pay to get too friendly with them Japanese because they'll turn on you. They wouldn't take no blame. I think they was told to not have anything to do with us--socially or trading or anything. They'd get beat up pretty good. The Japanese officers--I guess right on down the line--would make the lower rank stand at attention while he beat him up--just hit him in the face over and over and over. So they didn't like that, either. If they could blame it on somebody else, they'd go ahead and do it.

Cruz: Did you suffer from many beatings at the camp?

Burris: I had quite a few of them. Most of the time I was able to act like I was hurt worse than I was (chuckle), and many times--I'd say many times--I would slip it. If they was hitting me on the back, just as it got there and I could see it, you know, I'd kind of lean forward just a little bit, and he'd come down across my back instead of

whamming right into me. But sometimes I took them right on my back, too. I avoided taking them on my head. It seemed like they were content to hit us mostly on the back.

Cruz: Why did you receive these beatings?

Burris: Well, sometimes for no reason, and sometimes I was thumbing my nose at them, so to speak. One time we was carrying water. We were supposed to carry water that day and water the plants one by one. This is on the farm. I got at the head of the line, and I got my bucket and went off there, you know. Then when everybody got a bucket, there was some more buckets left over, so they made the people in the front of the line take two buckets. I had to take two buckets. So I would go to this stream and fill them buckets half-full, and I'd go back with half-full buckets. I made several trips that day, just taking half a bucket on each one, but I was carrying as much as a full bucket of these others, you know.

Finally, this Japanese--I guess he had been watching me--came up there, and he saw me turn around, and I had half a bucket. He stopped me. He says, "You get on back there and fill them up." It mostly was sign language. I don't know what he said. He was talking in Japanese, but mostly it was in sign language. He made it plain that he wanted me to fill those buckets up. I set them down, and I said, "No." He said, "Fill them all the way up."

I said, "Me?" And, oh, he let out a scream (laughter). He had this little ol' thing. It looked like a croquet mallet, but the head wasn't as big. The handle was about the same size, I think, but the head was, oh, about half the size of a croquet mallet. I had on a pith helmet. That was one of the things I got for my cigarettes. He came down, and he whacked me on the head with that, and I just turned around and walked on with my half-buckets. He was right behind me. He whacked me on the head. The first time he just knocked the helmet down, you know. The second time it hurt. He hit me five or six times, boy, and I was getting a real bad headache.

I just turned slowly around, and he kept right after me; and I went back to where we picked up that water, and I filled them full. He hit me until I filled them full. I tell you, I had a headache then, and I don't know how long that lasted. But my head hurt a long time. You take somebody hitting you in the head with a little hammer like that...it's wooden...but he came down...

Cruz: I'll bet.

Burris: ...a good lick on my head. The only thing was that pith helmet, and after that first lick, why, there was no cushion in it--hardly any.

Then you didn't have to do anything. You could just be out of line or trying to find a place in line, and they

wanted the line already made up. They'd beat you for that. Sometimes I couldn't figure out why they was beating people. They just came running and screaming and would scare them. Several of these guys would get so scared that they'd let loose, you know, urine on the ground. They just couldn't hold it--just like a dog that's been scared half to death. They always had to come screaming and waving their arms and waving a club and just harass you. Sometimes they'd leave you alone after that. Sometimes they'd just beat the tar out of you, and you don't know what you did. Probably you wasn't doing nothing.

One time I went with one Japanese...he wanted one guy, and I caught it. Somebody pointed me out, and I caught it, and I had to go with him. He took me way off down by some grass shacks there, and he had a bunch of electrical wire--just a whole bunch of it. It must have been pretty good-size copper wire, I think. It was heavy. It had insulation on it, and it was heavy wire. I judge maybe it was ten gauge, or it might have even been eight. I don't know. I think it was about ten gauge wire. By the time you get some ten gauge wire with insulation and you got several hundred feet of it to roll up...I don't know if it was that long or not right now. It may have been only fifty feet, but it was a lot of wire.

Anyway, I started rolling this up. He indicated he

wanted me to roll it up, and I started rolling it up. He had a hoe handle without the metal part. It had been sawed off, so it was about the length of a pickax handle and almost as big as a pickax at the bottom end. Not quite, but almost.

I didn't see that one coming. I was busy rolling that wire, and he hit me right in the back of the head with that thing. He just knocked me right over that wire and knocked me out. I don't think I was out very long. Maybe a few seconds...ten seconds maybe...twelve...something like that. It wasn't very long.

Then I got up, and I indicated, you know, "What did you hit me for?" He indicated that he wanted me to start that roll smaller than I had it started (chuckle). Well, he was right, see. By the time I got down to the end of the wire it was unhandy to handle then. I couldn't hardly handle it then. Just barely. If I'd have kept going, I'd have to start it over. He was right, but he had a rough way of getting his point across (chuckle). That was one time that I'd say he was right. Well, he might have been right for that water, too.

Now sometimes I'd go out there, and I'd work hard all day. I just felt like working, and it's better to work and not be harassed so much. Then some days I'd just do nothing. I'd do less than nothing. I'd undo what I'd done.

If they'd catch me at it, I caught a beating. I caught a beating one time like that just before we started coming in. I don't know why they done it, but I caught a beating. He beat on me, and I just kept talking to the guy right next to me while he was beating on me. I kind of ducked a little bit, you know, but I didn't want to make it too obvious. Just a hair, you know. I'd keep on talking (chuckle).

Cruz: What was he hitting you with?

Burris: A long hoe handle, but it wasn't sawed off. He had to kind of catch it in the middle and try to hit me with one end of it, you know, and then the other end of the stick kind of got in his way, too. But it was a pretty good beating. He hit me about ten or twelve times right across the back. He didn't knock me down or nothing. It wasn't bad enough to knock me down like that guy on the wire detail. If you see something coming, you can just kind of give a little bit, and it don't hurt so much. Finally, he gave up on me, and I never did quit talking to this guy.

Just every once in a while--I guess I got dumb or something--I'd kind of snub my nose at them. I wouldn't work. I'd do it right in front of them. They'd tell us not to do something, and I'd go do it. Generally, I caught a beating. One time I almost got killed that way. A guy got his gun going. He put a bullet in the chamber, and he was getting ready to shoot me, you know, and a friend of

mine said, "Burris, you better watch out! He's gettin' ready to shoot you!" I looked around there, and I got straightened up. I got out of what I was doing wrong, and I got with it. He wasn't in too mean a mood toward us, or he would've killed me.

Cruz: What brought that on?

Burris: Well, I was doing something I wasn't supposed to do. I think I was walking across the stuff instead of going around it or something. I don't know. Sometimes I'd get out there and work all day long--hard as all booger. But generally, when I worked that way, they'd see me working hard, and they wouldn't give me too much trouble. Then I'd get ashamed of what I did for them, and (chuckle) I'd try to undo it, see--do something deliberately. The next day I might just plant as many weeds as I pulled. I did that often. I did that real often.

Cruz: Plant weeds?

Burris: Plant weeds. Pull them and then put them back in the ground. When he'd be behind me, I'd be pulling them; when he'd go down the line away from me, I'd start planting them again. You could see that line just bulge out as he walked around. I wasn't the only one, you know. Generally, I was the last one to catch on to what to do, and then I'd do it. I wouldn't even think of it. When he'd be here (gesture), this line would be pulling weeds, you know, and the bulge would be

there (gesture). As he came down, there'd be a bulge there. Then right behind him it was closing--right back where it started.

Cruz: This was common to undo the work that had just been done?

Burris: Yes, yes. Especially after we found out we wasn't getting anymore food than we was getting before--when we had that garden.

Cruz: And you'd say productivity really declined when that occurred?

Burris: Yes. Well, what they did, they gave it out to their own troops or maybe sold it. I don't know. We had enough food to eat well and still let them have plenty of food for someplace else. I don't know how many hundreds of acres...I just don't know the size of that farm, but we cleared an awful lot of land, and we built roads up.

I walked along that farm road one day, and I saw this fish get out of the water on one side, go and wriggle across the road, get in the ditch on the other side in the water. I've been told that there's fish that walked on land, but I didn't believe it. Some fish, they said, would climb trees and get up above a tree and catch insects up there like a frog, and I didn't believe that. I never did see that, but I did see that walking fish.

Before the war started, there was people running around whapping the ground, you know, and it wasn't even the rainy season. They were just whapping the ground. It was maybe

close to the end of it. The ground was still wet, but it wasn't water there. The water had all gone to these rice paddies. They'd be chasing them fish around and hitting them with sticks and then taking them off and eating them. I didn't see the fish, but that's what people told me what they were doing. That's the way they was catching fish.

Cruz: Are they catfish?

Burris: Well, they looked like catfish.

Cruz: There is a walking catfish.

Burris: They looked like catfish to me. In fact, the one I saw cross the road looked just exactly like a catfish. They say they can get down in the ground in that mud and stay there without dying the whole dry season. Then when it gets wet, they start moving around.

Cruz: Did you ever get to eat one of those critters?

Burris: No. No, I didn't get to.

Cruz: Did you witness torture at Cabanatuan?

Burris: Yes. I only witnessed torture once. There was a guy that got outside the fence--crawled under the fence. He was hungry, and he crawled outside the fence and didn't get caught. Instead of running off--he didn't know where to go--he went out to eat out of the garden. So he'd go out there and eat. That first night I imagine he gorged himself pretty good. I don't know what we had then. It

must have been the dry season because we had the haystacks sitting around everyplace. Then in the daytime, he'd get in a haystack and stay there. Then at night he'd go out and eat and come back in. He was gone about three or four nights, I think, and then he sneezed...I think somebody told me he sneezed while the guards were around there --in that haystack--and they caught him.

They took him out there and tied him to a stake. He had a little room to move around that stake. It was a short rope. I don't think it was more than about two or three feet long, something like that. He could move around a little bit on that stake, and it was probably stuck in the ground. He could move around a little bit right in the middle of that. They made a big circle around him, and they went around him singing their stupid songs--off-key songs--and then they'd scream and yell and wave clubs and throw rocks at him. Then every once in a while some ol' boy would take turns going in and kicking him or hitting him with a club or rifle. They spent all day killing that kid. He wasn't really trying to get away. When his body was brought back in and given to Colonel Beecher, why, they say there wasn't a bone in his body that wasn't broken in several places, and he was just a pulp. They spent the whole day at it--right there in front of us, you know, where we could stand there and look

at it. It'd just make you sick. They're just mean people --unless they've changed. But in them days, they were mean. I saw one of them beat a horse for a whole day. He spent a whole day beating a horse. Can you imagine spending your whole day just beating on a horse?

Cruz: No.

Burris: Dumb animal? I don't know what the horse did or wouldn't do to suit him, but he was like that.

One guy went out on one of these details...I kind of think it was on the airport detail, but it might not have been because we cut down a lot of ant hills on that farm. Anyway, the guy would catch these cobra snakes out of these ant hills, and he'd hold him up by the head, and another Japanese would slit his tail at the bottom end; and them two Japanese would just skin that snake alive. Then they'd just laugh--just a big ol' laugh. God, they thought that was great.

Cruz: That was a good joke, huh?

Burris: Yes.

Cruz: Boy, a strange sense of humor.

Burris: Yes. I saw one of them...he killed himself right in front of me. A Japanese killed himself. I was sitting on the workers' side right next to that little building that I had--that little grass shack that I had--which was right next to the fence. There was a small road there, and then

there was the Japanese. His building was made out of wood. It might have had a grass top, but it was a wood building, I believe. I could see in this square opening. This Japanese would take a two-headed ax, and, boy, we had them things sharpened like a razor.

I could <u>really</u> use an ax in spite of my weak condition. I could hit an ax right where I wanted it to--right on the money. We'd see how many trees we could knock down with one tree. You know, we'd line up these trees and make a small notch in them, and then we'd go to the bigger tree and make it fall so that it would knock all these trees down at once, see. I knew how to make a tree fall and everything. I was pretty good with that ax.

Then we carried wood out of there as big as we could carry. It was bigger than we could lift, but we could still carry it. They'd take two guys to lift the log up on you--on your shoulders--and you'd walk out of there with that thing and put it in a truck. You might walk down a hill someplace or up a hill where the trucks were, and you'd fill them up like that. Then the trucks would take that load in and come back, and by that time we had some more, and we'd fill them up again. I got pretty good with that.

In fact, I had a chance to escape there--maybe. One day I went out to eat--it was time to eat--and I left my

mess kit out where I was cutting trees. I walked in, and I got clear into that eating area before I realized I didn't have my mess kit with me. So I asked this commander --I went up to him and bowed--and asked him if I could go back to that area and pick up my mess kit. He said, "Yes." He got a soldier to go with me. I think what they did, during this noon hour, all these Japanese guards came in and made a little circle around where we were eating.

See, I got outside that circle--I think. Now I don't know. He may have had some people out there that I wasn't aware of. Anyway, I went over there and got...there was kind of a clearing where we had been cutting wood in that area, and I walked past this tree and started to pick up my mess kit, and I saw my ax laying on the ground. I didn't even take care of my ax. I went over, and I picked up the ax, and I had this mess kit in this left hand and this ax in the other. I just kept walking up there, and this Japanese was standing there with his rifle on the ground like he was in a parade stance, you know.

As I approached him, I realized I could whap him with that ax and probably kill him without him ever making a noise. Then I could take his gun and his bullets and high-tail it. I could probably have thirty minutes before they was ever aware that something was up. I figured I had maybe a good chance of getting away.

Then I thought, "What am I gonna do? I'm gonna miss my noon meal and my evening meal and tomorrow's meal." I wouldn't have been able to trust nobody. If I got away, I wouldn't have been able to...I didn't know who to trust. Some Filipinos would help you, but when the chips were down, they'd give you back. If you escaped and got back, you'd had it, and generally it was by torture.

Cruz: You didn't know any of those languages there?

Burris: No, I didn't. I should've learned that Tagalog. I sure should have learned that.

Cruz: That might have been tough, not knowing the language.

Burris: Oh, it came in handy to a friend of mine. Coming off the march, he was sick with malaria or something, I think, and kind of delirious. He was hot, and he couldn't hardly walk for malaria. He stopped at a little bridge that had a lot of reeds and tall grass in it, and he just kind of rolled off into those weeds. Then later on, when the group he was marching with went on by him...for a period of time, he was there probably by himself, and so he went up on one of those Marivales or Bataan mountains. He had made an effort to learn Tagalog. He knew Tagalog a little bit.

He said he got with some Filipinos, and they helped him and fed him and took care of him. Then he joined the guerrilla group. He said all they did was get up there and march and give commands--just a bunch of foolishness (chuckle).

He says he didn't stay long with that bunch. They never did do nothing, so he moved back and wandered around all over the island. I guess he went from the top to the bottom of Luzon (chuckle). He was gone about a year.

They captured him about a year after we'd...maybe a little over a year. The Japanese was coming down the road, and there was no way for him to escape. He was with these Filipinos, and he couldn't escape. The Japanese was too close. All of a sudden the Filipinos turned him in. They grabbed him and turned him in. He says he don't blame them a bit. That's the only way they could get out of it.

Since he hadn't been captured yet, they let him live. They brought him into our camp, and I met him. I got a picture of him. They took a picture of him, and it's in that book that I got, Of Rice and Men. There's a picture of him in there, and that's probably the reason that they took that picture.

I've wandered all over here. Do you got anymore questions about Cabantuan?

Cruz: I was just wondering...did you get much news from the outside there? Did you get much news from the outside there about what was happening in the war?

Burris: Yes, we did but we didn't believe it. The reason we didn't believe it is that we got a bunch of horse manure; I mean, it was just rumors. Every night somebody'd come around and

pass out the new rumors they had. Some of them were out of this world, I'll tell you, just crazy rumors. Yet, we were so desperate that we'd believe a lot of them rumors, and then they actually told us what had happened, well, we didn't believe it a bit because we didn't see any sign of it. Actually, as I look back at it, I don't remember exactly when different islands were taken and how close they were to us, but some was actually the truth. After the war was over, I found out we had a radio in camp. They kept it quiet.

In fact, they had one radio in this camp...this guy I was telling you about lives in this town. He kept that pump, and he said he had a little radio in a drawer that he could close. The Japanese never bothered that drawer, and he had it sitting right in there. He said whenever the Japanese come, he'd just close the drawer. He'd turn it off and close the drawer.

Cruz: So you feel that you did hear valid news during the time that you were a POW.

Burris: Yes. It was in the form of rumors. In fact, we had a daily round. They'd throw in some good stuff, and most of the time we didn't even know the names or where they were fighting--what island it was on. It didn't mean nothing to us, that they took this island or something. It was just another rumor, see. I don't know how a man can go

two or three years and not tell somebody, but these guys kept it a secret. They passed the news out in such a way that it was ridiculous.

Cruz: The radio?

Burris: Well, they mixed it in with so much other stuff, and then it was names of places we didn't know--we weren't that good on history and geography--so we just didn't believe it. Like, Henry Ford was going to give each one of us an automobile when we got home--free automobile. Oh, it was crazy. I can't think of them, but people wanted to believe that one so bad that they actually sold those cars in camp.

Cruz: That's what they then used for trading? The car?

Burris: Well, the guy would say, "I'll sell you my Ford, if I get it, if you'll give me a sack of beans." They'd get some paper, and they'd write a legal document (laughter) and transfer this car...

Cruz: Trade that car for some beans.

Burris: ...for maybe half a canteen cup of mango beans or something like that, or corn or something. People would sell them and hang on to those legal documents. They didn't really believe it, but it might be so, you know. They'd have three or four cars (chuckle).

Cruz: Did you ever see camp band?

Burris: Oh, wait a minute. I never did tell you about this guy who committed suicide. He hit himself in his head with this ax.

Cruz: Oh, the Japanese.

Burris: Yes. He screamed and then he hit himself again, and he screamed again. They finally took him off, and he was still screaming bloody murder. Boy, he had hit himself...chopped his head to pieces.

Cruz: Trying to commit suicide with an ax?

Burris: But he did. He did. Somebody said he died, or maybe he killed himself before they got to him. I don't remember. It seems to me they took him off, but I don't know if that was before he died or after he died.

Cruz: You know, the Japanese are big on that suicide.

Burris: Yes, yes. They did it. They do it. There's one more thing. Just before I went for the...I think it was September. We was sitting there eating our noon meal out on the wood detail--out in the mountains there--and a Japanese airplane came low over the trees--right across our thing--and right after him another airplane was diving at him. There was machine gun bullets going from both planes. Then this plane turned, and I saw the side markings on it, and it looked like a lightening bolt--like a jiggered, you know, like you'd draw lightening. It looked like that. It was white, and he had almost a dark grey airplane, and on the side of it and on his wings he had the same markings--like lightening. I just got a glance at him. He turned and flew away--out of sight.

Then he turned around, and he came back, and there was some more shooting. Then there was a big explosion, and a little while later, the smoke came up above the trees where we could see it. It was in the direction of our prison camp. The Japanese guard said, "Japanese practice." But that wasn't no practice; that was the real thing. That's when they were, I think, coming into Leyte or getting ready to come in or something.

When we went out that morning--on the truck--we saw all these planes go across, and in the front lines were "peashooters." They used to make in these S-curves in order to go slow enough for the bombers. They flew over us, and there must have been, oh, eighty, maybe a hundred, airplanes--lots of airplanes up there. They flew in formations and in groups of six, and it looked just like our formations.

So this guy says, "What do you think about that? Who do you think they are?" I said, "Well, I don't know." I said, "They sure fly like Americans." They were so far out that all you could see was airplanes. You couldn't see no insignia. I said, "I don't know, but they sure fly like ours." He said, "Do you think that's them?" I said, "I don't know. I just don't know. It sure looks like the way we fly, though."

Anyway, that guy shot that airplane down on the farm.

That airplane came down on the farm. Then he turned and buzzed that camp, I think, two or three times.

Cruz: I'll be darned.

Burris: He buzzed the camp. They got a good look at it, and they knew definitely it was American.

Cruz: They knew who had the victory.

Burris: Yes. So then he flew off, and when we got back in the camp that night, people told us that it was definitely an American airplane. They shot that guy down over the farm. That wasn't no practice. The Japanese did that so we wouldn't get too enthusiastic, you know, and give them trouble. Anyway, after that we didn't go on the farm no more; we didn't go on the wood detail no more. We stayed in that camp, and the Japs did the wood cutting and getting the food (chuckle). We didn't go out no more. We stayed in that camp steady from then on.

Cruz: I'll be darned. This would be about when?

Burris: This was in, I think, September of 1944. We stayed in camp, and along about the first of November, they lined us up and divided us into halves. I think the way they did it, they lined us up in several lines, and we'd start counting. Each line would count off, you know, one, two, three, four, five. Then the even number would go this way, and the odd number would go this way. In fact, they really divided us in half right there. Then Beecher and another colonel or

maybe a major were the leaders of the two groups. Then they said, "Right now they want half of us to go to Japan--go down to Bilibid, get on a ship, and go down to Japan-right now." They said, "A little while later, they're going to have the other group go. In order to see who goes first, we're going to draw straws."

The Jap commander had the two commanders meet, and he had a long straw and a short straw. They picked the straws out, and I don't know whether we had the long straw ...I was with Beecher's group. I don't know whether he had the long or short straw, but we got to stay, and the other group had to go. That ship was torpedoed and practically 100 percent of them were dead, see. Now that's how lucky I was. Then I happened to count off a number so it was even, and I got in this group, and, boy, that's a 50 percent chance of ending my life right then. Then these other two days, I should have lost my life both times. So I figured that maybe a person had about...myself, I had maybe one chance in twenty of not being killed by action as a POW or in our own group. So it was a pretty stinking chance.

Anyway, that's what happened. That's the last story on Bataan and all that. You started to say something, and I butted in there.

Cruz: Oh, I was just going to ask...did you see the camp band that

was there. I read about it.

Burris: Yes, yes, yes.

Cruz: How many times did you get to see them?

Burris: It was on the workers' side. I don't know when they started, but I think that lasted for all during one dry season--once a week. They had a band.

One time they put on an act. I kept complaining that they ought to try to put on an act. I don't know whether they listened to me or maybe some other people, but they finally put on an act. You know what they tried to put on? And they did a pretty good job of it. It was kind of a corny-type, and that way it made sense to us, you know.

It was The Drunkard. Do you remember The Drunkard? Have you ever seen it? "Put a nickel on a drum and help to save some poor drunken bum," you know. It was a musical. It's one of the most famous musicals ever ran. It ran, I think, in Los Angeles for years and years and years and years. The little baby would come out there begging his father to come home instead of going to the bar. Some big ol' guy had diapers on (chuckle), a baby hat on, you know, and he'd beg this guy to come home instead of drinking at the bar. Then his wife was begging him to come home. There was some girl there at the bar, and she was making eyes at him, you know. He had long underwear on and put big bulges of something in there, and they looked ridiculous,

you know. Then she'd come up and feel his muscles, say, "Whew!" (laughter). It was good, but that's the only one they was ever able to do. They tried two or three others, and they fell flat. I've wanted to see that Drunkard ever since I saw that. I found out that that was a real play back here. It was a comedy, too, even back here in Los Angeles, but it must have run for fifteen or twenty years.

Cruz: Did that give everyone a pretty good lift when getting to see this show?

Burris: Oh, you know it did, especially that play. And we liked listening to the music, too.

Ol' Taylor would be down there with his tub and baptizing people, too.

Cruz: Would he?

Burris: Yes, on a different day. Oh, I guess it was the same day. He'd be down there. People of different religions would go to their services. There was a lot of people who got religion, and they probably dropped it as soon as they got out of that tight fix (chuckle). They probably dropped it.

Cruz: Was there much preaching there?

Burris: Once a week they tried to give services for everybody. Now that "Frunday" off, see, was the same day we got to listen to the bands and all this. I think it was the same day, but maybe it was different times. He might have given the religious service first or at the end. Either way, I don't

know which. It seemed like both of them was pretty close. But people would stay for both--some people.

Cruz: The preachers got a pretty good draw?

Burris: Yes, the preachers did. Taylor would usually come to that stage and hold his there at that stage where he could baptize these people because he was strong on baptism. He was doing his business. He was always about his business, or else the Maker's business, which ever way you want to say. You got to admire a man like that.

Cruz: Did he baptize quite a few?

Burris: Oh, you know it. I don't know how good it took, but in those cases, some of those guys were actually worried about dying, see. Now I did, too. Like, on that ship I didn't see a way in the world that I could live through that. When I went down to get on the ship--I told you before, didn't I--I didn't see a way in the world that I could live through that. I knew I was going to die. I was bound to try not to, but I didn't see a way in the world. I told that ol' boy next to me...he says, "What do you make of that?" I said, "Well, we've had it." He says, "What do you mean, 'we've had it?'" I said, "Well, I know I could hit a ship this big. A target as big as this ship, I know I could hit it." I says, "If I could hit it, you know them Navy guys that's got more practice at dive-bombing than I have...which I hadn't had any, but I still feel I could

hit it."

I know I could. To this day I could've done it. I would have taken into account the fact that I had physics. If you let a bomb drop on you from a plane flying level, that bomb that's released from you is still going the same speed as that airplane is for a while. So that's its initial speed, and it will go out like this (gesture) and curve down. If it wasn't for air resistance, the airplanes would probably be past it if he's high enough. But if there was no air resistance, it'd be directly under that plane. It would stay under that plane, and they'd both fall. This would make the arch. So if I was diving, I would aim a little bit ahead of where I wanted to hit. It wouldn't be so much if you're going this way (gesture). The bomb would be fairly close, and I'd try to estimate just how much it would drop, and I'd shoot ahead of where I wanted to hit. I knew that.

But I still didn't expect those Navy pilots to miss, and they didn't. They missed and they hit, too. I think the reason they didn't sink that ship out in deep water was because they hit us with small bombs. They deliberately disabled that ship rather than sink it because the rest of the ships in that cargo, I think, was all sunk--period.

I think that if you ever want to get in touch with some guy to ask about that, it's Colonel Gary Anloff. He

sat up on that rung looking out through an opening in that cover some way or other. He may have had to lift it up to look out. He gave us kind of a running account of that. He'd tell us when an airplane was diving...of course, we knew that it was diving. As it got closer, the big guns went out, and the smaller guns would take over. Boy, it seemed to me like a million of them. It was a tremendous rattle of gunfire from that ship. We could also tell the bullets hitting the ship. We could hear that and see it. I didn't see it, but a bomb exploded right beside the ship, and stuff came through there. I told you about all that. I think they sunk all them ships right quick except ours. Then they'd fiddled with ours all day long. They lost maybe two or three airplanes fooling with it, too.

Cruz: What was it about that movie you said you were in? You said you carried a Springfield and...

Burris: I think so, but I'm not sure. I may not have nothing.

Cruz: What was that? A propaganda film?

Burris: Well, you know how we do in the war. Didn't we have a lot of military films during the wartime? If we had a chance to use POW's as the enemy, why, it would be nice to do. Well, they were taking the movies for home purposes--how they won the Philippines or something like that. They had us march...did I tell you about that on that tape?

Cruz: No, I don't think so.

Burris: Well, anyway, they gave some of us--maybe all of us--a rifle. I don't think it had a bayonet on it, and it certainly didn't have any bullets with it. We were told to kind of hold this stuff, you know, our rifles and come marching down. We may have even had an American flag. I'm not sure. We were to come marching down. They had a bunch of smoke pots around, and some of them, I think, were remote control, and they'd explode. We came down through that stuff, walking down kind of a smooth hill, and they had a track with a camera on it so it would come down with us, you know. In other words, you know how you can take a camera, and if someone goes away from you real quick, you know, it's ridiculous; but if you go with them, it looks more real. They had that.

I'll repeat it just in case you didn't get it on tape before. Some of these guys...again, I never had the brain work or the energy or whatever you want to take to think up these things that they would do. I'd usually see somebody else doing it, and I'd go along with it. That's the way it got me. But several ol' boys...I mean, it caught on real quick. Some guy did it, and then several did it. This ol' Japanese cameraman or director, whatever he was... I think he had a horn, even. He was probably the director, maybe. He thought they done just great.

Cruz: What were they doing?

Burris: Well, what they did, they'd get up and act like they were shot, and then they'd drop their rifle and go round and round; and they'd struggle up, and they'd go down some more. Finally, they dropped to the ground, and they'd writhe around on the ground and just before they'd finish off, they'd raise their feet up and give two or three kicks, you know.

Cruz: They'd ham up.

Burris: They really hammed it up good. It was ridiculous. Boy, that guy just thought that was great. He thought that was good actors: "You Americans are good actors." The only reason I went on that detail was because they promised us more and better food. And they did. They gave us more and better food, too. It was worth the trip.

Cruz: How long did that take?

Burris: I don't know. It seems like I was out there two days, something like that. More than one day, but I'm not sure. It may have been only one.

Cruz: Once again, Mr. Burris, I'd like to thank you for your time.

Oral History Collection

Charles Burris

Interviewer: Richard Cruz Date of Interview: May 31, 1985

Place of Interview: Hurst, Texas

Mr. Cruz: Mr. Burris, all in all, how long were you at Cabanatuan?

Mr. Burris: I was there...upon being captured to about 1944, except for the few months--or month or two--that I was at Camp O'Donnell.

Mr. Cruz: When was it that you all were taken to Bilibid Prison in Manila?

Mr. Burris: Did I tell you about them dividing us into two groups before?

Mr. Cruz: Well, go ahead and describe that.

Mr. Burris: Well, sometime, probably around the first of November, 1944, or it might have been a little later...I'm not sure of the date. It was a few days...it was some period of time before we went. Half the group went ahead of us, and then we went...we were the last group to go.

Mr. Cruz: That's November, 1944.

Mr. Burris: This is about November, 1944. But the way they did that, they lined us up in the compound there, and they made us count off. All the odd numbers were pushed over to one area, and all the even numbers were pushed off in the other area.

Up to this we didn't know what this was all about, although we had airplanes--American airplanes--flying over everyday. Some English and Dutch prisoners were brought in...I think it was Dutch...it seemed like it was Dutch. I know there was some British, and I believe there was some Dutch there, too, that were brought in after having been sunk in the China Sea probably someplace close to Iba. I think it was south of the Lingayan Gulf--south of there. Probably it was around Iba...oh, I can't think of half these things now. Anyway, they were brought in after their ship was sunk. I'd say maybe thirty or forty of them were brought in, so we knew the war was going on around us.

After being separated into two groups, then there was two leaders to come out. One was assigned to one group, and Colonel Beecher was assigned to this other group. I happened to be in Colonel Beecher's group.

Cruz: You started numbering off even-odd?

Burris: Yes. I don't even remember whether I was even or odd, but they made two groups. Then one leader took one group, and one leader took another group. Then they drew straws to see which one would leave camp first. One group was going to leave almost immediately--the next day, I think it was. It was pretty quick, anyway. I don't know how the straws came out except Colonel Beecher's group, which I was in, stayed, and the other people left. Then sometime later...

I don't know whether it was weeks or days or what, but it was probably less than a week. I won't swear to it. My memory is bad on this stuff. Anyway, then on Thanksgiving Day--either Thanksgiving Day or maybe the day after--then we were told we were to go. When we got down to Bilibid, the other group had gone. Probably they left just ahead of when we came down because as soon as they shipped those out, why, I think they told us to come down because they had room for us.

Cruz: How were you taken to Bilibid? How were you transported?

Burris: We were taken on a truck. Once or twice, it seemed to me, we had to hide under trees to keep out of sight of the American fighters and bombers. They were just all over the place.

Cruz: About how many were in your group at this point? Do you remember?

Burris: My memory says that my group was...I don't know. I get confused. I think there was either 1,867 or 1,687. According to this little booklet by Colonel Brown, it was closer to 1,619. I believe he said 1,619. I think it was more than that.

Cruz: You were taken in a truck...

Burris: At least the first group. Now there's one thing about this. The first group left, and some people in my group somehow got to remain in Cabanatuan. They were supposedly too sick

to make the trip. Some of those guys, I knew, weren't any sicker than I was--not a bit. Maybe they were not as sick as I was, and they were going to stay. I didn't know how they managed that. Of course, I found out later that one guy was in cahoots with somebody with dysentery, and he had a stool sample from this guy analyzed by the medics--which must have been in on it--and he was classified as having dysentery. He couldn't make the trip.

Cruz: So due to complicity and certain arrangements, you think some men...

Burris: Yes, some people were smart enought to stay; I mean, they thought they were being smart, and I did, too, because I figured that whoever was in the Philippine Islands would be freed before somebody else in Japan. It turned out that this was true. They were actually freed before the fighting in the Philippines was over.

Cruz: You were aware of cases where this type of thing occurred.

Burris: Well, I knew those people did it, you know. If I'd have been smart enough, I'd have thought of it, too. I wasn't smart enough. It's not that it was a bad thing to do. It was the smart thing to do. Any way you could get out from being under the control of the Japanese was a smart thing to do, but you had to make sure you had to go because if you made a mess of it, you were finished. There's no doubt about that. Anyway, we left there about Thanksgiving Day.

It seems to me like we ate our Thanksgiving early, or maybe it was on Thanksgiving Day that we ate our Thanksgiving dinner and the next day we went. I'm not sure again. It might have been right on Thanksgiving Day that they sent us to Bilibid.

Cruz: You were taken in a truck convoy?

Burris: Taken in several trucks.

Cruz: And you say that a couple times you had to get out of the trucks because of American planes?

Burris: Well, I don't remember getting out of the trucks, but the trucks would hide under trees and stop...

Cruz: I see.

Burris: ...when airplanes was around. Also, we saw a lot of Japanese tanks and trucks and things that were strictly military around. I think I even saw...when we were stopped, there was one place where they were practicing fighting in the high weeds. The Japanese would jump up and run a few steps and scream and holler and then duck down in the grass again, you know, and they'd advance and hop up and hide. The Japanese, I think, fought offensively. They never thought much about defense. It seems to me like they fought offensively, and they were going to attack. Of course, I don't know what they would have done if somebody had set fire to that dry field (chuckle).

Cruz: So you were taken to Bilibid Prison. What did it look like

there? How would you describe the prison? How did it appear?

Burris: Well, it had no beds or anything like that. It was just bare walls and floor. I got a couple of pictures someplace. Did I show you those?

Cruz: I don't believe so.

Burris: The interior of Bilibid Prison? It was just bare, and it was...I don't know. It seems like it was concrete and cement blocks or some kind of rock or something. I don't remember exactly. But it looked like strong walls. It had high walls around it.

Cruz: What were the conditions there at Bilibid?

Burris: Well, it was about like it was in Cabanatuan. We didn't get enough to eat. I think we were back down to two meals a day.

Oh, by the way, I mentioned the Thanksgiving dinner we ate. Our cooks would save back food, you know, because sometimes we would be so short that we wouldn't hardly get anything to eat at all. They tried to hide the food from the Japanese and give it to us as we needed it. I think, for the group that was going to stay there, they kept back enough food for them to last maybe a week without any Japanese issue at all or something like that. They hoarded some food back, but that still left enough from their previous hoardings to give us...gosh, I think I got

maybe two small sweet potatoes, you know--two of them, maybe two. It wasn't in the form of sweet potatoes. It was chopped up and in a kind of a soup, but it was much more than I'd been used to eating--rice issue and the other stuff. It amounted to what was almost a real Thanksgiving dinner.

Cruz: You had some sweet potato soup and your rice issue.

Burris: And the sweet potatoes were in chunks. It wasn't an awful lot, but it was sure a lot more than we'd been eating. I think I was maintaining pretty much a weight, oh, of about eighty-five to ninety pounds. I think that was about as good as I ever did in prison camp. I just wasn't eating enough to get above that. The only thing we did have was that we had all the water we wanted. In Cabantuan it seems like we had all the water we wanted--all the time I was in Cabantuan. We didn't even get that in Camp O'Donnell.

We stayed in Bilibid until the 14th of December, and American planes would bomb and strafe something around Manila everyday--just day in and day out. They never put us on ships, so we figured that the Japanese ships were coming in; but if they were coming in, they were getting sunk quicker than they could put us on. We thought maybe we would be there when American troops rescued us, but that wasn't the case. On the 14th the American planes did not come back, and that afternoon--it seemed like it was

fairly late in the afternoon, but it was daylight--we were issued Japanese clothes. It was warm clothing because I guess they were going to treat us halfway decent and let us have warm clothing.

Cruz: Do you remember what you were issued specifically?

Burris: Oh, it was a Japanese army uniform--the pants and shirt, I think. I don't think I wore it. I think I put it into my little bag of garbage, and I wore my own stuff.

Cruz: What were your possessions at this point?

Burris: Well, I'd already traded those three cigarettes for, I think, two nice pairs of trousers and a couple of shirts. They were worn and used, but, boy, they weren't in too bad a shape. I don't remember them being holey or anything like that, and they weren't rotten. I had underclothes. I had undershorts. All this stuff I traded for cigarettes. I had a mess kit and mess kit knife, spoon, and fork as well as my canteen, which I had all the time. I had a few bottles and some strings, and I think I had a nail, something like that. It was just stuff that would hold stuff like...if I got hold of tobacco, I could put it in there and tie it up or something, you know. I didn't have any that I remember at that time, although in Bilibid we were allowed to buy half a package of tobacco for each man. Two men would get a package, and we'd divide it. So I ended up having tobacco to put in one of those containers.

I don't know whether it was a bottle or what.

When the bombing started...had you talked about the bombing on this tape before?

Cruz: No, we hadn't mentioned that.

Burris: Well, I'll just go on to that. So I had some tobacco... and I had lost weight at Bilibid. They didn't give us enough food. It was very meager. Although I wasn't worked, I still lost weight. I went down some.

Anyway, we all talked to each other, and we felt the Japanese would never get a ship in there to take us out because the American planes would just sink it. I even felt like we were going to be there.

But then one day--and I think it was the 14th of December--the airplanes did not come back. Sure enough, that afternoon they issued us some Japanese clothes, and we left Bilibid on foot. We marched down to Manila to the wharfs and got on this Oryoko Maru.

Cruz: During this march were there a lot of Filipinos out watching?

Burris: Man, Filipinos was lining the streets watching us.

Cruz: Were they able to pass anything, or were the Japanese watching fairly closely?

Burris: The Japanese were watching fairly close, but they probably passed something. I don't remember seeing any of them do it this time. On the Bataan march, they did and I saw them. They'd run out and give it to somebody and run back

in the crowd. This time I don't remember seeing them, but they were out there. I feel sure that some of them had access to two-way communications to MacArthur and our military. MacArthur and our military knew when they marched us down there and what ship we got on and all that stuff.

Cruz: How would you describe the feelings that you and some of the men had at this point as you were being marched down there? Did you feel that you might be liberated at some point soon, or was it more of a feeling of just hopelessness?

Burris: I know I had a feeling of hopelessness. It just didn't occur to me, even before I saw the ships...the Americans had sunk Japanese ships. They were just thick in the bay. But even before I got down to the bay, it was one of, oh, being resigned to die, that's all. We were going to go on a ship, and it was going to get sunk and all that. American airplanes were around there almost constantly. They had been around constantly except for that one day, and they weren't going to let any ships go out of there.

Cruz: If a person were to walk up to that bay, what would you see? Could you describe that scene?

Burris: Well, the buildings were mostly torn and bombed out pretty good, although it seemed to me there was one that wasn't too bad. It was fairly close to that ship I was on. But when you looked out across the bay, the ships that looked like they might have been tied up at a wharf were all

bombed on the front. The front end was down, and the back end was sticking out of the water. The front end had been blown off or something, and the back end was still sticking out of the water. The ships that were farther away from the wharf, that may have been in deep enough water to be moving, it was just the opposite around. The back end was bombed off, and the front end was sticking out of the water. So I thought at that time the thing for me to do when I got on there...I could see the ship that we were going to get on. The thing for me to do was try to get as near the middle of the ship as possible. I thought the superstructure was mostly there, and that would help us from bullets and bombs, too. If we were bombed at the wharf, why, if I was in the front end, it would be bad; and if I was in the back end a little later, it would be bad. So I should try to get in the front, and that's the way I looked at that. I thought about what I could do to the best of my ability.

Cruz: This was Oryoko Maru?

Burris: Yes, it was the Oryoko Maru, and it was a pretty good-looking ship. I believe there's more dead Japanese ashes that went on that ship than the American prisoners. The Japanese commander would salute every box of ashes that went on board, and they had specially dressed guys, it seemed like to me, with the arm bands on or something with special symbols on them, and they would carry these on board this

ship. A lot of the Japanese were already dead, and they were going to take their remains--I think it was ashes--back to Japan. They treated these ashes like the military should. They treated them with respect. They saluted every box that went on board.

Cruz: So you were taken to the forward hold of the ship. Was it the forward hold?

Burris: I was near the front end of this mess--this group of people--and they were brought to the forward hold. That eliminated me from going to the back end or the middle. But I could still go back toward the middle in what area there was. I could stay away from the very point and go back to the middle. But as soon as I started down that ladder into that hold...and there wasn't too many people ahead of me--maybe fifty...I don't know--something like that...and this ladder was at a fairly shallow angle, maybe thirty or sixty degrees or something like that. It was fairly shallow. It wasn't just a vertical ladder or anything. And it was big. I think it was maybe three feet wide and made out of heavy two-by-four lumber. It was a pretty sturdy ladder, except it was more like steps than a ladder. You could go down standing up without holding on with all fours. You could just go down. There was no rails, but you could still step up, you know. It was pretty steep that way, but you could still step up.

As soon as I got down there, all this thinking about going to the middle of the ship left me. I lost that plan that I formulated when I was walking down there, and I saw something else. I saw that opening--this big, ol' square opening. I don't know how big it was. Maybe it was twenty feet on the side or something like that. I'm not sure. I thought, "Well, the thing for me to do when they sink this ship...." See, I thought the ship was going to get sunk. It never occurred to me that it would not get sunk. So I figured, "When they sink this ship, the best place for me to be will be right there," because then when the water came in, I could just float up and come out that hole and swim away from that ship. I thought, "So that's where I should be." So that was my big mistake. I soon changed my mind on that because everybody else, I think, tried to do the same thing. I went down and stood down under that opening, about the middle, and they kept pushing people in there and pushing people in there: "Speedo! Speedo!" "Hurry!" They'd whack you on the back or the head with something to come down there. Pretty soon it began to get crowded down there. I was just tight between other people around me. Everybody was just squashing up into the middle. They just came down and pushed into the middle under this area. Before they even...well, they finished loading that front hold. I mean, they just kept coming.

It was packed just like sardines in there--under that opening. Now in the back...before I had seen one shelf back there to the back...and there may have been some shelves to the front of that opening, but I'm not sure. But, anyway, it was deep and dark back in there, and there was some posts holding the thing up that I could see, and then it was just black. You couldn't see back in there very far. I saw that.

Then they started putting people in the middle and in the aft hold, although I wasn't up there to see it. I think that's the way they did it--front, middle, and aft--but I'm not sure. Anyway, they stopped coming, but we still stayed there for a while.

Pretty soon that group was moving and twisting and pulling, and I had to go with them. I was just kind of lifted up off the floor and dropped down again. I ended up on the deck, on the floor. Then people started walking on me, stepping on me. So I struggled...I had enough of that real quick. I was almost exhausted there. Like I say, I wasn't going to last no time there. All I was going to do and all they were going to do was wear themselves out--just expending energy for nothing.

So I crawled out between their legs, and I went to aft. I don't know why, although I was just trying to find a way out. Then I saw this opening again, and all of a sudden

that place looked pretty good to me. That didn't look crowded back there (chuckle), but it was crowded back there. Anyway, I got back in there, and I thought I leaned against the bulkhead, you know, the wall across the ship there, which was the boundary of that hold. I thought I was leaning up against the bulkhead, but actually I had turned, and I leaned...I put my back against the side of the ship--right side of the ship. I didn't realize the directions or which way I turned, but I guess I crawled left, and I found a place back there, and it wasn't too awful crowded. I got my back up against that, and I leaned up there; and although I couldn't see this guy, I recognized him. He was infantry. I think he was an infantry captain or first lieutenant or something like that. I'd known him in prison camp, and I sat right down beside him with my back to the wall, and I was just determined to stay there. It got crowded back there. People someway or other kept coming back in there. Just a little while longer and I would never have made it back there. We were just packed in there, too, although we weren't packed as tight as we were under that opening.

Cruz: That hatch opening.

Burris: But I had my back against the wall, and my feet were straight out. There was a man this side of me and a man this side of me (gestures), and there was a man with his back right

up against my feet. Now were were that packed, but that was a considerable area. Now some of these people...we were so packed in there that I think some of these people died from suffocation before we even ate a meal. They were that tight. They were back in the hold someplace and were packed so tight that they didn't get enough air. Then when they covered the hatch over, there was no source of air to speak of. They kept that hatch covered except for a small opening, but that opening wasn't enough to satisfy those men, especially back in the back. When air would go back there, by the time it got back there to the people back there, there was no oxygen left in it.

Cruz: What was your food and water ration?

Burris: It was very small, but I think we had about, oh, two or three GI spoonsful of rice. It was well cooked, and it was rice. It wasn't soup. It wasn't lugao. It also had about a teaspoon of little tiny fins like minnows--even smaller than minnows--and they were oily. It may have been cooked or something in oil or something. There was a lot of oil on it. You could taste oil. Mixed with the rice, it was pretty good. There wasn't much of it. I think I got a third of a canteen cup of water or tea. I'm not sure. It tasted a little bit salty, so I think they put a little saltwater into it, too. But we could still hold it, you know. Pumped a little sea water into it, is what they did.

Anyway, I drank that tea or hot water and ate my rice. I thought it was delicious, but it wasn't much. It was very little. The next morning...I know that the last meal and the last water that I drank was that night while I was on board the Oryoko Maru. I drank no more water and ate nothing else. That was it.

Cruz: For how long?

Burris: Well, the next day we were bombed, of course, and the next night was a terrible night. It was like a madhouse in there--that night after the bombing. On the 15th they started bombing us. In the night of the 15th, it was a madhouse down there. Then on the next morning, on the 16th, I guess you'd say, we were allowed to get off the ship. We swam ashore in Subic Bay.

Cruz: Well, how did things go the first night in the hold?

Burris: The first night it was bad. People were screaming for air and fighting and struggling, and it was bad enough. They were hot and thirsty, and they wanted water. They had evidently drank their canteen of water real quick and, of course, whatever water they got from the Japanese.

Cruz: Did they bring buckets up and down so the men could get...

Burris: I don't think so. I think they put a few buckets down in there, but I never saw a bucket. It ended up with people just...well, one guy...I don't know whether the first night or the second night, but he had defecated in his mess kit

and ate it. Of course, I don't think he held that down very long. Another one urinated in his canteen, and he drank that. Now there might have been more than one. There might have been several to do that. You know, common sense would tell them that urine would just make it worse, and defecation is...golly, it would be as bad as brackish water --slimy water. You know, you can't hold that down. But people were thirsty, and it was hot.

Oh, the temperature was hot. It was way up there. I think I read where it was about 120 degrees, and I believe it. In that hold we were packed in there, and the body heat was there, and there were stinking and sweating people struggling with no air to speak of. You got thirsty. Almost everybody took their clothes off. I did. I took my clothes off. Everybody around me took their clothes off, and I did, too. Then somehow I lost my little bag of stuff, and I didn't have my clothes with me. All I had with me was my...I had a mess kit. I think I took my mess kit with me because it was tied to my body. So was my canteen. But all that other stuff--tobacco and stuff--was gone. I had a pipe, and it was gone. I kept my shoes with me, although I took them off and had tied them to me or something.

Cruz: Had these disappeared while you rested, or did you just happen to lose them someplace.

Burris: Right. I didn't lose my shoes until I was on the ground

outside the ship. Anyway, it was kind of a minor madhouse. People were fighting and struggling, and they wouldn't pay no attention to Colonel Beecher. He tried to calm them and make things better.

The Japanese may have shot in there several times, although they may not have. I don't remember. I know they shot in there the next day. I know that for sure because we were going crazy down there. I guess the noise was bothering the Japanese, and they tried to quiet us down with threats, and they finally ended up shooting down there and killing some of us.

Cruz: How would you describe the scene the second day?

Burris: Well, the second day everybody was afraid, that is, we started moving out from the dock. We had been fed. They had put food down there--buckets of food--and some water, probably about the same amount they did the night before. But that food and water never reached me because we were moving, and pretty soon the Japanese started shooting their 3-inch guns. They looked to me like 3-inch guns. It looked like about our 3-inch guns. I think there was two of them on the front. There was a gun deck up there on the front, and then one on the back end. I don't remember seeing a lot of other guns, but they must have had a "jillion" 20-millimeters and something like .50-calibers and something like .30-calibers all over that ship. They

told us when the guns began to shoot that it was Japanese practice. This ol' boy sitting next to me that I said I knew, he asked me what I thought, and I said, "That's not Japanese practice." I said, "That's American Navy planes or something." Anyway, he said, "What do you think's gonna happen?" I said, "Well, we've had it. They're gonna sink us. We've had it." He said, "How do you know?" I told him, "Well, I knew I could hit a target as big as a ship when I used to practice against small, little bulls-eyes. I knew I could hit it. Even though I didn't know much about bombing, I could drop a bomb and hit a ship." I said, "These Navy boys are gonna be a lot better than me." I said, "They've been used to it, and they'll do it." After that we never said another word to each other probably until we were on the next ship several days later.

Cruz: How long did this last?

Burris: Well, this lasted all day long. The bombing and strafing ...shortly after we finished our conversation, I think the both of us shut up because we expected to feel a bullet slam into us and finish us off. But I don't believe any .50-caliber machine gun bullets got down as low as that hold that we were in. There was one hold...it didn't go to the top deck, but there was this shelf in there. No bullets ever got down to where I was. I think most of them were stopped by then. It seemed like they attacked

from the rear, and then probably most of them stopped in the superstructure and the cabins where the Japanese civilians and Army personnel was located.

But the return fire at the American airplanes was just fantastic. It was just tremendous. There was just a whole ...I wouldn't say curtain. I'd just say a tremendous faucet of bullets and steel going up at these airplanes--just fantastic.

I think it was Colonel Gary Atloff--I think it was him --who climbed up to the top of that ladder--which must have taken some courage to do because the Japanese didn't want anybody on the ladder--and he would peek out from that hole someway or another. They must have been so busy fighting the American planes that they didn't catch him or something. They probably would have killed him otherwise. But he kept up a kind of a newscaster-type of thing, letting us know how things were going. I think my memory says that he told us that one bomb hit some ship, probably, I thought, a destroyer or something, and they just sunk it right quick. No trouble. Pretty soon all he was talking about was the airplanes hitting us. I just feel sure that they sunk every ship in that convoy, and I don't know how many there were. According to this guy on the ladder, I think it was probably four or five. I don't know whether he told us that or what because I didn't ever see them.

We had some near misses in the front hold, and the back hold received a direct hit. Everybody was tense. I know that every airplane that came down, I just waited for something to hit me. I couldn't move around. I couldn't even do that. I just had to sit there where I was, and I expected to be hit. I think probably everybody else did, too, and some of them, I think, mainly due to the fact that they didn't have any water. They were thirsty, and they were just out of their heads for water and just went crazy. They probably moved around or tried to, and it was just a one big struggling mass of writhing men like a bag of worms in there. Just everybody that was involved in that would get so weak that probably they were walked on or one thing and another and then died. Some of them died from lack of oxygen. I'm sure several died in that front hold during that second night from lack of oxygen.

I know that the second night the Japanese shot down in there. They tried to keep us quiet. Colonel Beecher tried to keep us quiet, but you just couldn't keep them quiet. They just struggled, fought, and screamed and hollered and begged for water and one thing and another. Of course, none of it was coming. But you couldn't quiet them down. They just lost their minds. Colonel Beecher, when he got out of there, said it was like a madhouse, and I think in simple words that that's about what it was.

Cruz: How would you picture conditions that second night? What was that like?

Burris: Well, I was afraid of all of these people. During the daytime I had a full canteen of water on me, and I was hot and thirsty, too. I was naked, and I had that canteen cup around me and the canteen, and I thought about taking...it was dark, and nobody would've seen me--they might have felt me or something--drinking--and they might have heard me, but they wouldn't have seen me drink. It was too dark in there. But it never occurred to me that somebody might take that away from me, but if they'd have known about it, they would have. They would have taken it away from me and probably killed me in the process. I don't know. Anyway, I wanted to take a drink, and then I talked myself out of it. I said, "Well, so far I've made it without taking a drink, and if it doesn't get much worse than this, then maybe I could wait a little while longer because maybe a little while longer I may need it a lot worse than I do now. So I'll hold off." Everytime I wanted a drink of water...and it got worse and worse all that day. During that day it got worse and worse during the daylight. They made no effort to feed us after that early morning feeding. I kept saying that so when I finally...when we were allowed to get off ship on the 16th...we had been grounded there in Subic Bay, and I got off that ship. I got saltwater in

my canteen and ruined the water that I had.

Cruz: You couldn't drink it, anyway.

Burris: I didn't get to drink it, anyway. So I didn't have any water, and all these people had at least drank their canteen cup of water. Yet I was comparatively calm. I know I was scared. I waited for them things to hit me. Everytime an airplane dove on us, I got ready for it, you know, just wherever it was going to hit me.

Another thing...well, a little later on, I realized that...if anybody got a scratch on that ship, it was so infected in there and so messy and dirty that almost every one of them died. I thought for a while that anybody that got a scratch did die. They didn't make it. But, of course, some of them did make it, I found out later.

But, anyway, it was a madhouse during the bombing and strafing, and our ship went dead in the water that afternoon. They bombed it so bad that it couldn't go. Then they bombed several times when the ship was just stationary. The Japanese fought back, but it didn't do them any good. I think they shot down probably one or two airplanes. I know they shot down one because this guy on the ladder said they did. I think that may have been all. They threw up an awful lot of lead at these airplanes--tremendous. The roar of those guns all at once aimed at this airplane diving was fantastic--the noise that it made.

Cruz: Was Preston Taylor in your hold?

Burris: No, he was in the rear hold.

Cruz: In the rear hold. Well, how did things go during that night and everything?

Burris: Well, I probably couldn't describe it. People were just like a bag of worms--struggling and fighting for space and screaming for water and fighting each other. Boy, it was just like a madhouse. I can't hardly describe it anymore than the words I've got there. Except for one thing. Several people were cutting other prisoners' wrists and neck and drinking their blood. They got razor blades, and they would drink their blood. Of course, I didn't see it or anything, but I could hear them hollering. A guy would say, "What're you doin'? What're you doin'? Hey, he cut me with a razor!" You know, "He's drinkin' my blood!" That happened different times during the night at different places on the ship. So several of them drank other peoples' blood. Of course, like I said before, some of them were still drinking their urine and eating their defecation during this time. Of course, that night we thought that all we had to look forward to was another day of bombing and strafing, so it was just extreme fear that possessed these people, especially the ones that were struggling.

I know I crawled out of that mess because I knew I couldn't take it. From that moment on, I think for the entire trip, I tried to conserve my energy until when I

would need it. I tried to conserve my water until when I would need it. I was always thinking that I might need it later on, you know.

Cruz: These men that turned vampire--how was this dealt with?

Burris: Well, Colonel Beecher ordered somebody around him. He said, "Do you know who they are?" He couldn't get to them, either. He says,"Kill 'em. You know who they are. I don't know them." He says, "Kill 'em." He says, "They're not gonna stop. Just kill 'em." So he ordered them to be murdered, and they were murdered. He said, "Beat them with a shoe, choke them, do anything. But kill them. Make sure they're dead." You could hear them getting a beating, and they'd scream and holler. I don't remember their words, but some of them might have been begging for mercy. I don't know. But if they did...I don't know that, but if they did it wasn't forthcoming. They went ahead and killed them. Then that kind of stuff stopped. Or maybe it didn't. I don't remember. It went on, and it probably stopped to a certain degree, anyway.

Colonel Beecher was worn out. He sat at the bottom of that ladder. He was on the bottom rung of that ladder. That was where his command post was.

Actually, the only thing came through the ship that was close to me was bomb fragments. On near misses, close to where I was, the fragments would come through the ship--

the side of the ship--and go zinging off someplace. When it did this, I think it was twice that I had particles come through my head and this other guy's head. I could look sideways, and I was aware that that thing went through. It was during the daylight because they didn't do any bombing at night. Now I'm sure that when it went through it got red hot and then white hot, but it did it so fast that my eyes only registered the white hot. So as far as I could see, it got white hot, and then real quickly it cooled down into a red hot. During this time, and even after this time, I...well, in a lot less time than it takes to tell, it cooled down to where it didn't have any color. It was just a kind of a black. It was so black and the contrast was so fast--I mean, it was so fast during the contrast--that I don't remember seeing any light come through that hole. It was just a black spot where it was. Just a pure black spot is all that I could see because I think my eyes--what was it--instead of dilating, it went the oppostie--contracted. Then with the light, why, it contracted and then as the light got red and went out--there was no light there--mine were still contracted. I couldn't see any light. I think that kind of explains it. I thought about this years later--why I didn't see anything but a black spot. Anyway, that happened a couple of times. It hit right, I think, twice between me and this other guy.

Then there was other places it came through that I was aware of, but not that close to me. That one was just inches apart; I mean, we were just a couple or three inches from what came through. Just a little bit over and I'd have been hit in the head, or he would have been.

Cruz: Shell fragments?

Burris: Yes. And it went right on through and hurt somebody inside the ship, I'm sure, because we were packed in there good.

Cruz: At what point were you aware that you were going to be able to leave the ship?

Burris: Well, I expected, just like everybody else, that the next day would be just a continuous...when it got daylight, we'd be bombed again. But during the night--the ship was dead in the water during the afternoon--during the night the Japanese got started. Then it was the madhouse period that night, and some of it was before and some of it was after the grounding of the ship. I say grounding. I think it was grounded. It might have been just stopped there. I read later that it was sunk in forty feet of water. I think we'd have been below the water level with that kind of depth. So maybe the ship was just sitting in the water. I thought it was grounded.

They told us before daylight that they were going to let us off. The Japanese civilians had already gotten off, and all that was left there was the Japanese guards.

They were going to let us off right after daylight. After it got daylight, I climbed out of that place. Now before I climbed out, I didn't try to get up. Now most of these guys hurried for the ladder and got out as quick as they could and swam ashore. But I didn't because I wanted my pants back, and I wanted my shirt back, and I wanted my pith helmet back. I had a razor blade that I'd been using for a couple of years, but it was still...I was still using it. I had my tobacco, which was pretty valuable stuff, and I had some socks and undershirts and pants from trading those cigarettes that I previously told you about. I had those things, and I tried to find them. Now I found one pair of pants, and I found a shirt, and I found a couple of undershirts, and I think that was about all. I had a musette bag, and I couldn't find it, and I couldn't find the tobacco. There was tobacco all over the place. Somebody had been digging into everything. So I hung back to get that stuff.

In the meantime, I found what I could find, and then when I was about ready to climb the ladder, there was a Marine major there, and he ordered me to take Farmer Jones upstairs because he was too weak to climb the ladder. He was just like a kitten. He was bigger than me. He was a big man, but he lost so much weight and he was so weak that he couldn't crawl up that ladder by himself. He was

just spent, completely spent. He must have been in that hold all that time fighting for every little inch and space--whatever he could get for two nights and a day. The way we handled that, he got on my back and held on to my neck, and I kind of went crawling up the ladder. I kind of pushed my rear-end higher so he'd be kind of level because I didn't want him hanging on my neck. So he went up laying on my back, and I climbed up out of the hold. When we got to the side of the ship, the ladder was vertical. The metal ladder on the side of the ship just went straight down the side. So I kind of had him sit off to one side, and I got down on the ladder, and I told him, "Try it out. Just put one hand over on me." Then he kind of put his weight on me, but not so much that he couldn't back off, you know. He did this, and I couldn't hold him. My hand that was carrying most of the weight was unraveled, and I couldn't hold him. I didn't have nearly all of his weight. I think, also, that in going up the ladder, I was pushing down on the ladder, you know, instead of trying to hang on with my fingers, and maybe that was the reason I was able to do it that way. But I couldn't do it the other way. I told him that if I tried to carry him down that ladder, we would both fall. I said, "When you get to the water, you're not strong enough to swim." Then I said, "Besides, you might try to fight me, and I don't have the strength to

fight you." I said, "We'll both drown." So I said, "You get back up here, and you wait, and I think you can get a boat and go ashore with some of these Japanese or somebody that's waiting for this crowd to get out of here." Anyway, he did.

Then I changed my mind about going down. I thought, "Well, I'll go get me something to eat and something to drink." So I went into what I thought was the kitchen, and I think it was a pretty good guess because I didn't know or have any idea. I went back there, and, sure enough, that was the kitchen back there--at least a pantry--and it had shelves lined with our Red Cross packages. I remember Klim milk--just shelves and shelves of cans of Klim milk. That was powdered whole milk, I think. It's milk spelled backwards--Klim. I saw that, and it seemed to me like I saw other tins of stuff and stuff that was in those Red Cross packages that the Japanese were eating while we were eating their fish and rice. At least they had planned it for us that way because they didn't get to eat much of it, either.

Then there was a Japanese in there, and he saw me, and he started screaming bloody murder at me. He took his gun off his shoulder and was getting ready to shoot me, and I took off. I think the only reason...I think he still would have shot me, but he probably had orders to stay in

there and keep people out of there. So he was probably under orders not to chase me. If he'd have chased me, he'd have found me, and he'd have killed me. But he wasn't going to do it. Also, I think there was one or two dead bodies in there, maybe more. My memory's real hazy on that, but there was some dead people in there. Probably he had shot them earlier. But I saw that milk and, I think, some other stuff. My memory's only strong about the milk, though.

Then I got off the ship. I went down the ladder, and we were supposed to swim in one way, and I heard them shooting off the other side of the ship--a machine gun they had set up. I heard them shooting, and later on I found out that there was some people that tried to go that direction and were killed. I think one or two of them might have made it to shore, too. I don't know who they were, although I did at the time, I think, but they were probably caught on shore someplace. But they might have made it. I don't know. I just never heard of them no more. But I swam in the right direction, and while I was swimming ashore, I made up my mind, again, to be careful. Instead of swimming overhand or anything like that or on my back or anything like that, I dog-paddled. I did this to conserve energy. I thought maybe if I got tired and weak--and I was tired and weak already--I might panic and do the wrong thing and

drown myself. So I dog-paddled ashore. That was easy. We were behind the breakwater--a long pile of rocks--and there is no big waves or anything. I just dog-paddled.

While I was going to shore, this old Farmer Jones was in a boat. I think there was some Japanese in there and maybe an American or two. They passed me up. He got to shore quicker than I did. But anyway, he died on the second ship, I think, before we got to Formosa. Oh, he was in bad shape.

But we got on shore, and they put us in this tennis court. The American planes that day bombed all around us. Well, not all around us. They would fly over us, and they were aiming at something off to one end of where we couldn't see. Most of us were laying down in the tennis court--just laying down. I looked up at these planes, and I could see the pilot, and I could see the bombs come loose from the airplanes. Them bombs, I swear, were not more than a hundred feet above us--or maybe 150 feet--and they went off over there and hit something, you know, or missed something. They'd strafe over there, too. If they was coming down, they'd be spraying their bullets out, and then they'd get to a certain point, and they'd drop the bombs. Then they'd curl up and go away and maybe come back again. Usually, I think each plane dropped about two bombs. They may have made several passes at us. Those bombs looked like

small bombs--maybe anti-personnel bombs or something, you know, high fragment type.

During the day, why, the Japanese didn't give them any trouble. Before we got off that ship that day, before they let any of us off, the American planes came back and bombed us again. I don't know whether it was the first or second wave that stopped. They dropped a bomb or two or maybe more, and they strafed us while we were getting off. Then they waggled us. They'd waggle their wing, and some of them after that would just dive on us--no shooting or nothing. They just waggle their wing and go on because they knew it was us getting off the ship. Everybody except me, I think, was naked (chuckle)...almost naked. I think we were told not to take our shoes, but I took mine. Then while on the tennis court, during one of those bombing raids, somebody stole my shoes. I wasn't watching my shoes, and they stole my shoes.

I don't think we got any water until about the next day, but I'm not sure. After a while we had...I don't suppose we had all the water we wanted, but I was able to drink water, and I think I kept my canteen pretty near full. I'd drink it some and then go fill it back up, you know. I got that filled just as quick as I could.

They didn't feed us for five days. On the fifth day, I think, late in the afternoon, they brought around some

boiled rice. I think I got two tablespoons, or GI spoons, or raw rice, and that's all I had to eat from the time... we stayed on that tennis court for several days.

One guy had been shot and wounded badly, and I guess gangrene was setting in on his leg or something--arm or leg--and the doctors didn't have any medicine at all. They took a mess kit knife, and they cut off the member. Whether it was his leg or arm, I forget. This guy...all he would say was, "Oh, doctor! Oh, doctor!" He died, I think, twelve hours after that. They managed to make a tourniquet or something on his leg, but he didn't last. He died. There was several others that died there, too. They weren't able to last very long.

Then on that fifth day--I think it was the 20th or the 21st of December, something like that--several trucks came, and we were picked up and put on these trucks right after we had eaten, I believe. We were taken to San Fernando, Pampanga, which is kind of a central rail station kind of northwest of Manila. It was the same place where we had got on the train after the Bataan death march. We got on the train at San Fernando, Pampanga, and went up north up past Clark Field to Camp O'Donnell. So we visited the same place. Now we didn't have any idea we was going by train or anything, but we did. Anyway, we were fed once a day. We might have been fed more than that, but I believe

it was only once a day--a rice ball. But my memory's bad on this. We weren't fed much. It was a small rice ball. It seemed like we had not enough water, you know, where we had plenty, but we weren't dying for thirst, anyway, there.

Cruz: This was where now?

Burris: They had put us in the theater at San Fernando,Pampanga. Now before we came, or before I came or after I came--I don't know which--they put some of them in the jail. But I didn't know this. I thought we were all in the theater at San Fernando. During one of the nights there--maybe both the nights...I only stayed there one or two days--probably two nights, maybe three. I don't know.

The Japanese soldiers were marching by at night. I don't think they were doing much moving during the daytime because American planes were everywhere. Those weird songs--off-key songs they sang, you know--kind of reminded me of the movies I used to see about people in the little bamboo pens caught by the Africans. You know, there was a pot getting ready to cook them, and they were dancing around and singing their weird songs. Well, the Japanese were going by, and I felt just like those guys must have felt. It was a weird feeling, kind of scary and kind of a morbid feeling. It was amazing what you'd think of when those things...but somebody that understood Japanese said

that they were singing that they were going to go die for the emperor or something like that. I think they realized they were really going to die, anyway, whether it was for the emperor or not. I think they felt the hot breath of death on them, too. But they did sing. It'd take hours for them to get by us and finish up. It seemed like it was every night we was there.

Then just a day before we left that place, this lieutenant came in and talked to somebody--I guess it was by interpreter or something--and said for us to pick out our ten sickest men, and they were going to take them back to Bilibid. Well, there was plenty of sick men around here. They were like Farmer Jones. He was just spent. He was like a limp rag. But the people they took were a bunch worse off than he was. They were wounded and strictly litter cases. They had to carry them out. They didn't walk out; they had to carry them out. Unknown to me, and I didn't find this out until about maybe two years ago, they had somebody in the jail, and they took a total of fifteen, not ten. I thought it was just ten. I thought that for years until just recently. Anyway, they took five from the jail and ten from our area, and I envied them because I figured they was going back to Bilibid, and this time there was going to be no more ships to come in to take them out.

But they didn't get them back to Bilibid. They took

them a short distance out of town--maybe there was a graveyard on the edge of town or something--or more like a barrio than a town--and they murdered them. I think they had to actually go and carry them to the dadgum grave hole and murder them because I don't think they had enough strength to walk to their grave.

Cruz: And this is something you just found out about in recent years?

Burris: Well, I didn't know...as far as I knew, they went on back to Bilibid. I didn't find that out until after the war was over, but the numbers--the ten and the fifteen--I thought it was always ten until just a few years ago. It was one or two years ago, I'm thinking, because I had been reading more stuff from that action. Anyway, I envied those guys. Of course, I shouldn't have because they were all murdered and buried in a shallow grave.

The next morning that lieutenant was back to lead us down to the railyard. We got in those boxcars for the second time. We'd been on there right after Bataan. This time there may have been people dying from suffocation again, but there wasn't near as many. We were packed in there good. It was hot and stifling and miserable, and people were urinating right in there and all that stuff.

But the American airplanes were everywhere in the sky --just all around that railroad when we got on--so they had

part of us get on top of the rail cars and sit and part of us inside. Now that may have made the difference. I don't think we were near as crowded as we were after the Bataan march. It was still crowded, but not as bad as before, where people were suffocating. There may have been some, but I'm not really aware of it. I think there was some, but I'm not sure of how many. Anyway, we went up to past Clark Field, and the American planes--all the time we were going there--were all around us. They were bombing and strafing things. I could see out someway or other. I must have been near the door or something, near a crack or something. I could see out. I remember seeing out. All the way there, they were bombing and strafing stuff all around us, but they never did strafe or bomb that train. They could have had that train anytime they wanted. Of course, I'm sure they knew we were on the train, and that's probably the reason they didn't. I'd like to find out for sure, though, just like that other thing, but I've never been able to.

Cruz: Approximately how many men were in the car you were in?

Burris: Well, I don't know. It was packed. It would have been really packed if it hadn't been for that bunch that had gone on top. It was a small boxcar. It wouldn't hold too many. I don't remember. Anyway, the people on top was told to wave to our friends so that they wouldn't,

you know, shoot at us. Apparently, it worked.

When it passed Clark Field, still going north, boy, they were just giving Clark Field a terrible pasting. They were just bombing the holy heck out of that place. They were just giving it bloody murder, that's all. It was taking a pasting.

Anyway, we went on past Camp O'Donnell, just kept going on, and it got dark. My memory says that we got to the Lingayen Gulf in the early morning hours--maybe three, four, five o'clock, before dawn. We got to a place called San Fernando La Union--another San Fernando in another parish. It was right on the Lingayen Gulf, where the Japanese had made their landing and where MacArthur made his landing. It kind of splits the island in half. That makes it hard for the defenders and easy for the guys that has the initiative of attacking.

On Christmas Day we were there at San Fernando, and we were finally told...I believe that later on that day, we were marched down to a ship. It was a great, big ol' ship, and it looked to me like a great, big ol' square box. It must have been forty or fifty feet in the air--rectangular box, really--and they built a point on the front end of it (chuckle), and it was just floating right on the top of the water, you know. For all practical purposes, that's what it looked to me like. I know it was

awful high up.

But before they were ready to put us on...I don't know whether they were still taking things off of it or not. Now let me say here again that the first ship had a lot of gunpowder everywhere on it, and we turned kind of yellowish. That acid in the gunpowder would kind of eat in our skin, and we would turn brownish-yellow or yellowish-brown or something over our entire bodies. That second ship that we were getting on, I don't remember the name of it.

Cruz: Was this the Enoura Maru?

Burris: What was the other one?

Cruz: The Oryoko Maru.

Burris: No, it was the first one.

Cruz: The Enoura Maru?

Burris: No, there was a third ship. Brazil Maru, yes. But I got on the Enoura Maru. That's the ship I'm describing--Enoura Maru. Anyway, I think they were taking off horses. When we got on board, I think there was a lot of horse manure and straw as well as gunpowder everywhere. There was two decks, and I was put in the lower deck. After we went down in the hold, we could go where we wanted to. I think the colonel fixed it so the weaker ones didn't have to go down into the bottom hold. They could stay on the upper deck. They had plenty of air--much more than we did. We were

packed down below. The guys sitting up on the other deck were hanging their feet off, but we were packed in pretty good. We were laying down and just packed in laying down. You couldn't move around without stepping on somebody or getting somebody to move or something. It wasn't like the first ship, but it was still pretty packed. I remember seeing Farmer Jones up on that second deck, and I don't think he got off.

It took us four days, I think, to get to Formosa, and what the Japanese did, they went close to the shoreline as much as they could. I think that would help camouflage the noise of the ship and inhibit the ability of the submarines to aim properly. Even in the daytime, they'd stay close to shore if they could. But during daytime they'd try their sprints, you know. One night there, after we left Formosa, I think the last night there, we had to run for it. Probably that day and that night, we had to run for Formosa just as fast as that ship would go.

Cruz: On the Enoura Maru, did you get any food and water?

Burris: I don't remember. I don't think we were...if we did it wasn't much. It might have been a little, but I don't think we were fed the first day or two.

One of our men tried to escape that first night. When we got the...I took a bath. I started to tell you... when we got on the ship, we had to wait awhile, and they

told us that any of us that wanted to could go in the ocean and bathe in that saltwater--ocean water. Boy, I took advantage of that because I was stinking. I wanted to get that gunpowder off of me. I went in there clothes and all and did my best to wash that stuff off of me, and then I got back out, and I dried off. Then late in the afternoon, we got on the ship, and it pulled out right away. They put us on there and pulled out. That night we were going up close to the shoreline--I don't think we was more than a mile or two off of shore--and this one ol' boy was working on deck for the Japanese or something, doing something, and he jumped overboard. Boy, you could hear the Japanese running to the edge, and then they'd start shooting and screaming. Of course, the ship didn't stop, and that's the last I've heard of him. I don't remember his name, but I knew him well. I remember that.

Cruz: Once the Enoura Maru...was it attacked by submarines while you were on it?

Burris: Yes, it was attacked by submarines. During that rush it took us four days, like I said, to get to Formosa. We kind of island-hopped around there as much as we could, you know, to get in a position to make short steps across the water where we wouldn't have to touch on the shoreline--to confuse the submarines.

During this last night in going to Formosa, submarines

attacked us. We were dropping depth charges. That ship ...when the depth charges...I didn't ever know when they hit the water or anything, but when they would explode, it would cause that ship to raise out of the water. Then it would come back and slap the water. I could see...by this time we were...I think we were above deck. I'm not sure. We might have still been down in that thing. Anyway, it seemed like there was two big, tremendous steel posts--two rows of them--down in that ship that was really structural columns of some sort. When that ship would hit the water, it seemed like those posts would twist every which way, and creak. That steel would bend and slide on the rivets, you know. It was fantastic. I thought that ship was going to get sunk by their own depth charges. It was really scary. It was kind of a dim light in there, and you could see these posts just tilting all different ways--all of them, just as far as you could see.

Cruz: What part of the ship were these posts in?

Burris: They were up and down--along the sides--the ship and not too far from the middle. I'd say they were about halfway between...but my memory...now always take this in to account. My memory is not too good. These looked like two rows of big structural columns maybe three or four feet in diameter --big steel circle things--and they went from one place up to the top of the ship, I guess. They seemed to twist and

tilt at different angles everytime that...and that slap... when you had that ship to come down, it'd shake that whole ship. But we didn't get hit by any torpedoes or anything.

We got into Formosa. We got to Formosa. Now we lost about, I think, 350 people on the Oryoko Maru plus some that died on the tennis court. There was a number that died there. Then on the Enoura Maru, I think some still died. I think they were thrown overboard before we got to Formosa. I'm not sure, but I think they were. I think Farmer Jones died before we got to Formosa. They probably threw his body overboard.

Cruz: Was any medical treatment whatsoever offered by the Japanese?

Burris: None that I could see. None that I could see. I don't think we were even allowed bandages. I think they took up a collection of undershirts and shorts and stuff, or G-strings or what-have-you, and tried to make bandages after we were bombed on the Enoura. But up to that time, I don't think there was anything. The Japanese, I don't think, gave us... wait a minute. They may have given us some mercurochrome or something. I mean, it was ridiculous. I don't think they even gave us bandages. They sat up and just laughed at us.

Wait a minute. That's getting ahead of my story. We stopped in Formosa for--I don't know--a few days, and that's when they put us up on this upper deck. We was still in

a hold, but there was another deck below that. They filled the lower hold, and they put us up on the top deck to get some air, but actually they just wanted to get us off to one side so they could get what sugar they could and fill that hold. All they could take to Japan at this time, I guess, was sugar. Of course, there was a lot of sugar plantations in Formosa and the Philippines and all that. So they put a bunch of sugar in that bottom hold, and then they never did let us go back down there. They made us come back. Now we sat up on that deck while they did this.

There was a partition between the...I went in that second hold. It was a forward hold where the point was, and then there was a second hold, and then I don't know what was after that. I was put into that second hold when I went aboard that ship in the Philippines. Then we were put on that deck to get some air while they loaded the sugar in that lower hold. Like, this is the wall (gesture) from the...this is the point of the ship, you know. There's a steel wall separating the front hold from the second hold, and there was an opening here and an opening here (gestures) with a ladder going down on both side. I was put into one group that was told to go in the second hold...I was told to go into the front hold. Then the other group was told to go in the second hold.

But then the stupid Japanese...the minute they told us

to get down in there, they started rushing us and beating us on the back and screaming, "Speedo! Speedo!" They got it all messed. When I got to where I was supposed to go, I looked down in that thing, and it was deep down there and dark and wet, and it looked like the sides of it was slimy with coal dust or something. It looked miserable down in there. I had the idea that it was probably a foot or two of water to lay in down there, and that was all. I just didn't want to go down there, and yet I was kind of afraid. Then it occurred to me: "These dumb Japanese, the way they've loaded us in there, they don't know one from another. They don't know who's supposed to go down there." So I just kind of slipped around to the other side, and I went down in the second hold.

Cruz: So you went down more amidships...

Burris: Yes, more amidships.

Cruz: ...rather than the front hold.

Burris: But, again, I didn't do it because I wanted to go to the middle. I wasn't thinking, see. All I was thinking about ...I didn't like the looks of that deep, dark, wet, miserable-looking, dirty place down there. So I slipped around and went down in this other hold, and it was--up on that upper deck--fairly clean, and it was large so that we weren't too awful crowded. They were packed in there pretty good, but, oh, I think I had maybe six, seven inches between me

and the next guy. We wasn't just packed in like the other ships or like it was before I went on the second deck. Of course, by this time some more people had died.

Then the next morning they were feeding us. Now they fed us that day, and they may have fed us a little bit most of the days we were there, but I'm not sure. I think they were awful angry at us for our people sinking the Oryoko Maru--on that second trip from the Philippines to Formosa. Also, they may not have prepared for us good enough. I'm not sure of the reason, but I don't think it made them unhappy.

But, anyway, the next day American airplanes bombed that second ship--the day after we got on there. We was tied up side-by-side to another ship that looked identical, like they were sister ships.

Cruz: So you were attacked in the harbor there in Formosa.

Burris: In Formosa, in Takao. Takao harbor, I guess it was. But, anyway, we were attacked by four planes, and since we were stationary, they came down not from behind, but they came forward. We was tied there and motionless, and guess where the bomb hit. The forward hold--just like it did in the Philippines.

Cruz: I'll be darned.

Burris: Just like the Philippines. So it turned out that because I didn't like that front hold...I had a tendency to obey them

without thinking, you know, as much as possible. Then I'd see somebody disobey them, and I'd concur with it, or I'd have some reason. Thank goodness! Because almost everybody in that front hold was killed.

Cruz: You were lucky.

Burris: I think there was 350 in that front hold.

Cruz: My God!

Burris: Now it was told to me that one guy--I know his name, and I'm not going to put it down here--was hit in the arm by a fragment or something, and it cut a vein or artery, and he bled to death. He just slowly bled to death. He talked to his friends. He was trying to hold the blood back, and he just gradually passed out from lack of blood.

Cruz: So how did this scene look from your vantage point? This air attack...what did you see?

Burris: This bombing occurred during a feeding, and some people were stupid enough to run around in this lane of bullets. To me it was like the rain, see. You'll get wetter running. If you're out in the rain the same length of time, you'll get wetter running than you will walking. You'll get more wet walking than if you stand still. So you got a rain of bullets coming down there, and I thought anybody that would run around was just begging for more bullets to hit them. That's the way I looked at it.

So I laid down, and, say, like, this is the line of

the ship (gesture). I laid down perpendicular to the line of the ship. I knew the airplanes, when they are boring in to drop their bombs, you can't hide from them bullets. There is going to be an area there where they're going to come in, and you can't hide from them. I don't care what you do. But sooner or later that guy has to drop his bomb, and he starts pulling up. Well, he's still raking the ship from front to back, but he pulls up. When he does that, his bullets are spaced further apart. He was going this way (gesture), and moving this way (gesture). Them bullets are further apart. But as he's boring in, there's just one pattern coming in, and they're going everywhere in that pattern. So I thought that at least during his leveling off, and after his leveling off, them bullets would be further apart; and if I laid perpendicular to that path, I'd present less of a target to hit.

But some of them guys...the guys that would run around ...what they did, they tried to steal the food. Well, again, I don't think I got any food that day. The buckets was filled or something. I know I saw one guy I knew, and he had a bullet hole in him. Gosh, it looked like it was about two or three inches in diameter--great, big. It went right through his hip, and he was dead. That was the only mark on him, but he was bloody and black with dried blood. He was dead. So it must have been a .50-caliber bullet that just went

right through his hip.

I know that around me people were dead. I was sitting pretty close to the bulkhead--I wasn't real close, but pretty close--and that bulkhead was like a sieve. All the .50-caliber bullets that went through the other deck--and through that bulkhead--came right in on us, and that's where I was. Yet people were dead all around me and wounded and crying and screaming. Some people were dying--they know they're gone--but they still were fighting it. Some of them were not anxious to die, and they was trying to fight it, and it didn't do them any good. But they still struggle against it. It must be fearful, you know, to know that you're on your way out for sure. So a lot of that was going on.

After it was over, the Japanese stood around and looked down at us, you know, and they'd laugh. They thought it was great that we were in such misery. Beecher and some medical doctors tried to get some bandages and some medicine. See, that one guy...if somebody'd thought to make a tourniquet ...apparently they didn't down there. They were all struggling with their own problems. If he'd have thought, himself, to make a tourniquet, he might have saved his life, although chances are it would have got infected with all that filth and garbage down there. Most of them died. So help me, most of them with scratches got infected and died. The

only reason I say this...I met this chaplain and asked him about why he stopped saying this prayer, and he said that he had been wounded. He said it as long as he could, and then he had to quit and let somebody else do it.

Cruz: Was that on the Enoura Maru?

Burris: That was on the third ship, yes--the Brazil Maru.

Cruz: The Brazil Maru. I see. He was saying the Lord's Prayer at night?

Burris: Just about the time most of us would normally be going to sleep. I got to where I waited for that before I even dared to go to sleep because it meant a lot to me.

Cruz: What ship was this on?

Burris: This was on the Brazil Maru.

Cruz: I see.

Burris: The third ship. It was smaller than the Enoura Maru.

Cruz: So after this...

Burris: We got hit. That front end got hit. We were all in misery, and we hadn't eaten that day. I think, also, we generally got to eat only once a day from the time we left the Philippines on to Japan. We ate once a day. We didn't get fed twice a day. It was only once a day, and we got a little bit of--one or two spoonsful--saltwater and fresh water mixed. It was just real bad. Then we were miserable, and people were wounded and dying. The Japanese thought it was great. They'd just stand around and point to us

and just die laughing.

Cruz: No medical aid from the Japanese.

Burris: No. You can read some of these books...I think they might have given us something that was just almost ridiculous, like mercurochrome.

Cruz: That's all I'd heard of.

Burris: Something like that. I don't think they even gave us any bandages. I thought that was mean. I give all kinds of excuses for people being mean during war. You know, I figured, "Well, they're ordered to do this. They're ordered to do this." But I think these guys delighted in seeing us in misery. Of course, they were losing the war, and their hatred must have been running pretty high.

One other thing before I...when we got on the Oryoko Maru way back there, there's one other thing I'd like to kind of throw in here. When we got on the Oryoko Maru, I believe it was, on the 14th of December, I heard the Japanese ask somebody if we had been captured on Mindoro. They didn't know we had been captured at Bataan. The Americans, I think, then had landed on Leyte, and they were fighting on Mindoro, which is the next big island close Luzon--real close. So they thought we were captured there. I'm just throwing that in. Of course, we knew better, you know.

Cruz: After the attack on the Enoura Maru, were the bodies finally removed, or did they let them stay awhile, or were you able

to get rid of them?

Burris: Well, I think they stayed there three days before we started moving the bodies out. The holes in the side of the ship were...they had wood plugs that were, I guess, maybe that long (gesture). They were tapered, you know, and they just hammered these wood plugs in these .50-caliber bullet holes, it looked to me like, and that's the way they were going to fix that ship for a trip. We were going to seep water all the way, and they're going to have their pumps going all the time.

Anyway, we didn't go on that ship. I think that ship was damaged enough to settle on the bottom. It seemed like it did. Anyway, they left us there three days, and then they told us they were going to take the bodies out--the dead people out--and take them to shore and make a decent military funeral for them, and they would be...what do you call it when you burn them up?

Cruz: Cremated.

Burris: They were going to cremate them. So I imagine they just put them up in a big pile and threw gasoline on them and set them on fire. Later on, when I went back to the Philippines in 1972,I am pretty sure that I saw names that were...supposedly, the bodies were in that graveyard in the Philippines--that real nice military grave that they give for the Americans. The names were on that big marble thing.

Cruz: That monument?

Burris: I saw people's names that I knew were killed on the Enoura Maru in Formosa,and yet their names appeared there. I just wondered how they could put their bodies there when they burned them up--probably a big pile of them. So they probably went up there in that area where they burned them up, and they got a spoonful of dirt and said, "This is so-and-so." They they carried that back to the Philippines, and they buried that box in there as so-and-so. I guess it's just as good, you know. After all, I think the bodies were all mixed up, and the bones even were burnt to a powder and all just messed up together. There's no way of putting those bodies...saying,"This is so-and-so and this is so-and-so."

Cruz: How were the bodies removed from the ship?

Burris: Well, they asked for volunteers to help put them in a net. A big ol' crane would drop down, and you'd put them in that.

By this time I had lost my shoes on the tennis court, and I wanted them shoes. I was deathly afraid of being without shoes. I think I told you that before.

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: I could go hysterical if I thought I didn't have shoes. I'd do dumb things because I didn't have shoes. Anyway, I went over to get a pair of shoes. When I got there, them guys were stripped clean, and there wasn't nothing to get.

I don't know who got them, but when I got there, there wasn't nothing to get. So I didn't get anything. I went over there for selfish reasons.

Cruz: Were you stuck with the detail then?

Burris: I had to put the bodies in, and many a body...a guy would be taking his legs, and I'd take his arms or vice-versa. When you'd lift him up, his body would fall out; I mean, his arms would come loose, or his legs would just come off, you know, because it was rotten. The stench was terrible,and they had decomposed so that it wouldn't even hold together when you was trying to lift them up. Limbs would fall off their bodies, and then you'd have to grab them under the shoulders and hips and stuff to get them in. I'd say that was almost a rule, although some of them I lifted up, their bodies stayed together. They may have died a little later than the others. I don't know. But, anyway, in that climate it don't take long. On the march out of Bataan, I saw some Filipinos that probably were killed that day, and they were rotten. Oh, they stunk to high heaven! They were rotten, and they were just kind of falling away from their bones.

Cruz: Boy!

Burris: It was hot and humid, and your body deteriorates right away.

Cruz: Well, how much longer were you on the Enoura Maru after

the attack? Would you say three days?

Burris: I think we might have left there...gosh, I'd have to get a book for reference. After three days...it wasn't too long. I think we might have been in Takao harbor, oh, ten, thirteen, fourteen days.

Cruz: And then you were transferred to the Brazil Maru?

Burris: Yes. It was probably the fourth day after the bombing that we transferred to the Brazil Maru.

Cruz: How were you transferred to the other ship?

Burris: We went on little boats--little motor boats. It had a little motor on the end of it. We went over to the other ship and got on it.

A friend of mine...gosh, I'd kind of like to put his name in here, but I don't know whether that's good or not. He was the guy I told you about that would get the lizards and stuff. He was always scrounging around. He was a good scrounger. Well, we were told not to go down in that hold where that sugar had been put, and this ol' boy went down in that hold. He brought up not only a lot of sugar, but he brought it up in one of those sugar sacks. He about emptied three quarters of that sugar out and dumped it in the hold down there, and he brought the rest of the sugar up in the sugar sack. He gave most of it to me to take care of while he did something else. He was a go-getter (chuckle). So we had some sugar, and we had

that sugar sack. That sugar sack saved his and my life later on. We wasn't supposed to let the Japanese see it because we knew we'd get into some real trouble.

Cruz: How many men did you divide the sugar up with?

Burris: I divided it with one or two. I cautioned them not to eat too much of it. I said, "Let's hold off. Let's keep it. It'll give us energy. Let's try to eat it about when we go to sleep after dark, and let's watch that we don't eat too much of it." We did. There was a lot of people that ate too much of it, and they got the "runs," and they died. They wasn't getting enough food. It would help the diarrhea real bad, and at that time you wouldn't get the value of any food you ate. It'd just go right through you. So I told them that we should watch it, but if we did watch it, we could take advantage of that heat it would give us because, gosh, it was already getting chilly after dark. It wasn't real cold in Formosa, but it was kind of chilly after dark.

Cruz: About when was this when you were transferred to the Brazil Maru?

Burris: I don't remember the exact date.

Cruz: Was this early 1945? January or...

Burris: Well, it was...let's see...we got on the Enoura Maru on Christmas Day, I believe, or the day after Christmas--either Christmas or the day after Christmas. We might have

got up there Christmas, the early morning hours of Christmas, and then that same day we took a bath in the ocean and then got on the Brazil Maru, I think, on Christmas day. Then it took four days to get to Formosa. That would be the 29th, wouldn't it? Then we were there, oh, maybe a week,..ten, thirteen days, maybe two weeks. So that would be the 29th to about the 10th of January is when we got on the Brazil Maru.

Cruz: When you were taken to the Brazil Maru, where were you taken there on the ship?

Burris: Well, we were just driven into a hold immediately, you know, and then covered up.

Cruz: What were the conditions like in this hold?

Burris: I don't know why we did it, but an ol' boy and I were together. We had that sugar sack and some sugar in it, and we went on there fairly early again. I don't know whether he led me or I led him or whether we just found a place and that's it, but we got on near the middle of the ship, in that part of the hold. Now the hold was near the aft end, but not right at the end. It was probably second from the aft. We got in that hold, and we were near the top deck. It was almost a low ceiling. I don't think it was ten feet hardly. There was maybe twelve feet between the floor and the upper deck. It was a shelf in there, and we got about halfway up between this distance.

So we were probably five, six feet, maybe, from the bottom to the top. I don't know. It was close enough to the sun ...since the ship was narrow and small, it was close enough that we could get some heat, you know, on the side of the ship that the sun shines on. You have a deck in there, and then you have these supports running around the whole side of the ship. They were made out of steel. Then there's an outside deck, so there's a hole between these things and the deck. That sun heating that side of the ship makes hot air in there, and it comes up like a small warm wind--warm, actually warm. During the daytime we were near the top of the deck. It would hold eight there, see, and we were comparatively warm during the daytime. Then we had access, also...it seemed to me like I had access to the side of the ship. No, I guess it was the Enoura Maru where I stood on the side of the ship during the daytime. The nights were fairly cold, and there was a nice, warm wind blowing up there. Anyway, the heat would hold up there near the deck. We were warmer there than people laying on the deck.

That sugar sack was made out of reeds or something, little flat reeds just woven, you know, just plain ol' reeds. It had little holes all through it, but it held sugar. It didn't let much sugar slip out. Air would get out, and air would come in. I would get in that sack--

in the bottom of it--and this ol' boy would get in the top and take care of the closing of it, you know. I found out I couldn't breathe very good, so I opened up a hole. I stuck a finger through there, and I opened a hole up so I could breathe. It was still enough to hold our body heat.

Cruz: How big are they?

Burris: He and I were in comparatively good shape. It was cold now, but we didn't freeze to death. We didn't even come close to freezing to death. I know there's one friend in my squadron that walked by there one day, and we'd been freezing to death...oh, I'd say, an average of twenty a night would freeze to death. The sickest ones would be put down on the bottom of this room in the coldest spot on the ship. They would die.

Cruz: So the nights were very cold.

Burris: Oh, it was freezing. As we got closer to Japan, the upper parts of the ship was coated in ice. The steel ropes and things were just...ice was falling off of them every once in a while, but they were coated in ice.

Cruz: You think that sugar sack might have helped save y'all's lives?

Burris: Oh, it did. It did.

Cruz: But the Japanese never caught you in that sugar sack?

Burris: No, no. We managed to keep that hidden someway or another. I think we rolled it up and hid it someway or another. I

didn't think we had any sugar getting onto the...we had to get rid of the sugar, probably, before we got on the Brazil Maru. I don't remember having any sugar there. We already had the sugar. It was on the other ship. I gave it to some friends of mine. They thought I did a great thing, but there was more sugar than I could eat. I don't think it was such a great thing.

Cruz: How much food and water were you given on that Brazil Maru?

Burris: On the Brazil Maru, I don't remember eating but maybe once or twice, and one of them was during that bombing raid, and I missed it. I didn't eat. We might have been fed once, but I don't...check the records someplace, and you might find that we didn't eat at all on that trip to Formosa. Also, after we got on the Brazil Maru, they were angry at us again, I believe, and they took their anger out on us. Another ship got torn apart.

There was a big I-beam. It must have been, oh, three or four feet high, probably four foot high, and it was built up out of steel. Then it had a top and a bottom part to that beam--like an I-beam. It was built up with steel and was heavy across there. That thing was tremendous, and it went clear across the ship. It looked to me like it...well, I don't know whether it went across the ship or fore and aft. I don't know. That bomb hit that dadgum thing right where the bulkhead was. I went over and looked

in there. There was a burnt place where this thing had gotten the forward wall. Then it looked like the bomb had made a mark all the way down--just a burnt place on the steel. The explosion was not instantaneous. It didn't completely explode at the same instant. It was fast, but during its motion down there...and they could have had armor-penetrating bombs, I guess. They just dropped them. It's sharp and hard steel, you know, and it cut through. It looked to me like the explosion was all down the side there. But this beam was laying kind of forty-five degrees maybe or almost straight across, and under that there was a line of people just crushed.

Cruz: This was on the Enoura Maru?

Burris: Yes, when they bombed that front hold. Oh, so help me, there wasn't but...I think there was about 350 people in there, and I don't think more than five or six lived to see the United States. They didn't even see Japan, no more than about five or six. That hold was practically wiped out on that one direct bomb hit there.

But, anyway, that sugar sack helped us survive that cold trip to Japan. Boy, it was bitter! At night it was bitter cold. Now in the daytime, it wasn't too bad. Like I said, the heat would collect up there.

This friend of mine walked by me one day--I don't guess we were more than three days out of Japan--and he

looked terrible. He looked like he was frozen, and he couldn't get warm. So I told him to sit up there in my place, and I'd get down and walk around on the deck while he'd warm up because I had a pretty good spot. I think he did. Then toward evening, why, when it got time to go to sleep, I got back up there, and he left. The next morning his body was one of the ones laying on the deck--froze to death. He was out of my squadron. I probably should have made room for him up there, although there wasn't enough room hardly for this ol' boy and me in that sack, and I don't guess I would have gave him that sack under any conditions. I tried to stay outside of it one night, and, boy, that cold went right through me. In about an hour I couldn't stand it. I went back to the sack. That's when I was having trouble breathing in there, and I told him I'd just stay outside. I couldn't hardly breathe, you know. After about an hour out in that cold, I found a way to make a hole in that sack to breathe through there (chuckle).

The people that were sick, they put them in...I don't know what was the matter with the doctors and things...they put them right down there on the coldest spot on that ship. That's where they put the sick people and the weakest. Of course, everytime they put some down there, they had room the next day to put some more there because they died.

I think some of them might have resisted two or three days, but they died.

Cruz: Did they let you come up on decks for air?

Burris: No. No, we weren't supposed to come up on deck unless we had to go to the toilet. They had a box hanging over the front end of the ship--hanging there and swinging, you know, back and forth--and it had a slit torn out of the bottom of the box. I used to slip and slide out there and fall down--the motion of that ship--on that ice, you know, and I was barefooted. I wasn't barefooted. I had socks on. I didn't have no shoes. I'd slip and slide, and then I'd have a difficult time trying to get into that box from the ship when it'd be, you know, banging back and forth. Then I'd drop my britches to do my business there, and I looked down at that water, and, boy, it was cold-looking, you know. I knew it was cold because this ice was everywhere on top of the ship. I thought, "Well, it'd be real easy for to me kind of slip in here and fall." That box was kind of icy, too. I thought, "Well, if I fall in, I'm going to try to drown myself," because even if they was to stop this ship and pick me up, I wouldn't last. And they wouldn't stop to pick me up. They might for a Japanese, but they wouldn't do it for me. So I made up my mind that the best thing to do there was to get it over with--help it and get it over with. I remember that's how cold it was.

It was miserable.

They fed us...if I'm not mistaken, they fed us once a day, and it was usually a few spoonsful of rice...no, wait. On this Brazil Maru, it began to be chicken feed, what we call kaffir corn. That's what they fed us--boiled kaffir corn.

Cruz: Kaffir corn.

Burris: Yes. Did you ever hear of that?

Cruz: Yes, I've heard of that.

Burris: That's what my grandma used to feed the chickens. It's hard.

Cruz: I've seen it mixed with scratch feed.

Burris: Yes. One day there in Formosa, I think I got some soup that was made out of Irish potatoes--the first I'd seen since I was a prisoner. They smelled like Irish potatoes, and I think I got little pieces. The texture felt like Irish potatoes and tasted like Irish potatoes. It didn't have no salt or nothing in it, but it was warm, and it was kind of milky-looking, and it had a few tiny pieces. Anyway, most of the time we got kaffir corn, and, of course, what water they fed us was two or three spoonsful a day. That's all we got. And it was half water. You can imagine how we were when we got there.

I think we landed there on about, oh, someplace between the 1st and 5th of February--someplace in there. We'd been

on that ship about forty-five days and probably a few days over. Early in February we landed in Japan.

I was so weak...but first they took a sample of our stool and took that off. I don't know what they did with that. They probably threw them away--just took it and threw it away (chuckle). Anyway, I never heard anything about it. Some of the sicker ones they took to a hospital, and almost everybody in the hospital...I think they all died. It might have fifty of them, and I think they all died in the next four or five days. I think that hospital was as cold as that ship. I don't know. I wasn't ever there, but it seemed to me like somebody might have gone there and was telling me they didn't give them nothing. They just laid them down on the floor, and they just had nothing.

Cruz: So this was the dead of winter at Moji?

Burris: I think so. I was so weak that whenever...now they issued us some clothing, too, and shoes. I think the shoes I... I don't know whether I got them there or where I got these shoes. I don't know. Anyway, I got some British shoes either there or in Korea later on. I don't know where. But I got this pair of shoes, and maybe it was a shoe issue and some Japanese army clothes. I just bundled them up and took them with me. I had my pants. I probably put the shoes on.

They marched us down through the streets of that town with the Japanese looking at us.

Cruz: What was your condition at this point?

Burris: I was so weak that I could not walk off the ship. There was two or three little steps that I had to walk up to get to the gangplank, and I couldn't negotiate them. I could not lift myself up by walking up. I had to get down on all fours and crawl up there, and then when I got where it was level again, I walked. Then when we got to this camp--it was after dark--they put us on trucks then.

Cruz: Is this the camp near Fukuoka?

Burris: Well, it's Fukuoka--near there. They had them numbered one, two, three, and seventeen--something like that. I don't know what number. As far as I knew, it was just Fukuoka prison camp. Anyway, when I got to this prison camp, snow was heavy on the ground, and there was a soldier that I helped win a contest in Cabanatuan, and he got some cigarettes for it. I think there was three of them together, and they each got a cigarette for a prize. I helped him win that. Anyway, he was one of these guys wanting to help me off that back end of that truck. I said, "No, I don't need it." I jumped off, you know, and I splat--just hit the ground. I just stretched out flat in that snow--just right down in that snow face first. I needed help, and I just didn't know it. We were weak.

Then after that we got into that camp, people...oh, some of them died right away.

Like I say, I finally gave up some dignity and started washing clothes for cigarettes. I would wash clothes for cigarettes. This one guy had a lot of cigarettes, and he had a lot of them on that ship. He had a blanket he was in, and it was full of lice; I mean, he had a beautiful blue Navy blanket, I think it was, and it was gray with lice. There were just millions of them, and they just sucked his body's blood dry. He was in terrible condition.

Cruz: Was this in Japan?

Burris: This was in Japan. I washed clothes for him for a cigarette. I washed, I think, his blanket and some of his clothes. I managed to get hold of a little piece of soap and it was, boy, it was...they used the word "dear." Soap is "dear." That meant it was hard to come by and expensive. I don't know how I came by it, but I had a little bar of soap. I washed his clothes with soap, and then to make sure...I couldn't get the lice to leave the blanket at all--no way --so I found a bottle, and I rubbed them on a rock, you know, and I killed them. I could hear their bodies--"crack, crack, crack," you know. I told him I'd guarantee him that if I couldn't get rid of the lice, I'd get rid of all the live ones. They'd be dead. But he was too far gone. I think that within three days he was dead. He'd

been sucked dry by lice. Just all his blood was gone. He had made no effort to kill them or take care himself that way at all. He just laid there and let them eat him up, so he died that way.

Cruz: Did you use these cigarettes, then, for trading?

Burris: Yes, I think so, but I don't remember what I did with those cigarettes.

The buildings that we were in were about half inside the ground and half up. They were made up of some kind of timber, and the sides was bark. It looked to me like it was bark, and it would curl up. They'd nail it on there so that probably it was closed off at one time, but it dried up and curled up, so it was cold, and the snow would come blowing in there. But they gave us five...I think most of us had...they gave us five blankets. They were threadbare American Army blankets. They were threadbare. Boy, they were just ready to fall apart, but there were five of them.

Cruz: How large was the building you were in?

Burris: Well, I'd say there was a path down the middle, and then there was a step up--just like it was in the Philippines--and then we laid on some kind of a mat there. Then the rest of it was up to the top, you know. I don't think we had any heat in there, but we might have. I don't know. We had heat in Korea. I know that. We had a funny-looking

stove, but it did put out some heat. Anyway, there was enough room for men to lay down, so probably it was sixteen-by-twenty feet wide. People would just lay down on that mat, you know, up and down the sides.

Cruz: About how many men would be in there?

Burris: I don't know. Most of the people would combine their blankets, and all of them would lay together. Two or three of them would sleep together, and that way they'd have ten or fifteen blankets to cover up with. But I'd been crowded so long on those ships...we had a meter. We had a meter of space for each one. We had a meter--a little over three feet wide and however long it was. This one guy wanted to...he said, "How 'bout you and I sleepin' together so we can keep warm?" I said, "Nope. I've been crowded too long." And what they would do, they slept cold because they kept their clothes on. They'd go in there and pile up together and cover themselves with blankets with clothes on, and when one guy would turn, they'd all have to turn. I didn't want to sleep that way. Also, I felt like they were stupid. Their clothes--after you'd turn two or three times--would be twisted and tight on you and stop the circulation, and you'd be colder than if you didn't wear them. So what I did, I made me a...I'd take...I think it was two blankets, or maybe three, and I'd lay them lengthwise and lap them

over like this (gesture). Maybe three of them. Then I'd put one down at the head and stick it out...that's what it was. Underneath all that I'd put one down and center it, and at the bottom I'd center it; and then at the bottom I'd flip over, and that made me kind of a sack. I'd flip it over and kind of make me an overlap. Then I'd roll them over and overlap them again. Then I'd snuggle down in that sack and pull that thing over my head, and that kept my body heat. But I was stark naked. I went in there by myself, and I was naked, and I slept snug as a bug in a rug, you might say--just real nice. I wasn't about to get crowded no more, if I didn't have to. If I had to be crowded, that's one thing; but if I didn't have to, boy, I just wanted room.

On these questionaires these hospitals gave me, they asked me if I'd been held in isolation from other prisoners for long periods of time. I forget the word they used. My problem was just the opposite. I was always too crowded (chuckle). I would love some of that isolation, you know. I'd been crowded so long I was sick of it.

Cruz: How long were you held there in Japan?

Burris: I don't know. We landed there about...let's see...if I can kind of estimate, we landed there in the early part of February. I think we might have stayed there in March and part of April. Probably about the first part of April

or maybe in the middle of April, they took us to Korea. We all gained weight there. I think we ate two meals a day there.

Cruz: What were the meals?

Burris: Well, it was still kaffir corn and some kind of soup. I don't know. It was probably more hot water. They drink water hot. Probably we had some hot water. It might have been some weak tea, too, but I don't know. I don't remember too much about it except it continued to be kaffir corn. There might have been a little rice, and there might have been a little barley. It seemed like there was some barley.

Cruz: What kind of routine did you have in Japan? Did you have to work?

Burris: No. We was too weak to work. We were about gone. What we'd do, we'd eat...now there was other people...like, this guy that wanted to help me off the truck, he went out some-place and worked probably in a mine or something. Some of these guys started walking up and down to exercise and keep their muscles trim--do the best you can for your muscles--because we were down...I don't think I weighed more than sixty-five pounds when I got off that ship. Boy, I don't think I could have lost another five pounds and not die. I just don't think it was possible. I think I might have been up to, oh, seventy-five pounds, maybe, when I went to Korea. We were gaining weight slowly. I think we

ate twice a day, and we weren't harassed there.

I know I was so weak...they'd let us have a bath--hot bath--where we'd all get in the tub together--just get in and out. When I came out, that cold air hit me, and I fainted. I just dropped off, you know. I know I remember looking at that big ol' rooster...it looked like he was big enough to eat me alive. In the Philippines they grew small, and I got used to seeing small chickens,and the rooster in Japan looked like a giant.

Cruz: Looked like he could whip you, huh?

Burris: Oh, yes. I looked at him, and I just wondered (chuckle), "I better be careful around that rooster." While I looked at him, I passed out. The next thing I knew, somebody was carting me in the building. I was going through the door when I woke up. Somebody picked me up and took me in there.

Cruz: So the guards at this camp, then, were...it was milder treatment than what you had been used to?

Burris: Well, there wasn't many guards inside the camp. There was a few, but they left us alone. Of course, we didn't give them any trouble. We were too weak to give them any trouble. But I know the snow would come through them holes in the barracks. It was better treatment that I'd received, as far as lack of harassment and the food that they gave me. It wasn't close to what it should have been, but maybe the

Japanese were having a hard time, too. I don't know.

Cruz: Yes, I think they were.

Burris: But I think it could have been a little more than that, you know, but, anyway, I think we all gained weight and strength while we were there. I think I went up to maybe seventy-five pounds by the time they made us go to Korea.

Now it only took, I think, a couple of hours--three or four hours at the most--to go from Japan to Korea. We got off at Pusan. Is that right--Pusan?

Cruz: Yes. How were you transported to Korea?

Burris: Small ferry boat, I guess you'd call it. It wasn't too large. By the way, they might have taken some of us some other place besides this camp because there wasn't too many of us at this camp. I don't think there was more than, oh, sixty, maybe a hundred.

Cruz: Yes, I believe there were numerous camps throughout the islands, and the men were taken to a number of places.

Burris: But, anyway, there didn't seem to be too many, and when I got on the ship, it wasn't too crowded.

Cruz: How large was your group when you were ferried over?

Burris: Like I say, I think it was someplace between fifty and a hundred. Maybe not. Maybe it was fifty. I don't know. It could be fifty, or it could have been close to a hundred. I don't know.

Cruz: This was a short trip then.

Burris: It was only a few hours going across there. They put us on a train right after we got to this city. We got on a train. I don't remember much about how we walked to the train or what, but we got on the train. We may have been given a box lunch. Now the Japanese box lunch was made out of real thin wood--just almost paper thin--but it was stiffer than paper. It was wood, but it was real thin. They had to really have something to cut it that thin without making holes in it. They had a little box made out of that. They had some kaffir corn and barley and rice mixture maybe and some seaweed, and, boy, did that taste good. I don't remember any meat. I think it was just seaweed, and they might have had some of this stuff you get around hear when you eat a Chinese dinner. I think most of us call it bamboo sprouts or something or heart of bamboo or something. It was something like that.

Cruz: Bamboo shoots or bean sprouts.

Burris: It wasn't really shoots, but...you've seen these little discs when you buy a Chinese dinner.

Cruz: Oh, I see.

Burris: It was something like that, and it was delicious. Then we got on that train, and the lice on that train...they had beautiful green seats on that train, and they were gray with lice. They must have been using it for a troop transport, and they had lice. They were all alive and going good,

boy (chuckle).

Cruz: Alive and healthy, huh.

Burris: I told you about what we used to do in Cabanatuan, about throwing boiling water...

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: ...to kill the lice and bedbugs. I don't know how they say it. We had lots of both of them. I know of times when I sat around and would pick lice and squeeze them. Bedbugs just made you sick. Even in those days, they made you sick. I'd have to have been awful hungry to eat a bedbug, I'll tell you. I don't think I ever got that hungry where I'd ate a bedbug. They just smell...have you ever smelled a bedbug?

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: It's terrible. I could smell one within two feet of me. I could smell it.

Anyway, then we made a short trip, and they took about half of us on to the north, and they let half of us off about halfway up. I got off at a place called Jensin. After the war, I kept trying to show Ronnie and my wife or some people I'd be talking to about this place, and I couldn't find Jensin. It wasn't on the map. If I can find my atlas over there, I'll show you there's no Jensin there. Again, it was only recently...I went to a little school over here to Dallas--the Corps of Engineers.

About the last year I was in the Corps of Engineers--maybe it was the year before I retired--there was a guy from the Hawaiian Islands there, and there was a guy from Korea working for the Corps of Engineers. They'd come all the way from both places to go to this school, and it wasn't much of a school. It was an inspection school, and all they did was go through the specifications. That's about all they did, and I knew them pretty well backwards and forwards, most of them. Anyway, I was telling this Korean, you know, that I'd been to Korea. We got to talking about it, and I told him I was in a place called Jensin, and he said, "Well, it's not Jensin anymore. It's Inchon." It was Inchon. When the Japanese left, I think the Koreans... I think he told me that the Koreans changed the name back to Inchon. It was Inchon before the Japanese took over, and they changed it back. Anyway, they changed it when they left to Inchon. That was news to me that that's where I was. I'm coming to the end of the story, I think, pretty close.

Cruz: Well, describe this camp for me. What was the setup like? How do you remember it?

Burris: Well, it probably came the closest to meeting the regulations of the Geneva Convention for prisoners-of-war. We didn't get much harassment, and the work was light. Now everybody had to work to eat, but that was everywhere except in Japan.

None of us had to work there, and we still got two meals a day, but I think that's all we got. But to get a third meal in Korea, we had to work. The farm work was pretty light, and it wasn't too bad, not like it was in Cabanatuan. We didn't get the harassment or anything.

Cruz: Light farm work. What other kinds of work?

Burris: Well, I don't remember. It seems like we did some other things, but I don't remember. I remember the farm work, and I remember the factory work where they'd go out and bring clothes in and sew them up. Boy, they were threadbare clothes. They wasn't much. They were going to give it to soldiers, I guess. But they were so thin they wouldn't even be as comfortable as pajamas back here--just threadbare stuff. We were supposed to make the buttonholes and sew the buttons on. I think I did better at sewing buttonholes than I did sewing the buttons on. Anyway, I think I was supposed to sew twelve shirts or twelve pants or something like that before noon in order to get my...then we didn't have to work in the afternoon, it seems like, unless we hadn't finished our quota. It seemed like that or something. But to get your noon meal, you had to finish up before noon. The noon meal was nothing but some hot tea and some buns. Well, it was probably about like that. About what?

Cruz: Two inches across.

Burris: Two inches across--a little bigger than a biscuit--and maybe

an inch high, and it was heavy, you know, like they were made out of kaffir corn or barley or rice flour. It was heavy. It wasn't light. But that suited us better because, you know, we got more to eat, I think.

Cruz: What other things did you get?

Burris: It was just hot water. Now in the evening meal, I think we sometimes got seaweed--pickled seaweed. Boy, that was delicious. I think twice we got squid. I think the issue per man was one-half a squid.

Cruz: Was that good?

Burris: It was delicious. To me it was real good. I even liked them lines of dark stuff that went through it, you know, and I think that was--what do you call it--the tract that the food went through, and it was beyond the stomach parts (chuckle).

Cruz: I like squid.

Burris: I ate the whole thing. That didn't bother me a bit. The arms were good and different. There was two different textures in that thing. It was kind of rubbery, and yet it was not rubbery. I don't know. I think the arms were kind of rubbery and maybe the body, too. I don't know. I think we got that twice. Several times we got some seaweed. I don't remember too much now. I'd have to get my memory jogged by reading a book almost to say if I remembered this or that, see.

Cruz: How were the guards at this place?

Burris: The guards didn't bother us much.

Cruz: Not much intimidation?

Burris: Generally, I'd say, they didn't give us any trouble at all. Except that I almost got shot there. For no reason at all, I walked out of the barracks one day--I call it the barracks --that's where we slept--and I walked out and was walking around that compound there. All of a sudden, this guard started screaming bloody murder at me, and got his rifle ready, and I think he aimed it at me, but I'm not sure. He got ready to shoot, and I thought, "I've had it right here." For no reason at all. I hadn't done nothing that I could think of. But I thought again, "I better do something right now. I can't run away from this bullet." I wasn't even going to try that. But I thought of this real quick. So I thought, "Well, maybe I can distract him." So I bowed down, and then I saluted him; and then I bowed, and I saluted him--real fast, you know. He started laughing at me. When he started laughing, then I left (chuckle). I got out of sight. I think he must have had some bad feelings toward Americans in general. Probably some of his family got killed or something...friends or something.

Cruz: So you were able to use a little tomfoolery to slip past him?

Burris: Yes, I made a fool out of myself in order to stay alive.

But what I did was calculated. It was fast calculation.

Cruz: Quick thinking.

Burris: Yes. I did something.

Cruz: What were your barracks like here?

Burris: Again, it was like it was in Japan, except it was wider. Oh, shucks, I think we must have had enough room for two people to sleep on either side of the aisle. The building wasn't as long. Down in about the middle ot this building, there was kind of a brick stove--just a pile of bricks--and they'd put some wood in that, and it'd get hot, and it'd radiate heat during the night. They gave us a little round pillow about like that (gesture), oh, maybe twelve or eighteen inches long and maybe six or eight inches in diameter.

Cruz: What was that made out of?

Burris: It was made out of some kind of cloth and had something in it that was kind of hard. It was packed with something or other. It wasn't real hard, but it was not as soft as our pillows. But it kept its shape. I could sleep on my side and have my head almost on that pillow, and I wouldn't be bending my neck at all. Again, I think we had about five blankets, and it was warmer in that building. There was no slats or anything for air to come in. It was still cold up there now, although it was beginning to be spring.

We went out and worked on the farm, and later on we

were marched to this factory. I was out there one day on top of a hill when they had a great, big...oh, it looked like a marble post or cement post or something. I'm not too clear on that. The diameter must have been, oh, six or eight feet in diameter, and then these two posts tapered as it went up, and then there was one of these curved things at the top, you know. I think it was some kind of a religious spot for them.

Cruz: Did you ever see anyone throw rocks from the top of those?

Burris: No, they were too high. This is enormous. It was so big that it was very impressive. I was impressed by it--tremendously. I could see where people who would come to worship there would probably be impressed, also, in their worship. It wouldn't mean nothing to me that way, but I was still impressed by the size and the effect it would have on people.

Then, also, when they started dropping food on us... first of all, I have to tell you this other story about the buttons. We sewed buttons on there, and I couldn't sew enough buttons on these shirts to meet my quota. I finished them in the afternoon, but I lost my meal--that biscuit.

Also, there's one other thing I want to say. I think we got two Red Cross packages while we were in Korea, and we probably got two all the rest of the time I was in prison camp. Now we may have got one in Japan and one in Korea--

I don't remember which--but we got two that last few months of the war, from February to the end of the war, which was August, early August. It seems to me like the war was over in September.

Cruz: Were these two packages complete? Did they appear to be complete?

Burris: Yes, they were complete, although I know the Japanese ate most of them themselves. We never saw them. They didn't give us all the Red Cross packages. We probably got one of a hundred.

Cruz: These two you got did appear to be complete?

Burris: They were complete. They were not broken into. Anyway, we got these, and people would take these...they had some cheese in there--a little package of cheese--a little package of--what do you call it--oleo margarine. We had a little bit of sugar, and we had a little bit of dried coffee.

Some people...now, again, I didn't do this at first, but some people had to do it. I saw some people take a bun, and they took some powdered Klim milk that they had in there. Every case had powdered Klim milk in there, and they had a little tin of jelly or jam. Some of it was strawberry, some of it was grape, some was peach, and... I don't know. There were several kinds there. They'd take some oleo margarine and mix it with some powdered

milk, put a little sugar in it and stir it up and make a kind of a frosting for the cake. Then they would treat their bun as a cake, see, and cover it with this frosting. Then they started doing art work out of this stuff and putting coloring in it. I don't know where they got the coloring, unless it was in some of the jam or something.

Also, the Japanese in Cabanatuan gave us some tooth-powder for us to brush our teeth with. Instead of brushing our teeth with it, it worked better as a something to put a finish on some wood carvings (chuckle). It was more like sand paper.

Cruz: Pretty abrasive.

Burris: Yes. It had a peppermint taste to it--strong peppermint taste--and so some of these guys would put a little bit in something and give it a peppermint flavor. In the Philippines they had a sugar cake of brown sugar. It probably had all kinds of crud in it--straw and cow chips and everything mixed in with it, you know. It was dangerous to even eat one of them. They could melt that and put a little bit of toothpowder in there and give it a peppermint flavor. I tried to mix it with something--I forget what--and I always got it too strong. It tasted terrible. I did it once or twice, and I quit doing it. You had to be innovative.

But, anyway, it was great for shining the wood. The

guys made some chessmen out there. They had some wood that was almost pure white. There was little brown marks in it every once in a while--in this wood--to show the grain, but other than that it was soft and white. You could carve it. They made some beautiful chess sets. Then they had a black wood. Down the core of this wood--in the middle--was a solid black thing--just as black as that purse over there. It was just solid black, and you couldn't see any rings or nothing in it. We used it to carve in any direction you wanted to, except it was always narrow. Sometimes you'd get a big one, maybe this big (gesture), and it would taper up gradually to nothing. You could make black and white chessmen out of that, and some of that wood got into that prison camp. Some of these guys carved some beautiful queens and kings and castles and...I don't remember about the pawns, but they did a pretty good job on the knights. It seemed like they had some kind of person on the pawns--a head or something, a bishop's cap on it or something. But they would polish this stuff, and it was beautiful. Then they made inlaid chessboards out of this wood. They stuck it in there, and I don't remember how they got it to stick and all, but it was beautiful. Of course, they left that when they got on the ships and never saw it again. Some of that stuff was just out of this world. They polished those pieces with this toothpowder.

So I think we had some of that toothpowder in Korea, too. It had a peppermint flavor. If you put just a tiny bit in the whole batch--just a smidgen, you know--you could have a strong peppermint flavor as far as the taste was concerned.

Cruz: Were y'all able to play games?

Burris: We had cards. We played cards. We had a record in Korea, and we played that record over and over, and I never got tired of it. Guess what it was. It was one by Bing Crosby, and it was...what's that day when all the women march out to be seen? Is it Easter? "In Your Easter Bonnet." "In Your Easter Bonnet."

Cruz: "Easter Parade."

Burris: "Easter Parade," yes. Then on the other side was another song by him. I can't think of the name of it, but it stuck with me so long. When I got home, I bought records with him. I've lost them. Of course, I bought another one--cowboy song. Let's see. "Cattle Call." It's real short, but it...do you remember "Cattle Call?"

Cruz: No, I don't think I have.

Burris: It's kind of a famous cowboy singer.

Cruz: I'd have to hear it.

Burris: He'd make that sound kind of like the...Edward Arnold or somebody. There again, I think that's a movie actor. I think that's not right. Anyway, I bought some records,

and I probably still have them around here somewhere.

Cruz: So there was a record player there in Korea?

Burris: There was a record player and one record, and, boy, that record got some use (chuckle).

Cruz: The men were able to play chess, play cards...

Burris: We played chess, and we played cards. Like that sewing bit, I'd been missing my noon meal--one afternoon. I was struggling, and I was working fast and furious, and I still didn't make it. I didn't make it; I didn't get that bun. All I got was some hot tea or hot water. That's all I got. So, anyway, I asked one ol' boy...he sat there, and he'd get that stuff about seven o'clock in the morning, and he'd be done before nine. In fact, his whole group...they'd be over there playing cards or bridge or poker or...what do you call it where you move the pegs up and down?

Cruz: Oh, yes--cribbage.

Burris: Cribbage. Their work was all done, and there I was, struggling right up to the minute, and I'd probably still have three or four shirts left to do. So finally, after missing my meal for about a week, I walked up to this guy that was probably getting through earliest, and I said, "How do you guys do it?" I said, "I'm struggling to get this done, and I can't make my quota; and you guys are playing cards, and you don't work hardly any. You have time for playing cards, and you get to eat." He says, "You're not doing what they

told you, are you?" I says, "Yeah." Then he told me what they were doing. He says, "That's dumb." He says, "You go over to that box and get you one of them big needles--one that's got a big hole in the end of it." He says, "You're going up through there twelve times and down twelve times and then tying it, tying it, going around it to start with and then tying it, and then come back through there and tying it and go through there a couple of times and tie it up." He says, "You're doing all that for every button?" It just had two holes in a button, you know. The Japanese checked them. He'd count. There was supposed to be twelve across there. He said, "That's not the way to do that." He says, "You go over and get that big needle and put six threads through there." (chuckle) He says, "That way, you go up twice, and you're done." The only thing is, when you cut it off, every thread was probably that long (gesture), you know, not maybe over a quarter of an inch long by the time you tied it down. Then you wind it around a couple of times, you know, and stick it through there and a couple of times at different places and out the bottom.

Cruz: Do you reckon those fellows cared whether those buttons stayed on?

Burris: The buttons didn't stay on, but we had quality control there. The guy would count the treads, and he'd count the

buttonholes. I think there were supposed to be six up and down the front and one on each sleeve--something like that. Then he'd take the button, and he'd pull it like this (gesture) --just take it and pull it. He'd give it a little pull, you know, to see if it was okay. But the thing is, when a guy goes to button a button, he kind of twists it a little bit, and the threads were too short, so when he'd twist it, they'd just come right out. They just pulled right off. So I can imagine those Japanese soldiers getting that out to wear, and I could bet they were cussing in Japanese from here to Christmas. There wouldn't be a button to stay on there.

The reason I found out about it, when the war was over, we had a bunch of those shirts and pants, and we were working on them. We threw them all in a corner because we didn't have to meet the noon meal or anything else. They started feeding us three meals a day and treating us decent, you know. They even let us order things from...send somebody out and go get some meat and stuff.

Cruz: Was there a lot of swapping and trading going on at this camp?

Burris: Oh, yes, there was a lot of that, too. Anyway, then I met my quota, see. I got done probably not as quick as they did, but I got done before noon, and I got my bun from then on. Boy, if they'd ever found what we were doing, they'd

have killed us, I believe. They would've flat just killed us. But they never found out until it was too late. Of course, the guys out in the field...but I guess word never got back to them. About half the time, they had been mixed in with so much other stuff that they couldn't tell who did it. Some of their own people might have been doing it (chuckle).

Cruz: Well, how long were you at Jensin before the surrender came?

Burris: It wasn't very long, but it was most of the summer. Let me go back...they let us get a beef..,they let us get a beef...they let us take our...we had been saving, you know. We got that thirty pesos a month still.

Cruz: Japanese pesos?

Burris: Of course, they were Japanese pesos. Of course, we got yen--it was transferred into yen in the bank--where we had it in some Japanese bank. I don't know...I had several months to pay there. I had some yen, and the others did, too. We pooled our yen, and we was able to buy some Japanese hot beer and a live bull and, oh, a little bit of other stuff. I think we got some ice. When they brought that bull into camp, we were getting ready for a big feast. We all pooled our money, and it all went for just almost nothing because they really had inflation in Japan then, too. Somebody asked if anybody knew how to kill a bull. My buddy from the ship, Alsobrook, was there, and he said, "I do." He said, "I used to work around a slaughter house." He

says, "All you do is take a little small hammer and tap them between the eyes. Give it a sharp tap there." He says, "It knocks them out, and you hang 'em...you have a rope, and you tie it around their hoofs, and you bring 'em up--lift 'em up--by pulley and cut their throat and catch their blood and go about your business."

They said,"Okay, Alsobrook, we'll see if we can find us a hammer, and you do it." So they found a sledge hammer about...I don't know...what does a sledge hammer usually weigh? Fourteen pounds? A sledge hammer? Something like that. It looked like a regular sledge hammer that you'd normally see around here. So he took that sledge hammer, and he said, "Well, they usually do it with a smaller hammer." But they said, "That's all we got." So they had the bull with his head in place, and he measured off, and he reared back, and he whapped that bull right in the middle of the eyes--right between the eyes. That bull just shook his head. He was dazed, but he just shook his head. I don't think bulls and cows let out any pain when they're hurt. I don't think they do. They let out a pain when they can't get to a female.

Cruz: That's when they really hurt.

Burris: That's when they hurt. But I don't think cows and bulls make any noise when they're hurt. Anyway, he just shook his head, and Alsobrook hit that poor animal several times.

He finally knocked him to his knees, but he still was wide awake. He must have been hurting in the head something fierce. So he hit him enough to where we all got sorry for the animal, and we had him stop, and we had the guard shoot that poor (chuckle) beast. Then when we ate him, it was tough. I didn't enjoy that meat at all. It was as tough as a boot.

Cruz: How was it cooked?

Burris: Oh, I think it was probably right on the grate. They usually had great, big iron pots to cook their rice or barley or their kaffir corn in. It might have been in that with grease. I don't know. Some of us did the cooking, I think.

Cruz: Did it seem like it was boiled or...

Burris: I think it was more like fried.

Cruz: Fried or just roasted that way.

Burris: We probably just fried it. It seemed to me like there was little pieces. I know each of us got a nice little piece of that meat. We probably had it for two meals that day before we ate it up. But it was tough. You couldn't enjoy it.

I didn't like that hot beer. I couldn't stand that. I'd rather have the hot water. I got to where I enjoyed the hot water. I got some ice water, and I thought, "Boy, now I'm in hog heaven." Ice water, you know. All these years without any ice water, and I'm going to enjoy some

good cold iced tea with sugar in it. I threw up. My stomach wouldn't take that cold water, and I threw it up. I didn't enjoy that a bit. But it didn't take me too long to recover. Later on, when I got to the Philippines, at the hospital there I drank plenty of cold cokes and tea and what-have-you. But that first time it was like the beans. I ate pork and beans. Now they dropped...these big airplanes would come over and drop food to us. They'd weld two or three of these big ol' fifty-gallon drums together.

Cruz: This is after the surrender when you got the air drops.

Burris: After the surrender we got the air drops. They would drop this food to us. The first time they did it, some of the drums went right through the building where we were sleeping. They just buried themselves. They came through the top and the bottom, and they buried themselves in the dirt underneath, and they set fire to the place.

One double or triple drum came through the latrine. They had a latrine out there--a ditch. There was one guy who went out there to hide, and when that came through there, he jumped in that ditch. It was full of maggots and everything else (laughter). It scared him to death. He came out of there just stinking to high heaven. He dove in that stuff, I think. Head to foot, he was just full of that.

So when the next airplane that come across, we were up

to them this time, you know. In the meantime, we were trying to get the Japanese to signal to someway or other get communications to our troops to tell them to drop it someplace else, and we'd control where they dropped it. But not over the camp. I thought it was pretty dangerous out there, setting that fire to the place and everything.

So I went out...there was a long narrow compound... I don't know...it might have been as long as a football field or maybe a little longer. In one end we had the camp buildings for the Japanese and for us and all that, and up here was a garden area (gesture), but there was no garden planted there, just kind of a space. We just walked up and down in there. I went out to what I figured was the middle of that thing--right smack in the middle. I thought, "They're aiming right for the center point, right where I'm at. That's what they're aiming for." I said, "With an airplane they're never going to hit where they aim, so if I sat here, I'm safe; if I stand right here, I'm safe. Beside that, if I see it coming at me, I can run away from it. So the thing to do is get right out there in the middle."

Well, some guys went back and hid in the latrine again, and some of them went over and hid along the edge. They figured that would be safe, you know. A drum came down and hit right in the middle of that group that was huddled

over right next to the fence. It caught one guy's leg and smashed it, and I think they had to take his leg off. But they hid over there. I went over to the middle, like I said, and other people were at different places. What had happened, they'd tie several little tiny parachutes on these drums, and as soon as it hit the air, why, the parachutes would just tear off from the drums, and the drums would come sailing down through the air to hit the ground.

Anyway, here I was, sitting out there, and that drum started coming. I thought it was funny. I couldn't see it coming down. All it was doing was hanging up there and getting bigger. It wasn't coming down at all, as far as I could tell. It was just up in the air and getting bigger. Of course, I realized it was getting closer to the ground when it was getting bigger, too, but I couldn't tell where it was going to fall. It was getting pretty close, and it looked like it was coming right at me, so I ran to the right or left--I don't know which it was--one way--and it was still coming at me. So I ran back the other way, looked up, and that thing was still coming back to me. So I went back to the middle, and I sat down. I just sat down and just let it come. No, I didn't. That first time, I didn't. I was probably back about the middle, and it missed my by three or four feet. It came pretty

close to that point...

Cruz: Boy!

Burris: ...where it buried itself. Of course, we dug cans of beans and clothes and stuff out of there, but they were all dirty and bent and broken. But after that first one, I sat down in the middle and just sat there. I didn't even bother... I looked up, but I didn't make any motion to move because by the time you can tell where it's coming, it's too late to move. You cannot react. It's on the ground. Before you see where it's going to hit--whether it's coming close to you or not--you don't have the time to move like that. I think your brain may sense it, and by that time it don't have time to get the signal back to your feet. You can't move.

Cruz: After that you just didn't bother.

Burris: I just didn't bother to move. I just sat down and let it come. I think the first one is the only one that landed close to me.

Cruz: What kind of damage and injuries did you witness from these drums?

Burris: Well, just that one. Nobody got killed or anything, but one guy got his leg under one of the drums. I think they had to cut his leg off, but I'm not sure.

After about two or three days, the Japanese got them to drop the stuff someplace else, so when it was supposed

to be time for the drop, we'd walk out there. I don't know how we could tell...we probably just went out there and waited. There was a field out there. In the middle of this field--or one place on it--they had a big--looked like--concrete building. It was great, big, heavy, made out of heavy concrete--just a tremendous, strong building. From the door sizes, it looked like the walls must have been this thick or thicker (gesture), and the corners had bigger things than that, you know, at various places. It was just great, big ol' heavy-looking stuff. I thought, "Boy, that's a strong warehouse." I got the chance to go and look inside that, and all it was was a wooden frame with chicken wire on it and something like stucco on it (chuckle) to keep the rain out. From the outside it looked real rigid, and I think a good wind would have blown it away. You know, sometimes your eyes deceive you. Anyway, a drum out there killed a Japanese soldier. It fell on him. Of course, we didn't bother about that.

Cruz: How did you hear about the surrender?

Burris: Well, like you say, we had almost like a stockmarket...or what do you call it? Wall Street? We had almost like a Wall Street there in that. Again, I didn't think of it, but some ol' guy jumped up and says, "I'll trade somebody a bun-and-a-half next week for one now." Well, somebody took him up on it, and before you know it, why, every

night we were just trading. I jumped up, and I'd say... well, you know, I envied that guy eating two buns, and then I envied that guy that got his bun-and-a-half back. He got to eat more. I just thought, "Well, I'll just do that, too. I'll trade my bun off now for one-and-a-half."

Cruz: This is a pretty common trade?

Burris: Everybody was doing it, and we'd keep records. Every night I'd give one away or half of one away for a bun. I'd give half a bun for a bun next week or something. We got to competing, and then it dropped from a week down to five days and three days, you know, and that kind of stuff. Then the amount of bun you get...instead of getting one-and-a-half, you'd get two for one. You had to keep track of this stuff because I had several buns out. I remember one time I got my bun issue, and that was the day I was supposed to get some back. I got some back, and I owed some. What I did, I traded off probably six buns and got six buns and ate the bun I was issued (chuckle).

Cruz: Boy, you guys took a chance (chuckle).

Burris: But I had to go all through this motion, you know. Every-day it was like that. I owed some...

Cruz: Wheeling and dealing.

Burris: Yes, every one of us were like stockbrokers.

Cruz: Did you mostly trade some buns now for more later?

Burris: More later, generally. I'd get hungry and change my mind, and maybe a day or two days later I'd trade somebody

one-and-a-half for one now because I was hungry or something. I had to always be trading my bun off.

Cruz: As far as you could see, did fellows pay up pretty good?

Burris: They'd pay up pretty good. Now there was an enlisted man there, and one night he come out there--it wasn't night there; it wasn't dark yet--and he traded two or three buns a week from now for one tonight--one now. Boy, I fell over myself giving him that bun. It wasn't an hour later that the bug rumor started that the war was over. He knew ahead of time, and he took advantage. Oh, he had buns. He was eating buns out the ears for two or three days.

Cruz: That son-of-a-gun.

Burris: Then finally they started dropping food to us, and when that week rolled around, he'd come back and say, "Here's your free bun." What we were doing, we were still getting the buns, and nobody was eating them. Finally, he brought me...he'd say, "I'm paying up." I could've walked over to that pile myself.

Cruz: As good as his word (chuckle).

Burris: But the bottom fell out of the stockmarket, and I was a sucker. I went over and asked him, you know, when I finally was convinced that the war was over...I didn't believe it at first. It must have taken me four or five hours to believe it. It kept getting stronger and stronger,

and some guy went out to talk to the guards, and they said it was over. He asked them if we won. "Yeah, you Americans won." Then I think I saw one or two guys the next morning crying. But before the night was over, I went over and asked this ol' boy to...you know, he's still eating buns. I asked him...since the war was over and all, it wouldn't be worth much, so I asked him to give me part of them back, anyway. He said, "No, a bargain's a bargain." (laughter) So he come and paid me those buns back, but by then, why, we were eating pork and beans, and buns weren't...and I think we were eating something...I don't know whether we had bread or not, but the buns weren't worth much anymore. So that's the way I found out about the war. I lost my deal there.

Cruz: How was the cooperation then at this point between the Japanese officers and the Americans?

Burris: Well, as far as I could tell, they didn't harass us, and we did what they wanted us to do except for when we could get away with something, like, the buttons and stuff like this.

Now another incident...we went out one time on a farm detail, and we was resting between work periods, and a Japanese had a cigarette--was smoking a cigarette--so everyone--all of us--were waiting around just to dive at that cigarette butt whenever he threw it down. So finally

he threw it down, and a whole bunch of Americans...there was some British there with us, and this one British...I think he was a major...lord major...I don't know. He had a title a mile long. The Americans started to go for that cigarette butt, and he was real dignified, and he kind of went, "Harrumph," you know, and the Americans stopped and looked over at him. He reached over and picked up that cigarette and stuck it in his little pouch or tin. He did it in such an exaggerated, dignified way that he stopped us all from going after it, and then he picked it up.

Cruz: He just plumb snoockered you, didn't he?

Burris: So, anyway, I think a day or two after the war was over, the Japanese went through some kind of a ceremony. I didn't see it, I don't think. Maybe I did see it, too, but I didn't see all of it if I saw it. He had his troops lined up in front of Colonel Beecher. I don't know whether we were lined up or not. I don't remember. It seems like I saw it, and it seems like I didn't see it. But, anyway, they either told me or I saw it. I don't know which. The Japanese commander gave Colonel Beecher his sword, and after the ceremony was over he took it back (chuckle).

Cruz: He wanted that sword, huh?

Burris: Yes. Anyway, now it took, oh, a week or two, I think... I don't know. It took some time--several days--before the Americans...it was two or three days before the Americans

dropped food on us, and then it was a little while later before the Americans actually came in on land.

Cruz: Did you get to go into any Korean villages after the surrender at this point?

Burris: I don't think I...should I talk about that?

Cruz: Sure, if you're able to.

Burris: It's not very decent.

Cruz: Well, it's part of the record, part of the story.

Burris: Anyway, we were allowed to...the Japanese told us through Colonel Beecher...he went to them and talked to the commander...by the way, they changed commanders, too. The guy that was there would have really caught it because he was mean. They got rid of him, and I think they changed the entire guard--all the guards--around there. They weren't always nice or anything, but, anyway, the commander told Colonel Beecher that if the war hadn't have stopped when it did, two days later we would have been executed. I think we had dug our own grave already. It seemed like we dug kind of a long trench alongside of the road, or dug in it or cleaned it out or something--pretty good ditch.

Cruz: So the new commanding officer told you that he had orders to execute you.

Burris: They had orders. They had orders that the Russians were coming down the peninsula so fast that they needed all of their soldiers to fight instead of guarding us. He had

orders to execute us, and he said that if the war had lasted two more days, we would've been executed. I think we'd dug our graves already.

Then we asked them, "Why did you surrender?" He'd always told us we weren't fit to live, that we were the scum of the earth, because MacArthur said we would fight to the last man and then we didn't do it. We gave up. The Japanese would've fought to the last man, like they said, you know. So we didn't deserve to be prisoners-of-war, and that's why they were treating us like dogs. So Colonel Beecher went over there and said, "Now you told us this back there, and we've been kind of believing that you would do it. How come you're surrendering?" (laughter)

Cruz: He got to come back at them.

Burris: He said, "You were gonna fight to the last man, woman, and child, and all this stuff." He says, "How come...." (chuckle).

Cruz: What did he say?

Burris: He said, "Well, we would've, but it's on account of the atomic bomb." Colonel Beecher says, "And do you know what he told us? He told us this bomber--one bomber--came over one of the biggest cities that they had, and the Americans dropped one bomb on this town and destroyed the whole thing --just wiped out the whole thing off the face of the earth." He says, "Do you believe that garbage?" He didn't call it garbage. He called it something else, you know.

He says, "Do you believe that?" I don't think anybody believed it.

Cruz: None of y'all really believed it?

Burris: Some of these more radical people that would accept anything like Ford cars and all from Henry Ford, they might have believed it, but I didn't believe it.

Cruz: The average person didn't believe it.

Burris: A 500-pound bomb wouldn't even destroy a whole city block.

Cruz: The average soldier just sort of brushed that off.

Burris: I couldn't believe it. I did not believe it. In fact, we had some air raids, and I was playing chess there with people, and I didn't even bother to get up from the chessboard.

Cruz: Well, if you didn't know about something like that, that wouldn't be unbelievable.

Burris: But if I'd have known about the atomic bomb being able to tear up that kind of distance, why, I would've been ducking for cover, but I didn't believe that. The biggest thing I could think of was a 500-pound bomb, and that wouldn't even destroy a whole city. It might probably take five or six or maybe ten or twelve of them to destroy a whole city.

Cruz: It is an inconceivable notion--the very idea.

Burris: So I didn't believe it. Later on, I believed it, and then I got kind of scared and thought about myself playing chess. I thought, "You know, I should've been digging a

hole in the ground."

Cruz: So y'all did get to go into the Korean houses?

Burris: They told us we should stay in the camp. The camp authorities wanted the men to stay in the camp, and they'd continue to be guarded by the Japanese. It was not to keep us in the camp. It was to protect us in the camp from the ...he said, "There's a lot of people here that have lost their sons in the war, and their hatred is pretty high. Then you've won the war." He says, "They've still got you here." He says, "If you go out where we can't protect you around the city, you're liable to come to a bad end." He said, "Now if you want to leave, we won't stop you, but we can't protect you if you go on out of here." So there was a few people that went out. One or two of these guys came back, and they didn't have shoes anymore. Then the next night, there was some more people who went out, and they didn't come back with shoes, so we finally knew where they had been, you know, to lose their shoes. They had to take their shoes off to go into one of these cathouses (chuckle), and when they come back for their shoes, they didn't have them there no more. So that's what I meant.

Cruz: I see.

Burris: Some of them had diseases before we even got free. They had diseases already.

Cruz: They lost their shoes, but they picked up something.

Burris: They picked up something else, yes.

Cruz: Were you able to procure any victuals from the Korean village to eat or drink?

Burris: I don't think so. The Japanese brought it to us, or we had details go out and buy it and bring it back ourselves. I don't remember. I think that's the way we got some. They kept feeding us. The food got better and more of it, but within just a few days of the end of the war, we were eating pork and beans and plenty of Spam and everything else that went with it. We didn't eat their stuff no more. Of course, the first few days, I threw up on them beans. I couldn't hold the pork and beans down or Spam or anything else, unless I ate it in little small pieces and mixed in with the garbage.

Cruz: For most of the men, did it take a few days before you were able to hold down that food?

Burris: Yes. We tried to eat it, but then we'd throw it up. Then we'd feel kind of bad, and we'd mix it in with the rice and barley. But within two or three days, well, we were... like, after my first time with ice, I didn't get any more ice in Korea. I think the next ice I got was in the Philippines, and I was cured by then.

When the Americans came there, by that time we'd taken these colored parachutes and made an American flag. So when the Americans landed there--out there in that bay--and they came on the ground, they went directly to where

they saw this flag. Of course, it was our prison camp. These men weren't too awful big, but they were the toughest-looking men...and the hardest and muscular...they had big packs on their back, and instead of marching in a line of four like we always did, they were marching in lines of three. They were lean and hard, and they had a look about them that...they'd kill a Japanese if they just figured he wasn't smiling right. They looked hard and mean, but they were clean. Oh, they were clean, and their uniforms were pressed. They were carrying these big packs. They weren't too big. What they'd do, they were walking at a pretty good clip, and it was heavy stuff they were carrying. They were carrying all their belongings--bed clothes and everything. That was a heavy load they were carrying, and they had to kind of hitch themselves up to take a step; but they did it, and they looked like they could do it all day long.

Cruz: The first American troops looked pretty to y'all?

Burris: Beautiful. If they'd have been angels, they were the meanest-looking, most beautiful angels I'd ever seen (chuckle). But they looked awful good. They came in that camp, and they just kind of brushed the Japanese off. I didn't see it, but the Japanese commander, I think, saluted them when they came in, and they just brushed by. I think one guy told me that an American spit on him. He didn't care a

dadgum about him. They looked mean. They were ready for anything, and there was only a small group. I don't think there was more than thirty or forty of them. Of course, they were in an area that was hostile to them, and they were ready. They were neat and generally had a good appearance --strong appearance--but they gave the appearance that they wouldn't take no foolishness from any people--no foolishness at all. They were ready.

Cruz: So were you all then taken to a transport?

Burris: We were photographed by some kind of...what do they call those people? Public relations man?

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: And then our pictures were sent back to our hometowns. My picture came out in the Tulsa World, I think, long before I got home. Have you seen Of Rice and Men? Have you ever read that book by Calvin Chunn? Have you ever looked at it?

Cruz: No.

Burris: There was my picture along with Chunn, a teacher at Tulsa University. I met him at Cabanatuan in that hospital section. We used to have long talks about Tulsa. In fact, on that day during the bombing on the Oryoko Maru, when I was still alive and I'd seen my friends die...one of them died from a big ol' board--hatch cover board--that fell down on him and made a big hole in his back. He looked at me in kind of a dazed look, and he just kind of sank. Blood

started flowing out of his mouth, and he sank back to the deck, and he was dead. He probably died of lack of oxygen. Of course, he was hurt real bad. I walked around there on that deck, and it was a mess. Chunn was over on the other part of the ship, and he asked me where I was. I showed him where all the bullet holes were in it, and he said, "You lived through that?" I said, "Yeah, and there's some more who lived besides me." He says, "That's something." I said, "Yeah, I think it's possible we're gonna get back to 'T-Town' again. We're not through with 'T-Town' yet." He kind of laughed about it. We talked about Tulsa and Fourth Street there that had that marvelous milkshake and ham sandwiches. I ate there two or three times. Twenty-five cents was a lot for me to spend on a meal, but it was awful good. When I wanted to treat myself real good, I'd spend that twenty-five cents there. He knew about it, too. I think everybody in Tulsa knew about that place. We talked about that. He was in this camp...there was three of us from Tulsa in Jensin--Chunn, myself, and this other guy. I don't remember his name now. I've got that book, and it's about to come apart, about to fall apart. It's a cheap book. See, this Chunn was charged by Beecher, I guess, to write the history of the prison camp. Somehow, he was in on the radio that we had, and he kept his mouth shut. Nobody knew about it. It went out as rumors, and we'd get

a bunch of stupid rumors and some facts, and, of course, we couldn't differentiate between...

Cruz: Back in Cabanatuan?

Burris: Yes. He kept his mouth shut. That's a marvelous thing. I think the people he chose...I don't think my mouth would've stayed shut. I would've spilled it, but they kept that a secret. The guys they let in on that kept the secret, and we were actually told most of the...I think we knew about the big victory...big sea battle... what was that?

Cruz: Midway.

Burris: Midway. We knew about that. Of course, I didn't know where Midway was, but I think we were told about that. We were told about Okinawa, and we were told about a lot of stuff. We were told about some of the southern islands that they took away from the Japanese. But it was mixed in with so much garbage that we didn't believe any of it. We had a tendency to believe the most fantastic that there was and not the real stuff.

Cruz: You're getting that accurate news mixed in with all this other stuff.

Burris: Yes, all the rumors. Chunn had access to a camera, and there was some photographs made in Cabanatuan and, I guess, other places where other people where making them. I think I asked him how he got that back, and I think he said

that he buried it. He wrapped it in some stuff to keep water out, and then he put it in a glass jar or something and buried it in prison camp. When the war was over, they sent us all back to the Philippines, and he went back out there and dug it up.

Cruz: Well, I'll be darned.

Burris: So those pictures got into that book. His book is a poorly written book, I think. I don't think he had the ability to be a real good English teacher, but he taught English, I think. He taught English when I was going to school, and we recognized each other. I think he was an English teacher. His grammar was probably good, but he didn't really have the ability to put words together, or maybe he did, but he didn't do it in this book. It was more like just fact after fact after fact. It was not very interesting except that he covered a lot of points.

Cruz: So you were...this was a hospital ship or transport ship?

Burris: Well, it was a transport ship, but I think it was a hospital ship, too. I don't know. Anyway, they took us out to this...I think it was a hospital ship. They took us to the hospital ship and the first thing they did was get rid of our clothes. They took them away from us. I think they sprayed us good, and then they had us take a shower, and then when we came out of the shower, they took our temperature and questioned us about things. When it came

time to take my temperature, why, I told this ol' corpsman, "I think you're going to find I've got a temperature." So he didn't say anything, and he stuck that thermometer in my mouth, and I guess he took my blood pressure. They didn't give us much of an examination, but, anyway, he got ready to take that thermometer...he looked at that thermometer, and then he took off. He went up there and got a doctor, and they had me in bed real quick. I was feeling pretty good; I wasn't feeling bad. I think I felt about like that all the time I was in Cabanatuan working and all that time.

Cruz: So according to the way you felt, that was just more or less your regular temperature.

Burris: That was normal for me, you know, because I'd only had those quinine pills all that time, even though I had malaria. Anyway, I finally asked somebody what it was--probably a doctor--and he said it was 106 degrees. With anything but malaria, 106 degrees will kill you, but with malaria it could go higher. It don't kill you. You can stand those temperatures.

Cruz: And that's what you just felt as your normal operating temperature.

Burris: Yes. I didn't feel good. I felt kind of fuzzy-wuzzy, you know, but that was about as good as I ever felt in prison camp, and it was normal.

Just before the surrender--it might have been after the surrender--before we got any food or anything, I came walking down that little aisle...I was going out to the latrine or something and came back, and it was dark when I walked down that little aisle. They had lights going in there, and I went blind. I felt terrible, and I went blind again. I tried to estimate where my little bed area was, and I walked right into that wooden thing sticking up and cracked my knee pretty good. Then I fell over it, and I crawled up to where my bed was. I think that lasted three or four minutes, and then I got to see again. But I was having a pretty good attack then. But about two weeks later, I guess, I felt just about like I normally did.

Cruz: About what was your weight when they picked you up on that ship?

Burris: I probably weighed about eighty-five pounds, something like that. I'd been gaining weight slowly ever since I got off the Oryoko Maru, as far as that goes. I probably didn't weigh ninety pounds.

I'd been in that bed about...then they got orders to put the guys that weren't sick on this other ship--troopship. Then the doctor came in there, and he says, "Well, get up and put your clothes on. We gotta go up here to Manchuria where a lot of really sick people are." There wasn't no more boats to carry me over there anymore, so they put a

rope across one ship to the other, and they had me in a little basket there laying down in that thing. They towed me across to the other ship, and I got off and put my clothes on, and I went on down to the Philippines with the rest of them.

I think it took us four days to get to the Philippines on board that troopship. We weren't breaking any old speed record or anything. It took us forty-five or maybe forty-seven or forty-eight days to come up there, but it only took us four days to go back. Like, on that trip coming up there, we seen the sun on one side of us in the morning, and then maybe before the morning was out, why, we'd see the sun on the other side, and it was still morning. So we'd go north awhile, and we'd go south awhile, and then we'd go north awhile. I think part of the time we was probably over by the China coast. They probably found every little island that they could get to, and they'd have to work their way to get up there to Japan because I swear sometimes we went east and west, sometimes northeast and southwest, and north and south--just amazing.

There was one time we picked...there was a Japanese ship with a great, big hole in its side, but it was still floating--great big hole and still floating. We latched onto that ship and towed that to another island, and it took us two or three days to do that. I was worried about

submarines, you know, going slow, but nothing happened.

We got back to the Philippines, and I was put into the hospital there and given an Atabrine treatment. I never heard of Atabrine before, but it was quinine when I was there. But we were given Atabrine. I stayed there, I think, a month or maybe a little longer, maybe six weeks, and I was on this Atabrine treatment.

As far as I can tell, I've never had another attack of malaria. My wife says I have. I've had hot spells, but I don't think I ever had the chills...I may have been chilled, but I don't think I've had the alternating chills and hot fever and hot spells. I don't think I had that. I don't know. Maybe I did, but it hasn't been too bad. In prison camp, I had it about as bad as you can get it, but I think the Atabrine treatment was pretty good. Now it may have affected me in ways that are not too bad, you know. My mental condition...I felt kind of fuzzy-headed for years, and now it's getting awful terrible. Although I'm taking some kind of...a lot of dope. I'm taking an awful lot of dope.

Cruz: That could be it.

Burris: Look here. See, I stayed in this hospital area, and there was one of these corpsmen...he got fat real quick. I think I got fat. I bet when I came home, I was fat. I just ate all the time. I just ate and when I couldn't eat no more,

I'd go get some more to eat. Anyway, I was crazy about cokes, and in the Army area where I was at, the cokes were not iced. They were free, but they didn't have any ice. But the Navy had ice. They were free and they had ice, so I'd go to the Navy place to get my cokes. They were all in the same hospital area. They had a little area there where you could dance, so some of these old guys would dance with these nurses. This one corpsman, by the time we had been there a few days, he was just as fat as a butterball--just round. He was as fat as he was tall--just big and fat. He found a nurse that was just as fat as he was, and then in that ol' hot, steamy atmosphere in the Philippine Islands, they would dance out there. They would do the Bob Wills stomp--one, two, three, four, bomp; one, two, three, four, bomp. Just them two were out there, and they'd make that building shake. They'd come down on that floor, and they were heavy, you know, and the sweat would just pour out of both of them. They were just wringing wet, and they were just having a ball. They were just having the time of their life. I sat there just intrigued by it.

Cruz: They had that floor a shaking, huh?

Burris: I used to live right behind Bob Wills's dance hall in Tulsa, and I knew that stomp. I didn't know how to do it, but I recognized it when other people did it. They were doing it good, and they were having the time of their life, and they

just enjoyed life there. I remember that.

My ol' buddy, the scrounger, Alsobrook, was with me, and he was involved in this...people in the Philippines, during the Cabanatuan days, would bring food into the camp with some of the...I don't know...some kind of a detail or something. They had carts that would come into the camp. He had arrangements with some priest there that whatever got into this camp he was to give it to the men of his squadron. I don't know what squadron he was in, whether he was in the 34th or what, but he did it. He didn't take a drop for himself. He never took a drop for himself. He gave to the...and I don't know how often this happened, but it happened with some regularity. When the war was over and he got back in the Philippines, he went looking up these people to talk to them. I don't know what he talked to them about.

But he was gone this day, and I was going over to the place where I could get a coke, I guess (chuckle), and it had a ramp there. I was walking up this ramp, and I wasn't going very fast. I was still pretty weak, although I was putting on weight. And there was a colonel coming out of that building, and he came down, and he looked down at me, and I looked at him; and I saluted him, and he went on his way. I went in there and did whatever I was going to do, and I came back to the bed there in the hospital place,

and the nurse came in and said, "There's a colonel looking for you." I thought I had recognized him, you know, but I was not sure, and I said, "What's his name?" She says, "Colonel Gilchrist." So I said, "I want to see him. He was my neighbor. When I grew up as a kid, he was my neighbor." He was a World War I pilot, and he kept flying. After he got out of World War I, he kept flying. He was flying for oil companies and one thing and another, and he had given me my first airplane ride, I think, a year before I went up and got in the service. He saw me, and he asked me, "Would you like to go up?" He knew I was building model airplanes all the time. The fact is, the people he stayed with...he was single. He stayed with some people on the same street in Tulsa. I lived in the basement of that house with my mother and brother. I built a model airplane, and those people kept that. It wasn't much of a model, but they kept it. I guess if they were still living today, they probably still got that airplane because they told me when I buried my mother that they still had it.

Cruz: Well, I'll be.

Burris: So he took me up for this ride, and he was amazed that I didn't get scared or sick or anything. I was interested in looking at the wheels land. There was something I was interested in seeing while I was up there--take advantage

of every minute while I was up there to see what I always wondered about, you know.

Anyway, he was a big shot. He was a full colonel at this time, and he'd been in the Air Transport Command. There was a guy above him that was higher up than him, but I think he was second in command of that whole outfit. He told stories of landing in these jungle places and meeting with the natives and cannibals and what-have-you, you know. He had some pretty good experiences there. Some of them made the Life magazine and all that stuff. It was pretty interesting.

Alsobrook wasn't there, so I got to pick another guy, and I picked...I don't remember who it was, but I wasn't ever very friendly with him. I didn't hate him. He was just another guy. He wasn't in my outfit, and I don't even think he was a pilot, but he may have been. But there wasn't nobody there at the hospital to go, so I asked him if he wanted to, and, yes, he wanted to go. So we went out and stayed with all these higher ranking people overnight, and that night they gave us a jeep, and we went to the boxing matches, and they were pretty good boxing matches. Mostly Army people was there raising Cain, and drinking was going on.

Anyway, I could kick myslef. I was in kind of a daze, I guess, from just being out of prison camp. I just couldn't

hardly believe it. There was an opportunity for me to take that jeep...if I'd have expressed a desire to go anyplace, he would have given me a jeep and probably a detail of men to go with me for protection, and I could have gone anywhere I wanted to. I could've gone back to Cabanatuan; I could have made pictures; I probably could've got a camera; I could have gone just a little ways over to Subic Bay and taken pictures, and maybe that ship was still there. Probably it wasn't, but I bet I could have found pictures if I'd have thought, you know. I could have gone out to Bataan and all those places and seen things with friends like Alsobrook and all that, but I didn't think of it.

But, anyway, the next morning we got up, and we were eating breakfast, and about halfway through the breakfast, why, all these people started laughing at me and this other guy. Did I tell you what they were laughing at?

Cruz: No.

Burris: We ate Spam. We were the only ones at the table that ate the Spam. There was Spam and eggs that morning. They got a big bang out of it. You know, we just ate it all, you know. Of course, they were fed up with it.

Cruz: I looked pretty good to y'all, huh?

Burris: Anyway, it wasn't too long after that that I got a flight back home. I came directly to the West Coast. I think they landed at some island or some kind of atoll. I remember

the sign. This place was a little tiny island with an air base on it, I guess. We stayed there maybe an hour while they checked the airplanes over, and then we left again. We went pretty fast to the Hawaiian Islands. They had signs up: "No beer at all" and no this at all, you know (laughter). I got a bang out of that, and that was my first experience with "Kilroy was here." Remember that? You used to see those signs around: "Kilroy was here." I think we made about two landings, and we were back in the Hawaiian Islands.

We didn't stay there very long. We may have changed airplanes there--I'm not sure--but then it was one leg over to San Francisco, and we were there. Then I had relatives there, and it didn't occur to me to try to look them up. They're dead now. I haven't seem them since I was a kid.

Anyway, we took a train over the mountains to get home. I think it took a couple of days to get to Tulsa, maybe two or three days. Then I got home to Tulsa and found out my brother was dead and some of my cousins were dead, and some of my friends were dead. Some of it was kind of hard to take, but, nevertheless, I was home, and it was all over. That's about it.

Now there's probably a lot of things that I've left out--things I don't remember. When I was filling out this report, I guess I wrote that twenty times. I tried to think of everything and get it all in there, and then I

got kind of confused, and I don't know whether I was telling the truth or not. I worried an awful lot about the truth, and I tried to read different things and see if something would come up. Finally, I decided, "Well, to heck with it. I'll just state that my memory's not too good and put it down as I remember it." Like those dates, I know a lot of people disagree with me--going in both directions, from the 14th of December. Some people say it was the 15th; some people say it was the 13th. Also, some of these dates that they read out of books...I think there is some confusion as to what the time zone they're talking about. Now if they're talking about local time in the Philippines, that'll make a whole day's difference back here in the States, you know. I think sometimes some of these things are written by people--like you taking information from them--and I say that something happens on the eighth or ninth of December, 1941--in the States it's a different date from that. I don't remember which way it goes. I think the day starts earlier in the Philippines than it does here. So by the time Hawaii was attacked, it was already almost the 8th. In fact, it was the 8th. I think that in the Philippines it was the next day. Early that morning of the 8th is when I found out about the Hawaiian Islands being attacked. So the war started, for me, on the 8th, although it was in the morning of the 7th on the Hawaiian Islands. So I wonder

about some of these days, if it doesn't vary in people's minds as to where they were when they talk about dates, you know, whether they're talking about local time in the Philippines or American time in the Philippines.

Cruz: How much longer did you stay in the service?

Burris: I was going to get out, and I didn't ever want to go back anyplace in the Far East because I hated that place. When I left there, I made a point of throwing away anything that had to do with the Far East. I think that when I walked into that hospital ship I had my dog tags, my HEO card... and I think that was all I had. I had a new uniform on--it was too big for me, but I had it on--and new underclothes and a good pair of shoes. But everything that I had I didn't want to ever see it again, or have anything to do with it again.

It wasn't so much hatred for me toward the Japanese as it was disgust. I couldn't understand how we could get beat by them people. They did everything so primitive, and they dragged it out, and they beat us. Of course, they had supplies, and when our supplies ran out, we were not going to get anymore. They actually beat us, I think, with many fewer men than we had.

Cruz: You're talking back in Bataan.

Burris: Back in Bataan, when they beat us. But they didn't beat us on account of number of men. They beat us because they

had bullets to fire and food to eat. So when I look back at it like that, why, we were doomed right from the start.

Cruz: What feelings do you have regarding the Japanese that were tried by the American Military Commission for their treatment of prisoners?

Burris: I was against it. I feel like it was done because we won. We were trying to punish those people, and as far as a soldier is concerned, it should be an honorable profession. If I was ordered to execute somebody, I would execute somebody. I didn't know enough not to. I've read stories and saw movies and things about the different people that were ordered to do something that was wrong, and they asked for written orders before the would do it. They didn't refuse to do it, but they asked for written orders. That never occurred to me. If somebody had ordered to me to do it, I'd have done it.

The fact is, when I first saw them shoot an American pilot in a parachute, I hated them immediately. To me it was kind of a non-personal thing. It was airplane against airplane, you know. But I hated them. Right when I saw that, I thought that was a dastardly thing. Yet, that was normal. I was told later on that--but I didn't know these kind of things--if you're shot down over your own lines, where you could fly again, they'd have to fight you again. So they'd kill you. That was the object. If

the enemy was shot down over his lines, you should kill him. Otherwise, he'll come back and fight you again. It takes time to train a pilot, and you hurt the enemy not only by shooting his plane down but by killing him. Now if you can capture him, go ahead. He may know something that your army could...you'd let him live behind your lines.

Cruz: I see.

Burris: So for the war effort, it would be probably more sensible to let him live so that he could give information about his side.

Cruz: So as far as these Japanese that were tried for brutality against prisoners-of-war, do you think that they were justly tried?

Burris: No, I think it was wrong. I think they were being soldiers, and they fought the way they saw it. Now there was atrocities. Different people committed atrocities. Yes, they should have been killed, and, in fact, I wouldn't have minded seeing them tortured.

Cruz: If you would draw a line around those...

Burris: Well, they were getting big commanders--top commanders. Those are the people. They just put the whole blame onto them, and it was impossible for a commander to know of any certain atrocity, at least until after the fact. They didn't order it done, except we did hear they were going to execute us that time in Korea if the war lasted two

more days. Nevertheless, there was a lot of things that, at least for a while, the commanders didn't know about, when it happened at least, I'm sure.

Now I've got a book in there on the shelf someplace that actually says that at the time of the trial, these Japanese commanders didn't know of these atrocities on people marching out of Bataan and all this other stuff. That guy is off his rocker that wrote that book. He belongs almost in the area where Jane Fonda belongs, as far as I'm concerned, because there had been too much publicity. There had been a tremendous amount of publicity when Colonel Dyess escaped, when that little group of men escaped from Mindanao there. By the way, when I was flying, it was under Colonel Dyess--the two days that I flew. So I know good and well, by the time the trial came, that those commanders knew about that. That's ridiculous to say at the time of the trial that they didn't know anything about it when it had years for this publicity to scatter all over the world. They knew about it by then. I read that stuff, and it'd almost make you sick to read it, that this guy would print a book and justify not trying these people because the guy just still didn't even know what he was being tried for. He insisted that this was the first he'd heard of it at all. I don't believe that.

Cruz: So you believe that the officers might not have known about

it or soldiers involved in the brutality of war would not be culpable or responsible, but individuals who did commit atrocities should be held accountable for that.

Burris: Yes, yes, yes. The individuals that did it or even ordered it...

Cruz: I see.

Burris: ...should be accounted for--if they could prove it. But just to say that he is responsible for all these actions by his troops under him...I'm talking about the top men.

Cruz: Yes.

Burris: I used to say that when MacArthur...when we was in that war over there, to me it didn't look like any sense at all. It was just a big mess--a big bunch of errors and goof-ups and just a mess. Nobody knew what they were doing, and everybody did everything wrong. But later on, I got to reading about MacArthur and the way he looked at that, and he saw the overall picture. It wasn't so bad to him. A big general sees the big picture. He don't see the individuals in that picture unless they make a name for themself and become heroes or something. They're not aware of every individual man and what he does. There's no way he could be. These guys could do things on their own, like, that guy that shot the guy in the prison camp. You know, all he was doing was picking his okra up. It happened to be on the other side of the ditch, but at that time we were

allowed to have a garden there. All of a sudden he wanted to kill this guy, and he did it. I don't think anybody ordered that soldier to kill him at all. I don't think he said, "Start killing them when they get to the fence." I don't believe it. One guy did it, and that was it. So I just don't think the big generals could be held accountable for that stuff, and I think when we do it, it's revenge; and we're able to accomplish it because we won. I don't remember seeing anywhere where any of our men were tried for atrocities. I don't know of any, but I just believe that there were some. You get to hating each other and get used to that, and it don't take much for you to kind of just go off the deep end a little bit and do it.

Cruz: Is there anything else, Mr. Burris, that we haven't covered that we need on the record?

Burris: Well, maybe. It's about my not drinking the water while I was on board the Oryoko Maru, when everybody else drank theirs. As far as I know everybody else drank theirs, and many of them, I'd say the majority of them, went mad screaming for water to the point that they would cut people's wrists and necks where they had a good vein, and they'd drink their blood. They'd cut their wrists with razor blades and drink their blood. I was thirsty and hot, and I wanted to take a drink, oh, about maybe every ten or fifteen or twenty minutes. I'd want to take a drink, and

yet I kept saying, "If it doesn't get any worse than this, I can take it. Besides, I might need it a little later on. I better wait until then." Then later on I'd get thirsty with all these people screaming and hollering out there. I'd get awful thirsty, and I'd think about taking a drink, and I'd say, "No, I better put it off and drink later because right now I'm okay. I might need it worse later on." I just kept this up until when it was all over, I hadn't taken a drop of my water; and when I swam ashore from the ship, I got seawater in my canteen. Later on, after the war, I got to thinking about that, and it looked to me like it was so similar that I might say it was the little story of the glass mountain all over again, when the little boy would hear the big noise in the barn, and he'd say, "If it doesn't get any worse than this,I can stand it." He kept saying that until morning came and the noise stopped, and there was a new horse out in the pasture. He did this a second day and a third day, and he got more horses. It always got worse, but he kept saying that he could stand it if it don't get any worse than this. So I think that that was just another case of the glass mountain all over again. I think that's a good example of the glass mountain.

Cruz: I see. Mr. Burris, I want to thank you for your time. I'm sure this will be a valuable contribution to the record.

Burris: I hope so.