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**Center for Pacific War Studies
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*Pacific War
Studies*

**Interview with
Agadito Silva
200th Coast Guard Artillery, 515th Coast Guard Artillery
Japanese Prisoner of War**

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Agadito Silva**

(This tape starts without an introduction by the interviewer. Her remarks will be indicated by "Int." The tape begins in the middle of a sentence)

Mr. Silva: . . . in the southern part of New Mexico, it's about a hundred miles south of Albuquerque. In 1929, part of 1930, the Rio Grande had flooded it. There was nothing left there. So I had an aunt, and my Grandma lived in Gallup, New Mexico, so from the time 1929, '30, we went and I was raised in Gallup, I went to high school and graduated in 1939. After I graduated from high school I joined the National Guard. In January of 1941 we got inducted into the federal service 'cause I had joined the National Guard, and we got inducted into the federal service on the 6th of January they shipped us to Fort Bliss for training. We were at Logan Heights with other antiaircraft outfits there. They had the 202nd, the 201st, the 200th—we were the 200th Coast Guard Artillery. We trained in (???) in '41, then after that they shipped us to San Francisco to call our shots in Angel Island, and after we got our shots then they put us aboard a ship and shipped us to the Philippines, which we didn't know until we were about a week out on the ocean, before they told us where we were going. But we went to (???) Manila about a month later. From there they took us to Fort Stansberg, which was right next to Clark Field, which we were supposed to be protecting, and history has written down that we were bombed the same day at noon, Pearl Harbor was bombed the same day, we were having our director, which is like a computer, it tells these guys tracing with a height finder, and they trace this information into the guns, and our director was at Corregidor getting fixed, so we were in camp when we heard the news about Pearl Harbor being bombed, and there was a real fabulous commentator there, Don *Bell??*, I'll never forget, he was coming over the radio, and he says, "It's rumored that Clark Field is being bombed now," and he says "That's a bunch of hooley, look, we're here, there's no bombs," but boy, oh boy, about

maybe thirty minutes later we heard the bombs start exploding all around us, we looked out and there was about fifty Zero bombers shining in the sky, and all hell broke loose. But right after that, the Zeros started strafing us, and what saved most of us was that they had started digging trenches for sewage or water. We dug into those, I mean, we hid in there . . .

Int.: . . . good thoughts . . .

Mr. Silva: It sure did. It protected us. Then they went away. The following day they split the 200th Coast Guard Artillery, that's what I was in originally, they split it and they made the 515th Coast Guard Artillery. And I happened to go to the 515th out of Gallup, which was a D battery from Gallup. It was a three-inch antiaircraft gun. We'd shoot at the planes. And then after we got to Manila, we were in Tongo, it was right in the bay, Manila Bay, and then in December they started to retreat to the Bataan Peninsula, where we set up our guns again up until we surrendered, which was on April the 9th, 1942. I may say that I wasn't captured, I was not in the Death March, I managed to get across to Corregidor, and we had a heck of a time getting away because there was a second lieutenant at the end of the dock and he said they were not taking only just nurses and officers. But there was about thirty of us that had gone with me to Mariveles to get across to Corregidor, and we all went as a bunch. He said, "Sorry, boys, I can't let you go," you could see the Japanese bombers, bombing the front lines, and he said "You see those planes?" He said, "If they see this tugboat going across to Corregidor they're coming over here and they're going to sink you, and I don't want to be responsible for that." the following day we did the same thing, but it so happened that this day there was about 200 Filipinos out, and this American colonel wanted to get them across to Corregidor to help them protect, so they argued and argued and the colonel says, "Well, if I sign an affidavit that I think they're (???)" so he signed an affidavit and we jumped

into this tugboat and went across to Corregidor. And then Corregidor was captured, surrendered, a month later on the 6th of May.

Int.: Can you tell me what branch of service you were in, and what was your job?

Mr. Silva: My job was gun commander, three-inch gun commander. Staff sergeant.

Int.: Can you describe the living conditions (*illegible*)

Mr. Silva: In Bataan? We were on half rations and they cut us to one-third rations. We had no medications. We got sick, and malaria was rampant. Malaria was the worst disease we had, and we all had it, some of them, they got so bad that they went crazy. And then we had beriberi, we had dengue fever, all the tropical diseases we had. And the food, like I said. One thing that I would like to emphasize here that when I went to Corregidor, back at the docks there, and I didn't know where to go there, so I asked somebody and he said go to the cold storage, which was where they had all the meat stored there, and you couldn't see the facing of the cold storage, it was under a mountain, so we went in there, and the type C rations were stacked up to the ceiling. We started to fill our pockets with them, and a sergeant came up and he said "Hey, you know what that meat is," and we said "Well, we're hungry." And he said, "Yeah, well I'll give you a little" so that's what he did. And we started roaming around the cold storage and you wouldn't believe what we saw. We saw blocks and blocks in the cold storage of sides of beef hanging there, just hanging there, because they were saving them for the troops there in Corregidor, I guess, because we never got any in Bataan, and the conditions there, we were starving, we were eating whatever we could get ahold of, all the food, papayas and mangoes and snakes, monkeys, anything. Iguana, anything. We ate all our, the Filipino cavalry took their horses to into

Bataan and they slaughtered them to eat, so we ate mules and horses.

Int.: How was that?

Mr. Silva: When you're hungry everything tastes good.

Int.: You'd have eaten skunk, probably, if you'd had it.

Mr. Silva: They didn't have any skunks, thank god!

Int.: What were the overall conditions—besides being hungry, where did you sleep, and . . .

Mr. Silva: You know, bamboo is rampant over there, so we made our little like cots, we'd split the bamboo and make it, tied it with vines that grew there a lot, we'd make it, we had one blanket or so. That was when we were in Bataan.

Int.: Did you have any medical attention?

Mr. Silva: No. One day, I don't know for what reason, they paid us. It was February of '42 they paid us, and what were we going to do with the money? Where were we going to spend it? That's one thing I can never understand, why they did this. Anyway, they paid us. So we were playing poker in my bunk and there comes an air raid and I had my fox hole right there by where I was at by my gun, and there was two Filipinos 'cause we had the Filipinos help us man the guns, and I just stood up and I heard the airplane and I heard the siren and I just stood up right, I didn't get into my fox hole, I just stood there looking all around the sky and these two Filipinos got into the foxhole, and they had their arms like this, on the bags of sand that you protect yourself with, and all of a sudden I hear a "Boom," and I felt it behind me, so after that I got scared and I jumped into the foxhole, and I saw these

Filipinos, their blood was spurting out of their face, and then after awhile they says, "Well, let's get you out of there," and I says "No, I want you to get the Filipinos out first because they're the ones that are hurt," and then all of a sudden I feel the hot blood going down my leg and I felt the back of my leg and I had shrapnel here, and shrapnel went across my shoe, tore it apart, tore these two toes and my big toe, I don't have it, it's all shot up, the toe.

Int.: You didn't feel it.

Mr. Silva: I didn't feel it at the time. But after I felt the blood going down, and then they had to pull me up by my arms, I couldn't, I was frozen like. So they took me up and it's a good thing that the field hospital was right across from us, maybe a quarter of a mile or so, so they took me there to be healed up, and then I went back to my unit.

Int.: How long did it take to heal up?

Mr. Silva: I think about seven days. Not over. That's one thing that I'm not too good at, on times, like what time did this happen, I can give you more or less the month, but not the actual date.

Int.: What did you do after you all were notified there was going to be a surrender?

Mr. Silva: When our captain notified us that we were going to surrender, they were going to surrender us, we were taught that if anything like that happened, what to do to the gun. Destroy it. So I told my gun crew, I said "Let's go, and destroy this gun." The captain says, "Let's meet at the kitchen," the field kitchen, so I destroyed my gun so they can't use it against us, and we met at the kitchen and we stayed for a little while, and then the A battery, which are search lights, they search, they shine lights, big old lights, on the sky—you know what they are,

search lights—they were there next to us, they used the same kitchen, and they were loading the food, packages of food, into these trucks, big old prime movers, and they says “Get in, get on,” and we got on, and all of a sudden they says “Take off,” so we took off and we must have gone about maybe five miles and the truck started to heating, started to boiling, so we stopped at the side of the road to let the escort go by, and the trees up there are huge, and I leaned up against this tree and all of a sudden the tree started shaking, just like a twig, and I didn’t know what was happening. We had an earthquake. I don’t guess you’ve ever been in an earthquake, no?

Int.: No. I’ll bet it’s frightening.

Mr. Silva: Oh, it is, because you don’t know what’s going on. I said, “Is the earth going to crack and dump you in it or what?” but boy, I saw a tree go down there and you don’t know whether to, we didn’t know whether to run under the truck or what to do. But in just a few seconds, it only lasted just a few seconds, but they’re scary. So we all got on the truck and took off, and then like I said we went to Mariveles. We got to Mariveles and there was this sergeant there and he said, “Park your truck on the strip,” they were going to blow it right up after, and like I told you before, we went across to Corregidor. And then they assigned me to D Battery of the 60th Coast Artillery antiaircraft, but I wasn’t assigned yet, I mean I was assigned but I wasn’t, you know, I was just helping them.

Int.: What was it like on Corregidor:

Mr. Silva: It’s hard to believe what I’m telling you, because I went in there, I went and they assigned me to another 30-inch gun. And they called this “Base Monkey.” They all had different names. So they assigned me to Monkey Point and I went in to this gun, ‘cause that’s where we used to stay in case they would shell you or they would bomb you or

whatever, you were protected by the weapons around the gun, and cigarette buster, these guys there would take up, light up a cigarette and flip it after a puff and I started picking up all the cigarettes around the gun, 'cause we hadn't had any, we were smoking weeds up in Bataan, and that's one bad thing we had, one bad habit, smoking, I couldn't get away from it. This one guy, I don't remember who he was, he came up, he said "No, here, I'll give you a pack. What do you want?" I said, "Luckies. Give me a pack of Luckies." And he says, "Don't worry about the cigarettes. They're going to give you some, as soon as it gets dark you can go down to the supply house and they'll give you some." I said, "But I'm hungry." He says, "After it gets dark, we go up and get fed." They give me a mess kit, or I think I had my mess kit with me, I never gave it away, up. And we went through the line and boy, they heaped that steak, fruit cocktail and mashed potato, and everything, just like you've always eaten in a high-class restaurant. Big old steaks, and I went to the gun and we ate, and I told him, "I'm still hungry," and he said, "Well, what you're capable of, go through again." So I did. I washed it real good, and I went back, 'cause they don't know the difference.

So then I really got my fill, and then he took me to a hut they had built out of tin, facing Corregidor, you know Corregidor was like in the Pacific Ocean but facing, right in the mouth of that Manila Bay, but anyway, we were out, we were facing Bataan. So I asked him, he took me in and he showed me his locker, he says "Here, you're about my size," so he gave me some clean clothes 'cause mine was raggedy and dirty, and he says "After you go down to the, to the other side of the China Sea, go take a bath, and then put these things on," so I said "OK," so I tried them on and those clothes fit me perfect. So I saw a couple of cots in this shack and I said "Whose are these?" and he said "They're mine and my friend's." I said, "Do you sleep here?" He said, "No, we don't sleep here, we sleep around the gun." I said, "Well, can I sleep here, 'cause I haven't had a good night's sleep for a long time."

“Sure.” So stupid me, I go ahead and I take off my, ‘cause you know the tropics are kind of hot, warm, I take off my shirt, my pants, my shoes and socks, lay down and pass out. So that morning, I guess the sun was just coming up, and I heard a “boom” and I grabbed my clothes and I looked back, I must have been about 50 feet away from the shack, and a shell hit that shack and just blew it up. Boy, did I give this guy hell. I said, “Why didn’t you tell me about that?” He said, “I thought you wanted to rest.” I said “Yeah, I’d have rested the rest of my life.”

Anyway, I didn’t sleep very well, there was no place to sleep, because, see, whenever fighting during the war, the Japanese would shell from Cavite, which was the other side of Corregidor. It was quite a distance, maybe fifteen miles, I don’t know how long, but anyway when they got there they would kind of peter out, the shells would just hit the ground and I was hit by some (*unable to understand*) but from Bataan , which was only three miles, you could hear the report after the shot went over you. But they couldn’t hurt us because we were on a little hill and they’re vetting on the gun, and they’d hit the guns, and it would hit the revetment, and there was a lot of dark smoke and dirt onto us, and then they’d quit firing and we’d settle down and then they would elevate and go right over us. It was scary. And then it would go over in the China Sea after that. They kept doing that every day. They couldn’t do nothing to us because—and they knew everything we were doing on Corregidor. They had a balloon about maybe fifty kilometers in Manila Bay and they were looking down on us from this balloon. They were so far away that we couldn’t reach it, with shells. But they would spy on us and see everything we were doing, and so they knew that we were still active. They went and took some mortars—you know what a mortar is? You know, the ones they shoot up and then come down? Well, the first one they fired from Maraviedis came inside of where we were at, but what saved us, it didn’t kill anyone, in kind of injured a lot of them, a lot of people were all bleeding, and the ones on the other side of where we were at, the gun’s right here and then we were all around it, and I ws on this

side, laying like this, and I got some shrapnel in the back. In fact, I still have the metal there in my thigh.

Int.: After the airport, you had trouble getting to the airport?

Mr. Silva: Not really. It's kind of small. anyway, Silas says after the shell—'cause all hell broke loose, man, they bombed us, they shelled us, it looked like hell, you know, bombs bursting everywhere, shelling and all that. So after it settles down he says, "We'll take you to the hospital." Sure enough, after it calmed down, but boy, it was like you were going through hell, all the trees were burning, all the barracks, everything that they had shelled was just going to pot, burning. Then I got to the hospital, they put me on a gurney face down, the shrapnel was right here, see? You know, those snips that they use? He stuck it in that and he started looking for that piece of metal and he couldn't find it, and me hollering 'cause they didn't give me any anesthetic. And he said, "We'll take care of him later," so they put me into the hospital and gave me a cot. They never called me back to get that metal out. So I was there about another week. So that could heal.

You know, the nurses make their rounds, and she says, "OK, you're ready to go to duty." I says, "Well, I think I've got malaria." She says, "You're a liar, you're chicken, you're afraid to go out there." "I'm not," I said, "you can feel me, I got an attack of malaria." So she got her thermometer, put it in my mouth, came back in about thirty minutes, said "Sure enough. One hundred and four." And she says, "Well, I have to keep you." So she kept me. And it's a good thing, because the following day the Japanese made the landing there from Cavite and they killed all the people I was with. I can not find today, I cannot find nobody from D Battery (*cannot make out several words*) killed them all. And it's a good thing I had, that's one of the times I had . . .

Int.: Did the Japanese do any ground fighting where you were?

Mr. Silva: We were lucky, I guess, because we were anti-aircraft. We were behind the lines, so some of our boys they did take us into the front lines, but we didn't do actual hand-to-hand combat.

Int.: Did you take any prisoners?

Mr. Silva: Did we take any? None whatsoever. Not where we were at, anyway.

Int.: You didn't have any Japanese marching around on the island where you were?

Mr. Silva: No, because, there were some that went across while we were in Bataan and it was a victory joy, that was a sign of the Filipinos, so they learned it was a victory when they go in. We never saw them after that.

Int.: Were you moved to any other camp besides where you were?

Mr. Silva: Yes. After, well, I've forgot how many, I guess there must have been about, I don't know, twenty-five hundred Americans on Corregidor, and they put us down on the beach, facing the China Sea, and they put us in groups of ten. If one escaped, they'd shoot the other nine. So the group that I got with, we all made a pact that if you're going to go, tell us so we'll all go together. But they had boncas on the other side of Corregidor which the Japs couldn't see—you know what a bonca is?

Int.: Yeah.

Mr. Silva: And they would get these and go to other islands, or get away from Corregidor or Bataan, so in fact when I got in we were were so crowded, I was on the edge, and you could see the water there, and you could see about five boncas there. Next morning they were all gone. Like I say, they put ten men in one group and if one escaped they'd shoot the

others, and they said "We'll kill you if we ever find you." I never did, none of our group . . .

Int.: They'd kill the men in your company if one ran off.

Mr. Silva: No. See, every, when we got out of Corregidor, I mean *Malenta Town(sp??)* where I was at, they assigned you to ten men. If one escaped they'd shoot the other nine. Americans. Ten prisoners.

Int.: The Japanese.

Mr. Silva: The Japanese would shoot the other nine. And then they put us on (*cannot make out*) Beach, they called it, and then again disease started hitting us, we were dying constantly, every day there'd be guys dying, so our officers pleaded with the Japanese that they had better do something because we were dying, so right after that they put on little boats, I forget what they call them there, they're not too big, I think they'd carry about thirty, forty people.

Int.: What, a PT boat?

Mr. Silva: Well, not, it wasn't a PT boat, but something like that. They put us on that, they took us around between Corregidor and Bataan and there was a great big ship, battleship, facing the China Sea and they loaded us on that, and I says, "Oh my god, here we go to Japan. They're going to take us to Japan, or else why would they be doing this?" But lo and behold, after they loaded with us, they go back towards Bataan and Corregidor and of course Cavite, and then these boats, these small boats, they'd lower us, they'd go towards Cavite, the water was about this high where they dumped us out and I thought I'd take my shoes off because, 'cause you know walking on sand and how it hurts, and they wouldn't let me, threw me off the boat. From there they marched us to Bilibid in the Philippines which was about twenty

some odd miles, which wasn't as bad as the Bataan Death March. These Filipinos would have buckets of water under the palm trees, when the Japs would give us a rest, and on the bottom they had mangoes and bananas so it kind of helped. They took us to Bilibid Prison and we were there about seven days, eating rice and soup, onion soup. After about a week they put us on a train, took us to Cabanatuan.

Int.: And the train was packed?

Mr. Silva: It was packed. You've heard of these, what do they call these boxcars, forty and eight, they use for trains? They had the same kind there, they were smaller, and they'd pack 'em so you couldn't even stand, you couldn't do nothing, and from there they took us to . . .

Int.: And when you got off, did you have a lot of dead men on the train with you?

Mr. Silva: I don't remember if we did or not. I think some died, but I don't remember.

Int.: Did you receive mistreatment . . .

Mr. Silva: There on Cabanatuan all they had us doing was working on, you know they used to feed us steamed rice and lugau, that's like a mush, they'd put so much water it was just, we'd call that lugau. They'd feed you that. And then they'd bring in a cow once in awhile and slaughter it and feed us that, not steak, not good quality, they'd make soup out of it. And—what was the question you asked me?

Int.: About the treatment.

Mr. Silva: Oh yeah. And then if they caught anybody sealing they would bayonet or shoot him. And I saw a lot of that going on every day.

Americans, you know, they, if they got caught stealing. And what was the worst, I'd say—OK, after, in September '43 they picked 500 Americans, and every time they picked 500 Americans they would take them to McKinley Airfield, and they had these Americans working on the strips, repairing the damage that the bombers had done, with bayonet, this Japanese commander, they called him (???), he was a mean, if you went there you never came out alive. So when they said 500 men I says, "Oh, my god, Michel Field," instead of McKinley it was Michel Field. So they took us by train to Manila, and from there they marched us to the docks and there was a big typhoon, and the boat was rocking and they put us in this kind of boat, and after they loaded us on the boat they took us around to Lingayen and they loaded it with raw copper and after that you could feel the, every time it dropped a bucket or whatever of the raw copper, the ship would go down, and then they finally sailed to, we stopped in Taiwan, Formosa at the time, Taiwan, and we stayed there, I don't know, maybe seven days.

Int.: Were you on the boat all the time?

Mr. Silva: Yeah, we were all the time. They wouldn't let us see nothing, they wouldn't let you on topside.

Int.: What did you eat while you were on the boat?

Mr. Silva: Rice. Very little of it. And then, living conditions, you get 500 men cramped up in I think a room as big as this, may be a little bigger, but all cramped in, you couldn't sleep anyhow, and to do your thing on the floor a bucket, and when it was full they'd pull it up again. They had put toilets over the rails of the ship but they wouldn't let us go up. We had to stay in the hold all the time, 'til we got to Manila. Then in Manila they had several *bambusco(sp??)* buses that they took us to Clark Field. No, I'm sorry, eliminate all this. They took us to Japan.

From Formosa we went to Japan.

They took us to Clark Field and there they had brand new barracks that they had built for us to stay. Clark Field was like to the right of us, and we were in the middle, and then Statsenberg was on the other side. And then, I'm going back to the Philippines.

When we got to Japan we landed in Moji, from Moji they put us in a train, they took us to *Hamuta(sp??)* and the camp right there, I told you, those barracks they had built for us, and they built this camp on waste that they had taken out of the mine, basically, I forget what, Nagasaki Bay, I guess. Anyway, that's where they had us, and then they took us up and they had shovels and picks and jack hammers and in Japanese they tried to explain to us what they wanted, but heck, they think we were stupid we know what the hell they are, and that's one of the big (???) we had was conversing with the (???) because none of us knew any Japanese. Some guys did learn how to count to ten, which was lucky in a way, because every chance they got they would line you up and they would *kawabanga*, count off. So we all learned how to talk, I mean, count to ten, and we went outside, the first thing got a spot, so the guys after—but it was simple after we, had we known, had we known that language, we wouldn't have had as much trouble as we did, and like in later times, and we'd start—and it's real simple to—you know, I'm Hispanic, and there's no twisting of the tongue in their language it's the same thing, the syllables and pronunciations are the same way, so I wouldn't of had no trouble.

So then they took us down to the mine and they showed us where we were going to work, and there ws a Greek American, he was about six foot tall, he made his mind up that he was not going to go work in the mine. so, they would beat him up, and couldn't make him go. So they finally got tired of it, so they put him to work in their kitchen, and what he started doing was trading some of the leftovers from the Japs,

rice, and better than we were eating, and trading it to some of our prisoners for cigarettes, and they caught him and told him "Don't do that." But he kept on doing it, so they threw him in another jail inside our jail, and they just fed him water, that's all he got was water. He died after 43 days, he died of starvation. They wanted us to go see him. I didn't want to go see him, but he, when they starve you, you just feel like a skeleton, which is what we were, and he just shriveled up.

And then another time, every eleventh day they would give us a rest day, and then every Tuesday they used to make a little bread, and if you didn't work in the mine, they wouldn't give it to you. And then this one guy, I forget his name, he went and stole a tray of biscuits, or little bread, and then Little, he was a lieutenant from the Navy, he was in charge of the kitchen and he was pro-Jap. I saw him cross-eyed, he would turn me in, that's how bad he was, he would turn me in to a Jap and I would get beaten.

Int.: This was an American soldier?

Mr. Silva: He was an American soldier, Navy officer. So he looked and hunted until he found these breads that had been stolen. The barracks that we were there, we had a catwalk but we had to take off our shoes before we went in there, and the barracks had a four, six, four, six men, and then the ninth, there was fifty in there, and you always slept on these mats, and under the mat they had little orange crates, orange box, thin boards under it, and underneath there'd be nothing, we'd be about a foot and a half above the catwalk, and this was where this guy's put the bread. He should of hid it someplace else, but they found it and took him to the Japanese and took him to the back of where they were at, where the Japanese were, and they wanted us to go up there and see the execution, but I said "No." So they tied his hands to his back, and they tied his ankles, and they made him, then several, about twenty-some-odd Japanese with fixed bayonets surround him and the

Japanese camp commander had his saber drawn and wanted him to bend over so he could whack his head off, and he wouldn't do it. So he got so darn mad that he just gave the soldiers orders to bayonet him so they went from angles and just killed him.

Int.: I guess the head cut would have been better.

Mr. Silva: And then I got several beatings, too. One time I had a real good friend from St. Louis, his name was Wilbur *Peager(sp??)*, and we were real close, and we had three shifts, we worked three shifts in the mine, swing, dayshift, and night, graveyard, and this one time we were on the swing shift, we came in, we'd throw our dirty clothes off and get our spoons to go eat in the kitchen, the kitchen was way up, the mess hall was way off from where we was at, so they took off before us and we says, are we going to go eat? Heck yes, we can't afford not to eat. Our rations, they had a guard, you had to march down this side of the barracks, and then to the left, but here at the corner they had a guardhouse, a Japanese guardhouse. So we went—you remember I told you we had 500 original men? Within time it grew up to 2,000, it kept expanding.

Int.: They kept adding people.

Mr. Silva: Yeah, they took Japanese, they took more Americans, they took Australians, Dutch, English, British, they took them, up to about 2,000, they enlarged the kitchen. We went through all these barracks and just about the time we'd get into the line there was this Japanese soldier, we called him the One Armed Bandit because he had one arm missing, he was always around patrolling with a saber, so he caught us by the guardhouse, made us bend over on the steps, these two guards, Japanese guards, made us bend over and they hit us with a five-foot two-by-two across the buttocks, three times, and if you hollered they hit you again, if you hollered. So Bigger and I, I said, "Hey, we better

not holler.” We’d just grit our teeth. That’s all we did. I couldn’t sit for a month.

Another time I got a real hard beating was just before, maybe about two months before the surrender, Navy planes had been bombing where we were at, to knock out the generators and all this, and we would work in, they wouldn’t, the pumps wouldn’t work to take the water out of the mine, so we were working in knee-high water. And this one time—of course, in some spots, not all of them—and then I had diarrhea and I told my overseer, he was a civilian overseer, I says, “Man, do you know I yorushi,” he says “Go ahead,” so I went and I had come into a tunnel where they had started digging and they had hit solid rock, so I, they abandoned it, see, and stupid me, we had a, I pulled my pants down and the light was flashing up against the wall, and I hear these Japanese guys coming, the way we could tell their rank was in their lights, they had stripes—one, two, three if they’d been in the ranks, and this guy had two stripes across his, Japanese, he must have been about thirty years old, and he had a sixteen year old boy with him, and another smaller one, so I heard him say “Go hit him. Beat him up.” And there was a little piece of wood, well, what would I say, stick, about four feet long and a couple inches in diameter, and he went up there, it had been soaked water. When I heard him coming I tried to pull up my pants but I had a heck of a time because the battery weighed about two pounds and the pants that we had were rubber, so I had a heck of a time putting mine—so he started hitting me with his bowl, and I was, tried to dodge. He hit me on my arm, he hit me on my shoulder, he hit me on my head, the only thing he tried to hit me on the head but you see the was kind of low, he tried to hit me on the head but he couldn’t do it because he’d hit the ceiling. But, boy, I’m telling you, that kid really worked me over, maybe for about an hour, I couldn’t walk. So then he sent the little kid but the damage was already done. So I crawled to where I was at, my overseer, he said “*Nonka(sp??)* What?” I tried to explain to him that, because he saw

the condition I was in, so he said "*Yasamea(sp??)*" which meant "Rest," so I rested for the rest—so they took me topside in a wheelbarrow and I was in the hospital for I think about a couple of months. But there was no medication.

And then I had, the times I got wounded, and then they could have killed me with this beating, and then one time the mine caved in on me. When we got there they assigned five Americans to one Japanese overseer. He was either too old to go to war, so they assigned him—they were coal miners, I guess. So he took a liking to me, this Japanese guard, and our duty was in the mine they would sweep it usually like a hundred yards, and they would build five walls to keep keep us moving forward the next day, 'cause we would strip all of the coal out of there. We would be marching this way, and there would be five rock walls, and my job was to drill between the walls where you call a *stopa(??)* hammer, you start with a two-inch bit, and then another one, and then another, until it gets about six feet, then after you do that then you pack it with dynamite . . .

End of side one of tape. Side two picks up with:

Mr. Silva: . . . go between the rock and the coal, this little layer, and every time, I had to work with the *stopa(??)* hammer like that, otherwise if I let it go by itself without an operator . . .

Int.: It would go crazy . . .

Mr. Silva: . . . it would . . .

Break in the tape. Resumes with:

Mr. Silva: So this one day—well, every day, a little piece of shale would come down and hit my hand, but this one time, the Japanese were behind

me and they hollered "**Abunai**"(sp?), that means "Danger," and I thought it was just the shale coming down, but no, the whole ceiling came down, and what saved my life was the rocks that had been on the ground, I fell between them. I got four broken ribs on this side, I fractured my pelvis, my back hurts all the time now, I had a dislocated disc, that's what I suffer from now, my back. They took me to camp and I stayed, I guess, another two months in the hospital. They had nothing to—the only, for my ribs, you know how they wrap you up, with a sheet that they had. But, right after I got well they sent me back to the mine. It's hard to believe, but that happened.

Int.: Did you have any awareness of what was going on anyplace except just where you were?

Mr. Silva: You mean in the United States?

Int.: No, here in the war. Did you have any idea what was going on at the time?

Mr. Silva: Not while we were in Japan. We knew nothing.

Int.: Didn't hear anything about what was happening with the Americans?

Mr. Silva: No. Nothing. They kept us pretty well in the . . .

Int.: How did you tell where the Japanese had surrendered?

Mr. Silva: How did I know?

Int.: Uh-huh.

Mr. Silva: When we first got an inkling that the end had come, the guys that were going to go work on the swing shift, they told them they didn't

have to go. The guys that were in the mine came out. And we asked, Well, what's deal, why," and they said "It's a Japanese holiday, we're giving you a break." I think in a day or so, there was a correspondent from the *Chicago Tribune*, and they gathered us up and the whole 2,000 of us there, and told us about Roosevelt dying, and about the atomic bomb, about the jet planes, about everything that was happening while we were there, because we didn't, boy when you're in a country like that you don't know nothing. So that's what they told us, that the Japanese had surrendered and that they were going to have guards to protect us from the Japanese population. Hell, they were more afraid of us than we were of them.

Int.: What was the reaction of the people in the area. Did they . . .

Mr. Silva: The Japanese?

Int.: Yeah.

Mr. Silva: Well, like I tell you, we didn't have much contact with them. We didn't know what reaction they . . .

Int.: Did you have—did they bring supplies in or drop supplies in?

Mr. Silva: Yes. After the surrender the B-29s dropped a lot of food to us. You wouldn't believe it, it's hard to believe, I can't believe it myself, but we were skin and bone. We'd eaten three and a half years just on rice, onion soup, or whatever, seaweed soup. Then I weighed about 145 when the war started and I ended up with about 90 some-odd pounds and my skin. But once airplanes started dropping food to us and we started eating good, we built up. You wouldn't believe that we were prisoners of war. In fact, when we got to Manila, I think it was a train load of colored soldiers, and we were over here, and they told us "Where are you going?" and we told them we were going back home,

and we were prisoners of war, and they said “Ah, yeah, baloney, we can’t believe it.” I guess the body just bloated or . . .

Int.: Yeah, probably. You didn’t get any moisture in your body, I’m sure, no food. What happened to you following your release?

Mr. Silva: When we were released? They laid down their arms and we were on our own. And, right away, we started scavenging for food. Our camp when we were in Japan had four strands of live wire, electrical wire, all around it. If you touched it, it would just shock you, kill you. They said they were going to take off the juice, so they did, they said that when we were free and we just pushed—the fence was just, like it was made out of orange crate boards, real thin.

Int.: Is there anything that you think that you have that made you have the ability to survive through all that?

Mr. Silva: I always thought about my family. I never gave up hope. Guys that gave up hope, they didn’t make it. And we just kept hoping that some day we would be relieved, and I would think about my mother, my father, my sisters back home. One thing, I never did get any mail from them. They would write to me constantly, but I never received it.

Int.: Were you involved in any war crimes trials?

Mr. Silva: No.

Int.: Have you met with any Japanese you encountered during World War II?

Mr. Silva: No.

Int.: Do you have any after effects from your years in prison?

Mr. Silva: Like I said, my back aches, my pelvis, I've got a lot of ailments, suffer from bone aches all the time.

Int.: When did you finally come home?

Mr. Silva: When this war correspondent got there, two or three days after the surrender, he told us that the troops of occupation were coming in on Kanoya, Japan, quite a way from us, and the airplanes that were dropping the troops of occupation were coming back empty, so he says, "I can't tell you, but if you're able, if I was you, I would go **(scrambled)**. After he said that, we packed whatever, our shoes and blankets, what the airplanes had dropped to us, we packed that, went to the depot and commandeered this train. We traveled all night long, and the next day we got to Kanoya where we saw the American soldiers. We touched them to see if they were real, 'cause they had different helmets, and their khakis were new. "OK, you guys, we want to take you to camp. Get in the truck." So we got in the truck, they took us, then we had to get on the list. I think I waited another week there before my chance to finally get back to the Philippines.

We went back in a B-24. And from there we got into another list to come back to the United States. We all wanted to get back as fast as possible, as quick as possible, so everybody would sign the airplane list for the flight back, and I did, but then they said "Do you guys want any money?" I said "Yeah." They said, "Go to the table over there." They said, "How much do you want?" I said, "Ah, give me \$900." "Sign here." And as soon as we got the money we went into Manila. So when they called my name to fly back I wasn't there, so I had to wait for a ship.

Int.: When did you finally get home?

Mr. Silva: On October the 18th, 1945.

Int.: Do you have anything you'd like to add?

Mr. Silva: One thing, before I left, my mother was kind of ill. For any little thing she would faint, and that kind of worried me, because she's not going to take (*garbled*), but I was worried about my mother, she's so fragile, well, she wasn't fragile, but her mentality, I guess wasn't too strong, but anything you'd tell her—I worried about her a lot. But then before I left she was a kind of sickly lady, and they told her that she had cancer. And she had a real good friend, told her "Nah, you don't have cancer. Just go to Albuquerque and get a good doctor's opinion." So all she had was appendix, so they operated on her and she was OK. But what really, really hit me hard was my dad being blind when I came back. He worked for the Santa Fe Railroad and they would put him on day shift, but he'd go in at eleven o'clock at night, and work all night long, and he went blind while I was gone. He was a macho man, he was in really good physical condition. That's what really got me when I came back, because my mother and my aunt—when we got to Hawaii they says, "OK, wire your folks that you'll be in Manila on the 15th of October," and we did, and then after we got out of Hawaii, the captain of the ship told us that if we didn't get in there before the 15th we'd have to stay out in 21-mile zone, because the fleet was there. But he says "I'm doing anything I can to get you boys back." So he wired back and told them that he had a boatload of prisoners and they give him the OK to get in there. Boy, that boat was just shaking when we got there, I think on the 14th or the day before.

Seeing my mother and my dad, and my mother and my aunt were getting ready to go meet me, but then after that change they didn't know about it, so I had nobody to meet me, but then Wilbur and I were walking in our pajamas around the the compound there in the hospital, and when I see them, all three of them, my dad and my aunt, coming towards me, I hollered and they run to me and I run to them but my dad was standing by himself. What's wrong? 'Cause he just

stood by himself, about 50 feet away.

Int.: They left him?

Mr. Silva: They left him standing there, they were so excited to see me. So after I came back I said "What's the matter?" He told me, "I'm blind." And then I asked the doctor—he went through several operations and the doctor says that—see, Gallup is a frigid winter, really bad, and they used to shed tears for me and the wind did affect them.

And, to finish the story, I came back. After in August I married a lovely lady, Socora Silva, we have five boys, two girls, and twelve grandchildren now, and we have a happy life.

Int.: Did you win anything, like the Purple Star?

Mr. Silva: Oh, everything. I have several medals. I got three Purple Hearts with Oak Leaf Cluster, I got the Bronze Star, I can't remember all of them. Citations, we got three or four from the President for what we did.

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