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AND-001

Interviewee: Terry M. Johnson

Interviewer: Amanda Rhodes

Date of Interview: February 4, 1995

R: My name is Amanda Rhodes. Today is February 4, 1995. Our interview today is with Terry Myers Johnson. She was held in Santo Tomas[, Philippines] during World War II. We will be discussing her experience as a civilian internee. Ms. Johnson will you begin by telling us where you lived and your occupation prior to your capture?

J: I was a teenager. We lived in Manila. I was living with my grandparents on **Manga** Avenue at the time that the war broke out, because my mother and youngest brother were here in the states. So, I was staying with my grandparents.

R: What was your physical condition like prior to your capture?

J: I was in excellent physical condition. I was very athletic as a kid. Pretty much a tomboy, I was in excellent physical condition.

R: What were the circumstances that led to your capture?

J: Well, of course, MacArthur had declared Manila an open city, so the Japanese came in. They started rounding up the Americans, well it was actually the Americans and the Allies and took them in. Supposedly we were going to be registered. They came to our home right about noon time and said that they were going to take us, they didn't tell us where. They were going to take us, and they were going to register us, and to pack a few things that we thought we might need. So being the typical tomboy teenager that I was, I packed all the important

things, that I thought were important, my baseball glove, my baseball, my baseball bat, my basketball, my records and my record player. I neglected to pack any clothing or anything else. So when we arrived in camp, they took us to the University of Santo Tomas. My dad was there at the time. They did not take my dad. When the servants saw the Japs coming up the street, they ran in and warned us that they were coming. So, my dad ducked out the back door and he went out to fight with the troops. So my dad did not get captured.

R: Who were you captured with?

J: My grandmother, my grandfather, and my oldest brother.

R: And you were in Manila, the Philippines. And what day were your captured?

J: We were taken into Santo Tomas, January 4, 1942.

R: How old were you at that time?

J: I was fifteen. Actually I was fourteen, I had my fifteenth birthday in camp. I had four birthdays in camp.

R: What were your inner thoughts at the moment you were captured?

J: Well, you know, we always thought that it was going to be a temporary thing and that nobody could beat the Americans. That America was the greatest country in the world and nobody could whip us and that we would only be there a few days at the most.

R: What kind of treatment did you received at the time of your capture?

J: The first day, when they took us into Santo Tomas, they searched our luggage and everything. They took anything of value away. Like they took my fountain pen and my watch and a pen knife because we were not allowed to have any

kind of a knife, so they took my pen knife away which was not very big. They made no provisions for us. They assigned us to a room, but there were no beds, so the first night I slept on the floor. My grandmother and I, they separated the family. My grandfather and my oldest brother were taken to the room where the men were kept. My grandmother and I were put in a room on the first floor in the main building. We had no blankets, nothing to sleep on. We slept on the bare floor. You have to realize that we came from a fairly affluent home, very comfortable home, my grandfather owned a very large business, so I was used to a lot of servants and it was quite a culture shock. The mosquitoes and the bed bugs and there were no toilet facilities, there were no shower facilities. We just had four toilets at the end of the hall way that you had to share with everybody else. Toilet paper was rationed. You got four sheets of toilet paper every time that you went to the bathroom. The Jap guards walked in and out of the bathroom. There were no doors that could be shut, so you lost your sense of privacy. There were no bathing facilities. There was a small facet in the bathroom, oh, about two feet up and we used to crawl underneath and try to take a shower. Of course, there was only cold water.

R: Were you interrogated at the time of your capture?

J: No, I don't believe. I don't remember being interrogated.

R: You were taken to Santo Tomas, is that where you were taken first?

J: Yes.

R: Were you taken to any other prison camp?

J: No, I stayed there. But my oldest brother was transferred to Los Baños. But I stayed in Santo Tomas.

R: How long were you at Santo Tomas?

J: I was there, three years and one month.

R: Was there any medical treatment provided for you or any of the others?

J: Well, there was a clinic there. **Dr. Fletcher** was there, there was a clinic there.

Within a few days after we were captured, because of the filthy condition, everyone of us got dysentery and diarrhea. They gave us Kaopectate initially. I got diarrhea real bad and was hospitalized for a few days. About a week or two after we were captured, I was playing soccer with one of the kids, who shall remain nameless; he went to head the ball, and I went to kick the ball, and I cracked his hard head, broke my ankle. So they had to take me out of camp to Philippine General to have a cast put on my leg. They did have that. The first commandant we had in camp was, he had an American mother. He was a Nisei-American. He really was quite nice. But later on, as captivity went on, the commandants became meaner and nastier.

R: What other kind of diseases ran rampant through the camp?

J: Well, we all had beriberi, which is a lack of vitamin B because our diet was primarily rice and very little other. Now the Japs when first, those of us who were taken into Santo Tomas when they first opened it, which was February 3, really had it the roughest because the Japs made absolutely no provisions to feed us and we didn't think to bring any food in. So some of the people did bring food in and they shared it. That was before the Japs allowed the servants

to come in, to go to the package line and bring us the food in. So the first few days were really horrible.

R: Will you describe what your recollection of the prison camp was like? The living conditions? You spoke earlier of not having anything to sleep on. Tell me about the whole three years. What progressed from the time that you arrived until the time that you were liberated.

J: Okay, well, within a few days **Mr. Gumblefinger** found a cot for my grandmother. I still slept on the floor. He found a blanket for me. He got us mosquito netting, so that helped at night. Every day you had to check for bed-bugs. We would take the cot and my blanket out and check for bedbugs. Eventually, somebody in camp, I don't know who built me wooden slats for a bed. My grandmother had the wooden slats and I took the cot. They issued us a space of six feet by about three feet and all of our possessions had to be either under our bed or on our bed at night, you know. So we were very, I don't know what the word is, I can't think of the word. We had to fight for our space, and we were pretty adamant about keeping our space, that was something that we always had to watch.

R: How often did you receive food, and what amount, and what was issued?

J: I worked in the kitchen after a while, and we were fed twice a day. In the morning we got a gruel with lots of worms and bugs in it. And then they had a green vegetable that they called **thallium**. The first year or two the food situation was not bad because we could supplement it with, if you had money you could

buy food, and your servants could bring food in the package, supplementary food. But then the Japanese cut down. I remember Christmas, not Christmas but Thanksgiving of 1944, just around Thanksgiving, my grandfather paid \$420 U.S. dollars for a can of Vienna sausages on the black market. We didn't have it that day, and we didn't have it the following day, finally my grandfather turned to my grandmother and he says, Edith, where is that damn can of meat I bought. She said, well, I am saving it until we really need it. He said, good God when do you think we need it, we need it now. So, anyway. That will always stick in my memory and the fact that he said, hell I paid \$420 for that damn can of meat and I want it now.

R: Expensive can of Vienna sausages.

J: Right. We did get two Red Cross packages in...

R: What do you remember being in those packets?

J: Well, I remember the powdered milk and the concentrated chocolates. Because the chocolates were so strong that when we ate it, it made us sick. I loved the canned butter. Butter was almost like cheese, it was so thick, you know. I loved that canned butter. I guess those are the things that I remember in those packages.

R: Were you allowed any correspondence or contact with the outside world?

J: No, no. They let us write a post card. I wrote two post cards to my mother in the states. My mother, I still have those post cards. My mother saved them. Twenty-five words or less and that included the address. So you couldn't say much. Never got a letter, never got any correspondence from my mother.

R: But she did receive two from you.

J: Yes.

R: Did you have any recreational activities to participate in?

J: Oh, yes. We had basketball, and we had softball, we had very active basketball and softball games. In fact, our softball league we had the education girls, which was us teenagers, and then the nurses had a team, and what they called the Manila ladies had a team, and then the kitchen help had a team that we called the Scum Removers. This was until about mid-1944, because then, after that we were in such poor physical condition that we really couldn't participate.

R: Were you or any of the others forced to serve on any type of work details?

J: Well, actually it was mandatory, that if you were a teenager, that you had to work. So, I worked in the central kitchen and the line doling out food. I worked in the clinic, as a nurse's aide in the first floor clinic. Then I also worked in the Jap Commandant's office cleaning rice, which was a great job because I could steal handfuls of rice, which I did.

R: Tell me about working for the commandant.

J: Well, actually, it was, we went in and we had to clean the rice for the commandant's office and his staff. You would clean all the worms and bugs out of the rice, that is all we did. The guards never spoke to us, or very seldom spoke to us. We would have to bow when we went in and bow when we left. If we didn't bow to suit them, they might kind of threaten you and holler at you, basically they did not bother [us].

R: How did you occupy your time during a typical day, from the time that you were awakened in the morning to the time that you were back in bed at night?

J: When I first got up, I had to work in the kitchen because I doled out the food. Then after that, after I got finished with the kitchen duties, I went and I worked in the clinic for an hour or so. Then I went to classes. We had classes, so I went to classes for several hours. Then I had to work in the food line again. Then I worked in the clinic and in the afternoons, we would be free to play games and meet with my friends. And then in the evenings, the first few months or so, we would sing, we would have sing-alongs in the patio. The camp people put on floor shows. We pretty much amused ourselves. We played a lot of cards. Everybody played cards and everybody, I think that anybody that was in Santo Tomas became an excellent bridge player because we spent a lot of time playing bridge. And I am talking about kids, eight or nine years old, you would see them sitting there playing bridge.

R: There must have been a strong sense of camaraderie? Is that true for you?

J: Oh, yes very definitely. The friendships that you made in camp are life-long friends. Even though you don't necessarily correspond on a regular basis or anything like that, it is just like seeing family because we shared something very special.

R: An unspoken love.

J: Right.

R: Did you or any of the others attempt to escape from prison? If so, can you relate what happened?

J: Well, not really escape. I snuck out of camp one time.

R: Where did you go?

J: Well, we had, this was the first year that we were in camp. We had, the boys were playing football, Army vs. Navy, this was the Army/Navy football game time.

So, I snuck out of camp and stole one of the farmer's goats and brought it into camp as a mascot for the Navy team. Then the Army team wanted a mascot also, so I went back out to the same farmer's place and stole his horse and brought it back in. Of course, I had to bring it back out. I went through the Santa Catalina gate area. I had more trouble returning it than I had stealing it.

R: Now, how did you go about doing that?

J: I think there are still some nuns chuckling about this. I brought the animals, I snuck out, climbed the wall, snuck out over the fence area there, and this farmer had ... I brought the animals right through the chapel. [laughter] Because it was a sanctuary and snuck it past the guards.

R: How about that. How would you describe the treatment that you received from the guards?

J: They pretty much left us alone. The only time that I personally had any trouble with guards was one time that a group of us were dancing in the side, you know teenagers, were dancing at the side of the building there. And this Jap guard came by and he grabbed a hold of me and he wanted to dance. That is about the only incident that I had, you know, as far as the guards were concerned. I remember later on, the Japs were very emphatic about how we had to bow in unison. I remember one hot day where we didn't bow in unison and the Jap

guards kept us out in that hot sun teaching us how to bow for hours. As a group, you know, so we could bow in unison.

R: Did you speak their language?

J: No. I only knew two words. The Japs would say, **tamari**, which is halt, and the standard answer we all gave is **benjo**, which means you have to go to the bathroom. Because we had some outside bathroom facilities. The women's shower was outside. When they finally built a shower for the women, they built it outside with _____ walls outside. So you had to go outside to take a shower. If the guards stopped you, you know, you say you were going to the bathroom.

Benjo and **tamari**, the standard answer was **benjo**.

R: What forms of punishment were used? You just spoke of the guards making you stand out in the hot sun to bow to them and teaching you how to bow. What other forms of punishment were used to ensure compliance and cooperation of the rules by the guards?

J: Well, they slapped you. Of course, I don't really know that they did any as far as I was concerned.

R: Did you ever witness any mistreatment or cruelty of other prisoners?

J: Nope.

R: Were there rules and regulations set up among the prisoners themselves?

J: Yes.

R: What type of programs or committees or rule books?

J: Of course we had curfew, and you had to work, and the committee tried to run the camp as organized as it could be so rooms had room monitors. One of the reasons you had room monitors was because of theft. Very often a theft was within your own room, so you always had to have two people watching each room. You never left your room unguarded. Because they could steal from each other. When you are hungry, you know.

R: Were you ever on any forced march where you were forced to march or anything?

J: No.

R: What date were you liberated?

J: February 3, 1945.

R: Fifty years ago yesterday.

J: Right.

R: What country were you liberated by, what Army, and where were you at the time?

J: Well, I was in my room, which was the corner room. The Forty-fourth Tank Battalion **embattling basic** knocked down the walls of Santo Tomas. The **Georgia Peach** actually was the first tank that I saw, it pulled out right in front of our room and pandemonium broke loose.

R: What was going through your mind at that time?

J: God, these guys look gorgeous. [Laughter]

R: Describe what your physical condition was like at the time of your release.

J: When we were liberated, I weighed, I was an eighteen year old, and I weighed sixty-five or seventy pounds. So I was pretty emaciated. My grandmother, who is six feet tall, weighed about 100 pounds. And my grandfather who was also, my grandfather weighed about ninety-eight pounds. He looked like "Mahatma" [Mohandas K.] Gandhi, I don't know if you remember "Mahatma" Gandhi; he was so skinny.

R: What happened after that time period? After your release?

J: Well, shortly, a few days after we were released, the Japs started shelling the building. My room was the room that was shelled the worst. I was standing next to **Ann Davis** when she was killed. Actually, there were several people killed in my room at the time that I was there. **Ann Davis** was standing right next to me, **Dr. Folley, Mrs. Brooks, Ms. Archer, Mrs. Folley**, we were all within five, ten feet of each other. All I got was a piece of shrapnel in my knee. The Lord works in very funny ways, you know. All these other people were maimed and killed and all I got was a little tiny scratch, which is a scar today.

R: Do you ever wonder why you were spared from death?

J: I guess that I am pretty much a fatalist. I think that when your name, when the good Lord writes your name down, that is when it is time to go, and it is time to go.

R: How and on what date did you arrive back in the United States?

J: Let's see, we came home. I arrived in the United States on May 2, 1945. We came home on a troop transport called the **E. W. Everly**.

R: Can you describe your feelings and your thoughts when you first get back on U.S. soil?

J: We thought it was wonderful. It was chaotic. Because the **Everly** was one of the largest troop transports. The Red Cross issued, you know we looked like rag-a-muffins, and the Red Cross gave us some clothes. They gave us some money which we had to repay, incidentally, you had to repay them to buy clothes. Of course, stuff was rationed at the time. I had to buy a suit and shoes and everything. They provided transportation. I arrived in Los Angeles and my mother lived in Los Gatos [, California]. So I had to take the train to Los Gatos to meet my mother.

R: Speaking of clothing, you spoke earlier of leaving your home with only your baseball glove and your bat and things like that, and no clothing. What did you wear in the camp?

J: Well, the Japs let our servants bring us stuff for a while. We had a package limit. That is when I got clothes. Actually it was the third day, it was the 7th [January] when we had made contact with our servants and I got clean clothes and things like that. By the time that we were liberated, the clothes were pretty thread-bare. We used to take rope, I remember taking rope, and unwinding it and braiding it and sewing shoes. Making shoes for myself.

R: If you could give me a definition of a POW, what would it be?

J: A POW is an individual that is incarcerated against his will and held in captivity.

R: A lot of people have stated that you know, that maybe the civilian internees should not be called POWs. How do you feel about that?

J: The Japanese treated us no differently than they treated other, the military POWs. I don't care if you are a civilian or a GI, when you are not feed and you are starved, it does not make a difference what name you put on that individual. When you get berberi, and pellagra and when you get all of these diseases like we did, like I got, I don't see any difference between that, me starving to death and a GI starving to death.

R: How do you feel that this experience has affected your life since that time?

J: Well, if I had my life to do over again, I wouldn't change any of it, including the captivity, because it taught me the value of people. In camp, all of your pretenses were thrown aside and you got to know people as they truly were. You could be a millionaire and a skunk. Or your could be a prostitute and a wonderful person. I found that the friendships that we made in camp were really true friends.

R: If you could tell me one thing that bothered you the most about the prison camp experience since that time, what would it be?

J: Well, I think, probably, every once in a while, I can see, after we were liberated, in the shelling and the mass pandemonium. I worked in the clinic, and after they started shelling I worked around the clock with the nurses. As an eighteen year old, actually I had my eighteenth birthday after we were liberated, because my birthday falls in March. To see all this, limbs being thrown around and stuff. I remember working in the clinic late the night that we were liberated, early in the morning, actually, and the ambulance coming in and they brought in this GI from another battle some place along Manila and his foot was pretty badly shot up.

The doctors wanted to amputate it, and he was screaming he didn't want it amputated. Then my job in the clinic, after they started shelling, we moved the clinic to the back area of the main building, and I would wipe down the operating room tables and take the limbs and stuff and put, throw it in the basket and haul it out of the operating room while they got ready for another operation. So, every once in a while, those thoughts come back. You just kind of ignore it.

R: Do you have any other comments that you would like to add to our interview today? Maybe a story that I did not ask you about that you want to share with us?

J: Well, you know probably, the things in camp that I like to remember, the pleasant things that happened. Some of the jokes we pulled on each other, and that type of thing. But after we were liberated, three of us kids, **Ed McCreary**, whom you interviewed earlier; actually four because **Ed** went with us. We got a pass to leave camp, supposedly you could only go 1,000 yards away from the camp because Manila was still under fire. And we went out to **Grace Park** because we had met some of the fliers and they had told us that they were stationed at **Grace Park**, so we went to **Grace Park** to visit them. This was about maybe eight or ten miles away from the camp, we had to go through the city which was still under fire.

R: How did you get there?

J: I don't know, I don't remember, but we got there.

R: Anything else?

J: No, I guess that is about it.

R: I want to thank you Mrs. Johnson for giving me this interview. It will be used at the Andersonville National Historic Site for research purposes in the future.

Again, I thank you.

J: Thank you.

[End of Interview]