

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DALE MINGER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

HERNDON, VIRGINIA

APRIL 14, 2007

TRANSCRIPT BY

FANTASTIC TRANSCRIPTS

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Dale Minger. Is that how you pronounce your name?

Dale Minger: Minger, yes.

SI: Minger. This is Shaun Illingworth. The date is April 14, 2007, and the place is Herndon, Virginia. Thank you very much for sitting down with me. To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born.

DM: January 15, 1920. Tom Brokaw wrote this book, *The Greatest Generation*, and they were born in January 1920. So, I suppose I lead the greatest generation. [laughter] I also like to have humor.

SI: Well, that's good.

DM: I grew up on a farm about a mile and a half northwest of Wadena, [Iowa], and we walked to country school.

SI: Wadena is in Iowa.

DM: Yes. Fayette County. We walked to country school, and then we walked--we had to write tests to get out of country school. By the time I was twelve, I had a written test, and then I walked to high school. In those days, the Great Depression, when we played football, it was up away from town, we'd have to take our folks' car with all the players. Then they could come to the game when we played at home. This was the Great Depression. Then, in 1936, I started at Upper Iowa University. I had this uncle paying my tuition from South Dakota. Then, in the Great Depression, he moved to Glendale, California, right at the edge of Hollywood.

I went to college one year, and then I went down with a team of horses on an island by Guttenberg, Iowa, pulling logs. They were going to build the dams to clear the islands. Then I went back the next year, '38, to college again. Then, I stayed out in '39 to help build a new house on the farm. There was a spring that flows there, and we built it, so the spring flows into the house. But that time, the carpenter didn't want to put a bathroom in. [laughter] Anyway, it was put in--oak floors, French doors, full drive-in basement, bedrooms, dining room, kitchen. I think everything. I think the total bill was about thirty-nine-hundred dollars. Then I ended up going out to California because my uncle had moved.

Then the war was raging in Europe. My dad had bought me a rifle when I was twelve years old. I went back for timber, and there was a squirrel running along the ground there, and I shot it. I wounded it. It went up a hollow tree, and it was looking at me out this knothole. I said, "I should kill it," but I kept backing away so I couldn't see its eyes, and I missed the tree. Well, I kept on walking about a mile and a half down over the hill to Wadena, and I came home riding a bicycle. That was the end of my hunting. Anyway, I think it was 1941. A good friend of mine got drafted, and I knew I was going to be because I was twenty-one and strong. The war was raging in Europe. For some reason, we got an offer to go to the Philippines. So, we went to the Philippines.

SI: This was before you joined the military?

DM: No, this was in '41. We got over there about July of '41. I never had a day's training. In California, I heard about Sergeant Brady, who was the meanest man in the Philippine Islands. We went over on the *President Pierce* [Hugh L. Scott]. We got to Manila. I was sent to Corregidor and the only one that went to Sergeant Brady's outfit.

SI: Where were you when you heard about him? Were you on an Army base in California when you heard about Sergeant Brady?

DM: I don't know how. Somebody coming home from the Philippines or something. I don't know. All I remember is that I heard he was the meanest man in the Philippine Islands, and I had no training. Now, when we got to the Philippines, I'm the only person on that ship that went to Sergeant Brady. Well, I thought the way to get along with him was not to have anything to do with him. [laughter] So, I carried the suitcase off the ship for a man that was sick. It was rainy season. I'd opened it, saw these pictures--his wife--so his clothes and stuff wouldn't melt. I found out where he was. This was before the war started. I went into Brady's office and sat there. He looked at me, growled, and wanted to know what I wanted. I said, "Well, I'd like a pass to go to Manila." He looked down. I was waiting for him to ask my name, like a fool. The only new person in the company for months. Anyway, he looked up again and growled. He said, "Now, what do you want?" I said, "Nothing." The next morning I woke up. I felt something under my chin. I looked, and he'd delivered my pass to me while I was asleep. We became the best of friends right up until he was killed. That's one of those weird things that happened. But I heard about two o'clock in the morning about Pearl Harbor. Of course, we were across the dateline.

SI: Before we talk about Pearl Harbor, you were put into an antiaircraft artillery unit?

DM: Antiaircraft unit, yes. Battery D 60th Coast Artillery, number four gun. We never fired the gun. We'd been shown how. Then, when the war broke out, and the Japs started bombing us, we were meant to fire the guns. We [inaudible] but never fired it, see? The young man laid the shell into the gun barrel. The gunner ran the shot and pulled the lanyard, but he didn't know about the recoil. When it bounded back, it broke his shoulder. The young man that laid the shell in, I don't know where he went, but in about a minute or so, we [inaudible] operating it. So, that went on and on. One day, a number three gun--the gun commandeered ordered his crew out of the gun pit. One young man said he was going to take a nap. He laid on the gun platform, and a bomb hit right straight down on top of it. All we found was a shoe with a foot in it. The gun commander was court marshaled. He had never ordered that crew out before. To me, he should have gotten a medal of honor because something told him to get that crew. He'd never done it before. Anyway, it kept going, and Bataan fell.

SI: Where was your antiaircraft unit positioned during the fighting?

DM: It was on Corregidor.

SI: Was it always on Corregidor?

DM: Yes. It was east of Malinta Tunnel, up on the ridge. Then, when Bataan fell, they had a dirigible the Japanese put up so they could look straight down on us. They could bomb and shell at the same time. We were really getting it. One day, this voice says to me, "Get down," and I slid off the seat and the platform down on the ground, and there was a vast explosion. I landed on my head outside, and I could hear my first sergeant calling for help, but I couldn't move. The next thing I remember--the moon broke through the clouds and a little light and dirt was hitting me in the face. The Japanese had invaded and were shooting at me. For some reason, I was able to move. I picked a man up, carried him a half a mile ...

SI: This man had been hit by the Japanese, and he was next to you.

DM: Yes, they entered the island. I picked this man up, and I carried him about a half a mile to Malinta Tunnel. I don't know how long I was there laying there unconscious. I know I was terribly thirsty. I got him into the hospital area, and I'd been through this tunnel on streetcars, but never off. For some reason, I opened one of these lateral doors, and there was a little lightbulb shining. It was a new clothing department. I walked in there. I undressed. Wiped myself as clean as I could. I put on a brand-new uniform. Then I laid out a pair of trousers, shoes, socks--everything--rolled it up, and put a belt around it. I walked out. Here was a Jap wiping the blood off his bayonet, and an old man's long, white beard. Boy, when he saw me, he went out of there. Where I had walked, the dead lay everywhere. Now, I know this sounds like I'm bragging. It's unbelievable, but it's the truth. I couldn't believe it.

Anyway, the Japs took me up to their headquarters they set up. I had to stay with the Japanese guards all night. I'd count out work details in the daytime, all the time I was on Corregidor. Can you imagine that? [laughter] One day, we were loading. They'd cut our rations down to about a third a day. There we were, carrying boxes of food out--I wasn't--the other Americans. I told them, "Don't load the front of this hole down here. The Japs can't watch you. Then you can get down there and get something to eat once in a while." Then, I'd go down in there and check it out once in a while, too, and eat. [laughter] That was all while I was on Corregidor.

Then, eventually, we were taken to Manila, and we had to march through the streets with our hands in the air and put on a train. We were stood up in boxcars, packed in, and the doors slid shut. If you had to urinate when they'd stop at--they called it *barrios* over there--you could get out. They set out machine guns. You could get out a minute and then back on. At the first *barrio*, there were probably twenty-five women. By the time we got to Cabanatuan, there were probably five hundred women. We were marched to Cabanatuan in that heat. I knew I was going to pass out. Right out of that clear blue sky, just like a pail of cold water hit me on my head, and I had strength that you can't believe. At Cabanatuan, the death rate was about forty a day. One day, an American came to me, and he said, "I think I know how to solve this food problem." I said, "How's that?" He said, "We kill everybody over thirty. They've lived long enough." I said, "What good does that do? They'll cut our rations that much." He says, "That isn't what I mean." I said, "You mean, eat them?" He said, "They've lived long enough." I couldn't believe it. I made up mind; if I lived, I would look everybody straight in the eye. Then, from there, we went out on work detail.

SI: How long had you been in Cabanatuan before he made that suggestion?

DM: I don't know. Then we started being put on work details. I was sent out to this one place. I think it was Clark Field, and we were to move dirt for airplane strips, and I got sick. I went blind. I went about twenty-five days, not a bite of food. I can remember Japanese boys--there was an American doctor who had a microscope, and he had checked my blood. See, I had a different form of malaria. Mine was cerebral. I didn't have the chills and fever. The next thing I remember is being interviewed. This doctor, he asked me, "Are you sure you don't have syphilis? It's hard to tell the difference." I said, "I've got to have quinine." He said, "Well, the shape you're in, we'll have to take your word for it." That's the last I remember. One day, I started to see, and my mind started functioning. Seven months, I came-to in this Bilibid prison hospital in Manila. I couldn't believe it. Seven months I remember absolutely nothing.

SI: But they were giving you quinine the whole time?

DM: They must have. I have no idea what happened. But I came to with dry beriberi. Oh, it was so painful. I'd stick my feet in cold water. I'd slide them into leather shoes. Then they gave me some medicine that knocked me cold, so I could sleep all night. I don't know what it was, but eventually, then, I got out on work details. We had to go barefooted. I'd get down in a wallow with a water buffalo. Then I'd step up to my knees in it, and it would [inaudible] on me. We were carrying down ant hills and carrying this dirt, see? Well, then the ants couldn't bite me. Then, at night, I'd chip it off and do the same thing the next morning. That was one detail. Then I was on another one, and this Jap told me--he got on the truck, and he says, "I always get my work--my truck." We'd get up to a pile of dirt. He'd jump out. We'd shovel a little dirt on. He'd raise the hood, stick a crank in the front of the motor and open the door, and then he'd read until noon, and we sat in the shade. Then, at noon, [inaudible] scoop off that little dirt, and do the same thing in the afternoon. I never could figure out how he got away with that, but he did. Another detail--a little Jap told me if I did something, I could rest. I said, "Why should I believe you?" He looked all around to see if any Japanese were looking and let me know he's a Christian--the sign of the cross.

SI: He crossed himself.

DM: One day in Manila, we were right outside of a bakery, and this one Japanese had me on that truck that we never worked, came down the sidewalk, and I called him over. I said, "Would you get us something to eat?" Somewhere I had twenty pesos. He went in and got a whole armful of goods, and I gave him the twenty pesos. He said, [speaks in foreign language] and gave me twelve pesos change, and went on down the street. [laughter] I didn't offer the guard anything to eat. But that went on that way around the Philippines until October of '44.

SI: You mentioned before we started recording, that you witnessed some executions early on.

DM: Those were the first days, right after they took over. The first few days. Why those Americans tried to escape, I don't know. Later on, from Palawan Island, one did escape. I guess a few more did through the Filipinos. But I don't know. I saw the executions on the first ones

that got caught, so I didn't try it, and we'd watch each other. But later on, I guess it did happen once in a while. Now, at Palawan Island, that's where the--I had this friend of mine from Wadena that was on that island. When I came-to in this Bilibid prison, he came in, and I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I don't know. It's a strange fever." That's the island where about a hundred and fifty men were in their foxholes, and the Japs poured gasoline on them and burned them alive. [Editor's Note: On December 14, 1944, Japanese soldiers set fire to and shot one hundred and fifty American prisoners of war that were sheltered in trenches at the Palawan Prison Camp. Eleven men survived.] Did you hear about that? Ever hear about it?

SI: I've heard accounts about this.

DM: Anyway, [inaudible] is still alive yet. In Iowa, there are seven of us. He and I are two of the seven and went to high school together. But he can't walk anymore. He lives in Waterloo. His mind is good yet. He was in the hospital for two years when we got home. Oh, boy.

SI: In describing the executions earlier, you said it was pretty unbelievable. You couldn't believe what you were seeing.

DM: What?

SI: You said you couldn't even believe what you were seeing.

DM: No. That's when I came to. Let me see now. Then, I was work details around the island there, until October '44. The Americans were bombing pretty heavily. I don't know what I was doing up on Dewey Boulevard under some palm trees. Anyway, I saw this American plane come down past me, and I saw the pilot's face, and it exploded. Hit the ground, exploded right beside me--just up from me. So, I thought, "Well, it's about over." So, I went back to be with the rest of the men. I don't know what I was doing out there alone anyway. Maybe the Japs were so excited that they didn't even recognize it. But I thought, "Well, I want to be with the rest of them." Well, they brought in--I think it was eight more ships. They put us down in a coal bin, shoulder to shoulder and back to belly with bayonets.

For some reason, I had a blanket hanging around my neck and two short pieces of rope. When it got daylight down in there, I saw two hooks over on the side of the ship. I told the fellows, "I'll crawl over you. I won't bother you anymore." And I made a hammock up there. Why I had that blanket and two pieces of rope is one of those mysteries of my life again. But the third day out, our submarine sank the other six ships. Every day, when it'd get daylight, a rope would come down and pull the dead bodies up and throw them in the ocean. In Hampton, Virginia, at our reunion is the only time I met a man who was on that ship. He's the one that had to pull the dead bodies up and throw them in the ocean. But on this trip to Japan, we stopped at Taiwan. They let us off the ground for a little while. Then we got to Moji in the wintertime. There were American Red Cross women there. This is in late '44, early '45. They gave us blankets and overcoats and shoes and things like that. They must have given medicine because we were put on a train going north, and when the train stopped, I went to straighten up, and I had terrible pain in my chest. Somebody helped me up the side of that mountain that night. When I came to, I

was lying in some yellow straw in a barn with the sun shining in the windows on me. Can you imagine that? The pain was gone. So, then, I went to work at a copper smelter.

SI: How were the American Red Cross women able to ...

DM: I have no idea.

SI: Were they prisoners themselves?

DM: No. I don't know. This is a thing I don't know. But they were there [with] blankets. We were so thin that before we got separated, we'd lay four blankets down--there were seven of us--and we'd lay on our sides and put the other three blankets over it. We were that thin. If one had to move, we all had to move, see? I never saw a garbage pail in Japan. But one day, walking to work to the copper smelter, I felt a hand in my pocket. I reached in, and someone had--a Japanese had come up and slipped a rice ball in my pocket. Yeah, they were practically starving to death, too. But I got along. Getting hit one time down in the Philippines--this Jap was hollering [speaks in Japanese]. It didn't mean anything to me. Well, they'd numbered me, the Japanese. So, it probably took me ten minutes to learn to count to a thousand--very simple if you learn to count to ten. To eleven, you have to have a ten and a one. It's [counts to ten in Japanese]. At ninety-nine, to get to a hundred, it's [speaks in Japanese]. Then it's [speaks in Japanese], a hundred and one. A very simple way to count. So, I got along real good. Luckily, I had a couple of years of college before that. There were some people over there from the Great Depression that couldn't read or write--from Kentucky, Tennessee, and around there. Absolutely couldn't read or write.

Then one day, there were no guards. American planes had been bombing us and bombing us. Before that, every time we were being bombed, we had a cave we'd get in on the side of the mountain. I was going down this sidewalk in the dark, and somebody left a manhole cover off. I went down through, and I cut my face wide open across here and fell down over my chin. The Japs, they just pulled it up and taped it. I could pull my teeth out like that. I have one original tooth yet down here. [laughter] I'm pretty artificial. Anyway, when they stopped, they started dropping food, clothing, magazines and newspapers and stuff. The Japanese were scared of the civilians, but I taught the little children how to chew gum. I showed them how and boy, I'd walk down the streets, and they'd be pounding on my legs wanting gum. I went into a barbershop. These two Japanese women--the straight razors. This one started right up my hairline, right down onto my eyebrows, down over my eyelids, down over my nose and ears. I couldn't feel that razor; she was that accurate. Can you imagine that?

Then, they took us by train to Sendai. There was a hospital ship there. That's where we had to be sprayed through our new clothes in the ocean. I think I weighed eighty pounds by then. Then, when we got to Tokyo, we were flown to Manila. I remember on the flight there was a young nurse humming a pretty melody, and I said, "What's that?" She said, "You never heard 'White Christmas'?" I hadn't heard--only when Roosevelt died. Then we were taken down to Manila. We were put on a ship. Somewhere I was interviewed along the way. They wanted to know where I enlisted. I said, "Fort Des Moines." They said, "Don't be funny. You know that's WAC [Women's Army Corps] detachment." I'd never heard of WACs. All this was new to me.

They fed us night and day to try and get some weight on us. We got back to Seattle, and a friend of mine, (Ed Olson?) from Aurora, Colorado, when we landed, instead of going right to the hospital, we went uptown, got our pictures taken, and partied a little bit. Then we hired a taxi to take us to the hospital. I woke up the next morning, and the driver was asleep, and we'd been sleeping in the backseat, and the meter was running. Seventy dollars. I said, "Ed, where'd I get that money?" He said, "Well, you got in a dice game on the way home, and I pulled the money in for you." [laughter]

Anyway, I got to the hospital then. Then I ended up [inaudible] in Illinois to get discharged. Before that, even my barracks bag--everything was done for me, see? This man came in; he said, "Sign this. You won't have to get up." Well, I signed it because that's the way things had been going for me, but what I had done is reenlist for a year. Boy, I had quite a few months of--I didn't do anything. Well, I did spend a little time up in Minneapolis. But I didn't know what a military funeral was or anything. One day, up there, I was ordered to (pick up?) military funerals. So, I read the instructions. I asked the guys if they knew how to--yeah, they knew how to do it. So, we got out to the cemetery, and when I told her (put down arms?), this one guy loaded. When I said, "Load," he aimed. Well, I thought, "He's awake now." When I said, "Aim," he fired. He had people laughing. The mourners were laughing; it was so bad. Then I took him back to the truck, and I'll tell you--he got a recycling. I can still see that.

Then, one day, another thing I had to do was take a casket to Harper Ferry's, West Virginia. I had to stay with that casket. When we changed trains in Chicago, I had to be on the truck. We got down there, and this undertaker said, "Don't ask any questions here." He said, "I've had two funerals with this family in the last two years, both of the stillborn children. One weight sixteen pounds, and one seventeen pounds, and they only had one bedroom." I got that bedroom. Can you imagine? That was their living conditions? Then another one, before I got discharged, was up in Minneapolis. This prisoner in a hospital wanted to go to a hospital. So, I drove. I had a man get in the back seat, another soldier, and put a gun right to the back of his head. I said, "Now, I'm driving in a strange city, but don't let him move." We got him to the hospital, and he didn't have to go to the hospital at all. But he got back to prison. [laughter] How can I remember all of those things? It's unbelievable.

SI: A lot of very interesting experiences.

DM: Well, then I seizures from that cerebral malaria. Finally, I went down to the VA [Veterans Affairs], and I drank pretty heavily, too, when I got home. I couldn't even go to church because of the seizures, and I'd have to drink to be around people. Down to the VA in Iowa City, then they checked me out thoroughly, and they put me on this Tegretol, and they said, "Not one beer." I've never had a seizure since. Now I'm a regular church member again, and my life's getting straightened out. My paralysis has stopped. I still have a driver's license.

SI: That's good.

DM: I've been blind and paralyzed. I told you about being paralyzed, didn't I?

SI: On the beach.

DM: It was two pieces of board under my armpits. Maybe I didn't.

SI: Tell me about that.

DM: That was while I was in the Philippines. This man came to me. I had these two pieces of board under my armpits, dragging myself around. He came to me, and he said, "I've got six shots." I'm going to give you one every three days. I went for the fourth shot. I'm walking like I am today, and he said, "There's another man in this camp in the same shape. Do you care if I give him the other three shots?" I said, "I don't mind. I'm walking." But I never saw him before or afterward either. Now, who was that? Here I am, eighty-seven, particularly without an ache or a pain. It's pretty weird this life I've had, isn't it?

SI: You talked about guardian angels and faith. When you were in the camps, did that belief in a higher power help you through? What helped you through?

DM: I got laughed at one time. I had a little pocket Bible, and I was reading it. This was before I was taken prisoner. I got laughed at by an American. I was in church the night before I was leaving. We had a [inaudible] at the time, and I happened to see him afterward. He said, "I understand you're leaving in the morning." I said, "As far as I know." He said, "I wouldn't have been in church tonight." We had a young people's meeting on Sunday evenings. But he trained pilots through the war years. When I came home, I couldn't go to church because of the seizures and everything. Once they put me on that medicine in Iowa City, that dentist down there--if anything happens, he'll even call me at night to find out how things are. Isn't that great? I can't believe that I'm getting that kind of care, but I am--the medicine and nerve pills and sleep apnea. They take care of everything. It's a great hospital. I'm about ninety miles north of it. I have a hundred percent disability, and they pay me for my mileage down there. I don't have to file income tax on that pay.

SI: Was it difficult to get qualified for the hundred percent disability?

DM: I don't know. There was somebody in Wadena that was helping me out. He's dead now. I don't know. I was so fouled up. I went back to college, and they couldn't understand what was wrong. It was these seizures and stuff. I was about a week from graduating, and the VA came around and wanted to know what I was going to do. I said, "Well, I guess I'm going to have to try and farm." They said, "Oh, don't graduate. You've got two years of schooling coming." Then I went to night school [for] two years. There was a banker who told me that they'd finance me at five percent. I've been dealing with that bank ever since. Everybody was so nice to me. They started getting new cars over at (Elgin?) [inaudible]. The doctor got the first one. The (vet?) the second, and I got the third. [laughter] I was able to hire good help. Then, by going down to the VA and getting those seizures and stuff straightened out, no drinking--I've had a very lucky life for what I've been through. Very lucky. I've been blind, paralyzed, sterilized. At one time, I had breasts so big I couldn't touch them. They were using me as a guinea pig. But I look at the bright side.

SI: Who was doing that? The VA?

DM: What?

SI: Who was using you as a guinea pig?

DM: This was the Japs. When I say I look at the bright side that I'm sterilized, this is the way God intended. This is the way it is. I help other people. I try to help other people.

SI: When were they using you as a guinea pig? In the hospital in Manila?

DM: In the prison camps. I don't know what they were doing to me. It might have been something they fed you. What we really had was wormy rice and maybe a piece of fish once in a while or a little piece of meat. The day I came-to and started to see, they brought my rice with blood poured over it. A man about fifteen inches from me died at that moment, and I gulped that rice down, and I thought, "Dale Minger, how far down have you gone?" I remember that incident, too. Every time I have communion in church, I think of that. When the blood is mentioned, I think of that situation. That's the day I started to see and remember. Isn't it something to have your mind quit functioning the moment that your eyes do and then come back at the same time?

SI: Yes.

DM: Seven months. It's unbelievable, isn't it?

SI: Yes. It's amazing you survived everything you did.

DM: I know. It's unbelievable.

SI: You mentioned that when you got into Manila, they made you march through the city. Can you describe that?

DM: Well, we had to march through with our arms in the air so they could take pictures of us, I suppose.

SI: Did they have people lined up?

DM: Well, the Filipinos lined along the street waving to us. I liked the Philippines. I've been back a lot of times. I really like the Filipino people. I considered moving back there a number of years ago. I had my mother in a nursing home, and I found out you could hire three maids for practically nothing. It was costing--I don't know--the nursing home was costing--the total bill was around three hundred thousand. I was out there for Christmas dinner one day, and there was a Filipino doctor and a Filipino wife. She happened to be sitting next to me. I told her, "The next time your husband bills me, you're going to have to collect it." Then she said, "It will cost you double." So, she didn't have to do that. [laughter] There are people yet with humor around the world.

Yeah, I've been back to the Philippines. I've been back to Japan. I've been back to Taiwan. This banker's wife said, "You're going to Taiwan. You go to the Marble Mountains." So, I got a flight from Taipei back in the Marble Mountains. I couldn't believe what I saw there, the way that marble rolled out of the mountains, or big bluffs, or whatever you call them because they'd saw them like we saw logs. They have blades an inch apart, and the sand and the water were dripping down over the point of the blades. Back in there, I got a picture of two aborigine girls sitting on my lap with their arms around my neck, smiling and framed in marble. [laughter] I've done a lot of traveling. I met a lady in Hong Kong, China, that's very religious. She lives in Colorado. She's the one that got me a lot of these trips, too. I've got to go see her this June or July. It's about nine-hundred miles from where I live.

SI: Did you have trouble going back to Japan early on? Or the Philippines?

DM: No, I got along pretty good with the Japs. One little Jap one time down there--oh, he was mad. He was a guard down in the Philippines. He was angry. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "My dad wouldn't speak to me." I said, "What are you talking about?" He'd been home on furlough from the Philippines. They were in the same house, and his dad wouldn't speak to him. I said, "Why wouldn't your dad speak to you?" "Well, he said he's an officer, and I'm not." Can you imagine that?

SI: Wow.

DM: No, I got along pretty good with the Japs. They were trapped.

SI: Were you able to pick up Japanese pretty quickly, or did they speak to you in English?

DM: A lot of them could speak good English, and I picked up a little Japanese. Yeah, [speaks in Japanese] things like that. I got some of it. I don't remember much of it anymore. Yeah.

SI: Everyone I've talked to, and yourself included, describe most of the guards were very cruel, and would randomly kill people, but some of them were more kind, like the guy you mentioned who was Christian and gave you some food.

DM: Some were very cruel, but there were some that weren't. I happened to be the lucky one that got around some of the nice ones. But I did see executions. I saw a murder before the war started in front of my eyes. I don't know. I was walking along there, about noon on Corregidor, and it was a [Filipino] guard. There was a Filipino prisoner. I didn't see the prisoner do anything, but the Filipino just shot him right in front of my eyes, just like that. That's the first murder I saw.

SI: It was a Filipino guarding another Filipino.

DM: Yeah. Why he shot him right there, I don't know. I didn't see the prisoner do anything. He must have moved slightly or something. It's hard what you see in this world, I'll tell you.

SI: Do you want some more water? I'll pour it for you.

DM: Why I'm so thirsty, I don't know.

SI: Let me grab this note that they slipped under the door. Can you tell me a little bit more about the copper smelting in Japan and what you did?

DM: That job, up at the copper smelter--they had I think it was twenty-seven-hundred degrees heat. The job they gave me, you had to ram a rod in to keep the duct open through there, and the sparks would fly back out. I'd do it just once in a while. I didn't like that, and somebody, another American boy, he took it in a hurry. Sparks hit you in the eyes; they can blind you. Well, then I took the job of dipping water out of a stream and pouring on the slag to cool it off. What I didn't know was below that stream was another fast one, and one time, when I reached in there, I had leaped a little too deep, and it hooked the pail out of my hand, and it plugged the drain, and the water started flowing towards the smelter. The Japanese were running and screaming. Oh, boy. [inaudible] explosion, but nobody beat me up. Anyway, then I ended up--there were bowlegged women. They had sacks on their back, and they carried the coal over to this smelter. Why they didn't use a wheelbarrow or something, I don't know, but that was what they had to do. I ended up helping fill the coal in those sacks on their back. [laughter] I can still see those poor things, walking bowlegged and carrying that coal over there. Yeah.

SI: How dangerous was this work? Did anybody in your group get killed?

DM: No, not that I know of. Not that I know of. It was down in the Philippines, where the deaths were heavy.

SI: Were the guards less cruel in Japan?

DM: Yes. I didn't have too [many] problems up there. I told you about getting a shave. I went down the street. At first, the Japanese were scared of us, see? Because you start down the street and boy, they'd just be rushing off in any direction, the women. But I showed the little children how to chew gum and stuff from my parachute. Another thing, when I mentioned parachute, of all the planes I helped shoot down, I never saw a parachute. Those Japanese rode them right to their death. Never a parachute. I guess the greatest thing they could do is die for their emperor. I don't understand it, but that's what they were doing.

SI: You mentioned that when the war ended, the guards had just left the camp.

DM: Yes.

SI: Did you mostly stay in the camp? Were people afraid to leave?

DM: Well, at that time, there were Australians there, and there were Dutch. There were Canadians. I don't know--a lot of places up there. Up in Japan--see, down in the Philippines, as a prisoner, any time that a man said he'd trade his meal for a cigarette, he'd given up. Up in Japan, we got a Red Cross box on a Sunday. They said, "You're going to get one." The next Sunday was the emperor's birthday, and they said, "You're going to get one more." I thought,

"Well, I've lived this long on this food, and everybody was eating up their Red Cross boxes." So, I didn't open mine until about Wednesday. Then I traded--they were offering to trade, so I opened mine and traded it off. We got the one the next Sunday. I collected.

I had a corner in the cigarette market and no way of protecting myself, but the Japs had given a West Point graduate a little room, and he kept my cigarettes for me. I never took a meal unless a man couldn't eat anymore. One day, I collected a meal, and I saw this one American eat his ration at break time there at the smelter. But he got right beside me at noon and opened his mess kit, and it was empty. This Jap guard was griping his rifle and staring right at us. I opened mine, and it was full. I sat it down. I went over, and I took hold of the American's shirt and started twisting. I said, "I saw you eat your ration. Are you going to cause me to get that terrible beating?" I looked him right in the eye. Finally, he said, "I ate my ration." I said, "Alright." I let loose of him and picked mine up, but I didn't dare to give him any, or it'd have looked like I had stolen it. I can still see that Jap guard there staring at me. [laughter]

SI: Why was the guard so upset? Did they not want people stealing from each other?

DM: Yeah. It looked like I'd stolen. When I got there, down in the Philippines, when I got that box of vitamin pills from my uncle, I had to divide the food because the sores healed up--I could look right in and see the bone on my right arm from pellagra. Then I had to divide the food. You can't believe how those Americans would make it look like I was cheating. They could take a mess kit with the rounded edges and throw it back up to make it about twice as deep. Anything they could take. Or they'd get some piece of tin to make it look like--anything to make it look like you were cheating. So, finally, I numbered them. I said, "Now, any time there's anything left in this bucket, that number gets the rest of it." Boy, I'm telling you. When their numbers were coming up, they really watched me. How'd I get involved in all that stuff? [laughter]

SI: You mentioned the cigarettes. Was there a lot of trading and commerce?

DM: Oh, some. If they could get a hold of anything to trade, there was some.

SI: Did you trade with the guards at all?

DM: Yeah. They weren't all that bad.

SI: Were there any guards that were particularly bad?

DM: There were some. But they weren't all that way. I remember one time down in the Philippines; this American asked me if I'd like to have supper with him. I said, "What have you got to eat that I haven't?" He said, "You know that little dog that the major head?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "He hasn't got him anymore." But I didn't eat with him. But another time, they were cooking rice in these big black tubs and fire under them. This American came over and wanted to know if he could cook some meat. The cook said, "What have you got?" He had a little tin can that was about half full of water and a dead mouse floating in it. He wanted to cook that mouse. Can you imagine hunger like that?

I'll tell you. Between the Great Depression all my teenage years, and then that, and the next four or five years, it has affected my life. It's really affected it. I look at the prices of things. You know what I mean. I was down in a big store in Cedar Rapids one day, and I was farming. They had a toolbox there, about sixty-nine cents. I took it over to one of the managers. I said, "How many of these do you have?" Boy, he ripped that off. He said, "That's one of our biggest problems." See, people go along and put these little cheap prices on stuff. When they went through the checkout counter, all the girl is looking at is the price tag. He said, "That's one of our biggest problems." I learned that, too.

SI: Let's see. You talked also about humor. Did having a sense of humor help at all in the camps?

DM: Yeah. There was some humor. I don't remember anymore, but there was some.

SI: Dark humor?

DM: One thing I remember when this "Humor in Uniform"--*Reader's Digest* will pay three hundred dollars--I've never mailed it in, but before the war started, we had a man with a big nose in Corregidor. [inaudible] big nose, and he was always snooping around. He got drunk over in Manila. We laid him in the bathroom. The men and women use the same bathroom. To take a shower, you had a wooden clog with a strap over your foot. He came-to in there, and he heard this water running. He slid back, got his head under the door--the door is about from your knees to your shoulders. A Filipino gal was taking a shower. She got the water out of our eyes, and when she saw his face down there when that clog came down on his nose, he really had a big nose. [laughter] I can remember that incident. Yeah, I can remember that one. I never sent it in to *Reader's [Digest]*. They probably wouldn't accept that anyway.

SI: Maybe not. It's a bit more randy than their usual content.

DM: But that's true.

SI: You mentioned people giving up. They would ask for a cigarette instead of a meal. Was that common as time went on, or was it mostly in the beginning?

DM: Well, I didn't smoke. The average death rate was about forty a day in Cabanatuan.

SI: Would everybody try to help each other along?

DM: Well, some would steal. I had a little money one time. This fellow said he was going into work detail in Manila. So, I gave it to him to see if he could buy something. He never came back. I went over to the barracks where he lived, and I asked the commander there--I said, "Have you had any work details in Manila?" He said, "Never." I was walking back, and they were carrying these dead out. I said, "Do you know who this is?" They told me, and it was the same guy. One time, I got a letter asking me to come out to the community and this church. They wanted me up at the pulpit, and they wanted to know if he got a Christian wedding. All I could say was yes, but what we got was a--they would pile them up in the daytime, and then at

night, they'd [inaudible] just lay the corpses in. But one night, my gosh, a guy came to in one of those piles and came out and lived. So, I hope we never buried anybody that was alive, but in that once instance, it happened that he came to, got out, and lived.

SI: Were you ever on the burial detail?

DM: No. Before the war started, this fellow from Wadena and I were together. This is four or five months before the war started, and we mentioned Wadena. This man came to us, and he said, "Are you from Wadena, Iowa?" "Yeah." He said, "Are you going to be here a while?" "Yeah." He left. He came back with a letter. He's from New York. I don't know how he'd gotten to that little community, but he did. Anyway, he got a letter from this girl, and she said, "I am pregnant. I know that you're the father. You're the only man I was with during the month of August." He lived. I saw him. I said, "What are you going to do if you get to San Francisco, and there's a woman standing there with a five-year-old redheaded kid?" He said, "Reenlist for foreign service." [laughter]

SI: Is there anything else that we haven't gone over about your experience? Anything you'd like to mention?

DM: No, not really. I've been given beautiful care and able to hire good help, and I was financed by the bank. Everything has been going real good for me--no more seizures. I don't break the speed limit at my age. I'm forty miles from a gambling boat. I play cards maybe sixteen miles away or twelve miles away some nights. I was playing five-dollar blackjack here not too long ago. This gal came over, wrapped a nice scarf around my neck that she knitted. It was my birthday gift. I didn't know she knew me that well. I said, "I wonder why she did that." They said, "Well, you're always a tipper." I do pretty good playing that five-dollar blackjack. I try to be very careful. This girl that's my continuity of care down at the VA told me to keep on doing right what I've been doing. [laughter]

SI: Did you play any cards or do any gambling in the camps?

DM: I don't remember.

SI: They kept you working a lot, but would you do anything ...

DM: The time that I came to from being blind, while I was recovering, a Russian Jew taught me how to play chess. I remember that. A Pollack and him were good friends. The Pollack was pretending he was blind. We had bamboo slats to sleep on. For some reason, this one time, I found a needle and pulled a string off a shelter-half and some corn husks. I scooped them in and folded it and made myself a mattress. How I found that needle, I don't know. But this time, this Pollack said--I'm not going to use any names. He said, "Going out there and earn ten centavos a day." Well, I don't remember getting paid. I said, "No, I'm going out because I have to." He said, "Don't tell me." He was sleeping beside me on those bamboo slats. I hauled off like that, and I hit him in the mouth and stood up. I hit him again, and I bumped my elbow. I couldn't raise my right arm. I had two black eyes when I went to work. The Japs demanded to know who

gave me those black eyes. I had to tell them. This Pollack went to work. They said, "No blind man could use his fists that way." [laughter] He went to work, too. I remember that now.

SI: Well, I just want to reiterate for the tape that one of your main reasons for being here is to try and find other people who were in your gun group.

DM: I have been trying and trying to see if anyone else of my gun crew of thirteen men.

SI: Do you remember any of their names?

DM: No, I don't. All I know is the number. I remember the voice telling me to get down and then a vast explosion. I just can't believe that I'm the only survivor. But there was a terrible explosion in there, and I was below the gun pit on the ground. Then, to be blown up and out. It's bothered me, but if I'm the only one--I may be. I've left my message out here on the board.

SI: How long had you been with those guys before this happened?

DM: I got there about July of '41. This happened in May of '42.

SI: You were with them for quite a while.

DM: Yes.

SI: You mentioned before that you had shot down a number of planes and seen a lot of action before the surrender.

DM: Yes. That's why I said--well, I never saw a parachute of all the planes. They got so high we couldn't reach them. One day, they must have reported--they had us bombed out. There were two big bombers coming in from the South. We were down to about nine seconds, and we got the command to fire. We blew their wing off of one, and it came screaming down at us. The other one went down in the water out there. Then we really got bombed and shelled. I was wishing we hadn't have done it. [laughter] I can remember that time. Boy, did we get it. What I can't understand is how I could go blind, paralyzed, blown out of a gun pit, and never get a piece of shrapnel, and be on a ship going to Japan that wasn't torpedoed, and be able to come here today at eighty-seven. I showed you my birthday card, didn't I?

SI: No. [laughter]

DM: [laughter] Read it.

SI: Okay. "For your eighty-seventh birthday, I hired this woman to come to your place and do a highly erotic striptease. But don't worry. She knows CPR." [laughter]

DM: See what I mean about my life?

SI: Humor helps you through.

DM: It must be my lawyer. I know it's my lawyer. She'd do things like that. When you pull income tax, I pulled it out and asked her--I said, "Did you send this?" "No." I said, "Do you have a Bible here?" "No." [laughter] On my eightieth birthday, I had her at a restaurant, and a minister and his wife. I said, "I suppose you're wondering why I've done this. I figure when I meet Saint Peter, if I have a lawyer and a minister with me, I might have a chance to get into heaven." [laughter] That was kind of an expensive meal, too. I went in that restaurant a couple of months ago, and a relative's wife was sitting there and her sister-in-law. She looked up at me and said, "What's up?" I said, "At my age?" The waitress standing there said, "That's a good answer." [laughter]

SI: Well, thank you very much for sitting down and talking with me. Is there anything else you wanted to put on the tape?

DM: No. Not that I can think of right now.

SI: Well, thank you very much.

DM: I've had some miracles. There's one thing that really I can't forget. I had a man that worked for me for years. Every year, I'd give him a bonus. This one year, I said, "Do you know what it is? It's a free trip to Las Vegas, but no gambling." I'd never thought of it. So, I arranged it. We drove to Las Vegas, went to all the big shows, came home. He got sick, real sick. I was driving him down to Finley [Hospital] in Dubuque. I went into the emergency section. All the way, he was talking about those shows. In the emergency section--by the time I got parked and in, he died. There he was, talking about those shows, dying. Now, what caused me to say--his trip was to Las Vegas. These are the things that shake me. Yes. He worked for me for years. Yes. Mark was quite a man. But I quit being an elder anymore. I quit being an usher. Somebody asked me one time, how come I had the money to travel so much? I said, "Well, when I'm ushering in church, and everybody's bowing their heads and praying, I slip a little money in my pocket." I did lie once in a while, too, jokingly. As far as I'm concerned, nobody asked to be born, but we can't know what sex or color we're going to be. Nobody lives forever, so enjoy life if you can.

SI: That's a great place to end. Thank you again very much.

DM: You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 9/26/2020

Reviewed by Denise L. Strudthoff 9/26/2021

Reviewed by Isabella Kolic 2/5/2021