

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH PHARMACIST'S MATE (ret.)
JAMES BRAY, USN

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Telephone interview with Mr. James F. Bray, World War II corpsman and prisoner of war, 15 October 1987.

Back when you were a prisoner of war in the Philippines, the Japanese sent you back to Corregidor to make a propaganda movie. What do you remember about that time?

Another fellow who was with me at the time was Chet [Chester] Fast, who lives in Springfield, MO. He was with the group that went to make that film.

When I spoke to Ernie Irvin recently, he said you had worked at the Canacao Naval Hospital with Dr. Carey Smith.

Yes.

Did you know Dr. Thomas Hayes? I've read his diaries and he was quite critical of those he worked with in Bilibid prison.

I was just a young kid then. Hayes was a very talented person. He was a good writer and an expert in music. He was articulate. But he never had anything nice to say about anybody. I always remember an incident that happened with another orthopedist. I don't know whether Hayes was a board certified orthopedist or not. A young doctor by the name of Nelson, who was a board certified orthopedist in the reserve, used to get into some pretty heated arguments over treatment modalities with him. As you know, we had pretty limited care in those days anyway. Hayes was always a very critical person. He was bitter about being locked up. Carey Smith was the same way but Carey got over his vindictiveness toward people. I was around Carey Smith a lot. Carey never forgave his own government, which he thought let him down. I've read all the history. They couldn't have come after us if they wanted to.

As you know, many of the documents from Bilibid, patient records and secret journals, were recovered after the prison was liberated. One story is that the prisoners buried the stuff in the yard sealed in containers. What do you know about this?

A lot of guys wrapped stuff up in any kind of paper they could get like waxed paper. Metal containers were not that available. They would use any kind of container they could find around--cooking containers and that kind of thing. There were some metal ammo containers around. I had a big chest full of stuff that belonged to an Army chaplain named Cunningham. I couldn't take it with me when they told us to evacuate so I left it in the building and I notified the [Navy] Department when I got back that that's where I left it.

Did they ever find it?

Yes, I think they did. It was wills and that sort of thing.

I had a bunch of things handed to me by guys on the last draft that was going by ship up to Japan. I turned those in and sent them back to the Department. There was an officer's will and some guy's pay records, odds and ends like that.

I went back to the Philippines in '84 and also went back to Bilibid. I got hold of the military officer at the embassy. His name was Hoffman, a helluva nice guy. They kind of gave me the royal treatment.

What condition was Bilibid in?

It's terrible. It's in a more deplorable condition than when we were there. You can still see the bombed out, burned down sections of it. They've never done anything with it. It's the city jail. There were a lot of young people in there. I asked specifically whether they were political prisoners and they assured me that they were not. I also went over to Corregidor and to James Ravine where I was, and up to Malinta Tunnel. They've cleaned that up and made it a tourist attraction. The hospital portion of it is closed, but you can walk or drive through it and see the little laterals, but they have all been closed. The memorial on Corregidor was built by the United States and is in pretty good shape. The National Cemetery, which is not opened for burial any more, is still maintained by the U.S. Government. It is in Manila itself.

What about the graves that were in the prison yard?

I think they were probably either taken out of Bilibid by the families or they were reburied in Manila. [Robert] Kentner kept good records of the grave sites and the numbers.