Chapter Seven: You Call This Luck?

Among the first to leave and last to return—Taking a chance on love, rebuked

I was born Noel Marvin Ravneberg on November 19, 1916 in Devils Lake, North Dakota, the second son and youngest child of Nicolai Amundson Ravneberg and wife Martha. I lived in Devils Lake until entering the Army in 1941. In those days, I was known mostly by my middle name, Marvin. Only my mother called me Noel. Prior to 1941, the most notable events in my life happened to family members and friends rather than me.

My father, Nicolai Ravneberg, emigrated from Norway in 1906 and succumbed to tuberculosis in 1923. To help make ends meet in difficult economic times, my mother turned part of our home into a boarding house. My father's brother, my uncle Ed Ravneberg, entered our home as a boarder. But soon, the appearance of impropriety, romantic impulses, or both, led to a wedding that matched me with a stepfather who was also my uncle. At least my mother got to keep my father's last name even after he died and she remarried. My mother was an independent woman who did not need taking care of and I'm pretty sure that she didn't worry much about the things that people said. So, I have to think that she liked uncle Ed enough to marry him based on her own feelings, wants and needs.

My older brother, Lloyd, spent time learning the watch-making trade at the School of Horology at *Bradley Polytechnic Institute* in Peoria, Illinois. He then married a local Devils Lake girl, Elizabeth Nadine Nimmo, and moved to Spokane, Washington. In 1944 Lloyd, by then a commercial jeweler and watchmaker, took his family to Lewiston, Idaho. There, tragedy struck. In October 1945, six-year-old daughter Julie was hit by a car and killed. Lloyd and Nadine's marriage produced two additional children, second daughter Nancy and only son Ronald. My

brother eventually worked at Dodson's Jewelry in Kennewick, Washington. My only nephew, Lloyd's son Ronald, later also spent time in the trade, working at the Dodson's Jewelry store on Main Street in downtown Moscow, Idaho.

After I graduated from Devils Lake High School, in 1932, I took odd-jobs around town, including work at the local bakery and Haig & Nimmo's grocery store—co-owned by my brother Lloyd's in-laws—and at Gickson's department store.

On October 29, 1940 when the first WWII draft lottery was held, my principle claim-to-fame may well have been my relationship with Doris Limke. Doris was a popular local Devils Lake lass who had been in the Devils Lake High homecoming court before going to beauticians' school in Fargo. In those days, it was also common knowledge that I had a love for engine-powered-vehicles, especially motorcycles.

As luck would have it I had no good luck at all in that first WWII draft lottery: my name was among the first drawn. Instead of waiting for an assignment based on the draft, I enlisted in the Army in early November 1940. By early February 1941, I was on my way into the Army for what initially promised to be a one-year hitch that turned into service through most of 1945.

> *Devils Lake Journal*, "Personal and Social," page 5, February 1, 1941.
> "*Marvin Ravneberg Given Farewell Party*"
> "Mrs. Edward Ravneberg and Miss Doris Limke entertained a group of twelve friends at a farewell party Saturday evening honoring Marvin Ravneberg who leaves Friday for the Fargo induction station where he will join the U.S. Army Saturday for a year's service under the selective service act. The evening was spent socially and in cards, concluding with refreshments with a red, white, and blue theme being carried out in table arrangements. Mr. Ravneberg received a going away gift from the group."

I began basic training at Fort Snelling in March 1941, attached to the Minnesota National Guard unit associated with the 194th Tank Battalion. The unit then reported to Fort Lewis,

Marvin Noel Ravneberg, 2nd from left, on maneuvers
Fort Lewis, Washington, August, 1941

Washington, as part of the pre-war mobilization effort. My principle duties were as a motorcycle-riding messenger, an assignment that fit nicely with my long-time love of the two-wheeled ride.

We were told that we'd ship out soon; our destination and duties were secret. The men talked among themselves and a few suggested that we might be headed for the Pacific or the Tropics. I figured maybe the Philippines.

Somehow, the importance of secrecy in this matter escaped me when I called home to tell them I was going to make a quick visit before we shipped out. I didn't mean to "sink ships with loose lips." Frankly, I didn't think that my visit was a big enough deal for Mom to tell the newspaper about it. Obviously, I was mistaken. The *Devils Lake Daily Journal* published an article, two days later, announcing my visit home ***and*** my future duty station.

> *Devils Lake Daily Journal, p*. 1. *August 26, 1941.*
> "Friends of Marvin Ravneberg former Laker now serving in the Army at Fort Lewis Wash., received word that he will be transferred to the Philippine Islands on September 1st. He rides a motorcycle in a mechanized division."

The Army spotted the too-early (and un-authorized) destination revelation. The next article was more circumspect.

> *Devils Lake Daily Journal, p*. 6. *August 28, 1941.*
> "Marvin Ravneberg wasted no time in getting home when he got a surprise leave of a few days from Fort Lewis, Wash. He was on guard duty all night Monday and left by early Tuesday driving from Seattle to Fargo with four Army buddies in 33 hours! There he met his fair lady, Doris Limke and they started immediately for Devils Lake arriving here yesterday. He was to be back on duty at one a.m. Monday and leaves with his outfit for San Francisco and a water voyage of undisclosed destination on September 5th."

At this point, my luck appeared to change for the better. Upon our return to San Francisco, instead of assignment to KP or consignment to the brig for revealing war secrets, we were ordered to begin packing our gear in order to ship out, post haste. Of course, the deployment would, sooner than anyone expected, turn out to be anything but good luck. No. Not good at all.

Marvin Noel [Ravvy] Ravneberg sent this photo, taken in Honolulu Hawaii on September 13, 1941, home to his mother

Around noon on September 9 we joined the truck convoy loaded with our gear and by 3 p.m. the entire company was heading up the gangplanks of our troop transport. The ship set sail around 9 p.m. and we were not altogether sure where we were headed until we arrived in Honolulu at about 7 a.m. Saturday morning, September 13th. Then our commander, Col. E. B. Miller ordered that all the soldiers would have the opportunity to go ashore, so we set up a security relay for watch and headed out to see as much of Honolulu as we could in a day's time.

We were back on board before dusk and by 5 p.m. we again set sail. The next passage was made under a full communication black-out and no one discussed our destination until we entered Manila Bay on September 26. By then, it was clear that my earlier "leak" had been correct: We'd arrived in the Philippines.

> *Devils Lake Daily Journal* (evening edition), December 7, 1945.
> "Bataan Survivor Tells His Story"
> "(Editor's note: of the scores of Devils Lake men who served their country in uniform against the Japanese and Germans, Sgt. Marvin Ravneberg, son of Mrs. Martha Ravneberg, and survivor of the infamous "March of Death" on Bataan, is one of those whose whereabouts and welfare were in doubt the longest. For three years and five months he was a prisoner of the Japs, during which time his mother received eight postcards he was permitted to send home at widely spaced intervals and one message via short-wave radio, authenticity of which was even doubtful at the time. Not until several months after the capitulation of the Japanese was a learned that he was alive. This is the story of what happened during those many months of captivity, months during which the belief of relatives and friends grew that even though he had not been killed by his captors, he surely could not survive the treatment he must've received at their hands.)" p.1.

Prior to the outbreak of war in the Pacific, many considered duty in the Philippines very cushy. The weather was tropical, the native Filipinos were on our side and there wasn't any active fighting within thousands of miles. We read in the newspapers that FDR and the military, particularly the Navy, spent much effort and expense preparing to defend the continental west coast and territory in the Pacific. Pushing back against strong isolationist sentiment, the administration and Defense Department built air, and especially naval, forces far beyond those needed to protect the homeland in peacetime; the bulk of those men and machines were stationed as part of the Pacific fleet. We saw them first-hand, at Pearl Harbor, as we traveled through Hawaii on the way to the Philippines.

It appeared that American leadership greatly under-estimated Japanese resolve in the Pacific region and, as a result, our defensive plans and in-place defenses quickly became woefully inadequate. Defenses for the Philippine Islands suffered from both poor planning and execution. General MacArthur served as the chief military leader of the U.S. and Philippine forces, after Philippine independence in 1935. By the time of the Japanese invasion, the indigenous force reached nearly 60,000, so when we arrived in the Philippines we were surrounded by many native soldiers.

However, the Filipinos were poorly trained and were badly under-equipped. Much of the military implements on the islands were left-overs from WWI. There were also small amounts of newer gear that often came without proper instructions for use (sometimes written in English that not all Filipino soldiers could read), replacement parts, ammunition, and/or fuel or oil. Material and supplies for the ever-growing number of U.S. personnel were not much better. Perhaps most troubling of all, the native Filipino troops spoke a variety of dialects. This factor impeded their ability to work well together. Multiple dialects had not seemed an issue when the force was small but as the pre-war build up increased its size by 3-fold the lack of a common language became problematic. Likewise, their lack of training on modern military equipment proved to be a serious problem.

MacArthur put his faith in the native forces to hold the front lines against a Japanese invasion. The bulk of key equipment and supplies (including and especially food) were provided to the front-line Filipino troops under the assumption that they would repel any Japanese invasion near the coastline. For example, 10,000,000 tons of rice had not been moved from a depot at Catanatuan, one-hundred miles from Bataan. When, later, the Japanese overran the

mostly Filipino coastal defenses, the bulk of the equipment and supplies for our Allied forces (American and Filipino alike) were captured or destroyed. This led to the virtual starvation of most of the American forces well prior to the fall of the Philippines.

Not long after the December 7, 1942 morning (Hawaii time) attack on Pearl Harbor, we found out that our concentrated group of warships there were devastated, thereby crippling the Pacific fleet as well as depleting our military airplanes, especially fighters. We experienced, first-hand, the ferocity of the Japanese attacks by mid-day December 8 (Manilla time) as the attacks in the Philippines destroyed most of our remaining air power stationed in the Pacific. The initial bombing of the Philippines, especially at Clark Field, destroyed more than 50% of our Far East aircraft, and then two days later, other raids destroyed more fighters and the Cavite Naval Yard in Manilla Bay.

Out on patrol duty, we were about two miles from Clark Field when the Japanese attack planes arrived, far out of the range of our guns. Engaged in various duties over the Christmas week, we retreated toward, and arrived at, Bataan January 3rd. From there we did lots of shore patrol and airfield control.

During the initial weeks after the December 8 attack, remaining fragments of the wounded and crippled American air and sea forces attempted to prevent the Japanese from invading the Philippine Islands. By December 22, that modest resistance had been overcome and the Japanese began the land invasion in earnest. Defense plans called for holding the island until the Pacific fleet provided reinforcements. The attack at Pearl Harbor destroyed that defense plan.

Nevertheless, in order to slow the Japanese advance in the Pacific, we defended the Philippine Islands for as long as we could. We Americans took up five lines of defense while the

Filipinos were responsible for central beach defenses. Eventually we attempted to establish two primary lines of defense across the main island to be followed by retreat to more defensible positions as the need arose. After three months of heavy fighting by Allied forces, General MacArthur took his family and staff and left the command post on Corregidor—heading for Australia—promising, by radio address, to return. Before leaving he told some of his forces that reinforcements were on the way, they were not, and that our forces should fight on until relief arrived. Then, at the command of Army Chief Of Staff George Marshall, MacArthur and his family left Corregidor under the cover of darkness. He had been ordered to take only one staffer; he took fourteen.

After the December 8 attack, through April 9, 1942, we fought side-by-side with Filipino forces in a virtually hopeless campaign against the Japanese onslaught. Our side's lack of preparation for war in the Pacific, especially after the devastation dealt to the Pacific fleet and our air power, was evident almost immediately.

By late January we started running out of food. Rations were cut, drastically. By the time of the surrender, we were eating about one-third cup of rice with flour gravy and a small can of fish each day—shared by two men. We were short own gasoline as well. We could buy some food and provisions from civilian Filipinos but by that time they'd started using "market prices" to gouge us blind. Some of us paid a dollar per egg and another dollar for a cigarette.

It was easy to tell that the Japanese resented Allied resistance and despised the failure of their first attack. When they launched subsequent attacks during the end of March and the beginning of April, they brought overwhelming forces. By the end of the first week in April the

dye was cast. On April 9, 1942, American General King met with Japanese Major General Nagano to surrender.

> "*Operations of The Provisional Tank Group United States Army Forces in The Far East, 1941 – 1942.* Box 1158, Group 407. National Archives Collection. JAS. R. N. Weaver, Brig. Gen. USA. Formerly commanding The Provisional Tank Group, USAFFE."
> "The Decision," April 8, 1942.
> "At about 2230 General King announced to the three general officers present that further resistance would result in the massacre of the 6,000 sick and wounded in the area and the 40,000 refugees now congested closely about; that he was out of touch with any troops that might be still resisting behind the closely drawn lines; that there were less than 25% effective of those now holding; that at most he could not hold more than the next day; that he was going to send a flag across the line at daylight; that he would take this action on his own responsibility. Asked by the tank commander if any help was in prospect, he stated, 'no.' Destruction of the main ordnance dumps was to commence at 2340. Troops would destroy their arms and equipment and cease resistance at 0700 the 9th" (p. 29).

Of course, MacArthur's promised "Return" took longer than any of us, now vanquished and captured, had expected, hoped, or dreamed in our most savage nightmares. "The Campaign for the Liberation of the Philippines" did not begin until January 1945. In the meantime, 60,000 or so Filipinos and approximately 15,000 Americans began our captivity by going on the trek that has become known as the "Bataan Death March." And for those of us who were not killed during that week-long march toward and through the gates of hell, "The Trek" marked the beginning of 3-plus years of POW horror.

I learned of the surrender very early in the morning of April 9th. Thereafter, six of us took a truck to fetch water. A Japanese soldier stopped us saying he was borrowing our truck; We did not again see the truck. More Japanese soldiers appeared and pushed us down the road toward San Fernando. For us, that was the start of the "March of Death." Groups of soldiers, American and Filipino, were gathered to join the march.

> "At the time I was taken I had on only a pair of overalls and no rations with me. In many cases the Japs entered camps and searched the men's kits before they were started on the march." p.1.

The Japanese faced a difficult and unexpected situation after our surrender. None of the necessary elements were in place for taking charge of tens of thousands of troops. The numbers of surrendering troops were five or six times larger than the Japanese expected (or could handle effectively). We were marched on "The Trek" because Camp O'Donnell was to serve as the staging area for moving prisoners to other areas on the island and to the coast for transport to Japan and Formosa. No location within the Philippines, O'Donnell included, could adequately and humanely accommodate the enormous contingent of surrendering troops.

The Japanese despised the U.S.'s decision to surrender. Japanese training and temperament led them to fight to the death rather than face the dishonor of surrender. Also, their training was more physically demanding than that of the American/Filipino Allied forces and brutal punishment was often part of the Japanese training regime. Further, the Japanese used their legs and feet for troop movements while the U.S. forces depended on jeeps, tanks and transport vehicles. As a result, the Japanese had a much different perception of, and capacity for, long marches than did their captives.

March of Death—Resting

Further, by the time of the surrender, our forces were virtually starving from the reductions in rations that had been in place for months. Although men joined the march from all around the island, the majority were forced to march around 90 miles from the south toward O'Donnell. As a result of these and other factors, our captors rained terror down upon us during the trek, as well as in Camp

O'Donnell. As many as 750 Americans and 5000 Filipinos died during The March from exhaustion, disease, gross neglect, or beatings, stabbings, shootings or other acts of wartime violence.

> "I eventually wound up in a unit of about 500 men near the lead in the march. In all, I was on the road 10 days covering the 70 miles to San Fernando. Occasionally, Jap enlisted men formed two lines and made us run the gauntlet as they swung at us with clubs. One Jap officer who found his men punishing American soldiers took a club himself and beat his own men. Other Jap officers let their men do whatever they wanted with us. One of my buddies was hit by a club but I was lucky enough to be missed.
>
> Along the road I saw many men, Filipinos and American soldiers, lying dead with bullet holes in their heads.
>
> When a man became too exhausted to walk and collapsed a Jap would nudge him several times with his foot and if the soldier didn't move he was shot.
>
> A friend of mine who was further back in the line, told me later that he had been put on a burial detail and made to bury a number of Filipinos and Americans alive in shallow graves. 'The Japs made us take a shallow grave and throw the men in,' he told me. 'If there was any sign of life we had to strike him over the head with our shovels.'
>
> Twice during the 10 days I was on the road, the Nips gave me a handful of steamed rice and one other time we talked some Filipinos out of some rice, which we cooked. That, besides some old potatoes we found in a field when we were stopped for three days at Balanga, was the only food I had. Occasionally some of the men got eggs, chickens and fruit from Filipinos we passed but the natives were beaten by the Japs if they were seen giving us food.
>
> On the last day before we reached San Fernando one of the boys collapsed and two of us were carrying him between us. We begged a Filipino for some food for him and he gave us an egg. That little bit of food seemed to help him and we got him to the end of the March okay even though he was out of his head for several days after he reached O'Donnell.
>
> On the third day I found a canteen on the road and got water from numerous artesian wells along the way. I didn't drink much any time, however, just washing out my mouth for fear that I would become sick if I took too much.
>
> What were my feelings as we marched? As I look back, I don't know if I had any particular feelings at the time. I more or less took things as they came and really didn't realize at the time just how bad conditions were." p.1.

Unfortunately, conditions at Camp O'Donnell were so horrendous that the Death March almost seemed less gruesome in comparison. Our forces had built Camp O'Donnell as an

encampment for the Philippine forces. Its construction was incomplete at the time of the Japanese invasion. The conquering Japanese used it as a temporary "transit" station prior to moving POWs, first to other camps around the Philippines and later to camps in and around Japan and Formosa.

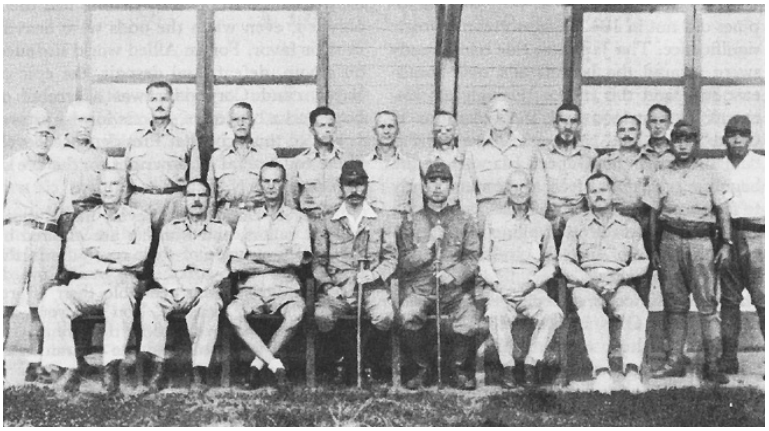
The facilities at O'Donnell were totally inadequate for the number and poor condition of the allied prisoners brought there. For most of the men held there, the average time spent at O'Donnell was approximately fifty days and O'Donnell proved to be their most horrific experience of the war. Many prisoners and later pundits compared O'Donnell to Andersonville (Georgia) the infamous Civil War death camp for Union soldiers.

The camp was divided into three sections with fence and wire: American prisoners on one side, Filipino prisoners on another, and the Japanese forces on the third. Generally, the Japanese did not venture into the prisoner areas as the filth and stench were beyond measure. There were open trenches for excretion that drew immense numbers of various sorts of flies and bred maggots in profusion. There was little food and what was served was largely whistle weed soup and a bluish tinted "lugao" soup, consisting of watery, often maggot-infested rice. Most American survivors reported seeing only one water spigot on their side of the camp; in truth, there were two—well below the capacity needed for the 9,000 POWs imprisoned at the camp.

Each barracks had originally been designed to accommodate forty men; now each held up to one hundred POWs. Some men slept on mats on bare floors; others were given filthy sleeping bags. Bedbugs ravaged what little skin the men had left on their starving, and march-damaged bones. It's estimated that one out of every ten prisoners processed at O'Donnell died there. Perhaps as many as 1,500 American and 15,000 Filipinos soldiers never made it out of that hell-

hole of an encampment. I was fortunate: My stay at O'Donnell was considerably shorter than most. Unlike the average fifty-day stay at O'Donnell, I was transferred out after just 20 days.

Perhaps due to my original assignment at the headquarters of the 194th battalion, I was sent, with 53 other enlisted men, from O'Donnell to Tarlac for duty serving the highest echelon of Allied officers captured in the Philippines. As long as I was with the officers, the food, medicines, and treatment that I received were somewhat better than for the usual Bataan POW.



AMERICAN GENERALS IN CAPTIVITY, July 1942. Seated, left to right: Generals Moore, King, and Wainwright; two Japanese officers; Generals Parker and Jones. Standing, left to right: Japanese messenger; Generals Lough, Funk, Weaver, Brougher, Beebe, Bluemel, Drake, McBride, and Pierce; Colonel Hoffman (interpreter); and two Japanese soldiers

Serving this duty also contributed to my being transported to Formosa early in our captivity, via comparatively benign circumstances. Prisoners who remained in the Philippines suffered and died at horrendous rates. Those that followed on subsequent voyages away, from the Philippines, headed for places on or near the Japanese mainland and traveled in boats that were later referred to as "Hell Ships." Many of the men on those ships and voyages suffered even more then they had on the Death March or while in O'Donnell.

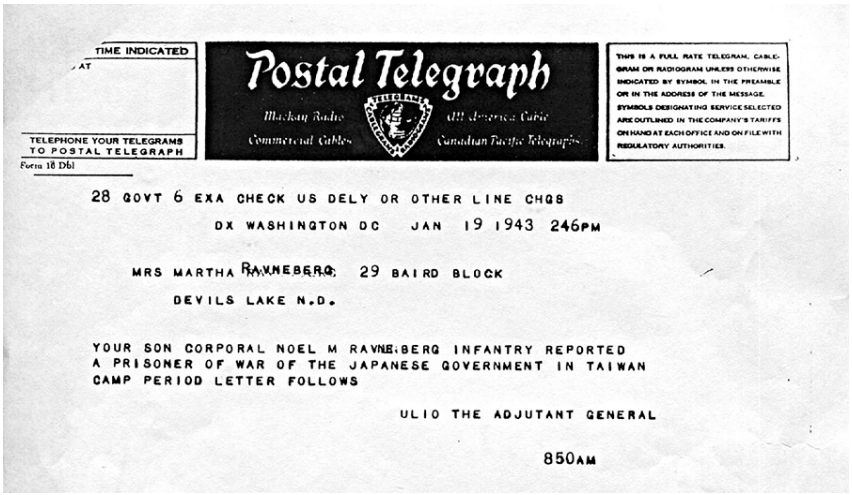
Some of those passages lasted up to a month. Thousands of the prisoners who entered the Hell Ships perished during the voyage, including many who died when Allied forces sunk the

unmarked Hell Ships not knowing they carried hundreds and sometimes thousands of American POWs below decks. Those who survived suffered through horrendous conditions on the voyages.

Although I traveled on two of the ships that were later labeled Hell Ships—the *Nagara Maru* and the *Otaro Maru* (also referred to as *Suzuya Maru*), I was on those ships with commanding officers receiving decent treatment. I was one of 179 American POWs who made the 6-day passage from the Philippines to Formosa between August 11 and August 17, 1942.

Our voyage included a small number of men (relative to the increasingly inhumane and almost unimaginable numbers shoved below decks on later trips) and was one of the very first groups of POWs shipped from the Philippines. Later, the Hell Ships took on the stench and filth of unmerciful disease and deaths of thousands of mistreated POWs.

On August 11 we were sent to central-coastal Karenko, on a train by way of Manila. We were joined by high-ranking British and Australian officers and Dutch soldiers. Relocating prisoners from prison camps in the Philippines to camps in and around Japan met a number of



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Japanese goals. First, moving the officer corps and command structure away from enlisted men was thought, by the Japanese, to weaken our abilities to organize and resist during our imprisonment. Second, the lack of adequate prisons and supplies in the Philippines encouraged

the Japanese to seek locations that were easier to provision. Third, we prisoners were used as slave laborers in support of the Japanese war effort.

I was held in four Japanese prison camps on the island of Formosa (now Taiwan) from August 5, 1942 until liberation on September 6, 1945. My time among top leadership continued during our stay at the first camp on Formosa, Karenko, between August 5, 1942 and May 1, 1943. May 1, 1943 through March 1, 1945 I was held at the camp at Heito; March 2, 1945 through June 1, 1945 we were held at Taihoku Camp. My final camp and duty was particularly notable. Sometime between June 1 and July 1, 1945, continuing until September 5, 1945, a group of us were transferred to the camp known as Oka in the mountainous regions not far from Camp Taihoku. Oka would later turn out to be, potentially, a very dangerous place. Initially at Karenko, POWs were made to work at a local farm with the intention of growing food to supplement our meager diets. Adequate food and other supplies, especially medical supplies, were largely withheld from us at Karenko; most of the food we produced on the farm was taken and eaten by our Japanese captors. Conditions led to many deaths among my fellow prisoners of war.

In May 1943, I was moved to Camp Heito, at a site that had housed local construction workers. Diseases were rampant there and the prisoners suffered from sunburn, sunstroke, malnutrition, beri-beri, and dysentery. Heito served as one of the main internment locations on Formosa and as many as 1,000 POWs stayed at or passed through the camp until it's closing early in 1945. It's commandant, Lieutenant Tamaki, was particularly vicious, promising to fill the cemetery with POWs. Eventually, a second camp burial ground was established after the first was filled. 134 men perished at Heito.

"After eight months at Karenko, 30 of us were sent to a work camp in the southern part of the island. . . .Our work was to clear stones from fields being cleaned for sugar cane. We worked in teams, carrying the rocks on "stretchers" made of bamboo. Japanese guards took us out to the field every morning at 8 o'clock and turned us over to Formosan civilians, who acted as checkers. We were under contract to a Jap sugar company. Since the guards didn't bother us during the day and we were able to bribe the checkers with various articles, we didn't work very hard.

Our earnings were about three yen a month, which we spent at the Camp PX for such things as catsup, fruit, soy sauce and other bits of food. After four months of this we were shifted to loading the rocks onto a narrow-gauge railroad, which carried them down to a mainline. We never found out what the rocks are being used for but assumed it was for naval base construction.

Later we were assigned to jobs in the sugar factory. Mine was on a sugar-making machine and the work was easy. I don't believe we ever put in a full day's work. We went on the job at 8 in the morning and usually by 10 the air raid sirens would blow and we'd be rushed out the shelters where we stayed until late in the afternoon. During the alert the trains bringing in sugarcane were also halted so when the night shift came on they usually only had enough material to keep them busy until about 11 p.m. and then were sent down to sleep the rest of the night. We alternated day and night shifts each week.

On February 7, 1945, a flight of American bombers came over and dropped about 100 anti-personnel bombs. Thirty of them landed right in our camp. 16 of our men were killed outright, nine died later and 65 were injured. Eight Nips were also killed. We had to treat the injured ourselves and the only antiseptic we had was an insecticide that was mixed with water. We had no bandages so we tore up sheets we stole from the Japs and bandaged the wounded. One Australian and one British doctor among the prisoners and a number of first aid men from British and American troops took care of the men.

Twenty-two months later I was moved to Taihoku, capital of Formosa, where I stayed three months in another prison camp.The Japs were great for group punishment. If one of the prisoners failed to bow or salute a Jap guard or committed some minor "offense," all of us were punished. We were paired off and made to slap each other. If we didn't slap hard enough a Jap would show us how he wanted it done. Some of them took great delight in this "sport," one in particular.

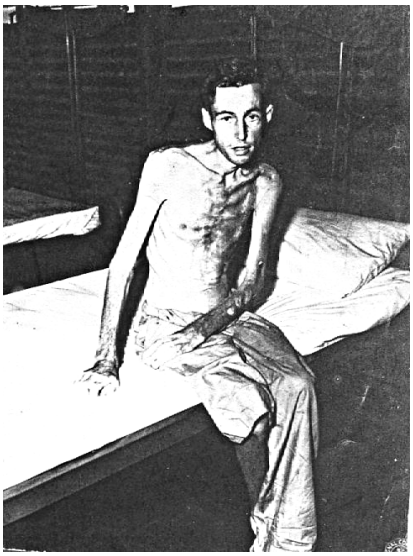
He would stand out behind our barracks in the pitch dark waiting for men to pass him on the way to the latrine. We never knew when he was there, or where he was until he shouted at us for not bowing. One night he had about 16 of us out there slapping each other for 45 minutes. It seems kind of funny now, looking back, but it wasn't at the time." p.2."

Prior to my arrival in early March 1945, Taihoku served as the main POW camp in the capital city area and as a transit camp for moving POWs in and around Japan. The men who worked there, largely British troops, slaved at building a memorial park and a man-made lake as

well as farming and working at the railway and in a bus repair shop. Approximately five-hundred men were at the camp at a time; as many as 74 POWs died there.

Now comes the danger I mentioned earlier. After three months at Taihoku, I was moved to a "special" assignment at a new camp in the mountains not far from the camp. Due to Allied progress in the war, the Japanese began to develop a "final solution" for POWs held on Formosa. I was sent with approximately one-hundred-and-fifty other prisoners to what became known as the Oka Camp, a satellite of Camp Taihoku. Oka was to serve as the killing ground where POWs held at Taihoku would be sent for execution if the Allied forces invaded Taiwan. Conditions at Oka were particularly severe that ten men died while working there and another seven died within two days of returning to Taihoku after the Japanese surrendered.

> "I believe the Nips began fearing an invasion and 150 of us were moved into the mountains to construct what we believed to be an evacuation camp.
>
> We were there when we got the first inkling of the Jap surrender. One of their officers came into camp one day and announced that effective the next day our food would be doubled and construction work on the camp would cease. We smelled a rat but it wasn't until later that we learned of the actual surrender and several weeks afterward American troops arrived.
>
> In the mean time I had contracted beri-beri and was flat on my back in the camp "hospital," where I was ordered on July 5. When the Yanks came in seven of us were flown back to Manila, where I was hospitalized for a month and then put aboard a hospital ship for San Francisco and a spell in Letterman General Hospital." p.2



Noel Ravneberg at Luzon, Philippines, September 1945

"(Editor's Note: Weighing 165 pounds the time of his capture Sgt. Ravneberg was about 90 pounds of "skin and bones," as he described himself at the time of his liberation. A signal Corps photo which he has, taken of him sitting on the edge of a hospital bed in Manila, is ample proof that his own description is no exaggeration and is also proof that the calm recital of his story probably left unsaid things that the picture plainly reveals)." p.2

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