

Interview with Henry Peck (Part 2 of 2)

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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

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Interviewed by David Overy

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

So he wasn't as bad as he'd been made out to be, then?

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

No, he wasn't as bad as he was made out to be because he never bothered us at all. He had three guards and they were way out. They weren't anywhere near around where we were at. So we came in that night and they wanted to know how we all made out. Hell, we had it made easy. It was a hell of a lot better than pushing carts, you know? So the next day at break time he called us over to take a break and we asked him if he would go buy us some coconuts. Some of their meals was pretty small and we were hungry. And so he said, yeah, he'd go get coconuts. And well he-- We gave him our money that we had he went down and he come back with a great big sack full of coconuts.

Overy ([00:01:22](#)):

Where did you get the money?

Peck ([00:01:23](#)):

Oh, we got three yen a month from the Japanese. And so you could maybe by a Coke for a 10 sen, you know. So we kind of stretched that out. You get a little salt. That's the only way we got salt was through the Jap commissary that they had come in. So by cracky--

Overy ([00:01:57](#)):

You had to buy salt?

Peck ([00:01:58](#)):

Oh, yeah. And you buy salt, and if you wanted tobacco you had to buy that, the old Filipino dried tobacco that men smoked. And we couldn't eat all that coconut, so we asked him if it'd be all right if we took it in, what we had left, for evening rice. And he said that was okay. But we still had our doubts because, Jesus, they catch you with a coconut, the guards at the gate, you know they would [inaudible 00:02:35] the hell out of you and take it away from you. So we told him about the guards and he said, "That's all right. Take your coconuts in and eat." And we was going in and he followed us all the way to where the guardhouse was and where the gate was. Jesus, one of them guards they started blowing up there because he was finding one of the boys had coconuts. Jeez, he gave a yell out, and I say you never seen anybody come to attention so damn fast. Holy, man. And, boy, he got up there and he read the riot act to them guards. And I tell you they didn't blink an eye. And so he told us all to go ahead, go into camp there. So we all went through the gate and one guard counted us off. And we had no more trouble. Boy, and I tell you there was guys that just begged us to get on that detail.

Overy ([00:03:44](#)):

Did you ever give it up?

Peck ([00:03:47](#)):

No, sir.

Overy ([00:03:47](#)):

Did they ever give you any clothes of any kind?

Peck ([00:03:51](#)):

The Red Cross came in and I got, I think it was, two pairs of white shorts in that three-and-a-half years there in the islands. And when we went to go to Japan, they gave us all a pair of pants and a blouse of the World War One type the Americans had. That was all the clothes I got.

Otherwise, we looked like-- Oh, I wish some of these boys in here-- We were bedraggled.

Overy ([00:04:43](#)):

Were you permitted to wash or anything of that kind?

Peck ([00:04:45](#)):

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Overy ([00:04:46](#)):

Were there showers or baths?

Peck ([00:04:47](#)):

Yeah, when we was out on detail, you betcha. They would get us water in every night, because see we cut our long pants off. This will probably show you something, give you an idea. See, they made shorts out them. Well then they started getting ragged looking and in three-and-a-half years there was not too much left of them, just the strings left. Where in the heck was it [inaudible 00:05:18]? Yeah, more like these guys here.

Overy ([00:05:20](#)):

Oh, I see.

Peck ([00:05:21](#)):

That's the way it-- Maybe your fanny was sticking out, everything else. But it didn't seem to make too much difference in the--

Overy ([00:05:34](#)):

Under circumstances like this, how did the men get along or prisoners get along with each other?

Peck ([00:05:41](#)):

Well, most of them they-- Pretty good. Well, once in a while you'd get-- A couple of them would get into some damn argument and they would try to fight and they was too damn weak to fight.

They'd swing and fall down, you know, and do the damndest [inaudible 00:05:54] you ever seen. But most of that, it was worse in Japan.

Overy ([00:05:59](#)):

It was worse in Japan?

Peck ([00:06:02](#)):

Yeah, for the men to fight, the prisoners, because we had the English prisoners in the same camp with us, and them and the Americans would get into it, you know. Of course, they were so damn weak when they'd swing they'd fall down. They couldn't hit worth a damn. So but as far as on the detail, there was not too many that's ready to scrap.

Overy ([00:06:27](#)):

Was there anything particularly that you could do in camp to amuse yourselves? Or did you even feel like humor, or what?

Peck ([00:06:38](#)):

Well, no, because see we had to work-- We worked seven days a week. And you worked with pick and shovel or pushing a wheelbarrow. You didn't want to be do any playing baseball or anything like that. Of course, they didn't have anything like that to do. But it was three days a year, and I think that was in January, that we would have off when they was having their Christmas or something, the Japanese Christmas, I guess it is. But otherwise, it was seven days a

week. You start in on the line at seven o'clock in the morning and they brought you in at 12. You had to eat and you had to be back out into the line at one. And they could work you from then, from one to five, or six or seven or eight or nine, 'til it got dark if they wanted to, because we never knew when we would come in, you know. But they most generally, we would work up until five and then they'd bring us in.

Overy ([00:07:44](#)):

Did you ever talk about escape at all? Was there ever a--

Peck ([00:07:47](#)):

No, because, see, we were put in 10-man squads. If one man escaped, the other nine was to be shot.

Overy ([00:07:56](#)):

That's a pretty effective way of controlling, isn't it?

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

You betcha. And I was only-- Well, at [inaudible 00:08:08] I guess there was some men that got - They escaped and the other nine got shot. So the Americans kind of put a stop to that. And then out on the detail there was only two men that escaped out, and they escaped out between where the kitchen and the Jap guardhouse was. And they figured that the kitchen crew had something to do with helping with that escape, and the kitchen crew didn't even know a damn thing about it. And they had to-- Their punishment, they had a broom handle, stick a broom handle under their knees, and they stayed on their knees on top of that broom handle all day long out in the sun, no water, nothing to eat. And that night when they did let them up, the men couldn't even walk. Their legs was numb. So they had to be helped back to darn kitchen. And the-- Okay, it was

kitchen crew, and I believe that they told the truth. They didn't know nothing about their damned escape. But they didn't take any nine men out for that company of men that--

Overy ([00:09:26](#)):

Oh, they didn't?

Peck ([00:09:28](#)):

No, not there, anyway. But they punished the kitchen crew for letting them, because they went out just between the Jap guardhouse. And Jesus, the Jap guardhouse they should have [inaudible 00:09:38], you know. It was at night. That's when they went. It was right after they got a bunch of Red Cross boxes in. And a lot of the men put their stuff up there at the head office there where the American officers were so that these guys that were sick in the camp during the day, they didn't steal them and eat it, eat their grub, see. That way they kind of strung it along a little. And these two guys, one of them he did patching on clothes. And he had a hell of a good job right there in camp. And the other one, he was more like a shoemaker. He cut down shoes that was too big for men or something like that and so they'd fit their feet. And they went to work and they had a couple of [inaudible 00:10:39] and they filled them up with these guys' grub that was there in the officers' building and they went through the fence.

Peck ([00:10:49](#)):

But I don't know if they ever caught them or not. I never did hear of them. But they were darned lucky that too many other men didn't get shot. And that's one of his cooks that had to stand over this broom handle, boy I tell you, if he heard of anybody even mention it, he was a great big guy, boy he was right down there goldarned neck and right now. You just didn't monkey around.

Overy ([00:11:15](#)):

You're not just supposed to get up to leave?

Peck ([00:11:17](#)):

That's right, because it's the men that is behind it that's got to pay for it.

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

Where you at all commanded by your own officers in these prison camps?

Peck ([00:11:30](#)):

Well, most generally, when we was inside the camp, yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Overy ([00:11:34](#)):

So the chain of command still existed within?

Peck ([00:11:36](#)):

Yeah, that's right. No, we had to listen to their officers at-- And the Japanese, after they were-- More of their guards would come through there once in a while to walk around, probably tried to talk a little English and threatened to try and learn some English. And we were probably learning a little Japanese in between times, you know, to try to get by. But I always found out it was the best to stay away from them son of a guns. If they gave you a job to do, go ahead, and it's your job, and don't stand and try to suckle to get an easier job.

Overy ([00:12:20](#)):

Some guys did?

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

Oh, yes, and they got in trouble too.

Overy ([00:12:23](#)):

With their own--

Peck ([00:12:24](#)):

The Japanese.

Overy ([00:12:25](#)):

Oh, with the Japanese?

Peck ([00:12:27](#)):

You betcha, because they would try to get some easy job and they'd force up on it, and that's when they got the hell slapped out of them. Just like the Japanese troops would do, you know, even if their troops were doing something like-- Well, we had a little Japanese that was driving truck. And he had these old '41 Ford trucks made here in the US, and he was trying to burn alcohol in them. And it wasn't the little driver's fault at all because the darn thing wouldn't run, but they'd take him out of there and they'd slap the holy hell out of him and they'd run him for a mile. He run all the way down and all the way back. Then they would put him back in that truck. And of course, as poor goldarn skinny prisoners, we were pushing it to try to get it started. And goll darn it, if it didn't start then, then by golly they'd take him out of there and they'd whoop him in the face slap the heck out of him, and down the road again running.

Peck ([00:13:38](#)):

We got to kind of feeling sorry for the poor little son of a gun, but he come back and I don't know what he did but we didn't push that truck over 10 feet and the damn thing started. And what was the trouble, I'll never know.

Overy ([00:13:57](#)):

Was there any advantage, do you think? You obviously were associated with guys from your hometown?

Peck ([00:14:08](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Overy ([00:14:08](#)):

Do you think this was a great help to have your Brainerd people around you?

Peck ([00:14:16](#)):

They weren't around us, though.

Overy ([00:14:17](#)):

Oh, they weren't?

Peck ([00:14:17](#)):

No, no. I was with Coast Artillery men, field artillery men, infantrymen, Marines, Navy guys, Air Corps. There wasn't-- Well, I'll take that all back. There was one that had come in afterwards that was from the Brainard unit that was with me until I went to Japan. But you always found something to talk about, you know, in the evening after we got in. Of course, mostly everybody was on their bunk when they got showered and ate because by golly they were tired.

Overy ([00:15:07](#)):

What was your food like?

Peck ([00:15:07](#)):

Well--

Overy ([00:15:07](#)):

Was it just rice and that's all? Or--

Peck ([00:15:10](#)):

Rice, we had steamed rice. And they would make soup, some of it was out of seaweed. Some was like turnip tops, or some kind of a celery deal. I don't know just what heck you would have called it. Sometimes there would be a little meat that they would give you. It'd be a flavor of meat, anyway. And every Friday, I think we would get some little fish, oh, about so big that they

had over there in Philippines. And then that would go with instead of the soup, see, maybe get a couple of them darned things, which we-

Overy ([00:16:11](#)):

Were you always hungry?

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

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. After '43, you betcha. And as we went further, went to Japan, it was the same darned thing. That's what you most generally talked about was something to eat, you know. See, I was down to 90 pounds time of surrender. And about the time that I was taken prisoner I suppose I was somewheres around 160 pounds.

Overy ([00:16:46](#)):

Did you ever wonder if you were really going to make it?

Peck ([00:16:49](#)):

We didn't know. We had so many close shaves. Like when we were going to Japan, we left the Philippines in October of '44.

Overy ([00:17:00](#)):

'44.

Peck ([00:17:02](#)):

And we were 39 days on an old French freighter. And as far as we got, we got into Hong Kong and back over to Taiwan. And I didn't think that we was ever going to make it through that. There was 11 ships in the convoy and three of them got into Hong Kong, China. And we had water-- Shells just busted and threw water up over and down in the hold on us. Then they put a tarp over the top so if we did get shelled we were just dead ducks. You'd have to go out through

the hole the shell would make, you know, if any of us lived which a lot of them did save themselves. That's what they had to do and they went out through and got debris. And--

Overy ([00:17:58](#)):

Was your shipped attacked?

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

Oh, there were shells. They fired at us but they dodged them. But as I say, there was three of them out of the 11 that got into Hong Kong China. We laid in there for 10 days and we got a chance to go up and we washed of the salt water there at a bay there in Hong Kong. Then they took us back to Formosa and we got off there and we stayed there until the 13th of January, '45. That's when the Americans then was heading to Taiwan up there, or Formosa, either one you want to call it. So then they come in and to our big surprise, they had a Japanese troop transport that they loaded us onto, and by cracky when went in on there, they handed us one of those straw mats about yea thick. We were handed a blanket and a comforter. And they took us down and we had room that we could stretch out. We had a mat under us and blanket and stuff over us to keep us warm. We had three meals a day, three good meals a day.

Peck ([00:19:42](#)):

And we didn't have no trouble going to Japan until we got within about two hours of Moji Bay and we heard a submarine sound us. We thought, Jesus, it's cold out there, you know. And we'd made it that far and we wondering if it'd be our tail end for us or what. But they probably would have got in a little closer but there was a little sea plane flying and that was the only trouble we had going from-- On that Jap transport [inaudible 00:20:26].

Overy ([00:20:26](#)):

You must have thought you were in heaven when that Japanese transport--

Peck ([00:20:28](#)):

Oh, Christ, I guess so. We had fish and we had steamed rice. We had hot tea. They come down through with the rations of it for us. And we had vegetables in our soup. So it, as I said, if we had been fed like that all the time, we'd have been a different bunch of men.

Overy ([00:21:02](#)):

Yeah, do you have any idea why they were treating you so well all of the sudden?

Peck ([00:21:07](#)):

We had no idea, no idea. It was just the difference in Japanese.

Overy ([00:21:11](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peck ([00:21:14](#)):

So that would've had to been the Navy, and they were sent to pick us up.

Overy ([00:21:19](#)):

But previously been on what they called the hell ships, huh?

Peck ([00:21:22](#)):

Yeah.

Overy ([00:21:22](#)):

Is that what they were?

Peck ([00:21:23](#)):

Yeah, that's what they called them and that's what they were. I don't know how many dead men that they took off of that French freighter in that 39 days that we were on that. But every morning, there was always six or seven men that they had to carry out. I don't know if they got smothered to death, if they got beat in the head. And it was a nervous proposition on that thing.

The men would be all quiet in there, you know, and you'd think they was all asleep. Then it would be somebody jump up and start running right across the bodies. And of course when they would start that, somebody was either hitting them with a canteen or something instead of catching them.

Overy ([00:22:19](#)):

So they went crazy?

Peck ([00:22:20](#)):

They did. That's what it was. They went crazy. On our side there one night there was, well, this big guy that I was telling you about that had a damn broomstick under his knees on account of those guys escaping. Him, and there was five or six of all sitting right in a small space there. And we had caught, I think it was 12 or 14 men and held them until they went to sleep right there. There was one on top of the-- We had to pile up in [inaudible 00:23:01] because we didn't have no hell of a lot of room where were at.

Overy ([00:23:02](#)):

So in other words, they would be sleeping on top of each other?

Peck ([00:23:05](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And they could have done that in the other parts of that boat, but at night you would hear them-- Hear a clunk noise. When you was asleep and it would wake you up, where somebody maybe knocked a man in the head to get him out of the road or something like that.

Overy ([00:23:27](#)):

[inaudible 00:23:27]

Peck ([00:23:27](#)):

We had a lot of Mexicans in there. Boy, I didn't trust them a bit over there on that side. There was few white boys and--

Overy ([00:23:35](#)):

You mean, Mexicans from the United States Army?

Peck ([00:23:37](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Overy ([00:23:37](#)):

Oh, I see.

Peck ([00:23:39](#)):

Yeah, from 200th Coast Artillery, because it was like they said, on that detail I was with all kinds of people. I wasn't with just men from my outfit. But then we got landed and almost froze to death when we hit out there on land there at Moji Bay. The men was passing out like as if they was-- They had heat stroke it was so cold. We'd come out of the tropics where you didn't have to have hardly any clothes and ended up there in this cold. And they had those gosh darn World War One uniforms that we put on.

Overy ([00:24:25](#)):

They were wool, probably.

Peck ([00:24:26](#)):

Yeah, they were. And our shoes were badly shot. Some was barefooted. And they took us and they put us in some buildings out of the cold. And then they fed us with rice balls. We each got a rice ball. And then the next day they put us on a train and we went off up through the island of Honshu there up the northern part up to a town they called [inaudible 00:25:14] where it was part

of the men was dropped off to work in the coal mines and we went on to [inaudible 00:25:26] to work in a copper smelter. And that's my job was I was working on the pourer, in the copper pourer. And there we had, I don't know for sure, but think there were Koreans that was brought over there to Japan years ago for work details, because they were altogether different than what the regular Japanese was. We had regular Japanese Army guards, but in there any of us in there was working with-- I figured it was Koreans. And they were a good bunch of people to work with too, because they were working too.

Peck (00:26:11):

In fact, a guard come in and knocked the heck out of one of the POWs that was working on a slag detail and man, there was a battle on. The guy that was Japanese or Korean or what the heck ever he was was in charge of that detail, the slag detail. Boy, him and that guard got into it. When the guard went out the door, that guy had his foot in his hind end. So but otherwise, it was not too bad.

Overy (00:26:41):

So you were working then for Korean supervisors, you figured?

Peck (00:26:44):

We were working under I think it was Korean supervisors.

Overy (00:26:47):

Was the work pretty hard?

Peck (00:26:49):

No, not really, because only our job was after we poured the copper, it had to cool. And then we would clean the pot out. We used a [inaudible 00:27:08], something similar to a jackhammer.

And if we knocked any brick off, then we had to put in new brick so to get ready for the next pot that was going to be poured.

Overy ([00:27:21](#)):

Were you pretty well taken care of there?

Peck ([00:27:24](#)):

No. We were pretty well starved, worse yet even than what we were in the Philippines, because we were getting weak where we started to kind of weave when we were walking, you know. But and it was hard on the civilians too, because we went there they used to bring a bunch of these rice bags made of straw that they'd carry their rice in. And we'd use that to put over the top of our copper to keep the heat in, so they would burn these rice bags. And us guys would take and shake them damn rice bags when they first started coming in and we'd maybe get a handful of rice. And then we had an old can there that we would put it in and we'd set it on top of this hot copper and it'd kind of brown it, and we'd eat it.

Peck ([00:28:20](#)):

Well, about three weeks before the surrender, this little guy that we was working under, when he'd bring them rice bags down he wouldn't let us have them anymore. Oh, no. He took and he shook them out in a little pan, and he ate them. So they were getting more hungry too, you know.

Overy ([00:28:40](#)):

You think it was just the fact that Japan was running out of food?

Peck ([00:28:43](#)):

They were, because everything was backed up and they had nothing to come in because they just had their own island because American troops was all around them, see. And as I say, it was

probably a good thing that the surrender came when it did because I think there would have been a heck of a lot more men starved to death.

Overy ([00:29:03](#)):

Were there a lot of men working in that same copper smelter?

Peck ([00:29:06](#)):

Not right there? I don't think we had over-- We might have had 300 men. There was English and Americans and Dutch East Indies troops in there. So I would say no idea because--

Overy ([00:29:33](#)):

Where did you live then? Did you live right in the factory? Or--

Peck ([00:29:36](#)):

Oh, no. No, we lived up about a half-mile up in the hills. In that country there, it was pretty rough country. It had some pretty good humps in there. And this factory was built in just a little valley. I don't think it was over 80 rods wide, that valley that come down through there, because they just had room to walk. And then there was a little stream of water going around through that little town and the shop over there, and we were backed up about half a mile from where the foundry was at.

Overy ([00:30:12](#)):

Could you stay warm? I mean, was there--

Peck ([00:30:18](#)):

Well, we kept warm, but going from the barracks down to the smelter you'd get a little chilly if the snow was happened to be blowing or something.

Overy ([00:30:36](#)):

But you were staying in decent housing of some kind?

Peck ([00:30:38](#)):

Well, it was, yeah. It was built of lumber, and we had no fires in, though. There was enough men in there to--

Overy ([00:30:46](#)):

Body heat.

Peck ([00:30:47](#)):

Body heat, I would presume, to-- And as I say, we had a mat and we had a wool blanket, and we had a big heavy comforter that they issued to us there to keep warm.

Overy ([00:31:03](#)):

This might sound like a strange question, but of course I've never been remotely in that situation.

When you don't have a lot of food or almost no food, are you always hungry?

Peck ([00:31:18](#)):

Oh, yes.

Overy ([00:31:18](#)):

I mean, five or six-- I mean, is there a point where you're really not hungry anymore after not having had a lot of food?

Peck ([00:31:25](#)):

Well, now like when we come out of Bataan, there it felt like it didn't make any difference as long as I could get water, because if you're thirsty you forget about hunger. But when you are not thirsty, then you start thinking about something to eat.

Overy ([00:31:43](#)):

Is it painful to be-- I mean, is it physically painful?

Peck ([00:31:46](#)):

You kind of get over that. You probably say one or two days that you're hungry. And finally you get over that and you forget that hunger. I don't know how long a person could go without eating, but I can see why some of these people that want to see doing--

Overy ([00:32:08](#)):

Hunger strikes?

Peck ([00:32:09](#)):

Hunger strikes can live so long as long as he gets water, because if he didn't have water, then he wouldn't last very long.

Overy ([00:32:19](#)):

But you just got enough food to keep you hungry? Is that about it?

Peck ([00:32:21](#)):

That's right. That's right. We never got where we got filled up, or-- In fact, we lost all of our muscle here in our arms. All that was there was just practically is your arm bone. And here you could count a person's ribs in front here and in back. And all the meat was practically gone. It was hard to even sit down. You didn't sit down too much on anything that was hard because your hip bones would right on through here. So as I say, we were just about to our last of trying to survive that son of a gun when they surrendered. And you know they fetched some of those prisoners back that they'd captured in the Philippines and all us guys up there in Japan, we were left up there for a month after the surrender before they came and picked us up. But they dropped supplies in, and I think they wanted to try to feed us up to get us--

Overy ([00:33:34](#)):

The Japanese dropped supplies in?

Peck ([00:33:35](#)):

No, no.

Overy ([00:33:35](#)):

Or the Americans?

Peck ([00:33:36](#)):

The Americans did after the surrender, and I think it was to try to get us to where we didn't look so goddamn rough, the shape, you know, because when I got back to San Francisco from over there, I left Japan on the 15th of September. And by the latter part of October, we landed in Frisco and I weighed 200 pounds. But I was eating all the time. I would go through the chow line twice each meal. Then we'd go down to the Red Cross, and there they had cookies and coffee, donuts. Sometimes they'd have ice cream. And we could go down there and we'd sit down there and eat. And we were so full we were in misery, but we were still hungry. We were still hungry. We'd go to the bathroom maybe three times a day because we were just jamming everything in trying to get our hunger satisfied. We came on a boat, and it was the same way on the darn boat. The only thing we didn't have the Red Cross the run to, but we would make them each meal twice.

Peck ([00:35:25](#)):

And then we got into Frisco and the same thing there, and it-- Where the cook was in there where we ate our meals at, even at 10 o'clock at night we'd go in there and ask him for something to eat. He'd ask you what you wanted and by God he'd fix it up for you.

Overy ([00:35:45](#)):

It must have been like heaven, huh?

Peck (00:35:47):

Well, geez, we were-- I don't know just how the heck to explain it to a man, but the more we ate the more we wanted. There was something that we-- Our system was lacking and we couldn't figure out what the hell it was. Maybe if they'd have got a doctor on to see us, then we probably would have, but I didn't see no doctors.

Overy (00:36:16):

Let me back up just minute. When did you hear that the Japanese had surrendered? How did that news come to you?

Peck (00:36:26):

Well, that kind of come kind of funny. I was on a night shift from seven til seven in the morning, and we knew there was something in the wind because there for about three days these Japanese that was working up in the smelter there didn't care if we worked or not. One night we slept all night, and that was not right. We knew there was something in the wind. And our boss, he ran the overhead crane, he made two trips to Tokyo. And after he'd come back then it just didn't seem like there was not a lot of them shifts that we-- That I went on after that, that we didn't run even-- Or pour a damn bit of copper, monkey around, maybe clean up a little bit or something like around in there.

Peck (00:37:32):

But anyway, the day that we found out we surrendered, we was getting ready to take off and seven o'clock shift came in. And there was a Mexican, he hardly said that by 10 o'clock, he says, "We'll be back up in the barracks with you guys." He said, "The Japs have surrendered." Now how the hell he found out, I don't know. But we just laughed because we'd heard all this baloney before, you know, so damn many times. But we came back up to the barracks and we got our

breakfast. I was just getting ready to lay down and go to sleep. And a man, it sounded like a thunderbolt coming in through that goll darned barracks, hearing that detail came back at 10:30, and we wondered what the heck was all coming off. And there was just one Mexican, I don't know if he'd heard the Jap guards or what the heck, but he said, by golly, he said, "We ain't going to go back down there to work anymore." He said, "We worked our last for them so-so buggers." And it went til around about noon, and there was a Jap come over and said that we were all supposed to fall out in the compound, that the Japanese captain wanted to talk to us. So we had an American in that was an interpreter too, but he hadn't said anything, you know. So they wanted Jackson over there too, and so we all fell out. And the old Jap officer, he come out of the guardhouse. Then he had an awful look on his face. I think he had look on his face about like we did when we found out we had to surrender, see. And he told us that Japan and America had shook hands. There was no more war, that it was all over with. And we didn't know about these atom bombs or nothing up there where we were at, we were so damn far north. We couldn't figure out what the heck, because we hadn't seen any American planes up there, and so we knew that they couldn't have landed on the island or we'd have seen American planes, sure as heck.

Peck ([00:40:39](#)):

And so he said that, we were all friends. We were no more enemies. And so after we had fell out and the men got thinking, god damn, if we were free men we didn't want no Jap guards. So I guess they finally got.-- Hired an officer in charge to go over and tell them that Japs leave their guns and their ammunition in the guardhouse. We'd do our own guarding. They could go down the hill. We didn't no more to do with them. So Captain [inaudible 00:41:21] he went over and he told them what the men wanted. And of course the Japanese officer, he thought that they should stay because he didn't know how the civilians was going to react.

Overy ([00:41:35](#)):

So you might be in danger from the civilians?

Peck ([00:41:36](#)):

Yeah, yeah. And he said the men figured they could handle it if they had their guns and ammunition here. So by golly, the old officer, Jap officer and his guards, they left their guns and their sabers right there and walked down the hill with just their uniform on. And we had no goll darned [inaudible 00:41:59] experience. In fact, it was a civilian that come and help us carry in our supplies from the B-29s that dropped supplies into our compound. He come over and helped carry it in there.

Overy ([00:42:14](#)):

How long was it before the surrender that you started getting supplies?

Peck ([00:42:18](#)):

Oh, after we heard of the surrender? It was about three days that there was Navy planes that was out looking trying to find these prison camps. And we saw them when they-- We heard them and we all rushed outside. And we saw them flying over the foundry. And of course there was men that got up on the barracks because we had nothing painted POW or nothing here on our barracks. And [inaudible 00:42:56] runs up there with their shorts because they were waiting. He was waving trying to get these planes to come in over where we were at. But they went on. And so we figured they just overlooked us, they went by us. And well, oh, maybe an hour after I guess we hear them planes again. We got outside and here there was three planes above us circling our camp. Well, there were these guys that was able to crawl up, get up on top of the goldarned barracks, they were up there and they was waving these white shorts so the pilots could see that they were the same as surrendering.

Overy ([00:43:35](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peck ([00:43:36](#)):

And by cracky, two of them stayed up and one came down later and he circled way out around us. Then he come right down, right over our camp. He must had it wide open the way it sounded. Then he went off and left-- And then he came back. And then that next time he came a little slower and he dropped a note, wanted to know if there was a prisoner of war camp there, an American prisoner of war camp. If there was, we was supposed to put five men out side of the compound. Well, man, it didn't take long for five men to get outside of that compound, you know. He made that swipe and then he dropped and note and he wanted to find out how many men was there in the camp, and you're supposed to put a, what was it, a man for every hundred. I think we had 350-some men, so they put out four men out there.

Peck ([00:44:42](#)):

So when he come over again, he come over pretty slow and he dropped another and thanked them for cooperating with him. He said they was out trying to locate these prisoner of war camps and that we should get some paint or something and mark POW on the roof with a red cross on it. But he said, "In a day or two there will be supplies dropped." He said, "They will fly you in supplies, drop them." And by golly, he went up, he made his circle, and gave us the old wave with his wings and they took off again.

Overy ([00:45:37](#)):

And this was what kind of plane?

Peck ([00:45:38](#)):

It was a Navy fighter plane.

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

Fighter plane?

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

Yeah. And so we thought, well we'll maybe starve for another three days, you know, before we get supplies. And about five o'clock in the afternoon, oh, we heard that gosh darn [inaudible 00:45:58] and we went and we saw one of the biggest planes we'd ever seen in our lives. It was flying low and it made a circle way down around over where [inaudible 00:46:13] was and because it was kind of hard to get in there on account of the darn hills. So they flew over camp and they wave them big wings of that son of a gun. And boy we thought, man what kind of a monstrous plane is that, you know? We never heard of a B-29.

Overy ([00:46:28](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peck ([00:46:32](#)):

And they got off. And I they were I suppose checking the wind or something. I don't know. But-- Said they looked to me like they was going to bomb the compound. And all at once, all I could see was different colored parachutes coming out. And they put all that they had, two 55-gallon barrels folded together. And they had clothing and foodstuffs, medicine, and they put it all right in that compound. And there wasn't a man got hurt. The only thing is one-- Two 55-gallon drums went down through the kitchen roof, but there was nobody ever got hurt. So we thought that was just a little too close, or the officers did, and all the men. They said, "Why can't we make a bullseye outside of the compound and let them drop in there?" So they got some lime someplace and they made a big bullseye out there. And of course that's where they would drop our supplies. And this one Japanese civilian he come up there and he helped us pack that stuff in.

Overy ([00:48:10](#)):

Because probably you were all pretty weak to carry that stuff?

Peck ([00:48:12](#)):

Well, we were. We were, you know? And he wouldn't take cigarettes. He wouldn't take candy bars. He wouldn't take no canned goods. But he would work his goll darned tail off and help carry that into the camp, into the kitchen, you know. So we stayed there until the 15th and then they pulled us out of there, and then took us out to the ocean where they had the Red Cross ship. There they took and run us through there and gave us a delousing and all new clothes again. And I don't know what they did with the ones that we had to wear [inaudible 00:48:57] except that they probably had a lot of lice in them. So they probably stuck them in a fire or something, I don't know. But they put us on-- I wound up on an English destroyer, and the others they come on American. There was an English and an American destroyer there.

Peck ([00:49:21](#)):

And they fetched us down to Tokyo. And there, they unloaded us onto a-- Oh, I don't know what kind-- It was some kind of a troop transport, I would call it. It's where they hauled the equipment and everything in too because they could drop the back tailgate down on that boat and run their stuff out to the land. And then we went in there and they asked us what we wanted. And everybody was wanting steak so that's what the cooks was doing. They was cooking up steaks for those men.

Overy ([00:50:03](#)):

Did you have any trouble adjusting to real food again?

Peck ([00:50:07](#)):

No. That surprised me. I thought men get sick on it or something, but they didn't. And maybe that's the reason these kinds of supplies that they was dropping, see it was all American food and canned goods and vegetables and meats and cheese and all of that.

Overy ([00:50:32](#)):

Did that make you sick when you first start to eat?

Peck ([00:50:34](#)):

No.

Overy ([00:50:34](#)):

It didn't?

Peck ([00:50:34](#)):

No, we only lost one man and it was his own darned fault. They had a bunch of sardines and so they passed them out to the men instead of going through the kitchen. Well, goll darn it you know, you shouldn't leave sardines from the swarm in a can. And that's what this guy did. He took out about half of them and so he wanted to leave the rest for the next day. Well, boy he did and he got ptomaine poison. And that was the only one we lost. They told them not to save anything in cans. Eat if you can and if not, throw it out rather than to get sick, but now one got sick. But as I said, if when we come back, our faces and our bodies was more of a puff. It wasn't a regular solid flesh. I looked like I was looking out of little peep holes here, my face was so swollen from, I suppose, the food being too rich or something. I don't know.

Peck ([00:51:43](#)):

But that's what I said. I never got to see a doctor going all the way back in Okinawa or-- We went to the Red Cross there, and that was the only doctor that he kind of gave us a check over,

and he was running us through there pretty fast. We got to the States and over to the Presidio, and no doctor. We got to Clinton [inaudible 00:52:13] way, down to ship general, no doctor. So but I weighed right at 200 pounds during that time, so you know I had to have been packing a lot of it away. And the other men was the same darn way, our faces were so flushed. You know, you could see it. They were swollen, and what caused that I don't know. It would have been nice to have found out.

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

What keeps a man going under certain-- I mean, I find it hard to understand how you could put up with all this and still keep going, and still have some kind of hope that you're going to get out. Or did you have hope that you were going to-

Peck ([00:52:58](#)):

Oh, yes, we did, if we didn't starve to death, because we knew the Americans was coming up when we were in Formosa before we left for Japan, see. We knew the Americans was getting close because they was bombing Formosa. And that's when they had taken the Philippine Islands, see. They landed where? I think at Mindanao first or [inaudible 00:53:26] there.

Overy ([00:53:27](#)):

Leyte.

Peck ([00:53:27](#)):

Leyte, yeah. See they was bombing Luzon, besides they was bombing the heck out of Taiwan up there. And we knew the Americans was there, not too far. And we was just hoping that we didn't know what was going to happen when they tied in the main island of Japan, see. But Jesus, when we came through Tokyo from the North, there was nothing standing. It was all just burnt tin and

ashes where they'd taken wheelbarrows and pushed it to the side so they could get traffic through.

Overy ([00:54:09](#)):

Obviously, at some time along the way men give up, don't they? Did you notice that? Do you think--

Peck ([00:54:18](#)):

Well, I--

Overy ([00:54:19](#)):

Some men give up and some don't, and you obviously did not.

Peck ([00:54:23](#)):

You know, the men that come out of that deal was boys that had a rough life at home trying to make a living. These kids that was raised in town, their parents had good jobs, and where they could take it easy. They were the ones that gave up first.

Overy ([00:54:49](#)):

They weren't used to struggling.

Peck ([00:54:50](#)):

They wasn't used to struggling like the country farm boy back there in the 30s and that. And those boys like in Arkansas that was raised up back in the hills that had a hard time, you know, knew what rough times were. And when this happened to them, well, it was something they were used to. Where these kids that was raised in town and had all this goldarned fancy stuff and would go to shows and raise heck around town, they were the ones that couldn't quite take that. And they--

Overy ([00:55:32](#)):

Did you ever feel like giving up?

Peck ([00:55:34](#)):

No. No, I didn't. When I was sick with malaria I knew if I stayed on my feet I might make it. And that's what I tried to stay on my feet. But if I was said if I was having a chill or something and I was starting to go with my little ration of rice and stuff, no, I wouldn't go outside. Somebody else would pick it up for me. And I did the same thing for them. And we had two officers in the barracks there with us that had very, very-- And they would sometimes have us to bring their rations down because they couldn't walk because their feet was all swelled up and I could see it. And they told us that we got orders, there'll be a lot of us that'll have to have our legs taken off. We'd have to have all new joints put in there and from the malnutrition from this darned very, very and that. And boy they were telling us the truth. But they made it me. But no, I never-- It never dawned on me to want to give up.

Overy ([00:57:06](#)):

Were you a particularly religious man?

Peck ([00:57:08](#)):

No, not really. No, I was in going church maybe once whenever I felt like it or something, yeah. But no, I don't claim to be a religious man right now. I believe in people having their own religion, but that ain't not running it down or bragging it up or anything else, because we had to pray. We prayed a lot of times, and I think that kind of helped us keep our right senses. But a bunch of men, when you get in on-- Throw you into a hole or something and you know death is not too far away, your nerves get so that they just won't let you stand still. And that's what happened to a lot of those men that I say was on those boats. If you could kind of just keep your

cool like I was trying to do and the other men that was right around me trying to do, that's all I guess a person could do.

Overy ([00:58:35](#)):

What long term effects did those years have on you as a man? As a person?

Peck ([00:58:50](#)):

Well, I tell you, I was always kind of an easy person to get along with when I was younger.

When I went to school, all the kids would always vote for me, then the other bigger kids. But now, I get mad. I want to kill. And I try to keep from that, and I think a lot of that was on account that they would try to make the troops mad over there when they knew that they was going to go into battle, like having a field inspection. You know, it's just fighting a war. [inaudible 00:59:49] and you get all that stuff ready, and when they're supposed to come around and inspect they don't come.

Peck ([00:59:52](#)):

And that pisses you off. You get mad, you know. Why the hell are they doing that? Getting all those white shorts out there and they're wasting everything and goldarned bombers and fighter planes flying over seeing that white, the hill, they'd know where the hell you was at. But we tried to keep it camouflaged as much as we could. And stuff like that, it'd make you mad. When you go into battle you'd want to take it out on something, you know. All that goldarned monkeying around.

Overy ([01:00:30](#)):

Did you have a hard time adjusting to being back in this country?

Peck (01:00:38):

Well, yes and no, when we come back to people that asked, "What happened?" And you would try to explain to them what went on. And they'd just the same as call you a liar. They say, "People are not that way. People are human." Well, you know, you couldn't explain to them and why the heck did they ask you all them questions if they didn't want to listen to what you was telling them? So it got so that we just all clammed up. They'd fetch up what happened and we'd just walk away. And we'd tell them, "We want to blank it out ourselves. We want to forget about it. It's done and it's over with." And it went for about 10 years that we-- There was nobody had any, not even get-togethers. And it went to getting together and they said we had to go to talking about our life in prison camp if it was just amongst ourselves. So the men started to come out and some of them had it damn rough, a hell of a lot rougher than what I had it.

Overy (01:02:23):

That's hard to believe.

Peck (01:02:25):

Yeah. And of course if you'd have seen them and had probably seen us guys that was on our detail, I think you would have seen the difference because I've seen our first sergeant and a couple of our officers to where I left the Philippines. And in fact, one of them was Don Samuelson, or [inaudible 01:02:53] father. And they were such an ash death looking color, they come in off of Nichols Field, that they looked like dead people instead of people that was waiting to be transported to Japan. And I think they got sunk after, because they left after we did. But we finally got to talking about it to the men themselves. We'd have our reunions. And that's how come we got to work and we got a little memorial started up. And we started it on our own. We didn't go ask anybody to buy in or anything like that. We did it ourselves. And then one of the

plaques, they still got it here. [inaudible 01:03:43]. It showed a soldier helping his buddies along the road.

Peck ([01:03:52](#)):

And the 25th anniversary they went over, Jim [inaudible 01:03:57], the city raised up enough money to send them over to the Philippines. And he brought back some soil from the town and they're going to have that here on this memorial too. So it worked out, and finally the newspaper put a little ad or something like that in the paper. I tell you, our newspaper here, well it wasn't worth a darn as far as their recognizing the men when they came back. The Koreans they think they got a dirty deal when they come back, but I think we got a dirty deal too. There was nobody there meeting us with any bands or anything like that. We were just another person dressed up in uniform.

Overy ([01:04:48](#)):

Did you have any nightmares? You hear a lot about this Vietnam veterans have this post-traumatic stress syndrome. Did you have problems like that for years after?

Peck ([01:04:59](#)):

I still do. I still do.

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

Still do? What's that like?

Peck ([01:05:03](#)):

Well, it just scares the hell out of you. You're seeing just like in your dreams, you're battling, or you're running for your life or something like that. Somebody is after you with a gun or something, you know. And you wake up and you're just shaking, just like that. No, that, I still

have troubles. And a lot of times I'll dream about the goldarned bugs bothering me. My wife will wake me up and ask me what's the trouble? I just keep it to myself.

Overy ([01:05:42](#)):

You feel like they're crawling on you?

Peck ([01:05:48](#)):

Crawling on, yeah. You will have a lot of flashbacks, even battles that maybe you was never in that somebody else was talking about. Or maybe you're trying to go in and help somebody that is all shot to hell, trying to help get him out, and you get so close and yet you're so far away. No, there's times-- I tell you, you most generally-- Now, with me it's more when I maybe have a fever or something. I don't know if it's the fever or what the heck it is that brings that on, but sometimes you're just scared half to death, just like if you was standing out here and they was starting to shoot at you and you were wondering why in the hell anyone was shooting at you for. It'd scare the hell out of you, you know. And then they talk a lot about men being brave. They may be brave, but they're scare to death too. Nobody is wanting to die or nobody is wanting to be crippled up or anything like that, you know. But you'll go and do things like that, and it's a fear or something. I just can't tell a person just how in the heck it is. I can tell them some of my experience in my damn dreams, but as I say, I wasn't afraid to go into battle when I did have to go into battle. And why the heck to do I-- Would I be afraid afterwards?

Overy ([01:07:41](#)):

Looking back at your prisoner of war experience, do you feel angry and resentful about it? I mean, you blamed somebody for it? Or--

Peck ([01:07:57](#)):

Well, you hear stories about how it started. Yes, I blame my damn country for a lot of it, and I blame the Japanese for the damn way they used the prisoners. They could have fed us as well as they could have fed their own troops, you know, just as good. And they could have used us like ordinary people, yeah, go out there and work five or six days a week and have one day off in the week instead of working seven days a week. And they didn't have to beat some of their prisoners like they did. No, I had to go through a bat line there at Camp Murray on a account that people were griping because they wasn't getting enough to eat.

Overy ([01:08:59](#)):

You had to go through a what?

Peck ([01:09:00](#)):

What they call a bat line, with a ball bat.

Overy ([01:09:03](#)):

Oh, a bat line? I see, okay.

Peck ([01:09:06](#)):

And of course the Jap mess sergeant, he figured that we were getting a lot of rice and food, you know. Well, he wanted all the men to fall out and tell him that we weren't getting enough. Well, we all fell out. I didn't have nothing to do with it, but I still had to fall out. And I got hit across here and I had problems there ever since I've been back. And now I got back problems. But you think the aid will listen to me?

Overy ([01:09:42](#)):

What did they do? They lined the Japanese up and then had you prisoners run through and they'd hit you with bats?

Peck (01:09:46):

Well, he lined us prisoners up and he was the one that was doing the damn bat.

Overy (01:09:53):

Oh, I see. I see.

Peck (01:09:55):

And a lot of them, he crippled up just like he did me. Boy, when he hit me across over that kidney there, boy, I went down on all fours and the next morning he had that damn bat right for to have sick call just waiting for somebody to go on sick call, because he'd have used the bat again and probably killed you. They didn't know. But a lot of men went to work and they were hurting.

Overy (01:10:26):

We talked about this a little bit before. Do you instinctively dislike Japanese? I mean, when you see one?

Peck (01:10:35):

I don't-- I call them a damn Japanese or a damn Jap or something like that. In fact I did here not too long ago I had to go down for a ultrasound on my right kidney, down the VA at Cities. And it was supposed to be a Doctor Ma. And he wanted to know what my problem was, and I said, "Well, I've got to have an ultrasound over my right kidney", I says, "on account of a damn Jap hit me with a ball bat." And you know he never come and talked to me when I was down there. It was an American guy that come to talk to me in there. And I know I don't want nothing to do with the Japanese. There's probably Japanese out there that had nothing to do with what happened to me, but I do not want them around where I'm at. They may be good people and all

this and that. And again what made-- It tees me off a lot was now these Japanese that they took during World War II and put them in camps, civilians, they're going to get \$20,000 apiece.

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

They said they didn't have nothing to do with it. Well, maybe they didn't, but there was a hell of a lot of them there that did have something to do with it, because we had a captain there at [inaudible 01:12:14] that come in there and he was there. He wasn't there very long, but he stood right on Pier Seven in San Francisco, and he knew just how many tanks the 194th Tank Battalion had. He told a [inaudible 01:12:29] how many guns they had and what they had. So, you say there was a bunch of them son of a guns that wasn't working for the country of Japan? No, boy, I was against that but what the heck can I do? I'm just not even a speck on the wall.

Overy ([01:12:59](#)):

Do you regret your time in military service?

Peck ([01:13:04](#)):

Not while I was under the Americans. No, I enjoyed being in the service.

Overy ([01:13:14](#)):

Did your prison camp experience have any positive effects on you that you can think of?

Anything about that experience that was-- That benefited you in the long run?

Peck ([01:13:34](#)):

No, no. Nothing that benefited me, no. No way. No way. No way. I knew how to work before I went in that, you know. And I give them the best that I had or could do when I was in there. Maybe that's what helped save me a lot. I don't know. But as far as anything that I learned in there, no way. That was a [inaudible 01:14:19]. I--