

MARTIN D. EICHMAN FMCpl USMC 4th MARINE REGIMENT 1941

In November 1941 FMCpl (Field Music Corporal) Martin D. Eichman was a member of the United States Marine Corps, assigned to "H" Company 2nd Battalion as a bugler, attached to the 4th Marines Regimental Band stationed in Shanghai, China. As the clouds of war began to gather, orders were issued for the 4th Marine Regiment to be transported to the Philippine Islands.

The regiment was transported by the USS President Harrison and arrived on December 4, 1941 on the Bataan Peninsula of the Philippine Islands. Within days the war with Japan broke out. The band was then assigned to serve as an infantry rifle company for the beach defenses on the Island of Corregidor. FMCpl Eichman was given the assignment to serve as chief runner for the Second Battalion Headquarters in James Ravine.

In May 1942, the Philippines were surrendered to the Japanese Forces and FMCpl Eichman along with the other surviving members of the 4th Marine Regiment became prisoners of war until the surrender of Japan took place on September 2, 1945.

Mr. Eichman remained in the Marine Corps, serving as a Drum Major and was later promoted to a CWO (Chief Warrant Officer), serving as a Band Officer until his retirement.

FOR MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

August 22, 1998

On my 81st Birthday, I would like to share with you my memories of the most unique part of a really unique personal experience in my past. It

may serve as good recreational reading. 100% accuracy is not guaranteed.

In January 1944, 300 of us "healthy" Prisoners of War were selected to go to Japan to serve as labor troops. Most of us had been incarcerated in Camp Cabanatuan since June 1942. Cabanatuan was the main P.O.W. camp in the Philippine Islands. Mostly, we had been working on the immense farm that we created adjacent to our camp. Many of the P.O.W.s had been transported to Japan before our group. More would follow us.

We first were transported by narrow-gauge rail box cars to Manila. Before World War II, Bilibid Prison had been the main civilian prison of the Philippines. It now served chiefly as a staging point for P.O.W.s heading overseas. I had spent about two weeks there in June 1942 when we were transferred from Corregidor, where I was captured, to Cabanatuan.

While we were waiting for our ship, we were considered to be non-working prisoners. Our half-ration consisted of a rice ball in the morning and a tablespoon of parched corn noon and night. (During my previous stay at Bilibid, we got a rice ball three times a day.) Fortunately, we each were issued our first-ever personal Red Cross box. More than half of the ten(?) pound box was foodstuff.

In early February, we were glad to leave Bilibid and board our ship for Japan. Our "luxury liner" turned out to be a chromite ore freighter. We were placed down in a hold on top of the steel cover for the chromite ore. We each had a space about 3 X 5 feet for ourselves and our gear. This was our "home" for almost six weeks.

We were allowed up on deck only to use the "W.C.". During the first two weeks we were escorted by a fleet of destroyers. When the

weather was rough you could see them appearing and disappearing in the waves at a distance. We had considerably very rough weather and our Japanese Army guards were usually seasick.

Few of us P.O.W.s suffered mal de mer. Perhaps it was because of our diet of just rice and boiled carrots. The rice was Japanese rice--the best we ever had. We were allowed an open fire on the well deck and two huge pots to prepare the food. We had no mess kit cleaning facilities in the hold. (I can remember no washing facilities of any type.) Excepting the changes from rough seas to smooth seas the boredom of the trip was unrelieved. We had no extra space and no activities.

We finally reached Yokohama and were allowed to come up on deck. It was nighttime and the sky was lit by the heavy manufacturing plants. We were allowed a salt-water hose and had our first bath in 5 weeks.

We then proceeded north up the coast to Hitachi. The "Moto Yama Copper Mine" in the hills above Hitachi was our destination. Our sea voyage was at end. We were about the last P.O.W. transport ship to escape U.S. bombs or torpedoes.

We struggled up the mountain past the mine for about a mile. We weren't in very good physical condition after our "pleasure cruise" from Manila. Suddenly, there was our fenced-in compound.

The camp looked very good to us as it was newly built. It turned out that our "Tokyo P.O.W. Camp #13" was a new experimental work camp. We were separated into ten-man bays (roomettes). The wood rooms had an entry at ground level. The living (eating, sleeping, etc.) spaces were raised about eighteen inches above the entry level. The flooring of the entire living area was covered with woven tatami mats.

We were given new "names." Mine was "Ni-haku-yonju-u-ban" (#249). Each of us was issued three different size black plastic bowls and a pair

of very good square chopsticks. (Also, we still had our mess kit tableware.) We were issued a work uniform and a "dress" uniform. (The "dress" uniform was worn once--for our official pictures.) We also got a pair of one-toed tabis (rubber soled canvas top shoes). Several thin cotton blankets were given to us. Finally, we got a cheap 5" X 7" lined notebook "to write our diaries." Mine became "Let's Eat" which is part of my memorabilia in the P.O.W. exhibit at the Marine Corps Museum, Building 58, Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. An enlarged copy of my "official picture" also is there.

When we left the Philippines we were in the middle of our tropical summer. Hot!! Hitachi is facing the Pacific Ocean. Fog and overcast were pervasive. The March winds off the ocean were C-O-L-D. We were C-O-L-D!

Part of the experimenting in this camp was our diet. We were fed barley, boiled soybeans and pickled onions. This was a welcome change from our rice diet--for a few days. We quickly developed gastritis from the extremely gassy diet. This diet was never changed. We were not very successful in trading with the Koreans, who worked with us in the mine, our noon meal for other grain.

Our guards appeared to be civilian Army reserves. Other than escorting us to the mine and back we seldom saw them. They did try to get us to "goose-step" Nazi-style when we entered the main gate at night. After a full day in the mine and a climb up the mountain, we were less than cooperative.

We come now to the part of this narrative that I found to be the most traumatic. I become a copper miner!! (My spelling of the following Japanese terms is mostly phonetic. I have never seen them in writing. Like in the Latin languages: a = ah, e = eye or eh, i = ee, o = oh or ah, u = oo.)

The Hoto Yama Copper Mine was reputed to be about 300 years old. The first three main levels could be accessed down hand-hewn stone steps. It is the largest copper mine in Japan.

On "Orientation Day" we were crowded into the cage that lowered the workers into the mine. It was used to carry the small rail cars that transported the ore up and down, as well as the workers. The cage held 18-20 miners--tightly packed or one rail car.

The cage was suspended by a steel cable attached to a one-inch bolt. The other end of the cable wound around a wooden drum that was powered by a donkey engine. Our few people "in the know" said that a U.S. Mine Inspector never would have entered the cage!

We descended a long, long, long way down to the sixth level. There was a central room set up with supplies and facilities for eating lunch. We were issued a "safety" plastic hard-hat and a cantera (a personal carbide lamp). We packed small pieces of carbide into the cantera, we then wet down the carbide. This produced a flammable gas, which when lighted, produced our light source.

The eleven main levels of the mine had electricity. There were three sub-levels between main levels. These had no electricity-and no source of light other than our canteras. If you were alone and your cantera went out, you were in total darkness. Panic!!

We next were separated into small work teams and were turned over to our honchos. These were experienced Korean miners who acted as our supervisors. There was no North Korea or South Korea at that time. Korea was ruled by Japan. Most of the younger men had been born in Japan where they were second-class citizens. Many dreamt of joining the Korean Navy.

My team went to a kittihaw. This is where the ore is extracted. Horizontal holes were drilled into the face of the wall of ore. The pneumatic drill was deafening. When about a dozen holes were completed, they were packed with sticks of dynamite. When the fuses were connected to the dynamite, the blaster shouted "hopa, hopa, hopa" and you had better evacuate the kittihaw fast!

The dynamite blast brings down a wall of ore. Now, we tyros get into the act. We each have a katza and a kenami. We rake the ore with the katza, which has a short handle, into our large dustpan-like kenami. The kenami has side hand grips. Then we carry the ore to a central chute and dump it. And again, and again, and again. The rail ore cars are loaded from these chutes. The drilling proceeds as we work. The noise, the dynamite fumes and the darkness are overwhelming.

We return to the central room for lunch. The inevitable bento boxes (like a small wood cigar box) are waiting for us. You know the menu! We refill our canteras. Back to work.

Each team is assigned a kamari. This is the amount of production we must complete to quit for the day. The fast teams wait for the slow teams. We climb up to our camp together.

Our average workday is about twelve hours. We work nine days and stay in camp the tenth day. This is our yasume day. The last month we were in the mine was toshi ban month. The mine's production and our kamaris were doubled. You just know what happened to our twelve-hour workdays and our yasume days!

The ore crusher was operated by conscript Chinese labor--mainly boys and elderly men. Their ration was bread, garlic, and?? We sure would have traded our barley for their bread, but we never got near to them.

When the rail ore cars arrived at the surface of the mine, they were met by teams of three tiny Korean women. They had to reach up on the chest-high cars to trundle them to the crusher. Much chit-chat and giggling prevailed.

The kittihaws could be cold or very hot depending on which sublevel they were located. The newly started kittihaws became oxygen depleted in just a short time. Some of the kittihaws dripped water from the ceiling. This was quite dangerous because big chunks of shale rock fell periodically.

Occasionally a team of two or three mine inspectors came by. These were Japanese men in black suits and hard-hats. Each had a little ball-peen hammer with which they gingerly tapped the overhead.

After about a month, I was transferred to a team in a juting. This is where a depleted kittihaw is filled back up. Waste rock and water descends down chutes from the crusher. Our job was to distribute the rock evenly to fill in the excavated room.

We had a series of wood platforms leading away from the chute. Each man threw shovels-full of rock to the next platform. At the last platform, shovels-full of rock were distributed evenly for the fill. I had the dubious honor of working the final platform. "You are a good shoveler" the honcho would tell me. This may have been the only commendation I received during the three-and-a-half years of P.O.W. time.

My worst assignment in the mine was in a large juting that was close to being filled. An ore car would be filled with the waste rock. We would push the car uphill on a jury-rigged track and dump it. There were just two of us P.O.W.s and our honcho. This was exhausting work! The dirty water from the chute sprayed us and kept us wet and filthy all day.

Luckily, we had our Japanese style hot tub to use at night. We took small wood containers and dipped out the water from the common pool--a sort of clumsy shower.

In the Philippines, we had little requirement for learning to speak Japanese--except for defensive purposes. Some of the work details outside of Camp Cabanatuan did find it necessary to learn Nipango. But now we were in Japan and the need for a larger Japanese vocabulary became evident. The Japanese and the Koreans were very reluctant to speak--or understand--English during the war years. During our break periods in the juting, we coaxed our honcho to chat with us and teach us some Japanese. (This also served to extend our break time.)

Early in the morning of July 4, there were some tremendous explosions. Our camp shook. Windows were shattered, Earthquake?? Later that day, we found out that someone had blown up the dynamite shack. So, we had a couple of days off.

The hard work, toshi ban month, and our diet finished off the majority of our group. The stronger P.O.W.s came down with beriberi heart problems. We puny ones just got more puny. I'm sure that our production suffered.

On August 22 (my 27th birthday) we were divided into three 100-man groups. One group stayed on. One group went to another camp somewhere?? My group went to Tokyo Camp #1 at Mitzushima. This was a notorious military camp, and rates another story another time.

My experience at the copper mine at Hitachi never seemed real to me. I guess that I was partially traumatized. It was more like an interesting bad dream. Oh well--fifty-four years later it still makes a good story. I hope you enjoyed it.

Marty Eichman