

Interview with Henry Peck (Part 1 of 2)

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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

St. Cloud State University Archives

Interviewed by David Overy

Peck ([00:00:04](#)):

[inaudible 00:00:04] a lot of things I forgot.

Overy ([00:00:06](#)):

Sure.

Peck ([00:00:08](#)):

But my old brain will still tick off, and I'll try to--

Overy ([00:00:14](#)):

Okay. Why did you join the National Guard here in Minnesota?

Peck ([00:00:19](#)):

Well, at that time, he was getting a dollar and a half a day working for a farmer, 14, 15 hours a day. I was age 19, where I was ready and he was talking about drafts. So, I thought, well, I heard that this tank company from Brainerd was going off to Fort Lewis. It was supposed to leave around the, I think it was 15th of September, 1940, to go out there.

Overy ([00:00:53](#)):

And you had joined up when?

Peck ([00:00:54](#)):

I joined up in September.

Overy ([00:00:55](#)):

In September? You were 19 years old?

Peck ([00:00:57](#)):

Yeah, in 1940. Then, like everything went, kept being held back and held back until February of '41. And that's when they mobilized us. We went out to, spent 10 days here in the armory and they sent us out to Fort Louis, where we were inducted into the regular army then.

Overy ([00:01:32](#)):

What was it like being in the national guard in Minnesota at that time? Was your training pretty good, equipment?

Peck ([00:01:38](#)):

Well training—Well, no, we only had two tanks. And our training wasn't too much, because it was once a month, I think, we'd come in for training see. As far as my training that I got before we went out to Fort Louis, wasn't very much. Sure, I was learning about machine guns and tearing them apart and so forth. And we put, in September until February, there was-- Put one night down at camp [inaudible 00:02:22], in [inaudible 00:02:23] area. And that was about the only good [inaudible 00:02:29] I had, until after we went west.

Overy ([00:02:32](#)):

In February '41?

Peck ([00:02:35](#)):

In '41, is right.

Overy ([00:02:35](#)):

What was your training at-- Was your training at Fort Louis much better?

Peck ([00:02:39](#)):

Oh yeah, because we were there every day. There they started giving us our ground rules and learning us to heap and step, and keep our ranks in line, such as that. And we would learn to-- We was taught to take our guns apart blind folded and put them back together blindfolded, which paid off many times for me, anyway. And we went, I think it was-- We went on one hike and the guys, they griped about being tankers and not doing infantry. So we didn't go any more of them. But we did a lot of night driving, and I would hate to say to be truthful, how many nights we went out on [inaudible 00:03:41] to train the men how to be camouflaged, using such as that. But then we were getting ready for our maneuvers with the other troops out there in the western part of Washington and I think we spent three or four days there, camped out there and more of less field rations that we were getting then. And when we got the call, we report back to Fort Louis and we all went back to Fort Louis as soon as possible. And then they said we had to-- Got orders to go to San Francisco. And, of course, they didn't tell us just right what we were headed for. We went to San Francisco by train and we got there, they took us over to what they Angel's Island, out there back past Alcatraz. And we was there, I think it was about two weeks, if I'm not mistaken. And during that time, they were loading our equipment on boat, we went on the USS Coleridge, which was a big luxury liner. And when they got all loaded, then they pulled us out and then we started for the Philippine Islands.

Overy ([00:05:58](#)):

What was your specific job at this time?

Peck ([00:06:01](#)):

I was in reconnaissance. My job was going out, checking bridges, checking roads. If a bridge we figured wouldn't hold a tank, then we worked to follow that stream until we could find a place for crossing. Or if we could cross--

Overy ([00:06:19](#)):

You were a private?

Peck ([00:06:20](#)):

I was private first class.

Overy ([00:06:23](#)):

First class.

Peck ([00:06:23](#)):

Yeah.

Overy ([00:06:25](#)):

What was your vehicle?

Peck ([00:06:28](#)):

We used Jeeps and then after we got overseas, we used half-tracks.

Overy ([00:06:36](#)):

I see.

Peck ([00:06:36](#)):

We had motorcycles, but they were kind of a damn nuisance for-- Especially when we got overseas, because there was too many of these [inaudible 00:06:46] cart trails, the Philippines had. They were supposed to be roads, but there was sand, so much sand that it was hard to keep a bike on. [inaudible 00:06:57] jack knife and then getting stuck in the sand.

Overy ([00:07:06](#)):

Did you go right to the Philippines from San Francisco?

Peck ([00:07:06](#)):

Yes, we headed for the Philippines, but we stopped off in Honolulu for a nine hour break. And there's where we picked up a destroyer, that was following us.

Overy ([00:07:20](#)):

Did you have any idea what you were supposed to be doing by going to the Philippines? Did you have any concept of what it was you were going to do or?

Peck ([00:07:28](#)):

Well no, no we didn't. We knew that things weren't too good with the Japanese at that time. What little news that we did get. And of course, everybody just laughed it off, but they figured, well the Japanese won't tackle the United States. So when we got that destroyer, out there floating alongside of us. Then they had a [inaudible 00:08:08] or seaplanes that would go out every morning checking. And after we got to the Philippines, they didn't have us no barracks built, so you know that somebody was pushing someplace pretty heavy. We had these five men tent jobs that they had for us. And we just got in and they were just working on these [inaudible 00:08:34] barracks for us. On the reconnaissance, we was out all over. Well, I say all over, we was up around Lingayen Gulf, checking all bridges in between that and Fort Stotsenburg. And most all them streams, you could cross. There was a few rivers that couldn't be crossed, because they were bigger rivers. These were small mountain streams that run, you could cross them without any bridges. And trying to get an idea of if we ever went into war, we would have some idea of what our roads is like and to use tanks on them. So then we just got into our barracks and just got settled down. Had it made now, didn't have to be all crowded up in them damn little tents.

Overy ([00:09:45](#)):

Did they keep you pretty busy?

Peck ([00:09:47](#)):

Well, no, not too busy. We would go out before noon and we'd be back at noon. And that after our lunch, we would go out and clean up the dust and putting our gun [inaudible 00:10:06] up, so that they were always clean and ready to go, if we needed them. Of course, on the vehicle, the maintenance crew, they had to check the vehicle. So and then the rest of the day, we had off for ourselves.

Overy ([00:10:23](#)):

And you were stationed where particularly at this time, where was your--

Peck ([00:10:23](#)):

Fort Stotsenburg.

Overy ([00:10:23](#)):

Fort Stotsenburg.

Peck ([00:10:28](#)):

Right where Clark Field is now. It's Clark Field in Fort Stotsenburg.

Overy ([00:10:32](#)):

Did you have much contact with civilians during this time?

Peck ([00:10:36](#)):

Just to more or less, what they call the bunk boys. The Phillipinos that come in and for three dollars a month, we would get our washings done and keep the barracks swept, so we didn't have to. Our bunks were made. [inaudible 00:10:55] was a solider, he didn't have to make his bed. He wasn't too much worried about three dollars a month.

Overy ([00:11:05](#)):

Sure.

Peck ([00:11:07](#)):

So they were making good money, these Phillipino bunk boys. So as far as rest of the civilians, no, we didn't have too much contact with them.

Overy ([00:11:24](#)):

What was there for you to do, when you weren't on reconnaissance? Was there much recreation or?

Peck ([00:11:31](#)):

Well you could play football, you could play baseball or you could box, whatever you wanted to, because you had that afternoon off. And then I think it was every Wednesday, was a recreation day. And then on Saturdays, you didn't have any money to run around, so you just go laying around camp.

Overy ([00:11:59](#)):

Was it pretty boring?

Peck ([00:12:02](#)):

Well, not exactly. So you had somebody to, if he had a story to tell or something like that. I couldn't say that it was boring, not for me anyway.

Overy ([00:12:16](#)):

What did you think of the countryside, what did you think of the area you were in?

Peck ([00:12:18](#)):

Well, it was like being out on the desert, I would say, because everything was burnt brown you know, because it was hot and dry, because they had their rainy seasons would come such and

such part of the year. And it was brown, as far as that. I didn't care too much for the country, myself.

Overy ([00:12:45](#)):

Did you get homesick?

Peck ([00:12:47](#)):

Oh, you're bound to, you're bound to, because you write a letter and it would take a month to get back here to the States. And of course, if any of your relatives wrote to you, it was the same way. And as I said, we didn't have a lot of money to be romping the country. Of course, [inaudible 00:13:16] staff or something like, and they made more money. They could do more romping around, visiting different places. But in the end, reconnaissance, I've seen a lot of the Philippines. There was, you got back in mountains and it was kind of pretty in through there.

Overy ([00:13:36](#)):

Cooler probably too.

Peck ([00:13:37](#)):

It was cooler, yeah, because it got hot over there. And Manila, when we crawled off the boat there, I just assumed turned on and walked back and crawled on the boat, because that was a filthy town.

Overy ([00:13:58](#)):

Just physically dirty?

Peck ([00:14:00](#)):

Dirty, dirty and I don't know if it is that way yet or not. I don't know. A lot of it looked like some farmer's barnyard and maybe worse because they had these [inaudible 00:14:14] ponies as taxes. And they had them standing along the curb and of course the manure was yay deep. And then

they had open sewage running along the streets. But after we got out, I liked it better out there, at Stotsenburg at the army base, than I did in Manila. But there was a lot of things I didn't know about the island at that time. I know a hell of a lot more now.

Overy ([00:14:52](#)):

Had you heard about Pearl Harbor? I guess Clark Field was attacked what, the next day?

Peck ([00:14:56](#)):

The next morning.

Overy ([00:14:57](#)):

The next morning?

Peck ([00:14:57](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Overy ([00:14:58](#)):

Had you heard about Pearl Harbor at all?

Peck ([00:14:59](#)):

Yeah, we did. And they shoved us out of Stotsenberg, our half-track right away, after we had breakfast. And we was out between Clark Field and [inaudible 00:15:18] when the attack came.

But it seemed so funny that we had fighter planes in the air from daybreak until about, I would say around 10 o'clock, 10:30, from the time we ate. If these planes came in to refuel and the other ones got on the ground, I was out in a rice patty, I was on guard.

Overy ([00:15:57](#)):

Right outside of Clark Field?

Peck (00:15:59):

Yeah, not probably three quarters of a mile because we was out there for parachute troops. That's what they had us out there for. And I heard that heavy drone in the air and I counted 54 bombers coming in a V formation. And I had no more than heard that and I call over to, we had the half-track in under some bamboo brush there. And I figured, boy, the US must have been up to Formosa some place there, and give them some of their own medicine, when all at once Clark Field was nothing but a bunch of smoke and--

Overy (00:16:54):

So you thought they were American?

Peck (00:16:56):

I thought they were American planes, because see they were so darn high, you couldn't see the thing there, because it was coming right toward me. And I didn't know if I should lay down, run or what, when all that was taking place. But I held my ground and the bombers went on over, and it was headed then for Nickles Field in Manila, and Navy base there at Cavite. So they got some of the same dose we got at Clark Field. Well after these bombers went over, then in come these Navy fighters. And everyone, the planes that did stand the bombing, they went to take off the field. Well, they were shot down before they even got in the air. I think we had, after all of that was over with, I think we had three B-40 fighters left. So it didn't leave too much of our air then. We thought after Hawaiian hell, they didn't take them B-17s and B-18s, and go to Formosa and hit them that morning, early. I wish they would have had time. It was only 250 miles from the Northern part of Luzon to [Tramosa 00:18:31]. It seemed so funny that-- And the only other planes [inaudible 00:18:40], the only planes that they had left, was ones that was stuck out in some bamboo runway. But when we went on Bataan we had three B-40s. So we didn't have no

air cover at all, and that what was so God darn rough, when we would get into a stiff battle. The God damn Japanese, [inaudible 00:19:08]dive bombers and that and that really raised hell with us.

Overy ([00:19:12](#)):

What happened to you or what did you do right after the bombing? What was your responsibility then?

Peck ([00:19:17](#)):

Then I reported to the half-track team, to my half-track. Then we got orders over the radio, that we had to go back. We didn't go into Stotsenburg. We had another Half-track further to the west of us, I suppose, about five miles, something like that. And we was to report there. And then soon as the planes kind of quieted down, then we took off. And we reported over to our other half-track. And then from there, I think that we had to come in, into Stotsenburg, so that we could start to load up for to go out to the field. And we was in there I think three days, and we was bombed twice. But they were all small planes, I suppose from Navy planes. And we got out to the field and then they moved us to south of Manila, the whole battalion went. Then we got down there, I suppose the Japanese troops was landing in Moro Gulf. I didn't get any dope in on it, because we was out reconnaissance down in there.

Overy ([00:21:10](#)):

South of Manila?

Peck ([00:21:12](#)):

Manila, yeah. And all at once, we got orders that we had to go, head north to up to Lingayen Gulf. And one of the companies went south. That seemed kind of funny to me, as a battalion tanks, why they was breaking these companies up, making them thinner instead of stronger. But I

wasn't running things, I was just the low man on the totem pole there. So our tanks took off and there was two of our half-tracks, we started out. We went a different direction than what the tanks did. We went off to by Angeles and up past the Clark Field. We went up to a little town of San Miguel's, where we run into the rear echelon. And our tanks then had been in battle already.

Overy ([00:22:27](#)):

Rear echelon you mean just the--

Peck ([00:22:27](#)):

The kitchen truck and a maintenance crew and stuff like that. That's where they were at.

Overy ([00:22:33](#)):

And that was your battalion or that was--

Peck ([00:22:34](#)):

That was our company.

Overy ([00:22:35](#)):

Oh, your company?

Peck ([00:22:36](#)):

Yeah, our company. The C company went south and they had to take their maintenance men, in case they had to get some maintenance work done. Then we got in there that night, and one of our tanks come in to San Miguel, with a sergeant and a lieutenant and they'd had a hole blown in the back end. They had put one of these heat bombs on it. And they didn't dare to shut the tank off, because if they shut the tank off, they probably wouldn't have gotten it started again. We had a general there. He was sleeping. And he was grumbling because that tank was keeping him awake. He wanted them to shut it off. And they told him if they shut it off, they wouldn't get it started again. But he didn't care. He said he wanted to get his sleep. And that was a guy by the

name of General Weaver. He was the general in charge over the two tank battalions that was over there. So this was about 10 o'clock at night, then we got a call that Colonel Miller wanted a half-track up where he was at. He was up towards [inaudible 00:24:11] river, where the tanks were fighting ground troops. And so they asked for volunteers, and then this lieutenant had to come in in his tank. He was supposed to go with the half-track. So our half-track crew, we volunteered to go up and take Lieutenant [Anticosti 00:24:37] with us, and we went up there and here Colonel Miller had the setup for a tank roadblock, wait for Japanese tanks to come down this one road. It was about midnight, it was, and here comes these three Japanese tanks, which they were fired on and it was knocked into the ditch. So he had no problem with that then on, or he was coming, covering the rear end of the tanks as they was going back toward San Miguel air. We had to hit another time. I forget what the name of that Tom was, but anyway, it was supposed to be a bunch of Philippine infantry coming through on a train. And we had to get to that and crossing to make sure that that train got through with that dumping of infantry. So we did, we got there and just about the time that train went through, and there was nothing happened there. But as we, after this Filipino train had went through, we were going down a road and here somebody was out in the field firing at us, just going down the road. And it had to have been either a Japanese machine gun or a Filipino that was working with the Japanese. And when I seen that blast, I did, I blasted their way too.

Overy ([00:26:38](#)):

What, did you have .30 calibers.

Peck ([00:26:39](#)):

I had .50, I had a .50 caliber.

Overy ([00:26:42](#)):

50 caliber.

Peck ([00:26:42](#)):

I had a .50 caliber that I used. We had two .50s and two .30s on that half track. We had firepower there and then there was no more firing. So we went back and then, I forget if it was the day or the day after, that they moved us back past the Clark Field into a parking area. And it was down by the town of San Fernando. And that was, we was in there two days. And then they about 10 o'clock at night, told us that we had to move back on the peninsula of Bataan. And there'd been trucks going, you know, empty trucks and had joined back and forth toward Manila. And I afterwards, I don't know why all of them trucks that was going into the town what the hell he was doing, going empty when they could have been loaded with food and stuff, instead of leaving it in warehouses there for the Japanese to take over, you know. Gas and stuff, such as that. Well, we moved back onto Bataan, and that was New Year's Eve. Yeah. Cause the next day was my birthday. I put my 21st birthday in down there. And they kept just, you know, kind of still blocking the Japanese. They was having tank battles coming down that peninsula there. And, they put a front-line across the Bataan peninsula up at, I think it was Malang. Then they had another one that they was getting set up at Orin. And that was the line that we held the longest. We had different battles in the Japanese and breakthrough a line, and then they would call the tanks or half-tracks in to help to push the Japanese back because he had always hit for these, the Philippine army ones. And once the Japanese hit the Philippine army, they didn't have too good at training. And they would just showed their gun and take off. To heck with it. They was about to get shot at, you know.

Overy ([00:29:37](#)):

Where you pretty much in continuous contact with the enemy as you were withdrawing from north?

Peck ([00:29:42](#)):

I was on a front line, but I was more on a beach defense. My platoon that I was with, we was about within about half a mile of the front line. They have a beach defense as well as a front line. They use mostly their, like your 31st Infantry and your Philippine Scouts, which were good fighting troops. They had their cavalry and they also had a--

Overy ([00:30:23](#)):

Horse cavalry?

Peck ([00:30:24](#)):

Yeah. They had a horse cavalry. When he got out of Bataan though, then they had to butcher most of them so to feed the troops. We were cut 21st of January of '42. We were cut to two meals a day. So we were on a rationed detail, you know. And that was a lot of the fault of us losing so many men after to surrender. Was it they were sick with malaria, dysentery, going in there and half starved to death too. So when the time to surrender, it was probably a good thing because it would've been just a regular bloodbath you know. With after the troops had come, it took Singapore come back in there, it was just too many. Once they broke the line, we couldn't push him. There was too many popping in there. So then we had to start backing up and that's when they surrendered.

Overy ([00:31:32](#)):

What was, you were what, in Bataan then from January through April '42. What was your day-to-day life like then? And what--

Peck ([00:31:42](#)):

Well, when we didn't have to go up to help push Japanese or something like that back, we were out looking for something to eat because we were hungry then. And we would probably find pineapples or bananas. Or we had a lot of these cashew nut fruits that taste something like a pear and they was shaped like a pear. And we really were out scabbing for stuff to eat too what with how hungry we were.

Overy ([00:32:18](#)):

Did you have any direct contact with Japanese troops during the defensive Bataan?

Peck ([00:32:24](#)):

Yes. I was one battle that we were in and then, we'd in a tank and was moving tanks back and he ran off the road and we went up there to try to get that tank retrieved. And I don't know, they seem like get there orders. There was too much God damn red tape going through your line up down to work. Like if you would had been on the ball and had a wrecker up there at the same time that these half-tracks and that all went in see. And Colonel Miller had us all stationed out so because we had a big cane field. Sugar cane field out here in front of us. We were right out in the open. And when a goll darn wrecker got there, the Jap troops were there already. Well, they came, we killed a 1500 Japanese out there in that cane field. Which I don't know how in the heck, they must've went back and took a head count or something. But we had two half-track 75's. It was shooting point blank in this cane field. And these other, street half-tracks were shooting small arms, .30 caliber, .50 caliber bullets.

Overy ([00:33:58](#)):

That's what you were doing, shooting the .50 caliber.

Peck ([00:34:02](#)):

I was shooting. I was on a .50 caliber machine gun. And by golly, we were holding them until the dive bombers come in. And then we had to get taked out of the [inaudible 00:34:16] to try to save our equipment that we did have. We'd, before it was, I forget how many tanks they lost to one river on the count of the engineer's blown the bridge before the tanks got there to cross.

Overy ([00:34:29](#)):

American engineers blew the bridge?

Peck ([00:34:30](#)):

Yeah. And so we had to try to protect every machine we could. But the only thing that I really had myself real combat was that there, when we was fighting the, those darn dive bombers and the Japanese troops that was coming in there when we was trying to retrieve that tank.

Overy ([00:35:03](#)):

Did you have an idea or a sense during your final retreat, that we actually knew what we were doing? I mean, was there a lot of confusion or?

Peck ([00:35:19](#)):

It, you would think I, for myself, I couldn't figure out why we were retreating so far apart from where the fighting was going on sometimes. And when we got on the Bataan, then we were all in closer. We had more troops in there to protect the little peninsula there. And hopefully we would have somebody who was way up in the middle part of the island. But it didn't seem like them officers was getting things straightened out or some damn thing, because there was a lot of things there, as they say, like those trucks. It was coming out of Manila, going onto Bataan. What the heck, where they brought in them empty trucks down there, unless they were loaded. And then we no more and get down there, and then you get to hearing stories about big warehouses full in

Manila that they left. Now, they had this plan of if the island was ever attacked, it was planned years ago before the war even broke out. Why didn't they have some big supply dumps built into marvelous mountain or something like that? You know, instead up having all into Manila.

Overy ([00:36:56](#)):

Did you have any sense about what MacArthur had done or were there any stories going on about MacArthur at this time and you were defending the time?

Peck ([00:37:04](#)):

Well, when the only thing he was when he took off from Pregador, and they started to call him Dug out Doug. And they figured that he was running, you know, that he let us down. Because it was such a kind of a, I'd say a screwed up mess all the way through. Nothing seemed to be working the way that we were told things was supposed to work during a war. But they say a private or a corporal or a buck Sergeant, something like that. They didn't know what the hell was going on in G2, or as the fighting man himself.

Overy ([00:37:55](#)):

Did you think that your, that your unit did about as well as it could?

Peck ([00:38:01](#)):

Well, they did the job they were put out to do. We couldn't hold the whole Japanese army that's for sure. You know, if, as they say, when any part of that unit was called in to fight, they were there to fight. Besides we were on 24 hour beach defense. Cause it was pretty hard to use tanks out in these rice patties and that they had, when they use them, they had to be on a road, you know, cause otherwise they would just sunk out there in that gumbo that they have over there its just a little bit wet underneath. I think our outfits did their job. We were supposed to only hold that island for a month and we held it for four months. So--

Overy ([00:39:00](#)):

Were you on the beach pretty much the whole time then?

Peck ([00:39:03](#)):

Pretty much, pretty much. There was four days that I had an attack of malaria. They sent me back to their rear echelon to the doctor and I got some quinine into me and kind of stopped the damn chills, they needed to have a half-track crew up to the front. And so they asked for volunteers and of course I had to go. Because I am a motorcycle rider, first Sergeant, and then the driver. And of course on half-track you only had two guns on, it was a .30 caliber and a .50 caliber machine gun. So I went back to the front and when we got up to the front line, they'd did their job already. So there was no battle there for me to get into. So, I said, well, being I'm up here I might as well go back to my unit and fight with my own unit. Instead of fighting with somebody that I hadn't fought with before, you know, and they see a day bomber they so damn used to running and heading for a foxhole. It was pretty hard for him to keep him in a vehicle going down the road when they would see a dive bomber flying over. You know.

Overy ([00:40:44](#)):

Did you think that your equipment just didn't measure up to the Japanese at this time? Did you feel like you had good equipment or could trust it?

Peck ([00:40:53](#)):

Well, our equipment, I don't know it was all new equipment that we took over there. And the one night after the surrender and I seen what the Japanese had, we just didn't have enough manpower and we didn't have ammunition or fuel to really have went into a good battle. Because towards the end they give you orders to not shoot until you could see the white of their eyes.

Overy ([00:41:28](#)):

So not to waste ammunition then, huh?

Peck ([00:41:30](#)):

That's right. It, we were just like a crippled duck sitting out on the pond is what people were doing. And the Japanese, they had these old cats that they had in world war one. Americans had in World War I. And that's what they use to pull their big guns with.

Overy ([00:41:52](#)):

Caterpillar tractors.

Peck ([00:41:53](#)):

Yeah.

Overy ([00:41:53](#)):

Is that right?

Peck ([00:41:57](#)):

And the, their bombs, they had these rivots out of the fan on these old Model T Fords. I don't know if you ever seen a fan on a Model T or not, they were riveted on, and that's what we would find after a bombing raid, was these damn rivets. Then they explode, that averages just be like bullets hitting ya.

Overy ([00:42:21](#)):

Sure.

Peck ([00:42:23](#)):

They were throwing a lot of stuff at us that they bought from the United States. [crosstalk 00:18:30] And I stay up on it. And it surprised me that they had these old caterpillars, the big artillery pieces.

Overy ([00:42:43](#)):

And you mentioned that you had malaria, you got malaria. It must've been an awfully miserable existence living in those jungles, wasn't it?

Peck ([00:42:52](#)):

Well it was hot, it was heat coming up from the ground on a count of, it's low ground. That's what they used is for the rice patties, and your bamboo and that stuff grows in there. And that no air comes in normally that they could get in under cover us to go in there and dozers and doze this God darn bamboo out of the road so they make room to put a kitchen truck and stuff like that in. But right out for I was out right out on a beach. It was not too bad because we could get a breeze in off of Manila bay.

Overy ([00:43:32](#)):

It helped keep the bugs away too, huh?

Peck ([00:43:34](#)):

Yeah, But that malaria was son of a gun. And then after that, after the surrender, then, well, in fact, the night before, the night that we surrendered, because we didn't, we was there the next day waiting for the Japanese to come in and they didn't come in until the next day after that. And of course that night I had to have a damned attack to malaria. So I tried to get some quinine from the Italian doctor and he said he didn't have any. So that's what I had facing me going up the hike from Marvales up to San Fernando, but luck had it that I didn't have any chills. I think I walked it out of me. You know.

Overy ([00:44:38](#)):

What's it like having malaria?

Peck ([00:44:40](#)):

Well, you, your bones ache. And then you will chill three hours. You just stare and just shake. Just make a building rattle is what you do. And that darn thing and stuff will come every 24 hours. If I had a chill say at noon today, I would shiver for three hours. Then it would break on me. The next day at noon, you could just time it. And that's what that damn malaria was. And if you used to walk out into the sun, it would just knock you out, just as if somebody cold cocked you with a club or something.

Overy ([00:45:28](#)):

Must be awfully weak during that.

Peck ([00:45:29](#)):

You are, you are weak. And in fact, I think you talked to Walt [inaudible 00:45:39] yesterday?

Overy ([00:45:39](#)):

No, I didn't.

Peck ([00:45:40](#)):

Oh you didn't?

Overy ([00:45:40](#)):

No he didn't make it.

Peck ([00:45:41](#)):

Oh he didn't make it? Well he was, after we were prisoners, he was in the hospital, what they call it the hospital area. It was a place that we had for Philippine troops, native NEPA covering. He had malaria and he just had a chill. And of course he was in different barracks than I was. And I was, I had to be right next to the door and I see Walt go by and he just went by and it just seemed like if somebody clipped him after he'd had this chill, he had to go to the bathroom and that was

out there. So he was headed for that. Then by golly, I seen what happened. He just passed out. So we had to get him out of that sun. So I and a couple of other skinny prisoners, we got out there and we rolled him into the shade and that's all we could do. And finally by golly he come to after he was in the shade for awhile. Made it to the, went on to the bathroom. I think he went in his clothes too at the same time. Malaria is something that's not good. Yeah. Even when I come back, I couldn't give blood on a count of I'd had malaria. And I think that it's even times that I've had light attacks. It didn't go into the shivering. But you just, you feel dumpy, just comes on and-
- You take malaria. They say, it'll come back or they told us anyway, it'll come back at you, if stayed down in the hotter climates, you know.

Overy ([00:47:48](#)):

That stuff just stays in your blood I guess.

Peck ([00:47:51](#)):

Stays in your blood. Yeah.

Overy ([00:47:54](#)):

We're talking about Filipino troops. Did you have much contact with them in Bataan?

Peck ([00:48:01](#)):

Well, there would be some come through, they had, not to where there was a lot of them. In fact, like our company of men that was here from Brainerd, we were mostly right on the beach of Manila, strung out, down and around. But once in a while, there would be a Filipino entered, one night, I suppose he got tired of being up on frontline so he would start back, he may have his rifle with him and everything, probably out looking for something to eat too. Same as we were.

Overy ([00:48:44](#)):

You said the Filipino stocks had a pretty good reputation.

Peck (00:48:46):

Well, they were. They were trained by US officers. You know? They've had them ever since, I guess the Spanish-American War. But they were used the same as American Troops. But the Philippine Army was not. That was the Philippine government.

Overy (00:49:08):

They were pretty bad?

Peck (00:49:09):

Well, some of them only had, [inaudible 00:49:09] was only in three, four days before the war broke out. You know. They didn't know no more about a gun and they knew about flying.

Overy (00:49:15):

What did you think about? How did you feel when you heard of the surrender?

Peck (00:49:22):

Well, when they, when we heard that we, they were surrendering us, we didn't know what the heck was going to happen. We were downhearted to figure that our country let us down. And that's what they did.

Overy (00:49:42):

Had you been expecting some help when you were in Bataan? Had you thought that the people--

Peck (00:49:42):

Well--

Overy (00:49:46):

--that people were going to show up and help you out?

Peck (00:49:47):

There were rumors going and all, that they were going to bring troops in. And we figured they probably, if they did, they would have to fly them in, airdrop them in there. But we didn't know just what the Japanese Navy had out between the China Sea. But we expected they at least, or they got us in ammunition and medical supplies and some kind of fuel to run our vehicles on. But they didn't. They were sending all their troops and stuff to Australia, and to hell with us guys.

Overy (00:50:38):

Sound like you were really bitter about that. Most--

Peck (00:50:40):

We were. And still bitter. Not only at the way the Japanese treated us, but the way our own country did us when they put us in such a gal damn place. And of course, it was probably, you look back and you think, "Well, maybe we had to spend three and a half years as prisoners, starve to death, that's probably what helped to save the country." Because they had to get troops into Australia because if the Japanese woulda got Australia, then it a been a different story. They would've had to battle their way in from the ocean. There was nothing like having land to have land-based planes to start off from. So it-- But we were bitter that our country let us down. Because MacArthur took off, he went to Australia, sure he stuck his neck out, he too. But [DeLarry 00:51:53] left Wainwright and King and them to take the blunt of the whole darn thing.

Overy (00:52:04):

Did that continue to color the way you viewed MacArthur even after the war?

Peck (00:52:09):

Yes, it did in a way. Hey, I probably shouldn't say it, but it did. I never cared too much for MacArthur after that. Because he was supposed to know what the heck he was doing over there and I think it, some young army private that had a year's training in a service could have done just as damn good a job. That's right. Because all the gal damn difficulties that they had during the time and the things that was pulled, that it could have been different, even in the beginning.

Overy (00:52:57):

So, you were never a big MacArthur admirer?

Peck (00:52:59):

No. No, I'm not. I had more respect for Wainwright than I did MacArthur, and also General King because he was the one that went up and surrendered us. Wainwright, he was still on [Corregidor 00:53:14]. But they tipped the brown bun in right along with us.

Overy (00:53:24):

Would you describe for me what the surrender was like, what you experienced, what happened when the surrender took place?

Peck (00:53:36):

Well, we were being pushed back, we knew that the [inaudible 00:53:43] and we knew that we were, probably if we couldn't hold, they was going to push us right into the gal darn China Sea there in Manila Bay. And we knew they were fighting heavy because where I'd been on beach defense all that time, our platoon commander and I and a driver and a radio operator, was up just a little ways up when watching for a troop, Japanese Troop movement, when, oh, I suppose it was about 4:00 in the afternoon and we seen a Filipino coming through the brush and bamboo. A little higher ground, but it ain't hard, [Addison 00:54:43], he said, "Hey Joe, watch out." He says,

"The Japanese Army is right behind me." And about that time bullets started hitting our half-track. Well, we knew that we had contacted troops anyway. So it's funny that we didn't get surrounded, but we didn't, we got out to the road. And we was giving all the firepower we could. Well, there was two of us on machine guns and we were trying to sweep up ahead so that our vehicles would be able to get through. You could keep them down on the ground anyway. We got off to the road and then we went down the road, I think it was about three miles to a little town of [Lamii 00:55:35]. And there we, him and I, we set up a machine gun nest. He was on one side of the highway and I was on the other and we had our half-track in camouflaged and we had our radio operator there. And well, I suppose I would say it was around about 6:00, about that time, I was on this bank and it's where this stream come down and here I could see that that stream was turning a different color. Of course, there was a lot of firing up above us where we were at. Lieutenant said, he says, "Boy." He said, "They must be doing a lot of battling right on that creek." And he said, "it's starting to turn colored." And then we got orders to, over the radio, to move back to the Bataan Airfield. And there was, again I thought, "Why in hell are we moving back that far when we could probably do some good right where we were at you know?" But he says, "Well, we'll move back." And on the way back the driver, he was so gal darned scared that he, there was a big mangrove tree, I don't know, great big son of a gun, and the road went [inaudible 00:57:23] on both sides. And what do you know? He had to hit that thing dead center. Well, there's where maybe some of my problems are from my back and stuff happened, but I wasn't thinking about my aches and pains at that time. And I don't think that the Lieutenant did either, but the darn half-track's off the track. Well, there we were stranded and it takes about three hours to put the track on one of those when they happen to throw one. But as luck had, there was a tank come back, come through and come by and by golly, they hooked a cable on

and we pulled that half-track on back to Bataan Airfield on the bogie wheels. So we got the half-track back that far in. And when we got back there, then they go out and they told us to pull over, part some to our machine guns and throw them every place, any which way. Fix the half-track so it wouldn't run, smash in the motor, the block. Do anything they could so that they couldn't use it. And that's when we figured that was the tail end of it. Because they said that General King was going up to surrender the men that was on Bataan. But he said it was just too much of a blood bath and too many men were too weak to fight, had been on the line too long. And so that's how it come up, that we found out that we were being surrendered.

Overy ([00:59:34](#)):

What was the surrender itself like for you? What happened?

Peck ([00:59:39](#)):

Well, it wasn't too much that really happened as far as it was, I was hurt to think that we had to surrender to the Japanese and we didn't know how we were going to be used. We didn't know if they was going to line us up and shoot us or just what the heck was going to happen. But I thought, " Well, we were with, we're all in a company and if that's what happens, that's what's happens. There's nothing that we can do about it." Because we had to take orders from the higher up. That's one thing you learn in the service is that you take orders from the higher up, and it's all passed right down to the little guy then.

Overy ([01:00:19](#)):

Were you marched somewhere to be surrendered or did the General--

Peck ([01:00:24](#)):

No, no.

Overy ([01:00:24](#)):

--show up to--

Peck ([01:00:25](#)):

They come in, our company, or battalion was all back into one little area, in a ravine. Way off in some, I even see pictures of us taken by the Japanese of this same ravine. We had men on both sides when the Japanese troops come in. And of course there was some officers was in the bunch, of course, they were yelling this and that and you didn't know what the heck they was saying because you couldn't understand Japanese. And finally, they got an interpreter. And while we were waiting that morning, the troops come through there staggering and all, they've been being pushed too. And there was one guy that, one Japanese, that I don't know if he was sick or drunk or what, but anyway, he had two of his buddies was helping him along and as they went on down onto the trail there, there was one of these Japanese officers, I see him take off after him. Pretty soon we heard a shot. Well, this Japanese officer came back to these two soldiers that was helping this other one, so I suppose we wanted to know what in the hell? If they shoot their own troops, what the hell are they going to do us guys? But they put two guards out there around us. There was officer's coming and a going. But the interpreter, he was trying to tell who was, Colonel Miller was in charge of that group at that time. And they said they was going to get us something to eat, which they didn't. They come with a couple of spoonfuls of whole kernel rice in a little envelope and passed out. But what the heck? We had no way to cook it or anything of the kind so we ate it raw. And we hadn't had nothing to eat all that day. So it started to getting toward evening and they got us all up and lined us up and went through and took rings and watches and knives and anything like that. Give us a shake down. And when they got all that stuff gathered up then they had us to sit back down again.

And they said that they was going to start us marching out. And the officers and they talking to the interpreter and he said, "Well, they had trucks they was supposed to haul us out." Well, he told us that the Japanese took over them trucks and are using them, that we had to walk. So it was about 7:00 at night they lined us up all down the road and they started down the road. Well, we hiked for about two hours, I would say, it was getting pretty dark and I suppose the guards figured, "Well, we'd be slipping off and going into the hills or something." See? So they got us all over on the side of the road and told us to [inaudible 01:04:25], that was to rest. So by cracky, we sat down and they should have kept us a walking at night and got us in the shade through the daytime, been better. But anyway, they woke us up pretty early in the morning. Just what time it was, I don't know, I didn't have any watch on me. But they started us out and they was pushing us right along, pretty good clip. And see, every two hours they would change their guard, put fresh guards on us, hiking up. But the stronger men, they took off and they went off and left the weaker ones behind, which I was one of them too. But we-

Overy ([01:05:29](#)):

You mean, they got away?

Peck ([01:05:31](#)):

No, no. They went with Japanese troops, see? And we were more what'd you call stragglers because the guards had to stay with the main bunch. And then we would see where somebody was either [inaudible 01:05:47] or shot or something.

Overy ([01:05:52](#)):

So you were in the back [crosstalk 01:05:52]-

P

eck ([01:05:51](#)):

I was with the stragglers. In fact, we made it from [Marveilles 01:05:57], 12:00 at night, we come into the town of [Balanga 01:06:03]. There was five of us together and there was a guard out in the middle of the road, told us where the fence was, where the compound, where we was supposed to stay. But it is funny, they didn't shoot us too, you know? Because we were straggling along, but there was no troops no place. See no Japanese troops, they were all pushing in so they could get ready to hit Corregidor, see? That's what they were doing.

Overy ([01:06:35](#)):

So there really wasn't anybody watching you in the back at all?

Peck ([01:06:38](#)):

Nope. Nope. We seen where there was, they say men that had got killed off on the way up, and that's the reason I say it's funny that they didn't shoot us because we were stragglers.

Overy ([01:06:50](#)):

Luck again?

Peck ([01:06:51](#)):

Yeah. And we stayed in that compound, it was four days. And then one morning they told us to line up, we were going to start walking and when we got up the road away, they was going to feed us. Well gal darn, we were now in there about four or five days without anything to eat. And they had one spigot out there in the field for us so we could fill our canteens, and of course everybody filled their canteen. Because boy, coming up, it was murder. Because we couldn't find no wells, no nothing. We didn't want to drink out of any of those polluted creeks that they had, a lot of men did.

So we started out and we marched all that day. And that night they pulled us into another compound where they had another spigot so we could get water, so that canteen of water had to do us all that day, but they didn't feed us. And then, we're tired, we'd lay down and rest and the next morning they told us they was going to feed us again. Well, they did, they give us a rice ball after we left, after we walked a couple of hours. And then we walked all that day. By that time we was getting in closer to San Fernando and they, it was an old sugar mill there and that's where they pulled us in there for the night. And then the next day they went and started us out again and we marched to about 10:30 I think it was. And they told us we was going to get fed again as soon as we got into town. Well, we got into San Fernando and it was a bunch of prisoners in there that was waiting to go to [O'Donnell 01:09:22], and they did. They passed us out all a rice ball and we had spigots there, but to hot, the pipes was on top, the water was warm. I figured it was wet. It looked to me like some big old storage building or something that had burnt down, because it had a concrete floor and there was men in there with dysentery and oh man, it was just a bunch of blow flies and everything else. And they kept us there a couple of days and then they put us on a train. Then they took us to Camp O'Donnell. They didn't have enough buildings for the men, a lot of them had to sleep out on the ground at night. But there, they tried to feed us three meals a day, rice and--

Overy ([01:10:22](#)):

[crosstalk 01:10:22] O'Donnell.

Peck ([01:10:22](#)):

At O'Donnell, yeah. We went to [Capas 01:10:26] there and then we had to hike six miles in there into O'Donnell. But a person can go, I found out you can go a long time without eating but you got to have water.

Overy ([01:10:40](#)):

Where do you? You said that you stopped every night somewhere.

Peck ([01:10:44](#)):

Yeah.

Overy ([01:10:45](#)):

Were you able to rest at all?

Peck ([01:10:47](#)):

Well, yeah. You was so gosh darned tired. It was so darned hot and they kept you on the move and they tried to, as further north we went, the more they tried to keep us together. They would keep prodding you, it was there was men ahead of us and there were men behind us that was coming out of the jungle back in their troops. So they kind of had to keep us a moving so that we wouldn't get mixed up with the other troops that was coming out.

Overy ([01:11:24](#)):

Were you and your buddies able to keep up pretty well during the march?

Peck ([01:11:26](#)):

Well, I did after we left Balanga, because I hadn't had any more of them attacks of malaria. And I think I'd have been, I'd been in good shape because I was feeling good at the time of the surrender. But I thought I was about a good a shape as any of them were. But I had that darned attack of malaria that evening.

Overy ([01:11:53](#)):

Was, among the Japanese who were guarding you, was there any brutality except when people dropped out or tried to get away? Did they?

Overy ([01:12:00](#)):

--brutality, except when people dropped out or tried to get away, did they bother you at all as you were going?

Peck ([01:12:06](#)):

No. Japanese civilians would be more-- At first the guards they were trying to keep us moving and keep the Filipinos away from us.

Overy ([01:12:25](#)):

Because the Filipinos were trying to help you? Is that it?

Peck ([01:12:28](#)):

The Filipinos were trying to feed us. The Japanese civilians were just about the worst of it. In the bunch that I was in see, I can't talk for--

Overy ([01:12:41](#)):

What did they do? What did the Japanese do?

Peck ([01:12:43](#)):

They had these black snakes, bullwhips.

Overy ([01:12:47](#)):

Is that right?

Peck ([01:12:48](#)):

Cracking a man on the legs, and it's funny that the guards didn't ever said anything to him. So, it was something that we had to take. It was no good. As far as the guards that I was with, I didn't see nobody-- Unless it were broke to make, if they seen water, then they might get battered around because he was breaking ranks. But as long as you stayed in ranks, went up the road, I

had no problem there. There was men in my company that I started out with, detail was in O'Donnell. Hell, three, four days before I got there.

Overy ([01:13:49](#)):

What was the train ride like?

Peck ([01:13:52](#)):

Well, we was packed in there like sardines in their little metal cars. I suppose they were probably 20 feet long and maybe seven and a half wide. They tried to stick a hundred men in each one of them. They had these little donkey engines that the Filipinos had, that pulled the train. They couldn't go too fast because they had a lot of light back there that was in there and of course, that sun beating down on that metal, you can just about figure. Men would dysentery in there. Was one hell of a mess I'll tell you. It almost makes you want to throw up when you talk about it. But, we got there okay. That's when I went to seeing men laying out on the ground, no clothes on.

Overy ([01:15:03](#)):

That was in O'Donnell?

Peck ([01:15:03](#)):

At O'Donnell. The Filipinos there, they tried to get grub into some, in which they did. That just depend on the guard that was standing in the door. If they could throw it to him and he caught it, he would pass it back. For some men they got something to eat, some didn't. After the train, we got to move into it, then it would be pretty hard for the Filipinos to get anything into it.

Overy ([01:15:39](#)):

How long were you at Camp O'Donnell?

Peck ([01:15:42](#)):

I was there six weeks. They took us out of there and moved us to Cabanatuan because rainy season was coming in. They were trying to get shelter for all the men because we had a lot of men who didn't have no roof over their heads.

Overy ([01:16:03](#)):

So, they were concerned at least a little bit about-

Peck ([01:16:06](#)):

Yeah, there was somebody who was kind of worried about that because they moved us out of there, trucked us to Cabanatuan. They put me in what they call the hospital area. They put you over there to die, because that's what they figured you was going to do.

Overy ([01:16:30](#)):

Because of malaria?

Peck ([01:16:32](#)):

Because of malaria and because they lost a lot of troops while they were trying to take Bataan; so yeah, kind of malaria. We didn't know that at that time, but they wouldn't give us no medicine. They gave us no quinine as long as Corregidor was fighting. See, Corregidor held on much longer than we did. They lasted till the 6th of May. I think that I probably would have probably died with the damn malaria if it hadn't been my buddy that come into O'Donnell. He went out on a detail back onto Bataan to help scavenge for a lot of metal and stuff, picked up the tubes and throw it away when they were coming up to those men. He came in after that to Bataan, and he had seven quinine pills. I guess that saved my life.

Overy ([01:17:39](#)):

He gave them all to you?

Peck ([01:17:40](#)):

He gave them all.

Overy ([01:17:42](#)):

Was he in the Brainerd crew?

Peck ([01:17:43](#)):

Yeah. He lives out at Sandpoint, Idaho right now. He's by the name of Larry Albert. I took one of them a day, and it stopped the goddamn chills. You're supposed to have three of them a day [inaudible 01:18:05] pills. But I thought, "Well, I'll take one and see if I can't string it out." By golly that helped to carry me over until the goll darn Japs went to ration quinine for the prisoners.

Overy ([01:17:43](#)):

This is Cabanatuan?

Peck ([01:18:23](#)):

Yeah, Cabanatuan. At O'Donnell, they didn't even hardly do anything for us there. [inaudible 01:18:32] burial detail all day long, the boys would die of dysentery and malaria all day. The night after we got into Cabanatuan, then we started to getting this wet beriberi and a dry beriberi. I had the dry beriberi, where my ankles, feet would swell. You sit on the bumps, like sitting on this here when your feet didn't quite touch the floor, then watch the water creep up from underneath your toenails. This damn dry beriberi. I draw disability on both my legs and feet now after that. Because they just burn continually, all the time. The doctor claimed it, the nerves were shot and then with dry beriberi, it bloated up.

Overy ([01:19:34](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peck ([01:19:37](#)):

Take a 150 pound man, and he'd die probably 300 pounds. Just full of water.

Overy ([01:19:44](#)):

Does this come from malnutrition or something?

Peck ([01:19:46](#)):

Yeah, malnutrition. They didn't have the burial. Men didn't die off as they did there at O'Donnell because they didn't have no medication at all, they lost men in Cabanatuan from different things. A lot of men had bedsores, and gangrene had set in. There were a lot of diseases going on. You talk to some of these doctors and they don't realize that all that stuff can happen, because they never had to go through it. They never send a POW to a doctor that was in a prison camp, they send you to these civilian doctors. They maybe was in the army, but they got to have a lot to learn about what happened. For sure, even if you was not in the service and you go to get an order sure, there's a lot of things pop up for these prisoners. There's a hell of a lot of things that was popping up a long time ago that shouldn't have been popping up, and they said, "Well, it's just your age."

Overy ([01:21:10](#)):

What sticks in your mind most about the O'Donnell experience? You were there you say six weeks?

Peck ([01:21:15](#)):

I was there six weeks and I had malaria there-- I don't know. Some of it I think I probably blanked it out too.

Overy ([01:21:39](#)):

Okay, sure.

Peck (01:21:41):

But that's I thought about that.

Overy (01:21:44):

But Cabanatuan was better.

Peck (01:21:47):

Oh, yes. You had a roof over your head. They say that there was a lot of men and even myself, that come into O'Donnell, and we had no roof over our head. If it rained, you got wet and you hope you're running a favor and getting wet. But it happens here, the same thing would happen over there. You try to stand up and get back in under the eaves. The buildings would be full of men and any place for a shelter to keep that damn rain off from you. Even at night you would-- The eave was far enough over so that you couldn't lay lengthways. If you happen to find space enough, you could hold it and lay it in under the eave so that-- But you had to be so careful there because lots of times when you would go there would be-- Somebody with dysentery, they couldn't hold their bowels. Man, they were all over the ground so you had to be careful where you walked, flies--

Overy (01:23:04):

You were in Cabanatuan then for a while? Before you were--

Peck (01:23:10):

I was only in Cabanatuan from June until December. There, I lived on what they call, they give you a half ration. I helped a lot of boys and they helped me a lot.

Overy (01:23:44):

How do you mean help? [crosstalk 01:23:45]

Peck ([01:23:45](#)):

If they were sick and couldn't get their ration, looked the kitchen. I was feeling where I could get and bring it back to him. That's what I did.

Overy ([01:24:00](#)):

They let you take an extra ration and bring it back to him?

Peck ([01:24:03](#)):

Oh, sure. The cook went, "Sure." You only had so many mess kits, you had a mess kit and they knew that. And you'd tell him--

Overy ([01:24:11](#)):

These were Japanese cooks?

Peck ([01:24:12](#)):

No.

Overy ([01:24:13](#)):

These were American--

Peck ([01:24:14](#)):

--American cooks who's in the kitchens. And they'd do the same thing for me if I was sick and I couldn't go stand in the chow line to pick up a ration. And I'll carry water for them.

Overy ([01:24:32](#)):

Was there always lots of water? Was there plenty?

Peck ([01:24:34](#)):

Well, after we once got our fill of water, yeah. We had one spigot down there, that was for about six buildings in there. Once you got your canteen filled up with water, it isn't-- Just picture, there's men here that have got 15 canteens trying to fill, and then pack them back to their

buddies. You'd probably have your canteen and two or three others. You'd to the spigot maybe there'd be nobody there, maybe there'd be three, four men there or something like that. So, we had a chance to get water after we got into the camp.

Overy ([01:25:24](#)):

Were you required to do any work?

Peck ([01:25:25](#)):

Not while I was in the hospital area.

Overy ([01:25:28](#)):

I see.

Peck ([01:25:30](#)):

But after I was sent over to the duty site--

Overy ([01:25:34](#)):

--and over to Japan?

Peck ([01:25:35](#)):

No, I didn't go to Japan right away.

Overy ([01:25:36](#)):

Oh, you didn't. Oh, I'm sorry.

Peck ([01:25:38](#)):

No, I didn't go to Japan until October '44. I went over to the duty site and I was on wood detail a couple of days, and I worked out on the farm there in the fields two or three days. I was getting a detail to go to an island in Batangas. By golly, I was lucky enough to get on that and that was about the best thing that ever happened to me too because as I say, I had a good detail where we went down there and-- They had these Japanese engineers that worked out there on the airport

with us. We did all right there, that was in summer of '43. We worked there until March of '44. They pulled us out of, down there.

Overy ([01:26:51](#)):

What were you doing particularly down there? You said airport duty?

Peck ([01:26:53](#)):

Airport duty. Pick and shovel, making runways. We built one main runway, was a mile and a half long. We cut through the banks, we used wheelbarrows, we used these narrow-gauge track carts. I suppose that hold about three quarter of a yard of dirt, and we'd would probably have 20 or 25 of those carts on a track. And that's how we made our fields out across the low spots. Then when we got to that, then we had to pave rock and-- What do they call it? It's a kind of soft rock. Also, when they have-- Mountain blows up or something, it rockets up to where they call it a-- But it smashes down like a concrete. As it were laid over the top of this hill that we put in, then they come in there with an old steam roller. They ran over and packed that rock into this dirt and then they laid concrete on top of that. Our runway was, one was going this way, one this way; and they had a median tool like a wheel shape. That's what they had figured out with their taxiways.

Overy ([01:28:39](#)):

This is where you said the treatment was fairly decent? You have pretty good food, enough food anyway.

Peck ([01:28:43](#)):

Yes, that's right. And we had medicine there, and they had an American dentist. I think it was three American doctors there in that camp. What they wanted, they wanted that airfield built and they knew they had to pay those men. I think a lot of it was in a-- Japanese commander. He was

an old frontline soldier from out of Korea. Oh, not out of Korea, but out of China. I think that made a lot of difference. Of course, he was still a commander when a bunch of engineer troops moved out and these young recruits come in there. I think it probably went on, was kept pretty [inaudible 01:29:48] kept pretty mum to old Japanese commanders. He didn't see because he wasn't right out in the field with us. In March of '44, they moved us back to Camp Maria, the old Javelin airfield. There we were building [inaudible 01:30:25] for planes and lengthening runways but they didn't put concrete on them. They filled her in with dirt and then they used this volcanic rock, is what it was; and that's what they used for their runway for their fighter planes.

Overy (01:30:51):

Were there any good guards? Were there good guards and bad guards or were there--

Peck (01:31:00):

Both. You would run into good ones and you'd run into bad ones. In fact, I'm not there at-- Camp Marie was the first time that I ever took a blow from a Japanese guard. How it happened was, we had these narrow-gauge tracks and there was supposed to be three men to a cart. We was short one man, so it was the two on the tail end of the track and we'd loaded. And this Japanese, he was a black looking son of a gun and why he was standing there I'll never know; but I asked him if he'd help us, give a push. When he thought I called him an SOB, and I felt myself going. When I woke up, I was under a shade tree and I had a doctor, and a Japanese interpreter. I asked him what happened. The interpreter said, "You're telling us." As much as I can remember, I said, "I asked the Japanese guard there to help us get that cart pushed so we can get it up a little raised there." and I said, "The two of us just couldn't push it, so I asked the guard to give us a push. That's all I can remember." The interpreter told me that two guards had to take on a son of a bitch. So by cricky, I got off in that. I never seen him that afternoon and he wasn't there, so the

interpreter told us just a local [inaudible 01:33:03]. We didn't have to fill [inaudible 01:33:05]. It was just the two of us. They had a [inaudible 01:33:12], so he's probably like our master sergeant I would say, in our army. He was in charge of the detail at building [inaudible 01:33:26] there. Oh, man, I guess the way some of them prisoners talked it, "Oh, he was a goddamn army," they didn't want to work under him. Then they come around and they wanted volunteers to volunteer. Well, I figured I didn't want any more of that black son of a gun with that damn hammer. So, I volunteered. And by golly, we didn't know what the hell they expect from me. My doctor, when he came and got us the next morning, we went out there and he showed us what he wanted done. So we started, there was so many with shovels and so many with baskets and what we were doing, we go down and the guy with the shovel, he would load the basket. Then you would just go in and make it like a golden triangle or circle. That's the way we worked. Oh, by golly, come along about 9:30, 10:00 and at 4:00 noon, he called us all over there in the shade. He asked me to sit down. So we did, and we sat there and he tried a little English and little Japanese in trying to talk to us. I got at least in my head, about a 15 minute break. I could see something like that. He told us that, "Thank you for the work." So we did, and he sat over there--