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Oral History

COL. E. H. MITCHELL

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ORAL HISTORY
COL. E. H. MITCHELL

This is a long story. I am not at all sure of any reason why it should be recorded. It is entirely true and I sincerely wish that most of it were fiction. In the summer of 1941, I had finished a four-year detail at Allen Academy in Bryan, Texas, and had been informed that I would be relieved and sent to troop duty. Pre-war mobilization had begun and troop duty meant anywhere and much moving. Accordingly, I settled my family in Austin, Texas, and commuted from Bryan on weekends while awaiting orders. On October 1st, I received secret letter orders to proceed to the Philippine Islands sailing from San Francisco on November the 1st. I spent most of October with my family in Austin and proceeded to San Francisco as ordered.

The night before sailing, the city papers reported the successive delays imposed on a Japanese liner trying to sail for Japan but diplomats had other important Nationals. The last delay was the re-inspection of stateroom luggage reportedly for the purpose of letting our ship clear first. I boarded the SS PRESIDENT COOLIDGE, the luxury ship of the Pacific sailing under army charter to Manila and then to revert to commercial business. We had every service afforded first class travelers. The passenger list included about seventy colonels and lieutenant colonels under orders similar to mine and many air squadrons. Before we were well out of Golden Gate we were openly discussing a conviction that each of us had held secretly since receiving orders that our two-year tour in the Philippines would not be completed before war with Japan became a fact. In the event of such war there was no plan for the relief of the Philippines; that no-such relief plan was feasible; that our destiny was capture for those who survived.

At Honolulu, we had a few hours ashore and on departing found that we were accompanied by the SS PRESIDENT PIERCE and escorted by the USS Cruiser LOUISVILLE. At night our ship was blacked out and smoking on deck was not permitted. Our ship was under navy control with a detachment from the LOUISVILLE on the bridge. We speculated as to the immediate cause of the strict security and

powerful escort. German naval ships disguised as merchantmen were known to be active in the Pacific. Relations with Japan were deteriorating rapidly. On November 5th, 1941, security seemed prudent. We arrived in Manila on November 20th and spent ten days at Fort McKinley drawing equipment and awaiting orders.

I received orders to the seven islands command and sailed December first for Sibu where I was assigned to the 61st. Division, Philippine Army and proceeded to Division headquarters at Iloilo, Panay, reporting on Saturday December 6th. The Division commander assigned me to command 61st Infantry Regiment on the island of Negros but instructions to join my regiment on Monday, December the 8th. Early on Monday morning Col. Cristy and I were having breakfast in the hotel dining room. A well dressed Filipino approached our table and stated that a friend of his had heard by radio that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Was it true? We assured him that we knew nothing about such an attack and he departed happily. At a conference an hour later the report was confirmed. I took the noon ferry to Negros. I was met at the dock by Capt. Fork, senior of six young American officers detailed from the Philippine Division as instructors for the Philippine army being assembled. I was handed a stack of radio messages from General MacArthur's headquarters. These messages required the defense of the island, stimulation of production and conservation of food, internment of all Japanese and Italian nationals, censorship of mail, radio, telephone communications, enlistment of Philippine volunteers to the limit of arms available, seizure and control of vehicle fuel and more. Martial law was not to be declared. This became a technical matter.

Upon our arrival at the regimental cantonment I met the other American instructors. I learned that the regiment was equipped with early World War I arms including the Enfield rifle as long as many Filipinos are high, 1917 Strokes mortars with ammunition of the same date, the old-type machine guns and automatic rifles, no communication equipment whatever. We had four army one and one-half ton trucks. We were never to receive one item of army supply thereafter. The 1st Battalion had been the first element inducted and Manila had delivered the ammunition for its range practice, otherwise, we would have had none. After making arbitrary allotments for machine guns and auto

rifles, we had sixty rounds for each rifle. I directed that one-third of the ammunition would be issued to the weapons, one third to remain under the control of battalion commander and one third would be issued only on my orders. I believed that untrained troops would fire all their ammunition at the first target seen and we would be finished. I expressed the wish to meet and speak to the Philippine officers of the regiment. They were assembled and I spoke a few I hope well-chosen words. Having finished, I turned to cross the porch to the office door. Captain Van Austern stayed behind and I could not help but hear him say, "Those of you who understand English, tell the others what the Colonel has said and tell them to repeat it in the Gallic and ??? dialects. This was a blow. Here I was eight thousand miles from home in command of a regiment many of whose officers did not speak my language nor I theirs. I was responsible for the defense of an island with about three hundred miles of coastline and inhabited by one and a half million people.

A rare good fortune occurred that I could not appreciate at the time. Louis Assoryo(sp?) and Donald Hanning were at the headquarters to meet me. They had walked out of the office of a large sugar interest and insisted on going to war. I could not enlist them in the Philippine army nor could I commission them in any army. I put them on the civilian payroll at one hundred dollars per month. Their knowledge of the island and the people made them immediately indispensable. Their lack of official status was an obstacle in dealing with civilians. I told them that without any authority whatever I appointed them 2nd. Lieutenants and told them to dress accordingly. Later, Louis, a Philippine citizen, was commissioned in the Philippine army. After the war Hanning was commissioned in the army of the United States backdated and back paid to December 8th, 1941. My recommendation for a bronze star medal was approved.

On Christmas day, 1941, I was ordered to move the regiment to the island of Mindanao, the southernmost island. About this time the Japs bombed Sibu on the east and Iloilo to the west. To eliminate further hazard, both cities evacuated large stores of gasoline in five-gallon cans by dumping them on the jungle shores of southern Negros. The principal industry on Negros is sugar and its by-product alcohol was generally used as

motor fuel. Our movement to Mindanao was to be made in three inner-island ships sailing under cover of darkness. Small Japanese naval craft had been seen in the inner island waters with increasing frequency. Assoryo and Hanning supervised the loading of the first ship departed at sundown. The second ship was very small and with an empty hold was not safe for a deck load of troops. A warehouse at the dock was full of sacked beans and sugar accordingly we loaded the hold of the small ship with beans and sugar ballast and the deck with troops. The third ship looked large but was late in arriving. Imagine our disappointment to learn that the hold was almost full of large hardwood timber. It was too late to unload the timber. On Mindanao there would be no sugar industry, therefore, no alcohol. Gas not needed on Negros would be in short supply on Mindanao. Accordingly with much misgiving we loaded about fifteen hundred cans of gasoline in the space between the timber and the single deck. Thus loaded we moved close to shore to a small bay near the south end of Negros. Hiding there during the day we entered the Moro Gulf at dark. Overloaded and in complete darkness we made slow progress. It was a very long night. The night did not last long enough for us to reach the port of Iligan in darkness. We got in broad daylight and spent the morning unloading in a completely exposed pier. Jap recon planes had been over Negros every morning and mid-afternoon regularly. This day we saw no air patrol whatever, for that my thanks.

The next morning we started our march across the Island of Mindanao toward the village of Malabang. The age-old hatred between the Filipino and the Moro stimulated alertness on the part of our Filipino troops after we had passed Lake Planau into the country of Lanao Moro. Lake Planau was the top of our climb. From the lake to Malabang was down grade on the same rocky mountainous road. The village of Malabang was on the south shore of Mindanao facing the Celebes Sea at the point where our mountain road turns southeast to follow the coast. Our mission was to resist hostile landing on the beach, defend the unimproved airstrip just north of Malabang, delay enemy progress to the north and screen against penetration from the west in the area of Malabang to Lake Lanao. The coastal plain was about two miles wide and almost clear. Northward the mountainous elevation and the jungle began on the same distinct line. The jungle contained very large hardwood trees among every variety of tropical vegetation.

From early January, until we were interrupted in late April, preparation of positions alternated with badly needed troop training. We prepared positions along the beach and dug continuous trenches near the edge of the jungle. I had the idea that our untrained Filipinos would fight better side by side than alone in foxholes. We prepared successive defensive positions up the mountain and cut logs for tank blocks at suitable cuts along the road.

Early in January Major Van Austen intercepted a message to me announcing my promotion to colonel as of December 19, 1941. Van and Assoryo searched the island to find the unlikely item, a pair of colonel's eagles. Without success elsewhere, they pressured General Fork to part with a pair made of coin silver by the Moros. At dinner that night, they made the surprise presentation of first the message and then the eagles. I was quite overwhelmed by both.

Shortly after our arrival, the 73rd Infantry Regiment, Lt. Col. Bob Vishey commanding, arrived and was assigned to defend Iligan facing northward toward the Moro Gulf. The two regiments were back to back with considerable interval. My disposition included two battalions on the front line each manning the beach position in its sector, the main line of resistance in the edge of the jungle facing the coastal plains, the reserve battalion near Lake ??? about half way up the mountain side. Early in March the battalion in the front line suffered an invasion of malignant malaria. We had no quinine or other remedy. A Filipino doctor found trees in our sector, which he said could be used as an antiparetic(sp?) . Under his direction bark was taken from the Diedert(sp?) tree, boiled into a tea and administered. It in no way cured malaria but after four days of treatment, the fever was gone and the weakened soldier was returned to duty. The school house at ??? was converted into a hospital and at one time we had twelve hundred of my small regiment where they were receiving treatment. We enforced rigid discipline in the use of mosquito bars, drained all pools, etc., and scraped the banks of the three streams that flowed through our area. Two slowly flowing streams were dammed and impounded water which was used to flush the stream every fourth day by opening the dam. New cases diminished and we had only two deaths from malaria.

The headquarters of the 81st Division, Brigadier Gen. Guy O. Fork commanding, was established at Camp Kiefk???, a semi-permanent cantonment on Lake Panau. Gen. Fork had arrived in Mindanao in 1899 as a trooper in an Indiana volunteer cavalry unit. At the end of the Spanish American War, he had taken his discharge in the islands and spent much time in the Philippine constabulary and more recently in the new Philippine army. When the war began, he was made a Brigadier General, Philippine Army. His command now consisted of the 61st and the 73rd Infantry Regiments. Gen. Fork had quite great faith in the jungle fighting ability of the Moro. After the last insurrection, the Moro was prohibited the possession of firearms. The General's approach to Moro assistance was to organize them under their own leaders to fight for their own territory using glade weapons and promising them the Japanese weapons they could take. Accordingly, several thousand Moros took a solemn oath on the Koran to defend Lanao against the Japanese invaders. Many of us had doubts.

The Japanese had landed at a large forest at Daval(sp?) on the southeast point of the island at Christmas, 1941. They had taken Zambawango(sp?) in February of 1942. Our position was about central and we expected some central point would be on their schedule. On April 29th, we were informed the Japanese had landed in Parang a village about forty miles east of Malabang. We alerted all troops and we inspected all weapons and positions. At this time the second and third battalions were in the front line, the second on the right. The first battalion was in reserve near Lake Defale(sp?). I asked permission to destroy a road bridge about five miles east of Malabang. Permission was refused, perhaps anticipating the withdrawal of the Parang Garrison in my direction. Communication being very poor, we received no further information. That night I inspected all positions and examined the demolitions intended to destroy several small bridges in our front. About midnight I bedded down in 3rd Battalion headquarters.

About 3:00 a.m., we were awakened by enemy tanks almost in our position. A company on outpost covering the left front had failed to get a message to the battalion over the wall-type crank operated telephones we had liberated from buildings in Malabang. For

some reason, the tanks withdrew and we were under mortar fire until dawn. Small units of infantry made attacks during the morning but fell back without apparent losses. By noon, artillery was evident and the buildup in front of the 3rd Battalion was serious. The 2nd Battalion seemed to be unopposed. About 4 p.m. I ordered the 2nd Battalion to counterattack to the left front to relieve the pressure on the 3rd. Battalion. With poorly trained troops I expected too much. The attack did not take place and I soon learned that the 2nd Battalion was back in its position. The enemy force had built up during the day to many times our strength; all was against the 3rd. Battalion on the left. About dusk I ordered the 2nd Battalion to withdraw, cross the river that separated it from the 3rd Battalion and move forward to support the 3rd. This order was sent by two runners and later by a staff officer; none got through. I then ordered the 1st Battalion in reserve to move forward to support the 3rd. They moved promptly by truck but arrived just as the Japanese launched a bayonet attack that rolled back the 3rd Battalion. About 9:00 p.m. in the dark dense jungle the confusion was complete. We did manage to bring some order out of chaos and withdraw to the second prepared position. We were able to break contact completely and the rear guard did not fire a shot. We occupied the second position and were soon under mortar fire but no pressure until dawn. The tanks advanced and could not move the log block. The infantry was dismounted from trucks to move the logs. Taken under fire the infantry withdrew and started an envelopment of our left flank. They went deep into the jungle and came in straight against our line. When the maneuver was almost complete, we withdrew to the 3rd position again without pressure. This position was occupied by early afternoon and was soon under artillery and mortar fire. I issued my reserve ammunition. At dark all Japanese weapons opened fire at the same instant but no general assault followed immediately. Firing continued as the night wore on but our fire decreased by the hour. About midnight all was quiet on our line and no communications were received. With Hill, my executive officer, I went forward to determine the situation. Deep in a jungle covered draw we were passed by two Jap patrols. Eventually we found parts of two companies and a few stragglers but these we moved to a road and finding it unoccupied withdrew to the north. There was no ammunition in the group except that which Hill and I had in our pistol magazines. About 3:00 A.M. we heard tanks on the road behind us. The group of about sixty Filipinos took

cover on both sides of the road. Hill went to the east and I thought that I should go with the others to the west. We stopped in a banana grove about a hundred yards from the road and I dropped facing the road and watched the Jap column move past. The tanks were followed by trucks, the last truck had a cow in tow.

I awakened about dawn and found that I was alone in the grove. I moved across the road and looked for Hill. I found no one. Knowing that there was nothing but Japanese to the south, I started north hoping to locate the Jap column and, avoiding them, join VC and the 73rd. South of Ganassi where a branch road leads east around lake Lanao, a young Moro told me that many Japanese had gone east. While trying to generate an idea, I heard marching feet on the road behind me. I took cover under an elevated end of a bamboo shack at the road junction. Soon a Jap scout came around behind the shack looking all around in the distance. He had not seen me but his rifle was pointed directly at my head. When he did look in my direction I'm sure he was as startled as I was. He pulled me out by the strap on my field glasses, threw away my tin hat, took my field glasses and pistol,. He then marched me to the road where another scout assisted in tying my hands behind me and giving me a painfully sharp jab in the buttocks with a bayonet, started me south on the flank of the marching column. Many men on the flank of the column stepped out of column to kick my shins and elsewhere or slug my face. Further down the column, a husky Jap with a black beard, very rare among Japanese, stepped from the column, reversed his rifle, and was swinging it from the muzzle like a golf club. I thought he was climbing. When I approached he swung at my head, I ducked as far as I could but the rifle butt caught my scalp and turned back a couple of inches. I would have fallen except for the scout giving a hard pull on the rope that tied my hands. Further along we met the first Jap officer I had seen. Here we turned around and joined the column. When we were about where I was captured, the column halted and the Jap lieutenant screamed for something. Soon he had a helmet full of water, a colored cloth, a clean Filipino army shirt. He washed the blood from my head and face without touching the wound. He put the cloth around my head like a turban, gave me the clean shirt, and the two of us proceeded forward in a small truck. About half a mile down the road I was taken into a grain field where several Jap officers were sitting on a woven mat. After

some Japanese conversation, the colonel of the Jap column made a little speech through an excellent interpreter. He said, "I am sorry that my troops have so forgotten their discipline to mistreat a prisoner of Japan. I assure you that from now on you will be under my personal protection and you will be treated with all the dignity due your rank and the great country you represent. On the mat in front of them was a bottle of scotch and a package of Piedmont cigarettes. He filled the smallest jigger I have ever seen and gave it to me, then one cigarette and a rigid intelligence interrogation. They were worried about the location of our artillery and since we had none I tried hard to keep from showing the truth. After the questioning I was tied to a fence in the broiling sun for the afternoon. That evening we marched a short distance to Ganassi where my escort and I slept on the floor of a bamboo shack that had once been the garage for my official car. With my hands tied, I slept well on a woven grass mat.

The next morning after a ceremony and the issue of rice we resumed the march northward. An army pack carrier was adjusted to my back filled with US canned goods, no doubt from my former headquarters mess. Our march was interrupted several times while the Japs drove off the defending efforts of VC's 73rd Infantry. After dark, our progress would start and stop. The advance guard was very cautious no doubt concerned by our non-existence artillery. The march continued all night. In my exhausted condition and with the load I was carrying, I was frequently knocked fully conscious. I would awaken marching down the road, my hands tied behind my back and a very young Jap soldier holding the end of the rope. Late in the night, when I would be slow to stand up, the Jap boy would tug on the rope very excitedly. I knew as well as he that if I failed to rise his duty would be my finish. We finished the march at Camp Keithly after sunup.

With the small detachment that were my keepers I was placed in a small house fairly clean with space to lie on the floor. They were content that I lie quietly. In mid-afternoon, it was indicated by pantomime that I would be taken to the river for a bath. In privacy shared by several hundred Jap soldiers, the bath was a success. The soldiers demonstrated much interest in their only prisoner and most examined my head wound with explanations that might have been sympathetic. We continued northward by truck

to the Iligan then east to Krogian. At Krogian, the Jap colonel sent for me and thru his excellent interpreter asked me to perform an errand of mercy. He explained that Gen. Wainwright had surrendered Corregidor, that the Americans were prisoners in Malenta Tunnel. That the Japanese general demanded the surrender of all of the Philippines and that Gen. Wainwright had by radio called upon all American commanders to surrender. The Jap colonel suggested that I with a Jap officer go by car, find General Sharp and explain the need for his surrender. I replied that regardless of my belief in the matter, I could not deliver such a message from a Japanese source to an American commander. He immediately saw the point. We returned by truck to Camp Keithly awaiting a surrender of Gen. Fork. The Japs did not go to the mountains to look for him.

The excellent interpreter that acted for the column commander was quartered with the detachment that guarded me. As time went on, my restrictions were relaxed to the point where I was tied up only at night and then with my hands in front. I was under constant observation, however. The interpreter seemed anxious to practice his English and we had many conversations especially at night. I learned that his father was a diplomat and they had lived all over the world except in America. The lieutenant was graduated from Oxford while his father was stationed in Europe. His conversation was very guarded at first but gradually relaxed. A composite of all these conversations would establish that he and a large sector of the diplomatic fraternity did not agree with the strategy of the war. He believed that the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines was wrong that the U. S. should not have been brought into the war with Japan. That Mr. Roosevelt would not have been able to bring the U. S. into the Pacific War to the benefit of England and the Netherlands. He believed that Japan should have continued to contain China, taken East Asia including Malaya, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. They then should have had peace for as much as twenty years to consolidate their gains, replenish their treasury, and rebuild their armed forces, then to take Burma, perhaps India, but surely East Africa. He believed that the riches of the East Indies and East Africa plus the strategic position held would make East Asia securely Japanese. He once said that after such a conquest, a future war with Germany would be inevitable if Hitler was victorious in Europe. Certainly the U. S. had no reason for war in the Pacific unless foolishly attacked. The

only possession, the Philippines, was to be independent in 1946 after which Japan could take any action that seemed expedient.

About May 20th, Gen. Sharp sent Col. William Dalton escorted by a Jap officer to Camp Keithly for the purpose of arranging general court surrender. After futile efforts at negotiating terms, Gen. Fork marched down the mountains and surrendered six hundred Filipinos and about 40 Americans. Although it was a sad performance, I welcomed American company. The Japanese set up a prison camp in Camp Keithly separating the Americans from the Filipinos and posting a routine guard in daylight somewhat reinforced during darkness. The troops that had captured me were relieved by an occupation force organized along military government lines, largely military and non-uniformed police. One prisoner was permitted to go to the Moro market each day and with our remaining money buy such items as we could accept. With fruit almost everywhere and rice issued we knew no hunger.

The new troops were tough and arrogant. Roll call each morning and evening was accompanied by a threatening lecture by a poor interpreter to the effect that if one prisoner escaped one prisoner will be "shotted." Gen. Fork had many acquaintances of long standing among the Moros of the area. One day the guard descended upon us and formed the Americans with much seriousness. They announced that they no longer considered Gen. Fork reliable and that hereafter he would not be in charge of prisoners. They moved me to the front and announced that I would be in charge being next senior. They explained that prisoners could not command and the in-charge meant responsible to the Japanese for compliance with Japanese orders. They put a brassard on my left arm bearing Japanese characters, I know not what

On July 2nd, four American enlisted prisoners disappeared. I learned of it in the early afternoon and was deeply disturbed as to what was best to do. I decided to wait until just before evening roll call and report to the Jap lieutenant in charge of prisoners. I had visions of the escape being discovered at roll call with the whole guard present. Most anything would happen. Accordingly, I found the lieutenant about sundown and stated

that there were four prisoners I could not find and asked if they were working under his direction. He replied that he would take care of the matter. At roll call, the guard was tense but nothing unusual occurred. Early the next morning I was sent for and kept in the room reserved for the secret police. I was questioned many times but not exhaustively about the escape. At noon I was sent back to our barracks. About 1:00 p.m. a messenger brought a note demanding the names of the respective superiors of the absent prisoners. They wanted the company commander, the 1st. sergeant, and the squad leaders, etc. We had no formal organization. General Fork, before being relieved by the Japanese, had designated Captain Price. I prepared the list showing myself as in charge by Jap designation. Captain Price as CO of the enlisted detachment, Sgt. Chandler as 1st. sergeant, and explained that we had no further organization. The reply was accompanied by a guard detail ordering that Lt. Col. Vischee(sp?) next senior below me, Captain Price, and Sgt. Chandler to report to Jap headquarters under guard. They were taken to the same building where I had spent the morning. We were all very disturbed and spent the afternoon on the porch of barracks hoping to see the three return. About sundown we saw then leave the building under an unusually heavy guard and march up the line of buildings and out of sight. Our tension was terrible. I even wishfully thought the Japs might send them to another camp leaving the pressure of the unknown to prevent further escapes. About 8:00 P.M. a guard detail came for all the belongings of the three. They had so little but the guard required three enlisted prisoners to carry what there was. About an hour later the carriers returned to barracks and reported that they had placed the belongings in the kitchen of a house. A secret police had required them to sit at the kitchen table and they were given a bottle of soda pop and I think some cookies. He then told them that four prisoners had escaped and that the three had paid and that they had died like brave soldiers.

About four o'clock the following morning I was shaken by a Jap soldier who indicated that I was to go to headquarters. There I was told that we would move by marching taking what we could carry. We ate some food and formed on the main road. The Filipinos in front and the Americans and two trucks in columns of four we were wired together from front to rear using belts to prevent breaking ranks. Thus on July 4th, 1942,

six degrees north of the equator we began a march toward Iligan twenty-five miles to the north. Having marched about two miles one of the prisoners called to me that Pvt. Childress was too weak to stand and the others were almost carrying him on the wire. I disengaged myself and dropped back to the truck and explained to the lieutenant that Childress could not make it, could he be put on a truck where there was ample room? I did not understand the answer and repeated the question. This answer seemed to be simply I am responsible. I returned to my place in line and wondered what would be next. Soon I was called again and told that Childress was completely out and was being carried by the others in his column. I returned to the truck and repeated my request. This time the lieutenant halted the column, had Childress cut away from the wire, almost carried the short distance to the rear and shot. When he fell the sentry fired another shot at the base of the skull. General Fork had been placed in the truck at the start and I was now placed in the truck beside him.

About noon we were issued some dry boiled rice and salt but no water. The only water in the column was that conserved in the canteen of individuals, if any. Before resuming the march, Captain Neiland fell in the road in convulsions, no time was lost. Two guards carried him beside a roadside bush and we heard the now familiar two shots. During the day I saw many, perhaps seven or eight, Filipinos beside the road thus disposed of. Of special memory is the body of a Philippine army medical officer his Red Cross armbands still in place. We arrived in Iligand after dark and were crowded into a schoolroom with hardly room to sit. Soon after arrival Lt. Brad, a young officer, was taken violently ill and died. It was thought that he had filled his canteen from a contaminated stream at the noon halt and that to purify it with iodine crystals, perhaps too many. I went to report the death to the Japanese lieutenant who had taken quarters in another building. He was not noticeably impressed by the report. With his very poor interpreter he tried to tell me something by pantomime and a few words of English I was told that four prisoners had escaped, that four must die. That three had died and that I was number four. Then pointing to himself and to me and to the brassard on my left arm he seemed to say that I was number four but he had saved me on account of being in charge. My survival was no

occasion for rejoicing considering the day now closed. Two Americans and many Filipinos had been murdered and left beside the road. I was in no mood for gratitude.

The next day we were crowded into a barge-like boat standing room only and spent most of the day laboring along the coast to Kogian, spent the night in another schoolhouse, this one much larger. The following day, July 6th we were loaded into trucks and moved southward to Malabli. Here we were herded into a Philippine army cantonment joining the horde of prisoners who had once been the main force. During my stay there we saw several executions of Filipinos who had escaped and been apprehended. In each case, they had dug their own shallow grave and were shot so as to fall into it. In early September, rumor had it that the generals and colonels were to be moved to Manila to occupy a hotel. Sure enough, in a few days these ranks were assembled and moved to Kogian, believe it or not, by passenger automobile. We were loaded into the hold of a small and very old rusty ship. The single hold was inches deep in fermented semi-refined sugar slush. Having no cot I parked on top of a pile of large crated bottles, very uncomfortable but above the slime. We stopped at Sabu and then Iloilo collecting senior officers from various islands, then to Manila and our rumored hotel. On arrival we were loaded in trucks and eventually unloaded behind the walls of old Bilibid, the historic Philippine prison. We were herded into the second floor of the main building. We had cots, the first beds in four months for most of us. I found a small store operated by some navy ??? selling among other things Philippine cigars. I bought two boxes and hurried back upstairs to give Gen. Fork a box of cigars. In his area, I was told that the Jap secret police had taken him away shortly after arrival, all were concerned.

The next morning the police returned and called for Colonels Mitchell, Tarkington, and Sgt. Beck. We were taken to old Fort Santiago and upstairs in what had recently been an American officer's quarters. The house had been built on top of the wall of the old fort with the ground floor devoted to an entrance stair and behind that a basement. The basement section had been divided into five cells with solid partitions. Soon after arrival we were fed rice and fish and later given the most thorough interrogation lasting about two hours. The Jap personnel were all secret police and the interpreter was completely

proficient in the English language. Since the Philippines had been completely surrendered and all the questions were directed toward personal experiences, I was at a loss to determine their purpose. After the evening meal of rice and fish, the interrogation was repeated in detail. This I presume was a check for discrepancies. Col. Tarkington was questioned in an identical manner but separately. After the second interrogation, Tarkington and I were taken below and confined in separate solitary cells. This was September 15th, 1942.

My cell was six by twelve feet. A mat or mattress thin and hard like a wrestling mat, a single bright light un-shaded in the center of the ceiling burned day and night. A wooden bench completed the furnishings. A single toilet for all prisoners was located outside the common front wall of the cells in the path of the sentry. After a few days a long tightly rolled spear of toilet paper came through a crack in the wall from the cell on my right. It was from General Fork. He wrote that he had learned that we would soon move to more comfortable quarters but not together. About this time Sgt. Beck was lodged in my cell. This was relief from loneliness and he had a pencil about an inch long. We could now communicate with Gen. Fork. We were not permitted to talk and when overheard the guard would reach in and crack each prisoner on the head with a heavy stick. Later Filipino prisoners were confined in our cell. At one time there were seven. We could each lie with our heads and shoulders on the mat, the rest on the concrete floor. We were given a toothbrush. We had no mosquito bars and they were badly needed. On October the 20th after thirty-five days in this cell, Col. Tarkington, Sgt. Beck and I were removed and taken back to Bilibid. On leaving the cell area I saw Gen. Fork in the cell near the door for the last time.

After close confinement Bilibid seemed like semi-freedom. We could go almost any place within the wall. Col. Tarkington and I spent much time discussing the interrogations at Fort Santiago and the reason for our confinement there. We came to the conclusion I still hold that the Japanese wished to punish anyone responsible for arming the Moros especially after capitulation of the regular forces. Tarkington and I had commanded units of the 61st Division to the Jap mind if I were in Lanao with the 61st

Infantry, Tarkington should have been there with the 61st Field Artillery. Gen. Fork had commanded the Lanao sector. The interrogation brought out that Tark had moved from Panai direct to Kogian and had never been in Lanao. I had been captured during combat and could not have armed the Moros. It strains the point to consider that the Japs had been interested in truth and justice sufficiently to investigate. It would have been in character to take all three. Gen. Fork had no cover and, while he did not arm the Moros, he could not possibly prove it. The Moro raids on Jap supply trucks had to be avenged.

Gen. Luther Stevenson and Col. John Peter Rand arrived in Bilibid from a camp in northern Luzon. About the middle of December, Stevenson, Rand, Tarkington and I would move to the docks, put aboard a small Jap freighter and departed Manila. We were kept in the coal hold that had been recently emptied of its normal load. We were given some freedom in daytime and except for coal dust at night was not a bad trip as prison travel goes. We landed at Takow, Formosa, then by rail half way around the island to Karankohl. Here you were committed to a prison camp occupied by generals and colonels selected from the Philippines under General Wainwright. The British and Australians under General Percival and the Dutch from the Dutch East Indies were all so emaciated that it was hard to recognize even our old friends. Here all prisoners worked at hard labor clearing jungles, tilling soil, planting crops all with hand tools and closely supervised by armed guards. We had previously complained that we were fed nothing but rice, here the complaint was not enough rice. Each of the three meals a day consisted of a teacup perhaps three-quarters full of dried boiled rice together with about a cup full of hot water in which weeds grass and sometimes unknown vegetables had been boiled. The result was a slightly discolored liquid with the virtue of having been boiled. Some vitamins might have survived the boiling. When the Japs were displeased, the amount of rice was reduced. We new arrivals were still in the condition of the others. Our condition made us sensitive to the cold wind that seemed to blow across Asia from Siberia.

In the spring of 1943 we were moved to a camp farther south where the mountains cut off the north wind, climate was the only improvement. In February, 1944, I received my first

mail from home since the war began. I believe there were six letters and one enclosed pictures of my wife and children. They were postmarked various dates in 1943. I still remember my elation and it is still indescribable. In October, 1944, we were alerted for another move, rumor said to Japan. The generals were moved out first and then two days later we moved by marching, then by train to Kelown where we boarded the Oreo Gold Maru on October the 9th. The ship was quite large, quite modern, and was designed for passengers and trading. The passenger decks were full of Japanese wounded and civilians. We were herded into a hold that had been cut in two horizontally with a center floor or shelf so that prisoners could be placed above and below with about four feet of vertical space. We were so crowded that there was no room to lie down. I was lucky to be against the hull of the ship and so could recline. Those in the interior had nothing but each other to lean against. The ship made several moves at night as though to depart but each morning we found ourselves at the same dock.

On the afternoon of October 12th we heard much firing and extensive bombing. Those prisoners on the starboard side of the ship who happened to be near a porthole described what they could see. Many American planes were bombing something just beyond the port. The early presence of Jap planes indicated that the target might be an airfield. Several times it appeared that an American plane was to make a run at the many ships in the harbor. Our close confinement in the hold made the thought of being bombed uncomfortable. The next day the attack was repeated. This time a U. S. plane peeled off in our direction with a Jap plane on his tale he dropped his bomb in the water not far from the ship. The ship was jammed violently against the wharf without important damage. Repeated the attempt but under similar circumstances dropped his bomb among the warehouses on our side of the ship. From a porthole near me I could see the resulting fire perhaps two blocks away. Someone had observed that this was Friday the 13th.

We were to learn that our department from Formosa was coordinated with Gen. MacArthur's attack on the Philippines. The Japs could not be sure where the blow would fall and seemed anxious to continue our company. On October 22nd, we moved out of the harbor of Kelown and escorted by two destroyers we arrived at Mogee Kiushu, Japan on

the 28th, nineteen days of congested misery. We were delighted at the prospect of leaving our hellhole on this ship but we had one more day of trial. Before landing on the sacred shores of Japan, we must have a physical examination. Accordingly, without clothing, we spent most of the day on deck waiting in lines of various indignities characteristic of such examinations. With the help of a cold wind our last day aboard was a fitting climax to our journey. The next morning we were taken ashore, herded aboard a train and departed for a destination unknown. Our travel ration was two cold sour buns and a can of pickled squid for each two prisoners. The discs of squid were too long, too large to swallow, too tough to masticate. That afternoon we arrived and de-trained at Nepou, a hot springs resort town with many fine looking hotels but these were not for us. We were marched to a poor area and then to a so-called hotel that occupied the second and third floors above some small stores. Removing our shoes at the door and being provided with sandals, we were assigned rooms with matting covered floors totally without furniture. We discovered a closet that contained three very thick cotton comforters, one for each of us. There was plenty of room on the floor; in fact, the room seemed huge after our restrictions on the Orrioko. Sleep was luxurious. A concrete pit in the basement filled with very hot water from a hot spring was the luxurious bath enjoyed by squads according to roster. Our food was soup, a sour dough roll, and tea. The absence of rice was enjoyable and the hot soup delightful. As the days continued the soup got thinner and the one roll got smaller and the familiar pangs of hunger returned. The surviving joy was the hot bath. On November 10th after two weeks of luxury at the spa, we moved by rail back to Mogee then to Hikada where we were put aboard a sea-going ferry, spent the night and sailed the next morning, destination Pusan, Korea.

On debarkation we saw the damage of recent bombing. The first Jap reporters that we had met told of bombing of Pusan that morning and the bombing of Mogee that afternoon. The bombers had cooperated perfectly, accidental coordination. Late that night we were put aboard third-class layaway coaches, seats alternating front and rear. Each seat was about one-foot wide and each back about one-foot high with no padding anywhere. One seat would almost hold two emaciated prisoners and the space between seats would not contain eight American feet and legs. There were not enough seats for

all but as it turned out those in the aisle were lucky because they could change positions, stand, sit or lie down. We were soon in the mountains of Korea with a real snowstorm brewing. Our overcrowded car was greatly overheated and without ventilation. Our route by way of Seoul, then Muckton, then north up the Manchurian plain for considerable distance. At a junction, name unknown, we turned west toward the Gobi desert. Side-tracked for all other traffic our progress was slow. but on the third day we stopped at Chanchia Tung, not far east of the Gobi and not far south of Siberia. We were issued heavy clothing, some wool captured from the British, some shotti made from coarse fibers I could not identify. I drew a jacket intended for a British highlander but no kilts, also I drew a shotti overcoat, a sweater, knitted ski cap, and a pair of Jap army trousers. The trousers were cotton khaki lined with cotton batting and interlined with a coarse crepe paper all sewn together with diagonal crisscross quilting stitch. All were to be badly needed. We left our overheated train to march a short distance in Arctic cold and stand in an open yard for almost two hours witnessing a change of command ceremony conducted in Japanese. A weather data station containing a thermometer and other instruments indicated the temperature at thirty below zero and it was to register most every day during the winter.

At long last we entered our winter home, a very large rectangular two-story brick building. Each floor had a center aisle and partitions from wall to aisle forming alcoves each containing ten bunks. Near the wall in each alcove was a Russian-type stove, a vertical cylinder about four feet in diameter and about nine feet high, near the bottom was a small fire box. The remaining space was devoted to fire brick. Twenty of these stoves would not heat the building but did prevent freezing temperatures which was their only purpose. Our food was a distinct change from the Philippines and Formosa. A typical day would be commeal mush for breakfast, boiled millet for lunch and soybean soup for dinner. For a short time potatoes were added to the evening soup, altogether a welcome change from too little rice. We felt well nourished and most of us began to gain a little weight for the first time since Pearl Harbor. At a distant building was a concrete pit supplied with water. It had connections to a live steam pipe from a boiler in an adjoining room. By roster about twenty of us at a time were privileged to douse ourselves with

cold water and sit in the hot caldron. It became a game for those near the steam valve to turn up the steam and see who could take it the hottest. Finally it was necessary to douse ourselves with wash pans of cold water before dressing and exposing to the bitter cold. The winter was quite dry, I think we may have had one-half inch of snow altogether. The wind blew almost all the time from twenty to fifty miles an hour. Most of the time the wind was laden with dust not sand, but a fine soil about like talcum powder. The effort to keep our alcove and beds clean occupied much of our time. The only other work required of us was the digging of slit trenches supposedly for our own protection. The frozen ground was like solid rock.

The high point of morale short of liberation came just after Christmas, 1944. A Jap sentry noted the beautiful wrist watch, gold with a gold band, on the wrist of Pvt. Longmire, a member of the enlisted detachment. Each time the Jap came through he drooled over the watch and offered many trades, finally offered the watch for a newspaper or perhaps two or three. Such ??? was highly dangerous for the Jap and for ourselves, but temptation was triumphant. Cols. Wood and Hoffmann, having studied the Japanese language in Japan, were qualified translators. While translation was in progress a very elaborate lookout system was enforced consisting of generals and colonels posted at every vantage point frequently relieved to insure alertness. Our first paper gave some news of the Battle of the Bulge and listed the Allied armies naming their commanders. The impact of sudden news of the Allied advance cannot be imagined. We had heard rumors that Eisenhower had invaded France but we could not know what to believe. By donation of the remaining wrist watches, we received newspapers at irregular intervals. We now knew that most of the news was accurate and covered many items not printed in the United States. With this new interest, time was greatly shortened. About May 15th a paper containing a report of the unconditional surrender of Germany our thought was how long for Japan.

About May 20th we were rushed to the railroad and boarded our third-class train and moved to ??? where we were superimposed on an existing prison camp of some two thousand prisoners. This camp had been established in 1942, the inmates being junior

officers and enlisted men from the Philippines who were laboring in two factories nearby. Other groups had been at it from time to time including a few survivors of the ill-fated December trip of the ??? Maru from Manila in 1944. Their experience made ours seem like a pleasant interlude. With some arranging we soon were getting newspapers quite frequently. We read of the loss of the remnants of the Jap navy in the futile attempt to relieve their defenders on Okinawa. About June 1st a summary was published for the month of May. American bomber hours over Japan had more than doubled, over a million homes had been destroyed, over five million persons were homeless. Food was adequate in the Empire but disruption of communications had threatened starvation in some cities. We read of the last defenders of Okinawa fighting to the death. Reports that Japan would certainly be invaded together with an appeal to all men and women to meet the invader at the beach and exact the maximum toll for desecrating the sacred soil of Japan. The Japanese papers contained only good news for us but we could not calculate the time of the capitulation which we had never doubted would come.

On August 16th we saw an unidentified aircraft dropping bright-colored parachutes in a field some distance away. That evening prisoners who swept the headquarters of the Jap guards heard English being spoken in an adjoining room. The prisoner insisted that he heard an American state with confident authority that the war was over. There was very little sleep for very few of us that night. The next morning senior officer of each nationality called a combined meeting in the yard. The end of the war was announced, a major, a captain medical and four enlisted men were introduced. One man was a Nissi Japanese, one a radio operator who spoke Russian, and one was a Chinese American. Without knowing it, we had watched them drop their cargo of medicine, radio, food, and even motion picture equipment. When they jumped they were arrested by Jap military police and almost executed. The Nissi Jap raised so much fuss insisting that the war was over that they were taken to headquarters. When and how the Japanese learned of the capitulation I do not know but the fact was accepted that evening. We were to remain within the walls and the Japanese were charged with our protection from outside the walls. Searching the compound a warehouse was found containing tons of mail and hundreds of Red Cross food packages. Some of the mail was two years old but it was

most welcome. The Red Cross food was delicious. The roster of the camp was sent by radio to Chungking, then to Washington.

On the evening of August 20th, we held a big patriotic singsong which was interrupted by the arrival of several Russian officers. A Russian captain took the stage and with the aid of an American soldier of Russian origin made a very eloquent speech claiming the honor of our liberation for the Great Russian Red Army. We were then asked to form a general line along one side of the prison yard. The Russian captain then marched the whole Japanese guard detachment to the center of the yard, with due ceremony he required the Japs to ground their arms. He then asked for a detail of Americans to take the arms and assume the guard over the Japs. Too many responded but the detail was soon in order and the Japs from colonel to private were marched to their confinement. The next day the Japs were at work filling the trenches, disposing of garbage, etc. The gate was now open and we were free at last.

In Muckton(sp?) chaos was complete. The Chinese first looted Japanese stores then all stores. The Russians seemed to permit looting for awhile then suddenly repelled looting with Tommy guns and horrible results. Frequent troop change arrived bearing Japanese army units now prisoners of war of the Russian Red Army. Trains loaded with industrial machinery were constantly moving outward bound no doubt for Russia. The old walled city of Muckton was a picture from ancient history, the expanded city including many modern buildings and a large Japanese industrial complex. American aircraft were arriving almost daily from Chungking, the American headquarters of the China command, bringing food and clothing, etc. On the return trip they took our sick and near-sick then the generals. From Chungking they were flown direct to San Francisco. When our roster of survivors reached Washington, the Red Cross arranged a special airmail flight for letters from our families. I received a wonderful letter and a color picture of Bernice, the children and my mother. They seemed so near and again so real. The mail was the high point of almost four years for most of us. Some of my friends had withdrawn to their bunks obviously depressed. Their news had contained reports of losses of sons in the war and one had been a widower for two years. The great joy of

liberation had been denied by tragedy. Our letters and answers were flown to the States and my family heard from me for the first time since Pearl Harbor, 44 months ago.

We could not yet tell when we would be home. A Pentagon directive called "Project J" was posted on our bulletin board. It directed that we were to be flown to the States first priority in suitable aircraft. Additional provisions covered hospitalization, recuperation leave, etc. After many days of negotiation with the Russians, two trains were provided to take the remaining thirteen hundred to the port of Darhan where navy transportation was waiting. This was the beginning of going home. The departure for Muckton and the fleas in our bed sacks caused no regrets. Accordingly, on September 10th, we were at last en route and after twenty-six hours and many K rations, arrived at the port. From the dockside railroad yards we moved instinctively toward the sea. It being about ten p.m. having no lights, no guides, no instructions, we had misgivings. Turning the corner of a warehouse I saw and experienced an unforgettable sight and emotion. The huge white ship, the hospital ship USS RELIEF, completely illuminated. On its sides a huge cross and a US flag in colored lights. After forty months under a hostile flag this sudden glory was overwhelming. Aboard after clean baths, clean pajamas, and delicious food served by angels in white nurse uniforms reality seemed far away. In this luxury we cruised to Okinawa arriving off Buckner Bay just before noon. The captain announced that we would have lunch aboard and debark thereafter. Before lunch could be served all ships were ordered to sea to ride out an approaching typhoon. We thus experienced the frightening excitement of the historic September 15th typhoon.

After two days at sea we were put ashore, spent the night, and flew to Manila. Our plane was a war-worn C-46, rusty and battered. It squeaked and groaned while taxing to the strip and we doubted it could fly a thousand miles over water but it did. Arriving at Manila, we were loaded into trucks and hauled twenty-six miles south to a new tent camp where the bulldozers were still pushing mud aside for additional space. Wet canvas in tropical climate was no improvement over some of our PW quarters. We were issued new uniforms, money and partial payments, and sent Red Cross cablegrams. Mine was not delivered. We were offered sea transportation to the States each day but most of us

awaited the promised air travel. After several days many of us became skeptical of the air promise and signed up for sea travel. Accordingly, we were in trucks for Manila and boarded the ABA Storm King, an attack personnel carrier. She was a fine fairly new ship designed to carry a battalion of infantry on a landing operation. She carried many anti-aircraft guns, numerous landing craft, and the usual ship equipment. The so-called state room contained eight bunks and a narrow aisle. In the entire ship there was no place to walk, and no place to sit except at mess. Designed to carry nine hundred passengers, we had fifteen hundred aboard. The mess served almost continuously so that there was no loitering in the only seats on the site. About fifteen of our group of ex-PWs and colonels refused to accept the transportation and left the ship. I was determined to go home so stayed with about twenty-five of my compatriots. The ship's captain was quite concerned for our situation and had some canvas cots set up on a portion of the bridge. This was greatly appreciated but was not too comfortable for all day and all evening. Our stateroom was just below the steel weld deck and immediately aft of the engine room hatch. Heat from the engine room and the tropical sun kept my room almost unbearable, only extreme fatigue produced sleep. We spent a night at Pearl Harbor and most of us went to Honolulu, sent radio messages to our families telling our arrival date in San Francisco and the name of the ship. This radio was the only communication to reach my family since the letter from Muckton. Although I had written again from Muckton and sent a radio from Manila through the Red Cross, the sudden news that I would be in San Francisco in five days was yet another voice from the dark. From the radio station we went to the Young Hotel for a wonderful night in air conditioned comfort. The next morning from the bridge of our ship we watched the entire Seventh Fleet leave the harbor for home.

We arrived in San Francisco October 15th after nineteen nights in the hot box. I had no idea that my family would even attempt the trip from Galveston to meet me. Our ship's captain had told of the rail travel conditions, restrictions, diner limitations, and all. As we drew near the docks, I gave my place at the rail to someone looking for his family. My attention was drawn to a boy sitting on top of a piling pointing in my general direction shouting and waving excitedly. When much closer I recognized my son Fred and he

pointed to Bernice. My heart skipped a beat then almost stopped. Where was Dot? At that instance Bernice lifted Dot above the guard fence and all was well. I moved as in a dream down the gangplank carrying a Japanese sword, a souvenir of four years of absence from this very place. I have little memory of the next few days except a feeling of great peace and thanksgiving.

Epilogue: After some months at home, I read in a press dispatch from Tokyo "By sentence of war crimes commission Lt. Col. Tenacka, the Jap commander at Camp Keithley, was hanged for the murder of Brig. Gen. Cork, Lt. Col. Vissey, Captain Price and Sgt. Chandler."

Transcribed by Eunice Gary June 19, 2007.