



## **Gene Jacobsen**

United States Army Air Corps

Supply Sergeant

Pacific Theater

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Interviewer:

Rick Randle

**THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY**

**Rick:** We have with us today Gene Jacobson who has very interesting stories to tell about World War II – Gene can you tell us a little bit about your early years, where you grew up and when you first...where you were on December 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Gene:** I can do that. I was born in Bloomington Idaho over by Bear Lake but I spent most of my life across the valley in Montpelier. I thought that was the greatest place in the world to live. I'm not sure it wasn't but it was very nice. My dad worked on the railroad and we had a little farm along with that, enough to keep...mother had five boys straight in a row...enough to keep us all busy. More so than we often wanted to but we had a good family life, really very good. Dad was a super fisherman and taught us all he knew and mother was just a jewel of a lady; she was a super super lady. So we just had a family group and that. They were very devout members of the LDS church and we grew up the same way. Had good experiences, especially in the boy scouts and that taught us how to work and everything turned out right. I graduated from High School – Montpelier High School and spent one year managing a brand new bowling alley in our town in Montpelier.

**Rick:** And that was during the depression years wasn't it?

**Gene:** Well yeah it was, all during the '30's and this was right at the end of the '30's. But it was a good job at that time but I was an out-of-doors person I couldn't stand being out-of-doors so as soon as the spring broke I went up to Cokeville Wyoming. I went to work for the Cokeville Land Livestock. I thought I was a cowboy all my life and I wanted to get on a big ranch and I did. And I found out there was a lot more to working on a big ranch than being a cowboy – play cowboy; but a man called on me and asked me if I would be interested in going out on the summer range with a young French Basque. He had come from France ten years before and worked for this owner for a period of ten years and was called to go back and be in the French Army – the war had broken out between France and Germany. And he didn't want to go back so he asked his boss if he would get him somebody to teach him English – *“If I'm going to be an American I wanna learn English, I wanna learn to read and to write and to speak”*. So he said, *“how would you like to go out with a man and teach him this”*, I said, *“I'd like that, I really*

would". And so he just made arrangements for to leave that job and to go with him and he had his...the grazing area up to the head of the Salt River in Star Valley – just out of Star Valley back in the mountains – beautiful beautiful country. And the first day I met this French Basque he could do a few words being here that long but he was about ten years older than I but he was such a nice fellow – good good guy and a happy fellow and a great man with sheep. He really knew sheep and I learned a lot about that from him. And he was a good cook! My responsibilities also included cooking and maintaining the camp and so on and he taught me a lot about dutch oven cooking because that's how we cooked, and how to prepare Basque food – we lived well, I mean we did, it was a great summer for me. Hard for me to leave that.

**Rick:** How old were you at that time?

**Gene:** I was eighteen, I turned 19 as we took the lambs down to be shipped in September and I left and about ten days later I was in the United States Army Aircorp.

**Rick:** Well did you...that was 1940 is that right?

**Gene:** Nineteen ah...1940, yes.

**Rick:** And so did you just join the Airforce? [**Gene:** right after that] what stimulated you to go in at that time?

**Gene:** Well I couldn't have stayed with the sheep man, I could have been with him again the other year...and by the way he and I became good enough friends that he said "*if you'd like to go to college, I'll pay your way – I'll support you in college. You can come back, you can take a degree in business and come back and work with me*". But I didn't want to do that; I wanted to see the world a bit. I really wanted to join the Navy but the Airforce guy got to me first.

**Rick:** And so you went down and joined up in the Airforce.

**Gene:** Pocatello sent me to Salt Lake and I was sworn in right up here at Fort Douglas.

**Rick:** All right and where were you when Pearl Harbor happened?

**Gene:** I was in the Philippines. I was sent to Hamilton Field from here and when we got to Hamilton Field, when I did, I was assigned to the Eighteenth Pursuit Squadron and they were bound for Alaska. And that excited me too but a new squadron was being put together – the 20<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron and they were scheduled to go to the Philippine Islands and they were inviting anybody who wanted to be a member of that squadron to volunteer and I did that. I thought I'll get to Alaska someday but I'll probably never get to the Philippines and so I did and still in October I had a couple of weeks of recruit drill and after that why business began and we sailed or we actually were able to get a ride on the SS Washington which was one of two large luxury liners owned by the Government and owned by Americans anyway and that was chartered to go to Shanghai to bring back the wives and children of businessmen in Shanghai so we just hitched a ride.

**Rick:** So you were on a luxury liner?

**Gene:** Luxury liner – first class all the way.

**Rick:** You had your own stateroom and bathroom and all that?

**Gene:** Right and dinner and breakfast and lunch like you couldn't imagine. And you know they had a swimming pool and it was great. Then they got loaded and then we headed from there right to the Philippines to Manila. And our first experience with the Japanese – we were escorted up the rivers, the Yangtze and the Wang Poo by Japanese ships – boats...

**Rick:** And this was in the summer of '41?

**Gene:** It was the fall and it was in October of 1940 and actually when we landed in the Philippines on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November I never forgot that because it was my dad's birthday, but that morning the sea was calm and we entered the bay – Manila Bay and the captain of the ship

pointed Carigula out to us and told us that was one of our Naval Bases and pointed out the ??? – the Bataan Peninsula – you think I'd forget that? But anyway and he told us a little bit about that area and we docked at Army Docks in Manila and oh it was such a gorgeous day and the trees were beautiful and it was just a beautiful...and Manila city was a gorgeous place. A Philippine Army Band welcomed us and we were taken by truck down to Nichols Field south of Manila – a little air base with grass runways. In the morning the pilots would fly off and in the afternoon they'd use it as a golf course and you only worked a half a day while we were there.

**Rick:** Now you mentioned that you saw some or had some interaction with some Japanese during that time or did I misunderstand that?

**Gene:** No, we didn't have any...we didn't have any problem that way at all. We learned later that there were Japanese around that were doing what they were supposed to be doing. In fact we used to go to a place that for a Peso – 50 cents you could buy a whole fried chicken and a bottle of Pepsi Cola and good hot bread, this was run by one of those Japanese that would turn out to be a Major or something in the Japanese Army. We didn't know that anyway, we didn't talk about anything.

**Rick:** So you were there with the Airforce and what were your duties basically?

**Gene:** I was appointed as Squadron Supply Sergeant and my responsibility was...we were in charge of clothing the men and taking care of all of the equipment owned by the Squadron. That is all of the mess material, the material in the day room and bunks and all that stuff. But we had 20 Philippino men working with us so they did all the work and we learned to be supervisors. When I say we, there were two other fellows were clerks. But it was a great assignment for me because I had an opportunity to work with each man individually and never met one that I didn't like. It was just a super group of mostly young men from the Washington, Oregon, Northern California, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and so we had a lot in common, we did.

**Rick:** Was the equipment that you had up to date or?

**Gene:** That was P26's, it looked like a toy, we thought it was a toy. But the pilots who flew it said "*it's very maneuverable*" and then we received P35's and they were air cooled as was the 26 and then on the...about July 1<sup>st</sup> the following year in 1941 we were transferred to Clark Field. Clark Field was a big air base with a headquarter squadron there and they had a bombardment squadron that flew V10's and V18's. We were the only fighter squadron – pursuit squadron. There were no barracks for us or anything so we went in there and we set up beds in one of the hangars and just before the war broke out they finished some little shacks north of the hangar line that would accommodate about 15 or 20 men and I had a supply shack for me all alone because of you know the equipment and so on and I just bunked there. And but we thought we were pretty well set up. One big air strip – dirt, no concrete air strips or anything like that, but the...even when it rained hard, it rained a lot there as you can imagine, they could land in the middle of the rainstorm and it never got muddy because it was too hard packed. We had...the total was about 215 to 225 officers and men.

**Rick:** When they would fly on missions were they just training missions or did they...were they aware that there may be some conflict with the Japanese?

**Gene:** They did some reconnaissance. A lot of it was training missions, no question about it. But they did some reconnaissance. They got well acquainted with the Dutch East Indies and Malaysia and Singapore and all that area – French Indo China. When the latter part of November 37 or 38 B17's were brought in, flown in and they landed at Clark Field and that was really something to see this. They did it all in two different flights but they...there was enough room for them to park there and land there fine. Half of them were sent down to Mindanao, the other half stayed there. Troops came in you know the squadrons, I don't know how many squadrons...if they had 18 planes I don't know how many squadrons that took, but I know there were quite a few Airforce came in and the responsibility...when we got to Clark Field there was no more funning around, we went all day long and it was you know pretty much business all the way. They built a new post exchange there to help people and they began building some barracks and some other troops came in. Some National Guard outfit – Mexico sent a lot of their National Guard people and California, some tank companies came in from that area and some of

those came to Clark Field and others were placed around. We didn't see much of those but the bombers were there.

**Rick:** And then tell us when you first heard about Pearl Harbor and where you were and what your thoughts were.

**Gene:** We were at Clark Field and we fell out every morning for role call as we always did. Our squadron commander, a young Lieutenant who was a first Lieutenant, he told me later he was an acting first Lieutenant – Joseph H. Moore, but he was very stern that morning and he told us Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese. And he said, *“We can anticipate the same kind of treatment I’m sure”*. But he said, *“we’ve been preparing for this, this is our business and I’m sure we’re going to be able to make it a good accounting for ourselves”*. And he said *“go about your business this morning, we’re schedule to go fly reconnaissance, we’re going to try to...if the Japanese planes come they’re going to try to...we’re going to try to pick ‘em up early”*, so we got a little head start on it. He said, *“it’ll be two or three squadrons flying reconnaissance, we’ll come back and refuel and so on and we’d rotate that as long as we need to”*. He said, *“go about your business and don’t miss any meals”*, he said *“be sure you have breakfast, if we get into war you never know when the next meals going to be”*. But I didn't feel like a meal and I had that call really wrong and I said *“the Japanese will never attack us, they got better sense than to take on a country like America”*, but I found out wrong, that I was wrong that first morning. I went back to the supply squadron shop there of mine and tried to keep busy but at noon I left because I was hungry to go over to the mess shack to see if I could get lunch and I had to cross kind of an open field and as I got about the middle of the field I heard a huge noise overhead and I wanted to see what that was and looked up and it was a great big flight of bombers. And in good formation and I thought *‘my gosh, Uncle Sam is on his toes, the war’s only been going for a few hours and here’s this big line of bombers’*, it was Japanese, but I didn't learn that. But I watched them coming and when I got looking up and saw the rising sun on the under carriage, the bombs had started to fall and I just dropped to the ground and I learned to get very thin. If you get close to the ground your chances of not being hit a pretty good because I stayed on the ground until they went over.

**Rick:** So they were bombing Clark Field then?

**Gene:** They hit Clark Field then and then hit Aeba, another field because that was right in and then they went out to sea I suppose back to their base in Japan. But and then the sky was filled with fighter-bombers, fighter planes. The Zero Fighter.

**Rick:** After the bombers came over?

**Gene:** Yeah. When the bombers came over it took out our entire squadron.

**Rick:** All those B17's stacked up there?

**Gene:** All the B17's and all of our squadron except the squadron commander got off. He just heard them coming or saw them and he got his plane in the air and but there...we lost, we didn't lose all the pilots but we lost down the line there we lost 16 men when those bombers and the other planes, the Japanese fighter planes, I don't know how long they were there. It seemed to me like they were there forever.

**Rick:** And were they dropping bombs or strafing?

**Gene:** No they weren't, they had a huge – it looked like a huge bomb on the under carriage and I thought that's what they were going to do, save that till the end and anything that they hadn't taken out they were going to use that, but they were tanks – gas tanks. There was a lot of stuff going on there and we saw planes with them and then without them and we assumed that they must be gas tanks because we didn't hear any. But they made a good accounting of themselves and when they left, the squadron commander landed and...

**Rick:** The Japanese squadron commanders?

**Gene:** No – as far as I know we had one guy in the sky – Harold Poole. We didn't have any guns like that see we were...we had planes we had to maintain and that was it. But a short time

before they had given us a number of...a small number of Lewis 30 caliber machine guns and they were one that had a drum on the top and they were put right down on the hangar line and Harold he told us about it he said *"I came into that area"* and he was an armament man and he said, *"I saw that Lewis Caliber machine gun standing there and I jumped down into the pit that it was in and it was jammed"*, but he said *"I was familiar with it, I cleared it and I took out a Japanese"*...he shot down a Japanese fighter plane. He said, *"that thing was coming right strait at me and I knew I couldn't miss it and I started shooting at it and knocked it down"*. And he got another one later with a 50-caliber machine gun pulled off of a P40.

**Rick:** Were there any anti-aircraft facilities there to challenge...

**Gene:** I'm not sure of that, I didn't ever was sure, I never did see any and there was a lot of noise around. A field artillery was there and they were firing, I know they were firing but whether they were anti-aircraft I never did know that.

**Rick:** How many days after Pearl Harbor was that?

**Gene:** Well it was the same day as Pearl Harbor. It was Sunday in Pearl Harbor and our Sunday was...well anyway we were a day different, so it was pretty close together.

**Rick:** All right well then what happened after that?

**Gene:** We stayed...one of the other squadron transferred the plane to us and those planes were used for reconnaissance. We were directed to go up in the mountains above...Fort Sotsenberg was up above us and that was a Philippine scouts but they also, they were cavalry and there were also field artillery but not...I'd like to tell you something here if it's okay for me to pause. When we heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed those men who were the commanding officers of the B17 squadrons went down to Manila, flew down to Manila to confer with General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur had...he was in command of all the troops in that part of...all the American troops – the navy, army and so on. And when they got to his office in the Manila Hotel, his subordinates were there, two generals and they said they needed to talk to him to get

permission to fly up because they'd fly reconnaissance, the bombers had over Formosa and that was the staging area. Planes by the thousands were in that area, and they said "*if we can get permission to go up there, we can take those planes out*", MacArthur had isolated himself, given instruction to his subordinates – "*I am not to be disturbed for a period of six hours*". So they said "*we cannot disturb him*" and they said "*okay, it's okay if you can't disturb him, you give us permission to go*", they said, "*We don't have the authority to do that*". "*Well you get the permission from MacArthur*", "*We cannot disturb him*". And so those bombers were sitting on the ground and they took out those bombers. The bombers took most of them out and these smaller planes took the rest of them and those planes were sent over there not only to protect the Philippines but for those other countries and you see that was a terrible thing and the word passed around fast so we all knew immediately what MacArthur was worth. MacArthur had taken upon himself the position that he could defend the Philippine Islands on the beaches. Now this...what they called '*The Orange Plan*' was a plan where we would try to hold the Bataan Peninsula and the Island of Corregidor and if we could hold those then they could get reinforcements to us you see in time. But he said "*that's a lousy plan*" and it turned out to be it wasn't a very good one but this idea of his holding the...keeping the Japanese off the beaches, the first thing that happened they made a landing north on Luzon and to the southern part of Luzon and put a '*pincher move*' towards Manila see.

**Rick:** How many days after that, after the bombing, after Pearl Harbor did they land their troops?

**Gene:** Oh within a week or so, yeah we couldn't keep track of them we didn't have any communication. But I think around a week they had big troops there and we had these horse drawn field artillery...

**Rick:** World War I equipment?

**Gene:** Yeah, but those Philippino Soldiers were great soldiers.

**Rick:** Well did they land unopposed, the Japanese landed pretty well unopposed?

**Gene:** Pretty well unopposed, yeah. We didn't have any planes; see they had air superiority after the first of that. That was a real tragedy for us.

**Rick:** Then just go on with the story.

**Gene:** All right, we stayed there flying reconnaissance so we could help the infantry and all the rest of them and then were ordered to go on to the Peninsula Bataan on the early...I mean on Christmas Eve. And I was able to get with the help of the squadron commander a five-ton truck. The only vehicles we had in the squadron were a pick-up truck and a ton and a half truck for field kitchens. And so we were able to get the truck and went over to the Fort Sotsenberg quarter master, said I want to load this truck with clothing, shoes, everything that the men need in war and they said *"let's see your requisition"*. And I says, *"come on! We're in war"*, I remember that and they said, *"we have to have a requisition"*, I said, *"The Japanese are within two days of this base, what are you going to do? Keep all these clothes and then give 'em to the Japanese when they came?"* and they held a little Powwow and decided we could do it. We filled that truck and the huge truck and we went over to the PX in Sotsenberg, it was vacant and we cleaned out all of the toilet articles – toothbrushes, soap and ??? And when we got through that thing was huge, a little top-heavy in fact. And we took out Christmas Eve on the road to Bataan. By about two o'clock in the morning we were on the...entered the Peninsula of Bataan. Pulled into a big bamboo thicket, stayed there that night, awake in the morning to have a little breakfast of bread soaked in gasoline and some strawberry jam.

**Rick:** That was on Christmas Day?

**Gene:** That was Christmas Day. The afternoon over the...we had a nice dinner. The next day we were directed to go to the southern tip of the Bataan Peninsula and find a bivouac area. The squadron commander told me to do that, take one white van with him and leave him there to guard our clothing and stuff, bring the truck back and haul some more of our troops down that way. And so I did that. I saw that Morrison Knudsen building three airbases on the Bataan Peninsula but they were too late because we didn't have any planes left. But we got down there

and found a place to bivouac up in the jungle. The Bataan Peninsula was very dense jungle most of it, and found a place and went back and we hauled the rest of the troops back. Sad, sad state there. And he was the guy I picked because he'd been an infantry soldier and he was good. And so that became our bivouac and our responsibility to them was to go down on the airstrip and build reventanence so that those...when the new planes would come in we'd have a place to keep them out of sight. And we were put on two meals a day right then, short rations and we got out and worked all day and we didn't have to do that for many days because we were transferred into the Philippine Army and we were given World War I infield rifles and World War I hand grenades ammunition and we were...we served for the rest of the time on Bataan as infantry troops.

**Rick:** And were you commanded by Philippine officers?

**Gene:** No, no in fact we...our same officers stayed with us and we all had about the same amount of knowledge about infantry but we were on the beach but the beach was down a ways and we were up above and the Japanese constantly night after night after night during January, February, March and...tried to land barges of men. And it was our responsibility to keep them from doing that and we did a good job of doing that.

**Rick:** So you were firing on the beaches?

**Gene:** We were firing as they came on the beaches. It was kind of like shooting ducks in a pond.

**Rick:** How was the morale of the troops? Did they...were there feelings toward MacArthur and were there a lot of fear of being captured at that time?

**Gene:** Nope, there were no talk of being captured. I never heard any talk of surrender or being captured. I heard a lot of talk *'hold on guys, you're going to be reinforced'*. Corregidor was there and they were keeping the Japanese Navy...couldn't get in touch with us at all and in fact if those who guns on Corregidor had been...they could be turned you know so they could defend

the bay, the open bay. If they could've been turned back where they could shoot at Bataan, we would have still been on Bataan if we needed to be if we had food. They could have kept all of those Japanese troops coming down. In fact the troops that we had on Bataan held them for gosh I don't know – a couple of months and they had to pull thousands of their troops back from...gone on past there see and bring them back and throw them against us because they had, what did they say? Two months to take Bataan and Corregidor and see it took them December, January, February, March and April up until the 9<sup>th</sup> of April.

**Rick:** Right and they invaded Manila on Christmas day.

**Gene:** Yeah, we left that as an open city and so...and I'll tell you some of those Japanese people got in real trouble with headquarters in Japan. Because they had to bring all these troops back and throw 'em on us because they needed Manila Bay. And so that's how that happened.

\*\*\*Tape Interrupt\*\*\*

**Rick:** ...you were down to two meals a day, how was it in early April? Were you starving?

**Gene:** We were out of food.

**Rick:** And what was it like? Did you have one meal day or?

**Gene:** Fairly early we got the ??? thousand calories, mostly rice. And it was my responsibility to go to a central place to get our ration for the following day and that last day I didn't get any food at all because we found ourselves in-between our artillery and the Japanese artillery and some of those shells and so on were landing right on us. So we decided, we waited there for four or five hours and we decided we needed to get out of that area and get back to camp. We were down off the road quite a little ways and when we got back to the road it was just jammed with troops – Philippino troops. And I talked to an officer and he says, "*we have lost the war, we were be surrendering (or had been surrendering) the war is lost*". And we couldn't get the truck on the road so we just left the thing and cut through the jungle area. We knew where the camp

was, it was quite a ways but we got back about daylight. When I say we, there were two of us. And this guy – Sad Sad Carrier, David R. Carrier and we all called him Sad Sad. But they hadn't had any word and we didn't get the word that we had been surrendered until about noon. Early morning there was down on the beach a one navy tunnel and we went down there to see if we could get some food, if they had any food and they gave us some bags of white navy beans and some gallon cans of prunes and when we took these up everybody was so happy to see that food and all the thing...the only thing the cooks had to put with the beans was water and salt and they could open the gallon cans and when they served that food I can't...I'll never forget how good that was. But we could have all we wanted.

**Rick:** Did you have plenty of water?

**Gene:** We were right by a little stream.

**Rick:** So you could drink that fresh water?

**Gene:** We had to boil it or use pills with it but we had...it looked like fresh water. We were having...we were eating in fact when that tank came down the road – a Japanese Officer standing in the tank and told us that for us the war was over, we had been surrendered. And told us where to stack our guns and ammunition and where to report, just down the road a little ways – a big open area. *"Tomorrow afternoon be there"*.

**Rick:** A Japanese Officer told you that?

**Gene:** A Japanese Officer told that.

**Rick:** In English?

**Gene:** Perfect English, you bet, he did. So we began talking then, you know *"are we really surrendered? I can't believe that"*. Nobody could believe it and we didn't have any food. But they were still telling us *"hold in till help arrives"*.

**Rick:** You were still expecting reinforcements?

**Gene:** We were still expecting that. Yeah, you talk about loyal people, we were loyal and we were doing the very best we could, we weren't ready to give up but nobody asked us if we had a vote. And it came as a real surprise and a tremendously sad surprise for us. When MacArthur left everybody was cheering when he left because he was no good to anyone and the...but any way MacArthur left...oh but when he left his...he had ordered us "*fight to the last man*".

**Rick:** That was his order huh? And were they were glad to see him go? Did they feel abandoned or anything?

**Gene:** No, no, they wanted him to get out. All the officers and men alike they didn't want anything to do with MacArthur. But, and he was supported in that by the President of the United States. That came out as a command from...the President withdrew that. But MacArthur never did withdraw it and his last remarks were "*I shall return*" and as he...the guys told me who were with him when he came back through he had the planes fly over and drop packages of cigarettes – "*I have returned*". But anyway, no he didn't.

**Rick:** And how did they feel about General Wainright?

**Gene:** Dugout Dart left and Skinny Wainright had been there for a long long time and he had been at various infantry...he was an infantry officer and it was when MacArthur went over in Corregidor that he moved into Clark Field and then he moved to Corregidor and when MacArthur left then he moved to Corregidor. When MacArthur left he maintained command and officers had to report to him. I mean he didn't say "*Skinny you be commanding officer and have the people report to you*", but anyway then...and he was taken as a prisoner of war – Wainright was.

**Rick:** So shortly after MacArthur left and you met this Japanese Officer who spoke perfect English and told you that you were going to surrender, take us from there what happened after that.

**Gene:** Well we...then we assembled and we stayed in an assembly. They said they were going to bring trucks and haul us off Bataan in trucks but no trucks came but the Japanese soldiers came and they just swarmed over us like bees. They swarmed over us bayoneting, beating and taking from us anything that they wanted. They went through and searched each one of us. If you made any attempt to say "*no, you can't have that*", you'd be run through the bayonet. We learned fast – don't say no.

**Rick:** They took watches and rings and anything...

**Gene:** My best friend Dick Watts from Tremonton Utah had glasses...I think I saw him with glasses on, glasses that were tinted a little bit and one of the guards, the Japanese wanted those and he said "*I have to have these*", he just took the butt of his rifle and smashed him in his face. We were beaten. And when they got through with us then they went on up the road. They were artillery and...to set up their artillery. We were moved down into a big field alongside of the runway that they were building. Guards were put around us and we were out in a wide-open space. We were there for three days and the third night no trucks came at any time. We began the march.

**Rick:** And did you have any food at all during those three days?

**Gene:** We had no food or water for three days and except for what we had in our canteens, we had that and when we...then we started the march in the evening. We were down at sea-level there and the road went, you had to wind through the mountains you know so we climbed to the top of the mountains, we got on flat ground again and we were somewhat above the sea then and they ran us off the side of the road. Early the next morning they got us up and to get us down the road early and the Japanese had set up their artillery along the road that we were marching, walking on and they were fighting on Corregidor and Corregidor was firing on them and we saw

them hit guns head on – I mean on Corregidor. They were accurate with their artillery and a lot of the shrapnel...a shell didn't land on us but a lot of the shrapnel flew out on us and some of our men...I don't know about the degree but some were not able to go on and some were just partially wounded and tried to go on and had to fall out. We couldn't carry these guys. It was the worst you know it was the most you could do was to carry yourself that's all there was to it.

**Rick:** And what happened to these guys?

**Gene:** They...as far as we know they were shot in the head or bayonet, killed that way.

**Rick:** And were the Philippino troops right with you there?

**Gene:** They were way up ahead of us you see their front lines were...because they started moving them out – they were three or four days ahead of us.

**Rick:** I see, and there were British troops too huh?

**Gene:** Some, yea a few. I don't know but you know they had been working with the Americans...right. But the...I don't know but some of those troops they could be four or five days ahead of us. We were the last ones.

**Rick:** And did you know where you were going and how long it was going to be?

**Gene:** No, we had no idea. No one communicated with us, no one knew that we knew. But we moved out of that area and then what they would do was get us up early in the morning and start us down the road and when the sun got out and started to get hot then they'd move us in the field – a big field and make us crowd all together standing up and they'd have us sit down. If we had any hats – take your hats off and they'd give us the sun treatment. They were punishing us. That was the purpose of that was to punish us and they did. They did for three and a half years – they punished the Americans.

**Rick:** But still no food or water.

**Gene:** Still no food or water. We got one canteen cap of rice – our group going off on the death march until we got to the end of it and they gave us another cup.

**Rick:** Which was about six days as I understand.

**Gene:** I don't know, I...I'll tell you I was in a real dilemma all the way. I had no idea how long it took. I tried to figure it out when we got in the first prison camp but I couldn't. I lost track of...yeah I couldn't.

**Rick:** Okay so did you witness any atrocities?

**Gene:** Lot's of atrocities.

**Rick:** You saw Japanese bayonet people dropping out?

**Gene:** Yep, and we say four men dig their grave and they were told to get in it and they shot them and I know at least one man because we were watching – they hadn't killed him and he tried to crawl out of it and they just kept battering him down with a shovel. Now they...it was unbelievable.

**Rick:** Well that is something, and then you reached a railhead as I understand.

**Gene:** The railhead of the San Fernando and there they put us in boxcars, made us stand as close as we could together. They do that at night too – at night when we were in the field we'd stand close together, sit down and spend the night that way. You couldn't...there wasn't room to sit down. But we stood up there and they packed us in and then we went...took most of the afternoon we were in the boxcars most of the afternoon, getting put in and then we didn't go a long distance but a little while and when they opened the boxcar doors there were dead among us who had died and...standing up. We were in so tight, he couldn't fall down. And we walked

about five miles up the road to the first prison camp and that was camp O'Donnell. An old Philippine Army training camp, it was in...it had been abandoned and anyway we stayed there. It was tough.

**Rick:** How long were you at Camp O'Donnell?

**Gene:** About a month, lets see – a month and a half.

**Rick:** And were you given any kind of rations?

**Gene:** Yes, we were given rice three meals a day and about the...early we were given as much rice as we needed. And the thing we'd have, we'd have eggplant – boiled eggplant to go with it. But it filled the space and the rice was pretty good rice, my gosh there was a huge huge rice grainery, I mean thousands of tons of rice. We know that because we hauled it all out for the Japanese – loaded it and unloaded it. And then because so many men couldn't eat, we were burying on the average of fifty men a day who died from dysentery and malaria and from starvation. Some guys couldn't eat rice, they just couldn't eat it.

**Rick:** And water, did you have fresh water?

**Gene:** There was one in our huge camp for hundreds of men there was one tap, it was almost a drizzle. So when a guy would go for water he would get into a long line at night because we had to work in the day time and he might spend all night and take as many canteens as he could and he'd fill them all. So water was precious. No we didn't get enough water. My two best friends we teamed up together and agreed that we were going to do everything we could to see if we couldn't make it through and you know by that time I had kind of gotten myself in shape a bit more and made up my mind I was going to make it. I thought the Americans would be there before the end of the year, I really thought they would be. In fact I thought the war would never last that long and I made up mind that I was going to make it through and get even with those first group of guys who had beat on us. But that part of it didn't change. And then they began early sending men to Japan to work in the mines and the smelters and so on and took those in the

best health and they wanted 300 men who wanted a lengthy work detail and all most all of them were out on detail or had already been taken out of that camp and but I was one of those they took. And my two best friends were out on day work detail and that's the last I ever saw them.

**Rick:** And so they took you then?

**Gene:** They took us and took us down to Manila and put us on flat cars and headed us down south.

**Rick:** Did you know you were going to be leaving at that time? Did you take anything with you?

**Gene:** Didn't have anything to take. We had half of a mess kit and our canteen – a canteen cup. That's all we had.

**Rick:** So they put you on a ship then?

**Gene:** No, no, they didn't put us on a ship they put us on a...when we reached the end of the railroad line we walked all night, came to the end of the road and we were told then "*you're job is to build, pick up on the road building from here and build a road until it reaches the bay water*". Three hundred of us and about two thirds of them were too sick to work at the beginning. And we didn't have any good tools. Now initially there were, we had cans of corned beef and some sardines and some rice. But we didn't have anything to cook the rice in – nothing. And so the only thing that was possible were wheelbarrows, iron-tired wheelbarrows and we'd put rice in that and put water on top of it. We didn't have anything to steam the rice and so any rice we'd cook was just gooey and we had to use that. And there were some of these cans and stuff, we'd go out on the road to work and within a matter of a short time the people who lived in that area had stolen all the canned stuff – there was no one there to watch it. So we were there until almost September.

**Rick:** Building this road. Was there any heavy equipment to help? Just strictly...

**Gene:** Nothing – wheelbarrows and picks and shovels. And heavy vines, oh it was terrible to try to clear the vines out. Big trees, we couldn't do anything with the big trees.

**Rick:** How many hours a day would you have to work?

**Gene:** Early, we'd go out early and we'd come back in time so we'd try to get something to eat before night. Didn't have any cover. It rained on us, we worked in the rain. It was terrible. We built...we buried...we had to burry al the dead too. We buried lots of dead – hundreds.

**Rick:** Can we throw another tape in here or do we gotta wrap? I mean this is...you're still in Manila here aren't you?

**Gene:** Well we're still in the Philippines.

**Rick:** Okay we got about ten more minutes. But then you worked on that road and you were fed rice and a little bit of water and then...take us from there.

**Gene:** They...we weren't making enough progress and we couldn't, we couldn't in that situation. Too many men had died too. So they took us back and put us in the Billbid Prison in Manila and I was in there until March of the next year. But as soon as we got...

**Rick:** What were the accommodations like?

**Gene:** It was an old Philippine prison, a city prison.

**Rick:** And were you in cells?

**Gene:** I slept on the floor – concrete floor. And but we did have some medical help because the navy medical group that was...oh where was it? Just a little ways south of Manila were put in there and they used...the Japanese used that to get men healthy so they'd send them out on

details you see. They were stripping the Philippines of everything they could use in the war effort. And I had Bery Bery. We all had jaundice. We'd suffered terribly from jaundice and oh I've forgotten the terms right now...

**Rick:** Did you have Malaria?

**Gene:** Malaria was terrible. I need to tell you about this because before I left the Bataan Peninsula one of the medics gave me a can and I don't know where he got them but he said "*I put in that can 15 fine grain quinine pills and don't use them until you absolutely have to and don't let the Japanese get 'em from you*" and I took those and I put them such that I could push them down the inside of my shoe so when they searched me you know they didn't take my shoes and they didn't know I had those. Now there were people who had Malaria but as far as we're concerned and most of us didn't have that until we got in prison and then it began to break out you see. But down there, after I'd been there for about a month or I don't know two or three weeks I started getting Malaria attacks. You get a Malaria attack – the first one you get is very severe and it doesn't last very long and you perspire and you, you know the pain...it's painful but the pain leaves and then two or three days later and it keeps going until you get closer together and then you stay in one all the time and you die. And I was at the point where I was getting one every day and they were getting more severe and this...I could feel this attack coming on it was early morning, we were out on the road and I said to myself "*do what the medic told you to do*", I went off the side of the road, took that out of my shoe, dumped those fifteen fine grain quinine pills in my hand – the pills and drank them down.

**Rick:** Took all 15?

**Gene:** Took all 15 at once, that's what he said – "*don't take 'em till you need to and then take them*". I went up the side of the road and the next thing I knew it was along towards the evening and I was lying by the side of the road, it was raining and when they got ready to go back to camp they hauled me back to camp. I couldn't eat and I...by that time we got some canvas which we put over top of us and it helped us a bit in the rain. We kind of dug out a little place for the bed for me in the gravel and went right to sleep and in the morning when I awakened I

felt pretty good, I really did and I was hungry. Because whatever it was that they had to eat I ate. And then it wasn't too long after that...that's how we came off...were taken off that project. But I never had another attack. When I got into a place where I...Bilbid Prison where I could explain this to doctors, they looked at me and smiled and shook their heads – that can't happen.

**Rick:** So while you were there in prison you had American doctors?

**Gene:** We had some.

**Rick:** And then when did you, how did you get over to Japan?

**Gene:** We were taken...I went from there to Caban Prison Camp, it was a big farm area, worked for almost a year there...

**Rick:** Caban Two One – the one where they rescued those guys towards the end of the war?

**Gene:** That's the one!

**Rick:** You were there huh?

**Gene:** I was there. I have a copy of the book of the fellow who was there, he wrote that story and he gave me a copy. He's dead now but I...yeah. That was a great move on the part of...

**Rick:** It certainly was. And so you were there at Cabana Tuaon. They took another 500 out of there to go to Japan. We went back to Manila, boarded an old Canadian freighter, another 500 from the southern island...Mindanao and headed for Japan. It took us 63 days in the hold of that ship to go to Japan and...we lost a lot of men. Starved to death...we got one canteen of rice, canteen cup of rice and a canteen cup of water a day for 63 days.

**Rick:** And did you ever get out of there to get fresh air during that time?

**Gene:** Once we got out to the ocean we could get up and walk around the deck a little while and then get back down. There wasn't enough room for everybody to sit down at the same time, there wasn't enough room on that ship. It was a terrible trip.

**Rick:** How did you sleep?

**Gene:** We tried to do the best we could. Some would sit, some would stand and some would take turns.

**Rick:** And you were there for 63 days?

**Gene:** 63 days and the bed was full of bedbugs and lice and ooh it was terrible. We were so filthy when we got off that boat we had long beards again and long hair and filthy.

**Rick:** How many pounds had you lost do you imagine by then?

**Gene:** I don't know, I don't know. We weren't very big during the war either but we lost a lot of weight. But anyway, they divided us into groups of 100 and our group went down to camp 17 at Omuda on the island of Kyushu and we went to work in the coal mine.

**Rick:** Now when you got off the boat did they truck you down? You didn't have to walk?

**Gene:** They put us on a train and there wasn't enough room on the train for us to all sit down at once either. Yep and we got...we rode all night, or most of the night and then until we had to walk into the camp which was out a way from the city a little bit. And it was a big camp – 1700 men in that camp. But they had a lot from Europeans and the Dutch East Indies, Australians – a lot of Australians.

**Rick:** Was the treatment still vicious and ferocious?

**Gene:** It was terrible. It was never changed. We thought when we got to Japan they'd be better, not a bit – not a bit. In fact that camp commander went down on record as being one of the very worst because he was responsible for the death of more men than most any other camp commanders.

**Rick:** You still had men dying around you just about every day.

**Gene:** Yes, not anywhere near as many but we were losing a few still. Some were starving to death, they didn't get enough food and some died of pneumonia. We were in an area where it snowed and froze you see and we had poor clothing, worked hard in the mine.

**Rick:** In the coal mine right? [**Gene:** in the coal mine] Pick and shovel work everyday?

**Gene:** Pick and shovel yep. All kinds...I was on a day shift all day and they had 24 hour shifts so you're coming and going all the time but we worked hard and we worked in nothing but a g-string. That's all the clothes we had and a cap to hold the lamp.

**Rick:** And was it just a hopeless situation?

**Gene:** It was almost a hopeless...

**Rick:** And a lot of guys gave up I guess.

**Gene:** Some guys still gave up but I made up my mind a long time ago and I knew what I had to do, I told myself what I had to do. I said to myself for example "*you are not going to get anymore food than they give you – there is no more food! You've got to make it on what they give you and you have to use good judgment and do that! But you can make it if you do it*". So I didn't suffer like a lot of the guys did. You know some of those big guys they need a lot of food and they didn't get enough food. We were working up on the outside one day moving some rails and there was snow and ice and they were frozen to the ground and we didn't have any gloves on or anything and we were carrying those and there was a navy chief with me. He was very thin

and he was a little older than I was...he couldn't have been ten years or so older but he said to me *"I'm not going to put up with this any longer, we're not going to make it and I'll be damned if I'm going to work for these people any longer. I'm just not going to...it isn't worth it to me"* and he died within a couple of days. He died.

**Rick:** Did he die of just his illnesses or...

**Gene:** Just died, didn't want to live anymore and he died. And that happened to people, I don't know how many it happened to it just happened to a number.

**Rick:** So you were a prisoner for three and a half years?

**Gene:** Three and a half years.

**Rick:** Well tell us about the end and when the...Pearl Harbor...when the bomb was dropped on....

**Gene:** We didn't know anything about that. Had no idea. We never had any information.

**Rick:** No clandestine radios or anything?

**Gene:** Nothing, nope we didn't have any of that. One of the things we did know is we saw fighter planes so we knew they had to be reasonably close.

**Rick:** American fighter planes?

**Gene:** American fighter planes – P51's. In fact our camp was strafed on day and one evening dive-bombers came in and set our camp on fire. Nothing was marked as a prisoner of war camp. A lot of men lost their lives going from the Philippines to Japan who were sunk by American submarines or American fighter planes.

**Rick:** Not knowing they were prisoner of war ships?

**Gene:** Not knowing and I read of at least two later on and I think three if I recall who lost around 1,000 men, almost everyone on the ship drowned by... wasn't that terrible – three and a half years and then... But anyway that happened. But we were working the coalmine and there were five of us and I was put in charge and the other guys were British, there was one Scotsman among them and it wasn't as easy as... very easy... always easy to get along with the British. They had the high... held themselves in high esteem and that's okay but they were talking about the *'blue bloods'* and I said to them while we were working *"who are the blue bloods"*? They said *"the British"*. He said *"we were in place long before any of the rest of you so we're the blue bloods"* and I said *"you call us as Americans"*. He said *"you are the (what did he call us? – anyway) you're the whole potpourri of people"*. Something far below blue bloods and I chuckled and I said *"it'll be those far beneath you to get us out if we get out of here"* and the Yanks and Tanks are the ones who rolled in. But anyway at noon, about noon time a young fellow Japanese came and told all of us topside *"Hiaku"* and so we said *"nanka, nanka, wakadinai"* but we went up and turned our tools into the sheds, underground sheds, heard some Japanese talking – heard them say *"Senso yamiyae"* – Senso was *'war'* yamiyae is *'finished'* and boy I tell you the old heart began to beat. Went up on the train and when we got topside they didn't search us, didn't make us get in formation. There's a little guy who took our lamps that was telling... he was very happy he says *"senso yamiyae"*...

\*\*\*Tape Interrupt\*\*\*

**Elizabeth:** How did you survive psychologically?

**Rick:** Let's see Gene we were, you went topside and the Japanese guards were saying that the war is over.

**Gene:** Yep, we got back to camp... they told... well no they didn't know that, they did not know the war was over but it looked like the chances were pretty good and we went back to camp, we didn't have to march we just went back to camp. When we got into camp the Japanese camp

commander came in and told us the war was...no he didn't he said "*send men for redcross food*" and they gave us each a little box...but we knew they had redcross food in camp but they didn't share it with us.

**Rick:** Well did the guards leave suddenly? [**Gene:** no, no they were all there] Was there any retribution done or anything like that?

**Gene:** No but they...we stayed up all night eating that good food that was in there and we even shared it with some of the guards. Some of them had been terrible but some of them had just guarded you as little as... We found out there were some who spoke English a little and the mean ones didn't come around us at all. I mean the seriously mean, they were all...because you know they would find themselves getting beaten if they didn't shape up. But anyway the next day we got out on the parade ground and they gave us a brand new Japanese non-commissioned officers uniform and it was a nice wool with leather shoes and socks and underwear and all that good stuff you know and oh boy morale shot way high. Redcross food and morale and the next day we got out on the parade ground again and the camp commander got up on the...I'm gonna...well the camp commander got up on the platform and with tears running down his cheeks he told us through the interpreter that the war was over and the allies had been victories. And he was crying as he said that. Now when he got up on the platform I said to myself "*here is my chance, as soon as this goes through I'm gonna...you're gonna be my enemy see*" and I didn't tell you going through I had one terrible experience and he beat me – the Japanese camp commander, severely and he punished me further. And after this is all through I'll explain that a little to you...so I really had...the times I was kneeling on the bamboo's with that camp commander after he had beaten me I said to myself, the only time "*maybe you wont make it*".

**Rick:** Well tell us a little more...kneeling on the bamboo's and was there some reason that he beat you?

**Gene:** Yes, I was working in the mine one time early in the morning working down in the water and it started, boy it started to feel like I was gonna have the flu or something and by the time the day was over I could hardly walk and the guys helped me back to camp and I did have the

opportunity for the doctor...we had an Australian doctor there and he checked me over and he said *"I have no idea for sure of what you have, the only thing I can tell you is to me it looks like you're having an attack of rheumatic fever"*. I hurt so badly I couldn't bend my fingers and he said *"I don't have any kind of medications that I can help you with, the only thing I can do is put you in a building over there where people are too sick to be anywhere else and if you want me to do that I'll do it"* and I said *"you know I think you better do that"*. So they did and I was in that building for three or so days, at least three and finally the fever broke and as that fever broke the pain flowed out of me just...you know I was sweating and with the sweat went the pain. And so as early as I could I went back in my building that I was supposed to be in and the...I couldn't go to work in the mine but they put us to work (who couldn't go to the mine) doing work around the camp. And a group of us were covering up air-raid shelters, they were concrete air-raid shelters but we were covering it with dirt and we had to pick the dirt loose and throw it up and the guy working with me had a pick and I had a shovel – he'd pick a little dirt and I'd throw it up. The guy in charge of us was an American who spoke fluent English (I mean Japanese) and he said *"I'm going to stand up here high and I'll watch and if any Japanese come around I'll tell you"*. Well he wasn't watching and this camp commander came up through some buildings close by and he got right to us and shouted *"attention – kiotshi"* and then *"nanka nanka"* and we said *"we're sick and we're scosh yasimae – a little rest"* he was just furious you could see his eyes were just...and he grabbed the shovel out of my hand and tried to hit me in the face with the edge of it but I put my arms up like this and blocked it but it knocked me down standing at attention and he beat me across the back. We didn't have any shirts on, just a little pair of old ragged shorts and then he turned and knocked Roholt down and beat on him. But I got up and he knocked me down again and beat on me and then took us with him over to the guard house and he had the guards put two bamboo poles on the concrete and they were old ones that had been out in...they were cracked and so on and one under the knee and one under the shins and pulled our feet back so all the weight would be on those bamboo poles and then handed me the shovel to hold over my head and went. And I was in that situation until he left in the evening to go, he left the camp and the guards...one of the guards came up and he said to Roholt *"you take the shovel, you"* and Roholt said to me *"I know I should take it from you but if I have to hold it I'm not gonna make it"*. I'm just holding on and I said *"it doesn't hurt like it did, it does not hurt like that anymore, I can do it"* And you know as evening approached, it was just beginning to

get dark a flight of American dive bombers came down and set our camp on fire – flew over back and forth and the guards just went crazy – boy you talk about frightened people and we could not move. I couldn't even get the shovel down.

**Rick:** You were still on the bamboo's?

**Gene:** On the bamboo and I was watching this and I was just...boy I was so happy. I pleaded with them "*burn the whole blasted thing down*". But they dragged us down and put us in a cell and oh I passed out...

**Rick:** How long after this did the surrender take place and this commander was up on the platform that you were telling us about?

**Gene:** Well this was, this was probably around...I didn't, I couldn't keep track of days but it was probably the latter part of June or early July, yeah and but I'll quickly finish telling you – I heard the interpreter and I called to him and he came back and he said "*I didn't know there was anyone in here, what got you...what happened?*" We told him and he said "*I don't know whether I can help you or not but I'll try*" and he went across to the commanding officers building and he came back and he had two forms – about two sheets of paper and he laid them down and he said "*you read this through and then sign it if you want to sign it*". And it said "*I the undersigned promise to never again to attempt to overthrow the Imperial Japanese Government under the punishment of death*" and I signed it. Now he said "*I want you to understand you have signed that – if you get in trouble, any kind of trouble again it's the end for you, they'll kill you*" and anyway then he said "*now you can go back to your building*" and we went back to the mine the following morning and were glad to get back in the mine I'll tell you.

**Rick:** These interpreters, were they Japanese that had been educated?

**Gene:** They were Americans who had been in Japan and were forced to be interpreters for the Japanese.

**Rick:** These were actually Americans that could speak Japanese.

**Gene:** American, yep – we called this guy...what did we call him? Los Angeles or something because he was from that area but you know you couldn't trust him because he was trying to live to. But he could interpret well. But anyway when I saw him up there I said "*this is the time, I'm going to get even with you*". But when I saw that and saw him and the fact that he was crying – all of a sudden all of the hatred I had for the Japanese just evaporated. I no longer hated them and I found myself feeling sorry for him because I knew how he felt and that hatred that I had was replaced with joy. That was my first experience with joy and I'm telling you it was the most beautiful thing that could happen to me. I never could believe I could be so happy. I know I cried, I know I laughed, I'm sure I sang a little bit, I was so...I'm just overcome with joy. And you know that just didn't drop out of me, it phased out of me – oh it was so wonderful and I'd had no hatred for him or any other Japanese and do you know what a blessing that was? Never again! I know fellows right now who are still filled with hatred for the Japanese and I've never had any hatred since then. They're God's children like we are and you know I've read a lot of books on the Japanese since that time and there's no question but what they...the man responsible was the Emperor of Japan and those Generals and Admirals who were also in charge, but the Emperor of Japan had the authority – he stopped the war. And you know this kind of training came from the Generals and so on and we were the lowest on the totem pole but all of a sudden that changed. Quickly then they left – stayed two weeks to protect us and then they left. We were there...now that was in the middle of August – the twelfth of September we were still there but a fellow newspaper reporter from I think the New York Times got in there some way and told us a little bit about the atomic bomb and all these other good things.

**Rick:** That was your first experience of that?

**Gene:** We didn't have any news of anything. He told us a little bit about the war and somebody shouted "*when are we gonna get outta here?*" He said "*the army of occupation will be in here about the tenth of October*" and he went on a little to him and then he stopped and he said "*you know, the army of occupation has landed on the southern tip of this island – Oukusu. If you could get down there you probably could get a flight out immediately*" because they're using C46's

and 47's to fly supplies, goods and they go back and forth and you see we moved out of the crowd. When the railroad station was before...we went to the railroad station and told the fellow who could speak English who was in charge "*we want to go*", we told him where we wanted to go and he was happy to hear that.

**Rick:** How many? Was this the whole camp or just a few of you?

**Gene:** No not the whole camp but more joined us you know. And so by the time they got a train put together there were a lot of us but they filled the train and we rode all the rest of the afternoon, all night until about noon the next day and we came to the end of the line and we knew – we were told that we were going to have to cross the...a large body of water to get where we had to go. And when we came to the end we walked...there were a number of good-sized ships there at anchor. We went on the one that looked the newest and the biggest and there was a large group of us and we told...the fellows were eating, they were eating their lunch and we told them that we wanted to go, told them where we wanted to go across and we want you to take us.

**Rick:** These were Japanese cargo ship merchants?

**Gene:** Yeah and they said...they jabbered back and forth themselves and they said "*no*" and so we moved back a ways and we said "*who are you to...*" – among us were navy. Quite a few guys were navy guys and we said "*can you sail this ship and get us across?*" They said "*yes probably*" and they says "*okay, will you try to?*" "*Yeah, we'll be glad to try that*" and so we went back and said "*we have money*" and the way we got money – B17's while we were still in prison camp you know after the surrender and so...came over with B29's – circled and dropped stuff to us and they dropped an overcoat so each of us could have an overcoat and this is a semi tropical place you know the sun was hot. So each one of us sold an overcoat to the Japanese and they gave us a lot of money, I don't remember how much. We all had that money, there was nothing to buy and so we said "*if you don't do it, we're going to take the ship and put you off*" and they said "*we'll take you*" and they got that ship going and it took us all afternoon to go across and when we got across we reminded us all that we had to...we promised we would pay them and everybody gave them all the money he had and they...no kidding it was just heaps of

money around here because they didn't want the darn stuff. We walked down the road and we saw some Japanese trucks, military trucks and a Japanese officer and we said "*where is the army of occupation*" he says "*a short way down the road*". "*How about letting us take your trucks?*" he said "*if you let me put a driver on you can because we need the trucks and they'll bring the trucks back*". And we did that and about midnight we rolled into camp and the camp commander – it was a big camp got...greeted us, welcomed us and said "*I suppose you're hungry*", we said "*we're hungry*", he said "*what would you like – we'll get the cooks up, what would you like to eat*"? And just like we had rehearsed, everybody said "*hotcakes*"! He said "*our tent's up for you, we knew you'd be coming – you have a bed, a blanket and a pillow, that's the best we can do for you – and when you hear the bell ring, come*" and we heard the bell ring shortly and we had ham and eggs and sausage and hotcakes and everything you wanted.

**Rick:** They knew that there was a group of prisoners coming towards them?

**Gene:** Oh yeah, they anticipated it. And so we did that and the next morning we – I didn't wake up until almost noon and went over to see if I could get some food – sure – and got on a plane and it didn't take very far to go into Okinawa. We landed at Okinawa and they put us in a truck, took us across the field to a Red Cross thing, you know that has stuff in it with about six or eight beautiful American girls around it and we got fairly close to that but didn't get any closer...nobody would go closer. They said "*don't you want a cup of coffee or a coke or something?*" and everybody just wanted to look at them – for most of us, a lot of us it had been over five years since we...and they were so nice and so cute and then we went up and they were so disgusted with us. We were in these Japanese uniforms. They said "*we can't believe you would put yourself...let them put you in these*" and we said "*if you'd seen what we were in before this you would understand*". But they immediately gave us new clothing and then they gave us dinner. And the next day they put us on B24's, we flew to – back to Clark Field and it was all concrete – runway's going in all direction. And then they put us on the train and took us to a re-patriation camp south of Manila and it was wonderful. It was just wonderful!

**Rick:** And then how did you get back to the United States?

**Gene:** The United States – we had a chance to go by plane or boat. I chose boat and we went non-stop except to refuel in Hawaii and on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October we told, they told us in the morning we'll dock in San Francisco by evening. About noon or maybe a little...along about noon a couple of smaller ships came out loaded with beautiful lady's. I mean beautiful! And they escorted us in all afternoon and the guys lined the dock looking at them, picking out the one he wanted, or two. When we docked it was just like San Francisco had moved down on the docks and they put us in the hospital for two or three days, divided us into...sent us to different hospitals throughout the United States. I went to Fort Lewis Madigan Hospital.

**Rick:** Did you have contact with your loved ones?

**Gene:** That we did. In fact we had a chance to call home before...

**Rick:** In other words they had no idea until you reached San Francisco that you were safe and...

**Gene:** They had a call from a boy by name...a man by the name of John Coway, George Coway this Scotsman that was working in the mine with us the last day. He got there and he had gotten a...the telephone number from me and he called my dad and mother and told them who he was and said I'm in...he got out, he went out on his own and he got back to...he got down to Australia and called them. And then when we got to – of course to the states then we had a chat but I need to tell you one more thing about this. They were great to us at the hospital – a group of doctors were assigned to us and we spent each half-day with them until Christmas. They said *“if you'll do that with us, we'll be able to get you home by Christmas – we think, we hope we can”* and then we had the afternoon and the night off, we'd get passes to go to Seattle or anywhere if we wanted to go there for the evening but I'd have a nap after lunch every day and I don't know whether the telephone awakened me or whether the nurse awakened me but she said *“there is a call for you from Seattle and I promised them that I'd have you return the call”* and I said *“I don't know anyone in Seattle”* and she said *“but you have to return the call – I promised them that you would”*, but I said *“I don't know anyone in Seattle and I feel foolish calling”* and I said *“was it a man or a woman?”* She said *“it was a woman”*, I said *“I darn sure don't know any women in Seattle”*. She got the number and handed me the phone and it was a lady on the

phone and I said *“who is this?”* and said *“its Barbara Perkins”*, I said *“Barbara Perkins, you mean you’re not married yet?”* Barbara Perkins was my High School sweetheart both Junior and Senior year and I really was in love with her. She went to college when we graduated and I did other things and I said *“what are you doing in Seattle”* and she said *“I’m in the Navy”*. Well she had earned her degree, taught school for a year and said *“I got to get in the action”* and joined the navy. She became a gunnery instructor. She said – we talked a little bit, she said *“when can I see you”?* I said *“anytime or I can come and see you”*. So anyway she came down that night and we spent the evening together, I went back to Seattle with her, she said *“if you’d like, come in”* – she was with a group of navy gals, they lived downtown because they had their quarters were downtown, but she said *“I’ve kept a scrapbook of the kids with whom we graduated and I can bring you up to date on that if you’d like me to”*. Well I wanted her to, naturally. We went and sat down on the couch with a book and oh it was wonderful. And two or three hours later a picture of an officer, an Airforce officer fell out on the ground on the floor and I reached down to pick it up and I said *“I don’t know this guy, a nice looking fellow”* and she said *“I guess I better tell you”* and she did that she was engaged to be married to him and I said *“well that’s great – I’m very happy for you. I do, it looks like a super guy. When will this take place”?* And she said *“well not till he gets out and it won’t be for some time”*. So anyway I said when we finished that book, it didn’t take much longer – Barbara said to me *“how long are you going to be here?”* and I said *“they’re going to try to get us home for Christmas”* and she said *“well that’s great, we’re close by and we can have some good times together”*. And I remember looking at her very seriously and I said *“no we can’t do that, we can’t – there was a time when I was really in love with you and you are promised and the next time I fall in love with a girl it’s going to be the girl that I marry”* and she just slipped over into my arms and within a week we were married. And that was the second time in my life that I experienced joy. I was happy to see her but this was real joy.

**Rick:** How long have you been married now?

**Gene:** 59 years.

**Rick:** Let me ask you a couple of questions, what do you think it was that kept you alive and able to survive that horrendous experience?

**Gene:** My mother. I really loved my mother. I loved my dad too but my mother was my pal, she was great and she was the one who wrote to me the year before and so on and I really – I had to go back and spend some time with my mother. There were things that I wanted to tell her and things that I wanted to do with her and so on.

**Rick:** So that gave you the impetus to not give up and fight mentally.

**Gene:** That's right, she was probably the greatest. Ah – the Lord. Because I began to understand why I was getting by the way as well as I was. I know that I was being blessed by the Lord. I can tell you a whole lot of things. I finally got to the point where I began fairly early identifying the kinds of things that I had to do if I wanted to survive this and one of the things was surely being in good standing with the Lord. I wanted...I told the Lord when people complained about that I wasn't one of those who complained against the Lord you know I volunteered for this, you didn't get me in this, I want you to understand that I don't blame you for anything. And I felt very close to him and so I talked to him a lot and still do. And it's...you know, I'm sure that to have a life as good as I've had it and be as fortunate as I have – these are blessing, lot's of blessings.

**Rick:** You know there's very few people on the planet that have had to endure what you've had to endure, is there any advice that you would give younger and future generations based upon what you've had to experience?

**Gene:** I think they have to stay close to their parents. They have to stay very close to parents because families are so important and those...you know those of us who have been educators and worked, we know that the...that's what's happened to the good kids in school and it doesn't happen to kids that don't have that opportunity to stay close to parents. Stay close to the Savior and to God and very close to the people that love you and care about you like teachers and people who work with you and organizations and so on. Stay close to them and these are the

main things. Strive to be a good American. Understand freedom, what freedom really means. Try to learn how fortunate we are, how blessed we are to have laws, good laws in our country and abide by those laws – this kind of thing and care for other people. And you know it takes that kind of thing, be honest with people and I learned honesty from my dad. He was, boy that was high in his behavior and just learn from good people.

**Rick:** Well Gene – thank you so much, those experiences were very interesting, we really appreciate you being with us today.

**Gene:** My thanks to you, that's twice you've done that for me.