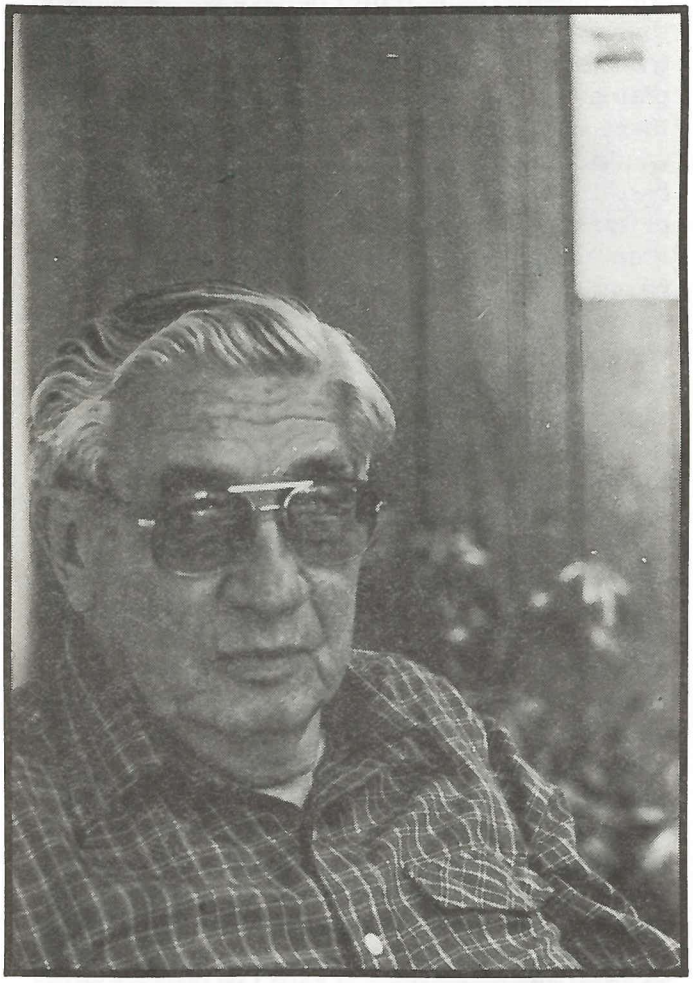
"I JUST SERVED MY COUNTRY AND HELD ON."



By RICHARD R. GILBERT

If there was ever a hero in my eyes, he is Richard H. Gilbert. Through the years I have known him, he has never thought of himself as a hero, and perhaps that is one of the many things that make him special. What makes him a hero is the endless struggles and trials he lived through in a prisoner of war camp in Japan during World War II. I was honored enough and truly grateful to get this story to share with our readers, especially after all these years. After all, a son cannot always see a hero in his father but that's what my dad is to me.

"I was born on December 29, 1918, in San Bernadino, California. On February 7, 1939, I enlisted in the Marine Corps because I wanted to go to China. China was not a communist country at that time, and the rate of exchange was very good. So as an enlisted man I could do quite well on the 21 dollars a month. Employment was tough to find at that time, and it was a chance to go to China. It just seemed like a good adventure. So I signed up basically because I couldn't get a satisfactory job in Los Angeles.

"As it turned out, I didn't go to China. After I enlisted, I spent basic training in San Diego Naval training station. Boy, was it tough! It was three months of training, and when I came out I was physically fit and thin. From there, I went into the local fleet Marine Corps which was a rapid development group, and we were put into even better physical condition with marches and maneuvers in the field. We were all young and in prime condition.

"After that I went to the fleet marine corps in San Diego where I spent 18 months and then was transferred overseas. We went to Mayor Island near San Francisco and left from there. We had no idea where we were going. We could have gone to Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, or even Shanghai or Peking. We weren't told until we left Hawaii. So we took our chances. I went to the Philippines which was lucky because the rate of money exchange was good. We lived quite well, actually with room boys who made our beds and shined our shoes.

"I got to the Philippines in 1939-40, I don't remember the exact year, but I do remember crossing the meridian and having two 4th of Julys. I was there almost two years before war was declared in 1941. Most of the time I was a private first class, and I was captured as that. Then when we came back they gave me a corporal rank for seniority purposes only but not for pay. They paid me private first class pay. I really didn't think that was right, but that's the way the marine corps was. When I enlisted I never thought we would go to war, or I might not have enlisted.

"In the Philippines I was a guard on duty over at the navy yard or a commandant's orderly. Since the naval commandant was there there was about a dozen of us who worked as commandant's orderlies. It wasn't a big operation.

"The base had barracks built on the sea wall. We could sit on the veranda and fish. There were just openings for windows, no glass because of the tropical climate. The atmosphere was so warm we changed clothes two or three times a day. At times I've seen typhoons come up, and the rain would go in one window and out the other, becuase it would be blowing so hard.

"The quarters were normal marine barracks. They would hold one hundred men or one squad. As I remember there were three or four squad rooms. There was also the sergeant's and non-commissioned officers' quarters.

"The main yard was an old Spanish fort. The ammunition depot had walls 15 feet thick on the seaward side and about a foot on the top. The commandant quarters were a 275-year-old house the Spaniards had built. It still had a hard wood floor on the patio that was from the original house. There were about three or four triangles left that had been in the ground. They were highly polished, and it was a really gorgeous floor. There were still hoof prints from the Spaniards who had ridden their horses over it. The building was very elaborate and beautiful.

"There were fortified islands entering the harbor to the naval station. We were well into the entrance of the harbor. At the entrance we had 14-inch turret guns and 6-inch case make guns and 12-inch howitzes. Fort Haig, Fort Drum and Fort Frank were all fortified the same. We also had the old 30-caliber military rifle which was an aught-three Springfield, three-inch anti-aircraft guns, and 50-caliber anti-aircraft guns. At the fort there was nothing larger than that.

"At Fort Drum where I ended up there was a cement battleship built on an island, which was leveled off 40 feet below the surface of the water. It was built just like a battleship, only it was cement and anchored down. There were two 14-inch turret guns that could swing 180 degrees. All case make guns would swing 100 or 120 degrees. We had no dive bomber defense. That's why 13 of us marines were sent as divebomber defense. Then 3-inch anti-aircraft guns were moved in for high flying defense. However, the guns had only a range of 18 thousand feet, and the Japs flew at 20 thousand, so we could never reach them.

"The equipment was all antiquated from World War I. One day we had had grenade drill and only one out of a dozen fired. The others were frozen from years of no use. The machine guns were badly worn from so many drills. They had been taken apart and put back together by blindfolded soldiers. The parts had been filed down whereas they would just fall into position. The only time I really did that blindfolded was at Fort Drum. One night we had a contest and, of course, being a marine, we took great pride in our abilities. So I had to win, and I did fortunately. That was about the only time I did anything of that kind blindfolded. Today they do the same except the men must fire a round to show that the parts work.

"The silk powder bags were 14 inches in diameter and three feet long. The silk had rotted and the bags would break, so we would have to pick up grains of powder to throw into the breech. The grain of powder for the 14-inch turret gun is an inch in diameter and 3-4 inches long, so it isn't like a hand gun or a rifle. It was a pretty good size gun."

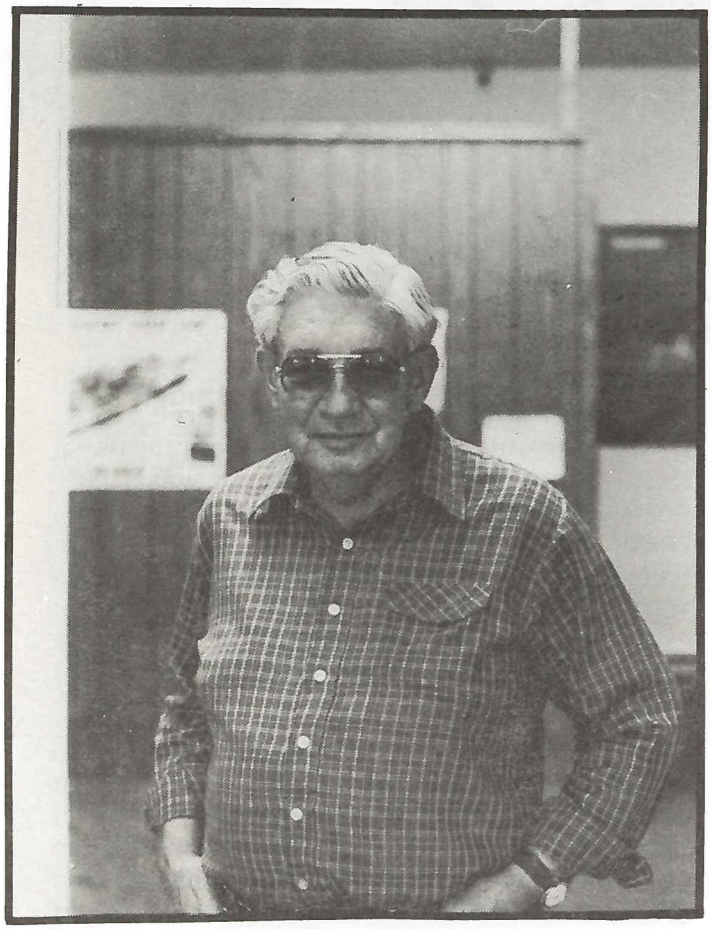
I then asked my dad if things changed as the war came closer. "Not really, but we did have some increased activity in training. Our attitude was that we really didn't believe we were going to war. For example, a buddy of mine was transferred back to the States. His friend explained that if he went back to the states and there was a war, it would be in Europe and he would be shipped right over. As it turned out, we had the war on our hands, and he was taken as prisoner. The light side of this story was that the man had a 20-day furlough while waiting for his re-enlistment papers, and he got into a crap game and lost everything, except a dime. He went to the office, his papers were ready, but he tore them up and went back and threw his last dime on the table. He ran that up to about 150 dollars, but now he had no furlough. The first sergeant gave him a 72-hour pass, and that was all he got."

Next I asked my father what he was doing on December 7 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. "December 7, I was sleeping nicely when they woke us up. The said, 'Come on, you have to go on watch. This is a real alert; it isn't a fake. The enemy is going to attack!' So we dressed and went to our positions on top of the ammunition depot and sat around. They were right! Pretty soon here came a bunch of planes. They made three or four passes at the ammunition dump and hit on each side but never hit the top. There were about a million pounds of powder in the depot, and I always contend had it hit I would have gone to heaven; I would have been blown so far from hell. So it was an exciting adventure. There were many casualties; many people were killed and wounded that day. Several ships and submarines were sunk still tied to the dock. It was a minor disaster compared to Pearl Harbor, but compared to what we had, it was a major disaster. We didn't get any planes that day. We only had 50-caliber guns available. The 3-inch gun couldn't reach them, and they didn't come in range of the 50-caliber. We shot at a couple of planes passing but didn't see any go down. After that day I thought when will help come?

"There was nothing at the fort to hold us there. The navy station transported our weapons into the field and later moved them to Corregidor and the islands there. It wasn't completely unexpected. As far as we were concerned we had been training for years and that's what we were doing. We were earning the money we had been paid. This is a sore point with me. We had several high ranking officers who were cowards, and I felt that after accepting the government's money all these years, they should stand up and fight alongside the rest of us. Instead they stayed in the Malinta Tunnel and avoided combat. They

didn't lead their troops; they directed the subordinates to lead their troops. Their job was to lead the troops, not to order the subordinates. They weren't that high; they weren't generals.

"I had an intense dislike for MacArthur, a complete disrespect; I thought him incompetent. My outstanding example is he was paid 50 thousand dollars a year, at that time a lot of money. He received that amount to train the Philippine Army, yet when they went into combat, they didn't even know how to load their rifles. I thought he was not earning his money. He had been in charge for several years, so it wasn't something that was completely new. He had a lot of time; it was just that he was in the tropics and as lazy as everybody else.



"As far as I am concerned he got there because he married the senator's daughter, and if it hadn't been for that he would have been quite a bit down in rank. Of course, I am a little bitter, but I think the biggest mistake was leaving MacArthur in charge and letting the fleet get caught in Pearl Harbor. It it hadn't been for that the war would have gone differently. I didn't think the atomic bomb was a mistake. The Japanese were prepared to fight in the streets, 'til the war was over or 'til they were completely defeated."

I next questioned the intensity of the fighting. "After December 7 the fighting certainly didn't die down. We moved back to Morvalose, a beach across from Corregidor. The Japs landed at several places outside of Manila Harbor, and we were there at the beach trying to defend the beach head. Why, we were waiting for help which was never forthcoming. The fighting continued constantly. Very seldom was there time when we didn't hear shelling. The Japanese used their artillery very well. I got used to it, but it was a continual hassle. Most of the time we weren't in actual combat but bordering on it.

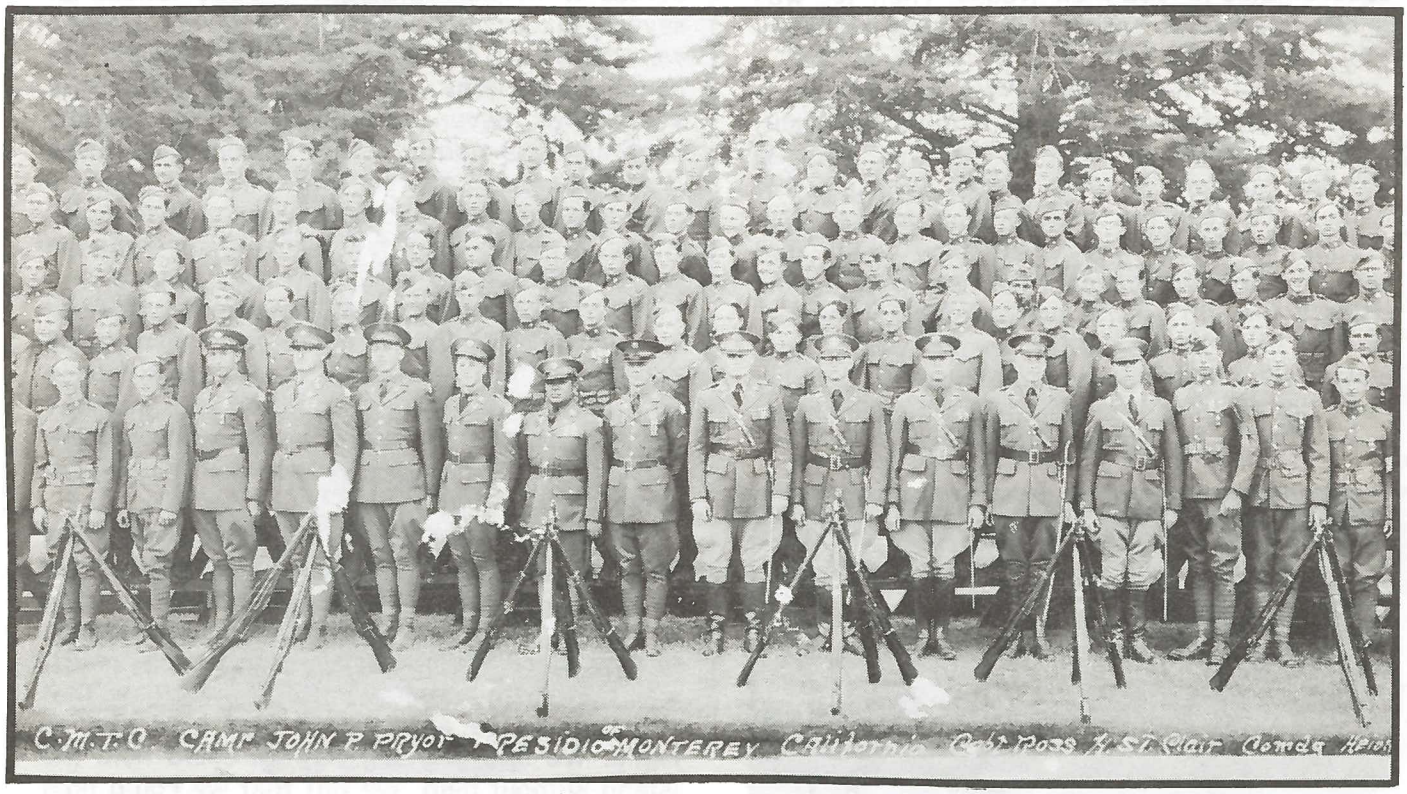
"One of the outstanding examples was General Wainwright's advance guard was five miles behind the general and his troops. I held him in high regard, as I was in that advance guard. I felt that he was very competent, a brave man. He was usually not covered, so I really held him in awe.

"In March I think it was, we were moved to the beaches. We were well aware that we didn't have sufficient forces to defend anything. The amazing thing was we were getting radio reports of how much the Japanese were taking, and it was quite astounding. We didn't anticipate that there would be anything of that kind and so rapid. We had no idea that we could hold the island without help. We felt that we could hold them until help got there, but we were of the stock faith that help was on the way. One of the stock jokes was that help was on the way, one of the nurses was pregnant.

"We had only 5 P40s for our air control. Everything else had been wiped out or sent out. They were hiding the P40s because the Nips had air superiority. Also the Japanese had the mini tanks, so we were fighting a delaying battle. All we could offer was a few prayers."

I then asked about the supply situation. "We didn't run out of ammunition; food was the major item. As I remember one day I had only 17 string beans about an inch long. That was my ration of food, plus a slice of bread. We had two meals a day, so there was a definite shortage. For example, we also had no water facilities at Fort Drum. One night as the water barge was coming in they weren't communicating the way they should have been with the light. So the colonel ordered the machine guns lined up. We lined up seven 30-caliber machine guns to attrack the attention of the water barge. We were sure that's what it was, but they didn't respond. Finally, the colonel ordered us to load. With all the clacking noise of seven machine guns, they still didn't respond. So he said, 'Open fire!'. One gun fired one round and jammed and all the others jammed before they fired one round. We didn't use much ammunition that way, but they did respond.

"I used the 50-caliber guns which were comparatively new and maintained by the marines.



Camp photo at C.M.T.C., 1935

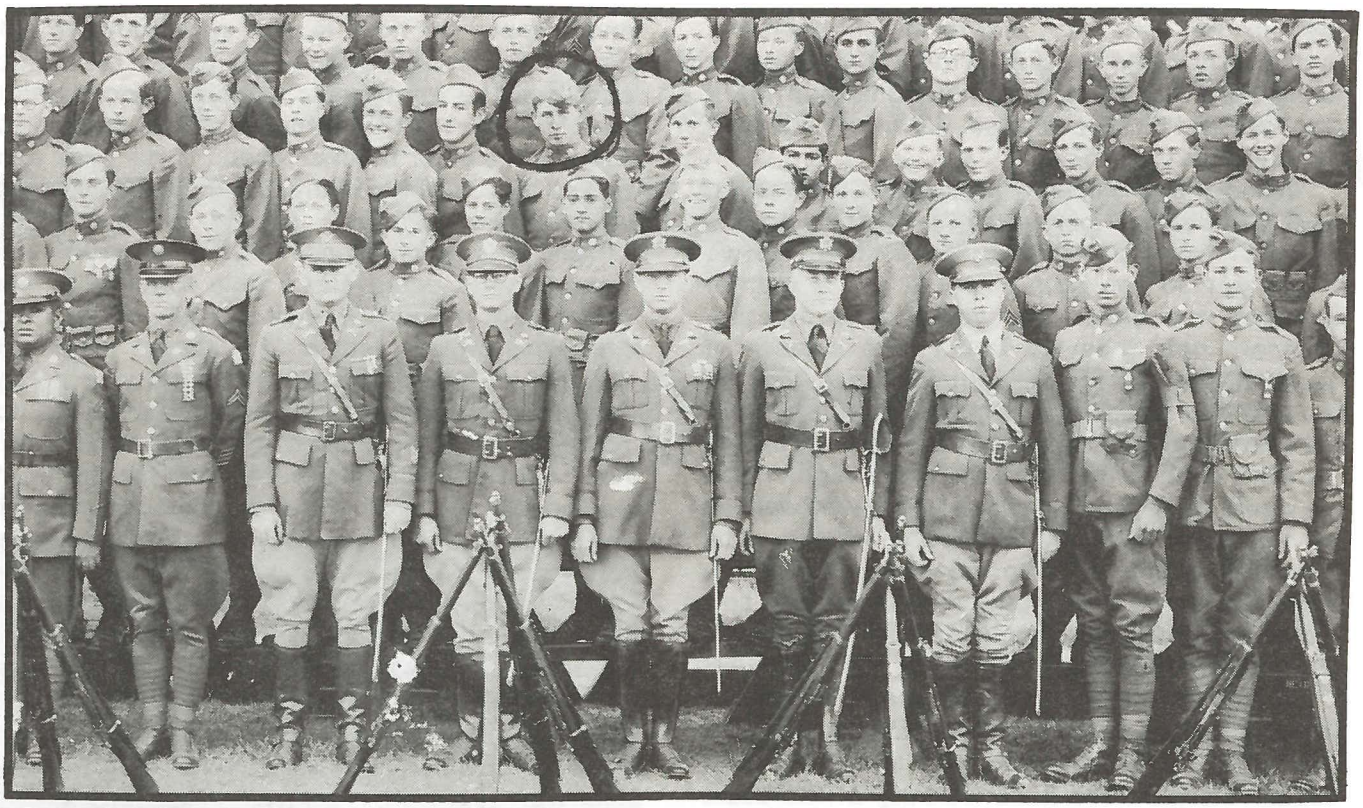
The Marine Corps demanded that we maintain them in top fashion. The ammunition we loaded ourselves into belts, so we knew that it was properly loaded. I don't remember, but I misfired only one of the 50-caliber bullets.

"You asked if I shot down any planes. I shot down two in Fort Drum. There was a Japanese plane that came over every day at noon. We just referred to it as the mail plane and didn't concern ourselves. It flew into Manila and went on. I was on the deck alone when the mail plane came over. I looked up, and it was in a dive coming right at me. I grabbed my machine gun and started to fire. I followed it as it went down, then I went back and got the next one behind it. We saw the first one go down in the bay, and the second one went down beyond our sight. It really wasn't any big thing, since there was so much action. We were fortunate if we had a cigarette to smoke afterwards. We were just doing our jobs; that's why we were paid. The only thing I ever fired was the machine gun, since I was in anti-aircraft defense. We moved back most of the time, ahead of the troops, and I never was in much hand-to-hand combat."

I asked my father about Bataan falling. "The Japanese told us about Bataan. They were the only radio contact we had, so they didn't hesitate to tell us that we might as well surrender because Bataan had fallen. Of course, we didn't want to believe it, but it didn't take long to find out that the Japanese were firing at us from Bataan. So they had to have taken it. We turned our one set of guns on Bataan and fired a 1440-pound projectile. These weapons were for naval ships, so the best we could get out was 5 hundredths of a second delay. The shell would hit the beach and bounce, and it would get about five feet off the ground before it exploded. There were hundred-pound pieces of shrapnel flying all over the place. The Japs referred to them as the 'big voices of liberty,' but we only heard that after we capitulated.

"The firing was conservative because we had a limited amount of amunition, but we fired enough to wear out the 14-inch guns. The size of these guns was big enough for a small marine to go through the barrel with a can of Vaseline and grease it. So we would clean the gun every night after we had fired. I had nothing to do with it; really the army did it all. They could get a dozen men on the end of a ramrod and jam ran it down through the bore just like cleaning a rifle. That was done almost every night, because the firing was pretty constant.

"The order came from Corregidor that General Wainwright had capitulated the islands. He had ordered the white flag of surrender. We knew the Japanese were coming aboard. We were to destroy all papers or anything that could have been used, so we threw our rifles and ammunition overboard. We fired the big guns with sand in the bore so that they would split. That made everything unusable, so it was to be



of no advantage to the Japanese. They did come aboard after a few hours. There was about 350 of us, and I would think a company, of maybe 150 men came and captured us. We knew we were lucky that we missed the death march; we had our own. It wasn't that disadvantageous, and it was just through a bunch of mud and gravel, in the middle of a rain storm. We marched all night, but we didn't suffer any casualties like on Bataan.

"We were somewhat relieved to be taken; it was obvious we were going downhill and that we weren't going to gain anything by fighting to the last man. So there was a sense of relief that the fighting was over. There was no opportunity to escape so there was nothing to do but sit and wait."

My dad had no grudge against Wainwright for surrendering. All the American and Filipino units were in bad shape from the constant fighting. He continues with what happened after the surrender. "At first they searched us and took any loot they could find. The soldiers took anything of value, then they put us aboard a ship and moved us to a place called Wawa Beach, which was on Manila Bay. There we were put in a warehouse. We were all lined up in order with machine guns on us. There was nothing we could do except stand there or get shot.

"The biggest problem we had was water. When we would ask for water they would laugh or tell us, 'Here's the ocean; drink all you want.' But they did give us food and water later, so we managed. The officers were always treated better than the enlisted men. There was no discrimination between the NCO and a private, but they did use some of the top NCO's to be in charge of the troops, if there were no officers available.

"We were pretty well reconciled to our fate, and there was not any talk or attempt to escape. We were only there for 3 or 4 days, and then they moved us to Manila and put us in prison for a couple of days. From there they took us up to Cabona Dawon, which was an old army barracks and training area. There were some who attempted to escape, and some who did from there. They caught the rest and made them dig their own graves. Then they shot them and let them fall into the grave. They did that where everyone could see. They had their own methods, and their own culture that was different than ours.

"For example, the Japanese live in terror of fire. Their houses are built of nothing, and so they don't even try to put a fire out. They just tear the building down to contain it. So things like smoking are very serious. It's a different culture than ours.

"We stayed there until the first of October, then they moved us to Manila and put us aboard a freighter to Japan. We were lucky. There may have been better food and clothing, and in the Philippines there was almost no activity. We dug trenches occasionally, but when we got to Japan the first job I had was in a steel mill. I worked there for quite a while, then I was transferred to a dock where we were loading and unloading box cars. That's where I stayed for the duration. It finally got to the point where the Japanese labor was shorter, and we got better jobs.

"Why, I was a crane operator, and I operated one of those big cranes over a warehouse with

the cab that runs back and forth. That was the bulk of my job. As the U.S. Army Air Corps came along they blew up the railroad line, and there was less and less work to do. We really did very little, except steal rice.

"When I was working as a coolie we moved bags of rice from boxcar to the warehouse and back. The bulk of the bags were straw, so we would put on two pair of pants and a pair of wrapped leg ends. We would wrap the underneath pair then we would take a piece of bamboo and split it. We would stand up against the bag and let the rice run down out legs to fill our pants legs. We would try to do this just before we went back to the barracks every night. Then we would trade the rice with a friend who worked at the steel mill or the brick factory. The Japanese didn't watch to see who was cooking. Then the friend would give me his rations, so I would get a double portion. At that rate, I went from 112 to 175 pounds.

"It wasn't just rice that was stolen and given to other prisoners to help them make it through the war. Just about anything that could be used, could be stolen. We were working at the dock. There was a field there and a half dozen Japanese had planted sweet potatoes. When it rained they would stay inside. We would go out and crawl down the rows of sweet potatoes and reach down underneath the ground and find one and break it off, so that we had the potatoes, and they had the vine. We used to kid about the Japanese sweet potatoes, 'all vine and no potato' because we got the potatoes. We never got caught.

"The Japanese turned their heads on a lot of things. For example, they took an area of the prison and said, 'All right, you are a cobbler, and that's what you do.' If a week later the man had leather to repair shoes, hammers and nails, then at least they didn't question. They just turned their heads and the fact that he was repairing shoes was why they were grateful.

"In turn, we never really sabatoged anything of theirs. The closest we came to sabotage was one night when our prison was bombed. We were in the bomb shelter, and there were some Japanese in a bomb crater, I presumed, wounded. So we started tearing the fire down on top of them in an effort to cremate them. However when the MP came along, we took off. I am sure that the MP's saved them, but that's about as close to sabotage as we came. It would have been too obvious. First off, they didn't let us in a position where we could do anything. We sabotaged them enough by stealing their rice.

"At one time when there were no trains moving in or out because the GI's had bombed the rails, there was a window open on a second story of a warehouse. I moved the crane down and dropped the hook to pick up a man and put him on the second window. I moved the crane away, and he went in and loaded up some small bags of rice. He threw them out the window to some of the other fellows. Then I came back and picked him up and put him on the ground, and we were never caught at it.

"We got a lot of things, I remember. We were working on a detail and I stole some wool and some yarn. It was 70% wool and 30% cotton, and I made a sweater out of it. I took a couple of welding rods and had them ground to a point. There was a Scottish man in the camp who could remember his sister's knitting. So he showed me how. I just knitted two pieces, one for the front and one for the back. I used a couple of strips for the shoulders, and then I sewed it all together as a sweater. Later it got caught with the incinerary bomb and burned, of course being wool, very rapidly. I have only a small piece of it left."

I then asked how he felt about working for the enemy and their food. "I think that all of us really appreciated the work, inasmuch as we would have gone out of our minds doing nothing. The work gave us an opportunity to fraternize with the natives, get cigarettes, and extra food, and things like curry powder. Now I'm still the only one in the family who will eat curry, but I learned to like it in prison. We had rice and soup three times a day, 365 days a year and fish seven times a year, and pork once. That was our meat ration for the year. One of the things that really surprised me was one morning I was sitting there eating a typical bowl of rice and goop for breakfast and I thought, 'Gee, this is good.' How foreign to Americans a diet of rice and goop is for breakfast, yet I was enjoying it. It took some time to get used to it."

I asked about the chance to escape. "Escape was a matter of how one described it. There is one place to go. We were on an island, so where could we go? Yet I contend I escaped five times one day because there was a trolley that ran from the power plant down to Kawasaki and back. I sneaked out the barracks and went down to the rail station, which was maybe half a mile away. I paid 50 cents for someone to run into Kawasaki and buy me a pack of cigarettes. Then I would sneak back. Now that was an escape, technically, but actually I came back because there was no place to go.

"There were other details that I remember. Once we went to Kawasaki with a hand cart and got fresh vegetables. We had two military guards with us. On the way back the guards wanted to stop for a beer, but they couldn't take us so we just sat on the cart while they were inside drinking. It was obvious that there was no place to go.

"We also went on a detail unloading boxcars in

Kawasaki. One of the things we loaded was cases of champagne. Their cases are not sealed like ours, but had slats in them, so if we broke a slat we were in trouble. We could reach in and pull the cork out and tip the whole case up and drink the champagne and put the cork back. We also would get fine barrels of sake. Since everybody was hot and sweaty we would open the door on the other side of the boxcar and tell the guard, 'It's hot.' Then we would move the barrel of sake,

"We could reach in and pull the cork, tip the case and drink the champagne."

so it hung over the edge. We then would slip it over the side , take a hook, jam it in there, so it would leak. Then we'd lay under there and drink it, taking turns. So you see, we managed to connive at different times.

"If we were caught the punishment depended on the interpreter. Whatever he decreed happened. The civilian guards that we had were eager to indulge in what they called Pinta,' which is basically standing at attention. Why, they beat the hell out of us. They did this to their own people, their soldiers, too; it made for good soldiers. They were always right. When we first got there and did not speak the language or

"The civilian guard indulged in Pinta standing at attention, why, they beat the hell out of us..."

understand the customs we would get beat daily. Those of us who were beaten the most were the Marines because they hated the Marines. They even hated their own marines, and they were the cream of the crop. If there was a bar room brawl we could bet there was a Japanese marine in it. So they continued this wrath to us. As we became accustomed to their way, learned the language better, and got better interpreters things improved to almost acceptable.

"When we ran out of rice one time the interpreter came to the job. We stole three bags of rice and threw them in a cart. The interpreter sat on top of them, and we hauled the cart back to the barracks. Nobody questioned a soldier as to what he was doing. They had difficulty trying to find anybody to testify against the last interpreter; he was so well thought of. Finally some English med did testify, and he got a year in prison, which was like giving him nothing. In turn, we had the other kind too. We had several who were vicious and delighted in punishment.

"Most of the guards were on a permanent staff and veterans of the China war, I guess, semi-retired. They were not in active military duty, whereas, the military guards changed duty frequently, and we had very little problem. As an example, I have forgotten now what I had done, but they got upset one night and pulled me out in front of the guard shack and started pounding on me. The guard shack was on one side of the entrance and on the other side was the back of a tool shed. Their corrugated roofs were smaller and lower than American ones, as such that to come here (points to the back of neck). The roof was bent from banging prisoners when they took them out. They beat them up, pounded on me for

awhile, and gave me a bucket. They told me to hold it out with my arms fully stretched, and then they posted a guard to bang my elbows as they fell down. This motivated me. There was about two inches of water in the bucket when I got through, and it wasn't really raining that hard. Out of seven hours, I only got to sit down an hour and a half.

"I don't recall anyone being beaten unconscious. American, or Japanese. One of the worst beatings I ever saw was a Japanese man accused of stealing a baseball mitt from one of the prisoners. They had him in the office, and they would hit him and he would vomit. They would hit him again and he would defecate. They just beat that poor bastard unmercifully.

"With us we went through different periods. As an example, we concentrated all our weight on our feet, so it was pretty hard to be knocked

"They were frustrated because they couldn't knock us down."

down. We would do that for a while, then they would get frustrated because they couldn't knock us down. Then we would do the reverse, and almost before they hit us, we would fall down, get up, then fall down again. There was pain, but, most of the time, we were capable of withstanding it."

As the war went on, and the Americans started to win, I wondered if the prisoners knew. My dad said, "It was in the way of shortages that we

were bothered. It wasn't until we got to the end that we could really tell. When they were bombing Japan, we knew what was going on. By then all were fluent enough in the language to understand. A couple of us got a Japanese backed him up into a corner and told him, 'I'm making a list of the good guys and the bad guys. You give me cigarettes, or I will put you on the bad guy list.' They were scared enough to give us the three cigarettes."

I then asked about propaganda used by the Japanese. "A recording company came into the camp and took half of us and made a recording that said we were all right. Then these were transmitted over shortwave, and mine was picked up and recorded in San Francisco by a ham operator.

"The Japanese made the recording that was translated. I would have to guess it was just like a tape and transmitted to the ham operators in the states. They wanted to show that they were treating the prisoners well and everybody was happy. The people in the U.S. then would be happy under the Japanese regime. At that time they still thought they were going to win the war.

"There was never a doubt in our minds that we would win, but we didn't know how long it would last. We went through different stages. It would last 90 days to a year; it wouldn't last any longer than World War I did, and finally we just ran out of predictions. What could we say? It was there.

"The problem was keeping up the morale. Americans have a great sense of honor. The younger men didn't keep their morale up, and those men died. The older men kept their morale. I say this, because I was one of the younger ones. Of course, that was some time ago, and I was determined to get home, if I had to crawl on my belly. There were times when we were bombed that I questioned whether I would get home. I wasn't sure if I would get the opportunity. I would have been killed by my own people rather than by the Japanese, so no one ever questioned that we would survive and win. The question was when.

"In all that time it was easy to lose the will to live, and in turn people died. Starvation never killed anybody; it just weakened us to the point that we caught pneumonia or something worse. I suppose pneumonia was the biggest killer. I got beri beri which was serious, and I had yellow jaundice. The Japanese method of curing beri beri is walking barefoot in the morning dew. I don't think that that had anything to do with it, but eventually it went away. It wasn't a painful thing, but I did swell, and it was ugly. I woke up in the morning with my head big, and at night I went to bed with big feet. For beri beri we got vitamins and fresh rice, with the husk on it. That was good for us physically, but we got tired of the husked rice. We would take a bottle, fill it up with rice and then take a piece of bamboo and pound on it till we had knocked all the husk off. We'd cook it ourselves, so it gave us a little change, although there was basically very little change of our diet.

"We were about four miles outside of Kawasaki on the water front. We worked for Mitsubishi Kometo which is Mitsubishi now. From working with the people we could tell they were ready to fight in the streets. We worked side by side with the Japanese. The day that they capitulated we saw Japanese recruits going to training camp. They had not slowed down their recruiting service or the draft; they were still at it.

"I feel confident the atomic bomb saved my life. If there had been fighting in the streets I wouldn't have made it. We probably would have gotten bombed along with everyone. The Allies were not the greatest in bombing, since they came over to bomb the power plants one mile from our prison. They put 17 500-pound bombs in our camp and missed the target by a mile. The bombing was not that accurate. They were dropped from B-29's.

"I forgot how I heard of the atomic bomb, but word came through the grapevine that there was a big bomb. Nobody knew it was atomic, it was just big and blew the hell out of everything. We heard about both droppings, and that the Japanese had capitulated September 2. We were all elated about it, just estatic. And the Japanese were quite subservient right away.

"Our camp was blown up, so the Japanese moved us to another camp, and they remained by their interpretation to protect us from the civilian population. The American officers were in charge of the entire thing. So before the U.S. Forces landed we took over, but we didn't venture out of the camp, at least not very far. We maintained our own protection in camp. The civilian guards in charge of the camp disappeared almost immediately. Somebody hollered that one of the guards that I had had many troubles with was in camp. If he had been there I would have killed him, but it turned out that he wasn't. That's the only time in my life I felt that I was going to deliberately kill a man, and I would have.

"The fighters from the Fighting Lady, I don't remember the carrier's actual name, came in with duffel bags of food, cigarettes, and candy, and dropped it to us. Next motor launches came to pick us up to take us aboard a hospital ship. From there we went to the airport, and they flew us out. As I remember we flew from Japan to Guam, to Hawaii and the United States. I was one of the first to get back to the United States.

"It had been quite hard on my family.

Everybody assumed we were dead. All the POW's told me people would ask my sister in the store if she was going to have my body shipped back. As far as she knew I was still alive, so it was hard on them in that fashion. They knew I was alive, but it took months to find out. They would hear in April I was alive at Christmas, so it was quite a reunion when I got back.

"We got back at four o'clock in the morning and they packed us on a bus and took us to Opral Hospital. We spent the night and the next day there and were given physicals. That night we were given liberty and out we went. It was a novel experience. We hadn't seen anything like bars with a counter to stand and drink.

"FOOD WAS THE THING WE MISSED THE MOST."

"I was only there a couple of nights then back to Long Beach. From there I went home. I didn't get out of the service right away. I got a 90-day furlough and a 30-day convalescent furlough. With 120 days of furlough that was enough to be home for Christmas. When I went back I was discharged in February of 1946.

"Our pay was scale for our rank while we were there, and we eventually got a dollar and a half a day rations and a dollar a day bonus. I had the allotment sent to my sister. They stopped it because they didn't know whether I was alive or not. When we got our first check we got a few

"I WAS DISCHARGED IN FEBRUARY OF '46."

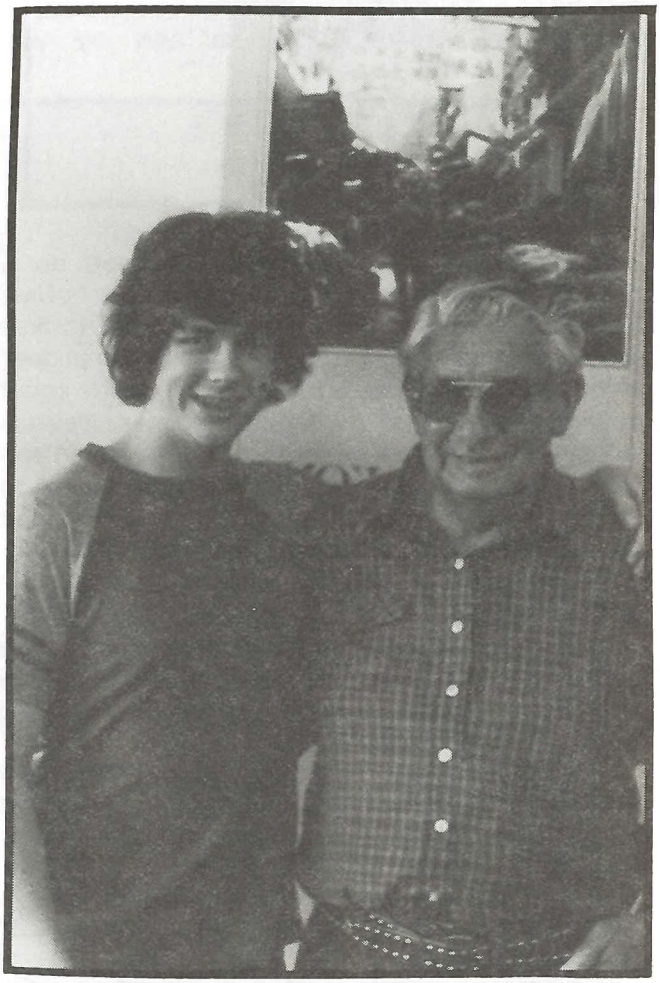
advances, and then we got a check for the whole thing. We were all running around like a bunch of wild men with two or three thousand dollars in our pockets. Mine lasted most of my furlough, but I was broke by the time my furlough was over. I spent most of it on food, and we ate and drank quite a lot. Food was the thing we missed the most, and breakfast was the meal we missed.

"When we got back we just accepted it. I had no bitterness, but I didn't have any Japanese friends either. As time went on I developed Japanese friends and acquaintances, like waitresses who would speak Japanese. I would talk Japanese with them and that type of thing. But no, I was not bitter about the Japanese; they treated us quite well. Most of the soldiers even treated us fairly well. The civilians, the soldiers who had been wounded in China and brought back to Japan, were discharged and put into a veteran's organization. Some of the ones who were in charge of us were pretty rough. We had some bitterness against them, but they went to prison."

I asked my father after having lived through the war and being captured what his views are today. "I have mixed emotions. For one thing, why build more atomic bombs when we have enough to whip the world? It just doesn't make sense that by building more we can have atomic warfare. I feel that basically we have to be a strong military power, and we have to have planes. The B-52's are so old they are practically falling apart. We do have to have equipment to fight a war which will probably be atomic. It is doubtful as to what type of atomic material will be used in any future conflict. So I am not very enthused about spending billions of dollars on MX missiles. For example, the missiles we have now will knock out everything in Russia. Apparently, the top people feel we could survive an atomic war. They estimate that there would be 10 million casualties out of 220 million, that's not many.

"I really can't understand the Viet Nam vets. I was a prisoner of war; I went to war; I know what it is like. I don't know what they expect. I had a son who fought in Viet Nam, and he came back, picked up the pieces and started over. That's what he had to do, so I just can't understand the Viet Nam vets. What do they expect from their country?"

I return to the hero concept of my story. My father stated finally, "I didn't do anything outstanding. I just served my country and held on. Why, I was a prisoner!"



MY FATHER AND ME