Gerald S. Chapman MacArthur Memorial Oral History Project

James Zobel

Mr. Zobel - This is Jim Zobel at the MacArthur Memorial Oral History Project. I’m here with Gerald S. Chapman of the 440th Ordnance Company, attached to the19th Bomb Group in the Philippines. It is the 20th of May 2006 and we are in Phoenix, Arizona. Mr. Chapman, if we could start, if you could give me a brief outline of your life before you joined the Army.

Mr. Chapman - I graduated from high school in February of 1940 and after a short period of time doing various small jobs, I decided to join the Army and the reason I did, I knew war was coming because of the world situation at that time and I was downtown Los Angeles and the newspapers came out with a new headline saying, Italy Stabs France in the Back. At that point, I knew it was time to make a decision. I walked two blocks over to the Army Recruiting Station and walked in and told them that I wanted to sign up for the Air Corps. There were no openings in the Air Corps at that time, but he said, we have an opening for someone in the Ordnance Department attached to the Air Corps and that I would be stationed on an air base. So I said, that’s fine. That sounds good to me. So they started to sign me up and then they said, we’ll you’re only 18 years old, you have to have your mother’s permission and so they gave me the papers and I went home to get my mother’s permission and she was quite reluctant, but I was adamant, I felt like I really wanted to do that and I felt that we were going to be in the war and I wanted to get in early.

Mr. Zobel - So you graduated high school in Los Angeles?

Mr. Chapman - Los Angeles High School. I graduated in the February class. I was an in between.

Mr. Zobel - So this was in early 1940 when you joined.

Mr. Chapman - 1940.

Mr. Zobel - You graduated in February, it was about spring maybe, or summer that you jointed the Army?

Mr. Chapman - Well, once my mother signed the papers, they shipped me down to Fort MacArthur and I went through the basic processing, basic training, and on the 17th of June 1940, I was officially sworn in the U.S. Army at Ft. MacArthur.

Mr. Zobel - And from there where did you go?

Mr. Chapman - I was given orders to go to Hamilton Field, California, which is north of San Francisco and at Hamilton Field, they had bombers there, B18’s and B17’s and I was assigned to the Ordnance Company there as one of the basic soldiers. I had my so-called basic training there. It was very rudimentary. They had some Sgt take us out and march around the parade ground and do some other things. We went through chemical training where we had to don gas masks and that sort of stuff, but as part of the Ordnance Department, I also had some training, driving the ordnance vehicle, which they called a bomb service truck. It was almost like a pickup. It had a crane on the backend so for the heavy bombs, you could pick them up off the ground with a crane. Otherwise, up to 250 lbs, two men could handle that.

Mr. Zobel - Can you describe what the duties of an Ordnance Company is? What their job is?

Mr. Chapman - The Ordnance Company Aviation Bombardment had the task of maintaining the machineguns in good working order, had the task of loading bombs, which included inserting the fuses before you put them in and then you loaded them into the bomb bay and actually hook them up with the… they have special hooks that you use to hook them up in the bomb bay.

Mr. Zobel - So as you’re training, did you have to become completely familiar with how to strip machineguns and break them down..?

Mr. Chapman - Oh yeah. Small arms. 45’s. We learned to do that. the 45 caliber pistol. With the rifle. With the 50 caliber machineguns. Yeah, we became very familiar with doing that and cleaning them and fixing them up.

Mr. Zobel - So you had to learn all the technical aspects of bombs, things like that, and that’s all part of your training as well?

Mr. Chapman - Well I don’t think we really learned any technical aspects. We were mostly involving with moving them from place to place, putting them in the bunkers. At Hamilton Field, we had special ammunition bunkers off on the perimeter of the field where we would store the bombs and whenever we went through an exercise, we would go out there and get the bombs, bring them down to the flight line, load them into the aircraft and just would be a training exercise, so we learned how to do that.

Mr. Zobel - Do you remember about how many men were in your Ordnance Company?

Mr. Chapman - There was about, well at first I think there was only about 50.

Mr. Zobel - Now is that part of a bigger Ordnance Unit?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. We were the first platoon. When I first got there, we were the 1st Platoon of the 10th Ordnance Service Company. Within a very short time, we expanded and we became an Ordnance Company and then we later on expanded into two companies. The reason for this expansion; in 1940, late 1940, they had the Draft Act implemented and started drafting people into the Army and as soon as that happened, we started getting all kinds of men. The significant thing that effected me was because we were getting all these new recruits right from civilian life, I was already almost an expert and I started getting promoted. Within a year, I was already a Staff Sgt and I’m only 19 years old.

Mr. Zobel - So you’re the old man, pretty much.

Mr. Chapman - I’m the old man. It felt sort of funny. By that time, we had over 100 people and we started out with less than 50. That expansion continued and our company, we became the 364th Ordnance Company and we were split into two, the 364th and 366th Ordnance Companies and the 366, which I wound up in, was transferred to Fresno, California, to help open a new airfield, which ultimately became Hammer Field. We moved down there in the early spring of 1941 and our 366th Ordnance Company, which I was involved in, we had one officer, a Lt. Walker, we had senior NCO, which was me, SSGT. We had another NCO Sgt. Summers, who was with me and the rest of the 100 mg were draftees, brand new, and somewhat difficult to handle because they were pretty wild. We had to get a couple of guys out of jail while we were there and things like that.

Mr. Zobel - What did you think of Army life? Did you like it?

Mr. Chapman - Yes, I did. Maybe I should have mentioned that to start. Ever since I was a small boy, I was interested in military life, for various reasons. My father was in WWI, served in France, and among his things that he had was a WWI helmet and his WWI gasmask and a few things like that, so as a kid I would play with those and we had a man next door to where we lived, who was a reserve officer in the Army Air Corps and I was fascinated by that. They’d have air shows in the Chicago area with the fighter planes, old biplanes demonstrating, and I got involved in building aircraft models and flying models and then when I went into high school, the first thing I did was join up with the Junior ROTC. That really was a good thing for me to have done that, because when I actually got in the service, I didn’t go through any basic training, like they do today. I didn’t go to a training base. They just sent me up to Hamilton Field and turned me over to all the new people coming in and they had a Sgt that was drilling us up and down and that was it. I was able to do all that because basic training I had in ROTC. So, I had some military background when I actually got into the service.

Mr. Zobel - When was it that they shipped your group to the Philippines?

Mr. Chapman - We were at Fresno and we got some classified orders, which told us that we were to prepare for overseas deployment, but they did not tell us where. They said, you will immediately prepare the company by making sure you have all of your TO’ing, whatever is required. Table of Organization Equipment. Included with that were things like overcoats, wool uniforms, like that, so we got all that stuff issued and the rumor went around that we’re going to Alaska. So then, the day came when we had to move out and we were all loaded aboard GI trucks from Fresno, Hammer Field, and headed for San Francisco.

Mr. Zobel - Do you recall when this was? The date? April, May, June of 41?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, this has got to be September.

Mr. Zobel - So they send you all to San Francisco.

Mr. Chapman - They sent us up to San Francisco to Ft. Mason and from there we were transferred over to Angel Island, which is the processing station for people going overseas. At that point, we became integrated with the 440th Ordnance Company. We became part of that. At Angel Island, we got our final shots.

Mr. Zobel - How many? A lot? Just a few? You always hear shots, but you never hear how many….

Mr. Chapman - I think we had 3 or 4.

Mr. Zobel - And then what ship did you go to the Philippines on?

Mr. Chapman - The TASKER H. BLISS, which was a former President Liner. I’d forgotten which one, but the TASKER H. BLISS was the name of it as an Army transport. It was a regular cruise liner that had been converted.

Mr. Zobel - Do you recall what other units were on the ship as well?

Mr. Chapman - There were some Air Corps units and there were some Coast Artillery units. I don’t know what they were.

Mr. Zobel - Hundreds of guys? Thousands of guys on the ship?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, I guess we must have had several hundred, yes.

Mr. Zobel - Can you describe the voyage at all?

Mr. Chapman - I was fortunate because at that time I was a SSGT and the SSGT, along with some of the Sgts were assigned to deluxe cabins up on the upper deck and everybody else went down to the steerage.

Mr. Zobel - You had a good deal going over.

Mr. Chapman - So, I had a good deal going. I didn’t have much connection with the people down below. The officers had a separate section up above and only saw my CO occasionally. He was busy mixing it up with all the other officers and we had some nurses on board. So, our trip to Hawaii was fairly uneventful. There were a few people that got seasick right outside of Golden Gate, which happens to people. When we were approaching Hawaii, the word came trickling down to rumor, I guess, I don’t know what, that when we got there we’d have the opportunity to get off the ship. So, I made preparations to get off the ship and then I heard that it would only be the first few grades of the enlisted people. That was Staff, Tech, and Master Sgt, so I got ready to get off the ship. So the time came to get off the ship, we docked and I went down to the gangplank and they, oh, no, no. Only officers are going to get off. I had written a letter to my mother and I was planning on mailing that. Well my CO showed up, LT Walker. He and I had established a very good relationship, since he was the only officer and I’m the senior NCO in his company, so we were pretty close. I told him that I really would like to get this letter on the way, so he took that and mailed it off. None of us got off the ship, except some officers. So, the next morning, we were on our way, sailing from Hawaii and as soon as we cleared the islands, we noted that we had an escort. This was a Navy cruiser, USS CLEVELAND…no that wasn’t it. I was a cruiser and we also had another Army transport with us. After we cleared Hawaiian waters going west, we had blackout on board the ship. We all realized that this is really getting serious, that obvious we were concerned about war. We touched at Guam at Agana and some of us were allowed off the ship. I did get off the ship in Guam. We were only there sundown to sometime in the night we sailed again to the Philippines. I mailed a letter to my mother from Guam. Actually a postcard. I still have that. We sailed to the Philippines. We came through the San Bernardino Straits. Our ship was greeted by some fighter planes. I think they were P35s or P26s. Buzzed the ship as we went through the San Bernardino Straits on up to Manila. We had left San Francisco on the 4th of October and we arrived in Manila Bay on the 24th of October.

Mr. Zobel - What were your first impressions going into Manila?

Mr. Chapman - Very busy place. Lot of ships. Big city. Quite impressive.

Mr. Zobel - Did you know anything about the Philippines before you had gone out there?

Mr. Chapman - No. I knew they were out there somewhere. As soon as we debarked, we were loaded into buses. We didn’t have any time to do anything. We were just off the ship and on to buses. The buses took us up to Clark Field and at Clark Field we went to our various places and our company was assigned an area, barracks, where we were to be billeted. The barracks were new barracks that had been built, but they were not very elaborate. Weren’t much more than the basic floor plan with the walls made out of Nipa shingles. No windows. You just had the airspace between the top and the roof coming down. You had a door at each end of it. You had regular cots and we had Filipino bunk boys, which was something new. We were always accustomed to doing our own policing of the barracks, so we had the Filipino boys that took care of that and before we came back to the barracks at night, the Filipino boys had the mosquito nets already tucked in and ready for us.

Mr. Zobel - Now did you have to pay them personally? Did you pay your guy, or what that just taken care of by the Army?

Mr. Chapman - I don’t recall any payment that we made.

Mr. Zobel - Really. So they were just….

Mr. Chapman - They allowed the Filipino to set up a barbershop operation in the midst of the barracks complex where you could go get a haircut and a shave and that sort of thing and you paid the barber. That was about it.

Mr. Zobel - Were you there when they started bringing the bombers in? The B17s?

Mr. Chapman - We had some there.

Mr. Zobel - So some were there already.

Mr. Chapman - They started coming in while we were there. The only reason that I remember that is at one point had an exercise where we went down and practiced loading some bombs into one of the B17s on the runway.

Mr. Zobel - How close to the airfield was your barracks?

Mr. Chapman - Right off the end. The thing that probably impressed us most was there was all kinds of preparation for possible combat. People digging foxholes, setting up defenses, which was sort of ridiculous. I saw in one place they were setting up a WWI Lewis gun, you know the kind with a drum on top. Another place, we had a 30 caliber machinegun, water cooled, WWI type, set up and these were defenses. Certainly aren’t going to do anything against ……., but there were no antiaircraft guns that I recall on the field at all.

Mr. Zobel - Even though they’ve already got the bombers there.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Zobel - Well, you’ll are getting ready. Did you think war was coming?

Mr. Chapman - Well, we felt that it was a very sensitive situation and there was a strong possibility that we would be in a war with Japan, but there was no feeling that it was going to start with Pearl Harbor. I mean, we didn’t have any idea that the Japanese would hit Pearl Harbor. Of course, nobody else did either.

Mr. Zobel - Do you remember when they brought in the New Mexico antiaircraft regiment there at Clark? Started setting up around….

Mr. Chapman - No I don’t. Things were very busy and a lot of things were happening. Clark Field and Ft. Stotsenburg were almost like one. At Ft Stotsenburg, they had the Philippine Scout Cavalry Detachment. They had the 192nd Tank Battalion. They were doing training activities and they were roaring in and out of that area.

Mr. Zobel - So you could see them doing their maneuvers?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, yeah. We were mixed up and those things were happening.

Mr. Zobel - Did that give you a better feeling about things when you saw that troop concentration coming in at Stotsenburg?

Mr. Chapman - I don’t know that it gave us a better feeling. We felt like we were part of a big operation.

Mr. Zobel - Were you there when Clark got bombed?

Mr. Chapman - No.

Mr. Zobel - Where had you gone?

Mr. Chapman - Well one week before Pearl Harbor, our company and the 701st Ordnance Company, along with some Air Corps ground crews were transferred to Mindanao. I think it was the 1st of December when we moved down to Manila and boarded the inter-island steamer, the SS MAYAN. I’m sure you’ve heard of that.

Mr. Zobel - Yes, certainly.

Mr. Chapman - We set sail for Mindanao with a stop in Iloilo, Panay, and stop in the port across from on Cebu, on the Island of Negros, port there that we stopped where we stopped. We stopped there and I remember it was nighttime. We had an incident there. We were watching the unloading of our ship. We had some things on there for the locals and some of our men in our company, were standing on the railing, hanging on the rigging as they were watching these things go up and this one guy shouted out, one of them up in the rigging, and he said, Hey, McGinedy, I dare you to jump overboard. And then the cry went up about that. This guy McGinedy was a real character. And sure enough, he bailed out. He took a diver over and he collected a bunch of bets before he ……..I don’t remember whether he got any kind of punishment for that. I don’t think he did. But they fished him out and brought him back aboard.

Mr. Zobel - Had some more money in his pocket.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. I remember that incident. It was after dark when this happened. Then we spent the next all night sailing down to Mindanao and we entered Cagayan Bay here, the bay here. We docked at a place called Bugo. Bugo was where the pineapple cannery was. They were canning pineapple and shipping it out of there. There wasn’t much action going on with the pineapple cannery. They were, for some reason, not working very hard there. From there, we got on board trucks and bused up to Del Monte Airfield.

Mr. Zobel - What were your impressions of Del Monte? Can you describe what it was like?

Mr. Chapman - The impression was that we really didn’t have much there. There was no paved runway as such. As a matter of fact, I don’t remember seeing many markers on the runway. At the south end where we were, they had a couple of barracks buildings under construction. They weren’t completed. They were 2-story wooden barracks, American style. We were, at first, we got into the barracks. First people arriving went into those barracks and one of the first things we did was set up the water cooled 30 caliber machinegun out in the open there and we didn’t have any real bathing facilities. The barracks were really basic. We had to build slit trenches for latrines and we got very inventive and there was a stream flowing to the area and went down to the stream bed and the guys that were handy with building things, built a little platform with something overhead and this overhead things was to be part of the shower and they built a trough, upstream part, to have the water flow through this trough and then they pounded out some tin cans and poked holes in them and pasted them over the hole in the trough, and that was to be our showers.

Mr. Zobel - Were there bombers already there at Del Monte?

Mr. Chapman - No, none. B18 came in from Clark Field and landed after we were there. At one point, the B17 came in and landed. I suspect what they did was probably checking to see that they could land on that field and how it was going. I don’t know why they did that. Our first task as soon as we got settled; there was a ship bringing in a load of bombs. So we started hauling the bombs from the ship up to Del Monte Field and our job was to position them around the field in little clumps so that they wouldn’t all be in one spot in case we got bombed, they didn’t want to lose everything at once. So that’s what we were doing. It was all pretty peaceful. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, the way I found out, our company commander the first thing in the morning, he called a meeting with the first…….enlisted people which included me. He said they had been listening to the radio and Pearl Harbor had been bombed and that we were now at war with Japan and we were going to have to be ready for possible action in the Philippines with the Japanese possibly landing in the Philippines. So we were alerted to what was going to happen.

Mr. Zobel - Shock?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. We were all shocked. Didn’t know what to do. Our company commander, Captain ………………, he was conducting this meeting. He said, well, I’m going to take care of my boys. He said, I’m going to make sure you guys get taken care of and we’re not going to let those Japanese do us in. Pep talk along those lines. He said, we have to go back about our business and do things. In the meantime, we started seeing Japanese planes coming over. These were long range reconnaissance aircraft, flying very high. So we knew things were happening. We also heard about the bombing at Clark Field and how Clark Field got wiped out.

Mr. Zobel - Was that a bigger shock?

Mr. Chapman - Bigger shock, especially because we had one of the B17s from Clark Field come in an land. The crew came out and were telling everybody about the destruction up at Clark Field and how they weren’t able to land there and they came down to Del Monte and landed to get fuel and get some bombs and be ready to take off and maybe do a mission from Del Monte. They passed the word around, which was pretty wild, and then they took off and went back up north. I think they went back to …………… or someplace up there. I don’t know where they went. But that’s where we got the first word of the extent of the destruction.

Mr. Zobel - The guys coming down and getting off the plane.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Zobel - Do you remember there being any tunnels at Del Monte?

Mr. Chapman - Yes.

Mr. Zobel - There were. Is that were ordnance was kept? In these tunnels?

Mr. Chapman - No. By the time we got there, somebody had already started building a tunnel on the mountain over on the east side of the field, which supposedly was going to be a shelter, possibly for aircraft and other things, but they were building this tunnel.

Mr. Zobel - I have a friend who’s digging in that tunnel right now, trying to find out if there is anything in it.

Mr. Chapman - The other digging that went on, we moved out of the barracks when the war started and that was the end of living in barracks. We moved into tents off the field. Moving on from when this first happened, 8th of December, 9th of December was when this airplane landed and gave us all the story about what’s going on, it was around the 20th of December, we were still doing our thing. Moving bombs around into clumps all around there and I was in charge of a detail of men that were doing this work. We were in one of these bomb service trucks that I described earlier that had the crane on the back. We were taking a break on the south end of Del Monte strip, so called, a smoking break, and as we are taking our break there, a couple of the guys were standing up on the back of the truck, this one guy, in fact a Texan named Riley, he shouted out, hey guys, look, here comes some airplanes. I turned around and I looked up there and I said, I don’t see any airplanes coming. He said, no down there, real low. I looked down and here comes three zeros and as I looked, they opened fire. Scared the bejeezus out of you. Took off in a dead run. They’re coming in on the field like this, and boy we split. Went off on either side. I wound up in a stream off the east side. These three airplanes, boy they strafed up and down the field. This B18 was still parked there. They hit that and it caught fire. They destroyed also this one B17 that happened to be there. It was out of commission because of some maintenance and they weren’t able to fly it out. It came down and they couldn’t get it out. That was destroyed and so that was our Baptism of Fire. That was about the 22nd of December. From that time on, we had periodic attacks by Japanese dive bombers. These were the float planes. I don’t know where they came from. Biplane float planes. They would come in over 10,000 ft or so and you’d hear the engines throttle back and all of a sudden it’s quiet, and they tipped over, dived down, and dropped bombs. They didn’t do any damage. I don’t know why they bothered.

Mr. Zobel - Just to harass, maybe? Keep you harassed.

Mr. Chapman - Harassment. We did in wandering around after these raids, find in a couple of places holes in the ground where bombs had not exploded and they just went in and just went way down.

Mr. Zobel - What did you do with those?

Mr. Chapman - Nothing. Just left them. We weren’t living on the airfield anymore. We were down in our tents off the airfield. We didn’t have any antiaircraft defense. We didn’t have any antiaircraft guns. The decision was made that we needed to establish some air defense and do something about this itinerant Japanese planes coming through. So the 701st Ordnance, which was a maintenance type company, they did all kinds of machine work, they got busy and they welded some tripods from piping and big pieces of steel to make a tripod out of it and then they built a framework on it and they mounted 50 caliber, twin 50’s, on this and in some cases there was just a single 50. These guns were salvaged off the B17 that was destroyed and the B18. Then we dug gun pits on each side of the airfield, off the edge. There was six of them. One on the north, one in the middle, and one in the south. They positioned these guns there as antiaircraft defense. At that point, they discovered that they also didn’t have any antiaircraft gunners. Nobody could man them, so word came out that they were looking for volunteers and I volunteered. Me and another guy became antiaircraft gunners and we got the twin 50s on the west side, right in the middle; north, middle, and south. We had the middle one and we had a hole in the ground that was about 5 ft deep and this tripod was mounted in there with a twin 50 on it and we had a rudimentary camouflaged thing that was some bamboo tied together and then some leaves over it. Easy to move…..Actually we didn’t use it very much. Once we got going, we didn’t worry about it. Our particular gun pit, the one I’m on, was right next to this B18 that was bombed out. The right wing of the B18 was touching the ground at one point, trailing edge, and it was held up by what was left of the landing gear, so that became part of our shelter, to keep us out of the sun. We had a pit with a piece of armor plate, where we had a fire, and we’d cook on this piece of armor plate. We didn’t do too much cooking on there. Periodically, a Sgt Sullivan, an old Army guy who was the senior sergeant in our company, would coming roaring around the field delivering supplies and any ammunition you needs, or whatever. We didn’t have much of a air warning…we didn’t have any air warning to tell you the truth. The warning came when we heard the planes. We’d just run out…

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Mr. Chapman - When we heard the dive bombers coming or whatever, we just heard airplanes coming, we’d jump in the pit and get ready and as I mentioned earlier with these biplane/seaplane diver bombers came over and when they’re ready to drop their bombs, you can hear the engine go quiet and they go vertical and then we’d be prepared. As soon as they came in sight, we’d cut loose with our guns. We didn’t have any sights on them particularly, so it was a water hose kind of operation. Once you got those twin 50s down where you could shoot at the airplane, they’re pretty heavy. We didn’t have them properly counter balanced……find myself like this trying to hold them. We’d shoot and we’d see the tracers up there, like a water hose.

Mr. Zobel - Did you all ever get anything?

Mr. Chapman - We don’t know if we ever got any. There was a rumor that one of them did crash somewhere away from the airfield and they think it was a result of getting hit, but I don’t know.

Mr. Zobel - Did you ever see any bigwigs there, like General Sharp, or you know any of the other commanders?

Mr. Chapman - General Sharp had his headquarters over in the Del Monte Plantation and at one point, they were concerned about whether or not he was going to get strafed or something, so somebody came over and said, well we want you to move your gun pit next to General Sharp’s headquarters and be prepared for defense there. So, the other guy in the gun pit with me and I, we went over there and they already had a big hole dug and we put the tripod in there with the guns in there and I was helping making the device that we were going to cover it with, the bamboo thing, and my souvenir of that; you can barely see it here, I was cutting the bamboo with a machete and that bamboo, when it’s hard, if you don’t hit it just right, it just slides off and that machete came down and hit me right there and at the time, it went almost through on either side, but that scar has stayed with me ever since. That’s my souvenir of moving our gun pit over to General Sharp’s headquarters.

Mr. Zobel - Did you ever see him?

Mr. Chapman - I don’t recall that I did. I think I did, because we were talking about it one day and I said, he’s a very tall guy.

Mr. Zobel - How about when MacArthur came through?

Mr. Chapman - He didn’t come through there?

Mr. Zobel - I mean, come through Del Monte and then fly….

Mr. Chapman - He didn’t come through Del Monte.

Mr. Zobel - Well, yeah the torpedo boat brought him into Kadian and then he got on the plane there at Del Monte and flew to Australia.

Mr. Chapman - No, they took him into Lanau area, and yeah, I guess he did, he must have left from Del Monte. I thought he left from the other airfield.

Mr. Zobel - No it was right there at Del Monte. So that was pretty much quiet from you then?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. I really didn’t know much about that. Never saw him. But that was it.

Mr. Zobel - How about when it’s getting toward the Japanese invasion of Mindanao? Did you stay at Del Monte all the way until they came?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. The 701st and 440th Ordnance Company, both moved off the base and moved all the way down….they moved down to…the 440th they moved down past …………………… to a place called ………………….

Mr. Zobel - Yeah, there’s a strip there too.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, the whole company moved down there, but they left the guys that were manning the guns there and we had a ….

Mr. Zobel - Was this May, or April, can you remember?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, it was a lot earlier than that. When the landings came, I guess it was about then was when they moved. They left us behind there, for some reason, defend the base or whatever, maybe the last man turning the lights out.

Mr. Zobel - Oh, they left you at Del Monte…

Mr. Chapman - Oh yeah.

Mr. Zobel - ….and they went down there. Okay.

Mr. Chapman - So we’re up there at Del Monte and they leave us here. Early in the year, because of the bombing attacks we had and the need to have some of us on the base, they had a guy with a bulldozer come in and the dug a trench that was about 12 ft wide and 12 ft deep and they put a cover over it, by putting logs across and then building a top over that and this became an underground barracks with an opening at each end and some air holes in between and there were about, oh, 12 or 15 of us living in that. I mentioned that because we destroyed it before we left there. But when the Japanese landed and started the advance from down where they landed up the Sayre Highway, there was absolutely no strong defense against their arrival. We did have some ground troops there, but they didn’t have any heavy artillery, or anything like that. So the Japanese kept moving on up and the word came that we were going to have to abandon Del Monte Airfield. So we put some 100 lb bombs in the air holes of that barracks that we had been living in and packed the fuse hole with dynamite and blew up that underground thing. We destroyed any of the ammunition that we couldn’t take with us. We loaded up our trucks and prepared to depart. We finally departed from Del Monte and that particular area, the Sayre Highway, goes down from Del Monte. ….there’s canyons there. The highway goes down into the canyon, little river or stream there and then climbs up and goes over the next canyon, so part of our crew destroyed the bridges as we passed. Blew them up, again using just what we had left of the dynamite.

Mr. Zobel - Were you at Del Monte when the bombers came in to do the Royce Raid?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Zobel - You were there.

Mr. Chapman - Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zobel - So can you describe anything about that?

Mr. Chapman - I really didn’t know what was happening. They came in and you know you’re thinking, they’re progressing on, we’re going to get relieved, and then nothing happened. They went on and did their thing and disappeared. It was in and out, so quick.

Mr. Zobel - In and out.

Mr. Chapman - But I knew about it. The last year at the convention at Cincinnati, I finally got information on it from the Museum there. I had been asking people for years about the Royce Raid and nobody seemed to know it. As a matter of fact, some people said, you must be mistaken, I’ve never heard of it. That’s when I found out that it really happened.

Mr. Zobel - Up at the air base.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Zobel - So when you pulled down and you were blowing the bridges behind you, where were you heading? To Malaybalay?

Mr. Chapman - Well, at first we started out from the Del Monte Airfield and then, I don’t know who gave me the orders, but I got orders to take an Air Corps tractor, to drive it down to Valencia or …………….somewhere down there. This airport tractor was the thing that was used primarily to change engines. It had a crane on the front of it with a big crane leaning out over the front of the tractor and when they went to change an engine like on a B17, you drive up at the engine and this crane goes on and they hook it on to the airplane and they can remove that engine and replace it and that’s what this tractor was for. But it was a pretty rudimentary tractor. Didn’t have a self starter, it had like an old Model-T. You had to crank it, magneto operation. So my companion, who had been on the gun pit with me, he and I were ordered to take this thing and drive it down there to this place down here. It didn’t make much difference where it was, because we never got there. We started driving it. We started out in the evening and we didn’t want to be driving it in daylight because the Japanese planes were looking for moving things. As we passed this one little place called Impasugong, the road went down on a curve like this to where there was a stream and then climbed up on the other side. Well this tractor had the exhaust out front and we’d been sitting there driving this thing with the exhaust fumes coming in our faces and we could hardly see and we started around this curve down at the bottom and we didn’t make it quite all the way and the tractor tipped off the curve towards this creek and the engine quit. It told John, John Bennett was the other guy, I said, John why don’t you get out and see if you can crank this and maybe I can back it out of here if we could get it started. Well, he climbed out and as luck would have it, he dropped the crank in the creek. We didn’t have any lights. No lights. This tractor didn’t have any lights and when the engine wasn’t running, there were no lights. So we debated on what to do. We decided, well there’s nothing we can do, we’ll just have to leave it here. So we took our stuff and we started walking. We got half mile or mile or so down the road and we came to a large Filipino residence off the side of the road and saw a couple of GI trucks parked there. So we figured there were some GI’s in there, sacking out for the night and it turned out to be true. We went in there and finished the night there. First thing in the morning, we asked them for a ride and they allowed us to ride with them on the trucks heading to Malaybalay and we moved down into Malaybalay. One of the guys that we ran into at this point was one of our ordnance men. I don’t know how he happened to be there, but this character had traded some of his special clothing. He was still carrying some different kinds of clothing. Traded it for a few bottles of cognac and he’s carrying this cognac. Well, we get all the way into Malaybalay and it’s now like noontime and it’s all active, people going every which way there. They are retreating from the Japanese and they’re going in all different directions.

We went into this one house and we’re relaxing trying to decide what we’re going to do next and we sat around drinking this cognac and had some lunch and then we drank more cognac, we drank more cognac. We all fell asleep in that house. When we woke up, it was dark. All the noise had stopped. There was no noise outside at all. Absolutely dead quiet. What’s going on? Went out of the house, went down to the highway; no trucks going by. Dead quiet. So we started to walk down the road and we see this staff car there. I think it was a Plymouth, forgotten what kind it was. Painted OD and there’s a Filipino soldier sitting in it. So we have a discussion. The guy who had the cognac, myself, and my friend that I had been with as to what we were going to do about this. We decided that the only thing we could do is take that staff car. How do we do that? Well we decided that we’d go up and tell this driver that the officer that had the car had sent us there, so we went up to the driver and said, whose car is this? He said, Oh sir, this is Captain so and so’s car. That was his first mistake. We said, yeah that’s right. Captain so and so told us that we can take this car. We said, oh yeah, we met him right up the road there. He said, we can take that car. This little Filipino guy was completely flummoxed and we opened the door and threw him out, jumped in and started driving. We drove out of Malaybalay, roaring down the road, and right outside of Malaybalay, the road goes down into a deep canyon and a river there and climbs up the other side. We got out, roaring down the road, and the guy that’s driving said, we started down the hill, he said, Oh, my God. This thing doesn’t have any brakes. He couldn’t slow it down. Fortunately the road goes down and then it climbs up. The road goes way up. We got up to the top and moved down it a little bit and came to another house with a big GI truck parked in the place. So we drove in there and we were going to maybe abandon this car, didn’t ride further. Turns out that the big GI truck belonged to the Ordnance Company and it had a big generator on the back that they were hauling somewhere. When we found the guy that was driving it, it turned out to be a guy that we knew. He was part of our company. It was a guy named, Fred Faust. You may hear about him later, a guerrilla. Clyde Childress knows him. So we told Fred that we were stuck, the car didn’t have any brakes, he said, well he’s driving back to the company compound at Meramec and we could go. So we climbed aboard and we drive back to Meramec and when we pull in there it’s like midnight of May 9th. There’s a mess shack there and there’s people in there having coffee. So we go in and we’re having some coffee and trying to decide what we’re going to do and we asked …………..what’s going on here in the company compound. These guys said, Captain…………..had us stack arms under his ……………. over there and we have received orders that we’re going to surrender in the morning. He said, their locking up all the arms and everybody’s got to be ready to surrender. I thought about that a minute and I said, I don’t like this idea of surrendering. I talked to my buddy, the guy who had been on the gun pit, John Bennett. John Bennett was one of the early Presidents of this……….. I told John, I said, hey, I’m not going to surrender. I’m going to take off in the hills. John said, I can’t do that. I’m a city boy from New York. I don’t know anything about going out in the hills or anything……….. Surrendering is not that bad. He insisted, so he let us have his rifle. We got several others agreed to go. Lou Ruberton, Fred Faust, and one other guy, Gus Mancuso. The four of us decided we weren’t going to surrender. What do we do next? Well, we’re going to have to have some transportation. Fred Faust, again, he’s the guy that had been with the motor pool and he was the one driving the truck. He said, I’ll get a bomb service truck. So he did. He got a bomb service truck and we started out the gate. Well they got a guard posted at the gate to keep people from leaving. The guard was a guy named Terry Whitley and Lou Ruberton who is a nut anyway, he whispered over to somebody else, knock him in the head. No we weren’t going to do that. I told Whitley, well you know we just came in here and you know I’ve been on detached service for the past week and I got to leave and get there back. So Whitley says, sure okay, no way, so we drive off and we go back on the highway.

Mr. Zobel - Had you guys supplied yourself with things? Before you left had you taken any supplies to get ready to go in the hills?

Mr. Chapman - Hardly any. I think we had a couple of cans of corned beef, we had maybe a little sack of rice or something. We were not prepared to do this. We were not prepared to do this. Because we made this decision, a snap decision to do it. So we’re driving down the road from Meramec, heading towards Malaybalay and all of a sudden, I look over at the heat gauge on this thing and the needle’s way off the side and I sad, Fred, did you check the water in this truck. He said, well no, I didn’t have time to check anything. I said, we’re about to freeze up. He looked at the heat thing and said, oh, my God, and at that point he slows down and when he slowed down the truck froze up. So there were are in the middle of the night, 1 a.m., middle of nowhere. I told him, I said, why don’t you wait here and I’m going to walk up to this next road and see if we can get some help. The next road up was a road that led into a place called Valencia, where some other troops went. When I get to that corner, here comes another bomb service truck with two guys on it that I knew. Jack Sample and John Starkey. So I explained our predicament to them and told him we wanted to take off for the hills and that we didn’t have transportation worth a hoot. They said, if we give you a lift, you’re just going to have to go where we go. We’re not taking you any other place. You’re going to have to go where we go.

Mr. Zobel - Were they going in the hills as well?

Mr. Chapman - Oh yeah. But they had a plan. We didn’t have a plan. We didn’t know where the hell we were going. Since we didn’t know where we were going, we said, no problem, we’ll just go with you. So we loaded on board their truck and off we go towards Malaybalay. Before we get to Malaybalay, they turned off on a little side road and we went down that a while and we wound up going through the field. Trucks apparently had used this side road and we get up towards where we’re getting into the mountainous area and the jungle is already closing in on us. Can’t go any further because there’s a GI truck parked there. Somebody’s already taken off for the hills and left their GI truck there because they couldn’t go any further. So we disembarked from our truck there and we took off and headed up the mountain. We were headed toward Agusan, south of Malaybalay, and we went up the hill and somewhere up here is a little settlement. It was on the engineering map I have. It may be on here. I can’t read it. But it’s Celie, I think it is. Celie.

Mr. Zobel - I don’t see it, but keep going.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, it’s not important. So we’re up on this range of hills and it’s now daylight and we come into this little settlement and it’s loaded with Filipinos.

Mr. Zobel - Army personnel or civilian?

Mr. Chapman - Mostly civilians and they’re from Davao. They’re trying to get away from the Japanese, who landed at Davao and occupied the place. So we’re sitting there debating on what we’re going to do. The other two guys, Starkey and Samples, who had a plan, they kept on going. They left us there and on they went. They went on over to the east coast. We didn’t now what we were going to do, so we’re sitting there and debating on what the next step is and a Filipino sergeant comes up to us. He says, where are you guys going? We said, we’ll we really don’t know. We’re trying to decide right now. He said, my names Verencio ……………. He said, was formerly a Forest Service Ranger in this area and he said, I live over in the Agusan valley. My family is over there and he said, I’m going over there and I’m here leading this group of people from Davao across the mountains, because I know the way. He said, it’s a rather dangerous area up there. There’s some people that live there that are not too friendly. This is the ……………… and he said, I see you have guns. He said, if you’ll join us as sort of an armed guard, he said, I will take you to my home over in the Agusan area and you can stay there the rest of the war and we’ll take care of you. So we had an offer that we could hardly refuse. So we did that. We joined this group and we had about almost 100 Filipinos, women and children, that were traveling with us. It was pretty touch going over the tops of this mountain range, but we went across and went down the other side into Agusan and as soon as we got out of the mountains on the other side, most of the people dispersed to places that they knew. Sgt \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ took us to his home place….well the name will come to me, but it’s a little barrio that’s up from the Agusan river and it’s on the map. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I think is the name of it.

Mr. Zobel - How long a trek was that to get from this over the mountains to Agusan?

Mr. Chapman - Well we left on the 10th of May from the camp and we got into Bunagat (?) on my birthday the 28th of May.

Mr. Zobel - Okay, so that was a good trip then.

Mr. Chapman - Oh yeah.

Mr. Zobel - So did you stay with him for a while?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, well we got in to Bunagat…

Mr. Zobel - What other Americans are with you right now?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, that was Ruberton, Faust, and Mancuso.

Mr. Zobel - Just the four of you?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. As we go into this little settlement, there’s hardly anybody there. Sgt. ……………..mother and brother were there and I think maybe his sister. We were about to get settled in the place. This little town was, prior to the war, their primary means of existence was from coconuts and copra. There was coconut shells all over the place on the ground that had collected water and lots of mosquitoes. As luck would have it, I got malaria almost immediately when we got into this little town.

Mr. Zobel - But you’d never had it before?

Mr. Chapman - Never had it before. I really came down with it bad.

Mr. Zobel - How about the other guys?

Mr. Chapman - For some reason, it didn’t seem to effect them. I don’t know why. At least they didn’t get it at that time. Well, this Bunagat is on a tributary stream from the Agusan River, which is the main river up and down the Province of Agusan. The word was that the Japanese were probably going to patrol the Agusan River. These people became nervous about the possibility of the Japanese getting word there were Americans in this Bunagat area and they felt it was too dangerous for us to stay there. So after we had been there a couple of days, we had been there a couple of days because it took me a while to come down with malaria, they said, we’re going to have to move you out of here, farther back up into the mountains. So they arranged to do that and Verencia \_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s brother was a real husky guy, farm worker and he was able to just pick me up and dump me in the boat and they took all four of us back up this little tributary stream, farther into the mountains to another little settlement where there was only, I think, five houses. They had one they turned over to us and put us in there. This was where we were going to be staying. I really became very ill there. I had the shakes and everything that goes along with malaria. What happen is, you go through a period of high fever and the shakes, and then you become very tired and I’d lay down and go to sleep and you recover from that initial attack and I’d wake up. I woke up this one time and I started to get up and one of my friends said, what are you doing? I tried to talk to him and nothing came out. I was scared. I didn’t know what to do. So I got a pencil and I was going to write him a note and say, I can’t talk. I couldn’t write the words. It was a terrible feeling. Apparently, this is part of the malaria. Well that gives you a feel as to how bad a shape I was in. At the same time, I got beriberi. Are you familiar with that?

Mr. Zobel - Yes sir.

Mr. Chapman - My legs swelled up from the knees down like watermelons. I could hardly walk. Well, my companions at least helped me in one way. I didn’t want to move or do anything. They kept saying, you’re going to have to go down and wash up. You’re getting dirty. They would force me to walk down to the creek and wash up. Well we were ready to stay there for the rest of the war, I guess, and these people took care of us. One day, an American walks in. He says to the Filipinos. Is there somebody named Chapman in here? They said, oh yeah, and they pointed over to me. He came up there and said, you named Chapman. I said, yes. He said, well, I’m Mike Pritz (?). I heard about you being up here and ill with malaria. Apparently the word got down the river through the grapevine. He said, we’re going to get you well. He said, I’m going to get you out of here and you’re going to come with me and I’m going to get you well. We got a place to take you. So he insisted I pack up right then. Have you heard the name, Mike Pritz?

Mr. Zobel - Yes sir, I have.

Mr. Chapman - So Mike takes me downriver. We go down to the big river, Agusan.

Mr. Zobel - Did all four of you go with Mike, or just you?

Mr. Chapman - Oh yeah. We all four go down. The other three guys wind up disappearing. Gus Mancuso; Mike Pritz told him that he had to get out of the area or he was going to run him out because Gus started some crooked gambling games with some of the Filipinos that were Mike Pritz’s friends. That was the wrong thing to do. Mike actually ran him out of the Island. He wound up in Boho. But, took me downriver and we turned on to the Agusan River and there was a big house up on the west side of the river and this was filled with a bunch of Filipino people that had malaria. Some of them were people that had been with us on the hike across the mountains. He moved me in there and he introduced me to the guy that was running it. He said, this is Dr. Edwards. Well it turns out that Dr. Edwards was no more a doctor or you or I, but he at least, he was posing as one. He was a ………………….. He was the son of an American who had married a Filipino woman and he was sort of running this as a local hospital, treating all kinds of diseases and giving phony treatments to people, including even phony appendicitis operations. At any rate, Mike Pritz told him I want you to take care of this guy and I have some ampoules here of, I don’t know what kind of injections they were, but anti-malarial.

Mr. Zobel - Atabrine. Was it Atabrine?

Mr. Chapman - No, this was an injection, liquid. Atabrine is mostly in …. He says he gave him enough for a certain period of time and he said, I want you to see that you give him these injections every day. Apparently, Mike was a very stern guy and this guy knew that if he didn’t do what Mike said, Mike would be back and raise hell with him. So Mike left me there with this guy and I began to recover from my malaria. Fortunately, I didn’t have the worse case. One of the Filipinos that was on the march with us over there, and that was there, he was actually out of his mind already. It had hit him so bad. So I stayed there and my companions Faust and Ruberton heard about the guerrilla and they said they were going to go down and join the guerrilla.

Mr. Zobel - Do you know where it was organized?

Mr. Chapman - Which guerrilla? I didn’t know about it. I don’t know how they heard about it. I don’t know what they knew about it. We were in the area though where, here is another name you know, ………………….Cordera. He was in that area. So I’m staying there with Edwards and all these people and they decide this is getting too dangerous, so Edwards decides he’s going to fold up his hospital operation, so everybody leaves and I had to leave. I’m shifted across to a farm family across the river. Unfortunately, I don’t remember their name, but a man and his wife who had two sons that were oh, roughly 18 to 20 years old. That family began taking care of me. I’m still recovering from malaria and the lady there, she would fix chicken dinners. I ate lots of chicken when I was there and every morning, she would gather some herbs from the local forest and she would bring me a drink and say, you got to drink this all the way down, a tall glass, and I drank it. It was horrible, but I knew what it was. It was quinine. The bark of the tree.

Mr. Zobel - Do you know about what time this is?

Mr. Chapman - Timeframe….May….It’s got to be probably July, up into August. Down in that timeframe, down into August maybe.

Mr. Zobel - So was she able to get you well?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. So, I’m staying with those people. She also cooked up another drink for me from the heart of some tree. This tree when you cut it, the center of the tree is blood red and she would take that and she would brew a tea from it that was also the same color, blood red, and she made me drink that every day. So I gradually got well. I really did. Some other Filipino person and this is to emphasize how well they treated us, a man showed up one day and he said, I heard about you here and I want to take you to my place. He said, I live up the river, farther up the Agusan River, near Talacogon and he says, I have some good food up there, ham, bacon, eggs. You can have hotcakes and so on. He says, we know how to make them up there. I want you to go to me and we’re really going to get you fixed up. So he loaded me into the baroto and off we go up to Talacogon. When we get up to Talacogon and I only stayed with him a day or two. I wound up going into the little village in Talacogon, which is on the other side of the river and they had a big Catholic church there. The Catholic church was maintained by these two Dutch Fathers; Father Alfonso and Father, I’ve forgotten the other guy’s name. These two Dutch Fathers were maintaining their Catholic church there and holding services for the people, but each week one of them would leave and make a tour around the countryside to other people, visit those people, and each week a different one would do that. They took me in and so I stayed with them in the convent. This timeframe, I can tell you for sure, was December.

Mr. Zobel - of ’42?

Mr. Chapman - Because I was there for Christmas. Fantastic Christmas. The church building had this corrugated iron roof and corrugated iron walls and they had an alter inside. The church Fathers had a Coleman lantern that was rigged up so they could get it lit and then hoist it up high over the alter area, which gave enough light so you could hold a church service. So we had Christmas church service there. The local people came and instead of money offerings, they brought food, chickens, stuff like that. That was a great experience staying there with them. Right after the 1st of the year, they decided that it wasn’t convenient for me to be there anymore, so I needed to leave and I’m not sure exactly what all the reasons were, but I wasn’t unhappy about leaving I guess. We went downriver to another place where another Filipino family took me in. This family was the family of Mr. Tio Filo Sanchez and he was the former….

End of Side Two