



William L. Taylor

United States Navy

Petty Officer

Pacific Theater

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Interviewer:
Rick Randle

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

Rick: Well we're very happy to have with us today Mr. Bill Taylor who is a native Utahn born in Ogden and has a very fascinating story related to World War Two. Bill, tell us about your early life up to the time of when you decided to go overseas.

Bill: Well I was born in Ogden Utah 1917; I can't remember the date because I was born on that date you know. But anyway it was a wonderful childhood but it was early...they were just starting to build houses that had their own toilets and things like that you know and were moving out of the country's more into the city. There was a little railroad, a little streetcar that went up the street. We lived on the corner of 25th and Tyler in Ogden Utah and of course I was young, I can't remember too many things there except that when I was five years old I set fire to the field next door to us and they had to bring the fire department up to put it up and my mom took me in and burned my hand so badly that then they had to take me to the doctor. That's one of the things I remembered about my early life. And so I grew up there and we did quite well, my dad – he was in the grain business and then the depression came along and it was quite bad. In just about three months my dad lost everything. We had a ranch there; we had a beautiful home there.

Rick: How many brothers and sisters?

Bill: I have two brothers and two sisters. I'm the youngest on in the family. They say that I'm spoiled but I don't think I'm spoiled, maybe I'm getting spoiled now because I'm getting older. Anyway, so that was it. But when we lost everything eventually we moved to Los Angeles and it was tough in those days. You know when there wasn't any money, there wasn't anything and my dad was ill because he couldn't support us, he had, you know there were seven of us, we lived in two rooms in Los Angeles and it was a tough thing. But I sold magazines, I...everything I could put my hand on I earned all of my own money even when I was really young and that hasn't been too bad, I learned how to work hard.

Rick: Did you bring money home to the family for food and stuff?

Bill: Sure, sure, it wasn't much you know but generally speaking I sold a *Liberty Magazine*, I sold the *Saturday Evening Post* and I sold them on corners and anything that could come up I'd grab a hold of it and sell it.

Rick: And then bring the money back to the family, that's the thing that would shock today's generation.

Bill: Well I probably shocked a lot of people, I didn't bring all of it back, but yes, I mean we had to contribute, my dad was ill and my older brother he worked in the stockyards and he paid the rent in the house and it was a tough time. My mother would you know in those days the women weren't that well educated so she worked in a shop, you know a little clothing shop and we had some money. But there was the determination and the love that we had that you can't, you can't buy it. So I had wonderful parents and then do you want me to continue on up to...?

Rick: I'd like to know what the thought was about the Japanese in '39 and '40 prior to Pearl Harbor.

Bill: So anyway when we got out of High School, the ones that had money could go to school, you know and so I didn't have any money so I went to work and then it was...I saw a, I read an ad in the newspaper that they were taking people, this was in 1941. They were taking individuals that they could go out to '*Wake Island*' and you could make a lot of money out there. You could make four or five times as much as you'd make on the mainland and so I signed up for it and my brother signed up and we went to a...we went overseas. And when we landed on Wake I see we have to go to Hawaii first and then Wake Island is a little coral Atoll that is 2,000 miles, 2,004 miles west of Barber Point in Hawaii and so it's way out there – it's closer to Tokyo than...Wake Island is closer to Tokyo than it was to the islands, the Hawaiian Islands and so we were out there by ourselves – actually it was a frontier and everybody got excited about building a submarine base out there and so they hired these contractors to go out. Well this is 1941 and we didn't get any marines there or anybody out there until about October, November of 1941 so you see there's a very short time there and when the Marines came they only had 376 marines

and then they brought a squadron in the VMF 211 fighter squadron in (Marines) and they had 12 planes.

Rick: Were they expecting any kind of an attack from Japan or was it talked about?

Bill: No, nobody wasn't I mean even in Hawaii no, why Japanese are not going to ever do anything, they don't have anything and their not going to do anything and if they do do it why we'll knock 'em into their...you know we'll whip them.

Rick: So there's no sense of eminent danger or anything while you were on that Wake Island in November?

Bill: Well there the signs, there would be a boat out there, something would happen and I think that the tension was building because we was already, you know, here we are fighting the war on the other side indiscreetly but we're giving everything we can to England and so the Pacific fleet was not that much. I mean they weren't so concerned about the Japanese hitting us so when they hit Pearl Harbor on December the 8th, a let see – we were at December the 8th on Wake, December the 7th because you cross the International Date Line and so when they cross the International Date Line why then you're, you run into Wake. But there was the feeling, there was a sensitive feeling and some of the contractors left; they didn't want to be over there in case there was any trouble. But we really didn't know and so we were going to take care of them. Of course when they hit what actually happened, when they hit Pearl Harbor, see it was a Monday, it's a Monday over where we were and we were working and I was a civilian and there were about 1,087 of us over there and a few Marines and the Marines didn't have anything, we were living in tents. And so we were absolutely unprepared. They had a few three-inch guns and some five-inch guns and they were all from World War One and they...just wasn't anything to take care of an invasion that we could come along. So when they hit Pearl Harbor I actually was on Peel Island – the Pan American Base was out there, they'd been out there for about five years and so when they hit Pearl Harbor about four hours later they came down and the Superintendent came down and he said, *“they've hit Pearl Harbor and they've practically ruined our fleet over there, they knocked everything out, the Japanese”*, oh that couldn't happen. So when they, an

interesting thing – when you're in something like that and they were...see that's why the civilian population can't compete, they can't handle any kind of trouble because they all run out in the streets, I mean that's what you're gonna have and if we have anything like in America now why everybody will just cuckoo and the Military, they've been trained. They've been through boot camp and they're able to operate okay. I came out and sat on the back end of this truck, it was about noon on this eventful day and I looked over the islands and I could see these bombers coming in and they were just coasting in. They had their motors; they were not revved up or anything. I'm about two miles away, maybe two and a half miles away and see the island is small, Wake Island is only about 2 ½ square miles, there are three little islands there together but when these bombers came in I was sitting on the back end of the truck and I thought "*boy, Uncle sure got here real quick*", but it was a Japanese Uncle – the wrong uncle. And when they came in why...it's amazing, it's like cyclorama I mean you can see this whole thing, I'm sitting on this truck and I could see the whole thing and I probably was the only one that could see everything and they came in and they dropped their bombs and their...but you didn't, you couldn't hear anything all you could see were the flashes and flashes and flashes – they were after the airport.

Rick: Did your Superintendent when he came down, I guess he got it on the teletype or whatever they had for communication (oh yeah, we got it) did you, did they tell you that there was a chance that then Wake Island would be attacked?

Bill: Oh sure, he came over and he said, "*We've been attacked by the Japanese and it's war*". But and he says, "*do you want to go home or do you want to stay or what do you want to do?*" We say "*Ah, we'll stay, we'll take care of the Japanese in nothing flat*". Well that was the general opinion, everywhere.

Rick: So you had a choice of whether you wanted to stay or go home. Did anybody opt to go home?

Bill: You couldn't go home, you're 2,000 miles out in the Ocean (that's what I was thinking), you're not going to go anyplace. But you say – the idea was they'd have boats in here and the Navy will come over and if you want to go or whatever it is you want to join up and fight with

the Marines that's okay and so it was ridiculous. But it was serious when they hit us because they killed over half of our VMF 211 people. They took most of our planes out, we only had 12 and when we ended up we only had about five planes left.

Rick: What was that VMF 211? Who were they?

Bill: It's a Marine; it's the Marine like you say '*Battalion number one*' or whatever you say.

Rick: Those are all active Marines then? And they killed half of them on that first bombing raid?

Bill: Oh yeah, they killed their personnel, they killed the Sergeants and the Officers and Pilots, I mean they killed half of them right there. And it was a tragic...terrible thing that happened there and probably could have been avoided because we had our – our planes were all out in the open too you see. We had four planes that were up so they didn't get those. But it was a tragic thing and I had some very good friends that went though that you know.

Rick: How many people did they lose on that first bombing raid?

Bill: Well, I don't know the exact number. We lost half the Marines that were in that squadron and then the Marines that were out...then they immediately asked the civilians, you know, "*would you help us out*" and of course we said "*sure, we'll do whatever you...we'll move the guns, we'll do this, we'll do that*". And so we only had a few AA Guns – Aircraft guns, I mean anti-aircraft. And so they, when they came over the island they also strafed the island and they strafed our buildings where the contractors were living, they just strafed everything. They killed lots of people that first day and they way it is – if something happened like that where we live – you're next door neighbor, he might go, he might be taken and it's a shocking thing in a sense because I was out on, out at the Pan Am Base and I came in and when I walked into the where they served the food – the recreation hall and so on, they had the tables lined out there for all the men and nobody was in the hall and all the food was on the table. So I went over to the hospital and they had the whole isle way lined up with guys that had been shot, died and so on. So that's

what, that's the war is and it's a...for civilians it would take a little bit more time, you just don't get used to it. Of course when you're in boot camp or you go through something like that, why you pick it up real quick you know and you...they teach you these things '*this is what's going to happen*' and your buddy next to you is going to get shot; and so that's that. But anyway we fought them for...they tried to come in, see this happened on the 8th and on the 11th of December they sent a task force in and the Japanese made a big mistake. When they brought this task-force in they...instead of staying out about 16,000 yards out they kept encircling and encircling and coming in and Devereaux, Major Devereaux who was in charge of the Marines – see Commander Cunningham, a Navy man see the Navy was in charge of Wake Island so he was actually the executive officer and Devereaux, Major Devereaux didn't have that authority but he had the Marines, he had the only fighting force there. And so he had to pretty well take over. And anyway when this task-force came in with the Japanese and they surrounded the island they just kept coming in closer and closer and "*let 'em come on in*" and so we just had those three inch guns and the five inch guns and when they got about 7,000 yards out why we let them have it.

Rick: Did they encircle the whole island?

Bill: Oh sure, they come around like this and...

Rick: And how many men did we have on that island at that time?

Bill: Well we had about...we had the Marines which I told you, we had about 356 something like that Marines and then we had the VMF 211; there was about 100 there and about half of those got killed. And they were fighting...all we had was an F4, F-Grumman Fighter Plane. That's all they had. And another thing we didn't realize that our fighter planes were inferior to the Japanese fighter planes. They had these Zeros and the Zeros didn't have so much weight to carry and they were faster and they were very good pilots and so the beginning of the war it was tough on America.

Rick: You had under 1,000 men on Wake at the time?

Bill: No we had 1,000 civilians and we had about 400 (with the VMF 211) we had about a little over 450, maybe 450 something like that.

Rick: What's the estimate of Japanese forces on those ships that were encircling?

Bill: I don't know except that when they tried to come in we got a transport and you know that's enough people. When they came over from Guam they thought they could walk in because Guam didn't put up any resistance, so they thought they'd take Wake but when they came in they were facing the Marines and Devereaux said "*we're going to fight 'em*". So they came in. And so there was the lapse of time. They bombed us and bombed us and bombed us and bombed us and you're living out on the dirt or whatever it was and the civilians took care of all of the food, everything that way and we had a lot of men. We had men on the guns because there wasn't enough men to handle everything they had and so...and we were moving the guns at night.

Rick: Did they launch invasion barges on that first attack?

Bill: No, no they couldn't, they couldn't, they just came in as a task force and we killed them right on the spot. It made big news in the country. This was a big thing for our country because it's the first time we've been able to come back and so it was big news that Wake Island is still resisting and they're fighting and all that. But they had bombing raids every day and of course if you've been in the bombing raids why you know you lay flat on the ground and that's about it. See the highest point on the island over there is about 12 feet above the ocean.

Rick: What's amazing to me is they call it "*The Alamo of the Pacific*" because 1500 men including about 1,000 civilians fought off this whole Japanese fleet that surrounded the island and then as I understand it they had to withdraw.

Bill: Well they withdrew because the task force was annihilated. They were bringing in and it just shocked them. So they pulled out now this Kajioka, Admiral Kajioka of the Japanese, he was in charge of the Guam thing and he came back and he got defeated so they gave

him...ordinarily in our country they get rid of the admiral or whoever it is and they're gonna – he's out. But they let him come back up into Wake and he was so determined to take Wake that he was ready to take his cruisers or anybody and jam them on the island. Well there's no way in the world that you're going to repulse these people once they get a foothold so on the 23rd of December they came in in the early darkness and they unloaded and of course...see there's Wilke Island, Wake Island and Peal Island and on Wilkes Island why all the Japanese that landed there were killed and they didn't come around on the other two islands – Wake was hit on the backside, but they came around. They didn't hit Peal Island and they didn't hit the bad part of Wake Island so the Marines didn't get in it...actually when it comes right down to the fact there were 87 Marines that did all the fighting and about almost equal amount of civilians that were in there with the Marines because we didn't know where the Japanese were going to land. It was a very bitter thing because we killed a lot of Japanese but they just kept pouring in. They were determined to take the island. This is a big thing that was all worldwide that was watching and so they came on the Island and just poured it in. Now Major Devereaux when he stepped out of his combat, he could see...see the communications lines were broken, like a telephone line, there was no way he could communicate – he looked across at Wilkes Island and he could see that the Japanese had raised some flags, actually they were raised flags but what had happened was the Marines and the civilians over there had wiped that out. There were people coming in from so many different places that he talked to Cunningham and he says, *“what do you want to do?”* and Cunningham says *“I don't know”*, nobody wanted to say, especially the Marines – they're not going to say *“we're going to fight to the last man”*. I mean that's the way the Marines are I love 'em. And so Cunningham finally made a decision he says *“I think we'd better surrender because they're going to wipe us out, they're just going to come in and **whhut**, they'll kill everybody on the island”*. And so they did come in and especially where the heavy fighting had taken place why they took these men out there and they stripped them off, take their clothes off, made them kneel down with their feet behind them, wired them up with telephone wire on their wrists and so on and then they put a wire from their back around their neck and tied it to their hands so that you had to stay in a certain position. If you were to slump like that the wire'd be in your neck I mean that's the way it was.

Rick: Were there any mortality at that time, these Japanese captors, did they abuse any prisoners?

Bill: You didn't have time for any of that, I mean people...you know when you're in a situation like that people get shot and they come out and a guy puts a...he's going to shoot him in the head and I think we probably shot some people in fact I know that we did and that angered the Japanese when they came on the island, we killed so many of them. And so when this surrender came out the Marines that were on Wilkes, they thought that the...they didn't know what was coming off, they thought we had driven the Japanese off because they had taken care of theirs but you see the Japanese didn't land over on Teal and these other places. When the surrender came Major Devereaux had to take that white flag and walk around the island, see it's only two miles or whatever, he walked around and everybody had to put their guns down, take the bullets out...he does...those rifles, the bolt action rifle from World War One, that's what the Marines had and some of those guns from day one you know didn't have anything...it was a...you know it was a tough thing. I would say that if it had been all Marines on there they probably would have killed everybody but they were going to kill everybody anyway as I told you once before and finally they took us out on the airport and took us all together out and some were stripped off and some were...My bother was there and he was on a truck and he didn't have any clothes on and I walked over to the truck and I said, he said "*what do you think they're going to do Bill?*" and I said "*they're going to kill us*". I said "*this thing is all set up, they're going to take you off in groups and that's going to be it*".

Rick: How old were you at the time?

Bill: 24. 24. I had just turned 24 or something like that. I'm getting so old now I can't remember how old I was. But anyway this is a...and then we surrendered and we went over on the airport and there was no water. They gave us water out of a 50 gallon drums and it had had gasoline in it so a lot of the guys got sick and we stayed there for several days and we actually was...

Rick: Day and night you were out there?

Bill: No we stayed out there for two days and then they let us come into the camp that had been blown up and where there was one man in that little space in one of the barracks they'd put ten or twelve men – just to keep out of the water. No body knew what was going to happen and then they...we got the word when they were going to kill us...I think I left this out. Major Kajioka, I mean Admiral Kajioka, this Marine Colonel, he was so angry that we shot so many of his troops, he was going to take everybody out and kill them. Kajioka came out and he was driving one of our trucks and he came out and he had a white uniform on you know and the sword and the Samurai sword and all that stuff and they had an argument and they argued probably for 15 or 20 minutes but he's the superior and they went to Tokyo and the word came back from Tokyo "*don't kill them*". That's how close it came.

Rick: So you were out there for two days on the tarmac, were there any restrooms I mean did they have any facilities or did they let you get up to go to the bathroom or anything?

Bill: No, that's the thing about a war, you hear about everything going on but you don't care where the guys are going to go to the john – you don't have anything, its in the, you just go wherever you can.

Rick: That was it huh? And you felt that as a 24 year old that was your last day on the planet?

Bill: You think about this but you don't...sometimes you just say "*well, you know, maybe it's going to end*", when they let us, they didn't kill us you know and they put us back in the barracks and we were laying around...you know the interesting thing, immediately the most important thing that you could have is cigarettes and so in those days everybody smoked. It was the craziest thing. I gotta tell you this little story. I had a carton of Camel cigarettes and I was walking around our little compound one night and I had tried to stop smoking for years. I couldn't stop smoking because you know in our church you're not supposed to smoke you know but I got in the habit of it and I couldn't stop. Never could stop. So I was walking around this compound and I started...ordinarily...I don't know whether I ought to tell you this or not, well anyway I was talking to my Heavenly Father and I said "*I can't stop smoking cigarettes*" and

you know, whenever we get in trouble we're always willing to make a deal so I said "*this is what I'll do...if you help me to get over this craze of smoking cigarettes I'll serve you the rest of my life and I'll never smoke*". So that's what's happened. But anyway, I took those cigarettes and I gave them away at the camp. When we got into the prison camp in China they gave us ten cigarettes every other day and I went in to the cigarette business in prison camp and I was able to finagle around and do some things and trade with the Japanese and I got cigarettes and so I was able to get enough cigarettes to buy me everything that I had to have while I was in prison camp.

Rick: So being able to quit right there...

Bill: It was a blessing, I look at it as a blessing and you can cut it all out of the script its okay with me.

Rick: No, that's interesting.

Change Tape

Rick: ...reinforced and came back and...to save face.

Bill: You see one was taken first and then they came into Wake. But when they came into Wake they, you know, they're going to bring so many troops...because it's going to be nothing; you're going to walk into Wake.

Rick: Okay, well Bill you were talking about – you're at your barracks after they took you off the tarmac and start from there.

Bill: Well they took us into the barracks and it was a...we stayed there a few days and then of course we woke up one day and we saw this huge liner out there called "*The Nina Maroo*", Nina Maroo tells you that '*Maroo*' is the Japanese word for '*ship*', and we had the Nina Maroo out there and it was a luxury liner that had been converted and they hauled us...they started hauling us out telling us that we were, that's it, they're going to put us on this boat. And they kept some

of the men on the island. Now they kept...one of the group was a group of men of the 98 men that they kept there for years and I have to just kind of go ahead on the story a little bit...but they kept that 98 men there to build up the island for the Japanese, they were skilled workers. Then October the 4th and 5th of 1943 they took these men out and lined them up on the beach and tied their hands behind their head and murdered them. And so that was a bad thing, that's what happened to some of those men that were left. But anyway they took us out on this boat the Nina Maroo, climbed up this ladder – an interesting thing, they had a little barge next to it and the barge would go up to the boat, the men would run into the ship. I was the last one that had to run into the ship and it was drifting away and this Japanese guy right there he pointed his rifle at me '*you get on here to jump*', so I had nothing to do, I threw my stuff and I ran and I grabbed...but I knew I wasn't going to make it and it grabbed the threshold and I was hanging there on the outside and this barge was going to come back and '*Krrptt*', and that would be the end and just before that barge came back a Japanese Sentry in there reached down and pulled me in the boat. Now there are people, both sides that are good people, I have to say that. There's good Japanese, there's good Chinese, there's good to every (?fur?) and then there are others that are cruel. So we went down to the boat, we went down to the bottom of the boat and there was about 250 of us in there with a 5-gallon can on each side of the hold and that's what you used for a toilet. Nothing but water, gruel and a little bit of barley and that was it. The Japanese would come down at night and they would say "*tokiyata maska*" or you know "*do you have a watch*" or "*do you have this or that?*" and they were robbing everybody down there. They would beat you (you have a cartoon, not a cartoon, you have a slip of that showing that if you want to do anything with it). And they beat the men, it was a...and so we sat down there for twelve days and the men just went downhill, they just went downhill and we had to climb the...see we had a deck, where we were on the bottom deck and then the next deck above us was a lot of Marines and civilians up there and so that's the way it was. They took out a lot of...on that first...they took out a lot...750 maybe 800 men out and it was, we didn't know where we were going but ***tape interruption***

...we was taken off and you know you worry about maybe a submarine putting something in the side of you. We had a little 25-watt globe hanging down from this hold and that was it. One thing that...it was just...you were there day and night, you didn't know what was going to go on.

Rick: The heat and humidity were indescribable.

Bill: Well it's different, it was, it wasn't nice that's for sure. I'll tell you this one thing, we had a guy in that hold that would...see they'd haul these buckets of, of just, you know the toilet stuff, they'd haul it up on this...take this five gallon can and pull it up through the hold and we had a guy in there that was absolutely fascinated to see it go up and one day he was standing there and of course we were all like this, but that thing got loose at the top and that bucket came down through that hold through a narrow opening, didn't hit a thing until it hit the deck on the bottom and went '*Ppoofff*' and that was the spray and that's what we lived in for all the time we were on that boat. Anyway we got up to Tokyo and...

Rick: How long were you on the boat?

Bill: Twelve days. So we went up to...it was about 8 days something like that to Tokyo and then they unloaded us, some of the men and then we started down. When we started down to Shanghai, they took three Navy guys that were above us and two Marines, they took them out on the deck and the guys were...went out there for about a half an hour and they came back and they were scared to death. They said "*there's something up there...I don't know what they're gonna do...you know these guys are crazy*" you know and then later on in the afternoon they came and got the same men and they took them out and we never, they never came back. Well we found out that what they did is they took them out there and they gave them a big lecture in Japanese you know about the '*spirit of the shield*', '*samurai*', all this stuff that came out of there, lecturing you "*she did this and did that*", and they had them kneel down, hands behind their back and cut their heads off. So they beheaded these men right up there on that deck. That was a terrible thing. When in Shanghai, we went into prison camp and we went up the Yangtze and stopped at '*Wu Sung*', got off there and went to a Wu Sung prison camp. And in this camp we had, very quickly, we had sections. I was one of the section leaders and I had about 38 men that were in my section and there was a platform that the men had to sleep on. It was about 18 inches, maybe two feet off the, well about 20 inches off the deck and they put this platform and so you'd have a man and a man and a man, we were in there like sardines. You had 23 inches of

space, six feet long, maybe six foot three and there was a shelf out in back that you could put anything up there that you had which we didn't have and so the men were stacked in there like sausage and that's the way we just lived for 3 ½ years like that. You knew everything about the guy next to you, you knew about his sweetheart, his girlfriend, his wife, his kids, you knew everything that you could think about. I had two guys with me Oscar Wray and Chalus Loveland and another guy and we'd, it was just amazing, we spent all those years together and we never had an argument.

Rick: What did you do during the day? Did they have you on work?

Bill: Yeah, they had work detailed. So we went on work details and this and that and this is the way it went through the prison camp. We had gambling in camp, the guys made cards and then eventually from the Red Cross we got cards. And so the guys would poker, they were gonna bet their salaries from every place you know that's the way it was. And they, you know, it was...actually getting along. In my section we didn't ever...we had one fight that was bad but other than that the men didn't fight at all and we just got along. Because what are you going to do? I mean what do you do? So I have to move along on this because anyway after a certain amount of years on this, we had some guys that would try to escape and they couldn't you know they all got killed. A few of them tried to escape and they got caught and they'd drag them through the barracks and take out their guns and shoot them and all that. So but you see we were at a 2300 volt fence right outside of our barracks then there was a road and then a wall and then another 2300 volt fence up on top of that so you're not going to get out of there. You're in there and they had Japanese Sentry's on all the corners you see. So the guys would try to escape and they all got caught and they'd drag them through the barracks and so on. Then the Japanese in 1945 they decided they wanted to take us, everybody to Japan. They were moving all...everybody out there...slave labor, you know it was slave labor. They were very vicious and in places like Manila, I mean down in the Philippines and whatever they killed so many of them. There was 143,000 of them and they were targeted to, the day that we left, we were going to land on Qui Shu. They were going to take, kill every single person and they were going to do that, every POW. Well anyway they decided to move. I was working at a, on a work detail I was on and I got to know this Japanese Sakimoto and he was a Colonel and he said, "*They're going to*

move you out". I played tennis with the guy. Nobody played tennis, I had played tennis with him so we got to be *'togadashi'*, I mean we got to be friendly. And he told me this and he'd let the guys didn't have to work so hard you know I told the guys *"don't say anything in camp, just you know"*. But anyway...

Rick: Were you fluent in Japanese?

Bill: No I've never been fluent but I got so I could make out. I could make out. So anyway he told me *"they're going to move you up to Beijing"*. In those days it was called *'Peking'* but now it's *'Beijing'* and that's it. So he told me what they were going to do and that they were going to move us up in railroad cars and so on, so on. So my detail was about oh I guess we had about 20, 25 men; we would go out and put barbed wire on these freight cars. So if you can envision a freight car with a sliding doors in the center and then we'd put barbed wire across and there and then we'd put barbed wire on the window, they had a window on each end, on each side. And that was to keep us in and so they put 25 men on each section, they had about...there was about 16 feet or maybe even less on each section beyond that center section, they put four Japanese on the center, 25 here and 25 men on that. (I've given you a sketch of that, and so you can see how it was.) And so that's the way they were going to move everybody, well when you look at that barbed wire you even see the places where they had been strafing the train, you know if you're in that train you're not going to come out alive because if you get strafed or whatever they've got you in the barbed wire and they'd just go out and machine gun you. So I was able to steel a pair of pliers because I knew that if we were in a jamb that you couldn't get out of there because you had barbed wired tined up tight, you can't get out with your fingers you know but if you had a pair of pliers you can do something. So I had a pair of pliers. Okay, when we were on our way out of (how many more minutes do we got?) So, anyway they put all these men on the cars and I was one of them and in the section so we left Shanghai and went up to Nan King, its about 150 miles up the river, Yangtze River and then the next day we cross over and went north. On the 11th, I think it was the 11th of May in 1945 I had told McCurry, he was my friend, I said *"Mac I'm gonna go over the hill"*, he said *"you're gonna get killed"*. He said *"you can't get out through that window, they've got barbed wire on 'em, and you've got four Japanese soldiers in the car"* he says, *"you can't make it"* and I said *"Mac, that's just what they think"* and I said *"if*

their thinking that, everybody's thinking that, there's nobody's gonna ever get out". But I got a pair of pliers, I'd taken off the window and on our car there's one bars that was out. There were you had two bars in the window and this one, the lower bar was out. I said, *"If we can get bar off there and get that bar, then we can go, I can go out the window"*. If you don't get your but stuck trying to get caught or you get caught by...see the Japanese guard was only about nine feet away and there were four of them in there, depending on if they're going to be asleep, their going to be laying down, it's going to be a night, it's going to be late at night. So anyway, I asked Mac if he wanted to go and he says *"I don't"*, he said *"Bill no way are you going to make this"* he sounded so...and I asked Chalus, there's a guy in there by the name of Hernandez, nice guy, just a sweetheart and he had bad thing in prison camp, he had a bad case of lock jaw and tetanus. Anyway I said *"Jack, I'm going to over"*, he said *"you don't tell everybody, you don't...be careful"* because noise happens, noise you know you get caught, you get people to start talking. So asked Jack, I said, *"do you want to go?"* and he says, *"Yeah, I want to go with ya"*. I said, *"I'm going out tonight"*, I said, *"we got some supplies"*, I said *"I'm gonna go out the window"*. So that night with the pliers I was up there and then Jack...see you had stuff hanging down from the...wire went across, we had our little belongings and stuff hanging there and this Japanese, he kept shoving his filet on me, and after the third time he just kept it there see so that's how...so I turned around, I told Mac I said *"I don't know how this is gonna go."* Hernandez said, *"Look, I'll...let me see if I can get the wire off"*. I said *"okay, you see if you get that wire off"*, and I said *"I'll sit next to Mac"*, Mac's sitting right next to the barbed wire and the Jap, he's only going to be about 12 inches away from him, the other guys are asleep; *'you sit next to me Bill and see what happens'*. Well this is what we did and the first thing you know...and Mac, the way he got the guy to tell whether he was looking or not, he lit up his cigarette and he'd take it from the glow and he could see if that guy was looking our way or not. And so this is the way it was, it was just going *'tick, tick, tick'* and Jack turned around he says *"I got the wire off, the windows up"* I mean that's it. That's when you have to make up your mind. You're either going to...there's a few naughty words that you'd say there but you know I'm not going to say them right day but you've gotta make up your mind, you're gonna do it or your not going to do it and that is a time when if you hesitate you're never going to do it and that's when these kind of things come up. You have to make up your mind are you going to do it or you're not going to do it and if you don't do it...if you do it the action will take you through it but if you sit there you're

going to die there. So anyway, I said, *“let’s go”*. So I got my stuff and I told Hernandez *“I’m going out, I’m going out the window right now and when I get out on the outside”* (and you have a sketch of that too, you have all that stuff) I went out and I said...there’s a little railing down at the bottom, there’s an angle iron down there you can hang on to that and hang on to the window bar and when you get out, we’d both be hanging out there and we’re going to be outside...it was pitch black, traveling 35 to 40 miles an hour so it’s moving along. The thing is you don’t know what you’re jumping into. So I went out and I got out there and Jack came out and we were hanging and I said, I’d already told him I said *“??? I’m gonna go”*. So I jumped and then he jumped and that one instant is your whole life...its dark and its just hit the ground like that. And so I got hurt, my leg was hurt a little bit, actually quite a bit but the thing about it, we didn’t know we had jumped off in a concentration, a Japanese, the whole army was out there and it was a very critical part and I didn’t know it until the next day. But we were out there and I was, had hurt myself and Jack broke his leg, so one of the most wonderful things that happened is the train went by and the two little red lights on the back of the caboose, I saw those and I thought *“damn, I’m free for the first time in all these years”*. What a wonderful feeling you know and I got up and I hobbled over to Jack and he said, *“I can’t go, my foot’s broken”*. So I reached down and took his shoe off and it was you know he couldn’t move. I said, *“Well let’s get out of here”*. I got him on my shoulders and I went out and there was a tank trapped that was down where we were and that’s a hole, I mean a trench to stop tanks from coming across the track. So here we are, we were down there and I got Jack on my back and we fell in this tank trap and I pulled him up on the other side and I said *“I’ll go out here a little ways and I’ll come back and get ya”*. And in the meantime we had disturbed a wire that had run along on the ties. There was a wire with a ring on the top and a there was a wire that ran through this ring and anything that...Japanese style, they had tin cans on each end of the line it would ring those cans and they knew there was somebody out there. So anyway you could hear these guys screaming and yelling and we finally got out to a tree and Jack says *“they’re around us, see if you can make it”*. It was the hardest thing probably I ever did in my life. I said, *“Okay Jack I’ll try to make it”*. To make a long story short, they captured Jack right after that and they took care of his leg the best they could. So I don’t feel so badly about it but if he’d a been killed out there I’d a felt worse. That’s one thing you don’t want to do is leave somebody. Anyway, I took off, I had some supplies and I traveled west as fast as I could and I got to a place and I got in the green field and

I looked out and I looked over and of course it was just night and there was nobody but then early in the morning I could hear these...there was five soldiers that went by and I looked up and I could see all these Japanese barracks out there and I knew I was right in the middle of them. So I waited till the afternoon. There was a well down there, there was a Japanese, a Chinese peasant down there and I went down and I told him that I was a '*Pungyo*' – Chinese for '*friend*' and I "*Wongpo yo day???*" and he put his hand on my thing, he was looking around all the time and with the Japanese barracks out there and I told him where I had to go and so he's the one that led me out. He told me which way to go. But I knew I had to go west...1,000 miles. Anyway, so I went out. There was a woman that brought me some water and I drank water and I had a canteen but I drank what I had but I knew that, you know you're never going to make it. It's very simple, so he showed me which way I had to go so I went up there and that night they were looking all over the place. They had found Jack and they were looking all over and they had dogs and everything but they didn't catch me. The next day I went on through and I stopped at a village, there was a Jap...the first thing you know I had a '*wang ching way*', '*wang ching way*' on this side – the puppet troops of the Japanese and I didn't want to go into that village because all the flyers had been shot down and they said "*hey, don't ever stop*". So I took off. That night as I was getting...just as the evening I was getting some wheat and I was making a wheat – a little bed and these two guys came down the hill and they were right on me before I knew it and one had a rifle and he was you know six feet away – you're dead. The other guy had a pistol and I had to strip off. I had a pair of Marine khaki's on and so I stripped off, lowered them down to my feet and then they were looking in my supplies and as they were doing this why I pulled my pants up and buckled them up and the guy, this one Chinese guy, he made a mistake. He had his rifle and he raised it up to another angle and when he did that I was right there on him and so we struggled around, I had the barrel and he had the stock and he had the same...he was about 18 inches away from me and we were dancing around out there and the other guy was trying to get a shot in. And finally he took his pistol and he shoved across his friends neck and he jammed it into my throat and I went like this and he knocked...and the guy with the rifle came around and smacked me in the head, down on the ground, jammed it on me. So anyway they were looking into my supplies and I just...they thought I was out so I just turned around and I could see them out of the corner of my eyes and they were looking in this...I pulled my, I got up and it was just getting dark and boy I took off and they...as soon as I...before they could even think of it I'm 50

feet away you know. I'm a moving target and I'm zigzagging and I'm just gone. So they yell at me and they started shooting and of course they're lousy shots, couldn't hit anything and they couldn't hit a moving target that's for sure. So I just ran and they were yelling and I finally ran and ran and ran until I fell down in back of, behind a bush and I just stayed there and all I had on was a pair of trousers. Now I got to get back to something religious but anyway I talked to my Heavenly Father and I said *"there's no way that I can make it out of here, all I got is a pair of trousers, I'm in the middle of China and everybody hates me, and I'm a white guy"*. Now that was, it came out just like that. But I went into three villages and one of the villages I went into the door was open in one of the little hut that he had next to the wall that went around the village. When I walked in there, well I didn't walk in, I moved in – it was black out. People inside can see black if the guy stands in the doorway, but anyway I got in and there was a bed in there and there was a guy asleep in there and all I wanted was his covers so I reached over and I got his covers. I knew where the doorway was, I pulled them off his bed and I was out of there. And I ran out of the village and dragging that stuff and I thought, *"when that guy wakes up"* he was the only one that had a door open. So when I got out there I found out that I didn't have a blanket, I had a coat and I had a coat and inside the coat there were two shirts so I put this on, it fitted perfectly and that morning when it got light it kept on going and that morning when it got light I had 1600 dollars in Chinese currency – CRB's and I looked at that and I looked at the thing and I said *"don't ever complain"*. I mean this is too good you know. Anyway after that I got captured by the Polygean, that's the 8th route army of the Communists and they were very friendly and I lived with those guys and I walked with them and on horseback and I went all the way across China, went up through the Thaiong Mountains and down into Shangri-La and I finally made it all the way back and then when I got up into Yangan oh the Americans found out I was in there. They said *"we're going to come and get you, you're walking days are over Bill"*. And they flew two B25's in, it's a pretty good size bomber, a medium bomber and the one guy came in and his nose wheel went out and so they landed the other guy and he picked me up. I came out of there with a guy by the name of Kim Il Sung who is the father of this nut guy that's up in Korea and he'd been down there for years with Mao. So we flew up into Yangan and we landed there and when I got off the plane, when I got off I looked across and there was an American Flag, beautiful, beautiful thing. I looked at that and I thought, *"Damn, boy this is something else"*. Here I am, I made it and now I'm at the Americans and that's why I love America – so much! I

get flags out everywhere; I got flags all over in my particular ward I'm in I got 75 flags out. I put the pole, the concrete, the flag and everything; I never charged them a dime. But anyway that was a fascinating experience and as I was getting ready to...down I went with the Generals and we had banquets and so on; I was there for about five days and then Mao showed up when I was getting ready to go on down to Xian and go around the world and go home. And he came and gave me some rugs, Chinese rugs and told me I was the only prisoner of war that had ever escaped through North China during the war. He had been through this, he had been through this on the Long March you know, he had done all these things. So that was a nice thing that they did (and you have a picture of that too). People never believe me until they see the picture. And then, I came home and that's it.

Rick: Fascinating story and I understand you've written a book about your experience.

Bill: I've got everything written but you see the book's getting better all the time because everybody's dying off. No really, its...

Rick: Is it going to be published soon or?

Bill: Well it's a...I have to go through it one more time and take out some of the...oh its going to be a money maker but I don't really, I just want...there's a different side to a military life. There's a...I think that something that should be brought out is that there is a God and that he watches over us and he loves us. Now that's what...I want to make that very clear and this is going to be for my kids. If nobody else reads it, fine, its going to be for my kids and I think that's important and the different things that happened, you know I should have been killed, I think – I was telling my wife the other day, I think about 6 or 7 different times that I should have been dead and how it happened, I didn't you see. So I figure...I think the Lord's got me mixed up with somebody else.

Rick: Well thanks for sharing those experiences Bill, we appreciate it you did a great job!