

Jacob "Sandy" Sanders

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Question: Okay.

Answer: And this Governor General of Hong Kong, and at first, one of the first people that were prisoners of war in World War II were 200 US Marines embassy guard in Tientsin and Peking. And they got them at 8 o'clock on the first morning of the war. And they brought them into our camp. And also the Jap raider ships out on the ocean had captured a number of ships, and several, several of them were Norwegians. And they'd take the crew off, make them prisoners of war, and if the ship had cargo they could use they kept it, otherwise they'd sink them. So we had a bunch of Norwegians in the camp. And a few different -- Britishers and all what not so it was really an interesting group. But somehow, now there in August of 1943 they picked up -- they drafted 400 of us and I don't know how they did it, but they put us on a ship and took us to Osaka, Japan. And they -- actually the Jap government, farmed us out to industry. From then on, I worked in a Japanese ship yard in -- Osaka, for 20 months. Which was interesting, it passed the time, it was hard work, it would have been hard work if we'd plenty of food and all ah but just existed 24 hours a day. And another thing, too, also the camp guards would pester you all night and then you'd go work 10 hours out there in the ship yard. I ended up, a gang of six of us, doing stevedore work. We unloaded all the steel that came in. It came in on barges. We had a boom and a winch and all this and we'd unload the stuff and put it in their respective spots around the ship yard. And it got to the point, too, which was interesting, they had two new ships being built all the time. On the slipways, why one would come off a slipway, we'd put it in a big dry dock, and finish it off. And the main Japanese rigging crew, when they got to the part of putting the main mast and the boilers and the big items on that new ship, they would have us come over and work with them on it. So it was interesting just to learn those things. But -- and the old Japanese named Namura was owner of that ship yard. It wasn't a very big yard. Very interesting personality; walked around, checking everything all the time, had a walking stick. And they -- they had these small gauge railroad track where we had to push this steel around. And it had curves. Well, you get a load of steel in those little old flat cars and try to go around those curves. Goll, we'd have -- two of us with crowbars and the other four of us pushing our guts out to try to get around those curves. And -- by an inch at a time. One day I have a bright idea

Answer: There's a bunch of grease underneath my winch down at the dock. I went down there and got some of that grease and found a little paint brush and greased the side of those tracks. Zoom (laughs) Old Jap saw it and gave me a whole pack of cigarettes. (laughs) And several times he'd observe me doing something, he'd never hand them to me -- he'd tap, tap, tap and throw them on the ground -- cigarettes. (laughs)

Question: So did you -- did you -- I assume within the inhumanity, there also was some humanity of the -- of the different guards that you dealt with. Did you build -- and it sounds like the way that he did it -- he'd drop them on the ground -- he couldn't say, here, but he could do that. Were there things -- other things like that happened where a guard took a liking to you and kind of --

Answer: Oh, yeah, oh yeah. Not so much guards. Actually, civilians in the ship yard took a liking to me. And in the last camp I was in, the steel mill, my boss in the steel mill took a liking to me and sent me food. But he had to watch out because no fraternizing -- they'd have beat the devil out of him. But that was -- there were some decent people, like everything.

Question: So within the war it's still people.

Answer: Yeah, that's right.

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Question: that goes on -- going on --

Answer: But that's all the little incidences that happened. And another thing that happened, it was very cold, freezing, hungry. One winter morning my best buddy, lives outside of Chicago, we'd been together many times through all these years, named Bucky. We had to go across and we got to work that morning, walked across the dry dock gate, go over the gun shell -- the shed over there and pick up our blocks and our stuff. Coming back, here was a Japanese Navy frigate tied up there, this is a civilian shipyard, It's not -- little, actually Navy, little frigate tied up there at the dock. And we hadn't had any extra food or made out for anything in ages. And just as we got alongside of this little ship, the Jap cook off that ship came out with a left over bucket of rice from their morning meal and leftover bucket of thick meat stew. Woo, we sat there with our bare hands and ate all that, freezing, god, what a -- what a feast. But little things like that, you know, you remember back. And I like to figure out -- I like to tell the story about sabotage one day. Bucky worked down in the barge, hooking up or unhooking. This particular day, in the latter -- latter days of the war, we did about -- we shipped about as much steel out of there as we brought in, cause they were trading with other ship yards, you know; they were short of everything. And this particular day we were loading out a barge of about 20 foot long steel plates and late in the afternoon, Bucky's down there; he'd give me signals. I was out on the winch. And all of a sudden he told me stop, hold it. And this kept, so I tied it off, walked over, looked down in there, and they had a load of one of those steel plates down, just nearly ready to drop it on the others and he was swinging that thing out, beating the side of that wooden barge. (laughs) Hitting the corner. (laughs) We finished at quitting time. We always -- we managed to do one thing. We would work; we knew what the job was for the day. Never finish early or they'd put more on you. At quitting time, we'd tie the barge off, swinging her out so it wasn't up against the dock, went to camp. Next morning we got there, nothing down there. So we -- I don't know what we did that day. Well, sometime in the middle of the morning, the stuff hit the fan. That barge was down to the bottom, right in front of the dry dock gate. (laughs) Took them about a week with divers, get in there to get that stuff out of there and they never did connect it with us. Or they'd cut our throat. Man.

Question: So you kept doing your war duties no matter if you were a POW or not.

Answer: That was funny. But this guy, Bucky, he had a mind for any -- anything like that. He -- we would -- when they launch ships, big launch -- I don't know if you've ever seen them launch a ship, but skid ways... They used wax and soft soap so that thing would slide better. Well, we were always out of soap and soap was a non--. So they were launching one one day and everybody stops work to watch the launch. Well, Bucky and I -- and they had a Dutch crew. We also, at that camp -- at this camp they ended up bringing a bunch of Dutchmen into our camp out of the Dutch East Indies. Dutch crew had to work er job of cleaning up after the ship was launched. They had a bucket to scrape up all the soft soap. Well, Bucky and I jumped in with them and we got us a bucket. Greedy, when you get the bucket full instead of taking off, and that boss of ours kept screaming at me to get on down there to the winch, Bucky said go on, I'll hide this. Well, some Jap official was watching us all the time -- beat the devil out of him and I got off free. (laughs)

Question: Now how long were you a POW?

Answer: Forty-five months, thirteen hundred and fifty-three days. Do you know how I found that out? A few years after the war, the US government had a hundred and something million dollars in frozen enemy assets, and somebody got the idea and I was all for it. Everybody was a prisoner of war, give us a dollar a day out of that money, and my check was

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\$1,353.00. And then about a year later they did it again, a dollar and a half a day. Well I had early in my married life -- man, that was a bonanza

Answer: But I was always -- people would say, well, you mean you counted them? Yeah.

Question: What -- when you got out of being a POW, what -- what happened on that day. Was that the end of the war, or when did --

Answer: Yeah, we win the war. I was going to lead up to that just now. Of course, the big thing that buoyed our spirits -- when the B-29s started coming over. We kept up -- it's amazing. The scuttlebutt as they would call it, at how stuff would come through and you would keep up with the war. And you would hear the Japanese always bragging to us, we're beating you at certain, certain spot, well, we knew that island was a little further north. And just kept on up. And then the first time we saw up there, about 30,000 feet in the middle of the day, this beautiful B-29. So that's where you -- but they were coming in there. Japs had dozens of prison camps cause they farmed us out to their industry. And they were -- they were out there, US was in there to defeat the Japanese. If we got hit, tough. Well, the night of the 14th of March, '45, American planes were overhead for about 4-1/2 hours over Osaka

Answer: The night before they'd gotten Kobe. We listened to it the night before. We got hit that night. Luckily, Barracks Number One, Barracks Number Seven was our hospital barracks and I had just come out of the -- had the flu or pneumonia or whatever it was, and was due to go back to work the next day. And the bombs -- it was incendiary bombs -- everything burning like mad everywhere. And American planes flying over real low and just boom, boom, boom. Killed four of our guys -- a lot of them got burnt. And you know what I was doing? The Dutch doctor -- we had a Dutch doctor -- asked me if I would take wet blankets and get up on top of the flat roof, put the embers out to keep the thing from catching on fire. And that's what I was doing during the bombing raid. Up there with a wet blanket. But they were bombing every day and I don't know -- I guess the Japanese -- you can blame them for a lot of atrocities, you know, but -- they made the decision to move us out of there and they moved us up to the northwest side of Honshu, straight across northwest of Tokyo over on the China Sea side, town called Nitsu. It was right -- it's a suburb really of a big industrial city, Niigata

Answer: And the camp had been there for several years with a bunch of Australians in it. And steel mill and carbon black plant and what not. And I ended up in the steel mill. Now there's another humorous story I like to tell and I've told this to a bunch of different seminars and what not and got big laughs out of it. The Japanese -- one of the Japanese bosses in this steel mill -- stainless steel incidentally, open hearth furnaces, spoke good English. He was a track star -- he ran the mile in the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. And he loved to talk sports to us when he had time, he'd stop and visit with us. They had us, another flat car hauling slag out to the slag pile out of this steel mill, which is hard work pushing those darn things. One day he walked up to us and he says we're short-handed crane operators, any of you ever have any experience operating overhead crane? And one of my buddies was from Toledo, Ohio, he jumps up, yeah. He says where at? And he said Firestone Tire and Rubber in Toledo, Ohio. Great. Anybody else? I was looking at that slag pile and, yeah. Where at? I said Bethlehem Steel, Long Beach, California

Answer: Great. Background on this was, my dad's best buddy that he grew up with had migrated to California and I played growing up with his son, his son was my age. And so several weekends after I was in the Marine Corps in San Diego, I took the Interurban up and spent the weekend with him. So where I got off the Interurban to walk to their house, I passed the Bethlehem Steel complex, I love to tell that story. But, then the ticklish part

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came. It's a one cab crane, it's inside a building, not one of those tall high ones outside. Crawled up that ladder, got in the cab, now what in the devil am I going to do now? Four motors, so I just -- one at a time and see what was going to happen. And couple three days time, I was working it. But the beautiful thing about it, the hot, so hot in that steel mill, you could only work an hour at a time and then the other guy would take over. So you had that hour to prowl around. (laughs) But I love to tell that story about my crane operator. But you got to take a chance.

Question: So you talked about getting the scuttlebutt. How did you get the scuttlebutt? How did you keep --

Answer: In so many ways, you can't believe the things that happened. Now our ship -- one of our shipyards, you know the Japanese were great, when their kids finished school here, send them back to the old country for -- for a couple three years. And one of the guys in one of the ship yards there was one of those. He would not join, he was an American, he won't -- make him get in the Army, he won't -- so they held him nearly as much a prisoner. But he was able to pass on word. Things like that. Another one, the greatest one though was, he just died recently. One of our Navy radiomen. And the ship yard he was in, he was in Barracks Number Four, they put him to work helping install the radio equipment on the ships. He built him a radio underneath his barracks for seven months before he got caught. So things like that. And then some of our guys were brilliant people would learn -- learn to speak the language a lot better than me. I learned a lot of words, but not grammatically. A lot of them were real good at it and learned to read even. They'd pick up a Japanese newspapers and they could read that newspaper and get the ideas. It's amazing how stuff happens. But the biggest one was that radio, yeah.

Question: That's pretty good.

Answer: And they damn near killed him on that, too.

Question: So where were you when you heard the war was over?

Answer: We were in this town of nitsu working at a steel mill and the night before they had bombed Ugata all night. And we figured maybe it was our night tonight. Incidentally in the steel mill we worked swing shift, five days, five nights. And that particular night, the day shift came in and we kept waiting for them to call us out for the night shift, and they said just stay in your barracks until further notice. Not going to work tonight. So we had blackouts -- after nine -- the lights are off at 9 o'clock at night. It was hotter than blazes, summertime, so soon as the lights were all off, we opened the drapes and everything in the building, big old three-story building. Everywhere you look you see lights glowing everywhere. And what in the devil's going on? Next morning day crew got ready to go and no, no work. Middle of morning, here come the scuttlebutt that the Japanese steward -- we had our own men doing the cooking, but he would issue the food to them. And he supposedly grabbed guys and -- grabbed them and hugged them and told them the war was over. Well, we didn't know. Stories, you know, fire like that. But later in the morning, or maybe -- I can't remember whether it was that afternoon, or it was the next day -- greatest birthday present I ever had -- August 16th. The Jap colonel had us all out in the compound out there, got up on the table and spoke to us and told us outright -- didn't -- didn't lie or anything -- he says you won the war, unconditional surrender, the war is over. And, but do you know, I've seen pictures of everybody screaming on the streets of Broadway and everything else. Well, guys didn't do that. It was amazing. You just accepted it. Thank God, oh man. Wasn't any screaming or hollering or anything else. Just compare it.

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Question: What -- what did you do? I mean, you're a prisoner of war, the war is over --

Answer: Yeah, nothing to do but just sit there -- what next? And they told us -- the Jap colonel said you'll be getting -- any time you'll be getting instructions from your people. And about the next day here come carrier planes off the USS Saratoga and dropped a briefcase or a bag with instructions and in the bag was some other things and included the ship's newspaper. You know they had a daily newspaper on those big ships. And in there the first we ever heard of A-bomb. Yeah. But -- and they told us to mark a parachute drop spot and a red cross or something on top of a building and they'd drop food and clothes to us. Well, a couple days later, here come two B-29's, open the bomb bay, 50 parachutes tied to a 50-gallon drum, food, clothes, everything. Boy, that was -- that was a holiday. But the sad part about that was they made a dumb run the first day. Instead of following the line we had laid out for them parallel to the camp, they went over it the other way. One of my friends was about 20 feet away from me and one of those parachutes didn't open; killed the poor guy. But those things happen, and it's a shame after all that time. But you talk about living it up then, all that food, goll... But -- we were sitting there, they had the guard still at the gate. We were all standing around there one day, had us inside that camp. We won this war. So we walked up to the gate, walked by the guards, and they just stood there, open-mouthed. Just spread out all over that town, man, everywhere. And of course guys went out on the farms, guys came back into camp with ducks, chickens, corn on the cob, and camp fire going all the -- there was about a 10 foot wooden fence around that camp. By the time we left there on the 7th of September, most of that fence was gone for campfires for cooking. (laughs) But the Japanese facilities and their kitchen was big old pots to boil something in. And all that food stuff. And guys were just running everywhere, guy go down to the train station, get on a train, ride awhile, come back. It's a great time. But then on the 7th of September, we had a Navy commander, senior officer of our camp -- was a submarine commander. Was shot out of the water off Singapore somewhere and was captured and he had the Japs get him a phone call for the Americans in Yokohama -- soon as they got to Yokohama, told them who he was and how many people he had there and what not and what's -- decided, well, they had to work up -- get troops into Japan and all and go liberate the people. He said I don't need liberating -- you just tell me where to come to. We'll be there. So on the 7th of September, peace was signed on the 2nd of September on the Missouri -- 7th of September we had a special train loaded up that morning and went to Tokyo and to Yokohama where they had set up a reception station on the docks at Yokohama with three hospital ships and all. And that -- that ended our prisoner of war days. So what a -- and the first person, the first American we saw -- at one of the stops -- we trained to Tokyo, and then Interurban on down to Yokohama

Answer: Stopped somewhere and here's some American service women running there giving us candy bars, and that was our first American. But it -- great thing to reminisce on because -- and then we got there and they had a big band out in front, ice cream and cake. And say, just enjoy yourself and what not. But then they had a reception inside with medical check you, de-lousing, shower and everything else. Then you sat down with -- with officers from all different services, interrogating you, getting your story. Who you were, and what not. Cause they -- and I did that dozens of times. I guess they put all that together. That way they got war criminals and everything else.

This first camp I was in Shanghai, the interpreter we had there -- we put him away for life. Actually he died in prison just before they were going -- when they were fighting the Korean War, they ended up letting all these Japanese war criminals out of jail in order to get their cooperation for us fighting in the Korean War. And he was due to be one of them but he died of TB before he got out. We kept up with those kind of guys. And it's funny, too, now, the interpreter we had in Osaka graduated from the University of Missouri but he was smart. He never did mistreat anybody. He'd do a little jujitsu or something occasionally, but nothing

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bad. So he -- he didn't get caught. He was a decent type person. But just all type of people in the world.

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

Answer: Part of what?

Question: Did you realize that you were a part of history when it was happening?

Answer: Not really at that time. We didn't really know enough about it. But we know now and we're in the Marine Corps historical and everything. So, it's great to know that and you're -- you're proud of it. Because there's nothing, I don't think there's anything prouder in the world than a bunch of Marines. And -- well, it's an amazing how they take these kids from all walks of life, bring them in there, and build a spirit of the Marine Corps in them the way they do that. It's just something. That's the reason I'm active. I'm the Adjutant Paymaster of our local Marine Corps League. You know, -- because they're such a great bunch of guys.

Question: What do you think -- what do you think the message is for generations to come? What do you want to leave with them?

Answer: Oh, Golly, that's a good one. There's so many things happened; I saw yesterday, happened down in Oregon. Youth today. I think the majority of them would come out like us, but so many of them are the other way. Couple of punks in some high school down in Oregon. They know of at least 18 robberies they've done and one of them escaped to Mexico. On spring break, all these kids went down to Mexico and partied with him. And took - - and spoke up for him; we've got to protect our own, that kind of things. But I think the majority of them -- I think that's a small percentage. Most of them would be like our guys --

Question: Do you -- with the war being over, because I talked about the within the inhumanity there was humanity, with the war being over, do you hold any animosity towards your enemy?

Answer: No, they were human beings, we were human beings. Animosity towards individuals, but not, not the bulk of them. And we all -- their outlook on life is so much different than ours, too. You never know -- I like to think about -- you've always heard about face saving -- Orientals -- how they think about face saving. That ship yard, we were looking and doing everything in the world but wheel and deal, and they shook us down each morning as we walked out that gate to see if we had anything on there that we shouldn't have. They shook us down when we came in the evenings. But we would smuggle stuff in they wouldn't catch. They would see it in the camp, well, okay, because they couldn't admit they'd been taken. One of the greatest ones that -- Bucky and I made out on. They'd assign one of our fellows to be the camp shoe cobbler. But he didn't have anything to half-sole shoes -- all the shoes were worn out. Well, thousands of feet of air hose all over that ship yard; it was about that big around, black, and one day we're out there, well wonder how thick that is. So we got a piece of it, stole a piece of it, cut it open. Golly, it was a full quarter inch thick. Well, we -- with -- in there. So we took two pieces each about this long, split it, put it on our shins and went into camp with it. Took it over to Smitty, and man, we had new half soles on our shoes immediately. So every day for days on end, we'd bring that in and trade it. Some guys -- it's amazing how people won't take a chance cause they'd beat. And we'd trade it for bowls of rice. And the main -- main exchange in the camp was based on cigarettes. One day a bowl of rice might be worth three cigarettes, next day it might be ten -- ten cigarettes. And I always compare that with stock market, we, we got rich off of those half-soled shoes. Man. Another time we had a piece of luck that came along there, too. Bucky waved at me one day, he was

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down in a barge, we were unloading a bunch of big, big I-beams. (gestures) Come here, come here. Salt -- we hadn't had salt you know -- and food without salt is awful -- in months. And run down there to the barge and in one of those channels in one of those I-beams, about this far in there, the beam was about that deep, was rock salt. We took our socks off, everything else. Man, we were at King's then. (laughs) Boy. The way you used to take a rock and grind the salt up as fine as you can get it to use it cause it was like ice cream salt. But little things like that happened when we were over there.

Question: When I listen to you talk, you'd think you were in summer camp.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: I'm sure that it was pure hell most of the time you were there but the ingenuity that --

Answer: Yeah. It -- funny. We had a -- a bad thing that happened. Had a little old small dry dock in the ship yard. They just brought small boats and latter months of the war they were bringing old boats out of the ship graveyards, cleaning them up to use them. One day they brought one in there and it was part of our job to help bring those boats in shore them in place in this dry dock. And when they right in the dry dock, here's mussels, thick all over the bottom of that thing. And one of the merchant seamen who was -- they put him to work right up on the dock with a fire, splicing cable. So we started putting those mussels up there and throw them in his fire and pop open and eat them. I ate about a dozen of them, about. This guy, Curry, this wire splicer was bragging that night about eating 72 of those things. Next afternoon he was dead. He must have got some bad ones. I said, man I'm glad I didn't eat any more than that. Lots of little things that were funny. Stories of guys coming back from Viet Nam into a hated country and all that, but the reception we got, they took us down to Guam and Naval hospitals, and then on to San Francisco. You couldn't ask for greater homecoming. It was beautiful. I'm on chemo -- not chemotherapy, radiology, for lung cancer. Not really nothing to tell about after I got back. Those things that happened in prison camp. Well, we nicknamed that mountain Mt. Fujiyama

Answer: That we were building. The guys that stayed there -- the rest of that camp stayed there the last four months of the war and then they moved them up through north China into -- up to Hokaido -- but they finished the mountain.