

Lankford, Paul H. Interview pt 2 7-26-91

[Speaker 2]

Testing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Testing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

[Speaker 1]

Where did it, uh, where'd you go on the field, Eddie Camp?

[Speaker 2]

Uh, this is, uh, Mr. Paul Langford, uh, tape 2. Okay.

[Speaker 1]

So the, uh, Battle of Bataan, as far as we were concerned, I mean, came to a close. And the, uh, Japanese storm troops were, uh, uh, coming south down toward, uh, Marvedis, which was the southern, on the southern tip of the, uh, peninsula at the time. And this is where that we had been ordered to.

Now, when we arrived down at Marvedis, uh, strip, our airfield there, uh, this was on the, uh, the next morning, which would be the 10th of, uh, April, 1942. The, uh, Japanese zero fighters came in very low, and, uh, they were, uh, apparently, I guess, some of their pilots, uh, still had not received the message, I mean, that we, uh, were surrendering. So, uh, they came in, and they strafed, and, uh, we had several people that were hit.

And, uh, but, uh, you had to run for your life there. And, uh, then, uh, finally, well, that, uh, we, uh, that ceased. And then, uh, that day, we sat under the big banyan trees there and, uh, uh, sat around waiting and waiting and all of this.

In the meantime, many other thousands of troops were, uh, moving down into Marvedis. And then finally, late that afternoon, uh, we, uh, received the order that, uh, we, we were to surrender. And, uh, you talk about a, uh, an experience, I mean, as to, uh, something that, uh, to see, uh, thousands of, uh, men, and I'm talking about those, I mean, my fellow comrades, I mean, uh, and, uh, to take out a white handkerchief or a shirt tail or anything and put it on a stick because the Japanese said that we were surrendering.

And then to, uh, uh, march up the hill, up there, back up into the hills there where we were to be, they'll wipe that, uh, that knife. And, uh, you talk about a lump coming into your throat and tears running up your back and, uh, tears in your eyes, I mean, that came because we knew that then, I mean, that we were, uh, becoming, uh, prisoners of war and that, uh, we were, uh, giving up and, uh, having to surrender. So, uh, that's, uh, one of the, I guess, uh, traumatic experiences, I mean, if you think of it, would never come, but it finally did.

[Speaker 3]

Oh, that's right.

[Speaker 1]

And, uh, so we went back and then my first experience to see a Japanese was in a tank. They came down what we call the back road of Mar Vegas there. They had, uh, busted through the lines, came on through, of course, with very little resistance because our, uh, our own American troops and Filipinos were, uh, retreating.

And, uh, but this tank commander, of course, I mean, he's speaking in Japanese and I didn't know him and, uh, couldn't, couldn't understand it, but, uh, we, uh, we heard him bark out some commands and then, of course, he opened fire with his, uh, machine gun, you know, and, uh, fortunately, I mean, he didn't hit anyone, but, uh, that was our first experience to see that. Uh, they, we spent, uh, that night, a lot of campfires there and all of this. We did have food because, uh, we'd, uh, en route we picked up some down by the hospital and then also there was, uh, some food that was provided for us.

Well, this was just about like manna from heaven because we'd been on a starvation dike, uh, just about, uh, up to this point. So, we sat around most of that night, you know, and talking about what was going to, anticipating, I mean, what would, uh, be taking place. Next morning, bright and early, I mean, at, uh, right at dawn, then we were ordered then to go down onto, uh, Mar Vegas, uh, airfield.

And, uh, then this is where that the, uh, stormtroopers, the Japanese stormtroopers came in. And, uh, they were bitter. And, uh, actually, when you take, I guess, uh, if you look at it, I mean, a prisoner of war, and I might kind of draw you an analogy, is that a, and especially a code which the Japanese live by versus what we as Americans live by is quite different.

Uh, the Japanese, because of, uh, the terms which you know of, the Bushido and the samurai swords and all this, and to sacrifice your life is, uh, for honor and glory. And, uh, that's why that, uh, uh, why that, uh, they look at it different. But in the American, uh, code, then, of course, I mean, for Americans, I mean, to, uh, have to surrender was not, uh, in shame.

It was not a, uh, dastardly deed or anything else. So, you can kind of see that they live by one code, we live by another. So, uh, to us, we were, uh, we were nothing, because we were yellow, we had, uh, thrown in the towel, we were, I mean, uh, people who had forsaken our country.

So, they were, uh, also they were warriors, uh, in the true sense. I mean, uh, we were now their, uh, we had been their enemy, and as a result, they had probably seen on the battlefields many of their fellow comrades which had been, uh, killed by the Americans. But, uh, now they were, uh, ready to take revenge.

So, the treatment, I mean, was very harsh. I mean, I don't, I mean, I don't guess any words can describe it, but, uh, what they did, uh, they had us to line up, uh, military fashion, and then, of course, I mean, we had to, uh, we were stripped in, I mean, stark naked. Uh, the Japanese guards, I mean, uh, came around, and, of course, they were armed with their rifles, with their bayonets, and they were taking, uh, watch and rings and, uh, uh, billfolds or anything like this.

People that had on, uh, eyeglasses, uh, what they did, I saw it myself, in other words, I mean, many of them, what they do is, uh, take the eyeglasses from the Americans, in other words, and then stomp them and, and, uh, break them up. And pity for some of the poor guys, I mean, they couldn't hardly see, I mean, with, uh, because they had no glasses. Others, I mean, uh, they would take the, uh, your billfold, and, of course, take the American money out of it.

The, uh, we had in the Philippines, we had the pesos. They didn't care about the pesos, but they did take that American money. And they would take, uh, pictures of your loved ones, uh, sweetheart or wives or family or children or whoever it was, and then, of course, I mean, they would tear those up right in front of you.

And, uh, you felt like, I mean, uh, uh, jumping on them, but, I mean, what, what were you going to do? Because there they were, and you were harmless, unarmed, uh, and they, of course, had the advantage of it. Uh, after they, uh, uh, we stood there, and, of course, the sun came up, and it was hot, boiling sun in the tropics, and, uh, stark naked.

And then, of course, I mean, uh, then finally, well, we were ordered then, I mean, to put back on our clothes. And, uh, then we were told then to, uh, head out up, uh, Maravedas Mountain. Now Maravedas Airfield was kind of in a little valley-like, but then, uh, start back up the mountain and, uh, back up, uh, north, uh, toward, uh, as far as the retreat was concerned.

And this is what is known as, uh, the, uh, infamous Death March of Bataan. And, uh, why it was, uh, called the infamous Death March of Bataan, because that the, uh, uh, storm troops of the Japanese were heading south, and then we were heading north. Now, when you say the march itself, I mean, was you were herded like cattle.

You had Japanese guards in the front of you, on the rear, and on the side, and, of course, they were armed with bayonets, and, uh, any, any, uh, you couldn't understand them. Uh, we didn't speak their language, and as a result, they'd bark out a command. Uh, if you did, uh, uh, try to break ranks or stray out, and then, of course, you'd hear a rifle, uh, fire or a bayonet, and you'd hear somebody yell out, and you'd look back, and you'd see a guy, in other words, he'd been killed.

But this, I mean, uh, seems like, I mean, the screaming and the torture and things like this. Uh, I get up to, uh, the top of the mountain. Now, when I say a mountain, I mean, it was actually, I mean, very small mountains in that, the road that led up through there.

But, uh, I had, uh, planned to take some of the peaches with me, and pretty soon, that hot tropical sun beating down upon you, and, uh, in the physical condition which I was in, with malaria and, uh, dengue fever, and, uh, I was beginning to get, uh, some, uh, uh, the, uh, dis, uh, well, actually, I mean, diarrhea and things like this, uh, because of the food which I'd ate the night before. And, uh, so, uh, when I got up, I mean, I was so sick that I, uh, couldn't even carry just a few cans of peaches. So I, uh, I had discarded those, and next thing you know, along the, the trail there, or the road, I mean, uh, this was dropped, and that was dropped, and everything else, because, I mean, it was just too, uh, too much of a burden to try to carry it.

And, uh, so as I got up to the top of the mountain there, and I decided to, and some shade trees, and I decided I'd just kind of break ranks, you know, and go out there and, and, uh, uh, rest a little bit, but, uh, found out that, uh, pretty soon, I mean, a Japanese guard, I mean, uh, he had cornered me, and, uh, he had already hit me in the leg with a bayonet, and, uh, so then I, uh, uh, got back in ranks, and then, uh, moved on up. Well, there was a truck up ahead that had, uh, stalled. I don't know what the problem was, but, uh, and, uh, the, uh, Japanese guards barked at us and motioned to us and finally they wanted us to push it.

Well, apparently I wasn't, uh, too strong and couldn't push my weight, and the next thing I know I had a jab in the shoulder with a, uh, Japanese bayonet. And, uh, we moved on up around what was known as the hospital area, and this is where that, to kind of give you an idea of why I say that we were almost on a starvation diet, was that the Japanese, I mean, the Americans, because of the small amount of rations and all of this and the, uh, tropics and so forth that we had, we were sending about a thousand men per day, uh, to the hospitals there. We got up to the hospital area, and, uh, something that was very unusual, and, uh, and that was that the, uh, Japanese tanks and trucks, heavy trucks and equipment, was coming south, and we were going north, and, uh, we were walking on something that felt like a jelly shaking.

Well, this was around the hospital area, and we wondered, you know, and then finally, I mean, you could, uh, smell the stench and so forth and all of this, and what had happened, they had, uh, the Japanese had gone into the hospitals, uh, took all of the, uh, different, uh, sick and the wounded and all of this, of our Americans as well as the Filipinos, put them out on the road and told them to head north.

And apparently then, of course, the tanks came along and the trucks, I mean, overran them, and there we was walking on human flesh, I mean, for miles and miles because they had, uh, they couldn't, uh, couldn't make the march. We got on up to around Cab Cabin, and there's a lot of artesian wells, and to show you, I mean, what is torture is that marching, in other words, or struggling along and trying to help your buddy and help your friend and things like this. Then, uh, with, uh, no water, so you ran out of water, and, uh, these big artesian wells that was there, they would march you up and set you right down, not in the shade of the tree, but over, I mean, right out in the hot, boiling sun and make you move in just as close as they could, and then, uh, what they would do is take a few guards and post them around you.

And then the other guards would go over and sit on the big shade trees and they, of course, had water. Anyone that attempted, I mean, to, uh, break ranks, go over there and to get water, then, of course, I mean, they shot them or bayoneted them. So a lot of people on the death march went berserk.

I mean, they went stark raving mad. They couldn't stand the pressure, and, uh, for water, you know, I guess they say that it takes about three days going without water. Well, I mean, about the most that I went without water was about two days, but, I mean, your thirst, in other words, I mean, gets to the point where you just about come mad because, I mean, your throat is dry and your mouth is parched and all this.

And, uh, I had on a pretty good pair of GI shoes, and so this Japanese guard, he decided he wanted to trade shoes with me, and, of course, he had a pretty large foot, and mine was a little bit smaller, but we traded, I mean, you know, at the point of a bayonet. And, uh, so I had to put his on. They were hobnails and, uh, hobnail shoes.

And, uh, so, uh, it didn't take me very long until I had blisters on my feet, and, uh, as a result, uh, those blisters, uh, walking a few more miles, and they would, uh, burst. And then, uh, the next thing you know, I mean, my feet were, my shoes were completely wet inside, I

mean, from all of the, uh, excretion from my body, in other words. It wouldn't have been so bad, I guess, I mean, as we forced with diarrhea, which later developed into dysentery.

And, uh, no food, no water. Uh, they, they intentionally, I mean, did this, uh, and then, of course, if you did, uh, as I mentioned, try to, uh, break ranks and all of this. Those that was struggling and failed, then, of course, I mean, that was, uh, where they, uh, met their death too, because, I mean, and it was, uh, uh, it was a situation, I guess, I mean, it's almost indescribable.

We got up into what's called the no-man's land, and, uh, this was, uh, a couple days later, uh, on the march itself. And, uh, we, we were marching day and night. I mean, there was no sleep, in other words.

And, uh, what we did, it took me about, about, uh, ten days, I mean, for to make the march. But what they would do is to turn you around and then head you back south. Now, we were going north, and then they'd turn around and head you back south.

And there was a lot of mass confusion and everything else, well, you know, because, I mean, when they, you get up to a certain point and they'd turn you and send you back. Well, unbeknownst to us, what they were doing was holding us, say, as, as a human gun fodder, because the, uh, Japanese was moving heavy artillery into Bataan there. And this was only five miles over to Corregidor.

So then they could set up their battery of, uh, their field artillery and to, uh, shell Corregidor over there. So they were holding us down in that particular, the southern part of the, uh, Bataan Peninsula there. And then we got into the, uh, no-man land, and then, uh, I had gone just about my limit.

Uh, no-man land might be described, you've seen it probably in movies and all this, I mean, where it's nothing but potholes and filled with, uh, blood and guts and, uh, dead bodies and stench and horses and things like that, and, uh, uh, stripped of all of its foliage and everything else. So we got into there, and I saw a little glimmer. I mean, this was the, it was dark, I mean, it was very dark, uh, when it was making the march, you know, no moon or shining.

And, uh, I saw that little glimmer, and I said, that's a water hole, and I said, I'm going to take my chances because I was seen like, oh, I guess saying that she was dying of thirst, and I said, I'm going to take my chances. So I, at the dark of the night, then I just kind of slipped out because the guards couldn't see me, lay down beside the, uh, road, and then, uh, as the column moved on past, then, of course, I rolled over and moved down and, uh, took my canteen, scooped up, uh, I guess, I mean, I don't know what it was, dead bodies or whatever it was that's in this, uh, no man's land and that stench and filth and everything else.

And then, of course, I drank some of it, filled up my canteen again, and then moved up beside the road, laid bare of steel, and, uh, the next column came on through, and then, of course, I got back into it. But, uh, on the death march, I mean, the, uh, the number of deaths, I mean, still are, uh, unaccounted for, actually, as far as the number of people because there's a lot of them that did, uh, escape, and they went into the hills, and the Japanese caught them and then, uh, later brought them into the prisoner of war camps, and

then they executed them. But, uh, we, uh, we made it on up to San Fernando, and San Fernando was where that, uh, just a big barbed wire entanglement, and, uh, by this time, uh, you can imagine now, this was almost, uh, this was about eight days, I guess, that I'd been on the, on the road going back and forth.

And when we arrived up there, uh, then they gave us a rice ball and, uh, gave us some water, and, uh, of course, with the, which the canteen, which I had, well, I, I made it on through. But, uh, the stench and the filth and all of this, the human excreta and everything else was all over every place there. And we stayed, uh, stayed in this barbed wire entanglement then overnight.

Next day, then, uh, at the crack of dawn, they had us up and on the Japanese guard, escorted us over and put us into steel boxcars. Now the, uh, in the, uh, Philippines, the boxcars are smaller than our American-made boxcars. But, uh, these, uh, steel boxcars, and, uh, they load us into that.

When I say load, it's like cattle, and they push you in very close and, uh, actually, I mean, you couldn't get another man, I don't think, I mean, in there in these steel boxcars. Closed the doors, and then, of course, we sat there for about two hours. I mean, then the hot boiling heat came up and then it began.

Well, we, uh, went from there up to, uh, pretty close to where Clark Air Force Base is. And, uh, unloaded there, and when they did un-open the doors, of course, I mean, the light came in, and it was almost blinding. Uh, bodies began to fall, uh, because you'd been pushed in and were standing, I mean, all during this, which took us about four hours, I mean, en route by train.

Uh, I don't know how many it was in the boxcar that I was in, I mean, that had died en route. Uh, and you couldn't tell, because, I mean, bodies were scattered everywhere. We did have to unload those, and they were dead.

Dragged the bodies out and stacked them beside the, uh, beside the railroad tracks. Now, the Filipinos and the little kids, and this is where that, uh, that, uh, the little kids wanted to offer the Americans some food. And, uh, the Japanese guards then, of course, I mean, as soon as they stepped up and offered some food, and then, of course, I mean, they took the machine gun and then shot them, see.

So, uh, women, children, men, or whoever it was, I mean, attempting, I mean, for to help the Americans, and then, of course, I mean, they executed them right there by the roads there. Then we made about another five-mile march, and that was into the first prisoner of war camp, which I was in, and that was Camp O'Donnell. And, uh, I'd like to distinguish a little bit between what is an internee and what is a prisoner of war.

A prisoner of war is a military person, all right. Now, we had Filipinos there at Camp O'Donnell, but they had, that was the soldiers, and also the American soldiers that was at Camp O'Donnell. Now, an internee is the civilians.

That's men, women, children, and babies, and all of these that were living in the Philippines, and then, of course, they were rounded up, and then they were put into prison camps, but

they called them internees. And there were children born in the internee camps. But we had, of course, the nurses were separated from us there, and they were put in the internee camps, the women.

All right. At Camp O'Donnell, the hellhole, in other words, and that's where thousands and thousands of me died daily, and primarily what we did there on a day-to-day basis was to either dig the graves or to bury the dead. And I think that what brought me through a lot was, of course, the great almighty above.

I put my trust in him. I had my family, I mean, and many others, I mean, that was interceding and sending the prayers, in other words, to the great almighty. But I put my trust in him, and then number two, I think, was the fact that I did not give up.

It's kind of like Johnny Majors, you know. He says, at the end of the tunnel, you know, there's light to be found, in other words. So I felt, in other words, I mean, not to give up.

And I had a good buddy that went through, he and I went to Dallas Aviation School, good Christian boy, one of these Jack Armstrong, all-American type, took his exercise and everything else. But after three days at Camp O'Donnell, he said, I'm not going to make it through. And he gave up, and he passed on.

But, you know, I'd go over and see him every day after I'd come off of either the grave or digging the graves or carrying the dead to the... What we would do, we'd be hundreds and thousands of people lined up, and they had one little spigot down there, and they would cut the water off, I mean, after, say, two or three hours. And so you'd still be lined up, sitting out there in that hot boiling sun with about 10 or 12 canteens, I mean, wanting to fill up your buddy's canteens, everything else.

And then they'd cut the water off. Well, there was a little creek that ran through there, and it rained a couple of times, and as a result, then the Filipinos, I mean, they were drinking water out of this. Well, with the dysentery, and they were dying like flies.

And the same thing, I mean, in our camp there. And it got to the point where that with the potatoes, they gave us a few potatoes, we had rice mostly, and I'm talking about when I say fish heads, I mean, that was what they were feeding us. And then I worked on there at O'Donnell also, and we had an automobile, and they used to call them in the springs, we used to call it a tire tool.

And I guess Mr. Tender remembers those. Yeah, the tire tool, okay. So what we did, I mean, they gave us some of those, and then we were sitting down and digging holes to build a barbed wire fence around the prison camp there.

So you'd sit there for hours on end, I mean, trying to dig a hole with that tire tool, and that was one of the tasks. But I mentioned there from sunup to sundown mostly was digging the graves. Now, digging the graves wasn't so bad.

And when I say graves, I mean, not in the description of what we had. Actually, what you was doing was digging a big trench. And we would then dig that trench, and then, of course, I mean, they would bring the bodies and go over to what they call the hospital area.

When a person, I mean, gets down to the point where they get the death rattle or something like that, or they get so weak, I mean, they can't move, then, of course, they'd take them over to the hospital area. Not that they received any more better treatment than we did or any more food than we did. But then they would bring them down and just dump them in to these big trenches and then go back, pick up others, and then find it when it was filled up, I mean, was to cover them over.

Wasn't so bad, I mean, during the dry season, but then when we was there, and then it began to rain, and the seepage out of the, and this was kind of in the low area, the seepage from the other graves into the place where you was digging the other trenches down through there, and all of that would come in and fill up, and so at times you were up to your hips, I mean, in all of this seepage out of the other places. Of course, the Japanese, I mean, guards, you know, any infraction of the rule or anything, I mean, it didn't seem like, I mean, if they didn't feel right or whatever they wanted to do, in other words, I mean, they were hitting you about the head and beating you up or giving you a prod with a bayonet and things like this. And I was very fortunate, I mean, to leave there and go out on a bridge reconstruction detail.

And I might say, I mean, if you're ever in a war, the best thing to do, in other words, I mean, is completely demolish your bridges because we had to rebuild some of those. I mean, they didn't do too good a job on it. But we went out to a little town that was known as, it was in the Nueva Ecija province, known as Gapan there in the Philippines, and we lived in a schoolhouse, slept on their floor.

I'll never forget the arriving late one evening at the schoolhouse, and of course, they had a big barbwire around it and had the guards and all of this. But we were within about, I'd say, 500 yards of the little city itself, the little town, rather. And what our mission was, I mean, as far as Japanese, which we were slave labor, was to go out and to rebuild that bridge.

And we had to unload from the boxcars the sacks of cement and then get the stone and things like this and mix it and the concrete and the mortar and then rebuild that bridge. Well, we were out there for about two months, and then I worked for approximately a month. And I had malaria to the advanced stages, and I had dysentery, and I had pellagra and scurvy and just about everything, I guess you could say, as far as malnutrition.

And so I passed out at the bridge, and they brought me back to the schoolhouse, and the captain that was in charge of our troops there at the schoolhouse, American captain, he asked me after a few days if I would mind staying in the camp there and help him. And I was very glad, I mean, to get that assignment there rather than to have to go back out in that hot sun and try to do the manual labor there because I was too weak in the condition. So my job then was to take care of making quinine.

And what I would do, I had a big 55-gallon barrel, and I'd get up early in the morning when the cooks would, and I'd fill up the barrel with water. And then me and this Filipino doctor under the guard of a Japanese went over to his place and got the chacona bark and roots and brought that back. And, of course, we made several trips over and then brought this in.

Well, that's what the extraction of the quinine is from, see? So I'd throw those roots in there and get that boiling and boil it all day long, keep the fire going, and boil it down till it was

just a thick, creamy, yellow syrup. And then at night whenever, and also in the morning, I'd stand there and I had a pot of that, of this thick quinine, and everybody had to take their GI spoon and dip in there.

And that was my duty, for to see that they took that bitter quinine before they even got fed, see? Well, the rations, I mean, out there, I mean, was no better than any other place. I mean, there was a starvation ration.

We had rice and fish heads and all of this. It was just about very meager. And finally, well, what we did also, I went out and dug some graves for the ones that had died in the air.

And then I was looking after the sick also that was there at the schoolhouse. And we had to begin to develop what's called berry-berry. Now, there's two different types of berry-berry.

One is the wet berry-berry, and that's where the swelling starts in the feet and also in the hands and then comes on up. And eventually, I mean, it comes up in your legs, I mean, or as big around as my body. And then when it hits the vital organs, all of that liquid that's in your system moves up.

And then, of course, I mean, it kills you. And that was the wet berry-berry. I had the dry berry-berry, and that's where, I mean, it's intense pain in your feet and in your fingers and your arms and legs and all of this.

And then it builds up the heat and everything from that, and it's actually the breaking down of the nerves and things like this. And so I had the dry berry-berry, and it gets to the point where you just barely can walk. I mean, the pain was so intense.

So I had that, and that developed also. Well, we finished up the bridge and then went back to Cabana to Juan. And Cabana to Juan, I think what's possibly most memorable was the fact that anyone that attempted to escape, they divide you up.

What they did, the Japanese divided us up into groups of ten. And if one person, I mean, escaped, then what they would do is take the other nine, line them up, and then they would execute them before the entire camp. So we had a couple of our American boys, I mean, that had escaped, and they brought them back in.

And, of course, I mean, they had been beat up. I mean, they looked like they'd gone through a sausage meal almost by the time they brought them back in. But then they strapped them down, stripped them of their clothes, strapped them down, and they lay out in that hot boiling sun.

And then every day what we had to do is to walk by and see them. So that first day, I mean, they would blister. The second day, I mean, the blisters would burst open.

And we had in the Philippines what we called the big blue-bottle fly. It was about as big as your thumb, a big fly. And, of course, I mean, those were swarming all over them and things like this, no water, no food.

And about that third day, then they passed on. But they looked like a charred, just...