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| **Veteran:** | **SNYDER, Wilburn** |
| **Service Branch:** | **ARMY** |
| **Interviewer:** | **Stroble, Brandy** |
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| **Transcriptionist:** | Terry Moore |
| **Highlights of Service:** | **World War II; Bataan Death March (vivid account); Imprisoned in Japanese slave labor camp** |

Interviewer: Do I have your permission to tape this conversation?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: When did you enter the service?

Veteran: 1940.

Interviewer: Was it voluntary?

Veteran: I had to lie about my age to get in. I was 17. It was evident that we were eventually going to get into the war, and I wanted to be in before the war started. Back then, we were still hearing about World War I, and I heard about the many fellas that were just shipped over there, and I didn't want that. I wanted some training first.

Interviewer: Where were you stationed at first?

Veteran: Fort Crockett in Galveston. I was there from June of '40 until September of '41. I put in for a short discharge, and I volunteered to go overseas. If you'd been in for over a year, you had to put in for a short discharge, which meant before you got the discharge, you had already reenlisted, so you'd do two years overseas.

Interviewer: Did you feel that you were mentally and physically ready to go overseas?

Veteran: Of course, I learned more overseas than I did the whole time that I was here in the states. They already figured that the Philippines were going to be invaded right away by the Japanese, so I was stationed in Manila.

Interviewer: When did you get sent over there?

Veteran: I left out of Frisco on October 4, 1941.

Interviewer: I guess if you volunteered, you were prepared to leave home.

Veteran: I'd made the decision to enlist, and I imagine had I been drafted, then I'd have been more leery about leaving home than I was. I knew when I volunteered that I wasn't going to be home.

Interviewer: What was life like in the Philippines before Pearl Harbor?

Veteran: We were spending a great deal of time on what they called 'problems.' It wasn't necessarily maneuvers, but it was what they called 'mini-maneuvers' for problems. In other words, you'd go out and you're facing this situation, and you're reaction and response to that situation. Go out in the morning and come back in the afternoon. I was with the only regiment of American infantry in the Philippines when the war started.

Interviewer: How many Americans were there?

Veteran: There was supposed to have been around 2,000 in our regiment, but we actually only had about 1,500. We had very good soldiering conditions in the Philippines. They did not push us. One of the reasons they didn't push us newer fellas was because of the change in climate. You could dehydrate in the Philippines in just a little while, so we wouldn't go out on a problem every day. We were learning what it would be like under combat conditions. I was with the medical part of the 3rd Personnel Infantry, so it actually took more preparation and training for a fella in the combat medics than it did in the regular infantry, because we had to not only bear arms, but we had to also try to get the wounded back to the aid stations. This took more training techniques as to how to get there, get them out of the foxhole or machine gun nest, and then get them back under fire to that aid station and then back to the field hospital. It was a tremendous amount of pressure and responsibility for an 18-year-old. We were consistently told the place of responsibility that we had, you know. Our commanding officer told us, "You're responsibility is to do everything that you can to stay alive to do what we must

do." We were undermanned. For instance, I was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, and there were 29 of us in the medical part. They were to take care of the wounded in that whole battalion. They were to get them back off of the line, back to the aid station. They were to stop the bleeding, and ordered to transport them back on litters to the aid station. It was a tremendous job for 29 men, and I might add that out of those 29 original men that went with the 3rd Battalion, 5 got back to the states.

Interviewer: When did you guys hear about Pearl Harbor?

Veteran: It's a day later over there, because you cross the dateline. In other words, when we got up on Monday morning, December 8, we were awakened by the call-to-arms, which meant we were to get bandoliers of ammunition and be prepared to move out at any time. Before the war started, there were Japanese troop transports lying out in Manila Bay waiting to invade. Their plan, which I've read in history, was first of all to come across through Hong Kong and simultaneously strike Pearl Harbor and invade the Philippines. Actually, what I felt like we'd move out to do was to get on ships and invade Japan. (Laughter) I'd seen *Sergeant York*, you see and all of the other World War I movies, and we'd just win, you know. When I looked out and saw the Asiatic Fleet moving out of Manila Bay, those thoughts came in my mind. Then when we got word that all of our bombers had been destroyed on Clark Field and most of our fighters had been destroyed at Nichols Field, I knew… I was kept in Manila to establish an aid station down at the port area, because they knew that it would be a target, and this aid station was for the civilian personnel in the port area as well as for any military personnel. In other words, whenever the bombing came we went and picked up the civilians as quickly as we did the military.

Interviewer: When you were fighting, what were the conditions like?

Veteran: When the war began, they kept the 3rd Battalion medics in Manila. On December 25th, Christmas Day, Manila was declared an open city. That means they're going to move out all military personnel, guns, etc. In other words, we're leaving the city defenseless. They were hoping this would spare Manila the bombings that they took anyway, and so we moved out of Manila on Christmas Day. Our

first contact with the Japanese—of course, this was the last prerogative that we had—and they finally broke down and said we'd pull back into the peninsula that jutted out into Manila Bay. We were hoping we could hold off the Japanese long enough for us to get help—reinforcements.

Interviewer: At what point did you realize that your side wasn't winning, and at what point did you realize that ya'll were waiting on an absolution that would never come?

Veteran: When MacArthur left. See, they had fed us this rumor that there was a hundred mile convoy coming. All we had to do was hold out until this convoy came, and we'd run these Japs back into the water. I never quite saw that, for the simple reason that there wasn't any reason to believe it. And I had the intuition from the start that, hey—here we are. Whatever happens is distant from our Department of Defense or anything else. We had a commanding officer in 3rd Battalion medics that was a gentleman. He was more like a daddy to us than he was a commanding officer. He told us going back Bataan, "I'll never ask you do anything that I wouldn't do," and he proved that. I was his runner a lot of times whenever they'd have battalion or regimental officer meetings, and I would go with him by his side. So I asked him, "Captain Brennan, do you think we're going to get some help?" And he said, "Do you think if we were going to get some help, that MacArthur would've left?" He said, "No. The time is coming when we're going to have to surrender." We knew we were being pushed back all the time, you see. For instance, we established a line, but the purpose was to allow the retreat of the forces back into Bataan. You never read about this in history, but it's one of the greatest military maneuvers that ever took place.

Interviewer: I was really surprised when I read in my history book, and there was just a few sentences about this and that was about it.

Veteran: Like I say, this wasn't planned for us to go back into Bataan, because we were going to stop them. In fact, MacArthur said, "Don't worry about them landing—we'll annihilate them after they land." Well, why it was such a successful landing on the part of the Japanese was that we had everything ready to meet them—the artillery and all that. They sent a couple of little old boats with lights on them just offshore of Langangka(?). Everything we had opened up on those

two little boats. They knew where all the artillery was, where everything was, so instead of coming in there, they went fifty miles up the beach and came in. Before the line could relocate, they were on their way to Manila. There was no stopping them from that time on. There was a possibility of stopping them there at the beach, but when they found out where everything was then they literally bypassed us, and our forces did not have the time to ever set another line. In other words, we were reeling back from the word 'go.' The second course was to stop them north of Manila, but that line never did materialize sufficient to hold the Japanese out of Manila.

Interviewer: They were a lot better prepared than you were.

Veteran: They had crack troops. I mean troops that had been preparing for this invasion for years. Then another thing that got us, when we got back to Bataan we were supposed to have munitions stored on Bataan. We did, and there was the munitions. We didn't have any quinine stored on Bataan, which is a malaria deterrent. We took that even before the war started to deter malaria in the Philippines. Well, when we got into the jungle, the quinine we had was the quinine we'd hauled out of Manila and it soon ran out. And the munitions that we were supposed to have had had been stored back there for twenty years. Only about three out of ten grenades that you throw would explode. Mortars were about the same. And then all of our antiaircraft ammunition was short fused, so we couldn't reach the Japanese aircraft with that ammunition.

Interviewer: Being in that situation, you're on Bataan, you have low ammunitions, low food, low men, people are getting sick with malaria. There probably wasn't a word in your vocabulary to describe it.

Veteran: Morale went fast.

Interviewer: Did you feel optimistic?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Did you look forward to anything? Did you have any kind of hope at all?

Veteran: No, we really didn't. But, we had instilled in us to fight. Most of us were young fellas. In my day, whenever I was a youngster, you were either a real good fighter or a real fast runner. I'm talking about in real life, like when you're in school. You could either whoop guys or outrun 'em. That's the way it was. There was this sense of loyalty. This was what we were supposed to do, you know. This is what we were here for, and no matter what response we get, we are to do our best. We didn't think about surrender until after the big push on Good Friday, April of '42.

Interviewer: What happened then?

Veteran: As a matter of fact, we whooped the invasion force so much so that there was about a month lull that there was hardly any combat, because the Japanese were waiting for us. Nahoma, who was the commanding officer, or general, of the 14th Japanese Army landing force, said they should leave us there because we weren't getting anything—no supplies. But Tojo said, "No. We're gonna whip them until unconditional surrender." He wanted total defeat. So, when Singapore fell, Yamashta and his troops were coming down the same time we were fighting in Malaya and marched on into Singapore, and when Singapore fell, then they sent these troops. I met a fellow last year that was in Yamashta's army. I was in Japan doing some mission work, and I ran into this fellow.

Interviewer: How did you feel going back to Japan after what had happened?

Veteran: You're talking about hatred and this kind of thing?

Interviewer: Yeah. I'm pretty sure you carried around some kind of emotional burden. Not really a hatred, because that's really a strong word?

Veteran: That's exactly what I had up until 1953. If I could have pushed a button that would have destroyed all of Japan, prior to 1953 I would have pushed that button. That's how much hatred I had. {Tape stopped, then restarted} See, I was one of the fellows that was taken to Japan in November of '42 for slave labor. As a matter of fact, I was in the first big group that went. They sent 50, and then they sent 100, and with the group I went with there was 1,500 of us for slave labor in Japan. So, I got to know the civilian population. When I say "know," I got to see

how they reacted to the war, so I built up tremendous hatred for them. My dream was for the war to be over so I could kill some of them. We prepared to hang every guard in our camp. I was working nights, and we had gone out this particular evening—August 14th—and this little Japanese fellow came along beside me. I was on the mess detail, and carried a bucket of whistle weed soup and a bucket of dough balls. Whistle weed was a hollow weed that they'd boil, and you'd chew it but you couldn't swallow it. You'd have to spit it back out. We'd chew it and get everything out of it that we could, you know. We were starving to death. It's just hard to imagine now a people intentionally trying to feed you as little as you could get by with and still go out to work, but that's what they did.

Interviewer: That's got to be hard to fathom now. I can understand that.

Veteran: Well, I saw some things that I can't understand now. I saw some things on the Death March that I can't cope with.

Interviewer: Prior to the march, what happened at Bataan when you guys surrendered? Did you just put down your guns and give up?

Veteran: No. The fellows on Bataan didn't surrender. That was a question asked me whenever they were debriefing me. "Where did you surrender?" I said, "Well, I didn't surrender. My commanding officer surrendered the whole mess. General King, surrendered us." There wasn't any individual surrender. General King surrendered our army. What happened was we got the word the night before that there was going to be surrender the next day, and we were given instructions. We pulled the firing pins out of our rifles and throwed them away and then stacked our rifles. Same way with the artillery pieces—machines guns, and this kind of thing to make them useless.

Interviewer: How did you feel that, in a sense, it was over? You had done all you could and you didn't win. How did you feel to actually have to grasp the idea that you were gonna have to answer to the enemy—you were in their hands now?

Veteran: This was the most traumatic experience that I've ever had. You know this is coming, and it's kind of like a loved one that's real sick—you know they're about

to die, but there's not a way in the world you can prepare for this. The emotion I'm talking about. But suddenly you're not a person anymore—you're an animal. I mean the transaction took place immediately. All your self worth is gone. Questions run through your mind—what if I'd been a better soldier; what if I'd displayed more courage? {End of Tape 1-Side A} {Side B Begins} …and it's just like pulling a plug and draining everything. Then it became a struggle for survival.

Interviewer: At that point, what kind of physical condition you were in prior to the march? When you realized you were now under their control and before they mistreated you—and we'll get into that—physically what was your condition? Ya'll had been low on food already.

Veteran: We had been foraging for our food for over six weeks. We had no food allowance. They couldn't get anything up to the front line. We had men suffering from malnutrition before we surrendered for lack of food. We had more men in the hospital from malaria and starvation than we did with wounds, because the quinine and food ran out. Then the ammunition began to run out. When the line fell at Mt. Sumat, that was our last organized line. We retreated back to Lamaou(?). We set up a line laying on the ground. I had one round of ammunition left in my rifle. I asked my commander what I was supposed to do when I fired this one round—"do I hit 'em in the head with the butt of it?" "Well, maybe when you fire that round, maybe the guy next to you will have been killed and you can get his ammunition." That's what he told me. I said, "OK." And do you know what? It happened. About twelve o'clock, the Japanese attacked this line. This guy next to me—do you know who he was? He was the battalion commander that I'd just talked to. They caught him right between the eyes with a 25 caliber bullet. I reached over there, got his bandolier of ammunition, throwed a new clip in my rifle and continued to fire. It's things like that, you see? Then we retreated back up into the hills to hide out. When they told us that we were going to be surrendering the next day, my 3rd Battalion medical commanding officer was wounded, and he was in the hospital at the time of the surrender. Our officers told us that if we had any contacts and we wanted to leave that we were free to do that, but most of us had just gotten over there. The ones that had been

over there a good while, some of them had some contacts, and so they went to the hills and made contact with the guerillas and didn't surrender.

Interviewer: So, what happened when you guys surrendered? Did you just stay there and wait for them to come take you over?

Veteran: We had our rifles stacked, so this symbolizes we were surrendering. There was three of us fellows in the 3rd Battalion that were real close. I mean we were just real close. I had gotten over there in October, and these other two got over in November. We talked and said, "Well, what do you reckon we ought to do?" We didn't know anybody and didn't know anywhere to go. They'd told us if we didn't know anybody, the guerillas were not going to accept us for fear of being turned in and this kind of thing. So, we decided that we'd just stick together whatever happened. We didn't know whether they were going to kill us all or what. When the Japanese came in, they made us put our hands up over our heads like this, and this Japanese soldier came along and put a cigarette in my mouth and lit it. Then another one came along and jerked it out of my mouth and put it out on my face. I heard a commotion behind me and turned around, and a head was rolling down the side of the hill. A Japanese officer had just beheaded an American officer right behind me. I said, "Oh, we're in for serious trouble now."

Interviewer: At that point, did you think that you were going to survive?

Veteran: I did not dream I'd ever make it. They would send 100 or 150 in a group out on the road to start out walking. We didn't know where we were going—didn't know how far we were going. When we got out on this road, I saw this Japanese soldier pick this dehydrated bit of a man—starved already—pick him up and throw him under the tracks of a Japanese tank. That tank rolled over that man and he looked like a flower that you'd press in a Bible. You could tell he was a man and all that, he was just pressed.

Interviewer: Is it hard for you think about these things even after so long?

Veteran: {Long pause.}

Interviewer: This is the march you are talking about now?

Veteran: Yes. They called it a march, but I don't know why. We staggered down that road more dead than alive. Never got out of sight of dead Americans—either rolled over in a ditch, laying on the road with a rifle bullet. If you dropped and you didn't get back up, you were dead—dead. Just gone. Us three walked together—we'd put one in the middle, and the other two would kind of drag him along to give him a rest, you know. Whatever happened to one was going to happen to rest of us three. Guys died of thirst—a horrible death. Actually, dying of thirst you choke to death. Your tongue swells up in your mouth and you choke to death. Along this road was some artesian wells, and for some of these wells they put a bamboo hole with a thing where you could get water out. I told these two fellows, "When we get up there, I'm going to get us some water." "Naw, they're not going to let you get any water." I said, "I'm not going to ask them." "Well, they'll kill you!" I said, "Hey, we're gonna die anyway if don't get some water—all three of us."

Interviewer: At that point, it's like you didn't have any dignity whatsoever. You'd rather die trying to get water than to die not having any water.

Veteran: Yep. You see, at one place in the walk, I told the other two fellas, "I'm sorry, I've gone as far as I can go. I'm not going any further."

Interviewer: How far did you guys walk?

Veteran: There again, you see, it wasn't how far, it was the condition we were in. It was actually about 65 miles. 65 miles of being hung on posts. They'd tie a guys hands and feet and hang him up like a toe-sack on a fence post, and he'd just die there in the sun, and they'd just leave him hanging there. They'd also bury men alive. I saw all of this. I know it. You can search all the records in Washington and all the records everywhere, and they never make mention of this, and they do not believe this. They won't accept it.

Interviewer: From what you're telling me, the Bataan Death March was horrific.

Veteran: And words can never describe it. I don't care how large your vocabulary is or how well you are at expressing yourself. People ask me to tell them what the Death March was like—I can't. I don't have the means to express to you what it

was like staggering down that road more dead than alive and ready to just say, "Hey, I've had it." I saw men in prison camp say, "Hey, I quit," and the next day or two they were dead.

Interviewer: What made you keep going? You could have just stopped and fell over.

Veteran: Well, at that time I didn't know. I know now. I didn't know what kept me going then. I got to O'Donnell Prison Camp, and I didn't know why I went through all of this to wade around in these maggots and dead bodies. But, I know now. God had a plan for my life, and all the imps in hell and all the Japanese soldiers in Japan couldn't stop that plan. At that time, if I'd died on that walk, you'd have had to call up hell to talk to me today. That's right. I was lost. I didn't know the Lord from anything. Wasn't even interested. You know they say, "Everybody gets religious on the battlefield." You're looking at one that didn't, but I'll guarantee you I know that you're talking—and I don't say this boastingly, except boasting in Him—you're talking to the physically healthiest survivor of the march, because we have get togethers all over the country, and I'm the healthiest, and I reserve that, survivor. My problem is not 'here,' my problem is 'here.'

Interviewer: It's evident now and it was proved by this point then that the U.S. government had no plan to help you guys out, and the fact that it's not written in history books and the fact that it's not recognized, how did that make you feel then and how do you feel now about that? Then, I'm pretty sure it made you feel a lot worse, but now?

Veteran: We had this poet on Bataan—he was a soldier, but he enjoyed this kind of thing. We had our cartoonists, our poets, all of that. This fellow wrote poem called "The Battling Bastards of Bataan," and it went, "We are the battling bastards of Bataan, no poppa, no momma, no Uncle Sam, no airplanes, no food, no ammunition," but then he concludes down at the end that, "Uncle Sam doesn't give a damn." That was the feeling of the fellows on Bataan, because we knew that our government had time to get us help and didn't make a move in that direction.

Interviewer: Well, not only did they have time, but they had the means.

Veteran: But do you know what they say, though? "The Philippines was blockaded." They weren't blockaded until just before we surrendered.

Interviewer: They teach us in history—and this might make you mad—was that we had troops in the Philippines and then you had Nazi Germany. The Philippines is "this" big, Nazi Germany is "this" big. Your larger problem—and this is what's politically correct and what they teach us—the larger problem was posed by Nazi Germany and was larger than anything the Japanese were doing. Up until Pearl Harbor, we didn't even worry about the Japanese. The Pacific War wasn't that big of a deal—not until we declared war on Japan. But they teach us that Hitler was the problem, not the Japanese, but then Pearl Harbor happened, and they still just forgot about ya'll over there. To this day, do you have hatred towards the government for what they let ya'll go through and just casually swept it underneath the rug? How do you deal with that every day? I mean, getting up this morning and thinking about coming to talk to me about this.

Veteran: One of the ways that I have dealt with this particular thing is I have been given the ability to forgive the ignorance and sorry leadership in what we'd call the Pentagon today. You see, MacArthur practically had to fight them in order to go back into the Philippines. They were going to bypass the Philippines, even though we had men interned there that were going to be killed. We had some loyal Filipinos that had been fighting those Japanese in guerilla warfare.

Interviewer: They knew MacArthur had said he'd return, and he did.

Veteran: Yeah—yeah. Is my patriotism affected by that? No. My patriotism is to my country, not to the politicians—then and now. My anger was not at my country. My anger was at my country's leaders, and I still don't feel too well about some of the things that passed that now we have access to about the fellows in the Philippines. As John Toland wrote, "We were expendable." John Toland was probably the greatest American historian that ever lived. But what did they do when he began to print the truth? They killed him. When he began to write the truth about Pearl Harbor, the press killed him. I knew John Toland personally. I talked to him after he wrote the book *Infamy*, and asked him, "What are you

going to do next?" He said, "I'll never do another history book. People don't want the truth in history. They want popular opinion in history." Right here at Lee College, I had a history instructor, and we were talking about the camps. He told his class, "Remember, history is the opinion of the writer. History does not necessarily mean what happened when you read the history books. It means, that's the opinion of that author at the time." You see, when I was doing my paper on the invasion and the fall of the Philippines, I looked up bibliographies and I'd have to put down what that "so-and-so" said, because I had to have so many bibliographies, but I said, "I know this to be the fact because I was there." Three different days on the evacuation of Manila—24th of December, 31st of December, and 1st of January. Neither one of them are right—it was on Christmas Day. So, I put it in there. I do not allow men and their foolish ideas to deter my patriotism of my country, because I know what my country is, whether the leaders go that route or not. That's how I've dealt with it.

Interviewer: If this is too emotional for you, I understand, but back to the march. It's probably as hard for me to listen to it as it is for you to tell me. Where did the Japanese take you? What were the conditions like? What did you have to do? What kind of tasks did you perform?

Veteran: They took us to a place called Camp O'Donnell. It was to have been a Philippine army barracks, and of course the Philippine army didn't have barracks like American soldiers had. It was a bamboo hut covered with needles. This place never did get finished, and that's what we came into. I was one of the last ones to get to camp, and there was dead bodies full of maggots on the ground. You could smell the place long before you got to it. The dead, human excrement, and the like. Many of the fellows had died from dysentery because they'd dip down in the garbage that was full of dysentery and drink the water. They'd drink anything that was wet. There was human excrement everywhere. I would dare say, and I don't have the official numbers, but I think there was a greater percentage of Americans that died in that camp. I'm talking about of all of them that went in there, a greater percentage of Americans that died—the percentage; not the numbers—than Jews that died at Dachau. It was a death camp.

Interviewer: What kind of work did they make you do?

Veteran: They sent some fellows out on details, but most of the fellows were like me. They were barely able to walk, let alone work. As a matter of fact, at that camp I should have been buried. I would have been buried, but one of these three fellows that we walked out together, they put me a place they called a hospital, but in essence it was a place to die. That's why you went there. He'd come over and see about me every day. He came over one day, and I wasn't there, and he asked, "Where's the kid [my nickname]?" "Down underneath." He asked, "Is he dead?" He gets down under there, shovels through all those bodies and finds me, drags me out from under there, and found I was still alive. But if he hadn't drug me out from under there, they'd have buried me the next day.

Interviewer: You were underneath bodies?

Veteran: I was in the 'zero ward' {End of Tape 1-Side B} {Tape 2-Side A} …Then the burial detail came along and picked them up and buried them up on the hill. I gave people this fellow's name and where he lives. He lives right over here in Lumberton, Texas. His name is Thomas Gerald Peat(?). Nobody believes this, but I tell them to get a-hold of him. Let me get his phone number for you. It's difficult to believe, because if I was sitting where you're sitting and you're sitting where I'm sitting and saying what I'm saying, I'm sure I'd have a lot of question marks. This is hard to believe, and I went through it. {Veteran gives student phone number at this point.}

Interviewer: What happened after he pulled you out?

Veteran: I didn't know, because I was 'out,' but he put me in a little old shack, washed me up, and whenever I came 'to,' he had some rice, and was pouring it down my throat. He said, "You weren't buried but you would have been. I pulled you out from under the 'zero ward.'" That was where the worst cases were, and that's why they called it the 'zero ward.' But he kept watching after me, and pretty soon I was up and able to walk, and able to go down to the 'zero ward' and help out down there. One of our buddies in our outfit died down there in that ward. Came all the way from Alabama. He said, "Oh, kid, if I could just get a pan of that crackling cornbread that Mama used to make." I said, "Wade, if you don't

eat some of this wormy rice, you're never gonna have the opportunity to eat any crackling cornbread." "I can't eat it," he said. I came down one morning, and he was dead. Got on that hell ship—my buddy was trying to watch after me, and I was trying to watch after him. I left the two that I walked with in the Philippines, and I lost them until after the war, but they found me. They had to help me on the truck that carried me to Manila.

Interviewer: This is after ya'll were liberated?

Veteran: Yeah. They said, "We never thought we'd see you again. When we loaded you on that truck, we figured that was the end." Them hell ships are something else you don't hear a lot about.

Interviewer: This was the ship you got on to come back home?

Veteran: No! They were the ones we got on to go to Japan. They put us down in the hold of a Japanese freighter. It was so thick, you could barely sit down, much less lay down. No restroom facilities. They let what little food there was down on a rope, but of course most of it got wasted, because …

Interviewer: How long were you held captive?

Veteran: Three years, five and a half months.

Interviewer: So, you were shipped back to Japan?

Veteran: Yeah, see I was shipped to Japan early in November of '42. This boat load got to Japan on Thanksgiving Day. They took me to Osaka. They divided us up. I went to Osaka. While I was there, I got pneumonia, and a little old pharmacists mate, which is a Navy medic, came back where I was laying on this mat, and he didn't know me, and I didn't know then what stopped him, but just stopped and said, "What's the matter, buddy?" And I said, "Well, they tell me I've got pneumonia." He asked me what they were giving me for it, and I said, "You know as well as I do they don't give Americans medicine." I did not see them administer one piece of medication to any American in three and a half years. They'd come in every morning and say, "Os-ta-cinda," and that meant don't worry about it, tomorrow you'd be dead. This kid that I didn't know put his life

on the line and broke into the Japanese pharmacy and stole some sulphur drug. The next morning, he came by my bed and gave me two of these sulphur tablets and said, "Don't you tell a soul about this until the war is over—not even the guy next to you." Gave me those two, and that night he gave me two more, and the next morning two more, and kept on, and directly I rose up in bed, and this Japanese doctor said, "Oh, {here, he says something in Japanese}." What he was saying was, "How did this guy get well?" It never dawned on him that somebody would risk his life to see that I got well.

Interviewer: Did that guy survive?

Veteran: I don't know. I left him there and have not been able to make contact with him, so evidently, he didn't make it, and that was the case with so many. On this walk, you'd see guys trying to help others. Pretty soon, you'd see that same one down and unable to get up. It got to where if you reached down to pick one of your buddies up, the Japanese would kill you. I mean, here's a guy you know. Here's a guy you fought with, and you can't reach down and pick him up, because you know he and you both would die. It was years after I got back home, I ran into this fellow at one of our reunions. He ran up to me and began to hug me. He said, "Is your name Snyder?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You're the guy that dug me out of that machine gun nest and bandaged my wounds to stop the bleeding." I said, "Your name Chandler?" He said, "Yeah." We fellows are closer than most. We're just about all gone now. This fellow I told you about, he died three months ago. I went back to my first prison camp site year before last. The first time I'd ever been to one. I was on a mission trip to Osaka, and the Japanese preacher that I was gonna be working with got a-hold of a man in this little old town where this prison camp was. This man was born and raised in that town, and he watched us going in and out to work. He said, "Yeah, I'll show him where the campsite was." So we went down there. Now you talk about an emotional experience. He went with us in the car, and he stopped the car probably twenty yards away and wouldn't let anyone else come. Just he and I went down there. He told me to stop and said, "You're standing in the main gate of the prison camp." I broke down—I mean I went plum to my knees. I thought I was ready, you know, but when he said that, that whole camp became visible.

When I'd finally collected myself enough, I said, "Right over there was the Japanese guard house. Right over here was some spiquets where we'd come in in the evening and pour the water over us to try to get some of the dirt and stuff off of us. I sat right down where what they called the hospital was, but it was really just a place to die. He said, "I'm sorry about that camp. Do you want to go out to the work site?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Good. We'll go out there. Do you want to ride or walk?" I said, "I'll walk." He said, "But it's a good ways." But I said, "Wait a minute. I walked that every morning and every night for a year." We walked along, and he said, "Do you remember this?" I didn't, but I looked up ahead and said, "Hey, I remember that bridge." We went over that bridge and saw that creek running down there and wished we'd had a fishing pole. We stopped where the roads crossed in the town, and he said, "Do you remember this?" I said, "No." He said, "This is where the civilians gathered to throw rocks at you in the morning and in the evening." One of the Japanese pastors said, "Did you throw rocks at them?" He said, "Do you think I'd have told him if I had? The people got their rocks at a rock site," and then I remembered it vividly. But this was the case everywhere we were. I think it was worse there, though. They just had a lot of hatred toward us. I was one of 120 of the most undesirable prisoners of war. The Japanese gave me that. Matter of fact, they wrote a deal on me and sent back to the officers about me. I was among the 120 they kept shipping around in Japan because we were undesirable prisoners. We didn't cooperate, we didn't work hard—we were just very undesirable. If they'd given me a citation for that, I would have felt better about that than the citations that I got back from the American government. A citation is a paper that you get if you get a medal. I saw my commanding officer just before he died for the first time since the war. That was four years ago that he died. He'd invited me to come out and see him. Didn't tell me he was about to die or anything, just showed me all over Flagstaff, Arizona, went up through Canyon Drive. We had a big time, and I told him, "I want to apologize to you for not being a better soldier." He said, "What makes you say that?" I said, "Well, I feel like if I'd been a better soldier, {voice drops off, and unable to hear what is said}.

Interviewer: How old were you when you came home?

Veteran: I was 22 years old. I hadn't been home in over four years.

Interviewer: Where did you come home to?

Veteran: I was discharged in San Francisco. Everybody thought I was dead. You know, when a war's going on, a soldier's a big hero, but when that war is over, they're just dog faces again. I came on a train from San Francisco to Houston.

Interviewer: You came from Japan to San Francisco?

Veteran: No. I came from Japan to Okinawa. I didn't get home until the last of October, and the war was over in August. They just messed us around—that's all you can say. They weren't in any hurry to get us home. I caught a bus out to a place out there, got off, started walking up towards Highlands to try to catch a ride, but I couldn't catch a ride. Finally, I got about half way to Highlands, which was about two miles from where I'd gotten off, and a guy picked me and took me to Highlands. I started walking out towards my house and here come this Model A pickup.

Interviewer: This was what year?

Veteran: '45. This fellow said, "Hey, can I give you a lift?" I got in, and I recognized immediately who he was. He kept looking at me, and I figured he'd call my name pretty soon, but he just kept looking at me. Directly he said, "You know, you sure look like a fella that used to live around here and went off to the war, but he died." I said, "Isn't that awful?" He said, "Yeah." Of course, I went all through school by my stepdad's name, and everybody thought my last name was Hammer. He said, "Yeah, kid by the name of Hammer." I said, "Mr. Teal, that's who you just spoke to." He said, "You're gonna shock a lot of people, because everybody around here thinks you're dead." I said, "Well, no, they may have wished I'd have died, but I'm very much alive." I was supposed to have married a girl, and as a matter of fact that's one of the reasons I went over to do two more years in the service. I was going to stay in the Army. I was a career man, and so I had to get two years of foreign duty in before I could retire. That was required. We were gonna get married and have a family. So, I got home, and my folks

were in Houston to pick me up. I beat them home. Whenever they drove in, I greeted them and said, "Hey, Dad, how about using your car to go down and see Mavis?" He said, "Wil, Mavis is married." See, I expected for everything to be just as it was, and I said, "When did she get married?" He said, "She got married in March 1942." I said, "You mean while I was still out there fighting them Japs?" And he said, "Yeah." If she'd gotten married, say, in '44 after everybody figured I was dead, I could have understood. I guess that was one of my biggest disappointments.

Interviewer: It was probably just the thought of going home to see her that kept you going, or the thought of your mom's cooking, or going to a drive-in on Friday night. Then to get back…

Veteran: And find out everything's changed.

Interviewer: Time didn't mean anything to you over there. You knew that the day was over and the night was here, and so on.

Veteran: But, you know one question I never heard asked after about three and a half years in a prison camp, "I wonder if we're winning the war?" Don't ask me why. There was just never any doubt about who eventually was going to win. We never gave one thought to losing the war. We just didn't know when. We didn't know what the hold-up was. {Laughter} At the prison camp, it wasn't a matter of if you were gonna get beat, it was just how bad and how many times. Went out there one day in August, and I'm talking about not one man got beat up. We came in and wondered what happened. Man—something's happened. Went out the next day, the same thing happened. Went out working nights, the Japanese boss came around and said, "Tonight, when the air raid siren sounds, we're leaving. We're gonna turn off the electricity on the way out." We were working on these big old open hearth furnaces. He said, "Ya'll can do whatever you want to." Sure enough, the air raid sounded, they threw the electricity and threw the tent around them as they left. We laid down there and went to sleep. They bombed Hoyama, just across the mountains over there. They had caves dug back up in the hills, and later on we found out what they were really for, and it's on record in the archives. They were going to carry us up there and kill us when the

Americans landed in Japan to prevent us from falling into the hands of the Americans. They had it all planned out. Before the Americans landed on Palawan, they took these fellas into what was supposed to be an air raid shelter and poured some gasoline in there and burned them up. The reason they know that is because two of them was out in the woods using the restroom and escaped and were able to get back and tell about it.

Interviewer: You said you broke down when you went back to the prison camp, but is there still a hatred for just everything they did was unnecessary? To this day, do you still carry around some sort of hatred? It's kind of hard to go through and let go of something like that.

Veteran: When I came back, in 1952 I went to work for Ethel Corporation, right on the channel. {End of Tape 2-Side A} {Beginning of Side B} I'd be there working, and here'd come this ship. I'd see on the back of it this flag with this big red ball. Whatever I was doing, if I was breaking a flange or whatever, I just left it, ran down to the channel, and cursed them as far as our property run on that channel. They called me in, and I said I wouldn't do it anymore, and I really meant it, but it's just like when somebody sticks a pin in you. 1953—I met the Lord. I was a drunk, I was a raving maniac, but I met the Lord, and He changed my life. That's why I could go back. I preached in Japan on three different occasions—I don't mean three times, I mean three different occasions. 1977, and two years ago I had two revivals. I never met one adult that was old enough to have been alive in the war. When they found out I had been a prisoner of war, they didn't say "I'm sorry." I've been almost all over the world on mission trips in different countries, but I've never been treated better in any country than I was treated in Japan.

Interviewer: They owe it to you.

Veteran: Well, for instance, this preacher's wife in Osaka was just a young girl, and she lived in Kokura. {Tape stopped, then restarted} Another thing that's helped is that I have been able to separate the military from the civilian population. I was pastoring out here in Cody, and I was just going out knocking on doors, introducing myself, and I knocked on this door and a Japanese lady opened the door. I said, "Kinichiwa." When I left Japan, I could talk to any person on the

street. She wanted to know where I learned that, and I said, "Well, I learned it in your country. I was in your country for almost three years," so we got to talking, and I said, "Does it astound you that you read that the Japanese soldiers were as cruel as they were?" She said, "No, it doesn't astound me, because they were cruel to us. If we were on the sidewalk and one of them came down the sidewalk, we'd better get off and get out of the way. They were mean to the civilians." So, I've learned to separate the people of that era. Also, the Lord has shown me something through reading. I read a book about the fire bombing of Tokyo. You can't believe how horrible that was. I don't mean it was wrong, it was just horrible. Literally, these people would run into these concrete buildings, and the fire was so hot that it was just as if they were in an oven, and literally, bodies melted together. So, if they bombed Houston, I would hate the people that did that. Then, of course, your hatred doesn't stop there. Just like on 9-11, our hatred didn't stop with the guys that were on the planes. Our hatred extended to the fellow in the store down the street. We wanted to go down there and put graffiti on the store or knock the windows out. Or, we wanted to kill that guy, and he didn't have anything to do with it, but to me he looks just like them. You see what I'm saying.

Interviewer: It's human nature not to distinguish between different shades of red.

Veteran: Whatever it was began to open my eyes that 90% of the Japanese population wasn't even alive whenever this happened to me.

Interviewer: Even if they were, they couldn't have done anything about it anyway.

Veteran: They had nothing at all to say about what happened. They didn't even have the opportunity to vote on the guys that did have things to say about it. Then, I began to see why they would have this animosity toward us. See, Doolittle hit Tokyo in 1942. But, God has done a work in my life. He's changed me completely from what I was. I couldn't any more sit here and talk to you before that time. Number one, you wouldn't have liked it. I couldn't talk to anybody—my mother, my grandmother. Back alley words would just pop out. I was the garbage of the garbage.

Interviewer: But to be in that emotional state, you had so much anger and hatred that it would just be inevitable to be like that.

Veteran: I could not have possibly carried that and lived. I would have been short-lived, because that anger and hatred begins to affect you physically. We had a lot of fellows that died soon after they got back simply because they wouldn't turn it loose. That hatred just grew, and then they began to try to express it on different things, and most of the time on themselves. Of course, our government—before we ever got our occupation troops landed—began to tell us, "Hirohito—he's just a puppet," and all this kind of mess. I've got a book on my shelf at home, not written by an American, but by a professor at Tokyo University that lays the whole mess right at Hirohito's feet. He made this statement in that book: "Nothing was done without the emperor's approval." People ask me, "Which bomb do you think ended the war—the one at Hiroshima or the one at Nagasaki." I said, "Neither one. I'll tell you what ended the war. On August 15 at twelve noon in Tokyo, whenever the emperor got on the radio and said, "It's over." That ended it right there. Of course, I think they were wise to try to protect him though, because it would have been more difficult to have occupied Japan without his help than it would have been without it.

Interviewer: Yeah, the Japanese would fight to the death. They don't surrender—kamikazes.

Veteran: That was another reason they looked down on us so. We were less than human because we didn't die in battle.

Interviewer: I think it would show more honor if they went against what they wanted them to do. Exactly like you said. If you had gotten a citation for being an undesirable prisoner, it would have meant more to you than getting one from your own government because you did something to get back at them, even if it was the smallest indirect way of being difficult to deal with. You were getting back at them, and you could be proud of that.

Veteran: It wasn't just me. We could and did do some things, like putting sand in the gear boxes, and this kind of thing. Also let the cars get away and tear up the rock crusher. Anything we could do like that, we did. We'd get together and think of things to do that would hinder their production of things. This went against the

English.  The English wanted to cooperate with them.  That's the reason they sent this 120 of us over to this English camp so we could learn.  We got over there, and this English commander got us out on the campus and said, "We have a good camp here, and we've worked hard to make this a good camp.  We cooperate," and 120 mouths started laughing.  One big old boy spoke up and said, "Well, Limey, looks like the days of your good camp is over, because we don't cooperate."  Woo, man, he got hot.  Did you see this movie, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*?  That English commander that was in charge of getting that bridge built, he went into a rage whenever those Americans started bombing that bridge. "All my work is being torn down in just minutes," and that's how they were. They would work, and thought it was their duty to do a good job.  Our good job was the worst job.

Interviewer: How has what you've been through from the minute you started fighting over there until you came home—everything you've been through, the march, the prison camps, the physical, emotional, and mental abuse—how has that shaped how you've lived your life?  You said you battled with alcoholism largely because of what you went through, but how has that shaped the way you felt when you got married, and how you valued life, and how you raised your kids, and the morals and the values that you instilled in them?

Veteran: I think, number one, there's not anybody in the world—and I mean anybody—that enjoys living more than I do.  I'm not talking about on special days.  I get up in the morning with the idea that I'm going to live this day to the very fullest. And I think the reason is that I saw the uncertainty of life.  I mean, here is a fellow laying next to you, and you're talking and the next morning you wake up, and he's dead.  That's just the way it was.  Therefore, I've learned the value of life.  Another way that it's affected my life is what I have been through makes it more real to not only believe in but to serve the true and living God.  He's everything to me.  I have learned the value of people.  They may not look like you.  They may not dress like you.  But within that person, there is the potential of a friend.  I'm going to tell you right now, the most valuable thing that a person can have is not 15,000 shares of Exxon stock.  The most valuable thing that a person can have is a true friend.  People have a house and jobs, but friends are

those that's unconditionally your friends. They're the ones you can call at one o'clock in the morning and say, "I'm down here on the side of the road with a flat tire," and they say, "Be right there." I've learned the value of real friends. I've learned what an important role women play in a man's life. When I married my first wife, I was a raving maniac, and she didn't even know it because I was able to suppress it. My cousin introduced me to her, and he said, "Let me tell you. The first time you pop a cap on a beer bottle, you're alone. She's gone. She's not going to be around." And do you know she didn't know I drank until after we got married, and she found out she was married to a drunk. I wasn't an alcoholic, because there wasn't any such thing back then. They were just drunks. Then the Lord took her home and gave me another precious woman. A man's blessed if has one good wife in his life, but he's doubly blessed when God gives him two, and that's what He's done. Especially a pastor's wife. I think they have the hardest job in the church. When folks get mad at the preacher, what do they do? They go to his wife. Like I say, I just really enjoy life, and I think it's because I learned the value of it.

Interviewer: You don't take everything for granted.

Veteran: Yeah. I can't get out there and run a hundred yard dash in twelve seconds, and I can't get out here and work like I used to work, but what I can do, I do, and enjoy it, and thank God I can do it. There was times in the prison camp, whenever I went on the hell ship, I couldn't step up on the gang plank. I was that weak, cause I'd had beriberi. This old boy had been on a good detail—a good old sailor boy named McIntyre—he came along and said, "What's the matter, buddy—you having problems?" He just reached down and grabbed me like a gunny sack. Up the gang plank we went, and he up and downed me into the hold. I learned to appreciate people, that you can't be an island. So may people have affected my life and are the reason I'm here today.

Interviewer: I want to thank you so much for talking to me.

Veteran: Hey, I've enjoyed talking to you. You're a good listener.

{TAPE STOPPED. END OF INTERVIEW.}