

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH LT (ret.) FRANCIS BARKER, USA

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21 OCTOBER 2003
TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY
WASHINGTON, DC

**Telephone interview with former POW, LT Francis Barker, USA.
Survivor of the Bataan Death March and the Oryoku Maru.**

Where did you come from originally, before you joined the Army?

I was from Los Angeles. I graduated from UCLA and got my commission there—ROTC.

What year were you born?

In 1919.

What was your unit in the Army?

Originally, I was in the infantry as an infantry reserve officer. But when I went over to Manila they said they didn't need any infantrymen. For the first month on Bataan I was with the Air Force. After that, we didn't have any supplies, so I went back with the infantry in a unit commanded by Horace Greeley III. It was a battalion for infantry purposes. We were called, I think, the 5th Interceptor Command. It was a makeshift unit.

You probably didn't have a lot of interceptors to work with?

Oh, yes. The interceptors and other aircraft were long gone. In those days, the Air Force was part of the Army so everyone had arms training and that kind of stuff. So we formed units to defend the beaches.

This would have been in April of 1942?

We had been made into infantry units about 6 weeks before that. We had fought on Bataan, January, February, and March. And the first week of April was the time of the surrender, which began the Death March. We were disease ridden and starving at the start.

Did you end up at Camp O'Donnell?

Oh, yes. Of all the prison camps, that was, by far, the worst that I had ever been in. When we were on the March, we were ragged and starving. The hope was that when we got to where we were going, everything was going to be taken care of. We didn't know where we were going to end up, of course. But when we got there, we found a pretty bad camp.

Let me tell you a story about that camp. I don't remember how I got from San Fernando Pampanga to the camp. I had a bad case of malaria and amoebic dysentery. When I got to the camp, I thought everything was great. I was put in charge of a group of a hundred

or so men to take the oath that we wouldn't escape. The camp commander got up on a little box and made a harangue, and then the interpreter interpreted it. He said, "Bow." So I bowed a little bit and got knocked around. Then the interpreter said, "Bow." So I bowed as deeply as I could bow. Then I really got knocked around. Then a man in back of me said, "He's not saying bow; he's saying, "I vow."" So I got straightened out.

Then I went over to the hospital, the so-called hospital.

This is at O'Donnell?

Yes. It was a very sad disappointment, as you probably know. The buildings were made of bamboo. The hospital was the floor of one of these buildings. The doctor came around. He told me I had malaria and amoebic dysentery. So I was really feeling good about that because I knew medicine could treat those diseases. I looked around at all these men around me who were soiling themselves in their own clothes, or what they wore. And there was no water to take care of anything.

The next morning I woke up and said to the doctor, "When do I get my medicine?" And he said, "There's no medicine. That's just what you need."

After looking around and seeing all these men dying around me, I decided I would be a lot better off to see if I could find my compatriots that I knew, which I did. And I left the hospital, which wasn't a hospital at all but really a morgue.

How long were you there at O'Donnell?

I was there about 6 weeks. And then we were taken over to Cabanatuan. In the time that I was in O'Donnell, there must have been 1,500 to 2,000 American deaths. They were dying so fast it was difficult to get burial details to bury them. Everybody was just in rotten shape. It wasn't only from the March itself. We were in rotten shape at the time of surrender. We weren't getting enough to eat and were starving to death. How anybody made the March is really kind of amazing. Of course, the hope was that when we got to O'Donnell we'd be better taken care of but, of course, we weren't.

Tell me about Cabanatuan.

We went there in trucks. What was such a big surprise was that when we got there we ran into the fellows from Corregidor. Of course, we were scrawny, sick, dying and all that kind of stuff. The men from Corregidor were all in great shape. They were a big help to us. Most of the men from O'Donnell were put in what was called the hospital area. It was some comfort to know that there were some

Americans around there in good shape and that if we lasted long enough, we might get in the same shape they were in.

Wasn't there some kind of farming activity there?

Yes. I was in the so-called hospital a year with cerebral malaria and dysentery. When I was there, one of the chaplains came around and he gave me the last rites of the Catholic Church. I don't remember anything after that. I was in a coma and a day or so later, I became conscious again and was in a building where all the corpses and dying were. I said to myself, "I'm not dying; I'm going back to where I came from." So I crawled out of the death house and went back to my barracks and resumed the life everybody else was leading, which wasn't very much. When I got well enough I did work on the farm.

Let me tell you about the farm. If you were well enough to work, it generally paid to work because you got an extra rice ration. There were lots of places you could work. I worked on the farm for a while. We also were building an airport a couple of miles from Cabanatuan. You also could go timbering.

What was your rank at the time?

Second lieutenant. That's one of the things I'm upset about. I was a second lieutenant all through the war. After the war I became a first lieutenant, whereas all my compatriots in my class were captains or majors so I was a little upset with the Army.

When you were in Cabanatuan, there were a bunch of Navy people in there also.

Yes. There were Navy people there. The commander was actually Marine Corps. My best friend was a fellow by the name of Powell. I don't know what ever happened to him. He was a Navy man.

Where did you go then? Did you go to Bilibid?

I never went to Bilibid to stay. I went from the Bataan Peninsula to O'Donnell, then to Cabanatuan, then down to Bilibid in Manila. Bilibid was a transfer point for most people going one way or another. I was with the last bunch of prisoners taken out of Cabanatuan. We left there sometime in the fall of '44. I think it was October. And then we went to Bilibid. Bilibid Prison wasn't that bad except there wasn't very much to eat. There was no work to be done. We all slept on concrete floors, occasionally got to watch the air shows when the American fighters and bombers came over and strafed and bombed the ships in Manila Bay. It was quite an interesting show.

How did you feel about seeing your countrymen flying overhead?

We knew the Americans were coming and were very happy to see them but there was always a question in our minds. Am I better off to get on a ship and go to Japan and probably end the war alive but maybe get sunk at sea? Whereas, if I stay here, two things can happen. I'll be liberated right away or I'll be shot. So there was always that question. Which way will I be better off? Of course, you really didn't have much of a choice. They told you what to do. The best off were the fellows who went to Japan very early in the game because our Navy didn't have control of the sea. Generally, if you got to a camp in good condition, you could make it. But if you got to a camp in rotten condition, you generally had a hard time making it. That was the general rule.

How did you find out that you were in a draft of men to go to Japan?

We felt that we were going to go to Japan because they emptied the camp of all the people who were capable of doing anything; the people left were amputees and people who were horribly sick.

We knew that this was a draft that was going to Japan. There wasn't any question about it. It was a great worry, obviously, because we knew ships were being sunk. And it wasn't a very pleasant thought to get on board a ship. But it didn't make any difference what you thought. You did what they told you.

I understand that they marched you from Bilibid down to the docks.

Yes. In general, you had to feel for the natives. They were sorry for us. They weren't for the Japanese at all. But they couldn't be too obvious because if they did, the Japanese would shoot them or something. But they made it known in a subtle sort of way that by just being there they were friendly. If they had been unfriendly, they would have taunted us. They didn't do anything like that. They were as expressive as they could be under the circumstances. I felt they were basically on our side and felt sorry for us. After all, we did fight for them so they had good reason to feel sorry for us.

What did you see when you got down to the docks?

I don't remember much. I remember seeing all the Japanese passengers getting on board the ship. I looked at the ship and said, "That's a pretty good ship." I thought we were going to use the staterooms or something like that. That, of course, was the furthest thing from the truth.

I don't recall seeing anything in the way of armaments or anything like that around the dock itself. If I remember correctly, it was Pier Seven we got on the ship there in Manila.

You certainly remember boarding the ship though.

Oh yeah. I remember getting on the ship. As soon as we got aboard, my illusions of going into a cabin quickly went away. This was a passenger ship so the hatches were small and the hold was comparatively small. Well, 700 or so of us were put in that particular hold I was in. There was one tier. It wasn't made of steel but made of bamboo. It was jammed-packed. You couldn't move around. You couldn't sit up properly. You couldn't lie down without laying on someone. And it was hot, but nothing compared what it would be later, it was very disappointing to get on that ship under those conditions because we knew ships were likely to be sunk. And to be in a trap like that didn't bode very well for the future.

That night was one of the worst nights we had. There weren't any toilet facilities. The people on the upper tier had the advantage. The people on the lower tier took what came down through the bamboo slats. And it was a horrible mess. Some men would go out of their minds and had to be quieted by force. Some died of asphyxiation. My feeling was that I would rather see this ship go down. There would, at least, be a possibility of getting out. Considering the conditions we were in and the food we were getting, and the heat, none of us are going to get to Japan. At first I was unhappy when the bombers came over, but when the conditions got so bad that it was intolerable, I wasn't upset about being sunk at all.

The planes would come over. You could hear the deck guns go off. Then you could hear the strafing of the ship. And then in a few seconds you could hear the bomb dropping. "Well, I lived through another one." So you'd just wait for the next one.

Of course that didn't happen with everybody. In the rear hold, they took a direct hit. There were about 700 or so in that hold and about 150 or 200 were killed.

You were in the forward hold?

Yes. The forward and rear holds were the worst. The hold behind us had more room and held many of the medical officers and wasn't nearly as crowded. As far as the conditions were concerned, the heat and lack of air were about equal. I don't know how they died in the back hold, but in our hold, maybe 20 or 30 died from asphyxiation or simply going out of their minds. It wasn't very pleasant.

I know that once the ship was badly hit, they tried to beach it.

Oh, yes. There's always been a question in my mind whether the ship was run aground or whether it was eventually sunk. I don't know. We left on the 13th and on the 14th we were severely attacked. They took the damage into Subic Bay. Then during the night, all the Japanese abandoned the ship, they took all the life rafts and other lifesaving equipment. We were let out of the holds, but only after the Americans made a direct hit on the aft hold.

Getting ashore was difficult. If you could not swim you had to have a friend who would pull you ashore. We weren't very far offshore, maybe a quarter of a mile. But swimming it was quite a difficult chore.

Before I even came up on deck, I went around among the dead in the hold and got a heavy pea jacket off a dead Navy officer. And getting that jacket saved my life. As we got closer to Japan, it got intolerably cold.

The Japanese had their machine gun and anti-aircraft emplacements made with planking. Our planes had shot up these emplacements. I found a plank that had been broken up maybe 4 or 5 feet long and threw it overboard.

One man couldn't swim so I told him to take my canteen and jacket and that I would pull him ashore. So he and I jumped overboard and grabbed the plank. It took us awhile to get ashore but we made it.

Let me digress for a minute. When you're not getting anything to breathe and you get something to breathe, nothing else matters. You don't care where you are. You've got enough air to breathe. And when you're on a ship that's being bombed and sunk, and you can see land in the distance, you don't care if that land is Coney Island, San Francisco Bay, Singapore—you don't care. It is land and that's all that really counts. So, those are two prime things—getting enough air to breathe and the shore being close.

He was holding onto the plank?

He held onto the plank. I was doing the swimming and dragging him. He couldn't swim. I don't even know his name. Anyhow, he kept holding my jacket, kept my mess kit and my canteen—very valuable things. That was his payment, so to speak, for getting pulled ashore. Being able to swim and to hold onto that plank and rest every once in while, really saved my life.

I had a good friend by the name of Fitzhugh. He was one of my roommates before the war. He couldn't swim and tried to get into one of the Japanese lifeboats. They wouldn't let him. They shot him in the attempt.

What happened when you got ashore? I recall, they gathered all the prisoners who had survived in a tennis court.

Yes, that is correct. Shore was at a Japanese Naval Base that had been an American Base. We were taken to the tennis court where we were fed a little bit. There was very little water. We were still under severe air attack most of the time. Things were flying all over the place. I had my head on my mess kit and I rose off of the kit just to see what was going on and we heard a thump. Everybody looked around to see what happened. There was a bomb fragment about the size of your fist that had gone through my mess kit and right into the ground. I had just moved my head just 2 or 3 seconds before that. I was very lucky.

This was in the daytime and brutally hot out there.

That's right. It was a typical tennis court. No shade. The interesting thing was watching the Americans in action—the bombing of the *Oryoku Maru* and the facilities around us. It was very hot but very interesting. The planes would come in all directions and you could see them drop their bombs and then fly over us.

In a sense, then, it was great entertainment but not bring part of that entertainment at that point.

Putting it another way, it was a great distraction as well as entertainment.

You had come through the experience unhurt?

Yes. I hadn't been wounded.

But there were plenty of people on that tennis court who were?

Oh, yes.

Did you see any of the medical people trying to work on these people?

Oh, yes. I'll be fair with you. The medics did their duty. The rest of us guys were just a bunch of prisoners whereas the medics...this was their job, as best they could, to take care of the wounded any way they could. They couldn't do very much but they did tear strips of clothing to put dressings and tourniquets on people to try to stop the bleeding and do what they could. The chaplain also did their work, too. I can't speak highly enough about the medics and chaplains.

Where did you go after the tennis court?

We stayed there for 3 or 4 days and went to San Fernando Pampanga.

Without any food?

We may have been fed once. I think we got water once. But it was the same old story. They would always run out early. Some people would get something and some people wouldn't. This was a case of constant starvation and constant dehydration and constant no toilet facilities. That's just the way it was. Of course, by the time we had gotten to the tennis court, most people had taken their clothes off in order to get ashore. So most of them were pretty nude and suffered from the sun. We had been in Cabanatuan working on the farm so all of us were pretty tan. If they hadn't been pretty tanned before they got there, they would have been very sunburned. It was hot and the sun beat down on us. Fortunately, I was on the grass part of the court and it wasn't as bad there as on the cement.

We moved from there to San Fernando Pampanga. That's the same place as the end of the March. We were divided into two parts. By the time we left the tennis court there must have been about 300 or so who didn't make it, either in the bombing or because they couldn't swim. So 1,300 of us were taken up by truck in two days in two loads. I was put in a picture show house.

Another interesting thing happened there. We had some wounded who managed to get ashore. The American medical officers were told to pick a dozen or so who couldn't make the trip. So they picked out the sickest and most badly wounded and they were loaded onto trucks. The assumption was that they were all going back to Manila because we were only 40 or 60 miles north of Manila. Well, we found out after the war that they simply took them down the road and bayoneted and beheaded them.

We stayed there for a few days and then were taken by train to San Fernando la Union, which is close to Lingayan Gulf. At that time we were put in boxcars. Those who weren't in great shape were put on the top. Of, course, the place was under attack most of the time. But they were put on the tops of the boxcars and instructed to wave when the planes came over. We thought that was a big joke.

When we got on that train, we were so packed, we all had to stand up. The bad part was, the Japanese closed the sliding doors so no one could slip through them and jump off the train. All the air we got was through a small slit in the doors. People were passing out all the time. I passed out. As you got further back in the car, it was harder and harder to get any air. When you passed out, they would try to pass you up near the doors to resuscitate you. It was a very miserable trip but typical of everything we did. Anytime we went some place, it was crowded and no food and water, or very little.

We got up to San Fernando la Union around Christmas time and stayed there 3 or 4 days with very little food or water. Then we were told we were going to get on another ship, which was very discouraging. We didn't know if we would be better off getting on

another ship or staying there and being executed. So we just took it as it was.

At least there was plenty of room to breathe and you could move around. It was like traveling first class again.

From San Fernando la Union we went to Lingayan Gulf. There we went down to the docks and jumped on the landing craft and taken to the *Enoura Maru*. The rest were taken to the *Brazil Maru*. The *Enoura Maru* was a freighter. Then we found out that we were going to go down in the hold. It was a great big hold. There was a lot of horse manure around but that was the least of the problems. That was just few weeks before the Americans landed there. For sanitary accommodations, we had buckets we could walk to. Then we landed at Takao, which is the south end of Formosa. Then we had some adjustments. The ones aboard the *Brazil Maru* came over. Then 450 of us were put into the forward hold, which was the hold just in front of the one we had been in.

A while after the transfer and before we left, we were being fed, which was quite a momentous occasion. As we were being fed, American bombers came over and dropped a bomb.

It tore a rip on the side of the ship. The rip was in the forward hold that we were in. With the blast of the bomb and the falling planks and steel beams covering the hold, about 250 men were killed on site. Another 150 were injured and later died. We stayed there another 4 or 5 days. The medics did all they could to plead with the Japanese for tourniquets or Mercurochrome or anything to help these men. But the help was essentially nothing.

I got slightly hit in the head with fragments but nothing too serious. After the smoke and dust cleared away, we looked around to see what we could do with the injured people. Bear in mind that it was feeding time, so some of them still had rice left and there was always the possibility that you'd find somebody who was dead with some rice left. I found one man who was dead. He was lying on his stomach. I could see that he had a fragment right through his back. I turned him over. I recognized that he had been an aide to one of the officers. There he was laying on his mess kit. And his mess kit had rice in it. The unfortunate part about it was, part of the rice had been contaminated with his blood. So I ate the rice around the edge and with just the bloody part left, I looked at it and said, "Well, I guess I've eaten some of the bloody rice already. I might as well eat the whole thing because I imagine this man guy doesn't have any more disease than I have." So I just ate the rice blood and all.

Well, we stayed there a few days while all the wounded died. That's where my commanding officer Horace Greeley III died. Also COL Maverick from the Texas family died.

Then we were transferred over to the *Brazil Maru*, but by this time we were down to about 900 to a thousand men. They put some of us in holds that had tiers similar to the ones on the *Oryoku Maru* but it was not nearly as bad.

There was air to breathe and in rare cases you could get something to eat. To show you what we'd do for food...They'd come around and count the number of people in what they called a bay, which was a section. They'd take a count and pass out enough rice for that number. One of my good friends, Jack Bachelor, a captain in the Air Force, was among us. He had been slightly wounded on the *Oryoku Maru*. He became very ill and died. We were sorry to see him go. We thought that since we all had been friends, we'd get his clothes when he died. But it didn't work out that way. During the night, someone stole all his clothes. We kept Captain Bachelor's body for 3 or 4 days so that when the man came around for the count we'd get the ration he would have gotten if he were alive. Then in a few days, the people who came around to make the count recognized that he was dead so they took him away and threw him overboard.

I can't remember how long we were aboard on that trip. It must have been 2 weeks or something like that. At the start, we were throwing 4 or 5 bodies overboard everyday. When we got close to Japan, it became very cold and 20 or 30 men a day were dying. Originally, we had all been crowded together, but after removing all the dead bodies, we felt kind of lonesome. We wanted to get close to one another in order to keep warm. Most of us just had under shorts by that time. Out of the 900 or a thousand who started, only half made it to Japan. The main problems were lack of food, malaria, the cold weather and dysentery. On board the ship, we could get out and go to the toilet. The toilet was a box about 3 feet square that was tied to the outside of the ship. It didn't have any top on it and the bottom of it was a slit about 6 inches wide. So you stood on the bottom and that was where you relieved yourself. Going there in rough sea was quite an ordeal. But at least it was an advance over the places we had been,

Then we got to Japan sometime around the end of January.

What shape were you in by that time?

When we got to Moji on the southern island of Kyushu, the well ones and I was one of them were taken to a warehouse. There we got food and water. The ill ones who were unable to walk were taken to the to the hospital. I never saw them again. But of the 500 or so who arrived in Japan, about another 250 died as a result of the trip. It's the old story. If you got to a place in reasonable condition, you'd be all right. But of those who went to the hospital; most of them died.

The camp we were put in was the regular Japanese camp with toilet facilities. In our camp maybe a dozen or so died out of the 250 or so who were sent there. There were not that many blankets but if you didn't generate any internal body heat, the blankets didn't do much good. You had to have some heat in your body to warm the blankets so that it could perform its function of not letting the heat get away.

What became of the pea coat you had gotten on the *Oryoku Maru*?

That was the most valuable thing I ever owned. That kept me warm while many other people died of exposure. When we got to Japan, we were given uniforms but I kept my pea coat as an extra layer. Most people were too ill to exercise to keep warm. I'm sure under normal conditions, everybody would have been fine, but there things were bad.

We did have all the water we needed to drink, but the food was very scarce and we didn't get much to eat. Before we left, we got to take one bath. It was a Japanese style bath. You clean up before you get in the tub. There was one tub for a couple of hundred of us to get in. I was one of the last ones and when I got in it was a murky mass of sweat.

We also got weighed. After fattening up a bit, so to speak, I was already up to 92 pounds. Having been sleeping on steel decks on the ship and being so skinny, the skin on both hips and my backbone wore out and the bones were exposed. That took a long time to heal and I still have the scars.

They were fattening you up with rice?

When I say fattening, that's just in jest. We weren't getting that much to eat.

After about three months we were put on board another ship. Getting aboard ships was never very pleasant for us. About 250 or 300 or so of those left, got aboard a regular Japanese ship and we left there to go to Pusan at the south end of Korea. There, everything was great. We were only on that ship overnight but got to sleep in the dining room, a great improvement over what we had before.

When we got to Pusan, we disembarked. We were expecting to get a happy greeting from the Koreans but they weren't happy to see us at all. They made attempts to beat us up and threw things at us.

Why was that?

They were on the Japanese side. They had been part of Japan. They had men in the Japanese army. And besides that, we had been bombing the place. We thought they'd be friendly.

At Pusan we were put on a train. By this time, traveling was

great. We were regular passengers on a regular train. Of course, we were prisoners but we were riding in a regular passenger coach. You remember certain things when you are a prisoner. When we got halfway up there, the train stopped and we were given a Japanese bento, which is a little boxed lunch with rice and cut vegetables on top. We couldn't believe that anybody in Japan or anybody in the Japanese Army or Navy would give us a bento. It was the most appreciated meal I've ever had.

Then we got to Seoul and we were split up. Some of us went to Manchuria and the other half went down to what is now called Inchon. It was called Jinsen when we were there. There was a little Japanese camp there. If you were well enough to work, you worked on the farm. If you weren't, you sewed Japanese military garments, making buttonholes and that kind of stuff. It really wasn't bad. I think we got one Red Cross box while we were there. But we didn't get any medicines or anything like that. Conditions were reasonable.

Under certain conditions, you even got to take a shower. As you probably know, in Japan they use all human waste for fertilizer. So if you worked on that detail to pick up the fertilizer and spread it around, you usually got pretty dirty. So they'd let you wash off, which was a pretty good deal.

Unfortunately, I got pneumonia in Korea. It was the same old story. No medicines, nothing. There were 3 or 4 of us who were sick. There were about 125 of us in that camp and a few British officers. What they called a hospital was just a place on the floor and I stayed there for a week or so. Finally, without any help from medicines, I got well.

The Japanese were trying to raise rabbits. They were just outside of our building. They fed them soy meal. When nobody was around and the guards weren't close, we just stole the soy meal to eat and that probably helped us get well. After a week or so, the rabbits were getting skinny so the Japanese gave up trying to raise them.

You were eating the food the rabbits were supposed to be getting?

Yes. When you're a prisoner, food is an all-consuming thing. What are you going to get to eat? When are you going to get to eat it? Am I getting my share? Is it better to mix the rice with the soup or just eat the soup separate? What did your grandma cook for Thanksgiving? What did your wife cook for breakfast? One of the guys had been the head of an ice cream plant. So we'd listen by the hour how he made ice cream. Food was more of a consideration than anything else. Obviously, liberty was the thing we all looked

forward to but on a day today basis, food was the prime consideration. That was true unless you were very sick with amoebic dysentery or malaria. Then if you were in a group who had that you'd talk about your disease—how many time you went to the toilet, what your fever was, and all that kind of thing.

We got there sometime in late spring or early summer of 1945. About the 16th or 17th of August, the Japanese commandant called us all together and we stood in formation like we usually did. The he announced that the Japanese and Americans had "reached an accord". When he said that, we knew what the score was. The war was over and the Japanese lost.

Then they changed the guards and we got all the Red Cross boxes that were available. We got plenty of rice and we ate our heads off. The doctors told us we shouldn't be doing that but we notice they were eating their heads off too.

A few days later, American bombers came over and dropped food and supplies. That was a dangerous business. A lot of these barrels from the parachutes broke free and dropped into the camp just like a dud bomb. They crashed through the buildings. I think one guy got his leg broken.

When they came around the next time, we rushed the gates. We were outside of the camp that time. A few days later, an American paratrooper came in and caused quite a surprise.

He parachuted down?

I don't remember. He got all our names and serial numbers and the like. Then we knew everything was okay and everybody was going to get to go home. A few of us went into town to see what we could do. Contrary to popular belief, the Koreans were not nice at all. Anybody who wanted to be safe stayed inside the camp.

At the end of August, the first of September, the invasion fleet landed there and they met us on the docks. They said, "Who are you guys?" We told them we were prisoners. "Where have you guys been all this time?" By that time we had uniforms on that had been dropped.

This was at Inchon?

Yes. Interestingly enough, one of the men I went to high school and college with was part of that force that landed. We were put aboard a landing craft and taken out to a hospital ship. But there weren't that many of us and the hospital ship was geared for lots and lots people and they didn't want to tie up a hospital ship with just a hundred people. By that time, none of us were what you might call sick. We were weak, tired and disabled, but none of us had

active terrible diseases.

Was it a Navy hospital ship or an Army ship?

I don't know, but when we got on you could smell civilization. You could smell perfume! We only stayed on that one a few hours. Then we were taken aboard a troop transport and taken down to Manila. It would kill us to watch the sailors on that ship. They didn't eat all their food and would throw it away. It hurt real deeply to see food thrown away. We weren't used to that.

We stayed in Manila for a couple of weeks, then put aboard another ship to go back to the U.S. That's about the end of the prisoner of war story.

You were liberated 58 years ago. Do you think about this part of your life much anymore?

After the war, I was disgusted. I was going to stay in the Army but here I was a first lieutenant being outranked by all my classmates in school. So I said I'd get out and go back to school and forget about all this stuff. And that's just what I did. I went back to school and forgot all about it. I wouldn't join any veteran's organizations. I just put it out of my mind completely.

But in the last few years, I went to a Memorial Day service and they had each veteran stand up and say where they fought. So I got up and told them I had been a prisoner, been at Bataan. There was deathly silence. And then afterwards, one of the people came up and said, "We'd like to have you give a speech about this." Well, that got me started. I gave the speech and after that I got lots of calls. From that time on, I got involved. I joined the local Bataan-Corregidor organization and I give these speeches. It's only in the last couple of years that I've thought about it.

I feel I have the obligation to tell anyone who will listen that we live in the greatest country on earth. And that the soldiers, sailors and marines who fought, survived and died help make us what we are.

When we talked to COL Rosen, we asked him why he thought he survived all of that? He said number one was luck.

I agree with that entirely. However, adaptability and forethought helped.

And being in the right place in line?

That's right. We all had to March in columns of four. The struggle was always to be on the inside of the column. It made it

harder for the guards to get to you and then beat. But luck was the first thing. Another thing too that killed a lot of people was smoking. A lot of them just couldn't give up the smoking habit. They'd trade off food for a smoke. And that, of course, killed them.

When you were discharged and decided you were going to try another profession, what did you do all those years after the war?

I already had a degree in geology so I went back to school and got one in engineering. Until I retired back in 1984, I worked at a number of places. I explored for oil, produced oil, and eventually was a vice president for production at Union Oil Company. I was also chairman of the Drilling and Production Committee of the American Petroleum Institute. I have been married for 53 years to my wife, Dee, and we have five children.

So you were able to adjust back to a normal life after that horrible experience?

Yes. I did make one mistake. When I was at school, a tire blew out. I immediately jumped under the desk and everybody looked around and thought I was nuts. I reacted the way I only knew how.

COL Rosen has been to several reunions and he says that when they all get to talking about their experiences, there were those who on the Death March, there were those who were on the Hell Ships, and there were those who were on both.

Not very many were on both.

He asked the ones who were on both what was worse? The Death March or the Hell Ships? He said without hesitation, they would all say the Hell Ships.

The Hell Ships were infinitely worse. When you don't get enough to breathe and it's so hot, and you're so cramped, it was much worse than the Death March.

And you were on the ships much longer than you were in the Death March.

That's right. But it was the starvation before that made the March so tough. Only about a thousand people died on the March but a couple of thousand died in the O'Donnell, and another couple thousand died in Cabanatuan as a result of the starvation before and the very difficult situations afterwards.

The experience aboard the *Oryoku Maru* was a horrible experience

when you could count 1,600 who started and only 250 or so survived. And that's tough. When you didn't get enough to breathe, nothing else matters.