Gerald S. Chapman MacArthur Memorial Oral History Project

 James Zobel

Continuation of interview from Chapman Part I

Mr. Chapman - After I left that hospital with this guy, Dr. Edwards, so called, he decided he wanted to organize his own guerrilla activity. He got a couple of guys to go with him, Filipinos, and he had them armed. He was going to take over the whole area. ……………. Cordera, did not agree with this and he was going to meet with Dr. Edwards and solve the problem. One of the guys that went in up the river with me, Lou Ruberton, got with ……………Cordera. He was working with …………… They went up to confront Dr. Edwards, which they did. He wasn’t very friendly with them and they had a big argument over it. They left him and went down to the river and got in their boat and they were getting ready to leave and Edwards had a BAR and he raised it and tried to shoot them. He opened fire on them. ……………… and Lou Ruberton overturned the …..underwater and escaped.

Mr. Zobel - Was Edwards just crazy you think?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, he was off his nut. This was the end of Edwards, because the two guys that he thought were his men, were men who were very good friend with ………. Cordera. ……………… was well respected by the Filipinos in the entire Agusan Valley and when they saw him open fire on …………., they turned around and shot Edwards, so that was the end of Edwards. So, I was staying with this family, and we’re talking about up in ….

Mr. Zobel - With the Sanchez family.

Mr. Chapman - The timeframe were at the first of the year, January, early February. With the good care of all the Filipinos, I’m now in pretty good shape. I was sitting on the porch of this house overlooking the river one day and this aberration comes up out of the river. I’ll use that term. It was Frank McCarthy, the guy with the lumbar company, but he had a full beard, looked like Santa Claus. He came climbing up out of the river and he walked up to me and said, are you Chapman and I said, yes, I am. He said, I know all about you, that you’ve been sick with malaria and you need help. I came here to help you. He said, I have this lumbar camp up in Surigao and I’m well fixed with food and stuff. What I want to do is take you with me up to my place.

Mr. Zobel - So he came all the way down from Surigao just to find you.

Mr. Chapman - Apparently. Through that Filipino bamboo telegraph, he found out about it. He said, so you’re coming with me. Unfortunately, the way he approached me, he walked up and said, is your name Chapman. I said, yep. He says, okay, get your stuff, you’re coming with me. I said, hold on. I’m not going anywhere. I got some real nice people here taking care of me. So after I got him settled down, I said, now tell me what you’re talking about. So then he explained all of this and he said, I want you to come with me and we’re going to get you all fixed up and you’ll be in good shape, so I agreed to do that. Off we went. We went down on the boat and then we had to hike through the jungle, to bypass Butuan. Butuan was occupied by Japanese at that time, so we bypassed that, got on the highway up to Cabadbaran, walking up the highway and …..we were up like……here and we bypassed, started walking up toward Cabadbaran. We stopped at a farm house of a man that he knew. The farm house was at a place called ………………., and there was an American and he had a Polish name, wasn’t Buckabenski, but something similar to that, also was there for some reason. He and McCarthy got in a real argument and McCarthy was about to put up with this crap from this young guy, who was a former 31st Infantry guy. In the process, B………… grabbed a shotgun and was going to shoot McCarthy. At least I think that’s the way the argument progressed. McCarthy was a pretty husky guy. He grabbed the shotgun out of B………………’s hand and when, B…………. tried to attack him, McCarthy hits him on the head and knocked him cold.

Mr. Zobel - How did Buckabenski get to Mindanao, being in the 31st….?

Mr. Chapman - I haven’t the faintest idea. I don’t think that was his name. I know Buckabinski, but really a Polack name. So we moved on from there up toward Cabadbaran and Cabadbaran is somewhat internal and there’s a little village on the coast there, can’t remember the name of it, but that’s a fishing place. We went down there and got a boat and went on up the coast to a place called Abunga and got off the boat at Abunga and climbed up to Lake Mainit, southern end of Lake Mainit, and we had a boat there to take us across up to his place. ………………… was where he was at. I was fascinated going across that Lake Mainit because I put my hand in the water when we were out in the middle and it was hot. That’s a volcanic…I guess the top of a volcano there. Very interesting.

Mr. Zobel - Was it just Mr. McCarthy that you were with, or did he have Filipinos with him, or anybody else? Or was he just along when he came to get you.

Mr. Chapman - No, he was traveling alone. He knew the country quite well. So I get up to his place and get settled there and he’s got another guy with him, a Mr. Kelly, who was also a…I don’t know if he was an engineer, or woodsman, or what, but he was involved in that. I think he was an engineer though because, Kelly had been involved with some of the inter island boats, including the …………………, which incidentally was sunk in the …………….. Harbor. So in addition, he also had a daughter.

Mr. Zobel - Kelly had a daughter?

Mr. Chapman - No, McCarthy had a daughter as well as some sons. This is sort of difficult to talk about. On the way up there, he had been telling me about his daughter and he was hoping that she would meet somebody and get married and all the way up there, he kept talking about this and I got the impression that his big idea was once I got up there, that maybe he could make the connection. Well, we got there and I was there a couple of days. There was another lady there. Her name was Betty and she was a Filipino from Northern Luzon, but she was married to an American engineer who had been captured by the Japanese, but she didn’t get captured, she was on the loose and she was staying at McCarthy’s place also. I don’t know why. I guess, her husband had been a friend of McCarthy’s. So McCarthy took me aside and he said that he had some business elsewhere and he was going to leave and be gone for a few days, but I’d be taken care of. His daughter would be there and would be preparing the meals and so on. So off he goes.

Well it turns out that his daughter wasn’t very talkative. She was sort of bashful, it seemed to me, but this other person, Betty, boy she was really talkative. We get talking and we have great discussions and chatted and I guess McCarthy’s daughter got upset about all of that. So when McCarthy comes back, he takes his daughter aside and he talks to her. I don’t know what she told him, but obviously she indicated that nothing happened between us and he comes out and says, well, I think you’re doing real well. I think it’s time for you to go and you better get your things. He told Betty that it was time for her to go too. He took the two of us down to Lake Mainit and put us in the boat and we went down to that little town, which is at the foot of Lake Mainit here. I don’t know what the name of it is. Jabonga, is that it? Well, he took us down there and he dumped us off. He didn’t take us down there personally, he had one of his boys take us down and dumped us off there. I didn’t know what to do from there. I had my Army field jacket. I was still wearing the same old fatigues that I wore when I took to the hills. Didn’t have any shoes. Barefoot. So I mention to this girl Betty, I don’t know what to do. What are we going to do from here? She says, well, one of the things we can always do, we can go to the local church and talk to the priest there. They’re always willing to help. She said, they’ve got money and they’ve got food. We never did talk to the priest, so we found a friendly family that put us up for the night and the next day, we went on down to Cabadbaran. Traveled down to Cabadbaran.

We got into Cabadbaran and we were trying to decide where to go from their and it’s at that point that I find out about the very active guerrilla and that’s where I meet Tom Baxter.

Mr. Zobel - Where was he? At Cabadbaran?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Zobel - Can you describe Tom Baxter for us? What was he like?

Mr. Chapman - Well, he was a rather brusque guy with a black beard and acted like a Texas cowboy.

Mr. Zobel - Did you have a beard at this time?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. I don’t have that picture with me, but I do have it. As we are having a bite to eat and some drinks, Betty and I were in a tienda and I met Baxter there. I guess it was after this event. But any rate, for some reason I get in a big argument with Betty and she gets mad at me and I say, well, if that’s the way you feel, the heck with it and I walked away. As I’m walking away, she threw a 7-UP bottle at me. Boy that was it. So, I met Baxter and he tells me they’re getting ready to have an attack on Butuan and I told him that I’d like to participate. I’m ready to get involved with the guerrilla operation. He said, fine, so we go on down heading towards Butuan.

Mr. Zobel - Was it just you and Baxter, or were there other Americans with Baxter that were with you?

Mr. Chapman - At this time, no, it was just Baxter and I and we made the circuit around the backside of Butuan to a little house where, I think he’d been staying and this guy, who you’ve already heard about, L.P. Morgan, and a couple of his cutthroats are staying there also. That evening after dinner, we’re sitting around talking about what’s going to happen the next day and Baxter and Morgan are more involved with this. They’re doing the planning, I guess, about things. They knew what was going to happen and where things were going. I didn’t know anything about it. But in the course of conversation, I remember having an extensive conversation with Morgan and he was telling me how he is related to his various namesakes. That pirate Captain and all. In the course of the conversation, and I don’t know how it came up, he said, he really holds it against his parents that they ever had him Baptized. He said that was a terrible thing they did to me, having me Baptized. He had a young Filipino with him who was about 12 or 13 years old, who was traveling with L.P. Morgan and his cutthroats, this other guy. I can’t remember his name. I guess sort of a chief of staff. This 13 or 14 year old boy was proud of the fact that he had already been in battle with the Japanese and had killed a Japanese. They were all Muslims from down there.

Next morning was when they were going to attack Butuan, so before the break of day, we moved out, and along with Baxter, we went down around the Butuan to the church where the big church is there and he said for me to be positioned just beyond the church at a point where I would be facing the school building where they had had the Japanese hold up for a couple of days and had not been able to get them out. So they said, after daylight, we’ll open fire on them. The signal will be when the ring the church bells. They’d been driving the Japanese crazy all along since they had them cooped up by ringing those church bells periodically. So when daylight came, the church bells started ringing and we all started shooting at the school building where the Japanese were. When I ran out of ammunition, I couldn’t do anything more, we started retreating back. We never did get the Japanese out. Couple of people got hurt. I’m walking behind a group of people that were retreating from this battle and they were carrying some guy in a stretcher and he was bleeding, obviously badly wounded from that. We moved out of there. From there, we moved on down to Buena Vista, down here in the ……………………. and here. The Japanese landed reinforcements and they also had a couple of airplanes come in and dropped a couple of bombs, but didn’t hit anything and we left. I think the only thing that happened as a result of the Butuan incident, was they captured a whole bunch of cloth, among other things and those of us that were involved, we all got some cloth. I got some khaki cloth and I was able to get a shirt and pants made out of that.

Mr. Zobel - A lot of guys were able to do that with all the cloth that was captured? Get new uniforms?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. Those that got them. At any rate, we moved down there and then I was moved over to the headquarters of ………… in Medina. I don’t recall exactly how I got there, but I think I got on the bonka and went over there on the bonka.

Mr. Zobel - Why did you go over there? Were you ordered to go over there?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, well, Baxter and all the rest of them, that was the headquarters…….

Mr. Zobel - So you went with all of them over there?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, and I reported in to McLish as a new member of the guerrilla and I’m ready to be part of this operation. McLish and Childress were there. I met both of them. They decided that I would be part of the S-3, the supply area and they were going to get me attached in the supply area.

Mr. Zobel - How did McLish impress you?

Mr. Chapman - I thought he was a rather dapper character.

Mr. Zobel - What do you mean?

Mr. Chapman - Well, he had the idea of being a cavalry officer, somewhere in his background and he had a horse and he would go out riding on this horse in the daytime and that’s what I mean by sort of a dapper. I could picture him in riding boots … The other thing that happened that reinforced this, he decided he’d like to practice polo and he had a local Filipino manufacture a polo mallet for him, but he didn’t give him exactly the right instructions and the guy had got the mallet head okay and then when he put the stick in it; in a polo mallet the stick is a real flexible stick like with bamboo, this woodsman put in a solid wood stick that was about that big around and it didn’t work very well, but I think McLish tried it once or twice. His idea was that if he could get a polo mallet made he could ride up and down the street and practice his polo. You recall, Clyde mentioned to you yesterday, that he also had a horse. So any rate, I was given the job of the supply guy and in the process I did several supply trips around the area. I took some supplies at one point up to Camiguin Island, going like ………… or Bonka. I took a trip over to Leyte, when I crossed over here. Went to …………….., down here and delivered supplies to Hemmingway and Jimmy Shane, who were operating a radio station there and came back here. While I’m doing all of these kind of things, they’re in the process of doing some planning about what’s their next objective and the next objective they decided on was Surigao. Kick the Japs out of Surigao. So the whole bunch of us, we take off and we go on over here and head up the coast here toward Surigao. We get up as far as Abungo here and we’re all gathering there and we get a message from Burdick’s headquarters that…………..

Mr. Zobel - Submarine?

Mr. Chapman - That the submarine had come in with …….Parsons and company and that they had new instructions for the guerrilla operation and that we were to immediately call off our activity that we were doing there. So a whole bunch of people were up here and we’ve got to turn around and head back and so that’s what we do.

Mr. Zobel - Who did you go up to Abungo with? Who went there with you? Who went, can you remember?

Mr. Chapman - I think Baxter was one of them. There could have been several other Americans.

Mr. Zobel - So you turned around and what happened?

Mr. Chapman - Well, we all came back. We came down to Cabadbaran and then we were getting ready to move on back to Medina and it was in Cabadbaran that I ran into Hemmingway and Shane. They had left their position over on Panaon Island because Shane became ill. The left side of his face was paralyzed and he wasn’t in too good shape, so they wanted to see if they couldn’t arrange to get him out of the islands, at least someplace where he could get care. Hemmingway radioed Burdick (?) telling him what they had done and that he needed a new assistant to go with him. After chatting with Hemmingway a while, I said, I would like to volunteer as your knew assistant. I think that radio coast watcher sounds like a good job.

Mr. Zobel - And you had met him before by making the runs?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. So we talked a little bit about that. He said, well, I’ll see if I can arrange that. So he radioed Burdick again and told him the circumstances, gave him my name, rank, serial number and Burdick radioed back and said, fine, I’m assigned to him and that we should go back to Leyte. Well at this point, for some reason, and I don’t know why, elected not to go back to Panaon Island. We went across to establish our radio station here, just above San Roque (?) and we were up on the hill behind San Roque.

Mr. Zobel - Is this about April? May? ’43?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, we’re already up to March. When I got assigned there, Burdick… when I got involved in the guerrillas, the first thing they did, they made everybody an officer when you got there and if you were an enlisted person, why you were automatically a lieutenant when you got involved with that, so that was what I was carried on the roster as. So when the orders from Burdick’s headquarters came through assigning me with Hemmingway, it says, Lt. Gerald Chapman on there. I still have that order, the original copy. It’s gradually fading away. As a result, we set up this station here at the tip of the island there and set up business. It’s not as good a position for covering this area, but it was okay for covering traffic in this area. There was another American, name of Gordon Lang, who was sort of a local guerrilla leader in Malitbog and Colonel Kangleon was the guerrilla leader in Leyte. He had been captured by the Japanese and released and he went there and took over. So we were operating there.

Mr. Zobel - Now was Lang stationed up there? Gordon Lang?

Mr. Chapman - Gordon was a Navy guy and had sailed there from Cebu, I think, when the surrender came. This became his evacuation spot and Gordon I think married a Filipino girl there.

Mr. Zobel - So he wasn’t really stationed there. He was just there.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, he evacuated there, to use the term we used at that time. He wound up; he had a nice house and a 39 Oldsmobile sedan that he drove around there. He had a guy named Laird who built a still and was making alcohol to run the vehicles, but he also made some booze on the side.

Mr. Zobel - Now did you and Hemmingway have to go get your equipment from here and take it over there?

Mr. Chapman - No, he had taken the equipment with him down here.

Mr. Zobel - Oh, okay, when he left with Shane.

Mr. Chapman - He had to leave the equipment there. So he had it all there and we just took it back to this same spot.

Mr. Zobel - How did you get up to the San Roque, by launch, or……?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Zobel - Do you remember which one?

Mr. Chapman - Could have been the Nara. They had the Treasure Island, and I know it wasn’t the Treasure Island. I don’t recall that it was the Bonka. Seems to me it was the Nara. We got up there and got situated. Our only difficulty there was Hemmingway had acquired a girlfriend who was the wife of a Chinese merchant in Leyte and she moved in with us. We had a little grass shack on the top of the hill, which was our quarters and this little grass shack was about the size of this room and we had everything, radios in there. We had two radio operators. We had a Filipino boy who was just a helper, all around helper. He cooked meals and built fires and ran errands, so that was the extent of our station. We operated there for a short while and then came the orders for Hemmingway to move over to Dinagat, which is where he went.

Excuse me; I’m ahead with myself again. The orders came for Hemmingway to go up to this little town right here in southern Samar. The report had come in from somewhere; I guess Burdick headquarters, that there was a post office radio available in that town. So they sent orders for Hemmingway to go over and get that radio and set it up in Samar. He wound up setting it up at Dinagat Island. So he left me where I was at and he went on over there, taking Kitty with him, and left me here. I wound up moving the station from here over to ………………. over here, where I could observe the strait coming in here. I had a very good situation there.

Mr. Zobel - How did you get all the stuff over there?

Mr. Chapman - (?)

Mr. Zobel - So you walked it over?

Mr. Chapman - We sailed across. I got a bonka across from here to …and then walked it around to ……………….. and there was a man, Sylvester Telaro and his wife. Elderly man. He had an evacuation house way up on top of the hill. Not a big house, I mean it wasn’t much bigger than this room, but it was a real house not a Filipino type house. He said we could use that for our radio station, so I accepted that and I moved in with the equipment and my radio operators and me. St. John had been reassigned to work with me with Hemmingway gone. So we operated that radio station there. That was a good deal, but that didn’t last too long. Hemmingway and I had become pretty close in the short time that we were together and wanted to keep in touch, so we decided to set up our own radio code and communicate when he got set up, whenever. So when he got up, before we got set up, he called me in the clear over the radio by the mike that he had and there for a while we were very careful communicating by voice in the clear. It was during that timeframe when I met Lou’s father. He showed up one day, walked into the station and introduced himself and he told me where he came from and what he was doing. He said, by the way, does your radio have a microphone? I said, oh yeah. Yeah, we do. He said, let me see it and he took it and said, okay, that’s it and he gave me hell for talking in the clear.

Mr. Zobel - When was this? What time of year was this? Do you remember?

Mr. Chapman - This is got to be sometime in mid-43, year mid-43. So at any rate, I lost my microphone at that point, but Hemmingway and I did set up code words to use for the transposition codes so we communicated. The next incident that occurred was his father comes back and says that there are orders for me to move the station to northern Samar.

Mr. Zobel - And this is Tom Jurika?

Mr. Chapman - Yes. Tom Jurika. To move the station north to northern Samar. We had an argument over that and I told him that I really didn’t want to move and that St. John was available there and he could go instead of me. Tom says, sorry, you’re the one that has been designated and you’re going. I said, supposing I don’t go. He said, well if you don’t go, I will be happy to arrange for a ride in submarine to Australia where you will undoubtedly be rejoined with the U.S. military and the infantry or somewhere. However, if you want to accept this assignment, when we get up and get your station in place, you can write a letter to your mother and I will take it and make sure that she gets it. I said, you just made the deal. An offer I can’t refuse. So we packed up and started our move.

Mr. Zobel - Who packed up? You and your Filipino guys?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Zobel - Did you go overland, up through Leyte?

Mr. Chapman - No, we left ……………… on the wildest launch. This was a launch that had been captured by the Leyte guerrillas I guess from the Japanese. It was a former fishing boat, I guess, and it had a one cylinder diesel engine, but the one cylinder was about like this and they had stripped the superstructure from this thing to keep it a low profile and so it didn’t have much superstructure on it. We loaded on board that thing in the evening to sail across the Leyte Gulf at night. When we got that thing going, I wasn’t sure whether it had a propeller or whether we were just going like this because that one cylinder diesel made boat wiggle.

Mr. Zobel - Was it Tom Jurika that took you up there?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact that was how I happened to meet Lou. Lou called me one day at home and said that he was going to follow his father’s steps up Samar and knew that I had gone with him and wanted to know if I’d like to go with him.

Mr. Zobel - Now when he came to you and took that microphone, was that when he gave you the choice of going to Samar or was this a later time?

Mr. Chapman - I don’t recall.

Mr. Zobel - But anyway, they took you up to the Samar area?

Mr. Chapman - Well what we did; we’re getting off this map. What we did, that boat that wiggled in the water, we took that directly across landing on the peninsula of Samar that went down towards Guiuan and we got off the boat there and went on down to Guiuan first and the local guerrilla leader we met in that area, Captain ……….. was going to provide us with an escort, the cargo doors and help us move the rest of the way.

End Side 1

Side 2 **Interviewer Louis Lee Jurika**

Mr. Jurika - You got into Guiuan and there was a Japanese captive there, the guerrillas had captured him. Tell us about that.

Mr. Chapman - I don’t know how he got captured, but he got captured in the area and he appeared to be maybe a Taiwanese that had gotten into the Japanese Army, but guerrilla hadn’t quite decided what to do with him. I guess they would like to have turned him over to somebody else to take care of. We didn’t stay there long enough to get involved in that because Tom was anxious for us to get going and move on up the coast of Samar to get the station in place. Are next stop was ……………..Sur, a barrio, which was associated with a large mine. I think it was an iron mine. We were there for a short while and then moved on up to Borongan, which is half way up Samar.

Mr. Jurika - Back at ……………………. Sur, you said the guerrillas had taken over the mining.

Mr. Chapman - The machine shop and they were manufacturing weapons and hand grenades and stuff like that.

Mr. Jurika - You were traveling overland?

Mr. Chapman - On the coast.

Mr. Jurika - You weren’t in a bonka.

Mr. Chapman - No we were walking up the coast.

Mr. Jurika - Next stop, Borongan?

Mr. Chapman - And the next stop was Borongan and we stayed overnight in Borongan and at Borongan we had dinner with a local, fairly well-to-do family in their very nice house. We were having dinner in their dining room on the dining table. Real deluxe for us in the guerrilla. Across from where I was sitting there was a buffet and on top of this buffet was a really fancy barometer. I was admiring this barometer and I kept looking at it and nudged Tom and said, Tom, you know that needle on the barometer has been moving. Tom laughed and say, Gerry, barometers don’t move that fast. They couldn’t move that fast. I said, well I swear that moved. He said, well let’s watch it. He went over and moved the needle. They have a special needle that you set opposite the one that’s moving and that way you can tell if it moves. So we set that and we sat there a little longer and sure enough it was moving. It had moved a little. Tom says, well we’ve got a storm coming and we’re about to receive a blow. Sure enough within the next 2 days, we had a tremendous typhoon that hit northern Samar.

Mr. Jurika - Did you stay in Borongan while that occurred?

Mr. Chapman - Well, we just stayed there overnight. The heart of the storm hit up above where we were and it wiped out coconut trees and towns and everything else up there. So when we moved up in that area there was a lot of destruction. We continued our walk up there the next day and in the process we picked up two new radio operators. Mr. DeLao and Mr. Abigato. They were going to be my new radio operators. The radio operators that I had stayed with Joseph St. John. So we continued on with our two new radio operators. They were from that area of Samar. We went up the coast, got up to I think Gamai (?) was the name of the town. At that town we were able to get a motor launch to take us the rest of the way around the northern tip of the island. It was a relatively small motor launch and we got on board and we had equipment and cargo doors were down below in the engine room with the equipment and everything.

We were heading up, getting ready to go around the north coast of Samar and when we started turning around, we wind up in a quartering sea. So the waves are going one way and we’re going sideways and this little launch, round bottom launch, is lowering in this sea and I’m getting all worried about we’re going to turn over. At one point, I said to Tom, you think we ought to warn the guys down below to come topside in case we turn over. He said, hell no, we need the ballast down there. The weather was clear, it was just a rough sea.

We finally made it around the northern tip of Samar and we disembark at the town that was there; name I can’t remember off hand. We need to have a map available to do this. From there we started the long walk across the northern coast of Samar, which borders the San Bernardino Straits. We acquired some new guerrilla activity at this point. The northern part of Samar was under control of a different guerrilla commander than the southern and they were not friendly with each other. Captain Valley (?) had his crew and up in the northern area we had a former army officer, graduate of Philippine Military Academy named Pedro ……………… His father had been a black American soldier from the Spanish American War with a Filipino mother. He was not very friendly even to us. I think he was upset that we were invading his territory. All we wanted to do was set up a coast watcher station, but he wasn’t happy with us.

So we started across the northern coast, marched across there and had no serious incidents going across there. Two days walking going across there possibly, maybe not even the full two days. We to the other side and if you look at a map of northern Samar, it’s flat across the top and at the western end there is a little nub of a peninsula that sticks out. That nub of a peninsula is only about 3 or 4 miles wide and maybe 5 or 6 miles long, extending out into the San Bernardino Straits. Well our objective was to set up that radio station on top of the mountain there at the end of that peninsula. So that’s what we did. We went out there to the end of the peninsula.

Mr. Jurika - Balicuatro Point

Mr. Chapman - Balicuatro Point, yes, you got it. We got on top of the mountain there and found a suitable spot where we could observe the entire surroundings and we sat a radio station in a Filipino type house of there that was on the top and we set up an outpost. The house where we were at, although we could see down on the east side, we couldn’t see over to the west side. So we set an outpost up at the tip of this peninsula and we would have a guy posted there all during the day, everyday to watch the traffic and so on. So that was our setup up there. In this move, I acquired a new station designator. We were TUT while Hemmingway was around. I now was MAG. So that was my call-sign. Once we got position and settled there, I wrote my letter to my mother and gave it to Tom and said, goodbye Tom, and he went off and he completed his task. He felt he’d done his job.

Mr. Jurika - And your mother got the letter.

Mr. Chapman - And my mother got the letter. I still have the letter. At any rate, we got the station in operation there and this was in September of 1943.

Mr. Jurika - How many people were left there with you?

Mr. Chapman - Well, I had my two radio operators, Abigato and DeLao. They stayed with me. Then I had, oh I forgot to mention, my bodyguard then. My other helper was Sgt Arab (?), a former Philippine scout had joined my cortage as a bodyguard. He was one tough Moro. He was a Moro. He didn’t eat ham or anything like that. He was something. Really tough guy. He still had his Garand rifle. Nobody was going to take that away from him. So he was there with us and he was sort of the camp guard, radio operators, and me, and that was about it. We did have a couple of Filipino boys that were the observers and general helpers. They did the observation tasks. So we were in the operation there in September.

We established contact with the local village down on the east side of the peninsula because we needed help with charging our batteries. We found out down there they had an old rice mill. They had a diesel engine there that ran things and we were able to set up a deal whereby we could charge our batteries. So we had a deal where we would take our batteries down there in the evening and get them charged and that’s the way we operated the radio. We had established a supply arrangement and with the local guerrilla leader, not Pedro Marin, but the local commandant of the area, we made arrangements to get supplies, kamotes, some corn. Supplies was the most difficult part about this whole thing, was making sure we had something to eat.

Shortly after I got established there, I was visited by an American civilian, Thomas Ferguson. Mr. Thomas Ferguson was a veteran of the Spanish American War, who had settled in Samar and he had married a Filipino wife and I guess he had several kids running around up north. In his younger days, he was an avid motorcyclist and he used to race his motorcycle up and down the roads there. He had taken a spill on one of his rides and fell on his right arm. His right arm ultimately became paralyzed so that his hand was paralyzed in a cup shape like this. He came up to my camp and wanted to welcome me there. He said, he had some cattle still on his ranch and that one of these days he was going to provide me with a side of beef. We got along well, chatting, and I had a 45 automatic Model 191l, Regular Army 45. Ferguson had a Colt revolver, 45 caliber, the bulldog one that had the big cartridge. He saw my Colt automatic and he said, would you be willing to trade. I said, why do you want to do that. He said, well the problem is with my hand, I have a difficult time with the revolver, but if I had that automatic, I wouldn’t have any problem doing this. So I said, okay, I gave him my automatic Army thing, and I wound up with his revolver. Of course, ultimately, I got more supplies.

When I got established there, the next thing that happened was that Colonel Charlie Smith showed up on the scene. He didn’t come to my camp. I was made aware through our radio station that he was being assigned as the net control and he moved in up at, I think was a place called Tal………, but it was up in the mountains back of the tip of Samar, back up in that area. So he would be my net control station and I would work through him and give him reports and so on. I communicated with him on all my reports and intelligence and complaints, and requests for support, whatever.

During this time, submarines were re-supplying the guerrillas in Mindanao and elsewhere and one day some guy named Robert Ball shows up in my camp and he’s brining me supplies from the submarine. The first time that I got any supplies. I finally got some boots to put on my feet. Up to this time, I hadn’t had any shoes. I got a pack that had a jungle hammock in it, it had all kinds of medicines, and I got some what I would call a candy bar, called D-rations. D-ration was a special kind of chocolate candy bar that was made with some grains in it to give it body and tropical seasons so it wouldn’t melt. It got that big bag of supplies and stuff and at the same time supplies were brought in for other stations in the area including a new one to go in over on Sorsugon.

Mr. Jurika - On the other side of San Bernardino straits.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. So, the thing was, was where I was to keep doing my coast watcher operation and at the same time working out my own supplies and collecting intelligence. I had several contacts. I had a couple of Filipinos that I could send into the local town where the Japanese were located and collect information and they’d bring it back and I’d send it out. I remember one guy whose name was Captain …………………… and he would bring in information to me.

Mr. Jurika - Did the Japanese ever come looking for you?

Mr. Chapman - Well, yes. Later on after I’d been there a while the local people brought me information that the Japanese were looking for a Captain Chapman, or at least that’s the name they gave and they thought there was some such person in the area. You be good Filipinos and let us know if you see him anywhere. Well, they let me know that that was happening. We started seeing patrol boats come. The patrol boats would come around the peninsula. I would see them go around. Then this was about in March or April of ’44. They started doing this more often. On one of these patrols, they stopped off at the little village below me where they had been supporting me by doing the battery charging and all and they had this man down there who was an engineer and he was doing all this stuff for me. They came in and they actually landed there. Now, in addition to the little settlement down at the bottom of the hill, there was a little island right there next to it and a lot of the people lived over there. So they went over to their little island and they sort of harassed the people, asking about any Americans around. My engine mechanic, who was doing the charging was around there and the next thing I know, they are really harassing him and they finally started beating on him. His wife was pregnant and they shot him because he wouldn’t give them the information. This was a blow to us there in our camp.

Mr. Jurika - Do you remember his name?

Mr. Chapman - I have it somewhere. I can’t remember right off hand. But, this was a blow to us up there. I realized that things were getting pretty hot for me there and that we’d be better off if we moved. Prior to this time, I had been contacted by a representative of the guerrilla operation in Sorsogon. There was a man named Bravaldo (?). He had been a Master Sergeant in the Philippines Army and he had been one of those that were sent home after the surrender and he went back to Sorsogon. He became involved in the guerrilla there and he was one of their representatives. He came over and contacted me and his initial contact was that he knew we were there and that they would like to send out messages through my station. That what the first contact was all about. Of course I indicated by message that I had been contacted through Colonel Smith that we had been contacted. Then the next thing was, they said, gee you’re in a pretty bad location. It’s a dangerous location. Why don’t you move over here and you’ll have a spot over here where you can see just as well as you can from where you’re at, but we can protect you better. Now we’re talking to a friendly guerrilla outfit, other than Pedro Marin who hadn’t provided any support at all. So, I started cogitating on that. Well after this incident, I knew the time had come, so I sent word over to them. I said, I am ready to move and they sent back…..excuse me, there was one other incident. One other incident.

One night as we were getting ready to fold up for the night, we see a light coming up the trail towards our camp. I didn’t know what the light was, nobody else did, and our outpost we had a guard posted at night to watch the trail. He reported this was coming up here. Sgt. Arab, my bodyguard, he’s already out there. He’s got his Garand ready to cut loose and we’re getting ready to do whatever we have to do. Our plan was if the Japanese patrol came up in this area, our cargo door boys would gather all the radio equipment and would take it to a place at the end of the peninsula that we’d picked out earlier where there was a cave and put it in there and they would stay with that. That was where they would hide. Then we would try to keep the patrol at bay until we could escape. This light coming up sure scared us. We thought they were after us. After that, I said, I can’t put up with much of this any longer and that’s when I decided that I’m going to go across, especially the serious incident where they landed.

Mr. Jurika - Who was carrying the light?

Mr. Chapman - It was a runner from town to say that the Japanese had left. I told somebody once upon a time, running a coast watchers station is like the story an airline pilot told me one time. He said, being an airline pilot is quite a career. It’s hours of boredom sitting there watching the autopilot take over and moments of panic when the engine stops. I said that’s like the coast watcher. You spend hours and hours doing nothing and then you have moments of panic. So, we sent word to the people at Sorsogon that we would move and we took all the equipment, bundled it up, made arrangements for the bonkas and one night we sailed across, stopping at this one barrio that we had been headed for. People met us there. They unloaded everything. Took us back up on top of the hill on the other side where they already had a house picked out for us. Moved us into this new house up there and we were all ready to go. Of course the next day, I sent off a message to Colonel Smith advising that our station was now on southern Sorsogon.

Mr. Jurika - You had not gotten permission before hand.

Mr. Chapman - Oh, he was unhappy about that. He wanted to know what had happened to some equipment that he had sent over with Bob Ball earlier when Bob Ball visited our station. It was an unhappy time for a while. So we got set up over there and we were all ready in business. The Sorsogon people were ready to supply us with everything we wanted. ………………………., who was the guy that originally set it up, he became the regular correspondent. He would visit my camp regularly to hear the news on the radio and he would take it back and publish a newsletter for the guerrilla in Sorsogon. He made contacts for me with various people. He set up a new radio on the airfield at Buluan. This was manned by one of our; this was like a substation manned by a Filipino that came across from Samar. I lost my bodyguard when we moved to Sorsogon, because he did not want to be up in Luzon, so he went back to Mindanao. I lost my two radio operators. We got a new radio operator in Sorsogon, Mr. Polo (?) and he was very good, very competent gentleman.

We started operating our station in southern Sorsogon and we were very soon joined by another radio station. This time it was a weather station and this was by a young corporal. I don’t have his name right now. It’s on the tip of my tongue, but he had an altercation with MacArthur’s Headquarters and he raised hell with them on the phone for not responding promptly to his messages. He said, this is Corporal (whatever his name was) to General MacArthur. You sent me up here to give these things and you’re not giving me any ……. He raised hell about it.

Mr. Jurika - I remember that incident. It was well documented.

Mr. Chapman - I was sent up there and we had another station that we got set up to go up to Legazpi, to the airfield up there and monitor that. We were collecting information from all over. So I got over there in April, I guess is was, of ’44 and everything was moving very fast in the South Pacific area at that time. I had a serious problem. My engine mechanic, who was assigned by the Sorsogon people was doing fine for me except that he had to move the generator back away from our camp, because we were right on top of the hill overlooking everything and if we operated that all night, why the sound of it would go everywhere. So he moved it back somewhere into a field and a couple of days later, he came up and told me we had lost the generator. They had a big fire in the center of this field, the sugarcane field and our generator burned up. That was the good one. This was the Briggs-Stratton generator that would run 110 volt lights.

Mr. Jurika - That had been sent in by submarine?

Mr. Chapman - Yes. So we scouted around and I finally wound up with a Montgomery Ward 2-stroke motor with a generator.

Mr. Jurika - How long were you off the air?

Mr. Chapman - Not very long, a couple of days. We managed to get our batteries charged by having somebody carry them. At one point, we, well that’s not important. We did manage to carry on. We got them charged in various ways. Then we got this little Montgomery Ward thing and we discovered that we could run that on coconut oil. It was like an outboard motor and that worked fine.

Mr. Jurika - Now sitting up there was pretty boring. There wasn’t a whole lot of action, but occasionally you would see Jap patrol boats go by? Aircraft?

Mr. Chapman - Oh yeah. Patrol boat and occasional destroyer or gunboat. Of course a transport ship once in a while.

Mr. Jurika - And then came the big show.

Mr. Chapman - And then came the big show.

Mr. Jurika - The fleet that was sailing out that eventually became the Marianas Turkey Shoot. Describe that. What happened?

Mr. Chapman - That occurred in June and in June, I think it was about the 15th, I got it recorded. Our outpost operator, observer, came running into the camp about 3:00 in the afternoon and he said, Sir, many ships coming and you’ll have to come look. Well among the things that Ball had brought to me in that pack was a spotting scope, the kind they use in shooting matches. They had the spotting scope up there, I think. I don’t remember if I took it or if they had it. We had field glasses. I went up there and I see these ships, Navy ships coming through the channel.

Mr. Jurika - Headed from West to East.

Mr. Chapman - Headed from West to East. The first two of them were like patrol boats and then followed by a couple of bigger boats and then a couple of destroyers and then here comes an aircraft carrier, which I hadn’t seen before. Never seen one. Before the first aircraft carrier, there was a Kongo Class Battleship. Ships keep coming and here comes another aircraft carrier and then another aircraft carrier and another battleship and another aircraft….by the time they got through, there were nine aircraft carriers.

Mr. Jurika - How many battleships?

Mr. Chapman - I think there were three battleships and several cruisers and a total of 35 ships. Of course, I recorded all this as fast as I could and got back to the camp and filled out a message with all the information in it that I had and sent it out as a flash message and said that they were all headed out the San Bernardino Straits ….

Mr. Jurika - ..into the Pacific Ocean…

Mr. Chapman - Into the Pacific Ocean and I gave them was heading that I could give them, but I couldn’t give them a very good heading.

Mr. Jurika - Well they disappeared over the horizon.

Mr. Chapman - Well after passing through the San Bernardino Straits, there wasn’t much else out there, but I believe there was an American submarine somewhere after they passed the San Bernardino Straits that saw them and also reported them. Stahl’s station, I think, also saw some of them coming down the inland sea. But at any rate that went out and then we heard about the battle of the Philippine City that took place out there, the so-called turkey shoot and then shortly after that we got a message from the Admiral commanding, saying, well done.

Mr. Jurika - And your name went into the record books with that one.

Mr. Chapman - Well of course, we goofed on the next one. Then the assault came on the Philippines and the Japanese…..

Mr. Jurika - In October. The Leyte landings in October?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. Actually what happened was a bunch of Japanese ships sailed through the San Bernardino Straits at night and we didn’t see them because we weren’t up there. Didn’t have an outpost up there. They went through there, I presume under blackout and they were the part of the Japanese fleet that attacked the landing force from the north and we did see the remnants of them though the next day or so.

Mr. Jurika - Coming back in?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. A destroyer came in from that area heading west and …

Mr. Jurika - A Japanese destroyer

Mr. Chapman - ….bunch of Navy planes on patrol spotted this destroyer and attacked the destroyer right in front of us. We were standing out there watching that destroyer come in and all of a sudden from nowhere comes these Navy planes. I had never seen rockets before and they were firing rockets at the destroyer. You could see them, you know, and boy that’s going on like mad and I’m watching all that. The next thing I know, my observer that was with me watching all that, he said, Sir, Sir, look over there, and here comes 6 Japanese fighters and they’re going to interfere with this. The Navy planes peeled off and boom, boom, they shot down two of the fighters right there as we watched them. This one pilot bailed out, we saw the shoot go out. It was quite a ways from us. We couldn’t even be close to him. The other planes turned tail and ran.

Mr. Jurika - Could you tell what type of Navy aircraft those were? Corsairs firing rockets, or Hell divers attacking ships?

Mr. Chapman - I really didn’t know because I wasn’t up to speed on the latest aircraft, but I think they were probably the Hellcats or Wildcats. Wildcats were the old ones. I don’t know which ones were which.

Mr. Jurika - Did you see more ships come through after the destroyer? I know the Musashi came through there.

Mr. Chapman - No, I didn’t see that one.

Mr. Jurika - That was it? The destroyer?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. But we did have some residual activity here. The Navy was attacking all of the bases in the peninsula there and some Navy planes attacked the field at Legazpi and some other places there and this one fighter plane wound up, according to the pilot who told me, he said that they lost oil pressure and a bunch of other stuff and apparently he got hit by ground fire. His engine stopped and he had to ditch his airplane. There was a Navy TBM with three men aboard it. They suffered severe damage and they wound up landing in the sea off Catanduanes Island and they deployed there little boat, survival boat. They climbed into it and they were rescued by the guerrillas and all four of these guys wound up over in my area wanting to get in touch with somebody to get them out of there. So we sent messages down to their headquarters, well actually we sent it to our net control about this.

Mr. Jurika - Charlie Smith.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. The word come back from them, sit tight, that they would get something for them and so in the meantime we had a chance to talk to them. It turns out that the guy that was the fighter pilot, his home town was near L.A. where my mother lived and he was telling me, he said, boy when I get back to the ship, I go home on leave immediately. Whenever you get shot down that’s leave home. He said I’ll be home in another month. I said, oh, maybe you can stop and see my mother. So he did and he took the message. The other three; there was a pilot and a gunner and a radio operator up in the TBM and so we had them waiting for their rescue.

When they came to my camp, they said, well where is the Japanese from here? I pointed down towards Matnog and I said, well the local Japanese garrison is right down there, which is about 8 kilometers from here. Oh, oh, oh. I said, not to worry. I said our local volunteer guard will make sure we have plenty of warning if anything happens.

We didn’t get the word that anything was going to happen to get these guys out, so they got nervous about being there. They were afraid that too many Americans in one spot would then be too much and the word would get out, so they said, they’re leaving. So they packed up and they went down and got local Filipinos to provide a bonka and took them across the Samar and they winded their way down and they finally got down to Tacloban.

End Side 2