

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

125

Interview with  
George Koury, Jr.  
April 27, 1972

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ron E. Marcello  
Terms of Use: Open  
Approved: [Signature]  
Date: April 27, 1972

Oral History Collection

Mr. George Koury

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: April 27, 1972

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. George Koury, Jr., for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 27, 1972, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Koury in order to get his reminiscences and impressions and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Koury was captured on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines in April of 1941 and was a participant in the infamous Bataan Death March. Mr. Koury, to begin this interview, would you briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, would you tell me where you were born, when you were born, your education, your present occupation, things of that nature?

Mr. Koury: I was born in Houston, Texas September 13, 1922. I finished high school in Texarkana, Texas.

Dr. Marcello: Texarkana, Texas?

Mr. Koury: Yes. I attended Southern State College in Magnolia, Arkansas, and Texas A & M in College Station, Texas,

until quitting to join the service in January, 1941.

Marcello: Why did you decide to enter the service?

Koury: Well, some friends of mine were in this flight training, and it sounded like a pretty good idea. I was at loose ends in school, really, didn't know what I wanted to do, and it seemed to be the thing to do at the time.

Marcello: I gather, then, that you went in the Air Corps.

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: Where did you take your basic training?

Koury: Well, I went to Scott Field, well, Jefferson Barracks and then Scott Field, and then to Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado.

Marcello: Did you go into flight training there?

Koury: I went to bombardment school, bombardier training.

Marcello: When did you go to the Philippines? Can you estimate that date?

Koury: I got to the Philippines about September or October.

Marcello: This would have been 19 . . . ?

Koury: '41 . . .

Marcello: Of 1941. At the time you entered the service, did you have any premonitions that the country would shortly be going to war?

Koury: Oh, they started the war hysteria on the movies and played their national anthem at the movies and showing

the flag on the screen, and I look back on it now and I see that we were being built up to it. At the time, I didn't think anything about it. I don't think any of us did.

Marcello: I would assume that all eyes were more or less turned to Europe, however, rather than the Far East.

Koury: Yes. A bunch of my friends in a National Guard outfit were called up, and they all went to Alaska, and they were all laughing about how lucky they were because they were going away from any action that might occur. If you think about it, they got right in the middle of it. The Aleutians, you know, were attacked fairly early.

Marcello: That's right. How did you get over to the Philippines? Did you fly, or did you go by ship?

Koury: No, we flew the first group of B-17's that went from the West Coast of the United States to Wake, Midway, Australia, and then north to the Philippines.

Marcello: Did you stop very long at either Wake or Midway island?

Koury: No, we just refueled and had one night layover. We were in Australia a couple of nights, but other than that we went right on to the Philippines. By this time, things were getting pretty dark.

Marcello: Where did you land when you got to the Philippines?

Koury: Clark Field.

Marcello: What was the situation like when you got there? Was it training as usual, or was it training taking place at an accelerated pace, or were there alerts or anything like that?

Koury: No, it was very calm and I would say normal, placid. No extra duty, no extra flights, leaves were unrestricted. And that was at first, and about the middle of November things picked up, and we started flying patrols, and leaves were cancelled, and things got a little tighter. But even then, if you wanted to go, you went, you know.

Marcello: I would assume that the Philippines was considered pretty good duty in peacetime, was it not?

Koury: Beautiful, fantastic.

Marcello: I understand that the American money went a long way, also.

Koury: A long way. In fact, the boys who were there much longer than I was told me you could take thirty dollars a month and live like a king, have your own house downtown, your own "mama-san," and all the little goodies that go along with it.

Marcello: Incidentally, could you identify your unit?

Koury: Yes. 19th Bomb Group.

Marcello: You mentioned when you got to the Philippines, all that you did was . . . well, let's say by November of

1941, all that you did was conduct these patrols and so on and so forth.

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: Where did these patrols go? Were these patrols just around the islands, or were you concerned with the Japanese planes on Formosa?

Koury: Well, we flew almost to Formosa several times. In fact, we thought this is where the attack would come from. In fact, most of us felt like we would be the first group hit, other than Pearl Harbor or any place else, and we thought the attack would come from Formosa. In fact, planes were tracked in, just as we were. We were going out, and they were coming in. But nobody ever saw them, but they claimed they picked them up on the radar and so forth and so on. But I didn't see them.

Marcello: Now as I recall, the head of the Air Corps in the Philippines at this time was a general by the name of Brereton. Is that correct?

Koury: Right.

Marcello: Do you recall anything about him?

Koury: No, I don't.

Marcello: Can you remember what your reaction was when you heard that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Koury: Yes. I was shocked.

Marcello: Can you remember where you were and what you were doing at the time?

Koury: Yes (chuckle). The day before, all leaves had been cancelled, and we had been put on full alert, and I was in the airplane on the ground. In fact, we were manning the planes, you know. A guy came running up and said, "Hey, we've been hit!" And I said, "Where have we been hit?" I thought we had been hit somewhere in the Philippines. He said, "Pearl Harbor!" And, of course, we were surprised, and we kept thinking, we were going to take off and hit Formosa because that was the plan. But the orders never came.

Marcello: What happened? Why wasn't the order ever given to get those B-17's in the air? Do you know?

Koury: Well, no, nothing but rumors, and, of course, we heard that MacArthur was called and was asked, "Do we go?" And he said, "I'll have to get my orders from Washington." He called Washington, and Washington said, "No, don't go." This is what we heard.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you heard you weren't going to get into the air to get to Formosa? Obviously, you knew that those B-17's would be a pretty inviting target for these Japanese.

Koury: Well, we were airborne not too long after, but we were

told to fly strictly defensive patrols. When the Japanese started landing--they were on their way then, of course--we flew over the convoys and did some indiscriminate bombing and hurt them very little except for a few schools of fish, I'm sure. It seemed like utter confusion, really. I look back now and say what I should have done this and that, and I'm sure the generals can and everybody else can. But at the time everybody was confused.

Marcello: Well, what happened next? You heard the word about the attack on Pearl Harbor, the bombers were in the air making routine flights, and then I gather you had to come back to refuel, wasn't that correct?

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: What happened then?

Koury: Well, we got back fine, and then we got back off again. We were out when we were hit.

Marcello: Now at this time, were you loaded with bombs, or are you still on patrol?

Koury: No, we were loaded. But Clark was hit, as was Nichols, while we were out on our second patrol. Again, we were told to try evasive action and try to survive. That's what we did, and we got back in, and that's when we got it.



Marcello: Were you able to land at Clark Field after you came back the second time?

Koury: Oh, yes.

Marcello: In other words, they hadn't done too much damage to the runways. What did the field look like?

Koury: It was bombed pretty bad. You have to remember that a B-17 isn't like a 747. It will land on grass. You can land it so slow that you can taxi around pretty easily. You got to realign your thinking of airplanes as compared to today's because they could land inside a football field, really.

Marcello: What happened after you landed?

Koury: Well, the place was pretty well shot up and, of course, the first thing we noticed was that everybody tried to do was go back to their quarters to see if we could salvage anything. I had some cameras, and other guys did too, and some stuff. And, of course, my stuff was shot all up. The first thing they hit, of course, was the living quarters and things like that, and everything was pretty well shot up and torn up. And that's it. We weren't hit nearly as bad as Nichols was, but Nichols was where the fighters were.

Marcello: What happened from that point then? Now this was on essentially the same day as the attack on Pearl Harbor, isn't that correct. It was December 8th your time?

Koury: Oh, yes. Right, same day exactly. People forget this. They think it was the next day, but really it wasn't, it was a matter of hours. I've never researched exactly what the difference was. Well, then everybody got to counting ranks, grades, and all this kind of stuff because there were very few airplanes left, and, of course, everybody wanted to fly the airplanes.

Marcello: Why did you want to fly the airplanes?

Koury: Well, it was a way out!

Marcello: I see. You were already looking forward then to the evacuation.

Koury: Oh, yes, everybody did. This was the first thing that came up: "Well, there ain't no way the Philippines can be defended." The well known plan was to withdraw to Bataan. This is MacArthur's plan that he was sent over to draw up when he was on loan to the Philippine government. It was the only feasible defense that they had, was to go to Bataan. Well, there is no Air Force in Bataan, so everybody assumed that the few planes that were left would be ordered out. Unfortunately, we weren't, and what was left of the force was destroyed piecemeal--not too piecemeal, really, but rather rapidly!

Marcello: Can you describe the destruction of those airplanes and how it took place?

Koury: Well, most of them was destroyed on the ground, but quite a few of the boys were shot down. I remember the last two P-40's that I saw. They went up and took on fifty or sixty Zeros, and, of course, that was foolhardy and they didn't last too long. But after that, there wasn't any airplanes. In fact, when we got to Bataan, there were only three little old liaison planes, I call them for want of a better word. They were the only ones on Bataan that I know anything about.

Marcello: I assume that everybody was in for a rather rude awakening when they observed those Zeros in action.

Koury: Well, yes. Also, those "Bettys," the bombers, were rather effective airplanes. But the Zero was a real craft. It really was. It could fly circles around anything we had. And the Japs were rather astute pilots.

Marcello: Can you describe the actual destruction of those bombers? Were you on the base when a lot of those bombers were destroyed?

Koury: Oh, you bet!

Marcello: Describe some of those attacks, exactly how they took place.

Koury: Well, the bombers would come in at high level first, and this was to get your anti-aircraft out of the way and get everybody's head down.

Marcello: And I gather those anti-aircraft weapons had trouble reaching those bombers.

Koury: Very ineffective because we didn't have any new fuses or anything like that, which came in later. They were very ineffective, and we didn't have any fighter planes in the air, so they just came in, oh, I'd say at twelve, fourteen, or fifteen thousand feet, dropped their bombs, and set everything on fire, and then the Zeros came in behind them and strafed everything. That's what really did the damage because they'd burn everything in sight.

Marcello: How soon did these attacks take place after you had landed on the eighth?

Koury: Oh, I think we got hit three times in the first day that I remember, and you will have to bear with me now. I think it was three times because it all happened so quickly.

Marcello: By the end of the first day, the Japanese had control of the air, I gather.

Koury: Oh, by the end of the first strike they controlled the air, really. In fact, if they'd flown in and dropped

paratroopers right then, the whole thing would have been over. Why they didn't do it, I'll never know, but they had things their own way. I think the first day they hit us with a total of probably three hundred bombers. I don't remember if this was fifty bombers six different times or what, but it was more airplanes than I had ever seen before in my life.

Marcello: Do you remember what you were doing when those bombers hit and what you did when they started to hit?

Koury: Yes, I was quite young then and very foolish, and I was laying there on the ground watching them. I thought it was rather pretty, really, until I saw my first men blown up, and then I saw what the bombs could do, and then I realized that it was kind of deadly (chuckle). Before that, I thought it was rather pretty, watching them in those beautiful formations come in and dropping their bombs.

Marcello: What does somebody in your position do? You obviously were not manning one of the anti-aircraft guns and so on. What did you do during the attack except trying to stay low?

Koury: Well, at one time we tried to get the planes out of hangars, the few that were in there, and we also tried to get some ammunition out of some burning

buildings and so forth. But after it was all over, I just thought, "Why don't you find a hole and just stay there?"

Marcello: In other words, you were relegated to a ground crew, I guess you can say, after those attacks.

Koury: I was purely a spectator, that's all. Some of the guys tried getting in the turrets of the airplanes and shooting the machine guns. Well, this was foolish. You couldn't hit a bomber with a machine gun. You just lay there and watched, that's all.

Marcello: How frustrated did you become? You know, watching these bombers coming over and not being able to do anything about it?

Koury: Not really frustrated. I think awestruck would be a better word because, I believe--and I'm sure that nine out of ten guys believed--that the Jap was inferior and that they wouldn't dare to strike us. In fact, my father had letters which he kept for years . . . I'd written him a couple of weeks before the war about not to worry, that we had more power than they did, and all this silly and childish stuff. But I was completely amazed that they had the ability to do what they did, and they just flat whipped us real good, that's all.

Marcello: Did you still think that it would be a very short war at this time?

Koury: At that time, I did. I thought, "Well, now they will get these airplanes out of here, and we'll pull back into Bataan. That's what the war plan is, and a couple of weeks from now they'll come storming in from Australia, and here we'll go."

Marcello: I assume you didn't realize the extent of the damage at Pearl Harbor.

Koury: No. All we knew was that Pearl Harbor had been hit. We did not know that the fleet had been as severely crippled as it was.

Marcello: And, of course, if any help did come, it was going to have to come from Pearl Harbor, isn't that correct?

Koury: Well, no. At that time there was a sizeable convoy on its way to the Philippines. In fact, as you probably know, it was sidetracked to Java, and that's where these troops fought what little fighting was done in Java. If they had been in the Philippines, possibly things would have been different, not a great deal. We could have held out a little longer, but they did have some airplanes we could have used and some tanks we could have used.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you did participate in

the bombing of the Japanese convoys when they landed.

Would you care to describe this?

Koury: Well, they pulled in there just like you would park out at a stadium at a football game or something and lined up hub to hub, ship to ship.

Marcello: Now where was this?

Koury: At Lingayen Gulf. There were more ships than I had ever seen before in my lif<sup>e</sup>. But they knew by then that we had maybe five or six airworthy bombers left.

Marcello: When did this take place?

Koury: This was about six or seven days . . . five or six days later.

Marcello: You still had a few bombers left yet?

Koury: Oh, yes. We had four or five that we could get into the air. This is where the Kelly saga was born, among others. They had no respect for us at all. They knew we couldn't hurt them. They just pulled in there and lined up and waded ashore. We made a couple of futile passes, but we couldn't get to them. We never hit one of those ships; I doubt it seriously. There were some awfully big lies told and claims made, but that is about what it amounted to.

Marcello: Well, what happened at this point now? The Japanese have attacked on December 8th, and within three, four,



five, or six days they had virtually destroyed all of the American planes. What did you do from that point? And by this time, I gather that they had already landed.

Koury: Oh, yes. You have to remember that Manila was declared an open city on Christmas Eve, I think it was, which is almost three weeks after the war started. The Japs never really tried to bomb Manila. We went back into Manila after our airplanes were destroyed, and we were given special duties or details. I was one of the guys that was involved in burning secret documents at the embassy. Money was burned, serial numbers were recorded, and money was burned. The gold was shipped to Corregidor. Cleaning out the city is about what it amounted to, and really it was still kind of like a game. Nobody just really knew yet what was happening.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago something about the serial numbers of the money. What did you say you did with that?

Koury: Recorded the serial numbers.

Marcello: Oh, recorded them.

Koury: Yes. They made a record of all the money that was burned, and why or what they did with it, I'll never know.

Marcello: They were going to make sure that nothing got into Japanese hands, apparently.

Koury: Tried to, but still a lot of stuff did, I'm sure.

Marcello: How long did this task take?

Koury: I was in Manila for about a week. Now I don't know how long the job went on, but I was there for about a week. I left with the last group of American troops that had to go to Bataan. We left in private cars that we confiscated and stole and so forth and so on, plus a few Army buses and so forth. It was just like a game, you know, kind of like a lark!

Marcello: Was this a rather uneventful trip from Manila down into the Bataan Peninsula?

Koury: Very uneventful, really. The Japs were closing rapidly on the neck of the peninsula up there, and we were told to get out and get on up there. Plus the fact, you weren't supposed to be in Manila after it was declared an open city. The main reason we left, as I remember it, was that they were afraid we were going to get cut off.

Marcello: I gather that you were a part of that--I don't want to use that word "motley crew"--that was behind the lines at Bataan. In other words, were you in that group that was a combination of sailors and airmen and

maybe a few Marines and that particular group? Did you get formed into that outfit as soon as you got to Bataan?

Koury: No. We still had one P-40 on Bataan, and I went directly there, and I don't know how this all came about, but they were looking for an armament man. I was an armorer, and I knew how to work on the guns and so forth. I couldn't fly the P-40, but I could help him keep flying. He lasted three or four days, and I stayed with him until he got shot up, and then I wound up with this group that was part infantry, part navy, and part air corps and what have you.

Marcello: What exactly was the job of this . . . again, I'll call them a "Motle crew" for lack of a better name?

Koury: To do anything that had to be done. We fought as infantry, we did some scouting, we did some supply work, we did just a little bit of everything, really.

Marcello: Were you ever on the front lines?

Koury: Oh, yes, quite often.

Marcello: When did you get to the front lines?

Koury: Well, when we got to Bataan . . . like I say, I went with this . . . I forget this kid's name. Anyway, it's not important; he got killed. But I was there about a full week, I'd say, and then we started on

back because this is when the Japs made their first big breakthrough. They gave everybody a gun and said, "You are now in the infantry." And I said, "Okay." So we helped set up another skirmish line, and I guess that's the first time, really, when we set up the second main line of resistance.

Marcello: What was it like in the front line?

Koury: Well, really, I never did see anymore to it, actually, than kind of camping out because you didn't see very many Japs. Occasionally you would see one.

Marcello: What was the terrain like?

Koury: Very rugged. I would compare Bataan to New Mexico or Colorado without the conveniences, really. It's awfully rugged country, and there was only one road with any nature at all to go on.

Marcello: This was the road that went all the way around the edge of the peninsula, isn't that correct?

Koury: Yes, they called it Highway 1. I guess it was the only road. They had mountains running right down the middle of the peninsula, and we had bridges that were easily destroyed, and there was a lot of water that they had to cross. But it wasn't too bad. It was kind of frightening at first, you know. It was the first time I had ever heard a mortar go off. I

didn't know what the hell was happening when they started dropping those mortar shells in on us. But I found out that you get in a hole, and unless they hit right in the hole with you, they ain't going to hurt you. But I didn't see too many Japs. I don't think I ever hit one. I shot at a bunch, but it wasn't too bad. I'd rather not be an infantryman if I had my choice, though.

Marcello: Were you on the front lines with the Philippine Army or the Philippine Scouts?

Koury: Well, this is what was the real problem, I think now. The Philippine Scouts were excellent troops.

Marcello: Now, they were strictly volunteers, and as I recall, they were really a part of the American Army, were they not?

Koury: Yes. They were paid, I think, and outfitted and all by the Americans. The Philippine Army was much like the South Vietnamese Army is today. It probably will end up without direction and training. I'm sure you've heard this from other guys that you would see one of them coming back towards you from the front, you would say, "Where are you going?" and he says, "Oh, I barely escaped with me mess kit." He doesn't even have his gun, but he's going out. You can't blame them. They didn't know; they hadn't been trained.

Marcello: I gather that these troops had been thrown into action rather hastily.

Koury: Yes. They were all draftees, I think, and all the training they had occurred probably from July of '41 on. But the Philippine Scouts were tough hombres. They would fight with anybody. But, there just wasn't enough of them.

Marcello: Well, how long were you on the front lines this first time?

Koury: Oh, about a week or ten days. Then we went back to . . . I forget the name of this little thing on the coast where the Japs were going to try to make an end run and come in on us.

Marcello: I don't remember the name of the point either, but they tried to land some commando outfits or something, did they not, behind the lines?

Koury: We stopped that.

Marcello: Well, can you describe that action or that activity?

Koury: Well, again, this was just a bunch of guys that weren't infantry or anything. We were sent back there and told that the Japs were going to come ashore down there. We were sitting way up, oh, 150 or 200 feet up, and there wasn't no way for anybody to come up there. So we sat there for a couple of days, and sure enough, about the third night, here they come. Well,

when they landed, it seemed like guns and everything like that just materialized from nowhere, and we heard later that they had it in caves. These guns had been put there and had been waiting for them. This had been done before the war started.

Marcello: You mean there were guns waiting there for the Japanese.

Koury: Yes, the heavy stuff, the mortars, the machine guns, and stuff like that. Of course, they had their handguns and stuff, but we heard later that this stuff had all been put there, prearranged by either Japs or fifth column before the war had started just for this purpose. But we stopped that. They got ashore, but we drove them back off.

Marcello: Some of them hung on for quite awhile, as I recall, did they not, before they were finally wiped out?

Koury: Oh, yes! You bet! They don't give up easy.

Marcello: Can you describe what some of this action was like?

Koury: Well, it was kind of like the Keystone Kops comedy. Nobody really knew what they were doing except they were the bad guys and we were the good guys. We were supposed to shoot the bad guys, and they would shoot back. And, of course, like I say, we had no mortars. We had some .50 caliber machine guns and a lot of rifles and a lot of hand grenades. We just rolled

hand grenades down and shot down the hill, and some of the Japs did get up, but they didn't stay up. I think, really, that may have prolonged Bataan for maybe three or four days, I don't know. I don't know why we left there, come to think about it. Oh, yes, I do too. They broke through in the middle. They overran the Philippine Army in the middle, and we had to fall back before we got outflanked. That's right.

Marcello: So you went back up to the front lines again?

Koury: Well, no, we went back to . . . by then . . . and this is getting on late in the activities. I think we went back to Mount Mariveles--a bunch of us did--and I know we started planning what we were going to do, that we weren't going to surrender, you know, a bunch of us.

Marcello: Why didn't you want to surrender? Had you heard that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Koury: Oh, we'd seen evidence of some of the things that they did.

Marcello: For example, what sort of things did you see?

Koury: Well, we seen some Filipino Scouts that had been overrun, and they were very badly mutilated and emasculated and first one thing and then another. Of course, I will say that the Filipinos did them the same way when they got their hands on one. I'm not too sure that the



Americans didn't either, but that wasn't the primary thing. Really, in our minds we kept thinking that somebody was going to come and get us.

Marcello: You were still expecting help from the United States.

Koury: Yes. MacArthur had sent out the message right before he left, and he said we had more troops than the enemy, and we had this, that and the other, and all this kind of stuff, and what we could do, and that we had to hold. We believed that. We really did up until they said surrender. We believed it! (Chuckle)

Marcello: What were your opinions of General MacArthur?

Koury: Well, I only saw him twice. I thought he was a tremendous person, really. I think he was an ideal general, dynamic, a showman, and I think a general has to be, really. The name "Dugout Doug" doesn't fit him at all. I saw him once in the middle of an air raid, and he was the calmest head around. He may have been frightened--I'm sure he was--but he certainly didn't indicate it, and he stood right out in the open and watched the planes.

Marcello: Was this on Bataan?

Koury: Yes. And everybody else was on the ground, including myself. In fact, this was right after Christmas. I think he was a great general, I really do. I think history will vindicate the man.

Marcello: What were the rations like on Bataan?

Koury: Well, this contributed more to the early demise of the defense of Bataan than anything else because we went on two meals a day right after we got there. These were two rather skimpy meals, and it's hard enough to stay awake eighteen or twenty hours a day and do any kind of physical activity much less being scared to death all the time and still be hungry. Plus being sick. A lot of the guys had malaria and stuff like that.

Marcello: What was your own physical condition like?

Koury: Beautiful. I was 160 pounds of steel, I guess, when the war started, and that's the reason I'm here now, I think. I was in real good shape, and a lot of the guys weren't. This is one reason why they thought the way they did about the 17,000 people or whatever it was that died on the march and this, that, and the other. You go out and get a group of people and walk them that way, and 17,000 of them would die, too, if they're not in good shape. But most of us that were fairly young and athletic survived without too much trouble.

Marcello: By what means did you supplement your diet? I gather that the troops found ways of supplementing their diet on Bataan.

Koury: You bet. We hunted. One funny story occurred when we were out of sugar, oh, for a couple of months. We had a dugout there with sandbags piled all over the top of it, and we got a real close near miss one day with a bomb on that dugout. It split open one of these sacks, and it was brown sugar; we had dozens of bags of brown sugar piled on this thing for sandbags, and most people didn't know anything about it. The rest of us made rock candy and had a good time with that sugar, for awhile.

Marcello: Did you ever reach the point where you were eating snakes or monkeys or things of that nature?

Koury: No, sir. I tasted monkey, but I never got that hungry.

Marcello: I assume that while you were on Bataan you were subjected to artillery and aerial bombardments. Which did you consider the worst?

Koury: Artillery, by far.

Marcello: For what reason?

Koury: It was more frightening. Aerial bombardments . . . you can see planes coming, you can watch the bombs fall, you can hear them fall, and you know you are safe. It's just that simple, even when they are coming right over you. But artillery is a vicious thing. It sneaks in on you like a snake, and when they detonate those shells

just six feet above the ground or so, boy, that shrapnel can really decimate people quickly. Artillery frightened me a great deal.

Marcello: This is, incidentally, the opinion that most of the people I've talked to have had, also. The artillery was much more deadly and much more frightening, much more bothersome, than was the aerial bombardment. Both of them, obviously, were bad, but the artillery was the worst, I think.

Koury: That's why I can't get too enthusiastic about our aerial support in Vietnam. I don't think we are doing anything except destroying a lot of foliage.

Marcello: Well, describe the events, then, leading up to the surrender. Where were you when you heard about the surrender? By this time, of course, the Japanese had finally broken through the last line after a tremendous artillery bombardment.

Koury: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Do you remember that bombardment?

Koury: Very well because of several things. One, this bombardment lasted for . . . oh, I don't know, twenty-four hours, we'll say.

Marcello: Was it constant?

Koury: Oh, yes, just like rolling thunder all the time. At the same time we were detonating and destroying our

own ammunition dumps. Right in the middle of this we had an earthquake, and this is why I remember it so well because I was laying on the ground trying to sleep while all this was going on. We were back at Mount Mariveles, and there were some 155's of ours that weren't too far from us that were shooting back at them. I thought, "My God, the world is coming to an end!" And, you know, it wasn't a bad tremor, but the earth shook enough that you knew it wasn't the artillery or the bombers or anything, But there was an earthquake in connection with that. I don't know how many people mentioned that to you, but it occurred, and we'd already been told then that at a certain hour the next day or something the war was going to be over.

Marcello: What did you think when you heard that the Americans were surrendering?

Koury: Well, a group of us--I say a group, I mean fifty or sixty, I guess--had already decided that we weren't going to surrender. We were going to split up, and, in fact, we were getting medical kits together, and money because money was most important, and food and hand guns, stuff like that. We were going to take off and stay around Mount Mariveles there because it was a good place to hide. The next day when the colonel told us to stack

our weapons and turn them in, well, we just took off for the hills. We broke into smaller groups, not fifty or sixty of us. We were in smaller groups.

Marcello: I assume you were planning to get into contact with some of the guerrillas or something and perhaps form some units back in the hills?

Koury: We had no plans, really. We were just trying to hide. We still felt that in maybe six months from then or a year, but not any more than that, you know, that they'd be back. But we lasted less than a week.

Marcello: What happened? Can you describe some of the things that happened during this week that you . . . in other words, you were out there a week after the surrender?

Koury: Yes, it was about seven or eight days after we were supposed to have surrendered before they caught us.

Marcello: What did you do while you were out there?

Koury: Well, we just hid. There weren't many people around, really. There was plenty of water, plenty of food, so we just slept and stood watch. Like I say, we had no firm plan for what we were going to do, except try to hide, stay out of the way.

Marcello: Did you see very many Japanese while you were out there hiding?

Koury: No, not really.

Marcello: They were all past you, I gather.

Koury: Yes. And we were up on the mountain, and they weren't bothering too much with that. They were too busy rounding people up down below. We woke up one morning, and there one stood, and he had one of these little guns on me, and everybody else was laying there, somebody had a gun on them. They were most unhappy to find us up there.

Marcello: What did they do?

Koury: Well, they wanted to know why we hadn't honored our word and surrendered like we should, and we told them . . .

Marcello: Did they have somebody there who could speak English?

Koury: Oh, yes, very, very well. We told them we didn't know anything about it and that we thought the war was still on, which they didn't buy at all, of course.

Marcello: Were you scared?

Koury: Frightened! You bet!

Marcello: Did they look like pretty rough customers?

Koury: No, this was the sickening part. They looked like-- I don't know--all little bitty guys, and they really were. I've seen a lot of Japs that weren't, but this bunch that caught us were. They were regulars, and they were good soldiers.

Marcello: Did they rough you up any?

Koury: Oh, they roughed us up. They didn't beat us or anything. They took our watches, our rings, our billfolds.

Marcello: They did completely loot you?

Koury: Yes, oh, yes. If you were a little hesitant in moving, well, they hit you with a gun or something, you know, or kicked you. Of course, I think this is one thing the American people overlook. That's the way the Japs treated each other. I've seen them . . . later on in the prison camp I was working at an airstrip where they was training navy aviators--the Japs were--and the instructor rides in the rear cockpit, where in America he would ride in the front. I've seen them stand up in that rear cockpit and beat these Jap student pilots around the head with a rubber hose while he was trying to land an airplane. Now that's taking it pretty far. I don't think they treated us too much differently than they treated each other. I think that's one thing people overlook. Sure, they treated us badly, but they treated each other badly, too.

Marcello: What did they do with you after they had captured you?

Koury: Well, they tied us up, which I learned later was unusual. Most of the troops, when they surrendered, they didn't tie them up or anything. They tied us up



and started us off down the mountain, and we got there in time to join that last exodus out. (chuckle)

Marcello: Now they took you down to the Mariveles?

Koury: Yes, down to the foot of the mountain.

Marcello: If you were this late, I would gather that you were on the tail end of the people who were on the march.

Koury: No, not really. As I understood it, during the first two or three days, a lot of the guys rode. I would say we were about in the middle of the march itself.

Marcello: I gather by the time you had gotten to Mariveles, there was mass confusion. From all of it that I have read, the Japanese did not expect to capture that many people, and they were totally unprepared to handle that many people.

Koury: They had no idea. Of course, it was totally foreign to their nature to expect a group that large to ever surrender. They expected to find maybe 2,000 or 3,000 people, and I don't know how many were there, but there were far more than that.

Marcello: Well, what happened when you got to Mariveles?

Koury: Well, we got to Mariveles, and they had these big open areas where the troops were, and you just went in there and sat down, and they took you out in numbers and started you up the road.

Marcello: Did they start you in groups of about 300? How large were the groups?

Koury: I have no idea, I really don't. No, I think our group was larger than that because basically the group I was in was fairly healthy people. I don't know but there was more than 300 people, I think.

Marcello: Well, describe the first leg of this journey. As I recall, it went from Mariveles to Balanga, isn't that correct, by way of Cabcaban.

Koury: Yes, Cabcaban then Limay and then Balanga. This wasn't too bad at all because, as I say, most of the guys were in pretty good shape.

Marcello: How long did that trip take?

Koury: Well, I don't want to lie to you, but as I remember, one day.

Marcello: It was about nineteen miles, as I recall, was it not?

Koury: Yes. As I remember, we made that in one day without too much strain because most of the guys in my group were in pretty good shape.

Marcello: Well, describe the first leg of that trip. What was it like?

Koury: This was where, I think, they started trying to get our attention--that we were prisoners-of-war and they were God's children.

Marcello: In what way? How did they try to get your attention?

Koury: Well, you kept going and you didn't stop, and you didn't go to the bathroom, and you didn't do anything or they would shoot you or knock you in the head or stick you with a saber or what have you. There was no hanky-panky at all.

Marcello: Did you have any food or water with you?

Koury: Nothing, nothing at all, no. They made us drop our canteens and made us drop everything before we started.

Marcello: What was the temperature?

Koury: Oh, it was awfully hot, as usual. I'd say in the nineties and awfully humid, you know.

Marcello: Did you have any sort of a hat or a helmet or a shield from the sun?

Koury: I had an overseas cap which is absolutely useless in the sun. As I say, most of our group made this without any problem. Of course, we were hot and tired and thirsty.

Marcello: Were there very many guards?

Koury: Surprisingly, no. I'd say one guard for every hundred guys, maybe.

Marcello: What was the attitude of these guards?

Koury: Mean, very unhappy.

Marcello: Did you actually witness some of the atrocities on the first leg of this journey?

Koury: Oh, yes. There were several people shot.

Marcello: Can you describe exactly what took place? I think this is important to get into the record.

Koury: Well, guys would break the rules or do something they wasn't supposed to do. They would see a stream or a pump, and in this part of the country there are a lot of artesian wells. A guy has been walking for four or five hours and he gets thirsty and sees an artesian well there, and he thinks, "My God, I'll get a drink of water!" Well, they would shoot him because they told us not to do this. Who is to say they are wrong, you know? I can't criticize them too severely for it. I think they should have let us have that water. On the other hand, they told me not to get a drink of water, and I wasn't going to get a drink of water. I never saw anybody shot, beaten, or stabbed unless they did something that was against what we had already been told not to do.

Marcello: Did you ever witness anybody being bayoneted?

Koury: Oh, yes. Yes, in fact, there was a real good friend of mine who was bayoneted after being shot that day. He took some food from a native alongside the road and sat down, and the Jap guard walked up beside him and hit him up beside the head with his rifle and then shot

him and then stabbed him.

Marcello: Did you see any decapitations in this leg of the route?  
I know, later on, there were some decapitations, but  
I wasn't sure if there were any on this leg of the route.

Koury: I didn't see any decapitations on the march at all. I  
saw some later in prison camp but not on the march. I  
saw some Filipino heads on posts that, I suppose, were  
decapitated on the march. But I didn't see any of  
them.

Marcello: Were there Filipinos in your group, or were these  
strictly all Americans?

Koury: No, we were strictly all Americans.

Marcello: Did very many people actually drop out or fall by the  
wayside and then get killed or shot by the Japanese?

Koury: Not that first day, no. We made it into some kind of  
a farm. They had some kind of animals there, anyway,  
where we spent the night and where we were.

Marcello: Did they harass you any when you got to Balanga?

Koury: No, not particularly. They herded us into this pen.  
I forget what it was now. They wouldn't let us sit  
down or anything, and then they said they were going  
to turn the water on for "X" number of minutes, I  
forget what it was. I think there was one spigot, and  
I know, I didn't get any water.

- Marcello: You did not get any water at all that first day?
- Koury: No. I don't know how many other guys didn't, but many of them didn't.
- Marcello: Was this the most serious part of the whole trip--not getting water?
- Koury: Yes. This is where everybody starts thinking, "Well, the next day we have got to do something. We can't go on like this because God knows how far we got to walk." It could've gone on for weeks. So a bunch of us started talking that night: "Well, there aren't many guards, and there are quite a few of us, and let's just take this thing over." The next day, the guards were probably doubled or tripled over what it had been the first day, you know. I don't think they heard us talking or anything, I think it was just one of those things that happened.
- Marcello: Incidentally, while you were on the first leg of that march, did you pass any Japanese troops coming the other way?
- Koury: Oh, yes. In fact, before we left down here, they were beginning to . . . they had some howitzers in there, and they were lobbing shells over the mountain onto Corregidor.
- Marcello: Were you caught in that bombardment that Corregidor sent back?

Koury: No. Now that came later, and I was back in Bataan then. After we got to O'Donnell, I was sent back into Bataan on a work detail because of my armament background, defusing bombs and shells. We did get caught in some of the crossfire then. The worst thing about the march was the lack of water.

Marcello: Well, these Japanese troops coming the other way, I understand that they would occasionally lean out of the trucks and so on and take swipes at the prisoners. Did this ever happen to your group?

Koury: Yes, but they weren't nearly as bad as the guys that were hawking us up the road here because, as I understand it, most of these guys that we passed coming down were regulars and . . .

Marcello: Front line troops

Koury: Yes, and they weren't too bad. I've heard these same things, but I didn't see any of this.

Marcello: What was your first night like here at Balanga.

Koury: I slept good, as I remember. We were awfully crowded, but as I remember, I slept pretty well. We got a rather early start the next day, again without food. I think I did get a drink, but I'm not sure.

Marcello: They didn't give you any food at all the next day again?

Koury: No. We got a rice ball the next night.

Marcello: Now they did have some trucks at Balanga to take some of the prisoners the rest of the way to O'Donnell. What happened to your group? How come you didn't manage to get on any of the trucks?

Koury: Because we were healthy.

Marcello: I see.

Koury: Also, they were still mad at us because we were bad guys. The fact that we tried to hide hurt us a little bit. Most of the guys in the group had been late "roundees" or whatever you want to call us.

Marcello: Well, let's talk about the second day, when you went from Balanga to . . . I think you finally ended up at either Orani or Lubao, was it not?

Koury: I think we went all the way to Lubao because I think we made it in three days, if I am not mistaken. They really pushed us.

Marcello: Do you remember anything that happened on that second day?

Koury: Yes, we had quite a few guys drop out, and they were killed, and some were picked up.

Marcello: Did you ever see any acts of compassion on the part of the Japanese?

Koury: Yes. Some were actually picked up on the second day by the Japs.



Marcello: Did they ever offer you any water or anything like that--any Japanese soldiers?

Koury: No, nothing. Now on the second day I did see this one interpreter pull this fellow into the shade and kind of prop him up and was wiping his brow off and everything, and we went on. I suppose he was taken care of. But some of them were actually picked up by trucks after they had fallen out. Then there were some who for no rhyme or reason were killed. It all depends on who the guard was, I suppose. I don't know.

Marcello: Did the guards seem to be taking a great deal of delight in the discomfort of the prisoners?

Koury: Yes, you have to remember that these guys are walking, too! They were walking just as fast as we were and without breaks like we were. I'm sure that this was just as distasteful to them even though they had plenty of water and food. They rather enjoyed, I think, cracking us on the shins and so forth.

Marcello: Did you pass very many civilians along the way?

Koury: Yes. I think, one of the most memorable things that happened through all of this was the obvious sympathy of the Filipino civilians for us and their repeated efforts to get food, cigarettes, water, and so forth to you even though they were risking their lives as well.

Many of them did this, especially after we got on the train and started up.

Marcello: Well, then what happened? Where did you stop that second night? Was it at Lubao?

Koury: I think it was, yes. This is where they locked a bunch of guys up in this building.

Marcello: This was the old rice mill, I think. Were you in there?

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: What were conditions like in that rice mill?

Koury: Oh, they put a hundred or so people in this room and closed all the doors and windows. It was stifling, and people who had preceded you on the march had used the restroom rather profusely in there, and it was rather uncomfortable, and nobody slept very much that night.

Marcello: By this time had you gotten any food or water?

Koury: Yes, I think we had a rice ball here, and I think we had water here. When I say water, there was not a great deal of it, just enough to keep you from perishing.

Marcello: I understand the Japanese completely enclosed the prisoners in that rice mill, and it was extremely hot, humid, and what have you, very little air.

Koury: That was a bad deal. It really was.

Marcello: I'm sure you spent a rather uncomfortable night.

Koury: Well, I don't think anybody slept. I was trying to remember . . . I think that was the first time where we had burial detail, but I'm not sure.

Marcello: What was the burial detail like at this place?

Koury: Well, it was to bury the boys that died that night, and that was the first time that I ever had to go out with a group and bury a bunch of Americans by just digging a hole and throwing them in it. I say a bunch, five or six. There wasn't too many compared to later burial details, but that was a bad deal that night. It really was. There wasn't any sense in that because there was a big compound that was fenced, as I remember, that we could have been locked up in.

Marcello: Well, I gather that there weren't even too many prisoners to be put into this rice mill, and they were actually outside. There were prisoners outside, too, were there not?

Koury: Yes, but only when they couldn't get anybody else in there.

Marcello: Right.

Koury: And the boys outside, as I remember, they had water and everything all night long. I don't know what the reason for that was. It may have been because there was a rather sizeable civilian community, and they may have been worried about them, but I don't know.

Marcello: So what happened on the third leg. On the third day, you made it from Lubao to San Fernando, which is where the railhead was.

Koury: Made it to the freight train.

Marcello: Was every day getting tougher?

Koury: Well, the third day another guy and I--I forget his name--were carrying a major who was in pretty bad shape, an older fellow, and that was a hard day. But they seemed to let up a little bit, and as I remember, we had a water stop that day. Then when we got to San Fernando, they kept us over night, and the next day . . .

Marcello: Where did they keep you that night at San Fernando?

Koury: As I remember, at the railyards. The next day they jammed us into these old "forty-and-eight" boxcars, and that's when I thought we were all going to die, really.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like on those boxcars.

Koury: Well, you barely had room to sit, and that was completely with your feet doubled up under you. It was like trying to win a contest to see how many people you could get into a room. That is about what it was. They locked the doors on those babies, too, after they got you in there. Again, you are in the tropics, and you are jammed in there, and there isn't much air to breathe or anything else.

Marcello: People had dysentery?

Koury: Many of them by then, yes. It was rather uncomfortable to ride. They did stop--I don't know--once or twice and open the doors, and if they hadn't, I don't think anybody would have made it because it was rather bad.

Marcello: I understand one of the things that did take place when they did open the doors was that there was a steady rotation of troops from the back up to the doors and so on. Did that take place in your car?

Koury: Yes. The Americans by and large at this stage of the game were still trying to take care of each other. Now later on, this changed.

Marcello: Sure.

Koury: But at this stage of the game everybody was still trying to be a good Joe, and if they'd stayed that way, a great many more would have made it home than did.

Marcello: How long did that trip take from San Fernando to Capas, which was the end of the railhead?

Koury: Less than a day, as I remember. I don't remember, really, but I think it was less than a day because I think we got into O'Donnell still early in the afternoon, early enough to get our indoctrination speech anyway.

Marcello: You got off the train at Capas, and then, as I recall, you marched from there to Camp O'Donnell. Describe what the march was like.

Koury: Well, around Camp O'Donnell, the terrain was completely changed. You'd think you were in the Texas prairie country, and it wasn't bad at all. At Capas we all got food and water. We were in bad shape from the railroad ride, but the food and water helped, and it wasn't too far from there on into the camp, as I remember--eight, nine, or ten miles--and, again, I'm guessing.

Marcello: I gather the Japanese didn't harass you very much on this last leg of the journey.

Koury: No, they didn't, not until we got to the camp.

Marcello: How about civilians? Did you see additional civilians along the way?

Koury: Well, from Capas on, no. As I remember, we didn't.

Marcello: How about at San Fernando?

Koury: Oh, yes, many were there. That's a rather large town for that part of the country, but, there again, they were all friendly to us even in the face of the Japs being right there. The worst leg, I think, was the second day--to me at least, as I remember it now.

Marcello: Were you personally ever struck or hit by any Japanese guards on this march?

Koury: On the march, no.

Marcello: I gather that you were in fairly good physical condition by the time you reached O'Donnell.

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what it looked like when you got there. What did the camp itself look like?

Koury: Well, it was a Philippine Army barracks. That was what it had been built for--for the Philippine Army. It was a kind of a training camp, and it was bamboo barracks with thatched roofs.

Marcello: Was there a barbed wire around the camp?

Koury: There was a barbed wire fence but not the high barbed wire fence at all. They had constructed guard shacks up on stilts. It didn't look too bad, and there were plenty of water spigots, and there was water running. We were all crowded into a small area and told to be seated and wait because the commander wanted to talk to us. He came out and made a nice little welcoming speech to us.

Marcello: What did he tell you, among other things?

Koury: He said that we were no damn good and that they were going to work us until we couldn't work any more and then kill us!

Marcello: Why did he say you were no damn good?

Koury: Well, we wouldn't fight, we were cowards, we were a disgrace to our country and to ourselves, to our families.

Marcello: This, apparently, is something they couldn't understand-- the fact that so many surrendered.

Koury: No, they firmly felt this, they really did!

Marcello: In other words, they felt that you more or less had forfeited the right to live.

Koury: That's right. That's exactly what they felt, and they didn't hesitate to tell you.

Marcello: Well, what happened from that point then? Here you were sitting there, and you had received your indoctrination.

Koury: Well, then we were put into barracks by groups, and I forgot how many there were to a barracks. These barracks had no beds or anything. They were just double deck shelves. And, of course, there were no doors. It was just an opening down the middle.

Marcello: Did you have any possessions at all at this time?

Koury: I had what I had on, which was a khaki shirt and khaki pants and a good pair of shoes, and that's about it. I had a New Testament and that's all; they just shucked everything else out. They put us in these barracks, and about two days later they came around and made you fill out these papers, you know, and everything.



Marcello: What sort of papers were these that you had to fill out?

Koury: Name, rank, serial number, education, where you were from, parents, who you wanted notified, the usual jazz, what you did in the service, what your skills were.

Marcello: I'm sure they were especially interested in what your skills were in the service.

Koury: Yes, and this is where so many of us made a mistake. Instead of you saying you were infantry, we put down too much detail.

Marcello: You got a little bit too specific.

Koury: Yes. So they came around about, oh, after we had been there about a week, I think, and said we were going on this work detail.

Marcello: Incidentally, during this week that you were at O'Donnell, I would assume that the death rate continued, did it not?

Koury: Among the Filipinos, yes, particularly. They were dying like flies. Not so much the Americans.

Marcello: Did you ever get on any of the burial details at O'Donnell?

Koury: No, because as I say, again, very few Americans were dying. They had the Filipinos and the Americans separated and so the Filipinos were taking care of their own, of course.

Marcello: Do you know why they separated the Filipinos and the Americans?

Koury: I think because they wanted to alienate the two groups, and they would tell us that if the Filipinos had fought trying to defend their own country, we would have been better off, and then they would tell them that if they hadn't listened to the Americans, this wouldn't have happened. I think this is why. Going out on the work detail, I think, is the best thing that ever happened to us because after we got back to Bataan . . .

Marcello: On this work detail, you went to Bataan?

Koury: Yes, we went back to Bataan, and we were rolling up barbed wire, and we were defusing artillery shells and bombs and all that kind of jazz.

Marcello: How did the Japanese treat you on these details?

Koury: Beautifully. This was the best treatment I had all during the time I was interned. Again, I say, I think it was the best thing that happened to me because it allowed me to recover from the march because we had plenty of food, all the food you wanted. We ate and slept just like they did, and, in fact, we lived with the Jap troops. These were troops equivalent to our Quartermaster Corps, you know, and they didn't treat us badly at all. We had certain well defined rules,

and they worked the hell out of us, but we ate well, we drank well, and we slept well, and we were well treated.

Marcello: You mentioned certain well defined rules. What were some of these well defined rules?

Koury: Well, you didn't leave the camp area at night, and you "sirred" all the Japanese regardless of rank, and you saluted, and you asked permission if you wanted to go to the latrine, and when you were told to do something, you did it, and basically that's about all. There was no real harassment at all.

Marcello: About how many of you were there in this work party?

Koury: I'd say about fifty or sixty.

Marcello: And you did say they worked you pretty hard?

Koury: Oh, yes. The Japs were a hard-working people, and they worked just as hard as we did. We were stacking shells and bombs and trying to defuse all the duds and reclaiming the war materials. This is what it amounted to.

Marcello: About how long were you on this detail?

Koury: For about two months because we were still there after Corregidor, so I'd say a good two months.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that while you were on this detail, you did get caught in one of those barrages between Corregidor and Bataan.

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: What was it like?

Koury: Well, it was more frightening than it was dangerous because both the Japs and the Americans were using howitzers, and they were going over us. But we were right in the middle of awful big shells--these 2,000 pound babies going back and forth. And, of course, it didn't bother the Japs because they knew what was going on, but it kind of frightened us. Then we left there and went to Cabanatuan when we got through with our work detail.

Marcello: Had you heard anything at all about Cabanatuan before you went there?

Koury: Oh, yes. We heard all these frightening stories about everybody dying.

Marcello: How did you get to Cabanatuan? Did they take you there by truck?

Koury: Yes, we rode every inch of the way.

Marcello: Describe this camp as compared or contrasted to O'Donnell.

Koury: Well, it was very similar, about twice as large, but the facilities were comparable. By then they had had extended the fences. They now had two fences, an inner fence and an outer fence--the inner fence for the Americans to walk guard on and the outer fence for the Japs to walk guard on.

Marcello: Why did they have the Americans walking guard?

Koury: Well, as you know, the rule was that you were in squads of ten, and if one guy left, the other nine got shot! So we walked guard in self-defense which I think is fairly easily understood! (chuckle) Cabanatuan, by and large, was a decent place with the exception of the starvation diet.

Marcello: What was your diet consisting of?

Koury: Two meals a day, again of the lugao or the wet rice in the morning.

Marcello: This is a type of mush, is it not?

Koury: Yes. It's a rice that you don't cook all the water out of, and sometimes it is awful watery when the rice ration was short. We had dry rice in the evenings with an occasional cup of soup. Meat was very rare, maybe one pig a month for 500 guys or something. Now I'm just guessing, but there wasn't enough meat to amount to anything. You didn't never get enough of anything, and this is what was really frustrating. I think if you could have gotten enough of the rice with a little salt or something to go with it, you would have felt like a human being.

Marcello: I gather that by this time food was constantly on your mind at all times probably more than anything else.

Koury: Yes, unfortunately this is true.

Marcello: What sort of menus did you concoct in your own mind?

Koury: Oh, God! You should have heard some of those things-- turkeys and the bake sweet potatoes and all this kind of stuff! Thanksgiving Day dinners is what everybody could see themselves eating at every meal, you know. Other than that, the work details were fair.

Marcello: What was a typical daily routine like? Describe a typical day at Cabanatuan.

Koury: Well, you were up bright and early. I don't remember what time, so we'll say six o'clock. By this time, the water and stuff is pretty well organized, and you washed up just much like you do today. You had chow and then you lined up and went to work. They would line everybody up and count them off by numbers, and the first hundred guys, we'll say, went on the burial detail, and the next hundred guys would get hoes and go out and work on the farm, and the next guys might be working in camp. They had it pretty well organized. As I remember it, you worked thirteen days, and you are off one. I think that was the schedule we got more or less oriented on. They would work you from sunup to sundown pretty generally, and there wasn't much loafing going on. They didn't approve of that.

Marcello: What sort of jobs did you perform at Cabanatuan?

Koury: Well, I worked on the farm, for awhile.

Marcello: Was that your first job?

Koury: That was my first job at Cabanatuan.

Marcello: What was work like on the farm?

Koury: Well, it was pretty nasty, really, because the tools . . . you don't plow ground. You line people up side by side, and you give them a pick-axe, and that's the way they turned ground. You get out there and swing a pick-axe for two hours without stopping . . . and I mean, they don't want you to stop to straighten up, to wipe your brow, or anything. They want you to work! A lot of guys just couldn't do it, and then they had people coming along behind you with the rakes and hoes and all, and it does a beautiful job if you got enough people.

Marcello: And if the people are healthy and in good condition.

Koury: Yes, and this is the sad part. Let's face it, as people got sicker, their work got slower even in spite of the beatings and the harassment and everything because a man with the dysentery and a 104<sup>o</sup> fever can only be beaten so much, and he'll lay down and die. He doesn't care.

Marcello: Well, what sort of food were you growing on this farm?

Koury: Sweet potatoes, predominately. That is the one crop I remember because they grow well in the Philippines. I'm sure there were others, but that's one that I remember because we used to get the sweet potato tops in our soup, and they were eating the sweet potatoes. I never will get over that.

Marcello: I gather that on the farm, you ran into some rather rough customers as guards, too, did you not?

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: Is this where you ran into "Air Raid?"

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: What was "Air Raid" like?

Koury: Well, like a Nippon "Hitler" type. He was "screaming mime," very inconsistent. What was okay today was "no-no" tomorrow, and I think this was the main complaint people really had. You know, if I tell you the same thing today and tomorrow and the next day, whether you like it or not, you'll get used to it. But with that crazy character, he might walk by some day and knock your head off for no reason at all.

Marcello: Did you ever have any run-ins with him?

Koury: Not personally, no. I'm a coward, and I generally do what I'm told! (Chuckle)

Marcello: How did he get that name "Air Raid?"



Koury: I don't know, I really don't.

Marcello: Now was "Donald Duck" on the farm also?

Koury: "Donald Duck" was there, you're right.

Marcello: What was "Donald Duck" like?

Koury: He was a whole lot like "Air Raid," and where these guys got these names, I don't know. I don't have any idea. But you know Americans, they're going to give everybody a nickname. They were really two awful bad guys, but there were others just as bad.

Marcello: Can you think of any others?

Koury: I can't remember any names, no.

Marcello: Compared to other jobs at Cabanatuan, was working on the farm considered pretty tough duty?

Koury: Oh, yes, I think so. I think that was the hardest job we had at Cabanatuan.

Marcello: You did not plant any rice, however.

Koury: No, I did not. Now whether any was planted or not, I don't know.

Marcello: What were some of the other jobs you had at Cabanatuan?

Koury: Well, I was lucky. After I left the farm, again because of some of the stuff I had put on my questionnaire, I guess, I wound up working in the hospital.

Marcello: What could a person with your background do in a hospital?

Koury: Well, I wound up as the company physician's assistant. Dr. John Baumgardner was a very good friend of mine then, and I haven't seen him since. He's a Duke man, I think, if I am not mistaken. He was a captain. He and I collapsed lungs together with little rigs that we designed, and we had thorax machines that we made out of a syringe and a little rubber tubing.

Marcello: Well, were these thorax machines?

Koury: Yes! These guys had tuberculosis. I learned a lot, and we did some good, and we did some harm, I'm sure. But that's what I was doing by and large. Most of the time I was at Cabanatuan I was working in the hospital.

Marcello: I would assume that there had to be a lot of improvising done in that hospital . . .

Koury: Oh, yes! You had nothing, really, until the Christmas of '43, I guess it was, when the first Red Cross packages came to us. And then we had a few things, but by and large we had very little to work with.

Marcello: What did you do to treat somebody for dysentery?

Koury: Well, you tried to get burnt rice out of the kitchen, which was the first thing that we had to use. And then eventually they did bring in some sulpha drugs.

Marcello: And I think for awhile they also used charcoal or charcoal water, did they not?

Koury: Oh, charcoal is excellent. That is what the burnt rice was for. You could get very little charcoal, but you could get burnt rice easier. But that dysentery killed many a man, it really did.

Marcello: I would assume that the prisoners who did get to the hospital were in extremely bad shape in most cases.

Koury: Yes, this was a real problem, and we had what we called the "zero" ward. You probably heard about it.

Marcello: Describe it.

Koury: Well, this was just a plain old barracks, just like all the rest of them, but this is where men were put to die, pure and simple. When a man was carried in there, you knew he wasn't coming out alive. It was pretty gruesome, really, because all the guys had no control of their bowels at all, and most of them had beriberi and looked just horrible, really. It was a pretty sad thing to have to take a man in there and lay him down and know that in probably twenty-four hours that was going to be it.

Marcello: Did you get any more food and so on by working in the hospital?

Koury: No, not really, but I wasn't doing as much manual labor either, so this was a plus. I did get plenty of water, and I got my fair share of food which some of the boys

on the work detail didn't because at this stage in time the old American system of "he who has, gets" began to take hold. Guys would get a little clique forming, and a little captain would say you are in charge of the chow, and these guys gets two-thirds and you get one-third, and this is why many people died. Things weren't equally divided.

Marcello: By this time, it was more or less every man for himself.

Koury: You bet.

Marcello: And I gather that you saw the best and the worst coming out in people at this stage.

Koury: You bet.

Marcello: It brought out the true character of men.

Koury: That's right. I think that any man that has a choice to make, I don't know very many that wouldn't take care of themselves. There are a few that didn't, but by and large, I'd say that 99 per cent of them, when it came down to a choice of life or death, is going to make it for themselves.

Marcello: What were some of the more unusual type of operations that you witnessed or assisted in while you were in the hospital?

Koury: Well, we took appendix out.

Marcello: How did you do that? Apparently, you had no anesthetics, did you?

Koury: Yes, we had chloroform that the Japs gave us. Of course, with chloroform you just guess. You don't know what you are doing. Fortunately, taking out an appendix is not a big chore. Of course, collapsing the lungs was the most fascinating thing to me. We took off a foot, hands.

Marcello: Were amputations rather commonplace?

Koury: No, not commonplace at all. We took out a man's eye one time. If I remember, it was very simple. But the doctors did a great deal with nothing, frankly, and they were all dedicated people.

Marcello: What were sanitary conditions like in the hospital?

Koury: This, I guess, killed more people than disease itself, especially in the dysentery wards. There just wasn't no way to keep it clean! You had no hot water, except what you could heat. You had very little soap. You couldn't sterilize your instruments. Occasionally you would get alcohol. And then, of course, we had a siege of diptheria that threatened to wipe the place out.

Marcello: How did you manage to get rid of the diptheria?

Koury: Well, we were burying forty or fifty a day, I guess, with diptheria. The doctors kept telling the Japs that this was a dangerous thing, and it can destroy you as well as it can us. So the Japs brought diptheria serum

in, and the day they brought it in, I got diptheria. I was living right. I was one of the first ones to get the shots. That was the most serious thing, I think, that ever happened to us.

Marcello: I gather that the Japanese didn't supply you very much in the way of medical supplies.

Koury: No. We had Japanese physicians that came in and checked the hospital, and they would sit there and shake their heads, you know, and say, "Oh, we can't give you anything; we don't have anything to give you." But when the Red Cross started getting parcels in, we started getting sulpha drugs and basic medicines that we needed.

Marcello: I gather that you didn't receive any Red Cross supplies until about a year after you were there.

Koury: That's right. Christmas of '43, I think, was the first time. That's when you really saw the upturn in the morale and in physical condition.

Marcello: From what I gather, that was a real lifesaver.

Koury: I think it saved everybody's life.

Marcello: What were some of the things in those Red Cross packages?

Koury: We had canned beef, powdered milk, chocolate, hardtack, beans--I thought I'd never forget--canned coffee, cigarettes. Of course, by this time nearly everybody

had quit smoking. They were really great; they really were. If they hadn't allowed those packages to come through, I doubt if one-tenth of the people who made it back would have otherwise.

Marcello: How long did a package last?

Koury: Oh, you hoarded it! You really did. I forget how many we got. The first issue was four boxes, I think. The first one you went through rapidly because you were starved for all this good stuff, but then you hoarded it, and this is when all the bandits showed up. People started stealing from each other.

Marcello: Was thievery a real problem?

Koury: It was with the packages. Other than that, it wasn't.

Marcello: What preventions could you take to get rid of thieves?

Koury: Well, again, you handled this yourself, just like walking inside guard. I saw some guys beaten rather severely for stealing. Of course, I traded all my cigarettes, and I'll never be able to understand why people will trade that good food away for a damn cigarette, but a lot of them did.

Marcello: How did you manage to supplement your diet in Cabanatuan?

Koury: I didn't. I got by with no supplements other than the packages. This doctor, Baumgardner, and some of the other doctors managed to buy some stuff from the outside,

and they were really generous in sharing with me. I'd get an egg occasionally, but other than that, I got by on the basic diet until I went back out on detail again.

Marcello: What atrocities did you witness at Cabanatuan?

Koury: About the only thing that was an atrocity was the time they beheaded the fellow they caught escaping.

Marcello: Can you describe this incident?

Koury: Well, I didn't see it happen. All I saw was when they came parading through the gate with his head on a staff. They planted it there for everybody to look at it for a day or two.

Marcello: Did you get the message?

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: Were there very many escape attempts while you were at Cabanatuan?

Koury: Yes. In fact, we stopped several. I say we, not me personally, but the Americans. Everybody in my barracks was fairly well-behaved.

Marcello: Did you ever witness anybody escaping and being caught?

Koury: No, sir. If I had, I don't know what I would have done.

Marcello: Did you ever see anybody executed for escaping and being caught?

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what that was like.



Koury: I saw nine guys lined up and shot because one of their guys took off on them.

Marcello: What was this like? Did they just line them up and shoot them?

Koury: Yes. They took them out and took them away from the camp and beat them very severely, obviously. Then they brought them back and made a bunch of us watch it. They lined them up and shot them, just regular firing squad style.

Marcello: Did the officer then administer the coup-de-grace?

Koury: No, not to my knowledge. He didn't do anything like that. I'll admit that I wasn't too observant.

Marcello: Did you ever participate on any of the burial details at Cabanatuan?

Koury: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe what they were like.

Koury: Well, you carried the bodies on just anything you could. We didn't have any regular litters. We had kind of like shutters, you know, on the outside of the house? We would go out and dig these big open pits--some of them would be the size of this room--and dump the bodies in and cover them up.

Marcello: I gather that the depth of the pit usually depended on the patience of the guard.

Koury: Well, generally, it was dependent on how long he wanted to stay there, plus how many people were involved and how healthy they were because at one time, when the diptheria thing was so bad, it was almost impossible to get up enough real good healthy people to do it.

Marcello: Were the dead simply thrown into these pits?

Koury: Well, you took--I've done this many times in the hospital--you took their dogtags and put them in their mouth, and then they were just dumped into the pit. They wouldn't let you get down there and straighten them out or anything. You just dumped them and walked off, you know, covered them up.

Marcello: I assume that a lot of times it would rain, and the next day you could come out and see arms and legs sticking up. I assume this was rather gruesome.

Koury: This is a true story, however.

Marcello: Did you see this yourself?

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: I'm sure that must have made quite an impression, also.

Koury: Yes. It makes an impression, too, to see the bodies, period, because so many of them . . . well, they were all emaciated, and you wonder how a person could survive that looks that way. The guys that were burying them looked just as bad, generally speaking.

Marcello: How serious was the problem of collaboration?

Koury: Well, to the best of my knowledge, there was no collaboration whatsoever. Of course, give the devil his due. I don't believe they made any effort to get any; at least, I didn't see any.

Marcello: While you were in the camp, there were never any efforts made, I gather, to convert you to the Japanese cause or anything like that.

Koury: No, none at all.

Marcello: How much contact did you have with the Philippine civilians?

Koury: None, except for some little contact along the fence, and this was forbidden, and there was an underground smuggling system.

Marcello: Do you know anything about this smuggling system?

Koury: Oh, I knew a little. I knew how the radio got in and a few things like that.

Marcello: Well, describe that. How did you manage to get a radio into camp?

Koury: I did not, but I knew when it came in. There was a Masonic group--I was not a Mason at the time--but there was a Masonic group that was quite active. The Masons in Manila, as I understand it, disassembled a radio and had it smuggled in piecemeal. It was kept

piecemeal by a select group and assembled periodically, and they picked up news.

Marcello: Now were these Masons in the Armed Forces that were imprisoned at Cabanatuan?

Koury: Yes, right.

Marcello: They were the ones who got the radio?

Koury: This is my understanding.

Marcello: Then how was the news passed around?

Koury: Word of mouth. This is one reason why I don't think anybody was collaborating with the Japs, because if they had of been, they would have put a stop to this.

Marcello: Consequently, I gather that you were able to keep fairly well abreast with events in the outside world?

Koury: Yes, and I'm not sure this was good, either, because things weren't going too well for our cause at that time! (Chuckle)

Marcello: It didn't do very much for morale, I'm sure.

Koury: Not a thing. We began to believe that they were right. They were going to keep us forever, you know. This is what is so sad about these boys that have been over in Vietnam these five, six, and seven years. That's got to be terrible.

Marcello: How often did the Japanese inspect the barracks or pull sneak inspections, I guess we could say?

Koury: Of course, in the hospital, very rarely. In the regular barracks it was practically daily. They had almost a neurotic fear of where they expected guns or knives or anything. Where they expected the things to come from, I don't know, but they kept searching, constantly. Of course, there was no place to make weapons. Oh, I'm sure there were probably some weapons in camp that I didn't know anything about. But that's why the radio was such a miracle, that they could keep hiding this thing the way they did.

Marcello: What were sanitary facilities like at Cabanatuan?

Koury: They weren't too bad, not as they were at O'Donnell. They had these open urinals by this time, where they had the bamboo stakes run down into the ground and scattered around. Of course, the latrines were covered, and we did have lime. As they were used, well then they were filled, and new ones were dug. The Japs more or less insisted on this. Of course, the Americans are by and large a clean race anyway, so this wasn't too bad.

Marcello: Did they provide soap and things like that?

Koury: Soap we got occasionally--I don't know how often--but you can live without soap as long as you have . . . and we had plenty of water for showers, all cold, of course.

Marcello: Was the water rationed, or did you get as much as you wanted?

Koury: Cabanatuan?

Marcello: Yes.

Koury: All you wanted. Now let me rephrase that. For punishment, they would turn it off, but generally you had all the water you wanted.

Marcello: How did you manage to replace your clothing at Cabanatuan?

Koury: From dead people. As people died and were buried, they were usually buried in a G-string, and the clothing was boiled and reissued. We usually had enough clothing except for shoes. Shoes were scarce, but by then most people were going barefooted.

Marcello: Did you ever have any time for recreation?

Koury: You bet.

Marcello: What did you do?

Koury: Well, we had camp shows, I think, about once a month or every two weeks. I'm not sure. I think it was on our day off, which would have made it once every two weeks. We had a group of boys that were not amateurs by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, they were all professionals. Where the musical instruments came from, I don't know, but they had a pretty good little band put together and a comedian by the name of Melody

or something like that. I forget his name. Anyway, I saw him once since then, and he's working as a pro. They put on a show every two weeks that was highly entertaining, and we had softball. This is all after our first Red Cross packages. We played volleyball, softball. Most of us that were in halfway decent shape tried to do some exercise other than our work, calisthenics of one kind or another.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever harass you a lot here at Cabanatuan?

Koury: Not really. Some of the guards on the work details were evil tempered, and they would whip you for no reason at all. There were days when they would come through and make you line up and slap each other's face--even in the hospital--for no reason at all. I mean, none that we knew. Maybe they had lost a battle somewhere or something. But by and large they left us pretty well alone, I thought. Again, like a family, they had rules and you'd better obey them. If you didn't, you got into trouble, but I can't say that they was too bad in camp. Now on work details and things like that, you had to be quick on your feet or you would get into trouble.

Marcello: How long were you at Cabanatuan altogether?

Koury: Well, I was trying to think. I would say probably a year, maybe a year and a half, but not any longer than that because I left with a work detail that went to Nichols Field to develop and build a parallel airstrip to the one that the Japanese Navy was using to train pilots.

Marcello: How did you get from Cabanatuan to Nichols Field?

Koury: They trucked us.

Marcello: Was this a rather uneventful trip?

Koury: Yes. Again, it was a pleasure, kind of like a man being in prison and being brought into Dallas to testify in a trial or something. It was kind of a lark. They treated you halfway decent when you got away from the big group. This is a real hazy period as far as timing and the conditions, too. But we lived in some old barracks, I think they were Army barracks at Nichols Field. We were still working thirteen out of fourteen days, and we were building an airstrip, believe it or not, with picks, shovels, wheelbarrows. We would lay track to move this dirt, excavate this dirt, and we had these little cars on wheels that you pushed, and you had to do so many cars a day of dirt, or you got the hell beat out of you. It was a good day's work, but if you were healthy, you could do it.



Marcello: In other words, you had a certain quota.

Koury: Yes. Oh, yes.

Marcello: Suppose you met the quota?

Koury: You kept going. You didn't quit.

Marcello: Did they increase the quota?

Koury: No, they didn't play that game with you, but it got to the point where it was all you could do to meet the quota because you were trying to help fill in for guys . . . if you were sick, you went out on the work detail anyhow. They didn't leave anybody in the barracks. They were tolerant enough if you were sick to let you set up and not work, but you went out on the work detail anyhow, but somebody else had to do your work. On this detail, they fed us fairly well. By this time, the Americans are on their way back, and, in fact, this was the first place that we are attacked by the American Navy. They came in and strafed and dive-bombed the strip one day while we were working.

Marcello: Can you describe this in any more detail?

Koury: Oh, this is fantastic! The Americans are jumping up and down and running right out in the middle and waving and shouting and hollering, and nobody cared whether they got hit or not. Of course, this upset the Japs somewhat, but they didn't punish anybody for it or anything.

Marcello: Did you notice any change in the attitudes of the Japanese guards after this sort of thing took place?

Koury: We had noticed a change in their attitudes prior to this, and we knew something good was happening.

Marcello: How did the Japanese change?

Koury: Well, they were quieter; they were more intense. They were just as mean as ever but without all this haranguing and the cussing and the things like that, so we knew that something big was happening.

Marcello: What sort of sabotage were you able to commit in the building of this airfield?

Koury: Oh, we had all kinds of trouble with the little cars that you push the dirt in. The running gear was always breaking, and the track was always coming apart and things like this. You couldn't be too obvious, but they had to appear to be a legitimate thing.

Marcello: I gather that the guys that worked in the motor pool at Nichols Field also performed all sorts of sabotage from what I've been told.

Koury: Oh, yes. There's all kinds of stuff that wound up in gas tanks, in engines, and what have you. I don't think anybody tried to be a hero, but if it was something that you could obviously do, well, the people did it without being asked or told.

Marcello: How long were you at Nichols Field altogether?

Koury: I was there, I guess, from June or July until we left in November or December, whenever it was.

Marcello: Of 1944, isn't that correct?

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: What sort of physical shape were you in by this time?

Koury: Good.

Marcello: Had you ever contracted malaria or dysentery or any of those things?

Koury: I've had malaria several times. I've had yellow jaundice. I've had diptheria. Like I say, when I got diptheria, that was the day that the anti-toxin arrived. I was fortunate. I had the malaria when I was in the hospital, and I had immediate treatment with what they had, liquid quinine, and I was in good shape.

Marcello: Did the Japanese guards harass you very much here at Nichols Field?

Koury: Oh, I didn't think so. I think that by then they knew the war was over. I think they really did. I think that they felt like it was a lost cause.

Marcello: From Nichols Field did they move you into Bilibid Prison?

Koury: No, we didn't go into Bilibid.

Marcello: You never went to Bilibid? Well, you were different from a lot of those guys, then, that were at Nichols Field.

- Koury: We went directly from there to board the ship. We were never in Bilibid. No, I never saw the inside of Bilibid.
- Marcello: How many air raids were you subjected to while you were at Nichols Field? Just that one?
- Koury: Oh, no. This was practically a . . . let's see . . . they hit us that day, and they hit us hard. Then they missed us for, oh, I don't know, two or three days, and everybody got real down in the mouth again. Then they came back, and they hit fairly regularly for . . . not on that scale, but they would send over one or two practically every day just to let everybody know they were around.
- Marcello: What sort of protection did you have against these airplanes? I'm sure they didn't know you were there.
- Koury: None. Just slit trenches and holes and stuff. We didn't care, really. I mean, that was so good to see that star on the side that everybody was just overjoyed to see that plane.
- Marcello: Did the Japanese require you to build slit trenches and so on?
- Koury: Yes.
- Marcello: I assume they didn't want you out in the open waving and yelling and that sort of thing.

Koury: Oh, no, no. They were afraid, too, that we would try to set up signals of some kind and stuff. They always tried to herd us in when one came up.

Marcello: What happened if somebody didn't get in quick enough?

Koury: Well, they would beat on them or scream at them, stuff like that. But, generally, after the first day or two everybody was a little bit more sensible and wanted to hide, too.

Marcello: I gather that the Americans did not put this field out of commission.

Koury: No, absolutely not. In fact, I don't think that they tried to; I think it was more of a harassing thing than anything else because they didn't actually bomb it. As I recall, it was just strafing.

Marcello: Well, you were fairly close to Manila.

Koury: Oh, yes. You were right at Manila, right down the seawall.

Marcello: What were your reactions, or what were your feelings when you heard that you were going to Japan?

Koury: Of course, many of our boys had already gone. They had been going for a year or more, and we didn't feel like that we could make it. In fact, I guess I was more frightened about that than I had been by anything else. I didn't see how we could make it at all.

Marcello: Also, I would gather that you figured that the Philippines would be liberated before the Japanese Islands were.

Koury: Oh, yes. Of course, that entered your mind, and then, too, it was a change in climate that scared everybody-- going from tropical climate to a rather cold climate. We had no clothing, of course, except what we had. We heard all kinds of stories about what happened to these people who went up there, and nobody wanted to go.

Marcello: I'm sure that there were all sorts of rumors floating around in those prison camps.

Koury: Oh, tremendous!

Marcello: Probably you would start a rumor that you knew was a downright lie, and by the time it made its way all the way around, you actually believed it yourself.

Koury: If you listened to everything that went on, you'd go crazy. You really would. It was amazing! The Americans landed every day someplace!

Marcello: I gather that this was one of the more prevalent rumors: "They're coming next month! There's a big convoy on its way next month or next week" or something like that.

Koury: Somebody had talked to somebody at the fence that had seen them land, and they were on their way. (Chuckle)

Marcello: But I suppose that this was good in a way that these rumors did float around and that people did believe them. It probably did wonders for morale and so on. You had to believe this sort of thing.

Koury: Oh, you bet! You have to have something to look forward to. You have to have something to hold on to. It was surprising, too, when you look back on it, how much truth the Japs put in their few pronouncements that they made. They were fairly gullible, I thought, in what they'd tell you. They'd talk about the Gilbert Islands--and the last time you heard, we were miles away from there--about this big battle they won at the Gilbert Islands. You know damn well that if they are fighting at the Gilbert Islands, they are not winning any battles because it is coming their way! So we kept up pretty well, even when we got away from the radio like out on the details where there wasn't any radio. You still kept up with what was going on pretty well.

Marcello: Now at Nichols Field were you able to have any contact with any Filipinos?

Koury: A lot of civilians, yes. This was difficult for them to keep civilians out of there.

Marcello: Were these civilians used as coolie labor or something like that?

Koury: No, they had some civilians that were engineers that were doing the surveying and all of this kind of stuff, and they had lots of news. They had contact with the outside world.

Marcello: Were you able to trade with these people?

Koury: Yes. On the detail, you had more freedom to do things like this. If you could buy something, trade for something, well, they would let you.

Marcello: Were you working with the Filipinos on these details--moving this earth and so on?

Koury: No, this was strictly an American job. The Filipinos weren't doing any of the manual labor.

Marcello: Did you ever get into Manila at all on these details?

Koury: No, never did. Went through Manila, of course, going and coming, but I didn't get to see any of the city.

Marcello: Well, anyway, you have gotten the word that you are on the way to Japan, and you are very apprehensive about it. I gather that they simply marched you from Nichols Field straight down to the docks.

Koury: Right.

Marcello: What possessions did you have with you?

Koury: I'm trying to think. I think they issued us one uniform, I'm not sure, maybe two. Anyway, they issued us a quilted pair of pants and jacket, I think. I don't know if they issued us some shoes or not. You had just what you had on your back. That was it!

Marcello: Well, when you got to Manila harbor, what did it look like?



Koury: It looked like hell! It had been really torn up. That's where we found out that all the bombing had been taking place, and all the strafing and all that we saw coming in over us was just kind of an offshoot of what had been going on. Manila Bay was full of sunken ships. You know, it is not a very deep bay anyway, and once a ship goes down, it is half out of the water. It looked like some kid had been playing with his boats out there and had just scattered them around.

Marcello: As one prisoner described it, it looked like a forest of masts.

Koury: That's right. That's a very good description.

Marcello: Well, I gather that when you got to Manila Bay, there were two ships there: one that looked pretty nice, and then there was one that they were taking the horses off of. You thought you were going on the nice ship!

Koury: (Chuckle) We didn't go on the nice ship, I assure you! No, we got on the one . . .

Marcello: I gather that they no sooner got the horses off that ship than they put you on it.

Koury: Well, I don't know about that, but it was a very unfit place to be! I'll guarantee you. And, again, it is kind of like the "forty-and-eight" boxcars. We were just jammed in there till you could hardly breathe.

Marcello: Incidentally, before we talk about conditions aboard that ship, did you have any contact with the British prisoners that they brought in? Apparently, they were bringing in some British prisoners from Singapore, were they not?

Koury: Well, some of them worked on this bridge over the River Kwai deal, yes.

Marcello: Yes.

Koury: Yes, they were on the same ship with us, not before we got on, but after we got on.

Marcello: I gather that they were a pretty sorry looking outfit.

Koury: They were a terrible, filthy crew, really. They were cruds. Well, their standard of living is different from ours. Most of these guys were British, and there were some guys from Holland, I think.

Marcello: Right, Dutch. Probably, they were captured on Java.

Koury: Yes, that's right! Yes, and they were the crumbs of the earth! Oh, they were filthy!

Marcello: Just scruffy?

Koury: Oh, yes, just horrible! They would steal the eyeballs out of a living man, I'll tell you! They were terrible.

Marcello: I assume that you found most of this out after you got to Japan or after you got on the ship?

Koury: Found this out on the ship real quick because we had canteens and . . .

Marcello: Before we get into that, let's just talk about getting on board the ship. I gather that one of the first things they did was that they disinfected you . . .

Koury: Yes.

Marcello: . . . in some way or another. What was that like?

Koury: Well, they had a little thing that they sprayed down around your collars, under your arms, like you would an animal. Hell, I'd forgotten all about that! They sure did, though, they sprayed everybody. We were going on this stinking ship! (Chuckle)

Marcello: Where did they put you when they got you in the ship?

Koury: Well, we went aboard the ship and went down into the hold. I think I was two decks down, if I remember right, and, again, I think you would have been comfortable in there with about one-fifth of the people that we had. You wouldn't have been comfortable, but at least you could have stretched out.

Marcello: You could not lie down, is that correct?

Koury: No, impossible. There was no way that you . . . even with part of the people standing, you couldn't.

Marcello: When everybody sat down, your knees were in somebody's back, and their knees were in your back, I gather.

Koury: Absolutely. And it was that way for several days.

Marcello: Were you ever able to get out on deck during the first couple of days, let's say during the first two or three or four days?

Koury: I did not get out on deck at all. Now some of the guys that went out on the food details did.

Marcello: Were you able to see daylight?

Koury: I could not. No.

Marcello: As you put it, you were two decks below, is that right?

Koury: Right.

Marcello: I gather they had even sealed the hatches.

Koury: Yes, oh, yes. Yes, they did that.

Marcello: Why do you think they did that?

Koury: Well, I think they were hoping we would suffocate.

Marcello: And, of course, if there were a submarine attack, and if you were hit by a torpedo, there was no way that the prisoners . . . they were going to make sure that the prisoners did not get out. Isn't that correct?

Koury: That's right. According to some of the Navy types, I don't know, but there was submarines pinging on us all through this trip. You could hear it in that thing, and that's sort of nerve-racking!

Marcello: How much did the submarines grate on your mind?

Koury: Much more than the airplanes did because the idea of

being that far down under the water and being torpedoed didn't set very well.

Marcello: Well, you know, come to think of it, it was probably lucky you were on that old tub. It probably wasn't even worth being sunk!

Koury: That's right! If we'd been on that other one, they'd have torpedoed that thing.

Marcello: In fact, the other prison ship was torpedoed, was it not?

Koury: Right. And that's the one that we picked up the very few survivors from.

Marcello: I gather that when they got you on that ship, they did not give you any food or water for a couple of days.

Koury: I don't remember. We were fed fairly well, as I remember, before we got on. I think we were supposed to be something like three or four days to Formosa.

Marcello: And this was supposed to be a twelve day trip altogether back to Japan.

Koury: Right. And I can't remember when we went to Hong Kong, but we went through Hong Kong.

Marcello: You went from Hong Kong to Formosa. You were at Hong Kong before you went to Formosa.

Koury: We were at Hong Kong and we got bombed.

Marcello: Right.

Koury: But I can't remember how long it took us to get to Hong Kong, and that's just a spit from Manila, really.

Marcello: Well, I gather what these ships had to do--and it was a convoy of ships--they had to travel along the coast. They couldn't get away from the coast on account of the submarines.

Koury: Oh, no. Certainly. They stayed right along the coast all the way.

Marcello: Well, anyhow, getting back to the hold of this ship, here you were, all crowded in there. How did they get food down to you, or what did you use for food?

Koury: Tin buckets.

Marcello: They lowered the rice down in buckets?

Koury: Yes. The American food detail went up and got so many buckets apiece for so many people, and they brought it down and distributed it.

Marcello: How did you maintain order when they were distributing that rice?

Koury: Well, this is where the Dutch really showed out. I mean, this is where we found out what kind of people they were.

Marcello: What happened?

Koury: Well, they wouldn't pass the food, and a cup of tea would get there and they'd drink it, and the next cup

of tea would get there and they'd drink it. So this had to be handled by the rest of the guys, and we did it.

Marcello: How did you manage to bring discipline out of this chaos?

Koury: We just told them if they wanted to die right there, to keep that up! If not, pass the food around.

Marcello: I would assume that otherwise, the guys in the back of the hold were going to have trouble.

Koury: Would get nothing.

Marcello: Incidentally, where were you?

Koury: I was about in the middle, just about in the middle. In fact, I had a great big Dutchman that slept on me all the way, just about! (Chuckle) No, they knew that they would get killed because people in that condition will do anything.

Marcello: What did the Japanese do about water?

Koury: We got the drippings off the steam winches and all on the topside, and they let it down like they did the tea. It was distilled water, good water.

Marcello: Were you ever in that group that got salt water?

Koury: No.

Marcello: Did you hear about the one group of prisoners on the ship that got salt water?

Koury: I heard that. I don't know if it is true or not. I heard about them drinking urine, and I don't know if

that is true or not. I've heard this story. I could get by on very little fluids, and I did.

Marcello: Were you ever able to put any water in your canteen?

Koury: Oh, yes. I had a full canteen practically all the time. I learned that on that march--don't ever be caught without water.

Marcello: And I gather that you had to be very careful when you went to sleep at night, or somebody would steal your canteen.

Koury: Well, I slept with that canteen in my arms.

Marcello: Did you ever see anybody or did you ever hear of anybody getting killed having their canteens taken from them?

Koury: I've heard that this happened, but I didn't see it, no. I don't doubt it a bit, but I didn't see any.

Marcello: Was the dysentery still prevalent down in the hold of the ship?

Koury: Not too bad. In fact, most people like myself . . . I don't remember going . . . I think it was nineteen or twenty-one days that it took us to get to Formosa, and I went that long without a bowel movement. I remember that very well. I think most people were the same way because you were eating very little, and you were doing no exercise at all, so there was no reason you've got to defecate. I did have dysentery, and very few people didn't by then.



Marcello: What was the death rate like?

Koury: Very light, really. I wouldn't hazard a guess. There were a few every day.

Marcello: What did they do? Did they just pull them out of there?

Koury: Take them up and push them over. Our hold didn't have very many. Now I don't know about the others.

Marcello: Also, you made your first leg of the journey to Hong Kong, and what happened when you got to Hong Kong?

Koury: We were greeted by the American bombers in the harbor, and we didn't stay very long.

Marcello: Was this a morale booster?

Koury: Oh, you bet! You bet! In fact, we thought they were going to put us off the ship there, but they didn't.

Marcello: Did you ever get up above deck yet?

Koury: No.

Marcello: You still really hadn't seen daylight.

Koury: No, I hadn't, not since we left.

Marcello: Was it dark down in the hold of that ship?

Koury: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Were there any electric lights burning?

Koury: None.

Marcello: You were virtually in complete darkness?

Koury: Right. No light at all, none.

Marcello: What were your thoughts when you were down in the hold, other than trying to stay alive.

Koury: Well, I think this is a full time job. I think this occupies your mind, and you don't think about anything else. Nobody really gave up. Americans are crazy people. We sang "God Bless America" over and over again, you know, and songs like that. You just don't have time to think about anything else. When we got to Taiwan, we got to go up on topside.

Marcello: Well, what happened when you got to Taiwan? Incidentally, I gather all the time that you were on this ship, you were being shadowed by submarines, and ships were constantly being sunk by submarines.

Koury: Right. We picked up people, occasionally. We got to Taiwan, and I think it was nineteen or twenty-one days or something. I forget what it was. Anyway, they let us all go topside and go swimming. You know, clean up.

Marcello: Well, it was pretty cold, wasn't it?

Koury: Yes, but everybody went.

Marcello: What did it feel like to get out in fresh air once again?

Koury: Oh, it was fantastic! You've been with a bunch of guys that's been cramped up down there, couldn't even stretch your legs out all these days, and yet they are going off the sides of this dang ship into the harbor. And

then we went ashore. There was a naval station there, and they fed us. Now if I remember, it wasn't cold, either, because we swam quite awhile and got cleaned up. Then we sunned out on this naval station to dry, so it couldn't have been very cold.

Marcello: Now you remained in Taiwan for some time, did you not?

Koury: Yes, we went to a school, what had been a school building.

Marcello: And what did you do?

Koury: Nothing, really, for the first time in months. I think they were trying to make up their mind what they wanted to do with us--whether they were going to leave us there, try to get us through, or what. These were very nice quarters. It was an old . . . I'm pretty sure it was a school in the mountains north of Taipei there. It was real nice.

Marcello: Did the Japanese harass you, or did they leave you alone?

Koury: No, they left us pretty much alone, except, again, it was kind of like being on the work detail. You were confined more. It was a kind of a smaller place, and you had to get permission to go to the restroom or do anything. It was not like the camp where you had freedom inside the compound.

Marcello: Did you have inside facilities in this barracks, or did you have to go outside to the restroom?

Koury: No, you had to go outside. There were separate buildings, as I remember.

Marcello: What was the food like?

Koury: As I remember, it was good. It was better than we had had in the Philippines, and there was more of it.

Marcello: Incidentally, you had mentioned that you weighed about 160 pounds when you went in the service. What did you weigh by this stage?

Koury: Oh, I still was over a hundred pounds. I was really one of the healthier ones. I managed to hold my own as far as size. Then, of course, from Formosa to Japan was very uneventful, and we were on a much better ship.

Marcello: Oh, you got off the old tub!

Koury: Right, yes. They put us on one of their better ships, and we breezed right on in.

Marcello: Were you still part of a convoy again?

Koury: No, we were soloing, as I remember, and we had a lot more room, and we had our winter uniforms on. I remember that.

Marcello: Where did you get winter uniforms?

Koury: I think we got those before we left Formosa because when we got to Japan, it was cold. They put us on this train . . .

Marcello: Incidentally, where did you land when you got to Japan?

Koury: Tokyo, I think. Yes, I know it was because they put us on this train, and they boarded up all the windows so we couldn't see how Tokyo had been bombed.

Marcello: In other words, the train met you right at the docks?

Koury: Yes. We went zipping right through, and we couldn't see any of the damage. Some of the guys claimed that they could see through the cracks and all, but I couldn't. We went to the northern tip of Honshu to this Camp Number Seven. The snow was, oh, eight or ten feet deep everywhere.

Marcello: This was in the winter of 1944.

Koury: Yes. We worked in open pit iron mines.

Marcello: As an old boy from Texas, had you ever seen that much snow before?

Koury: No, sir! I had never seen an open pit iron mine before, either! That's where they put us to work.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do?

Koury: We were mining! You rode these cars up into this open pit iron mines, just a big hole in the ground, and you would dig this stuff out and put it in these cars and push it up these rails by hand.

Marcello: This was strictly a pick and shovel job?

Koury: Oh, yes. And, again, the old Koury luck came out, and I got put on the kitchen detail, working in the Japanese kitchen which cooked for the Americans as well. We got to steal enough Japanese food to help us out, too.

Marcello: Did the Japanese supervise the activities of this kitchen pretty closely?

Koury: Oh, yes, but they knew that we were stealing food and didn't particularly care as long as we didn't make too big a issue out of it. In fact, I used to take my buddy rice home nearly every night and stuff like that. But that didn't last too long, and then, of course, we had a Japanese doctor that came in camp, and he spoke English very well, and he kept us abreast of what was going on. He told us when the first atomic bomb was dropped, and the way he described it I never will forget it. He said it was like the sun fell out of the sky, and he said that the war would soon be over. That was the way he described it. Of course, there was a naval base not far from us that they was hitting every night. When the war was over, well, this doctor again told us that the war was over.

Marcello: Well, describe the day that you found out that the war was over. What was it like?

Koury: It was kind of an anti-climax, really. I think everybody believed it was a foregone conclusion that it was just a matter of, you know, days. You heard all these guys talking about how I'm going to get that dirty so-and-so, you know, and everything and nobody did. The Japanese commander called our commander in and told him that the war was over, but he said for your own protection and for the protection of your people, I request that you stay in the compound, and we did. We took details out and into town and in the countryside. One silly thing that we did--there was some English in our camp and--we got a cow and put a sheet over it and wrote British Red Cross on it and sent it to their barracks because the British Red Cross never had sent anything over, you know. We did silly stuff like that, but we stayed there for about two weeks after the war was over because we were so far north. We were waiting on our orders on what to do.

Marcello: Did the Americans ever drop any supplies to you?

Koury: Yes, they did. That was what my wife was referring to about the fruit salad. You probably heard the story.

Marcello: No, I sure haven't.

Koury: Well, the B-29's flew over and dropped notes--of course, we put POW signs up on the top and everything--

and said that we were to stand two men out in the yard for each hundred people in camp and so forth, which we did. This was so they would know how much stuff to drop. They came back the next day and dropped another note and said we were to get everybody inside, and so we told everybody to get inside. And they came back over and they started dropping this food in parachutes, and one poor GI runs out there, and a fifty-five gallon drum of fruit salad hit him right in the head and killed him. That's the saddest story of the whole war.

Marcello: Coming through all those terrible things and then ending up by . . .

Koury: Getting killed by fruit salad!

Marcello: . . . being killed by a flying fruit salad!

Koury: The funny thing about that is that a friend of our's married a boy from Oregon, and we were talking to this boy's father, and he was a pilot on one of the B-29's that flew over the camp, and he remembered this happening. That's a real coincidence.

Marcello: Well, apparently, this food was dropped in those fifty gallon oil drums, was it not? Is that the way your food came?

Koury: Yes, a lot of it did, and a lot of it was in bags and crates and so forth.



Marcello: Now, I assume, like you point out, that this is pretty dangerous because sometimes these parachutes won't open, and those oil drums were just like a lethal weapon, were they not?

Koury: Well, this one didn't open. That was why he got it. The whole point of the story is that they dropped far more food than we could possibly eat. I think there is something that is indicative of the American nature and character and personality because when we left, the food was left for the Japanese. Rather than ruining it or spoiling it or destroying it, we left it for the guys that had been guarding us because they had been on kind of short rations, too! They finally dropped us a note that said we were to go to the railroad station and that a special train would pick us up. They dropped us this note and told us to go to this railroad station, and this special train would pick us up. The Japs went along with us to guard us from the aroused civilian populace in case they started to do us bodily harm, and they were quite upset, really, because the Japanese people were prepared to fight to the death to defend their homeland.

Marcello: Was this camp close to any city?

Koury: A very small one. Osaka or something like that, but I forget now.

Marcello: Did this city receive any bomb damage?

Koury: None . . .

Marcello: In that sense, they weren't necessarily hostile against the prisoners. Some of the prisoners ran into quite a bit of trouble because they paraded them through some of these bombed-out towns, and the civilians didn't take too kindly to them.

Koury: Yes, I can understand that. The closest bomb damage was at this naval base which was fifteen or twenty miles to the north of us. We were picked up by this train and carried to the coast, and I don't even know the name of the little town. We were picked up by the destroyer Taylor, which is quite a historical ship. It had been in the Pacific the day of Pearl Harbor, and it had never been back to the States. It had been in the Pacific all during the war. It was also the ship that rammed the submarine that was about to get MacArthur, according to the story, when he returned to the Philippines. The captain was quite a guy. He broke open a couple of jugs, and everybody was about half stoned when we got back to Tokyo Bay.

Marcello: I would assume that it didn't take too much.

Koury: Not very much at all, no. All the way back they were releasing these balloons and shooting the guns, and they had a real celebration for us. We got back to Tokyo Bay, and there was a hospital ship there, and they told us to throw everything over the side, and that's where we had to get rid of everything that we had. They ran us through a dipping tank nude, and then we went up on deck of the hospital ship, and the little nurses there met you with a hypodermic needle in each arm, and that's about it!

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you left a great deal of food back at the prison camp when you left. Am I to assume that some of these civilians at this prison camp were pretty good guys, or were you so glad to get out of there that you didn't care?

Koury: Well, I think this is indicative of how forgiving the American generally is. I think that as soon as the war was over that all these self-proclaimed sadists who were going to gouge out eyes and all this kind of stuff to get even were just so damn glad to be alive and to be going home that they immediately forgot these steps. I know I did. I couldn't have done any of them any harm. Then, too, we were treated better in Japan than we were anywhere else.

Marcello: I assume, then, when you were working at this open pit mine that the Japanese really didn't harass you that much.

Koury: No, we worked right along with Japanese civilians and everybody else. We were kind of absorbed into their community.

Marcello: You actually didn't work too much in the mine itself, did you?

Koury: No, I didn't. I worked there only a week or so, and then I got on the kitchen detail.

Marcello: What sort of quarters were there in this prison camp?

Koury: This was bad. You were cold all the time. You had a wood issue. These were your wooden barracks with the decks again, no beds. There was one stove, and they issued something like five or six small sticks of wood a day. In other words, you could have one fire, and when that was gone, that was it. And, of course, most people chose to have it in the evening because you could have a little social life and sit around and talk, but the rest of the time you were just cold.

Marcello: Did you have to double up in the bunks and so on?

Koury: A lot of guys did.

Marcello: They issued you a couple of very, very thin wool blankets or cotten blankets, I guess they were.

Koury: Yes, cotton. But the uniforms were worn, the quilted uniforms. If it hadn't been for those, we would have frozen to death. But most guys shared their quilts and blankets and survived someway. Hell, I don't know!

Marcello: Did they ever threaten to kill you if the Americans invaded?

Koury: Oh, they told us that repeatedly--not in an official way, but the guards did, you know. I mean, you could see this when we landed, when we first came into Japan. Fortifications were all over the place, and everywhere you went there were slit trenches and bunkers and caves and men, women, and children prepared to fight. If we would have had to invade Japan, we would have lost a million men. There is no question about it. We would have.

Marcello: You saw a great many of these preparations yourself.

Koury: Yes, oh, yes. They were ready. There was no question about it. I don't think they could have altered the outcome, but . . .

Marcello: It would have prolonged the outcome.

Koury: Oh, definitely.

Marcello: You are sure of that.

Koury: At least a year. They were prepared to die to defend their country.

Marcello: Well, when the surrender was announced, did the guards just kind of disappear?

Koury: No, in fact, they kept their arms, and as I remember the story, their commander asked our commander, "What are your desires? Do you want the guns, and do you want to stand guard, or do you want us to?" And he said, "No, you continue to do so" and so forth. But there was no more details or duties or standing in formation or anything.

Marcello: What sort of soldiers were guarding you? Were these veterans who perhaps for some physical disability could no longer fight?

Koury: These were all the marines that had been in combat.

Marcello: If they were marines, they were pretty big guys.

Koury: Yes, these were the biggest troops. They were the Manchurian types that had been in combat, had been wounded, were overage, or had been relocated home for one reason or another. But these were all good troops, and by and large they didn't bother anybody unless you goofed up.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you . . .

Koury: Knew the war was over?

Marcello: . . . when you knew the war was over and you were going to be liberated?

Koury: I don't know, really. You were tremendously happy, of course, and elated and thankful, and, again, I think it is indicative of the American character. Basically, we were pretty decent people. I think everybody was thankful to God more than anything else. Nobody could have survived if they had known it was going to last that long, I don't believe.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what you see as being the key to your survival?

Koury: The constant hope and foremost the knowledge without a doubt how it was going to end. There was never any doubt about this. I think if you ever doubted for a minute that America was going to win, you would have died. I don't think anybody ever doubted that; I don't think the Japs doubted it. Then, second, was the constant hope that it was going to be next week, you know, just around the corner. I think everybody felt this way.

Marcello: I want you to answer the next question very carefully. I want you to think about it for a minute. At the time of your liberation, if you can place yourself back at that time, what sort of feelings did you have toward the Japanese? Now, again, don't try and let your feelings in 1972 influence your answer. What were your feelings toward the Japanese in August and September of 1945 when you were liberated?

Koury: As a race now, or as a guard?

Marcello: As a race or as a group of people. We'll start from there and maybe work down to guards.

Koury: Well, maybe I am sick--I don't know--but I had a lot of respect and admiration for what those people did, not so much in the war but for their pride and their dedication and for the fact that they damn near whipped us with nothing, really. True, I don't approve of their methods. They killed a lot of my friends, and a lot of good people are dead because of them. But even then I had an awful lot of respect for them, and I have more today.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how your opinions have changed today.

Koury: The only difference that I can see now is that I don't see how they lost the war. I really can't. Except for two real bad mental errors, I think they would have won.

Marcello: What were the mental errors that you think they made?

Koury: If they had hit the West Coast instead of Pearl Harbor, and if they had followed up with an instant invasion, I think they would have won. I think that they could have hit the West Coast just as easy as they hit Pearl Harbor.