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Bloomfield, N. J.
Mar. 29, 1946.

Dear Sir,

Received your letter dated 4 Mar. 46 requesting data concerning my internment as P. O. W. of the Japanese and I am most happy to oblige.

I was a member of Hqs. Btry, 59th C. A., on special duty on Fort Frank, Carabao Is., P. I. at the time of the surrender of Corregidor, May 6, 1942. We were taken the following day. Most of the personnel which consisted of American and Filipino troops were removed from the island to Wawa, about 30 miles south. The party in which I was, reached there about 3 P. M. and we were immediately put to work filling in holes along the dock with pieces of coral piled up on the undocked section. Perhaps I should explain that the pier with a causeway running out to it had been blasted by our engineers during the withdrawal to Batuan. There were numerous holes some ranging from 10 to 20 feet across along the whole length of the dock. At the end the Japs had piled a huge mass of coral with which to fill in these holes. We worked about 12 hours without a break, in a human chain passing the rocks, each weighing at least 40 or 50 lbs.,

2. To fill the holes in the far end of the dock. Then we were split into 2 sections and worked in four hour shifts. During the off shift we were allowed to sit down but sleep was prohibited. Whenever someone dozed off he was quickly awakened by a Jap guard with a rifle butt blow to the head. All this was in the middle of the hot & dry season in the Philippines. During the middle of the first morning the Japanese took away all the headgear allowing the men to work under the blanching sun bareheaded and without water to drink. In order to keep cool we had to soak our shirts in seawater and keep them soaking on our backs. On the second day the Japs allowed a detail to go and get a fifty-five gallon drum and a wheelbarrow and bring water to the approximate five hundred men in the dock. Naturally this was entirely insufficient and many had to do without. During the middle of the third day we finished filling the holes and were given a very small amount of rice, our first food in three days and a little more water. Naturally due to the lack of food and more so, the water, many of the men temporarily lost their conscious reason and went berserk.

After the Japs were finished we were marched off to Nasugba, about 3 miles distant, to stand a review for a local Jap general. During this

3. march. many of the men were so weakened that they passed out and had to be carried. After the review the Japs turned us loose at the fountain in the park in which the review had taken place and you can imagine the consequences.

Afterward we were removed to a warehouse where we were kept until our removal to Manila late in May '42. During our stay here we received a reasonable amount of food and water and due to a change of guards, treatment wasn't too bad.

Late in May we were taken with the men from Corregidor and Hughes to Manila. We were dropped off barges near Cavite and marched in a Jap triumphal parade to Bilibid Prison. The pace was set by a Jap cavalry officer and was too fast for many of the ~~men~~ who passed out and had to be carried.

From Bilibid I went to Cabanatuan #3.

Then we were put up in barracks in from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ the space originally intended for the occupants.

The ration was rice and watery soup in very small quantities. Malaria and Dysentery were rampant and there was only the small amount of medicine that some of the men had managed to keep hidden from the Japs. Men began to break down and the death rate began to climb. During the first couple of months the Japs supplied very

4. Little if any medicine and met complaint made by our officers on the lack of food with the comment that we were ungrateful for the generosity of the Emperor. Here I would also like to comment that our officers did not hesitate to take more than an equal share of the food and most of them remained in very good shape except of course in the case those who caught dysentery.

After several months at Cabanatuan I was sent on detail to Nichols Field, Cavite. There the men were required to work like slaves seven days a week, getting a break only on a Jap holiday, and not always then. Food was shorter than that at Cabanatuan and the quarters were infested with mosquitos. At sunset when they began to emerge from hiding the air seemed to boil with them. The Jap Commander was a Naval Lieutenant, whom the men called "The White Angel", because of his immaculate uniform and kindwin temper. At time he seemed to go berserk and took great delight in beating or punishing a man for trivial offenses. His underlings were of the same calibre and did not hesitate to beat up a man under the slightest excuse.

The original detail at Nichols was 150 men but was gradually built up to 500.

5. After a couple of months at Nichols, I was so run down that I could not work and was sent back to Cabanatuan #1. Staying there I found that the death rate among the men of Bataan, who had been brought from Camp O'Donnell was very high. Food was as scarce as before but the Japs had brought in quinine and most of the malaria patients were taken care of. However, most of the men were so weakened from the low diet, that once they caught dysentery which was, very rampant due to the great numbers of blow flies, their chances of living was very slim. At this time, rainy season was well advanced, it was impossible to dig latrines more than 4 feet deep and water stood everywhere. Flies and mosquitos bred by millions. Malaria, Dengue, and Dysentery (both bacillary and amoebic which had been tapped) were the worst diseases but beri-beri and pellagra were also taking their toll.

Here, I would like to mention that H. G. Beecher, U.S.M.C. who was appointed Camp Commander late in '42 deserves great credit. He fought and argued with the Japs for tools, food and medicine and it was under his direction that sanitary conditions in camp were brought under control.

6. Late in '42 the Japs seemed to have had a change of command in the Philippines. A Jap medical officer visited Cabanatuan, then the largest camp in P.I. with about 2,000 prisoners, and denounced the conditions he found. He announced that the camp needed both food and medicines and that it would be brought in.

And true to his word rice and beans began to arrive in large quantities and the local commander saw to it that carabos were purchased from the natives to supply us with some meat. Of course, the quantity of meat received by person was very small but that small piece helped considerably. That first month the death rate was cut in half. A month later at Christmas we received our first Red Cross parcel. A week later we received another and then another half. In a couple of months the deaths were down to 2 or 3 a month.

I stayed at Cabanatuan until late June '44 when I left for Japan. During the time from Jan. '43 until the time I left conditions were (to my way of thinking) not too bad. We worked a farm next to the camp raising produce for our own consumption and the rations were adequate to exist on. There

7. of course were beatings by guards and all but two of the men who tried to escape were caught and killed. Those caught sometimes met a very horrible death. A Filipino brought in one man who had his eyes gouged out, teeth knocked out, his head and jaw smashed, with numerous bayonet wounds and many of the bones in the body broken. The Japs said he resisted and after killing him had left his body there.

We received four individual parcels per man late in Nov. 43 thru Mar. 44.

On July 2, 1944, I was one of a Japan bound detail of 1024 men who boarded the former S.S. Canadian Inventor enroute to Japan. We were packed in the upper ~~two~~ compartments of the two forward holds in a manner that would do credit to a sardine packer. For two weeks we lay under the broiling tropical sun in Manila Bay waiting for a convoy. During this time only 50 men were permitted on deck at one time and water had once again become a precious commodity. The ration of water was about $\frac{1}{2}$ canteen per day and the food was 1 canteen cup of rice per day. We finally left Manila Bay and after a number of days (I don't remember how many) we docked at Takao,

8.

Formosa. There the ship took on a load of salt and one day we were permitted to disembark for a few minutes to bathe.

From Takao we started to head for Japan but developed boiler trouble and had to put into a port in northern Formosa where we stayed another number of days. Finally we left Formosa for Japan. Once along the Japanese mainland we put into shore every night due to fear of our submarines. Finally on Sept. 3, '44 we docked at Maji, Japan.

There we disembarked and were split into various groups designated to go to different camps in Japan. ^{All} Most of the men were in a pitifully weakened condition. Most had lost from 15 to 30 pounds on the trip due to lack of food and water.

The group in which I was included was 200 men bound for the camp at ^{#17} Omote, Kyushu.

There we were given a short rest to recuperate some of our lost strength but the ration was too small for any great change. Soon most of us were put to work in the coal mines working with other prisoners who

9. had been there for some time. At that time there were 1200 men in Camp but by V. J. day this number had been built up to 1800: 700 Americans; 700 English and Australians and 400 Dutch.

Here the work in the mines was sheer torture. Men broke hands, arms, legs, feet in order to get out of work. All this in spite of the fact that they knew that the diet was very deficient in foods necessary for proper knitting of bones. Ulcers, of the type one reads of during the Middle Ages were cultivated with lime, dirt, and life. The overmen, Jap civilians were mostly brutes never hesitating to beat a man, sick or otherwise, in order to get more work out of him.

During the winter of '44-'45, men had to wrap their feet in rags to protect them from the cold and work barefooted in the mines.

Sick call was so heavy, that unless a man was almost ready to keel over, it was impossible to get a day off. Men were sent to work suffering from bronchitis, pleurisy, and even in some cases pneumonia. Needless to say, many didn't last long.

10. After spring came, conditions improved a little. The ration remained the same and not having to fight the cold, one could get by on it a lot better. And our planes began to appear in ever increasing numbers. This probably helped the men more than anything else.

I don't think it is necessary to describe the change in the Jap attitude from V.J. day until our return to American control. Such a change of face had probably never been witnessed anywhere before.

As close as I can remember the outgoing mail at Cabanatuan was 1 card a month after Dec. '42 and at Orosa it was one in every 3 or 4 months. Some of the men received quite a number of letters from home but many of us received only 1 or 2 and some had never received any.

There are officers who can give you much more detailed accounts of all these camps than I. For information about the I. S. Canadian Experiment, you might contact Col. Stubbs, C.A. and for information

11. on Omaha, Maj. Hewlitt, M.C. had kept
a very close record of American personnel
and conditions. He can probably supply you with
very accurate data on arrival of American P.W.s,
Deaths, etc.

Hoping this will be of some use to you,
I remain

Sincerely yours,
John Seckowski.