

Richard A. Dennig Prisoner Of War Story

Joined the Navy in July 1938 and was 17 years old.

Went to Boot Camp at Great Lakes Naval Station, Illinois. At boot camp I choose the Orient for Service Duty.

Sent on an Oil Tanker and upon arrival in the Philippines I was assigned to the USS Canopus, a Submarine Tender.

We made trips to China and the southern Philippines which every sailor enjoyed because we saw a part of the world that we had never seen before.

After one of the cruises the Canopus was tied up to a pier at Marvales Naval Base in the Philippines. At the pier I was on watch. The radio was on a U.S. station when I heard the news that was the shock of our life, THE JAPANESE HAD BOMBED PEARL HARBOR!

Within a day or 2 the Japanese bombed our air base knocking out all planes.

We got underway with the Canopus and tied up the ship at a pier in Manila. Everyday thereafter the Japanese planes went through the same procedure, bombing everything. The Captain of the ship decided to move the ship away from the pier and in the dark of night we moved to a Bataan Bay. Once there we covered the ship with camouflage netting to hide from the Japanese planes. It didn't work.

One of the Japanese planes came over and dropped a bomb on the Canopus which went down the stack of the ship, through all the decks and hit the propeller shaft and the shrapnel from the bomb went through ammo which started explosions on board. The on board crew formed lines from the ammo area passing shells and powder overboard. Another plane came over, dropped a bomb killing and wounding many of our sailor friends.

While I was on guard guarding the Civilian Engineers who were building tunnels in the side of the mountains for storage of gasoline we would play poker. A marine came one day to play cards. He was driving a motorcycle. The marine lost in the poker game, offered to sell the motorcycle. I gave him \$100 for the motorcycle. Two days later the military police showed up and asked who owned the motorcycle. I said, "I did". They asked where I got it and I said I bought it from a marine for \$100 and the military police said that the motorcycle had been stolen from the marine area. So they took the motorcycle away and left me with no wheels.

One day I climbed the mountain behind me and when I got to the very top I was going around a curve on a path and I came face to face with a Japanese soldier. Needless to say the fact that I am still here shows that we didn't shoot each other.

I notified the powers that be about the Japanese soldier that I encountered on the mountain. A day or two later I was back up on the mountain waiting to see if there were anymore Japanese and

someone tapped me on the back and it was a group of Philippine scouts that came to the top of the mountain. This scared the * * * * * out of me and they said to back down the mountain that they were going to take care of the Japanese permanently, which they did.

One day I felt real sick and turned myself into the hospital on Batan and they checked me and told me that I had malaria. They put me on the bed and treated my malaria.

Bataan finally surrendered. The Army, Marines and Scouts approximately 75,000 were lined up by the Japanese and made to march about 75 miles to where the Japanese had a base. About 54,000 of them made it to the end. However I missed out on the march and the Navy decided that they were going to dispose of the Canopus. THANK GOD!!

The Navy personnel left on Bataan were ordered on board motor launches and taken to Corregidor. When I and the Navy personnel evacuated Bataan, they took the Canopus in the channel between Bataan and Corregidor, opened all the valves in the ship, dropped the anchors overboard and sunk it. And to this day our ship that we sunk is still in the bottom of the channel.

Japanese eventually got down to the shore facing Corregidor and set up gun in placements such as 14" mortars and used them to shell us on Corregidor. MacArthur and his family left Corregidor on a PT boat for Australia and they made it. The Japanese eventually came to Corregidor and made us all surrender. For 2 weeks we were billeted on an air strip on Corregidor. After the surrender by the Americans the Japanese loaded every American on Corregidor on their motor launches and took us to Manila.

The Japanese made us jump out of the motor launch in waist deep water and in some places a little deeper and gathered us all together and started us on a march for Bilibid Prison. We were forced to march past all the Philippine watching us to go to Bilibid Prison. Every Filipino on the march was perfectly quiet and crying as we went by them, they were that sad for us.

After 3 days in prison we were put on a train and taken to Cabanatuan for slave labor. The labor was building roads and buildings for the Japanese. Some POW'S tried to escape but failed. One time the Japanese caught 3 escapes brought them back to camp made them dig 3 graves and told them to get in the graves and shot them. Those of us still alive had to bury them. The Japanese then put us in groups of 10 and if anyone in your group tried to escape and was successful or not the Japanese would kill the rest of the group. No one in my group tried to escape THANK GOD!

Three months later the Japanese took most of the sailors and marines put us on a train back to Manila. From there we boarded a Japanese cargo ship, which we were on for about 3 weeks. We were on the lowest deck on the ship which was the 3rd deck. There was standing room only. The toilet facility was a wooden bucket which quickly filled up by the 100 American POW's on board. Once I was on deck dumping the bucket and while I was doing this I myself went to the bathroom over the side of the ship. While on the 3 week trip to Japan approximately 120 Americans died.

About halfway to Japan a US submarine fired a shell on my ship. The US had a lot of submarines around that were sinking Japanese ships. They did not know that there were US POW's on board otherwise they would not have shot. THANK GOD THE AMERICANS MISSED!

On the ship with us there were also Japanese soldiers. One day I saw a 2 stripped Japanese soldier was taking a nap on the floor of the deck covered with a blanket. A PFC walked by the soldier laying down and stepped on his feet. The 2 stripped soldiers stood up and beat the other soldier senseless all the while he stood at attention and took the beating.

Upon the ship arriving in Osaka Japan, we were unloaded and the Japanese put us in groups, which we didn't know what for. The Japanese sent each group to a different job in Japan, working in mines, loading and unloading box cars, loading and unloading ships, building roads and other types of labor. I was sent to an area called Umeda Bunsho. The Japanese made us all goto a railroad station and load and unload box cars with items that ordered to that station. I worked inside the box car. And there was nothing wrong with my nose. I could smell apples and other fruits that came in the boxes that I had to unload. I would open them up, either give my work gang something to eat or put the apples in my shirt to save for later. I learned how to carry bags of rice with a yeahpole. While working a boxcar I had to go to the bathroom. I walked by a boxcar whose doors were sealed. With no one watching me I opened one of the boxes inside and the contents happed to me Japanese Army field ration candy bars. I took about 50 candy bars. I put them underneath my sweater and I went back to my original work station. I was shoveling coal at the time and every time I bent over to shovel the candy bars came to the front my sweater and after a few shovels I had a big belly. I needed to fix this problem. I told my other workers about the candy and that I was going over to an empty box car to fix the candy in my sweater. I went inside the box car and there was a grass rope hanging down. I took the rope and tied it around my waste to keep the candy from falling out. While I was doing this a Japanese guard came over to me and asked what I was doing. I said I was fixing the rope. He then socked me in the stomach and asked me "nondi" which means what is it. I then had to show him what was in my sweater. He took it away and started my punishment. He took me to a central area and put 2 benches together and made me kneel on them with a board between my legs approximately 2 feet x 2" behind my knees.

Every time the soldiers walked by they would push on the board that was sticking out from my knees wrenching down on my knees. This went on for some time. A Japanese soldier with a gun, sword saw this and ordered me to jail. They took me to the jail where I had to stand at attention permanently. There was no guard watching me the whole time but would stick his head around the corner to make sure I was doing what I was supposed to do. While in the jail I had nothing to eat or drink. My friends would take some of their rice ration and sneak it to me. They would put some rice in paper and fold the paper and sneak around the back of the jail and put the paper through the spaces in the wood walls. I would eat this as fast as I could. Because I stole Japanese Army rations I was to be shot or beheaded. After my jail time was over and still in one piece the Japanese guard came to get me. Took me to the camp commander and interpreter. They asked all kind of questions. They asked why did I do it, I said because I was hungry and I was working hard. Someone wrote on a paper for me to sign about what I had done, breaking in the box and stealing the rations. My last statement on the piece of paper was, "I'm very sorry that I did this and I'll never get caught stealing again." It was saying this that got me released. They told me that I was free to go and that I was to go to the kitchen facility and to ask for some rice to eat. I did this and I was so full of rice from my friends sneaking me rice that when I got the rice I walked away from the person who gave it to me that I gave all my rice to other POW's that were sitting there eating. After this they realized me and told me that I had to go back to work the next day.

Occasionally we received packages from home. My mother and dad sent me a package containing American food, candy bars, chewing gum, cigarettes and feniment gum. (Something you take when you can't go potty.) I couldn't understand why my mother had sent this buy I kept it. The next day I went back on the job chewing my Wrigley's gum. One of the Japanese I was working with asked me what I was eating. I told him chewing gum and asked him if he wanted some. He said yes he did. So I took the feniment out of my pocket and gave him 3 pieces of it. He chewed the gum and said he really liked it. The next day I went back to work and my Japanese friend was not there. I found out he was sick at home. About 3 days later he showed up for work about 30 lbs. lighter than the day I gave him the gum. I told him I was glad to see him back and asked him if he wanted more. He waved his hands saying no, no, no.

One of the box cars that I unloaded was full of phosphorous. Once this was unloaded we had to push by hand the box car away and push the other one to where we could unload it. This box car had large bottles of something in it which we had to put on the yeahpole and carry out. I told my friends that I was going to figure out what was in them. As I was walking I swung with my right hand one of the bottles and purposely broke it. It went on the ground and spread out and when it hit the phosphorous it exploded and started a fire. They had to call the Japanese fire department to put the blaze out.

By the way, my pay for all this effort was 10 sen a day. 10 sen equals 2 cents American money.

I then left there by train and was transported to Tsuruga. The job was unloading ships. We were living at a big house on the water which was across the street from the ships that we were unloading. One day an American airplane flew over and dropped a bomb on our quarters and blew everything up. We ran across the street into the water and went up to our chin. When we heard the whistle of the bomb we would take a breath and duck under the water. We didn't know what they wanted to blow up, the ship, the house. Turns out it was the house, so we lost our living quarters. A day or 2 after the bombed the house a Japanese Commander came and inspected the building that had been blown up. While he was walking around going through the building he stepped in a slit trench. He fell in and came out smelling badly.

When they blew up the house they put us in another building approximately one mile from the water. After a short time at the new quarters one day we woke up and could not find a Japanese guard, they had all disappeared. We started walking around trying to figure out what was going on. Some of the men knocked on doors of the Japanese and were given rice. The American B-17's then flew over, opened the bomb bay doors and dropped clothing, shoes, food, everything we needed by parachutes. (The only trouble was everything was khaki and not sailor blue.) And as they left they dipped their wings back and forth. With this being done we were assured the war was over.

I went down to a Japanese police station to confirm the surrender. They were listening to an American broadcast and when I heard this I knew the war was over with. After putting on new clothes, 60 of us POW's went down to the railroad station and said take us to Tokyo. We got off the train we were looking for some sign of American vehicle or troops. I spotted an American jeep with 2 people in it. I went over to them and asked them, "you guys are American's aren't you?" And they said, "Who the hell are you?" We told them and they said what are you doing here. They said the American's aren't here yet. We said we were the first ones here. We had to go

to Yokohama. We got there, stepped away from the railroad station and saw American trucks going by non stop. We knew these were American trucks because they had the big American star on them. We were waving our hands and none of the trucks would stop. All 60 of us decided to make a road block for the trucks so we went across the road in a line and stood so the trucks couldn't get by. The truck stopped and the driver shouted some words at us and asked us "Who the hell are you?" (Keep in mind that we are dressed nice from the items that were dropped by the B-17) We told the driver that we were POW's and we wanted to know where the American's were. The driver could not believe it. We loaded the trucks and were taken to where the US were billeted. We got out of the truck and were told where to go. As my marine buddy and I were walking the truck driver yelled out, "here's some POW's". Everyone one just looked at us. As my Marine buddy and I were walking we saw a Navy nurse who was standing leaning against something with her chest out. My buddy said to her boy those sure are nice and she wiggled her chest and said don't worry there's a lot more of us where you're going. We were then told to get in line and go through that tent. When we entered the tent we were ordered to strip naked, walk through the middle of the tent and get deloused. Once in the back end of the tent we got all new clothes again. They put us up on the ship overnight. Next day we were going to be starting on our way home.

Morning came, we were taken to the airport where we climbed on a B-17. Took off and headed for the United States of America. I had a window on the airplane, watching the ocean. I looked at one of the propellers and it wasn't moving. I said to my friends that we are going to go down. The pilot came over the speaker and said that we couldn't make it, there were plane problems and that we had to turn around and go back to Okinawa.

Once back at the airport I took Japanese rifle, bayonet, etc. to bring back home. We went back to the hospital ship. The next morning we climbed on another B- 17 and took off and made it to Honolulu.

I sent a telegram to my mother and father, it said "One the way home, kill the fatted calf."