

John Creighton

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Question: First of all, where are you from, right now? Do you live in --

Answer: I live in Olympia, Washington on the East Side. And we've lived here for 33 years.

Question: The first question I have is for you to state your name, the branch and material you served in and what your rank was and when you served.

Answer: I enlisted in 1941 and was sent to the Philippines to do my basic training. And I was in the Coast Artillery -- 59th Coast Artillery. And we were on heavy mortars and that's where I was the whole war that we fought.

Question: Now let me get -- that was real good. One other question. Just give me my name is --

Answer: My name is John G. Creighton.

Question: And your rank?

Answer: I was a private then. And after the Korean War I was a staff sergeant.

Question: Army?

Answer: Army.

Question: Okay. What were you doing before you joined the services?

Answer: I was a Western Union delivery boy in Beverly Hills, California

Answer: And I finally couldn't find any really good work and I joined in the Army in 1941. And I enjoyed the Army. I never regretted joining. You know, I -- when I went to the recruiting office I asked to be sent to the farther post that the United States had at that time which was Panama and the Philippines. So I picked the Philippines.

Question: How old were you?

Answer: I was 18.

Question: And you served for how long?

Answer: For a total, ten years. Six years in the regular Army and four years in Reserve.

Question: So during the World War II, what was your assigned job?

Answer: My assigned job for the -- our guns which were 12 inch mortars, was to be an observer for horizontal firing and targets and we observed ships coming in, war ships if needed come in, or troops that were landing on Mariveles Island next to us, the mainland.

Question: For a lay person, how far away were these ships that --

Answer: Well, our -- our extreme range was only seven miles so they had to be pretty close to us. But we never fired on any ships; we fired on barges that the Japanese were bringing in behind the men on Bataan. And we turned them back. So they wouldn't be caught

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in between the front line and the rear line. And that was our duty until they told us to cease firing because we fired on artillery that was firing on us after Bataan fell, and we didn't know they were behind a field hospital and our first shell killed two of our men in their beds. And the second shell, we made a direct hit. Then we got orders to cease firing because the Japanese were using our men as shields.

Question: Hmm. What's -- and this is a real hard one for a lot of people of my generation because I was too young for Viet Nam. I was way too young for World War II and Korea

Answer: What's it like, during the day in battle. I mean, are you scared all the time or --

Answer: Well, you're -- you're scared. In our case, we were in a position that we knew we were not going to be helped at all. We were 1500 miles behind the front lines to begin with. We didn't have a Navy; we didn't have an Air Force. And being scared, yes, I can still hear that first bomb coming down. And this went on for five months. And after awhile the scaredness left you because you could watch the planes and see which way the bombs were going to fall. But the shelling was a different story. We didn't know where they were coming from and they shelled us day and night and bombed us just about every day and on January 28th of 1942 we lost 29 of our men in one bomb and our battery wasn't very big to begin with. We had 98 men plus officers. So that took a third of them right there. And after Bataan fell they zeroed in our battery. We were the last guns to fire on Bataan -- or on Corrigedor. And they zeroed in our battery and they blew it up and I don't know how many men we lost in there because we didn't know who was in there. But we had eight -- eight guns, four in each pit, and only one gun was left in the pit after the explosion. And we -- we still don't know who was in -- in the powder room or the shell room because there was nothing left.

Question: You were how old at this time?

Answer: Nineteen.

Question: Nineteen. What -- and then you were taken prisoner.

Answer: I was taken prisoner on -- on -- Bataan fell on April the 9th and Corrigedor fell on 6th of May. And we were all hungry, our -- we had no artillery left and we were running out of ammunition. The food was nonexistent. And they surrendered us -- our higher-ups -- not us. We would have continued. I really do believe we would have continued to fight. If -- if they'd let us, because we wanted to do something. After all that bombing and shelling, we wanted to meet them face to face. And so we did meet them face to face on the -- on the morning of the 6th and we killed about 6,200 Japanese before they finally made us surrender -- the high-up. General Wainwright, I believe, would be the man.

Question: So how does that happen. I mean we've seen the movie version of surrenders. What happened on that day? I mean --

Answer: Well, it was very nerve-wracking. General Homma who was in charge of the troops in Shanghai, the British Shanghai, he was finally sent over to man -- or to run the troops of the Imperial Japanese Army. Because they expected us to fall in three weeks. Well, five months later, we were still fighting. So when we were taken prisoner, he -- he lined us all up and made us put our hands on top of our head and he took his sword out and he'd kind of swipe over each top of our heads. And it made us nervous. Because of the stories we have heard from Bataan. And cause there was men beheaded over there for having conscript Japanese money in their pockets. And -- or any Japanese souvenir, they were beheaded. And

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so that made us very leery, and finally they put us all out on the end of the Island which was called Monkey -- Monkey's Point. It was flat area, and they kept us there for about three weeks before they shipped us to Manila.

Answer: But the food was so scarce, all of us were sick. I mean really sick. We had some of -- I don't know if you want me to name all of the diseases or not, but we had quite a few.

Question: Quite a few, yeah.

Answer: And Bataan had already made their Death March on the 9th or 10th of April, which we heard and I have a brother-in-law who was in the Death March that they shot anybody that fell out of ranks or bayoneted them or even buried some of them alive as they were on the march. And they marched about 87 miles and for orneriness or sadistic reasoning, they would make them do about face and walk back a mile and then turn around and walk them back the other way with no water to drink and the temperatures are very high -- 114, 120 degrees. And dusty. And Filipinos would try to give us a cigarette, or them, not me, them, a drink of water and they would bayonet the Filipino. So it was -- it was a death march. And they -- they, by the time we caught up with them when we was surrendered, we had a march. And they marched us down the boulevard, Rizal Boulevard -- it was called a boulevard which was the name of the highway there, and took us to Bilibid Prison where the Filipinos were incarcerated for crimes and no food and no water. And then they -- I slept leaning against the execution block, where they executed Filipino prisoners in the peace time. And then the next day they loaded us on boxcars that were made of steel; they were very small. I would say narrow gauge track. And they pushed us in there till we were absolutely stacked in there that I don't know how many was in there but you couldn't move. And if someone died he wouldn't fall or if he fainted from heat he wouldn't fall. So we didn't know until we got to the end of the line who was fainted or dead. And we did lose a few dead because of the heat in these boxcars and they closed the doors on us of course and we were in there for about 24 hours. And then we -- they took us to a school and we were in the school grounds. And they didn't feed us that night either, so we've been without food for about three or four days. And it's -- we laid down on the dirt and then it started raining, and it -- they have pretty good tropical storms. So after about two inches of water was on the ground I finally got up and went over and sat next to a tree with my back to it and tried to sleep. And then the next morning they started to march us again to these camps were named Cabanatuan 1, Cabanatuan 2, Cabanatuan 3. Cabanatuan 1 was where they -- men on Bataan fought, or were captured. That was their campground, and they were so -- they had -- I don't know if you ever head of beri-beri, but beri-beri is a disease that swells up -- fills your body full of water. And one leg would be bigger around than your waist. And they -- when they would lay down at night the water would go back up into their chest and they would die. So we learned to sit up all night and sleep if we could. And then there was the dry beri-beri which was painful. It drew up your ligaments and held them tight where you couldn't hardly walk. So it was best to have the dry, but it was more painful. And they took us out on details just to keep us busy. I went on one detail for about three months and I actually started back from where they -- the American troops surrendered on Bataan and went the whole route taking down telephone wires that they were going to ship to Japan. And so a lot of us were sick, really sick then, because they still didn't feed us good. And we all had -- by that time we had malaria and dysentery and anemic dysentery and diarrhea and -- and we had -- have you ever heard of Guam blisters? They're about the size of a quarter and they puff up. They're full of puss and if you break one, then you get another one. They didn't give us any medication and we would work all day long, taking these telephone pole wires down and then we'd bring them back to camp. And then when we got so far they'd move us on up. And --

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Question: So you moved from camp to camp?

Answer: Camp to - along this highway, until we were done.

And then the way we took baths was to fill up a 50 gallon drum, under a fire, of course, and then get up on a table and put a piece of wood in the drum and go down to the floor of the drum on the wood so you wouldn't burn your feet. And that's the way we took our baths. And it was kind of comical. This officer who was in charge of us liked the song Molly and Me and Baby Makes three. So he had us sing that at night. The Americans, of course, and we didn't know all the verses but we could hum it, but that was the evening entertainment. So when that detail was done they took us back to -- started to take us back to Cabanatuan, and we got to a theatre and they split us up; half were going north to do some more work and the other half went back to Cabanatuan 3. And it wasn't very long after that that they chose the ones that looked fairly healthy. I already had beri-beri and malaria, but they took us to the Port and they put us on -- there was two ships. In fact we were the first two ships to go to Japan. That was in November of 1942. And there was three holds to a ship and there was about 700 men to a hold. And we left and we hit a typhoon at Taiwan and we were stuck there for two days. And everybody was, well, the diarrhea, what can you say. They'd pass -- they'd lower five gallon buckets to go to the bathroom and they'd haul it up and throw it overboard. Well, it come to a point where you were in line continually. So finally they let us come up on deck, and their toilets lined the bow of the ship over the water and we'd stand in line. You'd just -- go to the line then come out and go back to the line and stay in it and go around, back and forth. So we had a little fun. We got into the Japanese toilets and when they would knock, we'd go "Wait", like we were Japanese. And that made it a little better because we could stay in there longer. But we lost -- no, in this can that they drop down to us now, is what they dropped to get rice down to us, feed us. Same cans that we went to the bathroom in. And we picked up thousands of lice. This -- these ships that brought horses over to the Philippines for the cavalry. And we picked up thousands of lice then and seven men died in the hold on the way over and we had them piled in the corner over there. And this ship hole was so small that half stood; the other half sat. We took turns. So when we landed in Japan, on Thanksgiving of 1942, it was in the evening and it was sub-zero weather. And we still had our khakis and nothing else. And they carried out a hundred and twenty some men out on stretchers because they couldn't make it up the stairway. And they laid them on the dock and we never seen them again. So out of that six or seven hundred men that were in the hole, we lost about 127 just on that trip over to Japan. And when they finally got to the barracks where -- or the factory where we were going to work -- it was Yodagawa Bunsho

Answer: it was in Osaka

Answer: And the first winter we're there, we lost nearly half our men. We were down to about 200 and some men. And the fellow next to me that was laying there with me went to sleep that night and the next morning he was dead. And he died of pneumonia.

Answer: And we had one civilian doctor and he could not get medicine. And they wouldn't give him any medicine. And if you didn't do any work, you got fed less. So we worked every day through the month, rain, snow or whatever, in the same clothes, and a lot of us got frozen feet which I did. And we worked about 12 hours a day in a -- making parts of war ships. They were the cleats that they put on the decks for tying rope to the dock and also 50-gallon drums and corrugated tin. And we got fed three times a day. Those three rations wouldn't fill a canteen cup. And our soup was kelp. There'd be a piece of kelp in the hot water and that was your soup with your rice. Then sometimes we'd get a whole fish thrown into boiling water and they'd cook the whole fish, insides and everything. And we'd get that

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once in awhile. And then we'd get moss from the ocean off the rocks -- or they would, and they would feed us this moss which was really salty.

But also in this camp, we lost men from -- from beating. And ... you couldn't do anything about it. And you had -- you'd walk by them and you couldn't look at the men getting beaten. Because they would beat you if you'd look at them. And he was knocked down two flights of stairs and he was dead. (crying) And then they (crying) excuse me for a minute.

Question: You want a drink of water or anything?

Answer: Wouldn't hurt.

Question: Let me ask you a question and hopefully it will be a little bit easier. I appreciate you -- I know this is tough to -- I'm sure it brings back a lot of memories -- things like that. But you're -- when -- when you arrive at Japan you're 19 years old, 20?

Answer: Twenty, hm-hmm.

Question: So a year of your life has passed by. What is going through your head? I mean -- and again I'm thinking of this of 19-year old boy, in school, listen to you talk today that cannot relate with what's it like to face something. But how, in here, I assume, there's got to be a lot that goes on that makes you survive.

Answer: Well, there is. We come to the conclusion, a lot of us, that you existed, you didn't live. Cause you were actually living on death row for the 3-1/2 years we were in prison, cause you never knew when they were going to kill you. And went through my mind was to go out and try to get near a furnace to keep warm in the wintertime and do my job. I didn't have a very heavy job to do. Mine was chipping sand out of these molds that they made for these cleats for the battle ships. And I -- going through my mind at night, the two of us would probably talk about before we came into the service of -- of going dancing and the fun we had and hunting rabbits in the desert and we'd try to think of the happy things. Well, nobody home -- I didn't really have anybody at home to know whether I was dead or alive until they -- until they had received a little message in the paper. And the -- thoughts each day was just an existence because you're -- you never went by a day without getting hit with a wooden sword or a board or -- and the stand and watch two Americans standing there with their arms folded was really bad because it looked like superiority over the Japanese. And they'd come up and hit you on the shoulder or on top of the head or in the back or they'd poke you in the seat.

I'd like to go back a little bit to Cabanatuan 3 if you don't mind. There was four men that were on detail and they -- regular Army picked them up. They had black bands on and they were on a detail. But they made them think that they were trying to escape so they brought them back to camp. And they tied these four men up to a leaning pole -- about a six foot pole that was leaning, and they tied their feet back to the pole and their hands behind their back to the pole and they couldn't stand up straight. And they were there for nearly two days in this hot sun and their tongues were so swelled that they could not keep them in their mouth and after the third morning or evening they asked to be executed, shot. So they dug three shallow graves and made all of us stand on each side as they shot these three men. And they weren't satisfied with that. They beat them while they were standing out there on these poles. And that was one of my memories that's still very vivid in my mind. And other things that were vivid in my mind were the beatings in the camps. And what I get really emotional about is the men that died of starvation. That they be laying on their bunks and the flies would be crawling out of their mouths and their nose and their eyes and their ears. They'd still be alive. And then God would take them, and that was good.

So now during an air raid, I got locked in -- locked in the factory, warehouse, and --

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Question: This is in Japan now?

Answer: In Japan. And I couldn't get out. They locked the thing and so I had a regular Army -- Imperial Army soldier and I was holding up the detail. There was 12 of us and I was the 12th one and I couldn't get out. And I was yelling out through this crack in the door and I -- I was shoving paper through and going up and down the door and everybody was gone and finally they come back and looked for me and unlocked the door. Well, when I got back to my detail of 11 men, this Japanese guard hit me so hard right here with his fist and knocked me over and you learn by experience you don't lay down. You get right back up because they would kick you with their steel toes and heels. And then also when I got back up he hit me on the other side. And did the same thing. And -- pardon me. And that -- that -- then they made us run back to the barracks then.

I didn't mention the weight we all lost. I weighed 198 pounds when the war started and within a few months I weighed 98 pounds. I'd already lost a hundred pounds.

Question: What's -- cause we're running just a little tight on time. But, so you were in the war camp how long and then when were you released? What happened then?

Answer: Well, the war was getting closer to our -- Osaka

Answer: We could tell because we could see our planes and we could see the short range bombers and then the -- well, first the long range bombers then the short range bombers. So they moved us from that factory because it was a -- it was a military object and they moved us from the factory and moved us to another place in Oeyama.

Answer: And there they worked in the coalmines and we were there probably five months. Then one day they called us back in to the compound and closed the gates. The gates were about 15 feet high, the walls were. And we stood out there from about 10 o'clock until about noon and we didn't know what was going on. And we didn't even know that they had dropped the A-bombs; we never heard them or saw them. And finally the Commandant of the Japanese came out and handed his sword to the higher person in ours and said they had surrendered. So we waited another few -- probably two weeks, and our planes were dropping food to us like mad, in 50-gallon drums with three parachutes, and we were eating very good and probably made a big mistake because we bloated up. And then they -- we picked up all our parachutes and put them on a boxcar and they brought us back to the Port. And we met the 82nd Airborne Division. And they were playing California Here We Come. And we didn't give them a chance to play. We were all over them, jumping on them and really happy. Then I guess the most embarrassing thing was we had to get de-loused. But they de-loused us then gave us new clothes. Then we waited till our ship was full and then we were shipped back to the Philippines and we stayed there till they fattened us up, and which we really got big. And they took us back to San Francisco to the hospital and we were getting tests for couple three weeks, then went to -- sent us down to where near where we live and went to another hospital and stayed there.

Question: Did you realize you were part of history while it was happening?

Answer: No, I ... we -- we knew we were either going to be killed or prisoners. And I'll be honest with you. We would have rather fought and not been captured. That is my belief now and it was then cause we were young and we were ready to give back some of it that we got. But they -- higher command surrendered us. We didn't surrender.

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Question: What do you think your - what do you think major message would be to generations that come?

Answer: Well, I would say, as an ex-serviceman, honor, duty, country. That is my message to the young people. If they get into the service, to do their duty and honor their duty and do a good job like they did at Desert Storm. And I would like to see them have enough equipment over there to even the match in a war again.

Question: Do you think there's a purpose for war?

Answer: Pardon?

Question: Do you think there's a purpose for war?

Answer: Well, I -- I would have hated for us to lose and the Japanese take over us and the United States. You -- I don't think you'd be around today. And there -- if you want to keep peace, you're going to have to fight for it. Cause when you lose your freedom -- that is the hardest thing in the world. One minute you're free, the next minute you're a slave. And from that time on you're beaten, driven, worked, you're not fed. You're spit on, you're called a coward. Women threw rocks at us when we got in Japan. And we were called cowards. And I would say never again. Not would I ever go through that without going the whole distance then. We were so far behind the front lines we knew we didn't have a chance in the world. We had Air Force pilots next to us fighting in their ranks. Navy, cooks, clerks, anybody that could fire a gun was along with us. We lost our two Navy ships in Java

Answer: Our Navy was the Houston and the Marblehead. And they were sunk. We lost all our planes on the ground except one.

Question: How do you think -- and you touched on it a little bit. Basically you said your freedom was taken away, became a slave. How do you think that affected you in your later life? Your view on the world, people --

Answer: The way it affects myself personally. Sometimes I see what goes on in the United States now. It feels like it was all for naught. All these things that's going on in this -- in our world, in our country. I -- I don't see where we did any good. As far as straightening this nation out. And the -- I think the wives should be commended for marrying a POW because they're not easy to live with. And we still have these memories. Very badly. I'm going to a psychologist and a -- and a psychologist and a -- what's the other one Norma? OFV: Psychiatrist.

Question: Psychiatrist?

Answer: Psychiatrist, yes. I'm going once a month to them. I've been going to the American Lake Hospital for the last fifteen years getting shots and trying to get my mind straightened out and I -- I will probably take some things to my grave without telling what I know. I -- people I don't think would believe us, and I still do, this day, think that people don't believe us when we say what we've said. I had a very good friend that I ate with during the war was a Philippine scout. And he was right down below me and he was observer for a smaller artillery. And he got word that his wife and his daughter had been raped and murdered in Manila and he couldn't do a thing about it. And it -- it made him fight all the harder. And I've got to say that the Philippine scouts are, to me, some of the best soldiers in the world. And I -- I really, really enjoyed talking to them and eating with them. And it's a pity that things are going the way they are now. That we have a lot of good kids, but I don't

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know. It -- it makes you kind of sick at your stomach to know that you went through this to make a safe country and to be honest with you, I think you're safer on the front lines than you are around here now. At least you knew who your enemy was. And we fought -- we fought our -- fought as hard as we could. There was no question about it. They -- I never saw a man cry until now when we're home talking about these things. Nobody -- nobody would beg or do anything not to shame their country. When our flagstaff was cut in half by a bomb fragment and the men ran out there immediately and put that flagstaff up -- half way up and tied it -- lashed it to the bottom part during a heavy bombing raid. And we were very -- I think we were very patriotic and we'd gladly died for our country. Even at our age, which our age is -- I wouldn't do it now. But our age then was -- was to fight and to destroy and until we didn't have nothing to fight with. Which we did.

Question: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Answer: Your welcome. I hope I did all right.

Question: Yes, sir, you did.