Gerald S. Chapman MacArthur Memorial Oral History Project

 James Zobel

Continuation of interview from Chapman Part II

Mr. Jurika - Okay, the day after they left …..

Mr. Chapman - The day they left and were on their way, we were awakened by the roar of airplane engines and three P38’s roared overhead. I mean they really buzzed the place and I guess they strafed the Matnog area. They did several passes, roaring over the area, and while they’re roaring over the area, one of my observers says, Sir, look way down there. I looked down on the surface of the water and here comes the Catalina and it landed out there. My immediate reaction was, grab something and go down and get on board.

Mr. Jurika - Get out of here?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, but I knew that I couldn’t make it because it was too far for me to make, but they were there to pick up those flyers and several of the natives paddled out there and they told them they were here to pick up some Navy flyers….

Mr. Jurika - Three pilots that weren’t there..

Mr. Chapman - …and they said, they’d already left. They hurried and took off while the P38s are still roaring around.

Mr. Jurika - Now the one Navy pilot that took the message to your mother; he had left before the three other pilots?

Mr. Chapman - No, they all went together.

Mr. Jurika - All four of them.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, they were in our camp there waiting for, you know, pickup.

Tape stopped/started

Mr. Jurika - Tell me, between the time of sighting the 35-ship Japanese fleet that eventually went out to the Mariana’s Turkey Shoot and your sighting the remnants of the Japanese fleet coming back from the action at Leyte Gulf; there’s a period there from July to October, anything special happen in those 4 months? Just settled back down to boredom? Did you call any…..

Mr. Chapman - Well, we had a lot of flying activity. I recall one morning we saw a whole flock of Navy planes, came over. I think they were heading for to attack. I think that’s were we got one of the ….

Mr. Jurika - Navy pilots.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, the fighter or the TBM that got knocked down and came to our place.

Mr. Jurika - So now that they’ve landed in Leyte and they’re moving up the coast, what happed to you after that?

Mr. Chapman - Well, of course, prior to the landings in Leyte, and I’m sure we were on alert to report all movements and we would go on the air in the clear and send our messages out in the clear, you know, airplanes that flew over and any ships that we saw.

Mr. Jurika - You say, in the clear. You were no longer sending messages in code?

Mr. Chapman - Well, not even sending it to a particular person.

Mr. Jurika - Just broadcasting….

Mr. Chapman - *Yes*. We were advised that there would be, I guess, the net control station, or other places would be listening for any messages coming in over the air and we had a call sign, MAG, and that was it.

Mr. Jurika - How long did you stay there then? After Leyte?

Mr. Chapman - Well, at Leyte, they landed in October, and we had these incidents with the destroyer activity and the pilots getting shot down and all that sort of stuff, and it was about the end of November, we began having radio problems. We lost contact with our net control station. We couldn’t figure out what was happening to the radio. Why it wasn’t working. It wouldn’t work at all. There wasn’t anybody nearby and our radio operator, he was strictly a radio operator, and he didn’t seem to know what we could do to get this thing operating. So, I made the decision that we would take the radio down to Tacloban and get it fixed and maybe they would provide a Catalina to bring us back and put us back in operation. Sort of a dumb idea, but at any rate, we packed up the radio and a little equipment. The radio operator stayed there, the radio operator I had. I went down to the local people and I guess it was the cargo boys that I had with me, the camp boys that were working with me, they went with me and we got in a bonka and sailed across to northern Samar and stopped at the place where I had my radio station before and checked out whether or not there were any Japanese, where they might be farther south. They didn’t have anything to offer us, so we set sail again and we’re sailing down the inland sea there. We decided to touch base at Zumarraga, and island north of Leyte. So we touched base there and discovered that the American Malaria Control Team had visited their area, but had left. There were no Japanese there, so it appeared there was no Japanese in the area. We went east to Samar to a place called Villareal.

Mr. Jurika - On Samar?

Mr. Chapman - On Samar. Villareal was the name of the place and our boat grounded about 50 yards offshore. It was really shallow from there on in. Ankle deep, at the deepest, knee deep. So we waded ashore. As we waded ashore, I see these figures come out on the shore and it looked like American soldiers and sure enough that’s what it was, American soldiers, and they saw this character coming out of the water with a big hat on, beard, and carrying a carbine over my shoulder. I’ve got a couple of guys with me; one of them is carrying a Thompson submachine gun and we walked up on this. It just so happened that 3 or 4 of these guys that are standing on the beach there, these Army guys, everyone of them was over 6 ft tall. One of them was almost 7 ft tall. So they made me feel like a midget and they said, where did you come from? I said, well, we came down from Luzon. He said, how could you do that. He said, we haven’t gotten there yet. I said, well, I was there. That’s where I came from and I want to go to your leader. I need to get to Tacloban. So they said, okay, that they would do that. They were part of the 1st Cavalry Division and they had taken over southern Samar and we hiked with them up to the local road and they introduced me to their lieutenant who was in charge and I explained to him my situation and where I came from, what we were doing. I said, I’ve got to get into Tacloban. He said okay, and the next day we could do that. I spent the night there. I stayed in quarters where the Lieutenant was; no I didn’t. I told him I wanted to stay with my group. So, I went down with those Filipinos that I had traveling with me and I stayed with them and my radio down there. The next day, I got assistance down to the strait between Samar and Leyte and there I got on a small boat, one of those landing crafts. Small landing craft. Loaded our stuff on their and went into Tacloban. I told them in Tacloban, I needed to speak to somebody in the intelligence group. Trying to figure the sequence, one of the first things I did was check into a place to stay. I told the guy who I was and said, I am a member of the U.S. Army and I gave him my serial number and I said, I’m a Staff Sgt. So they took me down to the billeting place and put me up in the billeting place. I told them that I needed to get in touch with somebody in the G2 area and so a short while later, a Captain Morgan shows up, an Army Captain, and I tell him who I am and what I needed to do. He said, well, first thing we’ll take you to our office and we’ve got to talk with you. So I went to his office, G2, and I think Colonel Magee was there. Trying to think it was. At any rate, the guy that I talked to of course knew all about me and where I came from. So…

Mr. Jurika - How long did you spend in Tacloban?

Mr. Chapman - About a week or two.

Mr. Jurika - And then where did you go?

Mr. Chapman - Oh…

Mr. Jurika - Let me ask you some specific questions here: Did you sail all the way across the Pacific on the TASKER H. BLISS without knowing where you were going? At what point did they tell you, you were going to the Philippines?

Mr. Chapman - Before we left Angel Island.

Mr. Jurika - Oh, okay. So you knew you were going to the Philippines before you left the States?

Mr. Chapman - Before we physically left the States….we were never off the ship long enough to tell anybody else.

Mr. Jurika - When you were assigned to the 50 caliber machineguns at Del Monte Airfield, you had never fired a 50 caliber up until then. How did you learn to lead the target and aim them at airplanes? Did you have any practice?

Mr. Chapman - No, but I had fired rifles and shotguns and had some of that kind of training. Even in the ROTC, you know, we’d fire on the target range and then they give you training and tell you about when you’re in combat that there’s a problem sometimes in having to lead the target, depending on what it is.

Mr. Jurika - At Del Monte, there was one airfield that you were assigned to. Were you involved or aware of the other seven airfields that were built?

Mr. Chapman - I was aware of the one nearby, which was only about 2 or 3 miles from us. That’s where I got the tractor. A P40 had landed there and we attempted to load a bomb on to that P40 and they had an accident and they crashed into the woods.

Mr. Jurika - Did you ever get to the clubhouse at Del Monte?

Mr. Chapman - ?

Mr. Jurika - Did you ever see the tunnel built for the aircraft?

Mr. Chapman - At a distance. Well, I was on one side of the field and there was the other side.

Mr. Jurika - And that’s where the tunnel was?

Mr. Chapman - Yes.

Mr. Jurika - Do you have an idea how big that was?

Mr. Chapman - No.

Mr. Jurika - Did you ever see any planes go into it?

Mr. Chapman - No.

Mr. Jurika - On your 18 day trek to Agusan with that large Filipino group of evacuees from Davao, how many Filipinos were in that crowd, estimated? 500?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, no. We’re talking like maybe 100.

Mr. Jurika - When you were assigned to southern Leyte, where were the Japs at that time, when you were down in San Roque?

Mr. Chapman - Tacloban and then on the other side…..Tacloban is on one side and the other side was a big town. Ormoc, yeah.

Mr. Jurika - And the Japs were there and nowhere else? Okay.

Mr. Chapman - No where else.

Mr. Jurika - Describe Gordon Lang to us.

Mr. Chapman - Gordon Lang was blonde, slender. I’d say maybe 5’10” , 6’.

Mr. Jurika - Same age as you?

Mr. Chapman - I really don’t know.

Mr. Jurika - We’re looking for personality traits here. Anything else you can tell us about Gordon Lang?

Mr. Chapman - He seemed like a real nice guy. I mean, even tempered. No special characteristics like that.

Mr. Jurika - How many guerrillas did he have, that he led?

Mr. Chapman - I don’t know, because we never were with him long enough to see him do anything with the guerrillas.

Mr. Jurika - Did you ever meet Chester Peters and his wife Julia Peters, who called herself Joan of Arc? Describe them in detail as much as you can.

Mr. Chapman - Chester Peters wasn’t in very good shape when I met him.

Mr. Jurika - He had already been shot?

Mr. Chapman - You know the circumstances.

Mr. Jurika - I do. I want to hear them from you though.

Mr. Chapman - Well, I knew how he got shot, that he was in the truck and he had been stopped and the shotgun went off and took out a hunk of bone in his leg and he was in bad shape. So they were taking him, trying to get him somewhere where he can get medical treatment. Julia Peters is another issue. She was, in some circles you might have called her a tough broad. She was a rather attractive Filipino. She immediately became attracted to Hawkins when Hawkins came over to Leyte. As modern troops would say, she and Hawkins were a thing for a while. I always felt that all she was doing was trying to further her own objectives, whatever those might be. They started out when she was trying to run the guerrilla up north and Kangleon wouldn’t put up with that and she finally wound up coming down to Mindanao, but by that time I was well out of it.

Mr. Jurika - Describe Truman Hemmingway, who you got to know very well.

Mr. Chapman - He was the son of an Episcopal Priest and he had traveled prior to getting into the Military. He had been to Denmark where he got a lot of tattoos. He had a ship tattooed on his chest and some tattoos on each arm. He like the outdoors. He was interested in travel. He had a lot of plans for traveling when he got out of the service after the war.

Mr. Jurika - Didn’t you have a plan to travel with him?

Mr. Chapman - Not me. He was going to travel with, I think his original plan was with Jimmy Shane.

Mr. Jurika - Describe Joseph St. John.

Mr. Chapman - I didn’t now Joseph St. John too well. In the discussions I had with him, he grew up in Philadelphia on the wrong side of the tracks and he has memories of teasing the fireman on the trains that went through and getting them to throw coal at them, so they could pick up the coal and take it home. Of course he was one of those that was on the bonka that overturned off the east coast of Mindanao and swam ashore.

Mr. Jurika - Who else was on that bonka?

Mr. Chapman - There was, aside from Richardson and he, there were several other enlisted troops. I met all of them, but I don’t remember all their names. One of them was an Air Corps guy. ………………… was one of them. The Air Corps guy I remember because he was the only one that really knew how to swim and he made the mistake of stripping off down to his shorts and swimming ashore and it took all day to swim ashore. He got blistered on his back from the sun.

Mr. Jurika - Was that the bonka that Nortz was on?

Mr. Chapman - No, Nortz died off somewhere.

Mr. Jurika - Describe Captain V…………….(?)

Mr. Chapman - Oh, yeah. Captain Valley we called him. No, I didn’t really get to know him very well at all. He seemed like a fairly young man and even tempered. I guess that’s about all I can say.

Mr. Jurika - Did you ever meet David Richardson?

Mr. Chapman - Oh, yes. Many times.

Mr. Jurika - Sounds like you have something to say about him. What can you tell us?

Mr. Chapman - Well, I guess I first met him when, let’s see when was it? I met him briefly I guess on Mindanao before I actually left on the radio station. He came up to southern Leyte, a real blusterer. Like a fighting cock rooster. He wasn’t all that tall, but he’d march right in, you know. I’m Navy Lieutenant, Army Major Richardson. He wanted to make sure you knew he was Army and Navy. He would let you know. He came to Leyte and said he was a Major now on Burdick’s staff. He had been sent up there to contact Kangleon and to discuss mutual problems, whatever, and that he was the official liaison from the 10th Military District for doing that. That was pretty much my experience with Richardson during the war, but when I came back home, I hadn’t been home very long. I came back to the States, went to the Pentagon, got debriefed, came back to Los Angeles, to my home, and I got assigned to a job helping the support the war effort. My first job in that was to go out to the Vernon Alcoa Plant to talk to workers that wanted to change jobs and tell them how important their job was. Then I came back into the office and they were sending speakers out and who should I run into there, but I.D. Richardson and now he’s part of the speakers bureau and he’s got a Navy Chief as his coach and monitor, or whatever. They are getting ready to go out to speak to the workers at the aircraft plant, in ……out by what is now LAX. They invited me to go with them. So I went with them and was part of the team that spoke to the workers about the war and all the things that were going on. They took a picture of us. I got it at home. He and I and this Navy Chief on the stage. Rather pompous guy.

Mr. Jurika - Now on Samar, the situation was so bad between the guerrillas there that most of them were little more than vandals. Did you know, or ever hear of one of the guerrillas on that island by the name of Dorello (?)?

Mr. Chapman - No.

Mr. Jurika - When my father took you up to Balicuatro Point and installed the radio with you, you tested the radio by calling back down to where? Burdick’s headquarters?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah. WAM

Mr. Jurika - WAM. When you got back a message confirming the contact, do you remember any particular content of the message that came back?

Mr. Chapman - No.

Mr. Jurika - Do you remember at all that there was a message for my father telling him that his mother had been captured by the Japanese?

Mr. Chapman - No. I know that. I didn’t hear that. I heard it later, but I didn’t get a message that said anything about that.

Mr. Jurika - Okay. Did you see any of these people after the war on your remembrance visit to the Philippines in 1977? Mr. Delao, Mr. Abugato, Captain V., ………

Mr. Chapman - No.

Tape stopped/started

Mr. Jurika - Okay, you’re talking about Roberto Kangleon right now?

Mr. Chapman - I’m talking about, this is before I came home from the Philippines. I turned in to the Military at Tacloban and I got checked in and I got confirmed that I was now a Lieutenant and I had my orders. I got shepherded down to the Signal Corps to have a picture taken so I could show my mother, my beard, and then I got shepherded to the barber to get it off. I found out that Kangleon was in town. So I went to see Colonel Kangleon and I was there with him for Christmas.

Mr. Jurika - Okay. 1944.

Mr. Chapman - Yeah, he was a really nice guy. I told him that I would be in touch with him when I got back to the States and I did. I wrote him a letter and got a very nice letter back. He indicated that he would really like some cloth for his wife to make some things out of, and so I was in Orlando, Florida at the time. I went to a department store and got some cloth and we mailed it to him.

Mr. Jurika - Do you know whatever happened to the Civilian American Thomas Ferguson?

Mr. Chapman - No, I don’t.

Mr. Jurika - How often did you see Charlie Smith, who was your net control up there? Can you tell us anything about him?

Mr. Chapman - Never met him. To this day.

Mr. Jurika - Except his son. How about Bob Ball?

Mr. Chapman - Yeah.

Mr. Jurika - What was he like? I don’t even know what he looked like.

Mr. Chapman - Well, he was sort of like Richardson in a way by his actions. He was very confident of his abilities. He had a radio station, UU2 was the call sign, but I don’t think he was operating as a coast watcher. He was a collector of intelligence ….. if you went to. I met him once back in the States. Seems to me, he gave me a call at my home. I don’t recall how he found out where my home was. Somebody called me about Bob Ball. I think it was this Colonel Magee, or one of the colonels in charge of the intelligence net for the Philippines. The radio control net. And they had supplied all of us with this, among other things, money. I got, I remember at one point, something like $400 in Japanese pesos. I got some real pre-war Philippine currency also, which I had to use sparingly because I didn’t have much. This call came to me at my home and he wanted to know if I knew where Bob Ball was. I did not know at that time and I asked him, what’s the matter? He said, well he is not accounted for all the things that we sent him and we want an accounting of that.

Mr. Jurika - Thank you very much, Jerry Chapman.