

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
HERBERT BURNS
Truck Driver, Army, World War II.

1999

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Burns, Herbert, (1917-2009). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 71 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 71 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 71 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Herbert Burns, an Osseo, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a truck driver with the 31st Infantry Division in the Philippines and his experiences as a prisoner of war in the Philippines and Japan. Enlisted in February of 1941, Burns talks about being sent immediately to the Philippines and having his basic training there. Stationed at Nichols Field (Philippines), he recalls hearing the news about the events of December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor and being attacked by Japanese forces the next day. He comments on having both the airfield and tents strafed by aircraft, soldiers' firing uselessly at the planes with pistols, and retreating into the Bataan Peninsula. Burns mentions fighting Japanese troops, the effectiveness of the Japanese horse-drawn artillery, and being told by General Edward King to surrender. As a prisoner of war, Burns describes being searched by the Japanese, marching from Mariveles to a train station without food or water, and transportation by overcrowded boxcar. He touches on the two- or three-day march, seeing men fall out of line and be killed, and attempts by Filipino civilians to give supplies to the prisoners. Burns details his experiences at Camp O'Donnell, including boiling water from a contaminated stream, cooking their own small rations of rice, assignment to work detail widening airstrips, and often being sick. He mentions a typhoon damaging the camp and buying sugar for a friend who had jaundice. Moved to Camp Cabanatuan, Burns describes growing and eating fresh vegetables after an Army captain started a garden, lack of clothing and shoes, and having to watch three prisoners dig their own graves. He mentions getting boxes from the Red Cross at Christmas time. After passing out and ending up in the hospital ward, he speaks about volunteering for work duty in Japan. Shipped to Fukuoka #17 Prisoner of War Camp, he talks about working in a Japanese coal mine and living facilities in the camp, including colder weather, slightly improved rations, earning money he couldn't use, and the camaraderie amongst prisoners. Burns mentions having to bow to a Buddha outside the coal mine and occasionally being beaten. Near the end of the war, he states the Americans firebombed the camp and destroyed his barracks building while he was in the mine. He characterizes a prisoner who had a mental breakdown. Burns comments on a typical work day, food in the mine, and drinking cherry leaf tea. He discusses learning the war had ended from a Chicago Tribune reporter and taking rice by force from a nearby warehouse. Burns describes liberation, his first full meal at an American-occupied airfield, getting sick from the rich food, and being transported to the Philippines. Diagnosed with tuberculosis, he talks about getting treatment at an Army

hospital in Santa Fe (New Mexico) and at a veterans' hospital in Waukesha (Wisconsin), buying a new car, and joining the American Legion.

Biographical Sketch:

Burns (1917-2009) served with the 31st Infantry Division and was taken prisoner by the Japanese in the Philippines. A survivor of the Bataan Death March, Burns was liberated in 1945 and returned to Wisconsin, eventually settling in Rio.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999

Transcribed by Clint Cargile & Tyler Young & John Maerzke, 2011

Checked and corrected by Channing Welch, 2011

Corrections typed in by Lauren Kelly, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

Jim: You entered in the United States military service in when?

Burns: February--

Jim: In February of 1941. Did you volunteer?

Burns: Yup.

Jim: Volunteer. And where were you sent? You volunteered, you joined, and where did they send you?

Burns: The first place—I was in Wausau is where I joined. And then they sent me to San Francisco on Angel Island. And then from there I went over to the Philippines.

Jim: In the Army?

Burns: Yup.

Jim: And this is in '41 before the war started?

Burns: Yup.

Jim: Right. And so you were a regular right off the start.

Burns: Right.

Jim: And so you went to—from San Francisco to the Philippines directly?

Burns: Right.

Jim: What outfit were you in?

Burns: 31st Infantry.

Jim: 31st Infantry. And you had more training in the Philippines?

Burns: That's where my basic training was.

Jim: Oh, I see. They didn't waste any time in this country—

Burns: No, no. They give me the shots in San Francisco.

Jim: I see.

Burns: And I was there from February to April. And then—yeah, no, no, in San Francisco.

Jim: Okay.

Burns: And then I went from San Francisco, and it took us twenty-eight days to go to the Philippines on the old Republic [USAT, U.S. Army Transport ship].

Jim: And what did you do other than your training in the Philippines? Anything special or just—

Burns: No, nothing special. But then I got to be a truck driver over there so that made—I had to take kind of a driver's test over there.

Jim: I see. Well, so then it was mostly training up until all of sudden the war was suddenly upon you, right?

Burns: Right.

Jim: What did you think when you first heard about it? Tell me your reactions.

Burns: Well, I don't really know. I mean, it didn't seem to bother me. Everybody seemed to be so messed up, you know. I mean, always afraid. They were shooting at these planes with a .45. I says, "You're crazy." You might as well spit at 'em as to use a .45 at them planes.

Jim: Right. But when you first heard about Pearl Harbor, they hadn't attacked you—

Burns: No. No, they hadn't me until the next day.

Jim: I understand. That's what I'm gettin' at.

Burns: They said that we were attacked the same day, but we weren't because we got news in the Philippines of the attack. And there we got—we was out on A-range in the tents.

Jim: I see.

Burns: And when they said, "Now, you guys pack up all your stuff. Put all your belongings in your barracks bag—in your, uh, mattress covers—put your name on it, and we'll send it back to the States." But they never got to States, not that I know of. And we went and camouflaged our trucks and

moved out in the bushes so they wouldn't—and it was right north of Nichols Field.

Jim: Is that right outside of Manila?

Burns: Right. Nichols Field. And we could see the bombs coming down and everything. The planes, Jap planes come over and strafed our tents and everything. So they must have knew that was—

Jim: That's the guys who were shooting their .45s at 'em?

Burns: Yeah. And I thought, "They're crazy." I said, "Might as well spit at 'em as to use a .45 on a—"

Jim: So, then what happened?

Burns: Well, then they said that we had to get out of there. And so we started for, uh, hmm—

Jim: Bataan [Philippine province covering the whole Bataan Peninsula on the island of Luzon; site of the Bataan Death March]?

Burns: Bataan. Yeah. So we started moving out to Bataan. It took us quite a—I don't know, it was a day or two I guess it took us to get out there to Bataan. But then we had to—fighting just to—went some certain distance. Then we went back again, then went back again, and went back again, kept on going back. So, retreating, you know.

Jim: You didn't form any kind of a line, a defensive line?

Burns: Oh, yeah. That's what I mean. It was a defensive—

Jim: Just not adequate?

Burns: Well, it was—I tell you we licked that one force that came in the Philippines. But then when they sent that outfit from Singapore over, they had horses—more horses than we had men.

Jim: Really?

Burns: They had great big tall horses; whoa! They had big mountain guns. They was pulling--those horses were pulling the mountain guns. I looked at one day—after—I didn't see that, you know, before that, but after the war was over, we come back through on the death march, then we see all that stuff on the side of the road and stuff. Some of them big horses, oh boy.

Woman: They were superior at that time.

Burns: Oh, oh, I guess so.

Jim: So they were pushing you back towards Corregidor [Island; Philippines]?

Burns: Yeah, we went down to Mariveles, and that's just across the bay from—see, Corregidor's the island. So we was right on, at Mariveles, and Corregidor was across the bay. And some of the guys swam over there.

Jim: To Corregidor.

Burns: To Corregidor. So they had fighting and other—we was, we was—one month before they surrendered. We surrendered months before.

Jim: Well, you never went to Corregidor.

Burns: No, never got to Corregidor. I stayed around Bataan. And, well, most of my bunch did. We stayed—

Jim: Tell me about how you ended up surrendering. How did that happen?

Burns: Well, we were down to Mariveles, and General King come in with a tank, on the front of a tank, and a microphone, and he says, "Everybody surrender. Throw your guns down. You gotta surrender." What could we do?

Jim: Did anybody object?

Burns: Well, what could you do? I mean—

Jim: I know, but did anybody say anything?

Burns: I suppose lots of 'em took off through the bushes, you know.

Jim: They did?

Burns: A lot of 'em did, yeah. Lot of the guys did. But, uh, I said, "There's no sense in fighting it. We're outnumbered."

Jim: You weren't surprised when he came--

Burns: No, I wasn't a bit surprised because I understood what it was.

Jim: You realized the numbers were—

Burns: Yup, yup.

Jim: Just not there.

Burns: Yeah, and their planes that we had—the thing is, uh, when we was in the Philippines, when the war started they left all the planes right on the field, you know, like this. The runway was here. The Japs came down and strafed the whole works. What could you do about it? Nothing. I thought, sure, on the death march I was dead.

Jim: Well, don't get too far ahead.

Burns: No, but I mean, that's—on the death march, when it was on—after we surrendered we started on the death march, and I just about passed out.

Jim: Don't get so fast now. You're hurrying up on your story.

Burns: Well, no. But I mean that's what I—

Jim: Oh, I understand. I don't want to miss any of it.

Burns: No.

Jim: I just like to have it in sequence, okay?

Burns: Right, right.

Jim: Okay. So he says you're gonna surrender now, what were you told to take with you?

Burns: Nothing. They took it all away from us.

Jim: Well, I know, but—

Burns: We had, we had—they gave us—

Jim: Did you just sit there and these guys came up and—

Burns: No. We were all in the group, still in the group, and they said that we had to surrender. Well, we—

Jim: Throw your hands up?

Burns: Yeah, we had to surrender. Well, we just—no, we didn't throw our hands up. No, we just had to surrender, throw your guns down, didn't take a

mug even. I didn't have them. I had them in the truck and had to get rid of the truck. We left the truck right there.

Jim: So what did that—what happened next?

Burns: Well, then they marched us up—and that's at night, after we surrendered about 4:00 or 5:00, 6:00 o'clock at night. Then we had to march up this hill from Mariveles back up towards where we were supposed to camp. Then I didn't know what was going to happen.

Jim: So you got up the hill?

Burns: Got up on the hill. That next day they searched us and took everything away from us that they could find. I mean, the Japanese—

Jim: Cigarette lighters and all that stuff.

Burns: Well no. No cigarette lighters, but watches and stuff.

Jim: They took all that.

Burns: Took all our watches and stuff, and of course before when we surrendered, tear up all your identification. My drivers license, the whole works, had to be gone. The only thing they could say, you tell 'em is, if they wanted to ask you questions, was your serial number. Name, rank, and serial number, that's all they give us. But after we were surrendered and we moved up on the top side, we didn't get nothing to eat, but, ahh, we got in this one field, an empty field, and they—and everyone's out in groups of a hundred, next morning, march us out in groups of hundreds, and we started marching.

Jim: Did the Japanese speak good English?

Burns: No English. We couldn't—

Jim: Listen to translation (??)?

Burns: No.

Jim: They just—sign language only.

Woman: No officers?

Burns: I don't know if it was sign language, how we got through. I don't really know.

- Jim: Okay, so you're in groups of a hundred.
- Burns: Right.
- Jim: And they put you on the road.
- Burns: Right.
- Jim: Still haven't had anything to eat?
- Burns: No, not since the night before. No, and we didn't get anything—well, we got to this one little town, about noon I believe, and they had a five-gallon square can with rice balls in it. And each guy was supposed to get a rice balls. Well, they tore that can right apart. Us guys. Americans. Ripped that can right apart. Each guy got a rice ball all right. That was all right. But there wasn't anything left. They just ripped that can right apart. I can't believe how they tore that out of there. A tin can, you know. It was a can about that high. Five-gallon can, they tore it right apart. I suppose looking for some more to eat.
- Jim: I suppose (??).
- Burns: Yeah. Well, then we got from there to San Fernando [Philippines]. I think it was San Fernando, and we got on a train. We still in hundreds. They put a hundred guys in each boxcar. Ish. You couldn't sit down, you couldn't stand—well, you had to stand up. And we said, "No smoking! Nobody smoke now!" You might as well talk to the wind. They had to smoke, and everybody had to smoke. That's, boy, it just blew in. And they had a little crack all the way around the top for air. That's all you got, around the top of the boxcar.
- Woman: Did some of them get sick?
- Burns: No, guys passed out. What you gonna do about it? They just had to stand—
- Jim: Fall down.
- Burns: You couldn't fall down, you had to stand there. They had to hold you up.
- Woman: Oh!
- Jim: So how long a train ride was it?
- Burns: Well, we went up to, I don't know what town it is. I don't know the towns over there in the Philippines no more. Uh, we hit another place [coughs]. I

don't know if that was before or was it—not, it was afterwards. When we got to San Francisco, or Santiago, I believe it was, it was in a yard there, in a fence. Dirty, dusty place, oh, terrible.

Jim: So you got out of the railroad car.

Burns: Yeah, we got out of the railroad car and they lined us up in groups of a hundred again, and they put us on trucks and hauled us over to this camp, prison camp, for this—old Japanese training camp, I think, Japanese Army. And to get water, there's no water in the place, they had a water tank, but there was about a half-inch pipe goin' all over the camp, and it just dribbled out of that little thing. You couldn't get a canteen full. Took you half an hour to get a canteen full of water. But we went down to the river, crick. It was dead horses and dead GIs and everything else in there. So we got water and took it back to camp. We had to boil it in order to drink it. They wouldn't let you drink it.

Jim: Who wouldn't let you?

Burns: The Americans wouldn't let us drink it because it was—

Jim: What Americans?

Woman: The officers.

Burns: The officers.

Jim: Oh, you didn't say you had officers with you.

Burns: Well, the officers—everybody was with us when we surrendered. And then after we got in prison camp, then they took us—separated us and took the service officers some place and the enlisted men another place. They had a few doctors, and I guess probably the camp commander or something was left there, but the other officers were all someplace else. And they got better treatment I think than we did, I'm not sure.

Jim: So you—you drank some river water after you boiled it.

Burns: Right.

Jim: Then, did they give you something to eat again?

Burns: No. Give us something to eat? They didn't hardly give us anything to eat. I mean, we were lucky we got anything.

Woman: [unintelligible]

Burns: Well, they did on some of the way, but I never got anything.

Jim: Okay, so now we're getting pretty hungry.

Burns: Well, yes, we was hungry, I tell ya.

Jim: This is two days now.

Burns: Yeah, probably three days before we got anything to eat. Well, this one ball of rice we got when we're on the trip.

Jim: Okay, so you're in this camp.

Burns: But in camp, we got to the Philippines, and this—what's the name of that? Not Cabatuan, the other one.

Woman: Camp O'Donnell?

Burns: O'Donnell was the first camp. Camp O'Donnell's the first camp. That's where that water was so—just real hot, because it was hot over there, and the water coming out of that little half-inch pipe was so just about boiling. Well, we had to have something to drink anyway, so we drank it, hot water out of that pipe. Whether that was legal or not, I don't know.

Jim: Okay. Then what?

Burns: We got into these barracks, these homemade out of bamboo, and, uh, in different places. And they had sort of a hospital ward down here, but I didn't go to that until I got over to the other camp.

Jim: [unintelligible] get ahead, now.

Burns: Yeah, yeah, but I mean this was—we was in the—

Woman: How long were you at O'Donnell?

Burns: I don't know.

Jim: Days? Couple days?

Burns: Oh, no. We was there, must have been couple three months.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Burns: Yeah, we was there a couple three months before they—and then—the—
[coughs]—when they—

Jim: They must have fed you.

Burns: Well, I tell you. They give us the rice. Whether it was wormy or whether
it was moldy or what it was, we had to do our own cooking. See, the
barracks are here, and then they had a kitchen on this end, with a big,
round, steel—

Jim: Wok?

Burns: I don't know what you call 'em. Must have been a wok of some kind, a
great big one. So we did all our cooking there.

Jim: For everybody.

Burns: Yeah, in that one barracks. Each line had a different cook on it at each
end.

Jim: How many to a barracks?

Burns: Maybe it was a hundred, maybe it was a hundred twenty or so. I think it
was a hundred, though. I believe it was still that hundred that was, each
one. But, uh—

Jim: And then? So that went on day after day. You didn't do anything? They
didn't ask you to do any work?

Burns: Oh, yeah.

Jim: Okay.

Burns: Yeah, we did. We did work. But—

Jim: What'd you do?

Burns: We went out on that airstrip and widened it out. I don't think we
lengthened it even, but we had to use wheelbarrows to haul and shoveled it
to lengthen that runway out. And then we came back in—well, I was sick
most of the time so it didn't make any difference whether I did anything—
'cause you wouldn't get much to eat. If you didn't work, you got about
half a ration and the canteen—well, they had it in bamboo bowls. About
that big around, about that high. And if you worked, you'd get that thing
full, and if you didn't work they'd cut it off a chunk about, oh, so it'd be
about three-quarters of a ration of rice. And that's all you had. Ah—

Jim: All right. So, you were starving then on this diet.

Burns: Starving? I guess we starved all the time I was there.

Jim: You said you were sick.

Burns: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: What kind of sick?

Burns: Well, I don't know. I really—

Jim: You [unintelligible] an intestinal sickness or a lung?

Burns: No, I don't know because I kinda passed out. I don't know what it was. You know, on the way up, on this drive a captain picked me up, and I had a towel, a little towel, about that long, with me. And he took his canteen, got that wet and put it on my head. Because I didn't have no cap on or nothing.

Jim: That was that first march?

Burns: On the march from Mariveles on up to this San Fernando. Yeah. He was the one that picked me up; otherwise I would have been passed out. They probably would have killed me right there. So, uh, I got to camp, we didn't have any beds, just some bamboo slats to lay on. Nothing to sleep on, no beds, no bedding, or nothing. We go to bed—well, I was upstairs. They had two levels. You had to crawl upstairs or else down below. 'Cause I had to be upstairs. I don't know which one it was, whether it was a tornado or what the heck they call it, comes through there.

Jim: Typhoon.

Burns: Typhoon, well, it might have been a typhoon.

Jim: While you're at Camp O'Donnell?

Burns: Yeah, I'm quite sure it was Camp O'Donnell. I don't think it was the other one. It's kind of hard to remember from the two camps. But, this typhoon come through there and wipes out pret' near all of our camp. Well, then that friend of mine from Janesville was in a tank outfit, and he got yellow jaundice. Well, he's got yellow jaundice, you got to have sugar to fix that up. So, I didn't have any money, but I went outside when I had to go to the bathroom, and they had outside latrines, you know. I went out there to go to the bathroom and here was fifty cents, fifty centavos laying

there. And I went back quick like into the barracks, and the guy had bought a great big bag of brown sugar. For a canteen cup, he said fifty cents, for a big canteen cup full of sugar.

Jim: Who did he buy that from?

Burns: I don't know whether he got it from Japanese, he must have got it through the Japanese or what. 'Cause it was a big burlap bag full of brown sugar. It wasn't processed, I mean white, it was brown sugar I think, just from the sugar cane. But where he got it from, I don't know, but I suppose he had money and he allowed the Japanese to sell him, or the Japanese let him buy some sugar. I give this guy all the sugar I could get, and then he got over the yellow jaundice. Then he got diphtheria. So they put him down this ward and he passed out, passed away. But I don't know whether it was—I think it was this camp, this first one, because the second one—

Jim: You didn't have a long march?

Burns: After we got to camp we didn't have to march anymore.

Jim: How long was the march, the initial march up to Camp O'Donnell? How long did that take you?

Burns: Ahh, I don't remember.

Jim: A day or two or—

Burns: Oh, it must have been two or three days, at least. [Approx. 3 sec. interruption by public address system announcement]

Jim: So, during that time did some of the guys fall out of line?

Burns: Oh, lots of them did. There was lots of them of did. No water, you couldn't get water. And the Filipinos tried to give us stuff, and they wouldn't let you do that.

Jim: Civilians?

Burns: Civilians tried to give us water and stuff.

Jim: The Japanese wouldn't let them?

Burns: Wouldn't let them. No way.

Jim: So what did the Japanese do to these boys that fell?

Burns: Kill 'em.

Woman: They'd bayonet them.

Burns: Kill 'em.

Jim: Bayonet 'em or—

Burns: Sure, sure. Shoot them or kill 'em or—

Jim: Either one, or both?

Burns: Either one, I suppose. Yeah, they'd take them out, and if they happened to drop on the road—

Woman: Didn't you say that the young Japanese were the worst?

Burns: Oh yeah, the young officers were all right. It's the young privates that thought that, well, they're going to get even with you. It wasn't the officers so much as it was the younger guys. The privates were mean, yeah, yeah.

Jim: So then after Camp O'Donnell you say you were there for—

Burns: Well, I don't know just how long, and I don't know how I got to the hospital area. And I woke up between two mosquito bars, and I had a handful of pills. Now where the pills come from, I don't know what the pills were—what they were for or nothing, but I had a handful of pills. I said, "Well, that must be something for me." So I took the whole works and swallowed 'em. They said that anybody that wants food, go over to the mess hall.

Jim: Who said that?

Burns: The guys in the ward there.

Jim: You mean the prisoners?

Burns: Yeah, one of the prisoners, yeah. He said, "You got to walk over if you can. Otherwise we'll have 'em bring it to you." Well, what they give 'em to bring to us was nothing, just a little dab of stuff. So I crawled over to the mess hall and got my own food and brought it back and ate it. And then they finally, I don't know a couple days or so, they said is "Anyone who wants to go to Japan, get outside and crawl into that truck." Well, I got outside, I couldn't crawl in the truck. I only got up on the tire, and somebody boosted me out into the truck. I couldn't lift—

Jim: Too weak?

Burns: Oh, was I ever weak. Funny I lived at all.

Jim: Because you were starving you think?

Burns: Yeah, right. We had better water in Cabanatuan. In Cabanatuan we had more, better water.

Jim: I don't know where that is.

Burns: Well, Cabanatuan—the first camp was O'Donnell. The second camp was Cabanatuan.

Jim: Was that in the Philippines?

Burns: Yeah, yeah, it's all in the Philippines. There was more water there. That's a better camp, seemed like a better camp.

Woman: The first camp was the worst then.

Burns: Yeah, the first camp was just a brig.

Jim: All right. Now we're at the second camp.

Burns: Yeah, it was at Cabanatuan,

Jim: Did you get better food?

Burns: Uh, not—well yes, I think we did because the thing is we started this—Lieutenant Jones asked—he could talk a little bit of Japanese or something. I don't know, he could got by with 'em. But he wanted to start a garden out east, out—was it west of camp? I don't know if it was of camp, anyway. And so they let him have a garden. Can you see it?

Jim: Go ahead.

Burns: And so we opened up this land, and we had tomatoes and watermelons and sweet potatoes, but we got the tops of the sweet potatoes—

Woman: They took all the good stuff.

Burns: They took all the bottoms of the sweet potatoes. They took all them themselves, you know.

- Jim: The Japanese guards?
- Burns: Yeah, well, the Japanese themselves. You see, the Japanese had—we were in a compound, see? The Japs were around this compound.
- Jim: Japanese soldiers?
- Burns: Yeah, or the guards. I don't know if it was guards or soldiers. Anyway, we went out this gate to work in this garden. And we planted over a thousand acres of garden out there.
- Jim: They ate most of it?
- Burns: Well, yeah, and we had to water the plants. We had to go down—took two five gallon cans and carry the water from this ditch. There was a great big hole in the water, and we picked water out of there and took up and watered these plants. That was before I got sick. When I went to the Philippines that was after that. This was in Cabanatuan, you know.
- Woman: Didn't you say you got sick at O'Donnell?
- Burns: Yes, that's where I got sick, at O'Donnell. But I got sick at—that's where passed out in Cabanatuan before I went to Japan. You see, but I was sick most of the time in O'Donnell, too.
- Woman: Tell him the reason why you went to Japan.
- Jim: Well, we're not ready for that yet.
- Burns: Well—yeah.
- Woman: Okay.
- Jim: Don't get away from the story here. So at this camp, were the sleeping quarters the same?
- Burns: Same kind, yeah.
- Jim: And the food, would you say it was the same? Rice balls and—
- Burns: Well, except we had a few more vegetables.
- Jim: Ah, some of which you grew.
- Burns: Right, right. Which we grew. And we would have—they'd have, oh, a thing about like this with four holes, four bars on, and we'd load that up

full of vegetables, and four of us of guys would carry them in. Now, no clothes, just a g-strap, a g-string, that's all we had.

Jim: No clothes?

Burns: No clothes. We had a string, a g-string of leather, about like that, stick it in, tie it on here and pull it up through and pull it over the top. That is what we had, and we made our own shoes out of boards. We put our foot on a board and marked it out, and put, I don't know where the nails come from, but the nails, were with cleats on the bottom of 'em so you could walk on 'em. And we had leather straps from old shoes or something to go over the toes. So we had to make our own shoes and everything.

Jim: Did anybody try to escape?

Burns: Oh, I suppose they did. A lot of them—

Jim: But there wasn't any place to go.

Burns: Well, that's it. I see three guys. I don't know whether they tried to escape or whether they were gettin' food from the Filipinos. Filipinos would try to get to the fence and give the guys food. Now, whether they were captured that way or what it was, but they had to dig their own graves outside the fence. We had to stand watch it. They dug their own grave, they had to kneel 'em down, tied their hands behind 'em. They kneeled over these graves, and the Japs shot them. They just fell in the hole. Now, who covered the hole up I don't know, but it's hard to remember that stuff.

Woman: No wonder you don't like the Japanese.

Jim: It's okay. Then—

Burns: Well, then, after I got sick, I got in this truck. I said, "Is anybody going to Japan?" I thought better to go to Japan than to stay here in the Philippines because if the Americans come over to the Philippines they'd probably before they'd let us go back to America they would shoot us. So if I went to Japan I'd have a better chance, and I might have better food. And it was better, not much, but it was better.

Jim: Okay, let's not get too far ahead.

Burns: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: So when you left the Philippines you went by truck to the ocean somewhere?

Burns: Right, it was Manila, went to Manila, and got on one of these old freighters that was made in Canada. It was written on the big board—

Woman: Republic, was it called? Or something—

Burns: No, no, the Republic's when I gone over to the Philippines.

Jim: Okay. And then what? Where'd you go?

Burns: I don't know what the heck—

Jim: You don't remember where it was?

Burns: I couldn't tell you—

Jim: North or south in which island?

Burns: It was the south island.

Jim: Was it in the main island of Japan?

Burns: No, no, it wasn't the main island. No, it was the one south.

Jim: Where Sasebo was? Down near there?

Burns: Right across the bay from Nagasaki. Now, where Nagasaki—

Jim: Yeah, that's the lower island.

Burns: Okay. It was right on the bay, right thirty-five miles across the bay from Nagasaki.

Jim: I've been there.

Burns: Yeah. Oh, you [laughs]—

Jim: Okay. All right, now—

Burns: It was a coal mine; we worked in a coal mine.

Jim: Wait a minute, before we leave the Philippines, did you see anybody from the Red Cross?

Burns: No.

Jim: Did you see anybody from the Salvation Army?

Burns: No.

Jim: Did anyone ever attempt to bring you mail or anything from the States?

Burns: Not that I know of.

Jim: Did you see a newspaper or anything?

Burns: No.

Jim: Did anybody have a radio they snuck in there?

Burns: Not that I know of.

Jim: So for all you know, you had absolutely no idea what was going on in the rest of the world.

Burns: Right, right.

Jim: Okay. Last question about—how long would you say, or when was it you got to Japan? That will tell me the same answer.

Burns: Japan? I think it was in October, September, October of '44.

Jim: '44?

Burns: '44.

Jim: Before you got to Japan?

Burns: No, that's when I left the Philippines. '44—it was either—se, because '45 I was there. I worked the coal mine from '44 to '45.

Jim: But you see there's so much time here.

Burns: Right.

Jim: You went to the Philippines—they captured you in '41.

Burns: '41, '41—'42.

Woman: '42.

Jim: Oh, '42, excuse me.

Burns: Yeah, and that was in the Philippines—

Jim: So you were there then two years plus—

Burns: Yeah, in the Philippines—

Jim: Two and a half years.

Burns: Right.

Jim: Before you got to Japan.

Burns: Right.

Jim: And most of this time is spent at your last camp in the Philippines?

Burns: Yeah.

Woman: Cabanatuan.

Burns: Cabanatuan.

Jim: Cabanatuan. That was your major camp then?

Burns: Yup.

Jim: 'Cause at O'Donnell you were just, say, maybe three months—

Burns: Yeah, if it was that long. I don't know just how long it was at O'Donnell.

Jim: The distance in those two camps was? A days walk?

Burns: They took us by trucks, so—

Jim: That's right.

Burns: They put us on trucks and pulled us over there.

Jim: Okay. Now we got that squared away.

Burns: Yeah.

Jim: All right. I can't think of anything else more about the Philippines that I want to know. Ah, one—your treatment of you get any better while you were in the Philippines?

- Burns: I don't think it was anything except that when I got them pills. That's the only thing I got, the medicine. That was the only medication I got. And I don't know where that came from. [Approx. 15 sec. pause in recording] But that's when I woke up in between them two mosquito bars, and I woke up and I had that handful of pills.
- Jim: But there wasn't any Japanese doctor taking care of you?
- Burns: Not that I know of, not me.
- Jim: When you were sick who did you see in the hospital?
- Burns: The ward boy, ward man, ward boy.
- Jim: He was American or—?
- Burns: Yeah, American, American?
- Jim: You didn't see any Japanese in the hospital?
- Burns: No doctors, no American doctors either.
- Jim: And this guy was a medic?
- Burns: Yup.
- Jim: Did you see an American doctor—
- Burns: No.
- Jim: In the camp?
- Burns: No, not there. I did in Japan, but not here, not in the Philippines.
- Jim: Okay.
- Burns: No doctors in the Philippines.
- Jim: Right, so now we're down in Japan and at your new camp. What was that camp's name?
- Burns: Camp [Fukuoka] 17. I think that's what they called it, but I don't know what Japanese name it was, but it was a camp.
- Jim: How many people were in that camp?

Burns: Oh, boy.

Jim: 10,000 or more?

Burns: Well, we had Americans, English, Australians and Dutch. Now what was the other ones I don't know.

Jim: Were there a large number of those other ones?

Burns: There was quite a few, quite a few.

Jim: How many others? How many Americans?

Burns: Well, there was one or two barracks of each one. And the barracks—let's see, the Americans had, I don't know, one, two. I don't know, two or three.

Woman: More Americans—

Burns: Yeah, there was more Americans than I think there was—

Jim: I see. And when you got there was it a new camp that was just starting? Or had those other folks been there and you were late comers?

Burns: No, they were there. Somebody was there the whole time.

Jim: Before you got there?

Burns: Yeah, right.

Jim: Okay. And after you got off the ship, they put you on trucks and drove you to the camp?

Burns: There was—we went on a train first. Went on a train to someplace and they picked us up. Well, I believe we took a train right to where that town was where we got off to get into—we walked—

Jim: Camp 17.

Burns: Yeah, right.

Jim: And how was your condition then?

Burns: Huh! Not very much better, I'll tell ya.

Jim: You mean you were weak from bein' starved?

- Burns: Oh yeah, right right.
- Jim: I mean, that was your main problem, starvin' to death.
- Burns: Right, right, and then we didn't have any clothes.
- Jim: How much did you weigh? You probably don't know how much you weighed.
- Burns: No, didn't have no way. I was ninety-eight pounds when I came out of prison camp.
- Jim: You probably didn't weigh much more before you started there.
- Burns: And when I left prison camp the war was over, and we went down to this place in Japan to get something to eat. Some rice, or something— anything, I don't care what it was, before the B-17's came over to drop the rations. Went down here and they wouldn't give us anything. They said, "No way." The Japanese wouldn't give us any rice or anything. So we went back to camp, and the Japanese guards left all their rifles in the rack. There was no ammunition, but they left the rifles there. So a bunch of guys took those rifles and went back down here, to this big warehouse, whatever it was. And they said, "We're going to get some rice, or we're let ya—"
- Jim: Shoot ya.
- Burns: Shoot you. "Oh, boys, help yourselves! Help yourselves!" So we went in there and got all kinds of stuff and took it back to camp.
- Jim: What kind of stuff?
- Burns: Rice, that's all they had. Big bags.
- Woman: That's after the war was over.
- Burns: Yeah, the war was over. Big—
- Jim: Right. We're getting ahead of our story here.
- Woman: Yeah, that's what I was thinking, we're gettin' ahead—
- Jim: You jumped to this thing—
- Burns: Well, that's what it's from, the Philippines. That's what it's—

- Jim: I understand. I'm trying to keep it in order, so that other people, when they listen to this can make some sense out of it. You know what you're talking about.
- Burns: Right.
- Woman: Right.
- Jim: So, we got to our new camp, was it immediately better? The weather? The surroundings, and et cetera?
- Woman: It was cold.
- Burns: It was colder. And they did give us shoes.
- Jim: American shoes, or Japanese?
- Burns: No, the Japanese. The big toe was separate from the rest of the toes. And it was a canvas shoe, kind of a rubber bottom and canvas top. And they did give us clothes. Well, maybe I'm gettin' ahead of myself again.
- Jim: Well, anyway, so this was in October so it was still pretty warm then.
- Burns: Well, it was cold there. It really wasn't cold until the snow came. I don't know what month it was that snow came. Must have been December, January; I don't know what it was. But, anyway, it snowed. We didn't just have those shoes to go on—we had to work in the coal mine.
- Jim: In this Japanese camp, did you hear any of the war going on?
- Burns: No, we didn't know how—about the only way you could tell is by the way the Japanese fed us. If they fed us good, then the Americans were getting closer. That's the only way we could tell is how the Japanese treated us.
- Jim: But nobody still had smuggled in a radio or anything like that.
- Burns: Nope, nope.
- Jim: Did you have any meetings with any of the Japanese civilians around your camp?
- Burns: They wouldn't let you talk to the—oh, you can't talk to the Japanese anyway.
- Jim: No, but if you waved some money in their face they might.

Burns: We didn't have any money!

Jim: You spent it all in the Philippines.

Woman: What about the cigarettes? Give 'em a cigarette—

Burns: We didn't have any cigarettes. The only time we got cigarettes—

Jim: From who?

Burns: From the American Red Cross.

Jim: Whoa. Wait a minute.

Burns: That was in the Philippines.

Jim: I asked you if you came across the Red Cross. You said no.

Burns: But the Red Cross at Christmas time. If we hadn't had the Red Cross to help us, we'd have all been dead. The whole works. They gave us Red Cross boxes. They gave us boxes from Canada. They gave us Red Cross boxes—I don't know if they were Red Cross boxes, but it was boxes from South Africa. Now whether these were all Red Cross—but Red Cross wasn't allowed in there. The Japanese wouldn't let them in there for a long time. But when Christmas came, Christmas time came, then they let us have—the first year.

Jim: Now we're back to the Philippines again.

Burns: Right.

Jim: So you really had some contact with them—at least their supplies.

Burns: That was the only time that we got anything.

Jim: And which Christmas was that? The first Christmas?

Burns: The first Christmas.

Jim: That would have been in '42 then?

Burns: Yup. That was the only time we got any Red Cross boxes or anything else. No mail, no nothin' else. We were lucky to get that. We had to split that with two or three guys. We couldn't with just one box, had two—three guys with us.

Jim: Well, back to Japan.

Burns: Yeah. Okay.

Jim: Now, think about your new camp. You said the food was a little better.

Burns: Yeah.

Jim: You got more of the same?

Burns: Well, no, we had a few more vegetables. They had rice and—

Jim: Fish?

Burns: No. Well, what little fish—we got—yeah, we got some blubber, whale blubber one time. We got the whale—and everybody got sick. I think it was rotten. I think it washed ashore. I don't know, but it was awfully darn greasy, but it was protein.

Jim: Blubber is pretty much protein.

Burns: We ate it—it was fat, but we ate it.

Woman: Well, when you're hungry—

Burns: Anything to make any difference, boy, it just—

Jim: Still no cigarettes. Didn't see any cigarettes, nobody had any?

Burns: Well, the only cigarettes they got was in the Red Cross boxes.

Jim: But that must have been gone by the time you got to Japan. That was two years later.

Burns: Well, they used the cigarettes for money. One cigarette for a bowl of rice. Everybody was trading cigarettes for money—or money was for—that was your money that you spent over there. And if you worked the Japanese would give you ten cents a day.

Jim: Oh, this is—now it's a different deal in Japan.

Burns: No, if you worked you'd get ten cents a day, but there was no way to buy it. What could you spend it for?

Jim: Right.

- Burns: What good is it?
- Jim: This is in your new camp now we're talking—
- Burns: No, all the way through.
- Jim: But you said before you got a full bowl of rice if you worked.
- Burns: A full bowl of rice if you worked, yeah. And a half a bowl if you don't work.
- Jim: Right. Now you're saying something else, you see, which confuses this.
- Burns: What do you mean it confused you?
- Jim: Well, now you say they give you ten cents—
- Burns: Ten cents for working. But what good is the money, I mean, you couldn't spend anything, couldn't buy anything with it. I mean there's no place to spend it. You couldn't buy nothin' from the Japanese. What good is it?
- Jim: Well, I understand, I'm not arguing with you. I just want to know what it was, you see.
- Burns: Yeah, yeah. Ten cents if you worked. Well, ten cents in Japanese money is—might as well say it's worthless anyway.
- Jim: Of course. Okay, and what kind of work did you do at this new camp in Japan?
- Burns: Well, in Japan then I worked the coal mine.
- Jim: What did you do?
- Burns: Preparation. In other words, they were strip-mining this mine; the Americans, I think, Americans had something to do with that coal mine, you know. And the Japanese were taking it—we were making a wall to hold the ceiling up. And then they were takin'—they'd already this coal out. So we had to make a wall in here so they could get the coal from here.
- Jim: What kind of wall?
- Burns: Well, make it out of logs and dirt. We had to blow a hole in the ceiling, and some of the rock—

Jim: Not cement?

Burns: No, no, no. No—

Jim: Just logs.

Burns: Made it out of logs and stones and dirt. Anything you could get to fill the back up—they made a regular brace like this, and then across this way.

Jim: Did you shore up the roof?

Burns: Shore up the roof. And then you put dirt and stones and everything in to build it up so it went to the ceiling.

Jim: But you didn't hammer at the coal.

Burns: No, I didn't have nothin' to do with the coal at all. It was a preparation crew and an extraction crew, and there was something else. Anyway, there was eight hour shifts. Eight? Yeah, three times eight is twenty-four, isn't it? Yeah, well, that's—there was three shifts goin' into the coal—

Jim: You worked one, and then you were off two?

Burns: Yeah—you go off, yeah. And then when the Americans blew half our camp up we had to sleep in the same barracks, the same beds as the other guys because this bunch was gone, and so we had to use their beds.

Jim: When the Americans what?

Burns: Bombed our camp with fire bombs.

Jim: Well, wait a minute, when did they do that?

Burns: Before the end of the war. Before they bombed Nagasaki. We were in Japan, and of course these planes come over, you know. Every once—you could see the planes comin' over. We had air-raid shelters in camp 'cause they—

Woman: You knew they were American planes.

Burns: Yeah, American planes come over and dropped bombs on our camp.

Jim: How soon after you got to that camp did that start?

Burns: Oh, golly.

Jim: In '45?

Burns: Oh yeah, it had to be in '45. Yeah, before they dropped the—

Jim: Oh, I understand that.

Burns: Yeah, it was before that, but not much. Maybe a couple, three, four weeks, or maybe a month.

Jim: It is my understanding that they moved close enough to Japan—

Burns: Right.

Jim: In the spring because Iwo Jima, you see, was in the spring.

Burns: Yeah, yeah. So—ya see, I didn't keep track of it; I didn't write anything down.

Jim: That's all right. That's not what we need here anyway. So, how did you get along with your fellow prisoners? Tell me about this. What was your relationship with these guys? You were pretty close?

Burns: Yeah. Yeah, I think we got along fine. I don't think there was any trouble whatsoever—

Jim: They were nice guys?

Burns: Awful nice guys. Everybody seemed to be—

Jim: Everybody sort of took care of themselves.

Burns: Yeah, we took care of each other, you know, too. I mean if—like I say this guy was sick, and I had to take care of him. 'Course that was in the Philippines.

Jim: He died of diphtheria you said.

Burns: Yeah, that was in the Philippines. He was in the Philippines, though.

Jim: So, have you kept track of all these guys?

Burns: Ah, only one that was in—no, two from my outfit, wasn't it? One, he is in Mississippi, and the other one is out in Washington some place.

Jim: Do you still correspond with them?

Burns: No, not no more. We used to.

Woman: The one in Mississippi—we've been to see him.

Burns: The one in Mississippi is—

Jim: You visited?

Burns: Yeah.

Woman: Mm hmm.

Jim: Oh.

Burns: I went down to see him. Oh, he didn't know who I was at first.

Jim: Oh, really?

Burns: And we told him. "Oh Gosh!" he says, that was really nice.

Jim: He must have been thrilled.

Burns: Oh, he was thrilled, big great, big guy.

Woman: He said you made my day.

Burns: But he can't—you know, he can't hardly see. He sees double. I said, "How do you drive?" "Well," he said, "I just drive in between the two."

Jim: The two spots? [all laugh] The fella in Washington you don't keep in contact(??)?

Burns: No, we sent Christmas cards at one time, but—

Woman: For a few years.

Burns: Yeah, but I don't know what it is anymore. And the one in—

Woman: Tell him what you did in the prison camp. As sick as, you know, hungry as you were, they made recipes out or menus—

Burns: Oh, I got some in my book. I got my little book out in the thing, and we—to make, you know, he was hungry. So we made—I got a few out in the book, a little book I got, that I had in service and in the prison camp, little black book.

Jim: That has some value.

Burns: Has it?

Jim: That's pretty valuable.

Burns: Well, I got it, and I made a picture of a motorcycle that I drew—

Jim: One of the things that you were thinkin' about.

Burns: Right, right. That's just—

Woman: What were some of your menus?

Burns: Oh, I could—I'd have to show you.

Woman: Roast beef and stuff like that.

Burns: I couldn't—

Jim: Just give me an example.

Burns: I couldn't explain; tell you. It's—

Woman: You told me you've got it written down.

Burns: I know, but I can't tell you what—

Woman: That's that little book.

Burns: Right. It's in that little book. I'll show you the book. I got it with me.

Jim: Okay.

Burns: I'll even give you—to the—for the—

Jim: We'd love it.

Burns: Right.

Jim: Those are really unusual, but I don't want to waste our time with that.

Woman: Oh, okay.

Jim: We'll get you to that.

- Burns: All right.
- Jim: So, I mean, these kind of menus. You would plan a meal that you would look forward to eating sometime? Is that what your—the menu was?
- Burns: I 'spose, yeah. I 'spose that we made it—
- Jim: There's nothing there that's available for you. So it was meals that you made up?
- Burns: Right. Yeah breakfast and dinner and supper, you know, and so forth.
- Jim: You always had steak for every meal I suppose?
- Burns: No, no steak. Well, I suppose there was steak in some of them, but I don't remember just what they were now. But they're in that little book anyway, whatever it was. And then my bunch from my outfit is in there, too.
- Jim: The what?
- Burns: The bunch that was with me.
- Jim: The names?
- Burns: Yeah, names of—I think most of them.
- Jim: Did anybody have a camera?
- Burns: No. The only camera that I saw over there was when this guy from Chicago Tribune came in after the war. He come in—he was all dressed up.
- Woman: That's the first they knew the war was over, was when he came.
- Burns: Yeah, we didn't know the war was over until he came in there. He was out there taking pictures, and I says, "Where did that man come from?" And I still don't know how he got into camp. And he said, "The war is over, fellas."
- Jim: Didn't the guards leave immediately?
- Burns: Well, I don't know when they left. They left at night, I guess, because they were still there when that guy came in; I think they were.
- Jim: So, is that all you did at this camp was work the coal mine?

- Burns: Right.
- Jim: And you stayed there until the end of the war?
- Burns: Right.
- Jim: Now, I want you to describe the bombing raid when they bombed your camp.
- Burns: I was in the coal mine, so I don't know. But they burnt half the camp out.
- Jim: You could hear it, couldn't you?
- Burns: No, I was in the coal mine. I don't hear it. We walked quite a ways to the coal mine.
- Jim: Oh, you didn't even know that your camp had been bombed?
- Burns: No, not till after we got back out to camp.
- Jim: Did a lot of your boys get killed?
- Burns: I don't know. They don't say nothin'. They don't tell you nothin'.
- Jim: I know, but you got back to your barracks. Was the barracks [**End of Tape 1, Side A**] down?
- Burns: Well, the barracks was all burned out. It was just straw, you know. They wouldn't have beds; they had straw.
- Jim: You mean you were on the working shift, but there was two other shifts.
- Burns: Right, right, so they didn't burn all the camp, just the part of it where we was. And now we had to move into this barracks, because that bunch was on work and detail. So we moved into their beds and slept in their beds, you know. But our kitchen is the same, and they had a big tank. Big tank full of hot water. You didn't have any clothes or no heat, no nothing, in there. They had electricity, but one bulb. But to get warm you had to go into that water after you come out of the coal mine. They gave you some soap—I don't know what kind of it was. It was more like lard than anything else. It was kind of pink colored, and you had to take this water in big buckets about like that. Dip in to get some water and soap down a little bit. Then you'd take some more and rinse yourself off.
- Jim: Every time you came out of the coal mine you had to do that?

- Burns: Right, right. And then you had to bow to the Buddha. Before you went into the coal mine, and when you came out you had to bow to the Buddha.
- Jim: Or what?
- Burns: Oh, I don't know what'd happened. We didn't try to find out [Woman and Jim laugh], you know.
- Jim: You were afraid of him.
- Burns: You bet.
- Jim: He have a big club?
- Burns: Well, I don't know, we got beat up a couple of times down in the coal mine, but, I mean, it was—
- Jim: Why?
- Burns: I don't know, we weren't doing nothing or something. I don't know what it—you can't understand the Japanese. They'd probably lick you just for doing nothing, you know?
- Jim: They never were really very nice to you then?
- Burns: Not that can I remember that any of them was. No, I can't think of any of them that was really what you'd say friendly.
- Jim: And you said when the Americans started getting closer to Japan you got better treatment?
- Burns: Right, right.
- Jim: Better treatment meaning better food?
- Burns: Right, and of course they left us alone no matter where you were. If you didn't pay no attention to them, they didn't bother you either in any of the camps.
- Jim: And you could grow what you want to—
- Burns: Right.
- Jim: Have your own gardens and all?
- Burns: Well, we couldn't—the only place you could have a garden—

- Jim: You said in the Philippines they took all your stuff.
- Burns: Well, I know, but that was the only place that we had anything was in the Philippines, was the big garden that Lieutenant Jones had. And they had whatever they want, the Japanese had. And what was left, that's what we got. And that wasn't very much.
- Jim: And in Japan, did you have another garden?
- Burns: No, no gardens in Japan. No way! You couldn't grow anything there. That was all slag from the coal mine that was—that's where—
- Jim: Oh, all around the camp—there was no piece of land—
- Burns: No dirt, it was all stuff that they had taken out of this coal mine and put over here, and that was where they built our camp or our houses or whatever you want to call them; on this filth—fill on the Indian—
- Jim: On stilts?
- Burns: No, it wasn't stilts, but it was—it's—I don't know what you'd call it—slag from the coal mine.
- Jim: And these were wooden camps? Wooden barracks?
- Burns: Wooden barracks. And to smoke we could smoke there.
- Jim: But you didn't have any cigarettes.
- Burns: Yeah, we had cigarettes. They got cigarettes. I don't know where they come from, but if you had a cigarette it would last you about three days. One cigarette would last you three days because you'd light it up and put out; light it up and put it out [laughs]; light it up and put it out. So it would last us quite a while.
- Jim: You just took one drag and put it out?
- Burns: Well, a couple of drags probably, but not very many I'll tell you 'cause—and then at the end, we'd save that tobacco, slip that out and save it and then we'd roll it, and they gave us—I've got some paper out there in the car.
- Jim: Some cigarette paper?

- Burns: Well, it isn't cigarette paper; it's toilet paper. They gave us toilet paper. But we used it, not for toilet paper. We used it for rollin' our cigarettes with. But it's kind of flimsy stuff.
- Jim: Now, when you first got to camp you said you still were in practically no clothes at all.
- Burns: In Japan. We still had—
- Jim: But it was getting cold.
- Burns: Yeah, then they started giving us clothes. But it was like canvas or something, it was real thick stuff.
- Jim: Trousers and coats?
- Burns: Yeah, and then they gave us overcoats from the Philippine Army—must have been Philippine Army—not Philippine, Australian.
- Jim: Oh!
- Burns: They give us these big overcoats. That's the only thing we had to cover up with, we didn't have no blankets.
- Jim: Did you talk to the prisoners from the other prisoner camps? The Australians or the British? You never—
- Burns: No, no.
- Jim: Saw them or talked to them?
- Burns: No, they were in a different area. They were in one area, and we was over in this area. And we marched from there, out the gate and over to the coal mine and walked back again. We had to be in order all the way through.
- Jim: Nobody tried to escape from that camp?
- Burns: No, what could they do in Japan?
- Jim: I understand, but people do strange things.
- Burns: Yeah. Not in Japan, that I know of. But there was one guy, as he worked in the coal mine he went berserk. I mean really lost his—and he came to camp, and they gave him a broom. And he carried that broom; I think he went to bed with it. The next day we went to work, he didn't come back out. We wondered where the heck he went to in this camp. And here he

built a whole wall down in the coal mine all by himself. There was nobody there. And we had to close camp and everybody go down and find out where he was. He was lost, but he was in the coal mine building that wall by himself.

Jim: You found him?

Burns: Crazy—yeah, nuttier than a fruit cake.

Jim: So you found him and brought him back out.

Burns: We brought him back out—

Jim: What'd they do to him?

Burns: Nothing. When he stood he had to have that broom with him. You know, we had to count off in the morning, count off at night before—

Jim: They checked you morning and night?

Burns: Yup.

Jim: Sound off by numbers?

Burns: Yup, sen ni-hyaku nana juu-nana, that was my number. Sen ni-hyaku nana juu-nana. 1277. Yeah, every day we had to stand up.

Jim: That was in Japan then?

Burns: Yup, yup.

Jim: And at night, too?

Burns: Yup.

Jim: Once before you went to bed—

Burns: Right. When we went to the coal mine we had to have so many people, and when we came out we had to have so many people, and that's where that guy was lost, you see. He stayed in the coal mine and built that wall by himself.

Jim: What time would they get you up in the morning?

Burns: Oh gosh, I don't know. I really couldn't tell you because we didn't have no watches or nothing. We had no time—no way to tell time.

- Jim: So you only knew it was time to get up when they opened the door and started hollering?
- Burns: Well, we had to get something to eat. We had to get up at a certain time to get somethin' to eat. I suppose they said, "Everybody get up for breakfast" or something, and we went over to the mess hall and got somethin' to eat. Then they gave us a bento. A bento was a little box that they'd give you to put some rice in or a biscuit. Don't eat the biscuit and go down the coal mine because it's yeast in there, and it would work on your stomach, and you'd get full of gas. You'd eat the rice down in the coal mine, don't eat the biscuits. So we'd eat the biscuit on topside. The coal mine was you had to go about a mile or half a mile down in the ground with a car or a track.
- Jim: Tram.
- Burns: Tram, yeah.
- Jim: And if you ate the biscuit, what happened?
- Burns: You'd get awful sick, because it would be you'd get gas. Oh, that gas, I 'spose that yeast in there would work.
- Jim: And?
- Burns: And so you'd get sick; you couldn't do nothin'. So they said, "Don't eat the biscuit down in the coal mine. Take that rice down in the coal mine." So at noon they'd give us a biscuit and—well, I think we went at noon. I think we went right after noon. I think we went to work after we had our noon lunch. Then they worked from until there till 7:00, 8:00 o'clock at night I guess. I don't remember just what it was.
- Jim: Were you fed twice a day?
- Burns: Ahh, I believe so. I believe it was twice a day. I'm not sure.
- Jim: Did the food get better as it got close to the end?
- Burns: Well, yeah because—well, in Japan it wasn't so much better.
- Woman: You weren't towards the end.
- Burns: Well, I know, but in Japan we had cherry leaf tea. Do you know what cherry leaf tea is?
- Jim: No.

- Burns: Well, I don't know—the Japanese have a lot of tea. To have anything to drink, they had a big round cauldron of some kind or urn, and they had this heated with some hot water. They put these cherry leaves, they were sticks about that long, you know, I 'spose they just grabbed the leaves off the trees and throwed 'em in there and they made this tea. Which wasn't too bad. We didn't have no sugar or nothing to put in there or no anything else, but at least it was better than just drinking plain water. It had a flavoring to it. We did get a few more vegetables I think in Japan. Not very much, but it was more.
- Jim: And the Red Cross? Supplies or people?
- Burns: No, no, supplies maybe. Might have got a Red Cross box. I'm not sure now.
- Jim: But you never saw any Red Cross people?
- Burns: No, no.
- Jim: Salvation Army?
- Burns: No.
- Jim: Neither one.
- Burns: No. The only one that I saw American was when the war was over.
- Jim: The reporter from the Chicago Tribune?
- Burns: Yup, that's the only one that we knew of that ever come in there. And then I didn't get no mail until now, after the war was over.
- Jim: That was your first mail?
- Burns: Yup, and they come in with this—and I got the letters out there, the telegrams or whatever you call them from Japanese—Japanese stationery.
- Jim: So the folks back home didn't know whether you were alive or dead?
- Woman: You see “missing in action”?
- Jim: Yeah, I got that.
- Burns: Not till after the war was over. Then we walked from prison camp down to the railroad station. Then the Japanese kicked all the rest of the Japs off of

there and let us, there was three or four hundred of us on this train, and they drove us down to this airport. The American MPs had taken over. I don't know who it was, if it was Japanese or Americans. Anyway, in Japan, and that's where we flew out of there to the Philippines.

Jim: The airport at Sasebo or near Nagasaki? It wouldn't have been—

Burns: Oh, no it wasn't near Nagasaki, no. It was someplace else. I don't remember. But we had to walk from the prison camp to this, and we was figuring ourselves we were gonna go over there, and here there were four or five hundred of us that went at the same time. We all figured about the same time.

Jim: How long did you stay there?

Burns: Well, what do you mean, where?

Jim: Well you went to the airfield—

Burns: Went to the airfield, got the train, went down to the airfield. We got to the airfield—

Jim: You didn't all get in the plane at the same time?

Burns: No, no, no, but at this—[Approx. 3 sec. interruption by PA system announcement]

Jim: Ah, sorry. Scared me.

Woman: That's all right.

Burns: Scared me, too [laughs].

Jim: So you got to the airport. There was five hundred of 'em. Then what?

Burns: They got us to this camp, and they give us pork chops and fried potatoes and things for supper—

Jim: These are the first American soldiers you'd seen?

Burns: And I got sick.

Jim: Right?

Burns: I mean—yeah, that was the first time we saw any Americans. And I tell you, they were great big guys. Oh, MPs, MPs—

- Woman: They looked real good.
- Burns: Ho, ho, ho.
- Jim: And of course everybody ate more then they should have, and they all got sick, right?
- Burns: Oh, you bet, did we ever get sick. They should have give us something more lenient than that, but, no, they gave their bunch the same meal, and of course we ate the same meals they did. Oh boy, I wish I'd have left it alone. Hadn't any brains.
- Jim: Stomach probably about that—
- Burns: Right. And did I eat, oh, pork chops and fried potatoes—I don't know what else it was. There was some more stuff, too.
- Jim: I'm sure nothing ever tasted so good.
- Burns: Ahh, I said, "Ah ha, I'm back in the United States." [laughs] But I was still in Japan, but I still said, "Oh we're home, we made it."
- Jim: And then you stayed there until they arranged the air?
- Burns: No, the next morning after that, I got up the next morning for breakfast, and I went into this one line. I come out, force (??) my mess kit, and they said, "Anybody that hasn't had breakfast get over in this other line." I rushed through, quick like over to the other corner [Jim laughs], over to this other line and I got in that line. I couldn't eat much, but I did eat some more, and I got out, and they were calling names off. I asked that truck driver, "Did you call my name?" He said, "What's your name?" And I told him. "Yup, jump on the truck." So I jumped on the truck, and they took us down to the airport. We got on this plane, C-46 or 47. I don't know which one it was; it was one or the other. We flew to—what the heck is that island in between the Philippines and—was is it Formosa? I think it was Formosa.
- Jim: Not Okinawa?
- Burns: No, it was Formosa I think. Then the American Red Cross came in there, and they gave us a bottle of Coke and a chocolate candy bar, and did I get sick. I was already sick from that [laughs] meal, and then they give me a chocolate bar and a Coke.
- Jim: They didn't try to sell it to you, they gave it to you?

- Burns: No, they gave it to us. They gave it to us, and then when we landed in the Philippines—well, let's see—we changed planes there from Japan to this Okinawa. Then we changed—was it a 6? A 46 [C-46] or 47 [C-47], one or the other there. I mean, I couldn't tell you which—'cause they're both the same, look about the same.
- Jim: Similar.
- Burns: One's a little bit smaller, and which one it was I don't know. But anyway then we flew from there to the Philippines, and we got off—I don't know what the airport it was, whether it was Nichols Field. It must have been Nichols Field. I couldn't tell. And I told the doctors that I had TB.
- Jim: How'd you know that?
- Burns: They said, "How did you know?" I says, "I can tell by the way I feel." I know, I was sick, and my lungs were bad. I was coughing a lot and everything, so I said, "I got TB." Because the thing—here's the whole thing. These people I lived with—now whether that has anything to do with it—the people I lived with had adopted a boy and a girl, and the boy got TB up there.
- Jim: Where was this?
- Burns: Up to Osseo, where I was—when I was first—
- Woman: Before you went in.
- Burns: No, I didn't—my folks weren't—I didn't live with my folks; my folks were separated. [Approx. 15 sec. pause in recording]
- Jim: The child had tuberculosis?
- Burns: Right, he adopted a boy and a girl.
- Jim: And you lived in that household?
- Burns: Right, and I got in some of their stuff that I suppose this boy had. Like boots and stuff like that, maybe some of his clothes that they gave me.
- Jim: That's not the way you get it, but go ahead.
- Burns: Well, I know, but I think within that house—
- Jim: Okay.

- Burns: Maybe there were some germs in there, I don't know.
- Jim: But no one ever diagnosed tuberculosis then?
- Burns: No, not before that.
- Jim: Okay. All right, so back to Japan here. You were talking to the doc, and you tell him you got to go home because you got tuberculosis.
- Burns: No, I didn't say about going home. I just told him that I had TB. He said, "How do you know?" I says, "I can tell by the way I feel with my coughing and everything." He said, "We'll check you out." So they took me down the—they give me all new clothes first.
- Jim: About time.
- Burns: They give me all new clothes, and I dragged the doggone stuff down to this shower room. It was kind of a tent shower room, and I took a shower, and I put my clothes on. I could hardly drag that bag of stuff up to this tent that they gave us. I think there was four of us in this tent. So they called me over, and they checked me out, and they said, "You've got TB." I said, "I told you that."
- Jim: Did they take a chest x-ray?
- Burns: No x-rays, no.
- Jim: They just listened to your chest.
- Burns: Well, no, they took blood samples or something; I don't remember just how it was.
- Jim: They had to of listened to your chest with a stethoscope.
- Burns: Well, maybe they did, maybe they did listen—but I don't believe there was any x-rays.
- Jim: Yeah, that's the only way. Without an x-ray—
- Burns: Yeah, maybe—no, they didn't x-ray, no x-rays I don't believe. I don't believe there was any x-rays 'cause I know that they—oh, they must have listened to my chest and that coughin' and everything.
- Jim: So anyway, they said you go.

- Burns: Yeah, well, then we stayed in the Philippines for, oh—
- Jim: In Japan.
- Burns: No, in the Philippines. We was in the Philippines.
- Jim: Oh, that's right.
- Burns: We was back in the Philippines. Back in the Philippines, and I don't whether I stayed there three-four days, and they says, "You're going to go back to the United States." So they put us in the truck or ambulance—I think it's ambulance, I think they put us in ambulances and took us down to the docks. We got on aboard ship, there was two, three of them sailing. After we got out of the harbor, we were on the wrong ship. They said, "Well, you guys got TB. We'll have to put you in a separate room downstairs." Well, there was four or five of us; it wasn't just me. It was four or five of us or maybe more down in this one room down below [coughs]. Anyway, we had to stay down there till we got back to San Francisco. Then we went to that hospital there. They didn't do nothin' there either. We stayed there for a couple—three days I guess, and they wanted to know where I wanted to be transferred. No, they sent us to New Mexico, at Santa Fe, New Mexico. Then in New Mexico, we stayed there—
- Jim: Was it a sanatorium or a hospital?
- Burns: No, just a regular Army hospital, Army barracks. It was—oh, I've got pictures of that, too.
- Jim: But you were an outpatient—
- Burns: Right, right. And then from there—
- Jim: But they didn't offer you any treatment.
- Burns: Yes, they did treat me.
- Jim: Ah.
- Burns: They did treat me there because I remember they shoved that tube down my throat, and they blew up my lungs. Then when I breathed they could tell whether there was air comin' out of this one or air come out—which one. They had two cans, one on each side of me, and that darn thing was going up and down like this. That was in New Mexico. This one kid that was from Texas had his lung removed there, you know. Part of his lung collapsed, yeah.

- Jim: What did they say they were going to do for you?
- Burns: Well, then they says, “What hospital do you want to go to? Do you want to go to Wood, or do you want to go to Waukesha?” And I thought, well Waukesha is a smaller hospital. I want to go to the smaller one. I don’t want to go to Wood because it’s too much—it’s a big hospital. I knew what Wood was. I said, “I don’t want to go there.” So I go to Waukesha, and it’s closer to home anyway. So that’s where I went, to Waukesha.
- Jim: What was that facility? Was that the TB center over there?
- Burns: Yeah, it was a veterans hospital.
- Jim: Oh, it was?
- Burns: Yeah.
- Jim: Okay, and what did they do?
- Burns: That’s where I had my operation, that’s where I had my eight ribs taken out. They wanted to give me air, pneumo see. They couldn’t give me pneumo because my lung was stuck to my ribs.
- Jim: So they gave you a thoracoplasty?
- Burns: So they gave me a—eight ribs out of this side.
- Jim: Called thoracoplasty. It’s a collapse of your lung—
- Burns: Four, four operations. Take out two or three ribs at one time and then two or three more ribs this time, and two more. Then they cut in front here and took the rest out.
- Jim: They were giving you medicine for that I’m sure.
- Burns: Oh, yes, they were giving me medicine, yeah. Well, the V.A. always did a good job with me. I can’t kick on ’em.
- Woman: That new medicine that they came out with—Ster—what was it?
- Burns: Huh?
- Jim: Streptomycin.
- Woman: Yeah.

- Burns: After they took all the ribs out, then come this medicine to kill T.B. I took a whole course of that, too, afterwards. They said, "There may be some more so we're going to give you this--"
- Jim: Streptomycin was just coming out then. It was brand new.
- Burns: Yeah, so I don't know what it was, but they give me this stuff after my operation in case there was some more TB that they didn't get.
- Jim: When were you discharged from the service?
- Burns: Discharged? That was in '46. I think it was July of '46 in—
- Jim: While you were in Waukesha?
- Burns: Waukesha.
- Woman: 7/14/46, [unintelligible] Place, Waukesha.
- Burns: Yeah. Okay. All right. Yeah, this, the museum down here they can use that stuff I've got.
- Jim: They sure can.
- Burns: Well, good.
- Jim: This is most unusual.
- Burns: Good.
- Jim: Now they discharged you on medication? When you were sent home and discharged from the service, did they send you home with medicine? And an appointment to go to the veterans hospital probably.
- Burns: Well, that's where they had the operation.
- Jim: Some place else—did they send you back home?
- Burns: From there? Here's the whole thing. I had my boss up to Osseo, had a garage, a service garage, you know, Chevrolet. And I told him, I said, "Now, when I come out of the Army I want a new car." When I went up there I says, "Hey"—around Christmas time. I went up there and I said, "You got my new car?" "Why? Did you want one?" I said, "Yup, I told you that when I left." He says, "Well, what kind do you want?" And I told him, and I told him that I was in the Waukesha Hospital. So he called

me—oh, gosh, was it '48? I think it was in January or February of '48 or so. January or February, February of '48. He said, "I got your car. It ain't the one you ordered, but you can have this one or wait till yours comes." I says, "I'll send my brother to up after it"—no, I says, "I'll come out and get it first." "I can't come." I says, "I'll have to send my brother out after it." Well, then I thought, "Gosh, why can't I? I'm in good shape now. I've had my operation, I feel good." I asked the doc for a few days. He wanted me to come back, the doctor wanted me to come back because he wanted a hemorrhoids operation, you know. He says, "How many days you got to have?" I says, "Well, it's going to take me a day to go up and a day to come back and about five days I think." So he gave me a five day leave, and I went up there and bought my car. That's another [laughs]—I lost a hundred dollars. I had a in my billfold. I lost a hundred dollars in the hotel. 'Cause I knew who got it, but what can I prove about it? The maid had to be the one to get it. But anyway, I cashed the savings bonds I had and bought the car. I had a check, \$1,600 check that was a bank check so she couldn't cash that anyway. So that was in there at the motel, and they found the billfold in the toilet tank. You know, I didn't put it in there [laughs]. So it must have been the maid or something. After I got the car, well, then I come back. No, I didn't go to the hospital. I come to my brothers.

Woman: You didn't go back to the hospital?

Burns: No, I didn't go back to the hospital, see. So I stayed out of the hospital.

Jim: Anyway, you got that treatment, and you've been on--and they check up on your TB every so often here?

Burns: Not that I know of of my TB.

Jim: Well, don't you have a chest x-ray?

Burns: Oh yeah, once in a great while, but I 'spose that's all they—yeah.

Woman: Yeah, they've got it listed right here on the file.

Burns: Yeah, they've got it on my chart.

Jim: Was that your only permanent disability?

Burns: I had heart trouble. I had a stroke. I had—

Jim: Yeah, but that was not service connected.

Burns: I don't know if it was or not.

- Jim: Well, the heart attack wasn't. You got that when you were well past the service.
- Burns: Oh, yeah.
- Woman: Here's the service connected disabilities right here if you wanted that.
- Jim: All right. Okay. Now, did you get any decorations, any of you guys?
- Burns: Oh, yeah, I got a lot of—
- Jim: I'll check all those. I'll save that till—
- Burns: And I think I got one decoration that they didn't put in my whatchamacallit and that's that—
- Woman: Oak leaf cluster.
- Burns: No, no, no, no. [Approx. 3 sec. interruption by PA system announcement] Riflemans, it's with the rifle on it, you know.
- Jim: [unintelligible] got one of those.
- Burns: Yeah, but they never put it on there, on my record either. They give me the thing and then they never gave me nothin' else.
- Jim: Okay. So, what would you say your experience was? How would you characterize it? I was tryin' to think of various adjectives. It was worse than you thought it might be, or it was easier than you thought it might be?
- Burns: Well, I never did give it a thought. I never give it a thought. I just went along with what they wanted I done. What they—didn't—I still didn't—I survived, that's all. I didn't try to beat anybody. If they said, "You've got to have this operation." I went along with it.
- Jim: I was talking about being in prison camp.
- Burns: Oh, in prison camp that's the same thing. I just went along; I didn't try to fight anything. I pret' near got beat up one time in prison camp.
- Jim: Why was that?
- Burns: I didn't work. See, they let you have a rest period at a certain time when you was working in the garden in the Philippines. I didn't quite get up in time, this guy came over that was going to beat hell out of me. This

Lieutenant Jones come over, and says, “Just take it easy now, just take it easy.” So I went back to work, and he—let him argue out with the guard there. But the guard was going to beat me up.

Jim: Oh, my.

Burns: But he didn’t beat me up because [laughs] Jones kind of stepped in—

Jim: Do you know where the lieutenant is now?

Burns: I don’t know.

Jim: You never kept track of him?

Burns: No, I don’t know whether—

Woman: Was that Lieutenant Jones the one who fed his dog better then he did his [unintelligible]—

Burns: No, no, that was Lieutenant Long. Long was a Navy lieutenant who was in the Philippines, and he had a little dog. I don’t know what kind of dog it was. That dog was—we were going to kill that dog and eat it. It was fatter then we were! But, you know, it belonged to the lieutenant, and we were just privates. [laughs]. We didn’t dare touch that dog. He was a pet dog for the lieutenant, you know.

Jim: I’m surprised somebody didn’t steal it. [Burns coughs] You were always just a private or did you get—

Burns: I was a corporal. I got to be corporal after I got out, yeah. I was a private all the way through prison camp, but then I got out they raised me to corporal.

Jim: So the decorations, you got the Purple Heart—

Burns: Yeah.

Jim: And the P.O.W. medal—

Burns: Yeah.

Jim: And the World War II Victory [unintelligible].

Burns: Yeah.

Jim: ’Cause (??) you have the Philippine Defense Medal and [unintelligible].

Burns: Yeah.

Jim: Now, have you got a Bronze Star?

Burns: Yeah.

Jim: Is that for a specific—or just being prisoners?

Burns: I don't know what they were—

Jim: Philippine Defense—

Burns: Yeah, I don't know what they were all for. I just—

Jim: Oh, I see.

Burns: They probably—they said to this and that and that—you know what, you don't listen to it. [Woman and Jim laugh] They just tell you, you're gonna get this star, you get that, you get this, and get that. I says, "Okay, I'll take it all." I don't argue with nobody; I let 'em go. If they talk, I just let 'em talk. [Jim laughs]

Jim: Did you join any veterans groups after you left the service?

Burns: Since I come back? The VFW, the DAV, and the Legion.

Jim: American Legion?

Burns: Yup.

Jim: Are you still active in all of these?

Burns: Yup, well, I'm not active, but this is lifetime, this is lifetime, and this one I pay every year. I should pay this one, but that's kind of high for what time I'm gonna have left. I got my new card for the American Legion this year already, I got it.

Jim: Yeah, I never joined. I never cared for the American Legion.

Burns: I take 'em all. The thing was—

Jim: They're too political for me.

Burns: The thing here, the thing is—
[End of Interview]