

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
HOWARD B. HEILIGER
4th Marine Regiment, World War II
2000

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Heiliger, Howard B., (1920-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 90 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Howard Heiliger, a Lancaster, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with the Marine Corps, focusing his account on combat experiences in the Pacific theater and his time as a prisoner of war. He tells of enlisting in the Marines, boot camp at San Diego, volunteering for overseas duty, and being stationed at Shanghai (China). He evaluates his service with the 4th Marine Regiment and comments on the ways servicemen spent their free time. Heiliger touches upon the lifestyle of the Chinese, seeing Japanese aggression intensify, and leaving China for the Philippines. Landing at the Olongopo Naval Base (Luzon) he describes an attack on the planes at his base on Pearl Harbor Day. Heiliger provides a detailed account of the early island fighting. Transferred to Mariveles and Corregidor he describes being under artillery fire, his feelings as bombs dropped, eating half rations, a Japanese banzai attack, and his unit's high casualty rate. With only twelve surviving men, his unit surrendered to the Japanese, and he comments on being held in a small area, hit with rifle butts, and forced to clear rubble from an area to establish a boot camp. He touches upon the small rations he received from the Japanese, bitter feelings when the soldiers learned General MacArthur left the island, and being taken to Manila (Philippines). Heiliger talks about marching through the streets of Manila, the faces of the people they passed, seeing bodies of dead POWs on the roadside, lack of food at Cabanatuan prison camp, and his assignment to burial duty. He touches upon the problems of malaria and dysentery and soldiers eating charcoal to prevent dysentery. He describes prisoners who lost the will to live. Heiliger and other prisoners were put on a ship to Mukden (China) where they stayed for two years. He discusses being guarded by Japanese soldiers originally from the United States, the buildings at camp, the tendency of the Japanese officers to hit prisoners, and sabotaging machinery at a factory. Heiliger talks about seeing American soldiers parachute down to liberate Mukden, forming work details with the freed POWs leading the Japanese, finding Red Cross parcels that were kept from POWs, and returning to Army guard duty. Heiliger mentions staying in Mukden for a month after liberation and seeing Russian troops pillage the countryside. He recalls how happy the POWs were to take showers and receive clean clothes. Put aboard a transport ship to Okinawa (Japan), he describes how men were killed when the ship hit a mine. Upon return to the United States, Heiliger speaks of being kept in isolation for malaria and given four months leave. After discharge, he describes using the GI Bill to learn carpentry, being a quartermaster for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and receiving service medals.

Biographical Sketch:

Heiliger (b.1920) served with the 4th Marine Regiment in World War II. He was taken prisoner during Pacific Island fighting and listed as missing in action (MIA) for two years. He was held as a prisoner from May of 1942 until August of 1945. He currently lives in Cambridge, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.
Transcribed by Jeremy Osgood, 2009.
Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: Okay. Got that going. That looks pretty good. All right. Tell me where you were born, Howard.

HH: Lancaster, Wisconsin.

Jim: And when?

HH: April 2nd, 1920.

Jim: Four, twenty. And Lancaster?

HH: Lancaster.

Jim: And, when did you enter military service?

HH: November, 1940.

Jim: Eleven, forty. And what branch of the service?

HH: Marines.

Jim: You volunteered?

HH: Yes.

Jim: This was a time when the draft was breathing down your throat and you decided you didn't want to wait to be drafted, or how did this happen?

HH: Well, they started calling in the National Guards. Well they wanted me to go into the Fort Atkinson National Guard. Well, I didn't want that. I wanted the Navy. But the Navy had a six year enlistment and I thought, "Gee whiz, that's too long!" So I walked right across the hall, and I joined the Marine Corp. And, of course you had to take your papers and everything home, get your mother to sign it.

Jim: That's right, you were only seventeen?

HH: Well, Twenty.

Jim: Twenty?

HH: Yeah, nineteen.

Jim: Oh, you still had to have your mother sign it at age twenty?

HH: Oh, yeah. You could go on your own at twenty one.

Jim: So, mom signed, and then what'd they do with you?

HH: Well, we went to Chicago, and then from Chicago we went to San Diego. And I went through the recruit depot and went out to Camp Pendleton for a little while, came around and did so-called boot camp. We were all there together, and I think there was ninety percent of us volunteered, cause they were looking for volunteers to go overseas. Well, they scattered us out. They dropped 'em off at Hawaii, Midway, Wake, Guam, Philippine Islands, North China, and South China, which was Shanghai, and that's where I got dumped off.

Jim: But you hadn't finished your boot training?

HH: Oh, yes.

Jim: Oh, you had.

HH: Yes, see this was in, this was already late January of '41.

Jim: January of '41, you were in China.

HH: Yeah.

Jim: Oh my, what was that like?

HH: Well, that was real good duty. It was nice. See, when you go over there for something like that, really, it's embassy duty.

Jim: You're just guarding the embassy?

HH: Sure. Well, you're the marines that are there, and we're just protecting American interests along with the, and that's what we were there for.

Jim: Well, besides the embassy, what other things came under your purview there? Anything else, or—

HH: No, no, there wasn't really much of anything else. We had two, two, let's see, we had the first and second battalions. And, well, you know we had everything we needed there—

Jim: How many people were in your—

HH: Altogether, probably a thousand of us there altogether.

Jim: And you had a lot of free time in Shanghai?

HH: Oh, gosh yes. We were on liberty three and four days a week. Every few days you would have guard duty, you know. But you were down there, you were guarding the embassy compound, or we guarded our own. You know, you had to have guards around your motor transport, the quartermaster, you know, the whole works there. Of course, then there was guards right there on our own compound. You had to keep a close watch on those Orientals.

Jim: What was it? You were worried about stealing?

HH: Yeah.

Jim: That was your main concern.

HH: Oh yeah.

Jim: Anything that was loose, they'd pick up.

HH: Just about. Just about.

Jim: Is that right?

HH: They weren't all that way, but there was a lot of good ones there. But they were good people. And—

Jim: Tell me about liberty in Shanghai at that time.

HH: Well, you know, it's probably a lot like you'd have over here. You knew where all the taverns were. And there's a few of the house of ill repute, you know—

Jim: There were a lot of those!

HH: Yes there were. Which, I never went in one. Never was in one.

Jim: Well, then, you stayed clean, then.

HH: Yes I did. But then we used to have what they called the Fourth Marine's Club, which was right down in Shanghai, I believe it was probably Well Road, I think was the name of it. And, the Chinese had a different name, I don't know what that was. Well, but we could go into our club there, and you could play cards, you could play pool, you could—little gambling, little of everything.

Jim: Movies?

HH: Yeah, there were movies in there. Not all the time. But we had three or four good English movies in Shanghai itself.

Jim: You mean movie theaters?

HH: Movie theaters. And I remember one in particular was the Metropol. A nice new-built one, and I think the English owned that. But it was a nice new theater and we had all the American movies, all English speaking in there. But then, another place where we used to, I always liked it, is, you got the Yangtze River there, but then there's a tributary that goes back, and it was called the Huang-Pu. Well, the Huang-Pu River in Shanghai, at that time, did not have a public sewer system. Everything was dumped into honey carts, and then dumped into the Haung-Pu. And I tell you, talk about an experience. And those people, they lived in sand pans there. You know, a lot of Chinese, they were born, they were raised and they lived and they died from the sand pans. Because there's so many Chinese, you know, they didn't have a place to go. It's the old saying, you never had a Chinaman's chance. And that's exactly the way it was. And most people at that time—

Jim: It's so crowded.

HH: Yes. And most people at that time, they were all, almost all classified as coolies. But it's altogether different now. Boy, I'd like to go back and have a visit to Shanghai again, because it's—

Jim: It's a big modern city now.

HH: From what I can see it really looks modern. And there's places, there was a place, the main water front down there they call it the bunt, or the bunt, you know, because the Germans settled that. And they were the ones that built all those nice big brick buildings that were there. And now, most of those old buildings are gone, because I saw pictures of the bunt out there, the old, big old wall, and the big spent platform which, oh, gosh, must have been a hundred feet back from the buildings, that was all there yet. But it's, that was good duty.

Jim: What about food? Did you, they make good Chinese food? Did you get pretty used to that, or not?

HH: Well, see, we had our own cooks. And once in a while, we would eat, if there was a restaurant that would be recommended, we have. And, or course, we couldn't drink their water.

Jim: How'd you deal with that? Did you buy bottled water when you'd eat in restaurants?

HH: Well, when I went into a restaurant, I'd buy beer. And, we had our own filtering system in our camp, to filter out the water. But anyway, it was a nice place, I liked it. I was there from January '41 till November '41. Boy, I tell you, the day we left there, we were packing up to leave, we had the old, I think it was the USS

Henderson. And, the minute we got out that Yangtze River, out into the South China Sea there, I tell you, we were scared. Little Japanese freighters harassing the heck out of us. All the way to the Philippines.

Jim: How?

HH: They would, like, they would come right at you, as though they were going to ram you.

Jim: With what?

HH: Well, with their little torpedoes, you know, not torpedoes, but their little gunboats. They were just small boats.

Jim: I see, but they, we weren't at war, but on the other hand, they were very hostile.

HH: They were hostile. But we knew something was up, because, my God, we had machine guns set up fore and aft over the ship that we had, and here these guys—

Jim: You were prepared to do battle with these guys.

HH: Oh, yeah. Well, we couldn't do much with a thirty caliber, compared with their probably a three inch guns that they had, you know. They had pretty good sized little guns on 'em. But they had big machine guns, too. But they'd come right up, probably from here to your thing over there. Go sliding right along by us, just harassing us, just waiting for us to fire on them, so they'd have a reason to probably sink our ship. But we did, four days later, we made it back into the Philippines. And they harassed us almost—

Jim: All the way? Not in the heavy seas with those little boats.

HH: Well, the seas were quite calm, when we were, they had two and three foot waves. But it wasn't bad. The trip wasn't.

Jim: This was a planned leave, when you left Shanghai? Did all the Marines leave?

HH: All the Marines left.

Jim: So somebody sensed that this is the time to get out completely.

HH: Absolutely.

Jim: You knew that no one was coming back, is that correct.

HH: That's absolutely right. But here's the bad thing, is we got out in Shanghai. But the ship dropped us off in the Philippine Islands, they headed north to go up into, what's the capital, Peking? It's different now, what do they call it now?

Jim: Beijing.

HH: Beijing. See it was Peking when we were there. They went up to get those Marines, but they only had 80 or 100 Marines up there. They captured the ship before it got there, so those guys—

Jim: POWs right before the war.

HH: Well, the ship was on its way up, and then they bombed Pearl Harbor. And then right away they confiscated that ship, and those guys, the Marines in North China, they never got out. And I guess those guys, they were interned, I guess, they spent the whole war years up there.

Jim: Never firing a shot, and they were held.

HH: No, never fired a shot.

Jim: And the ship, too, was taken in.

HH: I don't know if they ever got it back after the war or not; probably not.

Jim: Probably not. Nobody ever gives anything back to the United States. They just take, and they just don't—

HH: Right. Take everything we can get from us over here.

Jim: That's true. So, the Philippines was just a stopover. Where did you end up?

HH: Well, that's where we ended up, was in the Philippines. We were, well, we landed at Olongopo Naval Base, which is on the north end of the Bataan Peninsula. Well, we were up there a week, ten days, something like that.

Jim: And then the war started?

HH: Yeah. When we were in Olongopo, that morning, it's in here. That morning I was up in one of these little grass shacks. A sentry's box, up above the palm trees. My god, I was up there and scared as the devil, 21-yea- old guy, and here came four Jap zeroes up through there, and we had these old PBV's out there, you know, patrol bombers? Floated in water. It took about five minutes, they were all sunk. Sunk or burning.

Jim: They didn't take a pot shot at you, though.

HH: I tell you, I was thinking about that, it's in here, and I said to myself, "They won't come back and waste a bullet on a little old guy up in a sentry shack!" But, I thought maybe they'd come back and riddle the barracks. I didn't know.

Jim: So, what did your unit do then, now that we're suddenly at war, and you had no protection, really.

HH: We knew we were doomed. So, anyway, then what they did is, we were there, I'd say two or three weeks. So we were ordered down to Mariveles which was the naval base, that's another naval base. It's right on the southern tip of the Bataan Peninsula. And the Japs, they never did touch that, because they wanted that. After they knew that we were down, they wanted that naval base, there's no doubt about it. You have to kind of—

Jim: So your unit moved by ship down there?

HH: No, no.

Jim: You marched?

HH: By truck.

Jim: By truck. Your two battalions are still together?

HH: Yeah. They're still together.

Jim: And what did you do down there?

HH: Well that was another thing. We were down there, oh I don't think were down there any more than four, five, six days. So then we were ordered by MacArthur over as beach defense on Corregidor. So, that's basically where my headquarters was, was on Corregidor. But, you see, what they would do is, they considered Corregidor R&R. But it wasn't R&R, because we had three hundred and something Jap air raids on that darned little island. You know it's only about three quarters of a mile wide and a mile and half long. And, boy, it was a nice flush little tropical island, you know. And the day we surrendered all you saw was just little pieces that looked like toothpicks sticking up. The foliage was all gone. They just hammered and hammered and hammered us there. You can't do anything.

Jim: So, how was life in Corregidor?

HH: Well, it was all right over there, but, you know, we went over there and almost right away we went on half rations. Because there was only food left for an undetermined length of time. Well, then, we had the beach defenses there and we

were always on the alert, 24 hours a day. Cause the Japs who were from Bataan, they could reach us with their artillery fire. And they'd shell the heck out of us with that, and then here come the bombers up over the top. They didn't use any fighter planes over there, it was just their bombers.

Another thing is the Japanese when they got Clarke Field, which is over near Manila, they captured a bunch of our bombs. And you know those son-of-a-guns, they refitted their planes to where they could use those bombs of ours, and they dropped those bombs on us; on Corregidor. Five hundred pound bombs, you know how big that is. It's longer than this table, and it's about that big around, and when one of those hit, I'll tell you, it's like all hell let loose! God! It shook that whole island. It shook it more, every once in a while we'd have a little earthquake, there, you know, you'd be laying in your trench at night and, my gosh, you'd be wheeling like this or you'd be going like this, and you'd wake up wondering, what's going on. Well, the first time it happened, I wondered, what the heck's going on, and the old first sergeant he says, "That's all right, lay down, that's only a little tremor. Little earthquake," he said. He said, "They're here all the time." Which they are. The Philippines is rocked with them. But that's basically what it was.

Well, then, what I was going to tell them was, we had R&R. We'd be on Corregidor, and we would rotate over and have two weeks over on Mariveles, the naval base again, for two weeks, and then you'd go back out to the rock, and a new bunch would go over. So they had a rotation basis there.

Jim: How far was that away?

HH: Five miles, across the water; water in between us. You couldn't escape off Corregidor, I'll tell you that. Shark infested.

Jim: So, then what?

HH: Well. Let's see now. Well, it was just kind of the usual thing, beach defenses, and they didn't get us out and drill us anymore, anything like that.

Jim: Into survival now.

HH: Yeah. Well. Then, it had to be like May 4th or 5th. Here come these Jap Marines at night. And they landed out on the level part of Corregidor there. And it just so happened that I was more or less up on the hillside, and I was in the reserve unit, and they were down below there. Well, we got called out of the reserve unit and got down there. There was a lot of blood on the beaches. I don't know how many Japanese, but we had to bury them the next day.

Jim: What did you have? How many Japanese are we talking about, tried to land?

- HH: Oh, there was several hundred. You know, they had—
- Jim: And against them you had your just two battalions of Marines?
- HH: Actually, out there I think there probably was only like one battalion. I don't think there was any more than a hundred, hundred and fifty of us men out there.
- Jim: But you stopped them at the beach?
- HH: The first time. They came a second time, and they came double. And then they just overran us. They just overran us.
- Jim: They killed most, and took prisoners of the rest?
- HH: Well, you didn't take any Japanese prisoners, but they took all of us. The only Japanese that were left there were the living or the dead, one or the other.
- Jim: And how many of you were captured?
- HH: Well, I know there was probably at least a hundred Marines were killed out there on that thing. They just came, just ferocious, the way they came in. Bonzai attacks is what they did.
- Jim: With bayonets?
- HH: Bayonets, sure. They got you by their machine guns, their rifle fire, or their bayonets.
- Jim: And they just sort of overran your position.
- HH: Absolutely, they just overran us.
- Jim: I'm surprised they didn't kill you.
- HH: Well, some of us were lucky, you know. I went through the whole episode of three and a half years. I just did, I came through with amazing health compared to some of those guys.
- Jim: Oh, I'm sure. But when you looked up, you just saw there was twelve guys, and you simply couldn't handle that many, so you just stood up and held your hands up.
- HH: That's all you did.
- Jim: And how did they handle you then? Did they tie you up, rope you up, or just put you in a group.

HH: They'd go around and muttering out something in Japanese you don't understand, and the only you could tell is if they pointed, you went that way. And, they liked to use their rifle butts. And they liked to kick you. And they liked get you down on the ground. And they'd beat the heck out of you.

Jim: For no particular reason?

HH: No. It's just the idea that they were victorious, and we're top dog.

Jim: They want to remind you of that.

HH: Yes, that's right. I don't know, we maybe would of did the same thing, but the Americans through the Pacific, you know, they didn't take any prisoners. I mean it was just a few, I don't know how many. But the Japs that were down there, they were killed. Because it's, and it's in here, you'll see that it's a disgrace and a dishonor for a Japanese to surrender to the enemy. And that's why you didn't ever get too many Jap prisoners. They'd rather die.

Jim: So what did they do with you? Corralled you into a fenced-in area?

HH: Just a fenced in area, see they came at night.

Jim: But you're still in Corregidor, they had to get you off of that.

HH: Well, what they did is they kept us around there for a week or ten days. And, God, you had to live right out there in the sun. Everybody was sick and run down.

Jim: Nobody had any food?

HH: We never had any food, until the next day. And what they did, though, the next day, we were all down around there, and they had guards all the way around us. And they put us on work details.

Jim: To do what?

HH: Well, we had to help bury some of them. And then they used us around there. Like they would gather around an electrician, they need an electrician somewhere. Or they needed this. I was on a thing for a while where they wanted a little ramp thing out, where they wanted to get a boat in. And we just moved rubble, because all of our buildings and everything, the stones and the concrete was laying all over. And you built this little ramp thing, you know, and it would just kind of help doing the work for them. And of course, they only gave you two meals a day again.

Jim: What were those meals like?

HH: Rice; very little, in just a small bowl, twice a day.

Jim: Plain?

HH: Plain.

Jim: No soup?

HH: Well, not there. We didn't get it there yet. The soup came later. That was after they got us up into Manchuria, that's when we got that.

Jim: Stay right in order here.

HH: Well, then, after we were around there, and we'd worked for them for a while, there were some guys that were truck drivers. And I think they probably sent the lower end of their crop of soldiers over there. Because they didn't seem to me like they were very smart. Course, that's what we always thought about them, anyway. But they're smarter than what they look like. But, anyway, then they loaded us onto a couple three, well, it was bigger than a landing craft. It was something they'd captured. And then they took us over to Manila, to what they called the Bilibid Prison. That was a civilian prison of the Philippine government. And of course, when the Japs got over there they opened up the gates and they let all those guys free. Cause I think they wanted to put us in there. So we were in there. But then they took us over there and they paraded us around the street. Now, if you ever saw Filipinos sad. They knew that the Americans, we were good to the Filipinos, I don't care where you go, we're good to them.

Jim: They were in tears?

HH: Yes they were. And once in a while in the background you could see the old victory sign back there, but, boy, don't do it when the Jap was looking.

Jim: And they'd stick a knife in him for doing that.

HH: They'd kill a guy right off the bat.

Jim: If a civilian had done anything like that.

HH: Yeah. One thing, we got to go back, too, is when we left Mariveles to begin with, they started off, see, I made the first two days of the death march. That first day, oh god! I tell you, you'd see these guys just laying there and you know they were bayoneted, or they were dead, American young men. Laying there. And right away, you know, a body.

Well, anyway, we went the first day, no food, absolutely nothing. These men were just a haggard bunch of run down looking bunch of individuals you ever want to look at; just skin and bones already then. We walked the second day, and then they had what they called a release station. Well, it wasn't really a release station. It was another place for a guy to lay down. And if he laid down, he couldn't get up again. So I said to a couple of Air Force guys, you know, "We gotta get out of here," I said. "Let's see if we can make it to the rock tonight." And what I spotted was down, we were, oh, maybe twenty thirty feet up on a bank, and I spotted that log down there. And I said, let's see if we can get that log lowered from there." And I said, "Let's lay on our bellies, paddle like hell." And I said "I think we can make—"

Jim: Over to Corregidor.

HH: Over to Corregidor. So that's how I got back over there.

Jim: Oh, you did that?

HH: Yes. Yeah, these two Air Force guys.

Jim: Oh, three of you.

HH: Three of us. And then, see, when we were at night like that, the tide was going out. And when that tide goes out, it goes out. So you had this log, you had to fight this log to keep it like that, because you were pushing against the tide going out. We got over there, and I tell you, we landed from about here to the capitol over there right from my outfit. At night. And of course, we had guards down there.

Jim: Yeah, lucky you weren't shot coming ashore.

HH: Oh, yeah. And, so, We got pretty close to the shore, I don't remember. Maybe from here to that building. Couple of hundred feet. And I started yelling, telling who we were. And we started getting communications back. And I told them who I was, and here's a guy I knew. "What the hell are you doing out here?" And I said, "Well, I just got away from that mess over there." So, I got over there, I got back over there. On to Corregidor. See, after being over there on R and R guarding the Mariveles Naval Base. So, there it was. Then we went through the experience on Corregidor again. See, I got ahead of myself, I didn't tell you about those two days.

Jim: That's fine, I want everything.

HH: Well, then we got over and we only stayed three or four days in this Mariveles, or, not Mariveles, the old prison camp there in Manila. They loaded us on to trains, you know. Regular old boxcars. And they'd leave the door on each side open about this far. And Jesus, it was like some of this weather we've got now. Hot and

humid, a hundred to a hundred and ten degrees. And a lot of those guys they never did get out of that boxcar. They were dead. By the time we, I think they only moved us like, maybe seventy-five to a hundred miles. Well, then from that town, which I don't remember the name, we had to walk, oh, I'd say two or three miles. These guys, they were just flopping over, just like that. Dying.

Jim: Too dehydrated.

HH: Too dehydrated, sure. And starved, and they had malaria, they had dysentery, and everything you could think of.

Jim: That seems so quick, though. You were just prisoners just a short time, right?

HH: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: I just don't understand how they could be so starved so quickly.

HH: Well, you see, we were the last, see, we were in our first six months, but about the last three months, we were down to half rations.

Jim: On Coregador.

HH: On Coregador.

Jim: So you were practicing starving already, then.

HH: Yes, we were. But down at Coregador we're half rations, and the last week on Coregador we had just had hardly nothing. We were right down, and I would say we were probably down maybe to quarter rations. Just enough to say that we had something to eat. And that was once a day.

Jim: So you were really half starved by the time you were captured.

HH: Absolutely. Sure.

Jim: What was the feeling at the time MacArthur left?

HH: We were very bitter. None of us liked that. But he was ordered out. We'll have to admit that. But, there wasn't only MacArthur. I just watched the History Channel last night where all, what was it, twenty billion dollars of gold went out on these submarines, you know, used to come in at night. And once in a while when we were on guard you could look down and you could see those big old submarines down there. But they brought out the gold, they took out key personnel—

Jim: Stanley.

- HH: Yeah, they took out a bunch of nurses, you know, the Army, Navy nurses, they took them out, but the key personnel, Americans and Filipinos that were there. They took them all out. They all made it back to Australia.
- Jim: By submarine.
- HH: By submarine. And I'm sure they had many more than just the one that MacArthur went on, it had to be.
- Jim: Well, part of the ride was on a PT boat.
- HH: Some of it, yeah. I didn't know that till afterwards. So, yeah, because, you see, with the submarines would have to land on Corregidor, there. I think the Japs knew that because over, they would keep throwing an artillery shell, every once in a while into that area. If there's a sub, they'd get it.
- Jim: Tell me know, the feeling was, that, they're going to bring a submarine for all of you? That sooner or later, they're going to get you all out?
- HH: No, we knew they'd never come after us.
- Jim: You knew that you're not going to leave?
- HH: We knew it. We knew that we were just there for the duration. **[End of Tape One, Side One]** We all knew it.
- Jim: There was no surprise, then.
- HH: No. And we knew that it was impossible, you know, with all the Japanese fleet and submarines and everything out there, impossible to get supplies in. And, you know, here it was, two or three thousand miles down to Australia, maybe it was more than that.
- Jim: But, an impossible situation.
- HH: Yeah, and it was impossible. You couldn't escape. You're in an Oriental country. Let's see you put on a hat, and you can pull your eyes back, or die your hair black—
- Jim: You could shrink five inches.
- HH: Yeah, yeah.
- Jim: So, how many men were picked up by the Japanese from Corregidor at the final? How many were left? Do you recall?

- HH: No. I don't really remember that, but there was several hundred of us, anyway.
- Jim: Oh, there's many more than a hundred.
- HH: Yeah. Where most of us went was after they got us into their prison camps.
- Jim: And they took you by, the last journey to the prison camp was by truck, you said?
- HH: No, by train. Train, railroad cars. And then from where the little town was there, we walked about three miles. And that was pretty hard.
- Jim: And this was how long after you were originally captured, you remember? A month later?
- HH: Yeah, within a month. Three or four weeks. Something like that.
- Jim: All right, now you're in a prison camp. What was that called?
- HH: Hell hole. And we, that's where the soup comes in. They gave us either rice or soybeans. And they would just cook it up. And once in a while they would give us some kind of a green dish, you know, like a vegetable. And we always called it lettuce. Not lettuce, but, oh, this prickly stuff we grow around here, what do you call it? Nettles! Nettles! Because it had real sharp things on there, once in a while when you're chewing it, it'd prick your tongue or get up into you. But, believe me, I ate anything they put in front of me. And I'm that way yet today. I eat anything and everything. Nothing stops me. [laughs, unintelligible] But, it's in here, you know. I learned fast, to get an upper bunk. Because you know, if you got a guy up above you with dysentery, you don't want to be below.
- Jim: You're gonna share it with him. Or he's gonna share it with you.
- HH: He's gonna share it with me, down below. So I always got up there. But anyway, that's where it was the same thing. But while I was there it was kind of a morale booster. I volunteered for just about anything I could do. And the worst part of it was when you have to start burying fifty and sixty of your comrades a day.
- Jim: That many?
- HH: Fifty to sixty days. That was the worst. Let's see, we got there in late May, early July maybe. And then we were there until October. By gosh, on the first boatloads of POWs to go down to the Philippines, I got on that. Well, anyway, then.
- Jim: What did they, march you back down to the shore?
- HH: No, this time, well, see, this was way inland. It's what they call Cabanatuan. It's a prison camp. There was Cabanatuan One, Cabanatuan Two. And that's where

they had all of the prisoners. Well, a few of them were scattered out here and there. I'm sure they kept a few on Corregidor. There was some that went down to, I think, Mindanao, the island south. You know, it's a pretty good sized island.

And I don't know if you read about that, was, we found out after the years that where this one Japanese Lieutenant got blamed for, I think it was Palawan where there was, I believe they sent eighty to a hundred prisoners of war down there. And they herded these guys into this building one day, opened up the machine guns on them, and every one was killed. That was, I think they called it the Palawan Massacre, I think is what it was. I knew a couple, three marines that were there. Cause I read about this story in one of the old VFW magazines. Remember, they called it Foreign Service? Right after the war years? And I remember reading that. I had the magazine for a long time, but it's gone now.

But then, you start seeing these guys, they were just delirious, in this Cabanatuan prison camp. They'd be out roaming around at night. And they'd try to go down to the latrines, and they'd fall in them. And by god, you had to go down there and try and pull these guys out. And, you know, you didn't want to touch anybody, because of the diseases that you could pick up, you know? Dysentery, malaria, you had to get hit with a mosquito, but all these other diseases.

Jim: What was the most prominent disease, other than dysentery?

HH: Malaria. Dysentery was the worst. That was prevalent all through. And, you know, there was another guy and I, we used to harvest some kind of seeds. And we'd bring them into camp, and it always seemed as though that somebody had some matches or we'd get a little fire going. And we'd take our mess kit and we'd put these seeds in there. They looked like coffee. And what we'd do is we'd scorch them because we had been told that if you could get charcoal, charcoal was the best thing that you could eat if you had dysentery. Because you know, it relieves it. And I ate that for a couple three months. Maybe like spoonful a day or something like that, anytime somebody started a fire, you saved that wood. I saved it, this other guy and I, we saved that wood, and we had charcoal. And that's why, I had a little touch of dysentery, but I got rid of it in a hurry. So, you know, being an old farm boy, I think that helped. I really do. I think it did.

Jim: A lot of some other prisoners of war I've talked to have said that a lot of guys just gave up.

HH: They did, absolutely.

Jim: And that that contributed to their death. It was the attitude that killed them. Is that your experience?

HH: Yes it was. It's in there. Well, like in the Philippines there, see, I was on the burial detail, I was on the woodcutting detail. And, you go around, kind of like the

buddy system. It didn't make any difference if you knew them. If you could help somebody do it. And another thing is I used to, oh, they'd give us a paper box and a little bit of food, and you would deliver it over to this so-called hospital. And you know what the hospital was? It was like a metal building, and these guys, they would put them over there, and some of these poor devils, they were sleeping right on the bare dirt. If some of them had a blanket, they maybe would have the blanket under them, you know. And we would deliver food over to those guys. And a good share of them, "No, no, no, no! I can't eat! I don't want anything! Just leave me here! I'm going to die!"

Jim: They gave up.

HH: They gave up. Absolutely. There was, no doubt, thousands of those guys that it happened.

Jim: Once a guy had got to this point, did you ever turn them around? Did you ever see any of them, get a hold of themselves?

HH: Now, this is going off. It was up in Manchuria. There was a young guy there, he was from Rockford. His name was Jim Smith, and he's dead now. And he laid there, and laid there, and laid there. And I said, "Jim," I said, "You've got to get up off your butt, and get going!" I said, "Take yourself a shower." I said, "You don't like the food? Eat it!" I said, "Get off your butt!" And he was right beside me. Within a week or ten days, that guy was up and around, and I tell you!

Jim: You saved his life.

HH: Actually, I did. And he thanked me for it.

Jim: Well, he should. Well, anyway, back to the Philippines.

HH: Well, anyway, you know, it's a real gruesome thing. It's in here, where these men that we had to bury, you know. There was a hole. Well, I guess it's a hole. Eight feet wide, and it'd be about eighteen or twenty feet long. And we'd put fifty men to a grave. Generally, ten long. And there was only one way you could get those guys down, you know, because the hole was eight feet deep! And it was eight feet wide, and twenty feet long. Four men, each one had an arm, and each one had a leg, and you just dropped them. And when they dropped, you know, in the Philippines when you die, you just puff up like a balloon.

Jim: Everybody does.

HH: And when you dropped them, you quick got back because—

Jim: Because they might explode?

HH: Oh, sure, they'd explode. Probably out of their mouth and out of their rectum, both ways. I imagine. Oh, boy, I'm telling you! I always tried to be the lead man, carrying them down there. I didn't want to be in the back, bouncing them along.

Jim: They might explode prematurely.

HH: They could have, they could have. Every once in a while, my god, you'd get a great big guy, six feet tall, and there he is, all puffed up. But it was a good thing that there were a few of us that were healthy. It didn't make any difference if it was enlisted men or officers or who. The officers got a little better treatment than we did, but they got sick, too.

Jim: Were you in separate camps?

HH: No, we always had three or four officers at the head, you know, when you walked through the door. The officers would be right there on the end. And that was another thing. We had two young Marine Lieutenants. Dobervich (?), Dobervich was from South, yeah, North Dakota, and this other guy was from Tennessee. And by gosh those were the only two guys that ever escaped from the Philippine Islands. They were off doing something one day, and some Filipinos know that they were officers. And they told them, you know, "We'll help you get out." So they took a chance, and they went with them. And they had their little old hand-operated things, and by gosh, they got in contact with an American submarine out there, and these two guys got out. The only two.

Jim: How far were you away from the shore?

HH: Oh, gosh. Hundred miles.

Jim: I was going to say, you were quite a ways inland.

HH: Well, the way I understand, is these two guys, see, we were kind of on the west side of the island, and I think that these two guys with the Filipinos hiked all the way to the east side of the island. And that's, I think, there wasn't much of any civilization over in there, but these guerillas. They were the old Philippine Army. Or Philippine Constabulary. Or whatever. And they did, there's no doubt, they would have helped us every inch of the way if we could have got in contact with them. So, anyway, they got out.

So, that's just about it in the Philippines. Now here comes another gruesome part. Is when we got on these four shiploads of prisoners that went out of there. We embarked out of Manila on four ships. Well, this one day, you know, during the day most of us were up on deck, because the sick guys were down underneath, and you couldn't stand it down there. So, this one day three or four of us were sitting up on the thing, and way in back of us we saw a great big cloud of smoke come up. And some way or another, these ships all started to turn, and we knew,

hey, that's one of our ships. So, the next day, they got the lead ship that was in this convoy. So here I was on the second and third ship.

Jim: A torpedo from a sub?

HH: Yeah, and see, you don't know who it is. You don't know if it's British. The Dutch were in there. Australia. I don't know if New Zealand had any subs or not. But the Americans and the British were mostly. But the Dutch were in there, I don't know what they controlled. Something down Indonesia or somewhere down in through there. But they were all there. And, well, kablam, here goes the lead ship!

Jim: Did it go down in a hurry?

HH: Oh, yeah. It hit it right square in the middle.

Jim: So, in minutes it was gone.

HH: It was gone within ten minutes.

Jim: No survivors that you could see? Or very few?

HH: If there were survivors there, the Japs wouldn't have picked them up. They wouldn't have.

Jim: So, they're gone. One way or another.

HH: They're gone. So, the third thing. This was a scary part for me. We were up there again, and boy, I tell you, we were all eyes all day long. Here came, a sixteen foot torpedo right at us. And we all started to yell, and that old captain, or whoever the Jap up there, I tell you, boy, I don't think he'd ever turned that ship, because that old ship really turned over like this. And that torpedo went from about here to that building across the street from us. From missing us. And sometime, during that night we pulled into Osaka, Japan. And I thought, "Oh, god! It's over with!" Well. They took the sick and the dead off that morning. And we stayed around there that night. And the next morning we left. And I thought, "Good God, where are they going to go with us now?"

Jim: They didn't say anything to you? You never knew what was up?

HH: No, never knew. When you're a prisoner, you know nothing. Just by guess. So then, they took us to Pusan, Korea. And you've probably heard of Pusan.

Jim: I've been there.

HH: And they put us on a train. Hard oak, just like this, all oak inside those trains. If you've been there, maybe you've seen their trains. But they were just hard. And we were on that train for two or two and half days. And we took turns. Some of the guys would sleep in the seats and then the guys that were sitting up sleeping, would take turns. They would get down on the floor, if you could stand the noise of the click click click click click! Jeez, you couldn't sleep!

Jim: Did you get anything to eat?

HH: Just a little. Yeah, they stopped at various places and we each got, again, just a little bowl of something, twice a day. And we knew we were never gonna get much. So then, they pulled all the curtains all the time. They didn't want us to know where we were. Because—

Jim: You knew you were in Korea, though.

HH: Yes, we knew that. So then, where'd we end up, we ended up way the heck up there in what they call Mukden, Manchuria.

Jim: Mukden.

HH: Mukden. There's a new name for it now, but it was M-u-k-d-e-n.

Jim: Right across the Yellow River.

HH: Yeah, a little ways up there. It's kind of north-west of that. Well, then we got into this camp, and the first big shock that I had there, a couple three of us we had to go to the **[Three-second gap]** there was a Japanese soldier. Japanese Master Sergeant, he had like four stars up on his, you know, we knew he was pretty high up. And I said, we were trying to make like we wanted to go to the latrine, you know. And he said, "You mean you want the john?" Perfect English. And then son of a gun, right in front of us he admitted that he was from Oakland, California. And, that didn't set over to good with us. We used to say that to ourselves. But, see, that's what they were doing, the Japanese, before the war started, they were enticing these young Japanese kids to go over there, they were gonna get an education. Yeah—

Jim: But they wouldn't let them go home.

HH: No, they put them in the Japanese army as interpreters.

Jim: Okay. So, well, did you find the john?

HH: Yeah, we found the john. We came out, the guy looked right straight at me and I said, "Thank you." He said, "You're welcome." Just an American boy is what he was. Japanese ancestry. Well, then we had, another one in there, he was also a

master sergeant, but he was down from LA, somewhere. Kashema (?) was his last name, I can always remember. You know, you look at those guys for three, three and a half years, you don't forget their names. But he was an okay guy. He was good. He was real good with us guys.

Jim: You stayed in Mukden, this prisoner camp?

HH: Two and a half years up there. A little over two and a half years.

Jim: Was life better there than in the Philippines?

HH: Yeah. Up there we started getting, we still got our rice that was just cooked up in a soup, and I'm sure the guys that were (scraping sound) I'll leave that there.

Jim: Don't go too far away.

HH: I imagine guys in Korea, they probably, they were the guys that went through pretty close to what we went through.

Jim: Who did?

HH: The Korean POWs.

Jim: Oh, you met some of them up there?

HH: No, no, see Korea was in 1950. '50 to '53. But what I'm saying is, I'm trying to give you an example here of who would have had it about like the way we had it. You know, the Japanese prisoners over with the Koreans, you know, the North Koreans. You know they captured the Americans.

Jim: I was there, for that war.

HH: Yeah, they had a rough time up in there, too. So, anyway, things went pretty good up there, we stayed around camp. I should have, I put a drawing with that of what these buildings, the barracks, look like. But they dug them out of the earth. And they set up big old planks, you know. And make the whole building, they boarded on the inside, dirt is up against that outside. The roof is like the roof that these early pioneers used. Sod roofs. And they had sod roofs up there, and you know what, I never saw one of those roofs leak. I don't know what they had underneath it, but it was all sod. But you were down in, when you went in. We always called ourselves muskrats or burrowing animal, cause you always had to go down about six steps to get in. But it was fairly warm in the winter. Little bit underground like that. So then up there, the first food we got was much better. They actually, every once in a while, little sourdough, yeast, and we'd have cornbread. Talk about heartburn! My gosh!

Jim: Your stomach wasn't used to that.

HH: Oh, no! You just couldn't get used to it. But anyway, we did. Most of us did, we put on a few more pounds. But at the end, I was down to a hundred and eight, from about a hundred and sixty pounds. And I was down to a hundred and eight pounds. But boy, the minute Americans got a hold of us, my gosh, I tell you, needles, I think they were intravenously vitamins, and all that kind of stuff. And eat! Boy, I tell you, I put on forty pounds in about six, eight weeks.

Jim: How, in two and a half years in this one prison camp, did things change in that two and a half years, or were they about the same from the beginning to the end?

HH: No, no, things were a lot better up in Manchuria. Yeah, they were much better. We had a Jap captain up there, he was a son of a gun. We called him the Bull. Ishigowa Tayi (?). Tayi is captain. But Ishigowa was his last name. And he loved to use his saber. Anytime he could take that saber off and use it on somebody, he was in his glory. And he'd laugh.

Jim: Use it on flat side?

HH: Yeah, he never did pull it out of the scabbard. He would just, the whole, you got this—

Jim: The whole thing.

HH: Yeah. And he would pull the whole thing off and slap guys around with that. Well, I'll tell you, he didn't stick around there very long. The minute we had these guys come in to camp that when the war was officially ended, see, those people up there, they didn't know it. And we were out there outside there one day, and we saw a couple of planes going over the airport, which was a few miles away. All these guys parachuting out. We said, there we are, we're free, as of now. And sure enough, an hour later all these guys that parachuted in were right outside of our camp. And I think they—

Jim: They were Americans?

HH: They were several Americans. A couple or three Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese. They were all interpreters. And you know, the Japs up there, they wouldn't believe it that the war was over. So, they were held prisoner for a little bit. Maybe an hour or two.

Jim: But the guys in the parachute, who came down in the parachutes?

HH: That's these Americans. The guys that came to relieve us.

Jim: Right, it was an American unit.

- HH: Yes. See, that's what I was saying, there were American officers, Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese that parachuted in with them. They were American citizens, these guys that came in, the Orientals. And then—
- Jim: So, what about your guards, what did they do. Did they just leave, or did they capture them?
- HH: Well, they were temporarily, they were over there, but we had no guards. We were the guards, then.
- Jim: Right, but what happened to your guards? Did they run away?
- HH: Quite a lot of them did. There was a few of them stayed around there.
- Jim: Well, why didn't you shoot them?
- HH: Well, that's a little thought too, you know. But I'll never forget, there was one little guard, why he looked like a little twelve year old boy, and he had a rifle that stuck up about two feet above his head. And we had this big Jewish guy from New York somewhere. And that little guy, he, (claps) way down here, you know, sticking that rifle butt, and he was hitting him under the chin, out on a work detail one day. The minute the thing was over, they made up a work detail, they made sure that he was on there, but you should have seen what that little guy, I got a name for him, you should have seen what he looked like after this big Jewish guy got done with him. He had teeth out. His face was black and blue, he had one eye closed, and he was limping.
- Jim: So the guards didn't get away completely?
- HH: Oh, no, they didn't get away completely. And one guy that stayed there, and you'll find it if you read that, this Kashema. He stayed around, and he was working, taking care of the boiler plant. They had small thing there, and they had tubs for us where we could take showers and wash our clothes and stuff like that. Well, here Kashema was running the boiler. And he talked to us, just like nothing ever happened. But I'll tell you, when he saw us guys all leaving in trucks over to the railroad depot, he was right outside the gate, and I'm sure he was saying to himself, "Help me. Take me along."
- Jim: But you didn't.
- HH: Nope. But I did tell him. I said, "If you get a chance to get out of here," I said, "Get into anything," and I said, "Head south." Cause, see, at that the time the Russians came in, and they took over Manchuria. And they just stripped the country. They robbed the country of all anything that was available to move. They

went into these factories, they moved out machinery, and they just stripped them. Little rape artists is what they were.

Jim: So, what was your work up there, what did they have you doing?

HH: Well, there was an American factory up there that started, and we worked there trying to complete this factory.

Jim: Carpenter work, that kind of thing?

HH: Carpenter work, masons trade, and we had, we did our share of sabotaging up there.

Jim: Oh, how'd you do that?

HH: Well, see, they would have, and believe it or not, they had machinery up there right down near off East Wash, Gisholt. They had Gisholt machinery. And what we would do, is, we had an American that was up there running this big crane down through the middle. And if there wasn't any Japs around, fasten onto a box. And we're putting in these big footings. Put that box of tools, that went with this machine? Put it down in there, and that's the fastest a POW's ever worked, I tell you, and they were down under the ground. And I'll bet they wondered, whatever—

Jim: What did you do with them?

HH: Just buried them.

Jim: So they wouldn't have them.

HH: So they wouldn't have them. See, they had the machine. But they didn't have the others, see, they have certain tools you gotta have for—

Jim: To run the machines.

HH: Yeah.

Jim: So, you found a way to make the machines unworkable.

HH: Unworkable. We had a lot of things like that, that went in down underground.

Jim: The Japanese didn't punish you for doing this?

HH: Well, how could they prove it? They didn't know we did it.

Jim: Well, I thought they wouldn't have to prove it. If they decided you did it.

HH: No. They probably think, "These guys couldn't take it back to camp with them. Where is it?" But, see, they had the machinery there. And, you see, they wanted to get all these footings and spent cores and stuff like that so they could mount the machinery. But when they mounted the machinery, hey, where's the tools? We can't use that. Unless they were pretty good at make-shifting to make the thing work.

Jim: Well, they could send to Gisholt for some more.

HH: (laughs) Yeah. But then for a while up there I worked on these, you've probably seen these, those wood burning units they set in the back end of the cars, you know?

Jim: I saw them all over Japan. In 1950.

HH: See, I was, I worked on those, in their garage.

Jim: Charcoal burners.

HH: Well, see, the ones we had, they worked on wood. Either oak or birch, is the only kind of wood. It had to be a hard wood. And they were all in little blocks, about that long and maybe about that square, and you know you lifted up that cover, and then you sit it on the outside with that crank, they have to get it built up to where it makes the gas, and of course the carburetors are taking off, and all you got up there is just a flutter valve. And you could open up that flutter valve, and they'd take a piece of paper to find out if the gas was all right. They'd get inside the truck, start it up, and sure enough, they'd drive off. Drive fifty miles and they'd have to stop and re-stoke it again. So, it was fun working on those. **[End of Tape One, Side Two]** Somewhere, I don't know if I got it yet, but I had, it's all in Japanese, but it's a picture of one of those, and I really think I could build a wood burning unit. I think I could. It'd be fun trying it.

Jim: You didn't bring an instruction manual home, though?

HH: No, but I've got just a little piece of paper. I think I've got it yet. If I can find that I'll bring it up here. We'll find somebody that, that'd be an alternative for our fuel costs, wouldn't it?

Jim: Right. Every fifty miles, makes a lot of work.

HH: Yes, it was. And of course they had the Manchurians. They were the guys that always run the trucks and stuff like that. Japanese themselves didn't. But it was quite a deal.

- Jim: So, all of a sudden now you realize the war was over. And, tell me about getting something to eat. How'd that go?
- HH: Well, we raided their, the Japanese supply house. We found out they had quite a bit of food over there. Boy, that first night, we ate meat, and you know—
- Jim: That you'd never had. They never fed you meat.
- HH: No, and you know, a good share of us, it just came up. We couldn't eat it.
- Jim: Cause your stomach was about this big.
- HH: Yup. But we got into a lot of the other things. In fact, we even found some things in there that the Red Cross brought. And they never gave it out to us.
- Jim: You never saw a Red Cross package?
- HH: Yeah, we did.
- Jim: You did occasionally.
- HH: Never saw it until the end of 1944. That's when you got it. A lot of people nowadays, they've got a little sore spot for the Red Cross, you know. But I don't. I don't. They got us in a little bit of stuff, you know. That little bit helped. But they used to get in these little cans of pate. Pate, which I think is liver sausage.
- Jim: Paté.
- HH: Paté. And jams and jellies and little biscuits that would be in containers, you know?
- Jim: I bet that tasted good.
- HH: Oh, god, did it taste good! And, enough would come in, like every couple, three months they would dole it out. And of course those jams, you know. The guys were getting a little fed up a little bit now. And they were getting a little bit irritable with each other. You know we'd been together for so long. And, gosh, I was in charge of the Marines that were down on the end, and I tried the best I could to take these various kinds of jam, you had four or five kinds of jam. Well, this guy likes strawberry, and this guy hated grape, and the next guy to him he liked grape. And trying to figure out, you know, who's going to get what next month. And everybody wanted strawberry! So, I had a regular list made out until I couldn't take it any longer. And we had an old first sergeant there, and I says, "Sarge, I can't take this!" I said, "My God," I said, "I'm doing the best I can to make sure that everybody gets a little of instead of not all grape, or not all something else." And I says, "What are we going to do?" "Give it to me." You

know from that day on, the old first sergeant, the gunnery sergeant there, nobody said a thing. I think it's because I was a corporal, and they thought, well, we can push this guy around. But the old gunnery sergeant, he handled it.

Jim: That was the end of that problem.

HH: Yeah. The H with you guys. If you didn't like what you're getting, he'd just take the box and he'd go down and he'd just throw them out.

Jim: That or nothing.

HH: That or nothing.

Jim: You say you got Red Cross towards the end of the war about every month?

HH: 1944, the first ones.

Jim: And then about every month after that?

HH: Well, at least, I don't know how much the Japanese had out there, but about once a month we'd get something.

Jim: Okay. So, the war is over, and you've raided their pantry and ate too much and threw up, and then what?

HH: Well, then it was I think the next day, there was an American plane of some kind. I don't know what it was. It was a two engine, kind of a big fat thing. It was something though, that had to fly from Japan all the way up there to Manchuria. And, by god, here he came down about as high as that building, and these great big palates of food. Every kind of food.

Jim: C46, probably.

HH: I thought it was bigger than that, even.

Jim: Bigger than a DC3. Yeah, that's what it is.

HH: Well, anyway. He came down through there, and by god, what a job he did. He lined his plane right up with the old brick wall of that thing, and boom, boom! He landed two of those grate big palates, they were about eight feet square. And of course, the flour broke, made a cloud. And I'm sure the guys were trying to get the flour up there. But, everybody wanted their hands into that, but then we had a bunch of these officers out there, they had to shoo the guys away. But I never saw a guy place the packages right at the front, at the main gate! He was, that guy had been practicing for a while, I think.

Jim: Then he took off again.

HH: Took off, yep. Never saw him. We don't know, he probably went back to Japan.

Jim: Anybody in authority seem to take over by this time? Any outside officers or?

HH: Well, that's what it was. It was, I know there were a couple of guys over there that parachuted in, they were colonels. And then he was in, you know, the officers in our camp. And that's when we took over. The officers, they were back in command again, and we were putting guards out there for our gate. And you had the guys patrolling the barracks at night. And we were right back to good old American military. But it took us a month to get out of there.

Jim: Out of where?

HH: Out of Mukden. We had to get, the Russians, see, they came down. And that's where I was telling you, they raped that whole country. And, so, we finally got a train down to Port Arthur. You know that's a different name know too, but it's on the north Yellow Sea. We got this train which was, it was only an eight or nine hour train ride down from Mukden down to there. But it took us a whole month. The Russians, you know. I don't know. Maybe they thought they had us [unintelligible] But we had a heck of a time getting out of there.

So, then we got down there, and we got on, what was it? I used to know the name of it. USS Rixie? I think it was the Rixie. Well, you got down there, and it was just like an assembly line. The only thing we could keep was our billfold, and they fumigated that even. You even had to open it up, for lice or anything. And you went along, your shoes, your socks, your pants. Nobody had underwear. You just had pants, slacks. We didn't have underwear for three and a half years. And you threw it in a big incinerator, and it was burned, right there. You go on a little bit ahead, and the whole body went through this, you know, any disease we had on our skin, anything like that. Went right straight through that thing, right into the shower. After the shower, and you can imagine that, a shower with nice white towels. Wash rags—

Jim: Something you hadn't seen for a while.

HH: Sweet smelling soap. I can't remember what kind of soap it was. And then, when you got through there, the guys, oh, the guys were feeling cocky, and they were using the towel, you know, all that kind of stuff. And right out the other end, and there was a whole stack of new clothes for us. All new clothes. And Jesus, you talk about a bunch of guys that came to life. You never saw a thing like it. Let's see, I wrote it down there. I think its 22 or 24 hours, I layed down I think it was four or six o' clock one afternoon, and I never got up until four o'clock the next day. And the guys all around, you know, they were telling me, "You know you've had a watch on you ever since you've been in there?"

Jim: They thought you were dying.

HH: Yeah. And these officers, these doctors came by, and they said, “Well, he’s still breathing. Just let him sleep.” But it was, I think it was 22 or 24 hours that I slept. Just relaxed. Absolutely over with. And clean sheets? Wow! That was really something.

Jim: Was the disease rate less in Mukden than it was in the Philippines?

HH: No, Philippines was the big, yeah.

Jim: Right, but I said, that was improved, too.

HH: Yeah, I think we went up there with 2400 men, but it was still the deal that they were sick from the Philippine Islands. And there was six or seven hundred men that we left up there.

Jim: In Mukden. Who died from illnesses they’d contracted before.

HH: That’s what they died from.

Jim: But the living conditions were definitely much—

HH: Better. Yeah, yeah. It wasn’t bad up there at all, and another nice thing about it, you know, you’re out of the tropics and most of us guys were all northern boys. There were a few of them from the south. And that’s another thing up in there, we had a few days up in there, you know it was 20, 30 below zero. And that’s the first time in my life I saw 54 degrees below zero. And you think we were, we weren’t clothed for that. And we walked about a mile over to this plant, to this little factory where we were working. Some of these guys, the Japanese, they don’t have a ten or a twelve size shoe, and these guys would have to cut the toes of the shoes out, or the whole front of the shoe so the foot would go in. And you can imagine what would happen to those guys, froze the feet, froze the toes, everything. It was just a horrible mess all the way through. Every step of it. It wasn’t good.

Jim: What about drinking water?

HH: All boiled. You had to, all boiled water.

Jim: But you could get water when you needed it?

HH: Yeah, and then we had those lister bags, you know. And they would put that, what is that stuff that we used to put in?

Jim: Chlorine.

HH: Chlorine. And, boy, they'd make it with so much chlorine you could hardly drink it. But we drank it. Otherwise, we did, we had a lot of boiled water where we went, where we worked at that factory they would boil water in the kitchen. And then they would come out, the Chinese, you know. Coolies. And they would fill these bags up, and the Americans always had, we're bigger eaters and we're bigger thirst guys. We drink more and we eat more than an oriental. So they always had to keep those bags filled with water. Same way, you gotta keep the troops happy.

Jim: All right, now we're back in the real land here, back in Japan for a while before you came home?

HH: No. We went from Port Arthur, Manchuria to Okinawa. And that's where I got back into a little combat action. We got down there and I never saw so many ships in my life. There were hundreds or maybe thousands of ships all around there, and I saw my first kamikaze plane. Kamikaze. Coming on down through there, and jeez, these guys that were out on the little old guns on the fore and aft of the ship. As far as I know, that guy went for a couple of miles there, and they never did hit him.

Jim: This is when the war is over?

HH: This is when the war is over. See, they had kamikaze guys that were still fighting. Sure, they were still shooting. Well, anyway, they never did hit that guy. And then, the next day for some reason or another, we moved our ship. And you'll never believe it. We hit a doggone mine. A little floating mine like that.

Jim: What kind of a ship were you on? A transport?

HH: Yeah, it was a, what did I say, the USS Rixie or some darn thing like that. It was a nice ship, too.

Jim: So what happened? To the ship? Did they sink it?

HH: Well, the whole engine crew was killed. And there were three or four marines that had went through the POW camp, they got killed because they were right above it, and there's a concussion. It killed them.

Jim: But the ship stayed afloat?

HH: Yeah. No doubt, the Japanese or Chinese got it. Melted it down. But anyway.

Jim: How'd they get you off?

- HH: Well, there was another ship came over, little tug boat thing, and they took us from here over to another one. And then we got over there, and we stayed just a few days.
- Jim: Over where?
- HH: On Okinawa, near Ogana. Isn't it, Ogana? It's the name of the town. Ogana, or something like that. Then, I was one of the lucky guys. I had a very bad case, I'm glad it happened that long. I had a very severe case of malaria. It never showed up until 1945.
- Jim: This is the first attack?
- HH: The first attack. I had a very bad case. And by gosh, you know, the Navy had two or three of these great big 29s that bombed Japan. That dropped the A-Bomb. And, they had one that was going back to the states. And what do you know, I got a ride on that plane from Okinawa back to Oakland, California.
- Jim: Nonstop?
- HH: Nonstop.
- Jim: Nonstop?
- HH: I believe it was nonstop. I don't ever remember the plane stopping.
- Jim: That's a long push. Maybe it stopped in Hawaii? Or Midway?
- HH: Probably Midway or Guam.
- Jim: Midway would be my guess.
- HH: Well, those planes took off from the Marianas, didn't they. That's kind of. Yeah, but that's not very far from. I'm almost saying that it stopped at Guam. But like I said, I didn't—
- Jim: You just don't think they have enough gas to take it all the way across the Pacific.
- HH: Yeah, because that was one of the reasons that they took off from Monine Island, I think it was, in the, it's kind of between Guam and the Philippines, kind of up in here. But I just happen to think about that now, you know, I didn't put anything about that in there. But I did get a free ride back.
- Jim: Right. So, anyway, it got you back to the United States. Tell me about that.

HH: Well, they kept us, I was in, see, all the POWs that came back, the Navy anyway, they put us in, like, isolation.

Jim: Well, you were having to still separate from the Malaria.

HH: Yeah, well, everybody, they were afraid maybe we—

Jim: They didn't know what else you might have.

HH: Right. So, they kept us around there. I was there for about a month.

Jim: In Oakland?

HH: Oakland.

Jim: Yeah, I've been there.

HH: And boy. You just can't believe it from August to October how much your senses start coming back. You're just living in hell for three and a half years, and then everything comes to light.

Jim: You become human again.

HH: Yeah. So then I was there, in Oakland, like I said, they put me under observation, and, oh, god, they checked out everything. I got over my malaria. They gave me some kind of shots. I don't know what it was they gave you, but it sure didn't smell good when you went to the bathroom. Whatever it was, I don't know. Then finally from there, another scary thing is I was going back to Great Lakes, and landed at that other, that little Naval air station around Chicago there? Not O'Hare.

Jim: North of there?

HH: North or south, I don't remember, but it's a little, little naval air station there. Well, anyway, when we took off from the Oakland Naval airport, there, jeez, I noticed this plane when it took off, it was noisy. Just rattled, jeez, it rattled all over. So we got up into the air, and I was leaned back in my seat, and I kept looking at two rows of rivets that were right up above my head. See, they didn't go across Colorado, from Oakland they went down, and they went across Arizona and New Mexico up, where the mountains are lower. Then we stopped at Apathy, Kansas. And at Apathy, Kansas, this plane took off again. And I was leaning back, and I tell you, those rivets up there were just going in circles. And I said to myself, "My God, I got this far, get me to Chicago!" And that's what was rattling. I was afraid that that doggone plane was just going to fall apart. That's the first plane I'd ever been on. Sure. 1945. But it was an old C46 or 47, I don't know

which one. But it was a regular rattle trap, I tell you. My Model-T Ford was better than that.

But, well, then we got to Great Lakes. And that was in October, and they gave us a hundred and twenty day leave. Four month leave. See, because we never used any of our, the old terminal leave thing, you know. So they gave us all four months, see, like thirty days for every year. I should have had a hundred and fifty days, cause I had five and a half years. Well, so, I went home and stayed with my parents. And didn't really know what I was going to do after I got out. But I went back down to Great Lakes there, I didn't take my discharge until May. Because I didn't want to get discharged in the winter, it was cold! So I stayed, and I got out of the service 11th of May in '46.

Jim: When did your parents find out that you were not dead, and were in prison?

HH: Now this is another thing. I saw there's no telegram around, and I thought I had that, and I looked for it here a few years ago, but my parents didn't know that I was alive until November of 1944. Two and a half years!

Jim: But they did not think, there was no notice that you were dead, either?

HH: All it was, missing in action. Imagine that! From May of '42 till November of '44. You can't tell me that those Japanese. But the Japanese were so positive that they were going to whip us, and they just were cocky. That's really what it was, and they weren't going to do anything more for us that they had to.

Jim: They didn't.

HH: That's right.

Jim: So it was a joyous homecoming, then. So when you got back on your plane ride to Oakland, you phoned home right away, I assume.

HH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Jim: Your mother fell over in a dead faint?

HH: Yeah, just about. Well, you know. Then, of course I had three other brothers that were all in the service. I had five brothers, and three of us got in. I think my older brother never got in, but I think, I got a hunch, I'm playing a guess here. There were four of us boys in service. Now, I was missing in action, and nobody knew if I was dead or alive. And I think they gave my oldest brother, maybe he got a deferment, because—

Jim: Because they didn't know about you.

HH: I'm just taking a guess. Because four of us were all in.

Jim: Right. That was enough.

HH: I'm just taking a guess. But it's, who knows. A lot of things you and I will never know.

Jim: So, after you finally were discharged, then where did you go?

HH: Well, I went back to Fort Atkinson. But you know, I almost came to Madison, because my parents lived right over here on East Main. Remember where the old Philips Liquor was?

Jim: Oh, sure.

HH: My parents rented that apartment up above there. They lived in there for two and half or three years, something like that. And the reason my dad, mother, and my one sister, they left Fort Atkinson, and they came to Madison, because my dad got a job, I think this helped a little, too. He got a job with the VA. You know, he was a farmer, and he didn't really know too much about any other thing. But he got a job out there as a, well, I call it janitor. And he retired from out there. He only got in about 14 years, but he got a little pension out of it. Yeah, so.

Jim: Did you use your GI bill?

HH: Yeah, I didn't know what the heck to do, and I was 25 years old, and I thought, god, you're kind of a little old to go to college. But I think I could have probably swung something there somewhere. You know I was never a good student in school. But, then I took up the carpentry. And I stayed at that about twenty years. And you know, you hit around about 40, you kind of saying to yourself, you know, that cold. You don't appreciate cold. And I said to myself one day, "You know there's gotta be a better way than this to make a living." So, my neighbor told me about Jones Dairy Farm there in Fort Atkinson. And he says, "You know, Jones are going to start hiring." He says, "Why don't you get out and put your application in?" By gosh, I went down there, put in my application, and I stayed there for 24 years.

Jim: Oh, my goodness. What did you do for Jones?

HH: Well, I was maintenance department. When I first started out, the first month or six weeks, I worked right with the line, you know, guys cutting up beef, boning out stuff, with the meat. And this application came up, or it was posted on the bulletin board for maintenance man. So, heck, I put in for that, things worked out, and I stayed there for 24 years.

Jim: Well, that's wonderful.

HH: I retired out of there in 1984.

Jim: So you never got around to using your GI Bill, then?

HH: I went on the GI Bill with the carpentry trade.

Jim: Oh, the training school for that, you paid for that with the GI Bill. Where was that?

HH: Fort Atkinson.

Jim: It was in Fort Atkinson.

HH: We had a real good teacher. He lived in Madison here. And he came once a week. James was his last name, and he was out of Iowa. An old retired carpenter. And, oh, he was smart! Oh, I tell you, he knew his carpentry trade. You couldn't say something detrimental about the carpenter trade, because I tell you, he was right there to correct you. But he was a nice old guy to work with. But he worked out of the, I don't know if it was the carpenters union here, or if it was through the vocational school or something like that. But he worked for the state, anyway.

Jim: Sure. Did they give you any special medals for being a prisoner of war?

HH: Yeah, there's a POW medal.

Jim: There's a POW medal, right.

HH: Yeah, we all got that. And we only got that three or four years ago.

Jim: Yes, I know about that. Okay. And did you join any veteran's organizations?

HH: Yeah, I belong to, right now I belong to the DAV and the VFW. For three, few years I was in with the American Legion, but I thought, you know, I belong to two of them.

Jim: American Legion's membership is down.

HH: Yeah, there's no doubt it's a good organization, but I thought, Veterans of Foreign Wars, that more fit me.

Jim: Yeah, that fit me, too. That's what I, I support that. I mean, I don't go to any meetings or anything.

HH: No, I don't either. I was the quartermaster for 14 years at Fort.

Jim: Oh, really?

HH: Yeah. That got to be a big job, but see, when I went to Jones, every once in a while at night, I'd have to go in and work nights. Well, there's the books, you know, and I'd have to call somebody, I said, to take over the books, because I gotta work tonight. So after 14 years, I just gave it up, you know. I think I probably was the longest quartermaster that they had around there. Yep, I joined the VFW right away. I wasn't even out of service yet. Actually, I joined in 1946, but our records there has got it down, there records only start from 1948, so I'm going to write to the VFW headquarters sometime, and find out. I'm going to tell them, I paid my dues in '46 and '47 but or books are only from '48 up.

Jim: Okay. Anything you forgot to tell me?

HH: Good to be alive.

Jim: Right. All right. Very good.

HH: Oh, there could be things there, but most of it is in here. So if you read this sometime—

Jim: Is there something that should be on tape, that you'd want to tell me about?

HH: Well, you know, you were mentioning—

Jim: I'm going to make a copy of this for you, you know.

HH: Oh, you are going to make a copy?

Jim: Oh, I'll send it to you.

HH: Oh, I see. Well, you mentioned about that POW medal.

Jim: Okay, are you going to tell me something?

HH: Yeah.

Jim: Okay, I got you back on.

HH: Yeah, well, I was going to say, is, they gave us the POW medal about, what? Three or four years ago. And then, when we were in the Philippine Islands, the Army all got the Bronze Star. Except the Marine Corp, and the Navy.

Jim: They all got individual Bronze Star medals?

- HH: Yes, every man that was a POW in the Philippine Islands got the Bronze Star. Every one! So, we got the right kind of an Admiral in Washington. You know, the big guy. We got the right kind of a guy there, and he says, "Yes! The Navy and the Marine Corps, they earned that Medal just like the Army did." And he signed the order, so I just got my Bronze Star here. Two or three years ago. Like I said, the right kind of a guy got in there.
- Jim: And your citation read that you were in the defense of the Philippines?
- HH: Well, that whole paper, it's hard to understand it sometimes.
- Jim: But that's what it related to?
- HH: Yeah. But then, I got the purple heart, also. So I got three of the—
- Jim: Purple Heart on what basis?
- HH: Well, I was wounded, shrapnel. Over on Coregador, you know. Flying shrapnel.
- Jim: Oh, I didn't know. You didn't mention that.
- HH: No, I didn't. No. We didn't get around to the medals. Anyway, I got nine medals, altogether. One of them, there's a, we also got the—
- Jim: Philippine medal.
- HH: Yeah, we also got the Army distinguished unit badge, you know? But in the Navy and Marine Corps, you don't wear that. You just got your ribbons. And this one, you were over here. The Marine Corp, you don't do that. And then there's the distinguished unit from the Philippine Government. So there's a couple of them, if I wanted to wear them, I had to join the Army. Or the Air Force. But, getting back to those medals, but what I was going to say was, there was a Navy Distinguished Unit badge. Well, that's just a ribbon. There's no medal with it. If you ever see it, it's—
- Jim: Well, most of those units they didn't have medals anyway. I mean I got all those from Korea, but, they're all just unit things.
- HH: Yeah. But this one that the Navy and Marine Corp had, I think it's yellow, blue, and red. Just three red stripes through it. If you see it, you'll know what that is. But you wear it, right in amongst your regular. So that's a little bit different than what the Army does with theirs, then.
- Jim: Good. Now that's a good addition to it. All right. We're all through, then.
- HH: Well, that's about it. If there's anything I missed you'll see it in here.

Jim: Well, you did very well. And I appreciate it.

HH: Well, it's amazing you know, that a guy's mind can stay together this—

[End of Interview]