



Eugene Nielsen

United States Army

Private First Class

Pacific Theater

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Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:
Geoffrey Panos

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Geoff: When did you get into the Army?

Eugene: It was in January of '41 is when I went down to the recruiting station there and talked to them about it.

Geoff: And how did you end up in the Philippines?

Eugene: Well I had a certain amount of choices and I just thought maybe the Philippines might be more interesting, I didn't know anything about the country to speak of but I thought it might be interesting.

Geoff: And like I said, we're going to get into the other things like the attack Corregidor, Bataan, everything; but right now we're going to talk about Palawan. I know it is backwards, but forgive me, so when did you become a POW?

Eugene: The surrender took place on May the 6th, 1942.

Geoff: And how long were you a POW before you went to Palawan?

Eugene: We went to Palawan about 6 or 7 months after we went to Cabanatuan.

Geoff: And how long were you at Palawan before you escaped?

Eugene: Palawan, what was the date when I got there? (Background conversation)

Geoff: So maybe the late fall of '42?

Eugene: Yes, somewhere around there.

Geoff: And what did you do at Palawan, what did they start having you do?

Eugene: As a group we was building an airfield and we was clearing it out of the jungle more or less, cutting down the trees and digging out the ruts and leveling it out, chipping coral rock in places. It was all hand labor, the tools was very crude a lot of them was handmade probably, the axes were not a nice axe like we have built like a club on a stick well a club with a head on it. But it would cut and we'd be in groves and we'd dig around the tree and then we'd pick and shovel and then cut the roots with those axes.

Geoff: How many hours a day would they work you?

Eugene: It was pretty close to around 8 hours a day, of course when the American bombers started bombing the field we worked as high as 14 to 15 hours a day.

Geoff: When did those bombers start doing that?

Eugene: It was as long as December, long in August or September of '44.

Geoff: So this was a few months before you escaped?

Eugene: Yes.

Geoff: Now we've heard a lot about how awful the Japanese were to their prisoners, what did you think when the Americans started bombing the airfield? Were you happy?

Eugene: Oh yes.

Geoff: Why were you happy?

Eugene: Well it was our planes it was on our side.

Geoff: And could you see the pilots, could you see the planes?

Eugene: When they'd come down and straight, now to begin with it was more or less a patrol bomber B24 was loaded with machine guns and was patrolled, carried a couple of small bombs in it. But they'd circle the island and go in and out every little nook and making sure there weren't ships being snuck in there at night or something like that. And that went on for quite awhile and then later on why they started the bombing. This here alone plane for some reason or another, would come in at midnight and again at noon, very close and I never could understand why but the Japs put 5 Zero planes up there and one day they was waiting for them to come in at noon and they was up there all ready and here it comes, we was all kind of holding our breath hoping it didn't come that day. But here it comes same as usual and those 5 Zero planes was going to shoot it down, well he went right down the length of the field and as he went up out to the ocean there, why we seen a big black cloud in the sky. When a plane blows up it's a black cloud, its not a white one like some shells are white, some are black when they explode regards what kind of powder they used.

Geoff: So was this the American plane?

Eugene: Yes. But it went out, come right down, circled in and out, you come right down to the length of the field and after it went a ways by the Japanese was starting to dive on it. And he was up there quite high with the zero fighters and they dived down a ways but they seemed to be scared to get too close to it 'cause they probably knew how many machine guns it had on it and so they'd pull out before they got too close and I don't think they ever hit it.

Geoff: How many men were in the camp with you?

Eugene: It varied from around, probably close to 400 down to at last there, there's 150. It went down to 300 from the 400 and so, and then they took half of them out and took them up to Manchuria to work on mines and different stuff.

Geoff: And at this time, what were you being fed and what were some of the diseases and things you had to put up with?

Eugene: The diseases was much worse at Cabanatuan than they were at Palawan. But what we had to put up with down there, there's no medicine, no clothing, no toothbrush or toothpaste or soap or clothes, they never gave us anything like that. If you was ripe out of everything they'd give you a g-string, a piece of white cloth about maybe a foot wide and 18-20 inches long. You'd tie that around so it'd be hanging on the back of you, you'd tie it around you and then you'd loop it through your legs and over the string. A lot of guys would pick up old hatch or anything they could find to use to keep the sun off of them a little bit, it was hot especially at certain times of the year. And they'd go out to work and they had a little hat and sometimes they didn't have one, they'd be in the g-string and that was it, we didn't have shoes. I never had a pair of shoes on my feet for; oh it was probably 2 ½ to 3 years somewhere in there.

Geoff: What about what you had to eat?

Eugene: The food was rice and soup and the rice, if it was anything that the Japs didn't want, sometimes it'd get moldy, it was usually wormy to some extent. The worms were white with a black head about the same size as a kernel of rice, if the head was covered up why you'd never know it. But there was also, we got rice with shaft in it, it wasn't processed and you could hardly eat it, it's just like getting a mouthful of straw. The soup was, the most common soup we had was rice and grains. When it first came on the grains, they'd go out and cut them in a watery place or swampy place, like hay almost they'd cut it with a sie, throw it on a truck and bring it in, chop it up and boil it. And then you'd get a cup of that. One thing that hurt quite a bit is at times they wouldn't put salt in it, they wouldn't give us any salt and that made it hard to eat. Do you want to hear about the two best meals I had?

Geoff: Sure.

Eugene: There was two meals that I'll always remember. The one was, the Japanese had some squash, it was like cabbage squash and they peeled them and they threw all the peels in a separate pile to throw in the garbage. And one of they guys, he worked there, he took and gathered up and give us, I think it was a gallon can full of them. There was about 5 or 6 of us

that was involved with that, and they put it down and we had fires down there to boil the water and cook the rice and soup. And the squash was cooked and one of the guys had some salt, it was in one of these little cans he had and was kind of rusted but it was still salty. And he poured that in the squash and then we boiled it up and we had rice and squash and we had all we wanted. The other time, the Japanese shot a caribou – that's a water buffalo or whatever you want to call it. And they got it in and they cut all the meat off and the Japanese had that and they give us all the bones. Well we had a big chopping block there with sledgehammers; we had hammers we had to break a lot of rock out there on the field. And they took and put the bones all on that big block and broke it up real good with those sledgehammers and boiled them. Well we got, we didn't get a lot of meat on them 'cause it was already taken off, but there was enough there to flavor it and they gave us a little salt in it and that was the second best.

Geoff: Now Palawan, before we get to when anything dramatic happened, did anyone else try to escape before that time?

Eugene: Yes there were several of them that tried to escape. We didn't get too much information when they got caught because they never let them come back around any of us after that.

Geoff: Would they execute them?

Eugene: They'd take them out. Well, yes they would execute them if they found out they was escaping and there was some that escaped and he got turned over to the Japanese by a Philippino, probably so he could something he needed, I don't know. Philippinos in general was very sympathetic towards Americans and they were on our side.

Geoff: About this time this bomber showed up, that's about the time of the invasion of the Philippines, right? By American forces? About October of '44, how did the Japanese react when the Americans invaded the Philippines? Did you notice any difference in the guards or the behavior of the Japanese?

Eugene: Well when that bomber went down there and that big black explosion, it wasn't long after that you'd hear that bomber, the same one, come right back up the field again looking everything over you know these reconnaissance of the thing. Well they was very unhappy about that when they found that, because when they seen that big black cloud they figured that the zero fighters had shot it, the B24. And they were cheering and hooting it up, well they sure changed when they seen that plane come back, everybody saw them quiet.

Geoff: Would the Japanese take it out on you, I'm trying to get to the point where why they decided to do what they did to you when they started executing.

Eugene: Some of them would, you'd very seldom. Well one thing down there, you had different groups that would come in and guard you and they'd take that group out and bring another group in, that happened two or three times. Some of those groups was better than others, there's one group, they had some real bad ones in it. And after, I wasn't there very long until they quit carrying their rifles when they was in amongst you out on the field working. The rifleman was out around the outer skirts and then there's a path out around further than that where they patrolled, but the ones right in there amongst you, instead of carrying that rifle around they all got clubs. Clubs that was about 5 foot long and about close to an inch in diameter, pretty good-sized clubs. And they would the guys that was working you, the guards the Japanese guards, they'd have those and you usually got hit sometime during the day with one of those. If something happened, why you would get beat up pretty bad. I snuck out once, see there's no toilets there, no sanitary facilities or anything out there, you just go out and I made it look like I was going to bathroom. I heard there was a banana tree out there so that's where I snuck over to and that was earlier and I had an old shirt at that time. Well I filled it with bananas, with green bananas. And I come back, why they realized that I was out there and there was another guy that was with me and they got together and decided how many licks with them poles, well they used pick ends that day on us. He got something like 25 or 30 pick ends, there's two guys – one on each side of them and you had to stand there with your hands above your head and they'd give you that many licks. Well during those, not just this one but all of them, when they say 25 licks or 30 or 50 I think they'd give you 50 licks if you was dead, they never changed regardless. Well we got back, they got two guys there, one on each side and you stand there with your hands

up and there was one on each side and they was taking turns, you know, swinging like with a bat and hitting you between the upper thigh to your belt line. But one would hit, you know, and the other one on the other side would hit and they'd go back and forth. Well after so many hits you'd kind of, your legs just go out from under you you'd go down, you know, and fall. You're not unconscious but you just give away. Well they'd pour water on you to bring you to, cold water when you'd been knocked out or something like that there, brings you around pretty fast. And they'd pour some water on you and then you'd stand up and get up and hold your hands up and they'd start again. Well that happened a couple or three times.

Geoff: Now December of '44, tell us about how that all started when they started executing and the events of that day, what happened?

Eugene: That day we went out to work at the usual time in the morning, December the 14th. And we noticed the Japanese was acting very strange, instead of hitting anybody with their clubs they'd just stand around and kind of lean and a lot of them just stand there looking straight ahead and they didn't say anything, nobody was hit. It was very strange acting, we knew something was different but we never had no idea what it was. And then at noon they decided to bring us all back into the camp, which was a couple of miles maybe, across the peninsula back into the town of Port of Princes where the prison camp was. And we was there, I think we was given lunch of rice and soup is what it usually was. And then there was a, they called an air raid. They let us build three tunnels, not ditches or things, 'cause the Americans was starting to strafe, they strafed the camp. And funny thing, but the people the Americans ate of, they got hit from strafing bombs but none of the guys got hit. There was one guy in another place that one day got a bullet fragment in his neck somewhere or another, but it didn't seem to hurt him too much and they couldn't take it out 'cause they had no razor.

Geoff: So that afternoon what happened?

Eugene: They said there was an air raid, you know, the Japanese did. And they wanted us to get in those tunnels, now those tunnels, the three of them 50 men to each one or close to that. And they just had an opening on each end, enough for one man to get in and out of. And they told us

to get in the tunnels out of sight and we did and then there was an airplane up there, a P38 way up there high there was two of them. And it flew on over, it must have been up there about 30,000 feet. And then a little while later they called an air raid again and this time nobody seen any planes and we got down in the tunnels and they'd just hold us down in there. We never had that many Japanese guards in there around the place and they set up some machine guns on one side and the other side was the cliffs, on the other side of the double barbed wired fence, the cliffs that went down to the beach. And they set up some machine guns and was telling everybody to stay down out of sight, well in the trench I was in, I was down at the end closest to where the camp was and closest to the Japanese. And I was right close to the opening and one of the guys, his name was – they always called him Greasy, Greasy Smith; and he was sitting there and the high ranking Officers they was all kind of over in and that never happened before amongst the prisoners, you know. And of course we was all in the tunnels then, and they took their big swords out. And they exercise there in the morning, they get up there and do a lot of yelling and exercising that way, we thought they was just exercising waiting around. Well they told Greasy Smith, "Get down out of sight." You know in Japanese, we used certain Japanese words and they used certain American words and we could get a meaning to each other in a roundabout way, certain words that were very common like 'okay' and 'rice' and 'water' and stuff like that. Anyway, he just sat there and when they told him to get down out of sight, that's what everybody thought anyway, I mean the ones that was right around there. And he was out there and the Japanese commander of that island, he was there waving his sword, it's a big heavy sword you've seen pictures of them. And he was right in front of him waving around and he took it up with both hands and he come down as hard as he could right on his head and practically split his head open, he was killed instantly. Well I kind of got back away from the opening a little bit and then they started pouring gasoline in the holes and we seen them carrying them in, 5 gallon cans, it seems there was a lot of them that was in the Philippines. There's food storage in those, like flour and stuff on Corregidor. But they had them down there and they was carrying gasoline down there, and it was aviation gas you could tell from the smell it smells different from car gas. And they was pouring it in the holes and I was moving back away from that hole, its kind of hard to get by people, you know, 'cause you didn't have much room there. And I got back about half way and could smell that gas and then they threw some kind of a paper rag or something with gas on it and lit it with a match, you know, and threw it in those trenches.

Well when that big flame shot through there, why I made my way toward the other end, most of them didn't do much outside of sitting there waiting to see what was going on, a lot of them was getting burned pretty bad. And got down to the end there and I just got to level ground, I just put my head up and down because there was probably 40 Japanese there with rifles shooting anybody that they could. So when I was up and down like that, when that plane came through there at first I kind of realized what was going on. Its hard to believe something like that just out of, you know, something happened that's not the way people act you'd think. Well I found out that they were meant to kill us all off, so I decided I'd get down there and try to get out of there someway or another. So I got down to the hole and I was up and down, you know, just up and down like that there and what little glance I could see. I could see Japanese firing their rifles; some of them took hand grenades...

****Interruption****

I made my way to the end of that trench I was in and I'd peek out and see what was going on and down again real quick because they'd start shooting. And there was a lot of guys that got burned kind of bad and a lot of them was getting killed, they'd jump out and they had machine guns there and would blow them down. They was just on the side opposite the beach and the cliffs run down, you know, down to the beach. But on the other side they was set up there and they'd shoot everything, everyone they could that would move that way.

Geoff: How did you get through the wire, how did you get to the cliffs?

Eugene: There's one other thing, when they first started shooting and pouring gas in there, Dr. Mangle he was in, there's some of the Officers a few Officers there had separate little places to go themselves they didn't get in the regular tunnels. And he come out and I heard him, he says something about, "Do not kill these men, don't do it!" And I think he said something about, "For the love of God." Or something, you know, "Don't do it!" And they just up and shot him, but he did come out and try to get them to stop. As I got down to the other end, why I knew it was either die or get of there, there was no alternative to it. And they were getting some of the guys and torturing them then, instead of killing they would bayonet them down low and knock

them around and everything else instead of just shooting them. Well I decided I had to get out of there so I got all propped up so I could just dive out of that hole, land on my stomach flat and as soon as I could I got my hands and laid them out and as soon as I could I could sit with my feet under me, you know, so I could jump again. And I don't know how but I made it there and jumped as soon as possible and they was shooting but someway or another I made it through this fence. It was old barbed wire, it wasn't new barbed wire, it was barbed wired they took from another fence somewhere I don't know where. And they had a double fence there; it was about 7 or 8 foot high. Some of the guys made it over the fence, I've heard that later on there was one at that same hole I got out of, they pushed a big coral rock off that end of it running right to the edge of the bank and the fence was there. And they pushed that out of there and some of them got out through there without coming up, that's what I've heard I didn't ever see that. And there was about maybe 15 to 20 men that got out and was down there on that beach after I got out of the thing and went through the fence and then I dove over the cliff and they got these little trees there, its about so big around and quite tall. Well as I dove out I grabbed one of those trees and it just bent with me and I didn't even get hurt. But it is pretty hard to explain how it ever happened that I got through that fence, double barbed wire, 'cause ordinarily that would cut you up quite a bit. Maybe the barbs was pushed differently or something, I don't know. Anyway, I got down to the bottom there and there was a lot of the guys, the Japs was closing in from both sides of us. It was a 40-foot wall, you know, back into the camp. But we went down over that and we was down on the beach and you couldn't go back in, the water the ocean was on the other side of you and then they had Japanese coming from both sides – you was trapped there. Well I went as far as I could one way and then as far as I could the other way until running into Japanese squads. They had squads working that over, rifles and there was 10 men to a squad. Back and forth, it was pretty rough coral cliffs, you know, some places would wash in and there'd be a pocket in there. I remember I got into one of them and it was kind of a pocket but down at the bottom where you'd go in, so I popped myself up in there so they couldn't see me. They also had a landing barge going up and down the water in the ocean shooting anyone they could see from the ocean side. And I got up in there and then there was another guy, he was in that same one, I was holding myself up at the top so they couldn't see me and he was right – I could've touched him we was right both in the same little spot. He'd been burned pretty bad, his name was Sierre, he was muttering in a strange way, he'd been burned bad he was practically all over he just couldn't

help it, you know, it didn't even sound humanlike. And as they come along, I wasn't sure whether they were shooting at him or me but I guess I was up far enough so they didn't see me. And the first shot, well they shot several times, one hit him in the ankle and it just kind of flopped his foot over almost cut the whole front of it. And then when he did that he fell down and exposed his whole self and they finished him. I kept trying to find a place to hide and I remember I got to one place and there was a little bush about two feet high and it had about a dozen leaves on it, little leaves but it's the only thing there was. I was kind of there and that boat was coming along there and shooting away and I got behind that and crouched down and they up and one of them was pointing to the others, like there's one of them there, you know. They raised up their rifle, I thought they was aiming at me and they fired and I didn't even know the guy was there, there was another guy just below me a little ways in that place and they was shooting at him. Well I went as far as I could back and forth and everything. But in that there place, why there was maybe 15 or 20 guys that got down in there and when they come over they started wading out and there was a sand beach there in part of it, a nice beach for swimming or something like that but we never swam in it. But they was wading out there and the Japs up on the top was all shooting away at them and they shot all of them that was out there in the water, it wasn't very far about 40 yards or less, but they shot them all. And I noticed the water it was in close, you know, and it had a red streak of water about 30 feet or 40 feet long and maybe close to 10 feet wide, but just from those guys it colored it reddish pinkish. Some of them was, I was hid up at that time watching some of the was just giving up others was fighting to try to save their selves, you know, but they didn't have a chance out there in the open like that. Well I got to, up there on the cliff all the guards and everything, most of it was coconut branches and brush and stuff they'd throw in there. You could throw anything you wanted, it had a big chute, you'd go down on the beach and the tide would carry it away if it was something like peelings or something it would get carried away. But there was a lot of coconut leaves there and coconut husks and some shells and stuff. And I laid down alongside of that pile of stuff and started working my way underneath, I couldn't go either way, I didn't want to go out and start swimming 'cause all those up there above shooting at you and that was the only thing could do was start. I skipped one thing there. I got into that crevice before I started getting under the garbage pile and in that crevice is where the water washed and it was kind of parallel with the ground so that you could get back in there and they couldn't see you very well. Well there was

either 12 or 13 of us that got in there and the Japs come along and that's when I got down and started getting underneath the garbage there. And I worked my way under and got fairly well covered up by things, and the Japs come over there and they tortured those other 12 or 11 guys whichever it was. Instead of killing them, they was beating them down around the hips and down the bottom part, he wouldn't kill them. Well while I was there I heard two Americans, now that was right where the cliff goes up and they were up on top and here I was, so it wasn't very far off and I could hear them. They were cheering up there like it was the most exciting game they ever heard.

Geoff: These were Japanese?

Eugene: Yeah, the Japanese up there. And while I was laying there, there was two guys was begging to be shot up on top there, they didn't get out through the fence. They were begging the Japs and telling them, I remember one guy Evans he was pointing his headed and telling them to use the gun and telling them – some of them they poured gas on their legs and set them on fire and stuff like that. And he was telling them he wanted them to shoot him to use their gun, we knew what the Japanese names was for some of that stuff like 'guns' and 'Jew'. And he was trying to tell them to shoot him in the head and they were just torturing him, eventually he got killed. But these guys down there where I was, when they come over there they had most those guys, those 11 guys most of them wasn't wounded too much, they was the ones that got hid up. And when they got out there, why they was having their big affair just cheering and loving, you know, torturing those guys. Well then they took them and got shovels and was going to bury those 12 guys right there in that sand and they was shoveling and it was real hot there on the sunny side there and they finally got it dug down a certain amount and they took the bodies. And the guys, a lot of them was still alive, they weren't dead most of them, some of them were. One of them, when they'd come over there he picked up a big rock and his name was Street and he says, "Them sons of bitches, they're either going to take and shoot me or I'm going to bash their head in!" And he took that rock and charged at them. He threw the rock and I heard it hit one of them, you know you can tell the difference when a rock hits a person than when it just hits the ground, and they shot him. But they took those others, threw them in there in the hole and they were groaning, a lot of them alive, and just covered them up. Well when they got to covering it

up, why they thought they better throw some of that there brush stuff over it, you know, so it won't wash out. So they started throwing that brush over the top where they'd covered those guys. Well they uncovered my one foot from about knee down and I just lay there and I wasn't injured or anything at that time, I was getting eaten on by some sort of insects or reptiles. And eating a patch of about so big around on my back, but there was nothing I could do but lay there because they was standing right at the side of me, some of them. But then when they'd seen me and uncovered that one leg, they said amongst each other, "My friends, give me a burial." They thought I was dead and a little while later, why someone up on top there had been busy around ever since around noon and it was time for them to go get something to eat. Someone up there hollered and messaged to them, you know, and they all just dropped their shovels. When they seen me everybody stopped and they all stood there looking and then they said that about one of my friends would give me a burial. Well they stopped and I was so still there, they wasn't doing anymore shoveling or carrying, just standing there. When the person up there yelled down for that squad to come and eat, they did it in shifts you know, so they still had others patrolling there. And they just dropped everything they had, picked up their rifles and left. Well I got up and started shuffling back and forth again and I got cornered again and there was a, right on the water level, there was a place where the rocks, you know, kind of dropped down. And I got down behind that, you couldn't really be covered up or anything, but I got there and as I come over there, why they seen me and so I swam out as far as I could underwater. I used to go to a swimming pool in Logan and that was one of the big things, to swim the length of that pool a fair-sized pool underwater. As kids we used to ride our bicycles out there about three or four miles and get in the pool, so I was pretty good at swimming under water. And I would swim as far as I could and come up and grab a quick breath of air and go down and try to get down far enough, you know, and go as far as I could again. Well I made it about my third breath when I come up, but there was 10 guys up on top there in that particular place from where they was to where I was, was about 50 yards maybe. And this Smith, one of them that we looked at in that picture, he was up on top and they have a heavy grass during the wet season, the rainy season, why that grass grows tall and then along the pass it kind of falls in. So there's a really heavy growth and walk along there, well he got underneath a bunch of that grass but he's up on top looking down and he's watching them shoot at me. And there's a 10-man squad as usual and they emptied their guns twice, their magazines got 5 shots, I was up to 100 shots. But this time I

was getting out there a little further, on hit right alongside of my temple here, kind of knocked me out for a little while it didn't seriously wound me or anything, but I don't know if it was a concussion or what. Another one, as I was swimming, right under my arm and made it very sore in the muscle right in the armpit and it made it very sore, it grazed it. And another one hit me in my leg, hit me right here, it went up through my leg up in here and so that leg was completely numb. Well the bullets that they had going back and forth on the waterside in the ocean there, they just stayed anchored and went around and anchored and maybe went to eat or something, I don't know. Anyway, they wasn't out there. I got out far enough so they couldn't shoot you. Choppy water, if you're out there a ways, its just about impossible to hit a person. If you lay flat, you know, there's no target there to shoot at, it's very difficult to try and hit somebody out like that. But then this squad that got up there, they had a leverage where they could shoot down more and trying to swim across the bay in daylight like that, it was getting late and I just went along parallel to the shore. And they assigned these two Japanese, they figured I'd come, I think they knew they hit me because when that one hit me in the leg I just quit swimming I just laid out flat, you know, and put my arms out and feet and everything and just laid there more or less. And they figured that was it and quit shooting. But then I kind of worked my way out a little more and went parallel. Well these two guys walked along the shore waiting for me to come in and I just stayed out there and swam along slowly, I wasn't pushing at all just going along slowly. And they followed along and I could hear them talking all the time. Well pretty soon it started getting dark and it got good and dark and I went, tried to make it out. I knew they was there I could hear them talking all the time, and I made a lot of noise slapping the water as I went in toward the shore, I got there fairly close and then I turned around went out as quiet as I could. And I started swimming, you know, trying to get across. Well I swam for quite awhile and I wasn't sure, it was a real dark night, so I decided I had to stream out somewhere or another. So I picked the bright stars and picked the one in the direction I wanted to go where there was a river, I had to get to the water. I picked a star, one of the brightest ones, and it was right in the direction I wanted to go. As I started swimming across, I swam all night long, but I didn't realize that those stars go around in a circle, a big circle. It wasn't the North Star, you can't see the North Star from there its too far south, I thinks its right practically on the equator. And so I found out that the mountain range there, it's a narrow island and it's got a pretty good mountain range there through the middle. And as I swam along I could see just a faint line where the

mountain ends and the sky starts, you know you can look up and see that even on a dark night if it isn't too dark. And I realized I was just swimming out in the China sea, I was swimming in the wrong way entirely because during that night that star that I was following it turns, why that makes it go in that direction it goes right around each day, I mean the direction to a star like that. Because the North Star, you know, it's always in the north right in a certain spot, its practically north all the time though. And I was seeing the mountain range and I realized that I was swimming the wrong way. Well I corrected it and started and after swimming all out, then I had to turn around and start coming back because I had to get still to get to the river. After I'd seen the mountain and everything then I was pretty straight on my direction then as far as where I wanted to go.

Geoff: And you finally got there?

Eugene: No, I never did.

Geoff: Eugene, you're in the water, those Pacific stars are evolving and drawing you off course, pick up right from there.

Eugene: Well I was swimming out into the China sea I guess it was, and I was trying to keep track but finally I was looking around and I saw that little faint line where the mountains and the sky meet, it was very faint but I could tell that was the mountain ridge, so then I knew I was going in the wrong direction so I started swimming back the other way to get to the Iwahig river because that's the only place I knew where there was fresh water where I could go so I was trying to make it to that river and it was probably fairly close—it wasn't quite half-way through the night when I started swimming. I was out there one time I noticed my head was down in the water, and I thought I was swimming and realized that I couldn't breathe so I started fighting it. The manatee, it stayed with me quite a long time during the middle of the night. It swam in a counter-clockwise motion and it was so close I could reach out and touch it but I never dared to. I was afraid it might have been a shark. It was dark and I wasn't acquainted with him. I swam for several hours and I saw a little land there, it was kind of a little island out there, probably it was underwater during high tide. I went toward it and when I hit the shore, I mean the bottom

that I felt, I was going to get up and walk in and found out I couldn't. I just didn't have enough strength to stand up and walk, so I crawled up in the brush there, it wasn't a lot and it wasn't big but it was enough to cover, so I crawled in there and went to sleep. That was at daylight. Then the Jap landing barge ran up and down there by the prison and they were shooting everybody they could see, and that barge tore out around the bay and it wasn't too far from that little island from where I was sleeping. I think it woke me up—the motor popping away and I realized that I needed to keep covered up good then, but he just kept going and didn't see me, and he wasn't even a hundred yards from the shore and I was covered up by the brush. Then I started wading through there and got over into the swamp. It was a pretty nasty place in there and there was a lot of stale water and I just made my way along there. At one time I heard chickens crowing so I didn't know if those Philipinos would be on my side or the Japanese side. There was not way I ever had the chance to find out anything like that. They dropped bombs over there once and it made me wonder which side they were on seeing those bombs drop over there.

Geoff: These were U.S. bombs?

Eugene: I don't know. I think they were probably Japanese as far as I know. A lot of times the Japanese would even execute them or give them different kinds of penalties for doing anything they shouldn't for Americans or anything and sometimes the Philipinos were afraid of that. Later on I heard that the Philipinos had helped the Americans and when the Japanese found out about it, they executed them. That happened more than once. Well in that swamp when it got dark, I was trying to... there were coconut trees there in some places where the land was up above the water, and I was trying to get a coconut to drink the milk out of it or even eat the meat out of the nut, but I couldn't climb the tree. My left leg was numb. There's no way you could climb that. It's pretty hard to climb even if you're in good condition to climb. I found an old coconut and I broke off a little tree by hitting the husk right there where I broke it off. I got the husk tore off of the coconut and it's just a matter of breaking it on anything. The shell isn't too hard to break. There's always a tree or rock or something. I broke it, and it was kind of old and it was starting to grow. It will grow right up to a tree, a coconut will, and inside of it looked like cotton, but it's full of juice you know. Well that helped quite a bit because I was getting pretty thirsty. It was really a lifesaver probably. But that night I was so tired I decided I'd just rest and

lay around. Those mango swamps have a lot of roots coming down so I was in a place where I could have the roots underneath each arm to hold me from falling over or anything if you went to sleep. Of course I got down in the water as deep as I could clear up just above my mouth but not my nose so the mosquitoes wouldn't be eating all over me. There were a lot of mosquitoes in there. Then during the night you could see little eyes in the water that would come up. Some of them were maybe a half-inch apart, just little beedy ones. There was some kind of a florescent thing you could see at night. There might have been enough starlight to reflect there. Anyway it's like when you go out deer hunting, you turn a spotlight on a deer and he can be maybe two or three hundred yards away and you can see those eyes real clear. Well I could see those eyes there but some of them were an inch apart, and some of them were a third of an inch. I assume they were probably a little fish in there. Then there was one about six to seven inches apart—the eyes, and the size of them was about an inch diameter. Well it came up real slow and never made a sound and it got right up to me and I slowly raised my hands up and slapped the water as hard as I could right in front of it. I was right over his snoot by his eyes, and when I hit the water, it hit the water with his tail real hard and swam away.

Geoff: This was an alligator or a crocodile?

Eugene: It was a crocodile. That's what the native's all said it was. There was a native that was out fishing and they figure he disappeared you know, and they figured he'd got hate by a crocodile, and his two sons were out there hunting for it and some way or another they got it captured and brought it in and they found out it was the right one because it had their father's shirt in his stomach—parts of it. So they pretty well knew it was his. They skinned that crocodile. It was one of the biggest ones they had around there, and they tanned the hide and it's in the museum and on the floor is the skeleton. It's a huge thing. I think it was up in the teens, maybe eighteen feet. It was still there when we went over there in the museum there.

Geoff: After you slapped the water and it disappeared did you got to sleep?

Eugene: I don't think I went to sleep that night at all. Dawn came and I saw a Philipino fisherman, but he was a ways off and I went around him so he wouldn't see me. The chickens

were crowing. There were always chickens crowing in the Philippines, even in Manila in the middle of the town you'll hear a rooster crow. I went out around them and later on I got out of that swamp but there was a field cleared. There were prisoners at Iwahig. It was a Philippine civilian prison. They'd take the worst prisoners down there because that was a very isolated place, and they'd work on the land there and clear a farm and then when their time came as long-term prisoners, why they'd give them the farm and that was their livelihood after they were freed.

Geoff: So when were you first spotted by the Philippino Guerillas?

Eugene: I got into there in that big field of grass that grows four or five feet high and it has serrated edges on it so it will cut you a little bit—little fine cuts like a scratch you know. It's enough so you can see it you know. Going through that grass field like that I was getting hit by that grass and then in the middle of that field it was probably three hundred yards across that cleared area and maybe about five or six hundred yards long, I got over pretty close to the middle and here comes a guy. There was a path that ran right down through the middle of it, and he came by there and I hid and I didn't trust anybody at that time. I didn't know which side they'd be on, and he went by and I went on and got clear over there almost to the path in the middle, but as that tall grass as you walk it, it clomps it down in a path and then this here tall grass falls in that way. Well where it fell in you could hide under there and it was really thick to hold and nobody could see you. Well after a little while, here that same guy came back through that field and I thought I would jump him and get a hold of that big bolos he carries.

Geoff: That's a big knife isn't it?

Eugene: Yes, and they all carry bolos when they're out like that. That's their work tool. They're different sizes but they're big. They make good use of those bolos; they build their homes with them and their shacks and cut their way through thick places if they have to and all of that kind of stuff.

Geoff: So did you wait for him?

Eugene: Well, I was right there hidden in the grass and I was going to jump on him and grab that knife because he might not be friendly you know, and as he came by I just didn't jump him for some reason or another. He went on down the path about forty or fifty yards, and then I stepped out and I... well I didn't step out. I was hid but I had my head out and I hollered to him and said, "Hey Joe, come here, I'd like to talk to you." You always call a Philippino "Joe" and he calls you "Joe" if he doesn't know you. And he stopped and I kept trying to coax him to come back. I didn't want to get out in the open much, but he wouldn't come back of course. I could imagine what I looked like. I was stripped naked. I didn't have any shoes or clothes of any kind. I was stripped naked. That's why that grass was raking me. He just didn't want to come back so eventually after a while he wasn't leaving and he was just standing there and I was coaxing and I got out and I walked down a ways and he seemed to be friendly and everything so I think I walked up to him. I don't think he every came back, and I was asking him a few questions. I think one of the first or second things I asked him was if he had a pencil or a pen and some paper. I wanted to write a letter and he said, "Ya, I can get you one." He could talk English good. He had come from Manila. He was one of the x-prisoners, a civilian prisoner and he went out some more. I guess there are a lot of those native shacks are kind of hidden out in there in places. You don't see them because there's too much brush and trees. He came back with a pencil and I sat down and wrote a letter to General McArthur and gave him his address and everything. I told him now, "When the Americans come back, you take this to the highest officer you can find and he'll give you quite a bit of money for it." I tried to make sure he did do it and told him that and in the letter I wrote my name, serial number and where I was from, rank and I told them what was going on over there in Palawan and that they were killing everybody off. And I told them I thought I was the only one left alive. I told them it didn't seem possible that anyone else could be alive and asked them to let my folks know that I was there.

Geoff: So when did you meet up with the fellow? I saw his picture and you saw him in the hospital bed years later when you went back to the Philippines and he remembered you.

Eugene: Oh that was the leader of the guerilla camp and the headquarters was down around Brooks Point.

Geoff: When did you finally get there?

Eugene: Well that was a couple of weeks later. We had to go down the island about a hundred miles.

Geoff: So this fellow came back with food?

Eugene: Oh this guy... the next thing I asked him was, "Can you get me a drink of water?" And he said, "Ya, there's some right down here." So we went down the path and turned off a little bit and there was a spring, so I had a drink of water. Then I asked him, I said, "Could you get me something to eat?" He said, "Ya." He disappeared out in the jungle and came back. Well he came back with two roots of some kind. I never did know what kind they were. They were about five inches long maybe and about three-quarters of an inch in diameter. They tasted a little like a sweet potatoe or something like that.

Geoff: So you gobbled that up?

Eugene: Oh ya. And then he said, "Do you have friends?" I thought he meant he was friendly you know. And the people probably around there knew him. I thought he meant that. And we went on for a while and he said that about three different times... "You have friends?" And then we got down there once place and we left the trail and went up there and there were three other Americans there. There was Petri, Macheco...

Geoff: So the fellow we saw in the film, he was there? Was that Petri?

Eugene: Ya he was there and I think Bouchas was there, Smith. I'm not sure if Smith was there at first, but he was there a little later.

Geoff: And how long did you guys stay there?

Eugene: Well the Philipinos were pretty nervous about it. They wanted to get us out of there before the Japanese found out that they were helping us. If they knew we'd been there, they would have just killed them or shot them or something. So that night we started down the island. First we walked quite awhile, but I still had a numb leg so I had to keep that left leg straight because if it bent there was nothing there to hold it and the knee would just double up and fall so I was walking with a straight leg and when you're walking along holding one leg straight, you'd land on your heel on that foot so you couldn't bend it you know. You had to keep it straight.

Geoff: So how many miles did you go on that leg?

Eugene: Well we went most of the night.

Geoff: And where did you end up? How long did you travel?

Eugene: Well my heel got so raw. I stepped on a smooth-like colored rock. You'd leave a red print and hit so much on there walking on gravel or rocks there for quite a long time and then I kind of ran out of gas. I just couldn't hardly make it any longer. I was just going from one tree to the next tree and grabbing it so I couldn't fall. Finally, another Philipino had joined us. The one who was originally was with us went back and there was another one. He was part of the guerilla camp I guess. His name was Pablo Quilopie.

Geoff: Did they help you?

Eugene: Ya... he went clear on down to Bricks Point with us. He was a guide.

Geoff: Did they lift you? Did someone help you to walk?

Eugene: No, I told them, "I can't go any further. You guys will just have to go ahead and go and I'll catch up with you later." I was behind the other guys twenty or thirty yards. I was holding them up all the time so I told them that. They all got together in a huddle. There were about four

or five of them then, counting the guide and they had a little session there. I couldn't hear them. I was back a ways. They came back and said, "Well we decided to stay here the rest of the night." Well we pulled out in the jungle there and they had some plants there that looked a lot like rhubarb only it was about... you know how big a rhubarb leaf can get. Well these were about five times that big. So we got a few of those and it was raining a little bit, and we got those leaves and laid down on the ground and put them over us and went to sleep. The next day we decided to get caribous to ride, and he went out and got some caribous and we were moving along but not very good with them. We didn't know how to drive a caribou. The one I was on was huge. You had a club there and you had to sit there and smack it all of the time. If you stopped, it stopped. It was bothering my leg where I was sitting on it anyway and we came to a place where you could see the ocean. Well they (caribou) decided to go out there and there was a trail out to the water and waded out in there. You got down far enough so there was nothing but his head up above the water. I couldn't do a thing to turn it or anything else and I didn't know an animal could drink salt water but it drank that water so I tried to get it to go back in and there was nothing I could do about it so I just swam into shore and we started walking again. First this guy went and got some little pigmy people there that lived on this little dugout that was a big log. It was dugout into a boat with an outrigger on it and these little guys, about four or five of them were going to row us down the island. I think they only weighed about eighty pounds or something like that.

Geoff: So they actually took you by boat?

Eugene: Ya, they were going to row us down.

Geoff: And how did that work out?

Eugene: Well, the water was quite choppy and those little guys... they lived on those boats. That was there home. They fished, traded some fish for rice and that was their livelihood.

Geoff: So did they get you there?

Eugene: We got in that choppy water and they started to bawl and hooping it up. Boy we couldn't figure it out. We asked the guy, Quilope "Why are they crying like that so hard?" He said, "Because they think they're going to die." Well it wasn't working out so we were going to row ourselves, the Americans. We rowed for a while and there was a good breeze blowing in the right direction and we asked him, "Can you get us some kind of a sail or something?" He went out and got a GI blanket and we hung it up on poles and sat it up there and then we went down the island.

Geoff: So it worked?

Eugene: It worked great. We got down and stopped one place where the guerilla place was and they gave us a dish of rice and some little fish about so long, the kind that you could see right through. They just dumped them in the coconut oil and made them crisp and...

Geoff: So you were there overnight. Did you leave the next day?

Eugene: I'm not quite sure.

Geoff: I don't mean to rush you through all of this, but I want to get to the point where you saw your first American again.

Eugene: Well we got down there in the boat and then we pulled into shore and walked through a bunch of rice paddies. That was about Christmas Eve and we stopped at one place there, one of the shacks. There was no furniture in it. They just slept on the bamboo slats on the flooring and they had five or six different kinds of rice in there for their holiday celebration. They had black rice and yellow rice and white rice. We went through paddies and slept there that night. We had a big round bottle with a little neck on it for coconut juice.

Geoff: Lets get to that PBY crew.

Eugene: We went into the camp and the civilians there were having a resolve day and there were two Philipinos from south of Los Angeles there from one of those little coastal towns. They landed there at night off of a submarine and they had one of these crank-type radios like a little tricycle, but it didn't have wheels on it on the seat there, and you'd turn that and the other guy would work the radio. They got in contact with Americans and so they set up times for a plane to come in and pick us up. MacArthur told them to take care of us in the camp there. We built two fires on the shore so far apart and then the planes were supposed to come in at night and come in between the two fires. We did that twice and it didn't come in either time and we were wondering what was going on and so were the other people around there. Then someone climbed a coconut tree and got us a green coconut and we had cut them off and it's pretty good drinking if you get them at the right stage.

Geoff: When did this PBY show up?

Eugene: We were out there on the sand bar and here came a plane. We thought it was a Japanese plane. We had seen a plane come and look us over when we were in that boat. We were underneath pads and those little guys sitting on top of us you know and that plane circled around there and came down within, oh heavens, fifteen or twenty yards of us looking us over. Those little Philipinos stood up and waved at them you know, and they were sitting on top of us and couldn't see us. But we still thought they were going to machine-gun us, but they didn't.

Geoff: So when did the PBY finally show up?

Eugene: Well we were out there and here came that plane and we didn't know if it was an American plane or not. When it comes toward you, you don't see any markings or anything and it was a PBY and it pulled in there and a guy got out on the wing, one of the crewmen and he was yelling and he had two engines going there and we couldn't hear anything so Pacheco and I swam out there to it. They wanted to know what kind of a bottom there was, whether it was rock or sand. We had already been out there and told them it was just sand so he pulled over. They decided they better get out of there in a hurry. A B-24 had come in while it was sitting there. It had eighteen fifty-caliber machine guns on it. It had come along as an escort while they landed

because there were Japanese planes around there. So they wanted to get out of there as soon as they could and this guy had been there ever since the Spanish-American war in 1900. He wanted to go out so they more or less let us take the prisoners. So we took him with, and then there was with this Baptist missionary. It was a woman. She probably weighed 250 to 280 pounds. She was huge and had a little guy there. He looked like he was about twenty and weighed about ninety pounds, and found out that was her husband. She got married down there during the war and she was from the United States and she wanted to come back to the United States but she wouldn't go without the husband and we told her that if she wanted to go we'd take her back, but we couldn't take her husband. So she decided to stay and didn't come out with us. Then we took off.

Geoff: What was it like when you took off in that plane?

Eugene: Rough.

Geoff: What were your feelings?

Eugene: We were tickled to death.

Geoff: You were finally leaving.

Eugene: Ya, there were a pair of shoes about size 12 in the plane and they gave them to me. They were the first shoes on my feet for three years.

Geoff: What did that feel like?

Eugene: Well, it felt good to me.

Geoff: So where did they take you? Where did that plane land?

Eugene: We took off and went down within sight of some of the islands of Borneo then they turned east and they tried to stay away from the flight lines you know, and the first landing we stopped was down at Morotai in the Maracas Islands.

Geoff: So you're finally away from the Philippines?

Eugene: That must have been a good feeling?

Geoff: Yes. In fact I was one of the honorary speakers at the convention of the rescue plane organization and I gave a talk there and the pilot and the navigator was there. That must have been close around 1990.

Eugene: So where did that plane finally land?

Geoff: At Morotai.

Eugene: And you stayed there overnight?

Geoff: Started eating?

Eugene: Oh ya. Well we had been eating then in the camp there. They had a big dinner there and we filled up.

Geoff: I want to jump ahead to one spot, and then we can come back. When you met Marshall and you were at the Pentagon, you told me he was only suppose to meet with you for ten minutes or so. Do you know the story I'm talking about where he cancelled his appointments? Tell us about meeting General Marshall.

Eugene: Well they came back and shuffled around from one base to another. We didn't have any orders. Letterman General Hospital is the first place we went. We didn't have any orders. Went to Fort Scott and they didn't have any. Went to Angel Island and they didn't, and back to

Fort to Scott and back to Letterman General. And then there was a guy there looking for us. We were supposed to be in Washington and they lost track of us.

Geoff: So how did you get to Washington?

Eugene: This guy came from the Pentagon out there and he walked up to us at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco and he said, "Are you the ones who escaped from the prison camp?" And we told him, "Ya!" And he said, "Boy, I'm glad to see you! I've been looking for you for a couple of weeks! Are those the best clothes you got?" We had those big old shoes on and the clothes didn't fit at all. Of course I thought they were great. He called up the tailor and took us right in and fit us up with some clothes and a pair of shoes that fit and then as soon as he possibly could, he dashed us down to the airport. We took off and he took us down to San Diego and then on back to Washington and we stayed at a real nice hotel back there in Washington and we went sight-seeing and they took a station wagon and drove us around and showed us some of Washington and then we had a couple of other meetings with the Secretary of the Treasurer and had dinner. But then we went to the Pentagon and he has a big table in his office with maps that shows everything they're doing.

Geoff: And what did he say to you?

Eugene: One thing he said... he kind of apologized. He said, "I'm very sorry that we couldn't get any help to you guys. There's no way after Pearl Harbor, losing our power of the fleet that we could go across the Pacific to reinforce anything in the Philippines, so every time we lost something, they'd bomb and shell us sometimes ten or fifteen times a day for five months." Everything we lost something we couldn't replace it. We didn't have a plane or a warship to try and get out of there with. We didn't have a single tank and...

Geoff: So he apologized to you.

Eugene: Ya, he said, "We're sorry, but there's no way we could have done it."

Geoff: And then he asked you some questions didn't he?

Eugene: He gave me a little breakdown on his life. He said he was a West Pointer and there he was the top military man in the United States you know. He said he always wanted to be a General over an army but Roosevelt wanted him to take over as head of the Joint Chief of Staff so he was over MacArthur and all of those.

Geoff: What I'm getting at is, did he ask you what you had been through?

Eugene: Ya, we went through most of this stuff like I'm telling you now.

Geoff: And what was his reaction to the way you guys were treated?

Eugene: Well, after the first ceremony where he pinned the medal on us and it was very formal, it was just like talking to you. He was just one of you. He was very friendly and nice and telling his problems and he took us over to the table of the maps and showed us where he was going to make a landing the next day. He said it was top secret but there's not way they can do anything this late in the day. There was nothing they could do, even if we let them know it.

Geoff: I know we're jumping around, but I want you to say something as a person who has been through all of this experience. What does this country mean to you?

Eugene: Well I've seen some of the effects of the Japanese and Philipinos and different countries you know? They don't have what we have. The American army in WWII was a very good army and a patriotic army. It meant a lot to us. That's where our families were. We wanted to see our families again. That's one thing—when you're there you want to go see your own families again. We didn't know whether we would or not. My mother died while I was in the prison and I didn't know about it for quite a long time after she died. I got two letters that got through on a Swedish ship, like a Red-Cross organization.

Geoff: They brought you letters?

Eugene: They brought some letters and the first letter I got didn't say anything about my mother and I kept wondering. They said the house was rented out, our house. And then the second letter told me that my mother had died.

Geoff: So your daughter is very special because she has been researching this for many years and we've talked about how we feel about the country. Again, if you could tell us what you feel about the United States and why it is a special country. Your feelings about the United States...

Eugene: Well after seeing some of the other people—Mexicans and Philipinos and what I've seen of the Japanese, although I never was in Japan, and different natives up and down there, why I figured the United States was the best country to live in. I think it's the greatest country. We have more freedoms probably than any other country. And it's worth fighting for. WWII to me, that's the only time our country was ever in danger of losing freedom. These others, there is never any threat to the United States. We had the 911 deal, but that wasn't to try and take over the United States. If things had worked out a little different on a couple of countries besides Germany and Italy, why we may not have survived it. I was always proud to be an American because I think it has more freedom than any other country and so much of it is not just natural riches. Americans, I think work harder than most other people to keep their dream alive. I'd hate to think that the United States would ever get into a situation like Germany or Japan or Italy and even these late countries. The United States is more friendly, and I think they do more to help other people out than anyone else. When we landed there at first, they all looked like giants to me because most of us were a little on the skinny side. Gosh, we got into that jeep and they were taking us to the hospital there at Moratai and going past those guys, my gosh. A lot of them would be 250 pounds. We hadn't seen 250-pound men for three years. They just looked so big!

