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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MR. GEORGE B. THORNTON

INTERVIEWER: R. WAYNE PYLE

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Biography

George B. Thornton was born February 28, 1918, in Raleigh, Mississippi. His parents were George E. and Betty Thornton, both of Raleigh, and the Thornton family lived on a farm in Smith County. Mr. Thornton is a 1938 graduate of Raleigh High School.

In February of 1939, Mr. Thornton enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, and in 1940 he toured Shanghai, China, with the marines. In June, 1941, he was shipped to the Philippines where he was taken prisoner by the Japanese in May, 1942. After the war he was discharged from the Marine Corps in 1946, and he joined the army in April of 1948 and became an instructor in combat vechicle maintenance at Fort Knox, Kentucky. He was discharged from the army in 1952. In November 1954 he began working for the Mississippi National Guard at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and retired from there as an inspector on December 24, 1977.

On July 4, 1946, he married Gertrude M. Barns of Laurel, Mississippi. The Thorntons had two children: a daughter Wanda Glyn who resides in Florence, Mississippi, and has two children; and a son George Larry who drowned in a scuba diving accident in 1973. The Thorntons reside in Petal, Mississippi.

Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION
- A. Family background 1
- B. Graduate of Raleigh High School, 1938 1

II. MILITARY EXPERIENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
- A. Enlisting in the Marine Corps, 1939 2
- B. Routine duty in China 2
- C. The Panay Crisis 3
- D. Duty station in the Philippines 3
- E. The bombing of Pearl Harbor 4
  - 1. Routine alert 4
  - 2. Reactions to the bombing 4
- F. The Japanese as a formidable enemy 5
  - 1. Strafing runs on the island 5
  - 2. Downing a Japanese plane 6
- G. Moving the position to Corregidor 6
  - 1. A peace time fortification 7
  - 2. The population 7
  - 3. Duties on the island 7
- H. Generals Wainwright and MacArthur 7

III. THE FALL OF CORREGIDOR
- A. Japanese air attacks 8
- B. The morale of the troops 9
- C. The surrender of the island 10
- D. An escape attempt 12

IV. INCARCERATION AT CABANATUAN
- A. An execution 14
- B. Disbanding two of the three camps 16
- C. Work details 17
- D. The effects of long-term incarceration 17
- E. Description of the camp 18
- F. The diet of the prisoners 19
- G. Punishments 20
- H. A typical day 21
- I. The buddy system 22

V. INCARCERATION IN JAPAN
- A. The coal mines 24
- B. Acts of retaliation 25
- C. Perceiving changes in the war 27
- D. Hygiene 29
- E. The Japanese soldiers 31

VI. LIBERATION
- A. The end of the war 32
- B. Food supplies 33
- C. Leaving the camp 33
- D. The health of the prisoners 37

E. Prison mentality and survival 39
F. Returning to the United States 43

VII. MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LIFE AFTER THE WAR
A. Military assignments and civilian occupation 45
B. Family 46
C. Final statements 47

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MR. GEORGE B. THORNTON

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of the University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is being recorded with Mr. George B. Thornton, who is a career mechanic and inspector with the National Guard stationed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and is also a former American Prisoner of War in Japan during the Second World War. The interview is being recorded in Mr. Thornton's residence located at 202 Charles Street in Petal, Mississippi, on December 9, 1980. The interviewer is Mr. R. Wayne Pyle.

MR. PYLE: Mr. Thornton, on behalf of the university I would like to thank you very much for taking this morning with us. I can see your reticence toward interviewing after the story you told me about the article that they did in The Clarion-Ledger.

MR. THORNTON: The Hattiesburg American.

MR. PYLE: Oh, in the Hattiesburg American.

MR. THORNTON: Hattiesburg American.

MR. PYLE: So, we do appreciate this. Could we start the interview by finding out a little bit of your background, your parents' background in the state of Mississippi?

MR. THORNTON: Well, I was born in Raleigh, Smith County, February 28, 1918, and my parents, George E. Thornton and Betty Thornton. I went to school in Raleigh. I was a farmer, went to school in Raleigh and graduated in 1938.

MR. PYLE: Would this be from Raleigh High School?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Nineteen thrity-eight, okay. Were you going to go into agriculture too, like your father?

MR. THORNTON: No, my ambition really, back then, was to be a mechanical engineer and go to Mississippi State. But, during that time it was--

MR. PYLE: Of course, that was right in the later years of the depression and money was scarce.

MR. THORNTON: Yes, it was pretty scarce money.

MR. PYLE: How large of a family did you come from?

MR. THORNTON: There was seven in the family.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: One sister that is older than I and three brothers younger. When I finished school, I had wanted to go to Mississippi State, but that was during the depression, at the end of the depression. I didn't have any money, and my parents didn't have the money to send me to school, so I was looking around for some other means of furthering my education. [I] decided to go into the Marine Corps and take the engineering, go into the Marine Corps in February of 1939. Took boot training at San Diego and enrolled in MCIT, that's Marine Corps Institute of Training. [I] got all set up doing pretty good in my engineering studies and decided then that I wanted to go to China. One of my buddies and I had talked it over and decided that we didn't want to stay in one spot, so we decided to go to China, and went to China--

MR. PYLE: Were the marines sending large numbers of people to China at this time?

MR. THORNTON: No, it was just regular, routine duty, really. When you are in the Marine Corps, you could pick your spot and transfer anytime at all.

MR. PYLE: If they had a marine base?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: That's interesting, you normally think of the navy as, you know, join the navy and see the world.

MR. THORNTON: Well, a lot of people don't know this, that the Marine Corps is a part of the navy.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I didn't realize that.

MR. THORNTON: Yes, the Marine Corps is--

MR. PYLE: I knew that once it was a branch of the navy, but--

MR. THORNTON: Yes, it is a part of the navy. Anyway, I got to China, spent thirteen months in Shanghai, and headed back toward the states. I transferred from Shanghai to Olongapo, Philippine Islands. Olongapo is a little naval sub base south of Manila down there.

MR. PYLE: Is it still on Luzon?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: I want to ask you a question about your experience in China.

MR. THORNTON: All right, interrupt anytime.

MR. PYLE: In Shanghai, now you were there thirteen months. This would have been about two or three years after an incident that happened on the Shanghai River called the Panay Crisis. Did you recall that?

MR. THORNTON: Nothing, only seeing pictures and stuff of it.

MR. PYLE: I was wondering, being in China with the river patrols and all of that, if you had heard much about it, or anything of that nature.

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: It was a real close war scare, and had a lot of navy and marine personnel got pretty upset, of course.

MR. THORNTON: No, it had quietened down by the time I was over there.

MR. PYLE: You would have been in Shanghai during the year 1940, then?

MR. THORNTON: Let's see, we left the states in March of forty. Got into Shanghai in the later part of May of forty. We stopped over in the Philippines. Well, we stopped over in the Hawaiian Islands for a couple of weeks, and then the Philippines a week or two, and then on over into China. Then after I left China and got back to the Philippines and was waiting for the U. S. S. Henderson, a navy transport to pick us up and bring us on back to stateside. But the U. S. S. Henderson never made it, the war started before it got there.

MR. PYLE: Oh, you were in the Philippines several months then, five or six, seven months.

MR. THORNTON: Yes, I got in the Philippines, let's see, I left Shanghai in the later part of May, or the first part of June of 1941. So, I'd been in the Philippines from the middle of June, we'll say, until December.

MR. PYLE: The place that you were stationed at in the Philippines, while you were waiting for the U. S. S. Henderson, where was that again?

MR. THORNTON: Olongapo.

MR. PYLE: Olongapo.

MR. THORNTON: O-L-O-N-G-A-P-O, Olongapo.

MR. PYLE: How far would that have been from Cavite, from the naval base there?

MR. THORNTON: Cavite?

MR. PYLE: Which is on the Bay of Manila.

MR. THORNTON: I don't recall.

MR. PYLE: I asked because I interviewed a gentleman yesterday who was with the U. S. S. Houston, which was the flagship for the Asiatic [squadron] stationed at Cavite.

MR. THORNTON: Let's see, it was a good little ways. I don't know just how far, but it was a pretty good ways to Cavite. Olongapo, itself was. Well, there was nothing to it. It was just a small naval sub station in a little old town, I guess, at the time not over ten thousand [people]. It was a small place, down south of Manila down there.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. You were in Olongapo then, when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Now Pearl Harbor, of course, was bombed December seventh. That few days prior to Pearl Harbor, did anything change in the status of the marines?

MR. THORNTON: No, we had been alerted that there was something going on. We didn't know exactly what, but we'd been alerted several times. It was sort of routine.

MR. PYLE: But there was no red alert or anything like that?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: I asked that, because I heard something yesterday for the first time, and that was that the Asiatic fleet was put on red alert six days prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. That they were all out at sea away from Manila, away from Cavite, but they had had that kind of preparation. Where just north on Luzon, at Clark Field, for instance, there was no preparation at all, and they were caught completely off guard. It seemed like a tremendous dichotomy in the warnings that didn't come to the surface for some.

MR. THORNTON: We were alerted that there was something going on. But like I say, the war over in Europe and everything, we got that not regular, but occasionally, an alert would come along. We just more or less stayed on ready.

MR. PYLE: Pearl Harbor was bombed December seventh, but it was December eighth in the Philippines. Where did you hear about the news, and what was the reaction by yourself and the other marines around there?

MR. THORNTON: Well, I don't remember exactly where I was. We'd got up, let's see, I don't even remember what time, Manila time, or the Philippine time was, as opposed to Honolulu time. When we heard, then we just said, "Well,

great day, it's happened!" We'd been halfway expecting to be drawn to war for, oh, six, eight, ten months. We more or less stayed ready. But everybody, when we heard it, we just said, "Well, great day, it's happened! It's here on us." We began preparing as soon as we could. Immediately, we began sandbagging and getting ready for further orders.

MR. PYLE: There were a tremendous variety of feelings on the part of some. It was thought that, "Hey, we'll take care of these people in no time at all." On the part of the others, particularly those in the Philippines, I think, the feeling that, "Wow, are we ever in trouble!"

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: That was why I was asking about the feelings of the men around you.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: What kind, was it optimistic or pessimistic?

MR. THORNTON: Rather optimistic in the marine outfit that I was in. The company of marines that I was in, there was only, oh, some two hundred, I guess, in the company. Really, we were the only marines down in that part. The outfit, that I was in, was rather optimistic. We had the Philippine army and scouts and never dreamed that the Japanese were as formidable of an enemy as they were.

MR. PYLE: They surprised a lot of people, I would say [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: You better believe that it surprised a lot of people. Anyway, when we got the word that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, and we knew that we was in the war again, we fortified our positions, sandbagged and everything else. We didn't stick around long. We was moved out from there.

MR. PYLE: How long after the bombing were you moved off?

MR. THORNTON: Oh, two or three weeks, the best I can remember.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: The Japanese made some strafing runs, you had some PBYs [Patrol Bomber,] three or four, I believe, it was four or five PBYs in a little place that they would come in and land. The Japanese made some strafing runs and got all of them. They didn't stand a chance [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Did any of them even get airborne? Or were they all still on the field?

MR. THORNTON: No, they were caught sitting.

MR. PYLE: Would this have been in early January?

MR. THORNTON: It wasn't. No, it wasn't even January. It was before Christmas, I believe.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. The Japanese really wasted no time taking care of our allied air cover.

MR. THORNTON: No, man, they come on in after it. They destroyed those patrol PBYs.

MR. PYLE: Excuse me.

MR. THORNTON: Okay.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Go right ahead, you were just telling me about the PBYs being destroyed.

MR. THORNTON: They destroyed all of our PBYs, even with all the small fire that we could aim at them. We didn't have any aircraft at all. All we had was machine guns and rifles. They came all in just above tree-top level. Really, they weren't afraid of anything that we had. They made two or three passes, and we got one of the planes, I feel sure. But we never did find it. It left smoking, and we feel sure that we downed one of the planes. But, they got all of the PBYs. Shortly after that, then we had moved on north toward Manila and eventually wound up on Corregidor, all the marines ended up on Corregidor for the defense of Corregidor.

MR. PYLE: Now, when you got to Corregidor, was General Wainwright in charge then, or was--

MR. THORNTON: No, MacArthur was still there.

MR. PYLE: MacArthur was still there. I see, okay. Describe Corregidor, what you saw when you got there. What kind of a place was it?

MR. THORNTON: Just a big rock sticking up out of the bay.

MR. PYLE: Just a big island right in the middle of the bay.

MR. THORNTON: It wasn't a very large place. A half mile wide by a mile long, or something like that. It was unimpressive as far as just seeing it and manning it.

MR. PYLE: Was it heavily armed with artillery positions, for instance?

MR. THORNTON: No, not at the time. Of course, the navy had been using it for some years as a placement for naval guns.

MR. PYLE: That was the purpose, to protect the harbor itself, all the guns were aimed out toward the sea?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, and they had been using it for some years for that, for the defense of the little bay there. They had, I don't recall how many batteries there was on there. But as far as being just bristled with armorment, no, it wasn't all that heavily fortified. It was just more or less peace time fortification.

MR. PYLE: How many people were on Corregidor when you got there?

MR. THORNTON: How many?

MR. PYLE: Roughly. Were there several thousand?

MR. THORNTON: I was trying to remember. There were a few army personnel, some naval personnel. Just a rough guess, I'd say, there were a couple of thousand, twenty-five hundred. Something like that. I really don't know. I don't even know how many marines all toll wound up on the island. There was the company from Olongapo and a detachment from Manila and some on north of Manila up there, coming in. They had called all the marines from around there and put them on Corregidor to build up the defenses on Corregidor.

MR. PYLE: What was your duty on Corregidor? Were you still acting as a mechanic by and large?

MR. THORNTON: No. At that time, we had turned over the shops and all to the army personnel. I understand that the army personnel was taking care of it. Our transportation and all was out. We had no further use for transportation.

MR. PYLE: Plus the size of Corregidor, there was not a whole lot of transportation to ride, is there [laughing]?

MR. THORNTON: No, so there is very, very limited transportation on Corregidor. We were all trained, in the Marine Corps, when you go in you are trained as a fighting man first and then the rest of it is secondary. We just fell right into the taking up the defense of Corregidor. We had machine guns. We placed, my crew was placed on the machine guns, on what they called bottom-side, middle-side, and top-side. We were on the middle of Corregidor, a machine-gun implacement. So, I was on a machine-gun crew.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see. Now, both Mayhew Wainwright and Douglas MacArthur would have been on Corregidor at this time, did you have the opportunity to see them, or observe them?

MR. THORNTON: No. I didn't get a chance to see either one of them.

MR. PYLE: Part of the stories that I've received, in these interviews, is that Douglas MacArthur was seen by very few people, that he was largely in the big command tunnel; but that Wainwright was out largely, was out among the troops a good bit, inspecting and that sort of thing.

MR. THORNTON: At the time, this was when we first got on Corregidor, at the time Wainwright and, I guess, MacArthur also was still on the Philippines, back on Luzon, I think. At the time that they moved us in, they still had a lot of fighting left on Luzon. Now let's see, toward the middle of April, I guess, they began to be pretty well scattered, and the Japanese were making headway on Luzon. It was about then that a bunch of them come on Corregidor.

MR. PYLE: Up until then, they had been massed on Bataan, I guess, the peninsula there.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: General Homma was the Japanese officer in charge.

MR. THORNTON: Right. Shall I just go ahead?

MR. PYLE: Just with your experience before your capture here.

MR. THORNTON: Along about this time, the Japanese, well, they flew freely and bombed freely. We had nothing to hinder their flying. Along about the middle of April, I guess it was, they began to hit Corregidor. Occasionally, they would fly over and drop bombs on Corregidor. More and more people were leaving Japan and coming onto Corregidor. Along, oh, the middle of April or about the last of it, the escape from Bataan got on Corregidor, by then there was some six thousand, all tolled.

MR. PYLE: Yes, Bataan fell on April 9, 1942. The death march, the Bataan Death March, began April ninth, that's about nine days.

MR. THORNTON: So, about the middle of April, the last ones that had escaped had got on Corregidor.

MR. PYLE: What was the total strength of Corregidor about mid-April, then?

MR. THORNTON: Some six thousand, sixty-two hundred, about that. Now, I really don't know the exact figures, but it was around six thousand, sixty-two hundred.

MR. PYLE: How often were the bombings of Corregidor by the Japanese? Were they hourly, or--

MR. THORNTON: Oh no, they would bomb two or three times a day and once the next day and half a dozen times another day.

MR. PYLE: Just whenever they felt like it [laughter]?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. They didn't have to worry about anything. They could come over and bomb when they got ready to. So, if they were bombing something in Luzon, in Japan, and had a few bombs left, or something, they would drop them on Corregidor on their way out [laughter].

MR. PYLE: Let's go bomb Corregidor.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: What was the spirit of the men then, assuming that it would be easy to be kind of down in the dumps here?

MR. THORNTON: No, actually the spirit was high as could be, the spirit and morale and everything else, even though we knew that it was fighting a losing battle it seemed like. The spirit was high.

MR. PYLE: It just sounds very much like you were just sitting ducks. That, you know, that the Japanese might have had you at their mercy there.

MR. THORNTON: No, actually we still thought, possibly, up to the very last, that we would get some help in there.

MR. PYLE: That was one of those famous lines that reinforcements are coming, and there were no reinforcements anywhere.

MR. THORNTON: Right [laughing]. We thought possibly that we might get some help up until the very last.

MR. PYLE: Did your officers, the officers immediately in charge of you, tell you that reinforcements were coming?

MR. THORNTON: No, nobody actually said reinforcements were coming. But, it was the hope of everybody that help would come.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I see.

MR. THORNTON: When Bataan fell and Corregidor was all that was left, we were still hoping against hope that we would get help. It never got there. The Japanese got Corregidor before the help got there. Anyway, toward the last, can I just go ahead and say it in my own words?

MR. PYLE: Certainly, go right ahead, please.

MR. THORNTON: The last few days on Corregidor, the Japanese would bomb whenever they wanted to. By then, Corregidor actually was pretty well

fortified, but not nearly as well fortified, I think, as the Japanese thought we were. They just made boming runs and everything else.

One day one of my buddies and I had walked out on the football field on middle-side and stopped and were just enjoying the peace and quiet. We looked up and a couple of Japanese bombers were coming. We waited a little too late about moving, and the bombs hit close behind us. When it hit the ground, we jumped in the crater that it made, and another one fell right close in. Well, what's comical about this, my buddy got shrapnel in his hand, and he just folded up and said, "Great day!" Said, "They got me!" Actually he wasn't as bad off as he thought he was [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Did he think he was dying [laughing]?

MR. THORNTON: Right, scared him more than anything else. He saw the blood all flying. Anyway, after the bombing raid was over, we went on down and had his hand taken care of.

MR. PYLE: Being in the middle of a football field would be a bad place to be with a bomber coming up.

MR. THORNTON: Well, that was along toward dinner time, and it had been quiet all morning. So, we were right at the edge of the machine-gun placements. So, we just walked out there and was talking and wasn't really paying anything a whole lot of attention, at the time. So, they caught us sort of by surprise.

After the last week in April, it was about the twenty-ninth, I think the twenty-ninth of April, the Japanese made one attempted landing on Corregidor and was repulsed. Then the second, the night of the second of May, I believe it was, they made another attempt and landed a few [soldiers]. Mopping up operations the morning of the third, nine-thirty or ten o'clock before we got all of them cleared out.

Then things quietened down, no more bombing, or anything else, and things quietened down. You could look out across the bay, and as far as you could see from Manila, all the way down as far as you could see, they were getting ready to make an assault. There was no doubt in anybody's mind [because of] the numbers that were being readied for an assault on Corregidor, that they would take it.

It was along about this time that Wainwright, General Wainwright, surrendered the island. They had gotten in contact with him, in some way, and told him that if they had to take the island, that there would be nobody left. They would kill every soldier, every civilian, every person that was on the island. [That] is the word that we got.

I don't doubt one minute that they would have done just that. We could see, from the preparations that they were making, you could observe, from where we were, that there was just thousands getting ready to come aboard.

MR. PYLE: Wainwright was severely criticized by MacArthur for surrendering the troops. But from what you were saying, Wainwright's position was untenable, he didn't have a choice.

MR. THORNTON: He had no choice on the surrender because the Japanese were coming aboard. There was no doubt in anybody's mind. The Japanese had said that they were sparing nobody, that they would all be killed, if they had to take the island.

Now, they had paid dearly for the two assaults that they had made on the island. They had paid dearly for it. Looking out across the bay, you could see they had sampans and boats of all descriptions and everything else. As long as a soldier could pile on, the Japanese soldiers were on them. They were preparing to take Corregidor. They had that in mind, and the Japanese, regardless of how many died, they just keep coming.

Before we came in Corregidor, this rear guard action left, and one fellow was left behind to take care of the Japanese, to hold them up. He said that in a narrow pass, he had a couple of machine guns. He'd just shoot them, and he said they would just pile up on one another and just keep coming, right in the face of machine-gun fire. So, we knew that they intended to take Corregidor. There was no doubt in any of our minds that they intended to take it, and they had the people to take it with.

So, as far as I'm concerned, General Wainwright had no alternative. They had said that they would kill every last one of us, if they had to take it. If they didn't have to take it, none of us would be killed. We would be spared. We would be interned.

MR. PYLE: What were the specific orders given to the marine contingent that was there?

MR. THORNTON: At that time?

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. THORNTON: At that time of the surrender, [the order] was to destroy all ammunition and weapons and all. Destroy anything that the Japanese could use.

MR. PYLE: I asked that because at least one other story that I was given, this particular individual wasn't ordered to surrender. He said that his commanding officer left it up to the individual conscience of each person, that they couldn't order them to surrender their weapons and to turn themselves in, but he suggested that they did.

MR. THORNTON: I guess, we weren't ordered to. But, the word came down that we were going to surrender, and as such, to destroy anything and everything that might help the Japanese.

MR. PYLE: Had the stories been circulated about the Bataan Death March, was that generally known by the troops?

MR. THORNTON: No, not at that time. It was only after we left Corregidor and met one of the other fellows that we learned of that.

MR. PYLE: Okay, describe for me, if you would, the instance of your capture, and where you had to go from there.

MR. THORNTON: When the Japanese came aboard, we had destroyed all of our ammunition and our guns and everything else. They landed on what we called bottom-side and progressed on up the way. They were militarily correct, at the time. They ordered us all over into one place. We were stripped down and searched, and then carried to a compound, down on what they called bottom-side and placed in, oh, I guess, four or five acre spot that was level down there.

MR. PYLE: Yes, were you allowed to re-dress or were you still stripped down?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, we were allowed to re-dress. They had put up a barbed-wire perimeter around where they interned us all.

MR. PYLE: At this time, had the officers and the enlisted men, NCOs, were they all together?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, we were all in the same compound. Of course, the officers had a spot over on one side and then enlisted personnel another place. Then, can I tell something here just personal, like trying to escape or something?

MR. PYLE: Oh yes, most certainly. Please do.

MR. THORNTON: After the sixth of May when the rock fell, two of my buddies and myself decided right away that we would try to get out. Of course, anytime that a man can try to escape, then it's his duty to try to get away. Well, we'd decided that we would try. So--

MR. PYLE: Excuse me.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Okay we're ready to go on.

MR. THORNTON: Ready to go? Corregidor fell on or around the sixth of May. After all the people on Corregidor was rounded up and in one compound, a couple of my buddies and I decided that we would try to get out. We were good swimmers, and it seemed like a crazy thing to swim a ten-mile channel, but we had no doubt that we could swim it. We decided that we would give it a try.

MR. PYLE: Where were you going to try to swim, to the town, or the other side of the--

MR. THORNTON: The other side. The Japanese would take us in small work details to scavage anything that we hadn't destroyed and stuff. They would let us eat a little bit of what we found. So, the three of us got on a work detail, and we stuffed our face too much that day, I guess. Anyway, we'd planned on making our break that night. We had eat all that we could during our scavaging, and that night, the other two decided that they wouldn't try then. But I had already made my preparations, and when it got real dark, I managed to swim out under a little bridge and get away.

I got out from the camp, and it began to drizzle rain. It was a perfect night for getting away until I got some, oh, some five hundred yards, I guess not maybe that far, down a little ravine and got sick. I got deathly sick of something I had eaten, or something. Anyway, I guess the Lord's hand was in it, because I got so sick till I didn't know if I was coming or going. So I just laid back and let the rain rain in my face, slow drizzle.

I guess, I dropped off to sleep, or passed out, or something. Anyway, it was breaking daylight when I come to, or woke up. I knew that I had to get back inside, or get killed, one or the other, because they had already put us in groups and had roll call. If I wasn't there by roll call, they'd be out after me, a whole bunch of them. So, I had to get back. I didn't throw caution to the wind, but I did make it back within fifty yards of the camp without being seen or heard. By then, it was light enough that you could see all over everywhere.

There was a little bridge across the stream of water that I got out from, and I had to go back the same route. There was no way of standing up and going back, because the Japanese were patrolling around the perimeter. I eased off and got in the water and took a reed and got down under the water and went in. Then I got close to the little bridge and hid myself and looked around and waited. A Japanese had crossed the bridge and was standing still with his back to it. I went back in under the water and made my way on inside [the perimeter]. Once on the inside, I just kept easing on back into where my little group was. So, that ended that escape attempt [laughing]. That day, that afternoon, they moved off Corregidor, and we went to Bataan.

MR. PYLE: What sort of orders had the Japanese given concerning things like escape?

MR. THORNTON: Don't try to escape.

MR. PYLE: You would be killed?

MR. THORNTON: There was no way out. You would be killed.

MR. PYLE: I asked that because it differed in the prison camps. For instance, one at Cabanatuan, I was told that the men were grouped in varying

sized groups, but they were all told that if one of them escaped, all of them would be shot.

MR. THORNTON: Now, you ain't wrong there [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Okay, I was wondering if that kind of word had been passed down to them.

MR. THORNTON: No, at that time it hadn't.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: Then, we left Corregidor and was carried to Cabanatuan. Now, there was three camps in Cabanatuan, number one, two and three. The group that I was in wound up in camp number three. That was the furtherest up from Manila.

MR. PYLE: Roughly how far was Cabanatuan from Manila?

MR. THORNTON: You've asked me a question I don't remember.

MR. PYLE: Okay. We can look it up on a map, no particular problem, I was just wondering about the logistics.

MR. THORNTON: Right.

MR. PYLE: Did you have to walk to Cabanatuan, by the way?

MR. THORNTON: No, they put us on a train, and carried us up.

MR. PYLE: And that would have been a several hour train ride.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Yes, okay.

MR. THORNTON: We wound up in Cabanatuan camp number three. We stayed there for, oh, some two or three months I guess, and they disbanded that camp. But I would like to tell something that happened in camp number three.

MR. PYLE: Please do.

MR. THORNTON: One morning there was a couple of fellows had got outside the fence and walked the road some twenty, thirty steps, I guess, and crawled back through the fence and the Japanese took them and said they were trying to escape. Now what the two fellows were really doing, there was a little gully--we called a gully, some people call it a ravine, just a deep place--they were on one side, and they had some buddies on the other side. In order to get to them without crawling over the fence and around, they would have had to went down some hundred, two or three hundred yards and crossed

the ravine and back up the other side. Rather than do that, they just stepped across the fence, walked twenty or thirty steps, and back into the fence to talk to their buddies. But the Japanese grabbed them off and said that they were trying to escape. They took them down in a little place some thirty or forty feet square, I guess, and drove a couple of stakes and tied them down. Tied their feet and arms in behind them. Has anybody told you that before?

MR. PYLE: No, never.

MR. THORNTON: That was on, to the best of my recollection, was on a Monday morning about nine o'clock, when they walked over and wanted to join the other fellows. They said that they were trying to escape, carried them down to the bottom of the little ravine, to a smoothed out place down there, and staked them out. Their hands and feet tied behind their back.

On Wednesday, on Wednesday morning, they told them--now, they had nothing to eat, drink, or anything, we wasn't allowed to even talk to them. We could get within so close, of course, the Japanese had guards around them. We could get just so close and wasn't allowed, when we went down we weren't even allowed to whisper. We could go down, but that was it. They had been tied up there from Monday until Wednesday with nothing to drink, nothing to eat, nothing to relax them or anything, just there.

Wednesday, they untied them. Well, naturally, they didn't have any use for themselves, they just fell over. They put some water in them and moved them around and limbered them up and told them that they were going to have a court-martial. So, that was Wednesday afternoon.

They got to where they could talk, and they had limbered them up some. So, they took them away then, and we didn't see them until, oh, two or three days, I guess. In the meantime, they had treated them enough to where, well, they had fed them and watered them and got them well enough where they could walk and told them that they were going to court-martial them. They had said that if they were found guilty what they would do and all of that.

So, the two fellows, I don't remember their names, the two fellows said, "Well, just go ahead and shoot us." So, they called the whole camp, and those two fellows had to dig their graves and stand up and be shot. That was for no other reason except just taking the short cut around that ravine. They weren't trying to escape or anything, but the Japanese said that they were trying to escape. So, that made the prisoners there, that made them know that they best not try anything at all.

MR. PYLE: These guys were made an example of in front of everyone?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, right. We knew that they hadn't tried to escape. Escape wasn't even in their minds. They would have been crazy to try to escape right in the broad open daylight. All they did was just to cross a two-strand barbed-wire fence and walked twenty or thirty steps and back in the other side

where their buddies were. That was all they was wanting to do, to save going down that ravine a couple or three hundred yards across and walk back up. They thought they would save some.

MR. PYLE: What was the effect of that sort of thing on the men? Did it make them more and more determined to get away, or were they resigned to their fate?

MR. THORNTON: No, they were more or less--they wasn't exactly resigned to their fate, but they knew better than to try to escape, or do anything that would bring the Japanese down on them.

Then shortly after this incident, the camp was disbanded, and we were all moved down to camp number one. I don't know, along about this time, if they were moving some people out of camp number one on further south to work on stuff or what, but anyway, number three was disbanded and we were all sent to camp number one. Shortly after camp number three was disbanded, camp number two was disbanded, and we all wound up in camp number one. There was ten thousand, I really don't remember. There was roughly ten thousand POWs in that camp.

MR. PYLE: Were they all American or were there Filipinos there too?

MR. THORNTON: No, there was Filipinos and Americans and anybody who--

MR. PYLE: British, Dutch?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, anybody that the Japanese had happened to pick up and wanted in there.

MR. PYLE: Were there still officers as well as enlisted men together?

MR. THORNTON: Oh, yes. The officers were separated from enlisted personnel, but we were all in the same camp. It was along about this time that we were, as you was mentioning awhile ago, about being put in groups, and if one tried to escape all of them would be killed?

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. THORNTON: There was no doubt in any of our minds but what that was the gospel. If they said it, they meant it. They didn't go with idle talk. When they said something, they really meant what they said. So, we were put in groups of ten. If anyone of that group escaped, then the other nine, whether the fellow got away or whether he didn't get away, the other nine would be killed. So, that, you might say, put a stop to even thinking about escaping, because one fellow, even if he wanted to escape, wouldn't risk the lives of nine others for a chance of escaping. Of course, along about this time, the Japanese

was sending out work details first one place and another. They would never send all of one group together. They would split the groups up.

MR. PYLE: Why was that, do you know?

MR. THORNTON: So, that no one group could escape together.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see.

MR. THORNTON: That was to eliminate the thought, "Well, all of our group is here, let's go." So, they would never send the whole group together. That was to eliminate the chance that all of one group could get away. It would cut down on the chance of one fellow saying, "Well, there is only five that will have to die, if I get away." But even so, I don't know of anybody over there that would have said, "Well, the heck with you people, I'm gone."

But I did [attempt to escape] just to see if I could have got away. On one detail, we were out in the woods cutting wood, and just to satisfy my own self, I just wanted to see if I could have gotten away. So, I got out of sight, but I didn't go, I turned around and come back, because I knew that if I had left, the other fellows would have been killed.

MR. PYLE: How, in a prison situation, like you are describing, how close would you get to the other guys in your group? Did you get to know each other pretty well?

MR. THORNTON: Oh, yes. We were billeted in the same barracks and stuff.

MR. PYLE: I asked that because when the chance of death is so at hand, so close, if you would tend to not get really close to the guys. I don't mean physically, you are all together. Not really get close to them because, you know, they might be gone anytime.

MR. THORNTON: No, it drew us.

MR. PYLE: Here's that thing called prison mentality that eventually builds up after long periods of incarceration.

MR. THORNTON: It, you might say, if anything, it brought us closer together. This one particular time, I just wanted to see if I could have gotten away. So, I succeeded in getting out of sight of everybody. But I knew better than to leave because they would have shot the others down. So, I just turned around and made like nothing happened. I'd just got sort of lost off from them, making a bunch of fuss in coming back in, so that they would know that I was there and wasn't trying to escape.

MR. PYLE: To your knowledge, was there ever any escapes from Cabanatuan? Was there ever that kind of retribution taken?

MR. THORNTON: To my knowledge, there was never any attempt made.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I can understand why, under those circumstances.

MR. THORNTON: Right. There might have been some more people, like I was, to satisfy their own minds to see if they could have. But, no, no, I wouldn't have left.

MR. PYLE: Yes. Describe Cabanatuan for me, if you would. What did it look like physically? Was it a walled fortress?

MR. THORNTON: No, it was just a barbed-wire encampment.

MR. PYLE: Barbed-wire encampment.

MR. THORNTON: It was, I guess, if you could call any place in the Philippines the plains, it was level country. Right in through there, it was level country. It was farming country.

MR. PYLE: So, far as the billets were concerned, did you have huts that you stayed in?

MR. THORNTON: Oh, bamboo.

MR. PYLE: Bamboo huts?

MR. THORNTON: Bamboo huts.

MR. PYLE: How many people would they crowd in a hut?

MR. THORNTON: Around a hundred, about a hundred I imagine, in one of them.

MR. PYLE: These were pretty considerable structures, then?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, they were fifty--well, this is just rough estimates, I don't know--fifty feet long, to twenty [feet] wide, and double, they had double decks. They weren't two-story buildings, but the place one would sleep, would be about three feet off the floor and the other say, seven feet.

MR. PYLE: Almost one on top of the other.

MR. THORNTON: Yes, and it wasn't bunks. It was just solid like the floor. There was just a walkway between the two and the door. Then the bunks, partition, they were just solid, like another floor.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see.

MR. THORNTON: There at three feet and then about seven feet.

MR. PYLE: Earthened floors?

MR. THORNTON: No, it was bamboo. It was built on the inside of the huts.

MR. PYLE: There were no beds or anything?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Slept on straw?

MR. THORNTON: No straw [laughing].

MR. PYLE: No straw either.

MR. THORNTON: Just the bamboo slats.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see.

MR. THORNTON: We'd sleep one head there [motioning] and one's head here, head to foot, head to foot, down the line.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. THORNTON: So, that way they get about a hundred in one of them.

MR. PYLE: What was the diet like? What kind of food did you have, how often did you eat?

MR. THORNTON: Rice. That was the diet, and it was rice [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Now, how many different ways can you prepare rice, or was it the same all the time?

MR. THORNTON: It was the same.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: Same all the time. We had three, well, if you could call it meals, you had it three times a day. But, we were rationed at first, a cup full of rice for a day. But it got worse and worse and worse. Toward the last, it was just a piece of a cup of rice and some soybeans mixed with it. So, the diet was, that was about it. Now, we did manage, I say managed, the Japanese told us at the outset that we could farm and use what we grew to supplement our diet. So, we would get out, and, oh, I guess twenty, thirty, forty acres out there. We had cabbage, tomatoes--

MR. PYLE: This would have been on the outside of the encampment, then?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. Cabbage, tomatoes, onions, eggplant, oh, a bunch of garden variety vegetables and stuff. But when they were harvested, the Japanese, they--[laughing]--

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask that, if you were actually allowed to eat any of that, or did the Japanese get it.

MR. THORNTON: The Japanese got the bigger part of it [laughter]. We would take litters out and would gather ten litters, and the Japanese would get nine, and we would get one. So, we got very little of what we raised.

MR. PYLE: Yes. The Philippines, of course, were tropical. Were you able to supplement your diet with any tropical fruit, or anything like that?

MR. THORNTON: No. No, unless we happened to be out in the woods on a wood cutting detail or something and sneak it. Here is something else, if the Japanese caught you, and they kept a pretty sharp eye, if the Japanese caught you eating something, they would break an arm, or hit you over the head, anything. It didn't matter. Even when you were working, in what we thought was ours, when we were working in the vegetables, if they caught us eating anything, they [would] just as soon kill you right there as not. So, you didn't take too many chances even then.

MR. PYLE: Did that sort of thing happen often that someone would be executed for getting food?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. Executed, no, but beat up, hung up by your thumbs, tied up. Come in off of a work detail, they would strip, not strip you down because you didn't have anything except a pair of shorts, or something, on. If you had something in your hand trying to hide it, a little old green tomato, or a piece of onion or something, they would just hit you across--break your arm or something.

MR. PYLE: That tells something about the attitude that the Japanese had for American prisoners. Then, of course, Japanese were not a signatory power of the Geneva Convention.

MR. THORNTON: So, as long as you could outguess them, you done pretty good. I'm not saying that they were stupid. They were far from being stupid, but as long as you could outguess them a little bit and stay on your toes, then you stood a chance of avoiding a lot of difficulty.

MR. PYLE: Describe for me, if you would, the typical day at Cabanatuan. Would there be work details every day?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: For every man, I mean?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. A typical day began about, oh, sunup or shortly there after. We'd go get our little bit of rice and eat it. Then the work details would be called. Some days you would be on a work detail, other days you wouldn't. But the work details would be called. Then they would go out and come in and lunch and back out. By lunch, I mean a little bit of rice and water.

MR. PYLE: Oh, you wouldn't take that with you on the work detail when you were out on the field? Okay.

MR. THORNTON: The work detail would come back in and eat that and back out and then back in at night. The people that wasn't out on work detail had chores around inside that they can do. Sometimes, you had to do stuff, and sometimes you didn't have to do anything. Then if you could find any grass, or anything else to eat, I've eaten grass and a little thing that grew there wild that was a little bit sour. You would pull it up and eat it.

MR. PYLE: Was it a type of weed or root?

MR. THORNTON: It was a type of weed. You could do that in camp, and the Japanese wouldn't bother you. But outside, no, don't you dare touch anything. Anyway, the work details was the main thing. Some of us went on work details working on airports and stuff like that. In instances like that, then they didn't return until dinner time. Sometimes it was two or three days before they would come in.

MR. PYLE: On these work details was it mostly just makeshift work just to keep you busy?

MR. THORNTON: No, no, on these work details it was construction work for the Japanese.

MR. PYLE: And do they keep you at a pretty heavy pace of work, or if you were caught slouching--

MR. THORNTON: Yes. When you were working, you better be working. One instance, they put us out in the field. They put teams to pulling grass and cultivating the stuff. Of course, you had to do it with your fingers or little sticks and stuff, and no talking. But the way that we got around not talking, the Japanese had guard posts. They had so many people in a square. There would be a Japanese soldier standing on each corner of the group that he had charge of. You wasn't allowed to talk or anything. You worked. But the way that we got around talking, two of us would get on a row, and we'd keep each other's back covered. We would hang our heads, like we were working. We'd hang our heads and talk [laughter]. We wouldn't talk loud, but just enough to hear each other. On work details, you'd try to always pair with a buddy. A fellow by the name of Glyn Golden from Drew, [Mississippi,] and myself ususally got paired up. We tried to pair up when we'd get a chance.

MR. PYLE: Did you know Glyn Golden prior to prison camp anytime?

MR. THORNTON: No, no.

MR. PYLE: Just happen to live in Drew.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Oh, okay.

MR. THORNTON: I met him one day it was raining. I was standing under a little eave of the shed, and I heard somebody mention Drew, Mississippi. I looked around, and it was somebody had asked Glyn where he was from. I'd never met him. His name was Glyn Golden, and he was from Drew. I said, "Well, I'm George and I'm from," at that time my home was in Raleigh. We buddied up.

So, back to the story of hanging our heads and then talking [laughing]. I was out one day and about the only thing that we would ever talk about was when we got back home and got back to where we could get something to eat. That was about the main thing.

MR. PYLE: Food was the topic of the day [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: Food was the top of the list on every subject. So, this particular day, we were working. The signal for one of us to shut our mouth, the other would hush and start to working fast. That was our signal. But something happened to my signal that day. I got so engrossed on talking about food that I had to eat back home and if I ever got back what I was going to do, and I missed my cue. Boy, I missed it a sight. The jolt that brought me back to reality was a shadow and I said, "Oh, my Lord, help me!" I saw a shadow come up raising a bamboo pole. The guards carried bamboo poles or 2 x 2s, anything. But, they usually carried the bamboo because it was light, hard and would kill a fellow if you hit him right with it. Anyway, this shadow coming up and out of the corner of my eye, I saw Glyn way on down the row. So, I knew I had had it. So, I just said, "Oh, Lord, I've had it." The shadow come on up, and through no power of my own, I was transferred about two rows over. I don't remember even flexing a muscle. I was picked up and sat down a couple of rows over there. Instead of getting clobbered aside the head, which was normal, I felt a tap on the shoulder and the Japanese was grinning. That was something that they didn't usually do. They didn't usually smile about nothing. Especially when there was a work violation or something. But this Japanese had lowered his cane, tapped me on the shoulder, told me to get back over there and get to work. Of course, he spoke in Japanese.

MR. PYLE: But, you knew what he meant?

MR. THORNTON: Oh, yes. Get back over there--Hayaku, shigotu takson [laughter].

MR. PYLE: I hope my secretaries can spell that, because I can't [laughter].

MR. THORNTON: I can't either. Anyway, I got back over there.

MR. PYLE: Excuse me just a second.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Go right ahead.

MR. THORNTON: Like I say, I don't remember flexing a muscle. As far as I'm concerned, the Lord picked me up and put me over on the other row. The Japanese tapped me on the shoulder and told me to get back over there and go to work. He didn't whack me aside the head with that bamboo, which was normal. Everything else was something that just happened. It was out of the ordinary for him to smile. It was out of the ordinary for him not to beat me up. Anyway, after then [laughing], I didn't have to be reminded to keep my eye on my work partner [laughter].

Shortly after then, they called for volunteers to go to Japan. They said we would be better treated, have more food and everything else.

MR. PYLE: That's rather strange that they would call for volunteers. I would have assumed that they would have just pointed to you, you, you, and you, and say you're going.

MR. THORNTON: Well, they would have, but I guess they figured what the heck, you get them anyway if some of them wants to go. So, me and my buddy volunteered and along with a whole lot of the rest. Actually, what they done was fill us full of a lot of propaganda, that it would be better and everything else. So, me and my buddy volunteered.

MR. PYLE: Was this Glyn Golden?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, Glyn Golden. We wound up in Japan at a little place called Futashi.

MR. PYLE: You were at Cabanatuan, I assume you went by ship?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Did you go straight to Futashi?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. No, we--

MR. PYLE: Or would be at Formosa first?

MR. THORNTON: Formosa and [inaudible], oh, I can't even pronounce it anymore.

MR. PYLE: Was it one of the Japanese Islands?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay, one of the southernmost islands?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: I see.

MR. THORNTON: Anyway, we got there, some of us [were] sent one place, some another, some still other places. When we finally made it to Futashi City. It was a coal mining place, and here we were put in a camp with some Dutch and English people. I don't remember what part of England they were from. But anyway, it was Dutch and Englishmen there, along with Americans. We were in the coal mining part.

MR. PYLE: Let me digress just a second, Futashi City, where is, is that on Honshu?

MR. THORNTON: I've looked at some maps, and I've intended a lot of times to get one and be certain where it was. But really, I couldn't say. I think it was on Honshu.

MR. PYLE: Okay. You mentioned that when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki--

MR. THORNTON: We felt the shock waves.

MR. PYLE: So, you were somewhere near Nagasaki?

MR. THORNTON: Right, someplace in that part of the country, someplace down in there.

MR. PYLE: Were you on Nagasaki Bay, by any chance? Or was this an inland place?

MR. THORNTON: No, no. It was inland.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: We stayed there until the war was over.

MR. PYLE: When did you go to Futashi? It would have been in 1942, but--

MR. THORNTON: No, we went there, let's see, we left Corregidor the later part of May and went to Cabanatuan number three in the first of June and then transferred into Cabanatuan number one in September, October, along in there, I don't remember.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: And that was [inaudible].

MR. PYLE: [Inaudible].

MR. THORNTON: To then in 1943.

MR. PYLE: [Inaudible].

MR. THORNTON: In June of 1943, we left Cabanatuan camp number one for Japan. We got to Futashi City, oh, I guess the latter part of June, or in July. There is Dutch, English, and American POWs. We worked in the coal mines there until the war was over. In the coal mines the same difference as it was in Cabanatuan up there. The Japanese were on you, and if you even looked crossed-eyed, they would grab you off in a hurry.

MR. PYLE: In the coal mines themselves, were they run by Japanese military personnel, or by civilians?

MR. THORNTON: The Japanese military was in and around. They carried us down there, and Japanese military men was right handy at all times.

MR. PYLE: I asked that because I had an interview with another gentleman that worked in the coal mines. He said they were marched to the coal mines and back and were supervised by Japanese personnel. But once they got to the coal mines themselves, they were under civilian personnel, and under civilian personnel, they were treated somewhat better.

MR. THORNTON: I'm glad in his case, he was [laughter]. But in our case, the same treatment, and everything was no different than we'd known all along. In fact on one occasion, we were down there, we worked ten-day shifts, and was winding up a ten-day shift, and the Japanese had let us have a little extra, on that last shift, for something to eat, was a sweet potato. One small potato for each one of us. But when they brought the potato to us, they stomped it in the coal dust before they would let us eat it. So, I'm glad he had better treatment than we did [laughing]. Anyway, we were mining coal all the time, and we did it with picks and shovels, very little blasting was we allowed. We did have to drill and blast a little bit, but not often. We usually had to dig it out the hard way.

On one occasion, there was no chance of escaping, but on one occasion, we decided among ourselves on this one shift that we'd try to get even. It was shortly after they had stomped our extra potato in the coal dust before they let us eat it. We thought possibly that we just might get even with him--

MR. PYLE: Oh, there was just one particular guard you were after?

MR. THORNTON: Yes [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: Usually we'd fill a coal car up. It would hold, oh, a thousand, twelve hundred pounds of coal. [It was] on a narrow gauge steel track, and would roll down. For brakes, we had small timbers that we would have to put between the wheels and break them as we go down the track, because the track was on a pretty steep incline. Usually the guard would be down below while we were loading up one. The guard would then come up and see that we got it down all right. This particular time we'd figured that, well, if we're going to get that fellow, it had to be an accident. There was no getting around it, if we done anything it had to be an accident.

MR. PYLE: If it didn't look like an accident, y'all were going to have--

MR. THORNTON: Right, you better believe it. So, we broke our brake pole. We made it look like we were trying to stop it and broke it. So, we waited till we saw the light come in, and we turned loose when we saw his light coming up around the curve. [We] figured to give him time to get right in the curve, where he couldn't get out of it quick enough, and turn the coal car with that thousand pounds of coal loose on him. But, we miscalculated [laughing]. We turned it loose a little too quick, and he got out of the way.

MR. PYLE: Did he see through the ploy?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I was wondering what happened to everyone that--

MR. THORNTON: Naturally, when we turned it loose, we thought he was a little further up than he was. I mean, yes, we thought he was a little further up than he was and couldn't get far enough back. Naturally, when we turned it loose and shoved, we hollered, and screamed to high heaven that it was on the way, for him to run, that our pole had broke, so he never did suspect a thing.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see.

MR. THORNTON: He just made us clean it up and [laughter] and go on about our business. Lucky for us, he didn't suspect.

MR. PYLE: Okay [laughing]. How far was it from the camp itself to the coal mines?

MR. THORNTON: It was about twenty minutes marching time.

MR. PYLE: About twenty minutes walking, okay, okay. Considerably closer than the other coal mine camping experience that I've been told about.

MR. THORNTON: It wasn't very far from our camp down to the coal mine.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned ten-day shifts, explain that. Was the coal mine operable twenty-four hours a day, and you had different shifts?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay, and you worked ten days on one shift, and then you switch to the other.

MR. THORNTON: Switch to, we had two shifts a day.

MR. PYLE: Yes, twelve-hour shifts. Okay.

MR. THORNTON: Yes. It was a ten-day shift. One shift would work, well, the day shift. Then the next shift would work the night shift. So, every ten days we'd rotate.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I see. Describe for me, if you would, a typical day at Futashi. When you would get up, would you have a muster formation, when would you eat, go to bed, that sort of thing?

MR. THORNTON: Right. When we got to Futashi, we were given numbers. Each POW had a number, and they started at one and went as high as number of prisoners that were there.

MR. PYLE: From the top rank down?

MR. THORNTON: No, in this particular camp there was no officers that I recall.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: It was all enlisted personnel.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: Just the first, when they lined us up to give us the numbers after we got there, they just said fall in in three ranks.

MR. PYLE: Just wherever you fell in that was your number?

MR. THORNTON: They started at that end and right down the line numbered and there, well, there was right at five hundred of us, because my number was 484, yon hyaku hachijew yon, and that was 484. So, there was right at five hundred of us in that bunch.

Now along toward the end of the war, we began to sense something was happening. The Japanese had let up a little bit, and we didn't have to work so hard. We would see B-29s flying over occasionally. We knew that it was getting better.

Let me back up just a little bit on the way that we got anything at all concerning how the war was going. For instance, when we first got to Japan, Japan was winning everything that they come into everytime. Every island that they would hit, they was taking it and establishing a foothold. But later on, we'd hear that they had attacked an island here or there, but it would be a little closer in to Japan. All the time the Americans was advancing, the Americans would be repulsed from this island. The next time, they would be repulsed from a little island closer into Japan, and next time, a little closer. That's the only way that we knew how the war was going. The Japanese were saying that they were taking them or keeping them, [that] they were kicking the Americans off. But the next time we would hear a report, the Japanese would repulse a landing closer in to Japan itself. So, we knew that they were coming closer and closer all along. Then once in awhile, we could see a B-29. Not often, but occasionally, we would see one, and we knew that they were getting closer than they had been.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. THORNTON: Then closer in to the end of the war, you could see them more often. Then the Japs said that they had repulsed landings in the so-and-so. So, they would be closer everytime.

MR. PYLE: Did the Japanese realize that they were giving you this kind of inspiration?

MR. THORNTON: I guess not.

MR. PYLE: To them it was that [they] were defeating the Americans.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Where they were defeating them, just didn't occur to them.

MR. THORNTON: Right. So, we, our morale was getting a little better all along. When we heard that they [would] kick them off of here and kick them off of there, and every time, it'd be a little closer. So we knew that they were getting closer in. And then August, September--in September the B-29s would fly over more regular and more often. Along about then, they began to let up on us a little bit.

MR. PYLE: Now, by let up on you, does that mean, for instance, that there were some days that you didn't go to work, or that their work schedule was cut down in hours?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, sometimes we wouldn't go to work at all, and when we did go to work, they wouldn't give us a quota that we had to meet, or something like that.

MR. PYLE: I see, yes.

MR. THORNTON: They would ease up. The typical day would start with rice and soybeans.

MR. PYLE: Were they waking you at sunrise?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. We would go to the mines and mine their coal. They'd feed us a little bit of rice and soybeans for lunch. Then at dark-time they would march us out and back up to the compound and get our bath and eat again and go to bed--not go to bed, get up on the slats and sleep.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see. You said take a bath. Did you get to bathe daily, then?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, after the coal mines you were black and dirty and everything else. They had a big heated tub-like, oh, eight or ten feet in diameter, three feet deep, three and a half feet deep, that you filled up. Of course, we didn't have a whole lot of soap or anything, but we did get to jump in it and get some of the coal dust and stuff off.

MR. PYLE: A heated tub, that's nice.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay. That's something that I wouldn't have expected. The other Japanese prisoners, American prisoners in Japan that I've talked to, had cold baths, and thus they bathed very seldom, because of the weather.

MR. THORNTON: That was one of the good parts that we had.

MR. PYLE: What--

MR. THORNTON: Can I----

MR. PYLE: I'm sorry go right ahead, I interrupted. What other things can you think of [that] were good? That doesn't come out sounding exactly the way that I mean it [laughter].

MR. THORNTON: Yes, I know what you mean.

MR. PYLE: Oh, was that it [laughing]?

MR. THORNTON: Actually, that was about it [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Okay [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: Was the hot bath, that was about it.

MR. PYLE: For instance, when I was in Vietnam, I could write home and brag about the conveniences that we had, that we had flush toliets, hot and

cold running water. These were things that were luxuries to us, that most people didn't have. But why I asked, did you have other quote, unqoute luxuries?

MR. THORNTON: No, that hot tub was, that was it.

MR. PYLE: No, hot and cold running water otherwise or flush toliets, then?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay, I see [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: Just outdoor latrines and all of that.

MR. PYLE: Escape was unheard of over there. There was nowhere to go, and you couldn't speak the language anyway.

MR. THORNTON: No, no.

MR. PYLE: As far as the guards themselves go, you mentioned that toward the end of the war, things started to lighten up. Was there brutality on a major scale by the Japanese guards? Were they just outright vicious? Did they inflict pain just for the fun of it?

MR. THORNTON: Just outright ornery. They wouldn't inflict pain just for--they had to have just a slight cause. But it had to be ever so slight, and then they would beat you up, great day in the morning, over nothing. But, they had to have just an inkling of something before, along about this time, before they would bounce in on you.

MR. PYLE: I mentioned to you earlier that in the case of Germany, that once in awhile you would find a German guard that was brutal, that was mean. By in large, they were just doing a job and trying to make it as easy as possible. Was the opposite true about the Japanese? Did you ever find a guard that, I don't want to use the word nice--

MR. THORNTON: Right, yes.

MR. PYLE: But they were better than others?

MR. THORNTON: They were better than others.

MR. PYLE: Yes.

MR. THORNTON: One guard out of the whole hundreds, that we had, one guard we called him Smiling Sam, and he was Cabanatuan number one and everybody would try to get on his work detail. He very seldom spoke. Quite often when we would go out on a detail, out on the farm, he would turn his back. He would say okay, say I take a short rest. Of course, it was in Japanese,

and he'd turn his back on us for a given time. Then he would let us know how long. When he turned back around, we were all to be working. We could eat some of the stuff that we had or what we were working with or anything. He didn't see us, of course, he didn't do that but just a very short time. [He] is the only one out of the whole bunch that I could even begin to say was really a nice sort of a person.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: The rest were, well, they were soldiers. The Japanese soldier, when he received word from his superiors, that was the law. They'd just as soon beat up on one of their selves, just about, as they had somebody else. That was the way they run their outfit. If they told you to do something, you better well do it, or get caught trying to do it. So, that was the only one out of the whole bunch that I ever remember, even straying short of the rules.

MR. PYLE: The coal mines, were they in the middle of a town, in the middle of a village? Or was all of this--

MR. THORNTON: It was a small town.

MR. PYLE: I asked that, I was going to ask your opinion of the civilian populous. How were you treated by them, or was there any contact with them?

MR. THORNTON: No contact, absolutely no contact.

MR. PYLE: Okay, part of the reason that I asked that in interviewing, well, primarily flyers that were shot down in Europe, they were always told, try, if you are going to be captured, try and be captured by military personnel, not the civilians. That the civilians were ruthless, and I mean, after all they were being bombed daily, that they would kill you. I was wondering about your opinion of the civilian personnel. Would that have been true in Japan also?

MR. THORNTON: I don't really know. But the way, the Japanese were brought up and taught from childhood on up, that the emperor's word was gospel. Then the emperor saying that we were the enemy, I don't imagine it would have been too healthy for a person out in the civilian community.

MR. PYLE: In the article that we have in the Hattiesburg American was done in 1975, you mentioned that after the armistice was signed, but before the camp at Futashi was liberated, that yourself and several others went out into the community, that you had this sort of freedom. In that context, you would have been exposed to the Japanese citizenry.

MR. THORNTON: There again that article that you were speaking of was a little, they added a little, or took a little something away. Anyway--

MR. PYLE: Okay. I'll give you a chance to vindicate that particular position then [laughter].

MR. THORNTON: Right, when the war was over the Japanese camp commander called us all out, and that fellow could speak as good English as you or I. I mean his English was perfect.

MR. PYLE: He must have been educated in the United States.

MR. THORNTON: Yes. When it was over, he called us out and lined us up, and he told us in perfect English that the war was over. They had lost, and they were going to leave. But, that there would be some guards left for our protection to keep the civilian populous from coming in and to keep us from going out.

Well, that night the guards changed. The next day everything was quiet and didn't hear any guards changing and the next night didn't hear any guards changing. Of course, the guards stayed outside. We couldn't see them even before, but we could always hear them change guard. For a couple of days, we heard no guard change, or anything else. One of the fellows knocked a board, just hit it from the inside and knocked the board off the fence. You didn't dare poke your head out or anything for a while, but nothing happened when that board was knocked off. So an hour or two later, pushed it a little further and nothing happened. Then later on in the afternoon, stick something out and nothing happened. Then stick your head out, and there ain't--

MR. PYLE: It's all a very gradual process [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: You better believe it! Nothing happened and no guards anywhere. So, a couple of the fellows decided, well, we'll wander outside. So, they opened the gate and nothing happened, and [they] walked out.

MR. PYLE: Was the gate locked?

MR. THORNTON: Not at this time. Of course, we didn't know that it wasn't locked, but they had took the lock when they left.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: So, opened the gate and nothing happened, stepped out and nothing happened. Of course, this takes time. You don't just do it and expect nothing to happen. So, the next day, got a little further out, and a couple days after then, some fellows went out and made a scavaging raid and got some chickens and stuff. But, they didn't stray out too far or too long. They just grabbed off a few chickens and brought them back in.

MR. PYLE: There was alway that latent fear that the Japanese were going to come back.

MR. THORNTON: Yes, you better believe it! Then the planes dropped some food in, and then, we knew it was fairly safe. We could go out and go and come. Of course, we didn't mingle with the civilian people at all. In fact, I think that they were told before the military left to stay away from us, that we might try to kill them or something. But, there was very little contact with the Japanese civilians, and I didn't see any. In fact, I didn't go too far out, until after the planes started dropping food and stuff into us. Then we would venture a little out, but not too far.

So, some of the fellows decided, well, we'd had such a bad time down in the mines, that they were going to go down and work some of the mine people over for the tough times that they give them. They went down, but there was nobody at the mines. It was just like a ghost town just about.

Along about this time--this was a week, ten days, two weeks, I really don't remember, after the war was over and the Japanese surrendered--this Glyn Golden, that I was speaking about, and a Jack McFarland from Portland, Oregon, the three of us were very good buddies. We decided, well, we're going to see part of Japan--it was a crazy idea--before we come back home. We took off and had nothing except the pair of shorts and some shoes, but we decided that we would go anyway. That's the only contact that we had with the civilians, and only one or two then, before we got waylaid and headed down to an airstrip where there were some Americans.

We left one morning heading into a little town not far from there where there was a railroad, and on the way, I guess it was a foolhardy thing to even undertake, but we knew in our minds that MacArthur had told the military authorties that they best guarantee the safety of every POW in Japan. The military, working like they did, had passed the word down, and their word was law, that none of the POWs were to be harmed, and whatever. So, we felt confident that that was the word that had been put out, so we took off. Walking down the road, oh, we were some two or three miles outside the little town, and walking around a little curve in the road, we come face to face with a company of Japanese soldiers, and three American POWs, not ex-[POWs] yet, we're still POWs [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Thankfully you were unarmed [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: Three POWs facing a whole company of Japanese soldiers. I just said, "Oh, boy!" [laughing] I said, "Look a here," I said, "don't look right nor left, just go right straight on by them, don't even look." They were marching toward us, and we were [marching] toward them. We ain't looked right or left. I guess a person would have to be familar with the Japanese total dedication to authority before he could even begin to realize what had took place. Because they had been told, I feel sure, "Don't bother them." They did not even look right nor left, and we didn't either. We just marched right on down by them, and they went right by us, just like we weren't even there.

MR. PYLE: Well, that's interesting, also kind of scary [laughter].

MR. THORNTON: Yes, it was. Yes, it was scary, I'm telling you the truth [laughing]. If we had known before we left that we would have run into them, I'd dare say that we wouldn't have left then. But when we come front to front with them, it was too late. Don't run. Because if we had run, it would have been the wrong thing to have done.

MR. PYLE: Sure.

MR. THORNTON: So, we just went right straight on by them, didn't look right nor left, just went on by.

MR. PYLE: That's fascinating.

MR. THORNTON: [We] got to a little train station, oh, the little town was some, I guesss, ten miles from where we were, and got on down there to a little train depot. There was a train fixing to go north. So, we just got on. We just got on the train and it headed out north. But, I guess we didn't know the extent that the Japanese had been alerted, because the train didn't stop anywhere, no little towns, no nothing. It didn't stop anywhere, till it met another train. When the other train, when the two come to the same depot, they didn't tell us we had to get off, like we were used to being ordered. They came to us, the conductors, or whatever they were called, people in charge came to us and asked us, would we please get on the other train, that this train was going someplace so-and-so-and-so. So, it didn't matter with us. We didn't care which way we were going, we just wanted to see part of Japan.

MR. PYLE: Excuse me.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point there was a brief interruption.

MR. PYLE: Go right ahead.

MR. THORNTON: We just wanted to see part of Japan, so we said, "Sure, we'll get on the other train."

MR. PYLE: This person that asked, he could speak English though?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Oh, okay.

MR. THORNTON: We just--

MR. PYLE: You just knew what he meant, okay.

MR. THORNTON: Yes, we understood. See, we had been POWs hearing Japanese for three years.

MR. PYLE: Oh, okay. So, y'all could understand enough Japanese--

MR. THORNTON: Over three years, forty months, to be exact. So, we understood quite a lot of the language. So, they told us, "Please, get off of here and get on this other train." So, we said, "Okay." The three of us got off and got on the other train, and that train didn't stop till they had us down there at this airstrip where there were some Americans.

MR. PYLE: Oh, I see.

MR. THORNTON: They put us on and they didn't stop. I mean, they just said zoom right on down that airfield.

MR. PYLE: Were there other people on either one of these trians?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: What was your contact with civilians? Was it the same as your experience with the military, did you just not pay any attention to one another?

MR. THORNTON: We didn't pay any attention.

MR. PYLE: Or, nor did they then?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. There wasn't a whole lot of civilians but there was a few. So we just talked among ourselves and to each other. We'd find a corner and we'd sit down. We didn't travel around mixing and mingling with them. So, we didn't mix with them too well.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes, I can well imagine. I was trying to find in this article, let's see, the one that I referred to awhile ago in the Hattiesburg American, a statement in here that, yes, that mentions the Japanese are some of the friendliest people you ever met. Is that a misrepresentation?

MR. THORNTON: That was a misquote.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: That was a misquote.

MR. PYLE: Okay, you are just, I ask that because you are just explaining now that your contact with civilians was very limited.

MR. THORNTON: Very limited. The one contact that we had, personal contact to do with any of them, was after we had met this company of Japanese soldiers. We had a little rice that we had in a sack and come to a farmhouse and went up and asked them if they would fix our rice for us. They said, "Sure, we'll fix it." They fixed our rice, and these were nice people outwardly. We don't know what they were thinking. But outwardly, they were nice. They fixed our rice. They were polite. Of course, the Japanese populous, I guess, was polite.

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask, did you have the feeling that these people were being friendly, or just being obedient, just doing what they could to move you all on along?

MR. THORNTON: I think they were scared to death, to tell you the truth. They were afraid that something might happen to us, or we might do something to them, and they would be held responsible. They were sort of like you were, you might say, just friendly for the reason that they didn't want anything to happen to us, and they didn't want us to do anything to them.

MR. PYLE: I would think along the same lines if three escaped prisoners were to come to my house. I too would tend to be very friendly.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Yes, okay, I could sort of see their situation.

MR. THORNTON: So, I think that is really what the story is.

MR. PYLE: I'm going to back you up and ask you some more questions about Futashi City, the camp itself. What, clothing-wise, now you were in the Philippines at Cabanatuan. This is a tropical place. It would have been, just not a whole lot of climatic change. You would have gone up to Japan, even southern Japan gets pretty cold.

MR. THORNTON: Cold, that's right.

MR. PYLE: Where you still in the same shorts that you had in the Philippines? Were you ever issued warm clothing?

MR. THORNTON: Well, they didn't. They had none to issue, I guess. What they had, they used themselves. We'd march down to the mines, and we'd go in the mines, we were glad to get in the mines because it would be warmer down in there. The barracks, well, it wasn't barracks it was a compound walled in. You couldn't see out or in or anything else. They had high walls that kept some of the wind out. They had steam heat, but it was very inadequate.

MR. PYLE: But the barracks were heated then, such as it was?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, they had heat around the perimeters of the barracks, they were pretty well walled in. So, well, you didn't freeze.

MR. PYLE: It could have been worse, then?

MR. THORNTON: It could have been worse. Of course, it could have been a lot better too [laughter].

MR. PYLE: I would think, at the time, that you would think that it could not be very much worse [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: That's for sure [laughing].

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay. So, far as health goes, malnutrition, everyone would have suffered through that, of course. A rice diet just doesn't do a whole lot for you, particularly after they steam it, and that takes care of most of the vitamins. Health wise, what sort of problems were there? I've heard, for instance, many stories of beriberi, both the wet beriberi and the dry beriberi, and the jaundice and things of this nature.

MR. THORNTON: Dysentery, wet and dry beriberi, I've got dry beriberi in my feet. They hurt me quite a lot at times, burn and sting. The wet and dry beriberi, dysentery, pellagra, just normal run-down stuff. The man that normally weighed, well, we'll just take me, a hundred and sixty-five, seventy pounds, down to ninety-eight and a hundred, hundred and ten, just skin and bones.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. THORNTON: So, you are susceptible to most anything that comes along.

MR. PYLE: Medical treatment, was there any such thing?

MR. THORNTON: Nil, nil.

MR. PYLE: Nil, okay. If you got beriberi, you just had beriberi.

MR. THORNTON: Yes. For instance, one time I figured out in Cabanatuan number three that the rate that they were dying, if I had been the last person to have died, I had three hundred and sixty-three days to live.

MR. PYLE: That was the death rate?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay. You were talking about ten thousand people total at Cabanatuan, so perhaps, three thousand in Cabanatuan number three.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: I see. So, as far as health conditions are concerned, did you fare any better in Japan than in the Philippines?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Or any worse?

MR. THORNTON: Worse.

MR. PYLE: Worse.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Simply because of the climate?

MR. THORNTON: Not only the climate, the rice got slimmer and the diet worse. Oh, actually I think the Japanese themselves were hurting for food too. So, we got very little.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Among the prisoners of war themselves, was there any medical treatment. Was there any medical personnel within your group?

MR. THORNTON: No, not in the last group. Of course, in Cabanatuan number three there was, I don't know how many doctors, but there was a few military doctors.

MR. PYLE: Yes, yes.

MR. THORNTON: But not a whole lot.

MR. PYLE: Would I be correct in assuming that as a long-time prisoner in Japan that most of the men learned how to take care of each other and themselves? In other words, if someone was injured or hurt in someway was there the know-how of how to take care of them?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. They didn't have anything to ease the pain of a broke limb or something, but they just pull it out--

MR. PYLE: They learned how to set bones and that sort of thing?

MR. THORNTON: Yes, set a broken bone or something.

MR. PYLE: In the case of certain injuries would the Japanese, for instance, give you bandages?

MR. THORNTON: I don't ever remember seeing them do it. They wouldn't give out anything. Medical bandages or splints or anything else.

MR. PYLE: Okay. You mentioned in Cabanatuan number three the atrocity of these three men that were caught in their quote, unquote escape.

MR. THORNTON: Two men.

MR. PYLE: Two men, yes, that they, after being tied up for a couple of days without food and water, were nursed to health only to dig their own graves and were shot.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Did these kinds of atrocities go on also in Japan?

MR. THORNTON: I'm sure that they did. The camp that I was in, not too much. Of course, you would get beat up. They'd still beat you up for walking out of line, or saying the wrong thing, or not doing your quota of work, and all of this. But, no more shooting where we were.

MR. PYLE: Okay. For punishment, was there any other form of punishment other than being beat up or bayonetted or that sort of thing, was there anything like solitary confinement?

MR. THORNTON: Not where I was. If you had your punishment coming, they'd just beat the dog out of you, or bust you up, throw you to one side.

MR. PYLE: There was no such thing as systematic torture?

MR. THORNTON: No, not in our outfit.

MR. PYLE: Okay, good.

MR. THORNTON: Of course, ours was a small detachment and no officers and all of that. No, well, I guess what I'm trying to say, the biggest part of the people that was in the outfit that I was in, by this time, had learned to outmaneuver the Japanese, outguess them, stay one step ahead of them, so to speak.

MR. PYLE: That's all part of staying alive, isn't it?

MR. THORNTON: Yes. Just do your very best to do what they wanted, right when they wanted it, and that helped a whole lot.

MR. PYLE: Does it all become a game with the prisoners, to outthink and to outguess the Japanese? Is it a game of wits? Or is it just an act of survival?

MR. THORNTON: It's not a game. It's a survival outfit. You try to be one step ahead of them, to outguess them in anything that they have got coming. When they, like they say, "Dig that hole." You are already standing over there ready to dig. You are ready to go, just don't even hesitate. If he says, "Stand on your head," by the time that he gets that out of his mouth, you are trying to stand on your head. So, that helped a whole lot.

MR. PYLE: Is there such a thing as prison mentality that sets in after you have been in that sort of situation, incarcerated for a period of time?

MR. THORNTON: I don't believe I follow what you are--

MR. PYLE: Yes, that's a very general term, and I'm not sure that I can make sense of the question to rephrase it. One of the real tricks in staying alive in a prison camp is your mental attitude. The people that tended to die were the ones that gave up. They didn't care anymore.

MR. THORNTON: Right, right.

MR. PYLE: That's what I meant by that prison mentality. How did you personally handle that kind of situation, keeping yourself mentally alert, not just resigning yourself to giving up?

MR. THORNTON: Not wanting to sound like a religious fanatic or anything, but I turned all of that over to the Lord, prior to the fall of the rock. I just said, "Well, it's here." I wrote a letter back home. It was one of the last letters that I was told that would be pretty sure of getting home. That we had best, if we wanted to write, write and get it out on the next sub. So, I sat down and right out of the clear blue, I started writing. I told the folks, I said, "Don't worry about me. The Lord had promised me that I'll come out of this thing without a scratch," and He kept His promise. I went through the whole bit without a scratch.

MR. PYLE: That's fantastic!

MR. THORNTON: I never dwelled. From that day till the end of the war, I knew I was coming home. There was no doubt in my mind whatsoever. The instance I was talking about the Japanese, when he raised that thing up over my head, and I saw the shadow the first time I knew he was anywhere around, ordinarily, I would have been a dead duck [laughing]. He would have clobbered me but good. But, like I was saying, something just picked me up and put me over a couple of rows over there, and it wouldn't have mattered with him. He would have still come over there and beat the dog out of me. But he ain't touched me. He come over there and touched me with his finger and said, "Hey, get back over there and go to work."

MR. PYLE: And that was probably the lightest touch you had ever seen [laughing].

MR. THORNTON: You better believe it. A lot of people say there is no God. There ain't no this. There ain't no that. There is no doubt in my mind, because He told me that day. I'd been a Christian long before then, well, since I was a kid at home. But, anyway, He told me, He says, "Write home and tell them that you will see them when the war is over. You'll be all right." I didn't get a scratch. There was not a Japanese that laid a hand on me. I've been in a lot of tight squeezes, no problem.

MR. PYLE: In doing an interview with another gentleman, he mentioned something that was probably a pretty common phrase, I don't know. He said, "There is no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole." [Laughter].

MR. THORNTON: He may be right.

MR. PYLE: I was going to ask, in The Bridge Over the River Kwai, for instance, religion played a big part in those men's survival, reading the Bible and that sort of thing. Did that also go on at Futashi? Was there any sort of thing as organized religion?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Was there anything as disorganized religion?

MR. THORNTON: Not to speak of. I think that each individual took care of his own needs.

MR. PYLE: Yes. You would attribute to religious faith to part of the reason that you were able to make it out mentally, that you didn't give in. You were close friends with both Golden and McFarland, you mentioned the two gentlemen that left with you.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: In thinking back about their experience, they survived it too, how did the three of you, how did your attitudes differ from some of those that gave up and died?

MR. THORNTON: Well, I really don't know. I can't imagine a person just giving up, but there is many of them that did. Just said, "There ain't no use." They had been in good health, seemingly, and just quit, just give up, and in a week's time then, they would be dead. A person had to have a positive outlook, or he wouldn't make it. There wouldn't be no way for him to make it, unless he had a positive outlook on the outcome and what would happen. For instance, let me give you a for instance, here.

MR. PYLE: Good, outstanding.

MR. THORNTON: A positive outlook one fellow had. We in Cabanatuan number three, like I said awhile ago, I figured up if I had been the last one in that camp to die, I had less than a year to live. That was the rate that they were dying off. Now one fellow, he said, "No, no, I am not going to die." But he was sick when he said that. We'd divide our meager rations of rice with him, and he kept getting worse and worse and worse. To get to the latrine, he would have to crawl, literally get down on his hands and knees and crawl to the latrine. Of course, we would help him there and back and give him what he could eat of our rice and everything. And he said, "No, no, I am not going to die."

One morning they come through and they shook him, and he ain't said nothing. They rolled him on the stretcher, along with the other dead bodies, and carried him out and threw him in the grave, in open graves. They buried them several in a grave. Rolled him right on out with the rest of them. They were fixing to cover them up, and he moved a finger, put him back on the stretcher and brought him back in.

He got a little better. He died again, carried him back out, and that time he told them, says, "Don't bury me till I'm dead [laughter]." The last time that I saw him, he was doing better and I'm sure, I don't remember his name, but I'm

sure that fellow got back home. Because he said, "No, no I am not going to die out here." Now that was sheer determination, because they had already tried to bury him twice.

MR. PYLE: It's like you said, there were other men that--

MR. THORNTON: Just turn up their toes and die. Just give up and die, in a week's time.

MR. PYLE: That was what I was referring to by that question about prison mentality. For some men it does set in, and it kills them.

MR. THORNTON: Yes, I guess.

MR. PYLE: Okay, okay. When you went to Futashi with this original group of almost five hundred, you mentioned prisoners of war that were both British, Dutch, and American, did you ever get anymore prisoners, or was that it?

MR. THORNTON: That was it.

MR. PYLE: Okay. I asked that to see if there was, with newer incoming prisoners, if there was the rumor maybe that went around.

MR. THORNTON: No, that was it. We never saw nor heard from the outside.

MR. PYLE: Nagasaki, now it was one of two towns bombed with the atomic bomb. Did you ever hear anything about the desolation, were there any reports either from the Japanese military or civilian authorities?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: We didn't know anything at all, until we got back.

MR. PYLE: Okay. You also mentioned that this letter that you mailed from the rock, just before it capitulated, was that the last letter that you were able to write?

MR. THORNTON: Right.

MR. PYLE: Was there anyway to make a diary, or anything of this nature? Did anyone ever try?

MR. THORNTON: No, unless a fellow could just happen to have got a hold of a little note pad or something. They didn't let you have anything.

MR. PYLE: They didn't exactly allow that sort of thing.

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay. There are probably some other questions, or some other things about prison life, day-to-day prison life, that you could say that I haven't known to ask you. Is there anything that you would like to include in this portion of the interview that I just haven't known to ask?

MR. THORNTON: I think that's about--

MR. PYLE: We covered a lot of different aspects of it, and okay.

MR. THORNTON: About it.

MR. PYLE: Okay. We had, as far as the chronological story goes, we had you put on the second train, and you made it to an American base. What was the story from there on?

MR. THORNTON: It was all downhill.

MR. PYLE: All downhill from there.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: I assume that when you got to the American base, you got a decent meal?

MR. THORNTON: Right, they fed us up a storm! Biggest people I ever did see [laughing]. Their MPs met us there on that train. They sure looked a lot different than we did [laughter]. I was an average-size fellow myself, ordinarily a hundred and sixty, sixty-five, seventy pounds, six feet tall. I declare them MPs sure did look big to us [laughter]. They looked a sight bigger than I did. We stayed there a couple, three days. Then they flew us to Okinawa and stayed on Okinawa for a little while. Then we boarded the ship to Guam. We stayed on Guam for a week or two, and then they shipped us into San Francisco.

MR. PYLE: Somewhere along that way, you would have had to have gone through a complete physical, medical treatment, and that sort of thing. Did you?

MR. THORNTON: No.

MR. PYLE: Okay, that was back in the United States.

MR. THORNTON: They were just getting us back into the states.

MR. PYLE: I see. One thing that you mentioned that didn't surprise me at all, that the major topic of conversation was food, what you were going to eat when you got out. When you got somewhere where you had your choice, what did you eat [laughing], the first meal that you had the opportunity to pick?

MR. THORNTON: I don't remember.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point Mrs. Thornton enters into the conversation.

MRS. THORNTON: I was trying to think--

MR. THORNTON: Did I ever tell you what--

MRS. THORNTON: I was sitting here trying to think. No, I can't remember.

MR. PYLE: I've been told, it's been related to me that by the time that they were finally freed, that it really didn't matter that much. That they had dropped so much food, Red Cross food, from the air into the prison camps that these prisoners ate themselves literally sick [laughing]. That that first big meal wasn't that big a meal anymore. It didn't really matter that much.

MR. THORNTON: Right. I guess the first big one that we had was when we got off the train there at the airstrip, there on southern Honshu. They gave us anything and everything that we wanted. I really, really don't remember. I wanted some ice cream and cake. I don't remember what all, just goodies.

MR. PYLE: Oh yes, yes.

MR. THORNTON: By then.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Ice cream is an answer that has been given by a lot of people that that's what they wanted more than anything else, some ice cream.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: You got back to the United States, were you immediately discharged?

MR. THORNTON: No, when we got to San Francisco, they took us into Oakland, to a naval hospital there. We were run through some preliminary tests and examinations and all. Then we were transferred from there to Memphis Naval Ammunitions Storage in Memphis, and we were given more tests and some do's and don'ts and first one thing and another, then ninety days leave. Then, I was discharged from Memphis, from the Marine Corps in March of 1946.

MR. PYLE: I see, okay. The incarceration experience, the prisoner of war experience, for some people, particularly in Japan, have left a residue of problems that showed up primarily in later years, both physical and mental. You

mentioned dry beriberi, that your feet still bother you occasionally. Do you have any other things that have been left over from your incarceration experience?

MR. THORNTON: Not that I know of.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: I've been wonderfully blessed, I guess, mentally, physically, emotionally. I guess I come out on top.

MRS. THORNTON: I think the reason that he did, George is the type of person, he doesn't let things bother him. He just pushed it back over his shoulder and lets it stay there.

MR. PYLE: That's a good healthy attitude, that you have to take, yes.

MRS. THORNTON: I think it's been his lifesaver. I really do.

MR. PYLE: Yes, the thing that's amazing that forty months of incarceration and came out of it with no marks. That's truly amazing.

MR. THORNTON: Like I said, I can't take credit for that, the credit there goes to my Lord, for sure.

MR. PYLE: Okay, outstanding. What has been the path of your life since you got out of the service?

MR. THORNTON: Got out of the Marine Corps in March of 1946 and went to my mother's and daddy's. They lived on a farm south of Raleigh. Then in July of 1946, I married my wife and bought a farm two miles south of Raleigh, wasn't it? Two miles south of Raleigh and farmed for one year. That wasn't for either one of us. So, I went back in the service, couldn't get back in the Marine Corps, since I had married, and went in the army and went to Fort Knox as an instructor in the armored school. In April of 1952, after the four year hitch, I was discharged and went to Mobile. We moved to Mobile from Fort Knox and worked as a mechanic down there, for a year?

MRS. THORNTON: Honey, I don't remember.

MR. THORNTON: A year, about a year, a year and a half. Then we moved from there to Laurel, Mississippi, and worked at odd jobs there for a while. Then in November of 1954, I got the job at Camp Shelby, and I'd work and go to school and stayed there until I retired in, well, on December twenty-fourth of 1977.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: I retired.

MR. PYLE: December twenty-fourth, Christmas Eve.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Nice Christmas present.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: I assume, without adding all of that up, that that gives you thirty years of government service now.

MR. THORNTON: Thirty-four years.

MR. PYLE: Okay, thirty-four years. You do have full retirement then, that's good.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: That's good. That's good. How many childred have you?

MR. THORNTON: We had two.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: A girl named Wanda Glyn and a boy named George Larry. Our son is dead now.

MR. PYLE: I see. I'm sorry.

MR. THORNTON: Wanda Glyn lives out from Jackson, at Florence.

MR. PYLE: You mentioned that you had your daughter over here just this past weekend.

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Okay. Do you get to see a good deal of her?

MR. THORNTON: Yes.

MR. PYLE: Any grandchildren?

MR. THORNTON: Two.

MR. PYLE: Well, good.

MR. THORNTON: A boy named George Robert Thomas, and he is fourteen?

MRS. THORNTON: Will be fourteen next month, and Desirae.

MR. THORNTON: Alexandria.

MRS. THORNTON: Desirae.

MR. PYLE: Desirae Alexandria. That's an interesting name.

MR. THORNTON: Thomas.

MR. PYLE: Okay. That's good.

MR. THORNTON: She's ten.

MR. PYLE: I see. Fine, fine.

MRS. THORNTON: Just the two, that's all we have.

MR. PYLE: That takes care of all the questions that I had down to ask you. Is there anything that you would like to add to the interview that I haven't thought to ask?

MR. THORNTON: I think I've pretty well--

MR. PYLE: I've got to admit we breezed through the last thirty-four years [laughter]. Do they seem like they have gone that fast?

MR. THORNTON: At times, no. At times, yes, it flew.

MR. PYLE: Okay.

MR. THORNTON: For sure.

MRS. THORNTON: Did you happen to get a look at his medals in there?

MR. PYLE: No, that's--

MRS. THORNTON: Do you want to?

MR. PYLE: Yes. Mr. Thornton, on behalf of the university and the Mississippi Oral History Program, we would like to thank you very much for spending these three hours with us. It's been very fascinating, quite informative, and I've enjoyed it very much.

MR. THORNTON: You're welcome. I was glad to do it for you.

MR. PYLE: Thank you.