Orleans County Historical Association

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Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

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Mr. William F. Larimer

Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

William L. Lorimer
Signed

3-13-81
Date

Understood and agreed to: Marjorie C. Radzinski
INTERVIEWER

3-13-81
Date

I was raised in a village in southern Minnesota called Brice1yn with a popu1ation of about 700 wonderfu1 peop1e. My father owned a restaurant where a11 of us four boys in the fami1y 1earned to work when we were young.

In 1941, I joined the U.S. Army after comp1eting Shattuck Mi1itary Schoo1 in Fairbou1t, Minnesota. I asked for and received assignment to the Phi1ippine Is1ands where I arrived in Ju1y 1941, at the 12th Mi1itary Po1ice Company, Fort Wi11iam McKin1ey, which is about nine mi1es outside of Mani1a.

From Ju1y 1941 unti1 December 8, 1941, I performed the duties of a Mi1itary Po1iceman at Fort McKin1ey. On December 8, 1941, when I came downstairs for breakfast,I saw my First Sergeant reading the morning paper and he stated, rather noncha1ant1y, that Pear1 Harbour had been bombed by the Japanese. Needless to say, that threw us a11 in a turmoi1. We rea11y didn't know what to do unti1 they to1d us to pack a11 of our persona1 be1ongings for storage. Within the next coup1e of days everything was rather hectic in preparation for war. The Japanese came in bombing the Phi1ippines. To show you how ignorant we were, there was an airp1ane dog-fight over Ft. McKin1ey and a11 of us were shooting at the p1ane being chased! However, the one we were shooting at turne out to be American and we shot it down. Fortunate1y, the pi1ot was not injured bad1y.

In the event of war, the defense p1ans of the Phi1ippine Is1ands ca11ed for the immediate withdrawa1 of a11 troops to Bataan. Bataan was protected by the 18 inch guns on Corregidor Is1and which was just off the tip of Bataan. The guns cou1d fire in a 360 degree circ1e.

After the bombing, a11 the troops withdrew to the Bataan peninsu1a. My Mi1itary Po1ice Company was assigned the duties of guarding Genera1 Lough; however, I was assigned to motorcyc1e escort and messenger duties. One day I was escorting a convoy of mi1itary trucks from Mani1a to Bataan and the Japanese p1anes came in dive bombing us. I turned my motorcyc1e to avoid the strafing and I hit a pi1e of sand on the side of the road. My motorcyc1e f1ipped over on top of me; my pisto1 fired accidentl1y and the bu11et grazed my knee. Another incident happened to me just before our surrender when I was carrying

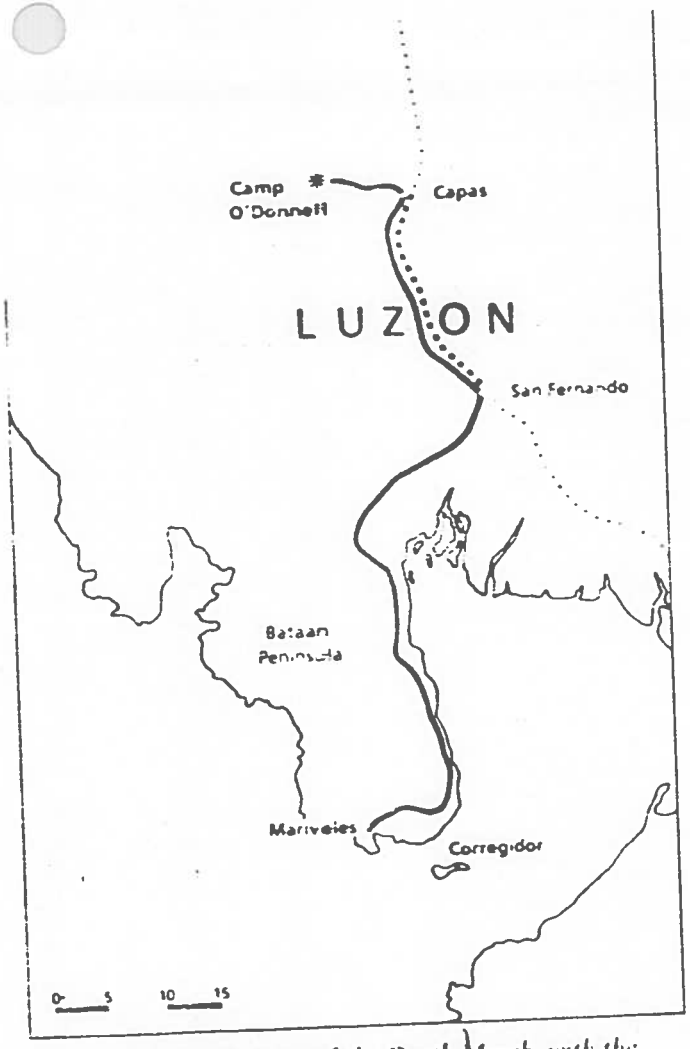
messages to Corregidor. I was riding down the road and passed out from malaria. When I came to, I was in the hospital; I had smashed up my motorcycle and was scratched and bleeding from head to foot. The day after my accident, the Japanese bombed the hospital and I got out of there quick and made my way back to my company!

Just to show how the Japanese were during the fighting, we strung barbed wire entanglements ahead of the front line. When the Japanese would attack us, they would form a human ladder, throwing their bodies over the barbed wire - as many as 4, 5, or 6 Japanese in a row laying over the wire so the rest of the Japanese troops could run across their bodies to get over the wire.

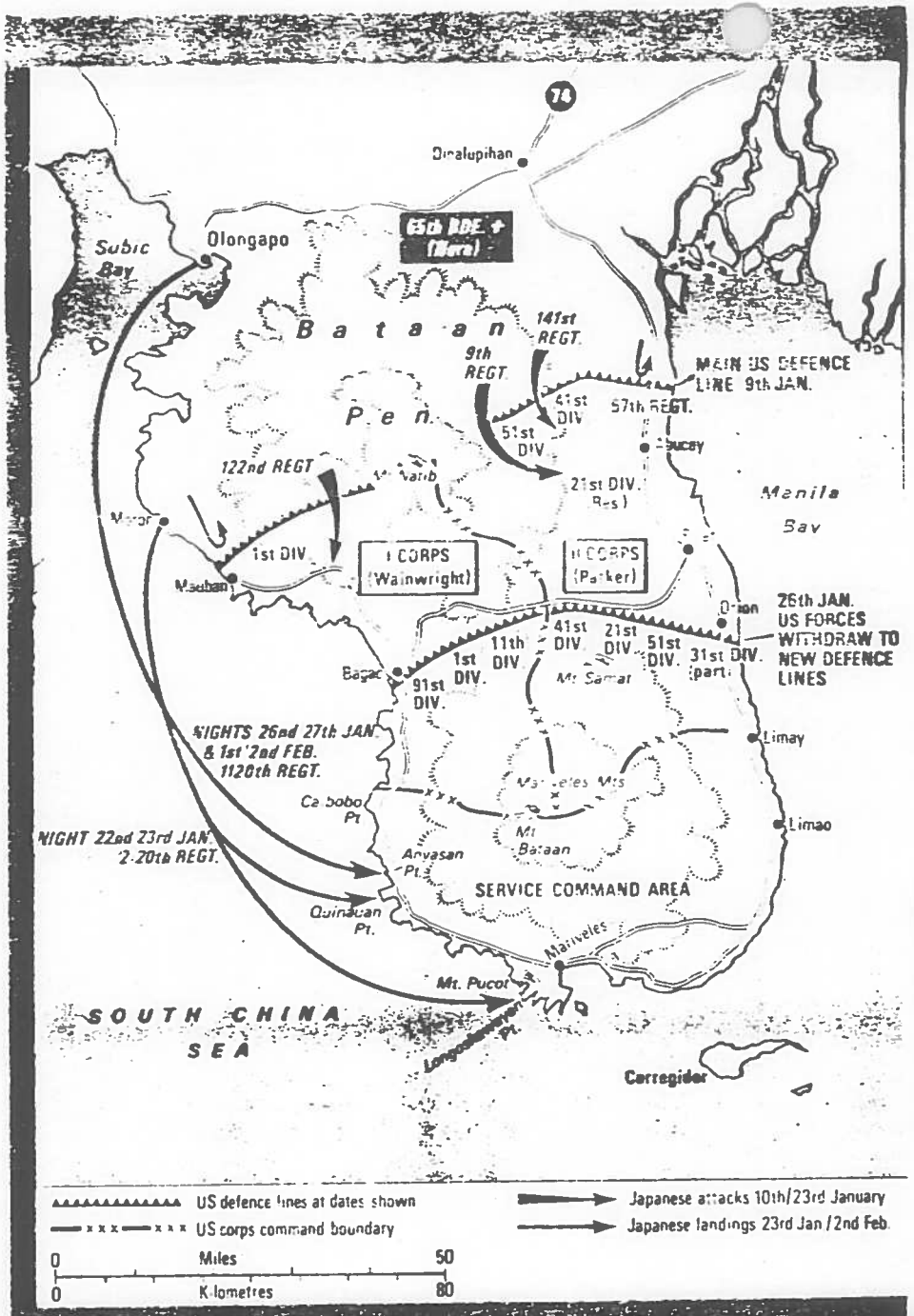
While we were fighting the war, we received our supplies from Corregidor Island. Corregidor had huge refrigerated storage caves where all the food was stored. We received no supplies whatsoever from any place except Corregidor. The Japanese kept a constant day and night bombardment of Corregidor and eventually were able to knock out the refrigeration & as a result, all the food spoiled. Also our ammunition was so low that it would have been useless to continue the fight; so, on April 8, 1942, General King surrendered all the American and Philippino troops on Bataan. Just prior to this, General Douglas MacArthur had left the Philippines for Australia. General Wainwright was left in command of the Philippines.

I would like to tell you that the surrender was a real nightmare! There were about 30 of us Military Police still guarding the General when they announced that we should lay our weapons down and the Japanese would be coming in. We were really frightened! I put a couple of guns on the ground in front of me; however, I had a sub-machine gun immediately behind me in back of a tree because I made up my mind that if they came in shooting, I could at least try to get a few of them.

Soon we heard a lot of hubbub at the forward end of the line, way ahead of us around the bend in the road, and we saw our first Japanese. The first ones were artillery men carrying a mountain howitzer. They were cheerful-looking little fellows and they smiled as they walked by. They were all covered in sweat, and



Opposite: The confusion of the Death March, with the conquering troops moving along the Bataan Peninsula through the lines of battered American captives, is shown in this painting by an official Japanese artist, Mukai Jun-Kichi Above: The route of the march appears in black, the dotted line designates the railroad that carried the prisoners from San Fernando to Capas.



The defence of Bataan Peninsula begins

we were amazed at the weight they carried. One carried a wheel, another the tube, another the trail, another the packs of the fellows carrying the pieces. They all had flies around their heads. Having been in the jungle for a while, they were filthy.

After them came the infantry and they were a lot more vicious. They started to go through our pockets. Some knew a little English and hollered,"Go you to hell! Go you to hell!" One of the Japs went over to a Colonel and showed that he wanted the Colonel to take off his wedding ring. The Colonel kept refusing. A Jap came up to me and cleaned me out. Then he reached in my back pocket. Suddenly he jumped back and his bayonet came up real fast between my eyes! I reached into my back pocket and found a rifle clip I'd forgotten about. Quickly I dropped it on the ground. The Jap took his rifle and cracked me across the head. I fell. My head was covered in blood. When I looked up, I saw the Colonel couldn't get his wedding ring off, and the Jap was about to take his bayonet and cut it off along with the finger. The Colonel saw me and he reached over to get some of my blood which he used to wiggle the ring off. Then he was slapped and kicked.

With the surrender of Bataan, General Homma (the Japanese commanding officer) still faced the problem of subduing the American garrison on Corregidor, a short two miles away in Manila Bay. Only when Corregidor surrendered could Japan claim her most valuable prize : the Philippines. For the Japanese 14th Army the campaign was not over yet. Before this decisive battle could begin, however, it was necessary for the Japanese to remove the enormous number of prisoners which Major General Edward P. King had just surrendered... Anticipating this problem in late March, an evacuation plan was developed by Homma's staff. The plan was simple: the captives would walk out of Bataan as far as San Fernando. There, they would be shipped by rail to a prison camp (Camp O'Donnell) in central Luzon. From Mariveles, on Bataan's southern tip, to San Fernando is almost sixty miles. Plans to feed and care for the prisoners along the road were proposed and agreed upon. Unfortunately for the men of the Luzon Force, the Japanese plan for their evacuation was based on three assumptions, all of which proved to be false. The first miscalculation assumed the surrendered force to be

in good physical condition. The second error was in not allowing enough time to work out all the details of a proper evacuation. Lastly, the Japanese made a faulty estimate in the number of troops they would have to move. They assumed the figure would be between forty and fifty thousand men.

Because of the chaos that followed the disintegration of the Luzon Forces, it is impossible even today to give a precise number of the men who took part in the march out of Bataan... An educated guess, however, puts 62,000 Filipinos and 10,000 Americans on the march.

Marivelles. Now that was confusion! No one knowing where they were going, or what they should take, or how long it would take to get where they were going. Marivelles: tanks, trucks, cars, horses, artillery;like a Philippines' Times Square... and everything buried in dust, horrendous amounts of dust being churned up by the tanks and trucks. You realized that Homma's shock troops were coming down Bataan on their way to taking Corregidor. The Japanes were just in a rush to get us out of their way. Our officers were milling around, trying to find out what was going on. The Japanes officers also seemed confused as to what they were supposed to do with this pack of hungry, sick, bedraggled men they had captured.

After they assembled the majority of us, they divided us into groups of 1,000 and we started what is now called the "Bataan Death March". We marched for eight days and covered between 60 and 80 miles to our first prison camp called O'Donnell. On the Death March, we received only one rice ball in the whole eight days and what water we could steal from streams or wherever. I don't believe anyone will ever know how many Americans and Philippino soldiers were killed on the Death March. If a man was sick or too weak to walk, the Japanese guard would just shoot or bayonet him.((Additional note inserted here by Mrs. Ruth Larimer...wife): This is my husband's story and I do not presume to interfere - but he won't mention the full rice ball story, and I must. Hungry as he was, Bill shared that rice with his friend - who also survived to return home and tell everybody in their little town that the little bit of rice helped him to survive. Bill's parents told me this, not Bill. When I said it was a fine thing to do, Bill's only comment was "He was in worse shape than I was." That is so typical of Bill, as he has

always been. - When the Doctor who had been in Bill's camp in Japan was a patient on my ward, having known from his medical chart of his Prisoner of War status, I mentioned that I was engaged to a former P.O.W. He immediately asked Bill's name, and immediately remembered him - insisted that he come to the ward and see him. Afterward, the Colonel told me that of all the men in the camp, he could never forget Bill - no matter how bad things were, he never saw Bill give up, or get bad tempered, or complain. He also told me that I had picked the finest of men to marry - which I know even better now, after 34 years!))

We moved down the ridge a ways when we saw this GI. He was sick. We thought he had come out of the hospital because he was wobbling along, uneasy on his feet. There were Japanese infantry and tanks coming down the road alongside us. One of these Jap soldiers came across the road, grabbed this sick guy by the arm and guided him out across the road. The guy hit the cobblestones about five feet in front of a tank, and the tank pulled on across him. It killed him quick. There must have been ten tanks in that column and every one of them came up there right across the body. When the last tank left, there was no way you could tell there'd ever been a man there except his uniform was embedded in the cobblestones. The man disappeared but his uniform had been pressed until it had become part of the ground.

Now we knew, if there had been any doubts before, we were in for a bad time.

One of the tricks the Japs used to play on us - they thought it was funny too - was when they would be riding on the back of a truck, they would have these long, black snake whips and they'd whip that thing out and get some poor bastard by the neck or torso and drag him behind their truck. 'Course if one of our guys was quick enough, he didn't get dragged too far. But, if the Japs got a sick guy...

They would halt us at these big artesian wells. There'd be a four inch pipe coming up out of the ground which was connected to a well, and the water would be flowing full force out of it. There were hundreds of these wells all over Bataan. They'd halt us intentionally in front of these wells so we could see the water, and they wouldn't let us have any. Anyone who would make

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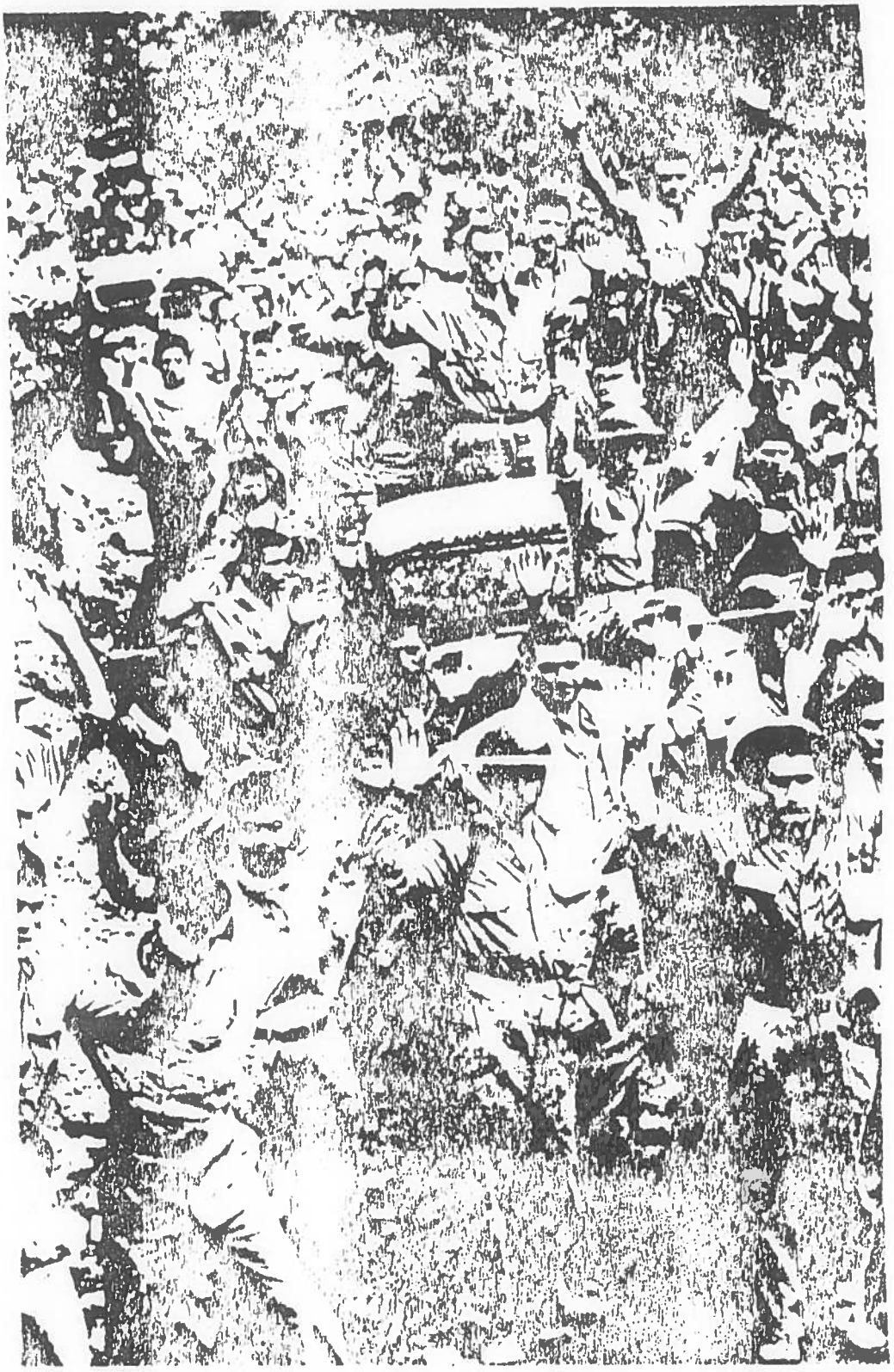


a break for the water would be shot or bayoneted. Then they were left there.Finally it got so bad further along the road that you never got away from the stench of death. There were bodies lying all along the road in various degrees of decomposition: swollen, burst open, maggots crawling by the thousands-- black, featureless corpses. And they stank!

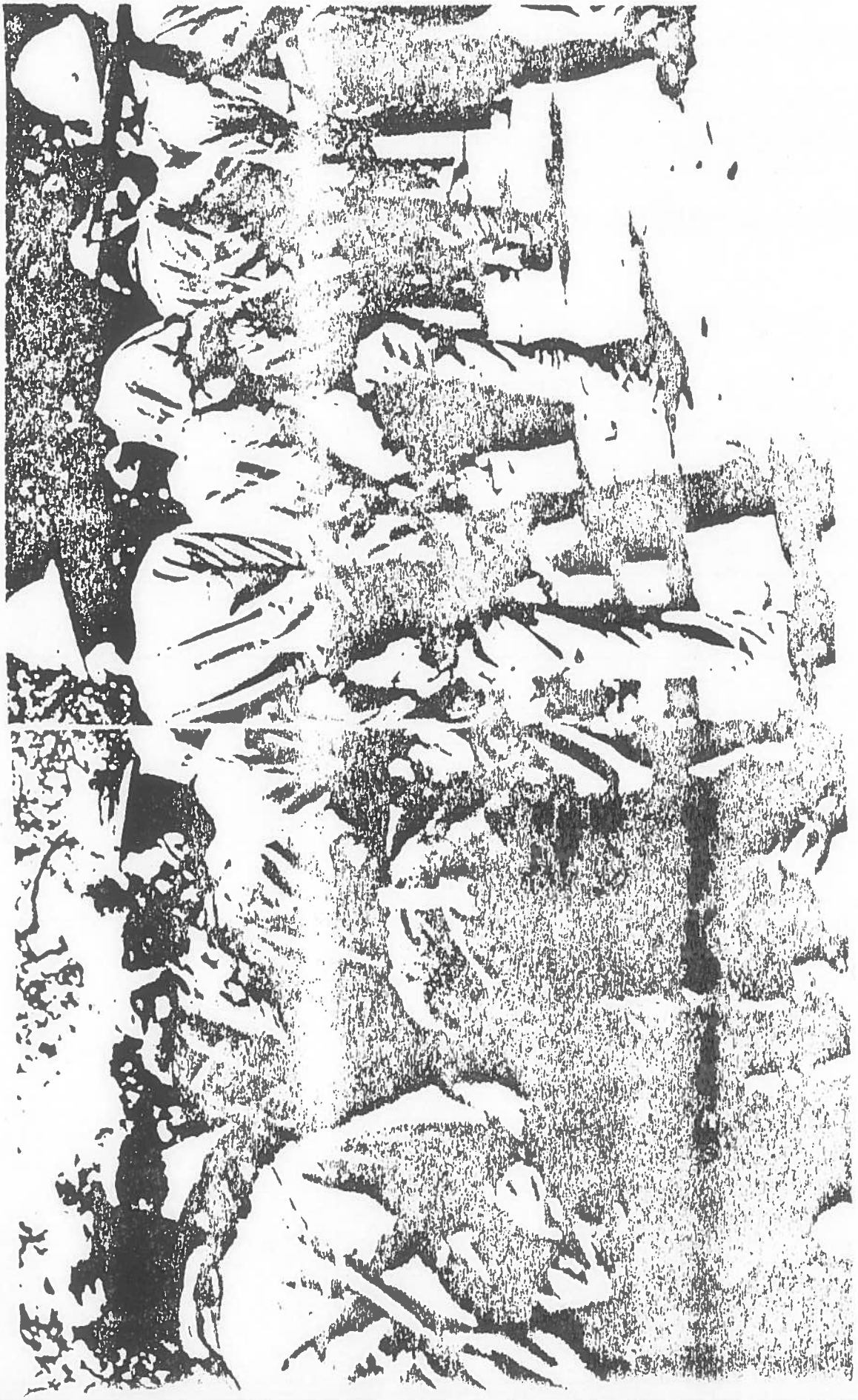
Sometimes they'd make us stand at attention two or three hours. They'd just stop us and make us stand still. If you got caught sloughing off, shifting your weight from one foot to another, you'd get beaten.

And the weather was hot, hot, hot. The sun comes up hot, and it goes down hot, and it stays hot all night. It was just plain hell hot...

We were waiting in the sun, in an open rice paddy. We stayed there without water 'till half a dozen men had passed out from the heat. Then we were ripe. The guards put us on the road and double-timed us. Every kilometer they changed the guards because they could not stand to double-time in the sun either. After a couple of miles, you could hear the shooting start at the tail of the column as the clean-up squad went to work. The old Indian guantlet with an Oriental twist...

When it came daylight, the Japanese would wake you up, make you form columns of four and stand at attention. Maybe once or twice they would allow an individual to collect a bunch of canteens so that he could go and get water. Then again maybe they wouldn't. It depended on the individual guard you were with.

First thing we would try to do is get all the men who were in the worst shape up to the front of the columns. That way as they got tired and the men who were helping them wore out, we could pass them slowly back through the column taking turns holding them or helping them. We knew if a man reached a point where he couldn't walk any more, he was going to be killed. So we tried to take turns helping the sick and injured. Sometimes we would prevail upon the guards to let us regroup and we'd be able to put the sick back up front. Sometimes we couldn't.



We could see some artillery pieces by the side of the road and some Japs taking a break in the shade. Some of them had tied a big pole onto a tree so that it could swing back and forth. With this they were taking turns raking it through the column of men. It was a big game to them, seeing how many of us they could knock down with one swoosh of this pile driver across the road. Some guys would duck or fall down, and the guy behind would stumble. It created a lot of confusion.

Of course we had a grapevine that worked like a telephone. Word traveled pretty fast. If there was trouble up ahead the word would come back down the column, and those who could, would walk more lightly. When we saw the trucks carrying infantry, we learned to get as far off the road as we could. The Jap troops would carry bamboo sticks -- rifle butts were heavy -- and they'd lean out and swat you as they went by. If they didn't have sticks, they had stones or knotted ropes. They'd just swing whatever they had and see if they could hit you.

There was a big tin warehouse or granary somewhere along the March that they packed us into one night. You could sit or lie down, but there was no water and it was very hot. And it stank! The next morning across the road the Japs had dug a hole and had some Filipino soldiers burying some dead men, except not everyone was dead. One poor soul kept trying to claw his way out of the hole. The Jap guards really started giving these Filipinos a hard time, trying to get them to cover this man up faster. Finally a Jap come over, took a shovel and beat him on the head with it. Then he had the Filipinos cover him up.

Late in the day my group had been herded into a field surrounded by three strands of barbed wire. It could have been the town square or close to it. There were a number of Filipino and American soldiers already there. We were so tired, hungry, thirsty, and so many sick or wounded, that we didn't at first notice the condition of those that were there. We would never forget it by the time we left the next day. Fortunately, it was close to dark and we didn't have to sit under the tropical sun. It had been another long, hot day without food and very little water...

Sometime after dark, the Japs brought some cans of rice to the enclosure gate. A five-gallon can for each hundred men. These cans were not full. Who cared? Those close to the gate were fed. There was not enough to go around. There was no crowding or pushing. A friend helped a friend. Many didn't care. Besides being tired, many were at the last stage of malaria. Just to be left alone in the grass or dirt to rest, sleep, or die. To have at least one close friend, a buddy to hold you in his arms and comfort you as you died, was enough. The few that still had faith and courage would have lost it if they could have forseen the future...

Later I talked to men at Camp O'Donnell who were behind us and arrived at San Fernando a day or two later. The dead had not been buried. The same terrible odor had doubled, and the sick and dying almost filled the area.

Shortly after noon all that could walk were lined up outside the barbed wire and marched a few blocks to the railroad station.

In the months ahead we would realize that each time we left the sick, they would never be seen again.

There was a train and a few box-cars. The Filipino trains are smaller than ours and the box-cars about two-thirds the size we used. Our spirits rose. We were going to ride instead of marching. In a few minutes we all wished we had continued to march. The box-cars had sat in the tropical sun with the doors closed.

The Japs divided us into groups of 100 men for each car. One Jap guard was assigned to a car. He pulled the door back and motioned us inside. The heat from inside hit us in the face. We stalled for time, but the Jap guard with his bayonet motioned us to climb in and he meant business. We all knew by now to openly resist them would be fatal.

We jammed in -- standing room only. Into the oven we went and, protest be damned, the doors were closed. The three hours that followed are almost indescribable. Men fainting with no place to fall. Those with dysentery had no control of themselves.

It seems to me that once in a while our train would stop, and the Jap guards would open the doors so we could get some fresh air. Then is when we'd get the dead ones out. If we could, we'd lift the corpses and pass them over to the door. There was

no way we could have passed them through...

We arrived at the small town of Capas. The boxcar doors were opened and we were ordered out. Sit down and be counted. Who could have escaped from that oven? While the Japs were making sure of the count, it gave us the opportunity to take off our shoes and pour the filth on the ground.

After a brief rest, we were told to get up and line up in a column of twos. Then we started marching down a dirt road the last five or six miles to Camp O'Donnell.

Some had marched all the way. A few had come by truck. Those that marched all the way suffered more... It wasn't the miles, it was the continuous delays along the March, The change of Jap command and guards, Standing in place for two or three hours, waiting for the order to start marching again, The lack of food and water, the rundown condition of the men before the start. A combination of all these things would make Camp O'Donnell just one big graveyard.

We would all help each other as best we could. My malaria was still bad because we had no medicine. I can only recall about half of the Death March because I was a little out of my head even though I kept going.

If I may digress to my one rice ball on the Death March: we were marched by day and put in a field to rest at night. I had just picked up my rice ball and was going back to the rest of my men when I glanced sideways and I saw a fellow who was from my hometown. I didn't even know he was in the service but he had been with the 4th Marines in Shanghai,China until he was brought to the Philippines..... (NOTE: see page 4,Mrs. Larimer).

There were about 27,000 American troops on the Philippines and after our surrender they put us all, and the Philippino troops, in Camp O'Donnell where the conditions were deplorable. We had no sanitary conditions at all except for those we were able to implement. We had very little food and no medicine at all. We had a well for water; however, there was not enough for cleaning clothes or for bathing. We did no work at all, except for work details for wood and supplies. Our people were dying like flies from dysentary, malaria, berri berri, elephantiasis and malnutrition.

Fortunately for us we were only at Camp O'Donnell for about one month then the Japanese moved us by rail, about 100 men per boxcar, to our next prison Camp Cabanatuan, where they only had us American prisoners. The Japanese made us work a 2500 acre farm, planting rice and sweet potatoes to be used for our own food.

The Japanese divided us into two groups: one the sick and the other the well group, with a separate fenced in area for each and the Japanese soldiers in the center. I was on the burial detail for a while and we buried in the neighborhood of 25 to 50 or more Americans a day in mass graves.

The Japanese soldiers were pretty brutal at Camp Cabanatuan; while we were working on the farm or on any work detail they would beat us around for any reason at all. I have scars all over the lower part of my body from some of these beatings. We did get even with them once in a while. For instance -- the Japanese loved Cobra snake meat to eat. The Cobra would take over big ant hills and when we worked the farms we would dig out the ant hills and when the Cobra would start coming out we would catch them, using long nooses. We would then taunt the snakes so they would turn and bite themselves. We would then trade the snakes to the Japanese for food or cigarettes.

While at Cabantuan, a few of us escaped. One Indian boy escaped and was caught just a little ways from the camp. The Japanese took him into a field where we all could see, put him on the ground and tied his arms and legs to posts with wet leather straps. The temperature was over 100 degrees and when the sun dried the leather straps, they shrunk and stretched the boy to death.

The Japanese then announced that we would be divided into groups of ten men and that if any of the ten escaped, the remaining men in the group would be killed. That was a deterrant for a while. However, one night one of the men escaped. The following morning they took the remaining nine men from the group outside the prison fence and lined all of us up to watch. They made the nine men dig their own graves and kneel down in front of the graves. A Japanese officer went behind each of the nine men and shot them in the head and pushed them in their graves.

Needless to say, there were no more escapes.

(End of side one of taped interview)

In about October 1942, the Japanese moved some of us prisoners by boat to Japan. There were around 700 of us in one of the holds of the ship. We could not even lie down we were so crowded, and we were not allowed on deck because they had the hold covered over. They would bring us a little food and water once a day, and the sanitary conditions were horrible. While on the 18 day trip to Japan, one of the prisoners had a bad attack of appendicitis and had to have an operation right away. One of our doctors performed the operation right there in the hold. He had no medication whatsoever. The Japanese only gave him a little cat gut to sew the boy's incision. We were all amazed that the boy recovered and walked off the ship when we docked in Japan.

There were a few Japanese ships which were carrying prisoners of war to Japan that were later bombed by our own planes. Of course our planes did not know they were bombing prisoners.

In one instance 1,619 American prisoners of war boarded a Japanese ship on December 15, 1944. There were also some 2,000 Japanese women and children and some 2,500 Japanese soldiers on board. The ship got a short distance from Manila and was repeatedly bombed by our bombers. The hold where the American prisoners were, suffered a direct hit and there were only 1,200 Americans alive to leave the ship back to Manila. Later they were loaded on another ship for Japan and their treatment was terrible. The Japanese would not feed or water them in the holds, and some of the prisoners turned to cannibalism and to drinking the blood of the dead to sustain themselves.

We stayed in Cabanatuan for about six months and I can't tell you how many of us were sent out on a freighter to Japan. We were taken to a camp in Japan by the name of Hiro Hata. It's right on the seacoast. We worked in a steel mill, did every imaginable work to maintain that steel mill. There were 475 of us there and we had one American officer who was a doctor. Thank gosh we had him! He was a wonderful man. My wife even knew him after the war. He ended up on her ward in Fitzsimmons Army Hospital. Conditions were much, much improved in Japan. First, we got away from the army. We had Home Guard guarding us;

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HIKO-HATA FRASER CAMP

we only had two Japanese Army people in the whole camp. They gave us hot baths twice a week; sanitary conditions were much better. The daily rations were 600 grams of rice, 21 ounces of rice a day, and green vegetable for soup. That was our rations for three and a half years. We learned to steal very well. If we were working ships, we would loot the storeroom or wherever we could find food or whatever. At that time, the Japanese food consisted of primarily the same thing we had. Of course they got much more and they would have a fish thrown in there.

The Japanese personnel we worked with were the Home Guard who were the old, non-draftable men that guarded us. They would carry us to the steel mill where they turned us over to the steel mill personnel who took us to our work areas. Discipline at the steel mill was rather lax; all they cared about was getting the work done, and we'd make a good show at working. We worked right along side Japanese and many Koreans. The Koreans were imported to do labor.

As far as mail from home, or any correspondence with home, my parents did not know what had happened to me for a full year and a half. Then they received word that I was a prisoner of war through the Red Cross, I think it was. About two years after I was a prisoner, they finally let through letters. At maybe two and a half years, they let through a box. My parents sent me as big a box as they could that had all kinds of goodies in it, and also about the same time I got the box from home we got a few Red Cross boxes. Our correspondence with our parents was only on form letters. They would fill in the most of it: I am well. I am in Hiro Hata Prison Camp. Say hello to ... and they would leave a blank spot, you know, like this.

Just to give you a little example: every day, twice a day, we had roll call. This one night we had been working all day, 12 hours a day, on all shifts. We all had our own number. My number was 311. We had to count off in Japanese when you spoke to the Japanese and while I was waiting for my number to come up, I yawned. My number came, I sounded off. After I got through the Japanese who was in charge, he called me down and asked me why I yawned. I said I was tired and he said we don't allow Japanese Army men to yawn. So he started hitting me, and for about twenty

minutes he beat my face. The next day my face was swollen and black and blue. That's the way they were. However, one thing to be said of them: they were also sadists with their own people. One of the Japanese soldiers did something wrong and an officer took out his sword and cut off the soldier's head.

As I mentioned, we had no medicine and our doctor asked us if we were ever on any ship details and saw any medication, we should steal it. Well, we had to steal to keep alive. On these ships we would go and loot the storerooms. I was in one of these storerooms and I saw some medicine in vials on a shelf, and I put it in my little loot bag and marched back to the camp that night. All the guards were out in front. I thought, this isn't right; they never were out in front. They would always march us into the compound and if they wanted to shake us down, it would be there. They made us strip, right out in the road, in front of God and everybody. Of course they found what they were looking for in my bag. To make a long story short, the vials that I had stolen were syphillis medicine. It did us no good but this medicine was not allowed for anybody outside the military, and this was a civilian ship that had it from the black market. So they beat me around quite a bit and they put me in a five foot deep fire bucket. This was in the middle of the winter and they broke the ice on the fire tub and put me down in the cold water and left me in it for about 45 minutes.

We had one interpreter who went to school at U.C.L.A. He was a real nice old man; he would try to keep us abreast of the war situation, and he was as good as he could be to us. One morning we awoke and there were no guards. The interpreter came in a little bit later and said he didn't know what happened, but the Americans had dropped a Bomb on Hiroshima and he said they had just leveled the city. We couldn't imagine what had happened. After the bomb was dropped, the Japanese guards stayed away. Our prisoners caught the two Japanese Army soldiers that we had: they didn't live very long. As for food drops that we got immediately after the Japanese surrendered: first Americans came in little Gruman Navy fighting planes. They were little swept wing planes; they would come in low and throw barracks bags of cigarettes and stuff down to us. Then the big planes came in and dropped all kinds of supplies. Three American Army men came in by jeep,

about three or four days after the surrender to liberate us. They didn't know where all the prison camps were. They said, "Look, you can stay here and we'll arrange transportation, or you can go to the nearest railroad station and commandeer a train to take you to Yokohama", which we did. We couldn't see sitting there waiting for transportation. In Yokohama they kept us there a day or two while they deloused us and sent us back to the Philippines.

One little side light: I weighed 120 pounds when I was liberated, and there was no end of food after we were liberated. When we got to the Philippines, we had to go through medical treatment, and we were there about a week. They kept a mess hall open 24 hours a day; you could go in all you wanted. I got off the plane one month later in Minneapolis, Minnesota where my folks were meeting me and I'd gained 100 pounds! Just bloat, I had put it on so fast.

After we went through pretty extensive medical exams at Camp Carson, Colorado they let me go home on a 90 day furlough. I was due to go back to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. At the end of 90 days I decided that I'd re-enlist in the Army, which I did; spent the next ten years in the Military Police. In turn, I volunteered to go to the Army Language School to study Chinese. I learned to read, write and speak Chinese after one year , eight hours a day. I was then sent to the Army Counter Intelligence School at Fort Holibird, Baltimore, Maryland. After completing the school, I was a Special Agent in the Army Counter Intelligence Corps. We were then sent to Okinawa where Ruth (wife), Connie (daughter) and I spent two and a half years.

To anyone who doesn't know, the Army Counter Intelligence Corps is an intelligence gathering organization, and the only thing I can liken it to is a spy outfit. We wore no uniforms, we were not allowed to tell anybody that we were in the military, we always traveled on secret orders, we were not even allowed to live among the military. Like Ruth (she was a civilian nurse in the Army hospital) she was not even allowed to tell the people she worked with where I worked. My job in the Counter Intelligence was the security of our classified instillations such as missile sites, or any place where the military stored

classified information.

At one time on Okinawa we were on 24 hour call. My wife and I were home, reading, at 11 o'clock at night, and my commanding officer called. He called us into a super hush hush meeting. We weren't even told what it was. We were told to go home, get what uniforms we could rustle up; all I had was a pair of fatigue clothes. So I had to break them out and stand by. A few days later we finally got the alert. We were all called into the office; this was maybe one o'clock in the morning. At about three o'clock we had to go down and meet a ship pulling into the harbor. We had about 30 trucks and were all armed with submachine guns and our own weapons (pistols). We escorted those trucks containing 41 huge metal boxes, maybe ten foot by ten foot square, to a warehouse. For three months we sat (four men to a shift) around the clock, on that warehouse. No one was allowed in or close to that warehouse. My organization was the only one allowed there because we were all cleared for top secret information, which was the classification. They took half the detail away in the middle of one night and we met an Air Force plane. The airplane dropped its bomb bay doors, and we unloaded eight million dollars American money. Then we knew what was in the warehouse! The next morning we went and got these 41 crates. All told, the Army had moved fifty million American dollars into Okinawa to exchange all money in the Far East. They had military script over there and they exchanged all this script to dollars. The reason there was so much hush hush on this whole move was to prohibit counterfeit script from being exchanged.

In 1961 I retired from the U.S. Army. A week after retirement I went right into the United States Treasury Department as a Criminal Investigator. Our job, 300 of us nation wide, was policing all of the Treasury Department. If any of the Treasury people got into trouble, we were the organization that was called. I stayed in the United States Treasury until 1975 at which time I fell off a train and broke a disc in my neck and had to retire. Subsequently we came to Albion. I also did a tour in Korea before I went into the Intelligence Division. I spent a year as a Military Policeman in Korea with the 2nd Infantry Division. Life, since being out of the service, is

wonderful, really. My wife and I decided on Albion many years ago when Ruth's mother (May Schnitzer/ Joe Schnitzer) was going to sell her house unless we wanted it.

If I may digress for a minute: In 1947 I was at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver; I was still with the Military Police. My wife was an Army Nurse at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital and she had sworn off all men when her room-mate and another girl talked her into going out on a blind date with me. Three months later we were married in our home here in Albion. It was rather a whirlwind courtship. My daughter Connie was born in Albion in 1952; however, I didn't see her until she was a year old. I was in Korea when she was born. I spent one year in Korea, and in order to get Ruth and Connie over to the Far East, I transferred to Japan and had to wait maybe six months before I could get them to join me in Kobe, Japan. We spent one and a half years in Kobe.

Incidently, a little sidelight here: Not being a farmer, I don't know anything about raising beef - but the Japanese are noted for their beef. Their prime beef is massaged by hand, with beer, and their beef is the best in the world! You can cut it with a fork; it's fabulous!

I think my wife had more animosity toward the Japanese than I did the second trip over there. The Japanese people themselves hated the war. It was the war mongers, your Japanese military people who wanted the war. However, during Ruth's second trip over there, we went to Okinawa. The Okinawans were the most wonderful people in the world. When you live over there, the pace is so slow. I'd hate to live over there for maybe ten years because you would be a sloth. The speed limit on Okinawa is 30 miles per hour on the whole island. They were of Polynesian descent more than of Japanese. The Japanese claim to own Okinawa and it now has reverted to Japan; but they are a different class of people altogether.

If I may take time to summarize this whole 1299 days of prisoner of war status, I'd like to say that I am firmly convinced that had I been any older than 18 when I was captured, I probably would never made it through. I think youth had its advantages. My health was good. I made it through very well. The older fellows, and the fellows who were married, had a lot rougher

time and I think it was the mental anguish more than anything else. A person with my temperment, easy-going, single, took each day at a time and didn't really worry about anything. I think that our mental outlook afterwards made a lot of difference in the way we responded after we returned to civilization. A lot of the fellows couldn't take it. So, youth had a lot of advantages when we were prisoners. It probably saved me.

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The initial arrangements for this interview were made by Mrs. Marjorie C. Radzinski of Albion, New York.

This text was transcribed by Nancy Mack of Albion, New York.

With several additions and corrections being made, the final transcript was completed by Helen M. McAllister of Medina, N.Y.

The pictures are thru the courtesy of Mr. Larimer.
Final compilation is by Mrs. McAllister.

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35th Anniversary

An open house was held on Saturday, Sept. 24 at the home of William and Ruth Larimer of Albion.

The party was given by the couple's daughter Constance in honor of their 35 wedding anniversary.

The Larimers were married on Sept. 22, 1948 by the Rev. Earl Hamlin. Both were at that time assigned to Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver Colorado. Ruth was a nurse with rank of 1st Lieutenant and Bill a Master Sergeant.

Daughter Constance was born on Dec. 24, 1952 at Arnold Gregory Hospital in Albion — her father was in Korea at that time.

The family joined Bill in November 1953 in Kobe, Japan. Moves were made to Ft. Dix, N.J., Monterey, California, spent two-and-one-half years in Okinawa and then on to Wilmette, Illinois.

Following Army retirement, Bill still in CIC work, was assigned by the U.S. Treasury Department to St. Paul, Minn., St. Louis, Mo., and to Chicago, Ill. They finally returned to Albion in October of 1975.

Friends and relatives were present from New Jersey, Rochester and Albion to congratulate the Larimers.

Mr. and Mrs. William Larimer
M. Dixon Photo

Albion Advertiser Nov 9, 1977, P-15

Larimer 18

Remember the Veterans

By Cal Colonna

Many of us remember the Battle of Bastogne—"Nuts to You." and the Malendy Massacre.

Let's not forget the Island fighting in the Pacific.

Another November 11th has hit and the remembrance brings to mind many incidents of servicemen of World War 1 and 2.

There is a soldier, who made residence in Albion within the last year and is very happy to be here.

What can we say of the guy who was a Japanese prisoner of war for 3½ years or about 1299 days. His name is William F. Larimer and he lives on East State St. with his wife Ruth (daughter of Joe and May Schnitzer.)

Bill enlisted in U.S. Army, May 4, 1941 and was sent to he Phillippines as an M.P. General MacArthur was aving trouble trying to hold to Manila but had to andon and withdrew into an, There his troops, hout replenished sup- s, held out until April 9,

l Larimer surrendered 27,000 other Americans Japanese on Batan. prisoners were d of their fighting and their only ion of any worth was

en were in double nation ready for the s Death March s to take them from Batan to Cabaratuan prison camp over a distance of 100 miles taking 8 days.

During the Death March, prisoners were fed only 1 small bowl of rice and were given no water except that which they could obtain from muddy rivers and streams.

There was extreme brutality during the Death March. Prisoners shot or bayoneited by the guards for no reason, frequent beatings, no mercy shown to those who were ill, injured or unable to keep the required pace.

The men dirty with dust from the forced march; also bleeding from a jab of the guards gun stock had no pleasant words for the Japanese.

Later the men were split up into 10 man groups and the Japs threatened to shoot every man in the group if one man attempted to escape. This threat was carried out when one man escaped, all POW's were lined up, the remaining 9 men, in the group were made to dig their own graves. They were made to kneel in front of their graves and were shot through the head, witnessed by all of the prisoner's as proof of the threat.

All POW's suffered from malnutrition, dysentry, malaria, beri-beri and other ailments. There were no medications, whatsoever to alleviate these conditions.

On about September 1943, Bill was selected among 400 American POWs to be shipped to Japan. They, were transported by Japanese freighter and put into holds like cattle.

During the crossing, one of the POW's was afflicted with severe appendicitis—our American doctor performed surgery in the hold with no surgical equipment or anaesthesia or medication of any type. The doctor used an ordinary knife and by a miracle, the patient survived.

During the entire trip, which took about 18 days, no one was allowed out of the holds at any time—sanitary conditions were deplorable.

Arrived in Japan and sent to Hirchata Prison Camp about 30 miles south west of Kobe.

At the camp of 400 only one American doctor with little or no medication.

Diet consisted of 2 meals a day—about a cup of rice each meal, possibly some thin vegetable soup and the clothing was inadequate for the climate.

The 400 men were required to work in a steel mill in which the fellows agreed to because there was something to do to take up their prisoner of war time.

One half mile separated the camp from the steel mill.

There's always a couple of guards who give trouble or make it more miserable for the boys.

On one early morning ready to hoof it to steel mill the GI's noticed no o around and plenty quiet.

The Japanese personne had vanished—gates open.

The Air Force dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima and Japanese empire surrendered.

Immediately the Mayor of nearby town brought in meats of all kinds and other goodies.

The prisoners made a wide search for those two Jap guards who made it miserable for the GIs while in camp.

They caught up with them and no one ever knew what actually happened to their disappearance.—You guess.

As of the last count, there are about 4,000 surviving American—Death March—from the Phillippines.

On Veterans Day, at 11 p.m. meditate for 2 minutes with your own prayer—for the many Vets up there.

Bill was one of the lucky guys to make it back after the Phillippines, Batan.

He's going to be a big asset to our community. He's on the town-village zoning board and a great job he and his wife are doing in Grave Register in putting out over 1100 veteran flags.

Bill is a grand guy—glad to talk to you at any time.

20 years with the Army retiring as Master Sgt. in 1961, a Counter-Intelligence Agent and worked as a Criminal Investigator for the U.S. Treasury and retired from that job in July, 1975.

Albion War Veteran Recalls Bataan Past

By TOM DOWNERS

[illegible] the latest reports of fighting in the Philippines:

"America's heroic chapter of history appeared ended today as a War Department bulletin reported that wave after wave of Japanese shock troops had engulfed the battle-exhausted defenders at Bataan."

Thirty-five years later, Bataan Peninsula is described as the scene of a heroic stand by 36,000 American and Filipino soldiers, who withstood for three months an invasion by 250,000 Japanese.

William Larimer of East State Street, Albion, takes a deep breath when he's asked to [illegible] Bataan, and the 3½ years [illegible] as a Japanese prisoner [illegible]

"It was just a punk kid back then," Larimer said. "Everything just seemed to happen so fast."

"The Japanese, they were fanatics. They rushed us from all sides," he said. "We had barb wire in front of us, but the first few (Japanese) fell on it, and the rest used them like a human ladder to get across."

The scene shifts to 1941, when Larimer, then 18, was serving in the Philippines as a military police officer.

"The day after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7, 1941) we (about 27,000 Americans) were forced to withdraw from Manila, because the Japanese invaded that day," he recalls.

"The [illegible] to Bataan, about [illegible] in all, was gradual, as the Japanese gained more territory, he said. "By the time we reached Bataan, we had little food and almost no ammunition."

After Bataan fell, the captured American troops were herded to a prison camp, a 120-mile "death march" which lasted eight days, he said.

"We had no food, except what they gave us, that one bowl of rice for the whole eight days," Larimer said. "I had malaria so bad that I didn't know anything about what was going on. I was out of my head."

Several hundred Americans died along the way, the victims of disease, starvation, and war atrocities, he said. "If you [illegible]

Eight months after the march, Larimer and 400 other prisoners were shipped to a city near Osaka, Japan, where they were forced to work in a steel mill. "I didn't mind working at the mill much," he said. "Anything to get away from the (Japanese) army. The supervisors at the mill weren't anything like the soldiers. Hell, they didn't want the war either."

A day after the bombing of Hiroshima, "an interpreter came in and told us what had happened," he said. After the war ended on Sept. 2, 1945, and the American occupation began, Larimer was ordered to the Philippines before he returned to the states.

[illegible] retiring from the service in 1951. In May 1951, he became a criminal investigator with the U.S. Treasury Department, before retiring in 1975.

Since then, Larimer has lived in Albion with his wife, Ruth, whom he married in 1948.

He recalled his war days this week as the nation prepared to honor its veterans today with the annual Veterans Day commemorations. The World War I armistice was signed Nov. 11, 1918, and that date became a legal holiday. Since World War II, veterans of all wars have been honored on Nov. 11.

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